

# **Monmouthshire Local Planning Authority (LPA)**

## **PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) – 2015-16**

### **PREFACE**

*I am very pleased to introduce the second Annual Performance Report for Monmouthshire County Council's planning service.*

*This report shows that Monmouthshire's planning service continues to perform very well, with all but two indicators ranked 'good' against the Welsh Government's targets, and all but one indicator scoring above the Welsh average. Of particular significance, the service scored above the Welsh average in terms of customer service feedback, demonstrating the planning service's commitment to an outcome-focused approach.*

*Good planning is central to the Council's objective of building sustainable, resilient communities while also generating growth in the economy and protecting the heritage and landscapes that make our County the beautiful place it is.*

**Councillor Peter Fox, Leader of Monmouthshire County Council**

## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This is Monmouthshire's second Annual Performance Report, which looks at the performance of the planning service against nationally set performance indicators, Welsh Government targets, the Wales average performance, and Monmouthshire's performance last year. The results are considered in the context of the challenges, opportunities, priorities and resources (staffing and financial) available to us. 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 we could learn from or share with others.

1.2 Performance is analysed across the five key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in the Planning Performance Framework:

- Plan making;
- Efficiency;
- Quality;
- Engagement; and
- Enforcement.

This Framework was established by the Welsh Government in partnership with Local Planning Authority representatives, and Monmouthshire's Head of Planning sat on the working group. Performance is ranked as 'good', 'fair' or 'needs improvement'.

1.3 Based on the customer feedback in Section 5 and the performance information in Section 6 and Appendix A, we can be proud of the service we deliver. During this period:

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

1.4 A summary table of our performance can be found in Appendix A. One of the 18 indicators (progress against LDP delivery timetable) is not applicable to Monmouthshire because we have already adopted our LDP. Of the 17 applicable indicators:

- 11 have targets set by the Welsh Government. Monmouthshire's performance is ranked 'good' against 9, and 'fair' against 2. The 'fair' results relate to the proportion of planning applications determined within the required timescale, where we achieved 79%, narrowly missing the 'good' target of 80%; and where the average time taken (68 days) narrowly missed the 'good' target of 67 days;
- We performed above the Wales average in 16 of the 17 applicable indicators. The indicator for which performance was below Wales average related to the proportion of enforcement cases fully resolved within 180 days, where we achieved 70% against a Wales average of 73%. Further commentary is provided on this indicator in section 6;
- Our performance improved against 12 of the 17 applicable indicators, and declined slightly against 5 indicators compared to last year. The declining performance related to:
  - 5 year housing land supply;
  - Average time taken to determine major planning applications;

- Average time taken to determine all planning applications;
- Average time taken to investigate enforcement complaints;
- Average time taken to resolve enforcement cases.

However, it should be noted that in all of the above cases, our performance remains significantly above the Wales average, and where a target was set by the Welsh Government, we are still ranked 'good' or 'fair'. The only indicator above of concern is our housing land supply, which we know has since dropped to 4.1 years' supply, below the required 5 year supply. This is discussed in detail in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).

1.5 Three actions are proposed going forward;

**ACTION 1: Work with consultees to seek more timely responses on planning applications.**

**ACTION 2: Streamline enforcement processes following a triage system to reduce the time taken to resolve cases.**

**ACTION 3: Arrange a training seminar on planning enforcement for Town and Community Councils via the new area-based clusters.**

## CONTEXT

- 2.1 This section sets out the planning context within which the Local Planning Authority operates, both corporately and in terms of Monmouthshire as a county, for the 2015-16 period.

### **Corporate Context**

- 2.2 The Council adopted its Local Development Plan in February 2014 and submitted its first Annual Monitoring Report in October 2015.
- 2.3 The planning service's purpose links directly to Monmouthshire County Council's objective of building sustainable, resilient communities. The Council has identified four key priorities:
- 1) Education;
  - 2) Protecting the most vulnerable in society;
  - 3) Promotion of enterprise, economic development and job creation;
  - 4) Maintaining locally accessible services.
- 2.4 The following Service Improvement Plan outcomes are directly relevant to the planning service:
- Older people are able to live their good life;
  - People have access to appropriate and affordable housing;
  - People have good access and mobility;
  - People feel safe;
  - Business and enterprise; and
  - People protect and enhance the environment.

In accordance with Section 2(2) of the Planning (Wales) Act 2015 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the planning function must be exercised for the purpose of ensuring that the development and use of land contribute to improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Planning Service has a key role to play in this regard. The Council is starting work on its Local Well-being Plan.

- 2.5 The planning service is divided into two main areas: Development Management, which includes planning applications, enforcement and heritage management; and Planning Policy. During this reporting period, the service has undergone a number of significant improvements including being restructured, rebranded and co-located under a new Head of Service (see Section 3 below).
- 2.6 The Enterprise Directorate vision provides a strategic context for the development and promotion of an enterprising culture, which builds business resilience and creates excellent outcomes for our communities.
- 2.7 Development Management:
- 2.7.1 The Development Management service vision is: ***"To advise on, give permission for and ensure the best possible development"***. The purpose of the service is to implement the Council's statutory adopted Local Development Plan by enabling good quality development

in the right locations, and resisting poor quality development, or development in the wrong locations.

2.7.2 The main customer is the applicant, however there are numerous stakeholders including individuals, communities, businesses, third sector organisations, other Council services and elected Members.

## 2.8 Planning Policy:

2.8.1 The Planning Policy service vision is: ***“To ensure Planning Policy is at the heart of Sustainable Development in Monmouthshire”***. From this overarching vision, the distinct purpose of the Planning Policy service is: *“The mediation of space for the co-creation of sustainable, resilient and distinct places”*. The purpose of the Planning Policy Service is to establish and disseminate the statutory land use policy framework for corporate decision making and delivery of the Single Integrated Plan. This ensures that the land use and sustainable development objectives of the Council are met with regard to adequate supply of land in sustainable locations for housing, retail, recreation, education, transport, business, waste and other needs, whilst protecting the County’s valued environmental and cultural assets.

2.8.2 The main customers are individuals, communities, businesses living or based within the County, as well as third sector organisations, other Council services and elected Members.

2.9 Key areas of work for the Planning Service include:

- 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 to offset the infrastructure demands of new development and meet the need for affordable housing;
- Safeguarding the County’s 2400 Listed Buildings and 31 Conservation Areas, areas of archaeological sensitivity, the Wye Valley AONB, the Brecon Beacons National Park and the European designated Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation;
- Taking robust enforcement action against unauthorised development that is unacceptable;
- Raising awareness of the statutory role and importance of the land use planning framework, building on the high levels of engagement underpinning the LDP process;
- Preparing supplementary planning guidance (SPG) to assist with the implementation and interpretation of LDP policy;
- Implementing the Council’s LDP through engaging and working with communities, and partnership working with internal and external partners to foster the co-creation and growth of enterprise, community and environmental well-being. This will include involvement with the Whole Place work and Local Well-being Plan; and
- Monitoring and evaluating Plan policies and the process of Plan preparation.

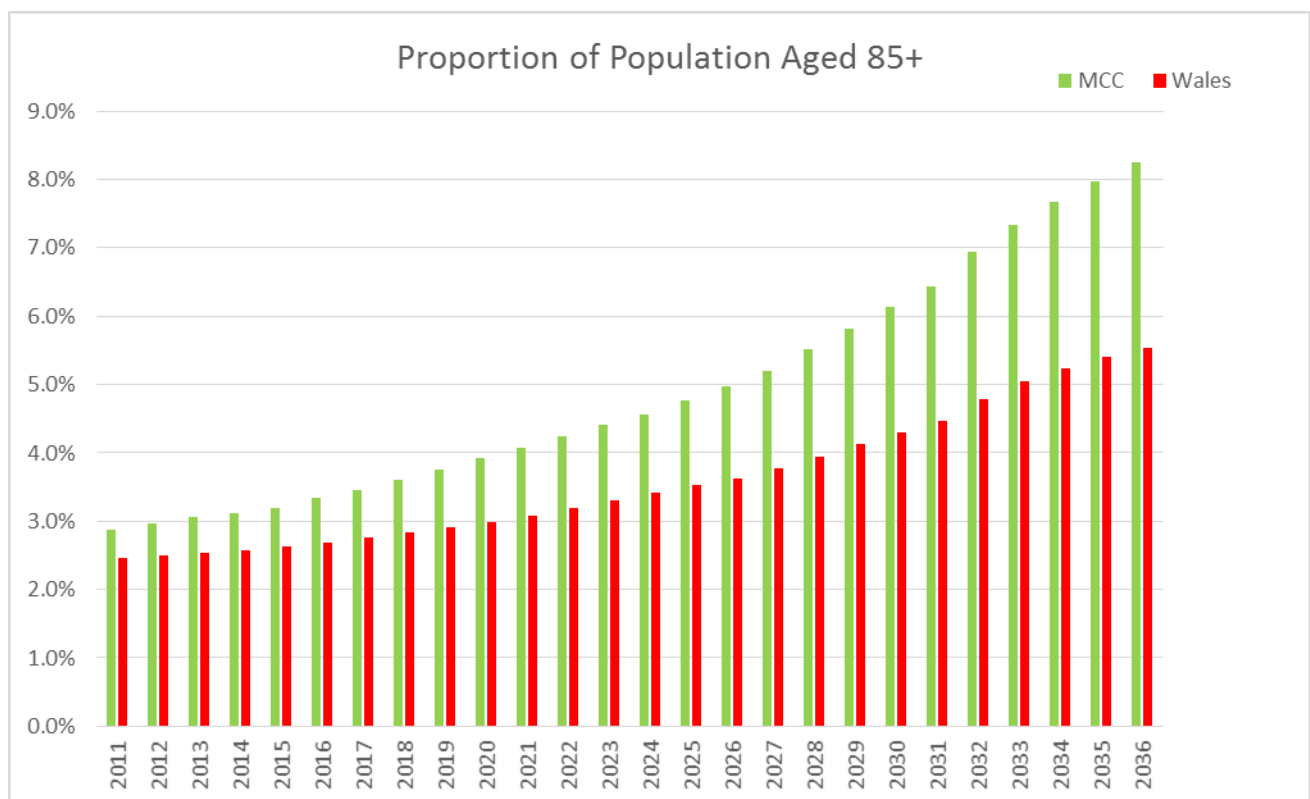
## Local Context

2.9 Located in South East Wales, Monmouthshire occupies a strategic position between the major centres in South Wales, the South West of England and the Midlands. The County shares a border with the neighbouring Local Planning Authorities of Newport, Torfaen and Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) in Wales and Gloucestershire, the Forest of Dean and Herefordshire in England, with Severn crossing links to South Gloucestershire. The County forms the gateway to South Wales, and is part of the Cardiff Capital City Region. This location gives the County a distinctive identity.

## 2.10 Our people

2.10.1 Monmouthshire covers an area of approximately 88,000 hectares with a population of 91,323 in 2011, 7.9% of which resides within the BBNP area of the County. The County has a low population density of 1.1 persons per hectare – significantly lower than the South East Wales average of 5.3 persons per hectare – reflecting the area’s rural nature. Only 53% of the population lives in wards defined as being urban areas (i.e. with a population of more than 10,000).

2.10.2 Our population has been increasing steadily, up 7.6% between 2001 and 2011 compared with the Wales average of 5.5%. This increase is wholly attributable to inward migration, with natural change showing negative growth. The County has a relatively high and increasing proportion of older age groups, and a lower and decreasing proportion of younger adults compared with the UK and Wales averages: this trend is predicted to continue.



Source: Office for National Statistics

2.10.3 This demographic change has significant implications for economic activity and demand for services to enable our citizens to continue to live independent lives. The Council has started a project named 'Future Monmouthshire' to consider the needs and aspirations of our communities going forward, and how those will be met in the context of a rapidly changing public sector. The project is also considering the extent to which we are a hostage to fortune of these demographic changes, or if we can and should seek to change trends, for example by seeking to retain younger people in the County and the role of affordable housing and employment opportunities in achieving that. This work will provide important evidence, context and direction to the next Local Development Plan and to regional planning.

## 2.11 Housing and quality of life

2.11.1 The County has three broad categories of settlement:

- The historic market towns of Abergavenny, Chepstow and Monmouth have developed over many years to have a wide range of opportunities for employment, shopping, community facilities and public transport;
- The newer settlements in Severnside of Caldicot/Portskewett, Magor/Undy, Rogiet and Sudbrook where recent high levels of residential growth have taken place without the local jobs and community facilities to match. The area benefits, however, from a strategic location at the 'Gateway' to Wales with good access to the employment markets of Newport, Cardiff and Bristol;
- The rural area, containing the small town of Usk, the larger villages of Raglan and Penperlleni, and a large number of small villages, widely dispersed around the County.

2.11.2 Over the last decade, housing completions in the Monmouthshire LPA area have averaged approximately 240 dwellings per annum, although there have been significant annual variations with just 158 completions in 2009/10. To deliver the LDP housing requirement, 488 completions per annum are required. To date, completions since LDP adoption have averaged approximately 240 per annum. This is discussed in more detail in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report.

2.11.3 Average house prices are significantly higher than the Wales average (£248,500 compared to £161,400 average in 2013) resulting in a significant need for affordable housing (source: Hometrack data). Of the 3,719 dwellings completed between 2001 and 2013, 15.8% were classed as affordable. Of the 376 dwellings completed since LDP adoption, 21.2% are affordable units.

2.11.4 Monmouthshire is generally a prosperous County offering a high quality of life for its residents. This is reflected in the 2011 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation with none of the lower super output areas (LSOA) in Monmouthshire in the most deprived 10% in Wales. However, poor access to community facilities and declining local service provision is an issue for rural and ageing communities. The health of Monmouthshire's population is generally better than the Wales average, with greater life expectancies and higher proportion of residents classing themselves as being in good health (2011 Census). Fewer residents in the County suffer with a limiting long term illness compared with Wales as a whole. The rate of reported crime in Monmouthshire tends to be lower than for Wales as a whole.

## 2.12 Our economy

2.12.1 The County has a high proportion of working age people in employment (62.8% in 2011) compared to neighbouring Authorities or the Wales average (58.2%). Our economy is reliant on the public sector and services for employment:

- The public administration, education and health sector accounts for 33.3% of jobs;
- The distribution, retail, hotels and restaurants sector accounts for 27.4% of jobs;
- Tourism, as part of the services sector, is also important in the County accounting for 12.1% of jobs, higher than the Wales average (9.6%). There were over two million visitors to the County in 2012, with tourist expenditure amounting to nearly £158m thereby supporting 2,700 jobs.

(Business Register & Employment Survey 2012).

2.12.2 The County had 3,720 active enterprises in 2011, 27% of which were in the property and business services sector. Nearly 99% of the County's businesses are classified as small (i.e. up to 49 employees). Monmouthshire has experienced growth in eight of fourteen sectors in the decade to 2011, with the greatest increases in the property business services, hotels and catering and education and health sectors, while there has been a decline in the number of manufacturing businesses.

2.12.3 The 2015 Welsh Government Commuting Statistics indicate that 58.3% of the County's residents work in the area. Although less than the Welsh average of 69.4%, this is an improvement of last year's figure of 54.5%. This suggests that there has been some progress in meeting the aspiration to increase the proportion of resident workforce working within Monmouthshire over the Plan period. However, the same data source suggests that Monmouthshire has a net outflow of 900 commuters – with 17,800 commuting into the Authority to work and 18,700 commuting out. There was significant in-commuting from Torfaen (3,000), Newport (2,900), Blaenau Gwent (2,800) and from outside Wales (8,000). The main areas for out-commuting were Newport (3,900), Bristol (3,400), Cardiff (2,500) and Torfaen (2,100), with a further 6,400 commuting to other areas outside Wales. A relatively high proportion of Monmouthshire's residents travel long distances to work, with a high usage of the private car. Heavy reliance on the private car and limited opportunities for public transport is a particular issue in rural areas. These figures should be treated with caution, however, as the data is based on a small sample survey.

## 2.13 Communications

2.13.1 The County is easily accessible from the rest of Wales by the M4, A40, A449 and A4042 and from England by the M4 and M48 Severn Bridges and the A48, A40 and A465. The good road transport links connect the County to major population centres such as Cardiff, Newport and Bristol. Monmouthshire is served by a number of local and national bus routes, with main bus stations in the towns of Abergavenny, Chepstow and Monmouth. In terms of rail provision, Monmouthshire has four stations, at Caldicot, Chepstow and Severn Tunnel Junction in the south of the County and Abergavenny in the north.

2.13.2 Public rights of way include 1,499km of footpaths, 71km of bridleways, 84.5km of restricted byways and 1.5km of unrestricted byways. These public rights of way are complemented by permissive paths. The County has three long distance regional trails (Usk Valley, Wye Valley



and Three Castles) as well as the national trail (Offa's Dyke Path). The County also provides the start of the all-Wales coastal path. There are two national cycle routes within Monmouthshire, both of which run from Chepstow. The countryside access opportunities available in the County are one of its key assets, sustaining tourism and providing opportunities for economic regeneration.

2.13.3 The rural nature of the County and high proportion of SMEs means broadband and mobile communication are both vital and challenging. The Council is part of the Superfast Cymru project rolling out BT broadband, and was also a pilot Authority for a UK and Welsh Government sponsored project for AB Internet which is seeking to increase broadband coverage in rural communities that would not normally be commercially viable. Most of the infrastructure to enable this has secured planning permission and is in the process of being erected.

## 2.14 Our natural heritage

2.14.1 The County is noted for its rural beauty and has a rich and diverse landscape stretching from the coastline of the Gwent Levels in the South of the County, to the uplands of the Brecon Beacons National Park in the north, the picturesque river corridor of the Wye Valley AONB in the east, and the Blaenavon Industrial World Heritage Site to the north-west. The landscape and countryside of Monmouthshire contributes not only to the health and well-being of Monmouthshire's residents but also supports the important tourist economy.

2.14.2 Monmouthshire has significant biodiversity and nature conservation resources, a number of which are internationally or nationally recognised, including:

- The Severn Estuary Special Area for Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Ramsar Site (Wetland of international importance);
- The River Wye, River Usk, Wye Valley woodlands and Wye Valley Special Areas of Conservation (bat sites);
- 49 nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) – covering some 2,087 hectares. Most are woodland or grassland sites with others designated for their wetland or geological interest;
- Two National Nature Reserves (Fiddler's Elbow (woodland) and Lady Park Wood) and one Local Nature Reserve at Cleddon Bog;
- Approximately 650 non-statutory Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) predominantly in relation to grassland and ancient and semi-natural woodland areas.

The statutory sites cover 6,432 hectares, or 7.6% of the LPA area; 3,664 hectares of which comprises the Severn Estuary SPA.

2.14.3 Other key challenges facing the planning service include areas at risk of flooding (including most of the Gwent Levels and the flood plains of the Rivers Usk and Wye and their tributaries. There are, however, flood defences within the towns of Chepstow, Monmouth and Usk.

## 2.15 Our built heritage

2.15.1 The Monmouthshire LPA area has a rich built heritage and historic environment which includes:

- Approximately 2,400 Listed Buildings, of which 2% are Grade I, 10% are Grade II\* and 88% are Grade II. Of note, around 176 Listed Buildings have been identified as being at risk.
- 31 Conservation Areas – designated for their special historic or architectural interest, covering some 1,648 hectares in total;
- 45 Historic Parks and Gardens – identified as having a Special Historic Interest, covering 1,910 hectares;
- 3 Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest identified by Cadw (parts of Blaenavon, the Gwent Levels and the Lower Wye Valley);
- 164 Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

2.15.2 The LDP is heavily reliant on greenfield sites to deliver its development needs due to a lack of brownfield sites. Air quality in Monmouthshire generally meets current standards, although there are two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) within the County, where objective levels of nitrogen dioxide may be exceeded. These are at Bridge Street in Usk and Hardwick Hill/Mount Pleasant in Chepstow. The Monmouthshire Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy has not identified any sites as being contaminated.

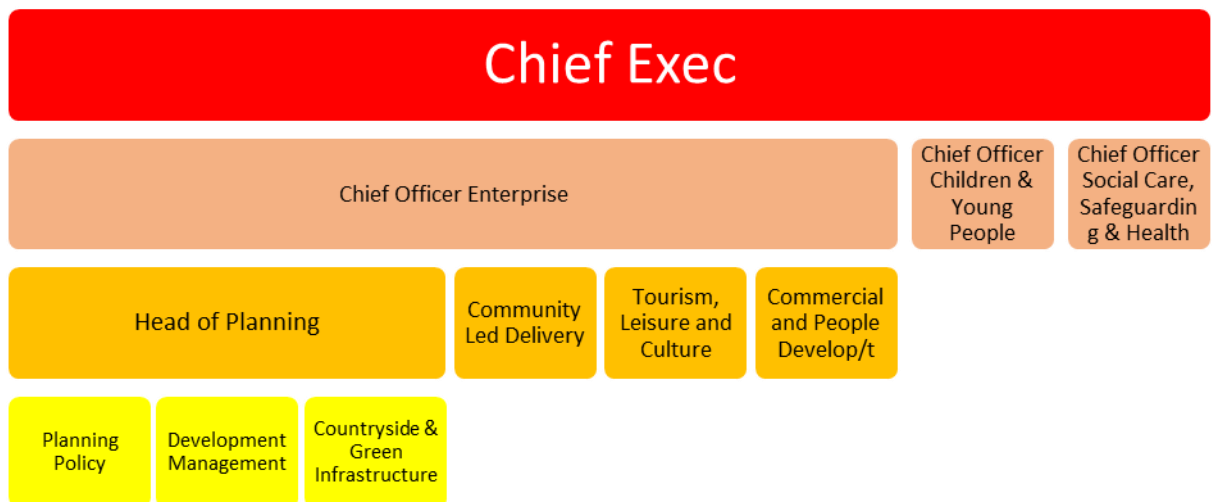
### 3.0 PLANNING SERVICE

#### Organisational setting

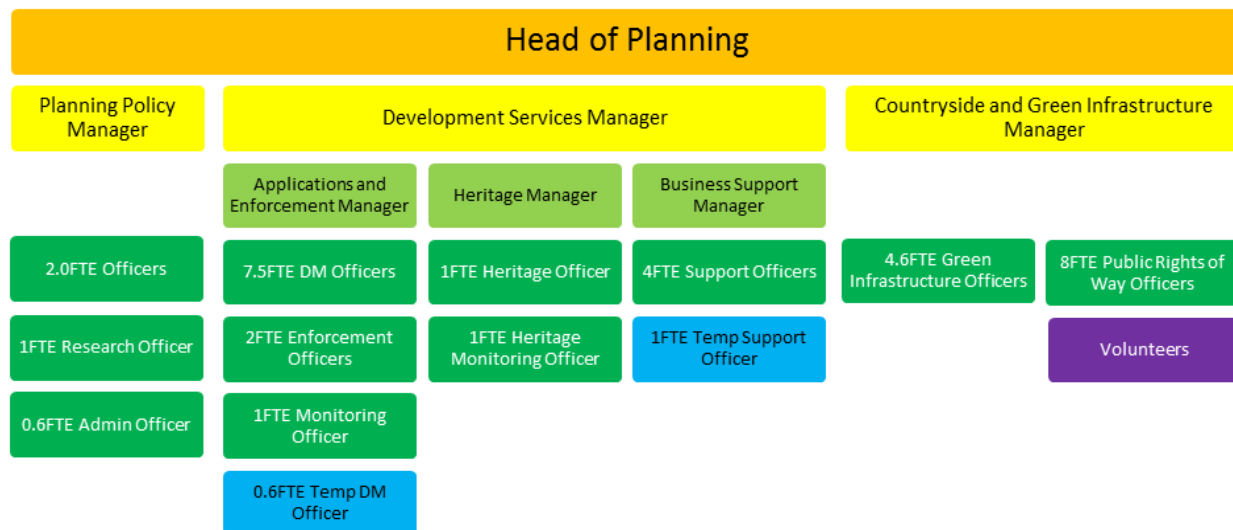
3.1 During this reporting period, the planning service has undergone a number of significant changes, including:

- Appointment of a new Head of Planning
- Re-branding from 'Development Control' to 'Development Management' to reflect and embed the role of planning in Monmouthshire as a positive enabling tool rather than a regulatory activity;
- Re-branding from 'Conservation' to 'Heritage Management' to reflect the importance of positively managing the built environment rather than preserving or resisting change;
- Re-branding from 'Development Plans' to 'Planning Policy' to better reflect the wider role of the team's work above and beyond the Local Development Plan;
- A restructure to locate the Development Management section alongside the Planning Policy section under the Head of Planning; and
- Physical relocation of the Development Plans team such that the whole planning service is now co-located in County Hall, Usk.

#### Department structure and reporting lines for the 2015-16 reporting period



## Planning service staffing structure for the 2015-16 reporting period



- 3.2 In October 2015, the Welsh Government increased planning application fees and the (then) Minister wrote to all Local Planning Authorities setting out an expectation that the additional income is reinvested in the planning service. As recognised by the Welsh Government, application fee income covers only approximately 60% of the costs of delivering the Development Management service. In Monmouthshire, the additional planning fee income in 2016/17 will in part (£40k) be used to reduce the net cost of the planning service, and in part (£30k) be invested in service improvements by making permanent the temporary Support Officer post shown above and by creating an additional 0.5FTE Development Management post. This change will be fully implemented in 2016/17.

### Links with other Council projects

- 3.3 There are a number of wider corporate activities that impact upon the planning service, or that the planning service supports and/or shapes:
- 3.3.1 Budget management  
Local Government budgets have been heavily cut over recent years, and the planning service has had to make savings in the same way as all other unprotected services. This has comprised a combination of reduced expenditure, increased income budget lines, and reduced staffing costs. In this reporting period, savings (£30k) were achieved to reduce the service's net costs via increased fee income from the pre-application advice service (introduced in 2013/14) and from increased planning application fees, with further additional fee income used to secure two additional temporary members of staff (the part-time DM officer referred to above and a Senior Landscape and Green Infrastructure Officer). A budget mandate for a further £40k savings via extra income has been agreed for 2016/17 (see paragraph 3.2 above) and options for up to 10% savings for 2017/18 are being drafted.
- 3.3.2 Service improvement/Systems Thinking  
The Council has reviewed a number of its services via a Systems Thinking approach. Planning underwent this review between 2010 and 2012, and it is now fully embedded. The review seeks to strip the service back to basic principles: who is the customer, and what is

important to them? As far as is possible (for example taking into account legislative requirements), activities that do not add value to the customer are removed.

In terms of the planning service, this has resulted in a high performing, outcome-focussed service. Officers are empowered to make decisions and take responsibility for their caseload from start to end. The outcome focus means that our emphasis is on securing a positive outcome where possible, rather than a focus on arbitrary performance targets. Performance against end-to-end times is monitored via monthly team meetings (also attended by the Head of Planning and Cabinet Member), however this monitoring is in the context that decision speed is only a small part of the wider picture, and is not always important to our customers.

### 3.3.3 Asset Management

In response to budget pressures, in addition to a wider desire to use our assets responsibly, the Council is undergoing a process of reviewing its estates portfolio and where appropriate, disposing of those assets. The planning service plays a key role in enabling best use of/return from those assets. As an example, planning permission has been granted for a solar farm on one of our own County farms. The revenue from energy generation can be reinvested into providing valuable services to our citizens.

The Local Development Plan includes 4 Council-owned sites as housing allocations. During this reporting period, a planning application was submitted for Coed Glas, Abergavenny, and pre-application community consultation was undertaken in relation to Rockfield Farm, Undy and Crick Road, Portskewett.

### 3.3.4 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools

The planning service continues to play a key role in advising on and enabling the delivery of replacement school buildings as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools project. The aim of this project is to give our young people the best possible start in life, and give them the best possible range of opportunities by the time they leave school. Construction has commenced on Caldicot and Monmouth comprehensive schools (approved in 2014 and 2015 respectively).

### 3.3.5 Whole Place

We have embarked on a programme of community-led place planning, with two Whole Place Plans completed to date. Work has commenced on the Lower Wye Whole Place Plan. There are opportunities for greater involvement from the planning service in this area of work, with potential links to CIL/community infrastructure priorities and Community/Place Plans. We have secured Welsh Government funding at the end of this reporting period to investigate how Place Plans, Whole Place and infrastructure planning can be better co-ordinated.

### 3.3.6 Local Transport Plan and Active Travel

We contributed towards the Council's Local Transport Plan in the previous reporting period, and will continue to work with colleagues to help enable delivery of the identified priorities and compliance with the Active Travel Act, whether this be via LDP allocations, planning application decisions or securing planning contributions.

### 3.3.7 IT improvements and 'channel shift'

The Council has a shared IT resource with Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils, and through this is working towards implementation of a new planning back-office system. It is intended that this will be a shared system with Torfaen Council. Setting up the new system has been very resource intensive but we aim to 'go live' in December 2016.

The planning service is a key frontline service in terms of visibility and customer access. We have already introduced agile working and electronic document management, and work has been undertaken to improve our website to improve the ability of customers and stakeholders to self-serve where possible, as well as to comply with the Welsh Language Measures.

In 2016/17 we aim to improve the planning applications search functions on our website to allow customers to self-serve more easily. We also plan to move towards a paperless office, resulting in printing and postage savings. Going forward we would like to scan old microfiche records so that these are also available via our website, however this is prohibitively expensive at present.

### 3.3.7 Development Team approach

A fee-paying pre-application advice service was introduced in late 2013 which has been well received by customers and is now embedded. The service was reviewed this year in response to customer feedback and to align with the new mandatory pre-application service introduced in March 2016. This service includes offering a Development Team approach, which seeks to provide an integrated, round-table multi-disciplinary approach to pre-application enquiries. This has helped build positive relationships with other service areas, and help all parties to understand each other's objectives and priorities, leading to better outcomes.

In 2016/17 we will be one of three pilot Authorities, trialling the involvement of Ward Members in pre-application discussions. This will be reported upon in the next APR.

### 3.3.8 Best practice benchmarking

We are involved in various regional and all-Wales working groups, including:

- Planning Officers' Society for Wales (POSW) (meeting of all Chief Planning Officers from Welsh LPAs). Monmouthshire's Head of Planning is the current Chair;
- South East Wales Strategic Planning Group (SEWSPG) (meeting of planning policy lead officers from the ten SE Wales LPAs and the Brecon Beacons National Park). Monmouthshire's Head of Planning and Newport's Planning Policy Manager currently jointly chair this group;
- South East Wales Heritage Forum
- South Wales Enforcement Forum
- South Wales Development Management Group (meeting of the South Wales Development Management lead officers)

Towards the end of this reporting period, an informal group of DM officers and managers from the former Gwent Local Planning Authorities has started meeting to share best

practice and procedures in the light of new regulations coming into force. The objective is to discuss consistency on a more manageable basis, and feed learning back to all LPAs in Wales.

Monmouthshire's Head of Planning sits on the Welsh Government's Positive Planning Advisory Group representing all Welsh Local Planning Authorities working alongside the private sector, Royal Town Planning Institute, Welsh Local Government Association and Welsh Government to co-ordinate the identification, promotion and dissemination of best practice.

- 3.3.9 In addition to the above, we hold monthly liaison meetings between the Planning Policy and Development Management teams to aid interpretation and implementation of the recently adopted Local Development Plan. This has provided a valuable forum to ensure a cohesive and consistent planning service is provided.

### **Operating budget**

- 3.4 The operating budget for the service is shown below together with the changes from last year:

	<b>Costs</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Net Cost</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b>2013-14</b>	£1,648,800	£601,200	£1,047,600	
<b>2014-15</b>	£1,397,400	£614,900	£782,500	£-265,100 (-25%)
<b>2015-16</b>	£1,360,500	£669,900	£690,600	£-91,900 (-12%)
<b>2016-17*</b>	<i>£1,478,200</i>	<i>£668,400</i>	<i>£809,800</i>	

\**Budgeted figures* are shown for 2016-17, actual figures are shown for the other years

- 3.5 The two main costs for the service are staff costs and the LDP budget (money is transferred from the above budget to sit in an LDP reserve, built up to fund the next LDP). Income is generated by planning application fees and pre-application advice (the latter amounts to approximately £38,000 per annum).
- 3.6 For 2016/17, planning application fee income is estimated to rise slightly, given the life cycle of the Local Development Plan and the drop in housing land supply below 5 years'. However, this will be partially offset by the likelihood that some applications for residential development on unallocated sites will be refused, which will involve additional expenditure to defend decisions at appeal. In addition, new regulations are in force as of allowing applicants to claim a fee refund if their application is not determined within 24 or 32 weeks of an agreed deadline. Every effort will be made to avoid incurring fee refunds, and where extended deadlines are not agreed by customers, it is likely that applications will have to be refused without further negotiation. This is not the outcome based focus that we strive to achieve, but is unavoidable if customers will not agree time extensions.
- 3.7 A temporary Development Management Officer post has been funded using the increased income (in post since January 2015) and a fixed term Landscape Officer post has been created for 2015-16.

- 3.8 Research by the Welsh Government identifies that application fees recover approximately 60% of the cost of dealing with planning applications. Additional costs are incurred through the work involved in the statutory Development Plan, and via other services such as enforcement and heritage management. Increased planning application fee income is not ring-fenced to the planning department as such, however budgeted increases in income are mostly used to reduce the net cost of the service to the Council. In-year windfall extra income is used to balance the Council's budgets and offset overspend in other services. Conversely in previous years, underspend in other services was used to offset planning's under-recovery of income, when the economic downturn resulted in a sudden drop in fee income.
- 3.9 Application fee income has fluctuated significantly over recent years, and this poses a challenge for budget management going forward. Fee income is heavily influenced by the wider economy, for example house-building (which itself is affected by mortgage lending and development viability) and other funding streams (for example the feed-in tariff for renewable energy schemes).

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
<b>Budgeted income</b>	£374k	£462k	£473k	£490k	£525k	£633k	£668k
<b>Actual income</b>	£459k	£375k	£415k	£596k	£584k	£664k	

#### **Staff resources**

- 3.10 Staffing levels for the reporting period are shown in the chart at paragraph 3.2 above. Staffing levels in the planning service have reduced by 5.2FTE between 2013 and the end of this reporting period. However, it has been recognised that resources are stretched too thinly and additional fee income has been invested in employing a 1.0FTE fixed term Senior Landscape and Green Infrastructure Officer in 2015, a 0.6FTE fixed term DM Officer and a 1.0FTE fixed term Business Support Officer. Work is underway in 2016/17 to make the 0.6FTE DM Officer permanent, recruit an additional 0.5FTE DM Officer, and to make the 1.0FTE Business Support Officer permanent and upskill the post to enable the successful candidate to deal with a caseload of minor applications.
- 3.11 For the reporting period, sickness levels were low, with an average of 4.75 days per colleague lost due to sickness. A significant proportion of total sickness was due to one incident of long term sickness.
- 3.12 Training and development opportunities provided for colleagues during the reporting period include interpreting LDP policy on affordable housing financial contributions and Green Infrastructure (the combined approach to landscape, biodiversity and ecology). This is in addition to in-house development opportunities provided via Development Management and Planning Policy Liaison Meetings. External training and development opportunities included attendance at events run by TCPA on garden suburbs or settlements, Frances Taylor Building Law on recent legal changes in planning law and the RTPi Wales Planning Conference. Training for all officers was organised with an external trainer on the economic viability of housing developments and there was joint training with Newport City Council on the Gypsy and Traveller community and the planning process (organised by Welsh



Government). Joint working also included reviewing our Environmental Impact Assessment screening process with assistance from Newport City Council. Design tours were held for Planning Committee Members and for officers to visit completed developments of various types around the County to learn what has worked and what could be better next time. A Member seminar was held on CIL and on the new planning regulations, and these seminars were also delivered to 6 Town or Community Councils. Planning Aid Wales delivered training to Town and Community Councils. The Head of Planning has spent half a day with 13 out of 18 Planning Committee Members to get to know them and the County.

3.13 100% of colleagues have had an annual appraisal during the reporting period.

## 4.0 YOUR LOCAL STORY

### Workload

4.1 Key projects during the reporting period included:

- Using Twitter [@MCCPlanning](#) to increase community awareness and opportunities for engagement, for example by tweeting Committee agendas, links to Planning Committee webcasts, the receipt of major applications, and key consultation for example SPG;
- Concluding a long-standing piece of work with the consultation on and adoption of 18 Conservation Area Appraisals as Supplementary Planning Guidance;
- Adopting SPG on Affordable Housing, Renewable Energy and Primary Shopping Frontages;
- Viability negotiations on an amended scheme for the Sudbrook Paper Mill strategic housing allocation having refused the first application which offered zero affordable housing;
- Approval of detailed planning permission for the strategic housing allocation at Wonastow Road for 340 dwellings, and approval of planning permissions for two Premier Inn hotels, Monmouth Comprehensive School redevelopment, four solar farms, and a significant expansion at Magor Brewery; and
- Reported to Economy and Development Select Committee on the LDP tourism policies and the extent to which they support glamping and other growth sectors that are important to our tourism economy. An officer working group was established to clarify policy interpretation and develop SPG to assist officers and customers;
- Working with a Building Preservation Trust to seek to secure the restoration of a Listed Building at Risk.

Application caseload has increased since the previous reporting period, however the proportion of applications determined within the agreed deadlines has also increased. This increase in decision speed has not been at the expense of the outcome, with the proportion of approvals remaining constant at 95%:

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
<b>Applications received</b>	1083	987	983	1173	1284
<b>Applications determined</b>	956	874	852	1053	1085
<b>% within 8 weeks</b>	45%	45%	70%	76%	79%
<b>% applications approved</b>	94%	94%	93%	95%	95%

4.2 Limited meaningful historical trends can be drawn in relation to the enforcement workload due to significant changes to the performance indicator definition since 2014, which changed both the deadline and the definition of when a case is 'resolved'.

### Annual Monitoring Report

4.3 The Council adopted its Local Development Plan in February 2014 and our second LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) will be submitted in October 2016 to cover the 2015-16 period. Our second AMR has identified that although the Plan strategy remains sound, housing delivery is well below target and the strategic housing sites are not coming forward as quickly as anticipated.

- 4.4 For this APR period, the Council had a housing land supply of 5.0 years' however it is now known that supply has dropped to 4.1 years'. To regain our 5 year supply, 647 house completions would be required every year from now until 2021. This compares with actual completions over the last ten years averaging approximately 240 dwellings per year. There are three main factors causing this problem: allocated sites are slow to come forward; external economic factors affecting site viability, consumer confidence and mortgage availability; and issues with the way TAN1 is calculated. As a result of the issue with housing land availability, we propose commencing an early LDP review.
- 4.5 As at March 2016, the status of the strategic sites is as follows:

**Deri Farm, Abergavenny (SAH1):**

Persimmon Homes submitted a full application for 250 residential units in November 2014. The application is yet to be determined given outstanding issues relating to site viability (affordable housing provision) and undergrounding of overhead power lines. It is anticipated that these issues will be resolved and the application progressed accordingly during the next monitoring period. The agreed 2015-16 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 185 units within the Plan period with first completions in 2017/18.

**Crick Road, Portskewett (SAH2):**

Council owned site allocated for 285 residential units and 1 ha of serviced land for business and industrial development. A master planning consultation exercise to consider various options for the site was undertaken during the current monitoring period, although a planning application has yet to be submitted. The agreed 2015-16 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 200 units within the Plan period with first completions in 2017/18.

**Fairfield Mabey, Chepstow (SAH3):**

The landowner submitted an outline application (DC/2014/01290) in October 2014 for up to 600 residential units (350 to be delivered within the Plan period), commercial space including offices and workshops (Use Class B1) and small scale retail/food and drink floorspace (Use Classes A1 and A3) and multi-functional green and blue open space. The application is yet to be determined due to outstanding highways issues (Welsh Government Highways Division had a holding objection on the application for 18 months which had not been resolved during this monitoring period). The agreed 2015-16 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 200 units within the Plan period with first completions in 2018/19.

**Wonastow Road, Monmouth (SAH4):**

Outline permission was granted for up to 370 dwellings and 6.5 ha of employment land in December 2014. The site developers (Barratt/David Wilson and Taylor Wimpey) submitted a reserved matters application (DC/2015/00392) for 340 units which was granted permission in November 2015.

The overall LDP site allocation is for a total of 450 units. The additional units relating to this allocation are to be delivered as an extension to the site at Drewen Farm. An application for this element of the site has not yet been submitted. This part of the site is effectively land-

locked until 2019 when the Taylor Wimpey development is sufficiently progressed to allow access through.

The agreed 2015-16 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 390 units within the Plan period with first completions in 2016/17.

**Rockfield Farm, Undy (SAH5):**

Council owned site allocated for 270 residential units and 2 ha of serviced land for business and industrial use. A master planning consultation exercise to consider various options for the site was undertaken during the current monitoring period. It is anticipated that an application will be submitted and progressed during the next monitoring period. The agreed 2015-16 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 195 units within the Plan period with first completions in 2017/18.

**Land at Vinegar Hill, Undy (SAH6):**

Site for 225 residential units, linked to the adjacent Rockfield Farm site and likely to progress in tandem. However, the developer has not submitted an application during the current monitoring period. The agreed 2015-16 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 120 units within the Plan period with first completions in 2018/19.

**Former Paper Mill, Sudbrook (SAH7):**

Full planning application (DC/2015/01184) was submitted by Harrow Estates (Redrow confirmed as the developer) in October 2015 for 212 residential units (192 market and 20 affordable units). There have been a number of site viability issues associated with this application. However, it is anticipated that any such issues will be resolved and the application progressed/approved during the next monitoring period. The agreed 2015-16 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 115 units within the Plan period with first completions in 2017/18.

- 4.6 The AMR highlights issues surrounding the delivery of affordable housing, and developers continue to raise viability issues on some of the strategic housing sites above. This is a Wales-wide issue.
- 4.7 The Council's Economy and Development Select Committee has recently (October 2015) scrutinised the LDP's impact on enabling tourism-related development. As stated above, the tourism industry forms a key part of the County's economy and links directly to what makes Monmouthshire distinctive. This scrutiny identified a need to produce Supplementary Planning Guidance to clarify for customers and officers how the LDP supports different types of tourism development, and also identified a need for future revisions to the policy to allow greater flexibility for agricultural diversification for tourism purposes. An officer working group has been established to lead on this project and will be reporting back to the Select Committee during 2016/17.

**Service Plan priorities for 2015-16**

- 4.8 The Service Plans for the Development Management and Planning Policy areas identified the following priority actions:

- Sustaining a good standard of performance against performance indicators while applying systems review methods. As can be seen from this report, this priority has been achieved;
- Successfully assimilate the new 'pre-application advice service' into our workflow. This priority has been achieved and a development team approach introduced;
- Adapt to, implement and disseminate new LDP policies. This priority is on-going;
- Prepare, consult and adopt Supplementary Planning Guidance. A programme for the preparation of SPG, including prioritisation between different policy areas to reflect available resources was adopted by Planning Committee. SPG has been adopted relating to Green Infrastructure, design guidance for agricultural building conversions, replacement dwellings/extensions in the countryside, and barn conversions (business use assessment);
- Work towards adopting a Community Infrastructure Levy. This is on-going, and it is anticipated that CIL will be adopted in early 2017. Consultation has been completed on the pre-draft charging schedule;
- Cross-departmental working to ensure corporate plans and activities align with the LDP. This priority is on-going;
- Consult on and adopt the draft Conservation Area Appraisals (CAAs). This priority was delayed until 2015-16 due to resource pressures;
- Implement a replacement IT data base system with planning application, enforcement and appeals modules. This priority is on-going. The system is due to 'go live' in December 2016.

### **Local pressures**

4.9 Key local pressures include:

- Enabling delivery of the County's housing needs: bringing forward allocated LDP sites; site viability; achieving good planning decisions, creating sustainable communities and maintaining a five year housing land supply;
- Adopting and implementing CIL;
- Securing timely consultation responses from consultees, both internal and external;
- The short lifespan of the adopted LDP and the introduction of the Plan expiry date;
- Constant change caused by successive new legislation, national planning policy and procedures;
- Staff succession planning.

### **Actions from our previous APR**

4.10 Our 2014/15 Annual Performance Report identified four actions:

**ACTION 1: Work with consultees to seek more timely responses.**

**ACTION 2: Increased use of extension of time letters where decisions cannot be made within 8 weeks.**

4.11 These actions were in response to the proportion of applications determined within agreed timescales which was an amber indicator last year (76% against a target of 80%). Work is on-going in relation to Action 1 and there is on-going dialogue with two internal consultee

departments to seek to identify ways of focussing their stretched resources on priority cases and achieving efficiencies via the pre-application service.

- 4.12 While our evidence shows that customers prefer a positive outcome than a quick decision, we fully recognise that if customers are going to continue using our pre-application advice service (which streamlines the subsequent stages, improves outcomes and generates fee income), they must receive timely and meaningful responses. In addition, new regulations allow customers to claim an application fee refund if their application is not determined within a given timescale. We can avoid this risk by agreeing extended deadlines, and Action 2 has been fully implemented, however customers will not be willing to agree a time extension if they cannot see a timely conclusion being reached or have previously received poor service.
- 4.13 This indicator remains amber for the 2015/16 reporting period, however performance has improved from 76% to 79%, and to provide context, only 8 Authorities in Wales achieved the 80% target.
- 4.14 Work with internal consultees will continue in 2016/17 (see section 7).

**ACTION 3: Report appeal decisions to Planning Committee to facilitate shared learning.**

- 4.15 This Action related to an amber indicator regarding one appeal costs award against the Authority (Llanvapley solar farm). This action has been fully implemented and appeal decisions are reported to Planning Committee every month for discussion and learning. There have been no appeal costs awarded against us in 2015/16 and we are awaiting decisions on two applications for awards of costs in our favour where we consider that appellants have behaved unreasonably and resulted in unnecessary expense to the Council.

**ACTION 4: Undertake additional benchmarking and identify and learn from best practice.**

- 4.16 This Action related to the proportion of enforcement cases resolved within 180 days. There was no target set by the Welsh Government for this indicator, however Monmouthshire's performance of resolving 67% of enforcement cases within 180 days of receipt fell below the Wales average of 77%.
- 4.17 Our performance against this indicator has improved in this reporting period (70%) but remains below the Welsh average (which has reduced to 73%). Monmouthshire's Development Services Manager sits on a performance indicator working group set up by the Welsh Government and the enforcement indicators are being revised in response to concerns about the clarity and value of their current wording. Performance against this indicator fluctuates throughout Wales from 90% to 38%, and there is some doubt that all Authorities are using the latest performance indicator definition: the work by Swansea City Council identified three slightly different definitions for this indicator in different documents.

- 4.18 The identification of this action in 2014/15 was predicated on the view that our performance might simply reflect the amount of formal action being taken: if we are taking more formal action, or inviting more retrospective applications to seek to regularise breaches, our performance will compare less favourably than an Authority that does not pursue formal action and simply closes cases as not expedient to pursue (which might be quicker but is arguably not achieving a positive outcome). The action therefore proposed to undertake further benchmarking to understand the context of Monmouthshire's performance and to identify and learn from best practice in another Welsh Local Planning Authority. This benchmarking has not been undertaken due to limited time and resources. With hindsight, while this benchmarking information would have been of interest, it would not have improved our performance, just sought to have justified it. An alternative action is therefore proposed this year.
- 4.17 Work has been started by Swansea County Council, where the recently appointed Enforcement Manager is taking a lead role throughout Wales in reviewing this performance indicator and in setting out a good practice guide, which proposes a triage approach to quickly sift out priority cases and complaints where there is no breach or action is not expedient, allowing resources to be focused on the most important work.

## **5.0 WHAT SERVICE USERS THINK**

### **What matters to our customers/citizens?**

5.1 Between 2010 and 2012 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.

5.2 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 validation of applications;
- They want Planning Committee to follow the officer's recommendation and value being able to have a dialogue with Members prior to determination;
- They don't 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.

5.3 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.

### **LDP survey**

5.4 Following adoption of our Local Development Plan in February 2014, a customer feedback survey was undertaken in November 2014 with 120 responses received. The key headlines from this survey were very positive:

- 60% total respondents were satisfied they had been kept well informed throughout the process;
- 63% total respondents found forms easy to complete (this was 83% amongst agents and external organisations);
- 70% all respondents considered they understood the LDP process; and
- 76% all respondents considered they had received adequate feedback on consultations.

5.5 Feedback identified the following areas for improvement:

- Website: customers sometimes experienced difficulties in accessing information due to the sheer number of documents, the lack of search facility, or the website going down. The MCC website has since undergone a redesign and enhanced search



facilities added. Future improvements will be made in terms of web page design and links between individual pages and documents. In addition, an increased use of social media will seek to target a wider audience;

- Length of process;
- Use of technical language, terminology and jargon;
- Dissatisfaction with outcomes, e.g. sites were allocated despite opposition; and
- Confusion caused by the alternative sites stage. The Welsh Government has since amended the regulations to delete this stage.

### Planning Applications Customer Survey

- 5.6 In 2015-16 we conducted a customer satisfaction survey aimed at assessing the views of customers who had received a planning application decision during the year. The survey was sent to 466 people, 15% of whom submitted a whole or partial response. The majority of responses (49%) were from members of the public. 9% of respondents had their most recent planning application refused.
- 5.7 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.
- 5.8 Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents that selected either 'tend to agree' or 'strongly agree' for each statement for both our planning authority and Wales.

**Table 1: Percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement, 2015-16**

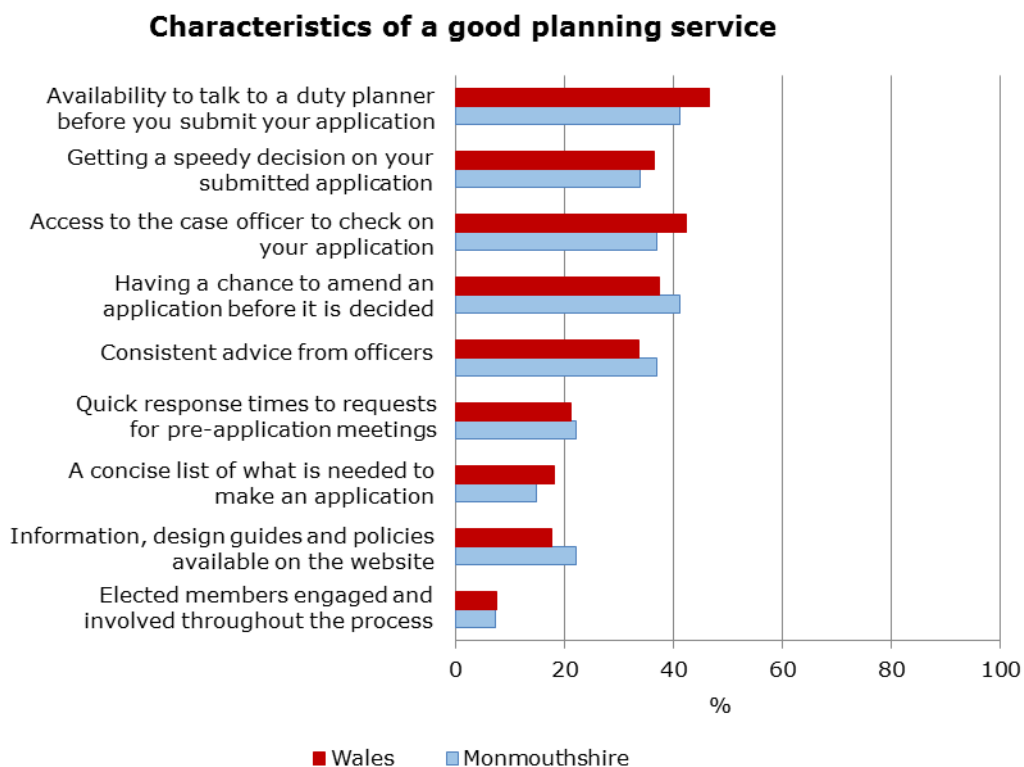
Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	%	
	Monmouthshire LPA	Wales
The LPA enforces its planning rules fairly and consistently	49	47
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	69	58
The LPA gives help throughout, including with conditions	55	49
The LPA responded promptly when they had questions	61	58
They were listened to about their application	68	57
They were kept informed about their application	59	49
They were satisfied overall with how the LPA handled their application	73	61

- 5.9 Direct comparison is not possible because the feedback is from different customers to last year, however overall satisfaction has increased significantly (73% satisfied overall compared to 65% last year), and a higher proportion of customers this year considered that we gave good advice to help them make a successful application, and that they were

listened to about their application. Two indicators where satisfaction had declined relate to us giving help with conditions (55% agreed compared to 63% last year), and responding promptly when asked questions (61% compared to 67% last year). In order to maximise honest feedback, the survey is completely anonymised, however this means it is not possible to drill down further into responses to better understand what exactly the concern related to and how we can learn from it. We do, however, know that white males aged between 45 and 55 are the least satisfied customers. We have experienced some uncertainty during the year regarding the requirements of conditions requested in relation to implementation of the new Green Infrastructure SPG, whereby planning officers themselves are unclear what is required to discharge the conditions. This might be reflected in the customer feedback, but it is impossible to tell. The feedback has been discussed in team meetings and we are working to improve the service we provide. It should, however, be noted that we score above the Wales average on every indicator.

- 5.10 The lowest scoring area of customer satisfaction for both Monmouthshire and Wales as a whole related to fairly and consistently enforcing planning rules, and it is considered that this relates largely to a misunderstanding of the system within which we must operate, for example that the purpose of enforcement is to remedy harm, not to punish offenders. This is discussed later in Section 6 and 7 and Town and Community Council training is proposed.
- 5.11 We also asked respondents to select three planning service characteristics from a list that they thought would most help them achieve successful developments. Figure 1 shows how often each characteristic was selected as a percentage of the total number of selections.

**Figure 1: Characteristics of a good planning service, Monmouthshire LPA, 2015-16**



- 5.12 These results illustrate the areas of most importance to our customers and therefore guide how we should focus our resources and attention. Unfortunately the survey does not capture the extent to which customers think an area is important and we already do it well versus where it is important and we need to step up, however when assessed in the round, the feedback suggests we are delivering what customers say is important to them.
- 5.13 Notwithstanding this limitation, the customer feedback has been taken into account when reviewing service delivery, for example when considering the level of duty planning officer service that we are able to sustain. Given the customer feedback, we have sought to maximise the level of service provided.
- 5.14 Customers also had an opportunity to provide further feedback. Comments received include:
- ‘Monmouthshire Planning Services were very helpful and relatively easily contacted throughout the determination process. One of the better planning authorities from this perspective.’*
- ‘Very prompt.’*
- ‘Happy with the service received and very good response time from Planning Officer’*
- ‘Excellent system but poorly staffed’*
- ‘Some officers consistently fail to return calls’*
- ‘Ease of communication but slow’*
- ‘The introduction of the pre-application advice service is welcomed and as a customer of this service found it to be very beneficial. However service could be further enhanced if the specified timescales set out in the service standards are routinely met. Whilst I appreciate the limited resources LPA’s have, time is the most important factor to me in the development process.’*
- ‘For most applications the LPA has to consult a number of consultees, both statutory and non-statutory. There is an obligation on LPAs to determine applications within statutory time periods; however, this obligation seems to bypass consultees, especially in-house departmental consultees and statutory bodies such as NRW, Cadw etc who seem to believe that these obligations do not apply to them. The system needs to be overhauled such that consultees are made to realise that they contribute fundamentally to the determination process and that they have an obligation to submit their representations in sufficient time for the LPAs to determine the applications within their set statutory determination deadlines.’ (See **ACTION 1** in Section 7)*
- 5.15 In addition to the above survey, the number of formal complaints and letters offering compliments are recorded. Although we receive a significant number of emails from customers thanking the case officer, these are not logged under the corporate system.

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number of Stage 1 formal complaints received	14	17	9	5
Number of Stage 2 formal complaints investigations received	8	11	5	2
Number of Stage 2 complaints upheld or partially upheld	4 partially upheld	4 partially upheld	3 partially upheld	0 upheld
Number of Ombudsman complaints upheld or partially upheld	2 partially upheld*	1 partially upheld	0	0
Number of compliments received	2	3	4	2

\*The areas upheld related to the way the stage 2 complaint was conducted by the independent Investigating Officer, not to the planning service/planning decision.

- 5.15 Overall, customer satisfaction has improved and we rank above the Wales average in every category, the number of formal complaints received has dropped, with none upheld this year.

## **6.0 OUR PERFORMANCE 2015-16**

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 Performance is analysed across the five key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in the Planning Performance Framework:
- Plan making;
  - Efficiency;
  - Quality;
  - Engagement; and
  - Enforcement.

### **Plan making**

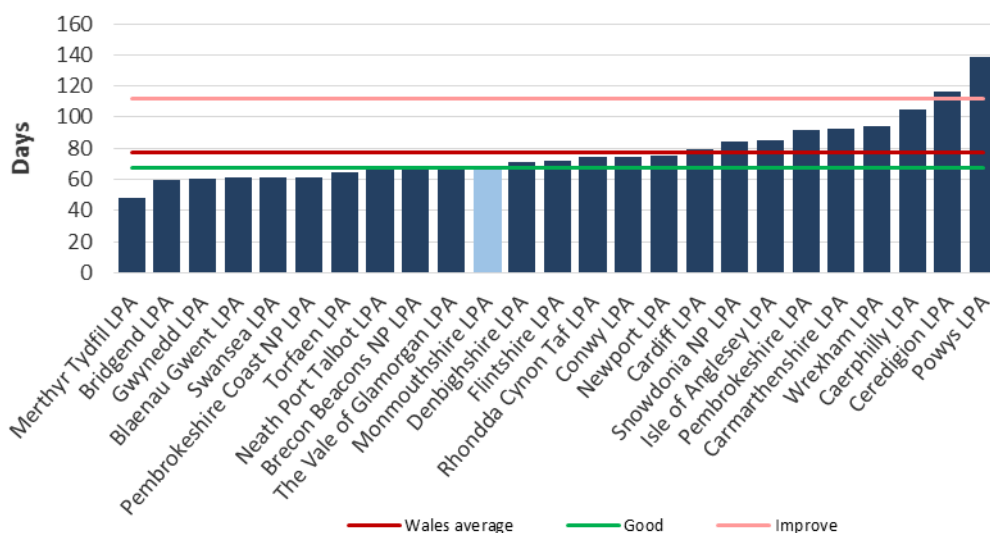
- 6.3 As at 31 March 2016, we were one of 22 LPAs that had a current development plan in place. We are required to submit an Annual Monitoring Report in October 2016. This document has been prepared.
- 6.4 During the APR period we had 5 years of housing land supply identified, making us one of 8 Welsh LPAs with the required 5 years' supply. However, we now know that our housing land supply has since dropped to 4.1 years'. Further commentary on this is provided in the Local Development Plan Annual Monitoring Report.

### **Efficiency**

- 6.5 In 2015-16 we determined 1085 planning applications, each taking, on average, 68 days (10 weeks) to determine. This compares to an average of 77 days (11 weeks) across Wales. Given our focus on outcome rather than speed, this is an excellent achievement and suggests we have struck the right balance between these two objectives.
- 6.6 This is a slight increase in output compared to last year but a slight worsening in terms of average time taken (1053 applications determined taking an average of 62 days in 2014/15). Performance narrowly misses the 'good' target however (68 days against a target of 67 days).

6.7 Figure 2 shows the average time taken by each LPA to determine an application during the year.

**Figure 2: Average time taken (days) to determine applications, 2015-16**



6.8 79% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. This compared to 77% across Wales, but was marginally below the 80% target. Only 8 out of 25 LPAs met the 80% target.

6.9 Following engagement with customers and stakeholders, Monmouthshire County Council has made the evidence-based decision that the outcome of planning applications is far more important than the speed of decision-making. Within reason, customers would prefer to continue working with us to secure an acceptable scheme and obtain planning permission, with as few pre-commencement conditions as possible, than simply have a decision made within an arbitrary 8 week deadline. The impact of planning decisions is long-lived and, while it is recognised that timely decisions can assist the economy, developers and investors also seek clarity and certainty and ultimately want planning permission. Our focus is therefore on the outcome.

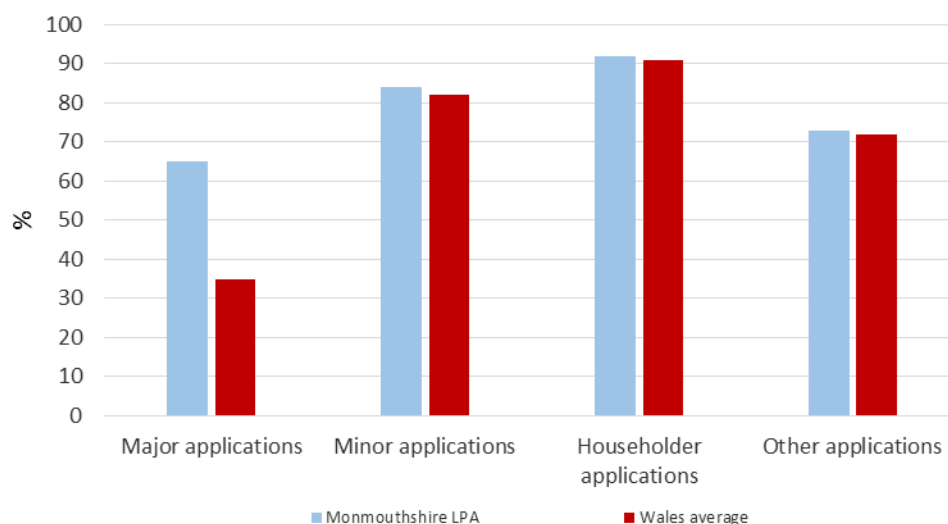
6.10 Notwithstanding our improving performance and our outcome focus, further action (**ACTION 1** below) is proposed in regard to this indicator in terms of continuing to work with internal consultees to seek to improve the timeliness of responses. This should lead to quicker decisions and improved customer satisfaction.

6.11 Figure 3 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 92% of householder applications within the required timescales, which is a significant improvement on our performance last year (87%). We use our monthly Board meetings to monitor performance against targets and desired outcomes, and in 2016/17 will be carrying out a trial of focusing these discussions on specific application types to identify

where things are working well and how those successes can be replicated for other application types. Initial investigations suggest that our stronger performance with householder applications is partly due to there being fewer consultees: i.e. consultees on more complex applications are a cause of delay. This relates to Action 1 from our 2014/15 APR (Working with consultees to secure more timely consultation responses) and further work is required in this regard in relation to both internal consultees and external consultees to seek to use the limited resources in those areas to best effect. This action is therefore carried forward into 2016/17 (see Section 7).

6.12 Figure 3 shows that we perform above the Wales average for decision speed in all categories of development. Our particularly strong performance for major applications is due to a combination of an effective pre-application service, and a good working relationship with customers ensuring agreement to an extension of time.

**Figure 3: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales, by type, 2015-16**

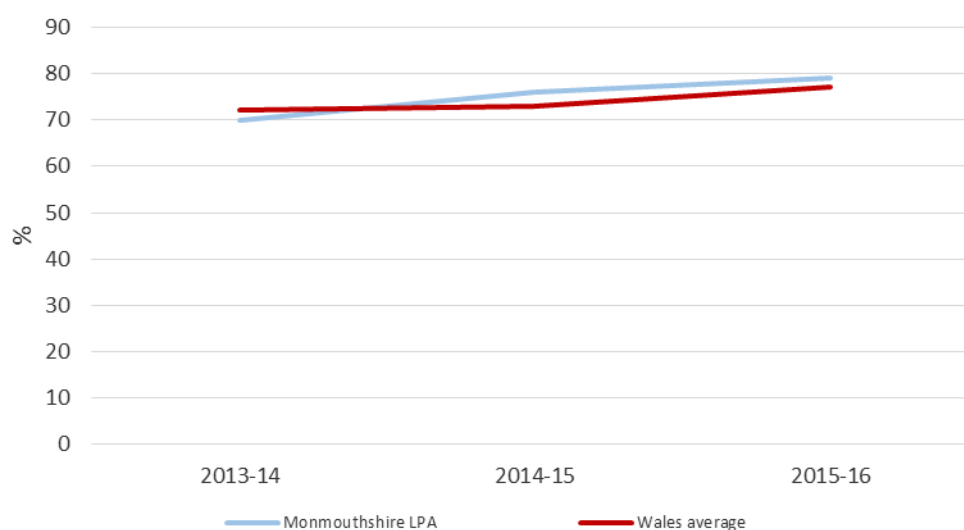


6.13 Between 2014-15 and 2015-16, as Figure 4 shows, the percentage of planning applications we determined within the required timescales increased from 76%. Wales also saw an increase this year. This is probably due in part to the increasing use of ‘extension of time’ agreements (**ACTION 2** in last year’s APR), however our research shows that the outcome is more important to customers than the time taken: a quick refusal serves nobody well if an acceptable scheme can be negotiated.

6.14 Over the same period:

- The number of applications we received increased
- The number of applications we determined increased; and
- The number of applications we approved increased (the proportion approved remained constant at 95%).

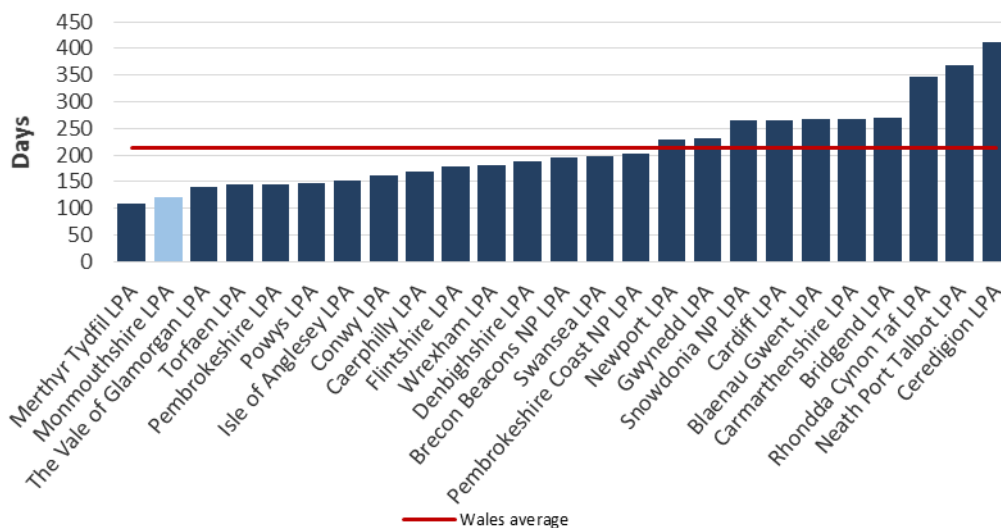
**Figure 4: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales**



### Major applications

6.15 We determined 20 major planning applications in 2015-16, none of which were subject to an EIA. Each application took, on average, 121 days (17 weeks) to determine. As Figure 5 shows, this was the second shortest average time taken of all Welsh LPAs which is an excellent achievement.

**Figure 5: Average time (days) taken to determine a major application, 2015-16**



6.16 65% of these major applications were determined within the required timescales, the third highest percentage of all Welsh LPAs. This is a significant improvement on the 50% achieved last year, especially given that we determined nearly twice as many major applications during this 2015/16 reporting period. It is also noteworthy that 30% of our major

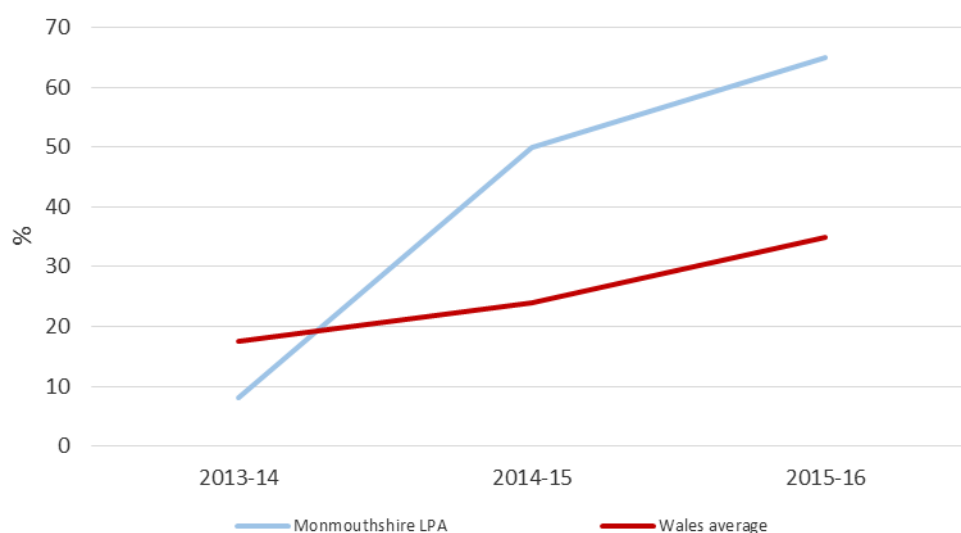


applications were determined within the 8 week target (the remainder were subject to agreed time extensions). This performance is aided by our pre-application advice service and by our Systems Thinking approach, which, with the applicant’s agreement, seeks to work towards a ‘clean’ application prior to starting to determine the application. It should be stressed that this approach has no bearing on the date on which the application is legally valid and therefore does not affect our stats returns.

6.17 Since 2014-15 the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales had increased from 50%. Similarly, the number of major applications determined increased while the number of applications subject to an EIA determined during the year stayed the same.

6.18 Figure 7 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 6: Percentage of major planning applications determined within the required timescales**



6.19 Over the same period:

- The percentage of minor applications determined within the required timescales increased from 74% to 84%;
- The percentage of householder applications determined within the required timescales increased from 87% to 92%;
- The percentage of other applications determined within required timescales decreased from 81% to 73%; and
- The percentage of applications approved remained at 95%.

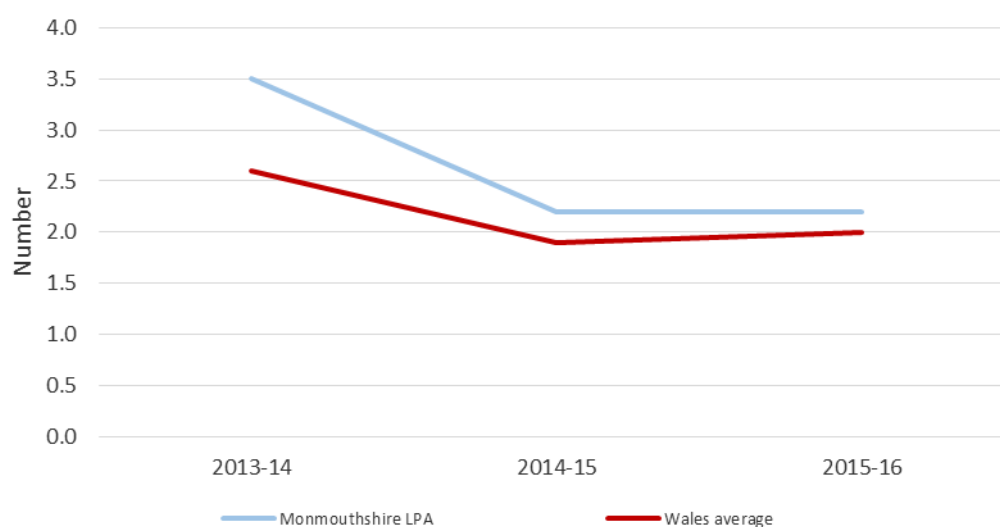
## Quality

6.20 In 2015-16, our Planning Committee made 68 planning application decisions during the year, which equated to 6% of all planning applications determined. Across Wales 7% of all planning application decisions were made by Planning Committee. This is an identical proportion to last year. Unlike most Authorities, we have a Delegated Panel system in operation whereby applications with between 1 and 4 objections are reviewed by a group

comprising the three lead Planning Committee Members. This system works effectively in reducing the number of applications referred to Committee while ensuring interested parties are reassured that their concerns have been heard and reviewed before a decision is made.

- 6.21 1% of Planning Committee decisions went against officer advice. This compared to 9% of member-made decisions across Wales. This equated to 0.1% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice; 0.6% across Wales. The low proportion of Committee overturns is testament to an effective Member-Officer working relationship, the added value of Planning Committee visiting every site before making a decision, and an experienced Planning Committee provided with appropriate development training.
- 6.22 In 2015-16 we received 28 appeals against our planning decisions, which equated to 2.2 appeals for every 100 applications received. Across Wales, 2 appeals were received for every 100 applications. Figure 8 shows how the volume of appeals received has changed since 2014-15 and how this compares to Wales.

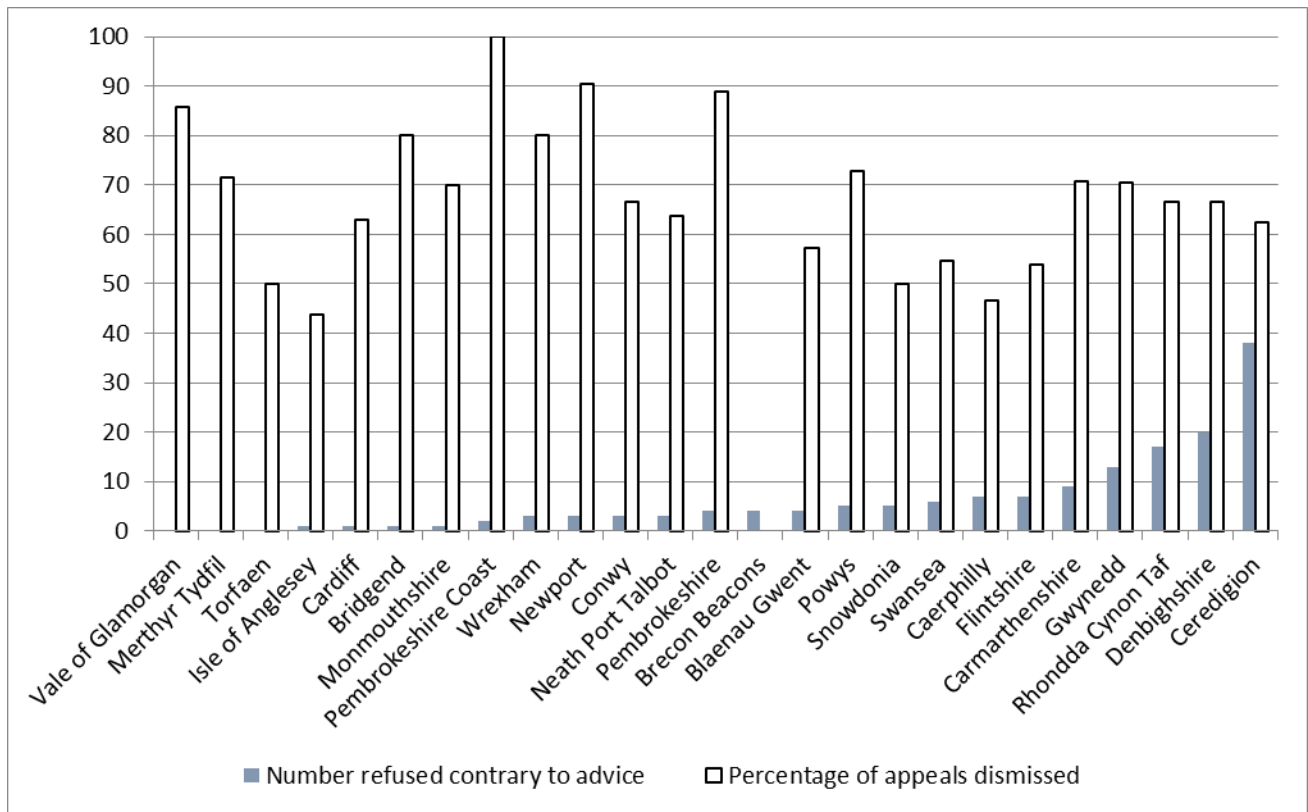
**Figure 7: Number of appeals received per 100 planning applications**



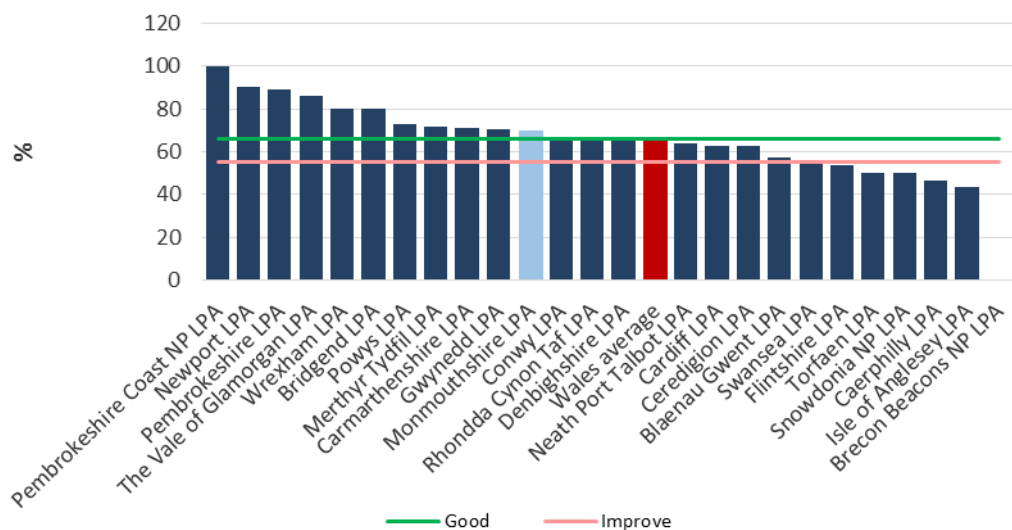
- 6.23 Over the same period the percentage of planning applications approved stayed the same at 95%.
- 6.24 Of the 20 appeals that were decided during the year, 70% were dismissed. As Figure 9 shows, this was higher than the percentage of appeals dismissed across Wales as a whole and we were one of 14 LPAs that reached the 66% target.
- 6.25 Figure 8 shows the number of Committee decisions made against officer recommendation, plotted against the percentage of appeal decisions that uphold the Council's decision. A high number of Committee overturns and a high appeal success would either indicate that officer recommendations are wrong (in the eyes of both the Committee and Planning Inspector), or might be unrelated if the Committee is approving applications against recommendation (for which there is no right of appeal). Conversely, a high number of

overturns and low success rate at appeal might suggest that the Committee is wrong (in the eyes of both the officers and Planning Inspector). None of these scenarios applies in Monmouthshire, where the number of Committee overturns is low, and appeal success rate is high.

**Figure 8: Number of Committee overturns plotted against appeal wins**



**Figure 6: Percentage of appeals dismissed, 2015-16**



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

## Engagement

6.27 We are:

- one of 24 LPAs that allowed members of the public to address the Planning Committee; and
- one of 20 LPAs that had an online register of planning application.

6.28 As Table 2 shows, 69% of respondents to our 2015-16 customer satisfaction survey agreed that the LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application. Customer satisfaction has improved against both indicators compared to last year.

**Table 2: Feedback from our 2015-16 customer satisfaction survey**

Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	%	
	Monmouthshire LPA	Wales
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	69	58
They were listened to about their application	68	57

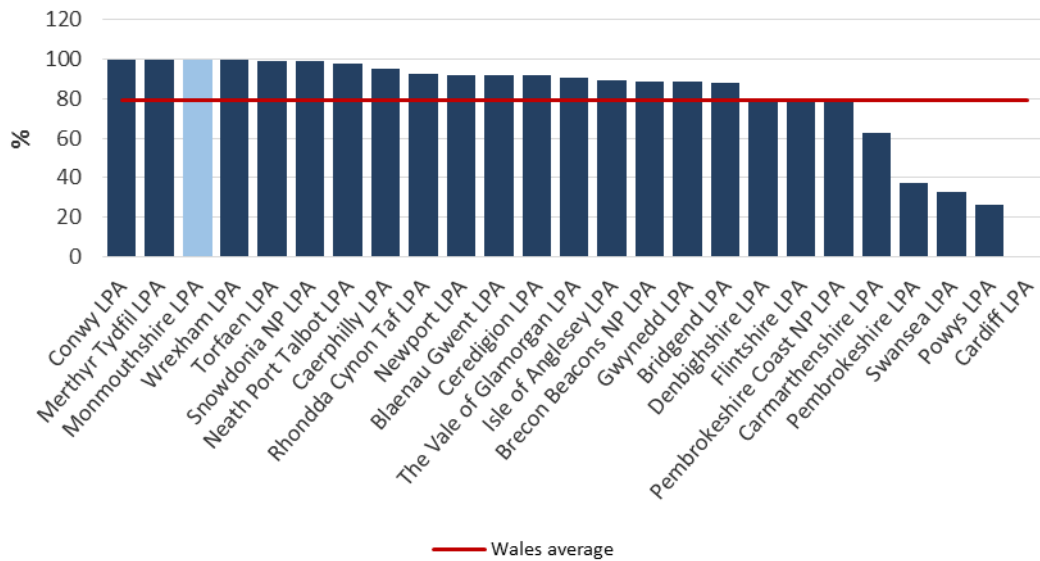
## Enforcement

6.29 In 2015-16 we investigated 285 enforcement cases, which equated to 3.1 per 1,000 population. This compared to 1.9 enforcement cases investigated per 1,000 population across Wales. The PI measures the time taken from receipt of a complaint of the alleged breach of planning control to the time taken to investigate and notify the complainant of the outcome and/or intended action as applicable: this could be that there was no breach of planning control, that there is a breach but action is not expedient, or that there is a breach and action is proposed. We took, on average, 16 days to investigate each enforcement case. We investigated more cases than last year, but the average time was slightly longer (16 days compared to 12 days last year). However, this is against a WG target of 84 days, and a Wales average of 88 days.

6.30 We investigated 100% of these enforcement cases within 84 days. Across Wales 79.4% were investigated within 84 days. Figure 10 shows the percentage of enforcement cases that were investigated within 84 days across all Welsh LPAs.

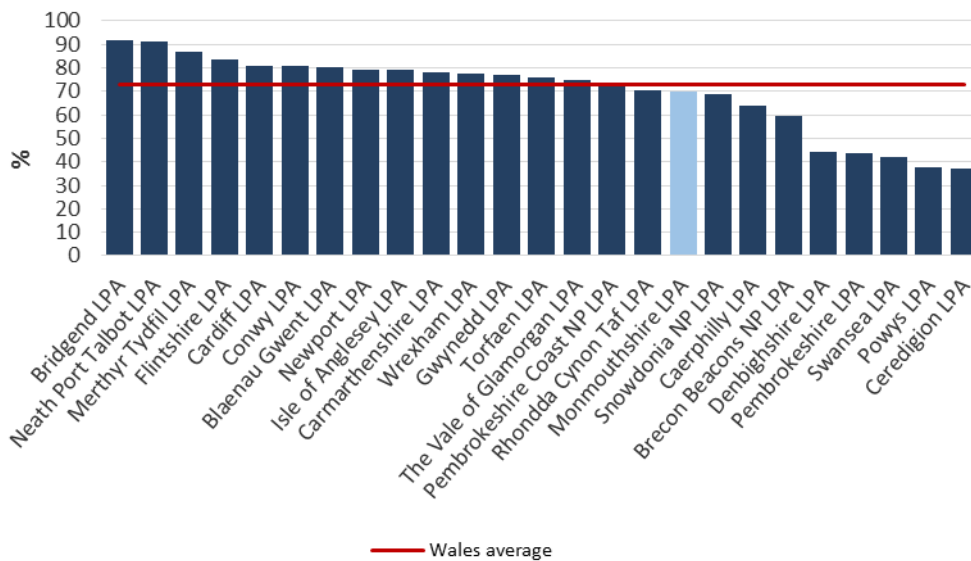
6.31 This indicator is being reviewed during 2016/17. While the indicator itself is considered to be appropriate, 84 days is considered to be an excessively long period of time to carry out an initial investigation and inform the complainant of the proposed course of action.

**Figure 7: Percentage of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days, 2015-16**



6.32 Over the same period, we resolved 168 enforcement cases, taking, on average, 143 days to resolve each case. This indicator measures only those cases where a breach of planning control was identified and further action was considered expedient. ‘Resolved’ means that the breach ceased, an Enforcement Notice was complied with, or planning permission was granted to retain the development/use/activity (either by us or at appeal by the Planning Inspectorate). We resolved more cases than in 2014/15 (168 compared to 110 last year) but the average time taken increased from 121 days in 2014/15 to 143 days this year.

**Figure 8: Percentage of enforcement cases resolved in 180 days, 2015-16**



- 6.33 70% of this enforcement action was taken within 180 days from the start of the case, which is an improvement on the 67% achieved last year. As Figure 11 shows this compared to 73% of enforcement cases resolved within 180 days across Wales.
- 6.34 As above, this PI is under review in 2016/17. In contrast to the 'investigated' indicator above, 180 days is considered to be a challenging target where formal enforcement action is pursued and case resolution may not occur until after a protracted sequence of application, appeal, Enforcement Notice and prosecution.
- 6.35 In the context of the above, our performance is considered to be good and improving. However, further action (**ACTION 2** below) is proposed in order to review our enforcement practices and seek to streamline activity through a 'triage' approach being piloted by Swansea City Council. Improved guidance for our communities is proposed to try and better manage expectations, and Planning Aid Wales is being invited to provide a seminar on planning enforcement for our Community Council clusters to help explain the processes, tools and powers available.

## 7.0 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Based on the customer feedback in Section 5 and the performance information in Section 6 and Appendix A, we can be proud of the service we deliver. During this period:

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

7.2 A summary table of our performance can be found in Appendix A of the APR. One of the 18 indicators (progress against LDP delivery timetable) is not applicable to Monmouthshire because we have already adopted our LDP. Of the 17 applicable indicators:

- 11 have targets set by the Welsh Government. Monmouthshire's performance is ranked 'good' against 9, and 'fair' against 2. The 'fair' result relates to the proportion of planning applications determined within the required timescale, where we achieved 79%, narrowly missing the 'good' target of 80%; and the average time taken to determine all applications where our performance (68 days) narrowly missed the 'good' target of 67 days<sup>1</sup>;
- We performed above the Wales average in 16 of the 17 applicable indicators. The indicator for which performance was below Wales average related to the proportion of enforcement cases fully resolved within 180 days, where we achieved 70% against a Wales average of 73%<sup>2</sup>. Further commentary is provided on this indicator in Section 6.

	Number of indicators
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance is 'good'	9
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance is 'fair'	2 <sup>1</sup> (see above)
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance 'needs improvement'	0
No target has been set but our performance is above the Wales average	5
No target has been set but our performance is slightly below the Wales average	1 <sup>2</sup> (see above)
No target has been set but our performance is significantly below the Wales average	0

7.3 Our performance improved against 12 of the 17 applicable indicators, and declined slightly against 5 indicators compared to last year. However, it should be noted that in all of the cases where performance declined, we remained significantly above the Wales average, and where a target was set by the Welsh Government, we are still ranked 'good' or 'fair'. The only indicator of concern is our housing land supply, which we know has since dropped to

4.1 years' supply, below the required 5 year supply. This is discussed in detail in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).

7.4 The declining performance related to:

Indicator	2014/15	2015/16	Wales average	WG target
5 year housing land supply	5.2 years'	5.0 years'	3.9 years'	5.0 years'
Average time taken to determine major planning applications	95 days	121 days	213 days	n/a
Average time taken to determine all planning applications	62 days	68 days	77 days	<67 days
Average time taken to investigate enforcement complaints	12 days	16 days	88 days	n/a
Average time taken to resolve enforcement cases	120 days	143 days	210 days	n/a

7.4 Customer feedback identified the most valued characteristics of a good planning service as the availability to talk to a duty planner before submitting an application, and having a chance to amend an application before it is decided. This provides further evidence that our outcome focus is what our customers want.

7.5 Three actions are identified going forwards.

#### **Speed of determining applications**

7.6 79% of applications were determined within agreed timescales, against a Welsh Government target threshold for good performance standing at 80%. The average time taken to determine all applications was 68 days, narrowly missing the 'good' target of 67 days. While it is accepted that timely decisions can have economic benefits, of greater importance to investors is clarity and certainty, and our evidence is that, within reason, customers are happy to have a slightly slower decision if it is a favourable one. We therefore place greater importance on securing a positive outcome.

7.7 However, this is an area for potential improvement, and one area for attention is delays in receiving consultee replies. Areas for consideration include reviewing the consultations sent to see if limited resources can be better focused on the most important matters; and ensuring consultees understand the implications of delays in terms of customer service, Plan delivery, economic impacts and potential fee refunds. It is therefore proposed to continue the action commenced last year:

**ACTION 1: Work with consultees to seek more timely responses.**

#### **Speed of resolving enforcement cases**

7.8 The Welsh Government is yet to provide a target for this indicator, however Monmouthshire's performance of resolving 70% of enforcement cases within 180 days of



receipt falls below the Wales average of 73%. It is also known that this indicator is under review in 2016/17. However, customer feedback and complaints often relates to perceived delays in enforcement cases. 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 us and/or unrealistic expectations. Performance has improved compared to last year, however there remains scope for further improvement. Consideration will be given to streamlining our processes via a triage approach based on a pilot developed by Swansea City Council, and arranging Town and Community Council training to improve understanding and better manage expectations.

**ACTION 2: Streamline enforcement processes following a triage system**

**ACTION 3: Arrange a training seminar on planning enforcement for Town and Community Councils via the new area-based clusters.**

**Opportunities going forward:**

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

- To improve the web site experience for customers and increase the amount of information available via GIS, which would drive out waste and enable channel shift so that more customers can self-serve;
- To replace the inefficient data base for planning applications to reduce waste for staff, including the production of standard letters and monitoring reports;
- To work towards being a paperless office to reduce printing, copying and postage costs;
- Collaboration with the Village Alive Trust and interested Preservation Trusts or investors to engage and work with the owners of Listed Buildings on the At Risk register or to acquire them from the current owner;
- Adopt CIL; and
- Adopt SPG to ensure the accurate implementation and interpretation of planning policy, in particular in relation to tourism development to support economic growth;
- To identify, implement and/or disseminate best practice via the Planning Performance Advisory Group, Planning Officers' Society for Wales or other working groups; and
- Succession planning.

7.10 Progress will be measured via our 2016/17 Annual Performance Report, 2016/17 LDP Annual Monitoring Report, and our 2016/17 Service Improvement Plans.

## ANNEX A - PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

### OVERVIEW

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
<b>Plan making</b>			
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
<b>Efficiency</b>			
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+
<b>Quality</b>			
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
<b>Engagement</b>			
Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to	Yes		No

WALES AVERAGE	Monmouthshire LPA LAST YEAR	Monmouthshire LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
47	N/A	N/A
Yes	N/A	Yes
3.9	5.2	5
35	50	65
212.7	95	121
76.7	76	79
77.2	62	68
9.0	3	1
66.5	67	70
0	1	0
Yes	Yes	Yes

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
address the Planning Committee?			
Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	Yes		No
Does the local planning authority's web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access, track their progress (and view their content)?	Yes	Partial	No
<b>Enforcement</b>			
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
Percentage of enforcement cases where enforcement action is taken or a retrospective application approved within 180 days from the start of the case (in those 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	Monmouthshire LPA LAST YEAR	Monmouthshire LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Enforcement</b>		
79.4	76	100
88.1	12	16.25
72.8	67	70
210.1	120.5	142.75

## SECTION 1 – PLAN MAKING

Indicator	01. Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
A development plan (LDP or UDP) is in place and within the plan period	N/A	No development plan is in place (including where the plan has expired)

Authority’s performance	Yes
The Council adopted its Local Development Plan in February 2014.	

Indicator	02. LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
The LDP is being progressed within 12 months of the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement	The LDP is being progressed within between 12 and 18 months of the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement	The LDP is being progressed more than 18 months later than the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement

Authority’s performance	N/A
The Council has adopted its LDP and therefore this indicator is not applicable.	

Indicator	03. Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
An AMR is due, and has been prepared		An AMR is due, and has not been prepared

Authority’s performance	Yes
The Council’s first AMR was submitted to the Welsh Government in October 2015	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>04. The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>		<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
The authority has a housing land supply of more than 5 years		The authority has a housing land supply of less than 5 years

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	<b>5 years’</b>
<p>For the APR period, the Council had a 5.0 year housing land supply.</p> <p>An updated Joint Housing Land Availability Study (JHLAS) was agreed by an independent Inspector in August 2016 and shows that we now have 4.1 years’ housing land supply. This matter is considered in detail in the 2015-16 LDP Annual Monitoring Report.</p> <p>The allocated LDP housing sites are coming forward more slowly than anticipated, with only one strategic site having obtained detailed planning permission by the end of this reporting period. Protracted viability discussions have delayed two strategic sites, and a third has been delayed by an 18 month Welsh Government holding direction in relation to trunk road matters. However, the strategic sites are progressing and there is not considered to be a problem with the Plan strategy. While the planning system allocates sites and can assist with their delivery through making prompt decisions on planning applications, other factors relating to the speed of delivery lie within the gift of the house-builders and land owners or are influenced by wider economic considerations such as mortgage lending, interest rates and job certainty.</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

<b>Authority's performance</b>	65%
<p>No target has been set by the Welsh Government for this indicator, however Monmouthshire's performance of 65% is well above the Wales average of 35% and also significantly better than last year's achievement of 50%.</p> <p>One of the reasons for the improvement compared to last year is a change to the indicator definition. It now allows for extended periods to determine applications to be agreed with customers, and provided this agreed deadline is met, the decision counts as 'in time'. These changes reflect the Council's customer and outcome focus, and aligns with our evidenced approach that customers prefer a positive outcome to a quick decision. However, these changes to the performance indicator apply to all LPAs, so the benchmarking remains consistent, and it is clear that Monmouthshire performs well against this indicator.</p> <p>Monmouthshire ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> out of 25 LPAs for this indicator.</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

<b>Authority's performance</b>	121 days
<p>As above, the Welsh Government has not yet set a performance target for this indicator, however Monmouthshire's average time of 121 days compares very favourably with the Wales average of 212 days and we rank second in Wales.</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 are determined within the statutory time period	Less than 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period

Authority's performance	79%
<p>79% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales, which just narrowly misses the 'good' ranking of 80%. This compared to 77% across Wales and is an improvement on our performance last year (76%).</p> <p>Following engagement with customers and stakeholders, Monmouthshire County Council has made the evidence-based decision that the outcome of planning applications is far more important than the speed of decision-making. Within reason, customers would prefer to continue working with us to secure an acceptable scheme and obtain planning permission, with as few pre-commencement conditions as possible, than simply have a decision made within an arbitrary 8 week deadline. The impact of planning decisions is long-lived and, while it is recognised that timely decisions can assist the economy, developers and investors also seek clarity and certainty and ultimately want planning permission.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the above, in 2016/17 we will continue working with internal consultees to seek more timely consultation replies, to enable improved performance against this indicator (see <b>ACTION 1</b> in Section 7).</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

Authority's performance	68 days
<p>In 2015-16 we determined 1085 planning applications, each taking, on average, 68 days (10 weeks) to determine. This compares to an average of 77 days (11 weeks) across Wales but narrowly misses the 'good' target of 67 days. Given our focus on outcome rather than speed, this is an excellent achievement and suggests we have struck the right balance between these two objectives.</p> <p>This is a slight increase in output compared to last year but a slight worsening in terms of average time taken (1053 applications determined taking an average of 62 days in 2014/15).</p>	

### SECTION 3 - QUALITY

Indicator	09. Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	
<b>"Good"</b>	<b>"Fair"</b>	<b>"Improvement needed"</b>
Less than 5% of decisions	Between 5% and 9% of decisions	9% or more of decisions

Authority's performance	1%
<p>Monmouthshire's performance is 1% of Committee decisions goes against officer recommendation, which equates to one planning application (the same number of applications as last year).</p> <p>This is unusually low and it is likely that the percentage will increase in future years. Provided that Committee decisions are based on good planning judgement and material planning considerations, overturned recommendations is a perfectly acceptable part of the planning process. The difficulty only arises where decisions are made that cannot be substantiated at appeal.</p> <p>The application in questionnaire related to a replacement dwelling in the countryside and AONB. An appeal has been lodged against the Council's decision, but we are awaiting the appeal decision.</p>	

Indicator	10. Percentage of appeals dismissed	
<b>"Good"</b>	<b>"Fair"</b>	<b>"Improvement needed"</b>
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

Authority's performance	70%
<p>Of the 20 appeals that were decided during the year, 70% were dismissed. This exceeds the Wales average (67%), our performance last year (67%) and the WG 66% target. This shows that the decisions we are making are sound.</p>	



<b>Indicator</b>	<b>11. Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>	<b>“Fair”</b>	<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
The authority has not had costs awarded against it at appeal	The authority has had costs awarded against it in one appeal case	The authority has had costs awarded against it in two or more appeal cases

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	<b>0 costs awards</b>
<p>No awards of costs for unreasonable behaviour have been made against us this year. We had one instance last year in relation to an application overturned by Committee against officer recommendation (Llanvapley Solar Farm).</p> <p>An action identified in last year’s APR was to report appeal decisions to Planning Committee every month for learning and discussion. This action has been fully implemented and has been welcomed by the Committee as useful. Committee Members are also encouraged to sit in on appeal hearings or inquiries as further development training.</p>	

**SECTION 4 – ENGAGEMENT**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>12. Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>		<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
Members of the public are able to address the Planning Committee		Members of the public are not able to address the Planning Committee

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<p>Monmouthshire has an established and effective Public Speaking Protocol and also allows applicants, objectors, supports and Town/Community Councils to speak at Delegated Panel site visits. This has proven to be a valuable exercise in terms of making informed decisions and improved customer and community satisfaction, even if the final decision is not the one they hoped for.</p> <p>It is hoped that the emerging national protocol seeking consistency throughout Wales is provided as best practice guidance and does not curtail the successful system we already employ.</p>	

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

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<p>We have a duty officer available every day from 9am to 5pm and although this is resource intensive, we recognise from feedback that this is a service that customers value.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>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)?</b>	
<b>"Good"</b>	<b>"Fair"</b>	<b>"Improvement needed"</b>
All documents are available online	Only the planning application details are available online, and access to other documents must be sought directly	No planning application information is published online

<b>Authority's performance</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<p>Our website allows customers to view all public documents and plans relating to applications including officer reports and decision notices, and also allows customers to comment online. We are installing a new back office system in December 2016 and hope that this will allow for improved functionality. For example, if customers can search on application descriptions and decision dates / status they may be able to resolve many enquiries without needing to contact the case officer, freeing up time for us to improve our performance on decision speed.</p> <p>It is also hoped that more information will be made available via MonMaps, the GIS system visible to customers, so that they can view constraints such as flood risk areas and protected trees.</p>	

## SECTION 5 – ENFORCEMENT

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>15. Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>	<b>“Fair”</b>	<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	100%
<p>Although no target is identified by Welsh Government, performance of 100% cannot be bettered and is clearly an excellent achievement. It is an improvement on our performance of 76% for last year and sits against a Wales average of 79%. This indicator is under review and we consider the 84 day deadline to be excessive for the activity defined by the indicator.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>16. Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>	<b>“Fair”</b>	<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	16.25 days
<p>Again, no target has been set by WG for this indicator, but our performance of an average of 16 days to investigate enforcement complaints sits well below the Wales average of 88 days. Despite this being slower than our performance last year (12 days) it is a strong performance and no further action is required for this particular indicator.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>17. Percentage of enforcement cases where enforcement action is taken or a retrospective application received within 180 days from the start of the case (in those cases where it was expedient to enforce)</b>	
<b>“Good”</b>	<b>“Fair”</b>	<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	70%
<p>70% of enforcement action was taken within 180 days from the start of the case, which is an improvement on the 67% achieved last year. However this is slightly below the Wales average of 73%.</p> <p>This PI is under review in 2016/17. In contrast to the ‘investigated’ indicator above, 180 days is</p>	

considered to be a challenging target where formal enforcement action is pursued and case resolution may not occur until after a protracted sequence of application, appeal, Enforcement Notice and prosecution.

In the context of the above, our performance is considered to be good and improving. However, further action (**ACTION 2** Section 7) is proposed in order to review our enforcement practices and seek to streamline activity through a ‘triage’ approach being piloted by Swansea City Council.

In addition, improved guidance for our communities is proposed to try and better manage expectations, and Planning Aid Wales is being invited to provide a seminar on planning enforcement for our Community Council clusters to help explain the processes, tools and powers available (**ACTION 3** Section 7).

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	142.75
<p>We resolved 168 enforcement cases, taking, on average, 143 days to resolve each case. This indicator measures only those cases where a breach of planning control was identified and further action was considered expedient. ‘Resolved’ means that the breach ceased, an Enforcement Notice was complied with, or planning permission was granted to retain the development/use/activity (either by us or at appeal by the Planning Inspectorate). We resolved more cases than in 2014/15 (168 compared to 110 last year) but the average time taken increased from 121 days in 2014/15 to 143 days this year.</p> <p>However, this performance is in the context of the Wales average of 210 days. We are therefore performing well comparatively. The proposed actions referred to above should help to both improve performance and manage customer expectation.</p>	

## SECTION 6 – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

The purpose of the Sustainable Development Indicators is to measure the contribution the planning system makes to sustainable development in Wales.

The Sustainable Development Indicators will be used to measure the progress against national planning sustainability objectives, set out in Planning Policy Wales, and can be used to demonstrate to our stakeholders the role and scope of the planning system in delivering wider objectives. The information will also be useful to local planning authorities to understand more about the outcomes of the planning system and help inform future decisions.

<b>Authority's returns</b>	Full responses were provided for all indicators.
<p>Monmouthshire Council provided full stats returns for these indicators. However, it should be noted that this work had to be undertaken manually because our back office IT system cannot store or retrieve most of the data. This is a common problem throughout Wales, the resolution of which has proven to be very time consuming. The Council has procured a new IT system that will 'go live' in December 2016 so it is hoped that the time and resource spent manually collecting this data will be reduced.</p> <p>It is worth noting that, in many cases, the sustainable development (SD) indicator definition is different to information collected in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR), and therefore the results are different in some cases. For example, in terms of housing approvals, the SD indicator records only detailed or final Reserved Matters approvals, whereas the LDP AMR quite rightly (for that context) also includes outline applications as evidence that allocated sites are coming forward. This can have significant differences in the results, for example the Reserved Matters approval for 340 dwellings at Wonastow Road is included in the SD indicators below but excluded from the AMR having been previously recorded at outline stage.</p> <p>These discrepancies have been checked and properly accounted for. Going forward, where appropriate, consideration will be given to amending the LDP AMR monitoring indicators slightly to reflect the SD indicators, so that similar data is only captured once, reducing duplicated effort and potential confusion. In other cases, such as reviewing progress on the delivery of LDP housing sites, the AMR monitoring indicator will remain unchanged.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD1. The floorspace (square metres) granted and refused planning permission for new economic development on allocated employment sites during the year.</b>
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<b>Granted (square metres)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	12,812

<b>Refused (square metres)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	0

The planning system should support economic development and steer such development to the most appropriate locations. This indicator provides information on the contribution the planning system is making to delivering traditional economic development in identified employment sites.

This performance indicator measures new buildings in square metres approved on allocated and protected employment sites. It excludes change of use consents where vacant buildings have been brought back into employment-generating use. It is also limited to measuring only 'B' use classes, and so excludes supporting employment uses such as hotels. Consequently, this data shows a small proportion of the decisions made to support economic growth in the County. More information can be found in the AMR.

During the monitoring period, 12,812 sq m of new economic development (as defined by this indicator) was approved on allocated employment sites. No applications for economic development on allocated or protected employment sites were refused. The applications included significant employment development on the Wonastow Road allocated employment land (part of a 6.5Ha employment site that received outline planning permission during the monitoring period) and for expansion at the InBev brewery in Magor.

This is a significantly higher take-up of employment land than in the previous reporting period (3925 sq. m). However, plenty of land is allocated within the LDP to allow for future take-up during the Plan period.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD2. Planning permission granted for renewable and low carbon energy development during the year.</b>
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<b>Granted permission (number of applications)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	4

<b>Granted permission (MW energy generation)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	17

The planning system can optimise renewable and low carbon energy generation. This indicator tells us part of the contribution the planning system is making to delivering renewable and low carbon energy generation and moving towards a low carbon economy.

Small scale renewables are now mostly permitted development and, because they do not need planning permission, will never appear in these stats returns. The indicator records only stand-alone schemes for the purpose of generating energy from renewables: it does not record, for example, solar panels on the roof of a new barn or on new dwellings.

Eight applications were approved over the monitoring period for on-site renewable energy generation. One of the schemes related to a biomass boiler plant to support an established Hotel/Restaurant in Skenfrith, in order to provide the business with a sustainable source of heating. The additional seven schemes related to solar development, three of which were for small scale solar power while the remaining four are considered to be solar farms. Of the solar farms a 2MW scheme has been permitted in Trostrey and two schemes are located in the South of the County in Magor and Sudbrook. These are both 5MW schemes and will each provide sufficient energy to support approximately 1500 homes over 25 years. An additional solar farm proposal on Council land was approved at Crick seeking to generate around 5.5MW of power.

Performance against this indicator has improved significantly since the previous APR, when 2 applications were approved.

The 2016-17 reporting period is likely to show a significant drop in approved schemes due to changes to Feed in Tariffs. This illustrates that factors outside of the planning system have the greatest influence on the delivery of renewable energy.



<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD3. The number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year.</b>
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<b>Market housing (number of units)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	484

<b>Affordable housing (number of units)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	159

The planning system can facilitate the provision of market and affordable housing to meet local housing requirements. This indicator provides information on the contribution of the planning system to delivering new housing.

It is worth noting that this data differs significantly from the LDP AMR data due to differences between the indicator definitions. In particular, this sustainable development indicator records only full planning permission and Reserved Matters approvals: outline consents are excluded.

During the monitoring period, detailed planning permission was granted for 484 market dwellings and 159 affordable units. This equates to 33% of all residential units approved being affordable. This is a significant improvement on last year's performance which saw just 267 dwellings approved (of which 19% were affordable). However, there is an issue with the LDP strategic housing sites coming forward in a timely fashion and this has affected our housing land supply. Of the 643 dwellings approved, 340 are on the Wonastow Road site. Applications have been submitted for three other strategic sites however approval has been delayed due to viability discussions (Sudbrook and Deri Farm) and due to an 18 moth Welsh Government Highways Division holding objection (Fairfield Mabey).

A detailed commentary on housing approvals is provided in the LDP AMR.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD4. Planning permission granted and refused for development in C1 and C2 floodplain areas during the year.</b>
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<b>Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that DID NOT meet all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	0

<b>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</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	0

<b>Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that MET all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	1

The planning system has an important role in ensuring that new development is not exposed unnecessarily to flooding and can guide development to locations at little or no risk from flooding. This indicator provides information on how planning applications for development in floodplain areas are being managed.

During this reporting period, one dwelling was approved within flood zone C1 that met all TAN15 tests.

No development was refused on TAN15 flood risk grounds during the year. No development was approved that did not meet all TAN15 tests.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD5. The area of land (ha) granted planning permission for new development on previously developed land and greenfield land during the year.</b>
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<b>Previously developed land (hectares)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	3

<b>Greenfield land (hectares)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	33

The planning system can ensure that, wherever possible, previously developed land is used in preference to greenfield sites, particularly those of high agricultural or ecological value. This indicator tells us where the planning system is directing new development.

The performance against this indicator simply reflects the rural nature of Monmouthshire as a County, with very little brownfield land available for development. Consequently, the majority of development is on greenfield land.

It is worth noting that the data provided above differs significantly from that recorded in our LDP AMR, because the definition for the SD indicator reported upon here excludes outline planning permissions, and therefore significant sites such as Wonastow Road, which secured outline planning permission during the reporting period, are not recorded here. Such schemes will be reported in future APRs when detailed planning permission or Reserved Matters consent is given.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>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.</b>
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<b>Open space lost (hectares)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	0

<b>Open space gained (hectares)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	5

Open spaces can provide recreational, amenity and environmental value as well as having a role in climate protection and adaptation to the impacts of climate change. This indicator measures how the planning system is protecting existing, and facilitating the provision of new, open spaces.

During the monitoring period no permissions were approved that would result in the loss of public open space.

As a result of planning permissions, 5Ha of new open space have been created.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD7. The total financial contributions (£) agreed from new development granted planning permission during the quarter for the provision of community infrastructure.</b>
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<b>Gained via Section 106 agreements (£)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	917,672

<b>Gained via Community Infrastructure Levy (£)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	0

Financial contributions can be used to fund the provision of community infrastructure required to support sustainable development. This indicator measures the level of financial contributions agreed for the provision of community infrastructure.

£0.9m worth of Section 106 contributions were secured during the reporting period, with £233k worth of S106 monies actually received by the Council during the same period. The latter relates to contributions actually paid as past planning permissions are implemented and the trigger points for payments reached. The low amount is a reflection of developments proceeding slowly and payment triggers not being met.

The Council is working towards adopting a CIL.