



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

Annual Planning Performance Report 2018-19

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Neath Port Talbot LPA

PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) – 2018-19

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 under estimated, especially after a prolonged period of austerity and the problems we are currently facing and will continue to face as a consequence of Brexit.

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.

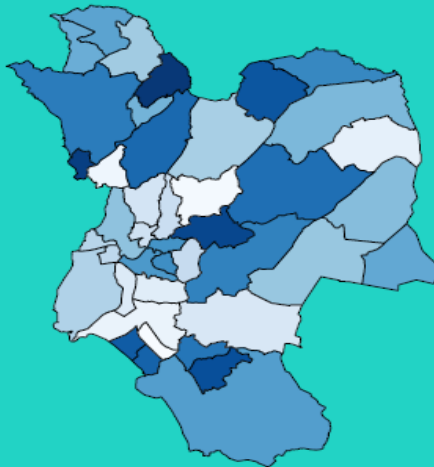
This is the fourth Annual Planning Performance Report to be prepared by this authority and incorporates a different more slim-line format to that used in previous years without undermining the quality of the content.

Cllr Annette Wingrave Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Sustainable Development.

CONTEXT

Neath Port Talbot Demographics

Population



Population
142,906

61.8%
of working
age 16 - 64



Employment



72.7% of working age people are employed compared to 73.2% in Wales. The Unemployment rate in Neath Port Talbot was 4% compared to 4.2% for Wales. Unemployment of 16-24 year olds is 17.7% compared to 12.6% for Wales.

Qualifications / Skills



11% of working age people have no qualifications compared to Wales at 8.6%
24% people work in manufacturing compared to 14% for Wales as a whole.

Businesses

10.8% of working age are self-employed compared to Wales 14.2%
56% of the 62,700 working residents in Neath Port Talbot work within the borough. Across Wales the figure is 68.6%

Housing



69,135 dwellings in Neath Port Talbot
Average house price is £118,821 compared to £168,318 in Wales.
29% of dwellings are terraced houses compared to 27.8% in Wales. Detached houses / bungalows make up only 18% of all dwellings in Neath Port Talbot compared to 27.7% nationally

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 Wellbeing Objectives as illustrated within the Corporate Plan:

NPT Well-being Objective 1 – To improve the well-being of Children and young people.

“All of our children and young people have the best start in life, so they can be the best they can be.”

NPT Well-being Objective 2 – To improve the well-being of all adults who live in the county borough.

“Everyone participates fully in community life – socially and economically”

NPT Well-being Objective 3 – To develop the local economy and environment so that the wellbeing of people can be improved.

“The whole of Neath Port Talbot county borough will be a vibrant and healthy place to live, work and enjoy recreational time.”

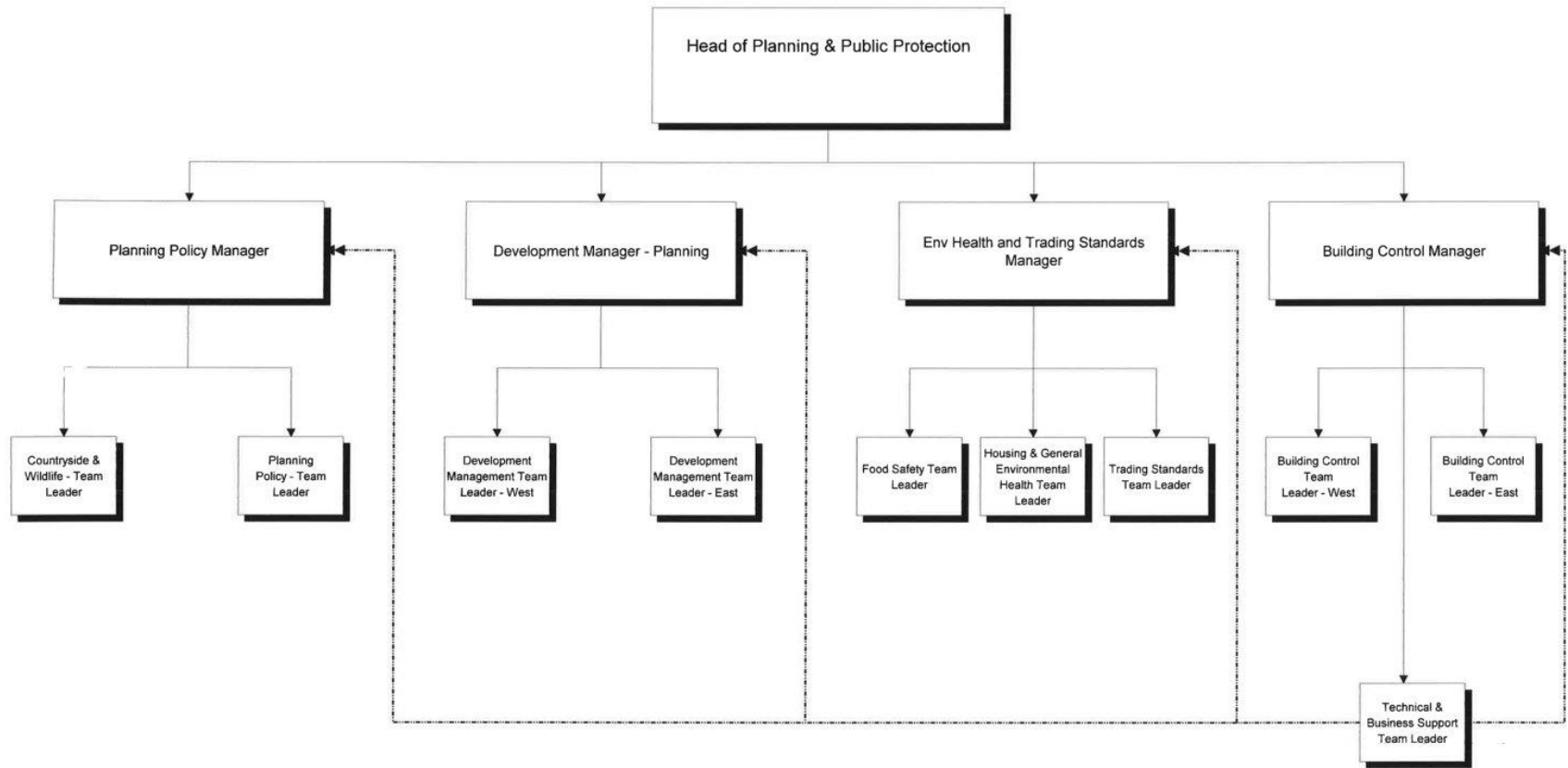
NPT Wellbeing Objective 4 – Governance and Resources (cross cutting) – To ensure the business of the council is managed to maximise the long term benefit for the citizens of Neath Port Talbot.

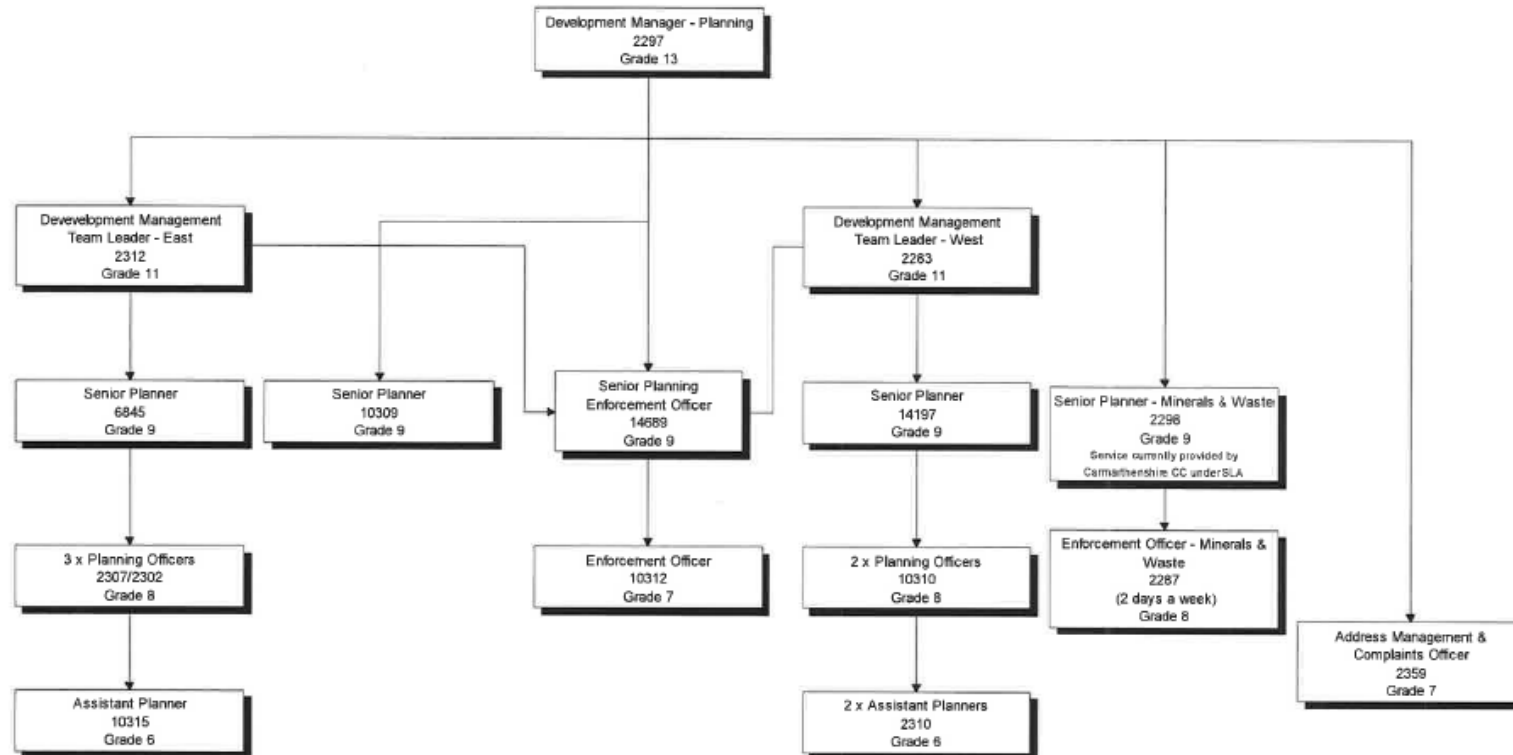
The objectives are very broad in order to respond to the 7 wellbeing goals as defined within the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. However flowing from these objectives are detailed Corporate Action Plans and Service Action Plans which link to all service areas within the council including Planning and Public Protection.

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.

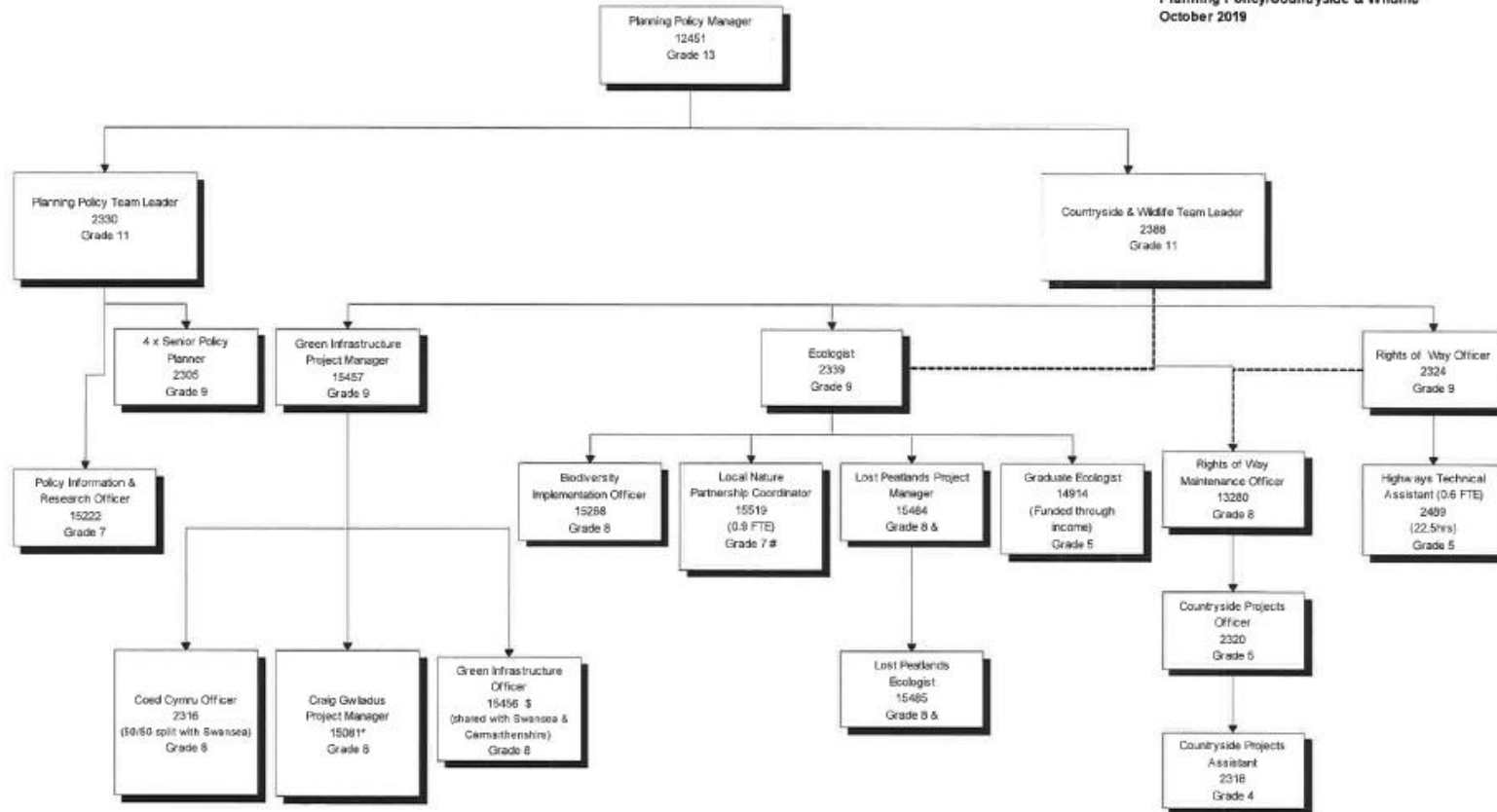
The Planning and Public Protection Service

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) together with the structures for Planning Policy and Development Management were created:





Directorate of Environment
 Planning Policy/Countryside & Wildlife
 October 2019



* Fixed term until September 2020 via grant funding
 # Fixed term until March 2022 via grant funding
 & Fixed Term until September 2020 via grant funding
 \$ Fixed term until March 2023 via grant funding

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.

The LDP is due for review in January 2020.

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 £19.449 million which amounts to a 54% reduction (ignoring inflation) since 2009/10. The budget for 2018/19 stands at £282,855,000 of which the budget for the Environment Directorate was £34,755,000 which equates to 12.29% of the councils overall revenue budget. This is decrease whereby the Directorates budget represented 14% of the council's budget. The Directorate was also tasked with securing further savings of 4% for 2019/20 although despite our best endeavours savings of only £524k were identified across the Directorate, £36k of which was from the Planning Service.

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. Despite this pressure, and due to the freezing of posts and cuts in other spending, the DM service was delivered during 2018/19 on budget. The recent announcement by Welsh Government to propose an increase in planning fees by 20% in the summer of 2020 and to undertake a review of planning fees to assess a potential cost recovery formula is nevertheless overdue and very welcome.

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 loss of the Rights of Way Improvement grant which amounts to £50k per year for 2018/19 placed a significant pressure on the service and it is likely that the quality and maintenance of the network will deteriorate as a consequence. This was identified as a corporate pressure and some of the lost funding was compensated for out of Corporate contingencies thus enabling the service to continue most of its existing repairs/improvements. The service is however responsible for income generation through asset sponsorship activities. To this end we have a contract with a private company who market our assets. The income target for asset sponsorship during 2017/18 was increased from £33k to £108k but only delivered £58k thus left the service with a shortfall of £50k. The contract has a further year to run and during this time we will be assessing income levels and likely costs of continuing the service and therefore assessing the value of its continued delivery in addition to exploring other delivery models.

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 2014/15 and 2018/19

	Development Management	Countryside and Wildlife	Planning Policy	Total
2014/15	£73,607	£445,103	£512,234	£1,030,944
2018/19	£314,983	£435,329	£298,999	£1,049,311
Difference	£241,376	-£9,744	-£213,235	£18,367
% Change	327.93%	-2.2%	-41.63%	1.78%

The above table indicates that there was a small increase in net expenditure associated with the Planning Service since 2014/15 of 1.78%. Whilst this is small it demonstrates that the continued cuts previously experienced, whereby expenditure reduced by 40% following staff cuts between 2011/12 and 2017/18 have now slowed down (The reduction in real terms is likely to remain as a negative figure when you take into account inflation).

The above expenditure levels in Development Management include both planning application fee income as well as other income. Given that planning fee income has been reducing significantly over the last few years we are now pushing more than ever our fee earning pre-application service in addition to arranging Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) with larger developers. This has resulted in income during this period of £131,481 which has reduced the net expenditure deficit.

Our Local Story

In 2018/19 the Authority employed 13 FTE Planning Officers within the Development Management team who report to a Development Manager. We also had use of specialist mineral officers within Carmarthenshire via a SLA although it is acknowledged that the demand for these services is declining. They comprise of 2 Team leaders, 3 Senior Planning officers (albeit one post is currently frozen), 5 Planning Officers, and 3 Assistant Planners. We also have 1 senior planning enforcement officer, 1 enforcement officer and a senior Minerals and waste enforcement officer (0.4 FTE).

During 2018/19 they determined 759 planning applications and investigated 229 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. It was intended that these officers would 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 the subsequent appointment did indeed achieve its intended objective, unfortunately, one of the officers has subsequently retired and due to the ongoing budget pressures experienced within the service, the post has been retained on the structure but frozen. In addition to this a further restructure has taken place as a consequence of the retirement of an enforcement officer. Given that the service has only two enforcement officers covering the county borough, one of the existing planning officers part way through the year was re-deployed to enforcement. As a result the service has not only lost a senior planning officer but there has also been a net reduction in the number of planning officers within the service.

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 115 applications last year and had an average determination rate of approximately 111 application each over the year

Planning Officers were allocated an average caseload of 77 applications last year and had a determination rate of approximately 75 applications over the year.

Senior Planning Officers and Team Leaders were allocated an average caseload of 41 applications per year and had an average determination rate of approximately 42 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 number of applications determined per officer together with an improvement in performance when compared with last year. There is however further work required to ensure that we are able to re-appoint to the now vacant senior officer post and thus enable major applications to be fast tracked through the planning system and delivered on the ground. 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.

Turning to Planning Policy, the section comprises the Planning Policy team, including active travel and asset sponsorship (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. Following the adoption of the LDP in January 2016, work has since concentrated on SPG

development as well as monitoring. Closer links have also been developed with colleagues within the Regeneration section and policy officers have as a result written design briefs for sites which the Council are actively promoting. They have also worked with colleagues within the Transportation service to submit funding bids to secure improvements to our existing cycle and pedestrian routes as defined on 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.

Main Achievements

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. All applications determined 'in time' remains at previous very high levels at between 95 – 96% (performance in top quartile of Welsh LPAs). The "8 Week figures" also remain very good, with comparative year-on-year performance shown below:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 (up to 27.3.19)
Majors	14.5%	38.5%	37.5%
Minors	63.1%	80.5%	75.8%
Householders	95.3%	97.3%	98%
'Others'	77.5%	80.9%	77.9%
Overall	79.4% (635 out of 800)	86.2% (693 out of 804)	85.2% (627 out of 736)

Average determination times remains an issue, with such figures skewed by determination of 'old' applications, however the most recent quarterly figures show we are performing just below a national average (74 days last quarter c.f. National 76.7 days average). Moreover, as discussed at the time of the last appraisal, it remains the case that for "the 95%" of our customers their applications are determined significantly inside the average figure, and well within '8 weeks'.

2. Delivery of the new Planning Software system (IDOX UNI-Form) was slightly delayed due to technical issues, but was eventually implemented at the end of May 2019. (whilst this falls outside the APPR period, much of the work was undertaken within 2018/19). The implementation has included regular meetings with Team Leaders relating to a review of workflow / procedures, which will include changes to 'hand off' tasks, determine and sign-off applications within UNI-form to avoid (as far as practicable) use of files and paper, and to ensure that the service delivers in the most efficient and effective manner, while also supporting a future move towards greater agile working practices and procedures.

3. The enforcement team has undergone a number of structural changes in the last year and whilst there remains work to do to ensure a consistent approach to the approval of 'investigated stage' reports – to ensure a 'decision' is made at that stage by the appropriately authorised officer, and that this is recorded on all such cases – in general the team is functioning well in responding expeditiously to complaints.
4. Officers continue to negotiate section 106 agreements in liaison with Policy colleagues and legal officers. There remains a need to rollout training in liaison with legal officers to ensure that officers are able to gain greater experience and understanding of the pitfalls in drafting s106s. Discussions have been held with legal about implementing such a training opportunity, as well as ways in which we can seek to review standard templates and provide more certainty to legal about Heads of terms, trigger dates etc. Since the loss of the 106 Officer, the responsibility for overseeing existing s106s has fallen to an admin officer and the Development manager which is not sustainable moving forward as such matters need to be dealt with by officers and managed by Team Leaders with support from the manager.
5. The enforcement service is being delivered in general accordance with the Enforcement Charter, and no upheld complaints have been received in respect of the service. There remains a need to ensure, with the new IDOX UNI-Form system, that appropriate management reports are made available to ensure delivery of the enforcement service against the policies and targets within the Charter (e.g. days to visit against Priority; Time to take 'positive action' etc).
6. Constant and regular monitoring has been undertaken over every aspect of the ongoing coaling and progressive restoration of the East Pit site. The delay in the coaling timetable has been agreed through a s73 application (albeit the s106 remains outstanding at the time of the appraisal), and restoration is progressing very well and will leave a legacy of a fully restored scheme. The site has recently completed coaling and full restoration is now underway with an anticipated end date of March 2020.
7. Restoration of the Margam OCCS was completed and aftercare commenced. Work is now concentrating on regularising the highway and footpath network within the site (to be determined by Welsh Government) which will in turn enable the site to be accessible to the public. Discussions have now commenced with the Wildlife Trust with a view to their involvement in the aftercare of the site going forward.
8. As part of the Council's commercialisation agenda changes have been made to decision notices to cross-advertise additional services offered by Building Control and Environmental Health/ Trading Standards, thus co-ordinating service delivery and looking to increase income generation opportunities.
9. The operation of the pre-application service, and especially the use of PPAs as part of increased income generation, has been high on the agenda throughout the year. All officers are actively promoting the pre-app service, and offering a very good level of service to those engaging with us at pre-app stage. In addition to improving the quality of applications and speed of determination, this has generated additional income for 18/19.

10. PPA work has continued throughout the year, including the Foel Trawsnant wind farm (amended) scheme, a Short Term Operating Reserve (STOR) electrical generating facility, and two concurrent PPAs for TATA relating to their NSIP power station proposal and the secondary de-dust extraction scheme. These schemes have resulted in additional income generation.
11. The PPA work with TATA has also been hugely positive in sending out the message as to how we work with developers to deliver complex projects on time. Indeed, their agents Turley are now positively encouraging a regular dialogue with us, and where appropriate the adoption of further PPAs for future larger-scale projects based on the excellent service they have been offered.
12. We have also negotiated a PPA / grant for 2019/20 in respect of planned work for the Nant Helen Rail Centre of Excellence proposal, which would generate over £50k for 2019/10. This scheme falls mainly within the jurisdiction of Powys, however for capacity and experience reasons, officers within NPT will be leading on the project.
13. A Consultation Draft 'Historic Environment' SPG was approved by Cabinet Board in December, with the 6-week public consultation having taken place in Jan/Feb'19. A post consultation report was taken to Cabinet Board in April where the SPG was formerly adopted.
14. The LDP Annual Monitoring Report for 2017/18 was submitted to the Welsh Government following scrutiny by members and indicated that our visions and overall objectives were being achieved in broad terms.
15. The annual Joint Housing Land Availability Study (JHLAS) demonstrated a five year land supply for 2018.
16. We continued to support and contribute to regional collaboration initiatives / studies including discussions on the scope and extent of a Strategic Development Plan (SDP); Economic Study and a Housing Market Assessment. In our lead/secretariat role for the region, we are continuing to facilitate ongoing discussion and progress in respect of regional collaboration initiatives and studies. All work will not only inform reviews of individual LDPs but will also contribute positively as a potential baseline for future work on Strategic Development Plans (SDPs):
17. Feasibility studies / option development, design and land purchase on selected active travel routes was undertaken to facilitate the implementation of the Council's 'Integrated Network Map'. Implementation of the Council's INM is now underway. Confirmation of a successful bid for up to £235k Welsh Government grant was received in April'18 for 'pre-work' activities including feasibility studies and route option development. Pre-work activities including land ownership and/or adopted highways checks, biodiversity surveys and design work are currently being undertaken on a total of 18 routes located across the County Borough.

18. An initial assessment of the Rights of Way network to inform the 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan' (RoWIP) has been completed. This included a consultation exercise which sought views of the public on the quality and condition of the Rights of Way network and the wider countryside, their use of Rights of Way and measures that could be taken to encourage greater use of the countryside. Based on this assessment, a review of the RoWIP is underway and is due to be completed in September 2019.
19. A 'Biodiversity Compensation Service' working group was established to facilitate and support the delivery of development across the County Borough. This consists of an internal officer working group who will develop the procedures for delivering a scheme along with an appropriate charging mechanism. Officers from Planning, Estates, Regeneration and Legal are all represented on the group. The focus of the initial work has been to identify sites within Council ownership that has the potential to be included on a 'habitat bank' where such sites can be utilised in the future to deliver necessary compensation works.
20. The 'Green Infrastructure Opportunity Mapping and Multi-Scale Delivery' Partnership Project commenced and was completed by the end of February 2019. The project has involved an initial mapping exercise, the identification of pilot sites, public/stakeholder engagement sessions; and site selection/design. Upon completion, consideration will be given as to how the methodology could be applied County Borough wide to inform the review of the LDP.
21. Implementation of the Biodiversity Duty Plan has commenced with an initial focus on risk assessment of service areas and agreeing a methodology for an audit of Council owned land. A programme for a review of SINCs has been established which is to be undertaken during the next survey season. A methodology for the land audit has also been prepared.
22. A programme of well-being and conservation activities has been delivered, raising the profile of the natural environment and its wider benefits. This has been delivered through the 'Working with Nature Project', the project is progressing well with activities, engagement and site management progressing throughout the year. Whilst engagement and delivery of health and well-being activities continue, the focus of the programme is being shifting onto encouraging repeat participation (and exploring the well-being benefits to these participants) and progression onto volunteering.
23. Funding has been secured from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to take forward a funding and improvement strategy for Craig Gwladus Country Park, securing £86K for the next 18 months. A part-time Project Manager has been appointed to oversee and deliver the project and a programme of engagement activities is already underway at the site. A HLF bid was submitted on behalf of a partnership with NRW, RCTCBC and Swansea University in June 2018. The project focuses on the restoration of a nationally significant area of upland habitat, particularly peatlands, and if successful, the project will restore and manage this section of the upland landscape, whilst supporting education and community use, contributing to tackling climate change, flooding issues and declines in biodiversity.

These are the most significant achievements secured during 2018/19. In addition to the above, our staff continue to deliver statutory functions despite a decreasing budget and increased expectations from the public. 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:

- Following the implementation of our new planning back office IT system, efforts will be concentrated on continued dialogue with colleagues in the City and County of Swansea (CCS), with a view to utilising the same management reports etc. as part of the Enterprise dashboard. It is proposed to extend these discussions to other LPAs in S. Wales who have recently adopted or are in the process of implementing UNI-Form, through a proposed User Group.
- Commence implementation of a fast track planning and Building Control service for household developments and other additional value services
- Introduce a competency/accreditation scheme for planning agents in conjunction with Swansea Council, possibly dovetailing with Buying with confidence in addition to joint agents workshops.
- Deliver the requirements of the Planning Performance Agreement for the Rail Centre of Excellence.
- Engage with Members on their training requirements and establish a programme of training to address these requirements.
- Reduce the average end to end times to improve our overall performance. This will need to be addressed through performance management measures to ensure that staff don't allow (without valid reason) the more complex applications to take longer than is reasonably necessary.
- Pre-Application / Planning Performance Agreements - With a critical eye on income generation beyond application fees (which remain out of our control), ensure the service seeks to work with customers to deliver an outstanding pre-application service, including increasing focus on the signing of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) which provide income generation while delivering for critical projects in a timely manner, thus continuing to reinforce the reputation of the service and of NPT as a 'Place to do Business'.
- Introduce a review mechanism for Members whereby they review the decisions they have made as well as those made by officers by undertaking a site visit and assessing the post development impact.

- Whilst agile working at a Corporate level is still at a pilot stage, introduce measures in terms of procedures and performance management to enable officers to work more independently but still deliver a quality and efficient outcome.
- Commit sufficient resources subject to available finance to ensure that the legal agreement required to issue the outline planning permission for Afan Valley Adventure resort is secured together with ensuring that support is given to the developer to enable for the submission of a high quality the Reserved Matters application and discharge of all relevant conditions.
- Continue work on the 'Port Talbot Harbourside Development Framework' SPG, in conjunction with work being undertaken by Regeneration colleagues who are developing a masterplan for the Enterprise Zone Board both of which are required to support the LDP.
- Establish with the City & County of Swansea the appetite for finalising and adopting this joint SPG and make a decision as to whether it should include the tidal lagoon or whether we progress on the basis that it will not be forthcoming.
- Commence work on the LDP review (starting in January 2020) starting with the 'LDP Review Report', which sets out the scope of the review process (i.e. identifying which parts of the LDP require amendment and why). Reinforce the costs associated with this review and ensure that such resources are highlighted.
- Complete the 'LDP Review Delivery Agreement' ready for consultation and submission to the Welsh Government – mapping out the delivery timetable and the scope of the Community Involvement Scheme. This will span the next two financial years.
- Continue to support and contribute to other regional collaboration initiatives / studies as relevant. To enable the collection of evidence associated with the LDP review as well as the SDP, acknowledging the political tensions that are evident within the region which will affect governance arrangements albeit these may be addressed should Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) be introduced.
- Complete feasibility studies / option development, design, land purchase on selected active travel routes to secure funding to deliver improvements required under the INM.
- Complete and publish the review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) by September 2019.
- Deliver against the Biodiversity Duty Plan, and publish an 'Implementation Progress Report', updating the Plan as necessary by December 2019.
- Evaluate the successes and failures of the work delivered to date through the 'Working with Nature Project' to identify lessons learned. This will enable the delivery of a more focussed programme of well-being and community based conservation activities, to ensure that we

deliver an increased emphasis on partnership working, raising the profile of the natural environment and its wider benefits.

- Pursue and support the delivery and use of 'Green Infrastructure' in Neath Port Talbot, through the GI Core Group and wider partnership working having regard to the mapping and consultation work previously undertaken with our partners and the local community.
- Develop a detailed training matrix for staff to ensure that skills and abilities are mapped and training needs are addressed thus ensuring that we have a tool to measure competency levels.

WHAT SERVICE USERS THINK

In 2017-18 we conducted a customer satisfaction survey aimed at assessing the views of people (agents and members of the public) that had received a planning application decision during the year.

The survey was sent to 315 people, 10% of whom submitted a whole or partial response. The majority of responses (44%) were from members of the public. 9% of respondents had their most recent planning application refused.

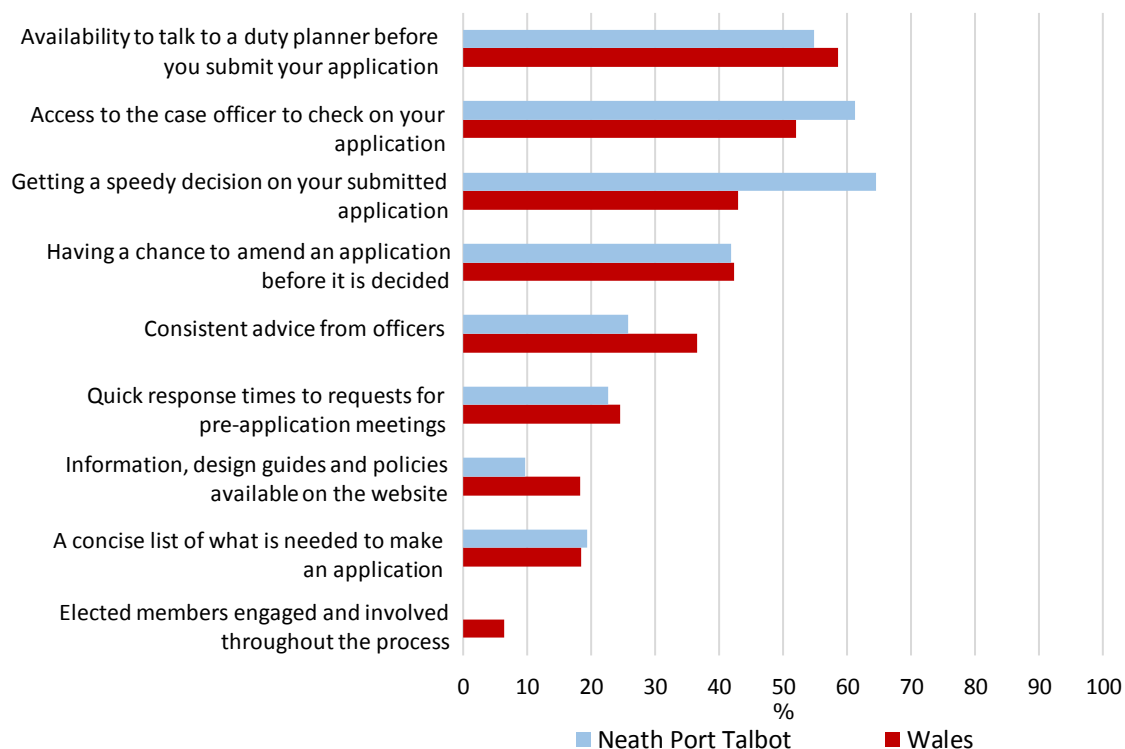
We asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the planning service. Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents that selected either 'tend to agree' or 'strongly agree' for each statement for both our planning authority and Wales.

Table 1: Percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement, 2017-18

Respondents who agreed that:	Neath Port Talbot LPA %	Wales %
The LPA applies its planning rules fairly and consistently	60	55
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	59	60
The LPA gives help throughout, including with conditions	53	52
The LPA responded promptly when they had questions	65	62
They were listened to about their application	61	60
They were kept informed about their application	61	52
They were satisfied overall with how the LPA handled their application	63	63

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. For us, 'getting a speedy decision on a submitted application' was the most popular choice.

Figure 1: Characteristics of a good planning service, 2017-18



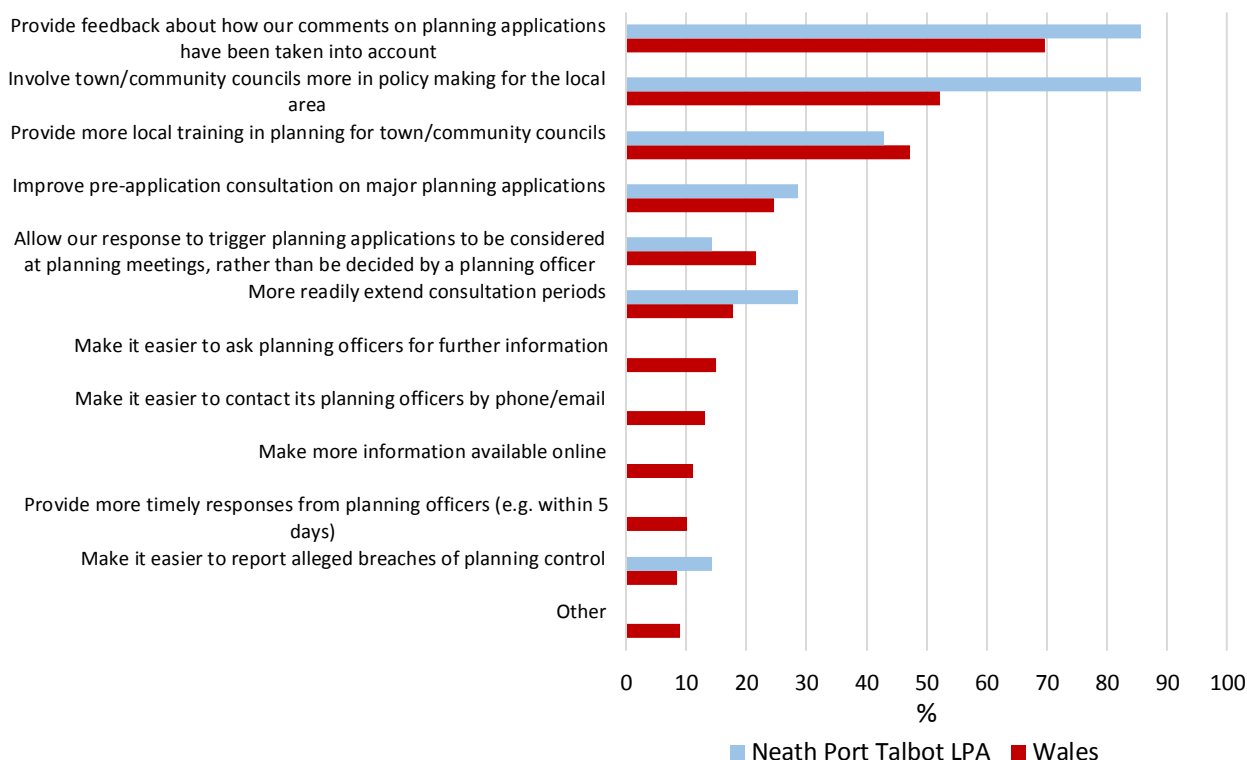
Comments received include:

- “The service we received was first class.”
- “I have found my experience with NPT Planning department a very professional and helpful experience.”
- "Over the last year or so, there has been an immense improvement in the service offered. “

In 2018-19 we conducted a survey of clerks of the town and community councils that are statutory consultees for our planning authority. There are 19 such councils in our area, and we received 8 responses to the survey.

The respondents were asked to select the three ways in which they thought our LPA could help town/community councils to participate more effectively in the planning system. Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents that selected each option as one of their three choices. ‘Provide feedback about how our comments on planning applications have been taken into account’ and ‘Involve town/community councils more in policy making for the local area’ were the most frequently selected option for our LPA.

Figure 2: Ways LPAs could help town/community councils participate more effectively in the planning system, 2018-19



OUR PERFORMANCE 2018-19

This section details our performance in 2018-19. 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 2019, we were one of 23 LPAs that had a current local development plan (LDP) in place. We submitted our Annual Monitoring Report in October 2019.

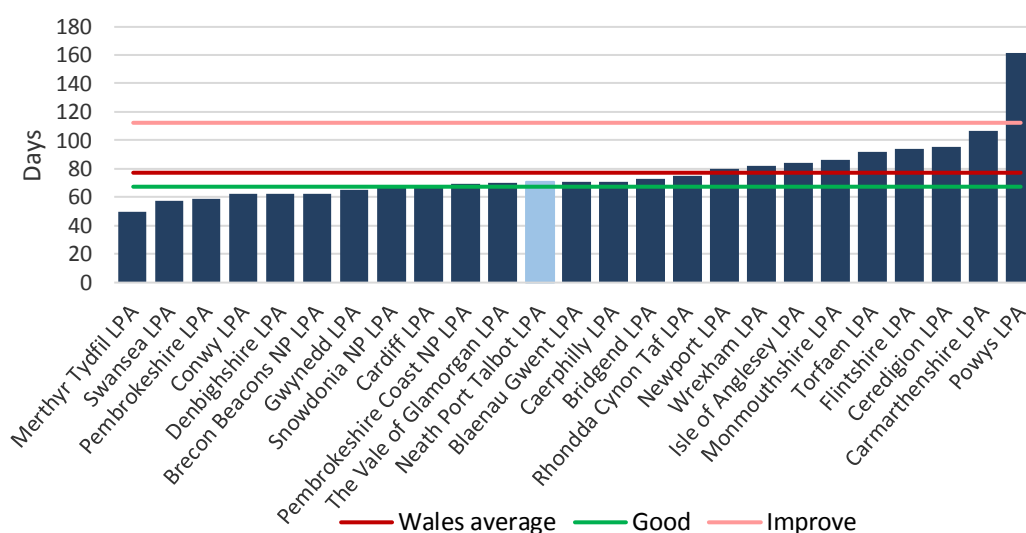
During the APR period we had 5.0 years of housing land supply identified, making us one of 6 Welsh LPAs with the required 5 years supply.

4 respondents to the 2018-19 town and community council clerks survey (50%) said that their council contributed to the production and/or review of our LDP. Of these, 33% agreed that the LDP process is easy to understand, and 100% agreed that their council is satisfied with how the LDP process is going (or went), compared to 64% and 62% respectively across Wales.

Efficiency

In 2018-19 we determined 759 planning applications, each taking, on average, 71 days (10 weeks) to determine. This compares to an average of 77 days (11 weeks) across Wales. Figure 3 shows the average time taken by each LPA to determine an application during the year.

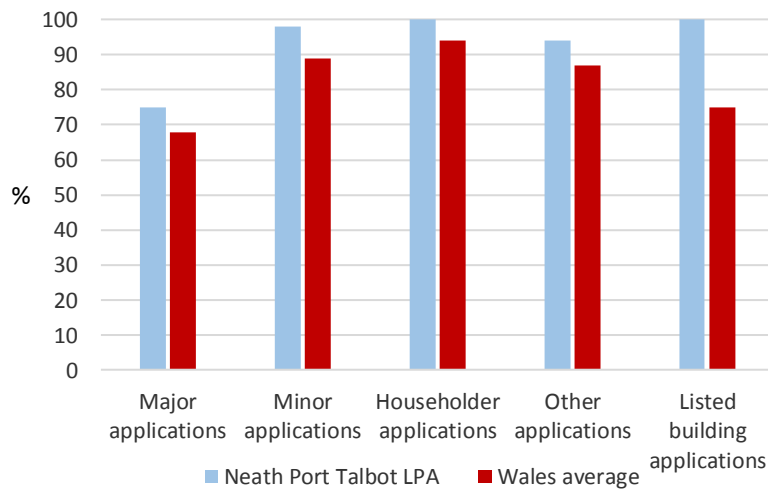
Figure 3: Average time taken (days) to determine applications, 2018-19



97% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. This was the fifth highest percentage in Wales and we were one of 20 LPAs that had reached the 80% target.

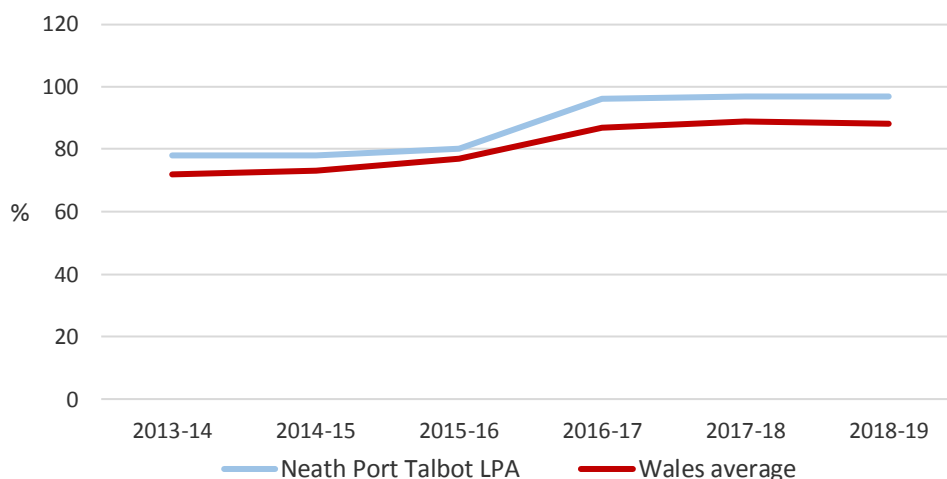
Figure 4 shows the percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales across the main types of application for our LPA and Wales. It shows that we determined 100% of householder applications within the required timescales. We also determined 100% of Listed Building Consent applications within the required timescales.

Figure 4: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales, by type, 2018-19



Between 2017-18 and 2018-19, as Figure 5 shows, the percentage of planning applications we determined within the required timescales stayed the same at 97%.

Figure 5: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales



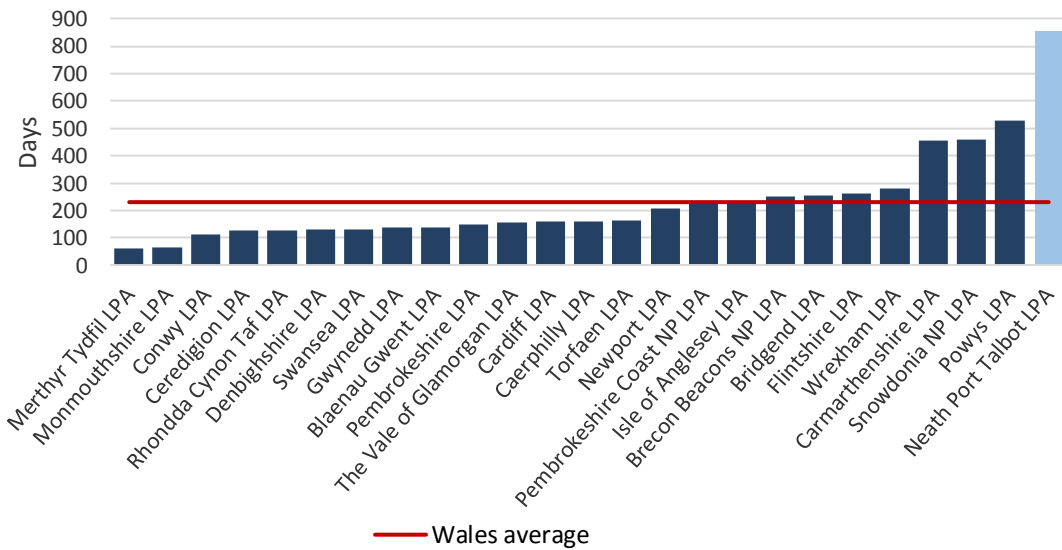
Over the same period:

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

Major applications

We determined 8 major planning applications in 2018-19, 38% (3 applications) of which were subject to an EIA. Each application (including those subject to an EIA) took, on average, 852 days (122 weeks) to determine. As Figure 6 shows, this was the longest average time taken of all Welsh LPAs. This was however due to the reluctance of developers to withdraw their applications nor submit outstanding information to enable progress to be made. We have since undertaken a review of ‘stalled applications’ in order to address this disappointing performance.

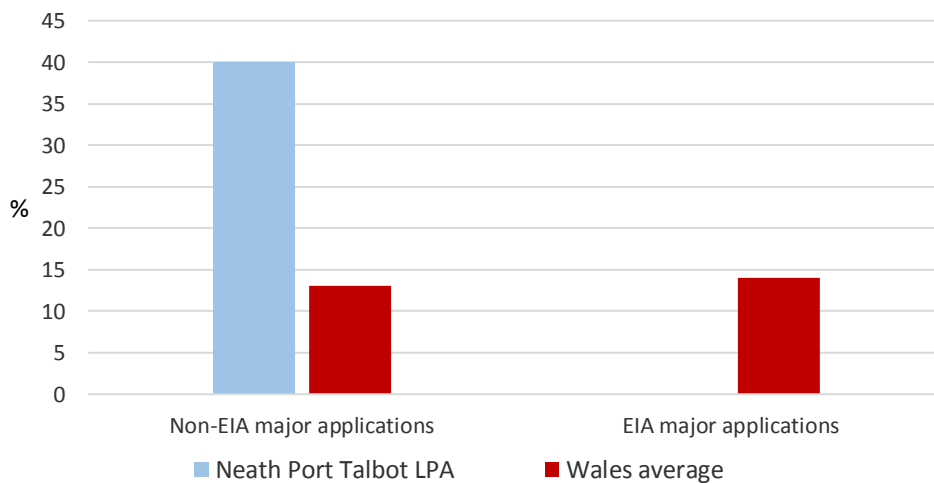
Figure 6: Average time (days) taken to determine a major application, 2018-19



75% of these major applications were determined within the required timescales, compared to 69% across Wales.

Figure 7 shows the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales by the type of major application. 40% of our ‘standard’ major applications i.e. those not requiring an EIA, were determined within the required timescales during the year.

Figure 7: Percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales during the year, by type, 2018-19

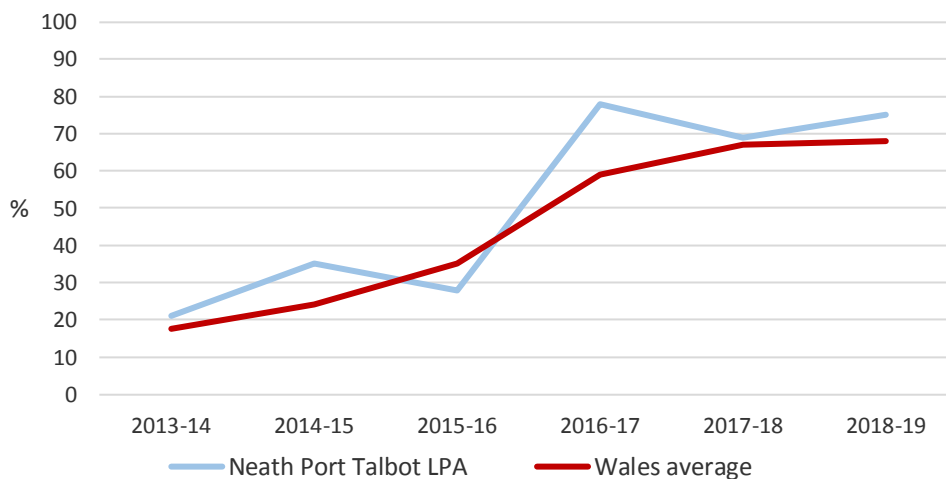


In addition we determined 4 major applications that were subject to a PPA in the required timescales during the year.

Since 2017-18 the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales had increased from 69%. In contrast, the number of major applications determined decreased while the number of applications subject to an EIA determined during the year increased.

Figure 8 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 8: Percentage of major planning applications determined within the required timescales



Over the same period:

- The percentage of minor applications determined within the required timescales stayed the same at 98%;
- The percentage of householder applications determined within the required timescales stayed the same at 100%; and
- The percentage of other applications determined within required timescales decreased from 95% to 94%.

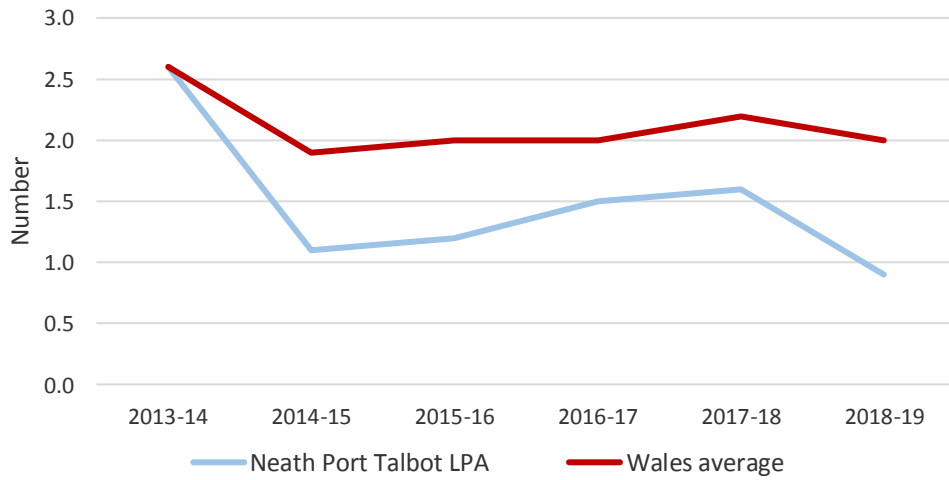
Quality

In 2018-19, our Planning Committee made 16 planning application decisions during the year, which equated to 2% of all planning applications determined. Across Wales 6% of all planning application decisions were made by planning committee.

6% of these member-made decisions went against officer advice. This compared to 9% of member-made decisions across Wales. This equated to 0.1% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice; 0.5% across Wales.

In 2018-19 we received 7 appeals against our planning decisions, which equated to 0.9 appeals for every 100 applications received. Across Wales 2 appeals were received for every 100 applications. Figure 9 shows how the volume of appeals received has changed since 2017-18 and how this compares to Wales.

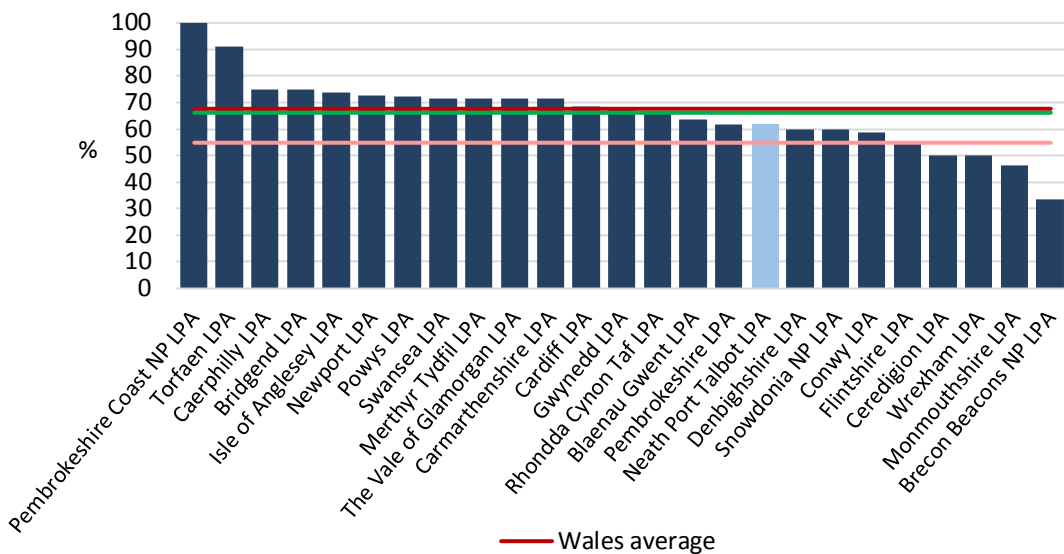
Figure 9: Number of appeals received per 100 planning applications



Over the same period the percentage of planning applications approved stayed the same at 80%.

Of the 13 appeals that were decided during the year, 62% were dismissed. As Figure 10 shows, this was lower than the percentage of appeals dismissed across Wales as a whole and was below the 66% target.

Figure 10: Percentage of appeals dismissed, 2018-19



During 2018-19 we had no applications for costs at a section 78 appeal upheld.

2 respondents (29%) to the 2018-19 town and community council clerks survey reported that they were either 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with how the Planning Inspectorate deals with their council around appeals, compared to 55% of the respondents across Wales.

Engagement

We are:

- one of 24 LPAs that allowed members of the public to address the Planning Committee;
- one of 22 LPAs that had an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public; and
- one of 21 LPAs that had an online register of planning applications.

6 (86%) of the town and community council clerks that responded to the 2018-19 survey felt that their council has enough time and resources to effectively contribute to development management in our area, compared to 59% of clerks that responded across Wales. 4 (57%) reported that they are 'always' able and 3 (43%) reported that they are 'sometimes' able to respond to applications within the 21 day statutory time period.

As Table 2 shows, 59% of respondents to our 2017-18 customer survey agreed that the LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application.

Table 2: Feedback from our 2017-18 customer survey

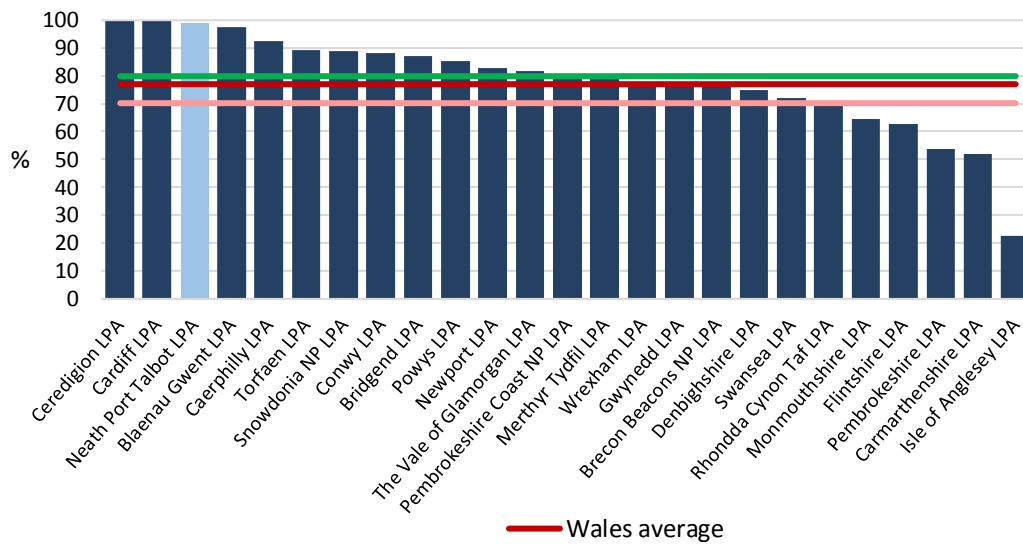
Respondents who agreed that:	Neath Port Talbot LPA	Wales %
	%	
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	59	60
They were listened to about their application	61	60

Enforcement

In 2018-19 we investigated 229 enforcement cases, which equated to 1.6 per 1,000 population. This compared to 1.9 enforcement cases investigated per 1,000 population across Wales.

We investigated 99% of these enforcement cases within 84 days. Across Wales 77% were investigated within 84 days. Figure 11 shows the percentage of enforcement cases that were investigated within 84 days across all Welsh LPAs.

Figure 11: Percentage of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days, 2018-19



The average time taken to pursue positive enforcement action was 136 days.

In the 2018-19 town and community council clerks survey, 3 respondents (50%) stated that our LPA investigates enforcement cases ‘very promptly’ or ‘reasonably promptly’, compared to 36% of respondents across Wales. 4 respondents (57%) reported that they are either ‘very satisfied’ or ‘somewhat satisfied’ with how our LPA generally responds to investigating breaches. This was 40% for Wales.

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+	73	N/A	N/A
Time taken to commence formal revision of an LDP following the triggering of Regulation 41, in months	<12	13-17	18+	17	-	N/A
Has an LDP Revision Delivery Agreement been submitted to and agreed with the Welsh Government?	Yes		No	Yes	-	N/A
LDP review deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	<3		4+	1	-	N/A
Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	Yes		No	Yes	N/A	Yes
The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	>5		<5	6 of 25	5.3	5.0
Efficiency						
Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	>60	50.1-59.9	<50	68	69	75
Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days	Not set	Not set	Not set	232	573	852
Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	>80	70.1-79.9	<70	88	97	97
Average time taken to determine all applications in days	<67	67-111	112+	77	78	71
Percentage of Listed Building Consent applications determined within time periods required	>80	70.1-79.9	<70	75	83	100
Quality						

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	<5	5-9	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
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	70.1-79.9	<70
Average time taken to take positive enforcement action	<100	101-200	200+

WALES AVERAGE	Neath Port Talbot LPA LAST YEAR	Neath Port Talbot LPA THIS YEAR
9	0	6
68	62	62
0	0	0
Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes
77	95	99
167	188	136

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
The LDP was adopted in January 2016 with a ‘drop dead date’ of January 2026. A review is due to commence in January 2020 and preparations are already underway to commence that review.	

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. Time taken to commence formal revision of an LDP following the triggering of Regulation 41, in months	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
The Delivery Agreement is submitted less than 12 months after Regulation 41 is triggered	The Delivery Agreement is submitted within 12 and 18 months after Regulations 41 is triggered	The Delivery Agreement is submitted more than 18 months after Regulation 41 is triggered

Authority’s performance	N/A

Indicator	04. Has an LDP Revision Delivery Agreement been submitted to and agreed with the Welsh Government?	
“Good”		“Improvement needed”
An LDP Revision Delivery Agreement has been submitted by the LPA and agreed with the Welsh Government		No LDP Revision Delivery Agreement has been submitted by the LPA or agreed by the Welsh Government

Authority’s performance	N/A

Indicator	05. LDP revision deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	
“Good”		“Improvement needed”
The LDP revision is being progressed within the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement		The LDP revision is being progressed later than the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement

Authority’s performance	N/A

Indicator	06. Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	
“Good”		“Improvement needed”
An AMR is due, and has been prepared		An AMR is due, and has not been prepared in time

Authority’s performance	Yes
Annual Monitoring Reports have been submitted in accordance with Welsh Government timescales every year since the LDP was adopted. The reports indicate that our policies are successfully achieving the Vision and broad objectives of the LDP. The Plan is however coming up to its 4 year review period and as such, a review will commence in January 2020.	

Indicator	07. The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	
"Good"		"Improvement needed"
The authority has a housing land supply of 5 years or more		The authority has a housing land supply of less than 5 years

Authority's performance	5.0
<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. This is to be reflected in the JHLAS for 2019.</p> <p>Whilst it is anticipated that this problem will continue going forward, extensive discussions have taken place with St Modwen who are developing the Coed Darcy development which is set to deliver 4000 houses. To date only 291 have been delivered by one housebuilder. Following the conclusion of S106 negotiations which should be soon, it is anticipated that multiple housebuilders will commence work on site to deliver a sustainable community.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the above, viability remains an issue within the County borough and the wider region and as such the regional authorities have commissioned the development of a viability tool which can be used by officers and developers during the candidate stage process of the LDP Review.</p>	

SECTION 2 - EFFICIENCY

Indicator	08. Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
60% or more 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	75
<p>Performance has improved when compared to last year with an increase from 69% to 75%. This was as a consequence of having three senior officers in post who were able to provide a tailor made service to developers. Unfortunately one of the post holders has since retired and their post has been frozen due to budget pressures. Since this will inevitably impact upon performance going forward.</p>	

Indicator	09. 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	852
<p>This performance was one of the worst in Wales and is an area where efforts need to be concentrated in future. It is however acknowledged that this was caused in the main by stalled sites whereby developers were unwilling to withdraw applications nor indeed submit outstanding information. A tougher position will need to be taken going forward although it must also be acknowledged that many of our sites are difficult to deal with and it is important to work with developers to secure a positive outcome rather than chase a target and as a consequence refuse the planning application.</p>	

Indicator	10. Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
80% or more 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	97
<p>This excellent performance is consistent with that secured for last year and 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 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	11. Average time taken to determine all applications in days	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
67 days or less	Between 67 and 111 days	Greater than 112 days

Authority's performance	71
This is a slight improvement on the performance from last year (78) and is as a consequence of improved performance management measures as well as the quality of the pre-application service provided.	

Indicator	12. Percentage of Listed Building Consent applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
80% or more 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	100
This authority does not have a specialist officer with experience, skills and qualifications associated with the historic built environment. As a consequence we are reliant upon regular contact with experts in CADW who can provide both general and specific advice on projects. Despite not having a council 'expert' we rely on the experience of DM officers who have secured significant knowledge over the years from 'learning on the job'. Given the aforementioned, the performance achieved is excellent.	

SECTION 3 - QUALITY

Indicator	13. Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Less than 5% of decisions are made contrary to officer advice	Between 5% and 9% of decisions are made contrary to officer advice	More than 9% of decisions are made contrary to officer advice

Authority's performance	6
In 2018-19, our Planning Committee made 16 planning application decisions during the year, which equated to 2% of all planning applications determined. Across Wales 6% of all planning application decisions were made by planning committee.	
6% of these member-made decisions at Planning Committee went against officer advice. This compared to 9% of member-made decisions across Wales. This equated to 0.1% of all planning	

application decisions going against officer advice; 0.5% across Wales. Whilst this is considered by Welsh Government to be a 'Fair' result, it doesn't reflect the decisions made on planning applications which are determined at Officer Panel which require ratification by Members. If these applications were considered the % figure would be considerably better again.

Indicator	14. Percentage of appeals dismissed	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
More than 66% 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	62
This performance is consistent with that secured last year and demonstrates the robustness of the Authority's decision making process. The actual number of appeals against decisions made by this authority is very small, and as such small fluctuations can have huge impacts upon the percentage rates. During this period the authority successfully defended 8 out of 13 decisions.	

Indicator	15. 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	0
The lack of costs awarded against the council further demonstrates the robustness of the decision making process.	

SECTION 4 – ENGAGEMENT

Indicator	16. 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 been updated to specifically identify the ability of community councils to address committee in addition to members of the public. This has also failed to increase the engagement of either the public or the community councils although a few high profile applications have attracted community representatives to address members at Committee more recently.</p>	

Indicator	17. Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
A duty planning officer is available during normal office hours	A duty planning officer is available, but not always during normal office hours	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	18. 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	No planning application information is published online

Authority's performance	Yes
This facility has been in existence for a number of years.	

SECTION 5 – ENFORCEMENT

Indicator	19. 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"
80% or more of enforcement cases are investigated in 84 days	Between 70% and 80% of enforcement cases are investigated in 84 days	Less than 70% of enforcement cases are investigated in 84 days

Authority's performance	99
<p>This is a slight improvement on last year (95%) and is exceptional given that we only have two enforcement officers covering the whole of the county borough. It is however evident that we have a growing number of older enforcement cases which have stalled and will need special attention going forward with support from Development management officers when capacity allows.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the above the service continues to be supported by our building control officers who 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. Nevertheless it is successfully enabling us to investigate cases quickly and see a high number of resolutions within statutory time periods.</p> <p>Since the merger of Planning and Public Protection, the enforcement section has also benefitted from a closer working relationship with colleagues within Environmental Health who have similar and often overlapping Enforcement responsibilities.</p>	

Indicator	20. Average time taken to take positive enforcement action	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
100 days or less	Between 101-200 days	Greater than 200 days

Authority’s performance	136
<p>This is an improvement when compared to last year (188 days) although there is still room for further improvement. Following the introduction of a new back office (IT) planning system, procedures need to be developed as well as better performance management reports to assist the Enforcement Officers. This is currently a priority within the service.</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	
<p>The Authority, has as in previous years, submitted a full return in relation to the Sustainable Development Indicators.</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	6,527

Refused (square metres)	
Authority's data	0

This is a huge increase when compared to last year where a figure of only 596 square metres was recorded. This is as a consequence of proactively working with our colleagues in the Regeneration section to support economic development on allocated sites.

This improved delivery is as a direct consequence of the projects delivered in and around the Swansea Bay University Campus from which there is a greater emphasis of developing the knowledge economy. It is anticipated that this will continue to improve when projects falling within the scope of the Enterprise Zone, the City Deal and the Valleys Task force develop and start delivering.

Indicator	SD2. Planning permission granted for renewable and low carbon energy development during the year.
------------------	--

Granted permission (number of applications)	
Authority's data	2

Granted permission (MW energy generation)	
Authority's data	18.02

These include a small windfarm which was submitted in 2014 generating 18MW of energy but was delayed whilst the developer addressed biodiversity issues together with a small Hydro Energy plant.

Indicator	SD3. The number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year.
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Market housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	67

Affordable housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	69

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. This issue has been considered in detail earlier in this report and there is no need to repeat concerns re: viability and land banking further.

Given that negotiations regarding the S106 agreement for Coed Darcy are progressing well, it is anticipated that the number of market houses approved will increase. It is hoped that this will encourage other developers to build within the county borough. Unfortunately, it remains to be seen, for viability reasons, as to whether there will be an increase in affordable housing.

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	7

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

All developments approved were within a C1 flood zone within existing built up area, one of which involved the change of use of an existing building. All were subject to acceptable Flood Consequences Assessments and positively contributed to the regeneration of Port Talbot.

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	7

Greenfield land (hectares)	
Authority's data	1

These were cumulative across many applications, but include a number of larger and very important schemes including an application to regenerate Neath town centre, and the redevelopment of poor quality affordable housing where anti-social behaviour was a serious concern with affordable housing which is more acceptable both visually and functionally by a Registered Social Landlord.

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	0

Audits of open space within the county borough demonstrate that there is an under provision of open space within most wards. Some of these gaps are being filled by the 21st century Strategic Schools Improvement Programme which is delivering improved sports and other play facilities which are also available to the community when not in use by the school. Despite this concerted efforts are being made to resist any loss of existing open space unless it can be demonstrated that it is no longer fit for purpose.

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	203,981

Gained via Community Infrastructure Levy (£)	
Authority's data	0

This is similar to the sums secured last year but a significant drop to those compared the year before. It is however a reflection of the reduced number of schemes being submitted and which are viable.