

Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO: Thriving Communities Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 7th of December 2022

LOCATION: Online

TITLE: Development Management

PURPOSE OF REPORT: To provide an update to Members on Planning

REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION: Members requested that officers update them on work in response to the Audit Wales Planning Report.

BACKGROUND:

In 2021 Audit Wales completed a review of the Planning Service in Ceredigion. The final review document was published in November 2021.

The report set out 10 recommendations relating to governance arrangements and to improving service capacity.

CURRENT SITUATION:

Appendix 1 sets out the Council's response and progress against each of these recommendations.

The work was taken forward through a Task and Finish Group that had been set up earlier in 2021 to implement an Action Plan for the improvement of governance and performance issues. The focus up until to March 2022 was largely on addressing governance issues and identifying additional resource to tackle planning application and enforcement backlogs.

The work on governance issues resulted in changes to the Constitution agreed in March 2022, including:

- New Terms of Reference
- New Operational Procedures
- New Code of Practice
- New Delegated Powers

Training was provided to all Members after the elections in May and these changes have now been embedded with procedures and practices being adopted well.

To address performance issues, it was necessary to look at tackling issues in four main areas of the development management process – validation, consultee delays, phosphates and staff capacity to deal with cases.

Validation was running 8 weeks late, so cases were often reaching officers at a point where decision should normally be issued. To address this, additional resources and training was made available corporately. The current position is that most applications are now processed within a day or two of being submitted which is where the service would like to be. Other issues remain as a significant number of applications are of a poor quality, meaning many need further information or changes in order to become validated.

Consultee delays often reflect capacity issues elsewhere, for example, in Highways or Ecology. Where the Council has control additional resources have been provided to help address issues. Further resource is being sought to assist with ecological input, in particular to help clear cases where phosphates has been an issue.

The phosphate issue has led to a large number of cases being held in abeyance building up a backlog of cases. New guidance and a proforma will help progress some applications but will add pressures over the next 3-4 months to clear cases.

Overall, there are now 511 planning applications (where ideally the service would want around 200) and 550 enforcement cases (ideally should be no more than 200 cases).

As staff recruitment has proved difficult, a tender exercise for engaging consultants took place earlier in the year and following evaluation of tenders, Capita were appointed to support the service deal with planning applications and enforcement cases. Capita have been actively working on cases since the beginning of September 2022 and are beginning to deliver recommendations so decisions can be made by the Authority. The process for considering applications or enforcement matters and making decisions is the same regardless of whether the staff are in house or contracted.

The above arrangements are expected to make a noticeable difference in the backlog level and time take to deliver decisions over the next 3-4 months but is likely to take up to 12 months to reach optimum levels.

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If not, please state why No as this discussion and is not producing or developing policy

WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS:

Summary:
Long term:
Integration:
Collaboration:
Involvement:
Prevention:

RECOMMENDATION (S):

No formal recommendations, discussion for information only.

To provide an update in April 2023 on the impact on the backlog and usual quarterly performance measures.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

To provide Members with an update.

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Date of Report: 18/11/2022
Acronyms: