

## **Mid-Year Performance Report Planning Service (Environment Directorate)**

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### **Introduction**

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The Head of Service report is produced on a half yearly basis and provided to Executive Members for review and assurance and will be available for Overview and Scrutiny Committees as part of their Forward Work Programmes.

The approach is based on exception reporting to summarise key information that the Head of Service feels Members should be aware of, including both good and poor performance. Emerging issues / operational risks should also be highlighted. The report is split into 3 distinct sections: -

**1. Improvement Priorities & Service Plan Monitoring** – this section is used to discuss the progress being made towards the Improvement Priorities which do not have an in year focus and therefore are not included within the quarterly progress report on the Improvement Plan. It is also used to highlight good news and key issues (including operational risks and the actions necessary to control them) arising from monitoring the progress being made towards delivering the service plan.

**2. Internal and External Regulatory Reports** – this section summarises regulatory work reported in the half year and its outcomes and intended actions arising from recommendations.

**3. Corporate Reporting** – this section summaries the performance in relation to corporate issues i.e. Sickness absence, Complaints

**Appendix 1- NSI & Improvement Target Performance Indicators** – summary table of the performance for the NSI and Improvement Targets. Graphs (where appropriate) and commentary are included in section 1 for those indicators shown with a red RAG status.

# 1. Improvement Priorities & Service Plan Monitoring

Report highlights for the half year are as follows: -

## **Improvement Priority – Environment – Pursue development of the Local Development Plan (LDP)**

Commencement Order secured from Welsh Government to begin work on the LDP. Initial briefing session held with Town and Community Councils at the June County Forum meeting. Planning Improvement Grant funding secured from Welsh Government to assist with background studies. Discussions held with Wrexham CBC to identify where a collaborative approach can be followed on background studies. Consultation held on the LDP Delivery Agreement. Revised Delivery Agreement to be reported to Planning Strategy Group in Quarter 3.

## **Development Management**

The key priorities identified for Development Management for 2013–14 are summarised below:

- **Embracing the Welsh Government (WG) modernising agenda with its emphasis on sustainable development and economic growth through a proactive Development Management (DM) approach which encompasses changing culture and attitudes as well as changed priorities and procedures.** – The culture change is a continuous process which is measured by perceptions of the service as well as in its performance against recognised indicators. WG is currently seeking to establish a series of indicators which will identify a ‘Good Planning Authority’, concentrating more on quality of the overall service as opposed to speed of decision and during the first half of the year officers have contributed to this national process.
- **Develop and continually review procedures through the DM Manual to ensure that they are ‘fit for purpose’ and provide for an efficient and effective service** – This is an ongoing process triggered by the types of initiatives and changes mentioned above as well as in reaction to service pressures and related performance issues. As an example of the latter the procedures relating to the handling of appeals have been reviewed in order to ensure that deadlines are met and responsibilities are identified throughout the process.
- **Ensure that the DM officers are fully trained on and can confidently apply the fundamental changes to service delivery following recent and forthcoming legislative changes** – Within Quarter 2 there was a need to adapt the service to meet the significant changes brought about by the Permitted Development amendments (which came into effect 30.09.13). This was the subject of a series of training events with both officers and Members and discussions at team meetings where all relevant officers had the opportunity to participate.
- **Question the delivery of some aspects of the DM service and explore opportunities for introducing charges for other aspects, to counter the efficiencies which will be required as a result of budget cuts** – This is again an ongoing process with no significant action undertaken during the first half of the year.

- **Maintain efficient service delivery and improved performance through the adaptations following service review and restructuring, particularly the introduction of area based DM teams, mobile working, a restructured Enforcement team and realigned Support Services** – The move to mobile working has been frustrated by difficulties with the Authority’s external software provider and the knock on effect in relation to the council’s own ITC service. These difficulties have now been addressed with momentum having picked up during the first half of the year and a revised programme of actions having been agreed to facilitate the necessary changes.
- **Ensure that performance is monitored continually and that benchmarking with other authorities is carried out consistently to allow Flintshire to compare favourably and maintain a high profile which will encourage and facilitate appropriate new development** – Performance against the speed of decision indicators continues to be monitored on an individual officer basis with regular reports to identify issues and the short term adaptations to service delivery required to meet these. As part of its review of what makes a ‘Good Planning Service’ WG is looking at potential benchmarking exercises which, it is anticipated, will be introduced as part of the changes resulting from the forthcoming Planning Bill.
- **Ensure that the DM team is fully equipped and motivated to play a leading role in the provision of quality development in terms of good design and sustainability** – There is and there will remain an ongoing need for training in relation to design matters and whereas there have been no specific events during the first half of the year officers are encouraged to discuss proposals with their peers in order to establish a consistent approach to design and similar matters.
- **With others develop an ITC system which has the capacity to facilitate and support the changes to procedures and performance management and which provides an accessible and user friendly recording and reporting system for service users** – This allied to the move towards flexible working and progress has been slow due to difficulties with the external software provider. These have been addressed with momentum having picked up during the first half of the year and a revised programme of actions having been agreed to facilitate the necessary changes.

With regard to performance in relation to the **Statutory Indicators**, the number of planning applications received in Q2 (**314**) is up in relation to Q1 (278) and significantly so in relation to Q2 last year (229). This partly reflects a perceived increase in activity in the building industry and partly the reclassification of application types by Welsh Government (WG), particularly in relation to applications for the discharge of planning conditions. This involves the approval of details following the grant of planning permission and as such applications do not involve formal consultation or publicity they can normally be determined well within the 8 week limit. This is reflected in the return for the ‘Others’ category of planning applications (74.51%) and the overall headline return of **71.68%** for Quarter 2.

Turning to the Improvement targets reported in Appendix 1, some have fallen below target during Q2 and they are examined in greater detail below :

**PLA 004a – Percentage of Major applications determined within 13 weeks.** Performance has slipped to 29.41% against the target (33.33%) a clear reversal of the Q1 return (48%) which was well above target. The relatively low denominator within this category of applications leads to an element of volatility in the results, particularly when it is considered that many of these decisions are subject to Committee determination and legal agreements. These major developments are also often subject to detailed negotiation and amendment in order to secure good design and a positive recommendation, which is often more important to the developer than speed of decision. It is significant that WG has now dropped the 13 week period as an indicator pending further review, as it never had a statutory basis in Wales as it does in England.

**PLA 004b – Percentage of Minor Applications determined within 8 weeks -** Again, the good Q1 performance (65.48%) has slipped below target during Q2 (57.29%). It is significant that there is a clear improvement when measured against the corresponding Q2 2012/13 (48.08%) but the drop in performance is difficult to substantiate apart from the fact that the quarter coincides with the main holiday period and that there is also no Committee during August. Nevertheless performance against this category will continue to be monitored carefully as it is seen as the main factor in achieving good overall performance.

**PLA 004c – Percentage of Householder Applications determined within 8 weeks –** The excellent Q1 return (95.93%) has not been replicated in Q2 (90.76%), falling just below target.

The Enforcement service continues to maintain its performance improvement against **PLA 005 – Enforcement cases resolved within 12 weeks.** Both returns, Q1 (88.24%) and Q2 (86.36%) are well in excess of the target (73%)

The picture is the same with regard to **PLA 003 – Number of Appeals upholding the Authority’s decision** with the Q1 (100%) replicated in Q2 (100%), exceeding the (75%) target.

## **Planning Strategy and the Built Environment 2013/14 Service Plan Priorities**

**Commission key LDP background studies to inform Core Strategy.** The overall soundness of the LDP will depend on the degree to which the plan’s strategy and its policies and proposals are based on a robust and justifiable evidence base. Some of this information already exists in terms of monitoring information such as housing land availability, but other evidence will need to be commissioned from specialist consultants. These include for example the need for a county-wide Strategic Flood Consequences Assessment, Employment Land Review, Urban Capacity Study, and an Infrastructure Capacity Assessment. It will be important to demonstrate that the plan’s strategy has a direct link to the supporting evidence, and part of the examination of the plan will focus on this issue. Welsh Government funding has been secured this financial year to assist with these studies and further bids will be made in Q4.

**Adopt LDP Delivery Agreement and Community Involvement Scheme.** The draft Delivery Agreement has been consulted on during August and September. The main outcome from the feedback received was that the draft timetable for plan production was too long and not ambitious enough. Consequently the timetable has been shortened such that the plan will be submitted for examination by December 2016, with the overall timetable shortened by 11 months. It will be important to secure agreement from the

Planning Strategy Group and Cabinet during Q3 to submit the amended Delivery Agreement to the Welsh Government to secure their agreement by the end of 2013. Only when the Council's Delivery Agreement has been agreed by the Welsh Government can the Council progress with formal stages in the plan process.

**Undertake LDP Visioning exercise and establish LDP Member Training Programme.**

This process will build on earlier workshops with Members held in January 2013 and will use the evidence base to begin a process with Members to set a vision and direction for the LDP strategy, developing options that can then be tested further against the evidence as well as being discussed with key stakeholders and Town and Community Councils to seek their views. There will also be a need to plan specific workshops/training sessions with Members as specific studies are completed e.g. Housing Viability Assessment, to give Members an understanding of the outcomes of the study and the evidence it provides to support plan policy development. The outcomes from these sessions will also inform the ongoing work of the Planning Strategy Group on the plan.

**Produce Sustainable Development Guide.** This is an important piece of guidance as there have been some significant amendments to national policy relating to sustainable development which have post dated adoption of the UDP. This guide will serve to highlight the present position in terms of national policy and how it should be implemented, as well as serving as background to policy development for the LDP.

**Approve all UDP Supplementary Planning Guides.** The Planning Strategy Group has already considered a number of draft SPGs which have been updated and brought into line with the adopted UDP. These will need to be agreed by the Cabinet so that they can be publicly consulted on, prior to final adoption by the Council. The SPGs are being considered in a number of batches by the PSG, two having already been considered. This process will continue to ensure that adoption of all SPG can take place this year.

**Completion of Holywell THI phase II.** The capital programme is now very near completion with final grant bids for remaining scheme being prepared. A report for Cabinet will be prepared that reflects on the considerable achievements in Holywell as a result of the THI work. This will also document how the THI work has acted as a catalyst for other regeneration investment in the Town.

**Implement and maintain progress on Flint THI and ensure strong relationship to Flint masterplan ambitions.** The Flint THI is now fully established both as a heritage repair and regeneration scheme, and also as part of delivering improvements emanating from the Flint Master Plan work. A number of schemes have already been completed in Church Street and Trelawny Square, and other key schemes are coming forward such as the Court Sessions House.

**Built Heritage Conservation Strategy (including funding for Building Repairs Grant).**

The development of a Local Heritage Strategy is a priority for this year and will bring together work already underway in relation to buildings at risk, buildings of local interest, and conservation area appraisals and the development of management plans.

**Implement Buildings of Local Interest policy.** A draft list of candidate buildings has been drawn up for assessment under the policy and these will be prioritised for consideration.

## **Countryside and Natural Environment 2013/14 Service Plan Priorities**

**Explore further collaboration with Denbighshire County Council over tree management.** The Tree Officer has undertaken some development work for DCC and looking at the potential to formalise an agreement to undertake some case work there.

**Develop an emergency response plan to manage a widespread outbreak of Ash dieback disease. Progress phase 2 of BWW on Countryside Sites.** Officers attended a seminar for the latest developments with ash die-back and convened a meeting to develop a response plan for the county. Information on Ash die back has gone on the FCC website to inform the public.

**Undertake ground truthing of wildlife site surveys, as part of the Planning Improvement Grant following the mapping work undertaken by Cofnod.** Enfys Consultancy has been commissioned to undertake ground truthing surveys of 40 wildlife sites, under the Planning Improvement Grant and is due to complete in Q3.

**Biodiversity project work in partnership e.g. Dee Day Invasion.** The Big Dee Day-The Invasion took place on 28th and 29th June 2013 to tackle invasive non-native species across the Dee catchment through raising awareness, recording and also providing volunteering opportunities to remove some of these species. It was a successful event with a well attended breakfast launch and 17 different volunteering actions taking place over the 2 days.

**Coed Cymru project work in Partnership e.g. Forest schools, living landscape.** The Coed Cymru Officer has been involved in the establishment of Forest School at Merllyn and Mountain Lane and a new business/ trading arm to deliver Forest School Training in North and Mid Wales and NE England (Plas Derw Outdoor Education and Training). Stronger links have been forged with CAIA Park (social enterprise) and the Countryside Team. The Coed Cymru Officer has overseen the establishment of community orchards, coastal school and forest school teacher training programme.

**Further develop and promote the NE Wales biodiversity partnership for closer collaboration on LBAP Implementation projects.** Biodiversity and Countryside officers have been involved in partnership with NRW, Chester Zoo and Bourne Leisure in the release of Sand Lizards at Gronant and Talacre.

**Progress conservation status and support/advise other FCC departments on SSSI management. Work towards the Natural Environment and Conservation team taking a lead role in the Authority's owned SSSIs. Deliver outputs in NRW core and conservation grants.** The FCC Ecologist has attended DEFRA's Great Crested Newt and Planning Task and Finish group as the Welsh representative and gave a presentation to the RTP1 seminar on biodiversity.

**Develop Coastal Improvement Programme, and work to develop a management regime for the path and produce a Dee Estuary vision for Coast Park.** The Flintshire Coast Park prospectus has reached first draft stage and is expected to be complete by the end of 2013. This project will produce a vision for the park and include visitor/community hubs along the estuary, and ties in with the Green Infrastructure action plans.

**Deliver year 1 Heritage Lottery Funded (HLF) work programme for Wepre Park.** The Wepre Park HLF project is continuing with significant improvements already underway with landscape works at the front of the park. An officer has been recruited to HLF project manager to deliver the 3 year programme, funded through HLF monies.

**Progress the work of the Halkyn Ranger and deliver year 2 of Aggregate Levy Wales limekiln project. Deliver RDP programme and work with the Grosvenor Estates in the management maintenance of the mountain. Secure funding for the Halkyn Ranger 2014/15.** The limekiln consolidation project is complete. This was funded by the Aggregates Levy for Wales to £175K. Further funding for interpretation and heritage trails has been allocated through RDP and is ongoing with completion by Christmas 2013.

**Ensure active engagement with AONB and in particular work to develop a Joint Council.** Discussions are on-going with regard to a new Structure and agreement to manage the extended area of the AONB. A draft agreement is due to be presented to Cabinet in Q3.

**Deliver education and awareness programmes for schools, plus an Annual Events Programme.** All events have been held as set out in the published Countryside programme, including attendance at the Flint and Denbigh show. The Coed Cymru Officer has overseen the establishment of community orchards, coastal school and forest school teacher training programme. The annual Big Dee Day took place in September with a breakfast launch held at the Sea Scout Hut by Connah's Quay Dock. The hut is to be signed over to the Quay Watermans Association as a community marine heritage centre and volunteers from the association and the Dee Wildfowlers with the Coastal Rangers put in over 800 hrs of volunteer time to prepare the building for the launch. The Dee Day itself involved 60 organisations and for the first time went up the River Dee to source to include Snowdonia National Park.

**Progress countryside and coastal partnerships and agreements managing green space and countryside sites in Flintshire.** The future Wales Coastal Improvement Programme is still unclear. WG have yet to confirm the allocation to FCC for the remaining 18 Months following application in March 2013.

### **Minerals and Waste Shared Service for North Wales 2013/14 Service Plan Priorities**

**Improve liaison arrangements at operational minerals and waste sites across the Region.** The Service has sought to increase its attendance at site operational, restoration and ecological management meetings, in part prompted by a need for operators to comply with conditional requirements highlighted as a consequence of chargeable site monitoring. This improves Customer relations and ultimately ensures a higher quality development and minimises adverse impacts on the amenity, restoration, water resources, agriculture and wildlife. Public liaison groups are also regularly attended and operators have been encouraged to set up new site liaison groups where these have not previously taken place or otherwise had lapsed. New groups have been established at Ballswood Quarry in Wrexham and at St George Quarry in Conwy. These have immense public relations value and give a mechanism for the community to engage with a site operator to be better informed about issues affecting the area around a given quarry.

**Renew Service Level Agreement for the Service from April 2014 onwards.**

Revised funding options are being explored based on assessments of time spent on each partner authority area to make future arrangements fair and affordable against a backdrop of efficiency savings identified in each respective partner authority. The service is seeking to retain full membership of the existing partners and to continue with its existing structure and funding model if possible. Negotiations and meetings with each partner are to take place during Quarter 3.

**Progress Regional Technical Statement for aggregates in line with Welsh**

**Government timescales.** A steering group and a Client group was established to drive the preparation of a first revision to the Regional Technical Statement for aggregate (crushed rock and sand & gravel), which will inform the LDP process on future need and provision for aggregates. Timescales and a programme has been established, and an initial draft prepared for technical appraisal by the steering group. Reports have been presented to partner authorities to ensure delegated authority is given (where possible) to nominated Members to endorse the final version of the RTS next year at a specific Member forum.

**Ensure all minerals and waste sites are monitored at least once per year.** Site visits to key operational quarries and landfill sites are pre arranged into a fixed programme, and letters issued to operators advising them of the scheduled dates to ensure that key staff are available to assist with answering technical questions and be made aware of non-compliance.

**Increase the Service's presence at relevant Town and Community Council meetings.**

The service is actively encouraging attendance at Town, Community and other public liaison groupings to explain the detail or impact arising from existing and proposed minerals and waste development and answer technical questions to assist the respective bodies in providing informed planning consultation responses, and to assist with wider public engagement. Presentations have been made to Gwernymynydd and Halkyn Joint Management Board with respect to major landfill and quarrying proposals.

**Ensure that the Service is prepared for the receipt of interest in unconventional gas**

**exploitation.** This is an unknown area of potential future activity. A number of the partner authority areas contain Petroleum Exploration Development Licences issued by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), and interest is being expressed by licence holders which may result in planning applications for unconventional oil and gas exploration, appraisal and development coming forward. This is against a backdrop of intense media and environmentalist interest in unconventional land based hydrocarbon exploitation, and it is vital that the service is prepared to manage such interest and be able to deal with informed technical issues. The service has a representative on the national Planning Officer Society group who liaise with Government and the Local Government Association, and key trade and industry bodies. An officer has also attended an industry specific day seminar to assist understanding of emerging issues with these technologies and the regulatory and public relations matters that arise.



## 2. Internal and External Regulatory Reports

### Internal Audit Reviews

Final recommendations of the internal audit into the use of Section 106 Agreements are being implemented following presentation to Audit Committee in September. Internal audit of the Minerals and Waste shared Service is about to be completed.

The Planning Service has been selected in the first tranche of Value for Money reviews and will report its findings in December 2013.

## 3. Corporate Reporting

### Complaints / Compliments

No. of compliments	Service area	No. of complaints	Service area	Percentage responded to in time
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Development Management – 13</li><li>Conservation -1</li></ul>	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Enforcement – 5</li><li>Development Management – 1</li><li>Conservation -2</li></ul>	75%

Given the complexity of some of the complaints received, we have been unable to provide a response within the prescribed timescale. Of the complaints received, only one has been partially upheld and that found no errors in the decision making process only that the complainant had not been kept informed of process. Inevitably, the majority of complaints related to the enforcement function where due to its nature, parties may be aggrieved by action or a perceived lack of action.

### Sickness Absence

Days lost Q1	Days lost Q2	Days lost per FTE Q1	Days lost per FTE Q2	Total days lost per FTE Q1 and Q2	Directorate Average (days)
280	173	4.23 per FTE	2.6 per FTE	6.76 per FTE	6.32

The service's average of days lost per FTE is in excess of the Directorate average for this period. Through Q1 the Service had three staff members, two in Countryside who were off on long term sickness. Both of these staff members resigned part way through Q2. For a relatively small Service such incidents of sickness have a disproportionate impact on the outturn average. It is envisaged that the average will recover significantly as the other staff member who was off on long term sickness will return to the workplace in November.

## Staff Turnover

Headcount	No of staff leaving Q1	Q1 staff turnover	No of staff leaving Q2	Q2 staff turnover	Total turnover Q1 and Q2	Total turnover Q1 and Q2 (Environment)
71	1	1.41	2	2.82	4.2	3.03

The Service's rate of turnover for this period exceeds the Directorate average due to the staff members leaving from the countryside team, referred to above. Again, with a relatively small Service, such numbers have a disproportionate impact on the outturn. Work is in progress to fill these posts on a short term basis and will be addressed by the VFM work in the long term.

## Equality Monitoring

Employees requirements for diversity and equality training assessed during personal development requirements as part of the annual appraisal process. The Customer Service Award also contains a module on equalities.

## Welsh Language Monitoring

The Directorate has been following the agreed timetable for the Welsh Language Scheme Implementation Plan. This has included use of bilingual greetings and messages, audit of all standard letters to ensure bilingual translation, guidance on bilingual text on e-mails, review of all forms, leaflets, publications to ensure bilingual availability, control point established to ensure all future publications are bilingual, Welsh language baseline assessments, reception staff received refresher training on bilingual greetings, notices displayed to ensure customers are aware that Welsh and English service available. Audit of employee Welsh language skills currently underway and results being captured in iTrent.

## Data Protection Training

### DATA PROTECTION TRAINING FIGURES

Mandatory posts	Completed	Percentage
48	31	65

The remaining posts will receive this training in the remainder of the year 2013/14.

## Appendix 1 - NSI & Improvement Target Performance Indicators

### Key

<b>R</b>	Target missed
<b>A</b>	Target missed but within an acceptable level
<b>G</b>	Target achieved or exceeded

The RAG status of the indicators for Q2 are summarised as follows:

 1     2     0



The RAG status of the indicators for the cumulative position for Q1 and Q2 are summarised as follows:





 0     1     2

Graphs and commentary are included in section 1 for those indicators shown with a red RAG status.

Note 1 – NSI = National Statutory Indicator    Imp T = Improvement Target

Note 2 – Change (Improved / Downturned) is based on comparison with the previous quarter. Where it is more appropriate to compare performance with the same period in the previous year this should be stated in the commentary.

Indicator	NSI / Imp T (Note 1)	Annual Target 2013/14	2012/13 Q2 Outturn	2013/14 Q1 Outturn	2013/14 Q2 Outturn	2013/14 Q2 Target	RAG Q2	Change e.g. Improved / Downturned (Note 2)	Cumulative RAG status Q1+Q2	Commentary
PLA/004a The percentage of major planning applications determined during the year within 13 weeks	IMP T	40%	33.33%	48%	<b>29.41%</b>	40%		Downturned		See Section 1. Cumulative performance for Q1 and Q2 is 40.5%

Indicator	NSI / Imp T (Note 1)	Annual Target 2013/14	2012/13 Q2 Outturn	2013/14 Q1 Outturn	2013/14 Q2 Outturn	2013/14 Q2 Target	RAG Q2	Change e.g. Improved / Downturned (Note 2)	Cumulative RAG status Q1+Q2	Commentary
PLA/004b The percentage of minor planning applications determined during the year within 8 weeks	IMP T	66%	48.08%	65.48%	<b>57.29%</b>	66%		Downturned, though significant increase on same quarter last year		See Section 1. Cumulative performance for Q1 and Q2 is 61.1%
PLA/004c The percentage of householder applications determined within 8 weeks	IMP T	91%	65.17%	95.93%	<b>90.76%</b>	91%		Downturned, though significant increase on same quarter last year		Cumulative performance for Q1 and Q2 is 93.4%
PLA/006b The number of additional affordable housing units provided during the year as a percentage of all additional housing units provided during the year	IMP T & NSI	30%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Collected and reported on an annual basis