

Meeting of:	DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	10 JULY 2025
Report Title:	PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES – WORKLOADS PROJECTS & CHALLENGES 2025 - MEMBER BRIEFING
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	JANINE NIGHTINGALE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES
Responsible Officer:	JONATHAN PARSONS GROUP MANAGER PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no impact on the policy framework or procedure rules.
Executive Summary:	Details of the workloads and projects that the Planning & Development Services teams have and are currently undertaking in 2025. The report will also touch on some of the issues and challenges faced by the Services teams and, where applicable, how officers intend to address them.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the workloads and projects that the Planning & Development Services teams have and are currently undertaking in 2025.
- 1.2 The report will also touch on some of the issues and challenges faced by the Services teams and, where applicable, how officers intend to address them.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Planning & Development Services Group (PDS Group) comprises the following statutory functions:
 - Town & Country Planning - development management/control, planning enforcement, strategic planning, Local Development Plans (LDP), Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), regional planning initiatives including the Strategic Development Plan (SDP). The Services teams are assisted by a back office team who provide essential technical and administrative support.
 - Building Control – compliance with the Building Regulations, dangerous structures and safety at sports grounds.

- Strategic Transport – active travel, transport projects, regional transport projects and contribution to the Regional Transport Plan (RTP)
- Highways Development Control – highway assessment of planning applications and expert highway comments on development proposals.
- Estate Development & Highway Registrar – Highway agreements, road adoptions, stopping up orders and highway searches.

3. Current situation/ proposal

- 3.1 There are 53 posts on the PDS Group's structure, 17 of which are currently vacant. The PDS Service also relies on external consultants and agency staff to deliver its functions.
- 3.2 The current officer workload in terms of Development Management (DM) includes the consideration and determination of large- scale housing and commercial planning applications; these include the Strategic sites approved under the Replacement LDP and a large data centre proposal. There are also a large number of smaller proposals and householder development. Officer caseloads are high; up to 70 live cases for each Officer.
- 3.3 The Strategic Planning Team (SP Team) delivered the Replacement LDP, which was adopted in 2024. The SP Team is now working on the associated suite of updated Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), with the first new generation SPG (Affordable Housing) recently approved by Council. Other SPGs are currently out to consultation or in preparation. Bridgend's Strategic Planning and Transportation Manager was also instrumental in the preparation of the SDP Delivery Agreement (DA) which was approved by the Regional Corporate Joint Committee (CJC), earlier this year.
- 3.4 A dedicated S106 Officer has recently been appointed and will eventually oversee the S106 compliance process including the monitoring of large financial contributions, as well as leading a proposed Infrastructure Management Board (IMB), which will prepare a delivery plan and ensure that any s106 contributions are paid and spent on time so that vital infrastructure is delivered. The IMB will also look at cross- matching other funding streams to ensure maximum value. This is a considerable undertaking and will require support from a number of other teams and sections. The exact details and heads of terms for the IMB will need to be agreed and approved by Cabinet in due course.
- 3.5 The Building Safety Act 2022 (2022 Act), presents a significant change to the way the safety of buildings is administered And has an impact on the Building Control Team (BCT Team). It was introduced in the wake of safety concerns for occupants of high-rise buildings after the 2017 Grenfell Tower tragedy and is intended to improve the design, construction and management of higher-risk buildings. It amends the Building Act 1984, to create powers to prescribe requirements on those who procure, design, plan, manage and undertake building work; it also introduces new enforcement powers for building control authorities. The 2022 Act also includes provision for the registration of building inspectors. Building Control Officers now need to gain "Registered Building Inspector" (RBI) status through competency tests and now need to be registered and accredited with the Building Safety Regulator in order to continue their role with regular re-certification.

- 3.6 Currently, within the BCT Team there are three Class 2 inspectors and one Class 1 inspector. Class 2 inspectors are required to supervise Class 1 on any non-domestic and larger domestic projects. This allows for Class 1 inspectors to gain the competencies and experiences to sit and progress through the Class 2 competency exam. Class 2 inspectors now have a greater level of responsibility and risk within their projects. In Wales, there are only around 60 Registered Building Inspectors (RBIs), and only a handful at the higher Class 3 or above. Whilst the fundamentals of the role have not changed between the old 'building inspector' and new 'Registered Building Inspector' roles, Officers will now be categorised based on demonstrable and assessable competence for certain tasks.
- 3.7 Further to this, local authority building control operates within a competitive sector and Bridgend's BCT service faces market competition from private sector Approved Inspectors (AIs), who may be able to undercut fees whilst not being obliged to provide a range of statutory services. The market share is regularly monitored and fees set to allow Bridgend's service to remain competitive whilst also covering costs. Nevertheless, this remains an ongoing issue.
- 3.8 The Strategic Transport and Highways Development Control Teams led on the delivery of the Porthcawl Metrolink bus facility. The Metrolink opened earlier this year and represents a significant regional project linking Porthcawl with the wider Cardiff Capital Region (CCR). The Metrolink project was funded mainly through UK and Welsh Government grants and was delivered on budget and in good time despite some site constraints and technical setbacks. Officers worked tirelessly to ensure its completion and operation.
- 3.9 The PDS team also contributed to the CCR Regional Transport Plan (RTP) and are also currently undertaking work on the active travel programme and other transport schemes including a proposed transport interchange in the Llynfi Valley.
- 3.10 Due to the work of the planning support officers, significant progress has been made and is ongoing with the digitisation of historic planning records. This will mean that, in time, all records will eventually be available online through the main back-office system, which will ensure more efficient working going forward.
- 3.11 In terms of constraints and challenges to service delivery, one of the principal issues is one of resource and funding. The PDS Group is highly dependent on fee income to provide the greater share of its staff funding. This raises issues of sustainability as planning fees and other income can fluctuate over time. Also, in years where there is a surplus in fee income it has been redistributed to other services rather than being invested back into the PDS Group. The resource issue not only affects the Planning & Development Group but also our partner functions such as legal, ecology, highways and drainage support, which is severely hampering the ability to respond on planning applications and development proposals as well as securing much needed S106 funding.
- 3.12 As it stands the latest Planning & Development Services Group structure (implemented in 2023), is not and has never been fully funded and the PDS Group faces considerable financial challenges. In order to address this situation Officers are working with colleagues in the Finance team to look at how the PDS Group services can be adequately funded in the future in order to ensure that the PDS Group can deliver its functions. This will involve a further restructure and a growth

pressure bid. In the meantime, the PDS team has created new income streams through its revised Pre-Planning Advice Service and the use of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs). This has allowed the use of consultants and agency workers to backfill roles that been diverted to major development proposals, and to assist in resourcing other teams.

- 3.13 Recruitment and retention is also a problem area for the PDS Group across all its service areas. Competition from the private sector and other public bodies offering higher salaries has had a significant impact. The recruitment of Building Control Officers and specialist Highways Officer roles are particularly problematic and there would appear to be a lack of suitably qualified personnel within both the region and nationally. The PDS Group has however, been reasonably successful in fostering a culture of internal advancement allowing more junior officers to progress to senior roles and in providing apprentice roles. Any new structure will make provision for trainee roles in order to continue this process and provide a degree of succession planning.
- 3.14 Bridgend's planning service is being audited by both Audit Wales and the internal audit service over the coming weeks. The audits will require a degree of officer and Member input but it should be seen in a positive light and an opportunity to reflect and improve on the services currently being delivered by the PDS Group. Members will be advised of the outcome of both audits in due course and any measures or changes to working practices.
- 3.15 The Planning and Development Service continues to deliver its statutory functions to the best of its ability and this includes a number of significant schemes and projects. However, it is under considerable strain across all its service areas despite efficiencies being made and innovative working over the last 10 years . Nevertheless, Officers will continue to seek ways of addressing the current resourcing issues in order to meet future challenges and ensure that the Planning and Development Service is fit for purpose.
- 3.16 Bridgend is not alone within Wales (or in the UK) with regard to resourcing difficulties. This issue has now been acknowledged by Welsh Government (WG) and Members will be aware that it has recently consulted on ways to improve the resilience of local planning authorities. There is also recognition of the national dearth of planning officers and associated professionals and expertise that are critical to the planning process. Legal Support for example is part of the planning process in that, S106 Agreements are often the last "gateway" to the issue of Planning Permissions for larger & Strategic (RLDP) Sites as well as advising/commenting on draft SPG, planning enforcement advice, certificates of Lawfulness etc.
- 3.17 WG is considering measures including the raising of nationally set planning fees and the ring- fencing of planning fees surplus to within the planning service. This will certainly assist and provide the flexibility for Bridgend to invest in its planning service but also potentially to assist in the resourcing of other functions including those described above. Members will be advised of any changes arising from the consultation in due course.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh Language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

5. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 - implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 This report refers to the implementation of the statutory Town and Country Planning system, which assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:

1. Supporting a successful sustainable economy – taking steps to make the County Borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the County Borough.
2. Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives. The Retail and Commercial Development SPG will provide additional guidance and material weight to support adopted RLDP Policies and seeks to provide clarity in respect of their future interpretation and application, setting out what the Council expects from applicants in respect of satisfying those policies' detailed criteria. This is a key contributory factor to delivering Local Wellbeing Objective one 'A prosperous place with thriving communities'.

6. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct climate change and nature implications 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

9. Recommendation(s)

- 9.1 That Members note the content of the report.

Background Papers

None