

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council



Planning Service: Annual Performance Report 2018

Welcome to the fourth Blaenau Gwent Planning Annual Performance Report (APR). The narrative text covers the period from October 2017 to October 2018. However, any data sets or performance indicator returns are for the financial year 2017/18.

The APR is an important document in critically examining the service and identifying what we do well and where we need to improve. We continue to provide a quality frontline planning service in what has been another challenging year of dwindling financial and staff resources. Service levels have remained stable and we have performed above the Welsh average in most areas.

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 and Economic Development

Blaenau Gwent Demographics

Population

Population
69,609

62.8%
of working
age 16-64



Employment



67.1% of working age people are employed compared to 72.7% in Wales. UNEMPLOYMENT rate in Blaenau Gwent was 6% compared to Wales of 4.9%. Unemployment of 20-24 year olds is 16.5% compared to all Wales 9.5%.

Qualifications / Skills



12.2% of working age people have no qualifications compared to Wales at 8.7%.

15.1% people work in process plant and machine operatives compared to Wales of 7.4%.

Businesses



8.3% of working age are self-employed compared to Wales of 9.7%.

49% of 28,600 working residents in Blaenau Gwent work within the borough. Across Wales, the figure is 32%.

Housing



32,367 dwellings in Blaenau Gwent.

Average house price is £85,128 compared to £154,835 in Wales.

52.2% of dwellings are terraced houses compared to 27.8% in Wales.

Detached houses /bungalows make up only 11.0% of all dwellings in Blaenau Gwent compared to 27.7% nationally.

Structure & Staffing

- The Council is currently restructuring to realign services to meet the challenges ahead. At the time of writing, this restructure has only been completed to heads of service level.
- The Development Team currently comprises of Development Management, Development Plans and Building Control. It is anticipated that these teams will remain as a single entity within the new Regeneration and Community Services Directorate. There may be changes around some services or line management responsibilities but this information is not available at the time of writing. The structure therefore remains as per last year's APR which is available on the Council website.
- The staff structure within the planning service is stable. There have been no substantive changes with the exception of the secondment of one DM officer to Monmouthshire CC. This secondment will terminate in March 2019.
- Within support services within the Council, the Highways Authority structure changed from 2 FTE's to 1 in the team that deals with planning consultations. Further, the ecologist has left the Authority. She has been replaced for the foreseeable future by the officer who was providing maternity cover whilst the substantive post holder was absent. These developments compound the issues of a lack of resilience in these support areas. The Council now has one highways officer who comments on planning applications, one ecologist, one landscape architect, a part time heritage officer, one structural engineer and one drainage engineer. These officers also have other duties outside of their advisory role to the LPA. They are single points of failure; the performance of the planning service is subject to periods of reduced capacity for reasons outside of its control. It is not known how the projected savings for 19/20 and current restructuring will impact on these areas.
- The Council has no dedicated GIS officer, Rights of Way officer, urban design specialist or Arborist. This presents challenges to the frontline delivery of the planning service.

Local Development Plan



The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for the Local Development Plan recommended that work commences on preparing a replacement Plan.

Following a Full Review of the Local Development Plan, it was identified that a replacement Plan was required.

Work has now commenced on the new Plan. We have a new delivery agreement with Welsh Government in place.

We are working towards having a new Plan adopted in early 2022.

Planning Applications



On average, we took 69 days to determine planning applications. This compares favourably to the Wales average of 81 days.

We determined 5 major planning applications in 2017-18. Each application took on average 109 days to determine. This was the second shortest average time taken of all Welsh LPAs.

98% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. This was the fourth best percentage in Wales.

Enforcement



We investigated 97% of enforcement cases within 84 days. This is the second best return in Wales where the national average was 81%.

The average time taken to pursue positive enforcement action was 201 days. A target for this indicator has yet to be set by WG.

Fees Income



	<u>13/14</u>	<u>14/15</u>	<u>15/16</u>	<u>16/17</u>	<u>17/18</u>
Projected Income (k)	£388.4	£279.7	£279.8	£283.2	£209.2
Actual Income (k)	£341.4	£246.8	£254.2	£180.3	£178.3
Deficit (k)	- £47.0	- £32.9	- £25.6	- £99.9	- £30.8

Customer Survey



“Officers are very helpful and responsive.”

85% of respondents said we gave good advice compared to 60% across Wales.



“Blaenau Gwent has a positive helpful attitude to Planning applications and are always keen to see the merits in proposals. They then assist to make the proposals the best for their area.”



77% of customers were satisfied overall with our performance compared to 63% in Wales.

“The team were very friendly and helpful and we hope to make applications again in the future. I do think some parts of the website could be improved a little bit to make them easier to navigate. I cannot fault the team however, I thought they were polite, helpful, reasonable and thoughtful at all times and really took the time to understand our needs. Thank you.”



77% of respondents said we applied planning rules consistently and fairly compared to 55% in Wales as a whole.

Areas for Improvement

In this APR period, we defended 4 appeals. Three of these were dismissed resulting in a 75% success rate. The fourth appeal was allowed and the Inspector awarded costs to the appellant. He considered the decision of Planning Committee could not be supported with evidence. ¹

We have less than a 5 year land supply in the LDP - currently standing at 1.28 years. This will be one of the priorities for the new replacement LDP.

Too many decisions of Planning Committee are made contrary to officer recommendation. On occasion, inadequate reasons based on immaterial planning considerations are given. ²

We do not have a searchable register of online planning applications or the ability to upload part 1 plans for public viewing. This is a longstanding weakness. We understand from our IT providers that a system is about to go into test with a view to a live system in early 2019. ³

^{1 & 2}

We undertook additional Member training during July 2018. We commissioned a Chartered Town Planner with experience of sitting as a Member of Planning Committee to conduct a 2 hour workshop with Members. We will monitor the success of this initiative in the coming months.

³

The Council recognises the poor web presence. We have received two letters from the CPO in the past. Our IT providers have been unable to install the software for a number of reasons. We remain hopeful that this will be actioned shortly.

Progress on Last Year's APR Priorities

Detail	Status	Progress / Comment
Maintain strong performance against PI's.	✓	For the most part, this has been achieved.
Commencing the full LDP review, including a new Delivery Agreement.	✓	AMR completed and submitted to WG on time. Delivery Agreement for new replacement LDP submitted and approved by WG.
Contribute to regional working and CCR.	✓	Officers attend POSW (national and regional), SEWSPG and SEWDEM.
Member development & training.	✓	External training provided on the role and responsibility for members of Planning Committee, good decision making and providing sound reasons for refusal.
IT improvements.	✗	Discussed elsewhere in this report.
Move to new Northgate back office software.	✓	New software still bedding in. As anticipated there are teething issues. We have met our account manager to discuss where the product needs to be improved.
Review enforcement service.	↔	Internal review started. Report to November 18 Council to change delegated powers to improve efficiency. Member questionnaire completed. Discussions with new Member champion for enforcement started. Work on a new enforcement policy about to begin.
Review s106 database.	✓	Complete.

The Vision	The Focus	Challenges	The Measure
<p>An efficient, responsive and cost effective statutory planning service.</p>	<p><u>Service Delivery</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commence work on the new LDP. • Complete review of enforcement. • Web site for DM. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructure pending. • Budget savings. • New back office software. • Implementation of online apps. • Circuit of Wales. • Quality of decision making. • Staff capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P.I. Returns. • Staff Questionnaire. • Functional website. • Appeal record. • Complaints record. • Agent's forum.

Conclusion – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

	Helpful	Harmful
Internal to BGCBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable structure and dedication of staff. • Co-location of services on same floor/building. • Excellent working relationships across Departments. • Excellent officer / member relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size of teams e.g. new LDP to be delivered by less than 2.5 FTE's. • Single points of failure within the team and amongst statutory/important consultees. • Lack of specialist skills such as design. • Inability to respond to upturn in workload due to size of staff structure. • Quality of decisions.
External to BGCBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signs of an upturn. Large residential and commercial applications and the Circuit of Wales could result in increased workload and income. • Collaboration with LDP with neighbouring LPA's through joint procurement of studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diminishing central funding resulting in need for further savings. • Ongoing requirement to provide online planning register and other documents.

Appendix 1

Indicator 01	Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	
"Good" A development plan (LDP or UDP) is in place within the plan period		"Improvement needed" No development plan is in place (inc. where the plan has expired)
BGCBC performance	Good - Adopted LDP expires 2021.	

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

Indicator 03	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
BGCBC performance	Good - All AMR's produced and submitted on time.	

Indicator 04	The LPA's current housing land supply in years.	
"Good" The authority has a housing land supply of more than 5 years		"Improvement needed" Authority has housing land supply of less than 5 years
BGCBC performance	Improvement needed - 1.28 years.	

Indicator 05	% of "major" applications determined within time periods.	
"Good" More than 60% of applications determined within the statutory time period	"Fair" Between 50% and 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	"Improvement needed" Less than 50% of applications are determined within the statutory time period
BGCBC performance	Good 100%.	

Indicator 06	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
BGCBC performance	109 days.	

Indicator 07	% of applications determined within time periods required.	
“Good” More than 80% of applications determined within stat time period	“Fair” Between 70% - 80% of applications are determined in stat time period	“Improvement needed” Less than 70% applications determined within stat time period
BGCBC performance	Good - 98 %.	

Indicator 08	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
BGCBC performance	Fair - 69 Days.	

Indicator 08a.	Percentage of Listed Building Consent applications determined within time periods required.	
“Good” Target to be benchmarked	“Fair” Target to be benchmarked	“Improvement needed” Target to be benchmarked
BGCBC performance	100%.	

Indicator 09	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
BGCBC performance	Improvement Needed - 17%.	

Indicator 10	Percentage of appeals dismissed.	
“Good” More than 66% (two thirds) of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal	“Fair” Between 55% and 66% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal	“Improvement needed” Less than 55% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal
BGCBC performance	Good – 75%.	

Indicator 11	Applications for costs at s78 appeal upheld in reporting period.	
“Good” LPA has not had costs awarded against it at appeal	“Fair” LPA had costs awarded against it in one appeal case	“Improvement needed” LPA had costs awarded against in 2+ cases
BGCBC performance	Fair – 1 case.	

Indicator 12	Does the LPA allow public to address Planning Committee?	
<p>“Good”</p> <p>Members of the public are able to address the Planning Committee</p>		<p>“Improvement needed”</p> <p>Public unable to address Planning Committee</p>
BGCBC performance	Good – Yes.	

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

Indicator 14	Does the LPA web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access track their progress and view their content?	
<p>“Good”</p> <p>All documents are available online</p>	<p>“Fair”</p> <p>Only planning application details available online, access to other documents must be sought directly</p>	<p>“Improvement needed”</p> <p>No planning application information is online</p>
BGCBC performance	Improvement Needed – No information online.	

Indicator 15	% enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning has occurred and if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days.	
<p>“Good”</p> <p>More than 80% of enforcement cases are investigated in 84 days</p>	<p>“Fair”</p> <p>Between 70% - 80% of enforcement cases are investigated in 84 days</p>	<p>“Improvement needed”</p> <p>Less than 70% of enf cases are investigated in 84 days</p>
BGCBC performance	Good - 80%.	

Indicator 16	Average time taken to take positive enforcement action.	
<p>“Good”</p> <p>Target to be benchmarked</p>	<p>“Fair”</p> <p>Target to be benchmarked</p>	<p>“Improvement needed”</p> <p>Target to be benchmarked</p>
BGCBC performance	201 Days.	

Appendix 2

The purpose of the SD Indicators is to measure the contribution the planning system makes to sustainable development. The Indicators will measure progress against national sustainability objectives set out in PPW.		Full Return
Indicator SD1	The floorspace (square metres) granted and refused planning permission for new economic development on allocated employment sites during the year.	
BGCBC Granted (sqm)		0
BGCBC Refused (sqm)		0
Indicator SD2	Planning permission granted for renewable & low carbon energy development.	
BGCBC Granted - no. off applications		0
BGCBC Granted - MW energy generated		0
Indicator SD3	The number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year.	
BGCBC Granted - Market housing (number of units)		99
BGCBC Granted - Affordable housing (number of units)		1
Indicator SD4	Planning permission granted and refused for development in C1 and C2 floodplain areas during the year.	
BGCBC Data - Number of residential units (plus hectares of non-residential units) which were GRANTED permission		0
BGCBC data - Number of residential units (plus hectares of non-residential units) which were REFUSED permission on flood risk grounds		0
Indicator SD5	Land granted planning permission for new development on previously developed and greenfield land during the year.	
BGCBC Data - Previously developed land (hectares)		1
BGCBC Data – Greenfield land (hectares)		3
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.	
BGCBC Data - Open space lost (hectares)		1
BGCBC Data - Open space gained (hectares)		0
Indicator SD7	The financial contributions (£) agreed from new development granted planning permission during the quarter for the provision of community infrastructure.	
BGCBC Data - Gained via Section 106 agreements		£50,000
BGCBC Data - Gained via Community Infrastructure Levy		Not applicable.