



Report of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Performance

Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Panel – 14th March 2023

PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) – 2021-22

Purpose	To provide an overview of the performance of the Development Management Service
Content	This report sets out the background to the Annual Performance Report, the context in which it has occurred and details the performance of the Authority.
Councillors are being asked to	Consider the information and give their views
Lead Councillor(s)	Cllr David Hopkins, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Performance
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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 Since the Covid-19 pandemic, comparison data has not been produced to allow Welsh Local Authorities to benchmark performance. Indeed, it appears from all-Wales meetings that the majority of Welsh LPAs are not producing an APR this year. However, it is considered this report provides an opportunity to consider the performance of the Development Management Service. This report therefore will set out the department's performance for 2020-21 and where relevant, provides comparison data to the department's performance for the last APR produced for 2020-21.

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.
- 2.5 The agile working arrangements that had been introduced previously meant that the department was already able to access its Planning IT systems from home when the Coronavirus Pandemic arrived in March 2020, Officers initially worked from home rather than in the office, and now work in a hybrid arrangement whereby they can work both at home 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 99% in 2021-22. The figures for 2021-22 show a fall in performance to 97% but this can be attributed to the increase in the number of applications received and periods of staff vacancies. This figure is still well above the Welsh average of 88% in 2018/19 when figures were last produced
- 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 86% in 2020-21. There was a slight drop in performance in 2021-22, which related to four applications that were reported to committee and therefore went over the agreed timescale. In 2018-19, the Welsh average was 68%.
- 3.4 The area which was most affected by the Coronavirus pandemic has been enforcement. In 2019-20, 74% of all enforcement cases were investigated in 84 days compared to 46% in 2017-18. However, the impacts of the pandemic meant that this figure dropped to 51% in 2020-21. The backlog of cases that arose as a result of the pandemic meant that 32% of cases were investigated within 84 days.
- 3.5 The percentage of Member made decisions contrary to officer advice has also reduced from 24% in 2016-17 to 2% in 2021-22. This equates to just 1 application out of a total of 44 decisions made by Planning Committee in just 0.04% of all decisions made by the Authority. This performance is below the Welsh Government target of 5%. In 2018-19, the Welsh average was 9%.
- 3.6 The overall quality of decision making when assessed against the percentage of appeals dismissed was 69% in 2021-22 compared to 64% in 2020-21. 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. As detailed in the APR, most appeals were allowed on subjective grounds.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 The APR provides a useful overview of the Council's performance over the last year. Comparison data to allow an assessment between local authorities has not been produced by Welsh Government. However, the report demonstrates pressures caused by increased workload and staff vacancies, the service has continued to perform at a high level. Enforcement has been 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:

City & County of Swansea APR 2019-21:

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