

Governance & Audit Committee

15 July 2022

Audit Wales: Review of Planning Services – Carmarthenshire County Council

Recommendations / key decisions required:

To note the progress made by Carmarthenshire County Council in response to the Audit Wales recommendations on planning services in Carmarthenshire (July 2021)

Reasons:

Audit Wales undertook the review of Carmarthenshire County Council's planning services following their Assurance and Risk work had identified the service as a potential risk. It was agreed that Governance & Audit would be updated on progress quarterly. The last report received by the committee was presented on 17 December 2021.

Relevant scrutiny committee to be consulted: N/A

Cabinet Decision Required: N/A

Council Decision Required: N/A

CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Cllr. Ann Davies

Directorate:

Environment

Name of Head of Service:

Rhodri Griffiths, Head of Place and Sustainability.

Report Authors:

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The Audit Wales review sought to answer the question: Is the planning service meeting its own objectives, and supporting the Council in the delivery of its overall objectives?

Overall, Audit Wales found that: Significant and long-standing performance issues in the planning service need to be urgently addressed to help support delivery of the Council's ambitions. They came to this conclusion because:

- the Council's current arrangements for determining major planning applications need strengthening to help it achieve its regeneration ambitions;
- long-standing, significant performance issues in development management and planning enforcement are undermining effective service delivery; and
- the Council needs to urgently review its performance and service improvement arrangements for its planning service to better serve its customers.

The report included 17 key recommendations for the Council to address, these are included in the Audit Wales report and action plan. The attached report provides a detailed update up until the end of June 2022 in response to the Audit Wales recommendations and the agreed actions and seeks to provide assurance to the Governance & Audit Committee that significant progress has been made over the last 12 months.

In summary, as of 28 June 2022, 15 of the AW recommendations have been completed. Of 49 sub actions which underpin the response to the AW recommendations, 47 actions have been completed.

A further two relating to the development of a planning and enforcement charter, are currently being developed with a view to completion in the summer of 2022.

At the end of the financial year 2021/2022 annual Planning performance standards set by the Welsh Government have been exceeded for the first time;

- PAM/018 Percentage of all planning applications determined in time. Cumulative 12 month figure - **80.4%** (WG target 80%)
- PAM/019 Percentage of planning appeals dismissed. Cumulative 12 month figure - **75%** (WG target 70%)

Quarter 1 performance standards for 2022 indicate that progress has further improved to outperform the standards set by the Welsh Government.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

YES

1. Carmarthenshire response and action plan

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report:

Signed: Rhodri Griffiths Head of Place and Sustainability

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO

Legal

Amendment to the Scheme of Delegation and the Planning Protocols were agreed by the Council as part of the proposals that will assist with improving performance of the Planning Division in February 2022. The council approved the Enforcement Statement in March 2022.

Finance

There are financial implications with actions taken to address the recommendations of the Audit Wales report. These are being managed within current budget. Financial implications identified relating to the undetermined planning application that were outside of the allocated 8-week time currently stand at £534k down from £755k in 2021.

ICT

Work is being undertaken to identify improvements that can be made to the Planning Services main ICT back-office system, Arcus Global. This work has been prioritised and taken forward by staff within the Place and Sustainability, ICT & Corporate Policy Division.

Risk Management

Risk has been identified from not addressing the Recommendations within the Audit Wales report and the Corporate Risk Register has been updated to articulate these Risks. Risk profiles have been downgraded from substantial /probable to moderate/ possible as a result of the progression of actions taken to address the recommendations.

Staffing

There have been staffing implications relating to the implementation of the actions to address the Audit Wales recommendation. Staff have been appointed into funded vacant posts in the last 6 months amounting to approximately 30% of the service's total workforce. The division is currently going through a structural review to regularise the temporary reorganisation put in place to respond to the recommendations, provide future opportunity for the development and progression of staff and in light of the department's new Sustainability responsibilities. Recruiting of experienced professional staff remains challenging across the whole planning sector, however the department has been successful in attracting new experienced professional staff in enforcement and ecology. Staff well-being is critical to maintain service improvement and everything is being done to support staff as the department reshapes its service.

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below.

Signed: Rhodri Griffiths, Head of Place and Sustainability

1. Scrutiny Committee: Not Applicable

2. Local Member(s): Not Applicable

3. Community / Town Council: Not Applicable

4. Relevant Partners: Not Applicable

5. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations: Not Applicable

**Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information
List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

There are none