

# Report of the Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Development & Regeneration

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 11 April 2016

## PLANNING PERFORMANCE & EFFECTIVENESS

<b>Purpose</b>	To provide a briefing requested by the Committee about the performance and effectiveness of the Planning Service.
<b>Content</b>	This report includes a summary of the performance and effectiveness of the Planning Service and reviews progress that has been made since the publication of the Swansea Annual Performance report 2014/15.
<b>Councillors are being asked to</b>	Give their views
<b>Lead Councillor(s)</b>	Cllr Robert Francis Davies, Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Development & Regeneration.
<b>Lead Officer(s)</b>	Phil Holmes, Head of Economic Regeneration & Planning.
<b>Report Author</b>	Ryan Thomas <a href="mailto:ryan.thomas@swansea.gov.uk">ryan.thomas@swansea.gov.uk</a> Tel. 01792 635731

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 In November 2015 the Authority submitted its first Annual Performance Report (APR) to Welsh Government for the period 2014-15. A copy of this APR is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 1.2 The APR is seen by Welsh Government as a key mechanism for the monitoring of Local Planning Authorities (LPA's) in Wales against a key set of measures set out in a National Performance Framework. The APR also represents a key tool for benchmarking the performance of Authorities across Wales but importantly must also be seen in the context of Welsh Government proposals to intervene where LPA's exhibit consistent underperformance. In this respect the Wales Planning Annual Performance report was subsequently published by Welsh Government in March 2016.

### 2.0 Context

- 2.1 The Authority underwent a significant change process during 2014-15, partly as a result of budgetary pressures, and partly in response to Welsh Government proposals associated with the Planning (Wales) Act 2015.

- 2.2 In this respect the Planning Control Service underwent restructuring in August 2014 to accommodate the implications of ER/VR and a comprehensive review of its enforcement function and planning application process was also undertaken following the introduction of the Idox electronic document management system.
- 2.3 Despite accommodating budget savings in excess of 40% over a 3 year period additional staff resources were also allocated to reinforce the enforcement function.
- 2.4 In addition the Authority's Committee structures and scheme of delegation were also amended in January 2015 to broadly align with the recommendations of Welsh Government contained within its consultation document entitled 'Planning Committees, Delegation and Joint Planning Boards (October 2014)'.

### **3.0 Performance**

- 3.1 The positive changes introduced during 2014-15 have significantly improved the Authority's development management performance in both qualitative and quantitative terms. This was not, however, fully reflected in returns for the APR submitted to Welsh Government in November 2015 given the timescales involved and the interim measures in place both prior to restructuring of the Planning Control service and following amendments to the Committee size, structures and scheme of delegation in January 2015.
- 3.2 A copy of the Welsh Government Performance Framework update to reflect the Authority's performance for 2015-16 is attached as Appendix 2. Please note that comparative data for Wales is not currently available and the statistics quoted for 2015-16 do not include data for the full period of Q4.
- 3.3 During this time there has, however, been a consistent improvement in performance when assessed against measures for both efficiency and quality of decisions. In efficiency terms the percentage of all applications determined within 8 weeks in Q1 was 80%, with 83% in Q2, 86% in Q3 and 89% in Q4 reflecting a top quartile performance in Wales during Q3.
- 3.4 The percentage of all major applications determined within required timescales has increased from 6% in 2014-15 to 32% in 2015-16, with the average time taken to determine all major applications reducing from 247 days to 207 days.
- 3.5 In qualitative terms the percentage of Member made decisions made against officer advice has reduced from 23% in 2014-15 to 11% in 2015-16 in line with the Welsh Average for 2014-15. With the total number of decisions made contrary to officer advice reducing from some 26 to 7 during these timescale. An analysis of Committee performance between the years 2011/12 and 2015/16 is reproduced at Appendix 3.

- 3.6 The percentage of appeals dismissed has also improved from 55% in 2014-15 to 61% in 2015-16. These figures are, however, heavily influenced by the performance of one individual Inspector who determined approximately 30% of all appeals heard during 2015-16 allowing 65% of appeals compared to 28% by all other Inspectors.
- 3.7 A partial award of costs amounting to £461 was made against the Authority on one occasion in respect of a delegated decision on grounds that the Authority had not evidenced one of its reasons for refusal relating to insufficient car parking (Planning Application Ref. 2014/1667 refers).
- 3.8 Similarly significant progress has been made in terms of reducing the backlog of outstanding enforcement cases, however, this has influenced performance relating to the average time to resolve cases as the historic caseload is reduced. The table reproduced as Appendix 4 illustrates the total number of outstanding enforcement complaints which has reduced from some 674 in July 2014 to 450 in March 2016.
- 3.9 LDP progress has been delayed over the past year whilst engaging with the public, stake holders and Members and hearing petitions on proposed sites to be allocated in the Plan. Whilst this has provided a far more robust basis upon which to move forward it has added some 9 months to the process. It is, however, anticipated that a Draft Deposit LDP will be presented to Council for approval in June 2016.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

- 4.1 The APR submitted to Welsh Government in November 2015 provides a useful tool to benchmark the Authority's performance against other Authorities in Wales and to monitor progress in future years. Over the last year there has, however, been a significant improvement when assessed against key measures set in the Welsh Government Performance Framework reflecting the Authority's commitment to addressing areas of performance that were in need of improvement and in embracing the Welsh Governments agenda for the modernisation of the planning system in Wales.
- 4.2 Moving forward the Authority faces significant budgetary pressures at a time of transformational change for the City and its region and to meet these challenges is inevitable that difficult decisions will have to be made regarding the Authority's priorities and service levels in the future.

#### **Background papers:**

Draft Planning (Wales) Bill and Positive Planning: proposals to reform the planning system in Wales published 04/12/2013 - <http://gov.wales/consultations/planning/draft-planning-wales-bill/?lang=en>

Wales Planning Annual Performance Report published 21/03/16 –

<http://gov.wales/topics/planning/planningstats/annual-performance-report/?lang=en>

Planning Committees, Delegation and Joint Planning Boards (October 2014) -

<http://gov.wales/consultations/planning/planning-committees-delegation-and-joint-housing-boards/?lang=en>

**Legal Officer:** Jonathan Wills    **Finance Officer:** Aimee Dyer