

SUBJECT: MONMOUTHSHIRE PLANNING SERVICE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR)
MEETING: PERFORMANCE & OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE
DATE: 21 NOVEMBER 2022
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide the committee with a report on the performance of the Council's Planning Service for the financial year period **2021-22**.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

- 2.1 To scrutinise the contents of the Planning Service's Annual Performance Report 2021/22 prior to its endorsement by the Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Economy and Deputy Leader on 30th November 2022 for submission to the Welsh Government .

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Welsh Government(WG) normally requires all Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in Wales to submit an Annual Performance Report for the planning service by the end of October each year (albeit that this requirement was relaxed during the reporting periods affected by the Covid pandemic). This requirement links with the Planning (Wales) Act 2015, and the Welsh Government's objective of creating a positive and enabling planning service. The Act included new powers for the Welsh Government to intervene, including removing planning powers from a Local Planning Authority, requiring the preparation of joint Local Development Plans (LDPs), or requiring the merger of LPAs.
- 3.2 This is the eighth Annual Performance Report (APR). All previous APRs were reported to the former Economy & Development Select Committee (with Planning Committee Members also invited). The report to a scrutiny committee provides the opportunity to review and discuss performance and was welcomed by that Committee, with a request that it become an annual item.
- 3.3 The APR looks at the performance of the Planning Service against nationally set performance indicators, Welsh Government (WG) targets, the Wales average performance, and Monmouthshire's performance over the previous year. The results are considered in the context of the challenges, opportunities, priorities and resources (staffing and financial) available. The objective of the APR is to reflect on and celebrate good performance, identify areas for improvement, and look across Wales to identify potential areas of best practice that Monmouthshire could learn from or share with others. As mentioned above, owing to the impact of the pandemic over the previous two years there was no requirement from WG to submit an APR and no all Wales comparative data has been provided as is normally done. Unfortunately, this year WG have been unable to provide the benchmarking figures to enable the council to review its current status against the Wales average therefore within the APR we have reverted back to the last all year figures we had in 2018/19.

This is unfortunate as the comparison being made is not accurate or reflective of the status of planning services across Wales during 2021/22. Issues such as the continued impact of the pandemic, resources limitations and environmental considerations such as water quality in rivers would have an impact on Local Planning Authorities across Wales therefore the comparison is flawed. Despite that, Monmouthshire's Planning Service decided to continue to commit to submitting an APR but had to base the assessment of our performance over those two years against the Welsh average in 2018/19 (the last year the national data was published). WG did indicate it was going to publish the all-Wales comparative data for 2021/22 but has not done so at the time of writing.

3.4 The APR is divided into sections, with the format and appearance being consistent throughout Wales, and all LPAs reporting on the same performance indicators. The report looks at where the Planning Service sits corporately, how it is structured and how its work fits with corporate priorities; local pressures; customer feedback; and performance. Performance is analysed across the five key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in the Planning Performance Framework:

- Plan making (omitted over this and recent years as no performance data was provided by WG and the issues are more than adequately covered by the LDP Annual Monitoring Report);
- Efficiency;
- Quality;
- Engagement; and
- Enforcement.

This Framework was established by the Welsh Government in partnership with Local Planning Authority representatives. Performance is ranked as 'good', 'fair' or 'needs improvement'.

3.5 The Annual Performance Report is provided at Appendix 1.

4.0 KEY ISSUES

4.1 The purpose of the Planning Service is to help build sustainable and resilient communities that support the well-being of current and future generations in Monmouthshire, which is a shared purpose with the Council's Corporate Plan and with our public service board partners. The service is directly involved with wider corporate projects such as 21st Century Schools, commercialisation of our estates portfolio and forms an enabling tool to help address some of the challenges and issues identified corporately.

4.2 Key areas of work for the Planning Service include:

- Carrying out a replacement of the Monmouthshire LDP
- Preparing and co-ordinating thematic supplementary planning guidance to help to foster the interpretation and implementation of LDP policy.
- Implementing the Council's LDP through engaging and working with communities, and partnership working with both internal and external partners.
- Reviewing infrastructure and consideration will be given to the best options for funding them alongside LDP progress.
- Monitoring and evaluating development plan policies, including preparing the statutory LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).

- Maintaining the LDP evidence base and ensuring fitness for purpose for future LDP revision.
- Developing linkages with the Council's emerging framework for community governance and development.
- Providing pre-application advice to customers.
- Determining planning applications in accordance with adopted policy and material planning considerations, taking into account stakeholder comments and corporate objectives.
- Securing financial contributions from developers via the planning obligation process to offset the infrastructure demands of new development.
- Safeguarding the County's 2400 Listed Buildings and 31 Conservation Areas, areas of archaeological sensitivity, the Wye Valley AONB and the Brecon Beacons National Park.
- Providing a heritage service for our neighbouring colleagues in Blaenau Gwent CBC that secures a resilient specialist service to that authority.
- Taking robust enforcement action against unauthorised development that is unacceptable in the public interest.
- Preparing and submitting the Planning Services' Annual Performance Report (APR) to WG which assesses the effectiveness of the Monmouthshire's planning service and benchmarks it against other Councils' performance.
- Supporting Monmouthshire's businesses and communities to recover and thrive following the Covid-19 pandemic and facilitating new and innovative ways of sustaining our high streets.

Delivery of service

- 4.3 Between 2010 and 2013 the Council's Planning Service underwent a Systems Thinking review. This review sought to strip the function back to first principles: what is important to our customers, and how can waste (actions or procedures that do not add value to the outcome) be eliminated. This evidence-based review has been fully implemented, although part of the Systems Thinking approach requires services to be kept under review and closely monitored.
- 4.4 This review identified that the following things are important to customers:
- Customers value pre-application advice and advice during the consideration of the application;
 - They want officers to be accessible and for there to be open and honest communication;
 - They want consistency of pre-application advice and in the validation of applications;
 - They want Planning Committee to follow the officer recommendation and value being able to have a dialogue with Members prior to determination;
 - They do not want too many conditions being attached to decisions, and when conditions are imposed they should be relevant and easy to discharge;
 - They value being able to submit an application online and to search for applications and information online; and
 - Third parties value being listened to during the application process.
- 4.5 The service therefore operates with these priorities as guiding principles, shaping behaviour and procedures. The service is committed to having an outcome focus rather than chasing arbitrary performance targets that are not a priority to our customers.

5.0 ACTIONS FROM OUR PREVIOUS APR

5.1 Our 2020/21 Annual Performance Report identified five actions:

Action 1 – Digitise information in relation to woodland / tree preservation order work to help customers self-serve and reduce the significant demand on the Planning Service’s Tree Officer, the daily Duty officer and Support staff.

Action 2 – Promote the positive aspects of new development to our citizens by publicising the contribution of essential community infrastructure provided under planning agreements attached to the planning permissions for new major developments.

Action 3 – Continue to review and make positive change to the Planning Service’s enforcement function and its processes to speed up our decision-making, ensuring we are providing a good service for our customers.

Action 4 – To develop a Buildings at Risk (BAR) strategy to manage and prioritise any interventions to enable key heritage assets to realise a sustainable use for future generations.

Action 5 – Conduct a review of the planning application process to consider how to improve the average time to determine planning applications performance indicator. The review would consist of reviewing the rationale for applications taking different time scales and it would consider any areas where the process could be amended to ensure best practice to improve customer service.

5.2 Action 1 has been commenced but involves significant initial sifting of the current tree information and then survey work in reassessing older tree preservation orders to verify if they are still fit for purpose or need amending/ deleting. The survey information would then be digitised and made publicly available to help customers to self-serve, reducing demand on the Tree Officer, daily duty officer and support colleagues. This will involve additional resource and potential use of consultants. The project is likely to be protracted and carried out in phases due to time and cost. This will thus be retained as a priority action for the next reporting period (and likely beyond that).

5.3 Action 2, publicising the contribution of essential community infrastructure provided under planning agreements associated with major planning applications, has been largely completed but its launch was delayed by the 2022 local government elections and will be concluded in the next reporting period, subject to agreement from the new administration.

5.4 In respect of Action 3, this was instigated following a downturn in the performance of the planning enforcement function in 2018/19 and has been an action for the last two APRs. Over 2019/20 there were substantial reductions in the time taken to investigate enforcement complaints due to measures instigated by the new manager of this team including providing more of a framework for meeting milestones in the enforcement process. During 2020/21 a team structure was agreed that essentially reflected the current structure, although there is now more emphasis on the (more junior) Enforcement Officer role prioritising enforcement cases rather than assisting with (enforcement related) planning application work. Over 2021/22 there were serious gaps in staff resources due to initially illness and then vacancies within the team – two staff members left to pursue new roles, one within the wider DM team and the other via career progression with another S-E Wales planning authority. This

inevitably had a significant impact on this small team's ability to turnaround cases and the key measurers for this team declined and are once again in need of improvement. There has been success in this reporting period to ensure the team is fully-resourced and the full establishment of three investigating officers and a manager have been in place since March 2022. There remains, however, scope for substantial improvement and this measure is retained for the next reporting period to monitor performance and verify whether the current resource is working effectively .

5.5 As regards Action 4, owing to reduced resource within the Heritage team (a senior officer left the team in December 2021 and there were changes to the management responsibilities of the MCC Heritage Manager which now entails significant additional management of officers dealing with planning applications) this action has been put on hold. The BAR is a significant but very important piece of work that will be commenced with the enhanced resource within the team (a new senior officer has started with the team in July 2022) in the next reporting period and will be retained as an action.

5.6 In respect of Action 5, carrying out a review of the planning application process to consider how to improve the average time to determine planning applications performance indicator, this is being conducted in September 2022 following a concerted recruitment programme. The previous reporting period was significantly disrupted by staff leaving (for various reasons) and there being gaps before new appointees started. The new team members needed to get established and used to our culture and method of working, as well as the becoming familiar with the area's geography and how local policy affects our work. It was considered that this review would be more appropriate in Autumn 2022 when our new resources had bedded in and we were in a better position to address the improvement to end-to-end times for applications. Thus, this item will be retained as an action.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF OUR 2021/22 APR

6.1 Based on the performance information in Section 6 and Appendix A, we can be pleased with the service we deliver. During this period:

- The proportion of major applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed timescales was excellent at 100%, and was well above the Good target of 60%;
- The proportion of all applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed timescales remained reasonable at 81% despite the impact of gaps in our staff resource as colleagues left for new opportunities and time was taken to recruit replacements;
- The proportion of applications we approved remained high at 97%;
- Of those applications that had gone through our pre-application advice service, and followed our advice 100% were approved;
- We 'won' seven out of ten appeals against our decisions to refuse planning permission;
- We again dealt with a large number of applications for listed building consent (61 applications) and 72% of these were determined within agreed timescales – this was despite having a reduced resource from December 2021 until the end of the reporting period;
- Enforcement performance declined but the remaining team members proved resilient in meeting demand despite the significant constraints of a temporary reduction in staff resource.

This shows that, despite a challenging workload, the effects of vacancies and impactful issues such as riverine phosphate pollution, our performance has been good and our pre-application advice service has been effective.

6.2 A summary table of our performance can be found in Appendix A of the APR. Of the 12 ranked indicators, 6 are ranked 'Good', while 4 are 'Fair' and 2 are in 'need of improvement'.

- The 'fair' results relate to i) the average time taken to determine applications (106 days) which was well below the Good target of 67 days but must be seen in the context of the major staffing pressures within the service during the reporting period and the impact of new environmental considerations such as water quality in the rivers Wye and Usk. ii) the percentage of listed building consent applications determined within time periods required (72% compared to 88% previously), also explained due to reduced staffing iii) decisions taken by Members that were contrary to the officer recommendation (there was only one decision so this has to be judged in that context) as well as iv) applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period which related to one case that was a Member decision contrary to officer advice, as outlined in the main body of the APR.
- The 'need improvement' results relate to the 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 being 55 and the average time taken to take positive enforcement action being 250. This is due to the impact of significant resource challenges within the planning enforcement team during this period. However, the team are now fully resourced and improvements to internal processes are resulting in improvements in performance this year 2022/2023. Within the last quarter (July -September 2022) the percentage of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days was 74.3% which would result in an amber (fair) rating rather than the 2021/22 red improve rating.

	Number of indicators
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance is 'good'	6
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance is 'fair'	4
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance 'needs improvement'	2

- We performed at or above the Wales average (2018/19) in 7 of the 12 comparable indicators. The indicators for which performance was below the Welsh average related to the percentage of all applications determined within time periods required, the average time taken to determine all applications in days, the percentage of listed building consent applications determined within time periods required, applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld and the two enforcement indicators – although it is arguably unfair to compare the performance in relation to these measures against pre-pandemic data for clear and obvious reasons. We are not able to compare ourselves with other LPA's who are facing the same challenges over the same period, and it is not therefore an accurate or fair comparison against pre-

pandemic performance. Further commentary on the performance against these measures is set out in Section 6 of the APR.

6.3 Five actions are identified going forwards.

Action 1 – Digitise information in relation to historic planning files and woodland / tree preservation order work to help customers self-serve and reduce the significant demand on the Planning Service’s Tree Officer, the daily Duty officer and Support staff.

Action 2 – Promote the positive aspects of new development to our citizens by publicising the contribution of essential community infrastructure provided under planning agreements attached to the planning permissions for new major developments.

Action 3 – Continue to review and make positive change to the Planning Service’s enforcement function and its processes to speed up our decision-making, ensuring we are providing a good service for our customers. Digitise the enforcement notice register to help customers self-serve.

Action 4 – To develop a Buildings at Risk (BAR) strategy to manage and prioritise any interventions to enable key heritage assets to realise a sustainable use for future generations.

Action 5 – Conduct a review of the planning application process to consider how to improve the average time to determine planning applications performance indicator. The review would consist of reviewing the rationale for applications taking different time scales and it would consider any areas where the process could be amended to ensure best practice to drive out waste and improve customer service.

Digitising paper information, improving the experience of customers and reducing demand on officer time

- 6.4 We still hold substantial information on tree preservation orders in the County as scanned records on the Council’s network, but this is not publicly accessible. There are also historic planning files on the microfiche which are only available in physical form at County Hall. Retrieving such information is time-consuming and inefficient and the lack of accessible information for the public leads to a high volume of calls and enquiries to the Council’s Tree Officer (who is part time, 0.6 FTE), the daily duty officer and also the Planning Support team. Digitising this information will reduce phone calls and emails to all those officers and will enable the public to access some of this information online. It will also free up time to carry out work of greater value to the service and customers, such as processing submissions for pre-application advice and the applications themselves. The quality of the data also needs review (for example, some of the older TPOs from the 1960s – 1980s need reviewing as the information will be out of date), although this may be carried out once the data is in a digitised format that is easier to manage and change and a phased approach may be appropriate given the scale of the work (Action 1).

Action 1 – Digitise information in relation to historic planning files and woodland / tree preservation order work to help customers self-serve and reduce the significant demand on the Planning Service’s Tree Officer, the daily Duty officer and Support staff.

- 6.5 We also manage and secure a substantial amount of social infrastructure when approving major developments – this includes areas of public open space, education facilities, affordable housing, sustainable transport infrastructure, ecological improvements and green infrastructure. Much of this goes unnoticed and unheralded, with many of our local communities tending to focus on more negative aspects of new development such as increased traffic or the additional pressure on local services. To improve awareness of the positive aspects of new developments that are delivered to a community we intend to improve how we promote the community infrastructure each major proposal delivers. This could be via social media as well as more conventional methods such as the Council’s web pages.

Action 2 – Promote the positive aspects of new development to our citizens by publicising the contribution of essential community infrastructure provided under planning agreements attached to the planning permissions for new major developments.

Speed of resolving enforcement cases

- 6.6 The performance of the Council’s Planning Enforcement team has declined in relation to the two enforcement measures in the Performance Framework over 2021/22. There is public perception that the service has and is poorly performing. While some of this is justified given the recent staffing pressures on the team, these issues are certainly not unique to Monmouthshire, and the problem is at least in part due to a misunderstanding of the powers available to this Council function and/or unrealistic expectations, a matter that had been addressed in some way by the training on enforcement in recent years for community and town councillors. As a result of the pandemic and then staffing pressures, unsurprisingly performance declined over 2020-22 and there remains scope for substantial improvement. The review of the Planning Enforcement function is ongoing and has already helped to improve this team’s practices and drive out waste. The action below therefore is a spin-off from previous years. A fresh element is the need to digitise the enforcement register so that the information can be downloaded, reducing the need for paper copies or customers to travel to County Hall for a copy (Action 3).

Action 3 – Continue to review and make positive change to the Planning Service’s enforcement function and its processes to speed up our decision-making, ensuring we are providing a good service for our customers. Digitise the enforcement notice register to help customers self-serve.

Buildings at Risk Strategy

- 6.7 There are competing demands on the Heritage Team and many requests from the community are received to intervene to stop the decay of prominent listed buildings throughout the County. Officer time and financial resources are limited in this regard, but an action plan agreed by Members would help to manage the cases that warrant priority working and action. To this end a Buildings at Risk Strategy and action plan is proposed to be developed to manage this process more effectively and to help the communities understand the choices we make when opting to take appropriate action to save and protect such assets. The strategy would put a methodology in place for drawing out the worst buildings and then set out appropriate actions as to how these are tackled; in all likelihood there would be actions identified to address the worst 5-10 buildings at risk so it is a more manageable and transparent process.

Action 4 – To develop a Buildings at Risk (BAR) strategy to manage and prioritise any interventions to enable key heritage assets to realise a sustainable use for future generations.

Average time to determine planning applications

- 6.8 The average time to determine planning applications increased to 106 days within the 2021-22 period although this is, to some extent, understandable given the significant impact that firstly the pandemic (lockdowns and home schooling) and then staff shortages have had on the capacity of the team. These issues will not be unique to Monmouthshire's Planning Service. This increase in average time is unsurprising given the higher number of applications determined within this year, the significant impact of resources within the team and the impact of new environmental considerations such as water quality in the rivers Wye and Usk. Whilst it is recognised that there is rationale behind this increase it is considered that there should be a review of the planning application process to ensure that there is a consistent approach across the team and that the system thinking principles that were adopted following the 2012-system thinking review are still being fully implemented. Notwithstanding the impact of the staffing issues (now resolved and we are at full complement for 2022/23) it is considered that there remains scope for continued improvement. The review of planning applications is ongoing however this more detailed review will be conducted during the Autumn of 2022 when there is the capacity to critically appraise the process and ensure best practice is being implemented.

Action 5 – Conduct a review of the planning application process to consider how to improve the average time to determine planning applications performance indicator. The review would consist of reviewing the rationale for applications taking different time scales and it would consider any areas where the process could be amended to ensure best practice to improve customer service.

Value of Planning

- 6.9 RTPI Cymru has published a toolkit which measures the value generated by a local authority planning service. The tool has been developed to capture the economic, social and environmental value at a local planning authority level across Wales. The tool and its 'Value Dashboard' has been designed to provide RTPI Cymru and the Welsh Government with a platform to demonstrate to local authorities, national policy makers, the private sector, researchers and other broader policy and media audiences, the value planning contributes and how planning is positively contributing to Wales' seven well-being goals. The data has been updated to reflect planning permissions and completions in the current reporting period, 2021/22. The toolkit has been a very useful means of promoting the good work undertaken by the department that is often taken for granted. Over this period, the toolkit concludes that the service has contributed £87.3 to the local economy by the allocation of sites in the LDP, the safeguarding of land, the granting and implementation of planning permissions, the operation of its enforcement function and the securing of planning obligations. We aim to update this for the ensuing reporting periods. The 'Dashboard' data summarises the Planning Service's contribution below:

Value of Planning in Monmouthshire 2021/22

Planning service key data



29 FTE jobs in planning service



1,152 applications handled



£0.4m collected in fees

LDP Land Safeguarded

- 20
- 369 ha Green Wedge
- 3,174 ha Local Nature Reserve
- 434 ha open space
- 7,942 ha minerals

LDP Land Allocated

- Residential**
111 ha
- Commercial**
244 ha
- Retail & leisure**
0 ha
- Waste**
0 ha

LDP Value

£2.1m uplift value
(based on land allocated for whole plan period)

Value adding policies ✓ 89%

Applications

- 4 major
- 1,147 minor
- 0 other

- 0 DCOs dealt with
- 1 DNS dealt with
- 53 LBC applications granted
- 10 refusals appealed
- 0 judicial reviews

Decisions

✓ 1,125 approvals (98%)

x 27 refusals (2%)

368 subject to pre app

- Refusals**
- Delegated
 - Committee
- Approvals**
- Delegated
 - Committee

Permissions

- Residential**
113 units
£4.6m uplift value
29% affordable
- Retail & leisure**
2,730 m²
£0.1m uplift value
- Tourism**
120 bedspaces
40 self catering units

Permissions

- Consistent with local plan
- Departures from local plan

- Commercial**
6,790 m²
£0.2m uplift value
- Renewables & other**
0 MW
0 tonnes waste
0 tonnes minerals
0 ha remediation
2 ha formal open space

Section 106 income

- £0.4m
- Breakdown
- Training and employment
 - Sports and leisure
 - Environmental
 - Community/cultural
 - Formal open space
 - Primary health
 - Education
 - Infrastructure
 - Active travel
 - Highways
 - Affordable housing

Contributions

- CIL income**
- £0 total value

Completions

- Residential**
419 units
17% affordable
£76.5m uplift value
£0.5m council tax p.a
- Retail & leisure**
650 m²
£0.7m uplift value
12 gross FTE jobs
#N/A

- Commercial**
7,450 m²
£4.2m uplift value
115 gross FTE jobs
#N/A
- Renewables**
0 MW
£500 community benefit
- Tourism**
25
8 FTE jobs
15 self catering units

Enforcement

- 388 enforcement complaints
- 6 planning contraventions
- 5 enforcement notices
- 11 breach of condition notices
- 0 stop notices
- 0 section 125 notices



Wider indicators

- £117,000 spend on consultancy fees
- 8 internal consultees
- 0 Energy statements
- 0 EqIAs
- 1 Environmental statements
- £0 health benefits of affordable housing provision p.a
- £140,000 recreational benefits from open space created p.a
- 2 Travel plans
- 0 HIAs
- 4 Transport assessments

In 2021/22 the total value of planning was **£87.3m**

SOURCES: Planning function outputs (LPA survey), Land and property value data (JLL estimates), business rates valuations (Valuation Office Agency), employment densities (English Homes & Communities Agency), Council tax rates (Stats Wales), Health benefits from Affordable Housing (Department for Communities and Local Government Appraisal Guide, based on various studies outlined in appraisal dashboard), Community benefit from renewables (Renewables UK Cymru). Some of the calculations require high level assumptions to convert between units/m²ha. Where possible, benchmarks have been employed otherwise reasonable assumptions have been used. Business rate, council tax and gross FTE job estimates based on assumption of 100% occupancy and do not factor in any displacement. Numbers of applications and decisions are unlikely to match up as these can take place in different financial years for any given application. 'Value adding policies' refers to the proportion of policies the team has identified as adding 'intangible value' that are included in local plans. Approvals and refusals do not sum to 100% due to applications carry across years. The total value of planning only incorporates some of the metrics presented in the dashboard.



7.0 OPPORTUNITIES GOING FORWARD

7.1 The following opportunities for the coming year have been identified as a result of this Annual Performance Report, our LDP, AMR and our Service Business Plans:

- In tandem with our systems thinking approach, to use Team meetings and performance reports to drill down into specific areas of workflow and identify where problems exist and why, with a targeted approach to identifying solutions;
- Continue to roll out the project management of major planning applications, where appropriate, via planning performance agreements to seek by best endeavours to ensure timely and well-managed processing of such applications, providing a good customer experience for the customer;
- To digitise the Tree information held by the Council in scanned or paper form to improve the web site experience for customers and improve customers' pathways to information (Action 1);
- To promote the positive work of the Planning Service and colleagues in other Council teams in securing much needed community infrastructure when we approve major development. This could be promoted via this document, our web site and social media (potentially through use of infographics) allowing our local communities to understand the tangible benefits of allowing new development (Action 2);
- To improve the speed with which we deal with enforcement cases via the continued systems review of the Enforcement function and via analysis of individual team members' performance (Action 3);
- To digitise the Council's enforcement register as part of the digital improvement programme to help customers self-serve (Action 3);
- To develop a Buildings At Risk Strategy to safeguard some of our most precious but vulnerable heritage assets (Action 4);
- Continue with the replacement Monmouthshire LDP because of the need to facilitate the identification/ allocation of additional housing land as well as addressing the demographic and employment challenges of the County;
- To identify, implement and/or disseminate best practice via the Planning Officers' Society for Wales or other working groups, including the Welsh Government, the WLGA and the RTPi
- Promote the value of the work carried out by the Council's Planning Service by updating the Value of Planning toolkit on an annual basis and publicising the findings in each APR.
- To support our colleagues via regular reviews and one-to-ones who have had to work agilely because of the pandemic and the reduced capacity of our offices, to ensure their well-being and mental health are resilient and their productivity remains high.
- To respond to the threat resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure our County's businesses can bounce back from the pressures caused by lockdowns and other covid measures that restricted business activity.
- To manage the threat of phosphate pollution in our two main rivers to reduce environmental damage, while finding new ways of managing this issue that will still allow sustainable development to take place in those catchment areas.

7.2 Progress will be measured via our 2022/23 Annual Performance Report, 2022/23 LDP Annual Monitoring Report, and our 2022 - 2025 Service Business Plan.

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

8.1 Officer time and costs associated with the preparation of this APR are met from the Development Management budget and work is carried out by existing staff.

9.0 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:

9.1 Sustainability, equality and well-being considerations are central to the planning service's activities. This report is a review of the previous year's performance against targets and benchmarking information, however the proposed five actions for future improvements seek to improve service delivery to the benefit of our customers and communities.

9.2 An Equality and Future Generations Evaluation is attached as an appendix.

10.0 OPTIONS CONSIDERED

10.1 There is normally a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to undertake an Annual Performance Report and to submit it to the Welsh Government by 31 October in a given year. Unfortunately, this year WG have been unable to provide the benchmarking figures to enable the council to review its current status against the Wales average. Issues such as the continued impact of the pandemic, resources limitations and environmental considerations such as water quality in rivers would have an impact on Local Planning Authorities across Wales therefore it is unfortunate that this data is not available to enable a fair comparison of our performance. We could decide not to conduct the APR for this reason however we do consider it useful to carry on with this work to help us continue to improve our service. Consequently, the following options were considered:

- 1) Recommend the APR for submission without any changes;
- 2) Recommend the APR for submission but with changes to the proposed actions for the coming year.

10.2 The APR provides a useful reflection on last year's performance against targets and benchmarking information. The proposed actions seek to continue that journey of improvement, given the resources available to us. Consequently, option 1 is the preferred option.

11.0 HOW WILL SUCCESS BE MEASURED

11.1 The Planning Service is measured against a number of clear and consistent (across Wales, and over time) performance indicators allowing aspects of a successful service to be measured. These indicators need to be viewed in the context of other factors, including what customers have identified as being important to them, customer and stakeholder feedback, outcomes (which are not always captured by performance indicators), and whole Council priorities.

11.2 We strive to deliver the best service possible, and our mission is to advise on, give permission for, and ensure the best development possible.

12.0 CONSULTEES

- Planning Committee and the Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee via a report to the latter to be considered on 21 November 2022.
- Cabinet Member for Sustainable Economy
- SLT
- Communities and Place DMT

- Cabinet Member for

13.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

14.0 AUTHOR & CONTACT DETAILS:

Craig O'Connor
Head of Planning
01633 644849
craiggoconnor@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Philip Thomas
Development Services Manager
01633 644809
philipthomas@monmouthshire.gov.uk