

Report of the Head of Planning and City Regeneration

Planning Committee – 6th November 2018

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 2017-18, is attached to this report as Annex A, for Member consideration. The APR must be formally submitted to Welsh Government following this meeting.

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 Development, Conservation & Design Section was restructured to accommodate budgetary constraints 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). In 2016 the Section also replaced its M3 Northgate back office system with Idox Uniform, 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 implementing the recommendations of its recent Commissioning Review which has identified further service improvements, cost savings, income generation and efficiency opportunities.
- 2.5 In development management terms the Development, Conservation & Design Section is also currently in the process of piloting agile working arrangements including the further refinement the "paperless office" processes developed since 2013 using electronic workflow systems and the introduction mobile App. technology which will allow officers to view and update files and records held on the Authority's electronic document management and back office systems whilst on site.

3.0 Performance:

- 3.1 The positive changes introduced in recent years 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 60 days was significantly below the Welsh average of 81 days. The percentage of all applications determined within required timescales also showed a significant and consistent year on year improvement increasing from 71% in 2014-15 to 98% in 2017-18, well above the Welsh average, 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 81% in 2017-18. A performance which is now significantly above the Welsh average of 69%.
- 3.4 In enforcement terms new Welsh Government performance indicators were introduced part way through the reporting year which, together with legacy issues following the introduction of new back office system has, influenced the reliability of data to inform performance and benchmark against other Authorities in Wales. Following the recommendations of a recent Internal Audit report a data cleansing exercise is currently ongoing with 76% of cases currently being reported by the system as being investigated in 84 days in first quarter of 2018-19.
- 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 equating to 0.2% of all planning application decisions being made against officer advice compared to 0.6% across Wales. Eight of these decision were, however, subject to a subsequent appeal following refusal and all were allowed. A summary of the relevant appeals is provided at Annex B for Member consideration.
- 3.7 Significant progress in LDP preparation has been made over the past year. The Deposit LDP has been subject to Examination in accordance with a revised LDP Delivery Agreement with adoption anticipated in February-March 2019.
- 3.8 Housing land supply remains around 3 years, however, negotiations with developers in accordance with the Council's agreed strategy for advancing planning applications on LDP Strategic Development Areas has resulted in the submission of a number of schemes potentially providing land for an additional 3823 dwellings. Further 'departure' applications are anticipated during the coming year with another SDA at pre-application consultation stage which will provide further opportunity to meet the housing land supply requirement going forward.

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 regeneration agenda and 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 further 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 2016-17:

<http://democracy.swansea.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=493&MId=7709&Ver=4&LLL=-1>

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<i>Date of</i>	<i>27nd October 2017</i>	<i>Document Name:</i>	<i>Swansea APR 2017-18</i>
<i>Production:</i>			