

[TORFAEN COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL]

PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2017-2018

PREFACE

I am pleased to present the fourth Annual Performance Report for Torfaen County Borough Council's Planning Service.

The Planning Team have worked on a number of major planning applications making sure that each development proposal is properly scrutinised in line with the principles of 'well being.' By working closely with developers in shaping their schemes the vast majority are decided positively. The most significant are a new school at Croesyceiliog, a new college adjacent to Cwmbran Town Centre and new Police HQ at Llantarnam. The approval of the Police HQ will ensure this important regional function and over 500 jobs are retained in the County Borough.

The Grange University Hospital which was given planning approval some time ago is now being constructed. This is an exciting new development and opportunities for complementary land uses are currently being explored.

I am particularly pleased about our decision to resist the loss of a significant open space which was successfully defended at appeal. This resulted in the retention of a valuable community space for local residents and established an important benchmark for future applications for development on other open spaces.

In the last financial year, an unusual number of large planning applications have generated an extra income of £250,000 in fees and Building Control have achieved self-financing status. This has helped to reduce current financial pressures within the Department.

The Council gave approval to commence a Replacement Torfaen Local Development Plan (LDP). This is an exciting opportunity to address the challenges facing the County Borough and positively shape the future of Torfaen by engaging with Members, residents and the local / business community over the next 3½ years. The Delivery Agreement setting out the Community Involvement Scheme and timetable for the LDP was approved by Welsh Government in July this year.

This year has seen my officers' actively collaborating with neighbouring Council's on the preparation of the LDP evidence base in order to gain a more strategic view and benefit from the economies of scale, best practice and the sharing of resources and skills. In addition, planning officers from the 10 South East Wales authorities are actively collaborating on commencing a Strategic Development Plan for the Cardiff City Region.

As the Executive Member for Planning I was pleased to be involved with the Wales Audit Office review into the role of planning in improving the economic wellbeing of Wales. Through this process and by engaging with planning managers I am confident that the Well-being objectives are central to the decisions we make in planning.

I will continue to work with Torfaen's planning service as we seek to produce a new LDP and make sure our primary focus is on outcomes for the benefit of Torfaen's citizens.

Councillor Fiona Cross

Executive Member for Neighbourhoods Planning and Public Protection

CONTEXT

Planning Background

The current development plan for the County Borough is the Torfaen Local Development Plan 2006-2021. It was adopted on 3rd December 2013. This replaced the previous Adopted Torfaen Local Plan (2000) and the Gwent Structure Plan (1996) as the development plan for the County Borough and for decision making on land use planning matters. The LDP covers the Torfaen administrative area, excluding areas of Brecon Beacons National Park that lie within Torfaen; responsibility for planning matters in these areas rests with the Brecon Beacons National Park Planning Authority. We commenced a replacement LDP in July 2018 following Welsh Government approval of the Delivery Agreement.

Place and fit within the community strategy and/or wider strategic and operational activity of the authority

The Local Development Plan (LDP) was developed cognisant of the aims and objectives of the overarching Community Strategy and subsequent Single Integrated Plan for Torfaen, providing the land use strategy to assist in delivery of many of their objectives.

Planning is part of the recently merged Neighbourhoods, Planning and Public Protection Service Area; one of 5 strategic service areas in the Council (Community Services, Education, Public Services Support and Social Care and Housing being the others). Above the Service Areas are the Chief Executive and Strategic Directors Team who have overall responsibility for shaping policy and strategy in the Council.

In addition, the Torfaen Public Service Board, established in April 2016, brings together the leaders of Torfaen County Borough Council, Torfaen Voluntary Alliance, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, South Wales Fire & Rescue Service, Gwent Police & Crime Commission, Heddli Gwent Police, Wales Probation Service, Wales Community Rehabilitation Company, Natural Resources Wales and the Welsh Government in the Executive Group; and many other organisations in the Delivery Group. Their purpose is to work together to prepare and publish a "Local Well-being Plan" setting out its objectives and the steps it will take to meet them, under the remit of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Well Being Plan for Torfaen 2018-2033 was published in May 2018.

The Planning Service has helped inform the preparation of the Well-being Plan, particularly drawing on their invaluable local knowledge and the extensive Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment work and background evidence base undertaken as part of the LDP production, feeding into the evidence base in order to assess the state of the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being themes in Torfaen; so that the set objectives were designed to maximise the PSBs contribution to the wellbeing goals. The Local Well-being Plan, and the seven well-being goals & five governance principles of the Act will inform the

preparation of the replacement LDP, in terms of the preparation of the Vision and Objectives and future strategy to ensure they reflect the Well Being Objectives.

Urban rural mix and major settlements

Situated at the eastern edge of the South Wales Valleys Torfaen CBC is bordered by Monmouthshire CC to the east, Newport City Council to the south, Caerphilly CBC to the south west and Blaenau Gwent CBC to the north west. Torfaen covers an area of 126km² and is the 5th smallest unitary authority in Wales. It is situated at the eastern edge of the South Wales Valleys and is part of a networked Cardiff city region at a strategic location along the M4 corridor.

It has three main settlements: the two key settlements of Cwmbran in the South and Pontypool in the centre; with the town of Blaenavon in the North. Cwmbran serves as an economic driver for Torfaen and operates as a sub-regional centre for services to the wider region; and with the A4042(T) and A4051 is also well located to the M4 and the Cities of Newport and Cardiff. Pontypool serves as a major district centre providing an important link between North and South Torfaen and provides important cross valley links to communities in Caerphilly and Monmouthshire along the A472-A4042 corridor. Surrounded by outstanding landscapes, environments and ecological resources and with a significant industrial heritage, it contains one of the most complete surviving industrial landscapes, the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site, which is of international importance.

Torfaen has a growing population (92,052 as of June 2016) and there is significant pressure for growth in the south of the County Borough. Over 50% of the population of Torfaen is located in Cwmbran and the LDP aims to secure further investment around this key settlement. The pressure for growth and regeneration must be balanced against the objectives to conserve and enhance the environment. The Torfaen Local Development Plan Strategy seeks to deliver planned, sustainable growth reflecting the role and function of the key settlements.

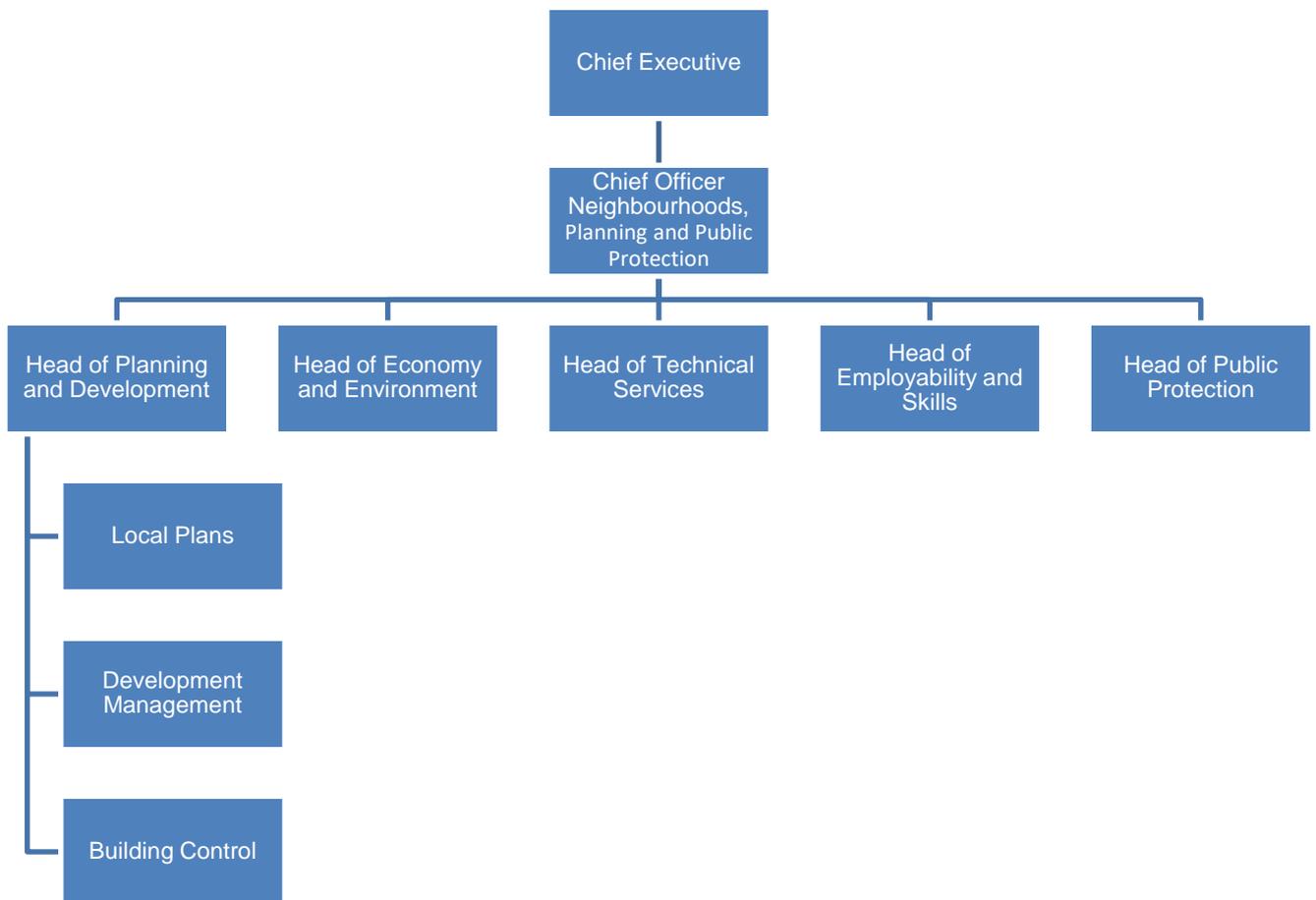
Approximately 80% of the land use in Torfaen is characterised as greenspace with 20% urban areas. The enclosed character provides attractive upland valley landscapes which also limit connectivity to other valley communities to the North, West and North East.

Population change and influence on LDP/forthcoming revisions

The Torfaen LDP has adopted a growth strategy; with a requirement of 4,700 new dwellings over the 2006-2021 Plan Period. The latest Welsh Government 2014 Based Population Projections for Wales (September 2016) forecast that, by 2021, the population of Torfaen will increase to 92,273. (The assumptions are based on past trends; and projections done in this way do not make allowances for the effects of local or central government policies on future population levels or distribution - they indicate what is expected to happen if these trends continue). However the development strategy pursued by the LDP was to have growth in excess of the population projections. The latest June 2017 mid-year population estimate for Torfaen was 92,264; compared to 92,052 in June 2016. This shows that the LDP strategy for an increase in population in Torfaen appears to be happening.

PLANNING SERVICE

The Planning Service is within the Neighbourhoods, Planning and Public Protection Department alongside other service areas which cover public protection, economic development, regeneration, environment, waste and transportation. The Department was led by the former Chief Planning Officer who retired in June 2017. Following this, the Department was re-organised by bringing together Development Management, Forward Planning (now renamed Planning Policy and Implementation) and Building Control services into a single service area under the newly appointed Head of Planning and Development. The Head of Planning and Development reports directly to the new Departmental Chief Officer as shown in the diagram below:



The previous few years saw 3 big events at Corporate, Departmental and Service levels.

1. The removal of dedicated support staff into a central administrative hub;
2. Re-organisation of Neighbourhoods and Planning; and
3. Introduction of a major new software system for planning.

All three events have had a major and long-lasting impact on the planning service which has been explained in previous APRs.

The re-organisation of the Department has not yet been completed and will involve some re-organisation of the management level of the Planning Service to take into account the loss of the Chief Planning Officer and bringing the planning services together under a single Head.

Wider Organisational Activities

The Council started an ambitious T22 whole organisation transformation programme in 2017 to drive change up to 2022. This work programme will be critical to the council's ability to meet its financial challenge, deliver on its corporate priorities and fulfil the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Some of the key questions to answer are:

- What kind of council will we be in 2022?
- How will customers get services from us?
- How can we make sure we spend every penny wisely?
- How can we get the community to do their bit?

The objectives are to:

- Build stronger relationships with the community and partners
- Create resilient communities willing to contribute and care
- Become ruthlessly efficient in the way we organise and support service delivery
- Meet the challenges of delivering high quality services in a digital age
- Better manage demand through prevention, early intervention and behaviour change
- Retain the best of what we do now as a foundation for service transformation.

As part of the T22 programme the planning service will be reviewed in the early part of 2019 in order to ensure proper scrutiny of services provided and that maximum use is made of IT.

Following the departure of the Council's Conservation Officer an opportunity has arisen to work with an adjoining Authority to explore a joint conservation service. This would provide resilience for the future, shared best practices and shared skills. An interim arrangement has already been put in place.

Operating Budget

The setting of the Council's budget continues to be a difficult process with the ongoing funding pressures facing local government. The Council completed an extensive and difficult budget setting process with WG funding at a 0.3% reduction on a 'like for like' cash basis. The Council approved its balanced budget and Medium Term Financial Plan on 28 February 2017, following successive reports at each stage of the process considered through both the Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees. The service area as a whole has had to mitigate a reduction of resources of £638,000 which has had an affect across the whole service.

The three year working budget and actual expenditure for Planning Policy and Implementation and Development Management is included in the table below. The service area retains all of the fee income generated for its activities. Future budget provision is set taking account of income, projected workload and

staffing levels. The fee income has remained stable for 2015/16 and 2016/17 with an increased level in 2017/18 due to the submission of some larger applications during the period, one of which was received slightly earlier than programmed. This will possibly impact on achieving 2018/19 budgeted income levels. The Council also commenced its commissioning of resources to undertake workstreams to underpin its new Local Development Plan which is funded and in line with the reserve level for this purpose.

Development Management & Local Plan Budgeted & Actual Costs

Description	Budget 2018/19	Actual Outturn 2017/18	Budget 2017/18	Actual Outturn 2016/17	Budget 2016/17	Actual Outturn 2015/16	Budget 2015/16
Totals	355,173	150,177.74	400,400	372,255.89	402,117	583,807.21	491,013
Employees	719,245	690,949.37	670,509	663,066.46	668,358	779,840.47	746,422
Premises	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	98.00	0
Transport	5,602	2,621.25	5,802	3,092.80	5,802	3,152.25	5,802
Supplies & Services	153,589	45,329.56	199,534	53,224.58	100,237	137,054.20	67,889
Transfer Payments	0	19,214.00	20,855	3,965.00	0	0.00	0
Government Grants	0	0.00	0	0.00	-28,480	0.00	0
Contribution from Reserves	-134,500	0.00	-134,500	0.00	0	0.00	0
Other Funding & Contributions	0	-20,910.67	0	0.00	0	-8,457.00	0
Customer & Client Receipts	-378,800	-513,385.77	-351,800	-326,162.95	-333,800	-319,064.20	-329,100
Recharges	-10,000	-73,640.00	-10,000	-24,930.00	-10,000	-8,942.00	0

Staffing issues

The Planning Service employs a total of 17 (FTE) officers (including the Head of Planning) which is broken down as follows:

Planning Policy and Implementation: There are currently 2 Principal officers and 2 senior officers. Given the commencement of the preparation of the new LDP we are also seeking to employ a temporary research officer.

Development Management (including enforcement): There are currently 1.81 (FTE) team leaders, 2 Principal officers, 2.5 (FTE) senior officers and 2 trainee planning officers.

Building Control: There is currently 1 principal officer, 1 senior officer, 1 trainee building control officer and 1 part time technician.

Previously, where staff have left, the practice has been to leave the posts vacant and review the level of service provision that can be provided. This has been compounded within the last few years through other temporary absences. However, more recently in Development Management, where vacancies have arisen they have been filled with less qualified staff on lower grades who are being trained and developed. This provides for succession planning and a good cross section of experience and grades.

Although there have been service reductions, the primary core activities of the Planning Service are being carried out and good outcomes are being achieved whilst maintaining performance levels. Fee income over the financial year has significantly exceeded projections, but this is exceptional and largely due to several large schemes. It is unlikely to be repeated in future years.

As mentioned in previous APRs there is no dedicated administration or technical staff for the planning service. Administrative support is provided by a central administrative hub (ABS).

As already mentioned in the wider activities above, we are exploring collaborative activities with an adjoining Local Authority in connection with conservation functions. This will provide an opportunity to explore wider collaboration in the future.

YOUR LOCAL STORY

Workload and Local Pressures

The LDP was adopted in December 2013 and provides a firm basis for decision making. However, the 2017 LDP AMR has recommended that there is evidence to indicate the need for a review of the LDP at this time because progress in delivery of the strategy is slower than expected primarily due to the global recession and its impact on the housing and employment markets.

The review of the LDP is likely to have a significant impact on the resources of the Planning Policy and Implementation team, through work on the emerging national and regional planning agenda as well as the LDP Review itself. The team will also have to update the LDP evidence base, both through their own work and through tendering and supervising consultants to undertake relevant studies; which given the increased level of regional co-operation may also be joint studies.

The Council had a statutory duty to review its LDP and report to the Welsh Government four years from first adoption (i.e. after 3rd December 2017); or earlier, as is our case, given that the 2016 Torfaen LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) suggested that certain aspects of the LDP were not being delivered (housing numbers and employment allocations) and thus an early review was needed.

The final 'Review Report' was considered by Council on 17th April 2018 and following this Council made the decision to commence a full replacement LDP. The Delivery Agreement which sets out the timetable for the replacement plan was approved at the Council meeting of 26th June 2018 and by the Welsh Government on 27th June 2018.

In recognition of the Welsh Government's local government reform 'agenda' and the reduction in the number of policy and supporting officers in the region since the preparation of the first round of LDPs and subsequent 'capacity / skill shortage' issues, the South East Wales Strategic Planning Group (SEWSPG) have agreed a formal work programme of collaboration to establish a consistent evidence base and agreed methodologies, building upon best practice. SEWSPG has already agreed the data collection and analysis methodologies for the employment and retail topic areas and the process / questions for the 'call for candidate sites' exercise. Similarly, SEWSPG is currently focusing on common methodologies / approaches to the 'development plan strategy', 'population & housing', 'built / natural environment', 'special landscape areas' and 'minerals'. It is clear that such working should save both time and money, reduce the need to employ consultants and help address policy officer capacity / skills shortage issues.

In addition, we are working closely with two adjoining local planning authorities, Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire, as all three LPAs are working on a full review of their individual LDP, generally to the same timescales. Work so far has concentrated on exchanging lists of future studies / in-house skills to identify the potential for joint working / collaboration or for one authority to undertake work for the other LPAs and vice versa. Joint work has started on preparing individual Draft Sustainable Assessments and the potential for a joint consultant's commission for the work going forward.

TORFAEN LDP: Annual Monitoring Report (AMR)

The fourth AMR was approved by Council on 22nd October 2018 and will be submitted to the Welsh Government by 31st October 2018. The 2018 report concludes with the following recommendation:

There is evidence to indicate the need for a review of the plan at this time because progress in delivery of the strategy is slower than expected primarily due to the global recession and its impact on the housing and employment markets. A review of the plan was carried out in 2018 and a replacement plan is now in preparation.

It is considered that the evidence collected from this fourth AMR following adoption of the LDP in 2013 indicates that the basic strategy whilst sound is taking too long to deliver both in relation to housing and employment development. The regeneration aims of the strategy are being realised, however delivery continues to be slower than anticipated. The main indication of this is the Joint Housing Land Supply figure continuing to fall below the 5 year figure at 3.9 years. This can be attributed to the impacts of the global recession and the delays in bringing forward key strategic sites. Whilst a number of these sites are now starting to deliver housing numbers and this has been supplemented by some acceptable windfall sites the number being delivered is still below the projected plan trajectory. It is considered the plan is moving in the right direction in terms of the achievement of its objectives, but the strategy is taking longer to deliver than anticipated. The downturn in the economy has had a marked effect on house building rates and therefore on the delivery of affordable housing. Whilst there is now progress on a number of key sites the previous low house building rates means delivery is still behind schedule. Viability continues to be an issue in overall house building and this has an adverse impact on the levels of affordable housing that can be delivered through the planning system.

The 2018 AMR sets out a number of actions intended to improve the 5 year land supply situation, on an 'allocated' site by site basis, encouraging appropriate 'windfall' housing sites; and reviewing the LDP itself.

From a regional perspective, the LDP is meeting its mineral and waste requirements in line with regional technical statements/regional plans through site allocations and policy implementation. Also the LDP is assisting in the planning of future health services for the region through facilitating the delivery of the new Grange University Hospital at Llanfrechfa Grange which will serve Gwent and South Powys

The development strategy remains fundamentally sound however due to slow progress there is considered a need for intervention at this stage in the form of a review of the Plan which is now underway.

The 2018 AMR is available at the following link:

<http://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/PlanningAndDevelopment/Planningpolicy/LocalDevelopmentPlan/AnnualMonitoringReport.aspx>

Five-Year Housing Land Supply

The 2018 AMR notes that the Council (paragraph 9.2.3 of PPW 9th Ed.) *“must ensure that sufficient land is genuinely available or will become available to provide a 5-year supply of land for housing judged against the general objectives and the scale and location of development provided for in the development plan”* and *“For land to be regarded as genuinely available it must be a site included in a Joint Housing Land Availability Study”*. Furthermore, paragraph 2.4 of TAN1 on 'Joint Housing Land Availability Studies' states that *“The housing land supply figure, taken from the JHLAS, must be included in an AMR and can be a reason to review an LDP”*; and paragraph 3.4 goes on to state *“Where the AMR identifies a shortfall in the required 5-year housing land supply the local planning authority should consider the reasons for the shortfall and whether the LDP should be reviewed either in whole or in part.”*

However, the Welsh Government in recognition of the pressures on local planning authorities without a five-year housing land supply, who are liable to receive speculative planning applications for housing; the need to

ensure the most appropriate housing sites are brought forward as part of a systematic and rigorous LDP process; and to allow LPAs the capacity to focus on LDP preparation and review, consulted (May - June 2018) on the temporary disapplication of paragraph 6.2 of TAN1 (for the duration of a wide-ranging review of the delivery of housing through the planning system). This would remove the reference to attaching “*considerable weight*” to the lack of a five-year housing land supply as a material consideration in determining planning applications for housing.

Subsequently, the Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning & Rural Affairs in a letter to all Welsh LPAs dated 18th July 2018, explained her housing review ‘Call for Evidence’ and dis-applied paragraph 6.2 of TAN1. The letter states “*As a result of the dis-application of paragraph 6.2 of TAN1, it will be a matter for decision makers to determine the weight to be attributed to the need to increase housing land supply where an LPA has a shortfall in its housing land.*” It is currently unknown if the dis-application of para 6.2 will only be for the duration of the Minister’s ‘housing review’, or for an indefinite period as many people believe.

Therefore, the 2018 AMR whilst noting that the Council, using the ‘residual method’, has an improved 3.9 years housing land supply at April 2018 (up from 3.6 years in April 2017) considers that the lack of the required five-year land supply is due to the recession and large allocated sites not coming forward until late in the plan period. However, the 2018 Torfaen JHLAS forecasts that 2,107 dwellings will be built over the next five years and the Council has resolved to commence its review of the LDP; in part because of an expected continuing lack of a five year land supply going forward, with adoption timetabled in December 2021. Also, using an alternative ‘10-year past build rate method’ for calculating land supply, it is estimated that there is 9.8 years housing land supply going forward. On the 22nd October 2018 the Council resolved that: for the duration of the dis-application of paragraph 6.2 of TAN1, when there is less than a five-year housing land supply in Torfaen, ‘low weight’ be given to the need to increase housing land supply as a material consideration in determining planning applications for housing.

Development Management

The number of applications submitted have been fairly steady since 2015, but in this financial year there has been an increase in the number of applications for major development including some very large and complicated schemes. These larger applications have a greater impact particularly on a smaller authority which has limited economies of scale. Nevertheless, focus has always been on achieving the best design scheme possible taking account of the well-being objectives.

The table below shows the number of applications received and determined in the last few years as well as the number ‘in hand.’ Overall the Development Management Team have determined significantly more than have been received. There are currently 5 FTE case officers in Development Management and a total of 233 applications in hand. This equates to an average workload of 47 applications per officer.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	TOTAL
Total number of applications received	595	670	719	668	670	3322

Total number of applications determined	565	744	806	676	657	3448
Total number of applications in hand	-	-	-	224	233	-

In line with T22 (explained above) we are reviewing our use of IT with particular focus on the new IDOX planning system which has not so far been utilised to its full potential. A local user group has recently been set up for those authorities using IDOX and sharing of skills and knowledge is already happening. In particular, a workflow tool has been purchased as part of the IDOX suite which should drive performance, help officers to manage workload more effectively and assist managers in monitoring workload. A training programme for users has already been set up for the end of this year and early part of next year.

The Council's only Conservation Officer recently left the Authority and the opportunity was taken to explore the possibilities of working with adjoining council's to set up a shared conservation service. This is still in its early stages but Monmouth and Torfaen have already agreed a 2 year pilot scheme for a shared service. This will provide much needed resilience and will ensure a more consistent approach is taken across authorities on conservation issues.

In terms of local pressures, the Development Management Team is currently dealing with a major residential led mixed use development (900 houses) and a major public enquiry for reclamation of former opencast workings, recovery of secondary aggregates and construction of new access road through an ancient woodland. These larger developments will always have a temporary disproportionate effect on the efficiency of the service, but are planned for in advance.

There is growing pressure for more proactive monitoring of conditions and Section 106 requirements particularly on larger development sites. However, because of the limited size of the team, enforcement tends to be reactive to complaints rather than proactive monitoring. The Service is currently being re-organised to backfill the loss of the former Chief Planning Officer and some additional support for the enforcement service has been achieved as a result of this.

Service Improvements

The main area of improvement mentioned in previous APRs is the purchase and implementation of a new software solution to manage and process applications. Following implementation it soon became apparent that further set up and training was required but this was delayed because of a number of significant upgrades required and IT issues. The last important upgrade has only just taken place and associated essential software will be installed in the next few weeks. This leaves things open for the implementation of the training programme and a full review of procedures.

Other service improvements previously proposed were:

1. *To review all appeal decisions at team meetings.*

This is currently taking place. Although 10 out of the 22 appeals decided over the year, 2 of these supported the officers recommendation. In addition, this is relatively low compared with the number of applications determined (5%) mainly due to the high approval rate of 91%.

2. *Review information on website*

This review is currently taking place and will form part of the larger review in 2019.

3. *Reduce backlog of older applications to 180.*

The outstanding applications which are more than 6 months old have been brought down to around 110.

4. *Implement training programme for IDOX and review procedures*

The training programme is due to take place at the end of this year / beginning of next year and the review of procedures will follow this.

5. *Review structure of Planning Service*

This has now taken place and a report is due to be presented to the Chief Officer by the end of 2018.

WHAT SERVICE USERS THINK

The Wales Data Unit carried out a survey of customers for the period 2017-18. The results for Torfaen along with the comparative all Wales results and previous years is shown below:

QUESTIONS	Torfaen (%)			Welsh Ave (%)		
Response rate	13.1% (12) (12)			12.5% (13) (13)		
Approval rate	100 (90) (85)			90.9 (90) (88)		
	agree	neutral	disagree	agree	neutral	disagree
LPA gave good advice to help make a successful application	56 (65) (52)	18	26 (15) (32)	60 (62) (58)	19	21 (22) (25)
LPA responded promptly when you had questions	63 (54) (56)	9	29 (31) (32)	62 (61) (58)	12	26 (26) (29)
You were kept informed about your application	47 (50) (50)	17	36 (29) (23)	52 (51) (49)	17	31 (26) (33)
You were listened to about your application	58 (60) (58)	14	28 (24) (23)	60 (59) (57)	19	21 (23) (24)
LPA applies its planning rules fairly and consistently	50 (60) (54)	22	28 (20) (35)	55 (52) (47)	22	22 (25) (27)
You are satisfied overall with how the LPA handled your application	56 (64) (56)	8	36 (20) (32)	63 (60) (61)	12	26 (26) (28)
LPA gives help throughout, including with conditions	46 (46) (60)	29	26 (27) (28)	52 (52) (49)	19	29 (28) (32)

NOTES:

Previous annual scores in brackets ()

Green – better or no worse than last year

Orange – worse than last year

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD PLANNING SERVICE	ORDER OF PREFERENCE %	CUSTOMER RATING %			
		Very well	Fairly well	Fairly poor	Very poor
Ability to talk to a duty planner before submitting your application	59 (53)	40 (46)	20 (46)	22 (0)	18 (8)
Getting a speedy decision	50 (50)	28 (17)	12 (42)	45 (8)	15 (32)
Consistent advice from officers	41 (53)	18 (21)	28 (50)	27 (7)	27 (21)
Access to case officer to check application	38 (57)	30 (20)	8 (14)	30 (33)	32 (33)
Having a chance to amend before determination	37 (33)	43 (21)	34 (57)	7 (11)	16 (11)
A concise list of what is needed to make an application	30 (11)	20 (0)	29 (64)	40 (36)	11 (0)
Information, design guides and policies available on the website	26 (11)	10 (36)	43 (0)	33 (64)	10 (0)
Quick response times to requests for pre app meetings	20 (19)	42 (24)	0 (78)	28 (0)	28 (0)
Elected members engaged and involved throughout the process	0 (8)	0 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

It is encouraging that the middle to high important characteristic of getting a quick planning decision and access to a case officer are up on last year.

However, the customer responses to the questions are poor and generally down from the previous year and in comparison with the Welsh Average. As previously described there have been significant changes in the last few years and, it is considered, this has impacted on customer service. The Planning Service is in the process of organisational change and it is intended to review the service in the New Year. This has not been possible previously because of changes to organisational structure and lack of training and skills for setting up and using the new data management system. A training programme has already been organised and this will be followed by a review.

From the survey, it is considered that the main areas which need to be looked into are: improving the quality and consistency of advice; better handling of applications and keeping applicants informed.

ANNEX A - PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

In summary, it is considered that the only areas where attention is required are customer service and how major applications are dealt with. These areas will be considered as part of the wider review proposed above.

OVERVIEW

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
Plan making			
Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	Yes		No
LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	<12	13-17	18+
Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	Yes		No
The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	>5		<5
Efficiency			
Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	>60	50-59.9	<50
Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	>80	70-79.9	<70
Average time taken to determine all applications in days	<67	67-111	112+
Percentage of Listed Building Consent applications determined within time periods required	Not set	Not set	Not set
Quality			
Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	<5	5-9	9+
Percentage of appeals dismissed	>66	55-65.9	<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	Torfaen LAST YEAR	Torfaen THIS YEAR
Yes	yes	yes
67	n/a	n/a
Yes	yes	yes
7 of 25	3.6	3.6
68.6	50	64
240.1	144	163
88.5	79	87
80.7	73	83
65.4		67
8.6	4	6
62.6	50	55
0	0	0
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	>80	70-79.9	<70
Average time taken to take positive enforcement action	Not set	Not set	Not set

WALES AVERAGE	Torfaen LAST YEAR	Torfaen THIS YEAR
Yes	yes	yes
80.6	99	94
184.6	n/a	n/a

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	
The Torfaen LDP was adopted in December 2013 and expires in March 2021, so is within the plan period.	

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
<p>The Council has commenced a replacement LDP following approval of the Delivery Agreement in July 2018. The replacement LDP is being prepared in line with the Delivery Agreement and is therefore on track with overall timescales for preparation.</p>	

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	
<p>The first AMR (2015) for the Torfaen LDP was submitted to the Welsh Government in advance of the statutory deadline.</p> <p>The second AMR (2016) for the Torfaen LDP was approved by Full Council on the 18th October 2016 and submitted in accordance with the statutory deadline.</p> <p>The third AMR (2017) was approved by Full Council on 17th October 2017 and will be submitted to WG by 31st October 2017.</p> <p>The fourth AMR (2018) was approved by Full Council on 22nd October 2018 and will be submitted to WG by 31st October 2018</p>	



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	
<p>The 2017 JHLAS (September 2017) identifies the Housing Land Supply is 3.6 years. The housing land supply has been maintained at 3.6 years from the 2016 to 2017 study however is below the required 5 years land supply under WG policy. The 2018 study will be reported next year.</p> <p>As reported in the 2017 Annual Monitoring Report It is considered that the evidence collected from this third AMR following adoption of the LDP in 2013 indicates that the basic strategy whilst sound is taking too long to deliver both in relation to housing and employment development. The regeneration aims of the strategy are being realised, however delivery continues to be slower than anticipated. For example in North Torfaen delivery of housing is in line with forecasts, but despite some progress on some large strategic sites is behind schedule in Pontypool and Cwmbran. The main indication of this is the Joint Housing Land Supply figure continuing to fall below the 5 year figure at 3.6 years. This can be attributed to the impacts of the global recession and the delays in bringing forward key strategic sites. Whilst a number of these sites are now starting to deliver housing numbers and this has been supplemented by some acceptable windfall sites the number being delivered is still below the projected plan trajectory. It is considered the plan is moving in the right direction in terms of the achievement of its objectives, but the strategy is taking longer to deliver than anticipated. The downturn in the economy has had a marked effect on house building rates and therefore on the delivery of affordable housing. Whilst there is now progress on a number of key sites the previous low house building rates means delivery is still behind schedule. Viability continues to be an issue in overall house building and this has an adverse impact on the levels of affordable housing that can be delivered through the planning system.</p> <p>The development strategy remains fundamentally sound however due to slow progress there is considered a need for intervention at this stage in the form of a review of the Plan. The continued shortfall of the Housing Land Supply figure needs to be addressed in order to ensure the continuation of a plan led approach.</p> <p>As a result of the above the LDP Annual Monitoring Report 2017 concludes with the following recommendations:-</p>	

1. There is evidence to indicate the need for a review of the plan at this time because progress in delivery of the strategy is slower than expected primarily due to the global recession and its impact on the housing and employment markets.

SECTION 2 - EFFICIENCY

Indicator	05. Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
More than 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Between 50% and 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Less than 50% of applications are determined within the statutory time period

Authority's performance	64%
<p>This is a significant improvement on last year and demonstrates close working with developers to achieve the best possible schemes.</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	163
<p>This is up on last years performance, but significantly less than the welsh average. One of the most significant applications determined during this period was for the reclamation of former opencast workings, recovery of secondary aggregates and construction of new access road through an ancient woodland submitted in 2003.</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 70% and 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Less than 70% of applications are determined within the statutory time period

Authority's performance	87%
<p>This figure is up on last years and comparable with the welsh average. Again this demonstrates a willingness to work closely with developers to get quality schemes on the ground.</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	83
<p>This is up on last year and above the welsh average. However, this needs to be improved further to take it into the 'good' category.</p>	

Indicator	08a. Percentage of Listed Building Consent 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	Performance statistic here (colour coded) 67%
<p>This is a new measure and cannot be compared with previous data. It is however, comparable with the welsh average.</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	Performance statistic here (colour coded) 6%
<p>This figure is up on last year, but only relates to 2 overturns out of 31 applications that were reported to Planning Committee. The officer’s recommendation was supported on appeal in relation to 1 of those cases.</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	Performance statistic here (colour coded) 55%
<p>This figure is up on last year but is below the welsh average. During the year, 22 appeals were decided and 10 of those were allowed. Two of these appeals resulted from Members’ overturns and both were allowed in line with the officer recommendation.</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	Performance statistic here (colour coded) None
This is consistent with previous years and the welsh average.	

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	Performance statistic here (colour coded) Yes	
Both supporters and objectors are allowed to address the Planning Committee.		

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	Performance statistic here (colour coded) yes	
This duty continues to be performed by planning technical officers backed up by professional planning officers.		

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
Third parties can register on the public access system for alerts on applications in their area and to monitor progress on applications.	

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	94%
<p>Whilst slightly down on last year, this is higher than the welsh average. The Planning Service is undergoing a small reorganisation which has recently resulted in an additional half officer for enforcement.</p>	

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

Authority’s performance	
<p>This is a relatively new measure and there is currently inadequate data in the system to produce a meaningful measure.</p>	

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	Summary of Sustainable Development Indicators data here (ie. full returns, partial returns or no data provided)
<p>For authority's who have not provided data, or only partial returns, include further details here. Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What data is missing?• For what quarters are data missing?• What are the reasons for missing data?• What actions are being taken to provide full returns?• When will complete data returns be provided? <p>The Council has recently implemented a new planning IT system, which includes software to automatically record the Sustainable Development data which will improve efficiency in collecting this data going forward. The returns have been done a manual basis by the Planning Policy and Implementation Team, as part of the more detailed analysis to inform the LDP AMR.</p>	

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	2782sqm

Refused (square metres)	
Authority's data	0sqm

Planning application granted for 2782sqm of B1/B2/B8 employment floorspace at LDP Employment allocation EET2/6 Usk Vale, Mamhilad.

Aside from LDP allocations there has been 0.446ha (4460sqm) of permitted of new employment floorspace on existing estates comprising extensions to existing operations to accommodate business expansion and new employment development on existing sites (unallocated in the LDP).

Delivery of allocated employment land is below target and small sites in Cwmbran have all been sold. Enquiries have shown there is a qualitative lack of larger sites. The Council has seen however a significant upturn in queries and demand for employment land and consider that land will start to be come forward for development in the near future. For example a number of employment allocations have recently been granted permission so delivery is expected to increase over the next few years.

The need for available and deliverable strategic employment sites to meet demand will be a key issue for the LDP Review.

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	0

Granted permission (MW energy generation)	
Authority's data	0MW

No planning applications granted for Renewable Energy development during the monitoring period

Indicator	SD3. The number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year.
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Market housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	292

Affordable housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	103

A total of 395 dwellings were permitted during the monitoring period. 283 dwellings were part of 2 Reserved Matters permission for one major Strategic Site, which represents 71.6% of total delivery coming through an allocated development plan sites.

Of the total permitted 395 dwellings permitted 103 were for affordable housing representing 26% of the total.

Indicator	SD4. Planning permission granted and refused 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) which were GRANTED permission	
Authority's data	Residential – 0 units Non Residential – 0.7ha (C2 floodplain)

Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) which were REFUSED permission on flood risk grounds	
Authority's data	Residential – 0 units Non Residential – 0ha

Planning permission granted for the development of industrial units in C2 floodplain (16/P/00238) for the erection of 2 terraces of industrial development (totalling 2,782 sq m). FCA undertaken and NRW & Council's Land Drainage Officer did not object providing appropriate conditions were attached and was assessed as meeting the TAN15 (Section 6) tests.

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	24.11

Greenfield land (hectares)	
Authority's data	31.97

During 2017/18, 24.11ha of a total of 56.08ha permitted was on previously developed land equating to 42% of all development permitted. However 27.2ha of the greenfield permissions related to Reserved Matters applications for one LDP Strategic Site.

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	0.23ha

Open space gained (hectares)	
Authority's data	9.07ha

The data on open space gained relates to significant open space gained through permissions on LDP allocated residential sites.

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	£140,300

Gained via Community Infrastructure Levy (£)	
Authority's data	N/A

Through Planning permission granted during 2016-2017 financial contributions totalling £140,300 alongside provision of affordable housing were secured by planning from new development for the provision of community facilities for Adult Recreation, Children's Play and Public Open Space.