CITY AND COUNTY OF CARDIFF
DINAS A SIR CAERDYDD

STANDARD AND ETHICS COMMITTEE   10 January 2007

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER –
WALES AUDIT OFFICE –
BASELINE ASSESSMENT OF THE PLANNING SERVICE

Reason for this Report

1.   To provide the Committee with the information and recommendations arising from an Inspection Report undertaken by the Wales Audit Office into the Planning Service of Cardiff County Council, and to invite the Committee to consider any further actions to be taken following on from such recommendations.

Background

2.   The Committee on Standards & Public Life operating under the original chairmanship of Professor Nolan recognised that planning decisions and processes provided the most frequent areas of concern for the public about probity and standards of public conduct. It is in this area that the Monitoring Officer receives the most numbers of complaints from the general public. In the majority of instances concerns arise out of the lack of understanding of the procedures and how the planning process operates, and complaints are unfounded. However the Nolan Committee and subsequent reports have recognised that maintaining trust in good standards also requires that regard is had to the perception of probity.

3.   The Wales Audit Office acting under the authority of the Local Government Act 1999 as amended by the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 carried out an inspection of the Council's Planning Service in the year 2005 – 2006 and published a report in September 2006. A copy of the Report is attached at Appendix 1.

The Committee's Responsibilities

4.   The Committee's Terms of Reference include the following responsibilities:

- To monitor and scrutinise the ethical standards of the Authority, its Members, employees and any associated providers of the Authority Services, and to report to the Council on any matters of concern;
- To advise the Council on the contents of its ethical code and to update the code as appropriate;
- To advise the Council on the effective implementation of the code including such matters as the training of Members and employees on the code's application;
- To recommend to Council and the Executive any additional guidance on issues of probity.

Issues

5.   The Welsh Audit Office Report deals with a number of issues, including service delivery matters, which fall outside the terms of reference of this Committee. However, paragraphs 62 – 76 of the report specifically addresses whether the Planning Service is being delivered in a fair and transparent way, and the report notes (amongst other matters) that:

- The Council's Constitution is not a user friendly document;
- The Council has no Code of Practice for Councillors and officers involved in the planning process as recommended by the Nolan Committee;
- The Committee does not have a permanent "home", thus making it difficult to arrange conveniently for members of the public and members of the Committee;
- The schedule of report is lengthy and the Committee can sit for many hours;
- Public speaking is not permitted at the Committee;
- The consequence of the way that the business is conducted may give the impression that matters have been previously discussed;
- Some training has been provided, but not all Councillors have attended.

6.   Paragraph 87 of the report sets out some clear actions, and the Committee may wish to consider, in particular, the recommendations to:

- Review the procedures for public speaking and operation of the Planning Committee;
- Prepare a Code of Practice for Councillors and officers involved in the planning process, having regard to best practice across Wales;
- Provide on-going training for all Councillors, particularly with regard to helping them deal with the conflicts that can arise between their roles as Ward Members and as members of the Planning Committee.

These recommendations fall specifically within the Terms of Reference of the Committee.

Council's Action Plan

7. Members of the Executive and the Planning Committee were invited to a presentation of the Welsh Audit Office Report in November 2006. The Chief Planning Officer is developing an Action Plan to address all of the issues and recommendations contained within the report. Both he and the Chair of the Planning Committee have been invited to attend the Standards & Ethics Committee on the 10 January 2007 to take part in discussions.

Legal Implications

8. There are none arising directly from this report

Financial Implications

9. There are none arising directly from this report.

Conclusions

10. The Welsh Audit Office makes a number of findings and recommendations which fall within the remit of the Standards & Ethics Committee. The Committee may wish to consider how they may work with the Chair and members of the Planning Committee and the development of a Code of Practice for the Council and providing appropriate training for Members.

Recommendations

11. The Committee is recommended to consider and decide upon what action it wishes to take in response to the Welsh Audit Office Report and specifically:

    (a) to endorse a recommendation set out in paragraph 87 of the Welsh Audit Officer Report;

    (b) to recommend that the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Planning Officer draft a Code of Practice for Councillors and Members involved in the planning process for approval by Council by April 2007;

    (c) to recommend that the Monitoring Officer and Chief Planning Officer develop a Training Programme for all Councillors, particularly with regard to assisting Members to deal with conflicts arising from their roles as Ward Members and as members of the Planning Committee, and

(d) to recommend that all Members of the Council attend such training, and in particular that no Member shall be entitled to sit on the Planning Committee unless they have attended the Training Programme.

KATE BERRY
Monitoring Officer

4 January 2007

Baseline assessment of the Planning Service

Cardiff County Council

Audit 2005/2006

September 2006

Author: David Wilson Ref: 698A2006

Overall, the Council is not providing a good Planning Service because planning policy is not properly integrated with other Council policies and there are issues relating to the operation of the Planning Committee and the management of the Service that need to be addressed.

Contents

Status of this report

This report has been prepared for the internal use of the named body. Our reports are prepared:

• In relation to audit, under the relevant enabling legislation and the responsibilities detailed in the Code of Audit and Inspection Practice, and in the context of the 'Statement of Responsibilities', issued by the Auditor General for Wales.

• In relation to inspection, following inspection work carried out under the Local Government Act 1999, as amended by the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004, and in accordance with guidance issued by the National Assembly for Wales.

Reports are prepared by the staff of the Wales Audit Office and appointed auditors, and addressed to members or officers including those designated as accounting or accountable officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the named body, and no responsibility is taken by the Wales Audit Office or appointed auditors to any member or officer in their individual capacity, or to any third party.

Summary

1. Cardiff County Council (the Council) undertakes a range of statutory duties as a local planning authority. These include formulating and adopting development and land use policy, conserving the built and natural environment and controlling development.

2. The Welsh Assembly Government (the Assembly) has set out what it expects local planning authorities to do in an Assembly publication 'Planning: Delivering for Wales'. The Assembly's objectives for local planning authorities are that they should:

   • be open, fair and transparent;

   • provide planning policies that are up-to-date and integrate with other policies, processes and actions;

   • continually improve the quality and responsiveness of their outcomes; and

   • inspire public and business confidence.

3. The purpose of this baseline assessment is to answer the question: "Is Cardiff County Council providing good a Planning Service?"

4. The criteria that we have used to make this assessment are based on the Assembly's objectives and are given in Appendix 1.

5. We have concluded that overall, that the Council is not providing a good Planning Service because planning policy is not properly integrated with other council policies and there are issues relating to the operation of the Planning Committee and the management of the Service that need to be addressed.

6. The Council has recognised the need to improve the Service and has decided to bring all the planning services together under one Chief Officer. This report has identified both strengths and weaknesses and the challenge now is to build on the strengths and to deliver effective responses to the weaknesses.

Planning policy is not up-to-date or properly integrated with other policies and actions and is not likely to be until the end of 2009 when it is estimated that there will be an adopted plan covering the whole of Cardiff

7. There is sufficient land to meet the immediate needs of the City and County of Cardiff, but there is no up-to-date Development Plan to assess development proposals against.

8. The current Development Plan is made up of the existing Structure and Local Plans, that were inherited from the previous councils in 1996.

9. The South Glamorgan Replacement Structure Plan covers part of the City and County until 2011 and the City of Cardiff Local Plan covers the former City Council area, but time-expired in 2001.

10. These plans were to be replaced by a Unitary Development Plan (UDP). The Council started to prepare the UDP in 1997, but has not been able to complete the adoption process. Work has now ceased and the Assembly has agreed that the Council can start work on a new form of Development Plan called a Local Development Plan. It is not anticipated that this will be adopted until December 2009.

11. This lack of progress in developing the UDP, has meant that planning policy is now not properly integrated with other council policies. Existing adopted plans do not reflect the Council's current aspirations, as we found when we carried out our work on the International Sports Village Site proposals.

12. Also there is little supplementary planning guidance to existing planning policy and concerns were expressed to us about the time it takes the Council to prepare this.

The fairness and transparency of the planning process is being undermined by a lack of user-friendly information about how the process is delivered and by the way the Planning Committee operates

13. There is a leaflet that explains the purpose and operation of the Planning Committee site visits, but other procedures are contained in the Constitution, which is not easily accessible to members of the public.

14. There is no Code of Practice specifically for councillors and officers involved in the planning process, as recommended by the Nolan Commission.

15. There is little guidance to explain to developers how legal agreements will be used and what they will be expected to deliver in community benefits.

16. With regard to the operation of the Planning Committee we found that:

- agendas are too long and complicated;
- meetings often last for many hours, which makes it difficult for members to sustain their levels of understanding and concentration;
- there is no use made of digital images to help people understand the issues being debated;
- the Planning Committee meetings can become a platform for Ward Members, who can speak for up to 10 minutes each; and
- public speaking is not permitted unless there is a petition of greater than 50 signatures.

17. There has been some training for councillors on the Planning System and the role they play, but not all councillors attended this and there is no ongoing training for all councillors with regard to their role as a member of the Planning Committee and the importance of the Development Plan.

The speed of processing planning applications is improving, but not all the Service's objectives are clear and measurable

18. The Development Control Service determined 70 per cent of all planning applications in eight weeks in 2005/2006, which was a significant improvement on the previous year and put the Council in the top 25 per cent of local planning authorities in Wales for this measure of performance.

19. Other information about the Development Control Service indicates that its performance:
- has been about, or above average, in defending the Council's position at planning appeals in comparison with other local planning authorities in Wales;
- has met the target for responding to all search enquiries within the standard of five working days; and
- has declined in relation to resolving enforcement complaints within 12 weeks.

20. The responsiveness of the Planning Service as a whole, to public enquiries by telephone or letter is not known.

21. In terms of other service outcomes, generally we found that although the Service's business plans contain Performance Indicators (PIs), they are essentially plans which identify priority activities. These plans do not relate these activities to outcome focused objectives which are all clear and measurable. Also, all staff do not have work plans, but a staff appraisal scheme is in the process of being introduced.

The loss of grant and other income could impact on the Service's ability to deliver continuous improvement

22. The Service has benefited from an Assembly grant over the last few years to help it respond to the improvement agenda associated with 'Planning Delivering for Wales.' It was £68,000 in 2004/2005. This increased resource is intended to be absorbed into the rate support grant settlement and we found no evidence that this would be included in the Planning Service's base budget when this occurs.

23. Also, a substantial part of the Planning Service's budget comes from fees charged for the processing of planning applications. Therefore an increasing work load, which the Development Control Section has had to respond to, is met by increasing fee income. However, unlike the Building Control fee income which is ring fenced to this service, there is no commitment from the Council that all the fee income from planning applications can be used to maintain and improve the delivery of the Service. In fact, on occasions, some of this income has been lost to other services.

24. In terms of cost comparisons with other local planning authorities in Wales, the Planning Officers' Society in Wales (POSW) survey of the financial returns to the Assembly in 2004/2005, indicates that in terms of expenditure per head of population on planning services, the Service is funded at a below average level.

It was the sixth lowest of the 25 local planning authorities in Wales. For the Development Control Service, the survey shows that in comparison with the 12 local planning authorities in industrial South Wales, the Council's costs were the third lowest for the Development Control Service, in terms of the expenditure per application determined and the lowest per head of population. In view of the improving performance of the Development Control Service, this would suggest that the Service is being run efficiently. For Development Planning, the cost per head of population was above average, suggesting a less efficient service in view of the lack of up-to-date Planning Policy.

25. The Development Control Service is the one most affected by the loss of income and the uncertainty about levels of funding, as it needs to be able to respond quickly to changing workload and market forces. The competition that now exists in the market place for planning staff, could result in staff leaving and the Service needs to be able to respond to this pressure if it is to sustain its improving responsiveness in dealing with planning applications.

Staff are generally well thought of by users, but physical access to the Service and public access to information held by the Council is poor

26. Feedback from our focus groups indicates that staff are generally helpful and well thought of by service users. The external stakeholders particularly thought that the Service benefited from the stability and experience of its senior staff.

27. Professional staff are generally available to meet the public or agents, although it is advisable to arrange an appointment if it is necessary to see a particular person.

28. Service users are not advised of the standards of service they can expect and the user-friendliness of the Service is also affected by staff being on two sites, one outside the city centre. This results in the public making abortive journeys, which is made more difficult by the parking and public transport inadequacies.

29. The reception facilities at City Hall are poor and the effectiveness of reception staff at both City Hall and County Hall is reduced because of the lack of leaflets and other forms of user-friendly information about the Service.

30. Facilities to access the Planning Service for individuals with a physical disability are particularly poor at City Hall.

31. There is no public access to the Council's website at either reception area.

32. The design of the Council's website is being up-dated and there is still much to do to improve public access to the information held by the Council. For example, it is not possible for the public to access electronically the details of individual planning applications and this is not helped by the fact that many planning application files have yet to be digitised. There is also a great deal of useful information about sites and developments stored on maps. This information has now been captured electronically, but the public do not have access to this either.

There are no systematic arrangements to provide ongoing feedback on the operation of the Service, so the Council does not know whether there is public and business confidence in it

33. An issue that can affect public confidence is 'findings of maladministration'. However, the Ombudsman has not found any maladministration relating to the Planning Service.

34. In terms of seeking the views of key service stakeholders, the Council has sought feedback from users in a number of different ways. A feedback box is used in the City Hall reception area, internal users have been surveyed, one-off meetings have been held with consultees and responses are made to complaints. However, there are no systematic arrangements in place for seeking ongoing feedback from the wide range of stakeholders that interact with the Planning Service.

35. Also, it is not clear to stakeholders what they can expect from the Service, so it would be difficult for them to make an assessment of how good the Service is if they were asked.

36. The people we spoke to, generally thought that the Service was good, but they also thought that the public's perception of the Service was less good than their own. They identified a number of issues that they felt need improving. The main ones are:

   • the lack of an up-to-date policy framework;

   • the councillors understanding of planning issues;

   • the lack of information about how the planning process operates;

   • the location of staff; and

   • officers needing to act more corporately.

37. These are all issues that affect public and business confidence.

Key recommendations

38. Appendix 3 contains a number of suggestions about what needs to be done to improve the Service. However, the most important steps that the Council needs to take to improve service delivery are shown as key recommendations below.

Over the next year the Council should:
R1 Strengthen its decision-making arrangements for delivery of the Local Development Plan.
R2 Review the operation of the Planning Committee, having regard to the issues raised in this report and review good practice and publish in leaflet format: • a Code of Practice for Members and Officers involved in the planning process; and   • the Council's procedures for the determination of planning applications and the operation of the Planning Committee.
R3 Present the Service's objectives as clear and measurable, outcome-focused statements clearly linked to operational activity and communicate them to staff.

R4 Locate all the staff involved in the delivery of the Service in a central location, with good public accessibility and effective reception arrangements.	
R5 Prepare and implement a strategy and action plan for the delivery of information electronically, to both internal and external users of the Service.	
R6 Clarify when and how the Service is allowed to retain the income it generates.	
R7 Extend the various strengths in the operation of the two existing planning sections across the whole of the newly amalgamated Service.	

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Criteria used to assess service performance

How good is the Planning Service?	
Lines of enquiry	Good practice/key questions
Is the Planning Service open and user-friendly?	Are customers advised of the role they play in the planning system, the information available to them and the cost of it?
	Are ongoing arrangements in place for seeking stakeholders' views and are these used to inform service delivery?
	Is user-friendly information available on standards of service delivery and performance?
	Is ICT used effectively to communicate with users and stakeholders?
	Is there reasonable access to professional staff?
	Is plain English and Welsh used and is Welsh translation available?
	Are services accessible to people who find it hard to access services?
Is the Planning Service delivered in a fair and transparent way?	Is there a user-friendly Code of Practice for councillors and officers involved in the planning process? Is it understood and applied?
	Do reports contain a fair analysis of consultation responses, policies, analysis and recommendations?
	Are a full range of policies and procedures

	publicly available in user-friendly format?
Are planning policies up-to-date and do they integrate with other policies, processes and actions?	Is the Development Plan up-to-date and does it cover the whole of the Council's area? Do policies contribute to national and local priorities? Does cross-boundary liaison take place to ensure a regional approach to relevant issues? Are planning policies consistent with other council policies? Are corporate arrangements in place to deal with policy development and development enquiries?

How good is the Planning Service?	
Lines of enquiry	Good practice/key questions
Is the Planning Service continually improving the quality and responsiveness of its outcomes?	Does service delivery compare well with that of other councils and is it improving? Are there adequate resources available to the Planning Services? Are performance management arrangements effective? Is there a well-trained and skilful workforce? Is the Council continually challenging how it does things, with a view to improving service delivery? Is ICT being used effectively to improve service delivery? Is the Council cost effective?

Does the Planning Service inspire public and business confidence?	Is there evidence that users are satisfied with the Service?
	Is the Council consistent in the advice it gives and the decisions it makes?
	Can the Council demonstrate that it delivers good practice and is sharing this with others?
	Are there any probity issues that could undermine public confidence?
	How many complaints are made and can they be substantiated?
	Have costs been awarded against the Council?
	What impression does the local press have of the service?

Assessment against the criteria

Is the Planning Service open and user-friendly?

Access to planning services

39. Members of the public are advised how to contact the planning services through the local telephone directory, the Council's website, the Capital Times and the Connect to Cardiff Call Centre.

40. Planning staff are based at both City Hall and County Hall; the Development Control staff being based at City Hall and the Strategic Planning (Planning Policy and Conservation/Design) staff being based at County Hall.

41. The City Hall location is seen by users and staff as a strength, but this is undermined by the lack of visibility of the reception area, which is at the side of the building and the facilities that are available there. It was pointed out to us that people often arrive at the reception desk in City Hall having first visited the front desk, only to be sent to County Hall on the other side of the City.

42. City Hall is well served by public transport and short term parking is available close by, although this is often fully utilised. There are no public toilets, the area is small and unwelcoming and there are two small interview rooms that have to meet the needs of seven public services.

43. The unsatisfactory nature of this reception area at City Hall has been recognised by the Council and discussions are taking place, with a view to relocating it to the front of the building. This will provide greater visibility and a better 'shop window' for the Council's services.

44. County Hall is not well served by public transport. There is visitor parking, but this is often full. The reception area is large and spacious and public toilets and meeting rooms are available.

Meeting the needs of people who might find it difficult to access services

45. There is parking for wheelchair users outside County Hall and City Hall, although the latter is not close to the Planning reception area. However, wheelchair users can not independently access the reception area or the meeting rooms at City Hall. There is no minicom system in operation, but a language line is available and written material

can be made available in large print. Officers will also visit people who have genuine reasons for not being able to access council offices.

Access to officers

46. The public are not advised of any standards for responding to telephone calls or for responding to correspondence. However, the Development Control Service has produced a Customer Charter and the Strategic Planning Section provides staff with an informative customer care guide.

47. Initial enquiries are dealt with by the call centre or reception staff. These staff are aware of the more commonly asked questions and advice is given, but there are no procedures for recording oral advice or responding systematically to commonly asked questions.

48. When the enquiry is too technical, it is passed on to the Service. The western team of development control officers has a 'duty' planning officer who is available during business hours to deal with such enquiries, but the other teams do not operate this system.

49. The Service encourages pre-application discussions and appointments can be made with particular officers from both the Development Control and Strategic Planning Sections.

50. In terms of service users receiving a co-ordinated response to their enquiry, the Council does not operate a formal 'one stop shop' approach. However, project teams of key officers have been established to deal with large planning proposals such as the St David's Centre Re-development. Also, there is generally good liaison between officers of different services, even when project teams have not been set up notwithstanding the fact that they are they are often located in different parts of the City.

Public information

51. Both reception areas are shared with other services and run by non-specialist staff and the effectiveness of these staff is undermined by the lack of user-friendly information about how the Planning System operates in Cardiff.

52. In the County Hall reception area, there is no public information displayed about the Planning Service, other than public copies of committee papers. There is also very little information displayed in the reception area in City Hall. Because of the restricted space at the City Hall reception, not all the relevant information can be stored at the reception desk. For example, the Register of Legal Agreements, the plotting sheets, the customer charter and a Planning Handbook were not immediately available at the reception desk.

53. A list of the information that is available for the public and the cost of it is not displayed and there is no information about the standards of service that users can expect. There is also no public access to a computer and the Council's website in the reception areas.

54. The information that is available includes leaflets on conservation areas and trees and how to complain and some national publications. There is also guidance on whether planning permission is needed for householder developments, how to make a planning application and the type of information that is needed to support an application.

55. Planning applications are acknowledged and the applicant receives the name of the case officer and is advised of progress on request. People who are consulted on planning applications and make written comments, also receive acknowledgements

and are advised of the decision. The public can also access previous planning applications at City Hall.

56. Generally, planning documents for the public are not independently checked to test whether they use plain language.

57. The Council's website provides access to information about the Planning Service. It contains planning application forms, committee minutes, the weekly list of planning applications and various planning/design policy documents. It has been possible to make planning applications 'on-line' via the Planning Portal since March 2005. The public and objectors can also contact the Council electronically.

58. The design of the Council's website is being up-dated, but there is still much to do to improve public access to the information held by the Council. For example, it is not possible for the public to access electronically the details of individual planning applications and this is not helped by the fact that many planning application files have yet to be digitised. There is a great deal of useful information about sites and developments stored on maps. This information has now been captured electronically but the public do not have access to this either.

Feedback from service users

59. Feedback from our focus groups on the user-friendliness of the Service (see Appendix 3), indicates that most front line staff are considered to be accessible, experienced and helpful. External stakeholders particularly thought that the Service benefited from the stability and experience of senior staff.

Summary chart

60. A summary chart of factors that can affect the user friendliness of the Council's performance is illustrated below.

Criteria	Strategic Planning Met = Not met =	Development Control Met = Not met =
Councillor training within the last two years.		
Staff training and development plans in operation.		
Staff training and development expenditure equal to, or exceeding 1% of gross salary costs.		
An adopted complaints procedure.		
Reception areas accessible to wheelchair users.		
A user charter or service plan in user-friendly		

format, detailing service standards.		
Targets set for responding to telephone enquiries.		

Targets set and monitored for responding to telephone enquiries.		
Targets set for responding to all mail.		
Targets monitored for responding to all mail.		
Regular (at least every 12 months) published performance plans.		
Survey of users views about the Service in the last two years.		
Key planning documents available in large print or Braille on request.		
Public documents available in Welsh on request.	some	some
Planning documents available on the internet.		

What needs to be done

61. The Service, as a whole, could be made more user-friendly by:
- • providing a new reception area at the entrance to City Hall which provides:
  - – accessible private meeting rooms;
  - – a low frontage desk to improve access for wheelchair users;
  - – adequate space to display more user-friendly information about the Planning Service, its standards of service delivery and what information the public can have access to and the cost of this;
  - – access to public toilets; and
  - – public access to a computer terminal and the Council's website;
- • using user feedback to drive service improvements;
- • formalising the development team approach for dealing with the more significant development enquiries and providing public information that explains how this will operate; and

• extending the planning information that is publicly available through the Council's website.

Is the Planning Service delivered in a fair and transparent way?

Policies and procedures

62. Councils have policies and procedures for how they operate the planning process. A transparent service ensures that these policies and procedures are easily available to the public and key stakeholders in plain language and in leaflet or other easily readable formats.

63. A description of how the Council carries out its business is contained in its Constitution. This is not a user-friendly document. There is also no Code of Practice specifically for councillors and officers involved in the planning process, as recommended by the Nolan Commission. The councillors we spoke to felt that

more needs to be done to explain to the public how the Planning Service operates in Cardiff.

64. A list of the planning policies and procedures that would benefit from being presented in a user-friendly format, so that they can be easily distributed and understood by councillors and the public is suggested in Appendix 4.

Decision making

65. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport has the responsibility for planning policy matters. However, decisions on planning policy are taken collectively by the Cabinet or are referred by the Cabinet to the Council. They are also often reported to the Scrutiny Committee for information and comment before a decision is taken. The Local Development Plan Delivery Agreement explains which of these bodies will take decisions with regard to this plan.

66. Decisions on planning applications are either delegated to the Planning Committee or officers. The Planning Committee meets monthly. It does not have a permanent 'home', which makes it difficult to set the room up in a way that makes it easy for both councillors and the public to follow proceedings and see plans and digital images of the developments that are being discussed.

67. The Scheme of Delegation is contained in the Constitution and is not easy for the public to follow and would benefit from being written in a clearer, more easily understood format. For example, a simpler way of presenting the Scheme would be to say that 'all matters are delegated to the Chief Planning Officer except…..' This could then be made available to the public and applicants in response to the objective of being more transparent. The opportunity could be taken at the same time to update the Scheme to reflect good practice.

68. We were advised that the Planning Committee could often last for many hours. We attended the Planning Committee meeting on 15 March and the schedule of reports ran to 418 pages, leading an observer to question whether any councillor could fully understand all the issues and take effective decisions with such a large agenda. This situation could be improved by:

- reducing the number of matters being considered;
- using digital photographs;
- adding page numbers to the index sheet of the planning applications to be considered;
- distinguishing between 'for decision' and 'for information' items ie structuring the agenda as a part 1 and a part 2; and

- using colour paper to distinguish between the different items and making this clear on the agenda page.

69. Good practice encourages public speaking at the Planning Committee, but in a controlled way with a spokesperson for each side of the case restricted to a time limit of typically three minutes. However, public speaking is not permitted at the Cardiff Planning Committee. All Ward Councillors can speak, whether they are on the committee or not and a petitioner can speak on behalf of 50 or more signatories. There is no public guidance on how these arrangements are conducted and the Chair is generally lenient with speakers. These arrangements

often become a platform for Ward Councillors, who can each speak for up to ten minutes. Members of the Planning Committee are allowed to speak more than once. On the occasion we attended, one Committee Member was allowed to speak five times on the same matter.

70. The consequence of the way business is conducted at the Planning Committee is that meetings last a long time, some applications are discussed at length and others often accepted without debate, giving the impression that the matter may have been previously discussed.

71. Sometimes the Planning Committee decides to defer an application for a site visit. A note on the procedure for this has been produced and the Council makes it clear in this that site visits are only for fact finding and are not an opportunity for interested parties to lobby councillors. However, the note also indicates that attendance will vary depending on the size of the development and that for larger developments objectors are notified. This in effect, creates the opportunity for comment and lobbying without the controls that can be utilised in the committee room to ensure equal opportunity for attendance and comment, again raising doubts about the fairness of the process.

72. Some decisions are taken against officer recommendation. Where this is likely to happen the reasons are minuted or the decision may be deferred to the next meeting for a report on the issues raised. There is no publicly available procedure note to cover this situation and provide a basis for monitoring consistency.

73. Members of the Planning Committee fulfil a quasi-judicial function, which is different from their role as a ward member. It is important that councillors understand these differences and act accordingly. A Code of Practice for councillors and officers involved in the planning process referred to earlier, would assist councillors in carrying out this difficult role.

74. Training has been provided for councillors, but not all councillors have attended this. The councillors we spoke to did not think that training for members of the Planning Committee is a priority, but they did suggest that training is needed for other councillors who attend and speak at the Committee. It is good practice for all councillors to have the benefit of an ongoing training programme and training on the code referred to above, could be part of this.

75. The way the Planning Committee carries out its business is an issue that was raised by the external stakeholders we spoke to and is one of their priorities for improvement reported in Appendix 3.

76. If the decision making process is to be seen to be fair, then a review of how the Planning Committee operates needs to be undertaken. The Chair has already recognised the need to develop protocols and these should help improve the situation.

Reports

77. One of the main functions of a planning service is to reconcile often conflicting views relating to the development and use of land.

78. The reports about planning policy matters that we saw, are well structured and provided a balanced picture of the issues involved.

79. For reports on planning applications to be seen to be fair and transparent, it is important that they should:

- outline the proposal;

- identify relevant planning policies;

- summarise the previous history;

- fairly summarise comments and objections;

- provide an appraisal of all the relevant issues; and

- make a recommendation.

80. The reports on planning applications that officers prepare for committee use a standard format. The reports generally address the issues raised above, although the policy context is made more complicated because the UDP has not been adopted and the policies of both adopted plans and the UDP have to be stated and considered.

81. There is no guidance to officers about the quality of report writing that is required. Such guidance would provide the basis for monitoring performance and taking appropriate action when the required standard is not met.

82. Reports on matters which are delegated to officers, follow the same structure as those presented to the Planning Committee, so this ensures a consistent approach between delegated and non delegated matters.

Legal agreements

83. Some planning decisions require a developer to enter into a legal agreement with the Council, to provide what is often referred to as 'planning gain.' For the system to be seen to be fair and transparent, it is important that the Council makes clear where it will require such agreements in advance of future development. This would avoid any perception that planning permission is being 'bought.' It also helps developers plan their proposals and speeds up the decision making process.

84. This is particularly important in Cardiff where legal agreements generate, according to the report to the Council's Scrutiny Committee, the equivalent of approximately £4.5 million per year to the Council. This involves officers in a considerable amount of work, which could be reflected in a local PI. The work could also generate a re-charge, which could provide extra income to the Service to help meet some of the cost of the officer time which is put into these agreements.

85. The Council indicates its general intention to use legal agreements in the UDP; Policy 1C: Planning Obligations. This policy does little more than reiterate what is already in planning legislation, but the UDP does indicate elsewhere, situations where this policy will be applied and supplementary planning guidance is currently being developed that will provide greater clarity for developers.

86. With regard to existing legal agreements, a register of these should be available for public inspection, but this is one of the files that is not immediately available at the Development Control reception desk. The Council's Scrutiny Committee has looked at the arrangements for monitoring progress in the delivery of these agreements and handling any payments that are received and has made a

number of recommendations. One of these is the need to better define the role of an officer, who would have particular responsibility for such legal agreements.

What needs to be done

87. The Service could be made fairer and more transparent by:

- reviewing the procedures for the public speaking and the operation of the Planning Committee generally;
- preparing a Code of Practice for councillors and officers involved in the planning process having regard to best practice across Wales;
- presenting the planning procedures relating to the situations suggested in Appendix 4 in a user-friendly format, so that they can be easily distributed to councillors and the public;
- reconsidering the format of the Planning Committee papers, having regard to the comments in this report;
- providing ongoing training for all councillors, particularly with regard to helping them deal with the conflicts that can arise between their roles as ward members and as members of the Planning Committee; and
- publishing supplementary planning guidance, to explain in more detail how the Council will implement its policies for the use of legal agreements and identifying an officer who has particular responsibility for overseeing and monitoring this activity.

Are planning policies up-to-date and do they integrate with other policies, processes and actions?

Statutory plans

88. Up-to-date planning policy is important, to ensure clarity and consistency in decision making.

89. The Council inherited a number of plans when it was established in 1996, which constituted the Development Plan. These are:

Structure Plans

- South Glamorgan (Cardiff Area) Replacement Structure Plan 1991-2011: approved April 1997;
- Mid Glamorgan Structure Plan Incorporating Alterations No.1: approved September 1989; and
- The Deposited Mid Glamorgan Replacement Structure Plan: 1991-2006: December 1993.

Local Plans

- City of Cardiff Local Plan (including Waste Policies) 1991-2001: adopted January 1996;
- Taff Ely Local Plan incorporating Waste Policies: Deposit Draft 1995;

- South Glamorgan (Cardiff Area) Minerals Local Plan 1991-2011: adopted June 1997; and
- Deposited Minerals Local Plan for Limestone Quarrying in Mid Glamorgan 1994-2006: March 1995.

90. The City of Cardiff Local Plan, which covers a large part of the unitary authority's area, time-expired in 2001 and although this is used for decision making, it can be argued by developers that its policies and proposals are out-of-date, particularly in view of the rapid change that has taken place in Cardiff since 1996.

91. The Council was required to prepare and adopt a UDP to replace these existing plans. A consultation document on the UDP was published in June 1997 and outline proposals were approved for consultation in April 2001. A Deposit Draft of the UDP

was prepared by January 2002, but this was not placed on deposit for public inspection until October 2003. The Council received approximately 650 representations. This stage should have been followed by a public enquiry, but the Council did not hold one and in January 2005, it sought confirmation from the Assembly that it could cease preparation of the UDP and make an early start on the proposed new Local Development Plan (LDP). This was because the UDP would not have been adopted before the new EEC Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive takes effect. Agreement to this course of action was given by the Assembly in March 2005.

92. The Council therefore, does not have an up-to-date Development Plan and Development Control staff have to use the South Glamorgan Replacement Structure Plan, which covers the period up to 2011 and both the out-of-time Local Plan and the unadopted UDP as a basis for making recommendations on planning applications.

93. Concerns were raised with us about the lack of compatibility between the Council's policy areas reinforcing one of the key messages arising from the review we undertook in 2004, on the proposals for the International Sports Village Site. This will need to be addressed during the preparation of the LDP.

94. The Council has now commenced work on the preparation of the LDP and published a Consultation Draft Delivery Agreement in December 2005. This indicates that the Council propose to place the LDP 'on deposit' by early 2008. It will then be necessary to consider representations, hold an independent examination in public, accept the Inspector's report and proceed to adoption. The Council's own assessment is that an up-to-date Development Plan, namely the LDP, will not be adopted until December 2009.

Supplementary planning guidance

95. Statutory plans are normally supported by supplementary planning guidance. The Council has a substantial programme for the preparation of such guidance covering some 18 topic areas, conservation areas and site specific briefs. The main issue raised during our work, was the time it seems to take to complete this type of work and this is perhaps something the Council can take note of.

Working strategically and corporately

96. The Council does work strategically. It is:
    • a member of the LDP Pathfinder Group of local planning authorities in Wales, which is helping to guide the early work on LDPs under the new development plan system;
    • an active participant on the South East Wales Economic Forum and the South East Wales Strategic Planning Group;
    • a partner in the Severn Estuary Partnership, which is producing a Management Strategy for the estuary; and
    • a member of the regional waste and minerals groups.

97. In terms of working corporately, during the preparation of the UDP, the Council established a 'Sounding Board' of Cabinet Members and Corporate Directors. There are also regular meetings of policy officers. These arrangements, however, were unable to ensure the adoption of the UDP over a period of eight years from 1997-2005. The Delivery Agreement for the LDP refers to a panel of senior councillors and officers to manage the plan preparation process, but this has no decision making powers. It also indicates the role that the Planning Committee and Scrutiny Committee will play. These arrangements will need to be more effective than those used for the preparation of the UDP if the timetable the Council has set itself, is to be met.

98. There are no formal corporate planning arrangements in place to deliver supplementary planning guidance. Such an agreement between service areas may help address the concerns mentioned earlier about the time it takes to produce such guidance.

Land availability

99. One of the primary purposes of planning policy is to ensure that sufficient land is available to meet the needs of the area. The last published Housing Land Availability Study in November 2005, indicated that there was more than nine years of housing land genuinely available for development. There is also sufficient land to meet the commercial and industrial needs of the City and County. The Cardiff Business and Industrial Landbank Monitoring Statement in July 2005, indicates that there are 115 hectares of land available for such uses.

What needs to be done

100. In order to bring planning policies up-to-date and integrate them with other policies, the Council needs to ensure that:
   • the arrangements for the delivery of the LDP are more effective than they were for the delivery of the UDP; and
   • Corporate Directors collectively agree work plans for the production of supplementary planning guidance.

Is the Planning Service continually improving the quality and responsiveness of its outcomes?

Responsiveness to enquiries

101. There is no information on the responsiveness of the Service to telephone calls and letters from the public and applicants.

102. The only standards for responding to mail relate to correspondence from councillors, MPs and AMs or from complainants. Compliance with these standards is monitored, but no monitoring information on performance levels was available for inspection during our work.

Planning policy

103. The position regarding the Council's duty to formulate planning policy and adopt a UDP and a LDP, has been explained in the previous section. To illustrate the Council's progress in relation to other councils in Wales, the Assembly's monitoring statement in October 2004, showed that Cardiff was one of 12 local planning authorities in Wales that had not passed the public enquiry stage.

Building Conservation

104. We received very little information about the Council's Building Conservation activity. What we have received, indicates that Cardiff has 25 conservation areas and a conservation team of the equivalent of 2.5 FTE staff. These staff undertake work and provide advice on conservation areas and the Council's 1,000 buildings, which are 'listed' as being of architectural or historic merit. A progress report reviewing the position of the conservation areas was presented to an Executive Business Meeting in March 2006. This does not make clear how many conservation areas have appraisals, although it suggests that few have and that more resources are needed to undertake this work. It would also appear from this report that there are no Enhancement Schemes or Townschemes in operation within the Council's area. There is also no 'buildings at risk' register for the 'listed' buildings and no grant scheme to help encourage the improvement of these buildings.

Development Control

Adding value

105. Staff consider that they are adding value during the development control process by:
- giving advice;
- seeking amendments to improve aspects of the development;
- imposing conditions; and

- negotiating with developers, with a view to making legal agreements to meet the community costs of their proposals.

106. The Council has not been monitoring such activities and their outcomes, so there is little evidence to illustrate the impact of the Development Control staff.

Planning applications

107. In terms of responsiveness, there is a national target to determine 80 per cent of all planning applications within eight weeks of registration and the Council's target is to do this. The Council's performance since 1996/1997 is illustrated in Exhibit 1.

108. The Council's performance has been variable, but it improved significantly to 70 per cent in 2005/2006. This is still 10 per cent below the Council's own target and the national target. However, as Exhibit 2 illustrates, this compares well against the performance of other local planning authorities in Wales. This exhibit also illustrates that the improving level of performance by the Council is consistent with the national trend.

Exhibit 1: Percentage of all applications determined in eight weeks

Source: Welsh Assembly Government

Exhibit 2: Comparison of Cardiff's performance in determining all planning applications in eight weeks, with the average in Wales and the top 25 per cent in Wales

Source: Welsh Assembly Government

109. A factor that influences the speed of determination is the level of delegation to officers. The percentage of decisions delegated to officers in 2004/2005 was 74 per cent. This was the 16th lowest out of the 25 local planning authorities in Wales, based on the survey carried out by the Planning Officer's Society in Wales (POSW). This percentage increased in 2005/2006 to 84 per cent.

110. The percentage of all decisions that are approvals was 90 per cent in 2004/2005 which, according to the POSW survey, was in the top 25 per cent. The same survey revealed that the Council was also one of the better authorities in terms of the number of decisions taken against the Development Plan.

Planning appeals

111. The Service's performance in defending the Council's position at planning appeals in recent years is illustrated in Exhibit 3. The Service does not have a target, but the Council's success rate is about or above the average across Wales.

Exhibit 3: Performance at planning appeals

Year	1996/1997	1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003
Number determined	82	102	87	72	82	90	80
Number dismissed or withdrawn	64	73	55	49	51	57	50
Percentage success	78%	72%	63%	68%	62%	63%	63%

Source: Cardiff County Council

Planning enforcement

112. The Council is one of 17 local planning authorities in Wales, that has no published policy on planning enforcement.

113. Officers use the Building Control Commencement Notices to monitor compliance with planning conditions, but there is little formal liaison with the Building Control Service.

114. In 2004/2005, the Council served 25 enforcement notices, which was above average in comparison to other local planning authorities in Wales.

115. The Council received 796 complaints about development activity and 69 per cent of these were resolved in 12 weeks. As Exhibit 4 illustrates, the Service's performance declined slightly in 2005/2006.

Exhibit 4: Percentage of development complaints resolved within 12 weeks

Year	1996/ 1999	1999/ 2000	2000/ 2001	2001/ 2002	2002/ 2003	2003/ 2004	2004/ 2005	2005/ 2006
Percentage resolved	Not available	65%	71%	71%	74%	79%	69%	65%

Source: Cardiff County Council

Searches

116. In terms of the Development Control input into land and property searches, there is an ongoing monitoring arrangement in place, relating to the responsiveness of

the Service. This indicates that the Service is regularly processing 100 per cent of these requests within the target of five working days.

Summary

117. The following chart illustrates the extent to which the Council's Development Control Service meets certain good practice criteria.

Criteria	Met = Not met =
The Authority defines its service standards.	some
The Authority publishes its standards in a user-friendly format.	some
The Authority publicises the fact that it encourages pre-application discussions and such advice is recorded.	
Application forms and guidance notes are available in English and Welsh.	
Acknowledgements of planning applications give the name of the planning officer dealing with the application.	
In-house staff or resources are available to provide specialist advice: • architectural/design; • conservation officer; • landscape architect; • ecologist; • GIS expertise; and • archaeologist (service level agreement with a local archaeological trust).	
Plan checking procedure exists between development control and building control.	
Planning officers are always available during defined office hours to deal with enquiries.	
Applicants are routinely informed of progress on their application.	
Planning conditions proactively monitored.	
Decisions are communicated to statutory consultee on request.	

The Authority has ongoing arrangements to monitor service users' feedback.	
The Authority has undertaken a survey of residents' views within the last three years.	
There is delegation of 70 per cent or more planning decisions to officers.	

Factors affecting performance

Wales Programme for Improvement

118. Under the Wales Programme for Improvement, the Council has a statutory duty to strive for continuous improvement. We found little evidence to show that the Service had carried out a comprehensive risk assessment. The performance information contained in this baseline assessment, will provide a more robust basis to assess the ability of the Service to improve and this information can be used in future risk assessments.

Workload

119. The workload is increasing both in volume and complexity. The Council has a heavy ongoing workload associated with the development of the LDP and supplementary planning guidance.

120. With the exception of 2000/2001, the number of planning applications that the Council has received has increased steadily since 1996. As Exhibit 5 illustrates, the number registered has increased by 52 per cent between 1996 and 2006. In addition, the size and complexity of applications is increasing, as are the number of legal agreements that need to be negotiated.

Exhibit 5: Number of planning applications registered

Source: Welsh Assembly Government

Expenditure

121. Clearly, the expenditure devoted to the Service is an important factor. In 2004/2005 the gross expenditure on the Service was £3,327,727. However, because of the various changes to the organisational structure robust comparative data for changes in expenditure and staffing levels are not available.

122. There is uncertainty about future of grant and fee income.

123. The Service benefited from an Assembly grant of £68,000 in 2004/2005, which has been used to improve the electronic capture of data. However, there is no commitment from the Council that this specific funding provided by the Assembly to help the Council meet its expectations under the 'Planning: Delivering for Wales' initiative with be available for this purpose when it is ultimately incorporated into the rate support grant settlement.

124. A substantial part of the Planning Service's budget comes from fees charged for the processing of planning applications. Here too, there is no commitment from the Council that all this fee income can be used to maintain and improve the delivery of

the Service. In fact, on occasions, some of this income has been lost to other services.

125. In terms of cost comparisons with other local planning authorities in Wales, the POSW survey of the financial returns to the Assembly in 2004/2005 indicates that in terms of expenditure per head of population on planning services, the Council is the sixth lowest of the 25 local planning authorities in Wales. For the Development Control Service, the survey shows that in comparison with the 12 local planning authorities in industrial South Wales, the Council's costs were the third lowest for the Development Control Service in terms of the expenditure per application determined and the lowest per head of population. In view of the improving performance of the Development Control Service, this would suggest that the Service is being run efficiently. For Development Planning the cost per head of population was above average, suggesting a less efficient service in view of the lack of up-to-date planning policy.

126. The Development Control Service is the one most affected by the loss of income and the uncertainty about levels of funding, as it needs to be able to respond quickly to changing workload and market forces. The competition that now exists in the market place for planning staff could result in staff leaving and the Service needs to be able to respond to this pressure if it is to sustain its improving responsiveness in dealing with planning applications.

Training

127. Strategic Planning staff all have staff training and development plans and their budget for training is 1.2 per cent of the gross salary costs. The availability and cost of training is an issue for Development Control staff. This Service is in the process of completing staff training and development plans but the budget is only 0.65 per cent of the gross salary costs.

Vacancies

128. There have been relatively stable employment levels within the Planning Service and unfilled vacant posts have not, unlike some other local planning authorities, been an issue which has impacted significantly on performance.

Sickness absence

129. Equally, sickness levels have not impacted significantly on performance levels. An example of sickness levels is given in Exhibit 6.

Exhibit 6: Sickness levels for the period 1 April 2005 to 31 August 2005

% sickness absence	Development Control	Strategic Planning	Council	Council Target
April – June 2005	3.21%	1%	5.31%	5.59%
July – August 2005	1.27%	1.3%	5.44%	5.59%

Source: Cardiff County Council

Performance management

130. Each service produces a three year business plan, but the application of performance management within the Planning Service is still developing. Although business plans contain PIs, they are essentially plans which identify priority activities. These plans do not relate these activities to outcome focused objectives which are all clear and measurable. Also, all staff do not have work plans, but a staff appraisal scheme is in the process of being introduced. These plans do not relate these activities to outcome focused objectives which are all clear and measurable. Also, all staff do not have work plans, but a staff appraisal scheme is in the process of being introduced.

131. Addressing these issues would provide a clearer and more robust basis to assess the Council's progress in improving service delivery.

Benchmarking

132. In terms of benchmarking, the Service supplies information to POSW. However, there is no evidence to illustrate how the Service is using this data to help improve service delivery.

Office procedures

133. Well documented office procedures can help ensure consistency in the way a service is delivered and retain knowledge which can be easily transferred to new staff. We found evidence of a work flow diagram and procedures and systems for the development control process and these processes are audited externally.

ICT developments

134. There is no ICT strategy and action plan for either Strategic Planning or Development Control and a co-ordinated effort by both service based and corporate staff is needed to deliver this. There has, however, been an ongoing investment in ICT systems, but this investment is not being fully utilised by staff or users of the Service.

135. Some staff are slow to adapt their working practices to the new systems. New systems are not being sufficiently well developed, so that the public can have

access to all the information stored within them. The amalgamation of Development Control and Strategic Planning Sections provides the opportunity to review what needs to be done, to ensure that existing systems are properly integrated to meet the needs of both internal and external users. The starting point for this review should be an identification of what the systems should deliver, to whom and by when. The Council can then put the necessary operational plans in place to deliver this.

Scrutiny

136. Scrutiny is an important function in challenging existing performance and in helping to deliver improvement. We found that the Economic Scrutiny Committee particularly, has been playing an increasingly significant role in reviewing existing service delivery; the most notable example of this being the review of 'Section 106 Agreements.' However, if the Service's objectives were more clearly presented, this would help the Council's scrutiny arrangements to more effectively evaluate the Service.

What needs to be done

137. The quality and responsiveness of the Service's outcomes could be improved by:

- improving the performance management arrangements and agreeing with the main stakeholders, clear and challenging service objectives with measurable outcomes for each service delivery area and adopting operational plans to deliver these.

138. And more particularly by:

- establishing standards for telephone enquiries and all correspondence and monitoring these and taking corrective action where the standard is not achieved;

- monitoring the added value provided by the Development Control Service and reporting this annually to the appropriate bodies;

- preparing and publishing a policy on planning enforcement, including the actions that will be taken to work jointly with the Building Control Service to proactively monitor new development's compliance with planning regulations;

- redrafting the Scheme of Delegation relating to applications for planning permission, so that it has regard to current best practice and is easier to understand and apply;

- using performance information from benchmarking partners to drive improvement; and

- preparing and implementing a strategy and action plan for the delivery of electronic systems and information to both internal and external users of the Service.

Does the Planning Service inspire public and business confidence?

User feedback to the Council

139. A feedback box is provided in the Development Control reception area and internal users of this service were surveyed recently as part of an electronic planning application project. Complaints are also recorded. However, we found little systematic analysis of this information or evidence of how it was being used to improve the Service.

140. Meetings are held from time to time with statutory consultees, such as the Environment Agency, but there are no well developed systematic arrangements for capturing feedback from the key stakeholders on the operation of the Planning Service.

141. A questionnaire is being developed by the Planning Officers' Society of Wales (POSW) and this will be used when it is available.

Other factors

142. There are a number of other factors that could influence public and business confidence. These are addressed below:

- The extent to which the key stakeholders have been involved in establishing service standards and priorities. There has been no such involvement so far and this needs to be addressed.

- Whether the Council delivers what it sets out to do. As it is not clear to the public what this is, this cannot be assessed either.

- The nature and number of complaints can give an indication of how well the Planning Service is perceived. The Council has a corporate complaints procedure. Although information is available on the nature of the complaints, there is no information about how these have been used to improve service delivery.

- Referrals to the Ombudsman. We are advised that there have been no findings of maladministration against the Council that relate to the Planning Service since 1996/1997.

Our focus groups and meetings

143. We met councillors and officers and held focus groups with key stakeholders, to seek feedback on the strengths of the Service and areas needing improvement. This

involved meeting a cross-section of 42 people. Full details of the feedback from the focus groups are given in Appendix 2.

144. With only a few exceptions, the overall indication from the focus groups was that the quality of service is good. However, all groups thought that the public's perception of the Service is less good than their own.

145. The main priorities for improvement identified by each focus group are given below.

Focus group	Priorities for improvement
Staff	• Addressing outstanding management issues. • Better IT usage and development. • Better two way public/user communication. • Bringing the two planning services together with a single reception providing a better public face. • Providing an up-to-date Development Plan and supplementary guidance.
Councillors	• Improving IT. • Providing better information about planning for the public.
Internal and external stakeholders	• Effectiveness of consultation arrangements. • Internal liaison arrangements so the Council is operating more corporately. • One location for all staff. • Policy framework and supplementary planning guidance. • Training for councillors and clear procedures and guidance regarding how planning decisions should be made.
Managers	• Improve information for the public and the reception facilities. • Management/organisational issues, particularly maximising the benefits of a united service. • More resources.

146. These are all matters that the Council will need to address, if it is to improve service delivery and build public and business confidence in the Service.

What needs to be done

147. The Service would inspire more public and business confidence by:
  • explaining more clearly what level of service it is able to give and then delivering it;
  • doing more to explain how the planning process operates and being more proactive in communicating this;

- improving the arrangements for securing feedback from all key stakeholders about the way the Service is delivered and being clearer how this information has been used to improve service delivery; and
- addressing the issues raised by the stakeholder focus groups referred to in Appendix 3.

Feedback from focus groups

The focus groups were asked to consider how good the Planning Service is, identify what they thought the strengths of the Service are and suggest what they thought needs improving. They were also asked to decide the relative importance between their suggested areas for improvement. The weighting is shown in brackets, such as (10), with the size of the number representing the level of importance attached to the suggestion.

Staff group

Present	
Wendy Lant	Receptionist / Supervisor
Sam Courtney	Senior Planning Officer
Hayley Best	Technical Officer
Gerry Lynch	Senior Planning Officer (UDP)
Lloyd Rivett	E-Government Officer
Richard Butler	Planner
Eluned Jones	Planner, Design Team
Dawn Chivers	Senior Administrative Officer
Alan Groves	Senior Planner
Ross Cannon	Planner - City Centre Strategy T
Ryan Thomas	Senior Planning Officer
Chris Morris	Planner – Conservation
Gail Connelly	Senior Clerical Assistant

Most staff think that the Planning Service is good. Two felt that it was fair because of the lack of progress with the UDP and the need to compromise in making decisions. Staff think that the external perception of the Service is less good than their own.

Strengths
• Training courses but Development Control do not have personal development plans, work plans or appraisal.

• Using 'in house' staff rather than consultants, it is better and cheaper.
• Approachable and supportive management.
• Friendly atmosphere.
• Good Development Control structure.
• Good relations between sections.
• Staff, their skills, knowledge, friendliness, adaptability, accessibility, and ability to adapt to change.
• IT systems – making good use of limited resources.
• Well organised.
• Prime location of office for Development Control.
Potential for improvement
(18) Political and administrative management issues such as : Having clear objectives, personal development plans for Development Control staff, individual performance monitoring, more systematic and structured staff briefings/meetings, extended flexi hours, pool cars, consistent approach to consultation by all three Development Control teams, officers meeting deadlines for reports and typing these on the template, simplify decision making processes for policy, resources to match priorities/objectives, bigger conservation team, improvements to method of filing/protocol and effective input into other policy areas.
(10) Bring the two planning services together with single reception providing a better public face.

(9) Better two way public/user communication.
Eg: PC terminals for public viewing, accessing Development Control systems through the website, better display in reception, late night opening, better public relations, seek public/user feedback and explain procedures to public.

(9) Better IT usage and development.
Eg: better access to files/information, more documents on line and bigger budget for equipment.

(8) Providing an up-to-date Development Plan and supplementary guidance.

Councillor's group

Present	
Councillor Gill Bird	Chairperson, Planning Committee
Councillor Richard Foley	Deputy Chairperson, Planning Committee
Councillor Robert Derbyshire	Member, Planning Committee
Councillor Jacqueline Parry	Member, Planning Committee
Councillor Cathy Pearcy	Member, Planning Committee
Councillor Elgan Morgan	Executive Member, Environment & Transport

Councillors thought that the Service is good to excellent, but they all agreed that the public's view of the Service is less good than their own assessment.

Strengths
• Staff – being accessible, answering questions, giving value for money.
• The Planning Committee – Consistent decisions, not political, public attendance, fair chair.
• Comprehensive reports.

• Innovative technology.
• Forward thinking.
• Hitting targets.

Potential for improvement
(9) Providing better information about planning for the public.
(8) Improving IT.
(4) Better planning training for councillors who are not on the Planning Committee.
(4) Not allowing political point scoring.
(3) Appointing a dedicated S106 officer.
(2) Better consultation.
Other suggestions: • hold the Planning Committee in same room and provide audio, visual facilities; • use community mapping; • have wording ready in case Committee goes against officer recommendations; and • third party right of appeal.

External and internal stakeholder group

Present	
External stakeholders	
Catherine Anderson and David Revill	Environment Agency

Neil Maylan	Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust
Vicky Lloyd	Cardiff Chamber of Commerce
Mr Chichester	Chichester Nunns Partnership
Ian Archer	Percy Thomas Partnership
Carolyn Jones	RPS Group
Steve Pritchard	Associated British Ports
Internal stakeholders	
Paul Freeman	Parks Services
Mike Yeoman	Highway Operations
Simon Richards	Waste Management
Leighton O'Connor	Building Control Surveyors
Alison Hitchcock	Housing Strategy
Rachel C Jones	Economic Policy

Stakeholders were split between a group that felt that the Service is fair and another that felt the Service is good. No one thought that the public perception was better than their own.

Strengths
• Qualities of most front-line staff eg helpful, responsive, positive, capable, experienced, availability.

• Stability and experience of senior staff.
• City centre office location.
• Efficient administration service.
• Good and extensive consultation.
• Internal cross-working.
• Fairness.
• First SPG on archaeology in Wales.
• Easy access to information.

Potential for improvement
(18) Policy framework and supplementary planning guidance.
(7) Training for councillors and clear procedures and guidance regarding how planning decisions should be made.
(5) Effectiveness of consultation arrangements eg consistency of detail provided, extent of information provided, timing, consulting earlier and being more extensive with the consultation.
(4) One location for all staff.
(4) Internal liaison arrangements so the Council is operating more corporately.
(3) Information for the public.
Other suggestions: • training for officers; • increasing resources; • consistency of advice and access to officers; • reduce number of KPIs and the amount of paper; and • IT systems.

Managers group

Present	
Dave Holtam	Operational Manager, Planning Policy
Ian Whittaker	Operational Manager, Planning Development Western Area
Nigel Hanson	Operational Manager, Planning Development Central Area
Carol Esposti	Development Control Office Manager
Peter Vaughan	Operational Manager, Planning Development Eastern Area
Darren Connelly	Planning Enforcement Manager
Gareth Harcombe	Group Leader – Regeneration
Lindsay Cuddy	Team Leader – Conservation
Stuart Williams	Group Leader - Policy

Managers thought that the Service overall, is good. Only one thought the Service to be fair because he thought it too easy to be complacent. No one thought that the public's perception is better than their own.

Strengths
• Customer focus. • Eg.'open doors', pre-application discussions, positive use of Section 106, ready to respond to consultation, response times good, positive attitude.
• IT/Website – has improved considerably over last few years.
• Qualities of Staff – commitment, professionalism, experience and sociable.
• Statutory basis for service.

• Evidence based.
• Good working relationships.
• Planning Committee.
• Joined up corporately.
• Helping to grow.
• Quality of development in the City.

Potential for improvement
(12) Management/organisational issues, particularly maximising the benefits of a united service eg: • all staff in same building; • flexi hours; • speeding up Section 106 Agreements; • faster recruitment process; • stability; and • better performance indicators reflecting the work done.

(10) Improve resourcing eg:
       • for IT development;
       • ring fence planning fees/grant; and
       • directing resources to priorities.

(8) Improve information for the public and the reception facilities e.g. :
       • more information on the website;
       • improve information to third parties;
       • PR information; and
       • leaflets to advise how Committee/public speaking works.

(2) Develop ways to get better feedback from service users.

> (0) Policy framework issues such as:
> - better input into corporate policy development;
> - speeding up UDP/SPG process; and
> - better clarity of conservation role of CADW/Welsh Assembly Government.

Planning procedures

This is a list of the planning policies and procedures that would benefit from being presented in a user-friendly format, for example, in A4 handouts or leaflets with the text expressed in straight forward language, so that they can be easily distributed to councillors and the public.

- responding to new national policies and procedures;
- negotiations with applicants and their agents;
- late representations;
- circumstances where the Authority will expect applicants to enter a planning legal agreement (S106 agreement);
- stakeholders attending and addressing committee;
- purpose and procedures relating to site visits;
- who takes decisions and for what, on behalf of the local planning authority;
- roles and behaviour expected from councillors and officers;
- councillors who are both members of the Planning Committee and town and community councils;
- lobbying of councillors and officers;
- training that members of planning committees are expected to attend;
- an application that the Council or a councillor or an officer has a direct interest in;
- decisions contrary to planning policy;
- decisions contrary to officer recommendation;
- presenting the Council's case at a planning appeal, particularly where the officer's recommendation has not been accepted;
- reporting appeal decisions to committees and the issues arising; and
- keeping the committees up-to-date on enforcement issues.