

Merthyr Tydfil LPA

PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) – 2016 - 2017

PREFACE

Introduction to the report by the Cabinet Member responsible for the planning service.

I am delighted to introduce Merthyr Tydfil LPA's Annual Performance Report for the period 2016-17. The principle goal for Merthyr Tydfil Council is to ensure that the required economic growth for the County Borough is balanced against the need to sustain our highly valued cultural and environmental assets. The ultimate aim, by working closely with our communities, is to improve the quality of life for residents and make the County Borough an even more attractive destination for businesses, visitors and future residents.

Planning is fundamental in delivering these ambitions. Therefore, I am delighted to note that Merthyr Tydfil's Planning service is performing extremely well and is consistently above the Welsh Average across the range of performance indicators measured.

Councillor Howard Barrett – Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside.

CONTEXT

Merthyr Tydfil is the smallest local authority in Wales with an area of around 11,100 hectares. Approximately one fifth of the County Borough lies within the Brecon Beacons National Park to the north, leaving some 8,668 hectares of land under the planning control of the County Borough Council.

Merthyr Tydfil has a population of approximately 59,810, of which, approximately 45,000 reside in the main town of Merthyr Tydfil which functions as the main commercial, retail and service centre of the County Borough and the Heads of the Valleys Region. The remainder of the population is distributed amongst eight interdependent settlements situated further south along the Taff and Taff Bargoed river valleys. These settlements contain a range of lower order services and facilities serving local needs. Merthyr Tydfil fulfils a key strategic role at the centre of the Heads of the Valleys region, benefiting from high levels of accessibility through its location at the intersection of the A470 (T) and A465 (T) strategic transport corridors in the north, and the A470 (T) and A472 strategic transport corridors in the south. The County Borough lies just 25 minutes north of Cardiff and the M4 corridor. The dualling of the A465 (T) will contribute to the establishment of an important new growth corridor across the Heads of the Valleys, and electrification of the Valley lines and the Metro will enhance levels of access to Cardiff and beyond.

Planning background

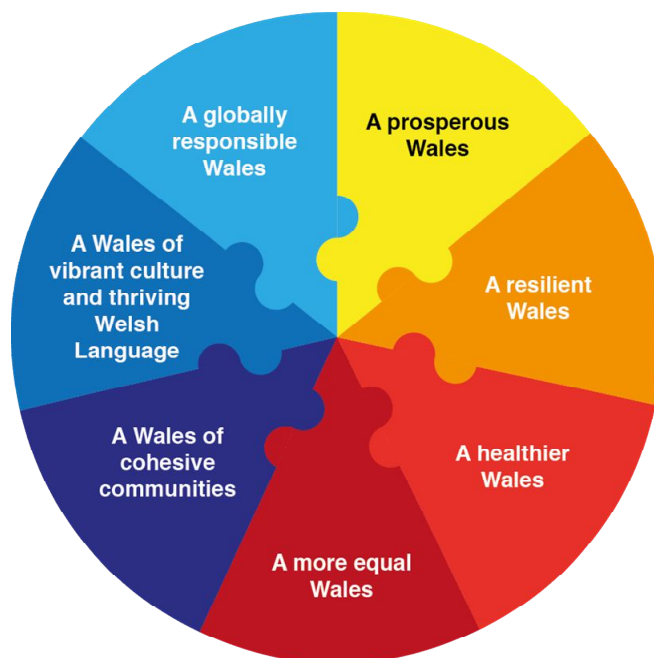
The Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted in May 2011 and covers the period from 2006 – 2021. The Replacement Merthyr Tydfil LDP (2016 – 2031) is currently being prepared. The Preferred Strategy was consulted upon during the summer of 2017 and it is anticipated that the deposit plan will be published for consultation during the summer of 2018. The Replacement LDP objectives are grouped by their contribution to improving the social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being of Wales to accord with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Single Integrated Plan (SIP) for Merthyr Tydfil, which was revised and approved by the Merthyr Tydfil Local Service Board in October 2015, has now been replaced by the Wellbeing Plan. The Cwm Taf Public Services Board (PSB) was established by The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

‘the Act makes all the public bodies involved think more about the long term, work better with people, communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach to its work’.

The overall aim is for Cwm Taf to contribute to the seven national Well-being goals for Wales:



In accordance with Well Being of Future Generations Act, a Wellbeing Plan is currently being drafted by the Cwm Taf (PSB). This plan, albeit with a new set of objectives, would be a replacement for the SIP.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act also requires Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to set and publish Wellbeing Objectives and to identify how it would work towards meeting those Wellbeing Objectives. Focus on the Future (Wellbeing in our Community) 2017 -2022 was approved by Full Council on 26th July 2017. The figure opposite shows how this plan sits in relation to the regional work across Cwm Taf and within the local authority.

Focus on the Future (Wellbeing in our Community) 2017 -2022, which has replaced the Councils Corporate Plan (2013-2017), sets the following objectives:

Best Start to Life

- Children get the best start to life.
- Children and young people are equipped with the skills they need to be successful learners and confident individuals.

Working Life

- Making skills work for Merthyr Tydfil: Developing the workforce of the future.
- Developing the environment and infrastructure for business to flourish.

Environmental Wellbeing

- Communities protect, enhance and promote our natural environment and countryside.
- Communities protect, develop and promote our heritage and cultural assets.

Living Well

- Developing safer communities.
- People have good physical and mental wellbeing.
- People live independently.

Existing and previous major influences on land use (e.g. heavy industrial, agricultural, energy, transport)

The historical development of Merthyr Tydfil has been heavily influenced by the location and exploitation of mineral resources. There are a number of resources that continue to be worked within the County Borough as well as further reserves of coal and sandstone. In relation to the former, there are extant permissions for coal extraction at the Ffos-y-Fran land reclamation scheme on the eastern flank of the Merthyr Tydfil basin, which will restore over 900 acres of derelict land over a 15 year period up to 2024; limestone extraction at the Vaynor Quarry located to the north of the main Merthyr Tydfil settlement straddling the boundary of the Brecon Beacons National Park; and sandstone extraction at the Gelligaer Quarry situated to the east of the County Borough near Gelligaer Common.

Historic/landscape setting of the area, including AONBs, conservation areas etc

The County Borough benefits from a rich and distinctive natural heritage which includes highly valued landscapes and biodiversity sites. The landscape of the countryside is primarily characterised by steeply sloping valley sides with their high ridges and open moorland. Much of this landscape has, however, been modified through human activity over the centuries and this is reflected in two historic landscape designations, namely the Merthyr Tydfil Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest and the Gelligaer Common Landscape of Special Historic Interest.



Two thirds of the County Borough is semi-natural in character. It consists of a complex array of landscape types including open moorland, common land, broad-leaved and coniferous woodlands, agriculturally productive land, semi-improved grassland, old industrial landscapes and reclaimed areas. Merthyr Tydfil benefits from a range of environmental resources with a number of sites identified as having particular biodiversity and / or nature conservation importance. These include a Local Nature Reserve, two Sites of Special Scientific Interest and numerous Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. It should be noted that the Preferred Strategy seeks to identify 5 Special Landscape Areas across the County Borough, Local Nature Reserves in each ward and support the implementation of the Open Space Strategy.

The built fabric of the Merthyr Tydfil reflects a rich heritage ranging from imposing bridges and viaducts to more humble workers cottages. The County Borough has 8 Conservation Areas, over 230 Listed Buildings and 50 Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Urban rural mix and major settlements

The County Borough comprises of a mix of urban, semi-urban and rural communities situated in a rich and varied natural, semi-natural and historic environment containing exceptional wildlife habitats, historic landscapes and archaeological features. The steeply sloping valley sides with their high ridges and moorland vegetation define the character of the area and provide an environmental and ecological context for the settlements of the County Borough.

Being the smallest authority in Wales, the number of towns and villages is limited with many settlements serving a mainly residential role, as such the LDP divides the County Borough into three distinct zones, namely the Primary Growth Area, comprising the northern sector which includes the main town centre of Merthyr Tydfil; the Secondary Growth Area, comprising the southern sector communities and the Other Growth Areas comprising the mid valley communities.

Population change and influence on LDP/forthcoming revisions

The primary aim of the adopted LDP is to facilitate a reduction in levels of out migration from the County Borough so that population levels stabilised by 2011 and a 10-year period of enhanced growth is achieved thereafter.

The 2011 Census data revealed that the first five years of the plan period had seen a significant level of population growth, from 56,627 in 2006 to 58,851 in 2011. This period also saw 1047 homes built in the County Borough, a much higher level of house building than there had been in the previous 20 years.

The population increase was primarily due to an increase in migration although there were also changes to the data for natural change (births and deaths). The 2014 based Welsh Government (WG) population projections (published 2016) show the population increasing slightly to nearly 59,400 in 2024, but then declining back to 59,000 at 2031. It is worth noting that the most recent Mid-Year Population estimate from WG shows the population at 59,810 in 2016, an increase of 500 people from the previous year.

PLANNING SERVICE

Setting within the wider organisation

- Following a senior management re-structure in February 2015 the Authority is split into two directorates namely People and Performance and Place & Transformation. The current Authority reporting structure takes the form of Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, two Chief Officers in each Directorate with heads of service sitting below. This reporting structure was introduced in the summer of 2016.
- Planning sits within the Place and Transformation Directorate. The Place & Transformation Directorate also includes Regeneration, Neighbourhood Services (inc Property & Estates), Finance, Corporate Services, and Public Protection.
- The Planning & Countryside Department includes the following services: Development Control, Planning Policy & Implementation (including Development Plan, Built Heritage & Conservation, Landscape, Ecology & GIS) and Building Control which are all headed up by the Head of Planning & Countryside.
- The Head of Service is supported by three Group Leaders who have line management responsibility for Development Control (including Enforcement), Policy & Implementation and Building Control respectively. The Planning & Countryside service is supported by three

technical support / registration staff who sit within the same office.

Wider organisational activities impacting on the service

The impact of the savings made by the Council over recent years and that continue to be made have been felt both directly and indirectly by the Planning & Countryside Division, as savings and staff reductions in other departments such as highways, engineers and environmental health contribute to the ability of the Planning & Countryside Division to deliver its functions. A significant number of experienced and knowledgeable senior officers have left the organisation in recent years without being replaced; the fact that the Authority does not have a Head of Engineering compromises our ability to plan strategically.

Operating budget

Planning application fee income	2012-13	2013 - 14	2014 - 15	2015 - 16	2016 - 17
Projected Income	£297,470	£314,470	£314,470	£192,000	£192,000
Actual Income	£315,059	£160,710	£180,000	£266,043	171,875

Over the last three years, two f/t posts have been reduced to p/t, one in the policy section and in DC. The inquiry & appeals DC budget, was reduced by 50% in 2015 on the basis of the trend for a low number of appeals being received and the limited number of these being dealt with by means of inquiry. Since the reduction of this budget we have needed to commission specialist (agricultural, renewable energy) advice on a number of occasions which has put pressure on this budget.

The level of income received is one factor in setting the following years operating budget, others include requests for growth to accommodate reductions in income targets or specific work streams (i.e. the LDP review, IT provision etc), which to date has accommodated any forward planning or operational activity of the service.

The table above indicates the clear fluctuations in the level of income received each year. Unsurprisingly these variations correspond to the economic climate at that time. Due to these peaks and troughs, the budget has recently been set by considering the trend over the previous 5 years.

The service does not retain its fee income in order to re-invest in the service; any additional income received is recovered by the corporate centre in order to offset the net cost of operating the service or reduce overspend in other areas.

Staff issues

The Planning & Countryside Service is currently fully staffed. However, in December 2016 the technical support section of department lost a post due to efficiency savings. This post, which led the team, was deleted from the structure. The loss of this role has not only increased the workload

of remaining technical support staff and team leaders but also, due to the skills and knowledge required by the post holder, has seriously impacted on the ability to improve processes and procedures through enhanced use of Information Technology. The service therefore lost one post during 2016/17.

The Planning & Countryside service (excluding Building Control) now consists of 15 full time staff (including the Head of Service, two group leaders and 3 support staff), 2 part time staff and 2 part time job share enforcement officers (equivalent to 1 post)

The Development Control team consists of a total of 5.5 staff comprising the group leader, a principal planning officer, two full time planning officers, one part time planning officer and one enforcement officer (job shared by two people). The planning officers validate their own applications and carry out front desk duty, registration and administration of applications is carried out by the technical support team.

The Planning Policy & Implementation team comprises of the Group Leader, two full time policy officers, one part time policy officer, a conservation officer, an ecologist, a countryside officer, a landscape architect and a GIS officer. The implementation team consists of SPOD' s (single points of dependency) and as such operates on a risk management basis when the post holder is on sick or leave.

The departments training budget, whilst limited has not been reduced over the last four years as the importance of training and staff development is valued highly in such a small service area so as to remain resilient and high performing, in this respect the free training sessions recently facilitated by both Welsh Government and RTPi Cymru are welcomed and the opportunity for staff to attend is always taken. Monthly 1:1's and team meetings are an opportunity for both the employee and line manager to identify training needs. Staff have recently been supported through ILM qualifications and the Council is currently delivering a "management academy" for senior managers. There are also opportunities in house for staff to take advantage of professional development training. For example, specialist officers (e.g. Design, Heritage and Conservation Officer and Ecologist) provide short seminars to enable staff to enhance their knowledge of specific topic areas.

LOCAL STORY

Workload

The principal planning officer and the group leader determine the more complex applications. In addition to determining applications officers also validate their own applications, stamp and issue decisions, carry out desk duty rota and respond to pre-apps.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Applications received	336	455	387
Applications determined	308	385	362
% within 8 weeks	93%	97%	99%

Whilst Merthyr Tydfil receives a lower amount of applications than some other authorities, it must be acknowledged that the corresponding number of planning officers dedicated to determining applications is low, being 3 full time and one part time.

It is pleasing to note that performance levels, in terms of the speed of determining planning applications, have increased yearly since 2014/15. It has continued to be well above the Welsh Average, and in three of the four quarters in 2016/17 Merthyr Tydfil were first in the Welsh Government Development Management Quarterly Survey (in the other quarter we were second in the table). The introduction of statutory pre-application enquiries has also impacted workload. However, the number of pre-application enquiries received (both statutory and non-statutory) is encouraging and has undoubtedly enhanced the quality of the vast majority of applications (and ultimately developments) which have been submitted following this process. This level of performance and efficiency is attributed to the dedication and flexibility of officers, the culture/spirit of the team and the on-going improvements to processes and procedures.

The enforcement indicators at Section 5 of this report highlight that a good level of service is being provided. It is noted that 15% of all enforcement complaints in 2016/17 resulted in the submission of a planning or other application.

The LDP was adopted in May 2011, Annual Monitoring Reports (AMR) have been submitted to Welsh Government in each of the years following adoption, the latest AMR submitted is attached at Appendix 1.

Service Priorities 2016/17

- Maintain performance above the Welsh average.
- Maintain the percentage of enforcement cases resolved in 12 weeks.
- To introduce improved visual presentation of information to committee in order to aid the decision making process

Local pressures

- Mineral applications – The LPA currently has an SLA with Carmarthenshire to determine its

minerals applications and related work, however if that service was withdrawn or the Planning service budget was cut, service delivery would be affected as the work would have to be dealt with by officers without the appropriate skills and experience.

- Reliance on the principle planning officer to deal with the major and complex applications.
- Monitoring compliance of conditions and major site restoration at Ffos y fran land reclamation site.

Performance Framework

It is pleasing to note that Merthyr Tydfil continue to perform above the Welsh average in every indicator (housing land supply is beyond our control). Feedback from customers (as detailed in the following section) is very encouraging and is recognition of the efforts invested in improvements to customer service and delivery of the planning service overall.

The only two identified areas for improvement (set out in Annex A) are the same as last year and relate to:-

- i) The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years, and*
- ii) The local planning authority does not allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee*

- i) This indicator is largely beyond the control of the LPA. Whilst we can allocate housing sites and determine applications quickly, it is the housebuilders and landowners that are responsible for and have the ability to deliver houses on the ground. Market forces and the economic conditions dictate finance and mortgage availability

Based on the residual method the LPA has a housing land supply of 1.6 years. Based on past build rates it has a capacity of **5.04 years**.

In an attempt to address the level of houses built in the County Borough, the Council has used funding from the Welsh Government's Vibrant and Viable Places (VVP) programme in order to increase levels of confidence over the delivery of housing sites by securing outline planning permission on allocated sites and commissioning a significant amount of survey work. It is anticipated that by carrying out survey work (site investigations, ecology surveys etc.), prior to the submission of applications, potential developers will have more certainty in regard to the level of risk on site; in turn increasing the attractiveness of these sites to housebuilders.

- ii) The Council's Constitution does not allow members of the public to address the planning committee, as such in order to address this Council would need to support a change to the Constitution. A Councillor workshop was held in early 2016 to respond to the WLGA consultation on Planning Committee's, where there was general support for public speaking at Committee. The outcome of the consultation is awaited before steps are taken to amend the Council's constitution to allow public speaking.

WHAT SERVICE USERS THINK

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

The survey was sent to 124 people, 20% of whom submitted a whole or partial response. The majority of responses (44%) were from local agents. 20% were from members of the public. 0% of respondents had their most recent planning application refused.

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

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

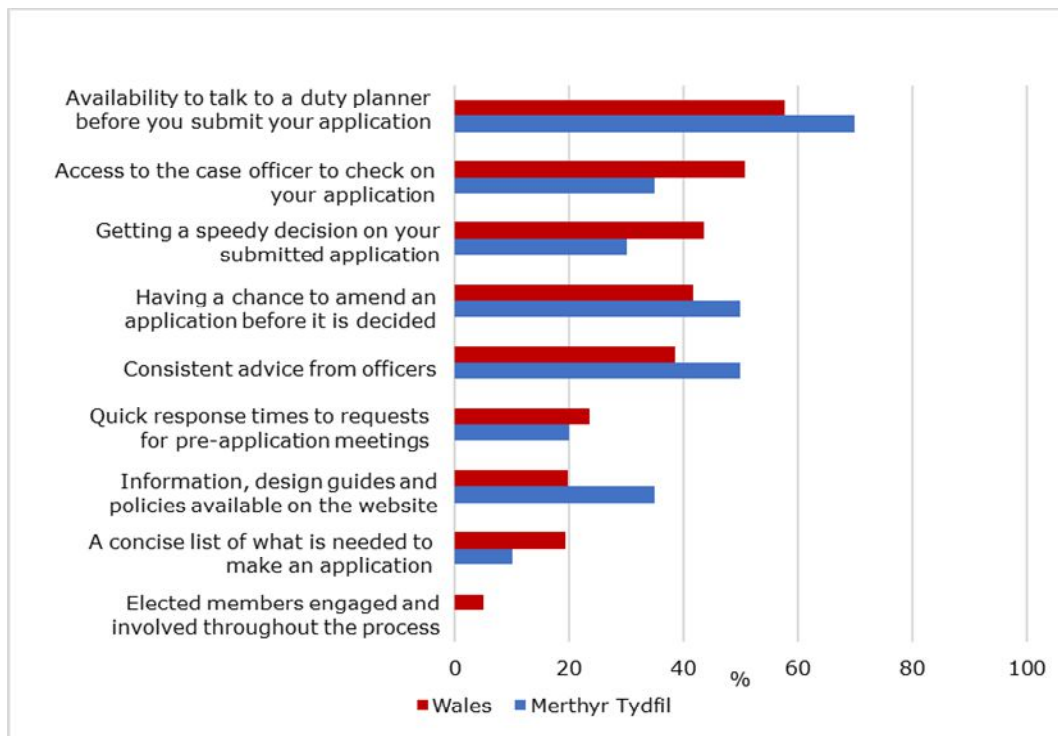
Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents that selected either 'tend to agree' or 'strongly agree' for each statement for both our planning authority and Wales.

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

	%	
	Merthyr Tydfil LPA	Wales
Percentage of respondents who agreed that:		
The LPA enforces its planning rules fairly and consistently	53	52
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	74	62
The LPA gives help throughout, including with conditions	60	52
The LPA responded promptly when they had questions	65	61
They were listened to about their application	50	59
They were kept informed about their application	45	51
They were satisfied overall with how the LPA handled their application	60	61

We also asked respondents to select three planning service characteristics from a list that they thought would most help them achieve successful developments. Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents that chose each characteristic as one of their three selections. For us, 'the availability to talk to a duty planner before submitting an application' was the most popular choice.

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



Comments received include:

- “No complaints - an excellent planning service.”
- “There seems to be a lack of consistency when it comes to the term design and some projects seem to be based on a subjective view rather than a planning view.”
- “Happy overall and would not think twice in approaching them for advice.”

OUR PERFORMANCE 2016-17

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

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

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

Plan making

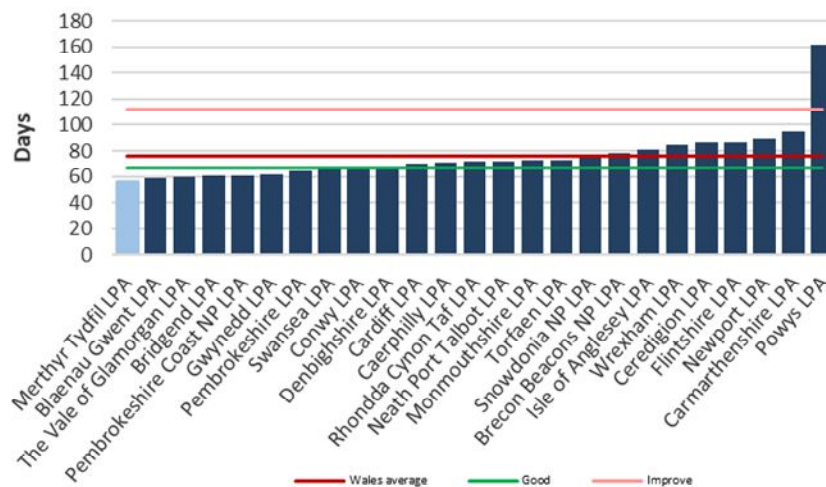
As at 31 March 2017, we were one of 22 LPAs that had a current development plan in place. We are required to submit an Annual Monitoring Report in October 2017. This document has been prepared.

During the APR period we had 1.6 years of housing land supply identified, making us one of 19 Welsh LPAs without the required 5 years supply.

Efficiency

In 2016-17 we determined 362 planning applications, each taking, on average, 56 days (8 weeks) to determine. This compares to an average of 76 days (11 weeks) across Wales. Figure 2 shows the average time taken by each LPA to determine an application during the year.

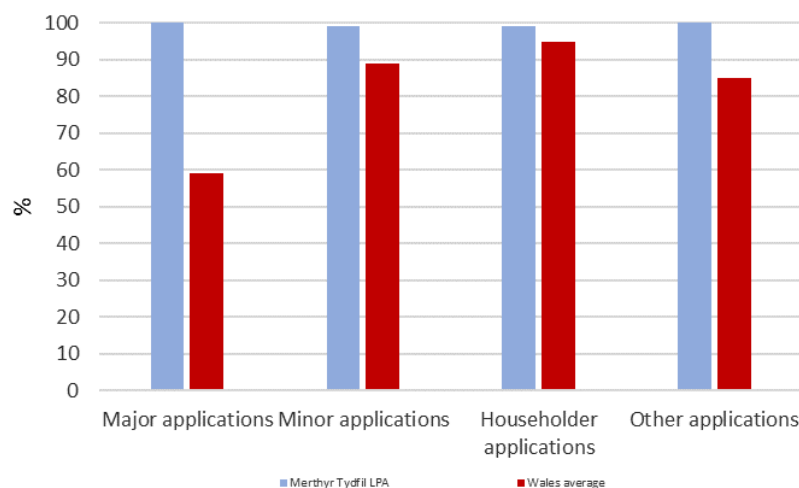
Figure 2: Average time taken (days) to determine applications, 2016-17



99% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. This was the highest percentage in Wales and we were one of 20 LPAs that had reached the 80% target.

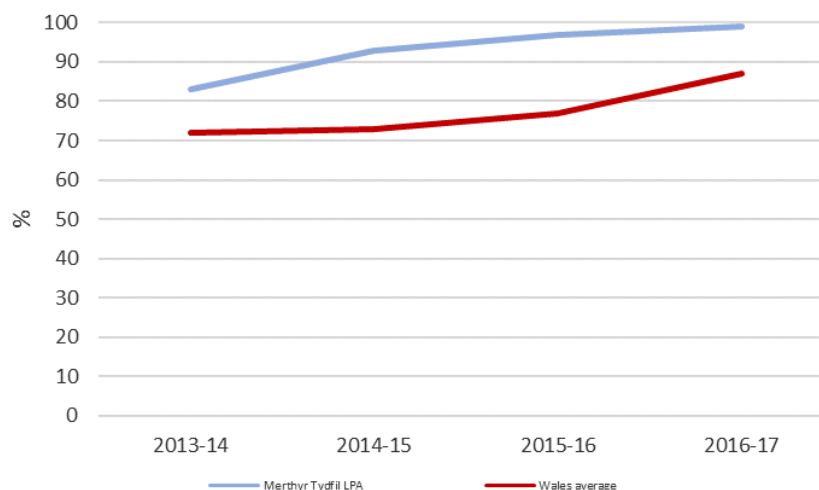
Figure 3 shows the percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales across the four main types of application for our LPA and Wales. It shows that we determined 100% of other applications within the required timescales.

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



Between 2015-16 and 2016-17, as Figure 4 shows, the percentage of planning applications we determined within the required timescales increased from 97%. Wales also saw an increase this year.

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



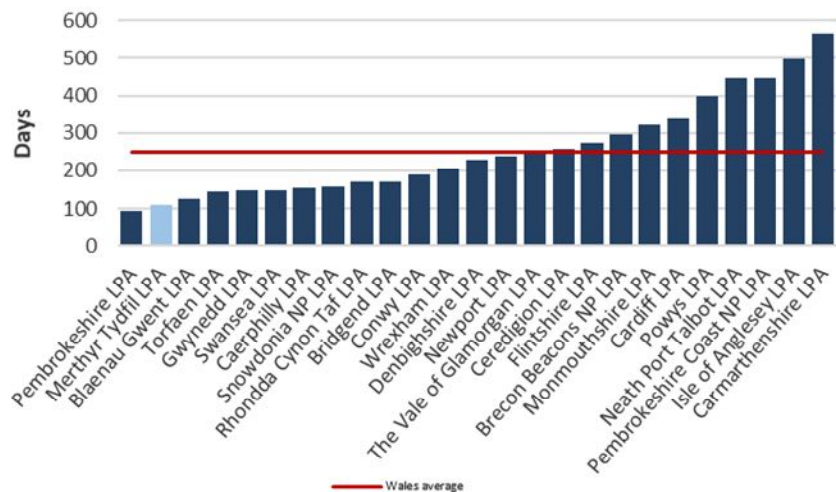
Over the same period:

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

Major applications

We determined 10 major planning applications in 2016-17, none of which were subject to an EIA. Each application took, on average, 110 days (16 weeks) to determine. As Figure 5 shows, this was the second shortest average time taken of all Welsh LPAs.

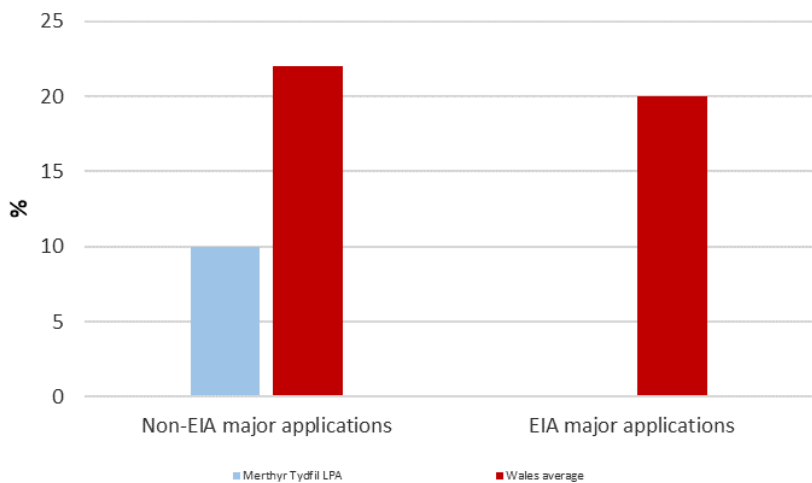
Figure 5: Average time (days) taken to determine a major application, 2016-17



100% of these major applications were determined within the agreed timescales, the highest percentage of all Welsh LPAs.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales by the type of major application. 10% of our ‘standard’ major applications i.e. those not requiring an EIA, were determined within the statutory 8 week deadline.

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

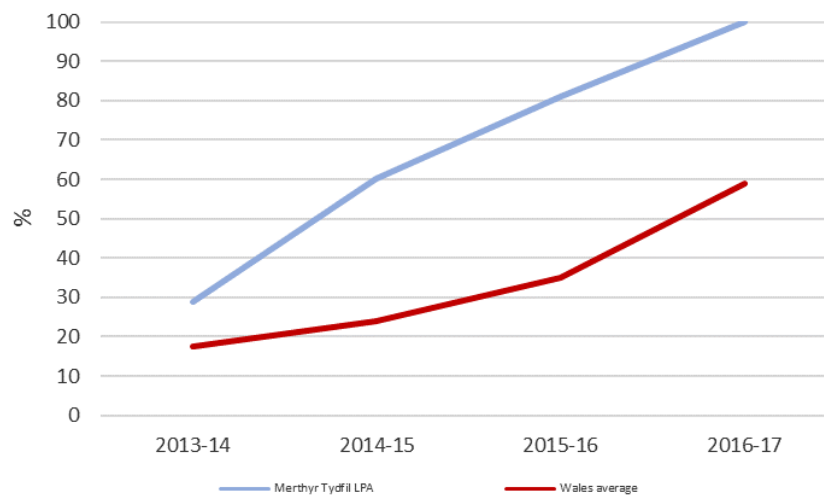


In addition we determined 100% of major applications that were subject to a PPA in the agreed timescales during the year.

Since 2015-16 the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales had increased from 81%. In contrast, the number of major applications determined decreased while the number of applications subject to an EIA determined during the year stayed the same.

Figure 7 shows the trend in the percentage of major planning applications determined within the required timescales in recent years and how this compares to Wales.

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



Over the same period:

- The percentage of minor applications determined within the required timescales increased from 98% to 99%;
- The percentage of householder applications determined within the required timescales stayed the same at 99%; and
- The percentage of other applications determined within required timescales increased from 97% to 100%.

Quality

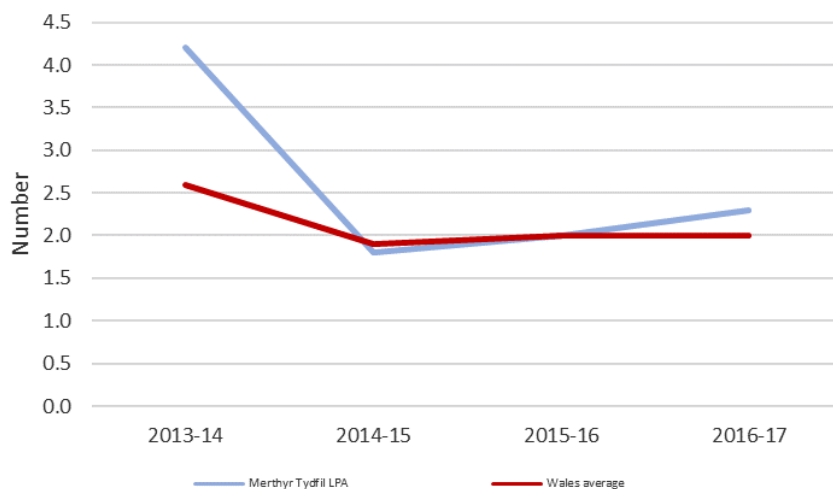
In 2016-17, our Planning Committee made 26 planning application decisions during the year, which equated to 7% of all planning applications determined. Across Wales 6% of all planning application decisions were made by planning committee.

4% of these member-made decisions went against officer advice. This compared to 11% of member-made decisions across Wales. This equated to 0.3% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice; 0.7% across Wales.

In 2016-17 we received 9 appeals against our planning decisions, which equated to 2.3 appeals for every 100 applications received. Across Wales 2 appeals were received for every 100 applications.

Figure 8 shows how the volume of appeals received has changed since 2015-16 and how this compares to Wales.

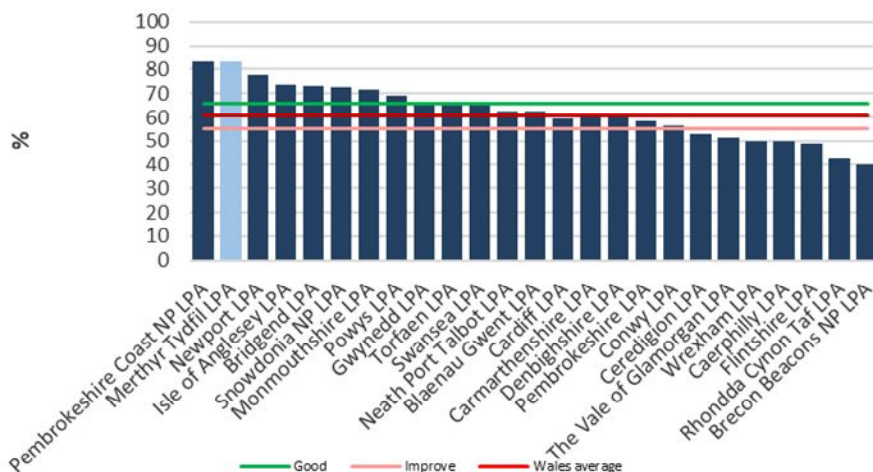
Figure 8: Number of appeals received per 100 planning applications



In 2016-17 we approved 92% of planning applications. This compares to 91% across Wales.

Of the 6 appeals that were decided during the year, 83% were dismissed. As Figure 9 shows, this was the highest percentage of appeals dismissed in Wales and we were one of 10 LPAs that reached the 66% target.

Figure 9: Percentage of appeals dismissed, 2016-17



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

Engagement

We are:

- the only LPA that did not allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee; and

- one of 20 LPAs that had an online register of planning applications.

As Table 2 shows, 74% of respondents to our 2016-17 customer satisfaction survey agreed that the LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application.

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

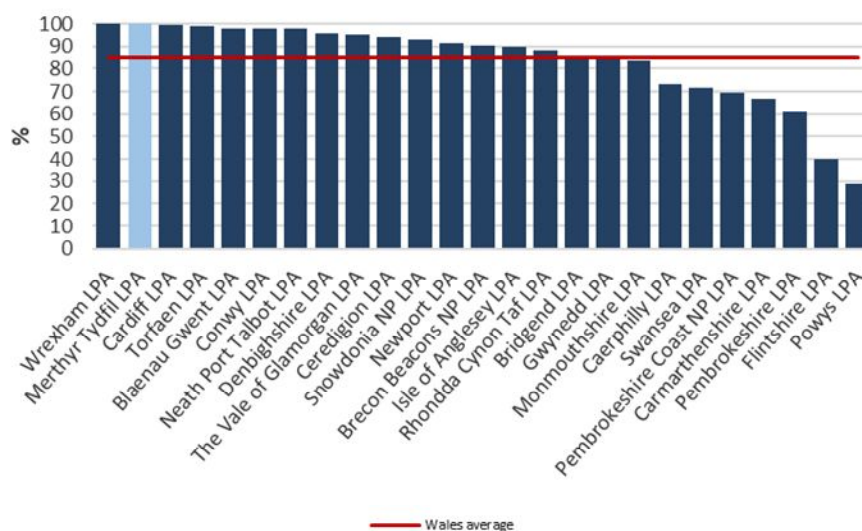
	%	
Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	Merthyr Tydfil LPA	Wales
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	74	62
They were listened to about their application	50	59

Enforcement

In 2016-17 we investigated 133 enforcement cases, which equated to 2.2 per 1,000 population. This compared to 1.9 enforcement cases investigated per 1,000 population across Wales. We took, on average, 10 days to investigate each enforcement case.

We investigated 100% of these enforcement cases within 84 days. Across Wales 85% were investigated within 84 days. Figure 10 shows the percentage of enforcement cases that were investigated within 84 days across all Welsh LPAs.

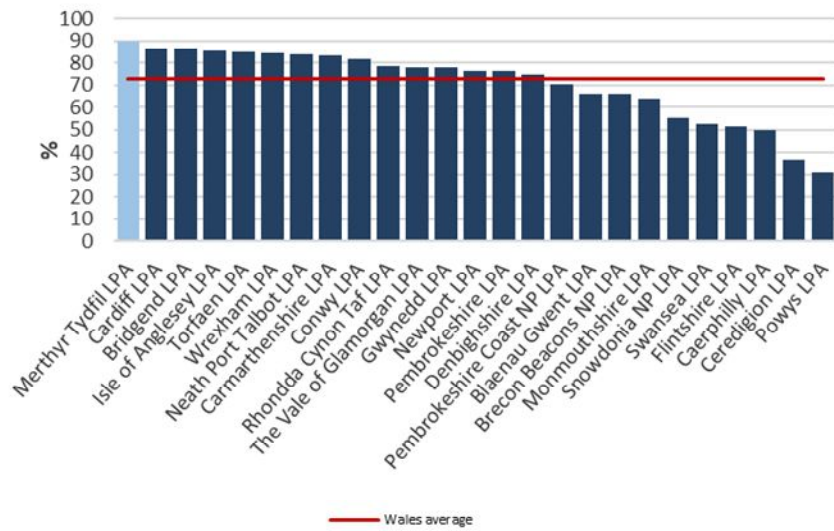
Figure 10: Percentage of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days, 2016-17



Over the same period, we resolved 129 enforcement cases, taking, on average, 89 days to resolve each case.

90% of this enforcement action was taken within 180 days from the start of the case. As Figure 11 shows this was the highest percentage in Wales.

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



ANNEX A - PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW

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

WALES AVERAGE	Merthyr Tydfil LPA LAST YEAR	Merthyr Tydfil LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
58	N/A	N/A
Yes	Yes	Yes
2.9	2.8	1.6
59	81	100
250	108	110

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+
Quality			
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+
Engagement			
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	Merthyr Tydfil LPA LAST YEAR	Merthyr Tydfil LPA THIS YEAR
87	97	99
76	48	56
11	0	4
61	71	83
0	0	0
Yes	No	No
Yes	Yes	Yes

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
Does the local planning authority's web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access, track their progress (and view their content)?	Yes	Partial	No
Enforcement			
Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percentage of enforcement cases where enforcement action is taken or a retrospective application received within 180 days from the start of the case (in those cases where it was expedient to enforce)?	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to take enforcement action	Not set	Not set	Not set

WALES AVERAGE	Merthyr Tydfil LPA LAST YEAR	Merthyr Tydfil LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
85	100	100
74	3	10
73	87	90
201	89	89

SECTION 1 – PLAN MAKING

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

Authority's performance	Yes
<p>The Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan (2006-2021) was adopted in May 2011 and remains extant.</p> <p>A replacement LDP is currently being prepared.</p>	

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

Authority's performance	N/A
N/A	

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

Authority's performance	Yes
Annual monitoring reports have been produced and submitted every October since the adoption of the LDP in May 2011.	

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

Authority's performance	1.6
<p>The 2017 Joint Housing Land Availability Study shows a housing land supply of 1.6 years, which was the same as last year.</p> <p>Using the past build rates calculation, the Council has a housing land supply of 5.04 years.</p> <p>The planning system allocates housing sites and assists their delivery through prompt decision making, however the implementation and rate of delivery is within the gift of the house builder and land owner.</p>	

SECTION 2 - EFFICIENCY

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

Authority's performance	100
<p>80% of major applications determined during this period were the subject of pre-application negotiations (1 application was refused which was not subject to a pre-application enquiry). This process enabled applications to be submitted with the necessary supporting reports, a scheme that had been agreed in principle and, if necessary, section 106 obligations established and a draft agreement prepared.</p> <p>Internal processes enable the application to be registered and transferred to the case officer within a short period of time (3 days). A planning committee is targeted which provides the best possible opportunity for the application to be determined in 8 weeks.</p> <p>This contributes to the reason why our performance is again this year way above the Welsh average of 60%. Continued refinement of processes has resulted in a 19% improvement on last year and demonstrates the high level of service provided.</p>	

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

Authority's performance	110
<p>In order to determine major applications as quickly as possible there needs to be commitment, trust and a good working relationship between the local planning authority (and other relevant lead officers of the Council) and the applicant and/or agent. A productive, informative, detailed and speedy pre-application process is an essential part of the process which improves both the quality of the application and speed of performance.</p> <p>Effective and consistent registration processes enable planning officers to start assessing the application (i.e. site visits etc) shortly after the application has been validated and registered.</p> <p>Since all major applications have to be reported to The Planning, Regulatory and Licensing Committee, the working relationship between officers and all Councillors (whether members of the committee or not) is open, honest and effective. This is reflected in the fact that all of the major applications reported to the Committee in 2016/17 were approved/refused in accordance with the officer recommendation.</p>	

These measures developed internally contribute to the reason why our performance is again this year way above the Welsh average. It is also pleasing to note the consistency with last year (i.e. 108 days).

Indicator	07. Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
More than 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Between 60% and 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Less than 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period

Authority's performance	99
<p>This 2% improvement since 2015/16 is impressive given the continued pressure on staff and resources due to budget pressures. The extremely high level of performance not only reflects the quality and commitment of planning officers and support staff but also their ability to work highly effectively as a team. The correlation between the longevity of enthusiastic and talented officers in these posts with the performance levels, is no co-incidence.</p> <p>The positive support and working relationship with all councillors cannot be underestimated. Their trust in the ability of officers to carry out their individual roles is fully recognised as an essential element of the department's success.</p> <p>The changes in legislation and the never ending endeavours to improve, necessitates changes to processes and procedures. The constant tweaks or larger alterations enable the level of performance reflected in the reported indicators.</p>	

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

Authority's performance	56
<p>Although an increase in the average number of days taken to determine an application since 2015/16 (i.e. 48), we still determine applications quicker than any other local planning authority in Wales. There is a strong commitment to provide the best service we can to our customers. This includes them getting a decision as quickly as possible. The emphasis is speedy validation and</p>	

registration in order to get an application to an officer as quickly as possible. The officer can then carry out a site visit, negotiate any changes and then make a recommendation.

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	4
<p>It should be noted that only 1 of the 26 applications determined by the Planning Committee was contrary to Officer recommendation. Furthermore, from 2015 – 17, 55 applications have been determined by the Planning Committee with only 1 (i.e. 1.8%) being contrary to officer recommendation. Amongst other things, this indicates the close and effective working relationship between members and officers and the commitment to the Local Development Plan.</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	83
<p>Only 1 appeal was allowed in 2016/17. This performance is an improvement on last year (71% of appeals dismissed) and significantly above the Welsh Average (61% of appeals dismissed).</p> <p>Of the 6 decision's that were appealed none were subject of a pre-application enquiry. This not only arguably indicates the usefulness of such enquiries to overcome objections/concerns but certainly reflects the strength of the LDP policies and the time (due to the consistency of processes and procedures) planning officers have to seek amendments to make applications acceptable.</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
<p>As was the case in 2015/16, there were no applications for costs in 2016/17.</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	No
<p>The Council’s Constitution does not currently allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee.</p> <p>A Councillor workshop was held during 2015/16 in order to respond to the WLGA consultation on Planning Committees, where the introduction of this was generally supported. The outcome of the consultation is awaited.</p> <p>It should also be noted that the loss of the lead officer in technical support combined with other departmental budget cuts has impacted significantly on the deliverability of this facility. These cuts have also impacted on the Democratic Service department particularly in terms of the provision of the necessary IT/other equipment and a welsh translator.</p>	

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

Authority’s performance	Yes
<p>A duty planning officer is available Monday to Friday to provide general planning advice both face to face and by telephone. Advice can be provided by a welsh speaking planning officer upon request.</p> <p>Customer feedback informs us that the ability to speak to a planning officer and to be able to contact the case officer is a priority.</p>	

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

Authority's performance	Yes
As pointed out above, all documents are available to view on-line.	

SECTION 5 – ENFORCEMENT

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

Authority's performance	100
<p>Merthyr Tydfil has two part-time Enforcement Officers therefore it is essential that they follow set timescales and robustly monitor the enforcement caseload.</p> <p>The size of the Development Control team necessitates an extremely close working relationship between all officers and support staff. The Enforcement Officer's attend the weekly team meetings which enables more complex cases to be discussed and a way forward to be agreed. This process, along with regular workload meetings ensures that enforcement cases can be investigated as quickly as possible.</p> <p>This contributes to the reason why our performance is 15% above the Welsh average.</p>	

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

Authority's performance	10
<p>Performance is significantly above the Welsh average 84 days. Although the average time taken to investigate enforcement cases has risen since last year (when it was 5 days), the figures confirm that, in terms of this indicator, Merthyr Tydfil is still an excellent performer.</p>	

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

Authority's performance	90
<p>As a result of all enforcement investigations, 15% result in the submission of a valid planning or other application. The Enforcement Officers have a pro-active approach to encourage the submission of applications which also involves helping applicants to submit valid applications.</p> <p>This level of performance is consistent with last year and contributes to the reason why our performance is the best in Wales.</p>	

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	89
<p>This performance is a reflection of all the processes and procedures already highlighted in section 5 and the emphasis on both individual and team performances. The performance is also consistent as it is identical to that in 2015/16.</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	Responses are complete
<p>This indicator provides information on how the Planning system supports economic development to ensure the delivery of development.</p> <p>The 588 sqm relates to applications on three separate sites for storage, offices and increase manufacturing floorspace.</p> <p>It should be noted however that it only records new build on allocated sites, and does not therefore pick up vacant buildings brought back into use etc.</p>	

Indicator	SD1. The floorspace (square metres) granted and refused planning permission for new economic development on allocated employment sites during the year.
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Granted (square metres)	
Authority's data	588

Refused (square metres)	
Authority's data	0

<p>This indicator provides information on how the Planning system supports economic development to ensure the delivery of development.</p> <p>The 588 sqm relates to applications P/16/0054 (erection of storage building), P/16/0126 (erection of offices) and P/16/0186 (erection of extension to existing unit).</p> <p>It should be noted however that it only records new build on allocated sites, and does not therefore pick up vacant buildings brought back into use etc.</p>	
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Indicator	SD2. Planning permission granted for renewable and low carbon energy development during the year.
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Granted permission (number of applications)	
Authority's data	3

Granted permission (MW energy generation)	
Authority's data	1

This relates to:

- a 0.9 MW turbine
- a 0.04 MW turbine
- a 0.15 MW turbine

Indicator	SD3. The number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year.
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Market housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	115

Affordable housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	65

The planning system facilitates the provision of market and affordable housing to meet local housing requirements.

36% of all dwellings granted planning permission during the year were affordable.

The AMR provides further detailed information on dwellings granted.

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

Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that did not meet all TAN 15 tests which were REFUSED permission on flood risk grounds	
Authority's data	0

Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that MET all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission	
Authority's data	12

Despite a significant amount of land in Merthyr Tydfil being within the floodplain, the data shows that advice is consistently being followed in accordance with TAN15 and PPW

Indicator	SD5. The area of land (ha) granted planning permission for new development on previously developed land and greenfield land during the year.
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Previously developed land (hectares)	
Authority's data	14

Greenfield land (hectares)	
Authority's data	5

Planning ensures (as far as possible) that previously developed land is used before greenfield sites.

The total amount of development permitted during this period was 19.37ha with 14ha of this total area permitted on previously developed land. This equates to 74% of development being permitted on previously developed land.

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

Open space gained (hectares)	
Authority's data	0

This indicator measures how the planning system protects existing facilities and provides new open spaces which provide recreational, environmental and amenity value to communities as well as contributing to the impact of climate change.

No protected open space has been lost.

The Council adopted an Open Space Strategy in 2016. This has proved useful for both pre-application discussions and during the planning application process. The detailed analysis contained within the Strategy has helped provide a solid evidence base to support the raising of objections to proposals that would otherwise entail the loss of open space and also to fulfil the requirement to provide equivalent alternative provision nearby.

Indicator	SD7. The total financial contributions (£) agreed from new development granted planning permission during the quarter for the provision of community infrastructure.
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Gained via Section 106 agreements (£)	
Authority's data	52, 170

Gained via Community Infrastructure Levy (£)	
Authority's data	0

This indicator measures the level of financial contributions agreed for the provision of community infrastructure which supports sustainable development.

£52, 170 worth of S106 contributions were secured from residential developments (new build and conversion) during the reporting period.

The Council did not receive any CIL income during the reporting period.

