

MERTHYR TYDFIL COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL



ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) **For the period** **1st April 2017 – 31st March 2018**

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PREFACE

I am delighted to introduce Merthyr Tydfil LPA's Annual Performance Report for the period 2017-18. In times of such austerity it is imperative that the Planning and Countryside division of Merthyr Tydfil ensures that processes and procedures are in place to provide an efficient, robust, flexible and consistent Planning Service. The service is committed to encouraging and managing economic growth in appropriate locations. In working closely with our communities and stakeholders we can ensure that our fabulous cultural and environmental assets are protected and therefore form an essential role in the attracting both businesses and visitors whilst also boosting the County Boroughs population.

It is clear from the evidence within this report and as captured on the 'value of planning' dashboard that the performance of the Planning Service is undoubtedly having a positive impact on delivering these objectives. I am delighted that in the vast majority of the indicators Merthyr Tydfil's Planning Service performance is excellent and is consistently year on year well above the Welsh Average.

Councillor Kevin Gibbs - Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside

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1.0 VALUE OF PLANNING IN MERTHYR TYDFIL (2017/2018)

Planning service key data



11 FTE jobs in planning service



377 applications handled



£0.3m collected in fees

LDP Land Safeguarded



5,044 ha Special Landscape Area

117 ha Green Wedge

3,423 ha Local Nature Reserve



154 ha open space

5,880 ha minerals



Residential

150 ha



Retail & leisure

9 ha



Commercial

37 ha



Waste

0 ha

LDP Value

£1.3m uplift value

(based on land allocated for whole plan period)

Value adding policies ✓ 56%

Applications

8 major

234 minor

136 other



0 DCOs dealt with

0 DNS dealt with

4 LBC applications granted

9 refusals appealed

0 judicial reviews

Decisions

✓ 354 approvals (94%)

x 23 refusals (6%)

46 subject to pre app

Refusals

■ Delegated ■ Committee

Approvals

■ Delegated ■ Committee

Permissions

Permissions

■ Consistent with local plan
■ Departures from local plan



Residential

270 units

£8.4m uplift value

16% affordable



Retail & leisure

3,602 m²

£0.2m uplift value



Tourism

117 bedspaces

19 self catering units



Commercial

6,950 m²

£0.1m uplift value



Renewables & other

1 MW

0 tonnes waste

0 tonnes minerals

0 ha remediation

0 ha formal open space

Contributions

Section 106 income

£0.2m

Breakdown



CIL income



£27,000 total

Completions



Residential

80 units

29% affordable

£9.9m uplift value

£0.1m council tax



Retail & leisure

6,399 m²

£6.1m uplift value

102 gross FTE jobs

£0.1m business rates p.a



Commercial

396 m²

£0.2m uplift value

5 gross FTE jobs

£0.0m business rates p.a



Renewables

0 MW

£0 community benefit



Tourism

0 bedspaces 0 FTE jobs

0 self catering units

Enforcement

145 enforcement complaints

14 planning contraventions

4 enforcement notices

0 breach of condition notices

0 stop notices

3 section 125 notices



Wider indicators



£932 spend on consultancy fees



9 internal consultees

0 Energy statements

0 EqlAs

0 Environmental statements



£10,000 health benefits of affordable housing provision p.a



£30,000 recreational benefits from open space created p.a

0 Travel plans

0 HIAs

2 Transport assessments

In 2017/18 the total value of planning was

£25.5m

SOURCES: Planning function outputs (LPA survey), Land and property value data (JLL estimates), business rates valuations (Valuation Office Agency), employment densities (English Homes & Communities Agency), Council tax rates (Stats Wales), Health benefits from Affordable Housing (Department for Communities and Local Government Appraisal Guide, based on various studies outlined in appraisal databook), Community benefit from renewables (Renewables UK Cymru). Some of the calculations require high level assumptions to convert between units/m2/ha. Where possible, benchmarks have been employed otherwise otherwise reasonable assumptions have been used. Business rate, council tax and gross FTE job estimates based on assumption of 100% occupancy and do not factor in any displacement. Numbers of applications and decisions are unlikely to match up as these can take place in different financial years for any given application. 'Value adding policies' refers to the proportion of policies the team has identified as adding 'intangible value' that are included in local plans. Approvals and refusals do not sum to 100% due to applications carry across 5 years. The total value of planning only incorporates some of the metrics presented in the dashboard.



ARUP

JLL

2.0 CONTEXT

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 Merthyr Tydfil has a population of approximately 59,953 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

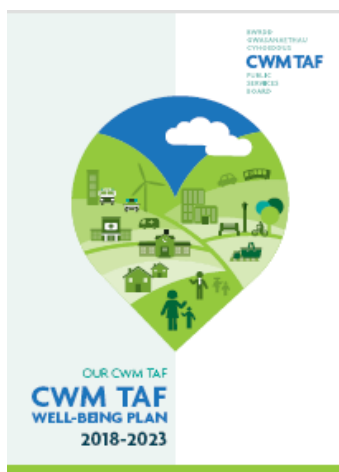
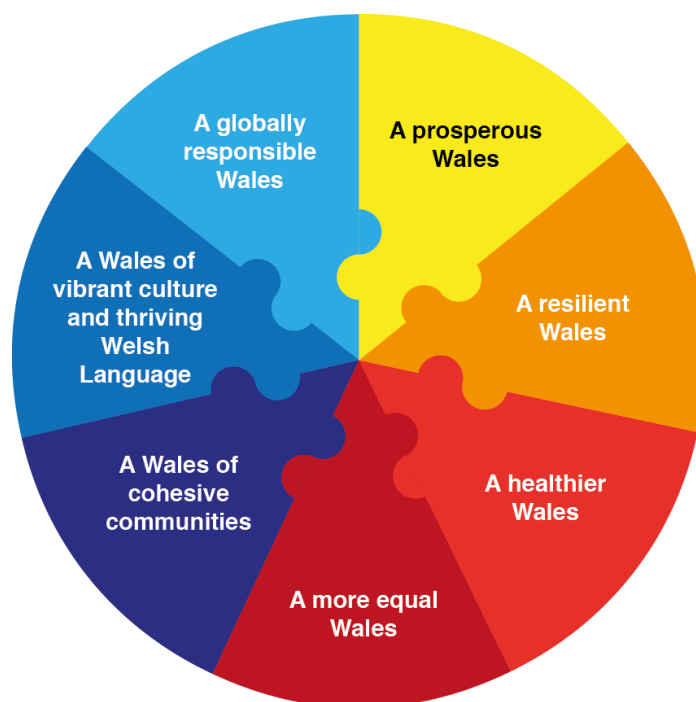
- 2.3 The Merthyr Tydfil Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted in May 2011 and covers the period from 2006 – 2021. The Replacement Merthyr Tydfil LDP (2016 – 2031) is currently being prepared.
- 2.4 The Preferred Strategy was consulted upon during the summer of 2017 and consultation on the deposit plan ended in Sept 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

- 2.5 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’.

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



2.7 In accordance with the Well Being of Future Generations Act, a Wellbeing Plan has been produced by Cwm Taf (PSB). The ambition of the board is to *'work as One Public Service, with communities, to support the development of resilient communities that are informed, connected, active and resourced and have the ability to adapt and influence change and improve well-being'*.

2.8 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.

2.9 Focus on the Future (Wellbeing in our Community) 2017 -2022, 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)

2.10 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

2.11 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.



2.12 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 deposit local plan 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.

2.13 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

2.14 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.

2.15 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 adopted 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

2.16 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.

2.17 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.

2.18 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 too 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 59,953 in 2017, an increase of 200 people from the previous year.

3.0 PLANNING SERVICE

Setting within the wider organisation

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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

- 3.5 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 senior officers have left the organisation recently which has resulted in knowledge vacuums.

Operating budget

Table 1: Projected and actual income

Planning application fee income	2012-13	2013 - 14	2014 - 15	2015 - 16	2016 - 17	2017 - 18
Projected Income	£297,470	£314,470	£314,470	£192,000	£192,000	£192,000
Actual Income	£315,059	£160,710	£180,000	£266,043	171,875	£234,101

- 3.6 Over the last five 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.

- 3.7 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.
- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 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

- 3.10 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 continues to impact on the ability of the service to improve processes and procedures through enhanced use of Information Technology. In 2017 the Group Leader Policy and Implementation resigned. Following a successful interview process, the service seconded (for 2 years) an experienced senior policy officer from the Vale of Glamorgan to lead the planning policy team. It was critical to employ an experienced policy officer (who had up-to-date knowledge of taking a LDP through the examination process) to ensure essential timescales and the correct background information and processes were in place. The ultimate aim being the efficient and effective delivery of a replacement LDP. In late 2017 the service also lost the Design, Heritage and Conservation Officer. Although now replaced, the absence of this post in the early months of 2018 had a significant impact on the workload of planning officers.
- 3.11 The Planning & Countryside service (excluding Building Control) now consists of 15 full time staff (including the Head of Service, two group leaders and 2 support staff), 2 part time staff and 2 part time job share enforcement officers (equivalent to 1 post)
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 The Planning Policy & Implementation team comprises of the Group Leader (seconded for 2 years), 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.

- 3.14 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. Conservation Officer and Ecologist) provide short seminars to enable staff to enhance their knowledge of specific topic areas.
- 3.15 The department is also represented on regional groups (e.g. the South Wales Development Managers Group and the South Wales Enforcement Group). These groups provide excellent opportunities for sharing experiences/knowledge, problem solving and undertaking tasks to improve/change specific aspects of the planning process. The ultimate aim is to provide consistency and make the planning process more efficient and easier to engage for all users. The groups often invite specialist officers of various organisations (e.g. from Welsh Water, Natural Resources Wales, Welsh Government, Planning Inspectorate etc.) to the meetings in order to discuss specific topic areas in an attempt to find solutions to existing problems.
- 3.16 Development Control officers have also learnt and adapted their skills to take account of the lack of certain specialist officers e.g. Urban Design Officer, Tree Officer etc. within the Authority.

4.0 LOCAL STORY

Workload

- 4.1 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.

Table 2 – Applications received/determined and 8-week determination figures.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Applications received	336	455	387	377
Applications determined	308	385	362	323
% within 8 weeks	93%	97%	99%	100%

- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 The performance levels, in terms of the speed of determining planning applications, have increased yearly since 2014/15. More importantly, the consistency in the level of performance

is evident from the figures shown in table 2. Performance has continued to be well above the Welsh Average, and in all of the quarters in 2017/18 Merthyr Tydfil were first in the Welsh Government Development Management Quarterly Survey. Statutory and non-statutory pre-application enquiries have also impacted workload (see Table 3). 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.

Table 3 – Pre-application enquiries (received)

	2017/18
Statutory	48
Non-statutory	27

- 4.4 The 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.
- 4.5 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 2017/18 resulted in the submission of a planning or other application. This is the same percentage as the previous year.
- 4.6 The LDP was adopted in May 2011, Annual Monitoring Reports (AMR) have been submitted to Welsh Government in each of the years following adoption.
- 4.7 The service priorities and local pressures are as follows:

Service Priorities 2018/19

- To review the pre-application advice service.
- To continue to be in the top quartile of best performing LPA's in terms of determining applications within 8 weeks.
- To ensure 70% of enforcement cases are investigated in 84 days or less.
- To improve the website experience for customers.

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.
- Although the new administration has a majority, it is very slender. This leads to a degree of uncertainty in the decision making process particularly if not all Councillors (of the leading party) attend Committee.
- The loss of knowledge and staff in the Engineering and Highway section which impacts on the

quality and timing of responses to pre-application enquiries and planning applications.

Performance Framework

- 4.8 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.
- 4.9 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*
- 4.10 This indicator (i) 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
- 4.11 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**.
- 4.12 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.
- 4.13 With regard to (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. However, it should be noted that, following the 2017 local election, Merthyr Tydfil now has a new administration. The new Independent administration clearly has its own policies and priorities and to date there has been no desire to change the current committee procedure. More importantly, nobody raised this as an issue in the response to the customer survey carried out. However, it is still considered pertinent to await the outcome of the WLGA consultation before steps are taken to amend the Council's constitution to allow public speaking.

5.0 WHAT SERVICE USERS THINK

- 5.1 In 2017-18 we conducted a customer satisfaction survey aimed at assessing the views of people that had received a planning application decision during the year.

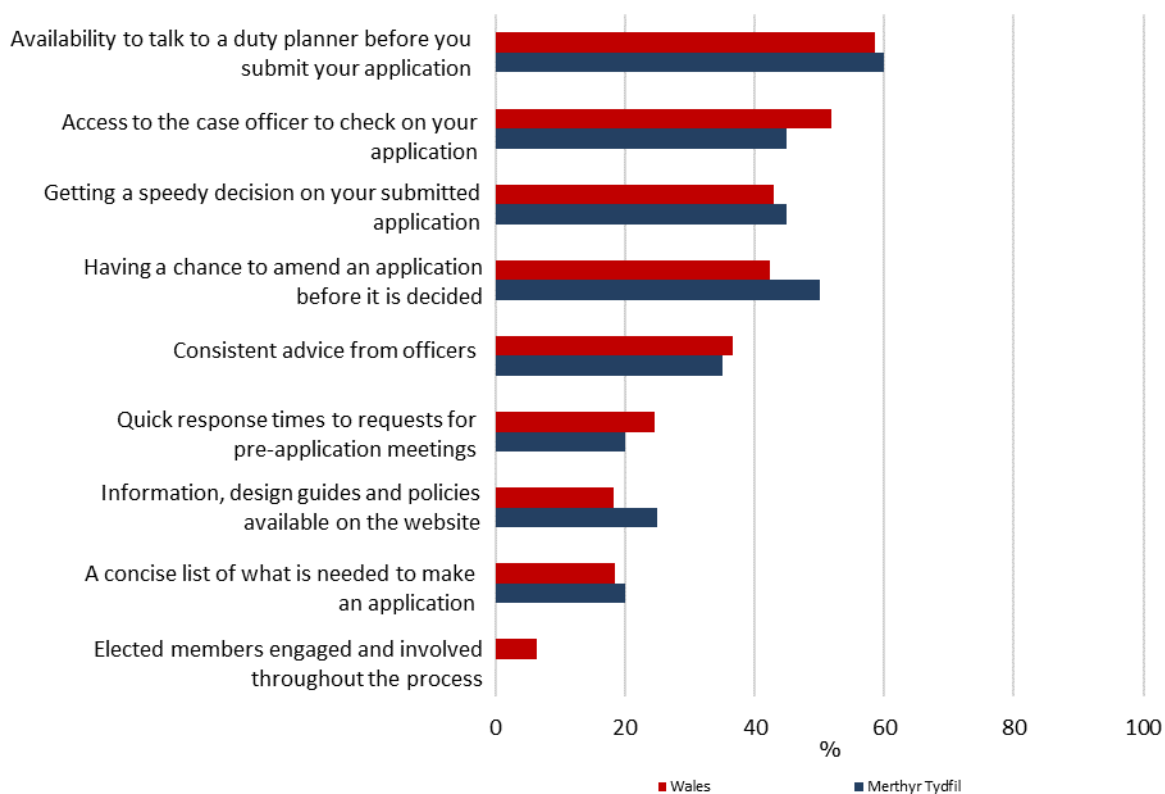
- 5.2 The survey was sent to 140 people, 14% of whom submitted a whole or partial response. The majority of responses (55%) were from local agents. 35% were from members of the public. 5% of respondents had their most recent planning application refused.
- 5.3 We asked respondents whether they agreed 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.
- 5.4 Table 4 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 4: Percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement, 2017-18

Respondents who agreed that:	Merthyr Tydfil LPA %	Wales %
The LPA applies its planning rules fairly and consistently	63	55
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	72	60
The LPA gives help throughout, including with conditions	53	52
The LPA responded promptly when they had questions	84	62
They were listened to about their application	72	60
They were kept informed about their application	65	52
They were satisfied overall with how the LPA handled their application	80	63

- 5.4 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. Interestingly, this was also the most popular choice in the previous two years. We feel that this service benefits both the customers and officers and is an essential part of the overall planning experience that is provided by Merthyr Tydfil. Some people just prefer face to face contact and particularly in planning, which is very visual, it is far easier to point to the relevant part of a plan and/or map on a desk rather than trying to explain or discuss an issue on-line or over the telephone.

Figure 1: Characteristics of a good planning service, 2017-18



5.5 Comments received include:

- “A pre-application advice was very quick and helpful.”
- “Easily the most straightforward local planning authority to deal with in Wales. Very helpful planning department from administration through to Head of Planning with a down to earth approach sadly missing in many council planning departments.”
- "Merthyr are much better than the surrounding councils. But one is aware that the whole process is under-funded and grinding to halt across the whole UK. The tick-box mentality is appalling, and much time and cost is wasted instead of talking directly and positively.”

6.0 OUR PERFORMANCE 2017-18

6.1 This section details our performance in 2017-18. It considers both the Planning Performance Framework indicators and other available data to help paint a comprehensive picture of performance. Where appropriate we make comparisons between our performance and the all Wales picture.

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

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

Plan making

6.3 As at 31 March 2018, 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 2018. This document has been prepared.

6.4 During the APR period we had 1.6 years of housing land supply identified, making us one of 18 Welsh LPAs without the required 5 years supply.

Efficiency

6.5 In 2017-18 we determined 323 planning applications, each taking, on average, 50 days (7 weeks) to determine. This compares to an average of 81 days (12 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, 2017-18

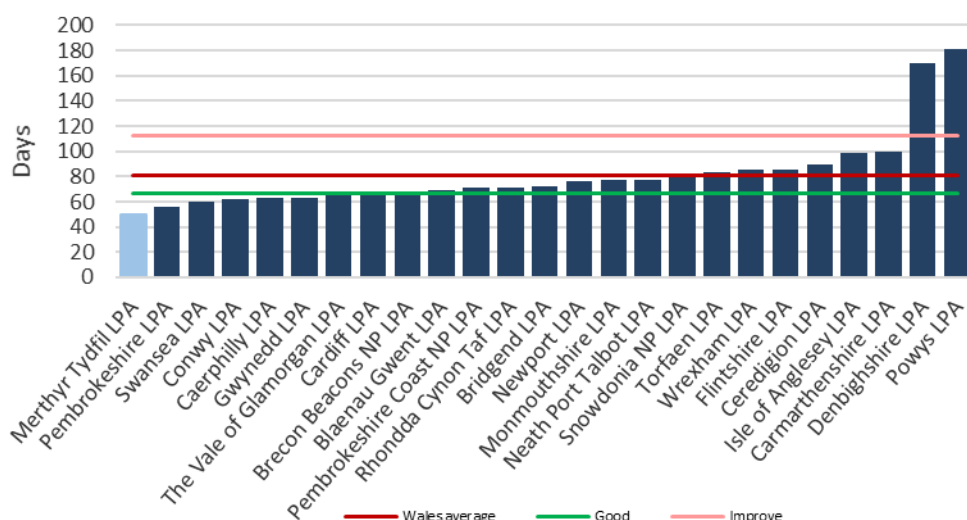
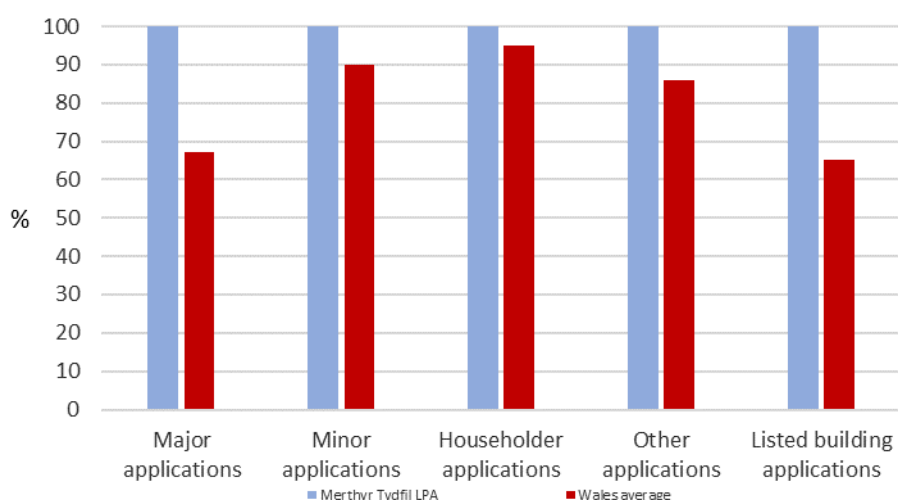


Table 5 – Average time taken (days) to determine applications in Merthyr Tydfil in the last 3 years

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Average Time taken (days)	48	56	50

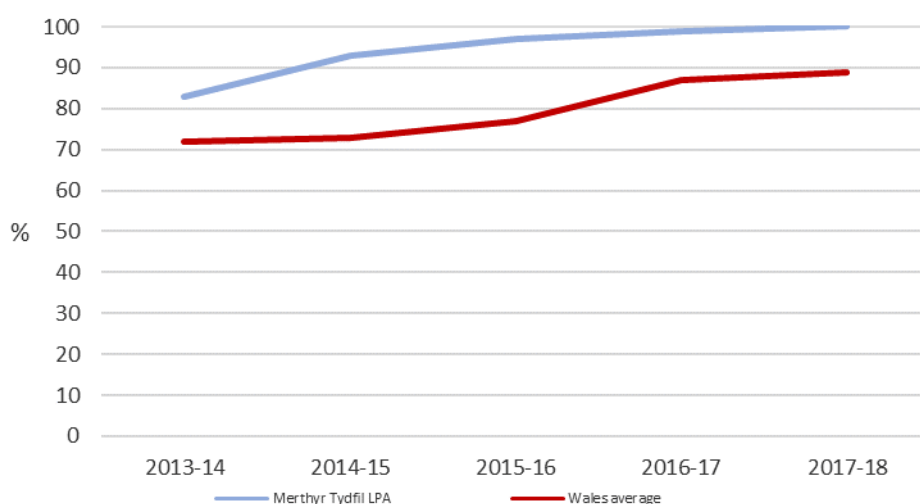
- 6.6 Table 5 illustrates the consistency in the speed of determining applications in the past 3 years. It should also be noted that in each year the average determination time equates to, or is less than, the statutory 8 week period (i.e. determination period required by legislation).
- 6.7 100% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. This was the highest percentage in Wales and we were one of 22 LPAs that had reached the 80% target.
- 6.8 Figure 3 shows the percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales across the main types of application for our LPA and Wales. It shows that we determined 100% of minor applications within the required timescales. We also determined 100% of Listed Building Consent applications within the required timescales.

Figure 3: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales, by type, 2017-18



- 6.9 Between 2016-17 and 2017-18, as Figure 4 shows, the percentage of planning applications we determined within the required timescales increased from 99%. Wales also saw an increase this year.

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



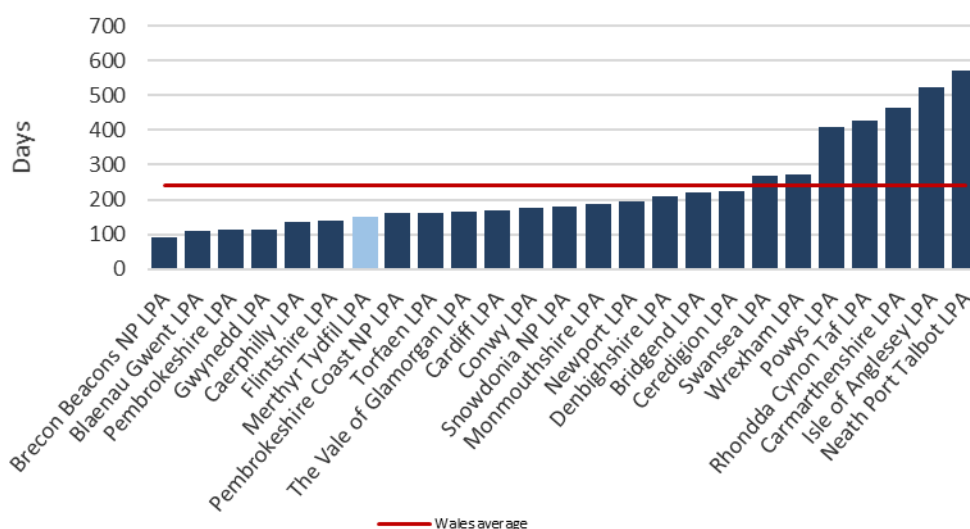
6.10 Over the same period:

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

Major applications

6.11 We determined 8 major planning applications in 2017-18, none of which were subject to an EIA. Each application took, on average, 149 days (21 weeks) to determine. As Figure 5 shows, this was shorter than the Wales average of 240 days (34 weeks).

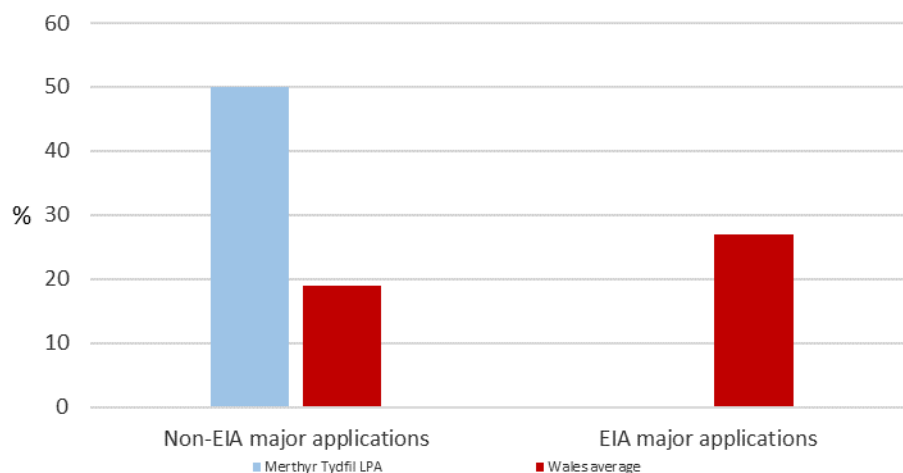
Figure 5: Average time (days) taken to determine a major application, 2017-18



6.12 100% of these major applications were determined within the required timescales, compared to 69% across Wales.

6.13 Figure 6 shows the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales by the type of major application. 50% of our 'standard' major applications i.e. those not requiring an EIA, were determined within the required timescales during the year.

Figure 6: Percentage of Major applications determined within the required timescales during the year, by type, 2017-18

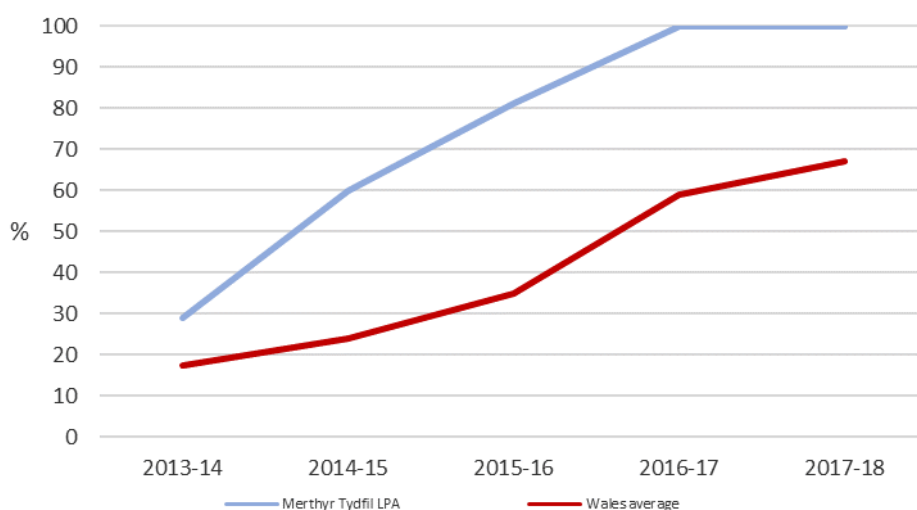


6.14 In addition, we determined 4 major applications that were subject to a PPA in the required timescales during the year.

6.15 Since 2016-17 the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales had stayed the same at 100%. 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.

6.16 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



6.17 Over the same period:

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

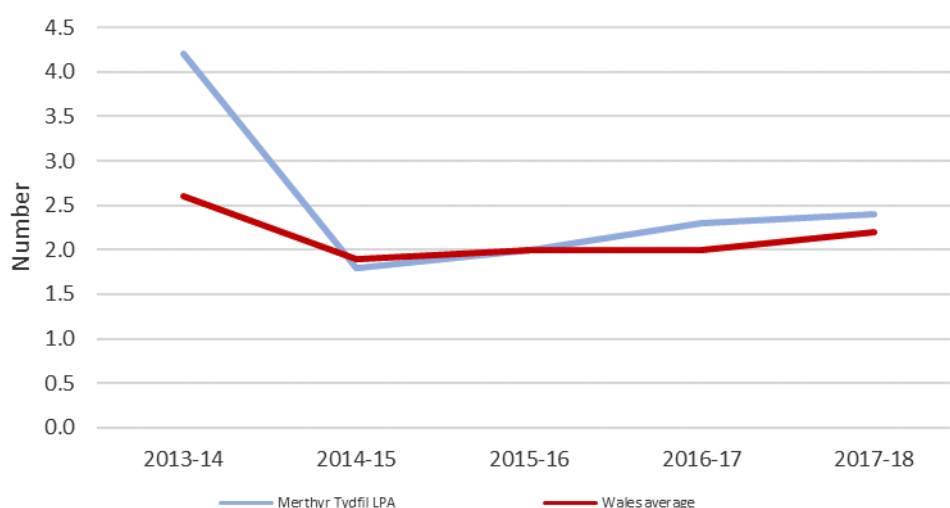
Quality

6.18 In 2017-18, our Planning Committee made 16 planning application decisions during the year, which equated to 5% of all planning applications determined. Across Wales 7% of all planning application decisions were made by planning committee.

6.19 0% of these member-made decisions went against officer advice. This compared to 9% of member-made decisions across Wales. This equated to 0% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice; 0.6% across Wales.

6.20 In 2017-18 we received 9 appeals against our planning decisions, which equated to 2.4 appeals for every 100 applications received. Across Wales 2.2 appeals were received for every 100 applications. Figure 8 shows how the volume of appeals received has changed since 2016-17 and how this compares to Wales.

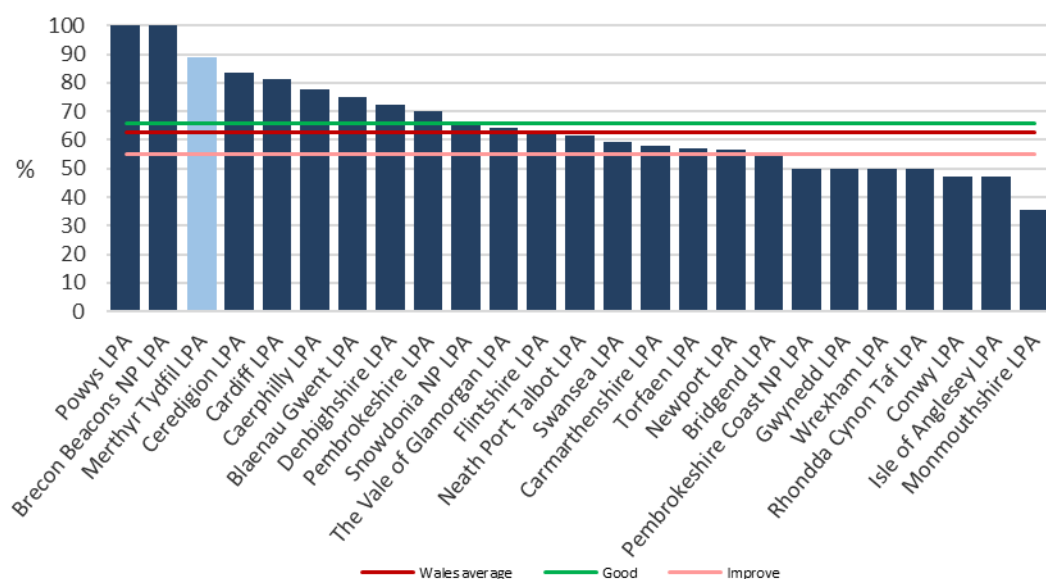
Figure 8: Number of appeals received per 100 planning applications



6.21 Over the same period the percentage of planning applications approved decreased from 80% to 78%.

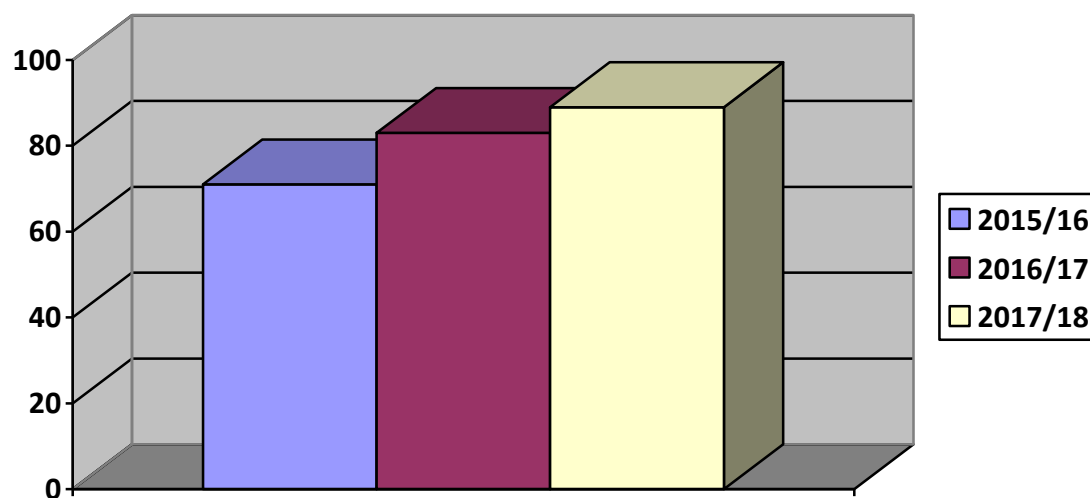
6.22 Of the 9 appeals that were decided during the year, 89% were dismissed. As Figure 9 shows, this was the third highest percentage of appeals dismissed in Wales and we were one of 10 LPAs that reached the 66% target.

Figure 9: Percentage of appeals dismissed, 2017-18



6.23 During 2017-18 we had no applications for costs at a section 78 appeal upheld.

Table 6 – Percentage of appeals dismissed (Merthyr Tydfil)



6.24 Table 6 indicates the percentage of appeals that have been dismissed following Merthyr Tydfil's decision to refuse an application. In the 3 years since 2015/16, 22 appeals have been determined by the Planning Inspectorate with only 4 being allowed. Therefore, in the last 3 years, 82% of appeals have been dismissed. This is well above the Welsh Average and results in Merthyr Tydfil being one of the best performing local planning authorities in terms of favourable appeal decisions.

Engagement

6.25 We are:

- the only LPA that did not allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee; and
- one of 21 LPAs that had an online register of planning applications.

6.26 As Table 7 shows, 72% of respondents to our 2017-18 customer survey agreed that the LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application.

Table 7: Feedback from our 2017-18 customer survey

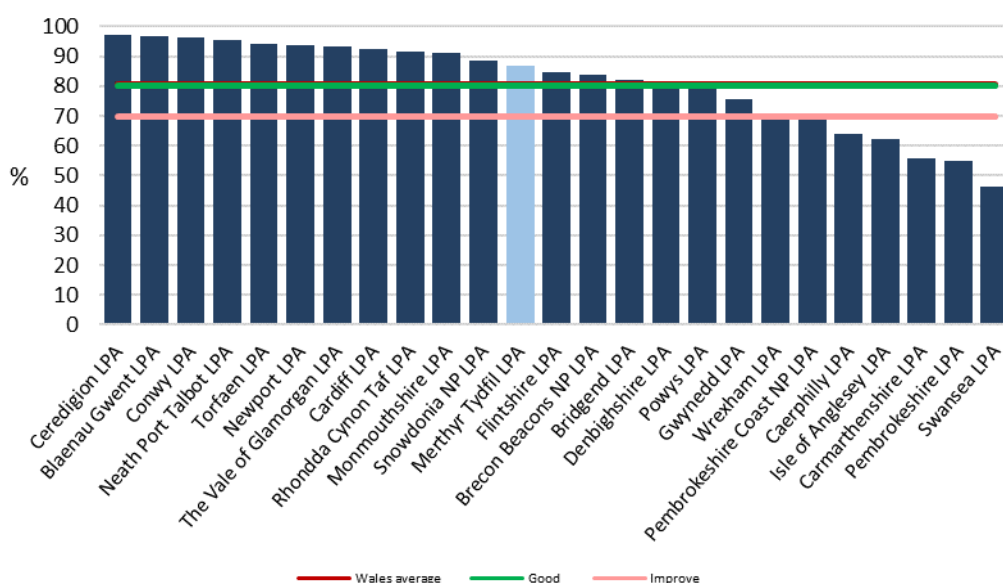
Respondents who agreed that:	Merthyr Tydfil LPA %	Wales %
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	72	60
They were listened to about their application	72	60

Enforcement

6.27 In 2017-18 we investigated 131 enforcement cases, which equated to 2.2 per 1,000 population. This compared to 2.0 enforcement cases investigated per 1,000 population across Wales.

6.28 We investigated 87% of these enforcement cases within 84 days. Across Wales 81% 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, 2017-18



6.29 The average time taken to pursue positive enforcement action was 82 days.

APPENDIX 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	>60	50-59.9	<50
Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	>80	70-79.9	<70
Average time taken to determine all applications in days	<67	67-111	112+
Percentage of Listed Building Consent applications determined within time periods required	Not set	Not set	Not set
Quality			
Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	<5	5-9	9+
Percentage of appeals dismissed	>66	55-65.9	<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	Yes		No

WALES AVERAGE	Merthyr Tydfil LPA LAST YEAR	Merthyr Tydfil LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
67	N/A	N/A
Yes	Yes	Yes
7 of 25	1.6	1.6
67.4	100	100
240.1	110	149
88.5	99	100
80.7	56	50
65.4	-	100
8.6	4	0
62.6	83	89
0	0	0
Yes	No	No

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
address the Planning Committee?			
Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	Yes		No
Does the local planning authority's web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access, track their progress (and view their content)?	Yes	Partial	No
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	>80	70-79.9	<70
Average time taken to take positive enforcement action	Not set	Not set	Not set

WALES AVERAGE	Merthyr Tydfil LPA LAST YEAR	Merthyr Tydfil LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes
80.6	100	87
184.6	89	82

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 so as to ensure continuous plan coverage.</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
The LDP is being progressed in line with the Delivery Agreement.	

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"
More than 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Between 50% and 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Less than 50% of applications are determined within the statutory time period

Authority's performance	100
88% of major applications determined during this period were the subject of pre-application negotiations. 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. Given that 50% of major applications were determined after 56 days (hence 50% were subject to an agreement to extend the period of time to determine the application), it is clear that there has been a positive working relationship between officers and agents/applicants/developers through this part of the development process.	

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	149
This is an increase from last year (99 days), however, the figure is somewhat skewed by a two applications. These applications were determined in 423 and 305 days and the delay was at the request of the applicants/agents. Interestingly, one of the applications (for residential development) was eventually refused and dismissed at appeal. If these applications were not included, the average time to determine major applications would be 59 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 70% and 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Less than 70% of applications are determined within the statutory time period

Authority's performance	100
This is a further improvement since last year (99%). This consistent performance (over the past year) is a reflection not only of the commitment and dedication of officers and support staff but	

also the positive relationship they have with applicants/agents, Councillors, consultees and others. It also highlights the importance of efficient processes and procedures and the fantastic teamwork that is prevalent within the Development Control section. The willingness of planning officers, enforcement officers and support staff to help each other out in time of need is of paramount importance to the smooth running of the section and department as a whole.

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	50
This is an extremely pleasing statistic. It indicates an improvement since last year (56 days). More importantly, it is the third year in a row that Merthyr Tydfil has been the best performing local planning authority in terms of the average time taken to determine all applications. Clearly, this figure cannot be viewed in isolation but when considered alongside appeal decisions (i.e. percentage dismissed in the last 3 years – 82%) and the overall positive comments received as a result of the customer satisfaction surveys, it indicates the service is performing consistently at a particularly high level.	

Indicator	08a. Percentage of Listed Building Consent 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
This performance undoubtedly indicates the importance of having an in house Conservation Officer. It also shows the close and essential working relationship between planning officers and the Conservation Officer. The importance of protecting and enhancing the heritage assets of Merthyr Tydfil means that pre-application enquiries and Listed Building applications must be considered quickly and the advice is helpful.	

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	0
<p>As highlighted in the main body of the report, following the elections in 2017, Merthyr Tydfil had a change of administration. This resulted in a significant proportion of new Councillors, some of which form part of the Planning Committee. It was therefore imperative that the correct training and support was in place to ensure the smooth running of the Committee. This performance indicates that the members of the Committee have embraced the planning process and supported the officer recommendations. The extremely helpful and informative dialogue between officers and Councillors should not be underestimated in aiding this level of performance.</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	89
<p>Only 1 appeal was allowed in 2017/18 and in the last 3 years only 4 out of 22 appeals have been allowed (i.e. 82% of appeals dismissed). Of the 9 decisions that were appealed this year, four were subject of a pre-application enquiry. In all cases, the applicants failed to take into consideration the advice that was provided by officers. This indicates the usefulness of such enquiries to overcome objections/concerns. It also reflects the strength of the LDP policies.</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 the previous two years, there were no applications for costs.</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>As highlighted in the main body of the report, 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. However, it should be noted that, following the 2017 local election, Merthyr Tydfil now has a new administration. The new Independent administration clearly has its own policies and priorities and to date there has been no desire to change the current committee procedure. More importantly, nobody raised this as an issue in the response to the customer survey carried out. However, it is still considered pertinent to await the outcome of the WLGA consultation before steps are taken to amend the Council’s constitution to allow public speaking.</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 again 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”
More than 80% of enforcement cases are investigated in 84 days	Between 70% and 80% of enforcement cases are investigated in 84 days	Less than 70% of enforcement cases are investigated in 84 days

Authority’s performance	87
The definition of this indicator has changed since last year and as such cannot be compared. However, performance is still above the Welsh average. The service only has 1 full time enforcement officer post (made up of 2 job share officers). Therefore, communication between both enforcement officers and the remainder of the team is essential.	

Indicator	16. Average time taken to take positive enforcement action	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority’s performance	82
This is a new indicator therefore comparison cannot be made. Nevertheless, it is still considered that this level of performance is very good and is helped by the Enforcement Officer’s attending 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 resolved as quickly as possible. The working relationship, in particular communication between the two job share officers ensures consistency, speed of decision and the ability to have a grasp of each other’s workload.	

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.

Indicator	SD1. The floorspace (square metres) granted and refused planning permission for new economic development on allocated employment sites during the year.
------------------	--

Granted (square metres)	
Authority's data	5638

Refused (square metres)	
Authority's data	0

This indicator provides information on how the Planning system supports economic development to ensure the delivery of development.

The 5638m² relates to applications P/16/0309 (Provision of 22 storage units and retention of boundary fence and gate), P/17/0093 (Erection of salt barn, vehicle wash-down facility and a bunded saturator/mixing plant. The provision of storage areas, external lighting, drainage, hardstanding areas, vehicle turning area with vehicular access), P/17/0283 (Erection of office building and erection of 9 no. industrial units with associated service road, parking and service yard area), and P/17/0284 (Erection of storage building).

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.

Indicator	SD2. Planning permission granted for renewable and low carbon energy development during the year.
------------------	--

Granted permission (number of applications)	
Authority's data	1

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

This relates to a 0.99 MW biomass facility.

Indicator	SD3. The number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year.
------------------	--

Market housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	227

Affordable housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	43

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

16% of all dwellings granted planning permission during the year were affordable.

Indicator	SD4. Planning permission granted and refused for development in C1 and C2 floodplain areas during the year.
------------------	--

Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) which were GRANTED permission	
Authority's data	138

Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) which were REFUSED permission on flood risk grounds	
Authority's data	0

The majority of the dwellings granted permission (135 units) were included in planning application P/17/0345 (Former Merthyr Vale Colliery).

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.
------------------	---

Previously developed land (hectares)	
Authority's data	33

Greenfield land (hectares)	
Authority's data	6

The total amount of development permitted during this period was 38.62ha with 32.98ha of this total area permitted on previously developed land. This equates to 85% 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.
------------------	---

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 requirements 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	95,000

Gained via Community Infrastructure Levy (£)	
Authority's data	27,000

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

£95,000 worth of S106 contributions were secured from residential developments (new build and conversion) during the reporting period.

Additionally, the Council agreed £27,000 of CIL during the reporting period, resulting in a total of £122,000 of financial contributions agreed.