

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

## **PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) – 2016-17**

### **PREFACE**

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

*This report shows that Monmouthshire's planning service continues to perform very well, with just one indicator ranked in need of improvement against the Welsh Government's targets, and all ranked indicators scoring at or above the Welsh average. In all but one criterion the service scored above the Welsh average in terms of customer service feedback (in some cases well above the average), demonstrating the planning service's commitment to an outcome-focused approach.*

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

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

## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This is Monmouthshire's third Annual Performance Report, which looks at the performance of the planning service against nationally set performance indicators, Welsh Government targets, the Wales average performance, and Monmouthshire's performance last year. The results are considered in the context of the challenges, opportunities, priorities and resources (staffing and financial) available to us. The objective of the APR is to reflect on and celebrate good performance, identify areas for improvement, and look across Wales to identify potential areas of best practice that we could learn from or share with others.

1.2 The nature of the performance indicators means their focus is on decision speed and customer service rather than measuring whether or not better outcomes have been achieved. It has not been possible to identify an objective way of measuring outcomes, however we seek to prioritise securing the best scheme possible rather than traditional indicators relating to speed of decision-making. Research has identified that our customers' priority is securing planning permission: customers generally understand the benefits of good design and, within reason, do not see the time taken as a priority.

1.3 For the purposes of this report, performance is analysed across the five key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in the Planning Performance Framework:

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

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

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

- The proportion of all applications determined within 8 weeks or an agreed timescale increased;
- The proportion of major applications determined within agreed timescales improved;
- Although enforcement cases increased significantly (up by over 40% compared to 2015/16) performance remained reasonable and we closed over 50% more cases than the previous year;
- The percentage of applications approved remained well above WG average and is stable at 96%;
- Of those applications that had gone through our pre-application advice service (17% of the total number determined), 98% were approved, and just 2% refused; and
- The proportion of respondents to our customer survey who were satisfied overall with the service was 73%, well above the Welsh average of 60%.

This shows that, despite a challenging workload, our performance and levels of customer satisfaction have generally improved and our pre-application advice service is effective.

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

- 11 have targets set by the Welsh Government. Monmouthshire's performance is ranked 'good' against 8, 'fair' against 2 and 'in need of improvement' against one. The 'fair' results relate to the proportion of planning applications determined by Members that were contrary to the officer recommendation, where we achieved 7%, narrowly missing the 'good' target of 5% or less; and secondly, where the average time taken to determine applications (73 days) narrowly missed the 'good' target of 67 days; the measure that was in need of improvement was the five year supply of housing land which has fallen from 5 years in the previous year to 4.1 years.
- We performed above or at the Wales average in 13 of the 17 applicable indicators. The indicators for which performance was below Wales average related to i) the average time taken to determine major applications in days, ii) the proportion of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days, iii) the proportion of enforcement cases where action is taken or a retrospective application received within 180 days from the start of the case and iv) the average time taken to take enforcement action. Further commentary on the performance against these measures is set out in Section 6.
- Our performance declined against eight indicators, The declining performance related to:
  - 5 year housing land supply;
  - Average time taken to determine major planning applications;
  - Average time taken to determine all planning applications;
  - Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice;
  - 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;
  - Average time taken to resolve enforcement cases;
  - 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) and;
  - Average time taken to take enforcement action.

However, it should be noted that in four of the above measures, our performance remains well above the Wales average, and where a target was set by the Welsh Government, we are still ranked 'good' or 'fair' except for the five year housing land supply measure, which had fallen to 4.1 years' supply (and we know has dropped further to 4.0 years' at March 2017) below the required 5 year supply. This is discussed in detail in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) 2017.

1.6 In the light of the above, five actions are proposed going forward;

*Action 1 - Systems review to be re-visited and reinvigorated to identify what matters today and how we meet that demand as well as identifying causes of variation in our system that lead to delays in reaching a positive outcome*

*Action 2 - New Idox Uniform training for colleagues to be undertaken to bed in our new IT system*

*Action 3 - Streamline enforcement processes following a triage system to reduce the time taken to resolve cases*

*Action 4 - Arrange a training seminar on planning enforcement for Town and Community Councils via the new area-based clusters (to be arranged via Planning Aid Wales)*

*Action 5 – Absorb the data from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Benchmarking Report, due October 2017, and investigate areas of good practice across elements of the service that we can apply to improve our performance.*

## 2.0 CONTEXT

2.1 This section sets out the planning context within which the Local Planning Authority operates, both corporately and in terms of Monmouthshire as a county, for the 2016-17 period.

### Corporate Context

2.2 The Council adopted its Local Development Plan in February 2014 and submitted its second Annual Monitoring Report in October 2016.

2.3 The planning service's work links directly to Monmouthshire County Council's objective of building sustainable, resilient communities. The Council has identified four key priorities:

- 1) Giving our young people the best start in life with a good education;
- 2) Protecting the most vulnerable in society;
- 3) Promotion of enterprise, economic development and job creation;
- 4) Maintaining locally accessible services.

2.4 The following Corporate Service Improvement Plan outcomes are directly relevant to the planning service:

- Older people are able to live their good life;
- People have access to appropriate and affordable housing;
- People have good access and mobility;
- People feel safe;
- Business and enterprise; and
- People protect and enhance the environment.

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

2.5 The planning service is arranged into two main teams: Development Management, which includes planning applications, enforcement and heritage management; and Planning Policy. During the previous reporting period, the service underwent a number of significant improvements including being restructured, rebranded and co-located under a new Head of Service.

2.6 The Enterprise Directorate vision provides a strategic context for the development and promotion of an enterprising culture, which builds business resilience and creates excellent outcomes for our communities.

2.7 Development Management:

2.7.1 The Development Management service vision is: ***"To advise on, give permission for and ensure the best possible development"***. The purpose of the service is to implement the

Council's statutory adopted Local Development Plan by enabling good quality development in the right locations, and resisting poor quality development, or development in the wrong locations.

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

## 2.8 Planning Policy:

2.8.1 The Planning Policy service vision is: ***"To ensure Planning Policy is at the heart of Sustainable Development in Monmouthshire"***. The purpose of the Planning Policy Service is to ensure that the land use and sustainable development objectives of the Council are met with regard to adequate supply of land in sustainable locations for housing, retail, recreation, education, transport, business, waste and other needs, whilst protecting the County's valued environmental and cultural assets.

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

2.9 Key areas of work for the Planning Service include:

- Providing pre-application advice to customers in partnership with key internal stakeholders;
- Determining planning applications in accordance with adopted policy and material planning considerations, taking into account stakeholder comments and corporate objectives;
- Securing financial contributions from developers to offset the infrastructure demands of new development and meet the need for affordable housing;
- Safeguarding the County's 2400 Listed Buildings and 31 Conservation Areas, areas of archaeological sensitivity, the Wye Valley AONB, the Brecon Beacons National Park and the European designated Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation;
- Taking robust enforcement action against unauthorised development that is unacceptable;
- Raising awareness of the statutory role and importance of the land use planning framework, building on the high levels of engagement underpinning the LDP process;
- Preparing supplementary planning guidance (SPG) to assist with the implementation and interpretation of LDP policy;
- Implementing the Council's LDP through engaging and working with communities, and partnership working with internal and external partners to foster the co-creation and growth of enterprise, community and environmental well-being. This will include involvement with the Whole Place work and Local Well-being Plan;
- Monitoring and evaluating Plan policies and the process of Plan preparation; and
- Joint working with SE Wales Authorities with the ambition of preparing a Strategic Development Plan.

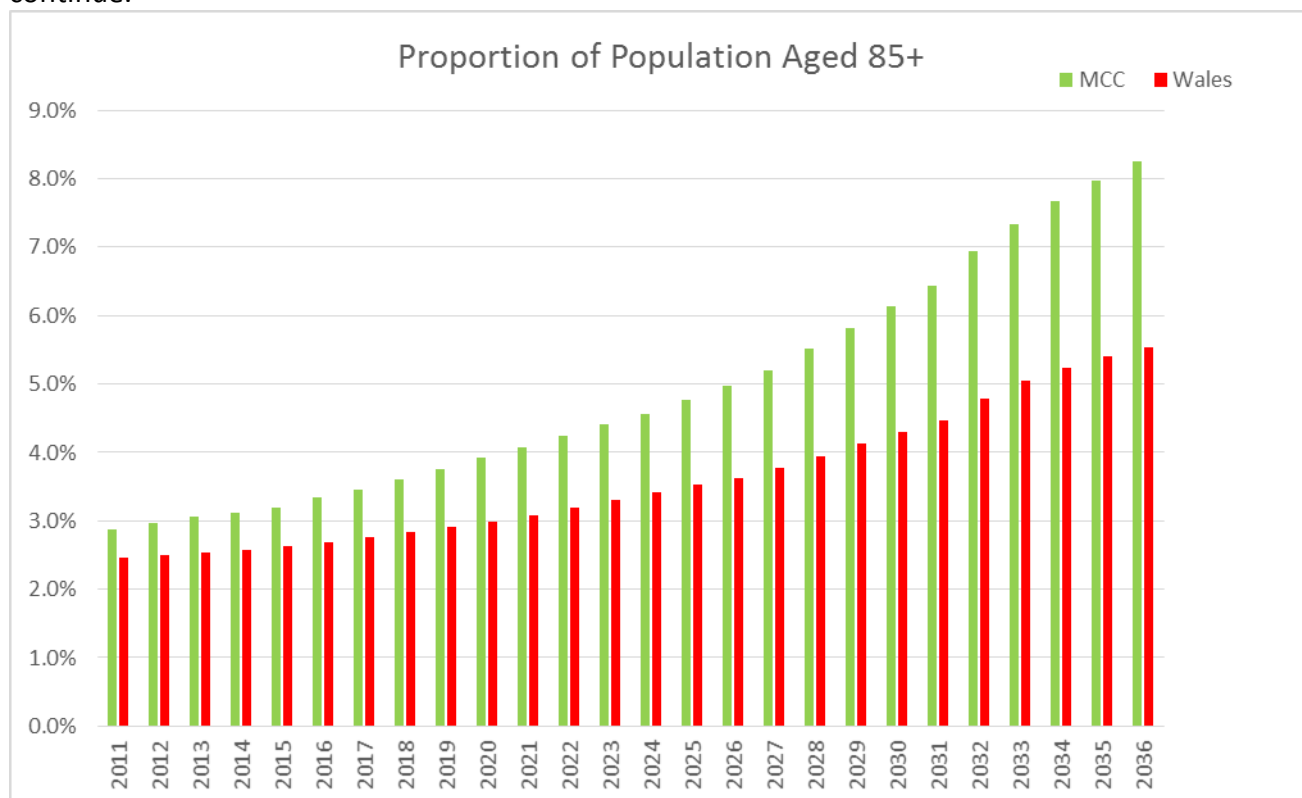
## **Local Context**

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

2.11 Our people

2.11.1 Monmouthshire covers an area of approximately 88,000 hectares with a population of 91,323 in 2011 (92,843 according to the 2016 mid-year estimate), 7.9% of which resides within the BBNP area of the County. The County has a low population density of 1.1 persons per hectare – significantly lower than the South East Wales average of 5.3 persons per hectare – reflecting the area’s rural nature. Only 53% of the population live in wards defined as being urban areas (i.e. with a population of more than 10,000).

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



Source: Office for National Statistics

2.11.3 This demographic change has significant implications for economic activity and demand for services to enable our citizens to continue to live independent lives. The Council has embarked on a work-stream named ‘Future Monmouthshire’ to consider the needs and

aspirations of our communities going forward, and how those will be met in the context of a rapidly changing public sector. The project is also considering the extent to which we are a hostage to fortune of these demographic changes, or if we can and should seek to change trends, for example by seeking to retain younger people in the County and the role of affordable housing and employment opportunities in achieving that. This work will provide important evidence, context and direction to future Local Development Plans and to regional planning.

## 2.12 Housing and quality of life

### 2.12.1 The County has three broad categories of settlement:

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

2.12.2 Over the last decade, housing completions in the Monmouthshire LPA area have averaged approximately 240 dwellings per annum, although there have been significant annual variations with just 158 completions in 2009/10. To deliver the LDP housing requirement, 488 completions per annum are required (2013-2021). To date, completions since LDP adoption have averaged approximately 226 per annum. This is discussed in more detail in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report.

2.12.3 Average house prices are significantly higher than the Wales average (£276,800 compared to £181,100 average in Sept 2017) resulting in a significant need for affordable housing (source: Hometrack data). Of the 3,719 dwellings completed between 2001 and 2013, 15.8% were classed as affordable. Of the 667 dwellings completed since LDP adoption, 19% are affordable units.

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

## 2.13 Our economy



- 2.13.1 The County has a high proportion of working age people in employment (62.8% in 2011) compared to neighbouring Authorities or the Wales average (58.2%). Our economy is reliant on the public sector and services for employment:
- The public administration, education and health sector accounts for 33.3% of jobs;
  - The distribution, retail, hotels and restaurants sector accounts for 27.4% of jobs;
  - Tourism, as part of the services sector, is also important in the County accounting for 12.1% of jobs, higher than the Wales average (9.6%). There were over two million visitors to the County in 2012, with tourist expenditure amounting to nearly £158m thereby supporting 2,700 jobs.
- (Business Register & Employment Survey 2012).
- 2.13.2 The County had 3,720 active enterprises in 2011, 27% of which were in the property and business services sector. Nearly 99% of the County's businesses are classified as small (i.e. up to 49 employees). Monmouthshire has experienced growth in eight of fourteen sectors in the decade to 2011, with the greatest increases in the property business services, hotels and catering and education and health sectors, while there has been a decline in the number of manufacturing businesses. Recent changes in Business Rates by the Welsh Government have disproportionately affected Monmouthshire.
- 2.13.3 Monmouthshire's approved Tourism Destination Plan has served the County well but has now reached the end of its initial 3 year life, so the Council has commissioned a review. Monmouthshire's tourism performance over the plan's life (between 2012 and 2015) has been steady, (10% growth in terms of economic impact, 8.7% growth in visitor numbers and 1.5% growth in FTE jobs), with exceptional growth (6.6%) seen between 2014 and 2015 which was above the national (5%) and regional average (6%). This has coincided with significant progress on delivery of the Plan's priorities in terms of the experience visitors find on the ground in our villages, towns and attractions, the focus on walking, the consolidation of the County as Wales' Food Capital, the Council's programme of events, or the quality of the product database which drives marketing and communications.
- 2.13.4 The 2015 Welsh Government Commuting Statistics indicate that 58.3% of the County's residents work in the area. Although less than the Welsh average of 69.4%, this is an improvement of last year's figure of 54.5%. This suggests that there has been some progress in meeting the aspiration to increase the proportion of resident workforce working within Monmouthshire over the Plan period. However, the same data source suggests that Monmouthshire has a net outflow of 900 commuters – with 17,800 commuting into the Authority to work and 18,700 commuting out. There was significant in-commuting from Torfaen (3,000), Newport (2,900), Blaenau Gwent (2,800) and from outside Wales (8,000). The main areas for out-commuting were Newport (3,900), Bristol (3,400), Cardiff (2,500) and Torfaen (2,100), with a further 6,400 commuting to other areas outside Wales. A relatively high proportion of Monmouthshire's residents travel long distances to work, with a high usage of the private car. Heavy reliance on the private car and limited opportunities for public transport is a particular issue in rural areas. These figures should be treated with caution, however, as the data is based on a small sample survey.

## 2.14 Communications

2.14.1 The County is easily accessible from the rest of Wales by the M4, A40, A449 and A4042 and from England by the M4 and M48 Severn Bridges and the A48, A40 and A465. The good road transport links connect the County to major population centres such as Cardiff, Newport and Bristol. Monmouthshire is served by a number of local and national bus routes, with main bus stations in the towns of Abergavenny, Chepstow and Monmouth. In terms of rail provision, Monmouthshire has four railway stations, at Caldicot, Chepstow and Severn Tunnel Junction in the south of the County and Abergavenny in the north. As part of the Cardiff Capital Region, Monmouthshire is set to benefit from the proposed South Wales Metro proposals. The local community in Magor Undy is at an advanced stage of campaigning for a new Magor Undy Walkway Station.

2.14.2 Public rights of way include 1,499km of footpaths, 71km of bridleways, 84.5km of restricted byways and 1.5km of unrestricted byways. These public rights of way are complemented by permissive paths. The County has three long distance regional trails (Usk Valley, Wye Valley and Three Castles) as well as the national trail (Offa's Dyke Path). The County also provides the start of the all-Wales coastal path. There are two national cycle routes within Monmouthshire, both of which run from Chepstow. The countryside access opportunities available in the County are one of its key assets, sustaining tourism and providing opportunities for economic regeneration.

2.14.3 The rural nature of the County and high proportion of SMEs means broadband and mobile communication are both vital and challenging. The Council is part of the Superfast Cymru project rolling out BT broadband, and was also a pilot Authority for a UK and Welsh Government sponsored project which is seeking to increase broadband coverage in rural communities that would not normally be commercially viable. Unfortunately, the company behind this project has recently gone into administration.

## 2.15 Our natural heritage

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

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

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

- Approximately 650 non-statutory Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) predominantly in relation to grassland and ancient and semi-natural woodland areas.

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

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

## 2.16 Our built heritage

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

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

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

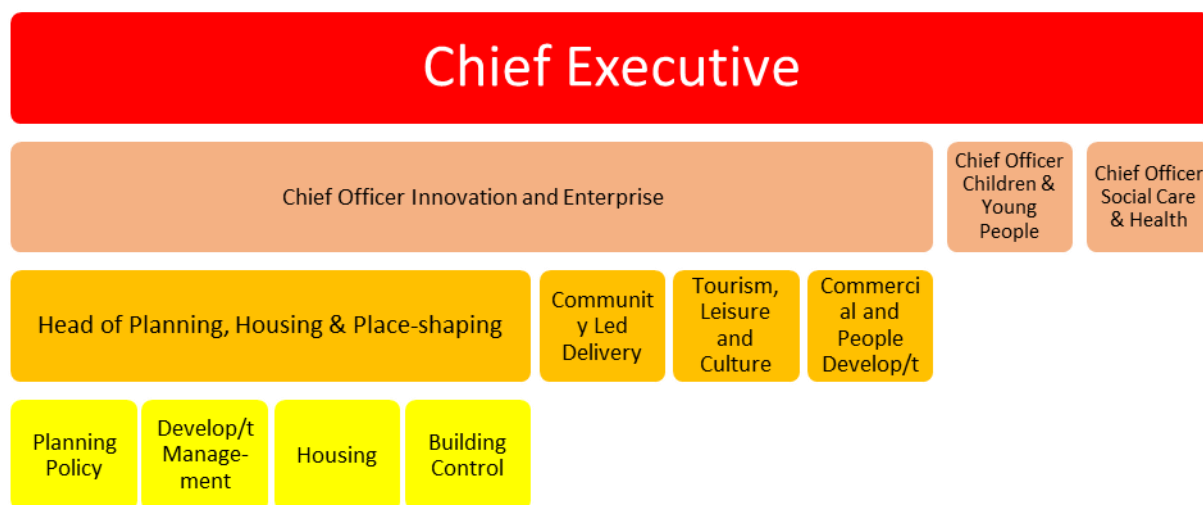
### 3.0 PLANNING SERVICE

#### Organisational setting

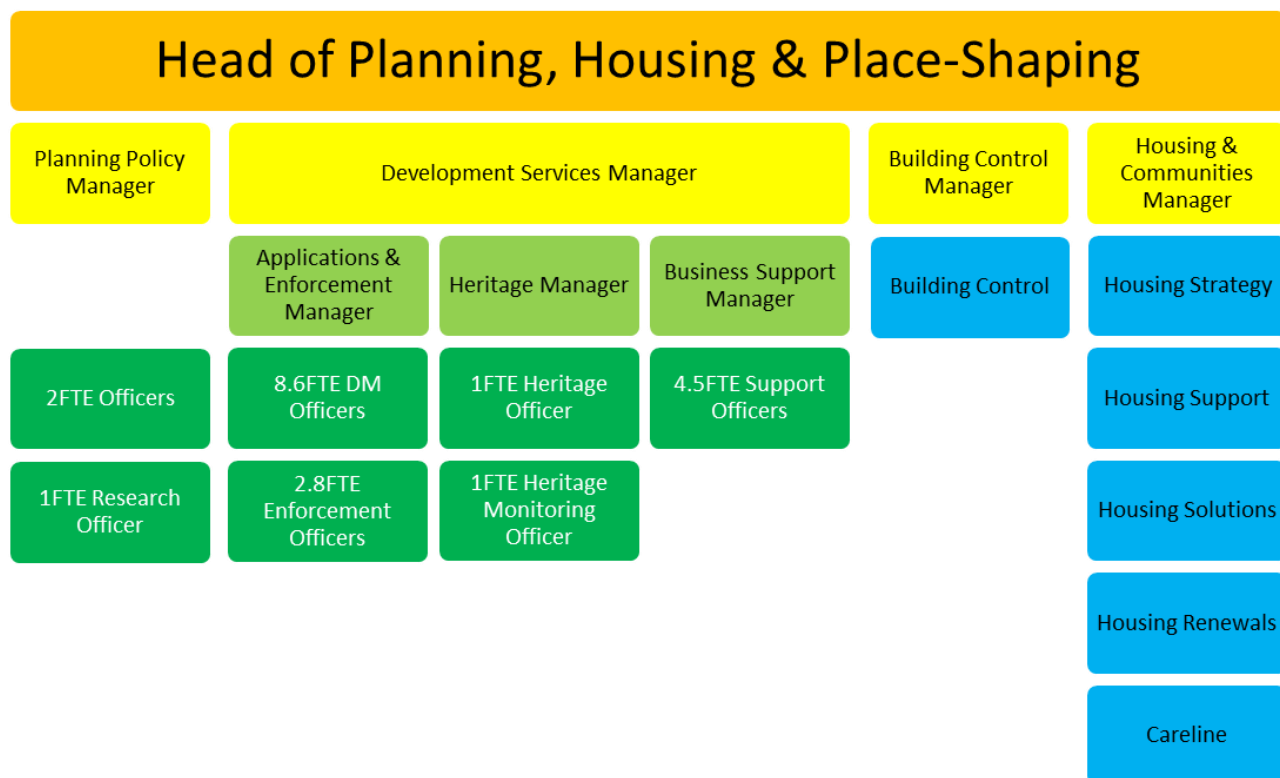
3.1 During this reporting period, the Planning service has undergone a number of significant changes, including:

- The Green Infrastructure and Countryside service sat within the Planning service for approximately six months before returning to the Tourism, Leisure and Culture Service to be part of a review into alternative service delivery models.
- The remaining elements of the Planning service (Policy and DM) together with Building Control and the Housing service for the Council came under the management of the re-named Head of Planning, Housing & Place Shaping (formerly the Head of Planning).
- Preparations were being put in place towards the end of this reporting period for the restructuring of management responsibilities within Planning Policy and DM led to a slight increase in management capacity as a response to officer feedback, to better support colleagues, to enable succession planning and recognise talent, and to support service delivery improvements. This has since been implemented.

#### Department structure and reporting lines for the 2016-17 reporting period



## Planning service staffing structure for the 2016-17 reporting period



- 3.2 In October 2015, the Welsh Government increased planning application fees and the (then) Minister wrote to all Local Planning Authorities setting out an expectation that the additional income is reinvested in the planning service. As recognised by the Welsh Government, application fee income covers only approximately 60% of the costs of delivering the Development Management service. In Monmouthshire, the additional planning fee income anticipated in 2016/17 was proposed in part (£40k) to be used to reduce the net cost of the planning service, and in part (£30k) be invested in service improvements by making permanent a temporary Support Officer post and by creating an additional 0.5FTE Development Management post. This change was fully implemented in 2016/17. See 3.3 below for further discussion on budgets.

### Links with other Council projects

- 3.3 There are a number of wider corporate activities that impact upon the planning service, or that the planning service supports and/or shapes:

#### 3.3.1 Budget management

Local Government budgets have been heavily cut over recent years, and the planning service has had to make savings in the same way as all other unprotected services. This has comprised a combination of reduced expenditure, increased income budget lines, and reduced staffing costs. In the two previous reporting periods, the DM team underspent by around £50k each year through underspends in respect of staff costs (gaps between posts being filled) and the Professional & Specialist Fees budget. In this reporting period,

identified budget mandate savings of £40k for DM were not achieved - savings had been anticipated via extra planning application fee income for 2016/17 – see par. 3.2 above; however, application fee income fell from £626k for 2015/16 to £506k for 2016/17 owing to economic conditions. Savings (or increased income) for 2017/18 have been identified via an increase in pre-application advice fees (by £5k), a drive towards a paperless system (reducing printing and copying – leading to savings of £5k), the introduction of new fee earning services (fast track planning applications and pre-purchase / completion certificates, anticipated to earn £4k) and a reduction in the DM Professional & Specialist Fees element of the budget by £43k. Planning Policy has set budget savings of around £17k for 2017/18, including a reduction in their Professional & Specialist Fees element of the budget.

### 3.3.2 Service improvement/Systems Thinking

The Council has reviewed a number of its services via a Systems Thinking approach. Planning underwent this review between 2010 and 2012, and it is now fully embedded. The review seeks to strip the service back to basic principles: who is the customer, and what is important to them? As far as is possible (for example taking into account legislative requirements), activities that do not add value to the customer are removed.

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

Following the recent management re-structure within the DM service and owing to the degree of change in the planning process and how customers access and use the service since the first review, the team is engaging in a systems thinking ‘refresh’ or revisit to refocus on where waste is occurring in our systems and where primary causes of variation are taking place so that these can be addressed and resolved, leading to a better customer experience. An Area Manager and senior DM officer have agreed to lead on this from autumn 2017 and this will take place in tandem with the introduction of our new planning application processing software which is anticipated to reduce waste created by the existing, inefficient software system.

### 3.3.3 Development Team approach

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

During this reporting period, we determined 179 applications where the applicant had engaged in pre-application advice (in total we responded to 503 requests for pre-application advice):

- 94% were determined within the agreed timescale, which is better than performance on applications that did not go through the pre-application advice service (88%);
- 61% (109) were determined within 8 weeks and it is accepted that there is scope for considerable improvement as this figure has fallen since the previous year by 8%);
- 98% were approved. There were 4 applications that received pre-app that were subsequently refused. Three of these four applications did not follow the officer advice given at pre-application stage (although one of these applications that was refused has since been allowed on appeal) and one was refused by Members at committee, contrary to the officer recommendation for approval.

In 2016/17 we were one of three pilot Authorities, trialling the involvement of Ward Members in pre-application discussions. Design Panels involving the Planning Committee Chairman, Vice-Chairman and a senior Planning Committee member together with the local ward member were arranged to discuss major proposals in Abergavenny, Caldicot and Monmouth. The first led to positive dialogue and engagement, and also amendments being made to the design proposals at a relatively early stage in the process, followed by a successful outcome at Committee. The other proposals are awaiting determination.

As part of the systems thinking revisit referred to in 3.3.2 above, it is intended to review our pre-application advice service to see how we can make this more effective for the customer and improve the timeliness of our responses. This is particularly important as we are looking to put in place fast track services for more complex proposals that will necessitate the Development Team approach. The Development team approach is valued by customers as it provides a comprehensive service but it is more challenging to organise given the number of different officers involved.

#### 3.3.4 Best practice benchmarking

We are involved in various regional and all-Wales working groups, which provide an important forum for identifying, learning from and sharing best practice, while recognising Monmouthshire's uniqueness. These groups include:

- Planning Officers' Society for Wales (POSW) (meeting of all Chief Planning Officers from Welsh LPAs; POSW is involved in benchmarking work among all Welsh local planning authorities undertaken for WG by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to understand the costs of running a planning service more accurately and comparably than CIPFA data. Monmouthshire's Head of Planning, Housing and Place-shaping was the POSW Chairman for this reporting period;
- South East Wales branch of POSW (POS-SEW), which is newly formed;
- South East Wales Strategic Planning Group (SEWSPG) (meeting of planning policy lead officers from the ten SE Wales LPAs and the Brecon Beacons National Park). Monmouthshire and Newport Councils jointly chaired this group during this reporting period, with Monmouthshire becoming the Chair Authority in January 2017;
- South East Wales Heritage Forum. Monmouthshire's Heritage Manager chaired this group during this reporting period.

- South Wales Enforcement Forum
- South Wales Development Management Group (meeting of the South Wales Development Management lead officers)

An informal group of DM officers and managers from the former Gwent Local Planning Authorities has started meeting to share best practice and procedures in the light of new regulations coming into force. The objective is to discuss consistency on a more manageable basis, and feed learning back to all LPAs in Wales.

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

In addition, we hold monthly liaison meetings between the Planning Policy and Development Management teams to disseminate policy changes at national and strategic levels, to understand corporate strategies and to aid interpretation and implementation of the recently adopted Local Development Plan. This has provided a valuable forum to ensure a cohesive and consistent planning service is provided.

### 3.3.5 Asset Management

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

The Local Development Plan includes four Council-owned sites as housing allocations. During this reporting period, a planning application has been approved for Coed Glas, Abergavenny while in June 2017 the Council's Planning Committee approved the proposed development at Rockfield Farm, Undy; pre-application community consultation was undertaken in relation to Crick Road, Portskewett.

### 3.3.6 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools

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

### 3.3.7 Well-Being Plan

There are four well-being objectives being finalised as part of the Council's Well-Being Plan, two relating to people and two relating to place:



People/Citizens:

- Provide children and young people with the best possible start in life
- Respond to the challenges associated with demographic change

Place/Communities:

- Protect and enhance the resilience of our natural environment whilst mitigating and adapting to the impact of climate change.
- Develop opportunities for communities and businesses to be part of an economically thriving and well-connected county.

In tandem with the Well-Being Act and the emerging Plan the Council's Planning Service is committed to securing sustainable development in the public interest for the good of the County's citizens and its environment.

### 3.3.8 Local Transport Plan and Active Travel

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

### 3.3.9 IT improvements and 'channel shift'

The Council has a shared IT resource with Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils, and through this is working towards implementation of a new planning back-office system. Collaboration on reporting functions and training has been undertaken with Torfaen Council. Setting up the new system has been very resource intensive but we aim to 'go live' in October 2017.

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

In 2017/18 we aim to improve the planning applications search functions on our website to allow customers to self-serve more easily. We have also moved towards a paperless office, resulting in printing and postage savings. Going forward we would like to scan old microfiche records so that these are also available via our website, however this is prohibitively expensive at present.

### **Operating budget**

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

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

<b>2016-17</b>	<i>£1,363,600</i>	<i>£572,000</i>	<i>£791,600</i>	<i>±£101,000 (+15%)</i>
<b>2017-18*</b>	<i>£1,426,200</i>	<i>£694,000</i>	<i>£719,600</i>	<i>-£78,500 (-10%)</i>

\*Budgeted figures are shown for 2017-18, actual figures are shown for the other years

- 3.5 The two main costs for the service are staff costs and the LDP budget (money is transferred from the above budget to sit in an LDP reserve, built up to fund the next LDP). Income is generated by planning application fees and pre-application advice (the latter amounted to approximately £44,000 over 2016/17).
- 3.6 For 2016/17, planning application fee income had been estimated to rise slightly, given the life cycle of the Local Development Plan and the drop in housing land supply below 5 years'. However, this has not been borne out, possibly in part owing to the new Welsh Government regulations requiring a mandatory Pre-application Community Consultation process for major applications; the impact of Brexit which has caused some economic nervousness and uncertainty in terms of investment as well as lending by banks; the lack of supply caused by skills shortages in the construction industry; the smaller number of volume house builders operating in South Wales (and thus their lack of flexibility to develop several major sites across South Wales concurrently); and challenges regarding the viability of sites allocated in the LDP, not anticipated at the adoption stage.
- 3.7 In addition, new regulations are in force allowing applicants to claim a fee refund if their application is not determined within 16 or 24 weeks of validation, or within 8 weeks or 16 weeks of an agreed deadline for household or other applications respectively. Every effort will be made to avoid incurring fee refunds, and where extended deadlines are not agreed by customers, it is likely that applications will have to be refused without further negotiation. This is not the outcome-based focus that we strive to achieve, but is unavoidable if customers will not agree time extensions. No refunds have been paid to date.
- 3.8 An additional permanent 1.1 FTE (a 0.6 FTE and a 0.5 FTE) DMO capacity has been put in place to deal with the upturn in applications that has taken place in recent years. The fixed term Landscape Officer post, created for 2015-16 was renewed for a further 12 months to ensure our new Green Infrastructure supplementary planning guidance is integrated into the planning application process as well as assisting the Heritage Team in responding to consultations for developments in conservation areas.
- 3.9 Research by the Welsh Government identifies that application fees recover approximately 60% of the cost of dealing with planning applications, although work is currently being undertaken with the Planning Advisory Service to provide a more accurate picture of cost recovery across all Welsh planning authorities. Additional costs are incurred through the work involved in the statutory Development Plan, and via other services such as enforcement and heritage management. Increased planning application fee income is not ring-fenced to the planning department as such, however budgeted increases in income are used to reduce the net cost of the service to the Council. In-year windfall extra income is used to balance the Council's budgets and offset overspend in other services. Conversely as was the case during 2016/17, underspend in other services was used to offset planning's

under-recovery of income, when economic and other circumstances resulted in a sudden drop in fee income, as explained in par 3.6 above.

- 3.10 Application fee income has fluctuated significantly over recent years, and this poses a challenge for budget management going forward. Fee income is heavily influenced by the wider economy, for example house-building (which itself is affected by mortgage lending and development viability) and other funding streams (for example the feed-in tariff for renewable energy schemes).

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
<b>Budgeted fee income</b>	£462k	£473k	£490k	£525k	£633k	£668k	£694k
<b>Actual income</b>	£375k	£415k	£596k	£584k	£664k	£560k	

### Staff resources

- 3.11 Staffing levels for the reporting period are shown in the chart at paragraph 3.2 above. Staffing levels in the planning service reduced by 5.2FTE between 2013 and the end of 2015/16. Workload increased during this same period (see table at paragraph 4.2). It was been recognised that resources were stretched too thinly and additional fee income was invested in employing a 1.0FTE fixed term Senior Landscape and Green Infrastructure Officer in 2015, a 0.6FTE fixed term DM Officer and a 1.0FTE fixed term Business Support Officer. During 2016/17 the 0.6FTE DM Officer was made permanent, an additional 0.5FTE DM Officer has been recruited, and the 1.0FTE Business Support Officer was made permanent (including upskilling the post-holder to enable her to deal with a caseload of minor applications). Measures were also prepared to adjust management responsibilities to increase capacity in DM (responding to staff feedback for more the need for more day-to-day management in 1:2:1s) creating a new post of DM Area Manager (Central & South areas) and re-designating the Planning & Enforcement Manager’s post as the other Area Manager (covering the North DM team and the Enforcement function). This also allows succession planning enabling the Planning & Enforcement Manager to work three days per week under the basis of flexible retirement. Within the Policy team, one of the part time (0.5FTE) Policy Managers left the Authority during this period and has been replaced by a full time Policy Manager from within the existing team while the remaining part time manager (who is also undertaking flexible retirement) takes on a more specialised role focussing on CIL and s106 issues.
- 3.12 For the reporting period, sickness levels were low, with an average of 1.74 days per colleague lost due to sickness in DM and 0 days within Planning Policy. Team morale is good despite work pressures, including implementation of the new planning data base software.
- 3.13 Training and development opportunities provided for colleagues during the reporting period include interpreting LDP policy on affordable housing financial contributions and Green Infrastructure (the combined approach to landscape, biodiversity and ecology). This is in addition to in-house development opportunities provided via Development Management and Planning Policy Liaison Meetings. External training and development opportunities included attendance at events run by Frances Taylor Building Law on recent legal changes in planning law and the RTPI Wales Planning Conference, June 2016. Training for all officers

included in-house biodiversity training and reviewing our Environmental Impact Assessment screening process with assistance from Newport City Council. Design tours were held for Planning Committee Members in Autumn 2016 and Spring 2017 and a separate visit for officers took place to view a variety of recent developments around the County as well as housing developments in Newport at Loftus Gardens and on the Usk waterfront to learn what has worked well and what could be better next time. A joint Member - Officer seminar was held on Understanding and Achieving Good Design led by the Design Commission for Wales (with a follow up to be arranged for the next reporting period on new housing layouts). Training regarding an introduction to engaging with the planning process for the new intake of community and town councillors (following the May 2017 local elections) was led by Planning Aid Wales, and attended by managers within DM.

3.14 100% of colleagues have had an annual appraisal during the reporting period.

## 4.0 YOUR LOCAL STORY

### Workload

#### 4.1 Key projects during the reporting period included:

- Using Twitter [@MCCPlanning](#) to increase community awareness and opportunities for engagement, for example by tweeting Committee agendas, links to Planning Committee webcasts, the receipt of major applications, and key consultation for example SPG;
- Providing a Report It function on our web pages to enable customers to report potential breaches of planning control to our enforcement team;
- Recruiting two new colleagues within the Heritage team to fill vacancies to ensure that team's busy caseload is managed effectively;
- Adopting SPG on Primary Shopping Frontages;
- Working with Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust to review the Archaeologically Sensitive Areas within the County, to reflect the significant archaeological interest in areas outside the current ASAs and provide greater certainty to all parties;
- As part of a WG initiative, piloting Member involvement in the pre-application advice process for major planning applications;
- Securing planning permissions for two of the LDP's strategic housing sites at Sudbrook and Coed Glas (Abergavenny), as well as allocated housing sites at Pwllmeyric, Shirenewton and Penallt, together with approval of a new foodstore on the former Cattle Market site at Abergavenny.
- Reported to Economy and Development Select Committee on the LDP tourism policies and the extent to which they support glamping and other growth sectors that are important to our tourism economy. An officer working group was established to clarify policy interpretation and develop SPG to assist officers and customers;
- Working with a Building Preservation Trust to seek to secure the restoration of a Listed Building at Risk including a CPO;
- Updating our Scheme of Delegation and Pre-application Advice service to reflect new legislation that came into force in March 2016;
- Bedding in and implementation of the Green Infrastructure SPG. This SPG is the first of its kind in Wales, and has broken new ground to fill an identified gap in guidance for developers and planners. There is considerable interest in the new SPG from stakeholders, including the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales and other local authorities. Crucially, it is having a tangible positive influence on Monmouthshire's landscapes and GI assets by encouraging higher quality planning applications. A review of 25 planning applications has been undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of the SPG which has quite clearly showed the added value, as well some challenges/lessons to be learnt. The Green Infrastructure and Countryside and Planning Policy teams collaborated in the development of the SPG; it was subsequently submitted for the Landscape Institute Awards in November 2015 where it was "Highly Commended" with judges commenting that it is; "A practical and very comprehensive tool to encourage consideration and application of Green Infrastructure in planning." It was also a shortlisted finalist for the 2016 RTPI Wales Planning Awards.
- Review of tourism Destination Management Plan to ensure it reflects our needs and increases the competitiveness of Monmouthshire as a year round sustainable tourism destination to grow the economic, environmental and social contribution of Monmouthshire's visitor economy.

- 4.2 Application caseload has reduced slightly since the previous reporting period, however the proportion of applications determined within the agreed deadlines has increased significantly, with a slight increase in the number of applications determined. This improvement has not been at the expense of the outcome, with the proportion of approvals remaining constant at 96%. During 2016-17, 93.5% of applications were determined under delegated powers.

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
<b>Applications received</b>	987	983	1173	1284	1117
<b>Applications determined</b>	874	852	1053	1085	1087
<b>% within 8 weeks or agreed timescale</b>	45%	70%	76%	79%	90%
<b>% applications approved</b>	94%	93%	95%	95%	96%

- 4.3 Of those applications determined during this reporting period that had gone through our pre-application advice service (179 applications – that represented 16% of all application determined), 61% were determined within 8 weeks and 98% (175) were approved. Four applications were refused planning permission. In all except one case the customer was advised at pre-application stage that their proposal was unacceptable. One case subsequently went to appeal and the Planning Inspector allowed the appeal. In the other case the officer recommendation to approve the application was not accepted by Planning Committee and it was refused by Members. No appeal has been lodged as yet. The conclusion is that the pre-application advice service is working well but we need to understand why the service is not always leading to quicker decision making. This will be reviewed as part of the Systems Thinking revisit (Action 1).
- 4.4 Limited meaningful historical trends can be drawn in relation to the enforcement workload due to significant changes to the performance indicator definition since 2014, which changed both the deadline and the definition of when a case is ‘resolved’. However, 2016/17 saw a significant rise in workload, which makes the need to review how we manage demand in this area even more important (Action 3).

#### **Annual Monitoring Report**

- 4.5 The Council adopted its Local Development Plan in February 2014 and our second LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) was submitted in October 2016 to cover the 2015-16 period. Our second AMR identified that although the Plan strategy remains sound, housing delivery is well below target and the strategic housing sites are not coming forward as quickly as anticipated.
- 4.6 For this APR period the Council’s housing land supply was below 5.0 years, at 4.1 years. We now know that the supply (as at 1 April 2017) is 4.0 years. To build the 4500 home target in the LDP, , 689 completions are required every year from 2017/19 until 2021. This compares with actual completions over the last ten years averaging approximately 250 dwellings per year. There are three main factors causing this problem: allocated sites have been slow to

come forward and then secure planning permission; external economic factors affecting site viability, consumer confidence and mortgage availability; and issues with the way TAN1 is calculated. As a result of the issue with housing land availability, we are commencing an early LDP review. Non-allocated housing sites are also being looked at on their merits in accordance with national planning policy, and a site at Grove Farm, Llanfoist has been approved by Members within the reporting period. Further non-allocated sites will inevitably come forward in the next reporting periods.

4.7 As at March 2017, the status of the strategic sites is as follows (more detailed information is available in the Council's 2017 JHLAS and AMR):

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

Persimmon Homes submitted a full application for 250 residential units in November 2014. Progress with the application has been slower than anticipated due to significant issues relating to site viability (affordable housing provision) and undergrounding of overhead power lines. However, considerable progress has been made with the application during the current monitoring period, with viability issues subsequently resolved, and it is anticipated that the application would be approved during the next monitoring period.

The agreed 2016-17 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 232 units within the 5 year period with first completions in 2018/19.

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

Council owned site allocated for 285 residential units and 1 ha of serviced land for business and industrial development. A master planning consultation exercise to consider various options for the site was undertaken during the previous monitoring period. Further advancement, including pre-application meetings, has been made with the proposal over the current monitoring period and it is anticipated that the planning application would be submitted and determined during the next monitoring period.

The agreed 2016-17 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 240 units within the 5 year period with first completions in 2018/19.

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

The landowner submitted an outline application (DC/2014/01290) in October 2014 for up to 600 residential units (350 to be delivered within the Plan period), commercial space including offices and workshops (Use Class B1) and small scale retail/food and drink floorspace (Use Classes A1 and A3) and multi-functional green and blue open space. Progress with the application has been slower than anticipated due to various matters, including highways issues (Welsh Government Highways Division had a holding objection on the application for 18 months). However, considerable progress has been made with the application during the current monitoring period, with outstanding issues subsequently resolved. The planning application has since been approved (i.e. during the early part of the next monitoring period) and is awaiting completion of the legal agreement.

The agreed 2016-17 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 170 within the Plan period with first completions in 2019/20.

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

Outline permission was granted for up to 370 dwellings and 6.5 ha of employment land in December 2014. The site developers (Barratt/David Wilson and Taylor Wimpey) submitted a reserved matters application (DC/2015/00392) for 340 units which was granted permission during the last monitoring period, with the first completions recorded on the site during the current monitoring period (21 completions).

The overall LDP site allocation is for a total of 450 units. The additional units relating to this allocation are to be delivered as an extension to the site at Drewen Farm. An application for this element of the site has not yet been submitted. This part of the site is effectively land-locked until 2019 when the Barratt David Wilson development is sufficiently progressed to allow access through. However, discussions are ongoing in relation to the possibility of providing an alternative access for construction traffic to enable the site to be developed more quickly.

The agreed 2016-17 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 450 units within the Plan period.

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

Council owned site allocated for 270 residential units and 2 ha of serviced land for business and industrial use. Progress with the site has been slower than anticipated due to various issues, including archaeology. However, significant headway has been made during the current monitoring period with an outline application (DC/2016/00883) for 266 units and 5,575 sq. m of employment land (B1 use) submitted to the Council and the application substantially advanced. The site is yet to be marketed. The planning application has since been approved (i.e. during the early part of the next monitoring period) and is awaiting completion of the legal agreement.

The agreed 2016-17 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 190 units within the 5 year period with first completions in 2018/19.

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

Site for 225 residential units, linked to the adjacent Rockfield Farm site and was expected to progress in tandem. However, the developer has not yet submitted an application and there has been limited no meaningful progress over the current monitoring period.

The agreed 2016-17 JHLAS expects the site deliver 120 units within the 5 year period with first completions in 2019/20.

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

Full planning application (DC/2015/01184) was submitted by Harrow Estates (Redrow confirmed as the developer) in October 2015 for 212 residential units (192 market and 20 affordable units). There had been a number of site viability issues associated with this application meaning that progress with the application has been slower than anticipated. However, these issues were subsequently resolved and the application was approved during the current monitoring period (November 2016) and site clearance commenced.

The agreed 2016-17 JHLAS expects the site to deliver 150 units within the 5 year period with first completions in 2017/18.



- 4.8 The AMR highlights issues surrounding the delivery of affordable housing, and developers continue to raise viability issues on some of the strategic housing sites above. This is a Wales-wide issue. The Council's approach to viability debates has now been established, and the links between a project management approach to these applications with LDP delivery are understood.
- 4.9 In October 2015 the Council's Economy and Development Select Committee scrutinised the LDP's impact on enabling tourism-related development. As stated above, the tourism industry forms a key part of the County's economy and links directly to what makes Monmouthshire distinctive. This scrutiny identified a need to produce Supplementary Planning Guidance to clarify for customers and officers how the LDP supports different types of tourism development, and also identified a need for future revisions to the policy to allow greater flexibility for agricultural diversification for tourism purposes. The SPG has been drafted for consultation, with a report scheduled for the Council's Economy & Development Select Committee in October 2017.

#### **Service Plan priorities for 2016-17**

- 4.10 The Service Plans for the Development Management and Planning Policy areas identified the following priority actions:
- Review the pre-application advice service to verify it is adding value, reducing waste and is valued by customers. The increase in our bespoke service fee rates was approved over the reporting period and take up has been strong over 2016/17 with fee income increasing by £5,600 compared to 2015/16. The performance has been good over this reporting period with 98% of applications that stemmed from pre-application advice approved, although the timeliness of some pre-application advice responses has been beyond our service standards. The review of our pre-application advice service will remain as a standing item and will be undertaken in 2017/18 as part of the Team's systems revisit.
  - Improve web site experience for our customers. The new Planning Committee public speaking protocol was added to the team's web pages, as were revisions to the pre-application advice service; the 'Report It' function was also established to help customers report enforcement complaints.
  - Implement LDP policies and seek to deliver the Plan's objectives and strategy. This priority is on-going;
  - Prepare, consult and adopt Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). A programme for the preparation of SPG, including prioritisation between different policy areas to reflect available resources was adopted by Planning Committee. SPG has been adopted relating to Primary Shopping Frontages while work is on-going on Landscape SPG and Tourism Policy;
  - Work towards adopting a Community Infrastructure Levy. The CIL Draft Charging Schedule was completed during the 2016-17 monitoring period. The findings of the national CIL Review were also published during the 2016-17 monitoring period which recommended fundamental changes to the CIL process. Consequently, the implementation of CIL in Monmouthshire has been deferred pending the outcome of the Government's response to the CIL Review which is expected during the next monitoring period i.e. Autumn 2017 (the progress of the CIL and any subsequent

implications for the LDP will be given further consideration in successive AMRs where appropriate);

- Cross-departmental working to ensure corporate plans and activities align with the LDP. This priority is on-going, although significant steps have been taken to improve cross-departmental working relationships, including work on s106 agreements, green infrastructure and the City Deal;
- Commence work on the second tranche of draft Conservation Area Appraisals (CAAs). Work on this priority has been delayed owing to staffing pressures, including rising heritage workload and gaps between posts being vacated and then filled;
- Implement a replacement IT data base system with planning application, enforcement and appeals modules. This priority is on-going. The system is due to 'go live' in Autumn 2017.

### **Local pressures**

#### 4.11 Key local pressures include:

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

4.12 One of our key challenges is balancing our aim of creating quality places with the numerous national policy and regulatory drivers that are pushing us in the opposite direction. The primary focus of national policy and regulations is on meeting housing number targets. This has negative implications for place-making; because design and place-making are typically given less weight than other material planning considerations, including land supply and viability issues. It is very difficult for a Local Planning Authority to refuse an application on design grounds alone, particularly when they are under pressure to maintain a 5-year land supply and deliver housing targets, coupled with recently introduced Welsh Government Development Management (DM) targets and application fee refunds. These serve to undermine the LPA's position to negotiate better design standards, as developers can use this timeframe to push an LPA into 'making a decision'. Application fees (particularly large housing sites) are the primary income for an LPA.

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

4.13 Our 2015/16 Annual Performance Report identified three actions:

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

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

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

- 4.14 Action 1 was in response to the proportion of applications determined within agreed timescales which was an amber indicator in 2015/16 (79% against a target of 80%). Performance against this indicator has improved significantly (90% of applications were within agreed timescales for the current reporting period). A protocol has been agreed regarding consultation with colleagues on green infrastructure issues, although work is continuing in relation to Action 1 with on-going dialogue with internal consultee departments to seek to identify ways of focussing their stretched resources on priority cases and achieving efficiencies via the pre-application service. This is particularly relevant to the Council's Highways Service, where capacity issues are directly affecting delivery of the Planning service. This issue will be followed up as part of the Systems Revisit for 2017/18.
- 4.15 While our evidence shows that customers prefer a positive outcome than a quick decision, we fully recognise that if customers are going to continue using our pre-application advice service (which streamlines the subsequent stages, improves outcomes and generates fee income), they must receive timely and meaningful responses. In addition, new regulations allow customers to claim an application fee refund if their application is not determined within a given timescale. We can reduce this risk by agreeing extended deadlines, and our response to Action 1 in this respect is working well. Customers, however, will not be willing to agree a time extension if they cannot see a timely conclusion being reached or have previously received poor service.
- 4.16 The key indicator in respect of timeliness of decision-making has moved from amber to green for the 2016/17 reporting period, but the issue will be monitored and acted upon as referred to above via the Systems Revisit.
- 4.17 Action 2 was instigated to improve our Enforcement Team's performance in relation to the measure on the proportion of enforcement cases resolved within 180 days. There is no target set by the Welsh Government for this indicator, although Monmouthshire's performance of resolving enforcement cases within 180 days of receipt has fallen below the Wales average in the last three years.
- 4.20 Our performance against this indicator has declined in this reporting period (it fell from 70% to 64% of cases resolved) and remains below the Welsh average (which has reduced to 73%). It should be noted, however, the workload (both in terms of enforcement breaches reported and cases investigated and resolved) has increased significantly during this reporting period. Monmouthshire's Development Services Manager sits on a performance indicator working group set up by the Welsh Government and the enforcement indicators are being revised in response to concerns about the clarity and value of their current wording. Performance against this indicator fluctuates throughout Wales from 90% to 38%, and gives some doubt that all Authorities are using the latest performance indicator definition. The definitions for the enforcement indicators have now been clarified via work

involving Welsh Government and local planning authorities so that benchmarking data should now be more meaningful.

- 4.21 Work has been undertaken by Swansea County Council, where the Enforcement Manager is taking a lead role throughout Wales in reviewing the enforcement performance indicators and in setting out a good practice guide, which proposes a triage approach to quickly sift out priority cases and complaints where there is no breach or action is not expedient, allowing resources to be focused on the most important work. Swansea has not yet finalised its triage system but Monmouthshire remains interested in this approach, particularly given the substantial increase in enforcement complaints we have received both last year and into 2017/18. This Action is therefore retained and dialogue with colleagues in Swansea will be maintained to help colleagues in our small but important enforcement team deal with the rising demands and expectations on this element of the service.
- 4.22 Action 3 was delayed given the timing of the local elections in May 2017 and thus the election of a new cohort of community and town councillors who would benefit from enforcement related training – this being arguably the most controversial and misunderstood aspect of Development Management. Monmouthshire volunteered as a pilot authority to undertake the training and this is anticipated to be rolled out in 2017/18 once Planning Aid Wales has appointed a new Chief Executive. Thus, this action is retained for the next reporting period.

## **5.0 WHAT SERVICE USERS THINK**

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

5.1 Between 2010 and 2012 the Council's planning service underwent a Systems Thinking review. This review sought to strip the function back to first principles: what is important to our customers, and how can waste (actions or procedures that do not add value to the outcome) be eliminated. This evidence-based review has been fully implemented, although part of the Systems Thinking approach requires services to be kept under review and closely monitored.

5.2 This review identified that the following things are important to customers:

- Customers value pre-application advice and advice during the consideration of the application;
- They want officers to be accessible and for there to be open and honest communication;
- They want consistency of pre-application advice and in validation of applications;
- They want Planning Committee to follow the officer's recommendation and value being able to have a dialogue with Members prior to determination;
- They don't want too many conditions attached to decisions, and when conditions are imposed they should be relevant and easy to discharge;
- They value being able to submit an application online and to search for applications and information online; and
- Third parties/stakeholders value being listened to during the application process.

5.3 The service therefore operates with these priorities as guiding principles, shaping behaviour and procedures. The service is committed to having an outcome focus rather than chasing arbitrary performance targets that are not a priority to our customers, although regrettably external drivers do not always support this approach (see paragraph 4.12).

### **LDP survey**

5.4 Following adoption of our Local Development Plan in February 2014, a customer feedback survey was undertaken in November 2014 with 120 responses received. The key headlines from this survey were reported in last year's APR.

### **Planning Applications Customer Survey**

5.5 In 2016-17 we conducted a further customer satisfaction survey (the first was carried out in 2015-16) aimed at assessing the views of customers who had received a planning application decision during the year. An identical survey is used throughout Wales to enable best-practice to be identified. The survey was sent to 434 applicants/agents using Monmouthshire's planning service, 13% of whom submitted a whole or partial response (57). The majority of responses (58%) were from members of the public. 96% of respondents had their most recent planning application approved.

5.6 We asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the planning service. They were given the following answer options:

- Strongly agree;
- Tend to agree;
- Neither agree nor disagree;
- Tend to disagree; and
- Strongly disagree.

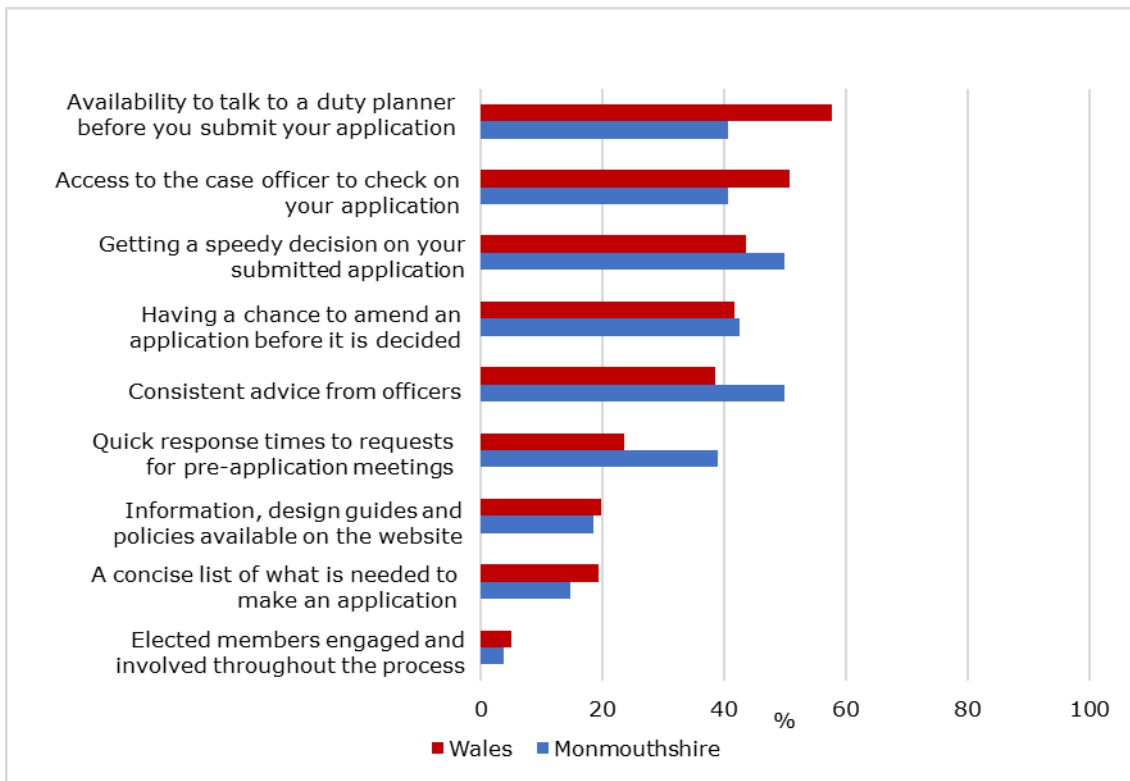
5.7 Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents that selected either ‘tend to agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ for each statement for both our planning authority and Wales.

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

Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	%	
	Monmouthshire LPA	Wales
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	80	62
The LPA gives help throughout, including with conditions	61	52
The LPA responded promptly when they had questions	70	61
They were listened to about their application	74	59
They were kept informed about their application	55	51
The LPA enforces its planning rules fairly and consistently	35	52
They were satisfied overall with how the LPA handled their application	73	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.

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



- 5.8 Direct comparison is not possible because the feedback is from different customers to last year, however overall satisfaction has remained at 73% (as per 2015/16, well above the Welsh average of 61%). A higher proportion of customers this year considered that we gave good advice to help them make a successful application, and that they were listened to about their application.
- 5.9 The indicator where satisfaction had declined related to us enforcing our planning rules fairly and consistently. However, several of the individual complaints on this element were directed at community councils and perceptions about their lack of fairness, rather than the local planning authority itself. Discussion of the customer survey results at a Team Meeting highlighted concerns that the question itself is poorly phrased, and that some respondents may have answered in terms of the enforcement function of the Council and others about the consistent application or interpretation of policy or process in decision-making. The fact that 43% of respondents gave an ambivalent response to this question suggests it needs to be re-expressed.
- 5.10 In order to maximise honest feedback, the survey is completely anonymised, however this means it is not possible to drill down further into responses to better understand what exactly the concern related to and how we can learn from it. We do, however, know that white males aged between 55 and 64 were the least satisfied customers.
- 5.11 In addition to this customer survey, we seek and act upon customer feedback. We have received some feedback during the year and there is a clear message that communication with customers is key to providing a good service. The feedback has been discussed in team meetings and we are working to improve the service we provide. It should, however, be noted that we score above the Wales average on every indicator, except question regarding the enforcing of rules consistently and fairly.

5.12 We also asked respondents to select three planning service characteristics from a list that they thought would most help them achieve successful developments. Figure 1 shows how often each characteristic was selected as a percentage of the total number of selections.

5.13 The top 5 characteristics identified by Monmouthshire's customers as being important are:

- Getting a speedy decision on your submitted application;
- Consistent advice from officers;
- Having a chance to amend an application before it is decided;
- Availability to talk to a duty planner before submitting an application, and
- Access to the case officer to check on your application.

These results illustrate the areas of most importance to our customers and therefore guide how we should focus our resources and attention. These priorities match very closely the customer priorities identified in 2012 as part of the Systems review (see paragraph 5.2).

Of these, customers responded on our service as follows:

- Decision speed – 73% ranked us as very good or fairly good which means we are ranked 3rd in Wales

- Consistent advice – 23% ranked us very good = 9th in Wales

- The chance to amend – 36.4% ranked us very good – 6th in Wales

- Access to case officer – 52% ranked us very good = 4th in Wales

- Duty planner available – 43% ranked us very good = 7th in Wales

In respect of consistent advice (our least well performing measure) it is worth noting that we were rated well by customers in respect of:

- Quick pre-application advice – 43% rated us very good - 3<sup>rd</sup> in Wales

- Information, guidance and policies on our website – 44% rated us very good = 1<sup>st</sup> in Wales.

5.14 Customer feedback has been taken into account when reviewing service delivery, for example when considering the level of duty planning officer service that we are able to sustain. Given the customer feedback, we have sought to maximise the level of service provided.

5.15 Customers also had an opportunity to provide further feedback. Comments received include:

*'Much quicker than other Councils in responding to pre app. Ditto for determination even though there were some objections.'*

*'The advice was very useful and helped me to ensure what I submitted was within the guidelines.'*



*'Officers have to check back with their managers and this can take time.'*

*'Found Elizabeth Bennet to be very helpful and approachable! Great to have someone to discuss matters with, especially when we had such limited self-knowledge on the application process.'*

*'I appreciate that the current planning laws mean a high volume of case files. However having worked in the commercial sector, the LPA's speed of decision feels slow.'*

*'[Amending an application is] Straightforward and simple to do. Also very helpful when you realise you have either missed something out or there has been a change.'*

*'Consistency is sometimes difficult due to the subjective nature of the job. I do not like the imposition of volume figures to determine if an extension is too big, it should be a considered design consideration and if the design is in-keeping. A lot of the officers have different opinions and sometimes this reflects in the design put forward for approval or refusal. Policy accepts a modest extension on a barn conversion but how large is modest? if it works with the building and is of good quality it should be acceptable, the fact that it is 42% bigger and not below 30% should be a true planning decision and not based on percentage figures. Delays can be caused on both sides because of this.'*

5.16 In addition to the above survey, the number of formal complaints and letters offering compliments are recorded. There were seven complaints received over 2016/17, the same as the previous year. None led to Stage 2 Complaint recommendations to remedy justified complaint or to any Ombudsman investigations. Although we receive a significant number of emails from customers thanking the case officer, these are not logged under the corporate system as compliments. We received nine recorded compliments over 2016/17 compared to two over the previous period.

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Number of Stage 1 formal complaints received	14	17	9	5	5
Number of Stage 2 formal complaints investigations received	8	11	5	2	2
Number of Stage 2 complaints upheld or partially upheld	4 partially upheld	4 partially upheld	3 partially upheld	0 upheld	0 upheld
Number of Ombudsman complaints upheld or partially upheld	2 partially upheld*	1 partially upheld	0	0	0
Number of compliments received	2	3	4	2	9

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

5.17 Overall, customer satisfaction has improved and we rank above the Wales average in every category (except whether we enforce our planning rules fairly), the number of formal complaints received has dropped over the last two reporting periods, with none upheld this year or last. This is an excellent result, but quality customer service continues to be a service and organisation priority so the momentum and desire to improve remain.

## **6.0 OUR PERFORMANCE 2016-17**

6.1 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 with last year's performance and with the all Wales picture.

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

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

### **Plan making**

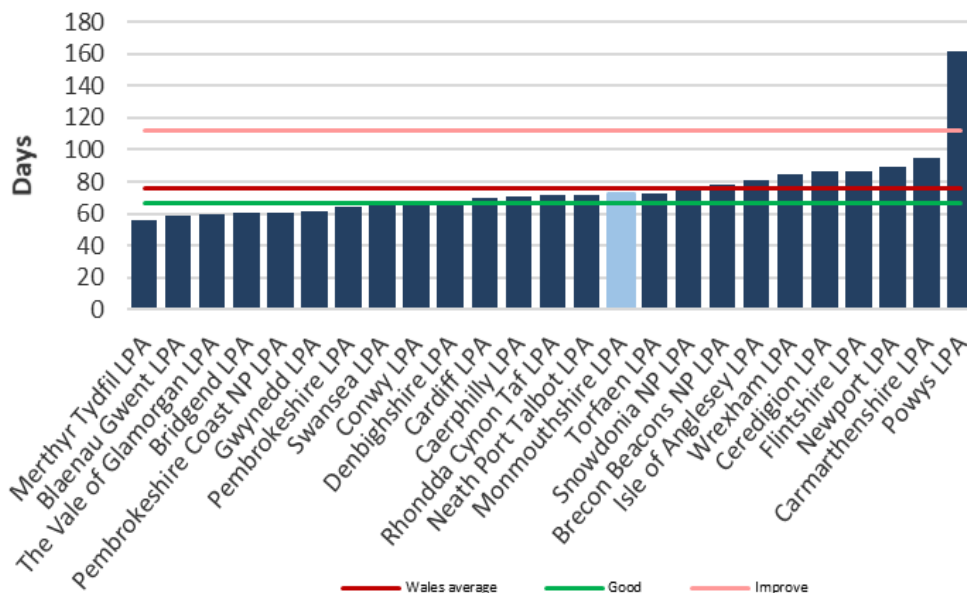
6.3 As at 31 March 2017, we were one of 22 LPAs that had a current development plan in place. We submitted a second Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) in October 2016 as required, and our third AMR will be submitted during September 2017.

6.4 During the APR period we had 4.1 years of housing land supply identified, making us one of 19 LPAs without the required 5 years' supply. We now know that our housing land supply has since dropped to 4.0 years': this is a common theme for Authorities throughout Wales and a matter that requires investigation. Part of the problem is the flawed system in TAN1: the Wales average land supply is 2.9 years yet more LDPs than ever have now been adopted. The flaws in this measure and the detrimental impact on the plan-led system have been repeatedly raised with the Welsh Government, but to no avail. Further commentary on our land supply is provided in the Local Development Plan Annual Monitoring Report.

### **Efficiency**

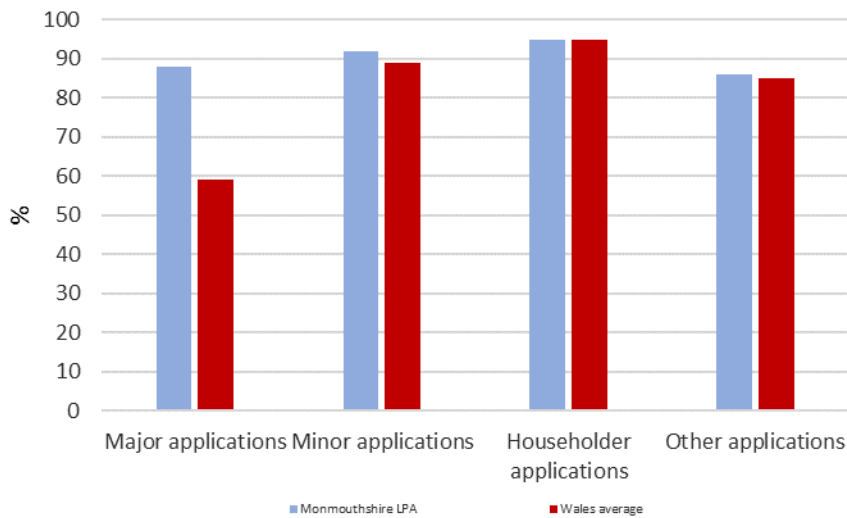
6.5 In 2016-17 we determined 1087 planning applications, each taking, on average, 73 days (10 weeks) to determine. This compares to an average of 76 days (11 weeks) across Wales. Figure 2 shows the average time taken by each LPA to determine an application during the year. Given our focus on outcome rather than speed, this is a good achievement and suggests we have struck the right balance between these two objectives. Performance narrowly misses the 'good' target however (73 days against a target of 67 days). There was a slight increase in output compared to last year but a slight worsening in terms of average time taken (1085 applications determined taking an average of 68 days in 2015/16).

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



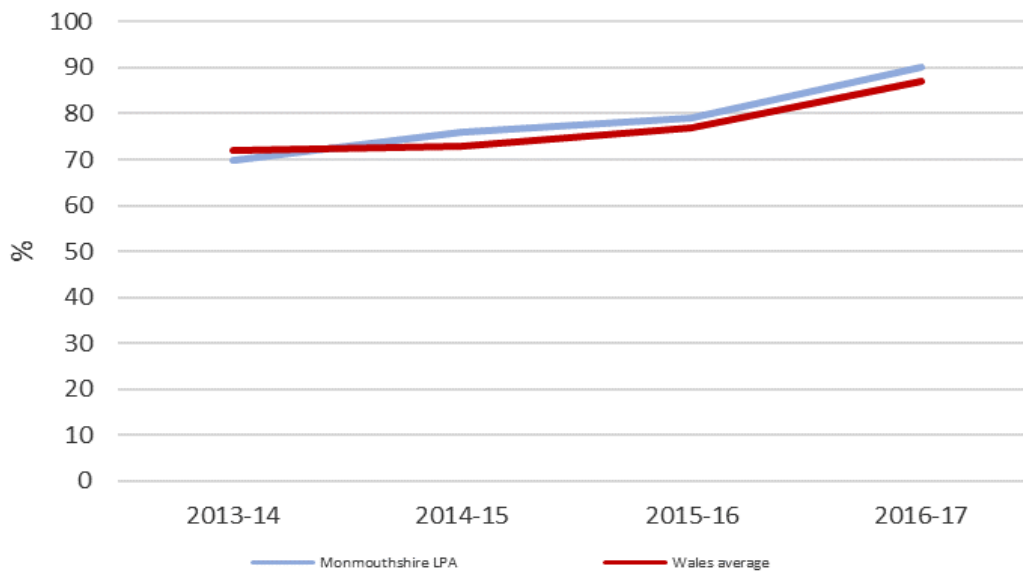
- 6.6 Figure 2 shows the average time taken by each LPA to determine an application during the year. Following engagement with customers and stakeholders, Monmouthshire County Council has made the evidence-based decision that the outcome of planning applications is far more important than the speed of decision-making. Within reason, customers would prefer to continue working with us to secure an acceptable scheme and obtain planning permission, with as few pre-commencement conditions as possible, than simply have a decision made within an arbitrary 8 week deadline. The impact of planning decisions is long-lived and, while it is recognised that timely decisions can assist the economy, developers and investors also seek clarity and certainty and ultimately want planning permission. Our focus is therefore on the outcome, although we still perform better than the Welsh average for end-to-end performance in determining all applications.
- 6.7 90% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. This compared to 87% across Wales and we were one of 20 LPAs that had reached the 80% target.
- 6.8 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 95% of householder applications within the required timescales.

**Figure 2: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales, by type, 2016-17**



6.9 Between 2015-16 and 2016-17, as Figure 4 shows, the percentage of planning applications we determined within the required timescales increased from 79% to 90%. Wales also saw an increase this year (87%). This indicates our efforts to work with customers as explained below. Over the same period, the number of applications we received decreased, and the number of applications we determined increased.

**Figure 3: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales**

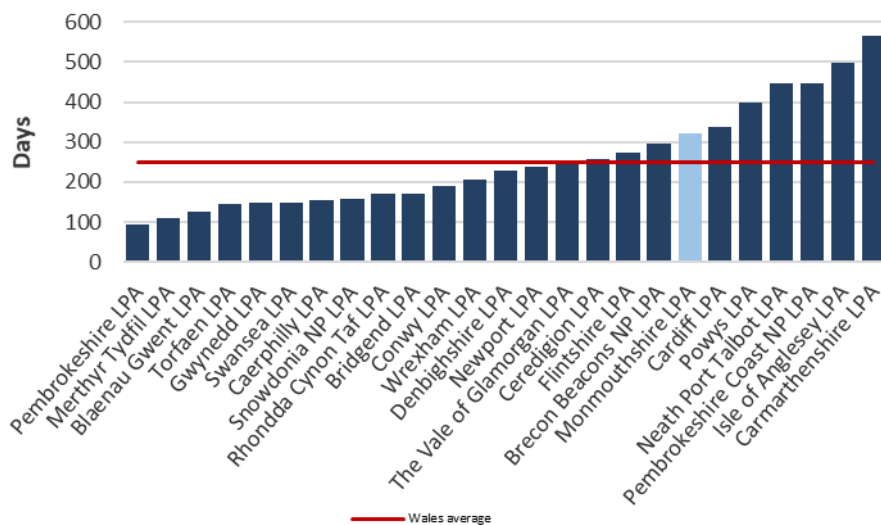


**Major applications**

6.10 We determined 17 major planning applications in 2016-17, 6% (1 application) of which were subject to an EIA. Each application (including those subject to an EIA) took, on average, 321 days (46 weeks) to determine. As Figure 5 shows, this was longer than the Wales average of

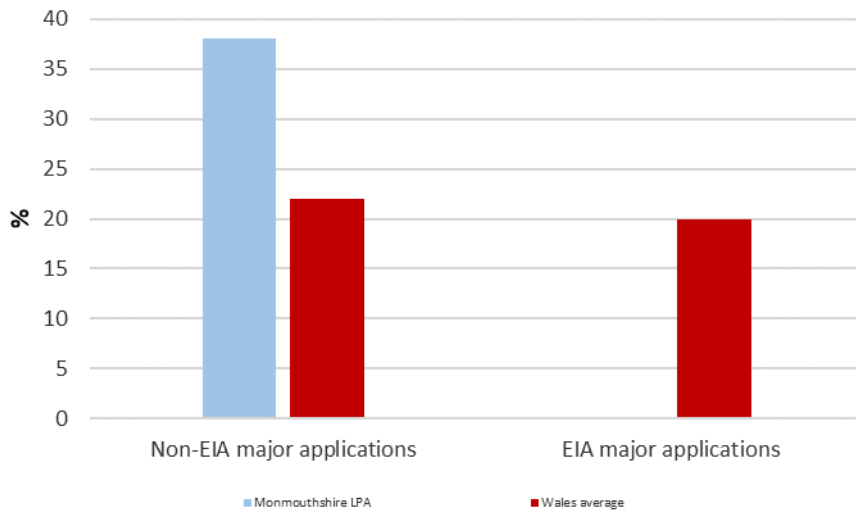
250 days (36 weeks). On analysis of this figure, it emerges that there were two long-standing applications at St Maur’s and Moun-ton Road, Chepstow. If these two are excluded the average time to determine the remaining major applications falls to 145 days, well below the Welsh average of 250 days, and is more of a reflection of our performance in dealing with major applications over the previous reporting period (121 days). If the 321 days average figure is taken, we rank 19<sup>th</sup> in Wales, although if the two outliers are removed and the 145 days is considered, we rank 5<sup>th</sup> in Wales.

**Figure 4: Average time (days) taken to determine a major application, 2016-17**



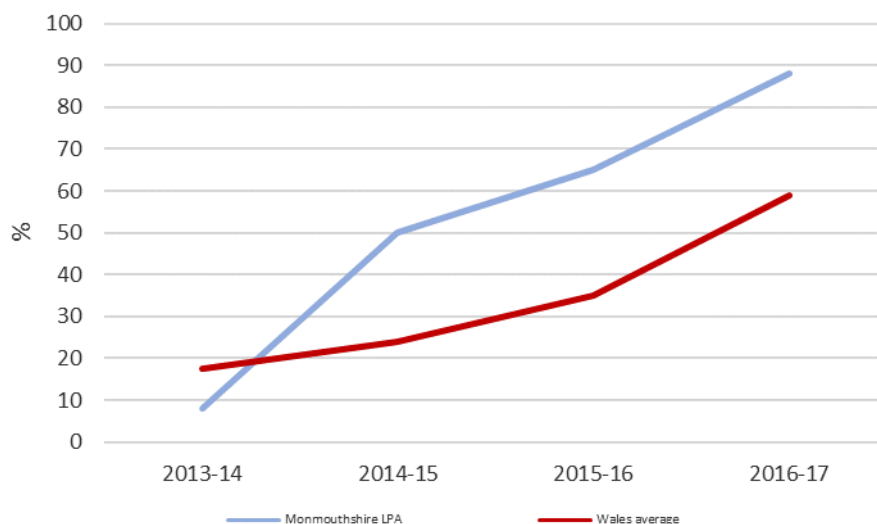
- 6.11 88% of these major applications were determined within the agreed timescales, the fourth highest percentage of all Welsh LPAs.
- 6.12 Figure 6 shows the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales by the type of major application. 38% of our ‘standard’ major applications i.e. those not requiring an EIA, were determined within the statutory 8 week deadline, well above the Welsh average of 23%.

**Figure 5: Percentage of Major applications determined within the statutory timescales during the year, by type, 2016-17**



6.13 In addition we determined 82% of major applications within an agreed extended timescale during the year. Since 2015-16 the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales had increased from 65%. In contrast, 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 6: Percentage of major planning applications determined within the required timescales**



6.14 It can be seen that we have consistently performed above the Welsh average on this measure since 2013/14. Our particularly strong performance for major applications is due to a combination of an effective pre-application service, and a good working relationship with customers ensuring agreement to an extension of time.

Over the same period:

- The percentage of minor applications determined within the required timescales increased from 84% to 92%;
- The percentage of householder applications determined within the required timescales increased from 92% to 95%; and
- The percentage of other applications determined within required timescales increased from 73% to 86%.
- The proportion of respondents to our customer survey who were satisfied overall increased.
- The level of approvals remained high at 96% (over 2015/16 it was 95%)

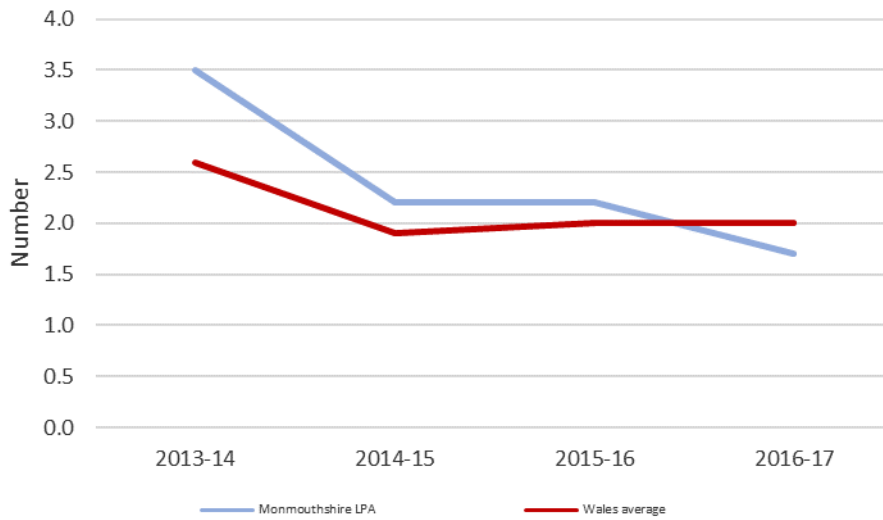
This shows a very good level of performance over the period.

## Quality

- 6.15 In 2016-17, our Planning Committee made 71 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, meaning our rates of officer delegation are comparable. We rank twelfth in terms of the proportion of applications determined under delegated powers. Unlike most Authorities, Monmouthshire has a Delegated Panel system in operation whereby most applications with between 1 and 4 objections are reviewed by a group comprising the three lead Planning Committee Members. This system works effectively in reducing the number of applications referred to Committee while ensuring interested parties are reassured that their concerns have been heard and reviewed before a decision is made.
- 6.16 7% of the 71 member-made decisions went against officer advice (5 applications). This compared to 11% of member-made decisions across Wales. This equated to 0.5% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice; 0.7% across Wales. The low proportion of Committee overturns is testament to an effective Member-Officer working relationship, the added value of Planning Committee visiting every site before making a decision, and an experienced Planning Committee provided with appropriate development training.
- 6.17 The overturned applications in question related to a mix of developments including a new, contemporary replacement dwelling in a rural setting refused on design grounds (later allowed on appeal) and the conversion and extension of a former gallery in Usk refused because of lack of parking provision (also subsequently allowed on appeal). The three other decisions involved two refusals that were not challenged on appeal and a resolution to approve a hotel scheme at Wyesham (contrary to the officer recommendation to refuse) that has been called in by the Minister owing to flooding issues and is awaiting decision.
- 6.18 In 2016-17 we received 20 appeals against our planning decisions, which equated to 1.7 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.



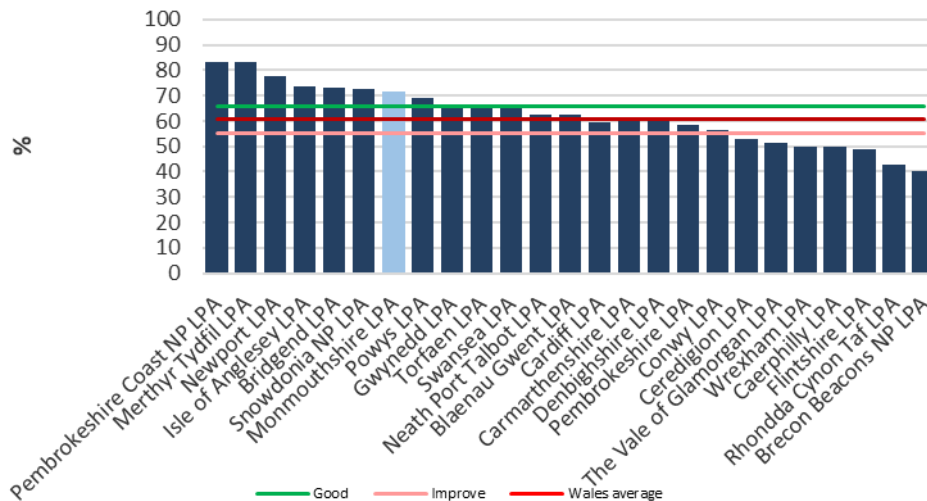
**Figure 7: Number of appeals received per 100 planning applications**



6.19 In 2016-17 we approved 96% of planning applications. This compares to 91% across Wales. This demonstrates our willingness to work with applicants to achieve a positive outcome rather than pursue arbitrary targets.

6.20 Of the 14 appeals that were decided during the year, 71% were dismissed. As Figure 9 shows, this was higher than the percentage of appeals dismissed across Wales as a whole and we were one of 10 LPAs that reached the 66% target. We ranked sixth highest in terms of appeals dismissed in Wales.

**Figure 8: Percentage of appeals dismissed, 2016-17**



6.21 During 2016-17 we had no applications for costs at a section 78 appeal upheld.

## Engagement

- 6.22 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.
- 6.23 As Table 2 shows, 80% of respondents to our 2016-17 customer satisfaction survey agreed that the LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application, well above the Welsh average, and an improvement on last year's response (69%). These characteristics were recognised by our customers as being important, so it is reassuring that we are performing well on these matters.

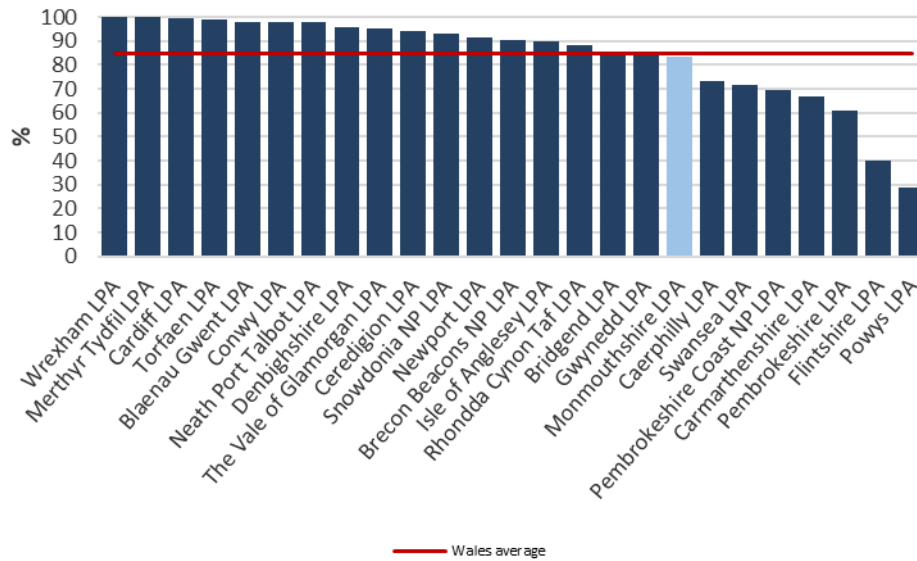
**Table 2: Feedback from our 2016-17 customer satisfaction survey**

Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	%	
	Monmouthshire LPA	Wales
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	80	62
They were listened to about their application	74	59

## Enforcement

- 6.24 In 2016-17 we investigated 484 enforcement cases, which equated to 5.2 cases per 1,000 population. This was the fourth highest rate in Wales. We took, on average, 21 days to investigate each enforcement case. The PI measures the time taken from receipt of a complaint of the alleged breach of planning control to the time taken to investigate and notify the complainant of the outcome and/or intended action as applicable: this could be that there was no breach of planning control, that there is a breach but action is not expedient, or that there is a breach and action is proposed.
- 6.25 We investigated 83% 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. We ranked 18<sup>th</sup> in this measure.

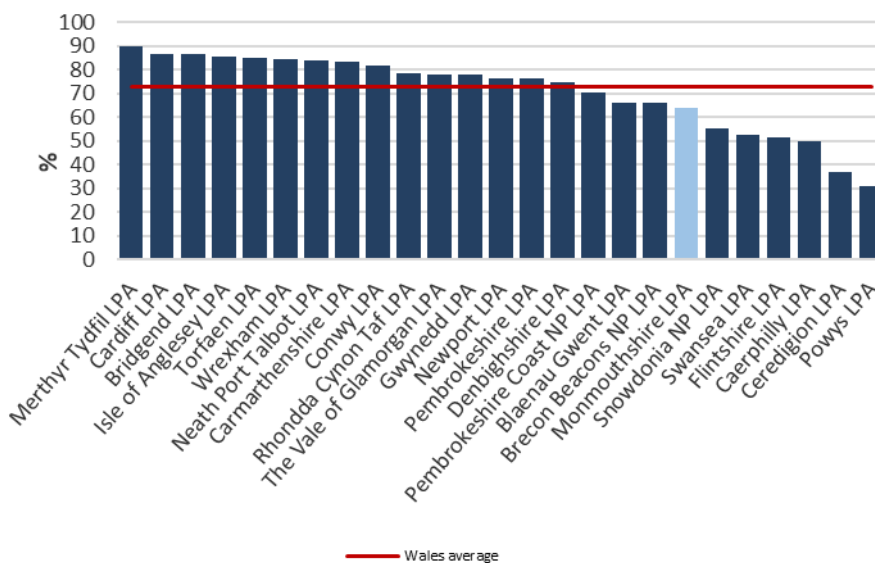
**Figure 9: Percentage of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days, 2016-17**



6.26 Over the same period, we resolved 254 enforcement cases, taking, on average, 227 days to resolve each case (over 2015/16 this averaged at 143 days but significantly fewer cases were resolved - 168 cases). A backlog of older enforcement cases was cleared over the period and there was a significant increase in workload received (484 cases compared to 285 over the previous reporting period) which explains the reduced turnaround for this measure.

6.27 64% of this enforcement action was taken within 180 days from the start of the case (over 2015/16 this stood at 70%). As Figure 11 shows this compared to 73% of enforcement cases resolved within 180 days across Wales. We ranked 19<sup>th</sup> in this category. This is one of the areas we wish to improve, as identified in our proposed actions.

**Figure 10: Percentage of enforcement cases resolved in 180 days, 2016-17**



6.28 In the context of the above, and especially given the sharp rise in workload, our performance is considered to be reasonable. However, further action (**ACTION 3** below) is proposed in order to review our enforcement practices and seek to streamline activity through a 'triage' approach being piloted by Swansea City Council. Improved guidance for our communities is proposed to try and better manage expectations, and Planning Aid Wales is being invited to provide a seminar on planning enforcement for our Community Council clusters to help explain the processes, tools and powers available (**ACTION 4**).

## 7.0 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

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

- The proportion of all applications determined within 8 weeks or an agreed timescale increased;
- The proportion of major applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed timescales improved;
- The number of applications we determined increased;
- The number of applications we approved increased;
- Of those applications that had gone through our pre-application advice service, 98% were approved; and
- The proportion of respondents to our customer survey who were satisfied overall was well above the Welsh average.

This shows that, despite a challenging workload, our performance and levels of customer satisfaction have improved and our pre-application advice service is effective.

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

- 11 have targets set by the Welsh Government. Monmouthshire’s performance is ranked ‘good’ against eight, ‘fair’ against two and ‘in need of improvement’ against one. The ‘fair’ result relates to the average time taken to determine all applications where our performance (73 days) narrowly missed the ‘good’ target of 67 days and the proportion of Member made decisions against officer advice where the 7% of decisions was just below the 5% ‘good’ target but well above the Welsh average of 11%<sup>1</sup>; the ‘in need of improvement’ measure is the 5 year land supply, the implications of which are discussed in full in the recent Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for the LDP.<sup>2</sup>
- We performed above or at the Wales average in 13 of the 17 applicable indicators. The indicators for which performance was below Wales average related to i) the average time taken to determine major applications in days, ii) the proportion of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days, iii) the proportion of enforcement cases where action is taken or a retrospective application received within 180 days from the start of the case and iv) the average time taken to take enforcement action. Further commentary on the performance against these measures is set out in Section 6 above.

	Number of indicators
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance is ‘good’	8
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance is ‘fair’	2 <sup>1</sup> (see above)
Welsh Government target has been set and our performance ‘needs improvement’	1 <sup>2</sup> (see above)

No target has been set but our performance is above the Wales average	2
No target has been set but our performance is slightly below the Wales average	3
No target has been set but our performance is significantly below the Wales average	1

7.3 Our performance improved or remained the same against 9 of the 17 applicable indicators, and declined slightly against 5 indicators compared to last year, and declined more substantially in respect of 3 indicators (see table below). However, it should be noted that in most of the cases where performance declined, we remained significantly above the Wales average, and where a target was set by the Welsh Government, we are still ranked 'good' or 'fair', except for one indicator. The only indicator of clear concern is our housing land supply, which has dropped to 4.1 years' supply, below the required 5 year supply. This is discussed in detail in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR).

7.4 The key areas of declining performance related to:

Indicator	2015/16	2016/17	Wales average	WG target
<b>5 year housing land supply</b>	5.0 years'	4.1 years'	2.9 years'	5.0 years'
<b>Average time taken to determine major planning applications</b>	121 days	321 days	250 days	n/a
<b>Average time taken to resolve enforcement cases</b>	143 days	227 days	201 days	n/a

The issues with our housing land supply are discussed in detail in the LDP AMR. Commentary is provided in par.6.10 regarding the average time to determine major applications: if two outlier applications are discounted, our average is a significantly improved 145 days, well below the Wales average. The primary reason for declining performance against this enforcement indicator is the significant increase in workload this year.

7.5 The main areas of improved performance were:

Indicator	2015/16	2016/17	Wales average	WG target
<b>Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required</b>	65%	88%	59%	n/a
<b>Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required</b>	79%	90%	87%	>80%

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

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

- 7.8 90% of applications were determined within agreed timescales, against a Welsh Government target threshold for good performance standing at 80%. The average time taken to determine all applications was 73 days, narrowly missing the 'good' target of 67 days (but below the Welsh average of 76 days). While it is accepted that timely decisions can have economic benefits, of greater importance to investors is clarity and certainty, and our evidence is that, within reason, customers are happy to have a slightly slower decision if it is a favourable one. We therefore place greater importance on securing a positive outcome.
- 7.9 However, this is an area for potential improvement and we are undertaking a 'Systems Revisit' to assess how much waste is in our processes and to understand if there are common themes as to why applications are not being determined within a timely fashion. There should also be reductions in waste in our systems and time savings to be made by the implementation of our new Idox Uniform database for the DM service; thus Action 2 below is identified. Action 5 also overlaps into making our application processing more efficient in that we may be able to identify good practice from the benchmarking exercise being carried out across Wales by the Planning Advisory Service, the results of which are expected in Autumn 2017.

**ACTION 1: Systems Re-visit to improve customers' experience of our service and to improve or end-to-end performance in dealing with pre-application**

**ACTION 2: Roll out training for our new Development Management database software for all Planning Service staff**

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

- 7.10 The Welsh Government is yet to provide a target for this indicator, however Monmouthshire's performance of resolving 64% of enforcement cases within 180 days of receipt falls below the Wales average of 73%. Moreover, customer feedback and complaints often relate to perceived delays in enforcement cases. These issues are certainly not unique to Monmouthshire, and the problem is at least in part due to a misunderstanding of the powers available to us and/or unrealistic expectations. Performance has declined compared to last year, explained by a sharp rise in enforcement workload (cases to investigate rose by 40%) and the resolution of some older, longstanding cases. There remains, however, scope for further improvement. Consideration will be given to streamlining our processes via a triage approach based on a pilot being developed by Swansea City Council, and arranging Town and Community Council training to improve understanding and better manage expectations.

**ACTION 3: Streamline enforcement processes following a triage system pioneered by Swansea City Council.**

**ACTION 4: Arrange a training seminar on planning enforcement for community and town councils.**

**ACTION 5: Absorb the results of the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Benchmarking exercise to learn from areas of good practice across Welsh planning authorities and put those into practice, where feasible.**

**Opportunities going forward:**

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

- To improve the speed of responses to pre-application advice requests and determining planning applications via a Systems revisit in order to remove waste from our system and to focus our work on areas valued by our customers (Action 1);
- In tandem with the Systems approach, to use Team meetings and performance reports to drill down into specific areas of workflow and identify where problems exist and why, with a targeted approach to identifying solutions (Action 1);
- To improve the speed with which we deal with enforcement cases via a triage system, and to improve stakeholder understanding of the powers and procedures (Actions 2 and 3, 4 & 5);
- To improve the web site experience for customers and increase the amount of information available via GIS, which would drive out waste and enable channel shift so that more customers can self-serve (Action 1);
- To train up staff to use the more efficient replacement data base for planning applications to reduce waste for staff, including the production of standard letters and monitoring reports (Actions 1 and 2);
- To continue to work towards being a paperless office to reduce printing, copying and postage costs;
- To promote and deliver our new offers including fast track applications, pre-purchase certificates and completion certificates, providing an enhanced customer experience and an increase in income to the Council;
- Collaboration with the Village Alive Trust and interested Preservation Trusts or investors to engage and work with the owners of Listed Buildings on the At Risk register or to acquire them from the current owner;
- Review whether to adopt CIL;
- Adopt SPG to ensure the accurate implementation and interpretation of planning policy, in particular in relation to landscape and design issues;
- Continue with an early review of the Monmouthshire LDP as a result of the need to address the shortfall in the housing land supply and facilitate the identification/ allocation of additional housing land. This will involve the production of a Review Report which will set out and explain the scope of the Plan revision required;



- To identify, implement and/or disseminate best practice via the Planning Officers' Society for Wales or other working groups, including the PAS Benchmarking exercise (Action 5).

7.12 Progress will be measured via our 2017/18 Annual Performance Report, 2017/18 LDP Annual Monitoring Report, and our 2017/18 Service Improvement Plans.

**APPENDIX A - PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK**

**OVERVIEW**

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
<b>Plan making</b>			
Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	Yes		No
LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	<12	13-17	18+
Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	Yes		No
The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	>5		<5
<b>Efficiency</b>			
Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days	Not set	Not set	Not set

WALES AVERAGE	Monmouths hire LPA LAST YEAR	Monmouths hire LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
58	N/A	N/A
Yes	Yes	Yes
2.9 years	5 years	4.1 years
59%	65%	88%
250 days	121 days	321 days

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

WALES AVERAGE	Monmouths hire LPA LAST YEAR	Monmouths hire LPA THIS YEAR
87%	79%	90%
76 days	68 days	73 days
11%	1%	7%
61%	70%	71%
0 cases	0 cases	0 cases
Yes	Yes	Yes
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
<b>Enforcement</b>			
Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percentage of enforcement cases where enforcement action is taken or a retrospective application 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	Monmouths hire LPA LAST YEAR	Monmouths hire LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
85%	100%	83%
74 days	16 days	21 days
73%	70%	64%
201 days	143 days	227 days

## SECTION 1 – PLAN MAKING

Indicator	01. Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	
<b>“Good”</b>	<b>“Fair”</b>	<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
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)

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

Indicator	02. LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	
<b>“Good”</b>	<b>“Fair”</b>	<b>“Improvement needed”</b>
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

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

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

<b>Authority’s performance</b>	Yes
The Council’s second AMR was submitted to the Welsh Government in October 2016.	

Indicator	04. The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	
<b>“Good”</b>		<b>“Improvement needed”</b>

The authority has a housing land supply of more than 5 years		The authority has a housing land supply of less than 5 years
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<b>Authority's performance</b>	4.1 years
<p>The 2016 Joint Housing Land Availability Study (JHLAS) was agreed by an independent Inspector in August 2016 and shows that we now have 4.1 years' housing land supply. This matter is considered in detail in the 2016-17 LDP Annual Monitoring Report.</p> <p>A fundamental contributing factor to this shortfall is the slower than expected progression of allocated strategic housing sites, albeit that progress is being made in bringing these sites forward and there is no evidence to suggest that the allocations are not deliverable. Nevertheless, the slower than anticipated delivery rate does suggest that there is a need for additional site allocations. The AMR seeks to address this position with a number of recommendations.</p>	

## SECTION 2 - EFFICIENCY

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>05. Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required</b>	
<b>"Good"</b>	<b>"Fair"</b>	<b>"Improvement needed"</b>
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

<b>Authority's performance</b>	88%
<p>No target has been set by the Welsh Government for this indicator, however Monmouthshire's performance of 88% is well above the Wales average of 59% and also significantly better than last year's achievement of 65%.</p> <p>One of the reasons for improvement over the last two years was the change to the indicator definition. The measure now allows for extended periods to determine applications to be agreed with customers, and provided this agreed deadline is met, the decision counts as 'in time'. These changes reflect the Council's customer and outcome focus, and aligns with our evidenced approach that customers prefer a positive outcome to a quick decision. However, these changes to the performance indicator apply to all LPAs, so the benchmarking remains consistent, and it is clear that Monmouthshire performs very well against this indicator.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>06. Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days</b>	
<b>"Good"</b>	<b>"Fair"</b>	<b>"Improvement needed"</b>
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

<b>Authority's performance</b>	321 days
<p>As above, the Welsh Government has not yet set a performance target for this indicator. This measure declined compared to last year's figure, but closer analysis indicates that performance was affected by two long-standing applications at St Maur's and Mouton Road, Chepstow. If these two applications are excluded the average time to determine the remaining 14 major applications falls to 145 days, well below the Welsh average of 250 days, and is more of a reflection of our performance in dealing with major applications over the previous reporting period (121 days).</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>07. Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required</b>	
<b>"Good"</b>	<b>"Fair"</b>	<b>"Improvement needed"</b>
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

<b>Authority's performance</b>	90%
<p>90% of all planning applications we dealt with were determined within the required timescales, which is well above the 80% threshold for the 'Good' performance ranking. This compared to 87% across Wales and is an improvement on our performance last year (79%).</p> <p>The improved figure represents a willingness to work with our customers to reach a positive outcome within agreed timescales.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>08. Average time taken to determine all applications in days</b>	
<b>"Good"</b>	<b>"Fair"</b>	<b>"Improvement needed"</b>
Less than 67 days	Between 67 and 111 days	112 days or more

<b>Authority's performance</b>	73 days
<p>In 2016-17 we determined 1087 planning applications, each taking, on average, 73 days (just over 10 weeks) to determine. This compares to an average of 76 days (just under 11 weeks) across Wales but narrowly misses the 'good' target of 67 days. Given our focus on outcome rather than speed, this is a very good achievement and suggests we have struck the right balance between these two objectives.</p> <p>This is a very slight increase in output compared to last year but a slight worsening in terms of average time taken (1085 applications determined taking an average of 68 days in 2015/16).</p>	

### SECTION 3 - QUALITY

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

Authority's performance	7%
<p>Monmouthshire's performance shows that 7% of Committee decisions go against officer recommendation, which equates to 5 planning application during 2016/17 (over the previous two years there were only two applications determined in such a manner). This compares favourably to the 11% average in Wales and is just below the 5% or less threshold to be rated 'Good'.</p> <p>The previous two years' performance of 1% of applications made contrary to officer advice was unusually low and it is not surprising that the percentage has increased during this reporting period. Provided that Committee decisions are based on good planning judgement and material planning considerations, overturned recommendations are a perfectly acceptable part of the planning process. The difficulty only arises where decisions are made that cannot be substantiated at appeal.</p> <p>The applications in question related to a mix of developments including a new, contemporary replacement dwelling in a rural setting refused on design grounds (later allowed on appeal) and the conversion and extension of a former gallery in Usk refused because of lack of parking provision (but subsequently allowed on appeal). The three other decisions involved two refusals that were not challenged on appeal and a resolution to approve a hotel scheme at Wyesham (contrary to the officer recommendation to refuse) that has been called in by the Minister owing to flooding issues and is awaiting decision.</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	71%
<p>Of the 15 appeals that were decided during the year, 71% were dismissed. This exceeds the Wales average (61%), our performance last year (70%) and the WG 66% target. This shows that the decisions we are making are sound.</p>	



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	0 cases
<p>No awards of costs for unreasonable behaviour have been made against us this year. There were also no awards of costs during the previous reporting period.</p> <p>An action identified in the first APR was to report appeal decisions to Planning Committee every month for learning and discussion. This action has been implemented and has been welcomed by the Committee as useful. Committee Members are also encouraged to sit in on appeal hearings or inquiries as further development training and to assist this the appeals we receive are also reported to 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	Yes
<p>Monmouthshire has an established and effective Public Speaking Protocol and also allows applicants, objectors, supports and community and town councils to speak at the Delegation Panel site visits. This has proven to be a valuable exercise in terms of making informed decisions and improved customer and community satisfaction, even if the final decision is not the one they hoped for. The public speaking protocol was amended during this period to enable the applicant to be notified earlier that an objector had registered to speak; this provides the applicant with earlier notice and more time to organise a right of reply.</p> <p>The Size and Composition of Local Planning Authority Committees (Wales) Regulations 2017 did not seek to control the public speaking element of a planning committee. If any future national protocol seeking consistency throughout Wales is published it is hoped it is provided as best practice guidance and does not curtail the successful delegation and public speaking system we already employ.</p>	

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

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

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

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

## SECTION 5 – ENFORCEMENT

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

Authority’s performance	83%	
<p>No target is identified by Welsh Government, and our performance of 83% fell from the 100% of the previous reporting period. This sits against a Wales average of 85%. Workload rose by 40% over 2016/17 which may partially explain the decline in performance but this prompts the need to review how we manage our work in our small enforcement team and thus, <b>Actions 3, 4 &amp; 5</b> (Section 7) are being initiated for 2017/18.</p>		

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

Authority’s performance	21 days	
<p>Again, no target has been set by WG for this indicator, but our performance of an average of 21 days to investigate enforcement complaints sits well below the Wales average of 74 days. Despite this being slower than our performance last year (16 days) it is a strong performance and no further action is required for this particular indicator.</p>		

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

Authority’s performance	64%	
<p>64% of enforcement action was taken within 180 days from the start of the case, which is a reduction on the 70% achieved last year. In addition, this is slightly below the Wales average of 73%.</p> <p>In the context of the rising workload, our performance is considered to be fair. However, further action (via <b>ACTIONS 3, 4 &amp; 5</b> – see Section 7) is proposed in order to review our enforcement practices and seek to streamline activity through a ‘triage’ approach being piloted by Swansea</p>		

City Council.

In addition, improved guidance for our communities is proposed to try and better manage expectations, and Planning Aid Wales is being invited to provide a seminar on planning enforcement for our Community Council clusters to help explain the processes, tools and powers available (**ACTION 4** - Section 7).

Indicator	18. Average time taken to take enforcement action	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority's performance	227 days
<p>We resolved 254 enforcement cases, taking, on average, 227 days to resolve each case. This indicator measures only those cases where a breach of planning control was identified and further action was considered expedient. 'Resolved' means that the breach ceased, an Enforcement Notice was complied with, or planning permission was granted to retain the development/use/activity (either by us or at appeal by the Planning Inspectorate). We resolved significantly more cases than in 2016/17 (254 compared to 168 last year) but the average time taken increased from 143 days in 2014/15 to 227 days this year.</p> <p>This performance is in the context of the Wales average of 201 days. We are therefore performing below average. This can be largely explained by two factors: i) the closing of a number of longstanding, older cases during this period, and ii) a sharp rise in workload, particularly during Q3 of 2016/17 when 163 enforcement cases alone were opened. The proposed actions referred to above should help to manage a challenging workload, improve performance and manage customer expectation.</p>	

## SECTION 6 – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

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

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

Authority's returns	Full responses were provided for all indicators.
<p>Monmouthshire Council provided full statistical returns for these indicators. However, it should be noted that this work had to be undertaken manually because our back office IT system cannot store or retrieve most of the data. This is a common problem throughout Wales, the resolution of which has proven to be very time consuming. The Council has procured a new IT system that will 'go live' in Autumn 2017 so it is hoped that the time and resource spent manually collecting this data will be reduced.</p> <p>It is worth noting that, in many cases, the sustainable development (SD) indicator definition is different to information collected in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR), and therefore the results are different in some cases. For example, in terms of housing approvals, the SD indicator records only detailed or final Reserved Matters approvals, whereas the LDP AMR quite rightly (for that context) also includes outline applications as evidence that allocated sites are coming forward. This can have significant differences in the results, for example the outline approvals for housing at Hill Farm, Pwllmeyric, and on land adjacent to the B4293 Llanishen (main village sites) are not included in the SD indicators below but are included in the AMR.</p> <p>These discrepancies have been checked and properly accounted for. Going forward, where appropriate, consideration will be given to amending the LDP AMR monitoring indicators slightly to reflect the SD indicators, so that similar data is only captured once, reducing duplicated effort and potential confusion. In other cases, such as reviewing progress on the delivery of LDP housing sites, the AMR monitoring indicator will remain unchanged.</p>	

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD1. The floorspace (square metres) granted and refused planning permission for new economic development on allocated employment sites during the year.</b>
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<b>Granted (square metres)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	2,237

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

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

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

During the monitoring period, 2,237 sq m of new economic development (as defined by this indicator) was approved on allocated employment sites. No applications for economic development on allocated or protected employment sites were refused. The vast majority of this floorspace related to a 2040 sq. m. B1/B8 building at Thornwell. A large extension at Magor Brewery, a key local employer, was not counted despite being 1,200sq.m, as extensions are not included in this indicator.

This represents a significant fall in floor area approved, with last year's figure being 12,812 sq m of new floor space. However, plenty of land is allocated within the LDP to allow for future take-up during the Plan period.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD2. Planning permission granted for renewable and low carbon energy development during the year.</b>
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<b>Granted permission (number of applications)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	3

<b>Granted permission (MW energy generation)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	14

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

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

Three applications were approved over the monitoring period for on-site renewable energy generation. One of the schemes related to a 6MW solar development at a farm at Parkhouse, near Trellech. Approval was granted for a combined heat and power plant providing 7.2MW at Trostrey Court Farm, near Usk and a biomass development (up to 1MW) was approved on a farm near Dingestow, Monmouth.

This reporting period has shown a slight drop in approved schemes due to changes to Feed in Tariffs (last year we approved 4 schemes likely to generate 17MW). This illustrates that factors outside of the planning system have the greatest influence on the delivery of renewable energy.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD3. The number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year.</b>
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<b>Market housing (number of units)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	346

<b>Affordable housing (number of units)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	77

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

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

During the previous monitoring period, detailed planning permission was granted for 484 market dwellings and 159 affordable units. That equated to 33% of all residential units approved being affordable. The year 2016-17 saw a reduction in planning permissions for residential development with 346 market units and 77 affordable units being approved (the latter 22%).

It is well understood that there is an issue with the LDP strategic housing sites coming forward in a timely fashion and this has affected our housing land supply. The strategic housing sites are progressing with approvals being granted at Sudbrook and more recently at Fairfield Mabey (subject to a section 106 agreement) but progress is slower than is desired.

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

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD4. Planning permission granted and refused for development in C1 and C2 floodplain areas during the year.</b>
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<b>Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that DID NOT meet all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	3

<b>Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that did not meet all TAN 15 tests which were REFUSED permission on flood risk grounds</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	4

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

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

During this reporting period, eight dwellings were approved within flood zone C1 that met all TAN15 tests – including three in Usk and four in Monmouth.

Four applications were refused on TAN15 flood risk grounds during the year. Three were approved that did not meet all TAN15 tests - two in Chepstow in a built up area where NRW was concerned about the danger of cars being parked for the new properties that would be damaged or cause damage themselves but where sufficient warning of a flood event would take place (the accommodation itself would not flood) and one in Pwllmeyric where the developer initiated the re-modelling of land to ensure the replacement dwelling would not be likely to flood, and the situation was a betterment to the existing dwelling which would be replaced.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD5. The area of land (ha) granted planning permission for new development on previously developed land and greenfield land during the year.</b>
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<b>Previously developed land (hectares)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	19

<b>Greenfield land (hectares)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	11

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

The performance against this indicator normally reflects the rural nature of Monmouthshire as a County, with very little brownfield land available for development. Usually, the majority of development is on greenfield land. However, this reporting period saw a rise in the development of brownfield sites including the Sudbrook Papermill, The Hill (Abergavenny), Magor Brewery and to a lesser extent the development of domestic gardens for new housing.

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



<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD6. The area of public open space (ha) that would be lost and gained as a result of development granted planning permission during the quarter.</b>
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<b>Open space lost (hectares)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	0

<b>Open space gained (hectares)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	4

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

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

As a result of planning permissions, 4ha of new open space have been created.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>SD7. The total financial contributions (£) agreed from new development granted planning permission during the quarter for the provision of community infrastructure.</b>
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<b>Gained via Section 106 agreements (£)</b>	
<b>Authority's data</b>	1,352,962

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

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

£1.35M worth of Section 106 contributions were secured during the reporting period (higher than the previous year's £0.9M), with £674,382 worth of S106 monies actually received by the Council during the same period. The latter relates to contributions actually paid as past planning permissions are implemented and the trigger points for payments reached. The amount is a reflection of developments proceeding relatively slowly and payment triggers not being met, although it is considerably higher than the £233k taken in over 2015/16.

The Council is working towards adopting a CIL, subject to potential changes to Central Government policy.