

Report of the Head of Economic Regeneration and Planning

Planning Committee – 4 October 2015

PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Annual Performance Report (APR) is seen by Welsh Government as an important mechanism for monitoring Local Planning Authority performance against a key set of National performance indicators and as a means of driving its agenda for modernising the planning system in Wales. It also represents an important tool for benchmarking the performance of Authorities across Wales and importantly must also be seen in the context of Welsh Government proposals to intervene where Local Planning Authorities exhibit consistent underperformance.
- 1.2 This year's draft APR, reviewing performance for the Authority for the period 2015-16, is attached to this report as Annex A, for Member consideration. The APR must be formally submitted to Welsh Government by the end of October 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 was restructured 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 (EDMS). The Planning Control Service is also currently in the process of replacing its M3 Northgate back office system with Idox Uniform, and refining its business processes further, to provide greater integration with its existing EDMS and improve efficiency.
- 2.3 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)'.
2.4 The service is currently in the process of undergoing its Commissioning Review which will identify further service improvements, cost savings, income generation and efficiency opportunities.

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.
- 3.2 The average time taken to determine all planning applications at 61 days was significantly below the Welsh average of 77 days. The percentage of all applications determined within required timescales also showed a significant improvement increasing from 71% in 2014-15 to 84% well above the Welsh average of 77%. Significantly, for the delivery of the Council's regeneration agenda, the percentage of all major planning applications determined within required timescales has increased from 6% in 2014-15, which was the lowest performance in Wales, to 36% in 2015-16, which is above the Welsh average.
- 3.3 Ongoing progress on reducing the backlog of outstanding historic enforcement cases continues, however, to influence performance relating to the speed of investigation and resolution of cases.
- 3.4 The percentage of Member made decisions contrary to officer advice has reduced from 23% in 2014-15 to 10% in 2015-16 equating to 0.3% of all planning application decisions being made against officer advice compared to 0.6% across Wales. The quality of such Committee decisions has also improved significantly with 5 of the 7 subsequent appeals made in respect of applications refused contrary to officer advice being dismissed at appeal. A summary of the relevant appeals is provided at Annex B for Member consideration.
- 3.5 Significant progress in LDP preparation has been made over the past year. The Deposit LDP has been written, agreed by Council and consulted upon. The representations received are in the process of being assessed and a consultation report is being prepared with the intention to submit the Plan for Examination in early Spring 2017. A revised LDP Delivery Agreement has been agreed with Welsh Government and an independent LDP Programme Officer appointed. A Strategic Environment Assessment and a Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Deposit Plan have been undertaken. The Affordable Housing Viability Study in support of the Plan has been updated. An independent study of the viability and deliverability of Strategic Development Areas has also been carried out. Officers from Strategic Planning and Development Management Control have been provided with viability assessment training and Strategic Site Masterplanning work remains an ongoing series of projects.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 This year's APR provides a useful tool to benchmark the Authority's performance against other Authorities in Wales and to monitor progress in future years. It also demonstrates that the Authority has already made significant progress in addressing areas of performance that were in need of improvement and in embracing the Welsh Government's agenda for the modernisation of the planning system in Wales.

4.2 Moving forward the Local Planning Authority faces continued budgetary pressures at a time of transformational change for the City and its region and it is inevitable that difficult decisions will have to be made as part of the ongoing Commissioning Review regarding the Authority's priorities and service levels in the future.

Background papers:

City & County of Swansea APR 2014-15:

<http://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=493&MId=6629&Ver=4&LLL=-1>

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