



County Hall  
Cardiff  
CF10 4UW  
Tel: (029) 2087 2000

Neuadd y Sir  
Caerdydd  
CF10 4UW  
Ffôn: (029) 2087 2000

## CORRESPONDENCE FOLLOWING THE COMMITTEE MEETING

**Committee** ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Date and Time  
of Meeting** TUESDAY, 6 DECEMBER 2016, 4.30 PM

Please find below correspondence send by the Committee Chair following the meeting,  
together with any responses received.

For any further details, please contact [scrutinyviewpoints@cardiff.gov.uk](mailto:scrutinyviewpoints@cardiff.gov.uk)

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Ref: RDB/PM/RP/06.12.16

04 January 2017

Councillor Ramesh Patel,  
Cabinet Member for Transport, Planning & Sustainability,  
County Hall,  
Atlantic Wharf,  
Cardiff CF10 4UW.



Dear Councillor Patel,

**Environmental Scrutiny Committee – 6 December 2016**

On behalf of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee I would like to thank you and the officers from the City Operations Directorate for attending the Committee meeting on Tuesday 6 December 2016. As you are aware the meeting considered an item titled “Planning Service – Member Update”. The comments and observations made by Members following this item are set out in this letter.

**Overall Comment**

Members feel that Cardiff’s Planning Service has performed exceptionally well in the last 12 months. Using a their very limited resources they achieved the following:

- During 2015/16 they have processed 3,053 planning applications – this is a 20% increase when compared against 2014/15;
- They achieved the £1.93 million income generation target for 2015/16;
- They supported the delivery of Cardiff’s Local Development Plan in January 2016;
- They achieved exceptionally low sickness rates during 2015/16;
- They processed an average number of 186 planning applications per planning officer – this was by far the highest number in Wales and only second to Liverpool (197 planning applications per employee during

2015/16) when comparison was made against all the other United Kingdom core cities;

- They have dramatically increased performance against the two main Welsh Government planning indicators, 'PLA/004 (a) – Percentage of major planning applications determined during the year within 13 week' and 'PLA/004 (c) - Percentage of householder planning applications determined during the year within 8 weeks';
- They have performed consistently well against the Welsh Government planning applicant feedback indicators.

As a consequence of these excellent results the Committee would like to pass on their thanks and congratulations to the Head of Planning and the Planning Service for their achievements during 2015/16. Members understand the importance of the planning function for the development of Cardiff and that the results have been produced against a background of financial pressure and legislative change.

### **Planning Applications**

Members noted the large number planning applications that were considered by Cardiff's Planning Committee during 2015/16. The number of applications processed by Cardiff's Planning Committee during 2015/16 was significantly higher than any other Welsh local authority planning committee – this in turn places a large work pressure on all those involved. The Committee would like to thank the Chair of Cardiff's Planning Committee; Members of Cardiff's Planning Committee and the officers who support Cardiff's Planning Committee for their hard work in the last year. Without this hard work Cardiff's planning and development sector would struggle to function.

### **Planning Fee Income**

Members noted that the planning fee income target for Cardiff's Planning Service has increased every year for a number of years. This is illustrated below:

- 2014/15 Planning Fee Income Target - £1.86 million;
- 2015/16 Planning Fee Income Target - £1.93 million;
- 2016/17 Planning Fee Income Target - £2.03 million;
- 2017/18 Proposed Planning Fee Income Target - £2.13 million.

The Committee congratulates the Planning Service for achieving these targets, however, they are also concerned at the regular increases and additional pressures being placed on staff. In terms of the number of applications processed Cardiff is already out performing all other Welsh and United Kingdom core cities (with the exception of Liverpool). As a consequence it is difficult to see productivity increasing much further without there being a detrimental impact on the performance of Cardiff's Planning Service.

Members feel that further income target pressures could result in a fall in staff morale, which in turn could increase sickness levels and ultimately reduce staff productivity. As we have previously commented, a fall in productivity could increase the time taken to process applications and, therefore, impact on fee income as applicants start to recover fees from the Council for failing to process applications within the new statutory timescales.

In addition to this there is a potential issue around the quality of work produced as the volume of applications per member of staff increases; irrespective of how good the staff are there will be a point at which the volume becomes so great that the quality of work starts to reduce. Finally, income targets have in recent years been viewed as achievable because development in Cardiff has been buoyant. In an uncertain world there is no guarantee the current market conditions will remain the same.

A downturn in the market could significantly impact on the planning fee income generated which would place financial pressures on the Council. In short the Committee believes that continually increasing planning fee income could become counterproductive and that the policy of continually increasing planning fee income year on year should be properly reviewed.

### **Local Development Plan**

Members noted the comments made by the head of Planning that there were no outstanding actions for the implementation of the Local Development Plan.

### **Annual Monitoring Report**

It was noted that the Council would publish the first Planning Service Annual Monitoring Report in October 2017; this would comment on the performance of the Planning Service and report on a large bundle of planning performance indicators (including 102 that will be used to monitor the implementation of the Local Development Plan). Members understand that this will be an important document and, therefore, have agreed to look to include it in the Environmental Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2017/18.

### **Student Accommodation**

During the meeting the topic of student accommodation was raised. An officer informed Members that new Supplementary Planning Guidance for Student Accommodation is currently being developed and that this will be available in 2017. **I would be grateful if you could provide the Committee with a draft version of this document** when it is circulated for consultation so that they can provide feedback within the consultation period.

### **Planning Enforcement**

A Member expressed a concern that some planning enforcement work was not being prioritised due to a lack of resources within the Planning Service. Members noted the officer response that this was not the case and that planning enforcement is not a cost driven process.

### **Control of Development**

During the meeting Members noted the importance of a fully adopted Local Development Plan in controlling the development of Cardiff and protecting / supporting the needs of residents. Without such a process the Council would

not be able to properly manage where and how development takes place. Members are also reassured that a suite of Supplementary Planning Guidance documents are currently being developed to help add even greater certainty to Cardiff's planning process.

I would be grateful if you would consider the above comments and provide a response to the content of this letter.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P. De Mitchell". The signature is stylized, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Councillor Paul Mitchell  
Chairperson Environmental Scrutiny Committee  
Cc:

Councillor Michael Michael – Chair of Cardiff's Planning Committee  
Andrew Gregory – Director for City Operations  
James Clemence – Head of Planning  
Simon Gilbert – Operational Manager, Development Management (Strategic & Placemaking)  
Darren Connelly – Operational Manager, Development Management (Non-Strategic Manager)  
Paul Keeping – Operational Manager, Scrutiny Services  
Davina Fiore – Director of Governance & Legal Services  
Members of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee  
Members of Cardiff's Planning Committee

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