
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) 2016



Steve Smith
Service Manager Development
Blaenau Gwent CBC
31st October 2016

1.0 PREFACE

- 1.1 We are delighted to present the second APR for the Blaenau Gwent planning service. Planning is central to the Council’s objectives of building sustainable local communities. Good planning can manage development in the right places to help create and protect jobs and address challenges such as providing for affordable housing. It can also protect our green infrastructure and heritage which are so important in enhancing our distinctive valley towns.
- 1.2 This APR shows that we have again performed strongly when measured against performance indicators and perhaps more importantly in terms of positive responses from our customers. This has been achieved in very challenging circumstances and in light of significant changes to the planning process introduced over the past 12 months.
- 1.3 We welcome feedback on this report and remain committed to providing the best possible planning service that we can.



Cllr Denis Owens
Chair of Planning Committee



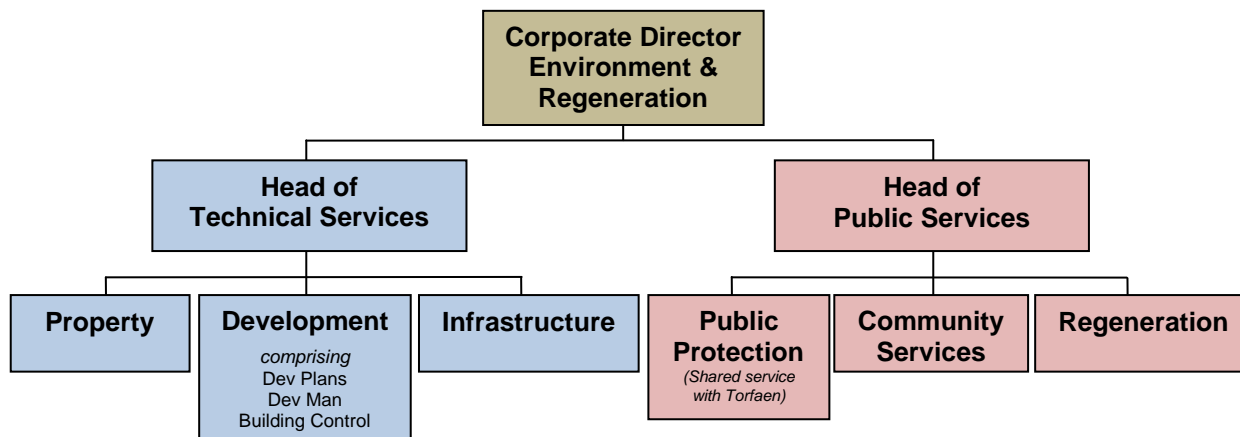
Cllr Jim McIlwee
**Executive Member for Economy,
Infrastructure & Active Living**

2.0 CONTEXT

- 2.1 This section sets out the planning context within which the local planning authority operates. The report covers the financial period 2015/16 when dealing with PI and budgetary data. However when discussing issues faced by the service, it deals with contemporary matters.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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 (2011) suggests that Blaenau Gwent’s population is expected to continue to marginally reduce from 69,812 in 2011 to 69,401 in 2021.
- 2.6 Ebbw Vale remains the key settlement 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.

3.0 THE PLANNING SERVICE

3.1 The planning service sits within the Environment and Development Department, specifically the Technical Services Division as shown below.



3.2 The officer responsible for the planning service is the Service Manager Development. He in turn reports to the Head of Technical Services and the Corporate Director. The development team is now co-located with the remainder of Technical Services on floor 1a of the Civic Centre having recently completed its move from a satellite office. The floor is shared with the Infrastructure team that includes key personnel to planning and building control such as the highways officers, drainage, geotechnical and structures teams. With the in-house architects team on the floor above and regen and environmental health colleagues already in the Civic Centre we are starting to enjoy the benefits of having consultees and other complementary services in the same building.

3.3 The Blaenau Gwent Local Development Plan was adopted in 2012. It is a key corporate document and assists the Council in meeting the aspirations and objectives in its Single Integrated Plan (SIP). That strategic document identifies key themes focusing on helping communities to be sustainable in all senses of the word. The LPA has a key role to play in enabling these priorities to be met through the LDP and decisions taken in respect of planning applications.

3.4 Planning Committee is autonomous in the sense that DM issues are constitutionally under its responsibility whereas planning policy is a function of the Executive Member for Economy, Infrastructure and Active Living . The Planning Committee meets on a monthly cycle to consider development management issues. However, Planning Committee also occasionally considers

reports relating to the LDP and SPG's, fulfilling a pre-scrutiny role. Its support for policy documents is often sought prior to the formal adoption route via the Scrutiny Committee and Executive/Council.

- 3.5 Development Management (DM) delegation scheme is considered to work reasonably well. In 15/16, 89% of applications were decided by planning officers under delegated powers. The remaining 11% were decided by Planning Committee. The extent of delegation achieves a reasonable balance with the Member call in option available to all Councillors provided they cite legitimate and material planning reasons. The level of delegation is however below many other Welsh LPA's, particularly those who are consistently in the top quartile of the performance table. The scheme is in need of updating but with the national scheme of delegation on the horizon, the decision has been taken to await that eventuality rather than dedicate limited officer time and capacity to revising it now.
- 3.6 One related concern is that once a national scheme of delegation is in place, the threshold for presenting applications to Committee will be set at a point that results in very few applications appearing on the agenda. This may result in meetings frequently being cancelled for want of meaningful business. We may need to consider convening Planning Committee meetings on an ad hoc basis and abandon a schedule of monthly meetings.
- 3.7 The Planning Committee is occasionally the subject of webcasting. Overall, the experience of this Council has been a positive one. The broadcasting service is bought in from an external provider with Planning Committee allocated a set number of meetings to be published on the website. Hit rates are understood to compare well with other Council meetings that have been webcast. Developers have expressed the view that it enables them to view the Committee debate without the spending the time and expense of travelling to the Borough. It also helps to make local government transparent. However, it is understood that funding for this initiative is unlikely to continue being a victim of the austerity savings.

4.0 BUDGET

4.1 The challenging financial climate impacts on the service. This is direct via budgetary cuts and indirect given the inactivity in the development industry in the area. This is not as active as other parts of Wales such as the M4 corridor. The negative income balance reported in last year's APR continues.

	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Budgeted Income	£373,320	£380,790	£388,410	£388,410	£388,410	£279,731	£279,731
Actual Income	£202,545	£299,639	£180,570	£288,584	£341,431	£246,821	£254,210
Deficit	-£170,775	-£81,151	-£207,840	-£99,826	-£46,979	-£32,910	-£25,521

4.2 The income estimate is set by the Corporate Director Resources. This is derived from the previous year with an inflationary element added and does not account for historical trends, economic outlook or potential projects in the pipeline. With development rates in the Borough low, particularly amongst volume housebuilders, fee income is unlikely to reach the estimates any time soon. This results in a year on year deficit which is wholly outside the control of the service to influence. The recent modest planning fee increase introduced by WG will not bridge this gap.

4.3 Our local preliminary enquiry scheme pre-dates the new mandatory national initiative and is cheaper and more comprehensive in terms of the service offered. For that reason, we have yet to receive any enquiries under the WG mandatory scheme. In 2016, we revised the local charging schedule with a small increase in some charges. Income was circa £5k.

4.4 The budget for the LDP (excluding staff costs) is less than £7k pa. Recent SEWSPG estimates are that the production of an LDP costs £500k+. To help address this future financial cost pressure we have agreed with the Chief Finance Officer that any underspends can be "saved" in readiness.

4.5 The service appears as an "overspending" committee/portfolio on an annual basis. Given that supplies and services budgets are relatively insignificant, the only means to reduce this deficit is with staff the development industry

recovers in the Heads of the Valleys area. It is therefore likely that the planning service will continue to operate below required income levels for the foreseeable future.

- 4.6 The issue of staffing will be discussed later but I make the point here that post numbers are already 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. However, even in that scenario it is unclear what cashable savings could be achieved beyond the obvious items like IT procurement. Given that we currently use different back office, GIS and EDM systems, even that must be in doubt when one considers the high level of investment required to amalgamate these systems.
- 4.7 Colleagues in environmental health and trading standards have already “merged” with their counterparts in Torfaen and now operate under a common head of service. In planning, we are already in preliminary talks with other LPA’s around joint working to produce a new LDP. The impact of regional planning in the form of the new mandatory SDP and in turn the influence of City Deal introduces further uncertainty as well as opportunity.
- 4.8 The Council is committed to greater collaboration. We are a member of SEWSPG (the Development Plans Manager is currently Treasurer). The DM team continues to build relationships with neighbouring LPA’s. We are part of the South Wales DM Managers group. We have also taken an active role in an informal Gwent DM group that formed with the aspiration of introducing an element of consistency in response to the DM legislative and procedural changes of the last 12-18 months. Lastly, we are also part of the newly formed POS-SEW which is proving a valuable forum for south east Wales LPA’s who also attend POSW.
- 4.7 In terms of savings, we achieved our target for 15/16. This was largely due to the retirement of the Building Control Manager. As a result, the Development Plans Manager has now assumed responsibility for the building control team in addition to her development plan work.

5.0 STAFFING

5.1 There have been three significant issues affecting the Development team.

- i. **Business Support** – the Council has elected to pool technical and administrative staff across departments into a central team. DM “lost” two members of staff and Building Control one. Administrative support for these services along with the Development Plans team is now carried out by the Environment Business Support Hub. It is early days and whilst there have been some teething issues, the service is operating reasonably well. However, there remain some logistical and technical challenges to overcome.
- ii. **Accommodation change** – DM, Development Plans and Building Control moved from Blaina District Office to the Civic Centre in June 2016. We are now co-located with the rest of the Tech Services Division. This is facilitating more day to day contact between operational staff. We have been allocated a 7:10 desk ratio and to date this is satisfactory.
- iii. **Agile Working** – although introduced some time ago, it is now fully embedded. Staff are allocated a laptop and elect to work from home or other Council base when appropriate. This has presented management and supervisory challenges to cater for this change.

5.2 The Development Plans team consists of the equivalent of 3 FTE’s; the team manager (who also manages Building Control), principal planning officer, heritage officer and a planning assistant. The team manager has recently returned from a long term absence and the principal officer is now on maternity leave. This has placed significant strain on the service. However Corporate Management Team recently approved the appointment of a short term appointment to ensure that the statutory review of the LDP is completed, despite a moratorium on recruitment.

5.3 During 2016, the Heritage Officer re-joined the Council. He was part of the Leisure Department that was externalised to a Trust some years ago. He has now joined the Development Plans team bringing much needed expertise in areas of listed buildings, archaeology and heritage “in house”. He also advises the DM team in cases of listed building consent, archaeology issues and enforcement.

- 5.4 In DM, the biggest operational challenge has been around the re-location of the two administrative staff to Business Support. As in many technical disciplines, these staff carry out far more than simple administrative tasks. They deal with routine enquires and screen a lot of calls from reaching professional staff. They are also key to the efficiency of the development management process. They are responsible for the registration of details into the back office system at the front end and issuing decision notices once cases are signed off. The impact of the re-location has been minimised through continual dialogue and the professionalism of staff to ensure that the system is fit for purpose. It is hoped that the benefits of creating a central administrative resource are fully realised in the future. There are still challenges to meet around the layout of the Civic Centre and the functionality of its reception area facilities.
- 5.5 Being a small LPA, it is impractical for staff to specialise in technical topic areas. We do not have the benefit of a dedicated GIS officer, s106 or appeals officer for example. Staff are required to deal with a full range of cases and training is organised on an ad hoc basis as courses and a budget become available. This LPA has recently seen its fair share of energy related applications; turbines and gas/diesel electricity plants. The DM Manager and two team leaders have responded well to these challenges and dealt with applications efficiently and professionally. We are now facing the prospect of two DNS schemes although both are presently at a very early stage.
- 5.6 Under the supervision of the DM team Manager, the DM team is split into two teams; East and West. Each area team is headed by a Principal Officer and includes a Technician and Compliance Officer. The West team has two planning Officers and the East team one. Of this total of 9 officers, 2 are in reduced hours and another was absent for a year on maternity leave (returning August 16). It is anticipated that the next 12 months will see more officers prematurely amending their contractual hours.

6.0 OUR LOCAL STORY

6.1 Development Plans

6.2 The Development Plans team has concentrated its efforts on preparing the AMR which incorporates significant effort in terms of gathering data; carrying out annual surveys of retail, employment and housing; and undertaking the Joint Housing Land Availability Study. The AMR was prepared and submitted to WG on time.

6.4 Other work undertaken includes the approval of 3 SPG's with a further 2 updated to reflect LDP policy. Five further SPG's are being prepared / updated. One of these is a local list of Historic Buildings which is a significant piece of work that is being undertaken by the Heritage Officer.

6.5 To promote development marketing sheets have been prepared and uploaded to the website for all housing and employment allocations. The Council has revamped its website to make it more user friendly. This involved significant officer time due to the amount of LDP information on the website. The Team also reviewed how it responds to planning applications to ensure efficiency of effort in light of the increased work that will be involved as a result of the need to review the LDP. A review report must be prepared and submitted to WG by May 2017.

6.6 The Team has prepared for the forthcoming LDP review but this work now needs to be reviewed in light of decisions being taken regionally and possible joint working opportunities. The City Region Board and SEWDER are due to take a decision on how LPA's in Wales should move forward in terms of Plan preparation. Although the preferred option of WG is for LPA's to continue with reviews of their LDPs the preferred option being considered is a SDP and "light touch" LDP. For the time being, there is uncertainty on how we should proceed. Added to this there are discussions taking place with neighbouring LPA's in terms of joint working on background work for the SDP and light touch LDP's.

6.7 Development Management

6.8 In the DM team the early part of the period covered by this AMR was focussed around the Circuit of Wales. Significant officer time was invested in working with the developer's consultancy team to discharge conditions and address s106 issues to enable the submission of Reserved Matters applications and to

permit pre-enabling works to start on site. However, due to financial “due diligence” issues being unresolved, this work has now ceased. We are in a state of readiness to recommence this work should the financial side of the project be resolved.

- 6.9 During the year, DM work was characterised by two main issues. Firstly, the number of energy related applications. These compromised back up energy plants (diesel and gas) on our industrial estates. Secondly, the introduction of new DM processes. The changes around discharge of conditions, live decision notices, invalidation notices and enforcement (amongst others) were introduced in a compressed timeline. Given the previously mentioned Business Support initiative that relocated admin/technical staff coinciding with these changes, this placed logistical and practical difficulties.
- 6.10 Having acknowledged the challenges, we must recognise that the volume of work is presently manageable. Caseloads per officer are at reasonable levels. It is rather the increasing complexity of the process rather than sheer number of cases that is presenting challenge. Major application work is at the time of writing, low. We have two DNS schemes at an early stage but volume housebuilding is extremely low. Appeal work is manageable.
- 6.11 In enforcement, the number of investigations remains relatively high. We do not have the resources to monitor any development sites for compliance with permissions or discharge of conditions. All proactive enforcement has ceased. Enforcement work is purely reactive; we investigate complaints only. This is regrettable but now commonplace in Welsh LPA’s. The compliance officers divide their time between investigating complaints of breaches and dealing with some discharge of condition applications.
- 6.12 The Development team are currently involved in two important departmental pieces of work. Firstly, the Ebbw Vale Innovation Corridor (EVIC). This is a large tract of land stretching from the A465 south to The Works. It incorporates a number of major business and residential allocations and key to the continued regeneration of Ebbw Vale and Blaenau Gwent. The Environment Department has set up a cross discipline team based approach looking at issues. The aim is to act as a catalyst to stimulate development.
- 6.13 Colleagues from appropriate teams are heading sub groups and are looking at issues around housing, town centres, infrastructure, the Enterprise Zone (inc Circuit of Wales) and The Works. The Service Manager Development attends

meetings in the role of quality assurance/critical friend. Planning issues are therefore brought to the table at a very early stage as the project areas are developed. These issues are brought back to the team managers of Development Plans and Development Management to address any specific issues in their areas of responsibility.

- 6.14 The second piece of work is around the Enterprise Zone. We are in discussions with Regeneration colleagues about designating a SPZ and/or LDO. This approach was previously discounted in favour of an alternative issues based approach. We are now looking at this anew.
- 6.15 During early 2016, we held our first workshop with local agents. It was a joint meeting covering Development Plans and DM issues. It proved to be a useful forum to discuss issues with the regular agents active in the Borough. It is hoped to convene another meeting next year
- 6.16 We are currently seeking to comply with the new Welsh language requirements.

7.0 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

7.1 Last year's APR contained 8 areas identified as being priority to improve the service. Each of these issues is discussed below.

7.2 Priority 1: Meet the challenge of legislative change

Response: The volume and breadth of change has been significant. It also happened at a time of considerable internal reorganisation whilst the Council created its Business Support unit and to an extent accommodation change as we moved offices. Subject to a few teething issues, the service has responded well to the change in process and approach. This is testimony to the professionalism and flexibility of staff to change working methods to suit the service. The full impact of some changes such as "live" decision notices is yet to be fully realised.

Status: Achieved and ongoing.

7.3 Priority 2: Address I.T. weaknesses

Response: This remains an area where little progress has been made. Whilst individually, officers are enabled to work agile with everyone issued a laptop with all relevant software pre-loaded, the lack of a usable public interface on the Council's website remains a concern. There has been improvement in the Development Plans web presence but not with DM planning applications. It has been previously highlighted by WG and now appears on the national "performance dashboard". The criticism is fully acknowledged and we continue to receive periodic complaints about the lack of a searchable register and that application details are not uploaded to the site. However, budgetary constraints at a corporate level and the reorganisation of the IT service into the regional SRS have not helped in delivering this part of the service. It is frustrating as the planning service is ready to go live. We will continue to strive for this to be delivered before the next APR.

Status: Not achieved

7.4 Priority 3: Consolidate DM performance

Response: Subject to some issues, DM performance against PI's has been strong and the customer feedback broadly positive. We will strive to deal with the issues raised by any negative feedback.

Status: Achieved.

7.5 Priority 4: Prepare for a full LDP review

Response: Preparations have been disrupted by the two main officer's responsible being away from work; one on maternity and the other on a long

term absence. However, despite the corporate moratorium on new appointments, the Council recognised the need to fulfil its statutory obligation to deliver the LDP review and we have now appointed a temporary officer experienced in this area of work. We have also agreed with Finance that any minor underspends in budgets can be hypothecated for future LDP work given the existing very modest budget.

Status: Achieved and ongoing.

7.6 *Priority 5: To work in collaboration with private/public sector partners to stimulate development.*

Response: Efforts are being concentrated on the Ebbw Vale area bringing together a number of major mixed use regeneration projects (Ebbw Vale Sustainable Framework (MU1) The Works (MU2)), Enterprise Zone sites, Town Centre Improvements and the Circuit of Wales. The new overarching Programme provides an efficient joined up approach to these existing projects maximising positive regeneration outcomes and benefits. New management arrangements have introduced a new level of co-ordination and challenge for delivery of key work packages. Progress has been made in terms of working with RSL's on an innovative scheme to build a mix of private and affordable homes at the former Secondary School site at Ebbw Vale. Terms of reference have been put in place enabling site investigations to proceed. Unfortunately planned discussions with the private sector regarding The Works site has been delayed due to NRW issues with the Flood Consequence Assessment. To assist in delivering LDP allocation marketing sheets have been produced to promote housing and employment sites. These have been placed on the Council's website.

Status: Progress made. Work ongoing.

7.7 *Priority 6: Meet timescales for delivery of Circuit of Wales.*

Response: To date all timescales have been met. However for reasons outside of land use planning, the scheme is currently in a period of stasis. As a planning service and indeed a Council we must be in a position to respond to any change in circumstances at short notice. Most planning conditions required to be discharged to enable reserved matters submission have been approved. Some obligations have been addressed and discussions around addressing others well advanced. However, re-starting the planning process will be a complex one and likely to be challenging in terms of timescales. There are also technical issues such as the seasonal requirements of some conditions to address.

Status: Achieved.

7.8 *Priority 7: Comply with the Council's transformation agenda and continue with a robust and suitable frontline service.*

Response: To date, all savings targets have been met. Service performance has been good.

Status: Complete.

7.9 *Priority 8: Address logistical difficulties from the relocation of staff in administration and any office accommodation move.*

Response: Achieved.

Status: Complete

7.10 Looking forward to the next 12 months, the following issues are identified as priorities.

- Complete the LDP review.
- Develop closer links with neighbouring LPA's (Dev Plan and DM) to maximise opportunities from collaboration in terms of service improvements and efficiencies.
- Deliver on the IT improvements including developing a functional website for public access to search registers and to view part 1 applications.
- Address archiving issues, scanning and file management.
- Maintain satisfactory performance against PI's and the dashboard given the reduction in staff capacity.
- Meet efficiency savings target.

8.0 WHAT SERVICE USERS THINK

- 8.1 In 2015-16 we conducted a customer satisfaction survey to obtain the views of people that had received a planning decision during the year.
- 8.2 The survey was sent to 157 people, 17% of whom submitted a whole or partial response. The majority of responses (52%) were from local agents and 41% from members of the public. 4% of respondents had their most recent planning application refused.
- 8.3 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.
- 8.4 Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents that selected either 'tend to agree' or 'strongly agree' for each statement for both Blaenau Gwent and Wales. It is pleasing to note that BGCBC surpassed the all Wales average in every category.

Figure 1:

Percentage of Respondents who agreed with each statement 2015-16

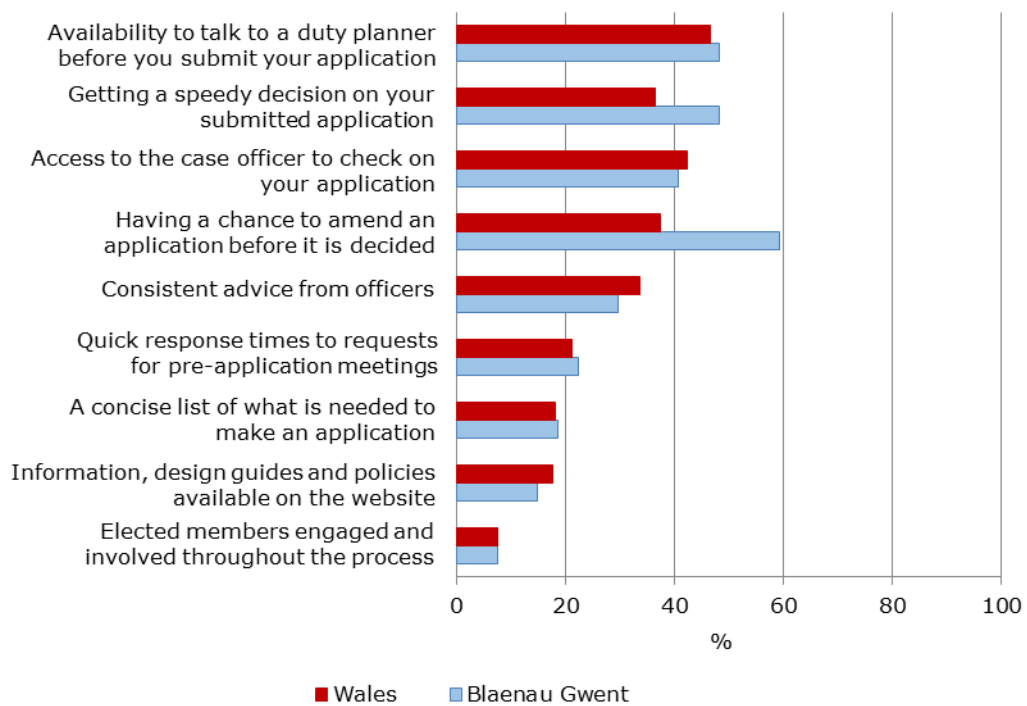
Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	Blaenau Gwent	Wales
The LPA enforces its planning rules fairly and consistently	52	47
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	80	58
The LPA gives help throughout, including with conditions	75	49
The LPA responded promptly when they had questions	75	58
They were listened to about their application	83	57
They were kept informed about their application	61	49
They were satisfied overall with how the LPA handled the application	77	61

- 8.5 We also asked respondents to select three planning service characteristics from a list that they thought would most help them achieve successful developments. Figure 2 below shows how often each characteristic was selected as a percentage of the total number of selections. For BGCBC, *'having*

a chance to amend an application before it is decided' was the most popular choice.

Figure 2:

Characteristics of a good planning service: Blaenau Gwent 2015-16



8.6 Comments received include:

“Planning authority is good but local members interfere with process”

“Staff tended to be helpful but would not give concise advice”

“The LPA officers were helpful, positive, available and pro-active. The decision was quick and the conditions/amendments dealt with equally efficiently. All in all, a positive and painless procedure.”

9.0 OUR PERFORMANCE 2015-16

9.1 This section details our performance in 2015-16. 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.

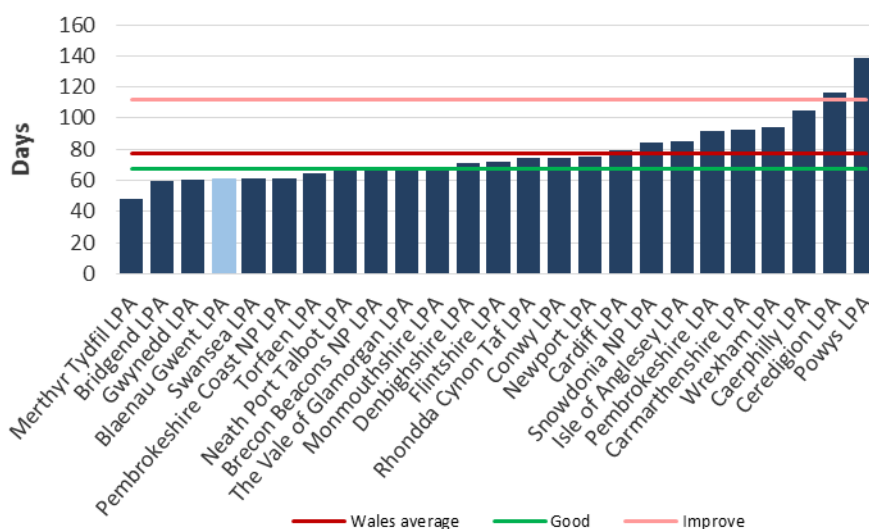
9.2 **Plan Making:** At 31 March 2016, we were 1 of 22 LPAs that had a current development plan in place. We were required to submit an Annual Monitoring Report in Oct 2016. This document has been submitted to WG on time.

9.3 During the APR period, we had less than 2 years housing land supply identified, making us one of 17 Welsh LPAs without the required 5 years supply.

9.4 **Efficiency:** In 2015-16 we determined 362 planning applications, each taking, on average, 61 days (9 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, 2015-16

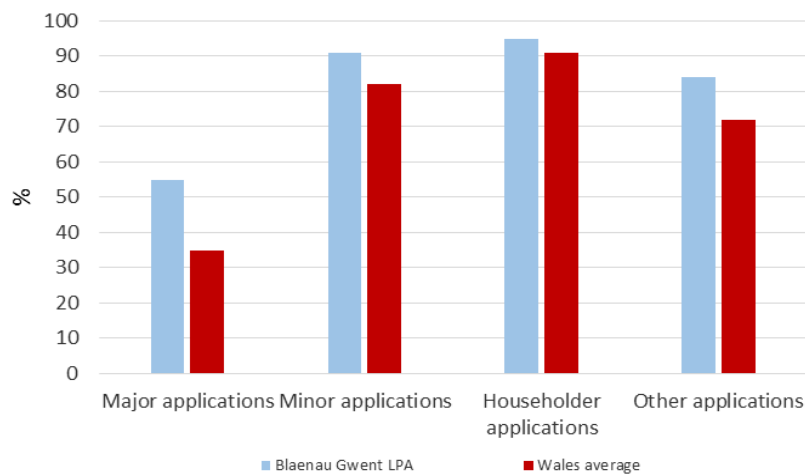


9.6 In BGCBC, 87% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. This was the fourth best return in Wales. We were one of only 8 LPAs that bettered the 80% target.

9.7 Figure 4 shows the percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales across the four main types of application for our LPA and Wales. It shows that we determined 95% of householder applications within the required timescales.

Figure 4:

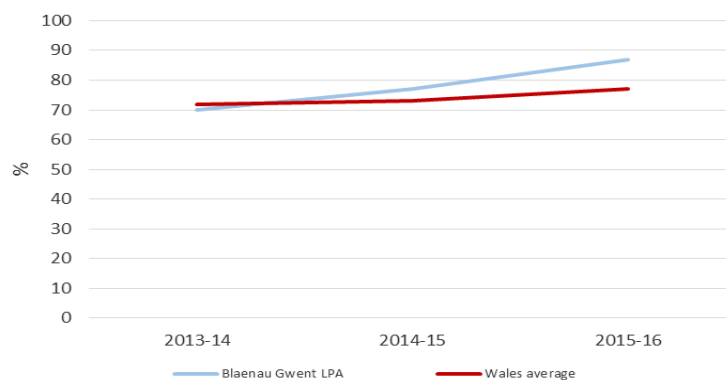
Percentage of planning applications determined within required timescales, by type, 2015-16



9.8 Between 2014-15 and 2015-16, as Figure 5 below shows, the percentage of planning applications we determined within the required timescales increased from 77% to 87%. Wales also saw an increase this year.

Figure 5:

Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales



9.9 Over the same period:

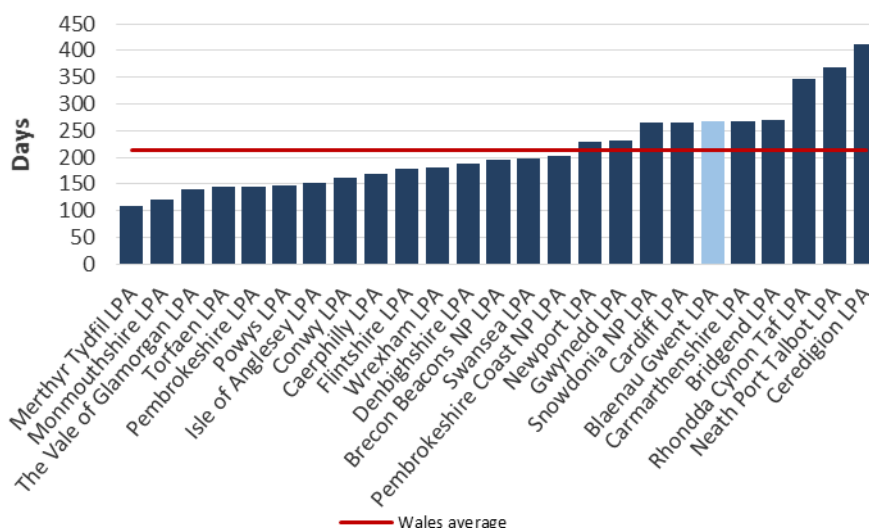
- The number of applications we received decreased;
- The number of applications we determined decreased; and
- The number of applications we approved decreased.

9.10 **Major applications**

9.11 We determined 11 major planning applications in 2015-16, none of which were subject to an EIA. Each application took, on average, 267 days (38 weeks) to determine. As Figure 6 below illustrates, this was longer than the Wales average of 213 days (30 weeks).

Figure 6:

Average time (days) taken to determine a major application, 2015-16

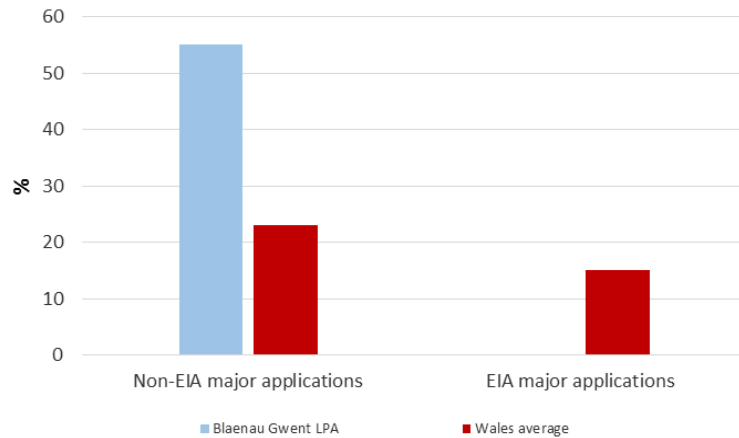


9.12 55% of these major applications were determined within the required timescales, the fourth highest percentage of all Welsh LPAs.

9.13 Figure 7 overleaf shows the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales by the type of major application. 55% 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, 2015-16

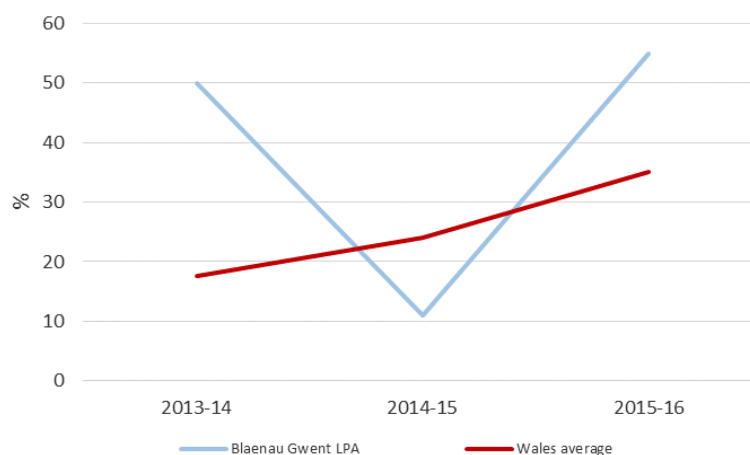


9.14 Since 2014-15 the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales had increased from 11% to 55%.

9.15 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



9.16 Over the same, the following positive trends are noted:

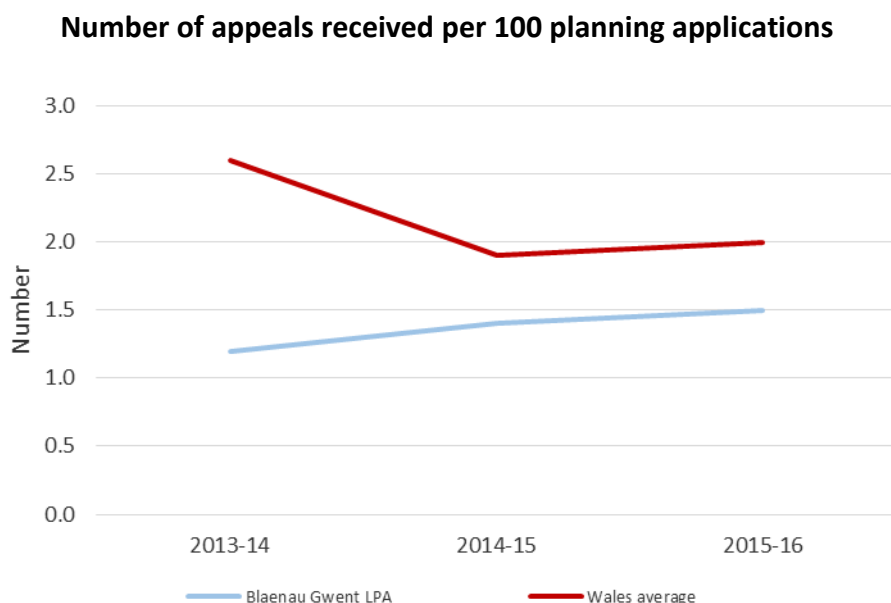
- The percentage of minor applications determined within the required timescales increased from 76% to 91%;
- The percentage of householder applications determined within the required timescales increased from 88% to 95%; and
- The percentage of other applications determined within required timescales increased from 83% to 84%.

9.17 **Quality:** In 2015-16, our Planning Committee made 37 planning application decisions during the year, which equated to 11% of all planning applications determined. Across Wales 7% of all planning application decisions were made by Planning Committee.

9.18 11% of these member-made decisions went against officer advice. This compared to 9% of member-made decisions across Wales. This equated to 1.1% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice compared to 0.6% across Wales.

9.19 In 2015-16 we received 6 appeals against our planning decisions, which equated to 1.5 appeals for every 100 applications received. Across Wales 2 appeals were received for every 100 applications. Figure 9 shows how the volume of appeals received has changed since 2014-15 and how this compares to Wales.

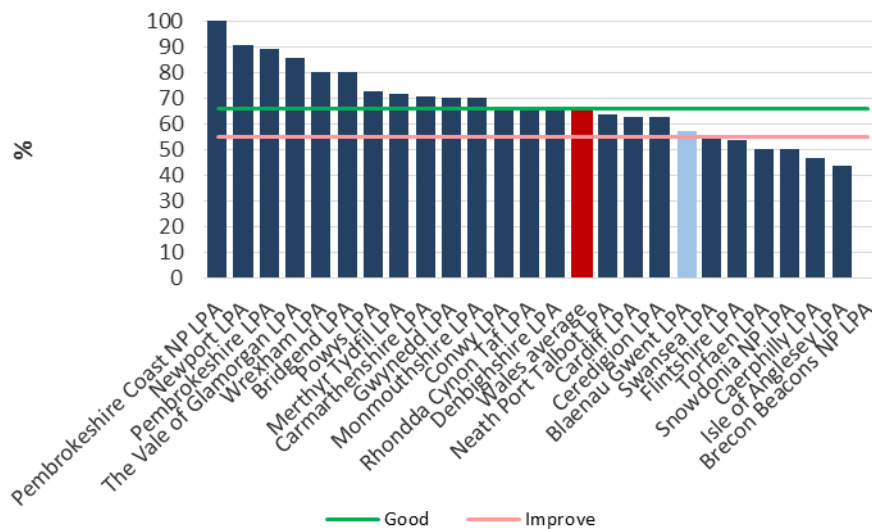
Figure 9:



9.21 Over the same period the percentage of planning applications approved decreased from 96% to 86%.

9.22 Of the 7 appeals that were decided during the year, 57% 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, 2015-16



9.23 During 2015-16 we had no applications for costs against us at a section 78 appeal upheld.

9.24 **Engagement:** On a positive note, we are one of 24 LPAs that allowed members of the public to address the Planning Committee. Conversely, we are one of only 3 LPAs that did not have an online register of planning applications.

9.25 As Figure 11 shows, 80% of respondents to our 2015-16 customer satisfaction survey agreed that the LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application.

Figure 11 :
Feedback from our 2015-16 customer satisfaction survey

Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	Blaenau Gwent	Wales
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	80	58
They were listened to about their application	83	57

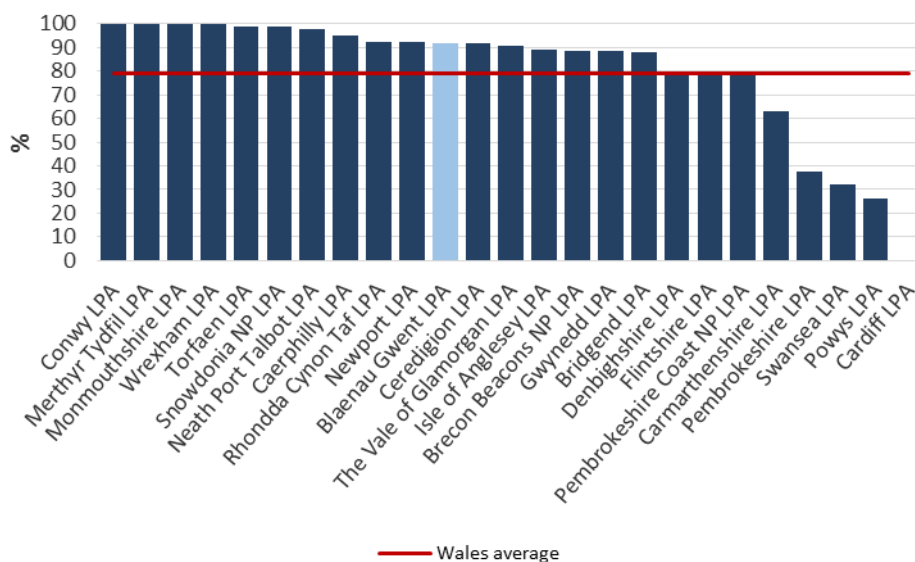
9.27 Enforcement: In 2015-16, we investigated 146 enforcement cases, which equated to 2.1 per 1,000 population. This compared to 1.9 enforcement cases investigated per 1,000 population across Wales. We took, on average, 36 days to investigate each enforcement case.

9.29 We investigated 92% of these enforcement cases within 84 days which better than the all Wales return of 79%.

9.30 Figure 11 shows the percentage of enforcement cases that were investigated within 84 days across all Welsh LPAs.

Figure 11:

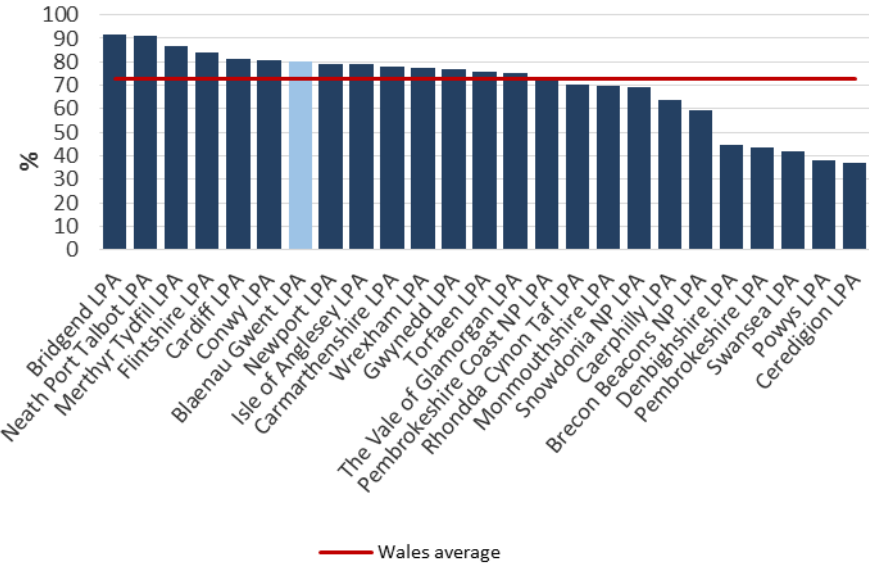
Percentage of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days, 2015-16



9.30 Over the same period, we resolved 186 enforcement cases, taking, on average, 103 days to resolve each case.

9.31 80% of this enforcement action was taken within 180 days from the start of the case. As Figure 12 shows this compared to 73% of enforcement cases resolved within 180 days across Wales.

Figure 12:
Percentage of enforcement cases resolved in 180 days, 2015-16



ANNEX 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 the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	<12	13-17	18+
Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	Yes		No
The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	>5		<5
Efficiency			
Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	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	4.9-8.9	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 authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to the public?	Yes		No
Does the LPA web site have an online register of planning app's, which members of the public can access, track their progress and view their content?	Yes	Partial	No
Enforcement			
Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percent of enforcement cases where enf action is taken or retrospective app granted <180 days from 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
47	N/A	N/A
Yes	Yes	Yes
3.9	2.6	1.35
35	11	55
213	55	267
77	77	87
77	55	61
9	13	11
66	75	57
0	0	0
Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	No	No
79	82	92
88	9	36
73	53	80
210	133	103

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 dev plan is in place (including where the plan has expired)
BGCBC performance	Yes	
LDP adopted 2012. The 4 year review process about to commence.		

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
BGCBC performance	N/A	
LDP adopted 2012.		

Indicator 03	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
BGCBC performance	Yes	
All AMR’s since adoption have been submitted to WG on time.		

Indicator 04	The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	
"Good"		"Improvement needed"
The authority has a housing land supply of more than 5 years		The authority has a housing land supply of less than 5 years
BGCBC performance	1.35 years	
<p>The issue in Blaenau Gwent is not with the supply of land but the reluctance of developers to build due to the recession, concerns over viability and a lack of confidence in the market.</p> <p>The residual method means that under performance to date is built up to be delivered in the remaining 5 years of the Plan. This results in us having an extremely high build rate (nearly 500) which is unachievable.</p> <p>If past build rates were used to identify the 5-year supply Blaenau Gwent would have a healthy 6 years supply.</p> <p>It is the firm view of this LPA that this issue needs urgent consideration by WG. It is undermining the plan led system.</p>		

SECTION 2 - EFFICIENCY

Indicator 05	Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked
BGCBC performance	55	
<p>This return relates to 11 applications. Many of these were of a highly technical nature. We will look to improve performance in this area.</p>		

Indicator 06	Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days.	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked
BGCBC performance	267 Days	
<p>BGCBC return of 267 days compares to an all Wales figure of 213 days. We will look to improve performance in this area.</p>		

Indicator 07	Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
More than 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Between 60% and 80% of applications determined within the statutory time period	Less than 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period
BGCBC performance	87%	
<p>This figure of 87% is above the all Wales return and the 4th best from an LPA in Wales. However, we recognise there is room for improvement.</p>		

Indicator 08	Average time taken to determine all applications in days	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Less than 67 days	Between 67 and 111 days	112 days or more
BGCBC performance	61 Days	
<p>BGCBC return of 61 days is well below the all Wales average of 77 days.</p>		

SECTION 3 - QUALITY

Indicator 09	Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Less than 5% of decisions	Between 5% and 9% of decisions	9% or more of decisions
BGCBC performance	11%	
<p>It is acknowledged that this figure marginally exceeds the RAG threshold and improvement is needed. The issue of member decisions was the subject of a specific member training session last year and it continues to be highlighted in the Council Chamber as DM Quarterly performance figures are routinely reported to Members.</p> <p>One contributory factor has been the interpretation of a town centre policy that designated core retail areas in each town centre within which non A1 uses would be resisted. This has proved a difficult policy to implement as some shops in the smaller centres e.g. Brynmawr have had vacant premises coming forward with A2 schemes which would be acceptable elsewhere in the town centres outwith of the retail core areas. This policy is likely to be the subject of consideration as part of the LDP review.</p>		

Indicator 10	Percentage of appeals dismissed	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
More than 66% (two thirds) of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal	Between 55% and 66% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal	Less than 55% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal
BGCBC performance	57%	
<p>The appeal cohort is very small and it would be inappropriate to draw meaningful conclusions. It is only a snapshot from one year. However, one appeal was allowed when planning permission was refused on design grounds. This was disappointing when the LPA is seeking to improve the standard of development.</p>		

Indicator 11	Applications for costs at S78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
The LPA has not had costs awarded against it at appeal	The LPA has had costs awarded against it in one appeal	The LPA has had costs awarded against it in 2 or more appeals
BGCBC performance	ZERO	
<p>There were no award of costs against this LPA in the period.</p>		

SECTION 4 – ENGAGEMENT

Indicator 12	Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?	
“Good”		“Improvement needed”
Members of the public are able to address the Planning Committee		The public are not able to address Planning Committee
BGCBC performance	Yes	
<p>We have a long standing public speaking policy at Planning Committee.</p>		

Indicator 13	Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	
“Good”		“Improvement needed”
The public can seek advice from a duty planning officer		There is no duty planning officer available
BGCBC performance	Yes	
We have operated a duty officer system for a number of years.		

Indicator 14	Does the local planning authority’s web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access track their progress (and view their content)?	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
All documents are available online	Only the planning application details available online, and access to other documents must be sought directly	No planning application information is published online
BGCBC	No	
This was highlighted in last year’s APR as a priority and it remains so. This issue is discussed within this APR.		

SECTION 5 – ENFORCEMENT

Indicator 15	Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enf action is expedient) within 84 days	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked
BGCBC performance	92	
This percentage figure is above the all Wales return.		

Indicator 16	Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked
BGCBC performance	36 Days	
Given resources, this is a satisfactory return.		

Indicator 17	% of enforcement cases where enforcement action is taken or a retrospective application granted within 180 days from the start of the case (in those cases where it was expedient to enforce)	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked
BGCBC performance	80%	
This percentage figure is above the all Wales return.		

Indicator 18	Average time taken to take enforcement action	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked
Authority’s performance	103 Days	
Given resources, this is a satisfactory return.		

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.

BGCBC return	100% - the BGCBC return was complete.
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Indicator SD1	The floorspace (square metres) granted and refused planning permission for new economic development on allocated employment sites during the year.
Granted (square metres)	
BGCBC data	558
Refused (square metres)	
BGCBC data	0
<p>Progress in terms of the granting of economic development on allocated employment sites is been well behind targets. The LDP identifies 50 ha of development land and only 0.2 ha has been developed to date.</p> <p>Notwithstanding this progress in terms of employment land provision on existing employment sites is far more positive with 32,035sqm built between 2006 and 2016.</p> <p>The fact that there have been no refusals is also a positive.</p>	

Indicator SD2	Planning permission granted for renewable and low carbon energy development during the year.
Granted permission (number of applications)	
BGCBC data	1
Granted permission (MW energy generation)	
BGCBC data	0
<p>Blaenau Gwent has granted a number of renewable and low carbon energy developments since the adoption of the LDP including: wind turbines, photovoltaic panels, combined heat and power plants and a biomass boiler. Though no target was set in the Plan installed capacity between 2013 and 2016 has totalled 5.23MW.</p> <p>The 0.5MW granted this year will enable us to continue to contribute towards national targets.</p>	
Indicator SD3	The number of dwellings granted planning permission during

	the year.
Market housing (number of units)	
BGCBC data	52
Affordable housing (number of units)	
BGCBC data	39
<p>With 91 dwellings granted this is in line with past completion rates achieved but below the LDP annual target of 233 dwellings which need to be completed every year. In terms of the percentage of affordable housing at 43% this is higher than the LDP requirement of 29% of the 3,500 units needed. However, a figure of 39 per year is below the 66 per year set out in the Plan.</p>	

Indicator SD4	Planning permission granted and refused for development in C1 and C2 floodplain areas during the year.
Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that DID NOT meet all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission	
BGCBC data	0
Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that did not meet all TAN 15 tests which were REFUSED permission on flood risk grounds	
BGCBC data	0
Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that MET all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission	
BGCBC data	0
<p>There have been no planning applications for development in C1 and C2 flood risk areas.</p>	

Indicator SD5	The area of land (ha) granted planning permission for new development on previously developed land and greenfield land during the year.
Previously developed land (hectares)	
BGCBC data	6
Greenfield land (hectares)	
BGCBC data	3
<p>At 50% development on previously developed land this falls well below the 80% target in the LDP.</p>	

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.
Open space lost (hectares)	
BGCBC data	0
Open space gained (hectares)	
BGCBC data	0
<p>Whilst no loss of public open space is positive the aim of the LDP is to increase provision in order to work towards the FiT standard.</p>	

Indicator SD7	The total financial contributions (£) agreed from new development granted planning permission during the quarter for the provision of community infrastructure.
Gained via Section 106 agreements (£)	
BGCBC data	0
Gained via Community Infrastructure Levy (£)	
BGCBC data	ZERO
<p>BGCBC has taken the decision not to introduce a CIL.</p>	