

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Regeneration and Sustainable Development Cabinet Board

27 October 2017

Report of the Head of Planning and Public Protection

Nicola Pearce

Matter for Decision

Ward Affected: All Wards

Annual Planning Performance Report

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To consider the content of the Annual Planning Performance Report on behalf of Neath Port Talbot Council and authorise its submission to the Welsh Government and its publication on the Council's website.

Executive Summary

- 2 The Welsh Government requires all Local Planning Authorities to submit an Annual Planning Performance Report relating to the operation of their planning functions. The report is required to identify the position of the service Corporately, a narrative explaining the local context for Neath Port Talbot, the staff structure and how that has changed over time, the income and expenditure levels for the service, the pressures experienced by the service, its achievements over the past year and priorities for the year ahead in addition to its overall performance in relation to a set number of different measures. The report primarily looks back over the period April 2016 to March 2017 although the priorities identified are forward looking to this financial year.

Background

3. The Annual Planning Performance Report for Neath Port Talbot is attached at Appendix 1. The report is generally very positive in terms of our overall performance despite the fact that both income levels and staff numbers have reduced over time. The independently conducted survey which was undertaken on our

behalf indicates that customers are generally very happy with the quality of service they received. This is in contrast to that received last year when it was a mixed picture. This is testament to the hard work of all staff who are trying to ensure that all customers receive a bespoke service relevant to their individual needs.

4. We are determining 96% of applications within the statutory determination period which puts us in the Top 4 in Wales. We are also approving 96% of applications which reinforces our objective which is to 'Approve Quality Development Quickly'. In terms of appeals, we successfully defended 63% of appeals submitted which is slightly below the Welsh average of 66% however this figure doesn't include the other appeals which we successfully defended in relation to enforcement and advertisement cases. Had these been included we would have achieved a success rate of 66%.
5. Despite having only two Enforcement Officers covering the entire County Borough we successfully investigated 289 enforcement cases and are in line with the Welsh average despite having restricted resources.
6. We have a housing land supply which exceeds 5 years, an adopted and up-to-date Development Plan and our service is accessible and transparent to all customers.
7. These are only a few of the areas of good practice evident for this authority. Notwithstanding these successes, it is evident that efforts need to be concentrated on improving our performance in relation to the determination of applications for 'major' developments. In order to address this, the service has recently appointed an additional senior planning officer. The service now has three senior officers who, together with the team leaders within Development Management, will aim to fast track major applications through the planning system to ensure that the council secures its ambitious regeneration objectives. It is anticipated that the performance for major applications will now improve going forward.
8. Having regard to the above it is clear to see that the Annual Planning Performance for 2016/17 is very positive and action is being taken to address the areas where improvement is required.

Financial Impact

9. The attached report indicates the income levels secured by the service together with the expenditure levels associated with the delivery of the statutory functions. Concern is expressed within the report that there has been a drop in major applications which normally attract the higher fees. These have historically cross subsidised the other applications which have smaller fees and which are insufficient to cover the cost of determination. This is a significant problem going forward given that workload levels are not decreasing but the operational budget of the service is reliant upon securing in excess of £800k of income. This is outlined within the attached report.

Equality Impact Assessment

10. There are no equality impacts associated with this report.

Workforce Impacts

11. There are no workforce impacts associated with this report.

Legal Impacts

12. There are no legal impacts associated with this report.

Risk Management

13. There are no risk management issues associated with this report.

Consultation

14. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

15. That having considered the report attached as Appendix 1, it is resolved to authorise its formal submission to the Welsh Government and also publish the report on the Council's website.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

16. To comply with the requirements of the Welsh Government whereby each Local Planning Authority in Wales is required to produce, submit and publish an Annual Planning Performance Report by the 31 October 2017.

Implementation of Decision

17. The decision is an urgent one for immediate implementation, subject to the consent of the relevant Scrutiny Chair (and is therefore not subject to the call-in procedure).

Appendices

18. Appendix 1 – Annual Planning Performance Report.

List of Background Papers

19. Business Plan for Planning and Public Protection 2015/16 and 16/17.

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NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL CASTELL-NEDD PORT TALBOT

Annual Planning Performance Report 2016-17

Nicola Pearce – Head of Planning and Public Protection

ANNUAL PLANNING PERFORMANCE REPORT (APPR) – 2016-17

PREFACE

As the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Sustainable Development, I have responsibility for delivering the Planning function within Neath Port Talbot. The contribution of the Planning service to secure the broader regeneration aspirations of the Council cannot be underestimated. Through the adopted Local Development Plan and individual Development Management decisions, we are creating a place where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and more prosperous. These responsibilities and statutory documents will also underpin the Council's ability to deliver its Wellbeing Goals which will in turn improve the health and wellbeing of our communities and as such the quality of life for all.

Councillor Annette Wingrave Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Sustainable Development.

CONTEXT

GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Neath Port Talbot is located on the coast between the City & County of Swansea to the west and the County Borough of Bridgend to the east. We also share boundaries and characteristics with Carmarthenshire, Powys, Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Brecon Beacons National Park. The Authority also forms part of the wider Swansea Bay City region and is the link authority between West and South Wales. Following its designation earlier this year, the County also hosts the largest Enterprise Zone in Wales, the need for which arose from the economic downturn in the steel industry which in turn jeopardised the continued operation of the Port Talbot steelworks which is the biggest employer in the local area. It is anticipated that this designation will boost economic development within the local area which will result in spin off benefits to the wider region.

The County Borough has a resident population of 139,800 (Census 2011), covering an area of over 44,217 hectares, the physical characteristics of the County Borough, can be broadly divided into the following two areas; the coastal corridor and the valleys.

The coastal corridor encompasses a relatively narrow coastal strip extending around Swansea Bay where the main centres of population, employment and the M4 corridor are located. The main towns and settlements of Neath and Port Talbot continue to be the major focus for house building both by private market and registered social landlords.

The valleys are characterised by the attractive landscape setting of river valleys separated by upland plateaus and mountains. They are rural in aspect and contain scattered communities throughout. While the individual valleys have strong individual characteristics and identities, they share common features and problems. Historically large scale house building has predominantly been limited to Pontardawe and the Upper Swansea Valley.

Corporate Context

The Planning and Public Protection Service sits within the Environment Directorate which is one of four Directorates within the Council each of which report directly to the Chief Executive. In addition to Planning and Public Protection there are three further Heads of Service within the Environment Directorate which include the Head of Streetcare, Head of Engineering and Transport and the Head of Property and Regeneration. Each of the Four Directorates work towards achieving the following Corporate Priorities:

Safer Brighter Futures - To improve outcomes for children in need and children looked after by improving the performance of the Council's Children and Young People Services Department.

Better Schools Brighter Prospects - To raise educational standards and attainment for all young people.

Improving Outcomes Improving Lives - To maximise the number of adults who are able to live independently with or without support within the home of their choice within their community.

Prosperity for All - To support and invest in our town centres and communities to promote economic growth, regeneration and sustainability to maximise job opportunities and improve access to employment.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle - Increase the percentage of waste recycled and composted.

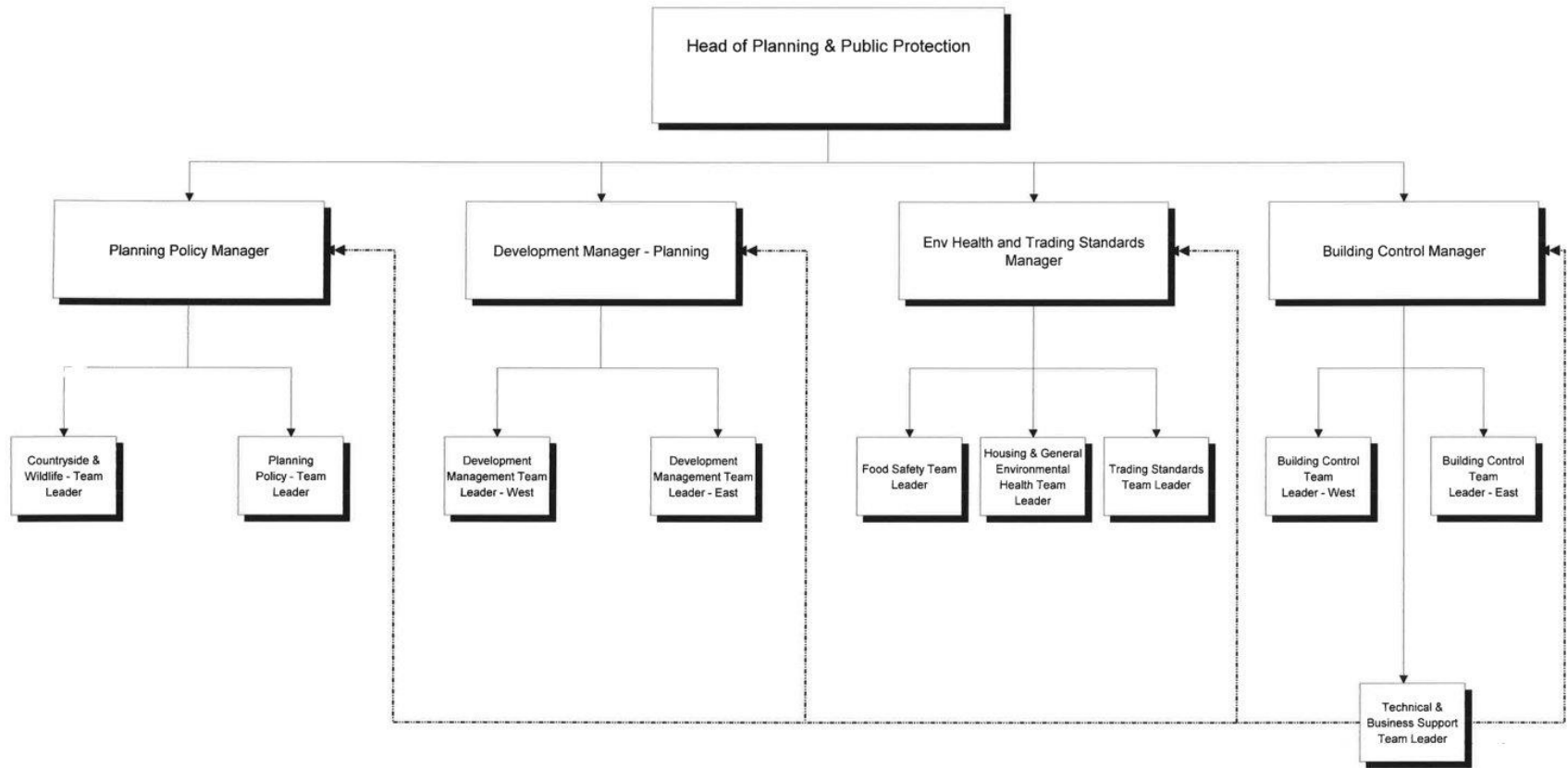
Digital by Choice - To Improve customer / citizen access to services and functions provided by the Council or on behalf of the Council and to improve the efficiency of those services and functions.

The Planning and Public Protection Service does not have a specific priority but contributes towards the achievement of all the Corporate Priorities to a greater or lesser extent. Given the level of information collected to compile the Local Development Plan we are also actively contributing to the preparation of the council's Wellbeing Plan which is currently in draft and subject to consultation.

Whilst the Planning function sits within a wider service area, this Report will primarily cover the traditional planning functions delivered by Neath Port Talbot Council.

The Planning and Public Protection Service

As stated above the service has been extended since April 2016 following its merger with the Environmental Health and Trading Standards service. As a consequence of this merger the following structure (to third tier level) was created as follows:



This enlarged service works collaboratively to secure the following:

Aim

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

To secure this aim the following vision will be pursued:

Vision

A pro-active front loaded service where everyone works together to achieve a shared purpose of promoting and creating safe, healthy and sustainable places to work and live in. This will enable us to achieve the corporate priority of securing prosperity for all, better, simpler and cheaper.

Values

Adopting strong values are key to securing the above aim and vision. This new service aims to work collaboratively to maximise shared knowledge and learning thus improve efficiency. We intend to help each other to secure continuous improvement, improve communication both internally and to our external customers. We will work in an environment of openness, with consistency, transparency, and equality at the heart of all of our operating principles. We will reduce waste within our services concentrating on adding value and doing what matters for all of our customers.

The services offered by the traditional Planning Service within that overall structure are as follows:

Development Management

Planning Applications

The team deal with all applications made under primary and secondary planning legislation including the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The main types of applications dealt with are:-

- Planning Applications (full, outline or 'reserved matters')
- Listed Building Consent
- Conservation Area Consent
- Applications for Certificate of Lawful use or Development (Existing and Proposed)
- Advertisements
- Minerals
- Waste
- Works to Protected Trees
- Hazardous Substances Consent
- High Hedges
- Hedgerow Removal

Pre-Application Advice

The team provides applicants / developers with a formal, chargeable, pre-application service which places significant importance upon the provision of the best possible advice to a potential

developer/applicant before a formal planning application is submitted. Officers seek to promote high quality development and use the pre-application service to front load the development process and therefore speed up the formal planning process.

Enforcement

The Enforcement section deals with complaints in respect of alleged breaches of planning control, which predominately relate to: -

- Undertaking building works without permission, or developing without complying with approved plans
- Failing to comply with condition(s) imposed on a planning permission
- Change of use of land or buildings without permission
- Untidy Land
- Unauthorised work to protected trees

Planning Appeals

If the Council refuses to give planning permission, or grants it subject to conditions, fails to deal with an application within statutory time limits, or issues an enforcement notice, the applicant/alleged offender has a right to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. Planning Officers within the team deal with all appeals, which can be heard by one of three procedures: - Written Representations; Hearing or Public Inquiry.

Minerals and Waste

The Minerals and Waste service, including all applications for mineral works, aftercare and restoration, and monitoring of existing Mineral and Landfill sites is currently provided in conjunction with Officers within the Carmarthenshire County Council under a Service Level Agreement which is reviewed periodically.

Section 106 Agreements

The team is responsible for negotiating and monitoring compliance with all legal agreements made under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act.

Planning Policy

Planning Policy comprises the Planning Policy team and Countryside & Wildlife team. The teams cover the following areas of responsibility:

Planning Policy

- **Local Development Plan** – statutory duties in respect of the preparation, delivery, monitoring and review of the Local Development Plan (LDP). This ensures that development is delivered in a planned and sustainable way in accordance with the agreed corporate priorities and objectives of the Council.

- **LDP Evidence Base** – duties in respect of maintaining an up-to-date evidence base to support the LDP.
- **Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)** – duties in respect of preparing a raft of SPG setting out more detailed topic or site specific guidance on the way in which policies of the LDP will be applied in particular circumstances or areas.
- **Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessments** – duties in respect of preparing and publishing the Council's 5 yearly Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessments.
- **Joint Housing Land Availability Studies** – duties in respect of the annual production of studies outlining the extent of the housing land supply.
- **Active Travel** – statutory duties in respect of preparing and reviewing the Council's Existing Route Map (ERM) and Integrated Network Map (INM).
- **Cycling Network** – duties in respect of cycle route development and promotion.
- **Asset Sponsorship** – duties in respect of facilitating the partnership contract with a third party provider to generate income through the sponsorship of infrastructure / assets.

Countryside & Wildlife

- **Public Rights of Way Network** – statutory duties in respect of the registered network of footpaths, bridleways and byways [including the definitive map and statement; diversions and closures; maintenance in respect of structures and obstructions; and delivering the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP)].
- **Adopted Highway Network** – duties in respect of advising on the extent of the adopted highway network.
- **Biodiversity / Ecology** – statutory duties in respect of advising on all aspects of biodiversity conservation [including habitat management and species conservation (e.g. bats); Local Nature Reserves; Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation; and delivering the Local Biodiversity Action Plan].
- **Coed Cymru** – duties in respect of advising on the creation, management and funding of woodlands as part of the Coed Cymru network.

Having regard to the above functions the role of the Planning Service overall is to develop a robust, evidence based and deliverable Development Plan and to undertake the decision making process for individual developments in accordance with that plan.

After a lengthy and detailed evidence gathering process and a robust Examination in Public, the Council successfully adopted our Local Development Plan (LDP) in January 2016. The Plan period extends up until 2026 and supersedes the Council's Unitary Development plan which covered the period up until 2016.

The LDP sits alongside the Council's Single Integrated Plan (SIP) (2013-2023) which sets out the Vision for Neath Port Talbot and seeks to bring about a number of outcomes in respect of health, safety, sustainability, prosperity and education. The LDP has been prepared in order to provide a

spatial expression of the land-use implications of the SIP and the LDP Vision in particular complements the Council's overall vision as set out in the SIP.

In addition, there are a range of regional and local strategies and policy statements that provide the framework for the LDP. Some of these key strategies include:

- Joint Transport Plan for South West Wales (2015-2020);
- Regional Technical Statement 1st Review (2014);
- Shoreline Management Plan (2010);
- Swansea Bay City Region (2013);
- The Economic Growth Strategy for South West Wales (2013-2030);
- Neath Port Talbot Waterfront Regeneration Strategy (2011);
- Neath Port Talbot Local Housing Strategy (2015-2020);
- Neath Port Talbot Local Biodiversity Action Plan (2014);
- Neath Port Talbot Environment Strategy (2008-2026); and
- Neath Port Talbot Tourism Development Action Plan (2011-2014).

The LDP encompasses a broad range of social, economic and environmental issues and the Plan's objectives provide synergy with the Wales Spatial Plan – i.e. building healthy, sustainable communities; promoting a sustainable economy; valuing our environment; achieving sustainable accessibility; and respecting distinctiveness. The LDP seeks to deliver Neath Port Talbot's role in supporting the wider aims, objectives and aspirations of the City Region.

Economy & Employment

Employment in the County Borough has a relatively high proportion of jobs in the manufacturing and public sectors and a relatively low proportion in the service sector. The employment base is predominantly located along the coastal corridor where Tata Steel and the Council are the largest employers. In the Valleys, the largest employers relate to the mineral extraction industries with the remainder being employed in small and medium sized enterprises.

Significantly more people travel out of the County Borough to access work than those who travel inwards. This work travel pattern reflects the fact that the County Borough is part of the broader Swansea Bay travel to work area. The landbank of industrial land with good access to road, rail and sea performs an important role in the sub-region, as will the University of Swansea Science and Innovation Campus on Fabian Way and the Coed Darcy Urban Village.

Transport & Infrastructure

The coastal corridor is traversed by the key road and rail infrastructure which underpins the County Borough as a key employment area within the sub-region, providing connections eastwards, via the M4 and rail, to Cardiff and beyond, and westwards to Swansea and to the Midlands via the A465 (T) Heads of the Valleys road. The docks at Port Talbot are also considered an asset to the area providing for both general cargo and deep water facilities for bulk cargo.

Natural Resources

The County Borough contains mineral resources, both coal and aggregate, which are significant on a UK scale. They are also important both in terms of their contribution to the Welsh economy and more locally in terms of employment.

Virtually the whole of the County Borough is underlain by coal resources. Coal has been mined extensively within the area for centuries and has contributed significantly to the creation and sustenance of many of the valley communities. The two major hard rock quarries in the area at Gilfach (Neath) and Cwm Nant Lleici (Pontardawe), supply high specification aggregates to various markets.

Due to the extensive upland areas within the County Borough, there is also significant potential for the exploitation of the wind resource. Two of the Strategic Search Areas (SSA E and SSA F) identified by the Welsh Government are predominantly located within the administrative area and following their designation, there has been considerable interest from developers in the area.

Historic/landscape setting of the area

Heritage

The area has a wealth of historical, archaeological and architectural assets, in particular relating to the area's industrial history in coal, iron, steel and copper. It also has many older archaeological remains dating back to pre-Roman times. All of these are important characteristics of the area that provide local distinctiveness. Many, such as Margam Park and the canal network, also provide opportunities for tourism and recreation.

The historic heritage of the area is recognised through a range of designations. Within the County Borough there are 2 designated Landscapes of Historic Interest, 6 Historic Parks and Gardens, 6 Conservation Areas, 92 Ancient Monuments and 391 Listed Buildings.

Landscape & Ecology

Neath Port Talbot has a varied landscape and a number of distinctive habitats ranging from coastal salt marsh and sand dunes through to ancient woodlands and upland areas of purple moor grass. Some of these habitats are of European, National or local importance. Large areas of the County Borough contain conifer plantations and the area also contains important geological features including glaciated valleys and rock formations.

The natural heritage of the area is recognised through a range of designations. Within the County Borough there are 20 designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), 2 National Nature Reserves and 3 Local Nature Reserves.

Urban/Rural mix and major settlements.

As stated above the County Borough is split into two distinct character areas; The Coastal Corridor which broadly follows the M4 corridor and the Valley Areas which comprise 5 valleys in total.

In regard to the major settlements, the LDP has defined a Settlement Hierarchy that identifies those areas which are the most sustainable locations and can more appropriately accommodate growth in terms of their function. Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe are identified as the 3 main towns, with Briton Ferry, Skewen, Taibach and Glynneath identified as district centres.

The remaining settlements are categorised as either 'large local centres', 'small local centres', 'villages' and 'dormitory settlements'.

Population change and influence on LDP/forthcoming revisions.

The level of growth set out in the LDP is based on an economic-led scenario which is aspirational in its approach and aims to maximise job growth within the local economy. In order to address the key issues of the County Borough, wealth creation through job growth is fundamental to achieving the LDP vision.

This method has enabled the Authority to forecast how economic changes over the Plan period equate to the requirements for employment land and the number of new homes needed to accommodate the projected total population and required labour supply. This ensures alignment between employment and housing resulting in a more sustainable pattern of development which in turn improves the robustness of the LDP.

This approach has used the Welsh Government's 2008 population and household projections and detailed analysis of underlying trends in mortality and fertility rates and average household size. Based on the aspirational scenario of job growth (taking into account the Authority's aspiration to reduce unemployment and increase economic activity rates in line with the Welsh average), the population growth for the area has been driven by the ratio of working age population to total population. It is considered that this approach makes the projections more robust than purely trend-based projections which do not accurately reflect the Authority's aspirations for the area.

Based on the projected economic-led growth scenario of 3,850 jobs for the area, the Plan makes provision for an additional 7,800 new residential units, leading to an increase of approximately 7,000 people and a total population of 147,400 by 2026. This approach is aspirational, linked to the local economy and is set to complement the projected growth in economic activity and reduction in average household size in addition to helping meet the need for additional affordable residential units.

Budget and associated Implications

Given the identified priorities of the Council, funding has been and continues to be prioritised towards delivering/improving services within the Social Services and Education Departments. The additional financial pressures facing the Council, following the collapse of the economy in 2008 and the consequent austerity measures which followed, have had a significant impact upon the Environment Directorate which has seen its budget cut by £18.257 million since 2009/10 and currently stands at £32,710 million for 2017/18 which is 14.27% of the councils net budget. This equates to a 55.5% cut in the Directorate's budget. The Directorate has also been tasked with securing further savings of £1.1 million for 2018/19. To date the Directorate has identified an

additional £763k of proposed savings, £105k of which is to be delivered by the Planning Service. These are to be secured through a combination of income generation ideas and savings and will soon be the subject of a consultation exercise as part of the Council's Forward Financial Plan (FFP). Such cuts have resulted in a reduction in staff, the cessation of some non-statutory services, the implementation of alternative service delivery models and an increase in fees where local discretion allows.

The biggest impact of the budget cuts has been the reduction in staff whereby 718 FTEs staff have left the authority since 2011/12, 179 of which were members of staff within the Environment Directorate. A significantly higher proportion left the authority between 2008/09 and 2011/12 but specific data for that period is unavailable. These figures demonstrate that the staff levels of the council have reduced by 19% however the staff levels within the Environment Directorate have reduced by 25%. The impact upon the Planning Service is even greater. Despite losing only 17 members of staff during this period this is in fact a reduction of 32%. This reduction in staff coupled with the reductions experienced within the services which support the planning function i.e. highways, drainage, environmental health etc has had a significant impact upon performance and morale within the service. As a consequence staff feel under increased pressure, are becoming less flexible and sickness is increasing.

Sickness management is a Mandatory Corporate Measure and there is a requirement for Service managers to reduce sickness levels year on year. As a consequence of the departure of some members of staff, sickness levels within the overall Planning Service has increased from 298 days (5.6 days per employee) in 2015/16 to 406.5 days (10.9 days per employee) in 2016/17 which is above the council average of 9.9 days. Sickness levels are a major influence on the ability of the Council to deliver the service as workloads associated with the staff off sick must be covered by the remaining staff. The service is currently experiencing an increase in the number of members of staff who are taking sick as a consequence of increased stress levels and they are taking more time off during each sickness episode. Unfortunately it is likely that this trend will continue due to less staff having to cover an increased and more demanding workload going forward.

The level of staff sickness is not the only factor which impacts upon service delivery. The performance charts towards the end of this report indicate that whilst we are generally performing well in dealing with most types of planning applications, there is a significant issue in relation to our performance associated with determining major applications. This has been acknowledged and resources have been put in place to address this. This will be outlined in more detail below.

Due to the pressure on the council to make savings, the Service has over the years suffered a loss in specialist skills; in particular skills have been lost in relation to conservation and design, landscaping, drainage and Minerals. In terms of the latter, given that the Council has one of the largest actively exploited mineral resources in Wales, it is not possible to operate without the specialist skills of a mineral planner. Given the lack of available officers in this field, the Council signed up to a Service Level Agreement with Carmarthenshire Council in 2015 and they now provide both the mineral planning and mineral enforcement service for the council, albeit the decision making powers are retained by Neath Port Talbot. This is a mutually beneficial arrangement on the grounds that Carmarthenshire is now appropriately funded to maintain a team of officers thus improving the resilience of the team and officers are also able to improve their skills

and experience by working on a number of complex and controversial mineral developments within Neath Port Talbot.

The Development Management function is a fee earning service and as such the budget associated with this service is based on trend based historical fee income levels, with the shortfall covered by the central revenue budget. There is pressure every year to maximise fee income and thus reduce the need for revenue support to plug the gap. Year on year the service has failed to meet its income target, mainly as a result of a decline in the big fee earning major applications especially associated with mineral and renewable energy developments, the latter significantly affected by Central Government cuts to subsidies and Welsh Governments' introduction of Developments of National Significance (DNS) which would see any such major fees paid to WG rather than the Council. In previous years this budget gap has been plugged by reducing expenditure in other areas for example, freezing vacant posts for as long as possible and cross subsidising from other services. The service has also, where possible, sought to engage with developers in signing Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) relating to strategic major developments, although such PPAs are voluntary and dependent on large-scale developments coming forward, which has not been the case recently. This annual pressure was acknowledged in the budget for 2017/18 when the income target was reduced by £100k. Despite this reduction, based on current income projections the service will still struggle to meet this reduced target by March 2018. Furthermore £30k of the budget savings target is associated with Development Management and it is likely, in the absence of other viable alternatives that the fee income target will increase next year.

The Planning Policy and Wildlife and Countryside section has very little fee income although grants are sought from various sources to undertake project work relating to active travel, biodiversity and improvements to the rights of way network. The service is however responsible for income generation through asset sponsorship activities. To this end we have recently entered into a contract with a private company who will market our assets with the aim of delivering sponsorship to achieve an increased income target from £33k to £108k for the forthcoming year.

Despite the above, the cost of delivering the service far outweighs the levels of income generated. The following chart identifies the overall expenditure levels for each of the services within the planning function both during 2011/12 and during the year 2016/17, thus enabling comparisons to be made over time and demonstrate the areas where we have made significant cuts over that period.

Comparison of Net Expenditure Levels between 2011/12 and 2016/17

	Development Management	Countryside and Wildlife	Planning Policy	Total
2011/12	£248,740	£498,205	£544,656	£1,291,601
2016/17	£253,140	£232,656	£330,771	£816,567
Difference	£4,400	-£265,549	-£213,885	-£475,034
% Change	+1%	-53%	-39%	-37%

The above table indicates that there has been an overall reduction in expenditure associated with the Planning Service since 2011/12 of 37%. This is mainly as a consequence of staff reductions and a reduction in budgets associated with the maintenance of public rights of way and the delivery of projects associated with the Biodiversity Action Plan. This is a significant problem given their contribution to the Council's emerging Wellbeing Plan. As stated above, this budget is likely to further reduce in 2018/19 and again in 2019/20.

In terms of income levels, this is mainly secured within the Development Management section of the service through planning application fees, pre-application fees and Planning Performance Agreements. These income levels have reduced from £936,768 during 2015/16 to £731,012 in 2016/17. This reduction in income is, as stated earlier, a consequence of a reduction in the submission of big fee earning planning applications which were used to cross subsidise the processing of smaller applications where the fee income was woefully short of that required to deliver the service.

The introduction of non-material amendments (NMAs) has also significantly reduced fee income which have in turn resulted in a reduction in the submission of amended planning applications and their associated fees has also decreased fee income. The NMA process has also enabled applicants to amend conditions under this process which appears to undermine the S73 process. Fee income has also reduced as a consequence of the requirement to include the plan reference numbers within a planning condition on all decision notices. Such a requirement has enabled developers to submit more section 73 applications for what are often major alterations to previously approved schemes. These often take a considerable period of time yet result in the submission of very low fees. This is likely to be a continuing problem which due to the need to make further financial savings going forward will put pressure on the service to further reduce the staffing levels. This will have a significant impact upon performance – a vicious circle.

In an attempt to address the above, the council is pursuing a commercialisation agenda whereby we are potentially looking to deliver fee earning services (subject to legislative constraints). We

already provide both a statutory and non-statutory pre-application service which creates income as well as entering into Planning Performance Agreements wherever possible. The fee earning potential in the pure planning sense is very restricted beyond these areas. Nevertheless our asset sponsorship work together with the consultancy work provided by the Biodiversity section and our colleagues within the Public Protection part of the service will enable us to continue cross subsidising in an attempt to prevent further cuts going forward. This is not likely to be a long term solution to the delivery of statutory services if further cuts are passed on from Central to Local Government.

Our Local Story

In 2016/17 the Authority employed 12.4 FTE Planning Officers within the Development Management team who report to a Development Manager. They comprise of 2 Team leaders, 2 Senior Planning officers, 5.4 Planning Officers, and 3 Assistant Planners. We also employed 3 Enforcement Officers 1 of which deals with minerals and waste. During 2016/17 they determined 817 planning applications and investigated 289 enforcement complaints. Due to disappointing performance figures in relation to the determination of major planning applications, a business case was made for the appointment of an additional senior planning officer increasing the number of officers to three. These officers will concentrate on fast tracking major developments through the planning process with a view not only to improving the speed of determination but also enabling the Council to achieve its ambitious regeneration programme. Whilst it is acknowledged that this performance report refers to the period of 2016/17, the budget decision made at that time to appoint an additional senior planning officer is currently being implemented and has identified a serious problem in terms of recruitment.

When advertising a senior planning post on a salary of £30,785 to £34,721, we had a total of eight applicants few of whom were sufficiently experienced and/or qualified. We also advertised a temporary planning officer (for a period of one year but could be extended) on a salary of £27,668 and £30,955 and had one applicant who had no experience. After going through a shortlisting and interview process for the senior planner the candidate who scored the highest points after the interview declined the offer of appointment as he was clearly using the process to secure a better deal with his existing employer. An internal appointment was subsequently made however this did not actually result in a net gain in staff given the need to backfill his substantive post. The backfilling process further reinforced the difficulty in recruitment as we only secured six applicants for this post with a salary of between £27,668 and £30,955, only three of which had any experience or qualifications. A successful appointment has now been made however despite our best endeavours to secure staff into posts as quickly as possible it has taken over six months. It is hoped that these new appointments will result in a further improvement in the quality and speed of decision making within our planning service for the next annual report. Nevertheless I have highlighted this issue as it is clear that the Planning Service is finding it increasingly more difficult to secure suitably qualified and experienced staff on the salaries we are able to offer.

Despite the above, during this period the Planning Officers and Assistants carried a varied workload as follows:

Assistant Planners were allocated an average caseload of 139 applications last year and had an average determination rate of approximately 141 application each over the year

Planning Officers were allocated an average caseload of 60 applications last year and had a determination rate of approximately 66 applications over the year.

Senior Planning Officers and Team Leaders were allocated an average caseload of 37 applications per year and had an average determination rate of approximately 37 applications over the year.

(This includes applications which are not normally reported to the Welsh Government such as consultations from neighbouring authorities, TPOs screening and scoping opinions etc.)

It is encouraging to see that despite the significant legislative and procedural changes that the planning system has recently undergone, the above figures demonstrate an increase in terms of the caseload handled by all officers and an improvement in performance when compared with last year. Furthermore the recent appointments as referred to above will enable us to focus on the delivery of major projects without distracting our attention away from all other development proposals. In addition to improving the Authority's performance in that regard, our objective is to reinforce the message to all of our customers that Neath Port Talbot is a 'place to do business', with potential benefits to the local economy as a consequence.

It is noted from the above figures that the workloads carried by the officers appears to be less than that which was identified within a research document commissioned by the Planning Officers Society in 2004. This piece of research confirmed that a reasonable case officer workload should be in the region of 150 applications (not including pre-apps, appeals and other non-planning application related work). However, that research was undertaken some 12 years ago and the complexity of the planning legislation has increased significantly since then. The Planning Advisory service is currently undertaking research into the quality of the service, the cost of delivery as well as assessing the capacity of each service to deal with the demands from our customers. The results of that research have yet to be published. Neath Port Talbot has emphasised as part of this research that it is also in a unique position whereby the Planning service no longer has planning technicians to support it. As a result case officers are required to undertake their own administration of applications including the validation, registration, scanning and indexing of documents on the electronic document management system and preparing files for dispatch post determination. All of this takes time and resources and needs to be considered on top of the case number details.

In addition, the responsibilities of all Planning Officers are also currently being reviewed to ensure that any potential spare capacity is actively utilised to support delivery of the enforcement service.

Turning to Planning Policy, the section comprises the Planning Policy team (6 FTEs) and Countryside & Wildlife team (8.7 FTEs) who report to the Planning Policy Manager.

Whilst the number of staff within the Planning Policy team has reduced since the start of the LDP process (by 3 FTEs), the responsibilities have increased from being purely planning policy (i.e. LDP preparation, monitoring and review, Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) etc.) to now extending to include active travel / cycling promotion and development and asset sponsorship. Having successfully steered the LDP through an EIP concluding with the adoption of the plan in January 2016, the emphasis of the work in 2016/17 has primarily switched to delivering a number of associated SPG, implementing the LDP monitoring regime and delivering upon the requirements

of the Active Travel legislation [i.e. the Existing Route Map (ERM) and the Integrated Network Map (INM)].

The Countryside & Wildlife team, who are responsible for biodiversity, public rights of way and highways advice, also input into the planning process. The number of staff within the team has also reduced over a period of time (3.4 FTEs) and consequently the role of the team has had to be re-evaluated to now provide a greater emphasis on consultancy style advice to other departments. Both biodiversity and rights of way are consultees to Development Management. A total of 576 responses were provided on biodiversity, relating to 459 separate planning applications, and 26 instances of informal advice. For public rights of way, informal advice is provided on an ongoing basis, with 39 formal responses having been provided.

Despite the budget pressures and reduction in staff experienced within the service, the Planning Service has secured a number of achievements over the last financial years, which are summarised as follows:

1. In previous years the Development Management section experienced a reduction in performance following a loss of experienced staff. Considerable efforts have been expended in revising procedures and focussing on the determination of planning applications, in particular, in an expeditious manner, while maintaining the quality of developments. In addition, in line with Welsh Government guidance, efforts have continued to frontload negotiations on applications, while also securing agreements from applicants and agents to determine applications in accordance with agreed targets. This has resulted in Officers determining 97% of all applications 'on time', while overall ('8 week') performance increased to 83% in the final quarter of 2016/17.
2. In addition to the development of the S106 database, work has continued on development of a new protocol to ensure that the monitoring and management of S106 infrastructure and payments to the authority is improved. A dedicated s106 Officer, who was also involved in development and approval of the Planning Obligations SPG, has improved the Councils ability to secure maximum contributions from developers on time and in the right places. This in turn should reduce financial pressures upon the Council.
3. Training for all elected Members has continued in relation to Planning matters, with bespoke mandatory targeted training for those Members who sit on the Planning Committee. Such training has and will continue to improve the quality of decision making and is especially important given the significant legislative changes which have been introduced in a very short period of time.
4. The introduction of standardised procedures and protocols in relation to the delivery of the Planning Enforcement Service and the Planning Appeals service was identified in the previous business plan as a priority. This has been overtaken by events following the merger of Planning with Environmental Health and Trading Standards which enabled the creation of a joined up enforcement service in relation to restricted number of matters. The introduction of a new Enforcement Charter / Protocol was delayed pending completion of the POSW work on enforcement indicators. The new Charter is in the process of completion, along with associated changes to internal procedures to ensure the Authority continues to provide a robust and resilient planning enforcement service. Similarly, there have been National changes introduced to the Appeals process which have delayed revision

of internal procedures and protocols, and these will now be introduced during the second half of 2017.

5. Significant work continued during the year on the Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), including informal and formal consideration of matters relating to the Discharge of Requirements under the Development Consent Order (DCO) which was determined by the Planning Inspectorate within the Council's boundaries. Although the Tidal Lagoon PPA - which previously secured contributions towards the costs of employing a planning officer and covered part of the salary of an ecologist within the service - has not been formally renewed due to the uncertainties surrounding the project, additional contributions were secured to ensure that the Planning service was still able to devote appropriate resources to the ongoing preliminary work relating to the Requirements.
6. Although a Planning agents' workshop has not been held since March 2016, the service has used its agents email database to provide agents with information relating to the service, which has also proved useful to ensure that agents working within the County Borough are aware of changes in legislation and as such satisfy our expectations in terms of the quality and validity of new submissions. The use of agent emails and workshop sessions will continue to be delivered on a regular basis during 2017/18.
7. Following the grant of planning permission for the mineral development at East Pit in June 2015, considerable efforts have been expended by the Minerals Enforcement Officer to control the ongoing minerals working and progressive restoration of the site, and to ensure accordance with the extensive number of conditions and alternative S106 agreement. This scheme, once completed, will ensure that the site will be restored and put into appropriate aftercare, thus securing significant visual improvements in addition to preventing potential flooding from the void area in an uncontrolled manner. The ongoing operations have also secured the continued employment of those directly employed on site and those working within the supply chain for a further four years.
8. The planning application for an alternative restoration scheme in respect of the former Margam Open Cast coal Site was approved in February 2017 after many months of legal discussions over the necessary legal agreement and conditions. Following the grant of planning permission, considerable work has been undertaken by Officers of NPT and Carmarthenshire CC (under SLA) to monitor ongoing development and ensure discharge of, and full compliance with, the myriad of conditions. As a consequence, the potential dangers identified in previous years in respect of the potential flooding and safety risks from the flooded void have now been to a large extent addressed by the ongoing work, which will also when completed have a substantial positive impact on the wider area.
9. Work has also been ongoing in respect of an amended restoration and aftercare scheme at Selar former opencast site. This application has received a resolution to grant consent and is waiting for the signing of a section 106 agreement, with ongoing minerals monitoring work at the site in respect of such ongoing restoration. Once this work is underway, it means that all three of the large open cast coal sites within Neath port Talbot will have acceptable and deliverable restoration schemes.
10. The Council continues to deliver a robust and efficient pre-application service which provides choice in the level of service available to customers, in addition to giving them the

opportunity to continue having confidential discussions with the Council until such a time as a planning application is submitted.

11. The Service Level Agreement relating to the provision of a minerals service to the authority by Carmarthenshire Council, including the enforcement of minerals and waste in addition to scheduled visits, has continued, albeit the overall level of income from monitoring visits has reduced year on year.
12. The Delegated arrangements were updated to improve the efficiency of the service while, the public speaking protocol has also been updated to incorporate concerns/constructive criticism received from elected Members and members of the public in relation to the procedure since it was introduced in November 2014, thus enhancing the accountability and transparency of the Development Management service.
13. To support and supplement the adopted LDP, five strategically important SPG were consulted upon, finalised and adopted including those relating to Planning Obligations, Affordable Housing, Baglan Energy Park Development Framework, Pollution and Parking Standards.
14. By the end of March'17, a further batch of SPG was prepared and endorsed by the Council for the purposes of consultation, including those relating to Open Space and Greenspace, Renewable and Low Carbon Energy, Design and Development and the Welsh Language. All SPG will provide further clarity to developers and Development Management officers when interpreting policies within the LDP, and will reduce risk and should encourage good quality development within Neath Port Talbot.
15. Collaborative work with colleagues in the City & County of Swansea has continued through the year on the emerging joint SPG for the Fabian Way corridor. This SPG 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 required to facilitate our collective regeneration aspirations. Prior to finalising the document however, and given the importance of the Tidal Lagoon to the area, officers have agreed to await the UK Government's response to the Hendry Review. Pending the announcement, the SPG will be finalised and adopted as soon as is practicably possible.
16. A research project commissioned by the Countryside & Wildlife team to investigate and develop a 'Biodiversity Compensation Scheme' to support the planning process was completed. Funding for the project was secured from NRW and the RDP's LEADER programme and the project report is being used to inform the preparation of the emerging Biodiversity and Geodiversity SPG, which is being prepared jointly by the Planning Policy and Countryside & Wildlife teams.
17. Procedures have been finalised to secure the efficient and effective collection of data in order to monitor the effectiveness and delivery of the policy aspirations within the adopted LDP. The results of this will feed into the first Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) which is due for submission to the Welsh Government in October 2017 and annually thereafter.
18. In consultation with the building industry, work continues in respect of the preparation and publication of annual Joint Housing Land Availability Studies (JHLAS). Two studies have been

completed since the adoption of the LDP, both of which have demonstrated a 5-year land supply.

19. Work on the Active Travel Act commitment in respect of the Council's first Existing Route Map (ERM) was completed. Following the Welsh Government direction to revise the ERM, further work was undertaken on the highlighted routes and an amended ERM was submitted to the Welsh Government in July 2016. The Council subsequently received Ministerial approval of the amended ERM in August 2016. Work has continued and a timetable devised to ensure the delivery of a review of the ERM alongside the delivery of the Integrated Network Map (INM) to the Welsh Government by the deadline of 3rd November 2017.
20. In light of the new emerging planning regime in Wales and the introduction of Strategic Development Plans (SDPs), work has continued in respect of supporting and contributing to the regional agenda. Initial discussions have taken place in respect of the future role of authorities and the potential for future collaboration initiatives and studies. Neath Port Talbot has taken on the lead/secretariat role for the South West Wales region in 2017/18.
21. The Council's Asset Sponsorship Management Service contract with a third party provider has been restructured and extended. A full procurement exercise was undertaken and completed, and in addition to the established assets, the new contract seeks to establish pilot schemes in respect of additional assets, which will allow the Council to determine whether such arrangements prove viable to pursue in the longer term. Over the duration of the contract new initiatives and methods of advertising that generate incremental income will continue to be considered as appropriate.
22. Officers within the Countryside & Wildlife team have established closer working relationships with internal departments across the Council through the provision of an internal consultancy service, and further progress has also been made in supporting applicants in addressing biodiversity constraints early on in the planning process. Support at this early stage provides better opportunities to fully mitigate or compensate for biodiversity loss, whilst minimising delays in determination.
23. The Countryside & Wildlife team's involvement with large developments through steering groups is ongoing and ensures that ecological and rights of way matters continue to be appropriately dealt with. Examples include Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm Ecological Steering Group; Selar OCCS Nature Conservation Steering Group; Swansea University SSSI/Whitford Point Management Committee; and Mynydd Brombil Wind Farm Habitat Management Committee.
24. The Biodiversity Duty Plan, a requirement of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, has been drafted. The importance of the planning process in the recovery of biodiversity is fully recognised, with a number of planning improvement actions being integrated into the Plan.

These are the most significant achievements secured during 2016/17. In addition to the above, our staff continue to deliver statutory functions despite a decreasing budget for customers who have 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 although this is becoming more and more challenging.

Priorities going forward

There are a number of key priorities and service improvements which have been identified for this year, some of which intend to build upon and continue to improve upon the success secured up until recently. These include the following:

- **Deliver a mobile working platform for planning and enforcement officers to secure more efficient working practices.** We have purchased mobile tablets for use by officers on an experimental basis. It is anticipated that these can be used to enable officers to enter data direct into our back office system and take photographs which can automatically be loaded into the system. In time it is even hoped that officers can write the bare bones of a report whilst on site. This should in turn reduce duplication and improve the efficiency of the service.
- **Implement a new back office Planning system.** We have been in discussions with a new IT provider for some time now but due to concerns over some issues within the system, we delayed implementation until we were satisfied that it was able to deliver the promises made by the salesmen. These discussions were held in conjunction with the City and County of Swansea, who due to contractual issues have already implemented the new IT system. It is anticipated that our outstanding concerns will be addressed this calendar year to enable for its implementation in the New Year. It should be fully functional by 2017/18 and will put us in a better position to deliver the Welsh Government's regional collaboration agenda.
- **Develop and implement a new Planning Enforcement Charter.** A Planning Enforcement Charter will be prepared and implemented having regard to the Welsh Government's revised performance expectations, with the intention of ensuring that the service is transparent and accountable, and can be judged by the public against defined service delivery targets.
- **Develop our website to enable for the submission of complaints and supporting information.** It is proposed to develop a system to enable complainants to submit their complaints electronically together with supporting information which will enable us to prioritise complaints and speed up the investigation process. Complainants will be directed to submit all complaints (over time) through our website rather than via letter, email or telephone. They will be expected to submit details of the complaint together with photographs which will aid our investigations. This will enable a desk top assessment to be undertaken upon receipt of the complaint and may even allow officers to confirm whether a breach of the planning legislation has occurred without even leaving their desks. As stated above, and given that we only have two enforcement officers (and one mineral and waste enforcement officer – although he is currently tasked with delivering the restoration of three major open cast coal sites) this will enable us to focus our time and resources on the more serious complaints straight away. It is not suggested that we will ignore the less serious complaints, however we could through a triage system, group complaints together, and therefore save time and money as a consequence.

- **Officer time will continue to be focused on delivering the schemes forming part of the Vibrant and Viable Places (VVP) Project and in time the second phase of this programme.** A new senior officer has now been appointed and they, together with the two existing senior officers will be tasked with supporting developers through the planning application through early intervention. The constraints which could prevent schemes from coming forward will be identified at the earliest possible stage and partners will be engaged to identify viable and deliverable solutions to ensure that the schemes are approved having regard to all material planning considerations.
- **The Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) will be the subject of ongoing review in addition to ongoing management of the S106 database and adoption of protocols governing the monitoring and spend of section 106 contributions.** The new S106 database will enable thorough monitoring of requirements sought and work secured/payments received. Developers will in turn be able to identify the costs associated with bringing developments forward from the start thus allowing them to establish risk levels. The Council will be able to maximise the amount of infrastructure delivered by the private sector and monitor its delivery going forward.
- **Continue to unblock the bottlenecks in the Development Management Service and ensure that Senior Officers are involved in providing advice to officers at the earliest possible stage.** This will require us to continue re-assessing the workflow /procedures associated with the Development Management system to reflect the extensive legislative changes which have emerged since July 2015 when the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 received Royal Assent. The objective is to reduce the end to end time associated with the determination of planning applications. It is also proposed to address the need for late changes to proposed schemes especially those associated with major applications as these are currently impacting upon performance measures.
- **Continuation of Members training, building upon what has recently been rolled out.** A timetable of training will be drawn up to ensure that Members have regular training in subject areas that are necessary to enable them to undertake their planning responsibilities whether it is as a member of the Planning Committee or otherwise. As a consequence, Members will be better informed about legislative change and individual topic areas which are important to the decision making process. This will improve Members understanding of the planning system which is complex and constantly changing and will also improve the quality of decision making.
- **The programme of works associated with the alternative restoration scheme at the former Margam Open Cast Coal site is maintained and regularly monitored to ensure work is in accordance with the approved plans and conditions.** The objective is to ensure delivery of the alternative restoration scheme which prioritises site safety and security, and includes working closely with the Coal Authority to supervise restoration going forward, as the work needs to be undertaken within a restricted period of time and within a finite budget.
- **Facilitate the continued redevelopment of the Coed Darcy Urban Village.** This is a strategically important development for the County Borough. St Modwen who own the site

have stalled bringing forward future phases of this development site since securing a resolution to grant a variation of their S106 agreement in February 2015. The delays have been associated with viability and whilst the council is currently working with St Modwen to ensure that the S106 only seeks to secure essential infrastructure, the sticking point continues to be the delivery of affordable homes. The council will continue to work to ensure that the site is delivered with all essential infrastructure but in a manner that enables the developers to commence development.

- **Work to secure the objectives of the Valleys Task Force.** This task force aims to re-invigorate our valley communities. This may well involve the redevelopment of land which was not deliverable when the LDP was prepared and subsequently adopted. We are aware that a number of sites within our valley communities were previously identified as being within a flood zone and as such were unable to be included as allocations within the plan. The DAMs are continuously being reviewed now and some of those sites are now out of a floodrisk area. Furthermore sites which were previously considered to be unviable, through the support of this initiative may well be deliverable going forward. This is a challenge for the Planning Authority given that sites are likely to be coming forward as part of this Task Force initiative which are departures from the development plan.
- **Continue work on the remaining SPG required to support the LDP.** The next batch of four SPG will be consulted upon, finalised and adopted (i.e. Open Space and Greenspace; Renewable and Low Carbon Energy; Design; and Development and the Welsh Language). Work has already commenced on a further batch of SPG including Biodiversity and Geodiversity SPG and Landscape and Seascape SPG respectively. These two guidance documents will be prepared for the purposes of consultation. Work on the remaining SPG will also begin in due course – these include The Historic Environment; Port Talbot Harbourside & Town Centre Development Framework; Fabian Way Innovation Corridor; and Park Avenue Development Framework. Once adopted, the SPGs will provide further clarity to developers and Development Management staff when interpreting policies within the LDP. This will reduce risk and should encourage good quality development within Neath Port Talbot. The adoption of the SPGs will be the appropriate measure.
- **Complete the joint SPG for the regeneration of the Fabian Way corridor.** The SPG will direct developers to deliver the regeneration aspirations of both Councils in addition to securing S106 money to improve essential infrastructure along the corridor. As referred to above however, the timescale for the completion and adoption of the document will be dependent on the announcement of the UK Government's response to the Hendry Review given the critical nature of the Tidal Lagoon to the future regeneration of the Fabian Way Corridor.
- **Complete and submit the first LDP Annual Monitoring Report.** Work is ongoing in respect of the preparation of the first AMR, with the document due for submission to the Welsh Government in October 2017 and annually thereafter. Monitoring is an increasingly important aspect of evidence based policy making and monitoring systems are key mechanisms in developing a fuller understanding of the issues that impact upon communities and the extent to which existing policies are meeting their stated objectives.

- **Undertake / publish the annual Joint Housing Land Availability Study (JHLAS).** In consultation with the building industry produce a comprehensive review of the amount of available land for housing development.
- **Complete the Active Travel Act commitment in relation to the review of the ERM and completion /submission of the Integrated Network Map (INM).** Work is ongoing in respect of the review of the ERM and completion / submission of the first iteration of the Council's INM. The INM will set out the Council's aspirations for the next 15 years, identifying either improvements to existing routes that could be made or new routes that could be developed and added to the active travel network. The INM will be an important document for the Council and once approved, will be considered as part of the planning decision making process so that aspirations are realised as part of ongoing development.
- **Continue to support and contribute to regional collaboration initiatives / studies.** In its lead/secretariat role for the South West Wales region in 2017/18, the Council will seek to facilitate ongoing discussion and progress in respect of regional collaboration initiatives and studies.
- **Finalise and publish the Biodiversity Duty Plan which will outline how the Council intends to comply with the new, enhanced biodiversity duty outlined in the Environment (Wales) Act, 2016.** The Act places a greater duty on Councils in terms of enhanced biodiversity. The plan will need to identify the extent of these emerging duties and protocols will need to be developed to ensure that all services within the Council are complying with this increased duty. Training of all staff will be developed and delivered.
- **Improve upon joint working practices between service areas to remove duplication.** Work has already commenced on amalgamating enforcement activities previously carried out by different services within the council. This work will now progress to the next level following the appointment of an empty homes officer who will enforce the legislation currently used by Planning, Building Control, Pest Enforcement and Environmental Health to deal with redundant buildings and over grown land to bring buildings and parcels of land back into beneficial use. This will be achieved through a combination of measures with the last resort being an enforced sale. Not only will this result in a net increase in residential accommodation within sustainable locations, but it will also address the blight caused by these buildings and land upon the communities within which they are located. This is also likely to result in cost savings and improved debt recovery to the council as these problem buildings have undoubtedly in the past been the subject of extensive investigations by various sections who have served notices on the land owner and in certain circumstances taken direct action following non-compliance. The sale of the properties will ensure that the council re-coups these costs and reduces the need for the investigations in the first place.

WHAT SERVICE USERS THINK

In 2016-17 we conducted a customer satisfaction survey aimed at assessing the views of people that had received a planning application decision during the year.

The survey was sent to 219 people, 15% of whom submitted a whole or partial response. The majority of responses (49%) were from local agents. 33% were from members of the public. 9% of respondents had their most recent planning application refused.

We asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the planning service. They were given the following answer options:

- Strongly agree;
- Tend to agree;
- Neither agree nor disagree;
- Tend to disagree; and
- Strongly disagree.

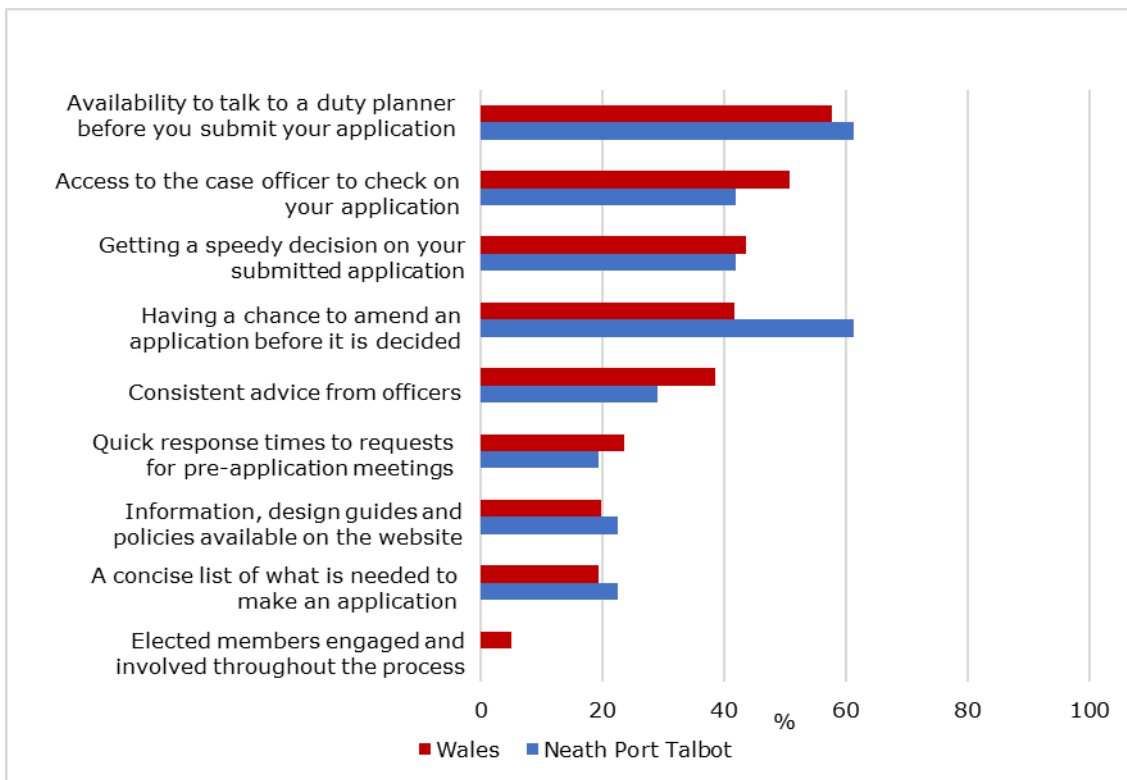
Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents that selected either 'tend to agree' or 'strongly agree' for each statement for both our Planning Authority and Wales.

Table 1: Percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement, 2016-17

Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	%	
	Neath Port Talbot LPA	Wales
The LPA enforces its planning rules fairly and consistently	60	52
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	65	62
The LPA gives help throughout, including with conditions	58	52
The LPA responded promptly when they had questions	73	61
They were listened to about their application	65	59
They were kept informed about their application	65	51
They were satisfied overall with how the LPA handled their application	74	61

We also asked respondents to select three planning service characteristics from a list that they thought would most help them achieve successful developments. Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents that chose each characteristic as one of their three selections.

Figure 1: Characteristics of a good planning service, Neath Port Talbot LPA, 2016-17



Comments received include:

- “Excellent service and customer focussed.”
- “NTP planning is probably the most efficient I deal with.”
- “Consistency within the planning application process as it seems some restrictions are not applied to all applicants.”

OUR PERFORMANCE 2016-17

This section details our performance in 2016-17. It considers both the Planning Performance Framework indicators and other available data to help paint a comprehensive picture of performance. Where appropriate we make comparisons between our performance and the all Wales picture.

Performance is analysed across the five key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in the Planning Performance Framework:

- Plan making;
- Efficiency;
- Quality;
- Engagement; and
- Enforcement.

Plan making

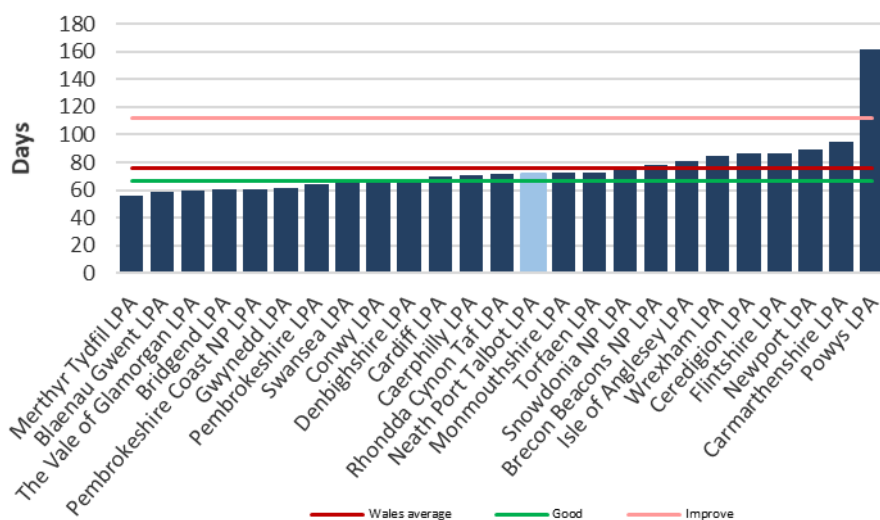
As at 31 March 2017, we were one of 22 LPAs that had a current development plan in place.

During the APR period we had 5 years of housing land supply identified, making us one of 6 Welsh LPAs with the required 5 years supply.

Efficiency

In 2016-17 we determined 817 planning applications, each taking, on average, 72 days (10 weeks) to determine. This compares to an average of 76 days (11 weeks) across Wales. Figure 2 shows the average time taken by each LPA to determine an application during the year.

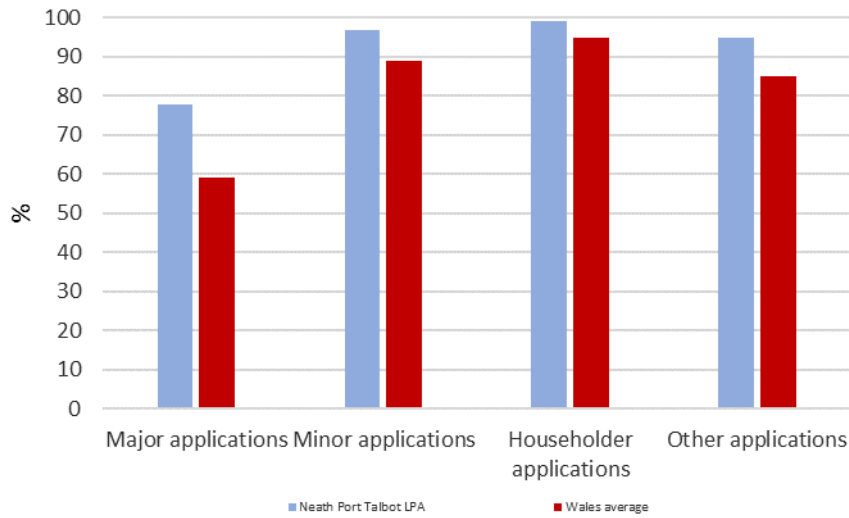
Figure 2: Average time taken (days) to determine applications, 2016-17



96% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. This was the fourth highest percentage in Wales and we were one of 20 LPAs that had reached the 80% target.

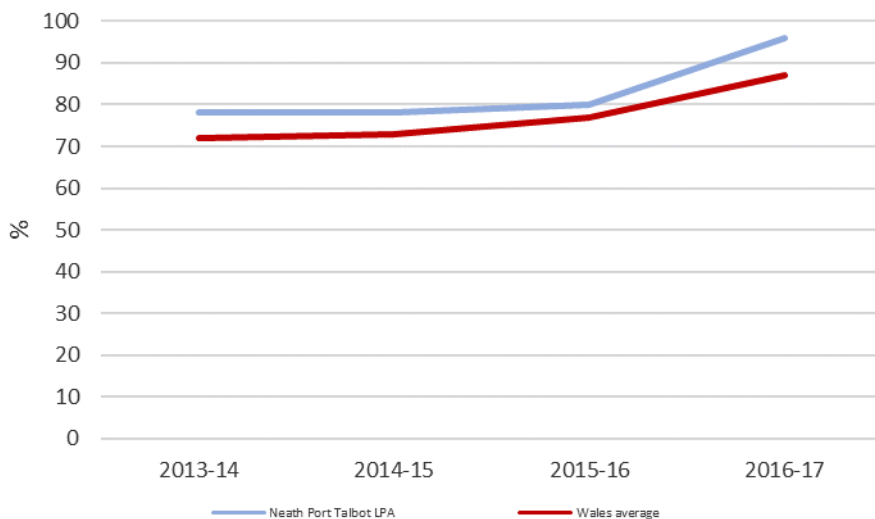
Figure 3 shows the percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales across the four main types of application for our LPA and Wales. It shows that we determined 99% of householder applications within the required timescales.

Figure 3: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales, by type, 2016-17



Between 2015-16 and 2016-17, as Figure 4 shows, the percentage of planning applications we determined within the required timescales increased from 80%. Wales also saw an increase this year.

Figure 4: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales



Over the same period:

- The number of applications we received decreased;
- The number of applications we determined increased; and
- The number of applications we approved decreased marginally.

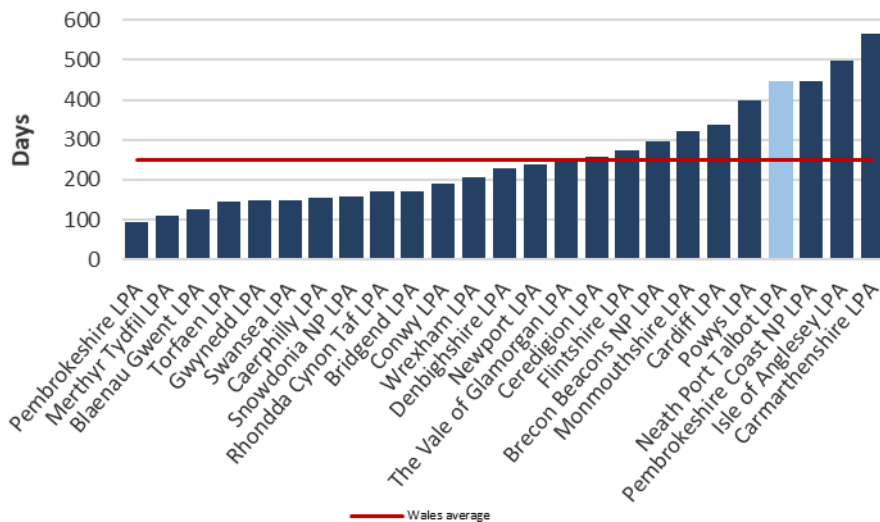
Major applications

We determined 27 major planning applications in 2016-17, 4% (1 application) of which was subject to an EIA. Each application (including those subject to an EIA) took, on average, 448 days (64 weeks) to determine.

This figure does however use a methodology preferred by the Welsh Government whereby they calculate an average over a quarter, then when all added together they again average the figure. This therefore doesn't accurately reflect the average figure which should in fact read 344 days (49 weeks). The actual average is far better and is demonstrating that we are improving the overall time taken to determine major applications.

Our commitment to further improvement is reflected by the fact that we have recently appointed a new senior planner who will concentrate on guiding developers submitting major applications through the planning process as efficiently as possible but without undermining our objective of 'Approving Quality Development Quickly'. Unfortunately Figure 5 shows, this was the fourth longest average time taken of all Welsh LPAs however this was based on the inaccurate figure rather than the actual figure.

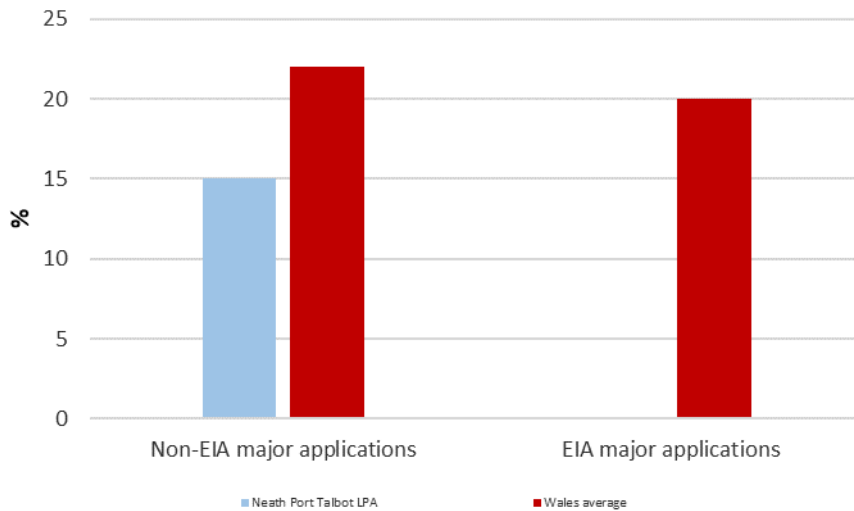
Figure 5: Average time (days) taken to determine a major application, 2016-17



78% of these major applications were determined within the required timescales, compared to 59% across Wales.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales by the type of major application. 15% of our 'standard' major applications i.e. those not requiring an EIA, were determined within the required timescales during the year.

Figure 6: Percentage of Major applications determined within the required timescales during the year, by type, 2016-17

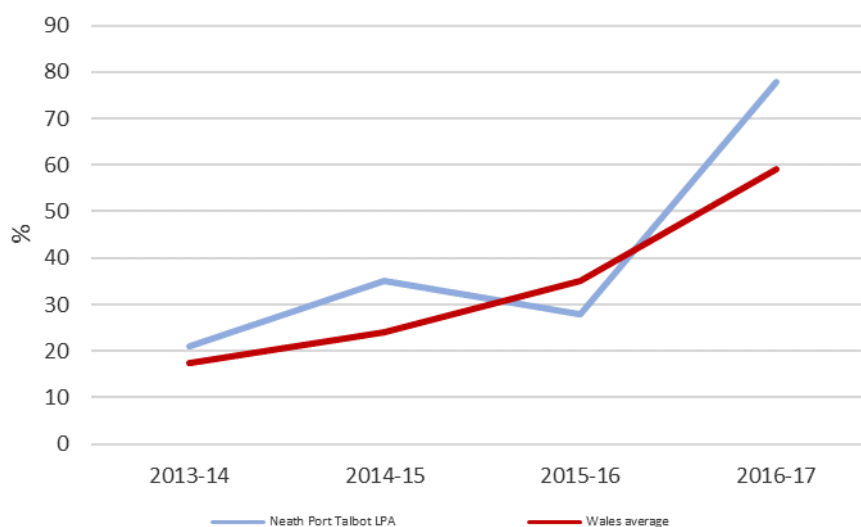


In addition we determined 17 major applications that were subject to a PPA in the required timescales during the year.

Since 2015-16 the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales had increased from 28%. Similarly, the number of major applications determined increased while the number of applications subject to an EIA determined during the year decreased.

Figure 7 shows the trend in the percentage of major planning applications determined within the required timescales in recent years and how this compares to Wales.

Figure 7: Percentage of major planning applications determined within the required timescales



Over the same period:

- The percentage of minor applications determined within the required timescales increased from 83% to 97%;
- The percentage of householder applications determined within the required timescales increased from 96% to 99%; and
- The percentage of other applications determined within required timescales increased from 79% to 95%.

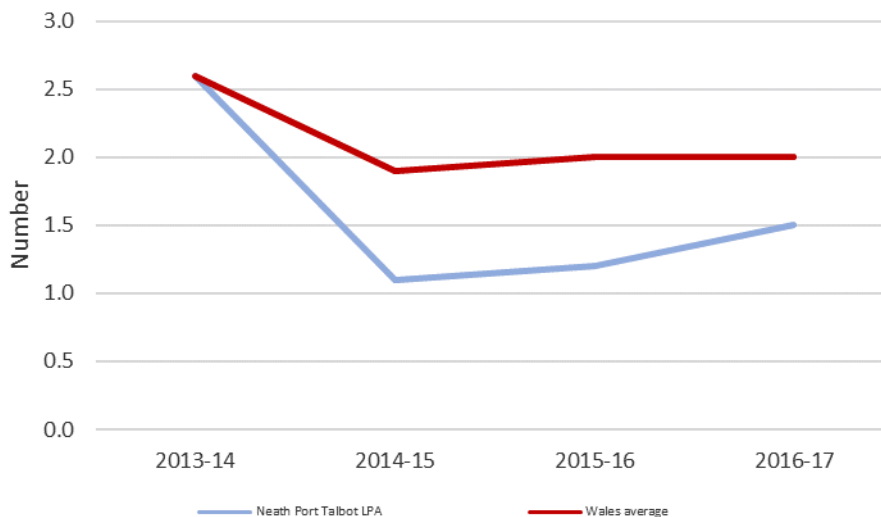
Quality

In 2016-17, our Planning Committee made 37 planning application decisions during the year, which equated to 5% of all planning applications determined. Across Wales 6% of all planning application decisions were made by planning committee.

8% of these member-made decisions went against officer advice. This compared to 11% of member-made decisions across Wales. This equated to 0.4% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice; 0.7% across Wales.

In 2016-17 we received 12 appeals against our planning decisions, which equated to 1.5 appeals for every 100 applications received. Across Wales 2 appeals were received for every 100 applications. Unfortunately this figure doesn't include several enforcement appeals and an advertisement appeal as these are not recorded by the Welsh Government. Figure 8 shows how the volume of appeals received has changed since 2015-16 and how this compares to Wales.

Figure 8: Number of appeals received per 100 planning applications

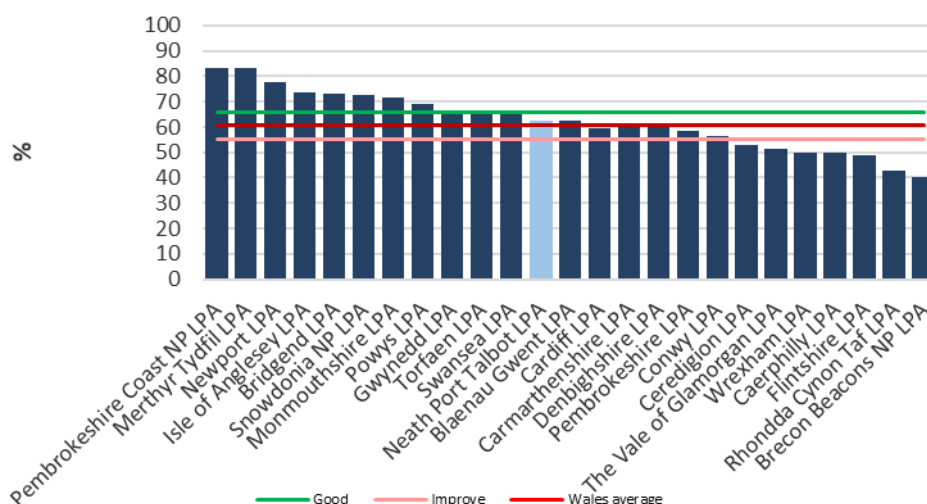


Over the same period the percentage of planning applications approved decreased from 96% to 84%. Whilst this appears to be a dramatic decrease it is actually as a reflection of a change in the method of calculating these figures. Previously, the Welsh Government included the discharge of conditions within the approval rate. Whilst they continue to use the number of such applications within the total number of applications received, they do not count the number of those submissions within the approval rate. If they had not changed the methodology, the figure would

have remained at an approval rate of 96%, demonstrating our continued commitment to working with developers to 'Approve Quality Development Quickly'.

Of the 8 appeals that were decided during the year, 63% were dismissed. As Figure 9 shows, this was higher than the percentage of appeals dismissed across Wales as a whole, but was below the 66% target.

Figure 9: Percentage of appeals dismissed, 2016-17



During 2016-17 we had 1 application for costs at a section 78 appeal upheld, making us one of the 11 LPAs to have at least one such application upheld in the year.

Engagement

We are:

- one of 24 LPAs that allowed members of the public to address the Planning Committee; and
- one of 20 LPAs that had an online register of planning applications.

As Table 2 shows, 65% of respondents to our 2016-17 customer satisfaction survey agreed that the LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application.

Table 2: Feedback from our 2016-17 customer satisfaction survey

	%	
Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	Neath Port Talbot LPA	Wales
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	65	62
They were listened to about their application	65	59

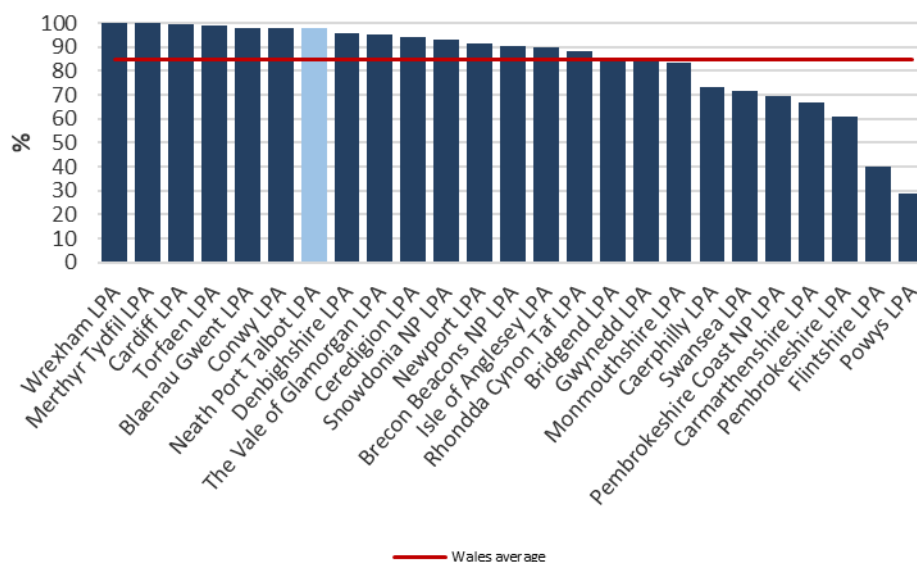
Enforcement

In 2016-17 we investigated 216 enforcement cases, which equated to 1.5 per 1,000 population. This compared to 1.9 enforcement cases investigated per 1,000 population across Wales. We took, on average, 10 days to investigate each enforcement case.

Unfortunately, the above is not an accurate reflection of actual performance. Our enforcement officers have been reviewing outstanding cases on the system and it appears that a number of cases which had indeed been investigated had not been updated on the system. Now that this has taken place, it is evident that we resolved 289 enforcement cases rather than 252, bringing us in line with the Welsh average. When calculated against the population it appears that we investigated 2 cases per 1000 population, which is above the Welsh average.

We investigated 98% of these enforcement cases within 84 days. Across Wales 85% were investigated within 84 days. Figure 10 shows the percentage of enforcement cases that were investigated within 84 days across all Welsh LPAs.

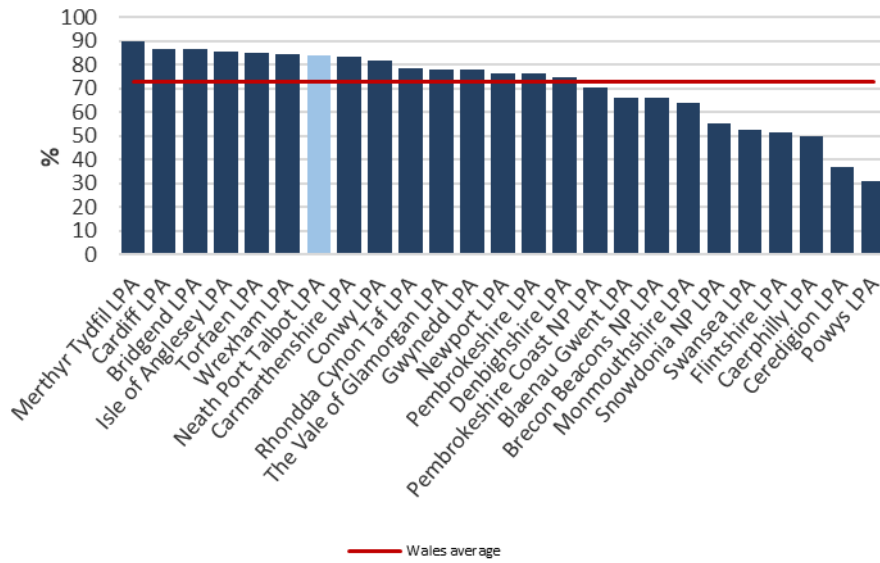
Figure 10: Percentage of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days, 2016-17



Notwithstanding the fact that we resolved 289 it was not possible to amend the chart above which indicates that we resolved 252 enforcement cases, taking, on average, 101 days to resolve each case. Whilst the table can't be updated to actually reflect the fact that we resolved 289, it is important to note this improved figure.

84% of this enforcement action was taken within 180 days from the start of the case. As Figure 11 shows this compared to 73% of enforcement cases resolved within 180 days across Wales.

Figure 11: Percentage of enforcement cases resolved in 180 days, 2016-17



ANNEX A - PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE	WALES AVERAGE	Neath Port Talbot LPA LAST YEAR	Neath Port Talbot LPA THIS YEAR
Plan making						
Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	Yes		No	Yes	Yes	Yes
LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	<12	13-17	18+	58	N/A	N/A
Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	Yes		No	Yes	N/A	N/A
The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	>5		<5	2.9	5.5	5.3
Efficiency						
Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	Not set	Not set	Not set	59	28	78
Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days	Not set	Not set	Not set	250	369	344

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	>80	60.1-79.9	<60
Average time taken to determine all applications in days	<67	67-111	112+
Quality			
Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	<5	5.1-8.9	9+
Percentage of appeals dismissed	>66	55.1-65.9	<55
Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	0	1	2+
Engagement			
Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?	Yes		No
Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	Yes		No

WALES AVERAGE	Neath Port Talbot LPA LAST YEAR	Neath Port Talbot LPA THIS YEAR
87	80	96
76	67	72
11	15	8
61	64	63
0	0	1
Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
Does the local planning authority's web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access, track their progress (and view their content)?	Yes	Partial	No
Enforcement			
Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percentage of enforcement cases where enforcement action is taken or a retrospective application received within 180 days from the start of the case (in those cases where it was expedient to enforce)?	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to take enforcement action	Not set	Not set	Not set

WALES AVERAGE	Neath Port Talbot LPA LAST YEAR	Neath Port Talbot LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
85	98	98
74	8	10
73	91	84
201	60	101

SECTION 1 – PLAN MAKING

Indicator	01. Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
A development plan (LDP or UDP) is in place and within the plan period	N/A	No development plan is in place (including where the plan has expired)

Authority's performance	Yes
<p>The Council's Local Development Plan (2011-2026) was adopted in January 2016. By the end of March'17, the Council had adopted 5 key Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) documents with a further batch of 4 prepared and endorsed for the purposes of consultation (these SPG were subsequently adopted by the Council in July'17). The Council has plans to prepare a further 6 SPGs in 2018.</p> <p>In addition to the above our first Annual Monitoring Report is due to be submitted to the Welsh Government in October 2017 with the first Review not scheduled until 2020.</p>	

Indicator	02. LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
The LDP is being progressed within 12 months of the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement	The LDP is being progressed within between 12 and 18 months of the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement	The LDP is being progressed more than 18 months later than the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement

Authority's performance	N/A

Indicator	03. Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
An AMR is due, and has been prepared		An AMR is due, and has not been prepared

Authority's performance	N/A

Indicator	04. The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	
"Good"		"Improvement needed"
The authority has a housing land supply of more than 5 years		The authority has a housing land supply of less than 5 years

Authority's performance	5.3
<p>The Local Authority successfully demonstrated that we have sufficient land available for housing however this is reliant upon the limited number of volume housebuilders delivering the planning permissions they have been granted.</p> <p>It is acknowledged that there are significant viability issues in the county borough and developers are struggling to deliver the essential infrastructure required to support housing developments whilst also securing a developer profit.</p> <p>It is anticipated that this problem will continue going forward. The Council are however looking to secure investment from the Valleys task force to try to secure financial support to enable developments to be delivered within our valleys communities where viability is at its most acute.</p>	

SECTION 2 - EFFICIENCY

Indicator	05. Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority's performance	78
<p>This improved performance is as a result of an acknowledgement by developers that their applications are not straight forward and as such they have agreed to 'Extensions of Time'.</p> <p>The biggest constraint for major developments within this authority are normally associated with flooding, contaminated land and biodiversity, all of which take time to address properly in terms of acceptable submissions (especially for biodiversity whereby the survey periods are controlled by the seasons). They also take a long time to consider by both internal and external consultees who have restricted resources.</p>	

Indicator	06. Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority's performance	448 (344)
<p>Whilst the recorded Welsh Government figure is 448, if you calculate the average figure correctly it is in fact 344 days. Whilst this is still high at just shy of a year, it is important to note that these figures include a number of very old applications which have been with the authority for a number of years, and have as a result skewed the figures.</p> <p>Whilst the Authority tries its best to determine applications as quickly as possible, the constraints identified above make it very difficult and rather than refusing applications at submission, we allow developers to address the constraints and thereby improve the potential for developers to deliver their developments. This is reflected in our approval rate across the board of 96%.</p>	

Indicator	07. Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
More than 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Between 60% and 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Less than 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period

Authority's performance	96
<p>The Authority works with developers to ensure that we deliver our objective of 'Approving Quality Development Quickly'. Not only are we securing improvements to the overall quality of the development, but we also approving them either within the statutory period of 8 weeks or within an agreed extension of time with the applicant.</p>	

Indicator	08. Average time taken to determine all applications in days	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Less than 67 days	Between 67 and 111 days	112 days or more

Authority’s performance	72
<p>We were one of the first authorities in Wales to measure end to end times, following a systems review back in 2008 when it was considered to be important to acknowledge the amount of time taken to register an application. This is still considered important given the poor quality of a large number of submissions. The recently introduced national validation procedures have improved this situation however our customers find it too formal. We therefore ensure that the notices we send applicants are accompanied either by a jargon free letter/email and/or an explanatory phone call, to ensure that applicants know exactly what they need to do in order to submit a valid planning application.</p> <p>The pre-application service will help this situation improve further and whilst we encourage all prospective developers to use the service, many are deterred by the fact that fees are charged for the delivery of this service.</p>	

SECTION 3 – QUALITY

Indicator	09. Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Less than 5% of decisions	Between 5% and 9% of decisions	9% or more of decisions

Authority’s performance	8
<p>This figure can change quite dramatically given the very low numbers of applications determined by our Planning Committee. During this period 37 applications were determined by the Planning Committee and only 3 of those applications were determined contrary to officer advice. In total 817 applications were determined during this period and as such only 0.3% of applications were determined contrary to officer recommendation.</p> <p>This high percentage is therefore a reflection of the very high levels of delegation in place. This level of delegation does not however undermine the democratic process as officers are in constant contact with elected Members throughout the determination process.</p>	

Indicator	10. Percentage of appeals dismissed	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
More than 66% (two thirds) of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal	Between 55% and 66% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal	Less than 55% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal

Authority's performance	63
<p>This is an improvement when compared with last year and demonstrates the robustness of the Authority's decision making process. Even though it is an improvement, the actual success rate is even higher as these figures do not take into account the appeals successfully defended in relation to enforcement cases and advertisements. Had these appeals been counted, the performance would have exceeded 66% and would have taken us into the green band.</p>	

Indicator	11. Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
The authority has not had costs awarded against it at appeal	The authority has had costs awarded against it in one appeal case	The authority has had costs awarded against it in two or more appeal cases

Authority's performance	1
<p>Unfortunately the Authority had one award of costs against us during this period. It related to an appeal against conditions imposed on a retrospective development. The developer had built a bungalow within their rear garden without planning permission despite receiving pre-application advice confirming that permission was unlikely to be granted for a dwelling at that location.</p> <p>A retrospective application was submitted for the retention of the building as a granny annex. Given the Authority's historical knowledge of this development and the Developers previous lack of compliance with the legislation and the advice from the planning authority, a legal agreement and conditions were imposed to secure the use of the building only as a granny annex rather than its originally intended use as an independent dwelling. It was acknowledged that this was a belt and braces approach however it was felt necessary given the fact that the applicant had failed to historically comply with the legislation. Despite the applicant willingly agreeing to all the conditions and signing the legal agreement they immediately appealed the conditions controlling the use of the building as a granny annex.</p> <p>Unfortunately the Planning Inspector considered that the actions of the Authority were excessive and did not acknowledge the problems experienced previously in</p>	

securing compliance by the developer with the legislation. This was an extremely disappointing result and makes the enforcement of the planning legislation more difficult when you lose decisions and costs such as this. It is also even more worrying given the decline of enforcement services both in Neath Port Talbot and nationally and the increase in covert developments.

SECTION 4 – ENGAGEMENT

Indicator	12. Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?	
“Good”		“Improvement needed”
Members of the public are able to address the Planning Committee		Members of the public are not able to address the Planning Committee

Authority’s performance	Yes
<p>Since 2014, Members of the public have been allowed to address the Planning Committee. Unfortunately despite publicising this opportunity, the number of participants has been very low. The policy and protocol has recently been updated to specifically identify the ability of community councils to address committee in addition to members of the public. Despite this we have only had one community councillor address the committee to date.</p>	

Indicator	13. Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	
“Good”		“Improvement needed”
Members of the public can seek advice from a duty planning officer		There is no duty planning officer available

Authority’s performance	Yes
<p>All officers are available to the public when they are in the office. We are aware that many authorities have a specific officer who is on a rota to cover all phones during specific periods of the day. Whilst this may be appropriate for general queries they will not be able to answer queries which are application specific without referring to the case officer. This referral results in at least two officers being involved in dealing with the query which seems to defeat the object of maximising the efficiency of the service. As a result all customers have access to their case officer during office hours. If the case officer is out on site or on leave, their colleague will assist if possible, thus maximising the quality of service to the public.</p>	

Indicator	14. Does the local planning authority's web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access track their progress (and view their content)?	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
All documents are available online	Only the planning application details are available online, and access to other documents must be sought directly	No planning application information is published online

Authority's performance	Yes
<p>This facility has been in existence for a number of years but is becoming increasingly difficult to resource. Whilst officers scan their own plans and application forms for current undetermined applications, the determined applications are scanned by a small administration team who service the whole of the Environment Directorate. Given the budget constraints affecting the council, back office staff have been severely hit by cuts and are struggling to keep up to date with scanning the planning files. There are concerns therefore about the ability for the system to be kept up to date going forward.</p>	

SECTION 5 – ENFORCEMENT

Indicator	15. Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority's performance	98
<p>We only have two enforcement officers covering the whole of the county borough. We have a system in place whereby our building control officers undertake basic checks in relation to householder development and if there is a potential non-compliance, they notify the enforcement officers. This is a tricky balancing act given that the building control officers are required to secure sufficient income to cover their operational costs and are also competing against the private sector.</p> <p>Nevertheless it is successfully enabling us to investigate cases quickly and see a high number of resolutions within statutory time periods.</p>	

Indicator	16. Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority’s performance	10
<p>Given that the Authority only has two enforcement officers covering the whole of the county borough, this is an excellent achievement. Despite this result further updates within our back office system actually indicate that we dealt with more cases than have been reported and the overall period for resolving them has decreased.</p> <p>Measures are being put in place to ensure that the back office system is kept up to date by all officers going forward.</p>	

Indicator	17. Percentage of enforcement cases where enforcement action is taken or a retrospective application received within 180 days from the start of the case (in those cases where it was expedient to enforce)	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority’s performance	84
<p>This is a very good result given the limited resources available to the enforcement section.</p>	

Indicator	18. Average time taken to take enforcement action	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority’s performance	101
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This is a disappointingly long period of time however it reflects the fact that a number of complex enforcement cases are taking a long time to deal with. These complex investigations are being dealt with in addition to covering all new complaints by only two officers.

SECTION 6 – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

The purpose of the Sustainable Development Indicators is to measure the contribution the planning system makes to sustainable development in Wales.

The Sustainable Development Indicators will be used to measure the progress against national planning sustainability objectives, set out in Planning Policy Wales, and can be used to demonstrate to our stakeholders the role and scope of the planning system in delivering wider objectives. The information will also be useful to local planning authorities to understand more about the outcomes of the planning system and help inform future decisions.

Authority's returns	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All data has been returned.

Indicator	SD1. The floorspace (square metres) granted and refused planning permission for new economic development on allocated employment sites during the year.
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Granted (square metres)	
Authority's data	767

Refused (square metres)	
Authority's data	0

As seen from the figures above, we work proactively with our colleagues in the Regeneration section to support economic development on allocated sites. Unfortunately due to issues regarding viability, as explained earlier in this report, developer interest in the authority is marginal.

We are awaiting news from the Welsh Government in relation to the Valleys Task Force projects and anticipate that there will be greater interest in developing our valleys going forward. This will however prove a challenge for the Local Development Plan given that the majority of our allocated employment sites are within the coastal corridor. This may well result in an increase in employment developments approved within our valley communities which are technically

contrary to the LDP, on the basis that at the time of preparation and adoption, many of our sites were undeliverable due to lack of available finance and/or lack of developer interest. The Valleys task force projects aim to address this in certain areas. Furthermore a number of sites which were previously identified as being appropriate under previously adopted plans were removed from the most recently adopted LDP due to issues of flooding. The new DAM maps have recently indicated that a number of these sites are no longer affected by flooding and as such may well be available to deliver the council's economic development aspirations.

For these reasons it is anticipated that the floorspace will increase going forward.

Indicator	SD2. Planning permission granted for renewable and low carbon energy development during the year.
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Granted permission (number of applications)	
Authority's data	3

Granted permission (MW energy generation)	
Authority's data	5.4 MW (solar/wind/heat pump)

This output is a combination of solar, wind and heat pumps.

Indicator	SD3. The number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year.
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Market housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	230

Affordable housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	241

These figures relate to the number of dwellings approved. Given concerns nationally relating to land banking, it remains to be seen when or if these units will be developed. The figures do however highlight that Registered Social Landlords are active within this County borough. In fact they are often the only developers interested and willing to deliver developments in marginally viable areas.

Indicator	SD4. Planning permission granted and refused
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	for development in C1 and C2 floodplain areas during the year.
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Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that DID NOT meet all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission	
Authority's data	2 dwellings and 1.28ha of land

Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that did not meet all TAN 15 tests which were REFUSED permission on flood risk grounds	
Authority's data	0

Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that MET all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission	
Authority's data	96 dwellings and 0.121ha of land

The Council acknowledge that large areas of land are identified as being at risk of flooding and whilst we are able to refuse applications immediately upon submission if they are within zone C2, we are aware that developers have in the past been able to address the concerns of NRW to ensure that future occupiers are not at risk of flooding nor will there be third party detriment.

This is becoming increasingly important given that many of our schemes formed part of the Welsh Government's Vibrant and Viable Places Programme and were key to the regeneration aspirations of the council for this part of the county borough. Much of this area was within a C1 zone as defined by the NRW flood maps. Given the importance of developing this area, which at the time was under threat due to concerns that the steel works would either cease to operate or significantly reduce operations, the council commissioned hydrologists to review the NRW flood map. That review resulted in significant changes to the flood model which has since been adopted by NRW. These changes enabled areas which were previously identified as being prone to flooding to be sufficiently mitigated thus enabling their re-development.

These sites would not have met the tests had the model not been interrogated by the Council.

Indicator	SD5. The area of land (ha) granted planning permission for new development on previously developed land and greenfield land during the year.
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Previously developed land (hectares)	
Authority's data	27

Greenfield land (hectares)	
Authority's data	10

These figures are in accordance with the trajectory which formed part of our LDP supporting documents.

Indicator	SD6. The area of public open space (ha) that would be lost and gained as a result of development granted planning permission during the quarter.
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Open space lost (hectares)	
Authority's data	0

Open space gained (hectares)	
Authority's data	87

This figure seems impressive and is as a consequence of the current restoration of the former Margam Open Cast Colliery Site. The council has spent years addressing the restoration of this site with the former and current owners. It has been particularly controversial and litigious given the transfer of ownership and associated liabilities together with the fact that insufficient funds were available within the bond to take direct action.

A solution was eventually negotiated which whilst not being in accord with the restoration scheme originally approved and anticipated by the public, is nevertheless acceptable. Work is progressing well on site and once complete should result in the creation of a beautiful, yet natural environment for residents and visitors.

Indicator	SD7. The total financial contributions (£) agreed from new development granted planning permission during the quarter for the provision of community infrastructure.
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Gained via Section 106 agreements (£)	
Authority's data	424,920

Gained via Community Infrastructure Levy (£)	
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Authority's data	0
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For viability reasons the council does not currently intend to progress with CIL.