

Planning: Annual Performance Report October 2017



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1.0 PREFACE

- 1.1 Welcome to the third Blaenau Gwent Planning Annual Performance Report (APR). It describes how our planning service is delivered and sets out how this Council has performed against performance indicators. It highlights areas where we perform well and also where we need to improve.
- 1.2 During the year, our performance has been closely monitored internally through the Council's performance management systems and regular updates have been provided to senior management and Planning Committee. In addition to those processes, this APR is a key document in capturing and publishing information on our performance to an external audience. It confirms that taken as a whole, this Council provides a good planning service that is consistently in the top quartile of local planning authorities in Wales.
- 1.3 These are challenging times for local government. Faced with dwindling financial and staff resources, we have to be innovative if we are to continue to provide quality frontline services. Planning is no exception. In the main, the service has risen to those challenges and performed above the Welsh average in most areas. However, we are not complacent and will be looking to improve performance in the next year, particularly with regard to I.T. Providing an online facility to host planning applications will benefit staff, applicants, residents and businesses. It continues to be a priority for the service in the coming 12 months.
- 1.4 As elected councillors responsible for the planning service, we are committed to providing a modern, responsive and user friendly service. We welcome constructive feedback on this report to planning@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk



Cllr Denzil Hancock
Chair
Planning Committee



Cllr David Davies
Executive Member
Regeneration & Economic Development

2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 The Welsh Government ensures each LPA strives to be a good planning service by measuring performance in both development management and development plan making. The indicators cover efficiency, quality, enforcement and engagement with service users.

2.2 BGCBC performs well in most areas. Some headline conclusions are...

- ✓ We out-performed the Wales average for determining all applications within the required timescales.
- ✓ Our percentage for deciding major, minor, householder and other applications in time is better than the Wales average in every category.
- ✓ We are the second best performing LPA in Wales in terms of average number of days to decide applications
- ✓ We were 5th best out of the 25 Welsh LPA's in terms of the percentage of enforcement cases investigated within the target of 84 days.
- ✓ Feedback from service users is mostly positive.

2.3 There are areas in need of improvement in the coming year...

- We must implement an IT system that allows service users to at least view documents online.
- The percentage of applications where Members overturned officer recommendation remains too high.

2.4 Other Service Priorities include....

- Commence the full review of the LDP
- Roll out the new Northgate back office software.
- It is timely to review our enforcement and compliance service.

3.0 INTRODUCTION

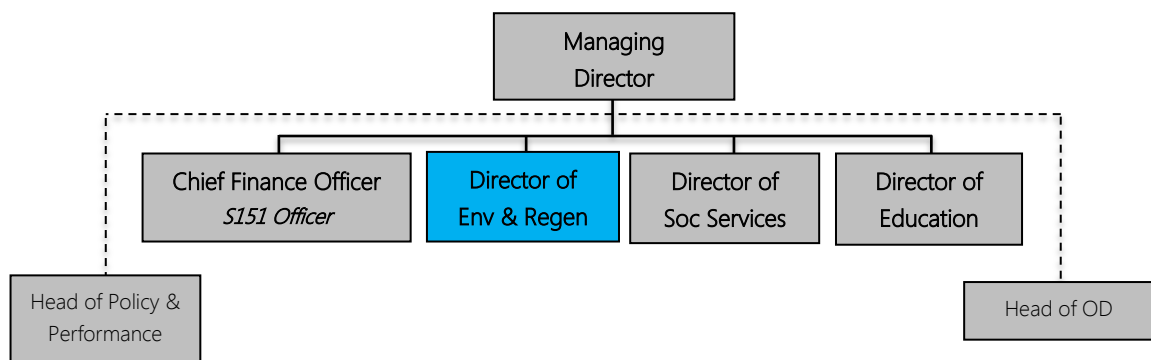
- 3.1 Blaenau Gwent is located entirely within the “Heads of the Valleys”, an area widely recognised as facing some of the greatest economic and social challenges created by economic re-structuring of the late 20th and early part of this century.
- 3.2 Blaenau Gwent’s history is closely allied to the exploitation of coal and the making of iron and steel. As a result, heavy industry came to fill much of the three main valleys of Sirhowy, Ebbw Fach and Ebbw Fawr. The settlement pattern is one of densely populated valley bottom and sides giving way to open areas of attractive countryside on the valley tops.
- 3.3 Whilst the coal industry declined in the 1970’s and 1980’s, the steel industry was a major employer up until the closure of the Ebbw Vale Works in 2002. The manufacturing sector which grew up around these industries continues to form an important part of the economy of Blaenau Gwent.
- 3.4 The population of the area has been falling since its peak of 127,611 in 1921. This trend appears to be slowing with population levels stabilising over the past decade. The latest WG projection (2014) suggests that Blaenau Gwent’s population is expected to marginally reduce from 69,674 in 2014 to 69,252 in 2021.
- 3.5 Ebbw Vale remains the key settlement identified in the Wales Spatial Plan and has a critical role to play in the success of the Borough and indeed the region. It must not only be successful in its own right but also function as a service and employment hub for the smaller settlements that surround it. It provides the central framework around which high capacity sustainable transport links have been developed. Other settlements in the area will also need modern shopping, leisure, community and cultural facilities, more attractive and affordable housing, clean and vibrant town centres, accessible countryside and of course employment opportunities.
- 3.6 There have been recent infrastructure improvements. The A465 Heads of the Valleys trunk road is now dualled through the majority of the County Borough. Work is progressing on dualling the section from Brynmawr to Abergavenny. Ebbw Vale is serviced by two rail stations and is also home to one of the regions established Enterprise Zones.

4.0 THE COUNCIL STRUCTURE

- 4.1 In Blaenau Gwent, the provision of the development plan and development management services is politically separate. Delivery of the development plan and supplementary policy guidance is the responsibility of the Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development. The development management function reports separately to Planning Committee. This Committee deals with planning applications, enforcement and appeals.
- 4.2 The Council is structured around 4 main Departments; Environment & Regeneration, Finance, Social Services and Education. This is illustrated in Fig 1 below. At the time of writing, the new Managing Director has been appointed and she is due to commence duties in October 2017.

Figure 1

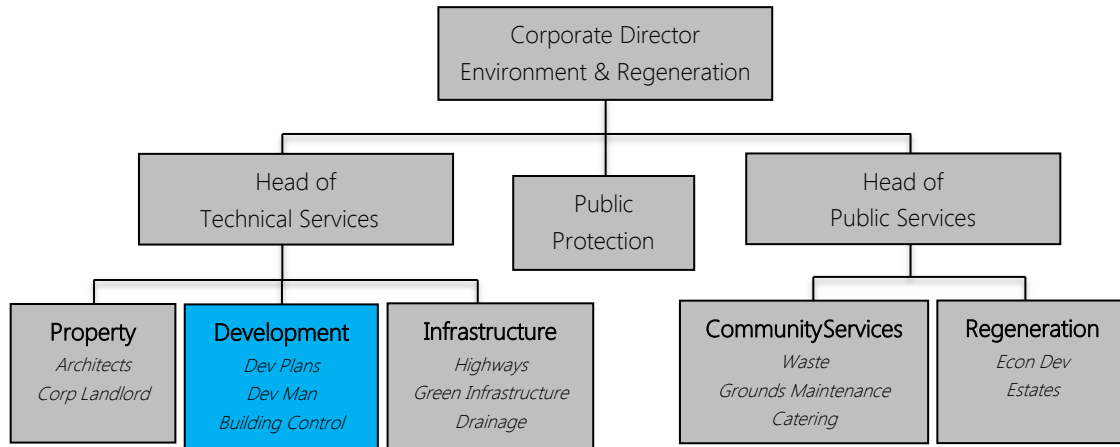
Blaenau Gwent CBC Council Structure



- 4.3 These Departments serve the various political portfolios, attendant scrutiny committees and regulatory committees within the Council.
- 4.4 The planning service is wholly located in the Environment & Regeneration Department (highlighted in blue) and is the focus of this APR.
- 4.5 The majority of the E&R Directorate is divided into two divisions, Technical Services and Public Services. However, Public Protection (Env Health and Trading Standards) sits outside these divisions as it is a joint service with Torfaen CBC.
- 4.6 The departmental structure is given below (planning again highlighted in blue).

Figure 2

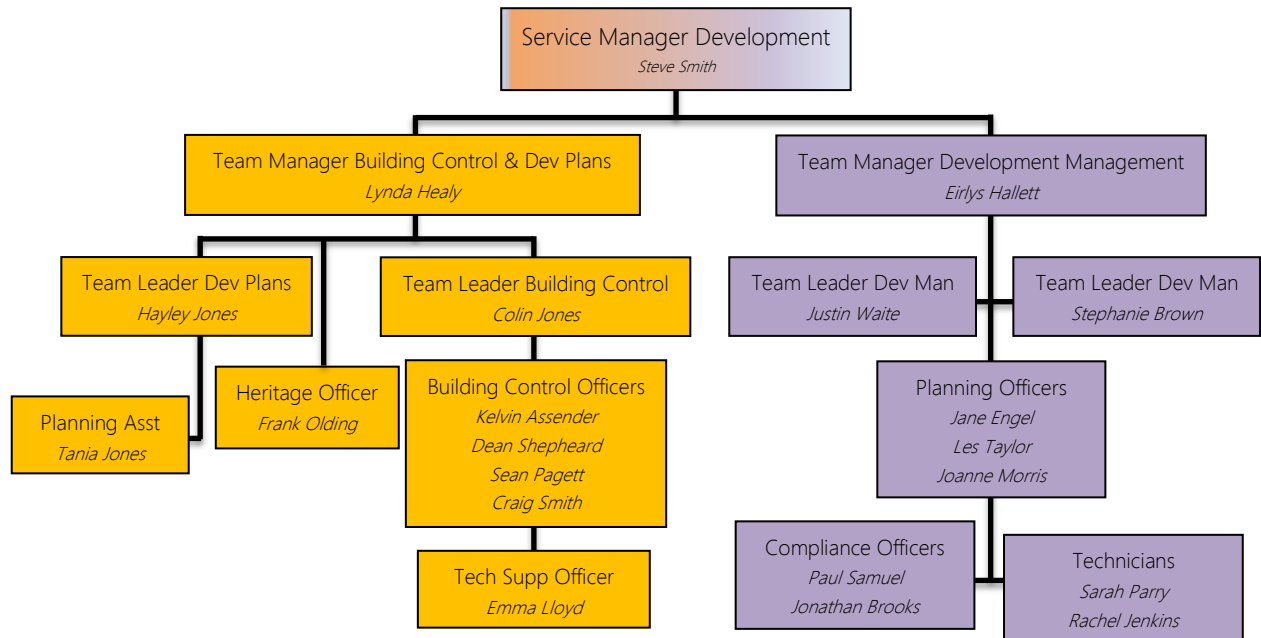
The Environment & Regeneration Department Structure



- 4.7 The planning and building control service is the responsibility of the Service Manager Development who reports in turn to the Head of Technical Services. Tech Services are now entirely located in the Civic Centre. The Development and Infrastructure teams are co-located on floor 1A of the building. This provides operational benefits with so many key consultees such as highways, drainage, trees and structures sharing the same office.
- 4.8 The structure of the Development Team is outlined in fig 3 below. The team includes Building Control. However, please note that this APR does not cover that service. It deals with the Development Plans and Development Management teams only.
- 4.9 To confirm, the structure does not record those staff on reduced hours or phased retirement. Of the 21 staff in the structure, 5 are on reduced hours. The FTE figure is therefore considerably less than the structure in fig 3 might suggest.
- 4.10 The administrative support to these services is provided by a corporate Business Support unit. This is also located in the Civic Centre. The team benefit from the equivalent of 2.2 FTE's to cover the three distinct areas of work. These staff are not included in the above structure.
- 4.11 Legal support is provided by two solicitors. Neither is a specialist in planning but are experienced in dealing with stewardship of Planning Committee and prosecutions (enforcement). Specialist legal advice is bought in as and when required on complex cases.

Figure 3

The Development Team Structure



- 4.12 The staffing structure is relatively stable with only one vacancy occurring in the last year. This was filled by an officer who was already working with a temporary contract with the Authority.
- 4.13 During the year, we moved away from a strictly area based approach in DM. The 3 planning officers have been allocated geographical areas but the two Team Leaders have a roving role assuming cases across the County Borough based on experience and capacity.

5.0 BUDGET

- 5.1 The service operates in a challenging financial climate. This is felt directly via budgetary cuts as the Council continues to make efficiency savings to meet the UK Government's austerity agenda. Indirectly, we are also victims of the macro-economic climate resulting in a lack of activity in the development industry in the region.
- 5.2 The negative fee income balance reported in last year's APR continues. The downturn is particularly acute for Blaenau Gwent. It is an accepted principle that the planning fees for larger/major applications cross subsidise the service for minor and householder applications. The absence of major schemes has meant that those applications that attract the bigger fees have all but dried up. It had been anticipated that the year would have seen the submission of detailed applications in respect of Circuit of Wales. However, for non-planning reasons, these applications have not been submitted. This is reflected in the financial bottom line.
- 5.3 The income estimate is set by the Chief Finance Officer (£151 officer)). This is derived from the previous year with an inflationary element added (with the exception of 14/15). It does not account for historical trends, economic outlook or potential projects in the pipeline. With development rates in the Borough remaining low, particularly amongst volume housebuilders, fee income is unlikely to reach the estimate in the foreseeable future.

Figure 4

Income Estimate and Actual Fee Income by Financial Year

	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17
Budgeted Income (K)	£380.8	£388.4	£388.4	£388.4	£279.7	£279.8	£283.2
Fee Income (K)	£299.7	£180.6	£288.6	£341.4	£246.8	£254.2	£180.3
Deficit (K)	-£81.1	-£207.8	-£99.8	-£47.0	-£32.9	-£25.6	-£99.9

- 5.4 This results in a year on year deficit which is beyond the scope of the service to influence. Periodic planning fee increases introduced by WG will not bridge this gap. This is not to say that application numbers have significantly dropped. The bulk of the work is made up of minor and householder applications, discharge of condition applications and non-material amendments. The fees for this work do not cover the cost of the service.
- 5.5 Our local preliminary enquiry scheme pre-dates the mandatory national scheme. The fees are lower and it provides a more comprehensive service. Coupled with the lack of volume housebuilding in the area, we have yet to receive any enquiries under the WG national prelim scheme. Income from the local advice service was circa £7.5K. It is proving to be a valuable service for developers and a useful source of additional income but it is not operating at full cost recovery. We are reluctant to increase fees for two reasons. Firstly, the majority of queries are from householders. Increasing the fee from its present £25 might dissuade the public from seeking advice and increase incidences of unauthorised development. Secondly we wish to offer every incentive to developers to look at Blaenau Gwent as a place to invest in. In that respect we compete with our neighbouring Boroughs. Although probably not a decisive factor, we keep our fees competitive; for example we offer advice to companies located in the Enterprise Zone free of charge.
- 5.6 The challenging budget is also an issue for the development plans team. The LDP budget (excluding staff costs) is less than £7k pa. It is looking increasingly likely that a full review of the LDP will be necessary. We estimate this to cost in the region of £250K+. To help address this future cost pressure, we agreed with the Chief Finance Officer that any underspends in supplies and services budgets be pooled in readiness. This has been happening for some time. Assuming we proceed to full review, work will need to commence on a new Delivery Agreement. This process will have regard to the budget. Wherever possible we are looking to share costs with neighbouring LPA's who are at similar stages in the Development Plan cycle.
- 5.7 The staffing structure is close to the critical mass required to provide a frontline service. The only means by which this Council can sustain the present quality of service in the long term is through greater collaboration with neighbouring LPA's. However, even in that scenario it is unclear what cashable savings could be achieved beyond the obvious items like IT procurement.
- 5.8 The service has been assigned challenging efficiency savings for the next 2 years. In a small structure that is already under pressure from demands placed upon it by service users, it is unlikely we will be able to perform at anywhere near present performance levels if asked to meet these financial targets. In a system where there is a right of appeal for non-determination within prescribed periods and refunds for fees, it will be a very challenging period for the planning service.

6.0 STAFFING

- 6.1 The planning service is currently fully staffed. An officer was on maternity leave. This post was covered temporarily to meet commitments with the LDP review. The DM team lost a team leader as the post holder left. The temporary appointment has now been made permanent and the officer moved to the DM team.
- 6.2 Although operating with a full complement of staff, it remains a challenge that a number of posts are now permanently operating at reduced hours. This includes the Team Leader Development Plans, two Planning Officers in DM and a Planning Technician.
- 6.3 Current caseloads are manageable due to the lack of major development. We do face a challenge is due to our size. We do not enjoy economies of scale. Staff absences are acutely felt and make it difficult for workloads to be easily absorbed by others.
- 6.4 The Heritage Officer has now returned to the Council from the Leisure Trust. He has successfully integrated into the Development Plans team. His duties extend beyond a traditional conservation officer. His post carries income targets which are met through guided walks and external lecturing. However, he has assumed direct responsibility for listed building applications and acts in an advisory capacity to the Council. He has also assumed responsibility for some high profile listed building enforcement cases.
- 6.5 Enforcement work continues to generate a large number of complaints. We have an enforcement team of two officers. They cover half the Borough each. We no longer have the capacity to routinely monitor sites to ensure compliance. This is regrettable. It does undermine the integrity of the DM system. It is not known how many schemes are being completed that are out of compliance with the planning permission issued by the Council. Problems are not picked up at an early stage. It also results in a loss of income estimated to be around £25K pa (based on past performance) when compliance checking was in place. However, we continue to investigate all complaints we receive.
- 6.6 The Development Team has a well balanced gender and age profile. In terms of succession planning the team leaders are encouraged to assume greater responsibility for the workload. DM Team Leaders are empowered to sign off NMA, DoC applications and close some enforcement cases. The Team Leader Development Plans regularly attends SEWSPG as the Councils representative. Team Leaders regularly represent the team at meetings and on occasion Planning Committee.

7.0 WHAT SERVICE USERS THINK

- 7.1 In 2016-17 we conducted a customer satisfaction survey to garner the views of people that had received a planning application decision during the year.
- 7.2 The survey was sent to 145 people. We received a 17% response. The majority of responses (68%) were from members of the public. 4% of respondents had had their most recent planning application refused. Whilst the response was small, it is considered statistically robust and we are able to draw reasonable conclusions from the returns.
- 7.3 We asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the planning service. They were given the following answer options:
- Strongly agree;
 - Tend to agree;
 - Neither agree nor disagree;
 - Tend to disagree; and
 - Strongly disagree.
- 7.4 Figure 5 shows the percentage of respondents that selected either 'tend to agree' or 'strongly agree' for each statement for both our planning authority and Wales.

Figure 5:

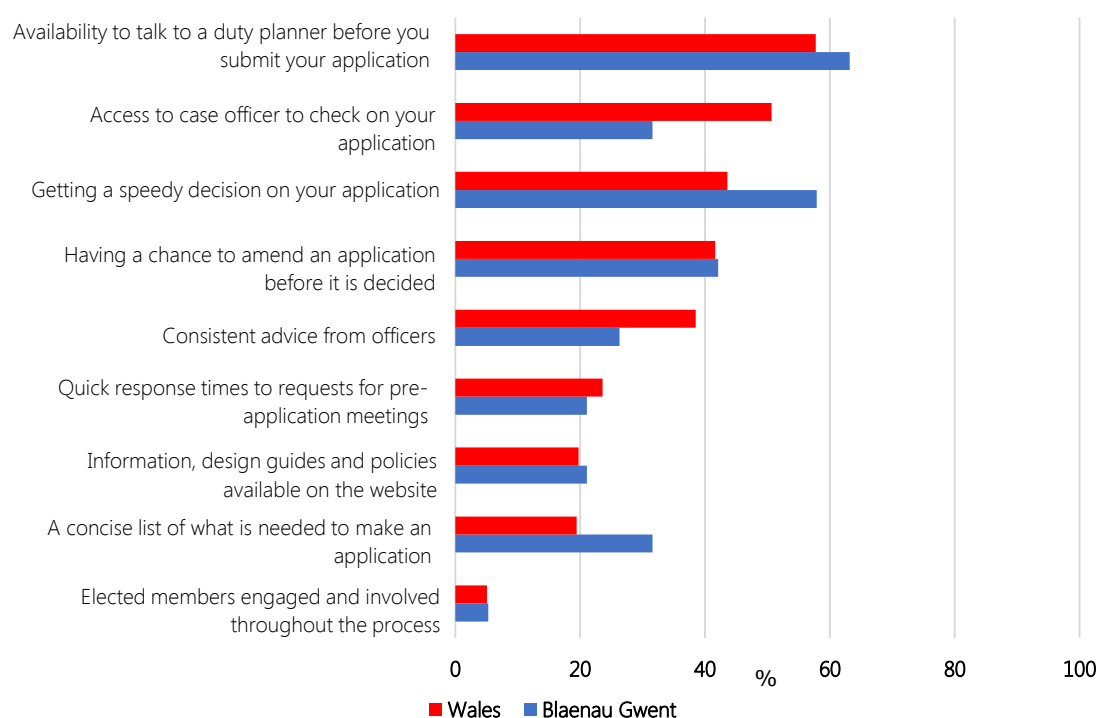
Percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement, 2016-17

<u>Percentage of respondents who agreed that:</u>	<u>BGCBC</u>	<u>Wales</u>
The LPA enforces its planning rules fairly and consistently	52	52
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	60	62
The LPA gives help throughout, including with conditions	60	52
The LPA responded promptly when they had questions	60	61
They were listened to about their application	65	59
They were kept informed about their application	57	51
They were satisfied overall with how the LPA handled their application	57	61

- 7.5 It is pleasing that this Council performed around or better than the Welsh average in every category.
- 7.6 We also asked respondents to select three planning service characteristics from a list that they thought would most help them achieve successful developments. Figure 6 shows the percentage of respondents that chose each characteristic as one of their three selections.

Figure 6

Characteristics of a good planning service Blaenau Gwent 2016-17



Comments received include:

"On the whole the planning application procedures appear to be fairly straightforward for routine submissions."

"Overall they dealt with the planning application very well."

"Helpful service with efforts to assist Planning Applicants. Officers are traditional in design approach."

- 7.7 For us, 'the availability to talk to a duty planner before submitting an application was the most popular choice. This isn't surprising given the nature of the caseload. A significant number of applicants are not represented by professional agents. We are looking to address the feedback regarding access to the case officer. This may be because calls are initially screened by Business Support or the duty officer thus avoiding direct contact with the case officer.

8.0 OUR PERFORMANCE

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

8.2 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.

8.3 Plan Making

8.4 At 31st March 2017, we were one of 22 LPA's with a current development plan in place.

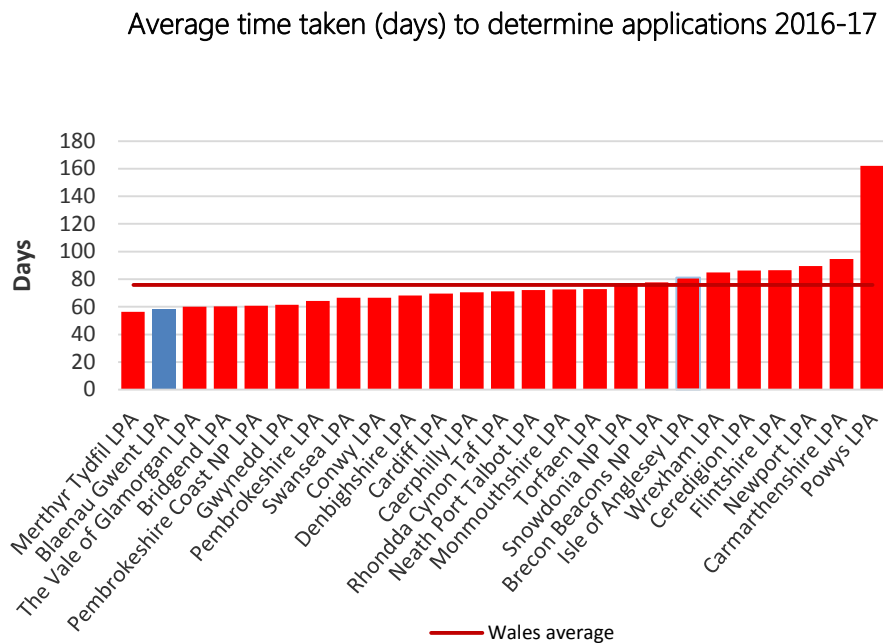
8.5 We are required to submit an Annual Monitoring Report in October 2017. The 2017 AMR has been prepared and is awaiting internal sign off before submission to Welsh Government (WG). All other AMR's from 2012 onwards have been submitted on time.

8.6 During this AMR period, we had 1.3 years of housing land supply identified, making us one of 19 Welsh LPAs without the required 5 years supply. This is of course regrettable. However, this Council is firmly of the view that this statistic presents a misleading impression of the development offer in the County Borough. Viability and macro-economic factors mean that volume house building in the heads of the valleys area is depressed. Whilst we are not meeting the aspirational targets we set ourselves on adoption of the LDP, there is ample development land available. If the alternative method of calculating land supply i.e. past completion rates were used (which is considered by this Council to be a more realistic representation of the situation in times of economic downturn), BG would have 7+ years. WG's refusal to reconsider this methodology of calculation is undermining the fundamental principle of the plan led system. Instead, "planning by appeal" is emerging across the region. It is not so acutely felt in BG given the lack of volume house building but remains a concern.

8.7 Efficiency

- 8.8 In 2016-17 we determined 326 planning (and related) applications, taking on average 59 days to decide. This compares to an average of 76 days across Wales.

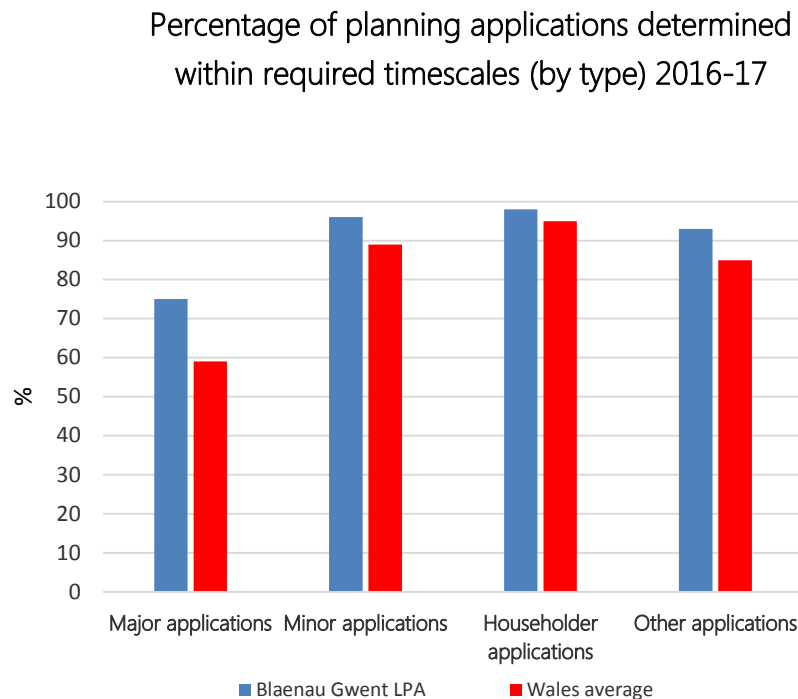
Figure 7



- 8.9 The return of 58 days was the second best in Wales. It is above the Wales average and better than the WG definition of "good" performance. We continue to look at ways to reduce this figure as we consider it a better overall reflection on the service. Whilst our return compares very well to the Wales average, it has to be recognised that 58 days is of itself longer than the statutory 8 week target for all applications.
- 8.10 The approach must take two strands; firstly that applications are decided as quickly as possible within the 8 week target. Secondly, in the case of more complex applications they are determined as soon as possible after the 8 weeks. Whilst reliance on agreeing extensions of time provides a good outturn under that particular indicator, it must always be viewed in the context of average number of days. Taken together they provide a much better indication of the service offer. This may require a more ruthless approach to applications that go beyond 8 weeks but continue to remain undetermined, frequently for reasons outside the control of the LPA.

8.11 Figure 8 shows the percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales across the four main types of application for our LPA and Wales.

Figure 8



8.12 Our performance is good in all areas. The major applications cohort is relatively small; nevertheless we outperformed the all Wales average. Householder application performance remains strong (98%) and this is the main area of work.

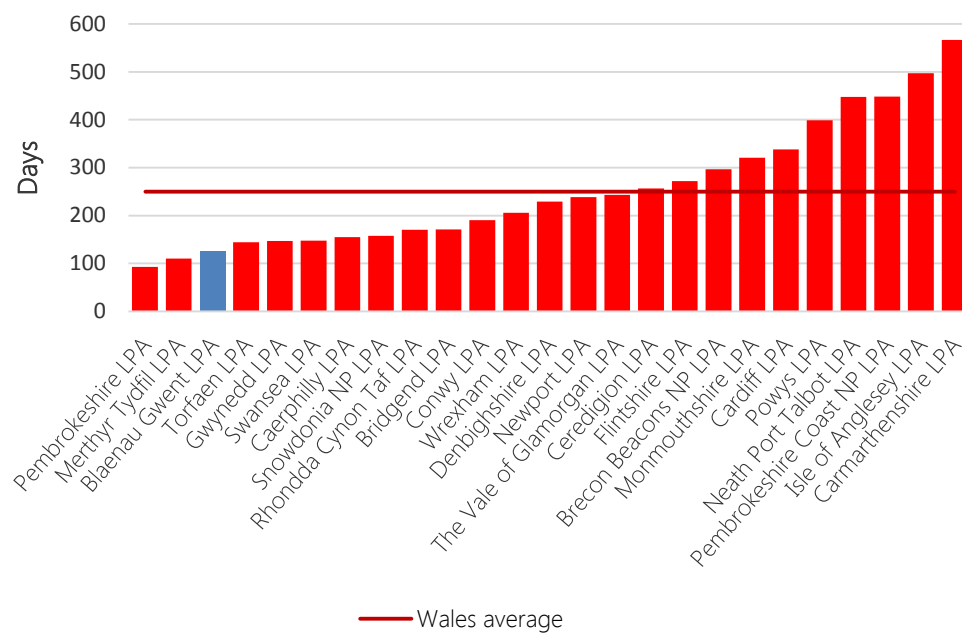
8.13 The performance trend continues to improve. Between 2015-16 and 2016-17, the percentage of planning applications we determined within the required timescales has risen to 95%. This was the fifth highest return in Wales.

8.14 We determined 4 major planning applications in 2016-17, none of which were subject to an EIA. Each application took, on average, 125 days (18 weeks) to determine. As Figure 10 shows, this was the third shortest average time taken of all Welsh LPAs.

8.15 75% of these major applications were determined within the agreed timescales, compared to 59% across Wales.

Figure 10

Average time (days) taken to determine major applications 2016-17



8.16 Over the same period:

- The percentage of minor applications determined within the required timescales increased from 91% to 96%;
- The percentage of householder applications determined within the required timescales increased from 95% to 98%; and
- The percentage of other applications determined within required timescales increased from 84% to 93%. This return is pleasing as this category is traditionally one where we are weakest.

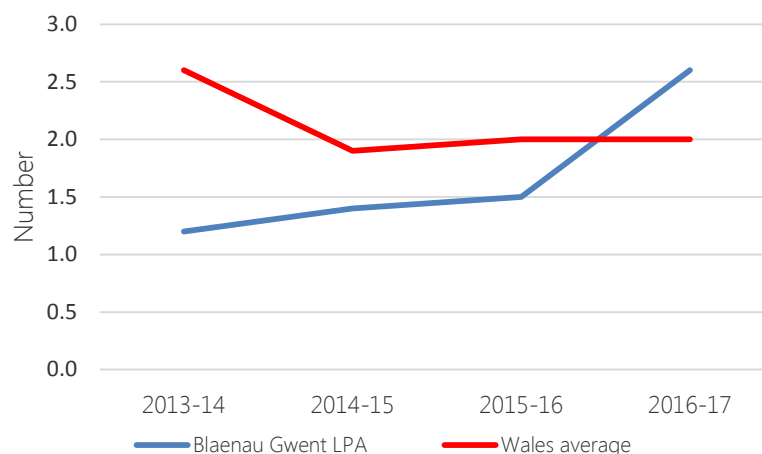
8.17 Quality

- 8.18 In 2016-17, our Planning Committee made 22 planning application decisions during the year, which equated to 7% of all planning applications determined. This compared to 6% across Wales.

- 8.19 27% of these member-made decisions went against officer advice. This compared to 11% of member-made decisions across Wales. This equated to 1.8% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice; 0.7% across Wales.
- 8.20 This is an area of concern. Discussions have been held with the Chair and Vice about the need to reduce this figure in line with the Welsh average. It has also been raised in debate at Committee. It is not considered that direct intervention (for example a repeat of a workshop examining "member overturns") is required yet. The Planning Committee is relatively new following the local elections. The Council has an unprecedented number of new members. Planning Committee itself comprises of 15 councillors of which 7 are returning and 8 new members. We will keep the matter under review.
- 8.21 In 2016-17 we received 9 appeals against our planning decisions, which equated to 2.6 appeals for every 100 applications received. This was the fourth highest ratio of appeals to applications in Wales. Figure 8 shows how the volume of appeals received has changed since 2015-16 and how this compares to Wales.

Figure 11:

Number of appeals received per 100 planning applications

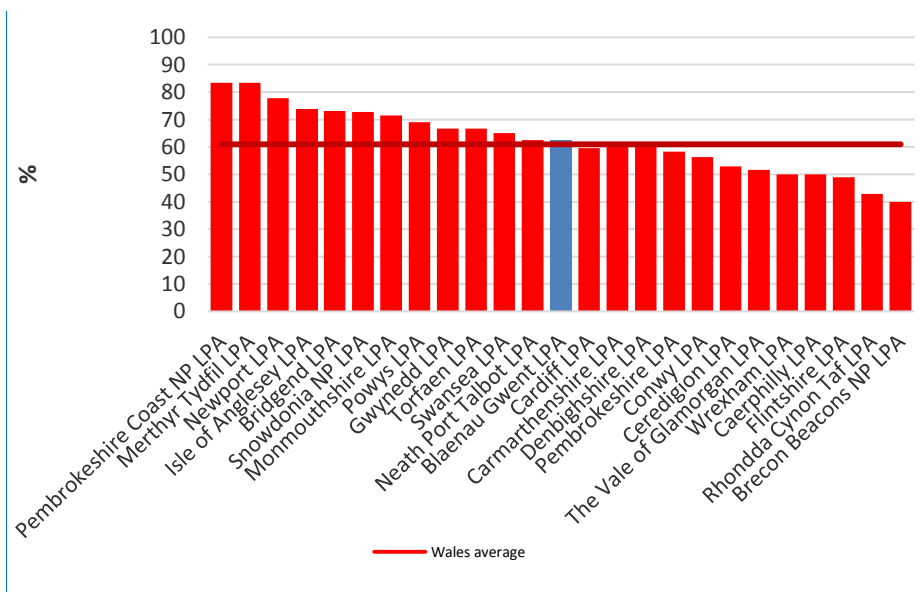


- 8.22 In 2016-17 we approved 90% of planning applications. This compares to 91% across Wales.

- 8.23 Of the 8 appeals that were decided during the year, 63% were dismissed. As Figure 12 shows, this was higher than the percentage of appeals dismissed across Wales as a whole, but was below the WG imposed 66% target.
- 8.24 Of those 8 appeals, three were upheld. Two of the three were “member refusals” i.e. contrary to recommendation. The third case was a finely balanced one involving issues of gypsy accommodation and highway safety.

Figure 12

Percentage of appeals dismissed, 2016-17



- 8.25 During 2016-17 we had no award of appeal costs against us upheld.
- 8.26 In response to previous criticism of inconsistency within the team, we hold twice weekly “planning surgeries”. All DM officers attend and controversial cases or cases that require an interpretation of the law/policy are discussed. This ensures the approach across the Borough is consistent.
- 8.27 We also hold regular validation meetings to ensure that the requirements on applicants are the same across the Borough.
- 8.28 Engagement
- 8.29 We are one of the 24 LPAs that allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee. We allow 5 minutes per speaker and a representative of supporters, objectors

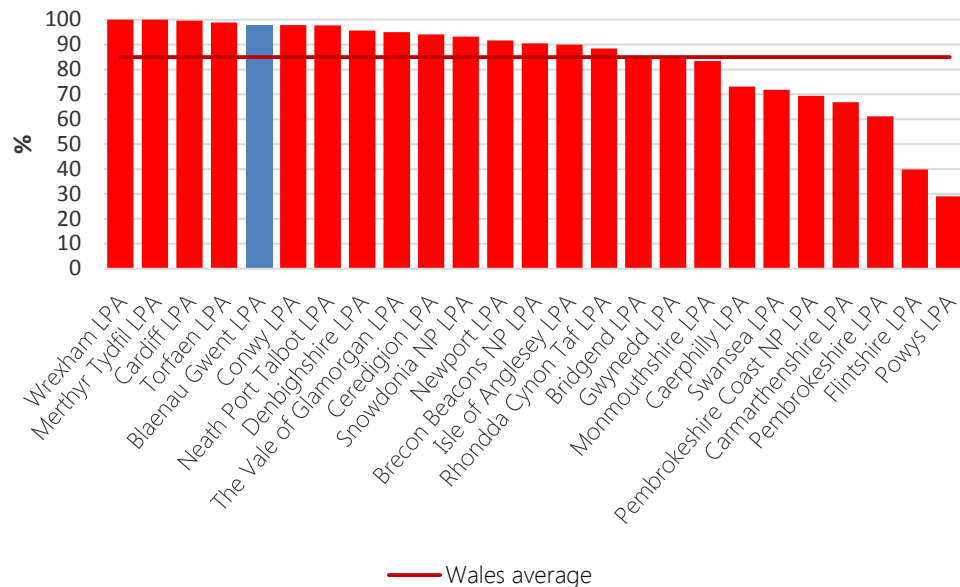
and the applicant as well as the town council and ward members not on Planning Committee. The system (anecdotally at least) works well. We impose a deadline for registering to speak 2 days before the meeting.

- 8.30 We are one of only 3 LPAs that do not have an online register of planning applications. This is acknowledged as a major weakness. We have now received two letters from WG compelling the Council to address the issue.
- 8.31 We have the software in place and going live is a matter of resolving relatively minor technical issues concerning the hardware behind the system. We also have to compete for that investment against other service areas. However, we continue to lobby the SRS I.T. provider to remedy the situation and latest indications are that we hope to have a system in place by Christmas 2017.
- 8.32 This will not amount to a fully integrated system where applicants can view progress of applications. However, it should allow for part 1 application details to be uploaded for viewing purposes by consultees and the public. We continue to receive verbal complaints about the lack of web presence and the demand is undoubted. It will also reduce workload for Business Support staff that have to email large documents during the publicity and consultation process. The Council has recently launched an interactive Council "app" and including planning information in that facility is a must.
- 8.33 During the year we determined controversial outline and reserved matters applications for a new school. Due to public interest, we uploaded application details to the web site as a one off exercise. The amount of web hits to those details proves the point that having application details on the web site is a service priority.
- 8.34 It remains a key ethos of our planning service that we negotiate with applicants to make applications acceptable. We do not subscribe to the view that unacceptable development should be routinely refused without negotiation to improve it. This approach is vindicated by respondents to the customer satisfaction survey where 60% of respondents agreed that the LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application and listened to applicants during the process.
- 8.35 We continue to operate a duty officer system. An officer is available during office hours to deal with ad hoc enquiries (subject to the chargeable preliminary service).
- 8.36 Enforcement
- 8.37 In 2016-17 we investigated 148 enforcement cases, which equated to 2.1 per 1,000 population. This compared to 1.9 enforcement cases investigated per 1,000 population across Wales. We took, on average, 11 days to investigate each enforcement case.

- 8.38 We investigated 98% of these enforcement cases within 84 days. This better than all Wales return of 85%. Figure 13 below refers.

Figure 13:

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



- 8.39 Over the same period, we resolved 188 enforcement cases, taking, on average, 140 days to resolve each case.
- 8.40 In Blaenau Gwent, 66% of cases were resolved within 180 days. This is compared to 73% of enforcement cases resolved within 180 days across Wales. We will aim to improve on this return by reviewing how we approach enforcement cases.

9.0 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

9.1 Last year's APR identified 6 priority areas. Progress on these matters is as follows...

9.2 Continue with the LDP Review Process

Progress: A report has been prepared based on the findings of preceding AMR's, a review of topic based background papers and engagement with key stakeholders. The report is currently being taken through the Committee process. A decision on which revision process is to be followed to update that Plan is expected in November 2017.

9.3 Develop closer links with neighbouring LPA's to maximise opportunities from collaboration in terms of service improvements and efficiencies:

Progress: We continue dialogue with other LPA's through SEWSPG to identify best practice and pool limited resources to provide development plan coverage. At the time of writing there is significant uncertainty around timetables for the various LDP's and SDP. We have helped compile a skills matrix for the region which has identified the strengths and weaknesses of each LPA. We are members of the regional DM Managers group where best practice is shared amongst the LPA's.

9.4 Deliver on the IT improvements including developing a functional website for public access to search registers and to view part 1 applications:

Progress: As reported earlier in this APR this remains a service priority for the coming year. The matter has been elevated to the Corporate Director who is fully supportive of the case. At the time of writing, we are hopeful this will be resolved shortly.

9.5 Address archiving issues, scanning and file management:

Progress: Progress has been made in uploading historical data to the EDM system. The challenge is to keep on top of current workload. Day to day scanning is not currently happening. We are reviewing the paper flow through the system and supporting the Business Support function (whose responsibility it is to scan) in their efforts to provide a service. This may extend to a temporary financial contribution from planning to the Business Support function. Clearly the success of an on line presence is intrinsically linked to an efficient scanning service.

9.6 Maintain satisfactory performance against PI's and the dashboard given the reduction in staff capacity.

Progress: Achieved. Performance management generally is becoming more firmly embedded in the service.

9.7 Meet efficiency savings target:

Progress: 16/17 target met. The challenging figures for 17/18 and 18/19 are not yet identified and remain a cause for concern.

10.0 ONGOING PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

- 10.1 In terms of the coming year, the main priority will be continued strong performance in frontline service provision. Given financial challenges this will not be easily achieved.
- 10.2 The other challenge for the service is the continued reduction of capacity in key “support services”. Administrative support is provided by the Business Support team. We benefit from 1 FTE supporting Building Control and 1 FTE for DM and Dev Plans. The remaining capacity is from the Team Leader. Whilst she has a planning background, her responsibilities extend across the support function for the entire directorate. Cuts in this area will have a direct impact on our ability to meet service objectives.
- 10.3 The Council has through necessity cut capacity on most service areas. We now face single points of failure in many consultee areas. These include highways, drainage and some parts of environmental health. The Council currently has no arboriculturist, rights of way officer, urban design expertise or housing advisor. These weaknesses inevitably impact on our ability to meet deadlines.
- 10.4 In addition, the following areas are identified as priorities...
- Commencing the full LDP review, including a new Delivery Agreement.
 - Contributing to regional working and preparation of the SDP through SEWSPG.
 - Contributing to the City Deal.
 - Continue Member training.
 - I.T. - improvements in our online presence discussed elsewhere in this APR.
 - Move to our new Northgate back office system.
 - Review enforcement performance.
 - Complete review of s106 database and refine practise for handling of receipts.
 - Meet our savings targets.

APPENDIX A - PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

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 dates in original Delivery Agreement (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	Not set	Not set	Not set
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	60.1-79.9	<60
Average time taken to determine all applications in days	<67	67-111	112+
Quality			
Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	<5	5.1-8.9	9+
Percentage of appeals dismissed	>66	55.1-65.9	<55
Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	0	1	2+
Engagement			
Does the LPA allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?	Yes		No
Does the LPA have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	Yes		No
Does the LPA'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 enf cases investigated (determined whether a breach has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percent of enf cases where enf action is taken or a retrospective application received within 180 days from the start of case (in cases where it was expedient to enforce)?	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to take enforcement action	Not set	Not set	Not set

WALES AVERAGE	Blaenau Gwent LAST YEAR	Blaenau Gwent THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
58	N/A	N/A
Yes	Yes	Yes
2.9	2	1.3
59	55	75
250	267	125
87	87	95
76	61	59
11	11	27
61	57	63
0	0	0
Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	No	No
85	92	98
74	36	11
73	80	66
201	103	140

1. Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?

*"Good"**A development plan (LDP or UDP) is in place and within the plan period**"Improvement needed"**No development plan is in place (including where the plan has expired)*Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: **GOOD**

Development plan in place and within the plan period. The Blaenau Gwent LDP was adopted in 2012. It expires in 2021. A review of the Plan was triggered in November 2016. The Review Report is currently being considered by the Council with a decision on which review process is required to update the Plan expected in November.

2. LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months

*"Good"**The LDP is being progressed within 12 months of the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement**"Fair"**The LDP is being progressed within between 12 and 18 months of the dates specified in original Delivery Agreement**"Improvement needed"**The LDP is being progressed more than 18 months later than the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement*Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: **GOOD**

LDP adopted in 2012.

3. Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption

*"Good"**An AMR is due, and has been prepared**"Improvement needed"**An AMR is due, and has not been prepared*Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: **GOOD**

Every AMR has been submitted to WG on time since adoption.

4. The LPA's current housing land supply in years

*"Good"**A housing land supply of more than 5 years**"Improvement needed"**A housing land supply of less than 5 years*Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: **1.3 YEARS IMPROVEMENT NEEDED**

The pending review of the LDP will have regard to this issue. However, this LPA maintains that the residual method for calculating this return is fundamentally flawed. This Council is not experiencing high build rates for many reasons. Failure to have a theoretical 5 year land supply is not one of them. The continued reliance on this calculation and the consequential implications of not having a 5 year supply is continuing to undermine the principle of a plan led system.

5. Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required

*"Good"**Target to be benchmarked**"Fair"**Target to be benchmarked**"Improvement needed"**Target to be benchmarked*Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: TBC by WG

Return of 75% is satisfactory. Improvement will require more fundamental change such as revising the scheme of delegation. Discussions around this issue are about to commence.

6. Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days

*"Good"**Target to be benchmarked**"Fair"**Target to be benchmarked**"Improvement needed"**Target to be benchmarked*Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: TBC by WG

Return of 125 days This is considered satisfactory given current resources.

7. Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required

*"Good"**More than 80% of applications are determined within stat time period**"Fair"**Between 60% and 80% of applications are determined within stat time period**"Improvement needed"**Less than 60% of applications are determined within stat time period*Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: 95% - GOOD

This out turn is welcomed and should be sustained well above 90% in the coming year.

8. Average time taken to determine all applications in days

*"Good"**Less than 67 days**"Fair"**Between 67 and 111 days**"Improvement needed"**112 days or more*Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: 59 days – GOOD

The challenge is to no maintain this level of performance in the longer term.

9. Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice

"Good"*Less than 5% of decisions***"Fair"***Between 5% and 9% of decisions***"Improvement needed"***9% or more of decisions*Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: **27% IMPROVEMENT NEEDED**

This figure is recognised as unacceptable and discussed elsewhere in this APR.

10. Percentage of appeals dismissed

"Good"*More than 66% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal***"Fair"***Between 55% + 66% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal***"Improvement needed"***Less than 55% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal*Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: **63% FAIR**

This is based on a small cohort of 8 appeal decisions. 2 of the 3 upheld appeals related to decisions where officers recommendation was overturned. See comments on above indicator.

11. Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period

"Good"*The authority has not had costs awarded against it at appeal***"Fair"***The authority has had costs awarded against it in one appeal case***"Improvement needed"***The authority has had costs awarded against it in two or more appeal cases*Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: **0% GOOD**

12. Does the LPA allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?

"Good"*Members of the public are able to address the Planning Committee***"Improvement needed"***Members of the public are not able to address the Planning Committee*Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: **GOOD**

13. Does the LPA have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?

"Good"

Members of the public can seek advice from a duty planning officer

"Improvement needed"

There is no duty planning officer available

Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: **GOOD**

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"

All documents are available online

"Fair"

Only the planning application details are available online, and access to other documents must be sought directly

"Improvement needed"

No planning application information is published online

Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: **IMPROVEMENT NEEDED**

Discussed in detail elsewhere in this APR.

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"

Target to be benchmarked

"Fair"

Target to be benchmarked

"Improvement needed"

Target to be benchmarked

Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: TBC by WG

BG return was 98 %

16. Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases

"Good"

Target to be benchmarked

"Fair"

Target to be benchmarked

"Improvement needed"

Target to be benchmarked

Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: TBC by WG

BG return was 11 days

17. Percentage of enforcement cases where enforcement action is taken or a retrospective application received within 180 days from the start of the case (in those cases where it was expedient to enforce)

"Good"

Target to be benchmarked

"Fair"

Target to be benchmarked

"Improvement needed"

Target to be benchmarked

Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: TBC by WG

BG return was 98 %.

18. Average time taken to take enforcement action

"Good"

Target to be benchmarked

"Fair"

Target to be benchmarked

"Improvement needed"

Target to be benchmarked

Blaenau Gwent BRAG Status: TBC by WG

BG return was 140 days.

APPENDIX B

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 are 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 may be useful to local planning authorities to understand more about the outcomes of the planning system and help inform future decisions.

Blaenau Gwent Return	100%
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Indicator SD1	The floor space (square metres) granted and refused planning permission for new economic development on allocated employment sites during the year.
Blaenau Gwent data Granted (square metres)	0
Blaenau Gwent data Refused (square metres)	0
<p>Commentary: The planning system should support economic development and steer development to the most appropriate location. This indicator provides information on the contribution the planning system makes to delivering economic development to employment allocations.</p> <p>This performance indicator measures new buildings in square metres approved on allocated sites. This year no approvals were granted. No applications were refused.</p> <p>However planning permission has been approved for 4,712 square metres on land protected for employment purposes. Whilst sufficient land (50ha) is allocated in the Local Development Plan, the take-up is very limited. This should change next year with applications expected for two sites within the Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone as a result of funding being made available from Welsh Government.</p>	

Indicator SD2	Planning permission granted for renewable and low carbon energy development during the year.
Blaenau Gwent data Granted permission (number of applications)	3
Blaenau Gwent data Granted permission (MW energy generation)	1.04 MW
<p>Commentary: The planning system can optimise renewable and low carbon energy generation. This indicator tells us the contribution the planning system is making to delivering renewable and low carbon energy generation and moving towards a low carbon economy.</p> <p>Three applications were permitted over the monitoring period. Two of the three applications were for wind turbines, 2 turbines at Crown Business Park and a further 2 at Coed y Gilfach, Six Bells. Permission was also granted for solar PV array at a Water Treatment plant at Abertillery.</p>	

Indicator SD3	The number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year.
Blaenau Gwent data Market housing (number of units)	38
Blaenau Gwent data Affordable housing (number of units)	14
<p>Commentary: The planning system can facilitate the provision of market and affordable housing to meet local housing requirements. This indicator provides information on the contribution of the planning system to delivering new housing. It is worth noting that this data differs significantly from the LDP AMR data due to differences between the indicator definitions. In particular, this sustainable development indicator records only full planning permission and Reserved Matters approvals: outline consents are excluded. During the monitoring period, detailed planning permission was granted for 38 market dwellings and 14 affordable units. This equated to 27% of all resi units approved being affordable. More detail on housing approvals and affordable housing provision is provided in the AMR.</p>	

Indicator SD4	Planning permission granted and refused for development in C1 and C2 floodplain areas during the year.
Blaenau Gwent data Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that <u>DID NOT</u> meet all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED planning permission	0
Blaenau Gwent data Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that did not meet all TAN 15 tests which were REFUSED planning permission on flood risk grounds	0
Blaenau Gwent data Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that MET all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission	0
Commentary: The planning system has an important role in ensuring that new development is directed away from areas of flood risk guiding development to locations at little or no risk from flooding. This indicator provides information on how planning applications in floodplain areas are being managed. During this reporting period, no dwellings were approved within flood zones C1 or C2. No development was refused on TAN 15 flood risk grounds during this period.	

Indicator SD5	The area of land (ha) granted planning permission for new development on previously developed land and greenfield land during the year.
Blaenau Gwent data Previously developed land (hectares)	2ha
Blaenau Gwent data Greenfield land (hectares)	1ha
Commentary: The planning system can ensure that, wherever possible, previously developed land is used in preference to greenfield sites. This indicator tells us where the planning system is directing new development. The performance data shows that 77% of development is on previously developed land which is just below the development plan 80% target. It is worth noting that the data provided above differs from that recorded in our LDP AMR as the SD indicator excludes outline planning permissions.	

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.
Blaenau Gwent data Open space lost (hectares)	0
Blaenau Gwent data Open space gained (hectares)	0
<p>Commentary: Open spaces can provide recreational, amenity and environmental value as well as having a role in climate protection and adaptation to the impacts of climate change. This indicator measures how the planning system is protecting existing, and facilitating the provision of new, open spaces.</p> <p>Two applications have created new open spaces this year. One at the site of former flats at Newtown, Ebbw Vale (0.44ha) and the other at Waunheulog, Nantyglo (0.46ha).</p>	

Indicator SD7	The total financial contributions (£) agreed from new development granted planning permission during the quarter for the provision of community infrastructure.
Blaenau Gwent data Gained via Section 106 agreements (£)	£38,000
Blaenau Gwent data Gained via Community Infrastructure Levy (£)	N/A
<p>Commentary: Financial contributions can be used to fund the provision of community infrastructure required to support sustainable development. This indicator measures the level of financial contributions agreed for the provision of community infrastructure. This year Blaenau Gwent agreed £38,000 from new development granted planning permission this year. The low figure reflects the low level of development and viability issues.</p> <p>Blaenau Gwent has resolved not to introduce CIL. This is due to viability issues on most sites.</p>	