

Meeting of:	DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	5 FEBRUARY 2026
Report Title:	AUDIT WALES REPORT BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE
Report Owner: Responsible Chief Officer / Cabinet Member	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 and procedure rules.
Executive Summary:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In July and August 2025 Audit Wales undertook a study of the Planning and Development Service at Bridgend and examined whether the Council supports the service to deliver value for money in the use of its resources. • The audit focused on the Development Control team and the Strategic Planning Policy Team within the Council's Planning and Development Service. • Building Control, Strategic Transportation, Highway Development Control and Highway Estate Development are also functions within the wider Planning and Development service but were not included within this audit. • Audit Wales noted the Service's performance but did not examine the reasons for its performance or make judgements on it. • Audit Wales did not look at the decisions of individual planning applications. • This report provides a summary of the findings of the Audit Wales report and the proposed management response

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to report to the Development Control Committee on the Audit Wales report on the Planning & Development Service at Bridgend CBC, together with the subsequent Management Response.

2. Background

- 2.1 Audit Wales (**AW**) undertakes a programme of work during the year to help the Auditor General discharge his duties under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004. The Auditor General's functions include auditing accounts and undertaking local performance audit work at a broad range of public bodies, alongside conducting a programme of national *value for money* examinations and studies. The Auditor General also assesses the extent to which public bodies are complying with the sustainable development principle when setting and taking steps to meet their well-being objectives.
- 2.2 Audit Wales carried out its audit of the Council's Planning & Development Service (the "**Service**"), in Bridgend during July and August 2025, and published their report, '*Planning Development Service – Bridgend County Borough Council*' in December 2025. The AW audit report noted the Service's performance but did not examine the reasons for its performance or make judgements on it, nor did it look at the decisions of individual planning applications.

3. Current situation/ proposal

- 3.1 The Planning & Development Service's Group comprises teams reflecting the statutory town & country planning functions: development control & strategic planning as well as building control, strategic transportation, highway development control and highway estate development. However, the AW audit focused upon the development control and strategic planning functions as part of its study.
- 3.2 The AW report indicated that Planning Services can play a key role in supporting councils in the delivery of their well-being objectives. The Council's Service is responsible for the Local Development Plan (**LDP**) which provides the land use policy framework that sets out what kind of development is suitable in different parts of the County Borough. The LDP together with national planning policy informs other Council services, developers, communities, and residents what development can happen and where. The AW report highlights that the Service together with the Council's Development Control Committee decide individual planning applications and that these vary from major developments, such as new school buildings, housing and industrial estates to house extensions or changes of use of buildings. As part of the determination process the Service must balance the need for new development with the importance of protecting the environment and local amenities. The Service also works to maintain the natural and built heritage and the environment. The Service also has enforcement powers to act against any development that takes place without the required permission.
- 3.3 The main issues identified in the report are summarised as follows (then outlined below in more detail):

- The Council has limited recognition and understanding of the important role the Planning & Development Service has in supporting the Council's priorities.
- The AW report identified weaknesses in the management of resources and risk to support the Service.
- The Service lacks a *service plan* and there is limited understanding and oversight of the Service's performance.
- The Council has comprehensive arrangements in place that supports its Development Control Committee.

- 3.4 It was indicated in the AW report that the Service is represented on various different Council programme boards, which helps to ensure that major projects receive the necessary professional planning advice. However, it would appear that other Council services often engage with the Service too late, which means that proposals may be at an advanced stage before consulting the Service. If the Service subsequently finds that planning developments are not in line with planning guidelines or the Replacement LDP (**RLDP**), it can delay progress or impact on meeting funding deadlines and may mean resources have been allocated to projects that do not meet land use planning policies or requirements. This may be due to a lack of understanding as to the role of the Service.
- 3.5 The AW report identified that following changes to the Council's Corporate Plan in April 2025, there is no reference to the Service in the Corporate Plan. Given the major planning developments underway within the County Borough, Audit Wales queried why the Service does not have a higher profile in the Corporate Plan particularly as many of the aims within the Council's Well-being Objectives and its RLDP overlap. These include redevelopment, new developments, regeneration and placemaking. These key principles cannot be achieved without the Service, yet the important role it plays in the overall objectives of the Council is completely absent.
- 3.6 With regards to resourcing, the AW report highlighted that the Service is facing a range of challenges which pose a risk to its resilience in meeting its demands. Also, the Service has not met its income targets for the last two years. The current funding arrangement for the Service is based on 70% of fee income (mainly from planning applications), and 30% of base budget funding. The AW report commented that this formula does not appear to be based on robust modelling and financial planning making the Service reliant on fluctuating planning fee income impacted by external factors outside of the Council's control. This arrangement does not provide stability for the Service and makes it difficult for it to plan for the medium to long term.
- 3.7 It was acknowledged that the Service has submitted reports setting out its challenges, workloads and resourcing needs to the Corporate and Cabinet Management Board (**CCMB**) in October 2020, December 2022, November 2024,

and April 2025. These reports clearly stated the potential impact on the Service's ability to support delivery of the Council's major projects and its competing demands. In 2022, the Service presented CCMB with a proposed new staff structure with an increased budget requirement of £646,000. The Service did not receive a permanent budget increase but instead received a one-off amount of £365,000 from earmarked reserves (**EMR**). The use of EMR is a short-term funding solution and does not support the Service in the medium to long term and at the time of the AW audit the reserves had run out.

- 3.8 The AW report acknowledged that the Service's annual budget does not provide a true reflection of the costs of delivering the Service. The budget does not include the costs of using agency staff, even though the Service has used agency staff for at least three years. The total amount spent on agency staff between 2022-23 to 2024-25 is £208,311. At the end of June 2025, the Service had spent £35,104. At the time of audit, no value for money assessment had been undertaken on the use of agency staff.
- 3.9 The AW report also referred to the Council's proposal to set up a S106 and infrastructure delivery team. It is estimated that the RLDP could generate approximately £116 million in Section 106 (S106) monies over its term. S106 income can help fund community infrastructure projects, such as parks and community facilities. Having a dedicated infrastructure delivery team demonstrates that the Council recognises the importance of overseeing this s106 income and the need to mitigate the potential for any underspending. Officers have since been appointed and the Service has now progressed proposals for a cross- directorate Infrastructure Management Board to produce an '*Infrastructure Management Plan*'.
- 3.10 The AW report highlighted that the Service does not have a risk register setting out its current and future risks and how it manages and mitigates these risks. There are no arrangements for the recording and oversight of Service risks; on such significant and long-standing risk is the capacity to support delivery of the Council's regeneration programme and its statutory responsibilities. For example, the RLDP is expected to attract more developers to the Borough with an anticipated increase in major planning applications which can help the Council achieve wider social and economic benefits. However, there is no risk management arrangement for the Council to assure itself it has capacity within the Service to respond to this demand and consequent increase in workload.
- 3.11 At a corporate level, the AW report identified an overall lack of awareness of the requirement for a Service plan as set out in its Performance Management Framework (**PMF**). Service plans should inform Directorate Business Plans and the Corporate Plan and, whilst there is a high-level annual Communities Business Plan, there is a complete lack of Service planning. In the absence of a Service plan, there is no clarity on service priorities, performance, and risks. There is no plan as to how the Service will set out how it will deliver its responsibilities. Furthermore, there is a corresponding lack of evidence as to how the Council monitors compliance with its Service planning in its PMF.
- 3.12 In terms of performance there is limited awareness of the Service's performance. Whilst data is submitted every quarter to the Welsh Government for inclusion into national performance indicators, the Service does not analyse this data nor is there oversight outside of the Service to understand its performance. The AW report

indicated that the Service focuses on making the right decisions rather than the timeliness of making decisions. The AW report highlighted that for the two-year period between April 2023 to March 2025, the Service consistently performed well below the Wales average for the percentage of planning applications determined within statutory and agreed timescales. However, aside from quarter 1 2024-25 (April to June 2024) and quarter 4 2024-25 (January to March 2025), the Service performed significantly better than the Wales average over the two-year period for the *average time in days* to determine planning applications. In this area, the Service is performing better than many other Local Planning Authorities (**LPAs**) in the time taken to make decisions.

3.13 In its report, Audit Wales has made four recommendations to the Council which focus on resource management, Service planning, risk and performance management as outlined below.

- **Recommendation 1 Resource management**

The Council should demonstrate it understands the resource requirements of the Planning and Development Service based on its demands and capacity to help inform resourcing decisions.

- **Recommendation 2 Risk management**

The Council should ensure the Service identifies, manages, and monitors its risks to help the Council understand how Service risks may impact delivery of the Service's responsibilities and the Council's priorities set out in its Corporate Plan.

- **Recommendation 3 Service planning arrangements**

The Council should comply with its Performance Management Framework and ensure the Planning and Development Service has a Service plan.

- **Recommendation 4 Performance monitoring and reporting**

The Council should ensure it manages, monitors and reports the activity and performance of the Planning and Development Service. This should be supported with up-to-date performance information to help improve the Council's understanding of the Service's performance.

3.14 Following the feedback from Wales Audit, Cabinet has agreed a further EMR in order to provide a short-term resourcing solution. This will allow recruitment of vacant posts and develop a revised structure including additional back office and technical roles to support the planning function and free up other officers. It is also proposed to set up an '*equalisation*' fund to ensure that any income surplus is ring-fenced to the Service. Whilst the EMR provides only a temporary funding solution, in the longer-term income will be re-modelled and realistic fee targets agreed to establish a sustainable funding model for the Service going forward. This will require some uplift to the current core funding. The Service will also be supported to maximise its use of resources through business process re-engineering and the emerging use of artificial intelligence.

3.15 The Service also proposes to set up and maintain a Service risk register outlining current and predicted work streams, together with resource requirements cross-referenced to the Council's wider aims. A *Service Plan* will be developed outlining the functions, responsibilities, aims and targets for the Service. The Service Plan will also incorporate the risk register and will be updated annually and reported to the Development Control Committee and the Corporate Management Board, to

ensure that the risks are identified and shared with senior management, members and other services. Such report will include statistical data as well as commentary and updates on the risk register and targets set in the Service Plan.

3.16 A full copy of the Audit Wales Report together with the completed Management Response Form is attached as **Appendix 1**.

3.17 The Audit Wales report was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee on the 29th January 2026, and will also be reported to the Communities, Environment and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 23rd February 2026.

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

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, socio-economic duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report and it is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 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 and Nature Implications

6.1 There are no climate change or nature implications arising from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no safeguarding or corporate parent implications arising from this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

9. Recommendation(s)

9.1 That the Development Control Committee note the report.

Background documents

None



Planning and Development service

Bridgend County Borough Council

November 2025

About us

We have prepared and published this report under Section 17(2)(d) of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and Section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.

© Auditor General for Wales 2025

You may re-use this publication (not including logos except as an integral part of the document) free of charge in any format or medium.

If you re-use it, your re-use must be accurate and must not be in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Auditor General for Wales copyright and you must give the title of this publication. Where we have identified any third party copyright material you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned before re-use.

If you need any help with this document

If you would like more information, or you need any of our publications in an alternative format or language, please:

- call us on 029 2032 0500
- email us at info@audit.wales

You can use English or Welsh when you get in touch with us – we will respond to you in the language you use.

Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay.

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

Audit Wales follows the international performance audit standards issued by the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI).

Contents

Audit snapshot	4
Key facts and figures	7
Our findings	9
Recommendations	16
Appendices	18
1 About our work	19
2 Planning and Development Service Performance	22
3 Service Plan benefits	27

Audit snapshot

What we looked at

- 1 We looked at whether Bridgend County Borough Council (the Council) supports the Planning and Development Service (the service) to deliver value for money in the use of its resources.
- 2 This audit focussed on the Development Control team and the Strategic Planning Policy Team in the Council's Planning and Development Service. Building Control, Strategic Transportation and Highway Development Control are services within the Planning and Development service, but we did not include these within this audit.
- 3 We note the Service's performance but did not examine the reasons for its performance or make judgements on it.
- 4 We did not look at the decisions of individual planning applications.
- 5 We undertook this audit between July and August 2025.
- 6 In January 2025, the Welsh Government closed its consultation on 'promoting a resilient and high performing planning service'. In summary, the Welsh Government consulted on:
 - increasing planning application fees;
 - changing the performance management framework;
 - Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) skills retention, bursaries, and apprenticeships; and
 - improving resilience and resources with Corporate Joint Committees including extending the Local Development Plan Review period.
- 7 At the time of this audit, the Welsh Government had not formally introduced changes following this consultation. This audit, therefore, reflects the service's arrangements before any Welsh Government changes.

Why this is important

- 8 A Planning Service can play a key role in supporting councils to deliver their well-being objectives. The service writes a Local Development Plan (LDP) and policies that set out what kind of development is suitable in different parts of the Borough. The LDP lets other Council services as well as developers, communities, and residents know what kind of development can happen and where.
- 9 The service and the Council's Development Control Committee (the Committee) decide individual planning applications. These applications vary from major developments, such as new school buildings, housing and industrial estates, to house extensions, or changes of use to buildings. When deciding whether to approve them, they balance the need for new housing, businesses, and infrastructure with the importance of protecting the environment and local amenities.
- 10 The service works to maintain the natural and built heritage and the environment. It also has enforcement powers to act against any development that takes place without the required permission.

What we have found

- 11 The Council has limited recognition and understanding of the important role the service has in supporting its priorities. There are weaknesses in the management of resources and risk to support the service. The service lacks a service plan and there is limited understanding and oversight of the service's performance. The Council has comprehensive arrangements supporting its Development Control committee.

What we recommend

- 12 We made four recommendations to the Council which focus on resource management, service planning, risk and performance management.

Key facts and figures

- During 2024-25, the Service received 707 planning applications. It determined 594 with 58 applications withdrawn.
- In April 2025, the Service had a backlog of 279 planning applications. This increased from a backlog of 224 planning applications from the previous year.
- At the time of this audit, the Development Control (planning) officers and agency staff had a combined total of 400 planning applications to determine. This averaged 50 planning applications each.
- The Development Control Team Leaders, Building and Development Control Manager and Group Manager also have planning applications to determine.

The Service has an income target from planning application fees:

- The 2023-24 income target was £832,092. The service achieved £408,028.
- The 2024-25 income target was £760,266. The service achieved £481,450.
- The 2025-26 income target is £952,060. At the end of June 2025, the service had received £353,448.

The Service has spent the following on agency staff:

- £28,366 in 2022-23
- £88,431 in 2023-24
- £91,514 in 2024-25

The Council is the first Local Planning Authority (LPA) since the COVID-19 pandemic to approve a Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP).

Our findings

The Council has limited recognition and understanding of the important role the Planning and Development service has in supporting its priorities

- 14 Senior officers from the service are involved in different programme boards, which helps ensure that major projects receive professional planning advice early. However, we were often told that Council services engage with the service too late. This means that planning developments may be at an advanced stage before consulting the service. If the service finds that planning developments are not in line with planning guidelines or the RLDP, it can delay progress. It could impact on meeting funding deadlines and may mean resources have been allocated to projects that do not meet planning policies. Delays cause frustration and may be due to a lack of understanding as to the role of the service and why early engagement is important.
- 15 The Council's Corporate Plan does not refer to the service following changes to the plan in April 2025. Considering there are major planning developments underway in the Borough, it is surprising the service does not have a higher profile in the Corporate Plan. Many of the aims within the Council's Wellbeing Objectives and its RLDP, for example, include redeveloping sites, building new ones, regeneration and placemaking. These cannot be achieved without the service, yet their important role is absent.

There are weaknesses in the management of resource and risk to support the Planning and Development service

Resource management

- 16 The service is facing a range of resourcing challenges, which poses a risk to its resilience to meet all its demands. The service has not met its income targets in the last two years. The service submitted reports setting out its challenges, workloads and resourcing needs to the Corporate and Cabinet Management Board (CCMB) in October 2020, December 2022, November 2024, and April 2025. These reports clearly state the potential impact on the service's ability to support delivery of the Council's major projects and its competing demands.
- 17 The current funding arrangement for the service is based on 70% of fee income from planning applications and 30% of base budget funding. We have not seen that this is based on robust modelling and financial planning. This makes the service reliant on planning fee income which fluctuates and can be impacted by external factors outside of the Council's control. This arrangement does not provide stability for the service and makes it difficult for it to plan over the medium and long term.
- 18 In 2022, the service presented the CCMB with a proposed new staff structure with an increased budget of £646,000. The service did not receive a permanent budget increase but instead received a one-off amount of £365,000 from ear marked reserves. The use of ear marked reserves is a short-term solution and does not support the service in the medium to long term. These reserves have now run out. At the time of this audit, the service was preparing to submit a growth bid to increase the base budget for 2026-27 as part of the Council's annual budget setting process.

- 19 The service's annual budget does not provide a true reflection of the costs of delivering the service. It does not include the cost of using agency staff, even though the service has used agency staff for at least three years. The total amount spent on agency staff between 2022-23 to 2024-25 is £208,311. At the end of June 2025, the service had spent £35,104. At the time of this audit, no value for money assessment had been undertaken on the use of agency staff.
- 20 The Council estimates it could generate approximately £116 million in Section 106 (S106) monies over the term of its RLDP.¹ This money can help fund community infrastructure projects, such as parks and community facilities. To manage and monitor the allocation of S106 monies, in early 2025, the Council approved setting up a S106 and Infrastructure Delivery team. This shows the Council recognises the importance of having a dedicated resource to oversee this money and mitigate the potential for any underspends of S106 money.

Risk management

- 21 The service does not have a service risk register setting out its current and future risks and how it manages and mitigates these. As a result, there are no arrangements for the recording and oversight of service risks and no way to assess risk scores or escalate relevant risks to the Directorate Risk Register.
- 22 We were told a significant and long-standing risk for the service is its capacity to support delivery of the Council's regeneration programme and its statutory responsibilities. For example, the Council's RLDP is expected to attract more developers to the Borough with an anticipated increase in major planning applications. These planning applications can help the Council achieve wider social and economic benefits. However, there is no risk management arrangement for the Council to assure itself it has capacity in the service to respond to this increase in interest.

¹ An S106 agreement (S106) is a legally binding private contract between a developer (or a number of interested parties) and a Local Planning Authority (LPA) that operates alongside a statutory planning permission.

The service lacks a service plan and there is limited understanding and oversight of the service's performance

Service planning

- 23 There is a lack of awareness of the corporate requirement to have a service plan. The Council clearly sets out in its Performance Management Framework (PMF) that services should have a service plan. These should inform Directorate Business Plans and the Corporate Plan. While there is a high-level annual Communities Business Plan, there is a complete lack of service planning within the service.
- 24 Without a service plan, the service is not providing clarity on its priorities, performance, and risks. Nor does the service set out how it will deliver its responsibilities. The Council does not support services to meet this corporate requirement by providing a service plan template. We found no evidence the Council monitors compliance with its service planning requirements in its PMF. We set out in **Appendix 3** some of the significant advantages of having a service plan.

Oversight of performance

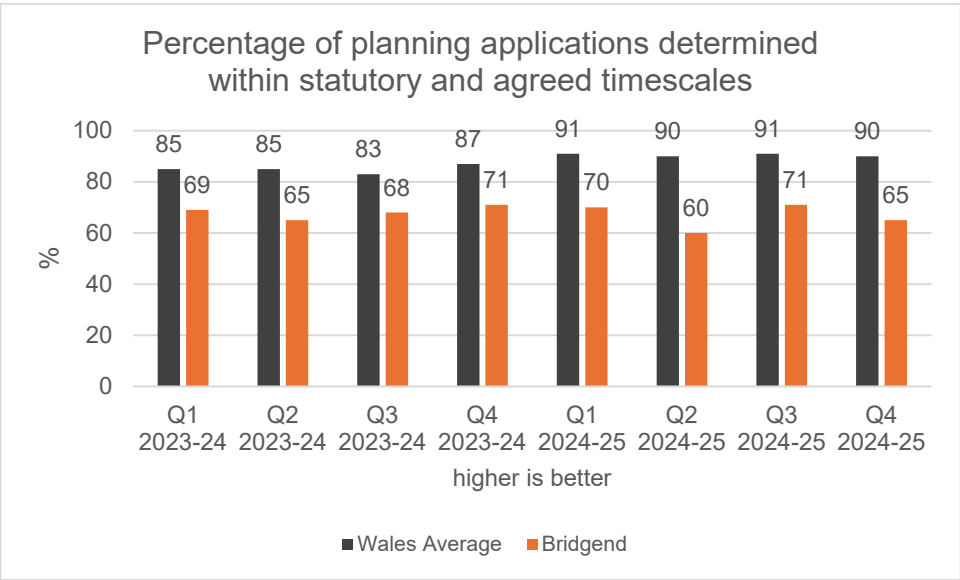
- 25 There is limited awareness of the service's performance. Every quarter, the service sends the Welsh Government its performance for several national indicators.² However, the service does not analyse this data nor is there oversight outside of the service to understand its performance.
- 26 We consistently heard the narrative that the service focuses on making the right decisions rather than the timeliness of making decisions. We were told the service is underperforming on timeliness of decision making, however, not all the performance data supports this.
- 27 There are two main national indicators set by the Welsh Government for monitoring the timeliness of decision making:

² [Development management quarterly surveys | GOV.WALES](#)

- percentage of planning applications determined in statutory and agreed timescales; and
- the average time taken to determine all applications in days.

28 As shown in **Exhibit 1**, for the two-year period between April 2023 to March 2025, the service consistently performed well below the Wales average for the percentage of planning applications determined within statutory and agreed timescales.

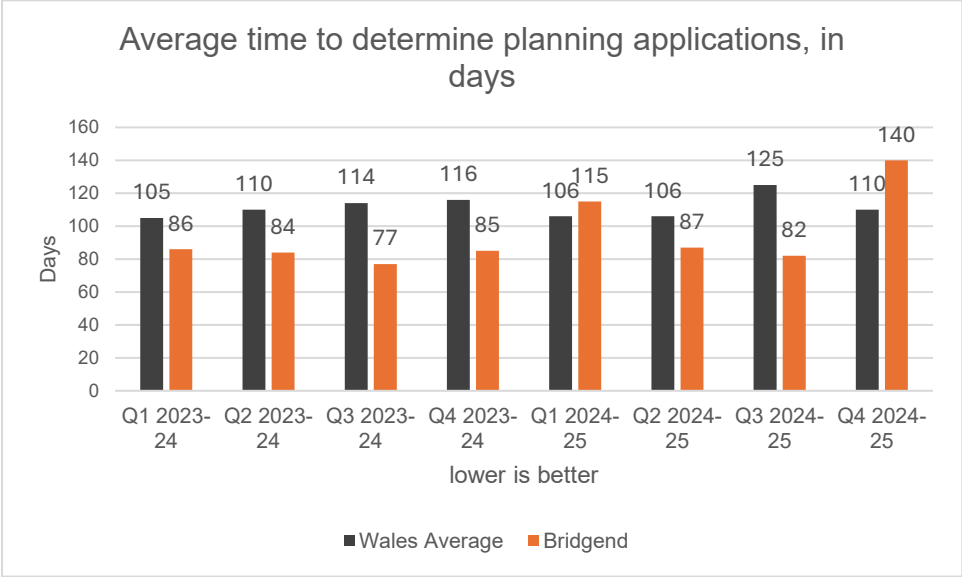
Exhibit 1: percentage of planning applications determined within statutory and agreed timescales



Source: Welsh Government, [Development management quarterly surveys | GOV.WALES](#), July 2025

29 However, as shown in **Exhibit 2**, aside from quarter 1 2024-25 (April to June 2024) and quarter 4 2024-25 (January to March 2025), the service performed significantly better than the Wales average over the two-year period for the average time in days to determine planning applications. Therefore, the service is performing better than a lot of Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in the time taken to make decisions.

Exhibit 2: average time to determine planning applications, in days.



Source: Welsh Government, [Development management quarterly surveys | GOV.WALES](#), July 2025

30 We found limited evidence of any public committee receiving information on the service’s performance, risks, and activity in at least the last two years. As a result, there is insufficient awareness, oversight and scrutiny of the service even though it is an essential enabler for the delivery of the Council’s ambitions.

The Council has comprehensive arrangements supporting its Development Control committee

31 The Council has a comprehensive Planning Code of Practice which guides members on the Development Control Committee procedures and arrangements. It last reviewed this document in May 2022, and is in the process of reviewing it again to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

- 32 Development Control Committee members receive regular support to help them understand their roles and responsibilities, and changes to planning policies. There is a good induction into the Committee and the service holds regular briefings and training for all members. This constant support can help all members understand the role of a committee member, the role and purpose of the committee as well as changes to local and national planning policies.

Recommendations

R1 Resource management

The Council should demonstrate it understands the resource requirements of the Planning and Development service based on its demands and capacity to help inform resourcing decisions. (**Paragraph 16**)

R2 Risk management

The Council should ensure the service identifies, manages, and monitors its risks to help the Council understand how service risks may impact delivery of the service's responsibilities and the Council's priorities set out in its Corporate Plan. (**Paragraph 21**)

R3 Service planning arrangements

The Council should comply with its Performance Management Framework and ensure the Planning and Development service has a service plan. (**Paragraph 22**)

R4 Performance monitoring and reporting

The Council should ensure it manages, monitors, and reports the activity and performance of the Planning and Development Service. This should be supported with up-to-date performance information to help improve the Council's understanding of the service's performance. (**Paragraph 31**)

Appendices

1 About our work

Scope of the audit

This audit focussed on the Development Control team and the Strategic Planning Policy Team in the Council's Planning and Development Service.

We looked at:

- whether the Council can demonstrate the service is a key enabler to support delivery of its well-being objectives;
- the planning and management of the resourcing of the service;
- whether there are clear roles and responsibilities in the service; and
- whether the Council manages the performance of the service.

We note the service's performance (**Appendix 2**) but did not examine the reasons for its performance or make judgements on it.

We did not look at the decisions of individual planning applications.

We undertook this audit between July and August 2025.

Audit questions and criteria

Questions

This audit sought to answer the following questions:

- Can the Council demonstrate the Planning and Development Service is a key enabler to support delivery of its well-being objectives?
- Does the Council have arrangements to plan and manage the resources of its Planning and Development Service?
- Does the Planning and Development Service have clearly defined roles and responsibilities to underpin operational delivery?

- Does the Council manage the performance of the Planning and Development Service?

Criteria

We assessed whether:

- the Council is clear on the role and function of the service;
- the Council has aims and objectives for the service;
- it is clear how the service contributes towards delivering the Council's priorities;
- officers from the service attend corporate or strategic groups for Council major developments and are well connected to other Council services to provide support and advice;
- the service has a business plan (or equivalent);
- the Council understands the service's risks, challenges, resource (finance and staff) requirements including demand and capacity;
- the Council has assessed its capacity and resource needs to deliver its commitments in its current Local Development Plan 2018-2033 and next iteration of this Plan;
- the Council has committee procedural arrangements for its Development Control Committee and regularly reviews these;
- the Development Control Committee members and the staff in the service staff receive appropriate induction, training and support;
- the Council has arrangements for the reporting and scrutinising of the service's performance;
- the Council can demonstrate how it responds to service challenges and opportunities; and
- the Council benchmarks the performance of the service to compare it to other planning services.

The development of the audit questions and criteria has been informed by our cumulative knowledge of our reviews at other Local Planning Authorities.

Methods

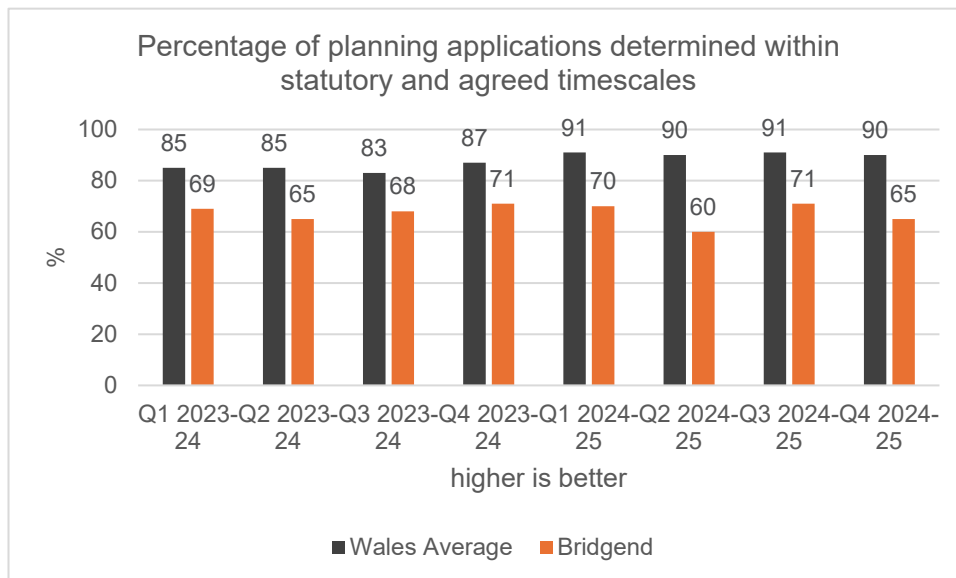
We read documents, watched Development Control Committee meetings, and interviewed officers and members.

2 Planning and Development Service Performance

Every quarter, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) report performance data to the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government publicly reports three performance indicators. Publication of this information allows for comparisons of the performance of the service. We reviewed the data published by the Welsh Government from the period April 2023 to March 2025. At the time of this audit, the Welsh Government had not published performance data from April 2025 onwards.

Below is the performance of the service compared to the other LPAs.

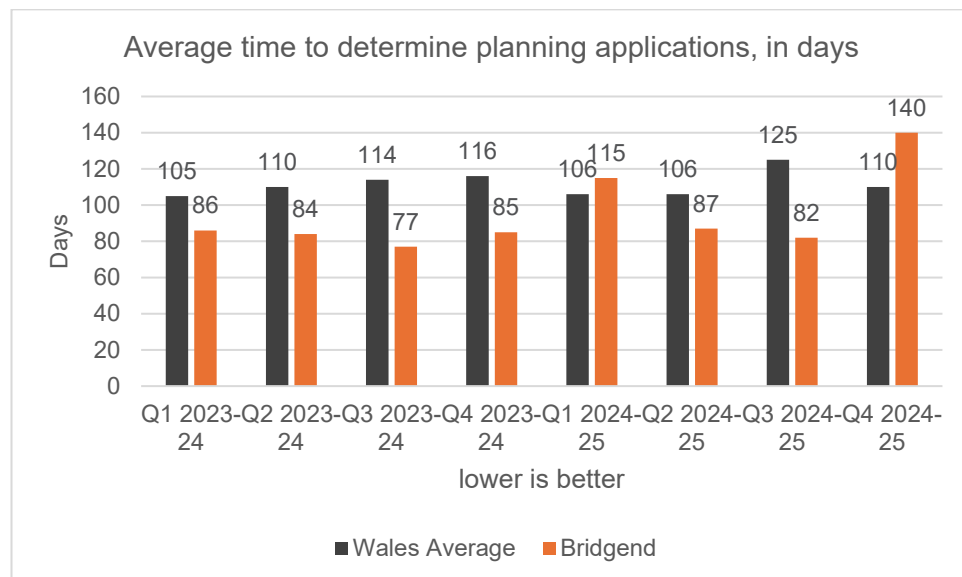
Exhibit 1: percentage of planning applications determined within statutory and agreed timescales



Source: Welsh Government, [Development management quarterly surveys | GOV.WALES](#), July 2025

For the two-year period between April 2023 to March 2025, the service consistently performed well below the Wales average for the percentage of planning applications determined within statutory and agreed timescales.

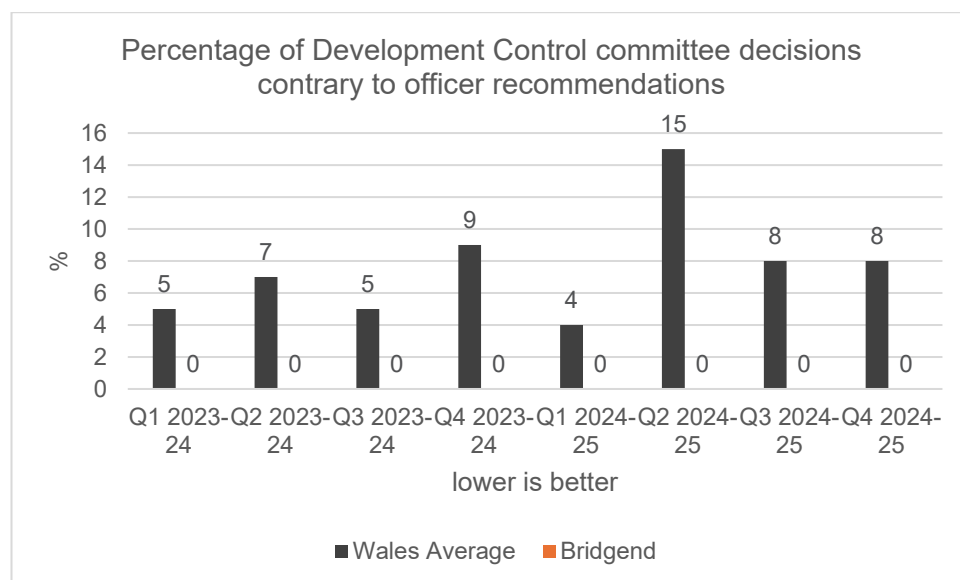
Exhibit 2: average time to determine planning applications, in days



Source: Welsh Government, [Development management quarterly surveys | GOV.WALES](#), July 2025

Aside from quarter 1 2024-25 (April to June 2024) and quarter 4 2024-25 (January to March 2025), the service performed significantly better than the Wales average over the two-year period for the average time in days to determine planning applications.

Exhibit 3: percentage of Planning Committee decisions contrary to officer recommendations

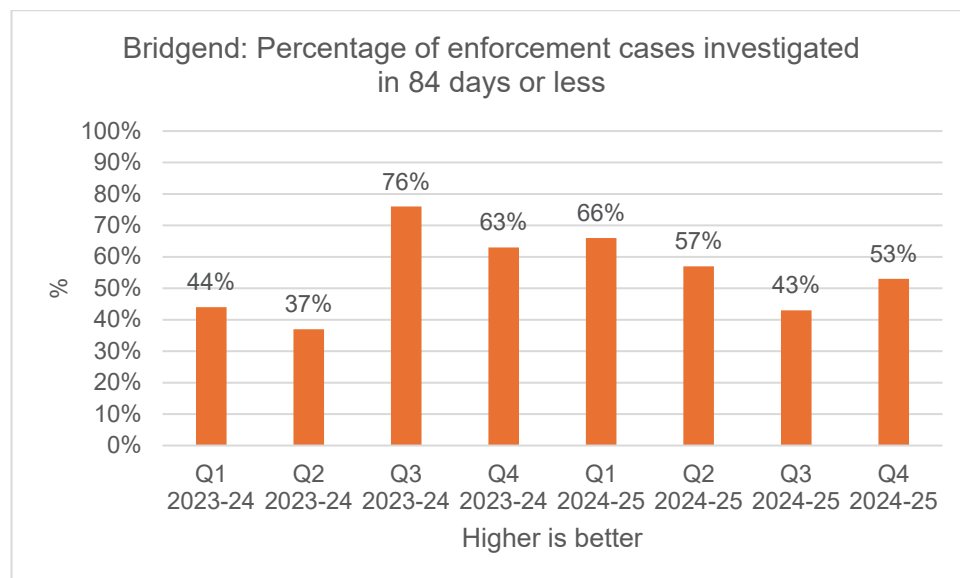


Source: Welsh Government, [Development management quarterly surveys | GOV.WALES](#), July 2025

For the two-year period between April 2023 to March 2025, the Development Control committee did not made any decisions contrary to officer recommendations.

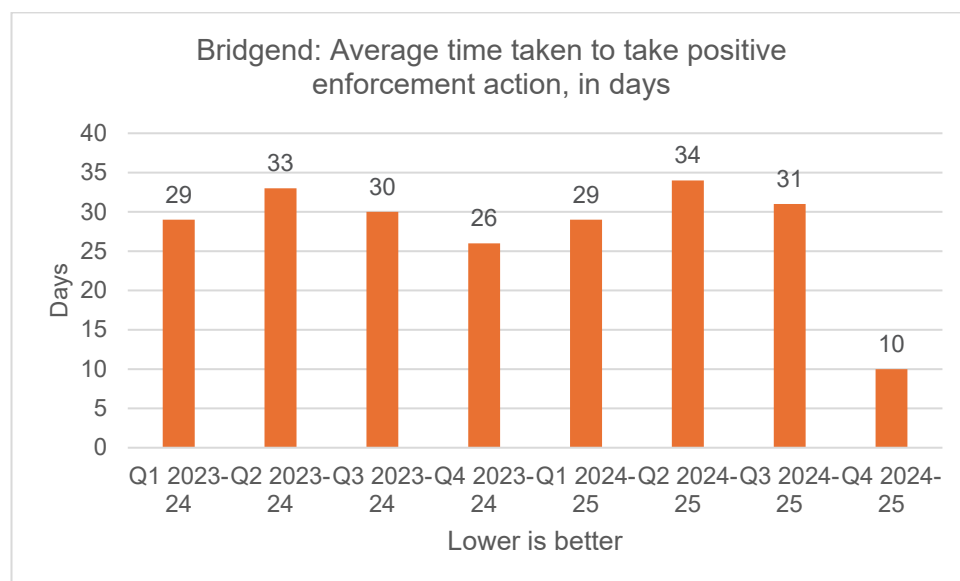
We also reviewed the Council's quarterly performance returns to the Welsh Government for the period April 2023 to March 2025. While the service reports this information to the Welsh Government, the Welsh Government does not publicly report this information. Therefore, we are unable to present comparable performance information for **Exhibits 4 to 6** with other LPAs.

Exhibit 4: percentage of enforcement cases investigated in 84 days or less



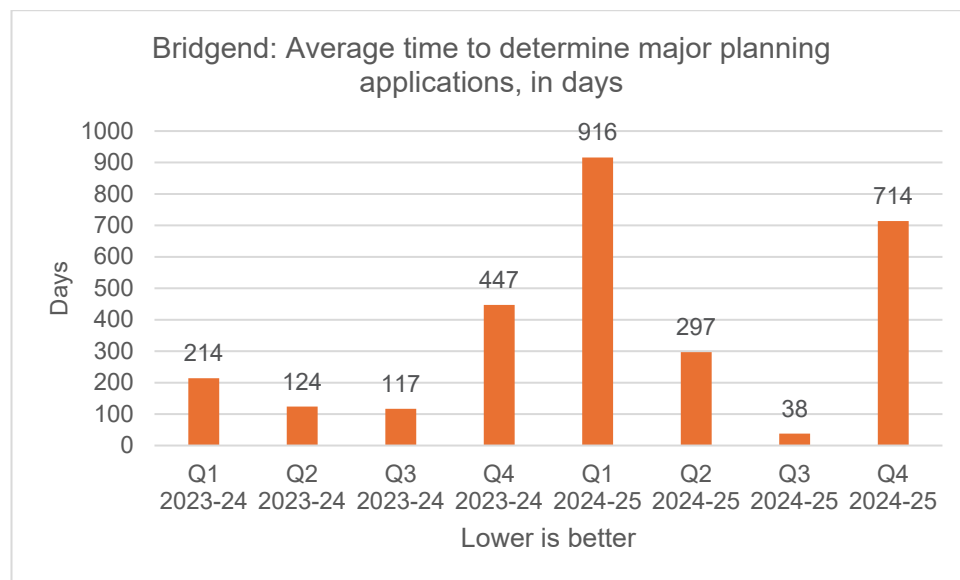
Source: Bridgend County Borough Council, **Development Management Quarterly Surveys**

Exhibit 5: average time taken to take positive enforcement action, in days



Source: Bridgend County Borough Council, **Development Management Quarterly Surveys**

Exhibit 6: average time to determine major planning applications, in days



Source: Bridgend County Borough Council, **Development Management Quarterly Surveys**

3 Service Plan benefits

There are several advantages to having a service plan. It can:

- reflect the range of the service's activity and contributions to the Council;
- help the Director and Cabinet Member identify actions and performance measures that support the Communities Business Plan and corporate priorities;
- state the service's performance aspirations;
- include the service's improvement actions;
- include key challenges, priorities and actions;
- identify service risks and mitigating actions;
- provide a structure for an induction into the service;
- inform future staffing resource needs; and
- provide a structure for performance monitoring and reporting.

About us

The Auditor General for Wales is independent of the Welsh Government and the Senedd. The Auditor General's role is to examine and report on the accounts of the Welsh Government, the NHS in Wales and other related public bodies, together with those of councils and other local government bodies. The Auditor General also reports on these organisations' use of resources and suggests ways they can improve.

The Auditor General carries out his work with the help of staff and other resources from the Wales Audit Office, which is a body set up to support, advise and monitor the Auditor General's work.

Audit Wales is the umbrella term used for both the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office. These are separate legal entities with the distinct roles outlined above. Audit Wales itself is not a legal entity.



Audit Wales

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: info@audit.wales

Website: www.audit.wales

We welcome correspondence and
telephone calls in Welsh and English.

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a
galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.

Management response form



Audit Wales use only

Audited body	Bridgend County Borough Council
Audit name	Planning and Development service
Issue date	November 2025

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)	Audit Wales only
R1	Resource management The Council should demonstrate it understands the resource requirements of the Planning and Development service based on its demands and capacity to help inform resourcing decisions.	A Ear Marked Reservice fund (EMR) is proposed to provide a short term resourcing solution to allow recruitment of vacant posts and develop a revised structure including additional back office and technical roles to support the planning function and free up other officers.	Mid-January 2026 for EMR Qtr 4 25/26 for equalisation fund and agree fee targets for 26/27	Group Manager Planning & Development Services in association with Finance Team	

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)	Audit Wales only
		<p>Introduce an equalisation fund to ensure that any income surplus is ring fenced to the Planning & Development Service.</p> <p>Model fee income and agree targets to establish a long-term funding model for the service</p> <p>The service will also be supported to maximise its use of resources through business process reengineering and through the emerging use of AI.</p>			
R2	Risk management The Council should ensure the service identifies, manages, and	Set up and maintain a service risk register outlining current and predicted work streams together with resource	January – March 2026	Group Manager Planning &	

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)	Audit Wales only
	monitors its risks to help the Council understand how service risks may impact delivery of the service's responsibilities and the Council's priorities set out in its Corporate Plan.	<p>requirements cross referend to the Council's wider aims.</p> <p>The risk register will form part of a wider service plan (see below) to be updated annually and reported to the Development Control Committee and Corporate Management Board to ensure that the risks are identified and shared with senior management, members and other services.</p>		Development Services	
R3	Service planning arrangements The Council should comply with its Performance Management Framework and ensure the	A Service Plan will be developed outlining the functions, responsibilities, aims and targets for the Service. The plan will also incorporate a risk register	January – March 2026	Group Manager Planning & Development Services	

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)	Audit Wales only
	Planning and Development service has a service plan.	and will be informed by an annual self-evaluation.			
R4	Performance monitoring and reporting The Council should ensure it manages, monitors, and reports the activity and performance of the Planning and Development Service. This should be supported with up-to-date performance information to help improve the Council's understanding of the service's performance.	Re-introduce the planning performance framework and report annually to the Development Control Committee. The report will prepared alongside the RLDP Annual Monitoring Report and Annual Performance Report. The report will include statistical data as well as commentary and updates on the risk register and targets set in the Service Plan	Report to be compiled and complete by Autumn 2026	Group Manager Planning & Development Services	