

Report of the Head of Planning and City Regeneration

Planning Committee – 1 October 2018

Planning Annual Performance Report

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Planning 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 2018-19, is attached to this report for Member consideration. The APR must be formally submitted to Welsh Government following this meeting.

2.0 Context

- 2.1 The Authority has undergone a significant change process in recent years, partly as a result of budgetary pressures, and partly in response to Welsh Government changes to the planning system as part of the "Positive Planning" agenda and the Planning (Wales) Act 2015.
- 2.2 The Council's Committee structures and scheme of delegation were amended in January 2015 to broadly align with Welsh Government recommendations and has proven to be a robust mechanism upon which to deliver sound and efficient decision making.
- 2.3 The Swansea Local Development Plan was adopted in February 2019 and now provides an up to-date policy framework, based upon placemaking principles, upon which to base decision making and facilitate the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities and regeneration agenda.
- 2.4 The Section has also been restructured, agile working arrangements have been introduced and processes and procedures have been subject to continuous review, facilitating a paperless office environment and delivering efficiency savings.

3.0 Performance

- 3.1 The positive changes introduced in recent years have significantly improved the Authority's performance in both qualitative and quantitative terms. When assessed against the Planning Performance Framework the Council now represents one of the best performing Local Planning Authorities in Wales.

- 3.2 The average time taken to determine all planning applications at 57 days is significantly below the Welsh average of 77 days. The percentage of all applications determined within required timescales has also shown a significant and consistent year on year improvement increasing from 71% in 2014-15 to 99% in 2018-19, well above the Welsh average and that of other large urban Authorities, a top quartile performance and the third highest percentage in Wales.
- 3.3 Significantly, for the delivery of the Council's regeneration agenda, the percentage of all major planning applications determined within required timescales has consistently increased year on year from 6% in 2014-15, which was the lowest performance in Wales, to 88% in 2018-19. A performance which is now significantly above the Welsh average of 68%.
- 3.4 In enforcement terms there has been significant improvement in performance with 72% of all enforcement cases being investigated in 84 days in 2018/19 compared to 46% last year.
- 3.5 The percentage of Member made decisions contrary to officer advice has also reduced from 24% in 2016-17 to 5% in 2017-18 and 6% in 2018/19. This equates to just 5 applications out of a total of 78 decisions made by Planning Committee in 2018/19 and just 0.26% of all decisions made by the Authority. This performance is marginally above the Welsh Government target of 5% and well below the Welsh average of 9%. A summary of relevant appeals in 2018/19 relating to Member made decisions is provided at Annex B for Member consideration.
- 3.6 The overall quality of decision making when assessed against the percentage of appeals dismissed has also improved significantly from 59% in 2017/18 to 72% in 2018/19. With the adoption of the Swansea Local Development Plan in February 2019 the Council now has a robust and up-to-date policy framework upon which to defend its decision making at appeal and deliver the Council's corporate priorities and regeneration agenda.
- 3.7 For information a copy of the most recent S106 completion report is attached as Annex C.

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 made significant progress in addressing areas of performance that were in need of improvement, facilitating the Council's corporate priorities and regeneration agenda and embracing the Welsh Government's agenda for the modernisation of the planning system in Wales.
- 4.2 When assessed against the Planning Performance Framework the Council now represents one of the best performing Local Planning Authorities in Wales. There are, however, significance challenges ahead in the face of continued budgetary pressures and acknowledged resilience issues and specialism gaps. At a time of transformational change for the City and its region it is inevitable that further difficult decisions will continue to be made over priorities and service levels in the future.

Background papers:

City & County of Swansea APR 2017-18:

<http://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=493&MId=8170&Ver=4&LLL=-1>

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