



To:
**Councillor David Hopkins, Cabinet
Member for Corporate Services and
Performance**

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4 April 2023

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Performance concerning the meeting held on 14 March 2023 and the Planning Annual Performance Report 2021/22 This letter does not require a response.

Dear Councillor Hopkins,

On the 14 March, the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel met to discuss the Planning Annual Performance Report 2021/22. The Panel are grateful to you and relevant officers for attending to discuss and answer questions. Our observations focused on the following areas.

You informed us that a Planning Annual Report has not been requested by Welsh Government this year therefore due to this and the pandemic, comparisons between Local Authority performances have not been available. We are grateful that this Annual Report is still prepared and that it continues to come to scrutiny annually.

Your officers reported a significant increase of 29% more applications this year compared to 2020/21. 97% of those applications were determined within the required timescales, the target set by Welsh Government is 80%. Despite the increase in the application numbers, planning fee income has not kept pace.

We were also informed that 300 more planning applications were received in 2021/22 compared to 2018/19 but planning income was £300,000 less. This was due to the increased number of household applications received. As a result, pressure has been put on resources because the planning income to a large degree provides the budget for planning services.

Your officers reported that appeals performance was up slightly and again was above the Welsh Government target on the previous year. Where appeals are allowed, it generally relates to matters of design.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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Enforcement

Your officers report that the pandemic created a backlog of enforcement cases due to officers not being able to attend sites as easily, as well as the impact of staff vacancies. We were informed that enforcement is a two stage process. The first stage being the initial investigation followed by the second stage which is to take appropriate action to decide if there has been a breach of planning control. This action could be an enforcement notice, resolution, or granting planning permission. The number of enforcement complaints investigated was a similar number to the previous year.

We asked about the performance indicators for enforcement and the officer explained that the initial investigation phase has a target of 84 days. Every complaint is investigated however only 32% of investigations were completed in the 84 day target, a decrease from 51% in the previous year. We asked how enforcement action is prioritised and the officer explained that they are prioritised by the seriousness of the breach.

We asked whether application fees could be increased in order to recruit more officers potentially temporarily to reduce the backlog of enforcement cases, however you told us you have written to the Minister to ask this and Welsh Government have said no at this point.

We understand the reasons this target has not been met and that unfortunately comparison data with other Local Authorities is not available but officers felt that other Local Authorities are likely to be in a similar situation. We raised our concerns that due to the backlog of cases, enforcement may not be seen to be fully carried out. We asked if every complaint is investigated and officers reassured us that they are all investigated and dealt with accordingly just not all are within the target number of days.

Local Development Plan

We had some concerns around the development of the new Local Development Plan (LDP). We are acutely aware of the changing landscape to Swansea, especially in terms of population and jobs for example. We asked whether the new plan would be developed any differently to the old plan and if there are any lessons learnt that may avoid predictions not materialising. Your officers explained that aims within the LDP are based not only on the statistical data in relation to population etc. but also the Councils Economic Regeneration Strategy and aspirational targets for delivering growth. All the data is from the best known available data forecasts from consultant partners and is the same method used across the UK.

Your Response

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but in this instance, we require no formal written response.

Yours sincerely,



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