

Grwp yr Economi, Sgiliau a Chyfoeth Naturiol
Economy, Skills and Natural Resources Group

Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol - Director General



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Adrian Crompton
Auditor General for Wales
Wales Audit Office
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13 December 2019

Dear Adrian,

Response to the Report of the Wales Audit Office on The Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales

My apologies for not writing to you during the summer to confirm that I welcomed publication of the above report. It was an oversight on my part.

I am pleased to set out the response to the two recommendations falling into Welsh Government and the progress made to date, details of which are outlined in the attached annex.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Slade
Director General
Economy, Skills and Natural Resources Group

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Recommendation 1

Part 1 of the report sets out the complexities of the planning system showing how challenging it is for local planning authorities to effectively engage with and involve stakeholders in choices and decisions. To improve involvement with stakeholders and ownership of decisions we recommend that:

- *Welsh Government*
 - *review the Development Management Procedure Order 2012 and update the engagement and involvement standards for local planning authorities.*

Response: Accept

It is accepted that there is a need to improve involvement in the planning system to reflect best practice. This will build on changes introduced by the Planning (Wales) Act, in particular statutory Pre Application Community Consultation. Initial work has commenced to scope a project in this area. This will result in the need to review legislation, policy and guidance in this area.

Recommendation 3

Part 2 of the report highlights that the cost of development control services is not reflected in the charges set for these services and progress in developing regional responses to strengthen resilience has been slow. We recommend that the Welsh Government:

- *reviews development control fees to ensure the levels set, better reflect the actual cost of providing these services; and*
- *consider how to use the powers in the Planning (Wales) Act to support and improve local planning authority capacity and resilience.*

Response: Accept

Welsh Government has been working with local government for some time to obtain a better understanding of the costs associated with processing planning applications and associated consents with a view to move towards full cost recovery. Assistance was provided to WLGA to engage the Planning Advisory Service to complete the first phase of this work. Arup have recently been procured to take the work forward to provide recommendation on how to move to full cost recovery. Arup will report in early 2020. As an interim measure, Welsh Government will consult on a planning application fee increase later this year as a step towards full cost recovery. The consultation paper is expected to issue over coming weeks.

The Planning (Wales) Act includes a number of measures which can be used to improve local planning authority capacity and resilience, which include the opportunity to prepare joint Local Development Plans and the establishment of Joint Planning Boards. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill includes provisions to introduce Corporate Joint Committees. Corporate Joint Committees will be mandated to prepare Strategic Development Plans and will provide a vehicle for local planning authorities to come together to identify and deliver other planning services on a regional basis.