

Meeting of:	DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	11TH JANUARY 2024
Report Title:	ROYAL TOWN PLANNING INSTITUTE (RTPI) CYMRU RESEACH PAPER: “Building Capacity through Collaboration and Change” NOVEMBER 2023
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES
Responsible Officer:	JONATHAN PARSONS – GROUP MANAGER PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	The report content has no direct effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules.
Executive Summary:	<p>Previous studies into the effectiveness of the planning system in Wales has indicated that it is experiencing a critical lack of resources and expertise to deliver the placemaking agenda and respond to climate and nature emergencies as well as providing the land use planning framework for future growth including affordable homes.</p> <p>This RTPI Cymru research paper identifies what planners are doing to make more effective and efficient use of existing resources - and the potential to collaborate and change within the parameters of present resources.</p>

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Development Control Committee Members with a summary of the key findings of the report. The full research paper may be viewed online via the following link:-

<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/find-your-rtpi/rtpi-nations/rtpi-cymru/policy-and-research/policy-publications/building-capacity-through-collaboration-and-change/>

Further information on the current state of the planning profession in the UK can be found via the following link:-

<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/policy-and-research/state-of-the-profession-2023/>

The RTPI research paper ‘The Big Conversation’ may be found via the following link

<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/13648/big-conversation-report-final.pdf>

2. Background

- 2.1 Members will recall that a report was presented to the Development Control Committee in February 2023, on the RTPI Cymru research in 2022 into the wellbeing of the planning profession in Wales. The report titled 'The Big Conversation' highlighted the difficulties faced by planners in carrying out their professional roles, a significant aspect of which revolved around lack of resourcing. The latest research from RTPI Cymru focusses on this area and how these issues may be addressed.
- 2.2 A series of published reports over the last few years highlight some inadequacies of the statutory land use planning system in Wales. Focused mainly on the public sector, these reports identify recruitment challenges, lack of specialist skills, reduction in budgets of local authority planning departments with planning services stretched to the point of a high risk of failure. Notwithstanding this, the range of issues and the scale of the challenges faced by the planning system in Wales, and what it is expected to achieve, continues to increase. Audit Wales in its 2019 report, 'The Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales', described the system "*neither 'fit for the future or able to deliver what is needed'*". Other reports on specific service areas have identified that planning departments are "*having to deliver more for less*" - a situation likely faced by many local planning authorities in Wales.
- 2.3 The constraint on resources is not just confined to council planning teams but also extends to Welsh Government and other public bodies and agencies engaged in the planning system in Wales such as Natural Resources Wales (NRW), and other statutory consultees crucial to positive planning outcomes.
- 2.4 The RTPI Cymru's research report (**Report**) suggest that there is a clear need for a better resourced planning system if it is to effectively deliver on the far-reaching economic, social and environmental agenda for Wales. A key aim within the Report is to recognise the reality of the resource constraints planners and other stakeholders are working within and that these challenges are not going to be lessened within the foreseeable future. Whilst it is important to continue to pursue better resourcing solutions, exploring new and different ways of working is also important. As such the Report takes a proactive and positive approach with an emphasis on identifying ways of using current resources in more effective and efficient ways.
- 2.5 This includes sharing experience and knowledge to sustain planners' skills and abilities, designing more efficient ways of producing information for users of planning services, and potentially developing shared services to enable higher quality input into plan-making and decisions.
- 2.6 The Report recognises that the implementation of the ideas and actions identified will require professional support as well as a degree of political leadership. This may entail a change in approach in current budget priorities.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 The key findings of the Report include:

- There has been a significant decline in resources in the planning system and this has impacted on the capacity of the planning system;
- There is a lack of capacity in some local planning authorities due to difficulties in recruiting and retaining planning staff;
- There are increasing demands of the planning system and an increase in stakeholder expectations – the planning system has been trying to ‘do more with less’;
- There is a skills deficit in some important but specialist areas of planning;
- There is a need to improve some local planning authorities performance data and other workload information to secure better and more focused use of their resources.

3.2 Key areas identified in the Report for developing good practice and identifying solutions to resource constraints are:

- Ensuring quality applications and decisions – for example, helping landowners and developers bring forward suitable sites for inclusion in Local Development Plans, and supporting applicants and agents to provide good quality information when submitting planning applications;
- Building expertise and capacity – for example, identifying those areas of specialist expertise that are in limited supply and exploring shared service models to sustain this expertise, as well as building planners’ expertise and confidence more generally;
- Communications and information – including making it easier for users of the planning service to find key information, managing planning enquiries in a more efficient way, and making planning and other data more accessible to the public and external users;
- Support systems and workload management – for example, using systems that promote more timely and efficient management of staffing and other resources, as well as building better insight into how well planning services are performing;
- Strategy and prioritisation – including working out what to focus on when resources are under pressure, as well as how planning services can connect with corporate priorities and their wider organisational context.

** Extracted from the article in ‘Cynllinio’ - Journal of RTPI Cymru – Winter 2023*

3.3 With regard to the current situation within Bridgend, like most other local planning authorities there has been a reduction in the level of staffing and specialist skills and business support roles over the last decade. However, during this time investment has been made in back office and public facing ICT systems, improvements in efficiency and reduction of unnecessary tasks, as well as the introduction of a new bespoke paid for pre-application advice service in order to reclaim costs. Bridgend is also pursuing the use of planning performance agreements (**PPAs**), for large scales developments in order to focus resources and backfill any resultant staff shortfalls.

- 3.4 The Council's planning team face challenges in 2024 with the adoption of the replacement Local Development Plan (**RLDP**), which will see a number of large - scale strategic housing sites come forward during the course of the year. There are also large inward investment developments and renewable energy schemes currently at pre-application stage that will require significant resource input.
- 3.5 Bridgend continues to work with neighbouring authorities and regional partners in developing and exploring ways of collaborative working.
- 4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**
- 4.1 The report is for noting and there are no negative impacts
- 5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**
- 5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.
- 6. Climate Change Implications**
- 6.1 There are no Climate Change Implications arising from this report.
- 7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**
- 7.1 There are no Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications arising from this report.
- 8. Financial Implications**
- 8.1 None – the report is for noting.
- 9. Recommendations**
- 9.1 It is recommended that the Development Control Committee notes the report.

Background documents

None