



Report of the Head of Planning and City Regeneration

Planning Committee – 24 October 2023

Planning Annual Performance Report 2022-2023

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 Since the Covid-19 pandemic, comparison data has not been produced to allow Welsh Local Authorities to benchmark performance. However, Welsh Government has recently published Development Management Quarterly Statistics so this has allowed some comparison of performance in determining planning applications.

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 structure 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 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. Work on the Replacement Local Development Plan has also commenced.
- 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.
- 2.5 The agile working arrangements that had been introduced previously meant that the department was already able to access its Planning IT systems remotely when the Coronavirus Pandemic arrived in March 2020. Officers now work in a hybrid arrangement whereby they can work both remotely and in the office.

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 last Planning Performance Framework, the Council represents one of the best performing Local Planning Authorities in Wales.
- 3.2 The percentage of all applications determined within required timescales has also shown a significant improvement, increasing from 71% in 2014-15 to 96% in 2022-23. This figure is well above the Welsh average of 83% and the third highest performing Authority in Wales. It should also be noted that in terms of the percentage of applications determined within 8 weeks of receipt, the Council was the best performing Authority in Wales at 78%, compared to a Wales average of 52%
- 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 81% in 2022-23. In 2018-19, the Welsh average was 68%.
- 3.4 The area which was most affected by the Coronavirus pandemic has been enforcement. In 2017-18 46% of all enforcement cases were investigated in 84 days. This improved to 74% in 2018-19. However, the impacts of the pandemic meant that this figure dropped to 32% in 2020-21 as there were restrictions on the number of cases that could be investigated. This created a backlog of cases and as a result 29% of cases were investigated within 84 days in 2022-23, although more cases were investigated than in 2021-22.
- 3.5 The percentage of Member made decisions contrary to officer advice has also reduced from 24% in 2016-17 to 3% in 2022-23. This equates to just 1 application out of a total of 33 decisions made by Planning Committee and just 0.04% of all decisions made by the Authority. This performance is below the Welsh Government target of 5%. In 2018-19 (last available data), the Welsh average was 9%.
- 3.6 The overall quality of decision making when assessed against the percentage of appeals dismissed was 66% in 2022-23 compared to 69% in 2021-22. With the adoption of the Swansea Local Development Plan in February 2019 the Council 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. As detailed in the APR, most appeal were allowed on subjective grounds and the figures were affected by the number of appeal decisions considered by one Inspector.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 The APR provides a useful overview of the Council's performance over the last year. Limited comparison data to allow an assessment between local authorities has been produced by Welsh Government. However, the data that has been produced shows that the service has continued to perform at a high level. Enforcement was affected by the pandemic and there will be challenges for the service in tackling the backlog that has grown over the last three years.

4.2 There are also significant 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:

None

Appendices:

City & County of Swansea APR 2021-22

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