

Carmarthenshire Local Planning Authority

PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2017

(Reporting period April 2016 – March 2017)



PREFACE

I am delighted to introduce the third Annual Performance Report for Carmarthenshire County Council's Planning Service, a service which plays a key role in delivering Council priorities, which will cover every aspect of people's lives. I fully welcome the Planning Annual Performance Report (APR), as it captures the ongoing work being carried out on improving performance and will form a basis for year-on-year analysis.

Good planning is at the heart of what we are about as a Council, making good, safe places for our residents to live, work and enjoy their leisure time in. The planning service can help in delivering these aims whilst generating growth in the economy and protecting our natural habitats. The adoption of the Planning (Wales) Act in July 2015 will introduce a number of new challenges and the implications of that Act beginning filter through in the form of secondary legislation and guidance (e.g. the new formal Pre Application Consultation process). It has been another landmark year for Planning in Wales as a result of two further new Acts that have significant implications for the planning process in Wales, that of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016. and This Council will continue to look at embracing the move towards positive planning that the Planning Act prescribes.



Councillor Mair Stephens
Deputy Leader

CONTEXT

Introduction

The purpose of this Annual Performance Report is to set out the planning context over the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 for Carmarthenshire. The report excludes parts of the County covered by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, as they have their own Development Management function and Local Development Plan, and will have prepared their own Annual Performance Report for the same period.

The County

Carmarthenshire is a diverse County with the agricultural economy and landscape of the rural areas sitting side by side with the urban and industrial south-eastern area. However, as a primarily rural County, the population density is low at 75.7 persons per sq. kilometre, compared with an average of 140 persons per sq. kilometre for Wales as a whole. This low density of population is more apparent in rural Carmarthenshire than it is in the south and east of the County where 65% of the Carmarthenshire's population reside on 35% of the land.

The main urban centres of the County include Llanelli, Ammanford/Cross Hands and Carmarthen with the former representing historically important industrial centres within the South eastern area. The historic market town of Carmarthen, sitting at the gateway to west Wales and due to its central geographic location, typically serves the needs of the County's rural hinterland and beyond. The County's other large settlements vary in size and many of them make notable contributions to the needs and requirements of their community and the surrounding area. These are supplemented by a number of rural villages and settlements which are self-sufficient in terms of facilities and services; however, many other smaller settlements lack services and facilities. The needs of residents in these latter areas are typically met by neighbouring settlements.

The adopted Local Development Plan (LDP) builds upon the spatial characteristics and diversity of the County and its communities and seeks to consolidate the existing spatial settlement pattern and previous development plan frameworks, whilst continuing to reflect and promote sustainability. It seeks to implement a land use framework which reflects and promotes accessibility to essential services and facilities, thus reducing the need to travel and improving social inclusion. It represents a plan-led approach based firmly upon the existing spatial context aimed at achieving viable, self-supporting settlements and sustainable rural communities. This allows for the potential consolidation of existing facilities and provides for the support, retention and continued provision of viable facilities, services and employment opportunities at accessible and appropriate locations. It also enables the further development of sustainable local economies and facilitates regeneration opportunities.

The County's strategic importance is confirmed by the fact that it is situated within three areas identified by the Wales Spatial Plan (WSP):

- Pembrokeshire - The Haven;
- Swansea Bay - Waterfront and the Western Valleys; and
- Central Wales.

The Swansea Bay City Region encompasses the Council areas of Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, City and County of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. It brings together business, local government and a range of other partners, working towards creating economic prosperity for the people who live and work in our City Region. The Swansea Bay City Region Economic Regeneration Strategy 2013 – 2030 sets out the strategic framework for the region aimed at supporting the area's development over the coming decades. The LDP, in recognising the role of Carmarthenshire, makes provision through its policies and proposals for employment development (including regeneration), with the economy an important component of the Plan's Strategy. The emerging role of the City Region and the City Deal secured during the year will be a consideration to ensuring the continued compatibility of the approaches in each County in terms of the strategic context of the Region.

Planning background

The Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted on 10 December 2014, and sets out the spatial vision for the future of Carmarthenshire (excluding that area within the Brecon Beacons National Park which has its own LDP), along with a framework for the distribution and delivery of growth and development. It sets out land-use planning policies and proposals for the future across Carmarthenshire and forms the basis for the determination of planning applications and in guiding future opportunities for investment and growth.

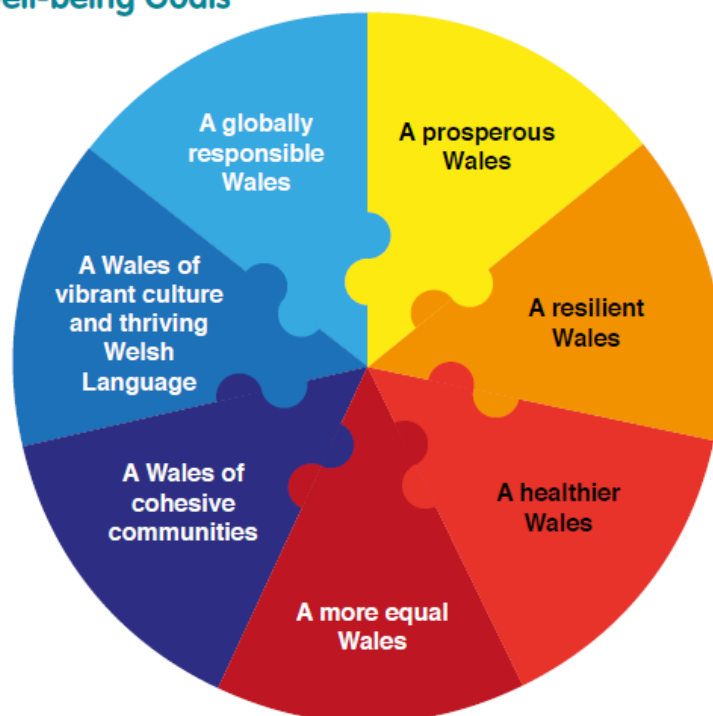
LDP policies include land-use allocations for different types of development (i.e. housing, employment, retailing, education, open space, built and natural environment etc.) as well as criteria for assessing individual proposals. The LDP has a direct effect on the lives of every resident of the County as well as major implications on investment programmes, other plans and strategies, communities and landowners. The LDP will guide development up to 2021, and will be monitored in accordance with the monitoring framework set out in that Plan and reviewed, as required.

The second Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) on the LDP has been prepared to see how the LDP is actually working in practice. This report, and its recommendations have been considered by County Council on the 20th September 2017, and will have been submitted to the Welsh Government by 31 October 2017 and published on the Carmarthenshire County Council website. The recommendations contained within the AMR will outline the need for review of the Plan and its content. This process is repeated from now on and submitted to Welsh Government in October of each year.

Planning and the community strategy and wider strategic and operational activity of the Council

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act is about encouraging public bodies to think more about the long-term, work better with people and communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach. This will help to create a Wales that we all want to live in, now and in the future. To make sure we are all working towards the same vision, the Act puts in place **seven** well-being goals, which are noted below:

Well-being Goals



The Sustainable Development Principle and the 5 Ways of Working

The principle is made up of **five key ways of working** that public bodies are required to take into account when applying sustainable development. These are:-

- A. Looking to the **long term** so that we do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs;
- B. Taking an **integrated** approach so that public bodies look at all the well-being goals in deciding on their priorities;
- C. **Involving** a diversity of the population in the decisions that affect them;
- D. Working with others in a **collaborative** way to find shared sustainable solutions;
- E. Understanding the root causes of issues to **prevent** them from occurring.

Over the next few years, Wellbeing Plans will provide part of the evidence base and context for future LDPs and any Strategic Development Plans. The LDP will remain a key tool to deliver Wellbeing Plans and there are clear advantages in terms of efficiency, engagement and outcomes to undertake both processes together. The progression towards Wellbeing Plans and the transfer from the Local Service Board to Public Service Board will be

considered within subsequent AMRs to ensure the continued alignment of these two core Plans.

The LDP also works hand in hand with other corporate plans and strategies to achieve sustainable outcomes. Many of these strategies have a common sustainability agenda. Some of these strategies include:

- Carmarthenshire Housing Strategy: People Homes and Communities;
- Transformations: Strategic Regeneration Plan for Carmarthenshire: 2015-2030;
- Carmarthenshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) and Review;
- Joint Transport Plan for South West Wales: 2015 - 2020;
- South Wales Regional Aggregates Working Party - Regional Technical Statement;
- Open All Year – A Tourism Strategy for South West Wales;
- Carmarthenshire Rural Development Plan;
- Gypsy and Traveller Community Strategy for Carmarthenshire County Council;
- Local Housing Market Assessment, Carmarthenshire County Council;
- County Council Corporate Plan 2014-2017.

In addition to working with partners within the County, liaison with neighbouring authorities has and remains a key feature across the South West Wales region playing an important role in the LDP's preparatory process and also in taking forward the many new implications emerging from the Planning (Wales) Act 2015. The Council has had regular contact with neighbouring authorities, both individually and collectively at regional level (through the South West Wales Regional Planning Group, which include Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, City and County of Swansea, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion, Powys and Neath Port Talbot), to ensure alignment between respective LDPs. Certain factors preclude complete conformity, but constructive discussions and shared information and experience has minimised the risk of conflicting policies, and ensured an appropriate level of integration.

The feasibility of introducing a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL); the Planning Act 2008 and the CIL Regulations 2010 in recent years. The Acts have introduced the opportunity to implement a new regime for funding infrastructure to support new development.

Introduction of CIL is not a mandatory requirement for Local Authorities. However, the new legislation effectively scales back the scope of using Section 106 legal agreements, limiting them to affordable housing and 'on site' mitigation measures only. Carmarthenshire has therefore been considering the respective merits of implementing CIL, particularly within the context of the potential to lose out on collecting contributions from developers to fund vital infrastructure, but also against a backdrop of variable development viability across the County.

In this respect, the District Valuers Service (DVS) were commissioned to undertake a viability study to inform the deliberations of adopting a CIL Charging Schedule. The study provides an evidence base of land, sales and rental values, construction costs and development viability for a range of land uses across Carmarthenshire (excluding the Brecon Beacons National Park area).

Whilst this and other evidence has proved beneficial in setting the context for CIL within Carmarthenshire recent changes in the national context have changed the Council's

approach to CIL during this AMR Year. In response to the review commissioned by the Department of Communities and Local Government - A New Approach to Developer Contributions to Ministers, along with the devolution of CIL to the Welsh Government under the Wales Act 2017 the Council has, for the time being, put progressing CIL on hold (Council decision 20th September 2017).

Existing and previous major influences on land use

The County is characterised by a rural and urban split which typifies the variability within settlements and their historic and future roles. This is exemplified by the predominately South Eastern urban areas and their post-industrial needs in terms of regeneration. The challenges faced by such settlements are often of a marked difference in terms of scale to those of rural areas which face separate challenges in respect of depopulation and changes within the agricultural industry. This encapsulates the diversity of Carmarthenshire's communities and settlements which are diverse in character, scale and role with a settlement's size not always reflective of its role. In this respect the distribution of opportunities for growth based on its position within the LDP hierarchy could not be predicated on a simplistic interpretation of distribution where growth is provided, for example across all tier 3 settlements (as defined by the LDP) on an equal basis. Indeed this equally applies within the Growth Areas (as defined by the LDP) where each has manifestly different issues and considerations underpinning potential for growth but within the context of their importance in strategic terms and the function they perform.

There are a number of considerations that affect the suitability of land for development across the County, notably flooding (many of the larger towns are situated adjacent to the sea and/or rivers) and nature conservation and designations (notably Llanelli/Burry Port and Cross Hands). Furthermore, there are a number of social considerations including areas of linguistic interest in terms of the Welsh language – notably within the Gwendraeth and Amman Valleys which need to be taken into account in looking at the suitability of developments being proposed and their potential impacts.

The significance of addressing the challenges of location and sustainability facing certain rural communities has been recognised through the LDP and its suitable settlement hierarchy. The various exceptions policies included in the LDP seek to ensure that organic and sustainable growth in such rural areas is where appropriate achievable.

Historic/landscape setting of the area, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, conservation areas etc.

The richness of Carmarthenshire's natural, built and cultural environment is an important spatial consideration in planning for the future of the County, particularly in terms of the potential for growth and the sympathetic siting of development. The County includes sites designated at the international level to protect and enhance important nature conservation value, as well as striking landscapes and distinctive historic towns and villages. The importance of the County's built heritage is borne out by the 27 conservation areas designated within its settlements, 470 Scheduled Ancient Monuments (ranging from Prehistoric to post- Medieval/Modern features of cultural historic interest) and the large number of listed buildings. There are also a number of designated sites for nature conservation and biodiversity importance, including 7 Special Areas of Conservation, 3

Special Protection Areas, 1 Ramsar site (Burry Inlet), 82 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 5 National Nature Reserves, 5 Local Nature Reserves and 7 registered landscapes.

Population change and influence on Planning matters

The 2011 Census identified the population of Carmarthenshire at 183,777 with 78,829 households.

Between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses, Carmarthenshire saw an increase of 11,070 in its population and an increase in households of 5,781. During the same period the housing stock rose by 6,969 dwellings. The current spread of population and households across the County broadly reflects the current urban form and established communities,

In preparing its LDP, the Council developed a revised scenario for population and household change. This used up dated evidence to derive the assumptions on future migration streams, but struck a balance between the very high net migration experienced mid-decade, the situation in 2009, which recorded the lowest net-migration to Carmarthenshire since 1993, along with all available and published data sources since the Welsh Government 2008-based projections. Consideration was given to the implications of the Welsh Government 2011-based Local Authority household projections and the projected reduction outlined within the 2011-based household projections against the strategic context of the LDP and its objectives. The Plan consequently is based on growth aspirations with an identified housing requirement of 15,197 dwellings over the plan period.

The publication of the 2014-based Sub National Household and Population Projections and their implications are considered as part of the 2017 AMR with due regard to be given to these projections and the need to understand the factors influencing future housing requirements and demographic change, and its impact on any LDP review.

PLANNING SERVICE

The Service and its location within the Council

Carmarthenshire County Council consists of six Departments who report directly to the Chief Executive. Each Department is responsible for a number of Services, with each service area having a Head of Service.

The Corporate structure for Carmarthenshire County Council can be seen in Figure A.

The Planning Service relocated to the Environment Department on 1 April 2015, with both a new Director of Environment and Head of Planning appointed during the 2015/2016 financial year. The relocation of the Planning Service means that it is now within the same Department as Highways and Transport, Property and Waste & Environmental Services. The Head of Planning reports directly to the Director of Environment.

Further changes to the structure of the Environment Department were undertaken within 2016/17, with realignments between the services with regard to some function. These changes do not have a direct effect on the Planning Service.

Figure B below sets out the structure of the Planning Service. As can be seen the Service is split into six separate functions (business units), each with a Business Manager and all reporting directly to the Head of Planning.

Figure A: Carmarthenshire County Council Corporate Structure, as at 31 March 2017

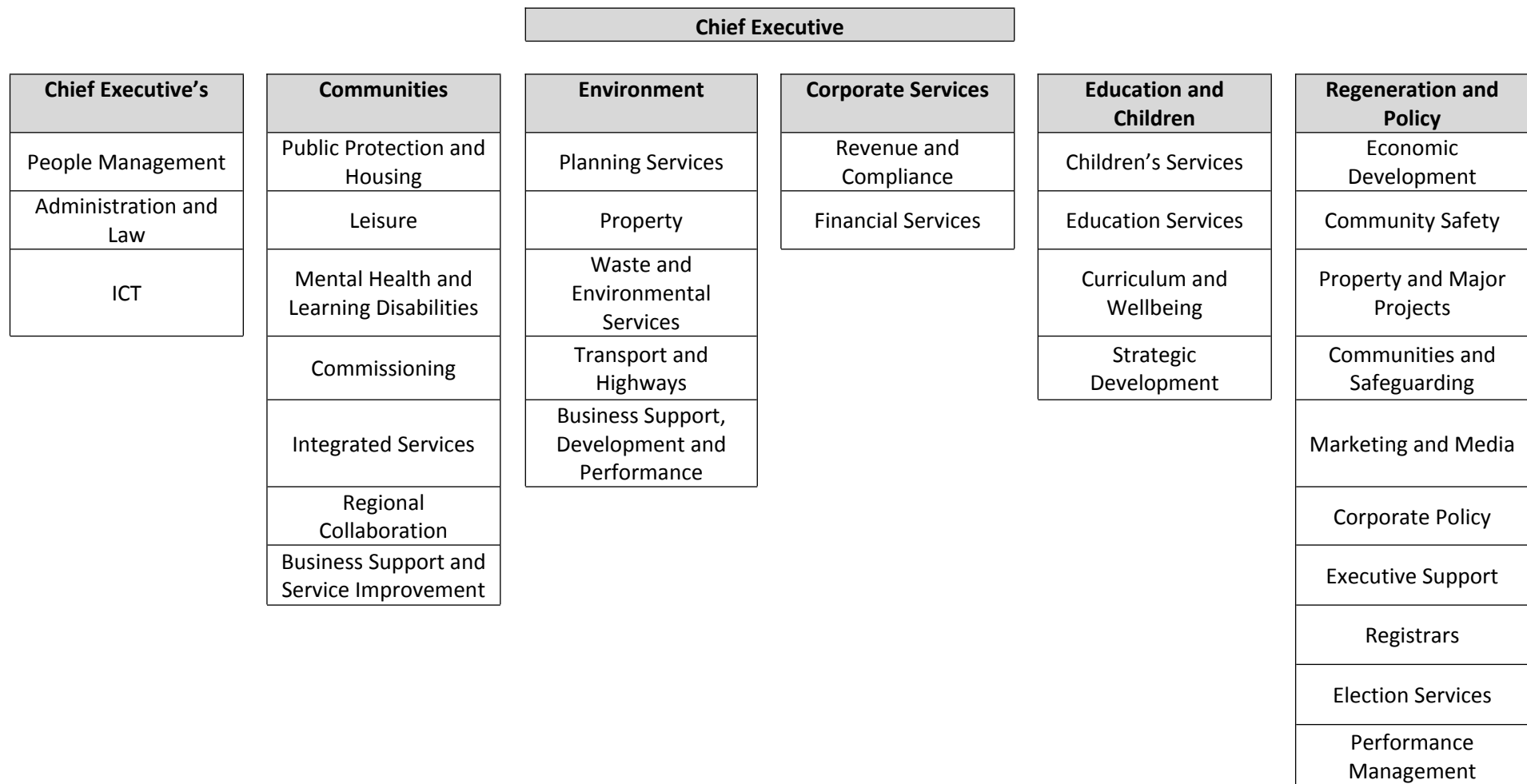
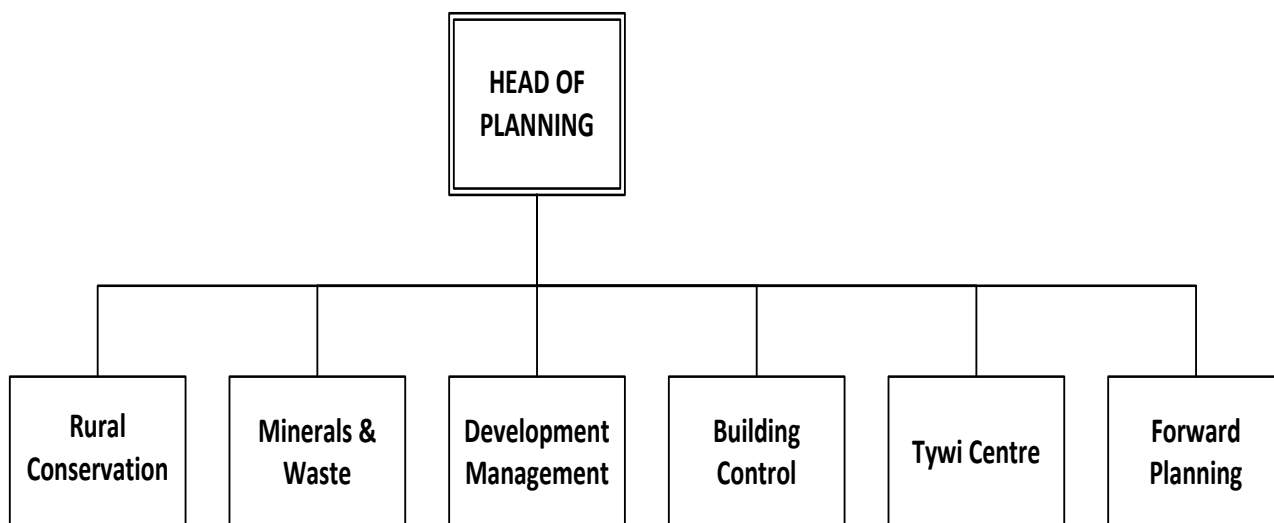


Figure B: Planning Service Structure, as at 31st March 2017



During 2016/17, the Planning Service followed the above structure as has been the case for a number of years. However, towards the late part of the year, a restructure process was commenced, the results of which will be reflected in the 2017/18 APR, which is when the changes become operational.

The Planning Service is located at Carmarthen, Llanelli and Llandeilo, occupying six separate sites in total as follows:

Head of Planning

The Head of Planning, plus 2 support staff, is located at Spilman Street, Carmarthen.

Rural Conservation

The Rural Conservation Team is primarily based at Carmarthen (Spilman Street) and Llandeilo (Civic Offices). The Team also has representation near Cross Hands in terms of the Management of the Caeau Mynydd Mawr project. One officer is also currently based at the Llanelli Office at least part of the week.

Minerals and Waste

The Minerals and Waste Team have their base at Llandeilo, within the Civic Offices - although they are largely site based due to the nature of their duties which includes undertaking the Minerals and Waste function for a number of South Wales LPAs.

Development Management

Development Management, which includes Planning Enforcement, Ecology and Built Conservation, currently have three separate teams. These teams are located at Ty Elwyn, Llanelli as well as Spilman Street, Carmarthen and Civic Offices, Llandeilo. This means that the County is currently split into East, South and West teams. The administrative hub for the registration of all planning applications and data management is undertaken at Civic Offices, Llandeilo. Although all three Teams have Development Management Officers and Enforcement Officers the Teams share between them the services of one Built Conservation Officer and one Ecologist.

Building Control

Building Control also have presence in three locations, which are Ty Elwyn, Llanelli, Civic Offices, Llandeilo and Spilman Street, Carmarthen, with Spilman Street being the base for plan vetting. The advantages of co-locating Building Control and the Development Management Teams is widely acknowledged by Officers.

Canolfan Tywi Centre

The Canolfan Tywi Centre promotes Bulit Heritage, and its vision has been to create a future where the land, buildings and culture of West Wales are better understood, enjoyed and sensitively maintained. The team of 4 staff have to date been based at the National Trust Offices, Dinefwr Farm, Llandeilo. During the year, work has been undertaken to look at the future role of the Centre and those changes will become fully operational during 2017/18.

Forward Planning

Forward Planning is the only function entirely located at Spilman Street, Carmarthen.

Wider organisational activities impacting on the service

The Service has identified Priority Based Budgeting (PBB) savings for a three year period of some £200,000 for the next three years (2016 – 2019), having already made savings over the period 2013/15 with 8 FTE staff being lost as a result of severance.

The Development Management Unit underwent an internal review process in 2015, with an emphasis of challenge being introduced through Systems Thinking. This has resulted in a redesigned service/system delivery, and is now being rolled out to other areas within the Service - Minerals and Waste. This review process includes the capacity for challenge and further examination on a regular basis, to ensure that the system and service remain up to date and relevant. The general principles underlying this include the need for early engagement and stress the importance of building quality into submissions at as early a stage as possible. It is noted that this resonates with some of the basic tenets of the Positive Planning agenda of Welsh Government. The service area is also looking at developing its own suite of monitoring measures, with a view to better evidencing quality in the process and being able to understand the customer 'end to end' experience. In addition to the above qualitative aspects, it is anticipated that this will realise further financial savings. Some of the savings to date have been achieved through changes such as a move to a more paperless way of working which has reduced printing and copying costs. The full impact will be evaluated as the new systems roll out further.

The Minerals and Waste team has, for a number of years now, established service level agreements with several other Local Authorities (LAs) in West Wales. The Local Authorities are:

- Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority;
- Pembrokeshire County Council;
- Brecon Beacons National Park Authority;
- Powys County Council;
- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council;
- Vale of Glamorgan Council; and
- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

These vary in format but include all of, or a combination of those LAs monitoring, planning applications and enforcement needs in relation to Minerals and Waste matters.

In addition, the Development Management enforcement function has also been subject of an on-going internal review, in the form of a Member-led Scrutiny Committee Review. This results from numerous recommendations made in terms of how the County Council operates its Planning Enforcement function, particularly in areas where there is a potential overlap with regulatory powers under other legislation. A multi-disciplinary group exists which meets quarterly and is chaired with the Executive Board Member who has responsibility regarding all enforcement matters.

The Planning Service is currently working with a provider for the development of a new 'back office' system that is cloud based. This new system should provide greater flexibility and provide opportunities for bespoke development to be undertaken in-house. The system also offers a more focussed opportunity for performance measurement. This new system should be in place by 2017/2018.

Additionally, the County Council's electronic data management system (EDMS), known as Information@Work, is being reviewed with greater opportunity being provided for the sharing of information on a cross departmental basis. This would better inform and support the Development Team approach to dealing with major development proposals that are being introduced within the County. The intention is, subject to safeguards, to extend this to external agencies such as Natural Resources Wales, with a view to, for example, better informing consideration of development proposals.

New Building Control fees were introduced during May 2015, to enable fairer and more transparent setting of charges based upon the principle of cost recovery. By relating charges to estimates of actual work, and the cost of providing the services, through professional and administrative staff, the fee schedule will be able to more closely follow commercial models for estimating and charging for services which should improve the competitiveness of the Local Authority Building Control in the marketplace and provide more direct competition with approved inspectors.

Operating budget:

The actual Planning Application fee income against that budgeted is indicated Table 1 below. The Planning Service retains its fee income, although, as the figures below show, there is a discrepancy between the budgeted income and the actual. This is a key factor when setting the annual operating budget.

Table 1: Budgeted and Actual Income re: Planning Fees

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Budgeted income				£1,194,630	£1,164,630	£1,164,630
Actual Income	£869,096	£965,491	£830,881	£876,801	£1,033,171	£722,215

Staffing, as at 31 March 2017:

The following sets out the staffing position for the APR period. During the late part of 2016/17, a restructure was being progressed however its implementation falls into 2017/18 and will be covered within the APR for 2017/18.

The **Development Management** (DM) Unit within the Planning Service is managed by a Development Management Manager, who has direct line management responsibility for three Senior Development Management Officers (SDMO). The Unit currently operates out of three office locations - Carmarthen, Llanelli, and Llandeilo - with the SDMOs leading the teams in these areas. In total, the teams have 10 Development Management Officers (DMO), in addition to 2 Development Management Assistants (DMA) (one DMA post is currently vacant and the other is currently working within the Minerals and Waste Team). The DMA posts are fixed term appointments where the Council provide training (normally post graduate) opportunities. These are posts that have been operated for a number of years, and three of the current DMOs have graduated up from these DMA positions.

There is a full time Ecologist who spends the majority of their time commenting on planning applications and inputting to planning policy. The Ecologist is based in Spilman Street, Carmarthen.

The Development Management Manager also has responsibility for an Enforcement team of four officers, and also has one Conservation Officer (previously having been 3) and one Conservation Enforcement Officer.

The DM function is given technical support by a team headed by the Information Management Officer (IMO). This support is in the form of registration of applications, updating of databases/GIS, scanning of information/plans, in addition to them undertaking Land Searches. The team is also responsible for all Planning-related IT development and website maintenance and updating. Under the IMO there are 5 Registration/Searches Officers, in addition to 2.6 FTE Data Support Assistants.

The DM team currently receives administrative support from 3 Administration Assistants whilst there is also a part time Appeals Administration Assistant.

The **Forward Planning** Team consists of a Forward Planning Manager along with 4 Forward Planning Officers covering all aspects of Planning Policy including the development plan policy, Supplementary Planning Guidance, site delivery initiatives and monitoring including the AMR, Regional Waste and Joint Housing Land Availability.

In addition there was a Contributions Officer (a post occupied by a seconded Forward Planning Officer) who has a specific remit for Section 106 matters and the consideration of a Community Infrastructure Levy for the County. The Team are supported by a specialist Graphic Design Officer and two technical assistants. The team has one vacant Forward Planning Officer post (the officer currently seconded to Contributions Officer), together with a further vacant post on the structure.

It is acknowledged that staff development and broadening its remit, whilst prioritising its statutory functions is key to the portfolio's future success. In this respect the Forward Planning team established an internal planning consultancy role during 2014/15, to assist in

maximising delivery opportunities on Council owned sites and to ensure there is clarity in relation to future development opportunities. This has resultant revenue benefits and reduces the financial burden to the Council through unnecessary use of external consultants. It is also an approach which is key to staff retention through financial income and a fresh and stimulating workload.

There are 7 staff currently working in the **Minerals and Waste** Unit; no vacancies are being carried. The Unit provides minerals and waste planning services for Carmarthenshire and for seven other Local Planning Authorities under Service Level Agreements, which have already been listed previously.

Loss of skilled personnel within the Minerals/Waste team has been identified as a significant risk which would result in the inability to provide a minerals and waste service at current levels. In addition, it is anticipated that demand for Minerals and Waste services will increase due to loss of key personnel in other Authorities which is adding pressure on existing staff resources.

A temporary Development Management Assistant exists within the Minerals and Waste Unit. The post holder is enrolled on a Masters Course in Planning in order to develop planning skills. Four members of the Unit have also been enrolled on an Institute of Quarrying distance learning course in order to develop their skills. Further appointments/transfers may be required in order to fully address succession planning in the short/medium term with the potential for this to be funded through additional income streams. The Business Manager is therefore currently looking at succession planning and any structural changes that may be needed to ensure the Team remains resilient.

The Planning Service also draws heavily on the expertise and input of the **Rural Conservation Team** – who are located within the Planning Service (9 Officers in total, not all full time). Much of the Landscape Officer's time is taken up with planning matters – particularly those relating to wind turbines. Other Officers who make up part of the team also contribute significantly to the planning process.

The potential loss of skilled personnel within the **Building Control** team has been identified as a risk which would result in the inability to provide a service at current levels. The management of the Business unit has for the past few years been undertaken on a temporary basis jointly by the Principle Officers. The Head of Service is looking at revising this to ensure the Unit has one point of contact and responsibility with regard to management matters. The Head of Service is also working with the two Principles on succession planning to identify whether changes are needed to the current structure to improve resilience but also to provide opportunities for junior staff to progress. These changes are likely to occur during 2017/18.

All Business Unit Managers understand the value of, and promote, training opportunities that support the business aims whilst allowing career progression and development. The DMA posts are an established indication of this, although there are other opportunities provided through ILM courses, and internal projects such as the Continuous Improvement Programme and the Future Leaders Programme.

All staff have annual appraisals, and regular one-to-one meetings with managers. Regular internal training seminars are arranged (3 or 4 annually) which count towards Continual Professional Development (CPD). The portfolio also supports and undertakes training and

development sessions to other staff, Members and Town and Community Councils building on experiences and lesson learned. The County Council does not pay membership fees of professional institutes.

The Service also operates regular agent seminars, with this being seen as particularly relevant in the more recent times of legislative change. These seminars offer Continued Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for the agents and occur in March and September.

The Division also offer on-going training to both County Councillors and to Town and Community Councils, as and when needed.

YOUR LOCAL STORY

Workload: Development Management

Carmarthenshire County Council is maintaining a general overall performance that sees it running at 68.13% for determining all types of Planning applications within 8 weeks. The recent period of internal review has had some impact in terms of people coming to understand new systems and practices. The introduction of pre application fees during March 2016 remains a relatively new approach and its impact on the application process is being monitored.

The numbers of applications that the Council has dealt with is indicated in the table below:

Table 2: Planning applications dealt with annually

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Application Numbers	1788	1627	1905	1907	1663	1414

The numbers of applications per officer will, at a very general level, be in the region of 150 per officer. That figure is predicted on a full caseload being undertaken by the three team leaders (SDMOs) although the supervisory and mentoring reality is that this will not be the case.

The Development Management service reflects the diverse nature of Carmarthenshire in terms of its rurality in the north and west, the numerous historic market towns interspersed throughout, and the post-industrial areas of the south and east with the former coal mines and steel works. This diversity, which generates the third highest number of applications across Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in Wales, is framed within a wide geographical context, with the County's administrative area being the third largest, accommodating the 4th largest population in Wales. Whilst the DM function deals with high numbers of Planning applications, its percentage of householder applications is relatively low (just over 20% in the last two years), reflecting the higher number of minor applications that are dealt with in the rural areas, in addition to the more major development proposals on the regionally important Strategic Sites of Carmarthen, Cross Hands, and Llanelli, as identified in the adopted LDP.

The Council is committed to understanding the impacts of its service delivery upon residents, and, as mentioned, is looking at alternative ways of measuring such, insomuch as it is seeking

to better understand and measure the customer end-to-end time. There is a commitment to reducing the numbers of incomplete and unsuccessful applications, and to ensuring a consistently positive and pragmatic approach to service delivery and outcomes. This is reflected in the customer surveys that see Carmarthenshire scoring above the Welsh average in areas such as availability of planning officers to discuss issues prior to submission of an application, having opportunities to amend proposals prior to determination, and an understanding of what information is required.

In order to increase efficiency given the additional workload the Unit is trialling different agile working options which will reduce travel time, reduce wastage and reduce office space requirements. This will require investment in digitising data and in agile working software which integrates with current back office systems.

The service area is in a period of change, and is seeking to adjust to that in terms of systems and processes, and promoting a behavioural change to facilitate economic development and regeneration where appropriate. There remain concerns that the positive actions the LPA is undertaking in this regard will be unreasonably challenged by budgetary pressures in the coming years. A further three year programme has been identified (2018 – 2021) in terms of savings and efficiencies, and the service review, whilst being framed to some extent by this, is also enabling these efficiencies to be introduced and realised. Changes to this framework have the capacity to impact significantly and negatively on the performance agenda being pursued.

Workload: Forward Planning

Recognising the need to maximise the opportunities for delivery, and the necessity to work within a financially restrictive environment the Forward Planning team provides a responsive service to other service areas to assist in bringing sites forward and for their disposal on the open market. The production of policy notes and site specific briefs and assistance with preparing and submitting planning applications is a proactive and positive approach developing collaborative working arrangements. The resultant revenue benefits, and the reduction of use of external consultants are becoming apparent, however the necessity to manage staff resources effectively to ensure core responsibilities are maintained make the role vulnerable to loss of staffing numbers. Whilst these risks are noted the benefits highlighted along with broadening staff skill sets is recognised as an ongoing opportunity. The Forward Planning Manager is currently exploring further opportunities in relation to assisting other Divisions in bringing forward Council sites for development – this consideration includes how to continue with this work when work on LDP review commences and becomes priority.

Ongoing requirements in relation to the maintenance of an up to date portfolio of evidence is paramount not only from a Forward Planning and LDP perspective, but also in ensuring DM decision making and requirements from applicants/developers is fully informed. The recent completion of the Carmarthenshire Retail Study 2015 Update is an example of a policy area where specialist input is required, and where prevailing circumstances in relation to factors such as market conditions are in a state of constant change. Consequently there is an ongoing requirement to review, interpret and prepare core evidence, and to ensure they are robust and stand up to scrutiny. The current high level of retail interest being exhibited in the County also requires specialist skills in responding to retail impact assessments and the need to utilise such expertise ensuring the broader impacts of development proposals are

understood raises challenges from a policy and DM perspective. The need to employ consultant expertise will in some form remain despite the Service undertaking as much of the evidence work as possible in-house.

A number of Supplementary Guidance (SPG) were adopted concurrent with the LDP. Further SPG in the form of the following were adopted on the 28th September 2016:

- [Placemaking and Design](#);
- [Archaeology and Development](#);
- [Leisure & Open Space - Requirements for New Developments](#);
- [Nature Conservation and Biodiversity](#); and
- [Rural Development](#).

Whilst the LDP sets a strong policy direction for retail provision within Carmarthenshire, the challenges facing Llanelli Town Centre have require specific consideration. In this respect and in recognition of the opportunities that exist to co-ordinate with, and develop upon the regeneration initiatives in the town centre and the establishment of a 'Task Force' to address matters surrounding its decline the unit is developing a Local Development Order (LDO). This LDO will seek to consider and address issues of vacancy and activity on both ground and upper floors, and to examine the potential for alternative uses within part of the Llanelli Town Centre. The draft LDO and Statement of Reasons along with key supporting evidence and documentation is being finalised ahead of a formal public consultation with the LDO main consultation document having been agreed at Council in March 2017.

For the APR and AMR period, the Council undertook the Joint Housing Land Availability Study (JHLAS) for the Carmarthenshire area, excluding the area that falls within the Brecon Beacons National Park.

The unit also in conjunction with the Minerals and Waste Team acts as lead authority in the preparation of the Waste Planning Monitoring Report for the South West Wales region.

Workload: Minerals and Waste

Demand for Minerals and Waste services is increasing due to loss of key personnel in other Authorities which is adding pressure on Carmarthenshire's existing staff resources within the Minerals and Waste Unit. A Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council was entered into in June 2015 and a SLA with the Vale of Glamorgan Council was entered into in October 2015. These are in addition to the ones already held by the Unit.

The Unit provides the Secretariat for the South Wales Regional Aggregates Working Party in accordance with Welsh Government (WG) requirements, which is grant funded from WG. The Unit also in conjunction with the Council's Forward Planning Unit acts as the Lead Authority for waste planning monitoring in the South West Wales Region in accordance with WG requirements. An Interim Report for 2016/17 has been produced and submitted to the Welsh Government. Work on the production of the 2017/18 report has started.

In order to increase efficiency given the additional workload the Unit is trialling different agile working options which will reduce travel time, reduce wastage and reduce office space

requirements. This will require investment in digitising data and in agile working software which integrates with current back office systems.

Workload: Rural Conservation

Carmarthenshire's landscapes and its habitats and species are some of the county's most important natural resources. They make up the green infrastructure which provides a framework for our social, economic and environmental health. The Unit promotes the understanding, conservation, enhancement, and responsible management of these resources, consistent with Carmarthenshire's Integrated Community Strategy and Carmarthenshire County Council's core values.

The Unit provides advice to development management, other Council departments and the general public on landscape, trees, woodlands, hedgerows, biodiversity, Common Land and on development within the [Caeau Mynydd Mawr SPG](#) area. It is also instrumental in ensuring that approved developments and other projects comply with relevant legislation and LDP policies relating to the natural environment.

The Rural Conservation Business Unit carries out the following statutory functions:

- Tree Preservation Orders - Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999;
- Hedgerow Regulations 1997; and
- Commons Registration Act 1965.

The Unit is now working to ensure that the Council's operations are compliant under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, and that the Council reports to the Welsh Government as required under this Act. The Council's Environment Act Forward Plan was completed in March 2017.

Workload: Building Control

The Unit has maintained its position as a CIOB Chartered Building Consultancy and has established a network of more than [75 local partners](#) including agents, consultants and other construction professionals to ensure the delivery of a high standard of service. In conjunction with Coleg Sir Gar, regular training seminars/workshops are hosted for the benefit of customers to provide advice and assistance in understanding and interpreting existing and proposed changes to legislation.

The unit have also participated in the annual LABC [Building Excellence Awards](#) whose aim is to celebrate the success of design and construction teams that have produced outstanding buildings within the County. Teifi Timber Products Ltd receive a highly commended award at the Vale of Glamorgan Hotel in the 'Best Small Commercial Building' category for their new state of the art Sawmill in Llanllwni in the 2016 awards, whilst Andrew Scott also received a highly commended award for the Sandhurst beach front development at Burry port in the Best Small housing category.

The Awards scheme whether it's County, regional or national is useful in promoting the work of the Unit and the long standing membership with the LABC has been invaluable in terms of promoting the Unit.

The Unit have also produced a 'Guide to extending your home' handbook. The guide which is available bilingually and in an electronic format is intended to provide advice about small scale building projects such as extensions, garage conversions, loft conversions, structural alterations along with other typical small scale projects.

Workload: Tywi Centre

The Unit is based in Llandeilo and since it was founded in 2008 has received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Rural Development Plan (RDP) for Wales 2007-2013 which is funded by the Welsh Government and the European Fund for Rural Development, Natural Resources Wales, the National Trust, the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and Cadw. It also generates some income from provision of consultancy and training services.

[*Building our Heritage Bursary Programme*](#) is a specific programme managed by the Unit which has taken heritage building skills training across Wales. Working in partnership with the Natural Building Centre in Llanrwst, 30 students will have been trained over 2 years, following the same training model as the previous Foundations in Heritage programme. In addition, an intensive introductory programme for 10 women was been designed and delivered, to promote greater equality within the construction sector. This project was completed in March 2017.

Consultancy and Training Services are also provided by the Unit. The success of the RDP funded Traditional Skills Training and Information Project, which ended in March 2014, and the reputation for delivering high quality training in the Heritage sector, has provided the Centre with opportunity to investigate developing a sustainable heritage skills training and information centre. Developing the capacity of the Centre through training skills assessors and trainers, identifying mechanisms for setting up as an accredited training centre, and investigating closer cooperative working with Coleg Sir Gâr, CITB and The Welsh Traditional Buildings Forum will be the focus over the forthcoming year.

The Team and projects have existed to date predominantly as a result of various funding streams. The future form of the Centre is currently being considered, with the aim being self sufficiency and less dependacy on grant funding. The Tywi Centre Business Plan was completed early 2017. The Plan identified mechanisms to ensure the long term sustainability of the Tywi Centre, for example income generation through training and information provision. However, what it did identify is that although a market exists for this Centre, it requires further time to develop. The Centre has therefore been brought into the Heritage arm of the Planning Service for the forthcoming year. This may be a temporary measure as suitable delivery mechanisms, which are self-sustaining, are further explored over the course of the next two years.

Current projects

Service Reviews - The sections above have referred to the Service reviews the LPA has been carrying out over the recent years, this being part of an ongoing, rolling programme of check, plan, review. The impacts of this have been significant in terms of improving how information is processed and shared, and also understanding what the customer expects in terms of timeliness and quality of service delivery and decision making.

As part of the ongoing reviews, the LPA has considered how it best engages with stakeholders and consultees, with a particular emphasis at the moment being the nature and timeliness of internal/external consultation responses. As outlined, this is being achieved, to some degree, by involving relevant parties as soon as possible in the pre-application process, and the intention is to formalise this (in line with a charging schedule) into a cross departmental/agency approach under the Development Team banner.

Carmarthen West - This Team approach has happened to some degree (not formalised) to help deliver a major strategic site on the western edge of Carmarthen. The site is subject of an adopted SPG in the form of a Planning and Development Brief that will see the delivery of 1100+ dwellings and a new school, as well as the provision of a major road infrastructure improvement. This will also benefit the aspirations of University of Wales Trinity St David's, as well as the proposed S4C Headquarter development.

Planning Enforcement - The Council is currently giving thought to the delivery of its enforcement roles and activities. This will seek to understand best practice across the field, and will look at how resource can be best channelled into this area. This has been flagged by Members as a concern, and whilst there may be a drive to consolidate simpler enforcement practices into one area, the County Council has acknowledged that Planning Enforcement presents particular and specific challenges and remains as an area to be addressed on an individual basis. This includes having the capacity and ability to ensure that the staffing structure and base is best mobilised to effectively address pressure areas, and to remain fluid in doing so across the wider Carmarthenshire area. During the next APR period a new Enforcement team will be set up under the leadership of a Senior Enforcement and Monitoring Officer.

Forward Planning Consultancy - Alongside its ongoing statutory function and delivering on other ongoing commitments, the Forward Planning team has established an internal planning consultancy to assist in maximising delivery opportunities on Council owned sites, and to ensure there is clarity in relation to future development opportunities. This represents an important step in maximising links and co-operation across service areas ensuring cost effective delivery with resultant revenue benefits and reducing use of external consultants thus offering best value in delivering the Council's objectives. In providing this service the Forward Planning team has agreed to a 3 year work programme with Council's Corporate Property team which includes production of site planning briefs and policy guidance. This supports the move towards enhanced fee income generation for the Unit and reductions in expenditure for the Council overall. Instructions have also been received from Council Regeneration and Tourism Officers in relation to a number of briefs to maximise and facilitate economic development and tourism opportunities. There are also initial discussions with the Property Design and Projects Unit with a view to offering additional value.

Task Force - The Planning Service is advising as part of the of a multi service Task Force's created to consider matters relating to Llanelli and Ammanford Town Centres. In relation to Llanelli this includes the potential for a Local Development Order to deal with specific issues within the town centre.

As has been alluded to, the Service has strong links to the Council's regeneration strategy and the regeneration team. This close working relationship will ensure that proposals are delivered in a consistent and co-ordinated manner which are in accordance with sound planning principles, and national and local planning policies.

IT - The Service has been undertaking the trial of tablet computers with the emphasis on trying to establish a better communications route to site based officers and where necessary advise on improvements to the system allowing the system to be tailored to how the department operates. It is hoped to reduce the amount of paper and documents produced to form a conventional paper file. This runs alongside, and is complementary to, the County Council's agile working strategy, and is seen as a key element in maintaining an effective delivery of service across the large geographical area of Carmarthenshire. Implementation is expected to be rolled-out in DM and Building Control during 2017/18.

Caeau Mynydd Mawr Project - The Cross Hands area has been designated as one of the three growth centres in Carmarthenshire's LDP. The area is also suitable habitat for the Marsh Fritillary butterfly which is a feature of the Caeau Mynydd Mawr Special Area of Conservation (SAC). In implementing the project the Conservation Project Officer assists in the delivery of key economic objectives while ensuring that development is compliant with EU legislation. The post is funded by receipts secured through Section 106 agreements, with receipts from development are in place to cover the salary of the project officer up until 2021, consistent with the LDP period.

During the year, the project has achieved the following:

- Installed and repaired fencing on 7 sites to allow grazing on neglected sites or better management of sites which are already grazed;
- Carried out mowing on 7 sites to reduce the density of vegetation and manage rushes;
- Improved drainage on 4 sites to improve habitat to allow access by grazing stock;
- Carried out vegetation management on 5 sites to increase the area of grassland habitat;
- Worked with 3 livestock owners to introduce grazing to sites with no stock;
- Set up cattle handling facilities on 3 sites and assisted with pre-movement TB Testing;
- Carried out a controlled burn to restore grassland in preparation for grazing;

The project works with colleagues from other Carmarthenshire County Council departments, Butterfly Conservation, PONT, The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, Natural Resources Wales, Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Bumblebee Conservation, Welsh Government and volunteers to achieve common goals within the project area.

As of March 2017, the project has 16 management agreements in place with landowners and it owns and manages a further 3 sites. Together these include 75.13ha of habitat suitable for breeding marsh fritillary.

HLF Funded Carmarthenshire Bogs Project - The Common Land Officer and Rural Conservation Manager are continuing to work with the Biodiversity Officer in delivering the Heritage Lottery funded Carmarthenshire Bogs Project that has attracted £43,000 of grant aid. All six sites covered by this project are areas of common land with no known owners: as such the Council is expected to protect these sites from illegal activities (scheme came to an end December 2016). With this grant the Council has worked to improve the conservation status of these commons.

Carmarthenshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan - Staff continue to facilitate the Carmarthenshire Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) Partnership, which draws together all the organisations involved in nature conservation in the County. In partnership, the Biodiversity Officer has delivered 12 projects across the county, some involve practical conservation, while others raised awareness of biodiversity issues and developed biodiversity best practice within other CCC departments consistent with CCC's new duties set out in the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Much of this work is funded by the Welsh Government's Environment and Sustainable Development grant to the Authority.

Morfa Berwig site, Llanelli – The Rural Conservation unit is working with the MCP Ranger to enhance this site for nature conservation and public access. It will be designated as a Local Nature Reserve in July 2017. Section 106 funding is used to finance this work.

Minerals and Waste Review - The Minerals and Waste Unit review of the current process was put on hold during the latter part of the year due to the restructuring being considered for the Development Management unit. This review will recommence in 2017/18. The aim is to provide the team with the opportunity to experience the service from the 'customer perspective', to identify what issues were impacting upon current performance, and what within the current system was causing this to happen.

Local pressures

A recent source of pressure for the DM Unit has been the impacts of the requirement for financial contributions to be made towards the provision of Affordable Housing within the County. This requirement extends to single dwelling and has presented challenges in terms of perceptions of this, and how this is best secured through legal agreement. There has been a pressure on the Council's legal service as a result, although they have been the subject of a reduction in staffing. Work remains underway to assist DMO to deal with Unilateral Undertakings (UUs) in order that legal can concentrate on Section 106 applications. Legal support remains available to DMOs throughout as it is recognised that some UUs won't be straightforward. The benefits of this new approach should be experienced during 2017/18. It is an area that agents have consistently asked for improvement in terms of timescales and clarity. It is recognised however that there may well remain a resource issue regarding s106 generally and that further solutions are likely to need exploring during the course of the next year.

The 'lag' following LDP adoption with new allocated sites and them being brought forward presents challenges in relation to a 5 year supply particularly during early stages post adoption (4.2 year supply this year as opposed to 4.1 in 2016). This may have the effect of distorting a 'true' picture of land supply and of the availability of genuinely deliverable sites during initial years following adoption. The implementation of TAN1 and its methodology with the use of the residual method may as a consequence precipitate an increase in speculative applications based on an artificially suppressed 5 year land supply figure. The land supply position will be monitored closely through the JHLAS and the LDP AMR (and is a real issue across most of the Welsh LPAs).

The introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations on 1st April 2015 has through its provisions changed the way in which planning obligations can be sought through Section 106 Agreements. In this respect the scope for requiring planning obligations has been significantly scaled back. The CIL Regulations establish a far more limited approach to planning obligations via Section 106 Agreements. Although the application of a CIL charging process has, for the time being, been put on hold in relation to Carmarthenshire, the impact of the legislation remains.

The impact of the legislation means that the tests for requiring planning obligations have to be tested far more rigorously, and have required the adoption of a case by case based approach to determining contributions sought and will require the regular review of the evidence base in determining future requirements.

In addition, the CIL Regulations place a limit on the Local Planning Authority to pool Section 106 contributions. Since 6th April 2015, no more than 5 separate planning obligations can be used to provide funding for a single specific infrastructure project. This has had implications for those obligations which are based on cumulative impact and require pooled contributions for their delivery. The effect of this provision is in essence that the Local Planning Authority is no longer able to secure a planning obligation which contributes to, or funds any infrastructure project or type of infrastructure if 5 planning obligations have already been entered into which contribute to or fund the same project or infrastructure type. This limitation is back-dated and takes into consideration all planning obligations entered into since 6th April 2010.

Section 106 Agreements have traditionally been more generic in nature, typically specifying a general area within which funds should be spent. However, in order to ensure that the threshold of 5 pooled contributions is not exceeded, the Council are seeking planning obligations for specific identified infrastructure to ensure they comply with the tests set out in Reg. 122. These challenges are notable not only from a financial aspect but also from the perspective of project delivery. SPG has been produced in relation to Leisure and Open Space requirements for new developments, which seeks to provide further clarity in relation to compliance with the provisions of the CIL Regulations. Further SPG will be published in due course.

WHAT SERVICE USERS THINK

In 2016-17 we conducted a customer satisfaction survey aimed at assessing the views of people that had received a planning application decision during the year.

The survey was sent to 594 people, 18% of whom submitted a whole or partial response. The majority of responses (55%) were from members of the public. 8% of respondents had their most recent planning application refused.

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.

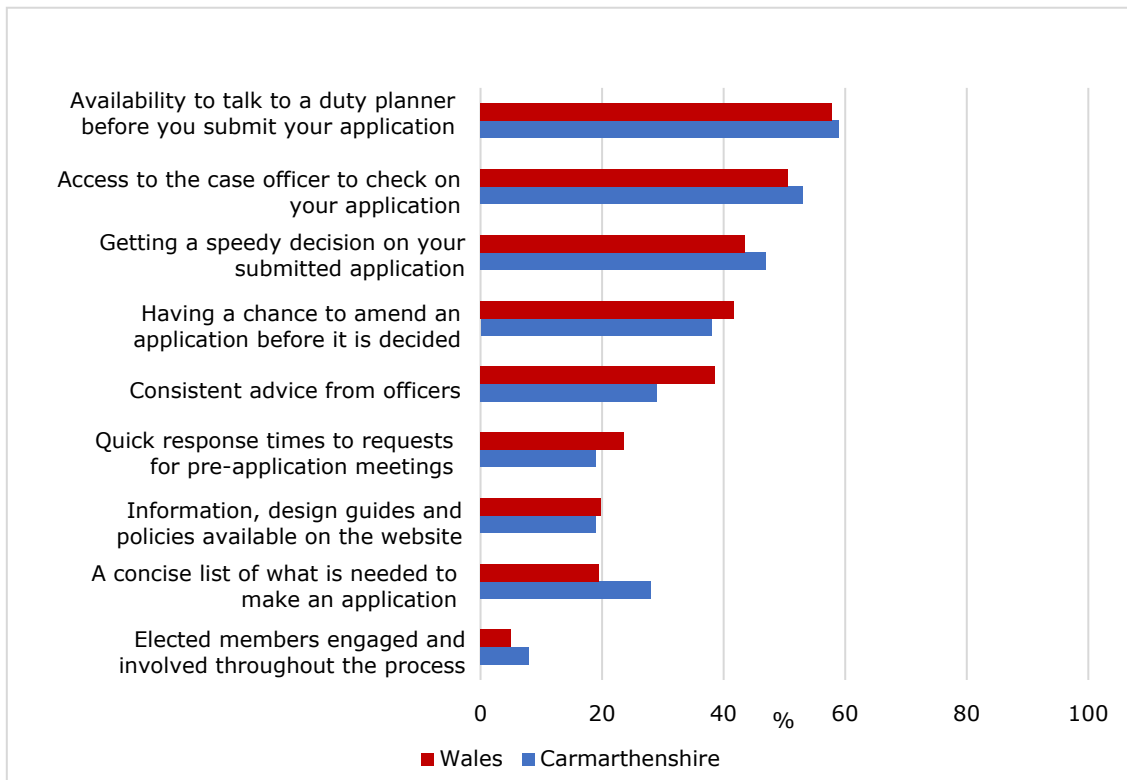
Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents that selected either 'tend to agree' or 'strongly agree' for each statement for both our planning authority and Wales. As can be seen Carmarthenshire remains above the Welsh average in relation to all categories.

Table 1: Percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement, 2016-17

Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	%	
	Carmarthenshire LPA	Wales
The LPA enforces its planning rules fairly and consistently	58	52
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	64	62
The LPA gives help throughout, including with conditions	61	52
The LPA responded promptly when they had questions	63	61
They were listened to about their application	62	59
They were kept informed about their application	57	51
They were satisfied overall with how the LPA handled their application	62	61

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 the percentage of respondents that chose each characteristic as one of their three selections. For us, 'the availability to talk to a duty planner before submitting an application' was the most popular choice.

Figure 1: Characteristics of a good planning service, Carmarthenshire LPA, 2016-17



Specific comments received in the feedback include:

- “My planning request was dealt with in a professional and timely manner. I had no problems with talking my idea through with the planning office prior to my planning application. This made it a stress free process.”
- “Carmarthenshire are the best and most pro-active LPA that I have encountered.”
- “Free impartial advice throughout the process greatly helps people with their planning process and should remain free as there are occasions where you require additional information and if you had to pay then it makes more work for everyone concerned and imparts a poor service reputation. We do pay an application fee and advice and assistance should be part of that.”

OUR PERFORMANCE 2016-17

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

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

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

Plan making

As at 31 March 2017, we were one of 22 LPAs that had a current development plan in place.

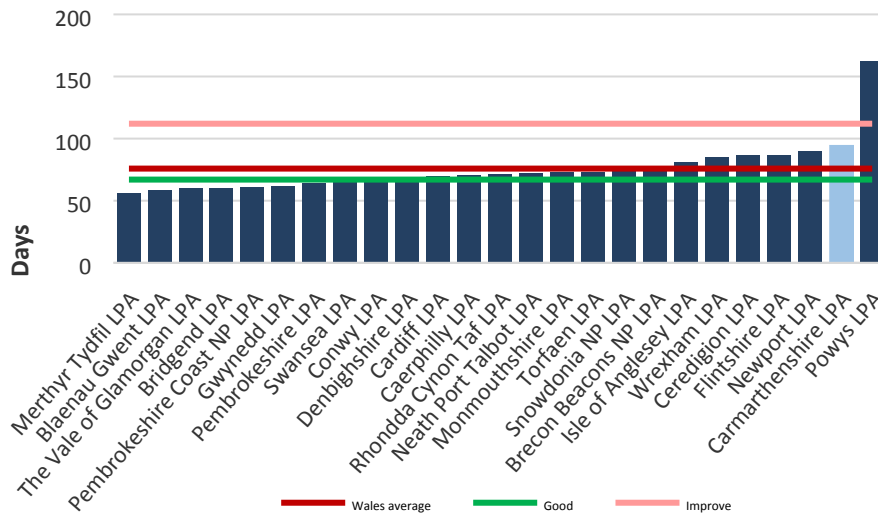
During the APR period we had 4.2 years. of housing land supply identified, making us one of 19 Welsh LPAs without the required 5 years supply. The table on page X shows the figure as 4.1 years however - this was the data for 2016/17 which is the comparator across used Wales as not all LPAs have completed their 2017 survey in time for this APR.

Efficiency

The next section sets out how quickly the LPA dealt with the various typed of planning applications that get submitted. An overall commentary on the next few sets of data (Figures 2-7) can be found at the end of this Section on Efficiency (page X).

In 2016-17 we determined 1414 planning applications, each taking, on average, 95 days (14 weeks) to determine. This compares to an average of 76 days (11 weeks) across Wales. Figure 2 shows the average time taken by each LPA to determine an application during the year.

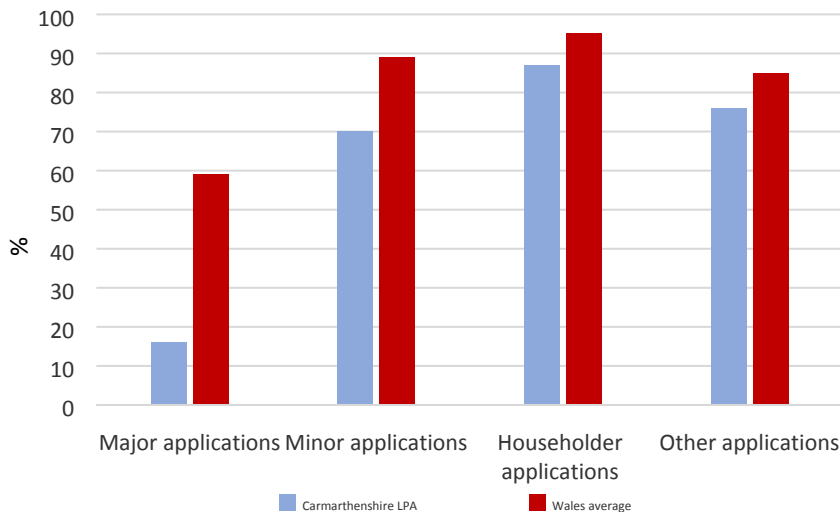
Figure 2: Average time taken (days) to determine applications, 2016-17



70% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. This was below the 80% target. Overall 20 out of 25 LPAs met the 80% target.

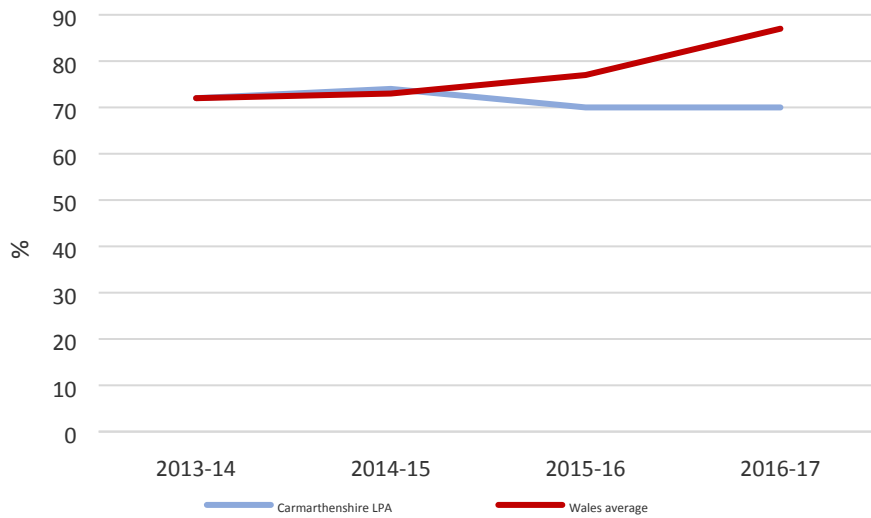
Figure 3 shows the percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales across the four main types of application for our LPA and Wales. It shows that we determined 87% of householder applications within the required timescales.

Figure 3: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales, by type, 2016-17



Between 2015-16 and 2016-17, as Figure 4 shows, the percentage of planning applications we determined within the required timescales stayed the same at 70%. Wales saw an increase this year.

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



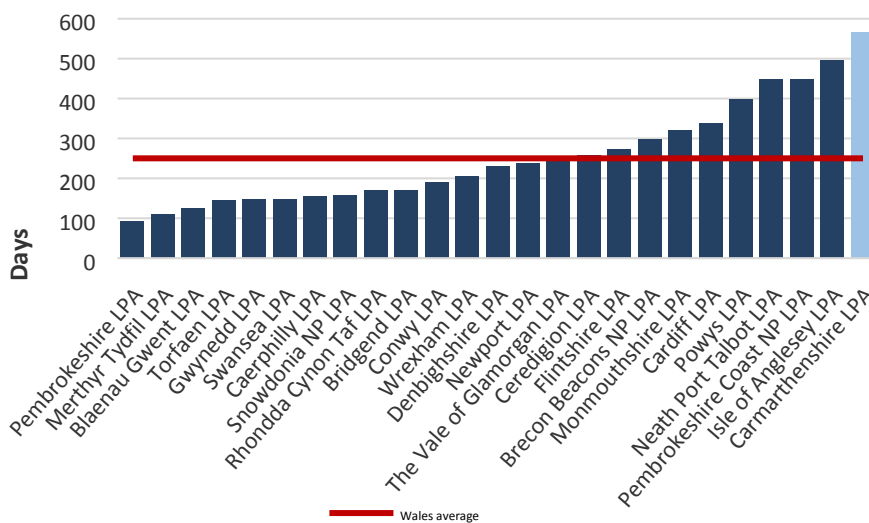
Over the same period:

- The number of applications we received increased (note that this is different to the number of applications determined); and
- The number of applications we approved decreased (91% to 86%).

Major applications

We determined 38 major planning applications in 2016-17, 11% (4 applications) of which were subject to an EIA. Each application (including those subject to an EIA) took, on average, 567 days (81 weeks) to determine. As Figure 5 shows, this was the longest average time taken of all Welsh LPAs.

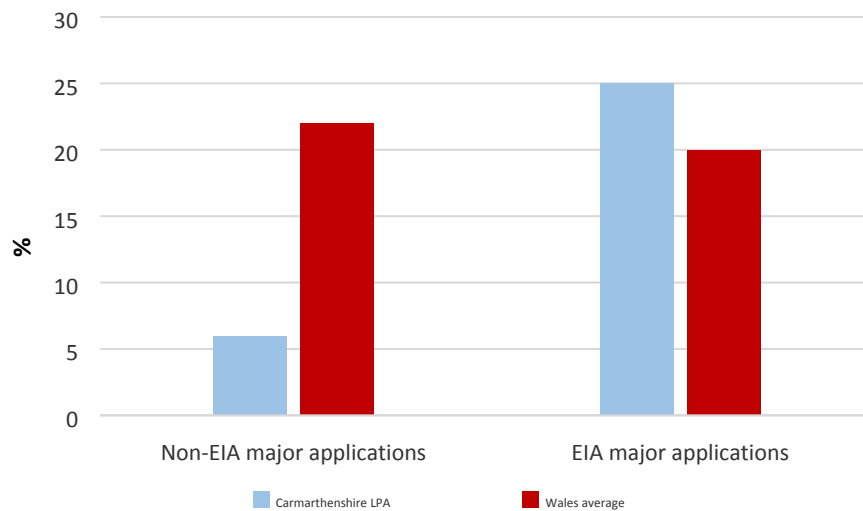
Figure 5: Average time (days) taken to determine a major application, 2016-17



16% of these major applications were determined within the required timescales, the second lowest percentage of all Welsh LPAs.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales by the type of major application. 6% of our 'standard' major applications i.e. those not requiring an EIA, were determined within the statutory 8 week deadline.

Figure 6: Percentage of Major applications determined within the required timescales during the year, by type, 2016-17

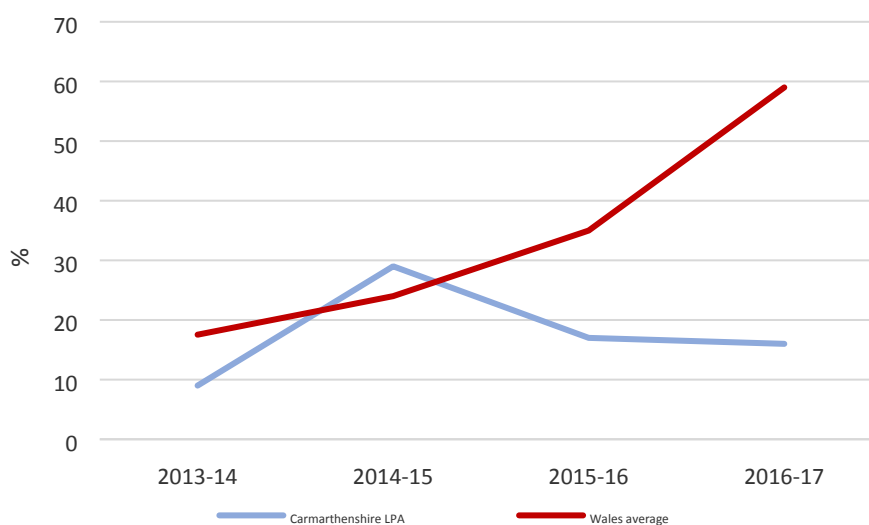


In addition we determined 75% of major applications that were subject to a PPA in the agreed timescales during the year.

Since 2015-16 the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales had decreased from 17%. Similarly, the number of major applications determined decreased while the number of applications subject to an EIA determined during the year increased.

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 7: Percentage of major planning applications determined within the required timescales



Over the same period:

- The percentage of minor applications determined within the required timescales decreased from 74% to 70%;
- The percentage of householder applications determined within the required timescales stayed the same at 87%; and
- The percentage of other applications determined within required timescales increased from 69% to 76%.

The LPA needs to further consider the results set in this Efficiency section. Some early discussion at an all Wales forum of Chief Planning Officers suggests that some of the seemingly lower than average results result from Carmarthenshire's continued emphasis on working with an applicant to achieve an approval. In many LPAs the target dates drive decisions – resulting in far higher refusal rates than in Carmarthenshire. Many of those refused applications do in due course get an approval through a subsequent application, which of course takes additional time. To date the process review which took place for Carmarthenshire LPA and on-going discussion with applicants indicate that generally applicants would prefer to work with the LPA to achieve an approval and it take longer than to be refused permission and have to re-submit. Not all applicants take this view and the LPA needs to take a balanced view in those case and be ready to refuse.

It is also clear from recent all Wales discussion that most LPAs in Wales are making better use of the 'extension of time' mechanism recently introduced by secondary legislation in Wales. This allows the LPA to negotiate with the applicant a revised target date. Thus many LPAs are achieving a higher % of determinations on target, even though the length of time will be longer than the initial statutory target. This needs to be looked at an adopted more in relation to future applications by Carmarthenshire LPA as it would identify a significant improvement in the % of applications determined in time. It is not of course refelective of the overall amount of time undertaken.

It is also apparent that Carmarthenshire receives the third highest number of planning applications of all the LPAs in Wales. How this is managed needs to be considered during the implementation of the new structure during 2017/18. Consideration needs to be giveb as to whether the service is adequately resourced to deal with this level of planning applications – particularly in terms of input from specialist staff in other Units (Highways, Ecology, Drainage etc).

Quality

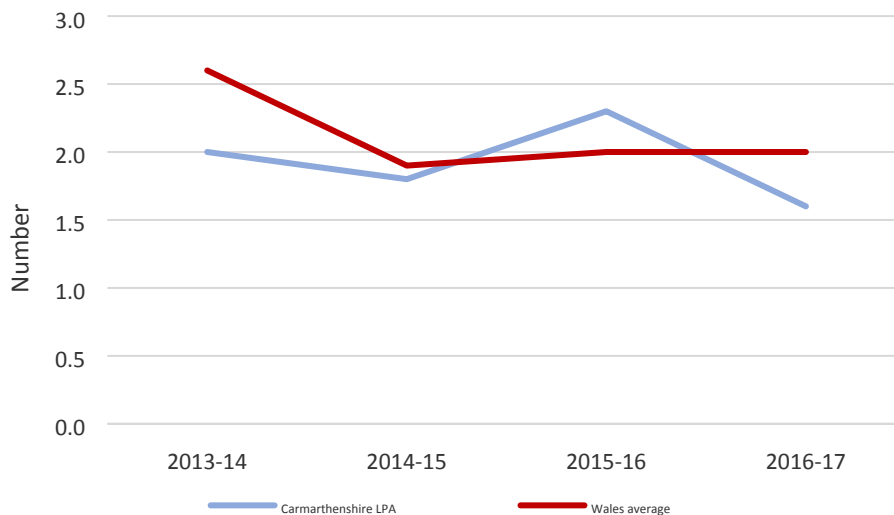
The next section focuses on the quality of the overall decision made – did we make the right decision? How did we do at appeal? An overall commentary on the next few sets of data (Figures 8-9) can be found at the end of this Section on Efficiency (page X).

In 2016-17, our Planning Committee made 100 planning application decisions during the year, which equated to 7% of all planning applications determined. Across Wales 6% of all planning application decisions were made by planning committee.

8% of these member-made decisions went against officer advice. This compared to 11% of member-made decisions across Wales. This equated to 0.6% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice; 0.7% across Wales.

In 2016-17 we received 23 appeals against our planning decisions, which equated to 1.6 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 2015-16 and how this compares to Wales.

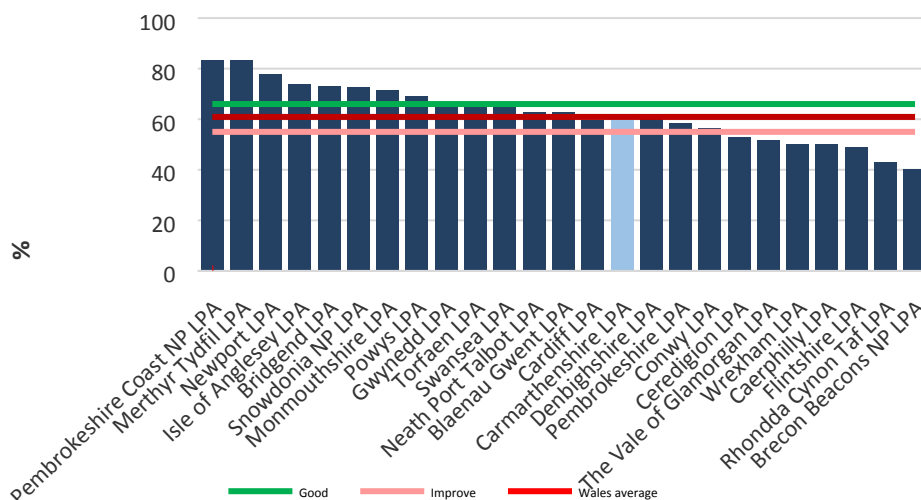
Figure 8: Number of appeals received per 100 planning applications



In 2016-17 we approved 94% of planning applications. This compares to 91% across Wales.

Of the 25 appeals that were decided during the year, 60% were dismissed. As Figure 9 shows, this was lower than the percentage of appeals dismissed across Wales as a whole and was below the 66% target.

Figure 9: Percentage of appeals dismissed, 2016-17



During 2016-17 we had 1 application for costs at a section 78 appeal upheld, making us one of the 11 LPAs to have at least one such application upheld in the year.

The above section shows that generally Carmarthenshire experiences a lower rate of appeal being submitted. This is likely to be due to continued high level of approval rate compared to many other LPAs (86%).

Of the appeals received that were dismissed the level of dismissal remains below the Welsh average.

Engagement

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 applications.

As Table 2 shows, 64% of respondents to our 2016-17 customer satisfaction survey agreed that the LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application.

Table 2: Feedback from our 2016-17 customer satisfaction survey

Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	%	
	Carmarthenshire LPA	Wales
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	64	62
They were listened to about their application	62	59

Overall general feedback on the service remains above the Welsh average.

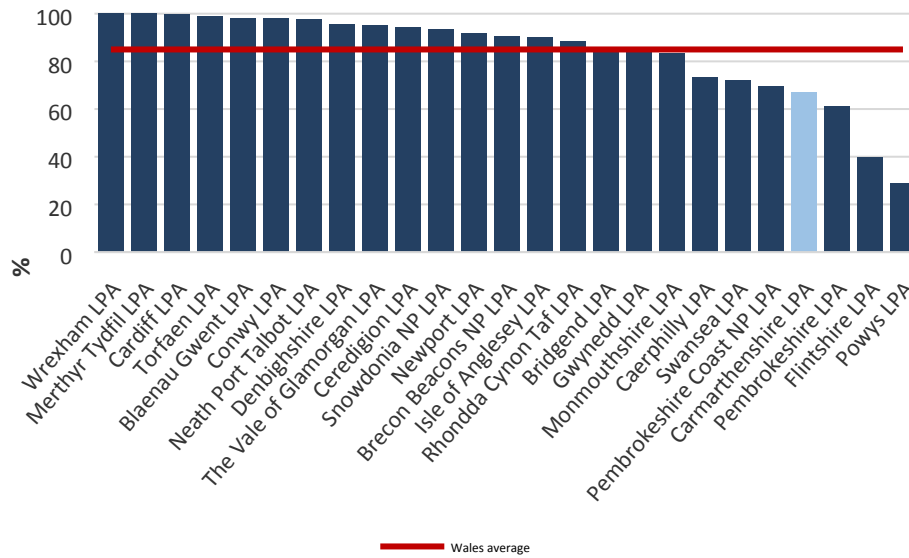
Enforcement

An overall commentary on the next few sets of data (Figures 8-9) can be found at the end of this Section on Efficiency (page X).

In 2016-17 we investigated 434 enforcement cases, which equated to 2.3 per 1,000 population. This compared to 1.9 enforcement cases investigated per 1,000 population across Wales. We took, on average, 123 days to investigate each enforcement case.

We investigated 67% of these enforcement cases within 84 days. Across Wales 85% were investigated within 84 days. Figure 10 shows the percentage of enforcement cases that were investigated within 84 days across all Welsh LPAs.

Figure 10: Percentage of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days, 2016-17



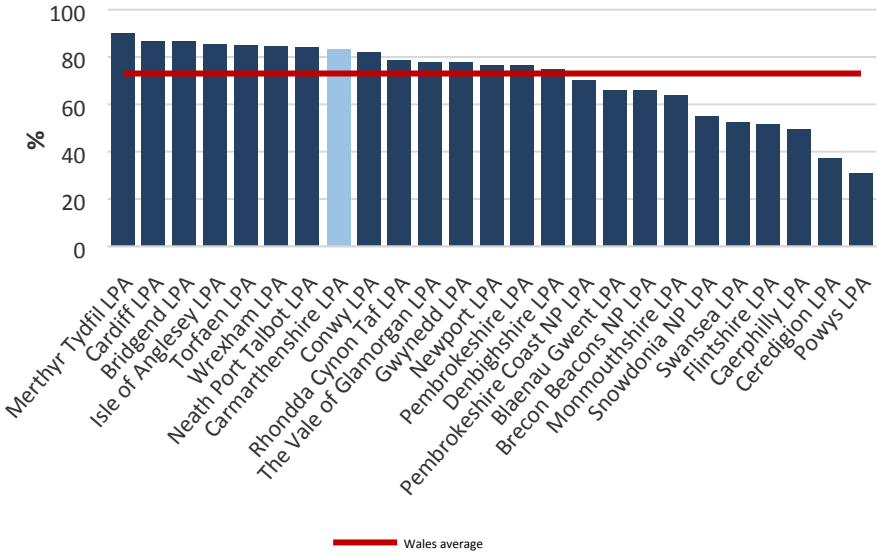
Over the same period, we resolved 412 enforcement cases, taking, on average, 134 days to resolve each case.

83% of this enforcement action was taken within 180 days from the start of the case. As Figure 11 shows this compared to 73% of enforcement cases resolved within 180 days across Wales.

As can be seen the number of enforcement cases dealt with by Carmarthenshire exceeds the number investigated on average across Wales. Although the number investigated within time is lower than average, the number resolved within the prescribed time periods exceeds the Welsh average of 180 days.

A new Enforcement team is being established during 2017/18. The Senior Officer along with their new team will need to consider any further improvements which could be possible in relation to performance in general.

Figure 11: Percentage of enforcement cases resolved in 180 days, 2016-17



ANNEX A - PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE	WALES AVERAGE	Carmarthens hire LPA LAST YEAR	Carmarthens hire LPA THIS YEAR
Plan making						
Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	Yes		No	Yes	Yes	Yes
LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	<12	13-17	18+	58	N/A	N/A
Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	Yes		No	Yes	N/A	N/A
The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	>5		<5	2.9	3.7	4.1
Efficiency						
Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	Not set	Not set	Not set	59	17	16
Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days	Not set	Not set	Not set	250	268	567

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE	WALES AVERAGE	Carmarthens hire LPA LAST YEAR	Carmarthens hire LPA THIS YEAR
Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	>80	60.1-79.9	<60	87	70	70
Average time taken to determine all applications in days	<67	67-111	112+	76	93	95
Quality						
Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	<5	5.1-8.9	9+	11	10	8
Percentage of appeals dismissed	>66	55.1-65.9	<55	61	71	60
Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	0	1	2+	0	0	1
Engagement						
Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?	Yes		No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	Yes		No	Yes	Yes	Yes

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
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
Enforcement			
Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases	Not set	Not set	Not set
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)?	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to take enforcement action	Not set	Not set	Not set

WALES AVERAGE	Carmarthens hire LPA LAST YEAR	Carmarthens hire LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
85	63	67
74	143	123
73	78	83
201	142	134

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	Good
The LDP was adopted on 10 December 2014, and provides an up to date and robust land use framework.	

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	Not applicable
The LDP was adopted on 10 December 2014. A review has not yet been triggered or started as at 31 st March 2017.	

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	Good
The Annual Monitoring Report has been produced, and will be submitted to the Welsh Government by 31 October 2017. Approved at Council on the 20 th September 2017.	

Indicator	04. The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	
"Good"		"Improvement needed"
The authority has a housing land supply of more than 5 years		The authority has a housing land supply of less than 5 years

Authority's performance	4.1 – Improvement needed
<p>This matter is discussed within the 2016/17 LDP Annual Monitoring Report. The issues surrounding the levels of a 5 year supply will be considered and addressed as part of the review into the LDP.</p> <p>The below 5 year supply is an issue common to most LPAs across Wales.</p> <p>That said the Carmarthenshire results far exceeds the Wales average which was 2.9.</p> <p>It should be noted that due to data availability across Wales that the result in the APR is always 1 year out and that the above result is that for 31st March 2016. Carmarthenshire has completed its 2017 study and the result shows a 4.2 years supply.</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

Authority's performance	16%
<p>No Benchmark has been set to date by Welsh Government for this indicator.</p> <p>Commentary has been supplied in the Efficiency section of the APR on this result (see page x).</p> <p>The commentary recognises the need for the LPA to make better use for the new provisions of agreeing an 'extension of time' with an applicant. This will dramatically improve the results under this measure.</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
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Authority's performance	567 days
No Benchmark has been set to date for this Indicator by Welsh Government.	
Commentary has been supplied in the Efficiency section of the APR on this result (see page x).	

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	70% - Fair
Performance is below the Wales average of 87%.	
Commentary has been supplied in the Efficiency section of the APR on this result (see page x).	
The commentary recognises the need for the LPA to make better use for the new provisions of agreeing an 'extension of time' with an applicant. This will dramatically improve the results under this measure.	

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	95 days - Fair
Performance is higher than the Wales average of 76 days. This is an improvement upon last year which was 93 days.	
Commentary has been supplied in the Efficiency section of the APR on this result (see page x).	

SECTION 3 - QUALITY

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

Authority's performance	8% - Fair
<p>Performance is lower than the Wales average of 11% of decision made by Members against officer advice for 2016/17. This shows an improvement from 2015/16.</p> <p>Where Planning Committee go against Officer recommendation, the reasons for which (including policy basis) are included within the Council minutes. The LPA is making greater use of the allocated Member training events to increase awareness in relation to the Committee decision making.</p>	

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

Authority's performance	60% - Fair

Indicator	11. Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
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

Authority’s performance	1 - Fair
<p>The application for costs refers to a One Planet development. The Officer report to Planning Committee recommended approval; the Committee went to site visit and subsequently refused the application. The applicant appealed the decision and was awarded costs. This result and the Inspector’s findings was reported back to the Planning Committee.</p>	

SECTION 4 – ENGAGEMENT

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

Authority’s performance	Good
<p>Carmarthenshire LPA allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee.</p>	

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

Authority’s performance	Good
<p>Whilst not having a formal “duty officer” system, officers are available to deal with general public enquiries/queries. As a result, the LPA would argue that it should not be categorised as in need of improvement, when a local review process has identified the current approach to be better accepted and more efficient than the previous duty officer system.</p>	

Indicator	14. Does the local planning authority’s web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access track their progress (and view their content)?	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
All documents are available online	Only the planning application details are available online, and access to other documents must be sought directly	No planning application information is published online

Authority’s performance	Good
<p>The LPA publish all details relating to a Planning Application on the website of Carmarthenshire County Council.</p>	

SECTION 5 – ENFORCEMENT

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

Authority’s performance	67%
No Benchmark has been set to date for this Indicator by Welsh Government.	

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

Authority’s performance	123 days
No benchmark has been set for this Indicator, but is above the Wales average of 74 days.	

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

Authority’s performance	83%
No Benchmark has been set to date for this Indicator by Welsh Government.	
The 2016/17 result is higher than the Wales Average of 73%, and showed an improvement from the Carmarthenshire 2015/16 result of 78%.	

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	134 days
<p>No benchmark has been set for this Indicator by Welsh Government.</p> <p>The number of days taken to take enforcement action in Carmarthenshire is significantly lower than the Wales average (201 days). Carmarthenshire is therefore performing far better than most local authorities in Wales in relation to the time taken to undertake Enforcement action.</p> <p>The result also shows an improvement from last year's result of 142 days.</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.

Authority's returns	<p>In quarter 1 - data returned in part (see individual SD below)</p> <p>In quarter 2 - data returned in part (see individual SD below)</p> <p>In quarter 3 - data returned in part (see individual SD below)</p> <p>In quarter 4 - data returned in part (see individual SD below)</p>
<p>The Authority has returned on a quarterly basis in part the data sought as part of the SD indicators process.</p> <p>The returns have been as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Returns complete. 2. Returns complete. 3. Returns complete. 4. Returns complete. 5. Data not returned. The LPA don't currently have a system in place to monitor total land area of brownfield/greenfield developments. 6. Data not returned. The LPA don't currently have a system in place to monitor total area gained/lost in relation to open space. 7. Data not returned. Part A – data is however included in the APR. Part B isn't applicable as the LPA have not adopted CIL. <p>Much of the data specified for collection was not readily available for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time required to update planning application systems: The LPA currently use MIS LGS (specifically the Headway product) to administer its planning application process. The LPA were advised in mid-2014 that MIS LGS was being bought out. At that time the LPA were advised that the Headway product would be discontinued over the course of the next couple of years. The LPA have therefore been working towards a replacement solution. This should be resolved during 2018, with the new product being geared up to dealing with monitoring far more effectively than its predecessor (including SD indicators). In the interim Headway remains the system depended upon by the LPA. It has not been possible for the LPA to acquire or require changes to Headway in the interim – upgrades/modifications were not available due to the product being discontinued. This has therefore affected the logging and collecting of SD and will continue to do so until full migration on to a new system has been successfully completed. • The LPA acknowledges that as we are now half way through the third APR period (2016/17) that any new system will not be in place to fully capture details for the APR until the fifth APR (2018/19). 	

The LPA will continue to work with WG and advise on the appropriateness of the various SDs. Any changes to SDs or the introduction of new ones should have a lead in period which allows systems to be updated prior to the commencement of the APR year for which the data is to be reported.

Indicator	SD1. The floorspace (square metres) granted and refused planning permission for new economic development on allocated employment sites during the year.
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Granted (square metres)	
Authority's data	291

Refused (square metres)	
Authority's data	No data available

The figure set out above in relation to applications granted is mainly accounted for by 2 large applications:

W/33814 - DEMOLITION OF AN EXISTING BUILDING USES FOR SHOP DISPLAY AND STORAGE PURPOSES (ATTACHED TO THE SHOP AND OFFICES). REPLACEMENT WITH A LARGER BUILDING ON THE SAME SITE WHICH WILL BE USED FOR DISPLAY, STORAGE AND A SMALL CAFE– 75 sqm (A1-A3) at Aberarad, Newcastle Emlyn;

E/34947 – DEMOLISH AND REBUILD NEW OFFICE BLOCK – 216 sqm (B1) at Capel Hendre Industrial Estate, Ammanford.

Data is not available on refusals at present (see explanation as part of introduction to SD Section above).

Indicator	SD2. Planning permission granted for renewable and low carbon energy development during the year.
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Granted permission (number of applications)	
Authority's data	6

Granted permission (MW energy generation)	
Authority's data	17.31

The 6 applications permitted are made up of the following:

- 1 Hydroelectric
- 2 Solar;
- 2 Wind
- 1 Other

The majority of the MW generation potential can be accounted for by 1 planning application – 9.1MW – Planning Application S/34211 – DEVELOP STANDBY ELECTRICITY GENERATORS AND ALL ASSOCIATED BUILDING AND ENGINEERING OPERATIONS AND LANDSCAPING LAND NEAR FFOS LAS SOLAR SITE, CARWAY.

Indicator	SD3. The number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year.
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Market housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	373

Affordable housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	70

The transfer from the previous Development Plan framework through to that of the LDP is a factor in the Affordable Housing figure. It is also noted that the Council has recently adopted a Affordable Housing Delivery Plan which, along with the provisions of the LDP, seek to maximise future Affordable Housing delivery.

Indicator	SD4. Planning permission granted and refused for development in C1 and C2 floodplain areas during the year.
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Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that DID NOT meet all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission	
Authority's data	2 residential units (0ha non-residential units)

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	
Authority's data	2 residential units

Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that MET all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission	
Authority's data	8 residential units

Data on hectares is not available.

The 2 approved which did not meet all TAN15 tests related to application S/35070, conversion of terrace property to two self-contained flats.

Indicator	SD5. The area of land (ha) granted planning permission for new development on previously developed land and greenfield land during the year.
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Previously developed land (hectares)	
Authority's data	Data not available.

Greenfield land (hectares)	
Authority's data	Data not available.

Data not available. See explanation as part of introduction to SD Section above.

Indicator	SD6. The area of public open space (ha) that would be lost and gained as a result of development granted planning permission during the quarter.
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Open space lost (hectares)	
Authority's data	Data not available.

Open space gained (hectares)	
Authority's data	Data not available.

Data not available. See explanation as part of introduction to SD Section above.

Indicator	SD7. The total financial contributions (£) agreed from new development granted planning permission during the quarter for the provision of community infrastructure.
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Gained via Section 106 agreements (£)	
Authority's data	To be confirmed by Finance

Gained via Community Infrastructure Levy (£)	
Authority's data	Not applicable.

Gained via Section 106 agreements: Although data has not been submitted to WG as part of the quarterly returns to date it is now possible to collect this information and therefore it has been included in this APR.

Community Infrastructure Levy: The LA do not currently operate a CIL regime. The second part of SD7 is therefore not applicable.