

BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL	
Report to	Chair & Members of Planning Committee
Report Subject	Quarterly Performance Information
Report Author	Service Manager Development & Estates
Directorate	Regeneration and Community Services
Date of Meeting	July 2024
Key Words	Performance Management Speed and quality of decision making Welsh Government Performance Monitoring

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Every local planning authority in Wales is required to collect performance information regarding the speed and quality of decision making on all types of planning and related applications. This is submitted to Welsh Government on a quarterly basis.
- 1.2 Welsh Government publishes this data on its website. It is a useful source of comparative information where the Council can not only scrutinise its own performance, but benchmark the data against the 25 other Local Planning authorities (22 unitary authorities and 3 National Parks)
- 1.3 It is usual practise to present a report to Planning Committee to update Members on the most recent performance in the form of league tables. This report deals with Quarter 3 of 2023/24 i.e. October to December 2023.

2.0 Content of the Report

- 2.1 This report will examine three indicators:
- 2.2
 - i. Applications determined in time - This is defined as within the 8-week target period or longer time that may be agreed with the applicant/agent.
 - ii. Time Taken – the average time (in days) taken to determine all applications.
 - iii. Quality of decision making – decisions taken by Planning Committee that are contrary to the recommendation of its officers.

3.0 Performance Information

- 3.1 The latest data WG has published was on 17th April 2024 and covered Quarter 3 of the financial year being October to December 2023.
- 3.2 i. BG decided **89%** of applications “in time”. This compared to an all-Wales average of 85%.
- 3.3 The trend for BGCBC over the preceding quarters was 95%, 90%, 97%, 97% and now 89%. This is consistently above the all-Wales average in each quarter respectively which was typically in the mid 80 percentile range.
- 3.4 ii. On average, it took **83 days** to decide each application against an all-Wales average of 115 days.
- 3.5 In the 4 preceding quarters to this one, the returns were 73, 84 95 and 105 days. In each of the quarters, this performance was well above the Wales average which fluctuated between 102 and 110 days.
- 3.6 iii. **0%** of applications in this quarter decided by Planning Committee were contrary to officer recommendation. The Wales average for this quarter was 4%.

4.0 Evaluation of Performance and Conclusions

- 4.1 Members should recognise that these performance figures represent a snapshot of performance for the given quarter. This data is now over 6 months old.
- 4.2 The performance tables confirm our performance is relatively stable in terms of trends over the past year and given capacity, is satisfactory. Nevertheless, we continue to identify areas where we can improve.
- 4.3 Members will be aware that the service is currently operating with one less planning officer who is seconded to other duties associated with migrating to a new back-office software system. Whilst some of this work was being allocated to an external consultancy, it does not fully compensate for losing one FTE.
- 4.4 In terms of recent news, one of the two enforcement officers is now seconded to another team within the Department. This is likely to have consequences for performance in that area of work.
- 4.5 Finally we will have a maternity absence later this year. We are currently investigating options to provide frontline cover which include potentially re-instructing an external consultancy. This would be paid from planning income fees.
- 4.6 The average number of days to decide an application is an important indicator. It gives a real world picture of the time taken to decide an application having regard to extensions of time which are agreed in the interests of applicants as well as the Council but does of course result in slower decision making.

- 4.7 Our performance return of 83 days compares favourably with other Welsh authorities where the average was 155 days. However, this is of course longer than the Welsh Government target of 8 weeks/56 days. Given resources and workload (which includes some major DNS schemes over this period) I consider this performance to be satisfactory.
- 4.8 On a positive note, at the time of writing the new back-office software is close to implementation. It is anticipated that this will bring behind the scenes efficiencies and assist in what are currently labour-intensive administrative processes behind each planning application.
- 4.9 Secondly although the average number of days indicator is still higher than we would like, the data confirms that the “carried forward figure” i.e. the number of undecided applications in the system has fallen. This is due to the clearing of a backlog of a number of older applications that of course impacts on the “average time to decide” indicator but stands us in good stead moving forward.

5.0 Recommendation

- 5.1 No decision is required.
- 5.2 However, Planning Committee is invited to scrutinise the performance returns and officers will address any issues or questions at the meeting.

Table 1

WG Quarterly DM Survey: Q3 23/24
October to December 2023
Percentage of Planning Applications Determined “On Time”
(Ranked in Order of Performance)

Welsh Local Planning Authority		Percentage of All Applications Determined On Time
1 st	Caerphilly	99
2 nd	Swansea	97
3 rd =	Neath Port Talbot	96
3 rd =	Pembrokeshire	96
3 rd =	Isle of Anglesey	96
6 th	Rhondda Cynon Taff	95
7 th	Merthyr Tydfil	94
8 th =	Torfaen	93
8 th =	Vale of Glamorgan	93
10 th =	Monmouthshire	92
10 th =	Brecon Beacons National Park	92
12 th =	Blaenau Gwent	89
12 th =	Newport	89
14 th	Powys	88
15 th	Ceredigion	86
16 th	Conwy	82
17 th	Carmarthenshire	81
18 th =	Cardiff	72
18 th =	Denbighshire	72
20 th	Bridgend	68
21 st	Wrexham	58
22 nd	Pembrokeshire Coast National Park	55
23 rd =	Snowdonia	54
23 rd =	Gwynedd	-
23 rd =	Flintshire	-
WALES AVERAGE		85 %

Table 2

WG Quarterly DM Survey: Q3 23/24
October to December 2023
Average Time to Decide Applications in Days
(Ranked in Order of Performance)

Welsh Local Planning Authority		Average No. of Days Taken to Decide Each Application
1 st	Rhondda Cynon Taff	74
2 nd	Bridgend	77
3 rd	Caerphilly	81
4 th =	Blaenau Gwent	83
4 th =	Conwy	83
6 th	Isle of Anglesey	84
7 th =	Neath Port Talbot	89
8 th	Newport	91
9 th	Merthyr Tydfil	95
10 th	Vale of Glamorgan	101
11 th =	Powys	102
11 th =	Pembrokeshire	102
11 th =	Monmouthshire	102
14 th	Swansea	107
15 th	Pembrokeshire Coast National Park	123
16 th	Carmarthenshire	132
17 th	Denbighshire	136
18 th	Snowdonia National Park	139
19 th	Torfaen	150
20 th	Brecon Beacons National Park	166
21 st	Ceredigion	169
22 nd	Wrexham	252
23 rd =	Cardiff	-
23 rd =	Gwynedd	-
23 rd =	Flintshire	-
WALES AVERAGE		115 Days

Table 3

WG Quarterly DM Survey: Q1 23/24
October to December 2023
Decisions Contrary to Officer Recommendation
(Ranked in Order of Performance)

Welsh Local Planning Authority		% of Planning Committee Decisions Contrary to Officer Recommendation
1 st =	Blaenau Gwent	0
1 st =	Brecon Beacons National Park	0
1 st =	Bridgend	0
1 st =	Caerphilly	0
1 st =	Cardiff	0
1 st =	Denbighshire	0
1 st =	Isle of Anglesey	0
1 st =	Merthyr Tydfil	0
1 st =	Monmouthshire	0
1 st =	Neath Port Talbot	0
1 st =	Newport	0
1 st =	Snowdonia National Park	0
1 st =	Pembrokeshire Coast National Park	0
1 st =	Pembrokeshire	0
1 st =	Powys	0
1 st =	Swansea	0
1 st =	Torfaen	0
18 th	Wrexham	5
19 th	Rhondda Cynon Taff	7
20 th	Carmarthenshire	9
21 st	Conwy	14
22 nd	Vale of Glamorgan	17
23 rd	Ceredigion	33
24 th =	Gwynedd	--
24 th =	Flintshire	--
Wales Average		4 %
