

# **ENVIRONMENT & HIGHWAYS CABINET BOARD**

## **REPORT OF *HEAD OF PLANNING, NICOLA PEARCE***

***9 JUNE 2015***

### **SECTION A – MATTER FOR DECISION**

**WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL**

### **BUSINESS PLAN 2015-2016**

#### **Purpose of Report**

To endorse the Business Plan for the Planning Section covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

#### **Background**

During the financial year 2013-2014, the Council reviewed performance management arrangements. A number of improvements to the Council's performance management framework were proposed following this review. These improvements were approved by the Policy and Resources Cabinet Board on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2014. As a consequence the first Business Plans incorporating the new format were prepared for 2014-2015 and the Business Plan for Planning was presented to this Board on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2014 where it was endorsed by Members. The same format has been used this year but updated to reflect achievements and new objectives going forward.

This Business Plan has been developed with the staff and has been agreed between the Head of Planning and the Director of Environment for the financial year commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015.

#### **Monitoring Arrangements**

Progress in delivering the Business Plan will be monitored in a number of ways:

- Fortnightly meetings are held between the Head of Planning and Accountable Managers to discuss a number of issues including performance management.

- Monthly meetings are held between the Accountable Managers and their teams in addition to one to one performance meetings with staff, to discuss and if needed, address performance issues.
- An annual Personal Development Review is undertaken for all staff including the Head of Service with mid-year appraisal meetings to establish whether identified targets are being achieved, and to set new targets for the forthcoming year. If targets are not being met and the reasons can be addressed, measures will be identified to ensure that services are back on track to achieve those targets.
- Action Plans for each Accountable Manager are prepared to create report cards which will illustrate performance targets and associated achievements. These will be reported regularly to both the Environment and Highways Board and the Economic and Communities Regeneration Board for scrutiny by Members. They are due to be reported to this Board on the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015.

### **Equalities**

A Screening Assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its Public Sector Equality Act 2010. After completing the assessment it has been determined that this function does not require an Equality Impact Assessment.

### **Financial Implications**

The Business Plan sets out contributions to the Forward Financial Plan of circa £97k.

### **Recommendations**

That, in relation to the section on Planning, the Cabinet Board formally endorses the aspects of the Business Plan 2015-2016 that are under the remit of Environment and Highways Cabinet Board.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision**

To implement the Council's performance management framework.

## **List of Background Papers**

Equality Impact Assessment Screening Form.  
Business Plan 2015/2016

## **Wards Affected**

All

## **Officer Contact**

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## COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

### BUSINESS PLAN 2015-2016

#### (a) **Implementation of Decision**

The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call-in period.

#### (b) **Sustainability Appraisal**

##### **Community Plan Impacts**

Economic Prosperity	-	Positive
Education & Lifelong Learning	-	Positive
Better Health & Wellbeing	-	Positive
Environment & Transport	-	Positive
Crime & Disorder	-	Positive

##### **Other Impacts**

Welsh Language	-	Positive
Sustainable Development	-	Positive
Equalities	-	Positive
Social Inclusion	-	Positive

#### (c) **Consultation**

This item is not subject to external consultation.

**Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council**  
**Environment**

**Business Plan 2015 / 2016**

For

**Nicola Pearce**  
Head of Planning

**Councillor Anthony Taylor**

Cabinet Member

for

Economic Development

and

**Councillor Edward Latham**

Cabinet Member

for

Environment

## Introduction

This is the Business Plan for the Planning Department within the Environment Directorate for the period 2015/16. It sets out a summary of achievements in 2014/15, describes the vision and objectives for the service going forward, together with the priorities for 2015/16 which have been identified to achieve these objectives.

Attached to this document are a number of appendices which outline the staff structure which was recently agreed by the Personnel committee on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2015. FFP savings together with performance management measures are also appended to this document.

## What are the most important things for the department to achieve in the next year (2015/16)?

### Departmental Aims and Objectives

The Development Management and Building Control sections of the service went through a comprehensive systems thinking review in 2008/09 which resulted in the creation of a purpose for each of the two services. Those purposes have been considered in light of the services provided under the larger Planning umbrella to create a combined aim, vision and a shared set of values which are as follows:

#### Aim

To establish the framework for shaping, creating and delivering quality and sustainable communities within which to live and thrive.

To secure this aim the following vision has been created:

#### Vision

A pro-active front loaded service where everyone works together to achieve a shared purpose of promoting and creating sustainable development to achieve the corporate priority of securing prosperity for all.

### Values

Collaborative working, helping each other to secure continuous improvement, communication, openness, consistency, transparency, equality, adding value and doing what matters for all of our customers.

### Key Achievements and Performance Summary 2014/15

In 2014/15 a number of changes were introduced to take account of staff reductions and an amalgamation of sections which were required to achieve savings identified within the previously approved FFP. Further restructuring took place at the tail end of 2014/15 to enable additional staff to leave via the ER/VR scheme and thus secure additional savings towards the FFP. All of these changes together with the financial savings associated with them were reported to and approved by the Personnel Committee on the 13th April 2015. These structural changes have resulted in the amalgamation of services under a reduced number of accountable managers, staff taking on different roles and responsibilities and due to a further loss in staff, those that remain have taken on additional workloads. As a consequence all of the identified FFP targets for 2014/15 were achieved and the financial pressure associated with the closure of the Print and Graphics unit was also absorbed within the overall Service budget. Despite this

reduction in staff and increase in workload, the service has secured a number of significant achievements which are outlined as follows:

- The focussed change consultation was undertaken and the responses were compiled and addressed within a comprehensive document which was forwarded to the planning Inspectorate for consideration as part of the Examination In Public (EIP).
- The Local Development Plan (LDP) was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in accordance with the timescales identified within the Welsh Government Delivery Agreement. The Hearing session phase of the Examination in Public (EIP) for the LDP was completed over a seven week period without any significant soundness issues raised. Whilst the inspectors report is unlikely to be received until September 2015, early indications suggest that the front loading approach adopted by this council has paid dividends.
- Five key Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) documents which were critical to support the LDP as part of the EIP process were completed in draft, albeit it is acknowledged that the Harbourside Masterplan SPG will require additional work to address concerns expressed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW).
- A number of projects to improve access along key circular routes forming part of the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network within the county borough were delivered. These projects involved the installation of 25 kissing gates (1 wooden), 4 bridle gates, 2 field gates and a number of wooden steps. Coupled with this, the removal of existing structures via landowner negotiations/agreements and extensive vegetation clearance has dramatically eased access for the communities using the routes.
- Objectives within the Rights of Way Improvement Plan have been delivered which included the waymarking and rebranding of St. Illtyd's walk which recently celebrated its twentieth anniversary, the establishment and completion of a series of guided walks, the installation of infrastructure to improve access to our network, appropriate maintenance and promotion of the wales coast path within the county borough, in addition to supporting the development management service in the determination of planning applications which could impact upon the PRoW network.
- A new Local Nature Reserve (LNR) was designated at Glanrhyd and Cwm du Glen which is located within the Pontardawe area. The LNR will be financially sustainable in terms of its revenue costs, whilst enhancing biodiversity within the area and providing an additional community facility for local residents and visitors.
- As part of ongoing work to ensure compliance with the statutory duty for biodiversity conservation under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, a set of protocols to be applied as part of any 'on the ground works' by the Local Authority has been prepared. These protocols are based on a risk management approach and aim to minimise the likelihood of any unintentional criminal offences being committed.
- The new Building Control structure following the loss of key qualified and skilled staff in March 2014 was implemented successfully without a reduction in service delivery or customer satisfaction.
- The Building Control section delivered the chargeable Building Control service on a cost neutral basis and despite losing staff, secured an increase in its market share of the business from 81% in 2013/14 to 87% in 2014/15.
- Performance in relation to one of the two main KPI's associated with Building Control continued to improve when compared with the performance in the previous year and in relation to the Welsh average. This KPI relates to the number of applications checked within 15 working days (KPI BCT 4) which achieved 100%. This demonstrates an increase in performance of 1.87% when compared with last year.

- In addition to delivering the regular services to customers, the largest regeneration project currently under construction in Wales (Second Campus development) has procured its Building Regulations from the Local Authority Building Control section. The project is four times the size of any scheme previously managed by the section and is currently being proactively managed by a team of officers who also continue to manage their more routine caseloads associated with their day to day functions. Completion of this project is due in late 2015. In addition to the university campus the section has also been providing the building control function on other land mark developments throughout the county borough, such as the redevelopment of Neath town centre and the rebuild of the Afan Lido leisure facility.
- Traffic related air quality has achieved significant improvement over the last year as previous causes of pollution were identified as a consequence of improved monitoring. The traffic management solution introduced at the cross roads adjacent to Pontardawe town centre has successfully achieved a reduction in PM10 levels thus ensuring it is not currently under threat of being declared an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). There has also been a slight reduction in the levels at Victoria Gardens however these levels still remain very close to the maximum threshold. A further reduction in levels is still required at this location to ensure that it does not constrain further development in and around Neath town centre.
- The Air Aware project was completed. The project introduced an alert system whereby residents who suffer from medical conditions linked to air quality would be advised at the earliest opportunity that air quality was poor. Such an alert would enable them to make informed decisions about their activities for that day, which would in turn reduce the demands and therefore the pressures upon primary health care services. The results of the project demonstrated that despite the alerts being in place the demand for primary care actually increased for those involved in the project. As a consequence the project has been closed down and will not be rolled out beyond the pilot area within NPT nor will it be rolled out nationally.
- Both funding and designs were secured for the construction of a dedicated cycleway linking Swansea university to Swansea City centre in addition to linking it to the network of existing routes within the Swansea Bay area, which includes Neath and Port Talbot. This required close collaborative working with colleagues in the City and County of Swansea given that it was a cross border piece of work. The agreed designs are to be implemented on both sides of the boundary during 2015.
- The Air Quality section has continued to work with industry to improve Nickel emissions thus ensuring that they are within European targets. One site within the County Borough which was previously breaching Air Quality Objective levels is now well within those limits, while a second site is currently operating using Best Available Technology to ensure that their emissions are controlled.
- The Contaminated land Strategy was rewritten following its initial adoption in 2002 and its review in 2005. This strategy has now been adopted by the Council following extensive consultation and will be used in the future to secure potential funding streams from the Welsh Government to deal with any land identified as being contaminated under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.



- Two Nationally Significant infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) for the Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon and the Tata power station developments were progressed through two separate Public Inquiries. Whilst the decisions for both schemes remain outstanding, all of the issues affecting this Authority were sufficiently considered as part of the Inquiry process.
- A controversial and politically sensitive wind farm which was refused planning permission by this Authority, was successfully defended at appeal after detailed and complex argument within a Public Inquiry.
- The complex and controversial application associated with the continuation of coaling, extension of coaling and the implementation of an amended restoration scheme and tourism led regeneration scheme at East Pit was finally assessed despite the lack of a mineral officer in post at the time. A comprehensive report was placed before Members of the Planning Committee who resolved to grant planning permission subject to the intervention of the Welsh Government being removed.
- A draft version of a Community Fund Policy relating to renewable forms of energy was accepted by the Economic and Community Regeneration Board, where it was agreed to commence consultation externally. This document will ensure that a consistent approach is followed to secure funds for local communities.
- The Planning Committee was successfully restructured to reduce it from 45 Members to 12 voting Members and one observer, and a public speaking protocol has been implemented. This has been operating for 6 months and whilst a review is about to be undertaken, early indications suggest that it is proving to be successful in terms of the quality of debate at the meetings and as a consequence the quality of decision making has also improved.
- The chargeable pre-application service was introduced which secured the targeted contribution towards the FFP but also reduced the number of pre-application inquiries submitted by developers who had no serious intention of developing. This has enabled the service to concentrate time and energy upon those who are committed to building quality development within the County Borough.
- The Development Management section has successfully contributed towards the delivery of major regeneration projects throughout the County Borough including the Swansea University second campus, Neath town centre, Afan Lido, Port Talbot parkway together with the ongoing comprehensive development of Wales' largest urban village at Coed Darcy.

All of the above are the most significant achievements secured during 2014/15. In addition to the above, the staff have continued to provide what are primarily statutory functions with an ever decreasing budget for customers with increasingly higher expectations. This will become gradually worse over the next few years when budgets become even more constrained. Managers within the section are monitoring and trying to boost morale to ensure that sickness levels are maintained at a minimum and performance at a maximum.

**Areas where performance was below expectation includes:**

- Performance management - There was a small drop in performance in relation to KPI – BCT7 which relates to the number of applications to be approved first time. This reduction is due to an increase in the number of poor quality applications being submitted. As a consequence of a loophole in the legislation which allows developers to build off rejected plans and the way in which Building Control Fees are structured on some types of work, it can be more cost effective for an applicant to leave the application rejected. The legislation does however allow for a potential increase in fees for such work to reflect the additional costs of dealing with such developments that will be progressed. Measures will be affected in the coming 12 months to address this loophole.

- Performance management within the Development Management service has reduced in relation to householder applications (from 94% to 87.4%) and Minor applications (from 71.3% to 63.5%). This was as a reflection of a particularly poor return within the final quarter of last year and will be addressed by going back to systems thinking principles where there was a greater emphasis on actively monitoring performance and acting upon the causes of poor performance.
- A consistent procedure in relation to appeals and enforcement was not delivered due to a lack of capacity within the service. This will be a priority for the forthcoming year.
- Due to the loss of two key members of staff, the Walking and Cycling strategy was not completed.
- Sickness levels increased from 287 (4.22 days per employee) in 2013/14 to 459 (7.29 days per employee) in 2014/15. This increase is mainly due to two employees being off at the time on long term sickness, which amounted to 188 days sickness. One has since left under ER/VR and the other has returned to work following the successful implementation of the new Return to Work procedures. Without the sickness days attributed to these two members of staff, levels would have been maintained at 4.3 days per employee. Whilst this is not a reduction it is significantly below the average for the Council as a whole.

### **Key Objectives in 2014/15**

These have been agreed with the Chief Executive, the Director of Environment, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and the Cabinet Member for Environment: They are split into general and service specific objectives:

#### **General**

1. To deliver the savings allocated within the Council's Forward Financial Plan and to continue to provide a high quality service to all of our customers.
2. To ensure continued improvement in performance despite reducing resources.
3. To minimise staff sickness levels and maximise outcomes.
4. To ensure continued staff development thus building a resilient service which has succession planning at its heart, with diminishing resources.
5. To continue to work with other agencies, together with other internal sections to ensure that efficiency savings are maximised through successful collaborative working.
6. To ensure that the service is delivered having regard to the Health and Safety regulations which are then transposed into appropriate risk assessments for each service.

#### **Service Specific**

1. Given the loss of experienced staff over the last few years it is necessary to further develop both recently employed Building Control officers and existing officers to ensure that they are able to undertake the duties commensurate with their posts and to ensure that they are able to maximise their promotion potential thus securing the service's succession planning potential.

2. To continue to maintain the very high performance achieved within Building Control in relation to the KPI's which measure the number of Building Control applications checked within 15 days (BCT4). The reduction in performance in relation to the number of applications which are approved first time (BCT7) needs to be addressed. This is as a consequence of an increase in the number of applicants who continue to work off rejected plans.
3. To maximise our market share for fee earning controllable building work and to continually monitor and assess why Building Control lose work to Approved Inspectors and implement measures to minimise these losses where possible.
4. To continue to play a leading role within LABC Cymru, contributing to each of the identified work streams within that organisation thus ensuring that this Council is influencing the National Building Control agenda going forward. Key issues to pursue amongst others, relate to the operation of Approved Inspectors and the development of a model for collaborative working in Wales..
5. To work with Neath RFC and Aberavon RFC to aid transition as a result of the deregulation of sports grounds.
6. To review and improve upon the working arrangements between Building Control and Development Management in relation to the enforcement of the legislation, without undermining our share of the Building Control market.
7. To implement the Council's recently-approved (April 2015) Contaminated Land Strategy for the County Borough, including seeking appropriate grant funding to enable pro-active site investigations to inform the Council's understanding of Contaminated Land across the County Borough.
8. To develop a Protocol covering the contribution made by the Pollution Control team to Phase 1 / Geoenvironmental Desk Studies for Council projects, and the provision of services to the general public / developers in respect of such matters, including appropriate pre-application advice on the content and methodologies of such reports.
9. Review and develop the Council's website to enhance the provision of information to the public on contaminated land issues, including publication of the Contaminated Land Public Register. The website currently holds a significant amount of information, however its layout and accessibility does not make it user friendly.
10. To continue ongoing monitoring of key sites in respect of air quality and nickel levels to ensure compliance with National and European targets.
11. To improve the performance of the Development Management section which has lost ground following a reduction in experienced staff. The aim is to re-gain the top performing authority in Wales status, which we held until staff levels reduced.
12. Design and implement a S106 database and protocol to ensure that we improve the monitoring and management of S106 infrastructure and payments to the authority. Whilst a database is currently in use this was designed for a different purpose and information cannot easily be extracted from the system.
13. Improve the training provided to all Elected Members in relation to Planning matters, with bespoke targeted training for those Members who sit on the Planning Committee. Such training will improve the quality of decision making.
14. Introduce standardised procedures and protocols in relation to the delivery of the Planning Enforcement Service and the Planning Appeals service to ensure that they tie in with the new Welsh Government targets and to ensure that the decisions of this Council are robustly defended.

15. Secure Planning Performance Agreements for the two NSIP schemes which are currently under consideration within the Council's boundaries. This will ensure that the Planning Service is appropriately resourced to address the pressures which will be placed upon the Authority should Development Consent Orders be granted for both schemes, as there are insufficient staff in post at present to address future demands.
16. Improve the provision of planning agents' workshops to ensure full engagement with stakeholders and to maximise transparency and accessibility. This will address the poor quality of submissions and will ensure that agents are aware of emerging changes to legislation and procedures.
17. Conclude the EIP, including the Matters Arising changes which will themselves require consultation and deliver an adopted LDP.
18. Update, consult upon and adopt the five strategically important SPGs which are essential to support the LDP going forward and which will also enable us to access funding streams and assist officers within both the regeneration and the Development Management sections.
19. Complete the joint SPG for Fabian Way through collaborative work with colleagues in the City and County of Swansea. This will help to secure a coordinated approach towards the redevelopment of this strategic corridor, in addition to securing funding through planning obligations which will itself deliver essential infrastructure which is required to facilitate our collective regeneration aspirations.
20. Establish systems and procedures for monitoring the performance of the emerging LDP.
21. Complete the Active Travel Bill commitment in relation to the preparation of an Existing Route Map for the two major settlements within NPT i.e. Neath and Port Talbot. Other settlements will follow soon after.
22. Amend our management and maintenance regimes associated with our PRoW network due to the relocation of the service to the SRC and the resultant reduction in storage space, and the cessation of contracts with a number of community councils who maintained their own PRoW.
23. To ensure the Local Authority complies with the statutory duty for Biodiversity Conservation under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and the requirements of other national and European environmental legislation (current and emerging); and contribute towards the delivery of the goals and objective requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

## **Methods of Service Delivery**

As explained earlier within this plan, the majority of the functions provided by the Planning Service are statutory, mainly associated with the regulatory functions of this Authority. These functions are measured by the Welsh Government and directly impact upon our communities.

Whilst a number of these functions have been outsourced in some Authorities, there is evidence to suggest in such circumstances that the quality of the service delivered has decreased whilst the cost to the public purse has increased. In a number of cases the service has been recovered by the Councils concerned and delivered in house as a consequence of these impacts.

Notwithstanding the regulatory nature of the work delivered within the Planning Service, much of it is intrinsically linked to the democratic role played by elected Members. As a result the outsourcing of services is more difficult to deliver whilst also maintaining that democratic link. Notwithstanding this, due to the loss of an experienced mineral planner and the lack of suitably qualified staff either internally or externally, it has been necessary to enter into a Service Level Agreement with a neighbouring authority who consequently provide professional advice to the authority on minerals planning. This is working successfully although not as efficiently as when the service was delivered in-house.

In terms of Building Control, the Local Authority has a legal obligation to deliver a Building Control service and is obligated to accept a Building Regulations submission from anyone who wants to submit one. Furthermore there are no alternative models for service delivery in relation to non-fee earning work such as applications from disabled people, dealing with dangerous structures, dealing with relevant sections of the West Glamorgan Act and discharging the Authority's responsibilities under The Safety of Sports Grounds Act.

Whilst it is acknowledged that some of the other regulatory functions could be outsourced, the Authority would then have less control over work prioritisation on a day to day basis. Given that many of the functions delivered by the planning function e.g contaminated land and ecology can also constrain the ability of the authority to perform its planning and regeneration functions, it is far more efficient and cost effective to maintain in house expertise rather than having to rely on external providers to support us when they can.

## **Why have these priorities been set?**

- The need to build a resilient and skilled workforce is essential to deliver the Councils Corporate aims and objectives within a decreasing budget. The need to support and up-skill staff has never been more important, as the lack of turnover in our workforce cannot be allowed to be responsible for the regurgitation of old ideas and procedures and the stagnation of our service. The need to motivate and nurture staff to ensure that they deliver their potential, is key to ensuring that the planning service remains proactive and responsive to service needs. It is necessary to ensure that all staff are appropriately experienced, trained and qualified to ensure that they apply the appropriate regulations and ensure that they advise all customers on the current legislation thus ensuring that quality developments are delivered. A skilled workforce is also more likely to deliver and improve upon demanding Welsh Government KPI's.
- The statutory plans and functions associated with pollution, development management, building control, policy formulation, maintenance of rights of way and the management of our protected habitats, places a responsibility on the planning service to ensure that our citizens have safe air to breath, safe land to live and work on, varied and sustainable places to visit and protect, and access to all the services required to sustain a viable and healthy community.
- Following the devolvement of Building Regulations to the Welsh Government, LABC is becoming more influential with the Minister. The need to have a presence on each of the work streams pursued by LABC will ensure that we influence Policy going forward. It will also ensure that the problems that we are experiencing as an authority, for example, the different operating practices relating to Local Authority Building Control

sections and Approved Inspectors is appropriately addressed to ensure that there is equality across the board. Partnership working as is currently undertaken within this authority also needs to be more widely embraced at a National level in the pursuit of the collaborative working agenda.

- Collaborative working at a national level must also be supported by collaborative working at a local level. Whilst Building Control and Development Management maintain a close working relationship there is always room for improvement. The use of Building Control staff to undertake enforcement responsibilities was introduced approximately 3 years ago as a pilot. Whilst it is perceived to be working effectively it has not been properly reviewed. Such a review is necessary to ensure that we are maximising the use of limited staff resources and to reduce potential duplication of work.
- The implementation of the Council's recently approved 'Contaminated Land Strategy' will ensure that all land requiring remediation is appropriately mitigated by landowners/developers. Where this is not possible and there is a need for Council intervention, the strategy can be used as a tool to secure appropriate funding from the Welsh Government, thus ensuring that the Council sufficiently protects the health and well-being of our citizens.
- There is considerable 'in house' expertise in relation to a whole host of technical areas, including contaminated land, ecology, building control etc. This expertise should be used to facilitate the delivery of other functions in the Council including our regeneration aspirations. The provision of such services to external customers will also secure fee income for the council, to the benefit of the FFP.
- National legislation and policy together with local policy requires the Council to preserve and enhance areas of Biodiversity and thus reinforce the sustainability agenda in addition to providing wider environmental benefits to the local communities in which they are located.
- The need to continue to improve service delivery by further front loading services and thus minimising waste is essential to ensure that performance improves whilst minimising costs. This will require an improved relationship with all stakeholders with enhanced agents' forums to ensure that our customers submit quality applications thus enabling the delivery of quality outcomes.
- The need to monitor the delivery of necessary infrastructure to support development proposals together with any financial contributions is essential given the position that any unspent monies need to be repaid within five years. The failure to secure appropriate infrastructure and/or spend submitted payments appropriately will place unnecessary pressure on the Council to provide the infrastructure out of our own budgets. The Council is also receiving an increased number of FOI requests relating to the types and value of facilities and infrastructure secured via S106. It is becoming increasingly difficult to respond to such requests in the absence of an appropriate database.
- The role of trained elected Members on the Planning Committee is key to the delivery of more transparent, accountable and appropriate decisions, thus ensuring that the Council remains at the vanguard of regeneration not only at a regional level but Nationally. It is this work which will secure the economic growth required to build economically sustainable communities.

- The regulatory role of the Planning function whilst being more proactive over the last ten years needs to ensure that it also addresses the enforcement responsibilities associated with the Planning Acts. Effective and consistent procedures need to be in place to ensure that appropriate and expeditious action is taken to protect areas from unacceptable and unregulated development.
- With decreasing budgets and increasing workloads, Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) are essential to ensure that the service is better resourced to deal with the expected commitment needed to assess the requirements associated with the discharge of the Development Consent Orders pursuant to the NSIP projects (Tidal Lagoon and Tata power station). Insufficient resources will result in the delay in the delivery of these strategically important schemes.

#### **Risks that have been identified and how risk will be managed.**

**The retention of appropriately trained and skilled staff is a key issue going forward.** The loss of professional and technical staff has resulted in a staff structure which is less resilient to change. This may negatively impact upon the ability to retain the remaining staff who are dealing with a greater volume of work yet on comparatively low wages when compared with private sector equivalents. It is therefore necessary to ensure that Job Evaluation scores remain accurate and succession planning measures are reinforced to retain a skilled and appropriately re-numerated staff structure.

**A reduction in fee income associated with the operation of the chargeable Building Control function.** This could arise as a consequence of a slow recovery in the economic climate mainly associated with the construction industry. In order to avoid this it is necessary to continue marketing the service in terms of quality and efficiency, and promoting added value services. It is also necessary to improve linkages with the Development Management section to ensure that we provide a one stop development service.

**Increased sickness levels associated with work related stress could result in an increased workload for the remaining staff.** This risk needs to be minimised by managing workloads and ensuring that whilst our market share is protected it is not at the expense of an over commitment to work.

**Collaborative working at a local as well as regional/national level** is essential to efficient and cost effective service delivery where service providers are working together following the reduction in staff numbers.

**Air quality in the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) may exceed European limits (35 exceedances per year) which could result in infraction proceedings being taken by the European Union with associated fines.** This is particularly important this year due to unusually poor air quality at the start of the year which if extrapolated forward would result in the European exceedance limit being breached. To avoid this, the Short Term Action Plan (STAP) has been initiated with other regulators, industry and Welsh Government to identify causes and explore solutions to address them.

**Potential for the declaration of additional AQMA's at Neath as a consequence of increased traffic pollution.** In response to this risk, increased monitoring has been initiated and the results will be evaluated and potential solutions considered.

**Potential failure to reduce nickel emissions to be within European targets within Pontardawe and Neath.** This could result in infraction proceedings and associated fines from the European Union. It is therefore necessary to work closely with industry and the Health and Safety Executive to improve operational and abatement systems.

**The reduction in staff coupled with an increase in workload could result in a drop in performance which will in turn undermine the need to promote economic growth which is one of the Council's key corporate objectives and could result in the imposition of financial penalties in relation to Planning Policy and Development Management.** A reduction in performance in its extreme could result in financial penalties from the Welsh Government in addition to the removal of planning powers from the Council associated with the preparation of the LDP and the determination of planning applications. Performance management measures will be refocused to account for the recently implemented restructure and will include monthly performance management meetings where measures will be assessed and systems re-evaluated using systems thinking techniques. Planning Performance Agreements will also be secured where applicable and improved agents workshops will ensure that the quality of submitted information is improved thus reducing the amount of time spent by staff to secure acceptable schemes.

**The failure to secure and appropriately manage S106 infrastructure could result in insufficient supporting infrastructure being provided at a developers expense.** The monitoring of S106 legal agreements needs to be given greater priority and a dedicated database and protocol delivered. The current database and disjointed procedures endangers the delivery of negotiated schemes and constrains the ability to follow a clear audit trail relating to submitted funds to the Council and the spending of those funds.

**Failure to comply with emerging legislative burdens.** A re-focus of approach to biodiversity conservation in Wales, led by Welsh Government could result in a significant increase in workload for the Countryside and Wildlife Team when staff resources are already stretched. The content of the Environment Bill in particular is not currently known but initial consultations indicate a complete overhaul of the approach to nature conservation in Wales with focus being placed on ecosystems, natural resource management and ecological resilience as the main themes; rather than traditionally protected sites and species. This significant change in approach is likely to have a huge impact upon the Team.

**Reduction in grant funding.** A number of the statutory functions associated with Biodiversity are delivered through grant funded posts. The potential reduction in grant funding could result in the loss of the posts but the retention of the statutory responsibilities which are cheaper to deliver in house rather than through consultants. To continue to pursue all grant opportunities is therefore crucial.



**How will we deliver the priorities we have identified?**

**Action Plans for each business unit within the service area**

*(note: action plans will be continuously reviewed and updated during the year)*

## Action Plan of Head of Planning

<u>REF</u>	<u>ACTION</u>	<u>HOW TO ACHIEVE / COMMENTS</u>	<u>OFFICERS RESPONSIBLE &amp; TIMINGS</u>	<u>FORMS OF EVIDENCE</u>
<b>Mandatory Corporate Measures</b>				
1	Manage resources within budget (including savings identified within the FFP).	Budget monitoring and minimising spend levels where possible.	Nicola Pearce and Section managers  Ongoing	Budget balanced and FFP savings delivered.
2	Reduce sickness absence levels by at least 5% on 2013/14 levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of the sickness management procedures provided by HR.</li> <li>• Return to work interviews</li> <li>• Use of OHU when appropriate.</li> </ul>	Nicola Pearce and Section managers  Ongoing	Reduced sickness levels within the section.
3	Ensure all staff EDRs are completed by 31.3.15. and implement identified learning and development requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete assessments for all staff</li> <li>• Prepare Individual Learning Plans</li> <li>• Update training record for the sections</li> </ul>	Nicola Pearce and Section managers  Ongoing	Completed assessments, training plans and training record.
4	Each financial year measure employee satisfaction levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular team meetings and feedback sessions with all staff.</li> </ul>	Nicola Pearce and Section managers  Ongoing	Confidential feedback forms collected and assessed

5	Each financial year measure customer satisfaction levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular customer surveys undertaken across all sections</li> </ul>	Nicola Pearce and Section managers  Ongoing	Feedback forms collected and assessed.
<b>Building Control</b>				
6	Ensure both new and existing staff are appropriately trained to ensure that they deliver a high quality service and for succession planning purposes	Implement a shadowing programme where staff shadow and learn from senior officers, in addition to ensuring that staff benefit from available and identified training.	P. Davis  Ongoing	Training records
7	Continue to maintain KPI (BCT4) which has improved year on year and reverse the decline in relation to KPI (BCT7) which marginally reduced last year.	Review the council's charging scheme to ensure that it is no cheaper to build off a rejected plan than a building notice	P. Davis  Ongoing	A change in charging scheme at the next review to ensure that the cost of building off a rejected plan is equal to that of a building notice on more complex schemes commensurate with the additional officer time spent dealing with them.
8	Maintain and increase Building Control's market share to ensure that sufficient income is generated to cover the cost of establish if it reduces or is maintained as a consequence of the restructure	Continue to promote and market the service and provide excellent customer care.	P. Davis  Ongoing	Calculation of market share based on direct submissions and data provided from Approved Inspectors.
9	Continue to play a leading role within LABC in order to influence legislation and Policy change by the Welsh Government	Continue to be represented on each of the forward work streams operated by LABC Cymru to ensure personal development for the staff and to address problems being experienced by NPT including the operation of Approved Inspectors.	P. Davis  Ongoing	Staff development and legislative change to address constraints experienced locally.

10	To work with Neath RFC and Aberavon RFC to aid transition as a result of the deregulation of sports grounds.	Assist representatives from each sports club in advising them of the changing legislation and ensuring a smooth transition from the existing to the new procedures.	P. Davis Ongoing	A smooth transition to comply with the new legislation is achieved and maintained thereafter.
11	To review and improve upon the working arrangements between Building Control and Development Management in relation to the enforcement of the legislation.	Establish a small working group to assess current procedures with a view to making the enforcement service as efficient and cost effective as possible through continuous improvement.	P. Davis and S. Ball Ongoing	A reviewed system will result in reduction in the number of site visits undertaken by multiple officers to a property thus making the service more cost effective.
<b>Planning Policy, Wildlife and Countryside</b>				
12	Conclude the EIP, including the Matters Arising changes which will themselves require consultation and deliver an adopted LDP.	Continue to respond to the Action point requests from the Planning Inspector and include all requested amendments into the LDP in terms of Matters Arising Changes.	C. Morris 30 <sup>th</sup> November 2015	LDP is adopted
13	Update, consult upon and adopt the five strategically important SPGs which are essential to support the LDP going forward.	In consultation with key stakeholders produce draft SPGs, consult upon them, vary if necessary and adopt final versions.	C. Morris 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2016	5 strategically important SPGs are adopted to support the LDP.
14	Complete the joint SPG for Fabian Way through collaborative work with colleagues in the City and County of Swansea.	Through joint workshops and discussions with major landowners draft a consistent document covering this strategic corridor	C. Morris 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2015	A SPG will be adopted by both Councils to secure the delivery of both Council's regeneration aspirations for this area.

15	Establish systems and procedures for monitoring the performance of the emerging LDP.	A data collection and monitoring regime is established to evaluate whether the policies within the LDP are working effectively	C. Morris 31st March 2016	An annual review of the LDP will be submitted to the Welsh Government who will assess the effectiveness of the LDP in delivering the Council's strategic development objectives. Whilst this is not required until the end of 2016, the monitoring will need to be in place following the adoption of the LDP
16	Complete the Active Travel Bill commitment in relation to the preparation of an Existing Route Map for the two major settlements of Neath and Port Talbot.	A member of staff is currently being trained by a consultant who is collectively completing this work on behalf of the Council.	C. Morris 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2015	An Existing Route Map is submitted to the Welsh Government.
17	Amend our management and maintenance regimes associated with our PRoW network.	Amended operating procedures are adopted in relation to the maintenance work carried out. Amended agreements are completed with Community Councils who still wish to complete work on their networks.	C. Morris 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2016	Maintenance of PRoW continues to be undertaken within the reduced budget.
18	Ensure the Local Authority complies with the statutory duty for Biodiversity Conservation under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and the requirements of other national and European environmental legislation (current and emerging); and contribute towards the delivery of the goals and objective requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.	Biodiversity protocols are implemented and ecologists work with colleagues in planning and regeneration to ensure that the duty imposed upon the Council is complied with.	C. Morris Ongoing	The Local Biodiversity Action Plan is delivered having regard to the existing and emerging legislation.

<u>REF</u>	<u>ACTION</u>	<u>HOW TO ACHIEVE/COMMENTS</u>	<u>OFFICERS RESPONSIBLE</u> <u>&amp; TIMINGS</u>	<u>FORMS OF EVIDENCE</u>
<b>Development Management, Contaminated land and Air Quality</b>				
19	To improve performance in terms of the 8 week statutory target in relation to householder and minor applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More rigorous performance management, reinforcing ownership of applications and building upon cultural change in terms of officer responsibility.</li> <li>• Review Planning Back office IT system to assess whether it is still fit for purpose.</li> </ul>	<p>S. Ball</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>March 2016</p>	KPIs & Benchmarking
20	Design and implement a S106 database and protocol to ensure that we improve the monitoring and management of S106 infrastructure and payments to the authority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with IT to design a database which is fit for purpose.</li> <li>• Work with colleagues across the Council who are involved in the S106 process, to prepare a standard procedure for negotiating, enforcing, and monitoring of S106 money and infrastructure</li> </ul>	<p>S. Ball</p> <p>March 2016</p>	A procedure is adopted and implemented

<u>REF</u>	<u>ACTION</u>	<u>HOW TO ACHIEVE/COMMENTS</u>	<u>OFFICERS RESPONSIBLE &amp; TIMINGS</u>	<u>FORMS OF EVIDENCE</u>
21	Improve the training provided to all Elected Members in relation to Planning matters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A training schedule offering bespoke training for Members of Planning Committee is introduced, while more general training is also provided to all other Members. Training will be delivered through a combination on in house and external providers.</li> </ul>	<p>S. Ball</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	Elected Members are appropriately trained to ensure decision making is more robust.
22	Introduce consistent and robust appeals and enforcement procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Systems thinking review of current appeals system and its interface with the Planning Inspectorate.</li> <li>Introduce and implement new procedures having regard to the completed review.</li> </ul>	<p>S. Ball</p> <p>March 2016</p>	New procedures implemented
23	Secure appropriate Planning Performance Agreements for NSIPs developments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional finance is secured to ensure that the council is appropriately resourced to deal with NSIP work and thus ensure the efficient delivery of these nationally strategic projects.</li> </ul>	<p>S. Ball</p> <p>December 2015</p>	Planning Performance Agreements secured and additional staff employed to deal with NSIP requirements.

<u>REF</u>	<u>ACTION</u>	<u>HOW TO ACHIEVE/COMMENTS</u>	<u>OFFICERS RESPONSIBLE &amp; TIMINGS</u>	<u>FORMS OF EVIDENCE</u>
24	Improve Agents workshops and means of communicating with agents generally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise biannual meetings with agents as a minimum with additional meetings organised as and when required to deliver key messages.</li> <li>• Introduce regular email updates to agents to advise them of procedural and legislative changes in addition to regularly updating our website pages.</li> <li>• Work with POSW to develop National customer service questionnaire to enable benchmarking to be undertaken.</li> </ul>	<p>S. Ball</p> <p>August 2015 and ongoing</p>	<p>Meetings will take place</p> <p>Email circulation lists will be created and website updated.</p> <p>Questionnaire completed and survey undertaken.</p>
25	To implement the Council's Contaminated Land Strategy including seeking appropriate grant funding to enable proactive site investigations to inform the Council's understanding of Contaminated Land across the County Borough.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional finance is secured to enable to Council to proactively address areas of contamination and to ensure that the planning system secures remediation of contamination where possible.</li> </ul>	<p>S. Ball</p> <p>December 2015</p>	<p>Sites which are identified as being contaminated are remediated in accordance with the objectives of the strategy.</p>



<b>REF</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>HOW TO ACHIEVE/COMMENTS</b>	<b>OFFICERS RESPONSIBLE &amp; TIMINGS</b>	<b>FORMS OF EVIDENCE</b>
26	Develop a Protocol covering the contribution made by the Pollution Control team to Phase 1 / Geo-environmental Desk Studies for Council projects, and the provision of services to the general public / developers in respect of such matters, including appropriate pre-application advice on the content and methodologies of such reports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate support is provided by the land contamination officer to colleagues in planning and Estates &amp; Regeneration in addition to developers seeking to work within NPT.</li> </ul>	S. Ball March 2016	A Protocol is prepared and adopted.
27	Review and develop the Council's website to enhance the provision of information to the public on contaminated land issues, including publication of the Contaminated Land Public Register.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The website is redesigned to make it more user friendly for the public. Information will be more readily accessible which will encourage the public to help themselves and as such be less reliant upon staff to obtain information on their behalf.</li> </ul>	S. Ball March 2016	The website is amended and requests for information reduce.

<u>REF</u>	<u>ACTION</u>	<u>HOW TO ACHIEVE/COMMENTS</u>	<u>OFFICERS RESPONSIBLE &amp; TIMINGS</u>	<u>FORMS OF EVIDENCE</u>
28	To continue ongoing monitoring of key sites in respect of air quality and nickel levels to ensure compliance with National and European targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring is undertaken and levels are reported to Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales</li> </ul>	S. Ball March 2016	Emission levels are collected and recorded.

### Contribution to the Council's Forward Financial Plan

Deliver the following savings measures:

Saving	Responsibility	2015/16	2016/17
		£'000s	£'000s
Reduction in staff at the end of the plan preparation - LDP	C. Morris	87	60
Reduce contaminated land and air quality monitoring	S. Ball	10	5
Ensure works in default income matches expenditure	P. Davis		10
<b>TOTAL SECTION SAVINGS</b>		<b>97</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>N. Pearce</b>		

## Performance Management

Each Section will produce a performance report card by May 2015 which will describe the measures, targets (where appropriate) and benchmarks (where appropriate) that will be used to gauge how well we are progressing to achieve the outputs and outcomes that we have prioritised.

Performance Scorecards will be developed for the following services/functions:

<b>Service/Function</b>	<b>Principal Officer Lead</b>	<b>Service Manager Responsible</b>
Planning Policy Wildlife & Countryside	Ceri Morris	Ceri Morris
Building Control	Paul Davis	Paul Davis
Development Management, Contaminated land & Air Quality	Steve Ball	Steve Ball
Attendance at Work	Nicola Pearce	All

**Structure of the Service**

