Swansea LPA

PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) – 2019-20 & 2020-21

PREFACE

I have the pleasure of introducing the Annual Performance Report (APR) for Swansea Council's Planning Service. APR's were introduced as part of Welsh Government proposals to modernise the planning system and improve local delivery of planning services. The Council's Planning Service is responsible for protecting the amenity and unique natural and built environment of our city and countryside in the public interest and facilitating sustainable development and the economic regeneration of our urban and rural areas. Having very recently adopted the Swansea Local Development Plan the Council now boasts an up to date planning policy framework which sets out a clear and ambitious vision for the future growth and regeneration of the City, its communities, economy and natural environment. In this context the APR provides a mechanism for ensuring that the Planning Service is responding positively to the challenges of evolving national planning guidance and the principles of the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act and the Environment (Wales) Act. In this respect the Planning Service presents the most tangible means of translating the Council's corporate objectives, commitments and regeneration agenda into development on the ground with the overall aim of improving the quality of life for local residents and building more sustainable communities.

Councillor David Hopkins – Cabinet Member for Delivery & Operations

CONTEXT

1.0 This section sets out the planning context within which the local planning authority operates.

1.1 The City and County of Swansea covers an area of 378 square kilometres (about 2% of the area of Wales), approximately 66% of which is rural and 34% urban. The City is the second largest in Wales and the regional centre for South West Wales. As well as being characterised by a highly development central area and surrounding settlements, the County benefits from a number of high quality natural environments that are part of its rural hinterland.

1.2 The policies and proposals set out in the Council's Local Development Plan (LDP) seek to address the County's need for new homes, jobs, infrastructure and community facilities to support economic growth and raise standards of living. Policies to promote development sit alongside and complement those that will ensure future proposals respect and promote the County's cultural heritage, important landscapes and sensitive environments. A clear 'placemaking' agenda is promoted which emphasises that future development must accord with the overarching aims of enhancing quality of life and well-being.

1.3 Swansea lies at the heart of the Swansea Bay City Region and the nature of future growth and development management will be critical to shaping the regional geographies of South West Wales. In particular, the aspirations for the City Region seek to significantly boost economic investment and activity, with an associated substantial uplift required in development, including housing.

2.0 **Planning background,**

2.1 The Swansea LDP, which was adopted in February 2019, provides the policy context for the period up to 2025. It superseded the Swansea Unitary Development Plan (UDP) (2001-2016).

3.0 Place and fit within the community strategy and/or wider strategic and operational activity of the authority.

3.1 The Swansea Public Service Board's Local Well Being Plan: Working together to build a better future (2018) has four objectives relating to Early Years, Live Well, Age Well; Working with Nature; and Strong Communities underpinned by key themes of Housing and the Economy which are supported by the planning system.

3.3 The LDP seeks to deliver the land use, regeneration and natural environment enhancement objectives expressed in the Local Well Being Plan and the Council's Corporate Plan, together with other Council strategies, plans and programmes. **Existing and previous major influences on land use (e.g. heavy industrial, agricultural, energy, transport).**

4.2 National policy supports employment growth within the Swansea Bay City region, and there is a requirement to align jobs with housing and infrastructure to reduce the need to travel, especially by car. Current local policy focuses on generating wealth by diversifying the economy away from public sector employment and growing a higher value knowledge economy (life sciences, technology and engineering) that offers higher skilled and better paid employment opportunities. There are a number of projects to help deliver these objectives which are likely to be continued throughout the LDP period, with initiatives such as the ongoing transformation of Swansea's Fabian Way corridor by two universities, plans for the redevelopment of the City Centre, Waterfront, Tawe Riverside Corridor and Lower Swansea Valley areas, together with new super-hospital proposals.

4.3 Between 2001 and 2011 the average property price in Swansea rose by 124.8%. The West of the County now contains some of the more expensive dwellings in South Wales, whilst the North and East of the County contain generally much lower house prices. In February 2021, the average house sale price in Swansea was £169,324, 5.9% below the average for Wales and 32.4% below the UK figure. .

4.4 Average weekly full time earnings (April 2020) are £538.00 (0.7% below the Wales average but 8.1% lower than the UK average).

5.0 Historic/landscape setting of the area, including AONBs, conservation areas etc.

5.1 Over 50% of the County's area is identified as being of significant ecological interest. Nearly 70% of the habitats and at least 20% of species identified as being of importance for biodiversity conservation in the UK can be found in the County, and approximately 17% of the County's area is protected by designations at a European (SAC, SPA, RAMSAR) or National (SSSI, NNR) level.

5.2 The landscape is of critical importance within the County, as it provides a striking setting for the City and at least 40% of the County (the Gower AONB) is recognised as being landscape of national importance. Most of the AONB coastline is also designated as Heritage Coast which extends for 59km. Gower attracts large numbers of visitors and tourism is very important for the local economy.

5.3 The County supports an extensive greenspace network, which is vital to economic, environmental and community well-being, and additional green infrastructure is needed to meet national guidance and local requirements for improving accessibility to open space. In particular improvements to linkages between open spaces, public rights of way and key destinations are needed to increase accessibility and promote physical activity.

5.4 The County has a proud industrial heritage and a number of historic buildings, such as castles and Scheduled Ancient Monuments. There are currently 31 Conservation Areas and 519 Listed Buildings within the County, many of which are characterised as having good authentic surviving historic features that still contribute to the distinctive, special character of the area. However, some Conservation Areas have been degraded in character due to inappropriate alterations to the external features of buildings, or new developments that are out of keeping with the character of the area. The character and size of Conservation Areas can vary greatly, from very small rural hamlets with a cluster of buildings around a church, to urban areas of buildings originally constructed for industrial and commercial purposes.

5.5 Most of Swansea's Conservation Areas were designated in the late 1960's and 1970's and therefore, the published documentation supporting these earlier Conservation Areas is often limited. This limits the amount of information available upon which development management decisions in Conservation Areas can be based. A programme of Conservation Areas Review is therefore underway.

6.0 Urban rural mix and major settlements.

6.1 The County can be broadly divided into four geographical areas: the open moorlands of the Lliw Uplands in the north; the rural Gower Peninsula in the west, containing a number of rural villages, contrasting coasts and the Gower Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); the suburban area stretching from the edge of Swansea towards settlements in the west and along the M4 corridor; and the coastal strip around Swansea Bay, which includes the City Centre and adjacent District Centres such as Sketty and Mumbles.

6.2 Some two-thirds of the County's boundary is with the sea - the Burry Inlet, Bristol Channel and Swansea Bay.

6.3 Most of the population live within the urban areas radiating from the City Centre and in the surrounding nearby urban settlements which are generally spread along the main transport corridors into the City. There are also rural / semi-rural settlements in and around the edges of Gower and to the North.

6.4 The regeneration of the retail heart of the City Centre through mixed use development, including the reintroduction of residential units into the central area, has been seen as a particularly important means of breathing life back into the City. There has been major investment in infrastructure and environmental improvements, and these areas are well located for access to a wide range of employment opportunities. Development has been encouraged within the Maritime Quarter, SA1 and Lower Swansea Valley riverfront areas to reinforce the image and role of Swansea as a 'Waterfront City'.

6.5 Within the North West part of the County development has been concentrated on the settlements of Gorseinon, Loughor, Penllergaer and Pontarddulais in support of regeneration initiatives and local employment centres. This has included significant levels of housebuilding over the past decade.

6.6 West Swansea was the focus for the greatest boom in post war building and is now largely built-out to its environmental limits. Beyond this area the Gower Fringe is characterised by rural and semi-rural areas, including the settlements of Penclawdd, Crofty, Dunvant, Three Crosses, Upper Killay and Bishopston, where development has historically been limited to infill and small scale rounding off. Within the Gower AONB restrictive housing policies have historically been applied, however small-scale affordable housing development required to satisfy the overriding economic or social needs of a local community is supported through LDP policy. An increasing number of dwellings are being used as holiday homes within Gower which also impacts on the availability of housing to meet affordable and local needs.

7.0 Population change and influence on LDP/forthcoming revisions.

7.1 The mid-year population estimate for 2020 for the City & County of Swansea is 246,600; comprising of 122,700 males and 123,900 females (Source ONS). This figure represents a decrease of approximately 400 (-0.17%) on the 2019 estimate; and compares with a small increase in the previous year (+500). Between 2014 and 2019, Swansea's increase averaged +1,200 per year. Analysis of the supporting data released with the population estimates suggests that Swansea's small overall population reduction during the year to June 2020 was due to negative natural change (600 more deaths than births in the year) and internal (UK-based) out-migration (-1,500 net approx.), partly offset by net international in-migration (+1,800 approx.).

7.2 The proportion of Swansea's population of working age (i.e. all aged 16-64), at 63.3%, is higher than Wales (61.2%) and the UK (62.4%). However, Swansea has a lower proportion of children (aged 0-15), at 16.9%, than both Wales (17.8%) and the UK (19.0%).

7.3 There are 12,000 children aged 0-4 in Swansea, 4.9% of the total population – lower than the equivalent proportion for Wales (5.1%) and the UK (5.6%). Swansea also has a lower percentage aged 5-15, at 12.0% (29,600 children), than Wales (12.7%) and the UK (13.3%). 33,500 (13.6%) of Swansea's population are young people aged 16-24, a noticeably higher proportion than Wales (10.9%) and the UK (10.5%), in part due to students. 25.3% of the population (62,300 people) are aged 25-44, in between percentages for Wales (24.1%) and the UK (26.1%). 60,200 people in Swansea are aged 45-64 (24.4%), lower as a proportion than both Wales (26.2%) and the UK (25.8%). 19.9% of Swansea's population are aged 65 and over (49,000), midway between the percentage figures for Wales (21.1%) and the UK (18.6%). 6,600 people in Swansea are aged 85 and over, 2.7% of the Swansea total; the same as the proportion in Wales but above the UK figure (2.5%). Life expectancy at birth in Swansea now stands at 77.7 years for males (Wales 77.9) and 82.5 for females (Wales 82.0)

7.4 The total number of households (with residents) in Swansea in mid-2019 is estimated at 109,500, an increase of approximately 700 (or 0.6%) on the 2018 figure. Since 2009, the number of households in Swansea has increased by approximately 7,900 (+7.8%), with average household size falling from 2.28 people

(2009) to 2.21 people (2019). The falling average household size can be attributed to the significant rise of single-person households who now account for over a third of all households.

7.5 The Welsh Government's latest trend-based population projections suggest that Swansea's population will grow by 7.5% (18,400 people) between 2018 and 2043. In comparison, the projections suggest a population increase of 5.4% across Wales over the period.

7.6 ONS research indicates that in 2016, around 19,000 people in Swansea (approx.. 8% of the population) were from a non-white ethnic group. A further 7,000 people were in the category 'All Other White', leading to an estimated 26,000 people (around 11% of the total Swansea population in 2016) being non-'White British'. higher than the equivalent figure for Wales (4.4%) and the third highest percentage of the 22 local authorities in Wales, although lower than the equivalent UK figure (12.9%).

7.7 The proportion of people aged 3 and over able to speak Welsh in Swansea decreased from 13.4% (28,938) in 2001 to 11.4% in 2011 (26,332 people); a fall of around 2,600 Welsh speakers (-9.0%) despite an overall increase in the population.

7.8 42.7% of Swansea's residents (aged 16-64) are qualified to NVQ level 4 (Degree level) and above (December 2020, ONS), higher than the Wales figure (38.8%).

7.9 GVA (Gross Value Added) per head in Swansea stands at £21,912, (2018, ONS); which is 5.7% above the Wales level £20,738 but 23.1% below the UK average (£28,729). Over the longer term (2013 to 2018), overall growth in Swansea's GVA per head has been 14.3%, which is below rates of growth in Wales (+14.8%), and the UK (+15.8%).

7.10 75.4% of Swansea's working age residents are economically active and 118,600 in employment (December 2020, ONS), mostly in the service sectors 88.4%, with 23.2% employed in the public sector and 4.5% working in manufacturing.

7.11 33,400 people commute into Swansea each day (2020, ONS/WG). Most significant cross boundary flows are from Neath Port Talbot and Carmarthenshire. Active businesses in Swansea grew by 3.3% between 2018-19, compared to 1.4% across Wales and 2.5% in the UK.

7.12 Estimates suggest 4.79 million people visited Swansea Bay in 2019 spending over £477 million (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Model).

7.13 Swansea is forecast to see significant population growth over the next decade. The County will need new homes, additional employment opportunities and improved infrastructure and community facilities to support this level of growth and raise standards of living, while respecting the area's cultural and natural heritage.

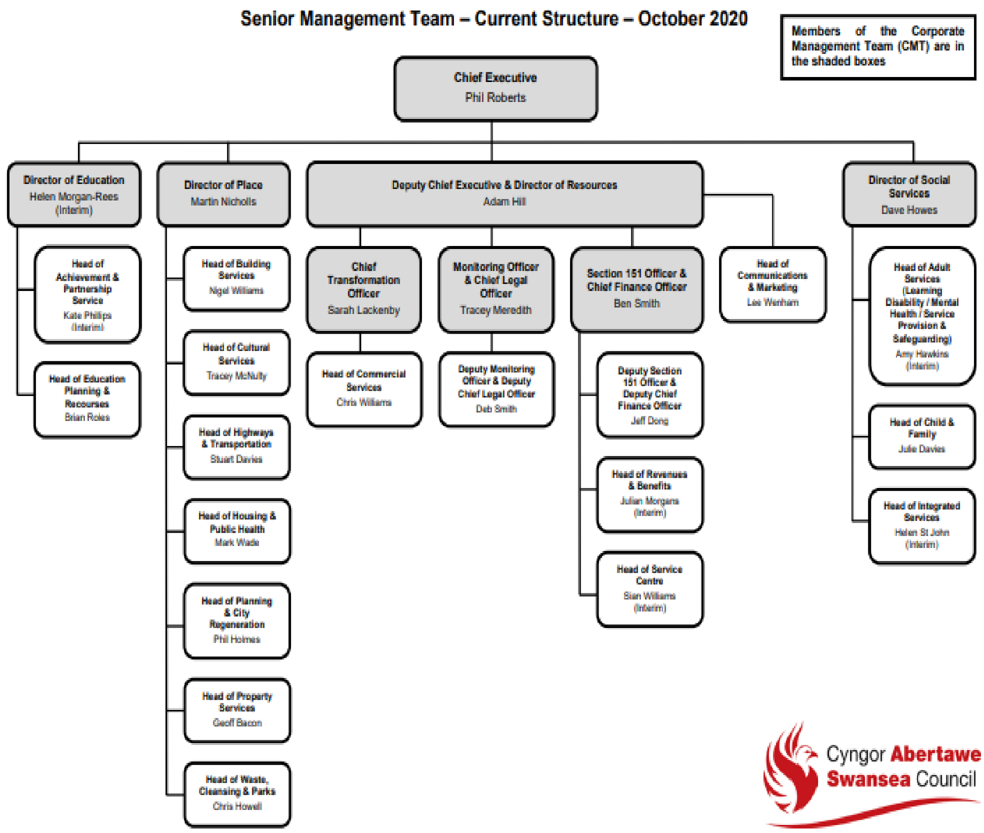
7.14 Key influences on the LDP include:

- The need to provide for 17100 new dwellings and support 13600 new jobs,
- Limited previously developed (brownfield) land remaining to accommodate development,
- The sustainable regeneration of the Swansea Central Area as the economic hub and main driver of the 'City Region',

- The need for further investment at SA1, Tawe Riverside and the Fabian Way Corridor to sustain the successful regeneration of waterfront areas, whilst complementing regeneration of the Central Area,
- Reorientation of the economy towards high quality, skilled and knowledge based sectors,
- Lack of available, high quality office space to meet economic growth needs,
- The impact of out of town development of retail, office and leisure uses on the Central Area,
- Significant opportunities for leisure, sustainable tourism and heritage-led development schemes,
- Supply of new house building not keeping pace with demand as the local population grows, a shortfall of affordable housing and the economic viability of sites for delivering new housing varying considerably across the County,
- Community cohesion issues in areas with high concentrations of HMOs,
- Need for greater variety of size and tenure mix within new housing developments to contribute towards sustainable balanced communities,
- Meeting the needs of an increasingly elderly population
- A sizeable Higher Education student population and increasing demand to provide additional accommodation,
- Significant variations across the County in terms of social indicators of deprivation, including access to health, education and community services and facilities and housing quality. Community cohesion issues in certain wards due to the number of conversions of housing stock to HMOs and the geographical spread,
- Safeguarding communities where Welsh language is an important part of the social fabric,
- The high quality natural environment, landscapes, and coastline are important assets to the local economy, attracting visitors, and providing resources,
- The extensive green space network is vital to economic, environmental and community well-being, and more green infrastructure is needed to meet national guidance and local requirements for improving accessibility to open space,
- Improvements to linkages between open spaces, Public Rights of Way, and key destinations are needed to increase accessibility and promote physical activity,
- Poor air quality is an issue in some areas, which can have a detrimental impact on human health. Parts of the urban area have been designated as Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs), where further deterioration in air quality would be of significant concern,
- The area’s industrial past has left a legacy of potentially contaminated sites, where remediation is required to protect human health and well-being,
- The existing highway network experiences traffic congestion along certain main routes and junctions, which can have a negative impact on amenity, health and well-being, and economic competitiveness.

PLANNING SERVICE

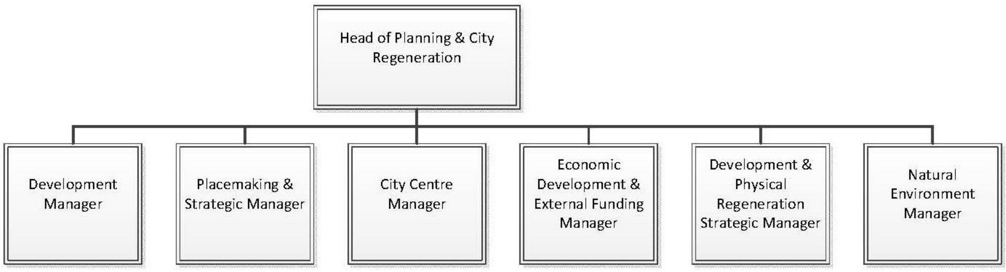
Chart 1 - Organisational Structure



8.1 The Council is organised into four Corporate Directorates reporting directly to the Chief Executive Officer, as detailed in Chart 1 above. Both the Development Management and Placemaking & Strategic Planning functions sit within the Planning and City Regeneration Service under a single Head of Service who reports to the Director of Place.

8.2 As detailed in Chart 2 below the Planning and City Regeneration Service, itself, is organised into 5 separate service areas namely Development Management, Placemaking and Strategic Planning, Natural Environment, City Centre Management, External Funding, and Development and Physical Regeneration.

Chart 2 – Organisational Structure



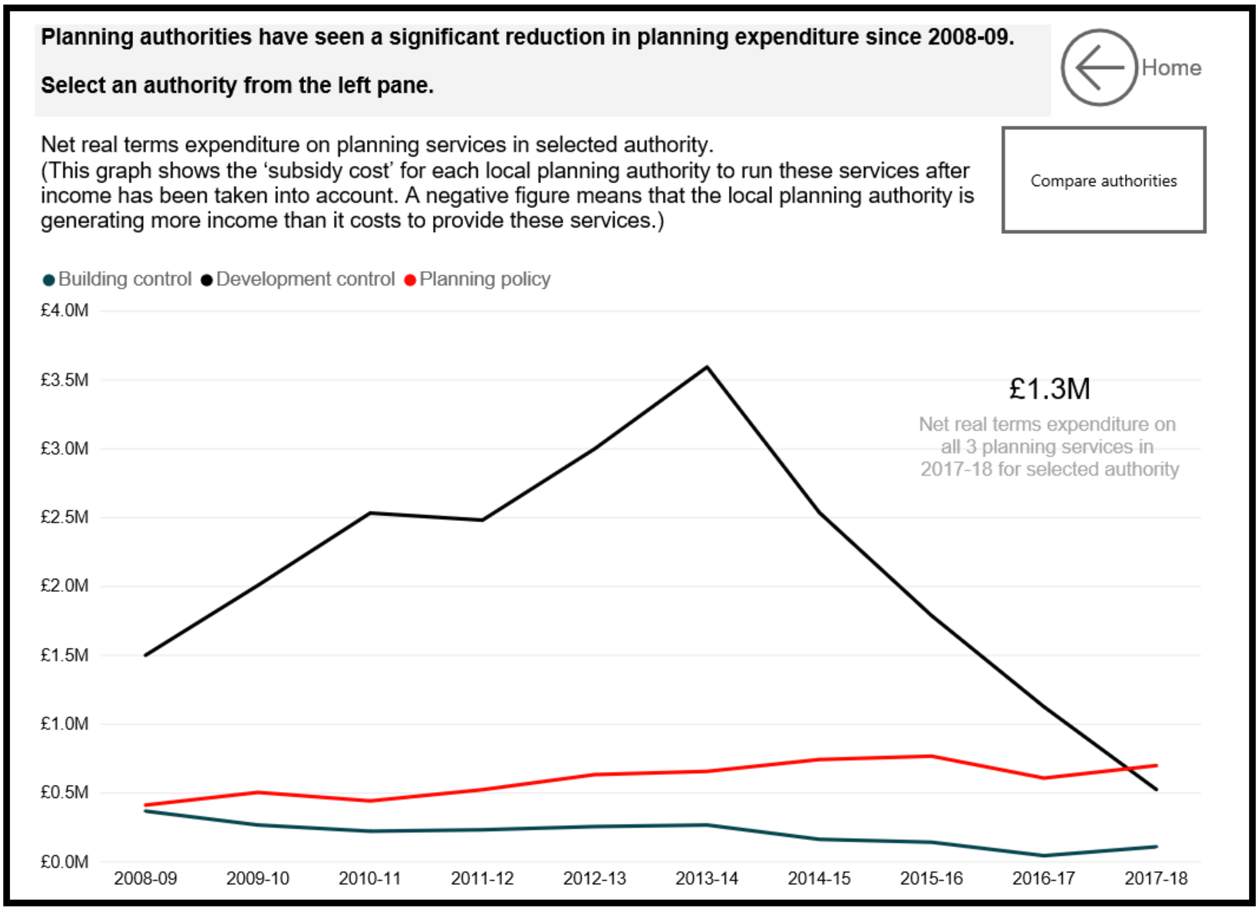
9.0 **Wider organisational activities impacting on the service – how has the department responded to financial constraints imposed during budget setting? What cross departmental activities has the department been involved in or been affected by, e.g. closer joint working, IT changes, real estate rationalisation?**

9.1 Agile working arrangements have been introduced as part of a corporate initiative, to facilitate the rationalisation of accommodation within the Civic Centre, income generation through the rental of office floor space and improved productivity. In this respect the Development Management function of the Authority has, since 2013, progressively introduced new document management, back office and workflow management systems together with revised and refined business processes to facilitate a paperless office which has allowed the efficiencies and benefits associated with agile working to be exploited more effectively. This work meant the when the Coronavirus pandemic restrictions were imposed in March 2020, officers were fully equipped to work from home.

9.2 Cross departmental working initiatives include the formation of a core Land Charges Team in April 2019 embedded within the Development Management Section. This brought together discrete functions carried out by 11 separate officers in 7 different Departments under one management structure providing the potential for greater resilience, improvements in the quality of service and opportunities to generate further fee income.

10.0 Operating budget – including budget trend over 3 years, and fee income. Does the planning department retain fee income? Is this used to calculate its operating budget? Has a discrepancy between expected fee income and actuals affected the forward planning or operational activity of the department?

10.1 The operating budget dedicated specifically to the Development Management, Placemaking and Strategic Planning and Natural Environment functions is difficult to establish as staff within the Development Management, Placemaking and Strategic Planning and Natural Environment service areas input into a range of functions including central administration for the department as a whole, rights of way, ecology and AONB functions. Data published by the Wales Audit office, however, illustrates a significant reduction in expenditure on the planning service since 2013-14:



Source: Revenue outturn (RO) data, Stats Wales. Analysis by Wales Audit Office

10.2 Whilst the overall budget for the Development Management has reduced significantly, fee income rose between 2012/13 and 2018/19. However, the last two years has seen a reduction in income as illustrated in Table 1 below. Figures for 2020/21 were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst Welsh Government increased planning fees in August 2020, and there has been an increase in the number of planning applications received in Q3 and Q4, this increase has been for householder applications which generate lower application fees.

Table 1 – Planning Application Fee Income

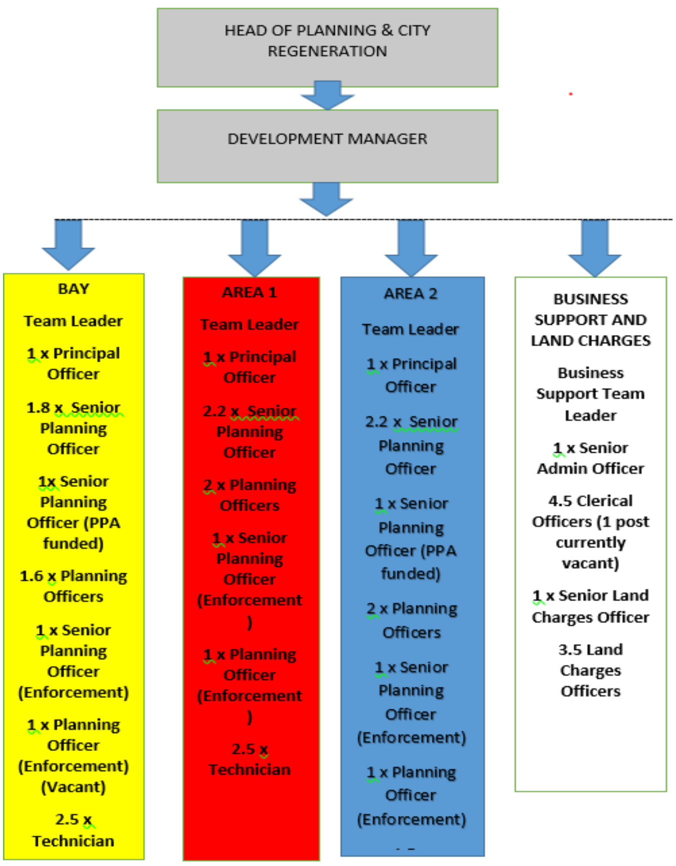
Income (£)	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/2020	2020/21
Target	639,000	689,000	787,600	847,600	1,006,600	1,070,100	1,072,100	1,073,800	1,080,500
Actual	908,685	841,115	961,407	906,526	1,156,952	1,287,180	1,257,249	934,109	916,723

10.3 Fee income is retained within the Development Management budget which is, however, set demanding fee income targets for each financial year to cover a growing proportion of the costs of the Service. Any budget underspend at the end of the financial year is not carried forward to the following financial year. Two full time Senior Planning Officers are also currently funded by Planning Performance Agreement. This places a heavy emphasis on unpredictable fee income as a means of sustaining the core business of the Service and represents a significant risk to service delivery should fee income fall.

11.0 Staff issues – what is the current staffing level of the department? What are the current plans for staff skills development and succession planning? Are any vacancies being carried? Has the service had to manage with redundancies (with reference to budget section above)? Has a loss of skills through sickness absence or other reasons, adversely affected the department? What are the coping mechanisms for this?

11.1 Development Management consists of 4 teams, comprising three Area Planning Teams, and a Business Support Team incorporating the Land Charges Section

Chart 4 – Development Management



11.3 The Section has previously been restructured and accommodated a number of redundancies with job descriptions rationalised to provide more flexible working. Authority has also been delegated further down the staff structure and through on the job training staff from previously discrete teams carry out a much wider range of functions. In this way the impact of redundancies and budget cuts has been managed to an extent with existing officers absorbing these roles in parallel with the introduction of revised business processes and a review of service delivery options.

11.4 Upskilling and reskilling of staff in this way remains an ongoing process but is a robust mechanism to manage the risk to the Service in the face of ongoing budget cuts.

11.5 Budgetary pressures and recruitment policies have, however, generated clear resilience issues, with a contracting, ageing workforce and reliance on a small number individual officers in key specialist fields. The Authority is increasingly having to "buy in" services to address specialism gaps.

11.6 Since early 2020, a number of vacancies have arisen in the department through a combination of staff resignations, long term sickness and internal promotions. These posts have now been filled but this process has taken longer than in normal circumstances due to the pandemic. These periods of vacancies, together with the need to adjust working practices as a result of working from home and Covid-19 restrictions, has created additional workload pressures on staff. In addition, the period from September 2020 has seen a significant increase in the number of planning applications being submitted, which further increases the workload pressure on staff. Temporary staff have been recruited to assist in the short term, although these posts are dependent on funding being available in the future.

11.7 In addition, and as stated above, two Senior Planning Officers continue to be funded via fee income generated from Planning Performance Agreements negotiated on a variety of projects. Fee income is now the primary source of funding for the service and as illustrated in Table 1 above can experience significant variations year on year placing the delivery of statutory services at potential risk moving forward.

YOUR LOCAL STORY

12.0 Workload. What are the current planning pressures the service is facing? What is the status of the LDP? Is development/monitoring/revision proceeding as planned? What is the impact on support of development management services, e.g. for master planning? What is the DM workload per officer?

12.1 Development management pressures stem from an increase in the number of planning and related applications received rising from 1482 in 2012/13 to 2027 in 2019/20 and 2088 in 2020-21. The first quarter of 2020-21 saw a drop in the number of planning applications received, primarily driven by the lockdown restrictions introduced from March 2020. However, since Q3 of 2020-21, there has been a significant increase in the number of applications received. In Q4 of 2020-21, 645 applications were received. If this is translated over a whole year this would be equivalent to 2580 applications being received. Early evidence for the 2021-22 year suggests this is the case, which will have a significant impact on officer workload. The number of planning applications received per case officer (FTE) was 120 per annum in 2019/20 and 124 in 2020-21. However, it should be noted that for most of 2020-21 there were vacant posts in the department which meant that in the average number of applications per officer was greater than this. This figure excludes the provision of pre-application advice, and appeals and input into the change process described above, appeals, enforcement cases, corporate projects and initiative and policy/SPG formulation.

12.2 The number of enforcement cases received in 2019-20 was 480 and 462 in 2020-21, which coupled with the remnants of an historic backlog of stubborn cases continues to place pressure on the enforcement service when measured against the new performance indicators introduced by Welsh Government in 2017. Furthermore, the restrictions brought in to limit the spread of Covid 19 has impacted on the speed of investigation of these complaints. Enforcement officers currently carry an average caseload of 129 complaints, up from 78 in 2018-19

12.3 Internal and statutory consultees have had capacity issues over the two year period, particularly with regard ecology, landscape, pollution control and highway issues. These capacity issues can have a significant impact on the provision of comprehensive and/or timely consultation responses and the efficiency of decision making.

13.0 Reference to the Annual Monitoring Report (as an attachment). In the absence of an AMR, the authority should report on its progress towards adoption of the LDP, and any key issues arising in the year.

13.1 The LDP was adopted in February 2019 and provides a clear planning framework to address key issues facing the County. It is underpinned by an extensive and up to date evidence base. The second AMR is presented as a separate item on this Committee Agenda.

14.0 Current projects. Any specific items of research, best practice development or other initiatives being undertaken within the planning service. Examples could include a "development team" approach to major applications, work on a Local Development Order or process reviews.

14.1 The LDP includes a policy that allocates suitable sites on the edge of rural and semi-rural locations in Gower, Gower Fringe and West of Swansea to deliver affordable homes for local people. The policy requires these sites to deliver a minimum of 51% affordable homes for local people with the range and type of homes tailored to meet the evidence of local need. This policy is an innovative, evidenced based and pragmatic response to an historic problem of under provision using previous policy approaches. The progress of development proposals through planning application stage on these allocated sites (despite early suggestions from objectors that such an approach would be unviable) demonstrates the effectiveness of the policy. It is a transferable approach to other Authorities that may have similar issues with providing affordable housing in rural areas, and this has been recognised by Welsh Government. The Minister for Housing and Local Government issued (July 2019) a letter to all Councils in Wales requiring them to implement similar affordable housing led sites through their LDPs.

14.2 In Development Management terms the Section introduced agile working arrangements including the further refinement the "paperless office" processes developed since 2013 using electronic workflow systems. This meant that when lockdown restrictions were introduced, officers were able to continue their duties from home.

14.4 Officers meet regularly with Stakeholders to identify issues which may impact on the efficiency of the Development Management Process, including Welsh Government, Internal Departments and Developers.

14.5 The promotion of a development team approach lead by officers from the Council's Development and Physical Regeneration Section (as developer and applicant), externally appointed consultants and officers in the Development Conservation and Design Section continues to be a highly effective model for the delivery of the Swansea City Centre redevelopment scheme. In development management terms roles were clearly articulated and resourced through the signing of a Planning Performance Agreement which has facilitated the efficient delivery of schemes through the pre-application process with added value and the determination of the resultant applications in a timely manner.

14.6 The Council has also established a Developer Forum to improve working relationships with small and medium sized housing developers (SME's) and address issues which may be frustrating the development process. In this respect two current work streams are ongoing firstly, focussing on providing consistency between planning placemaking policy and highway adoption processes and standards and secondly, on refining and reducing the number of conditions imposed on planning permissions, particularly pre-commencement conditions.

15.0 Local pressures. Major applications or other planning issues having a disproportionate impact on the efficiency of the service. Could include specific development pressures, enforcement issues such as major site restoration issues, monitoring compliance of conditions with non-devolved consents (e.g. wind energy applications) or applications of national significance (e.g. LNG storage site).

15.1 As detailed above a number of major and strategic sites including the redevelopment of Swansea City Centre have come forward. The approach adopted by the Authority detailed at Section 14 above has facilitated the effective delivery of a number of these sites in accordance with the "placemaking" policy objectives set out in the LDP and without formal challenge.

15.2 Considerable resources have, however, been dedicated to this process which has only been possible to manage, without impacting on the performance of the Development Management Service as a whole, through the appointment of staff via fee income generated by Planning Performance Agreement.

15.3 The number of HMO applications has increased significantly since the introduction of the C4 Use Class in February 2016. This produced significant workload and political pressures with a large number of applications being "called in" to Planning Committee for determination. The absence of a robust policy under the provisions of the Unitary Development Plan led to uncertainty and a number of applications being refused contrary to officer recommendation but subsequently allowed at appeal. A specific policy has now been introduced which incorporates clear thresholds to control the concentration of HMO's in an area following the adoption of the Swansea Local Development Plan in February 2019. There are, however, lessons to be learned over the impact of the introduction of such legislative changes by Welsh Government effectively within a policy vacuum.

16.0 Our Performance 2019-20 and 2020-21

16.1 As no APR was produced last year due to the Coronavirus pandemic, this section of the report provides details on performance for both the 2019-20 and 2020-21 financial years. In previous years, data has been provided to Local Authorities to allow comparison of our performance and the all Wales picture. However, this data has not been produced for the last two years. As a result, this report provides less detail than in previous years.

16.2 Performance is analysed across the five key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in the Planning Performance Framework:

- Plan making;
- Efficiency;
- Quality;
- Engagement; and
- Enforcement.

16.3 Plan making

16.4 The Swansea Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted in March 2019 and provides a framework for making decisions on planning applications.

16.5 Efficiency

16.6 In 2019-20 we determined 1,916 planning applications with 81% of applications approved, up from 72% in the previous year. In 2020-21, we determined 1652 planning applications with 82% of applications approved. 99% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales in both 2019/20 and 2020/21. The target for Wales is 80%.

16.7 Table 1 below shows that our performance remained at a high level over the last two years.

Table 1 : Percentage of planning applications determined in required timescales

Wales 2018/19	Swansea 2018/19	Swansea 2019/20	Swansea 2020/21
88%	99%	99%	99%

16.8 Major applications

16.9 We determined 27 major planning applications in 2019-20, 26 of which were in required timescales. In 2020-21, 14 major applications were determined with 12 being within agreed timescales.

Table 2: Percentage of major applications determined within required timescales:

Wales 2018/19	Swansea 2018/19	Swansea 2019/20	Swansea 2020-21
68%	88%	96%	86%

16.10 The figure for 2020-21 shows a drop on the previous year. However, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, there were no Planning Committees in April and May 2020. Both applications that were outside required timescales were due to be considered at that time but could not be considered until the June 2020 Planning Committee which means the decision was made outside the required timescale.

- The percentage of minor applications determined within the required timescales stayed the same at 99%;
- The percentage of householder applications determined within the required timescales increased from 99% to 99.7%; and
- The percentage of other applications determined within required timescales increased from 98% to 99%.

16.11 Quality

16.12 In 2019-20, our Planning Committee made 50 planning application decisions during the year, which equated to 3% of all planning applications determined. In 2020-21, our Planning Committee made 19 planning application decisions, which equated to 1.2% of all planning decisions made in that year. This drop in the number of decisions made by Planning Committee is a reflection of the type of planning application submitted since the pandemic began. There was a decline in the number of major planning applications submitted and an increase in the number of householder applications submitted. For information, Planning Committee has already determined 21 applications so far this year.

16.13 In 2019-20, our Planning Committee made 3 (6%) decisions against officer advice. This equated to 0.15% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice. In 2020-21, Planning Committee did not make any decisions contrary to officer advice.

16.14 In 2019-20 we received 111 appeal decisions against our planning decisions. Of these, the Council's decision was upheld in 84 (76%) of cases, up from 72% in the previous year. One appeal related to a committee overturn. This appeal was dismissed.

16.15 In 2020-21, we received 90 appeal decisions. Of these the Council's decision was upheld in 60 (67%) of cases. One appeal related to a Committee overturn. This appeal was allowed. Analysis of the appeals allowed shows that the applications had been refused for the following reason:

- Visual Amenity – 17
- Highway Safety - 4
- Residential Amenity – 2
- Residential and Visual Amenity - 2
- Non-compliance with HMO policy – 2
- Non-compliance with annexe policy – 2
- Impact on district centre – 1

16.16 It is evident that most appeals are allowed when the reason for refusal relates to visual amenity and these appeals related mainly to householder development. The design of a development is subjective. The Council is bringing forward new SPG so monitoring of decisions will continue particularly once the new SPG is adopted.

16.17 The Welsh Government's target for a good Authority is 66% of appeals dismissed so the Council is still performing above this target.

16.18 During 2019-20 we had no applications for costs at a section 78 appeal upheld. During 2020-21 two partial awards of costs were awarded against the Council. Whilst both appeals were dismissed, the respective Inspectors considered that part of the reasons for refusal were unreasonable.

16.18 Engagement

16.19 In previous years, data provided to the Council has allowed us to compare engagement with other Authorities. As this data has not been provided this year, this comparison cannot be undertaken. However,

- we allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee;
- prior to lockdown, we had an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public. Since the lockdown, officers have worked from home. The department has maintained a phone service, albeit with reduced hours (10.00am to 4.00pm) and officers have mobile phones.; and
- we maintain an online register of planning applications and the online system allows members of the public to view applications, follow progress of the application and submit comments.

16.20 Enforcement

16.21 In 2019-20 we investigated 326 enforcement cases, 74% of these enforcement within 84 days, up from 72% in 2018-19. In 2020-21 we investigated 229 enforcement cases, 51% within 84 days.

16.22 The drop in performance in 2020-21 can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, the Coronavirus lockdown impacted the ability of enforcement officers to investigate complaints. Access to property was restricted and as a result, it took longer for officers to be able to establish whether a breach of planning control had occurred. The number of complaints received also increased. It would appear that as a result of the lockdown, people are spending more time at home and observing development taking place in the area which has been reported to the Council.

16.23 The second issue is that one of the enforcement officers left the Authority halfway through the year. This vacancy put additional pressure on the enforcement service with an inevitable impact on performance.

16.24 The average time taken to pursue positive enforcement action was 81 days in 2019-20 and 30 days in 2020-21. Whilst it was taking longer for the investigation to take place in 2020-21 than previous years, once the investigation had been undertaken, any positive action needed was taken significantly quicker than in previous years (73 days in 2018-19)