

Carmarthenshire Rural Affairs

Report and Recommendations of the Carmarthenshire Rural Affairs Task Group

June 2019



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Foreword by the Chair

It is my great pleasure as Chair of the Rural Affairs Task Group to present this report to my fellow elected members and the wider public. The publication of this report marks a significant milestone for the authority as it is the first time ever that a wide-ranging strategy has been developed to regenerate our rural communities in Carmarthenshire. I am extremely grateful to the members of the Task Group for their commitment and input and I would also like to extend my deep gratitude to the officers who have provided specialist advice and support throughout. I would also like to extend my sincerest thanks to all of the officers, stakeholders, partners and interested parties who have attended Task Group meetings to present information and evidence for our consideration and to those who submitted their thoughts and comments as part of the public consultation. Your contributions have given us plenty of food for thought and have shaped our findings and recommendations.

For those of us who live in Carmarthenshire's countryside we take for granted the many aspects of its outstanding natural beauty, its resilient and close-knit communities, its long and distinguished agricultural tradition, the rich history and heritage that meets us around every corner and the unique culture associated with the Welsh language, which has been an interweaving fabric of community life in this part of Wales for centuries. And of course there are the people who live here – ever welcoming, unstintingly supportive of each other and tremendously committed to making their communities a better place to live and work.

This report has tried to capture those characteristics and build on them so that future generations can appreciate their wealth and value. It is why we have put at the core of this regeneration strategy an emphasis on creating jobs and business opportunities so that we can retain our young people in Carmarthenshire and encourage those who have left the county to develop their talents elsewhere to return and help us grow our economy. Of course young families, who are often priced out of the local housing market, need homes to live in and our recommendations around planning include an array of initiatives which will allow our young people to live and work locally. These developments will also strengthen the position of the Welsh language as demographic changes are one of the key reasons for its gradual demise.

We also need to raise professional aspirations and inspire entrepreneurs to bring forward ideas so that we can establish businesses in rural communities and make innovative use of vacant or unused agricultural buildings to create vibrant economic hubs. Education and skills, in particular digital literacy will play a pivotal role in our ambition for the county. However, this can only be achieved if we can improve broadband provision across all parts of rural Carmarthenshire so that digital connectivity doesn't become a barrier to rural development. Improving the infrastructure around connecting communities with services and digital platforms is at the core of the strategy.

Another key component of rural regeneration is the development of our rural towns, traditionally market towns, and our aim is to launch a 'Ten Rural Towns Initiative' which would ensure that our traditional social and business centres are economically, socially,

environmentally and culturally sustainable in the future. We look forward to working with people who live and work in our rural towns and the surrounding villages to develop individual plans for rejuvenation. We will also work with key anchor institutions to encourage more local procurement of goods and services so that we can build a robust foundational economy and strengthen the Carmarthenshire pound.

We also recognise that we have a diverse agriculture and food production sector that we need to support and grow by looking at ways of clustering businesses with high quality products and develop a Carmarthenshire brand for marketing purposes. Our commitment to protecting our environment, reducing carbon emissions and use of plastics is already Council policy but we need to work with other partners and agencies to ensure that we all share these common goals.

Our commitment as an authority to regenerate our rural communities is real and achievable; however it is set against the backdrop of great uncertainty due to the on-going deliberations around Brexit and the possible ending of basic farm payments. That agriculture and its associated business sector provide the backbone of our rural communities is as clear as night follows day and that any major changes to an already competitive export market and basic subsidies will potentially have a catastrophic effect on the future viability of the industry and sustainability of our rural communities.

As a local authority we cannot directly influence decisions that are made in Cardiff, London and Brussels but we can strongly urge our representatives to do whatever they can to safeguard the future of rural Carmarthenshire and rural Wales. This is essential so that future generations can live, work and spend their leisure time in communities where valued traditions can be maintained, but are also resilient enough to adapt to an ever-changing social and economic landscape. This report seeks to encapsulate that crucial balance between preservation and progression.

Cllr Cefin Campbell

Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs

Chair of the Carmarthenshire Rural Affairs Task Group

1. Background

At the outset of the Task Group's deliberations there was consideration of how we should define 'rural' in a Carmarthenshire context. It was agreed that as the Carmarthenshire Local Development Strategy (LDS) had been published as the framework for delivery of the Rural Development Plan 2014-2020) it would be beneficial to use that definition as a baseline for any statistical analysis and evidence but that there would not be a definitive cut-off point in terms of boundaries as part of the Task Group's considerations and recommendations as rural communities tend to have wide ranging circles of influence and connectivity which often transcend geographical boundaries.

Therefore, the wards noted in the table below are considered to be rural Carmarthenshire wards.

WARDS INCLUDED IN THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN					
1)	Abergwili	14)	Kidwelly	27)	Llangyndeyrn
2)	Carmarthen Town North	15)	Laugharne Township	28)	Llannon
3)	Carmarthen Town South	16)	Llanboidy	29)	Llansteffan
4)	Carmarthen Town West	17)	Llanddarog	30)	Llanybydder
5)	Cenarth	18)	Llandeilo	31)	Manordeilo & Salem
6)	Cilycwm	19)	Llandovery	32)	Pembrey
7)	Cynwyl Elfed	20)	Llandybie	33)	Pontyberem
8)	Cynwyl Gaeo	21)	Llanegwad	34)	Quarter Bach
9)	Garnant	22)	Llanfihangel Aberbythych	35)	St. Clears
10)	Glanamman	23)	Llanfihangel ar-arth	36)	St. Ishmael
11)	Glyn	24)	Llangadog	37)	Trelech
12)	Gorslas	25)	Llangeler	38)	Trimsaran
13)	Hendy	26)	Llangunnor	39)	Whitland

It must also be noted that most evidence stated below has been drawn from a mid-term review of the LDS undertaken by Wavehill: social and economic research, published in April 2019.

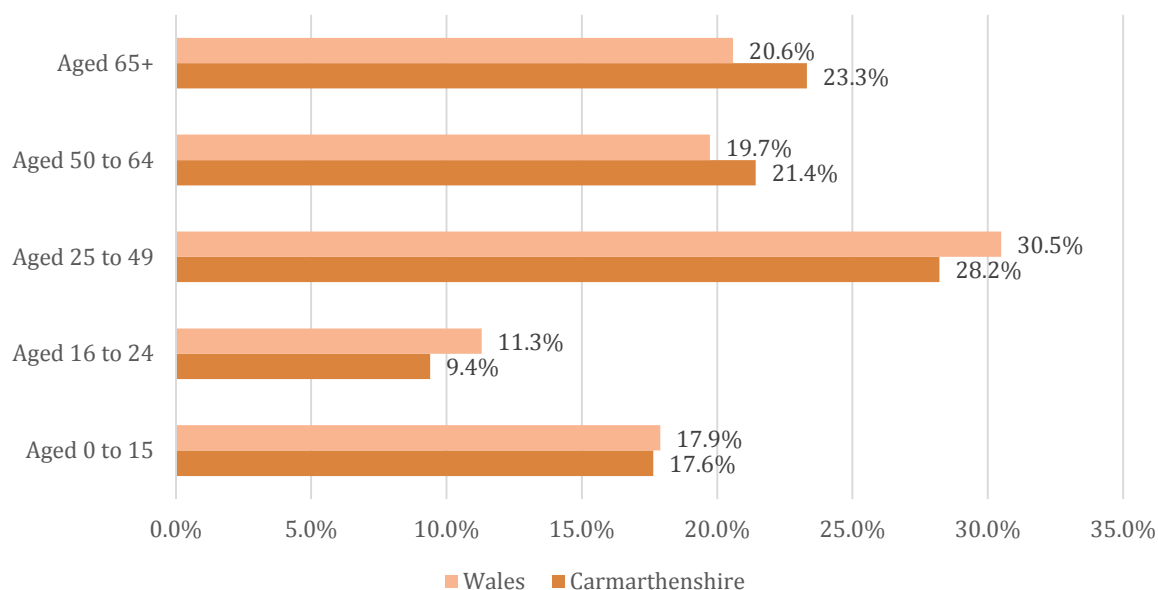
There are 186,500 people living in the whole of Carmarthenshire in 2017, representing 6% of the Welsh population. In the decade up to 2017 the population in Carmarthenshire increased by 2.9%, lower than the 4% increase experienced across Wales over the same period.¹

When considering the rural Carmarthenshire wards (as identified above), it is noted that there are 112,921 people living in rural Carmarthenshire, representing 61% of the Carmarthenshire population. This is significantly higher than the percentage of all Wales residents deemed to live in rural areas, which stands at 33%.

¹ ONS Population Estimates, 2018

Figure 1 below shows that Carmarthenshire as a whole has a greater population of over 65s (23.3%) compared to the Wales average (20.6%). As a result, the old age dependency ratio (OADR), which is the number of people over 65 years old for every 1,000 people aged between 16 and 64 years old, is higher in Carmarthenshire (339) than in Wales (289). The OADR is an ONS measure which is used to understand the balance in the population and the needs of the demographic i.e. the higher the number of people aged 65+ per 1,000 in the working age population (16 to 64), the greater the needs.

Figure 1: Population Age Demography in Carmarthenshire and Wales, 2017



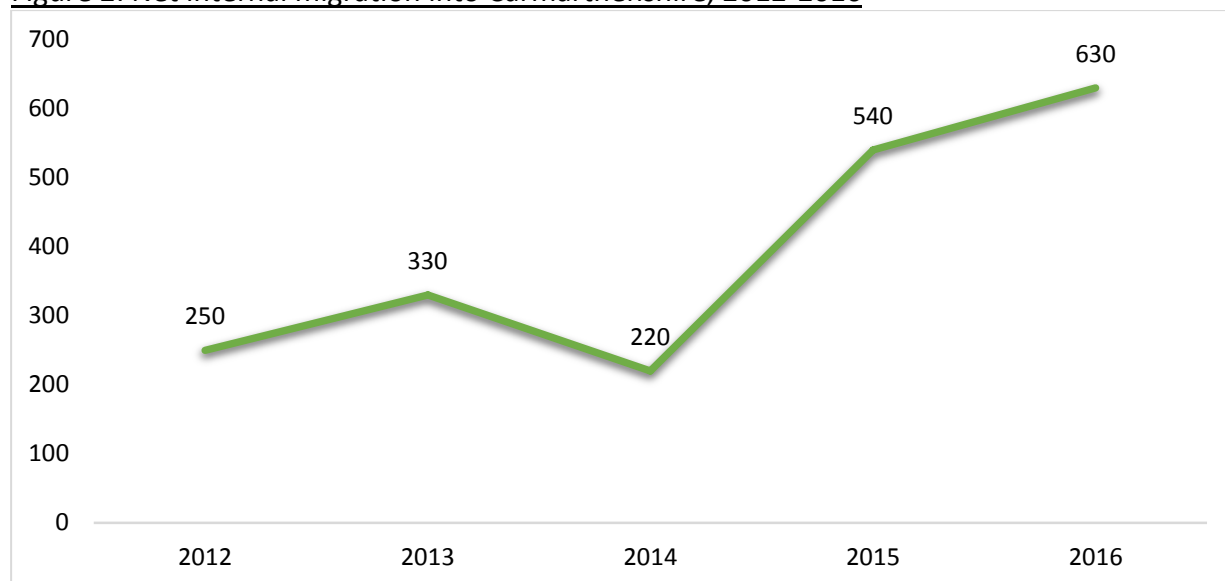
Source: ONS Population Estimates

Figure 1 also shows that the proportion of young people (16-24) is lower in Carmarthenshire (9.4%) than in Wales (11.3%).

Additionally, average (mean) age in Carmarthenshire stands at 42.3, almost two years higher than across Wales which stands at 40.6.

The growth in population described above can be partly accounted for by internal migration patterns between local authorities in the UK. Figure 2 overleaf shows that in the five years between 2012 and 2016 there has been more people migrating into Carmarthenshire from other local authorities than emigrating. In total, there was a net internal migration of almost 2,000 new residents into Carmarthenshire over the period. Rates of internal migration into the county appear to be rising with net 630 in 2016 compared to net 250 in 2012.

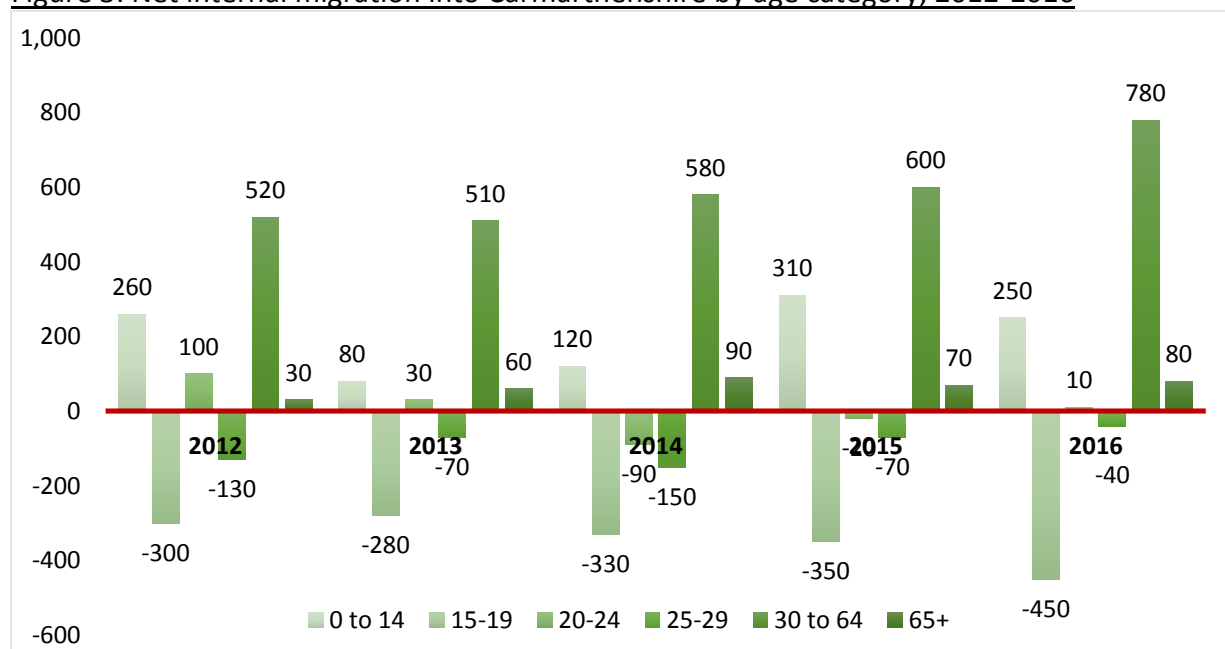
Figure 2: Net internal migration into Carmarthenshire, 2012-2016



Source: ONS data (based on a combination of several administrative datasets)

This net internal migration data is broken down by age category in Figure 3 below. This extrapolation reveals a broadly similar trend over the five years where there has been a net migration loss in the 15-19 age category followed by, in most years, a marginal gain in the 20-24 age group.

Figure 3: Net internal migration into Carmarthenshire by age category, 2012-2016



Source: ONS data (based on a combination of several administrative datasets)

According to the 2011 Census, Carmarthenshire as a whole had the highest number of Welsh speakers of all counties in Wales with 78,048 able to speak Welsh, 43.9% of the Carmarthenshire. However, when looking at the rural wards of Carmarthenshire the percentage of Welsh speakers raises to 50.2% of the population.

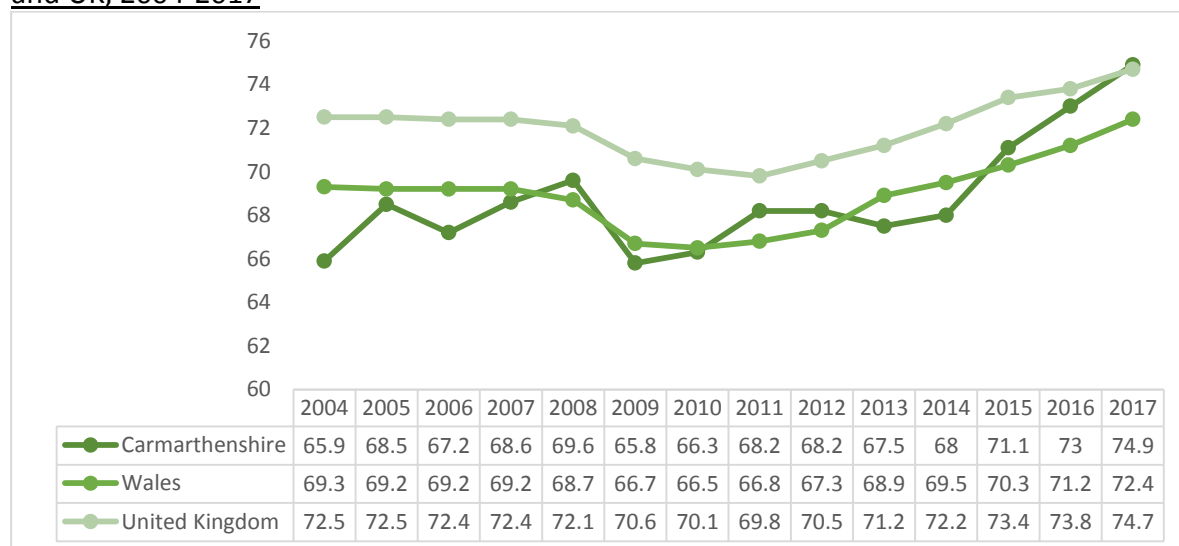
There is a slightly higher propensity of people with long-term and limiting illness in Carmarthenshire, which is likely to be explained by the county's older demography when compared nationally. In the 2011 Census, a quarter (25%) of residents had a long-term health problem or disability where their day-to-day activities are limited to some extent. This is 2% higher than the average in Wales (23%).

The APS publishes several statistics on the state of the labour market including:

- Employment: The percentage of working age people in employment
- Unemployment: The percentage of economically active people aged 16 and over who are unemployed
- Economic inactivity: People who are neither in employment nor unemployed (this group includes those in employment, retired or caring for their family).

The data suggests that Carmarthenshire has a similar employment rate to the Welsh average, slightly below the UK, in each year since 2004, but has increased in the last three years to match UK levels by 2017 at just under 75%. Combined with the falling unemployment highlighted below the effect is for more people to be working in Carmarthenshire, beneficial for both the economy and communities.

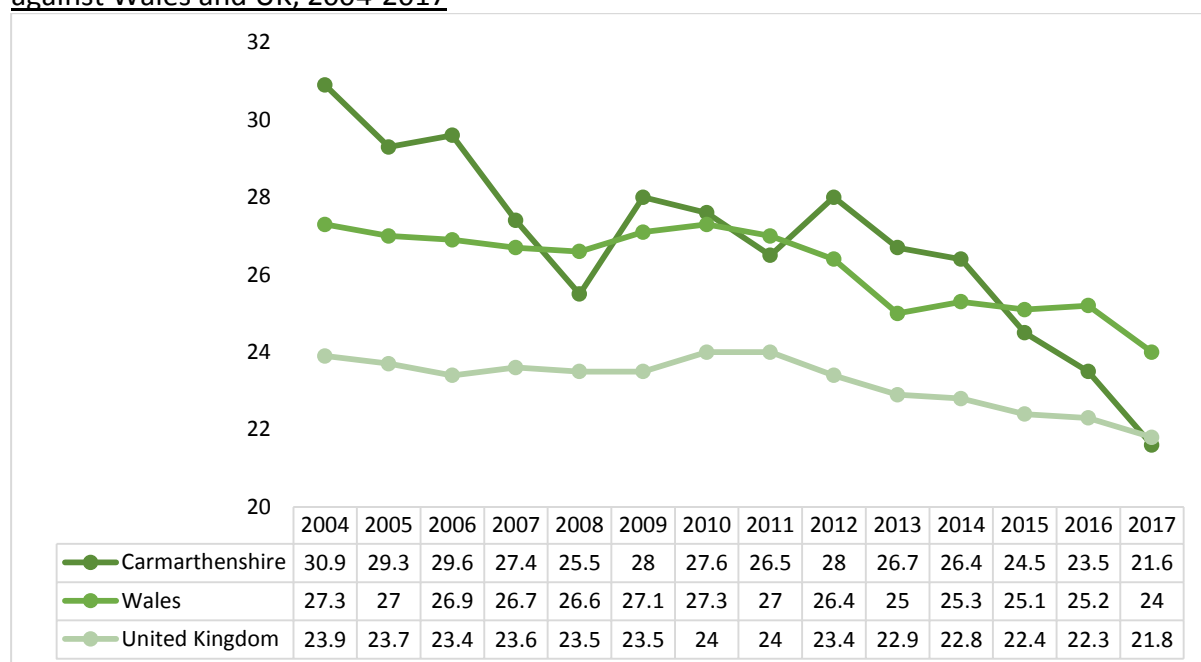
Figure 4: Employment rate – aged 16-64 in Carmarthenshire benchmarked against Wales and UK, 2004-2017



Source: APS

Finally, the APS also shows a vast decrease in the number of people who are economically inactive in Carmarthenshire – down from 30.9% in 2004 to 21.6% in 2017. Whereas the economic inactivity rate was much higher than both the Welsh and UK average in 2004, the latest figures show that it is now in line with the UK average and below the Welsh average.

Figure 5: % who are economically inactive – aged 16-64 in Carmarthenshire benchmarked against Wales and UK, 2004-2017



Source: APS

A greater proportion of people in Carmarthenshire are self-employed. In the most recent year (2017), APS found that 12% of those aged 16-64 in Carmarthenshire were self-employed compared to 10.6% in the UK and 9.6% in Wales.

A quarter (25.3%) of all those in employment work long hours of 45 or more per week and this is higher than the proportion working the same long hours in the UK (23.7%) and in Wales (21.5%). However, there are also more people in Carmarthenshire who work less than 35 hours per week (33.4%) compared to 32.4% in Wales and 30.8% in the UK. In addition, BRES data shows that there are slightly more part-time workers in Carmarthenshire as a proportion of the whole workforce (36% in 2016 compared to 35% in Wales).

Occupation information is also available from the Annual Population Survey and using a 3 year moving average again reveals that fewer people in Carmarthenshire are in professional occupations compared to the Wales average (16.1% vs. 18%). Associate professionals and Technical Occupations are also below the national average in Carmarthenshire at 9.7% compared to 13.1% in Wales. Occupations where Carmarthenshire has a greater proportion are skilled trades (14.7% vs 11.6%) and caring and leisure services (11.5% vs 9.5%). While important to the economy, the areas where Carmarthenshire has a lower proportion tend to be more productive occupations than the areas where they have a greater proportion.

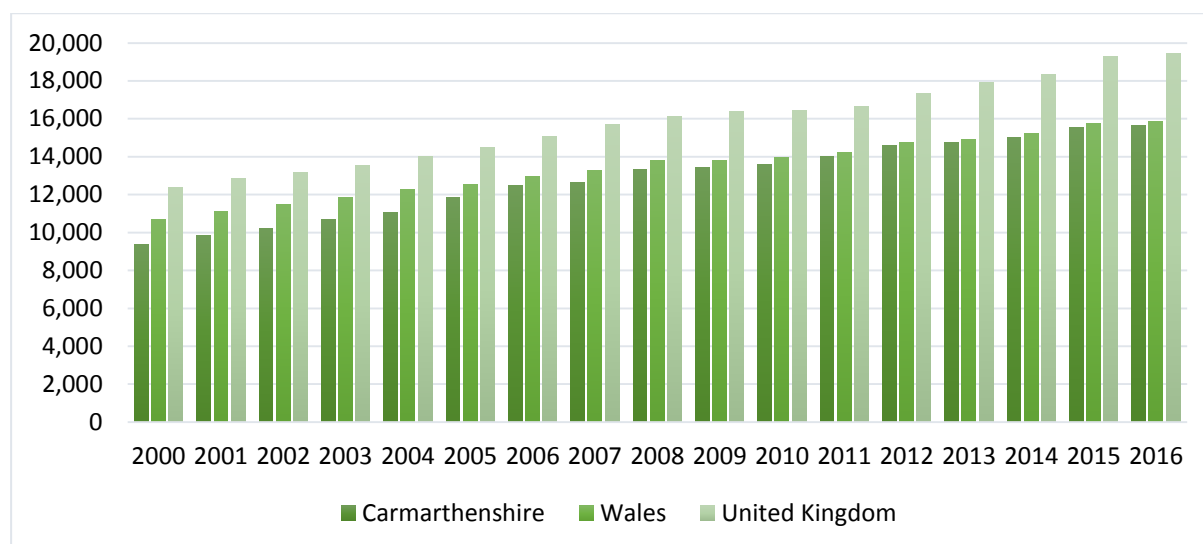
Job density can also be calculated to show commuting patterns and availability of employment in an area. In Carmarthenshire, the ratio of jobs per resident of working age was 0.7 in 2014 and has now grown to 0.76, on par with the Wales level but low compared to 0.85 in the UK. While there are fewer jobs available than residents of working age which indicates out-commuting or lower rates of economic activity, the increase over the last few years is a demonstration of a strengthening jobs market with an increase in real employment opportunities above population growth.

In relation to earnings, data from the ASHE (Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, conducted in April each year to obtain information about the levels, distribution and make-up of earnings and hours worked for employees) shows that on average residents in Carmarthenshire (£26,190) earn slightly less than the Welsh average (£27,039). In 2018 average resident earnings were identical in Rural Wales at £26,191 but all geographies are well below UK levels (£29,574). In each of the last ten years (2008-17) ASHE shows the median salary in Carmarthenshire at around 80-90% of the UK average.

Workplace based earnings in Carmarthenshire are below the resident-based earnings indicating that residents commute out for higher paid employment in other areas, with Swansea an important neighbour. Workplace based earnings are also lower in Carmarthenshire than in Wales (£25,500 vs £26,346) though slightly higher than the Rural Wales areas (£24,870). In the last 5 years workplace earnings have increased by 6.6%, below the 7.7% in Wales and 8.7% in the UK, suggesting that the increased employment and job creation is not converting into higher wages, possibly because of the ready supply of labour keeping wages suppressed.

Gross disposable household income (GDHI) accommodates some standard outgoings and can be used to show a level of cost of living in a certain area as tax and social contributions are discounted. In total it is the amount of money that all the individuals in the household sector have available for spending or saving after income distribution measures (for example, taxes, social contributions and benefits) have taken effect and per head comparisons show Carmarthenshire is below the Welsh average at £15,659.

Figure 6: GDHI per head (£) in Carmarthenshire benchmarked against Wales and the UK, 2000-2016



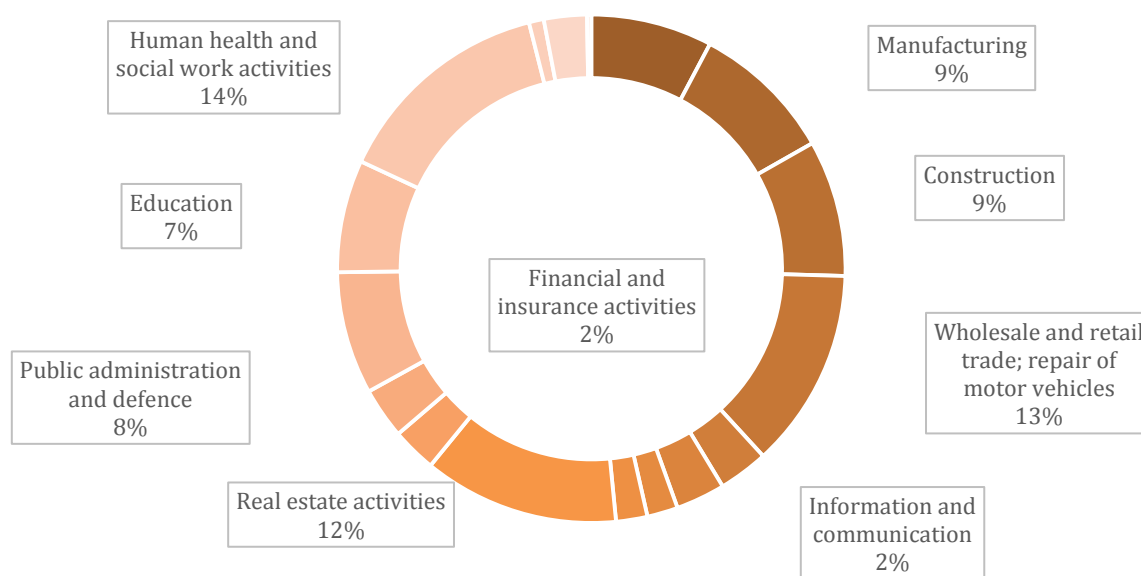
Source: ONS Data

However, the chart also shows that the gap has narrowed significantly since the beginning of this millennium. In 2001 GDHI per head in Carmarthenshire was 88% of the Welsh average and 76% of the UK average, whereas in 2016 it was up to 99% of the Welsh average and 81% of the UK average. This is another positive indicator for economic success in Carmarthenshire and something to monitor as one metric of average resident prosperity.

Gross value added (GVA) assesses the economic output generated by a region from all businesses and organisations. In total, Carmarthenshire generated £2.95 billion worth of GVA in 2017 which is 4.8% of all the GVA produced in Wales. This represents an increase of 28.7% over the last decade, similar to the level of growth in Wales (28.1%) over the same period. GVA per head is the best measure to compare the economic performance of regions of different sizes. ONS data reveals that GVA per head has consistently been lower in Carmarthenshire than in Wales and the UK over the past two decades. In the latest data in 2015, Carmarthenshire recorded £15,159 GVA per person compared to £18,535 in Wales and £25,878 throughout the UK.

GVA by industry provides a further indication of the relative areas of output and economic focus. In 2017 output in Carmarthenshire was spread across *Health* which contributed 14.1% to GVA, *Retail* and *Real Estate* drive another 12.7% and 12.5% respectively while high productivity and high value sectors such as *Financial and Insurance Activities* and *Information and Communication* contribute only 2% to GVA. The dominance of lower paid, lower productive sectors compared to high value areas is shared across Rural Wales but is still a limiting factor.

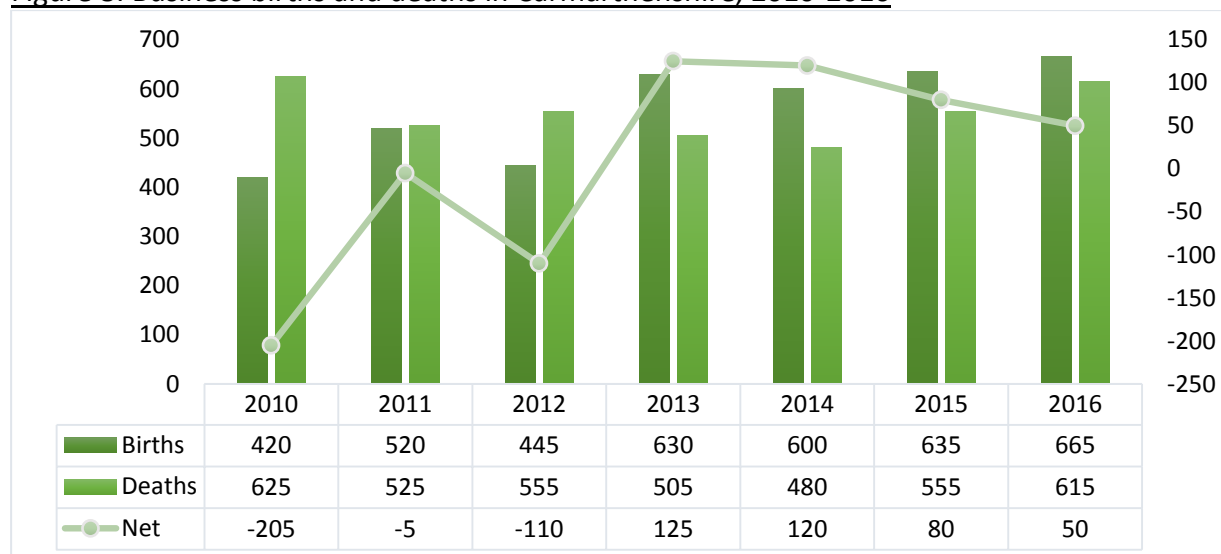
Figure 7: Carmarthenshire GVA by Industry



According to the IDBR (Inter-Departmental Business Register prepared by ONS), there were 7,720 businesses in Carmarthenshire in 2017, representing 7.5% of all businesses in Wales. The data also shows a greater business community in Carmarthenshire than in Wales as a whole with 38 businesses per thousand people in 2011 Census compared to 29 per thousand in Wales.

There were more businesses being created in each of the four years from 2013-2016 than businesses dissolved (i.e. net business creation), following a net loss in businesses in the three previous years. This points towards an improving business environment in Carmarthenshire.

Figure 8: Business births and deaths in Carmarthenshire, 2010-2016

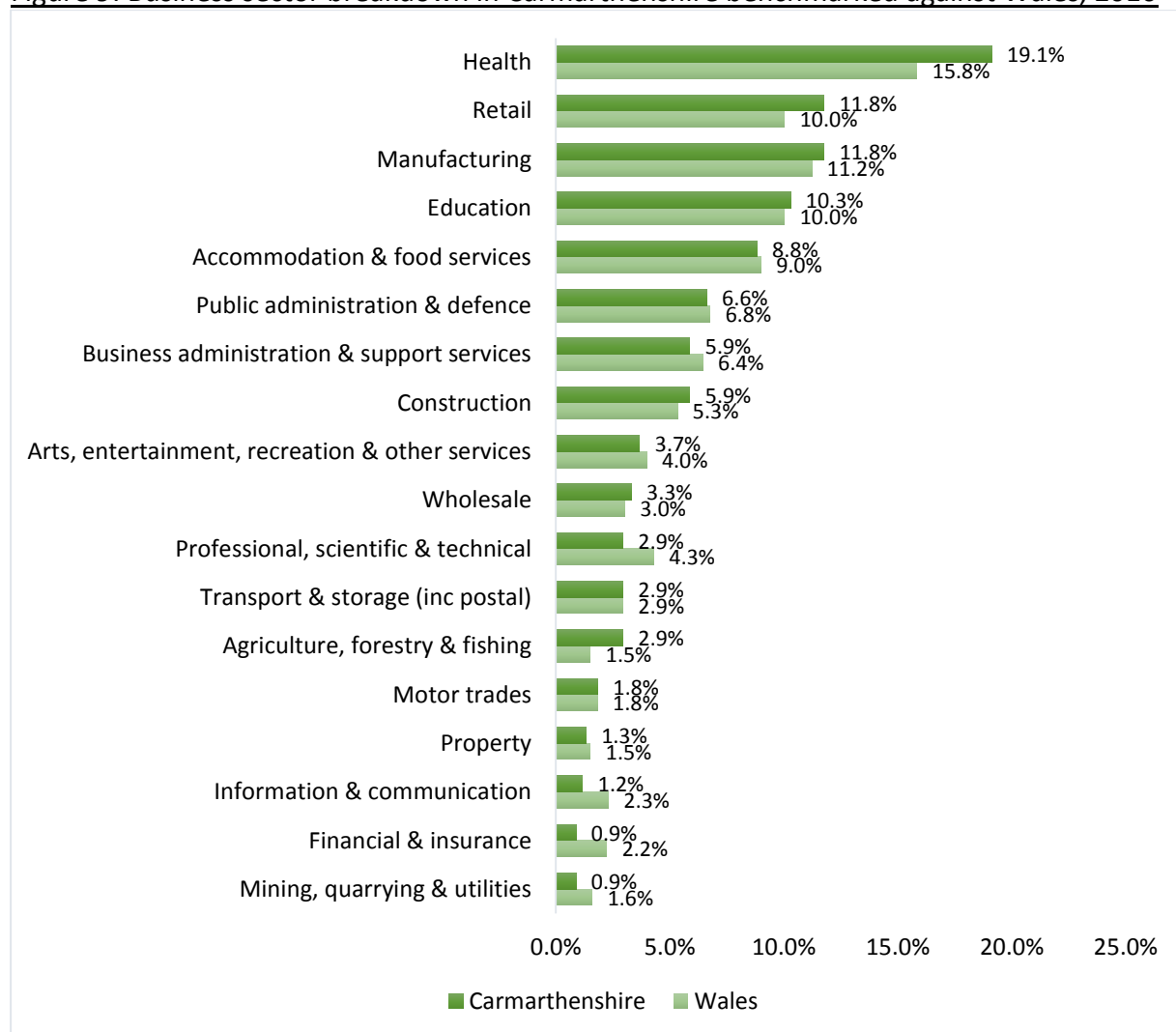


Source: ONS Data

Businesses in Carmarthenshire are typically smaller than businesses throughout Wales and the UK. In Carmarthenshire, microenterprises (0 to 9 employees) account for 91.4% of all business stock which is around 2% higher than the equivalent in Wales and the UK. There are proportionally fewer small (10 to 29) and medium-sized businesses (50 to 249) in Carmarthenshire.

Figure 9 overleaf shows the proportion of those in employment who work in each sector and reveals that the sectoral composition of businesses in Carmarthenshire is broadly similar to Wales as a whole. The Health and Retail sectors are particularly important to Carmarthenshire, accounting for more than 30% of all employment together. By comparison, these two sectors account for 25% of employment in Wales. Whilst agriculture, forestry and fishing represents one of the smaller sectors in terms of total employment, the proportion working in the sector in Carmarthenshire is almost double the national average (2.9% vs 1.5%).

Figure 9: Business sector breakdown in Carmarthenshire benchmarked against Wales, 2016



Source: BRES

2. Method

- 2.1 Following local government elections in 2017, Cllr Emlyn Dole, Leader of Carmarthenshire County Council directed the establishment of a Carmarthenshire Rural Affairs Task Group with the aim being:
- ‘to consider the issues affecting the rural communities in Carmarthenshire and to identify actions the Council, in partnership with other public bodies and organisations, can take in addressing those issues to ensure and support rural regeneration in future years’.*
- 2.2 The cross-party Task Group, chaired by Cllr Cefin Campbell, Executive Board Member for Communities and Rural Affairs, was established in September 2017 and has undertaken a detailed and thorough assessment of rural issues in the 21 months it has been convened. The Terms of Reference for the Task Group are included in the Appendices. Membership of the Task Group was as follows:
- Three Plaid Cymru Group representatives: Cllrs Gareth Thomas; Jean Lewis and Ken Howell.
 - Three Independent Group representatives: Cllrs Irfon Jones; Joseph Davies and Sue Allen (replaced Andrew James in March 2018).
 - Three Labour Group representatives: Cllrs Dot Jones; Shirley Matthews; and Colin Evans.
- 2.3 During the course of the 21 months the Task Group has met 22 times and a number of different stakeholders, partners and interested parties have presented information and ideas to the Task Group. A full list of contributors is included in the Appendices.
- 2.4 At the November 2017 Royal Welsh Winter Fair the Task Group launched a public consultation to seek the views of Carmarthenshire residents and stakeholders on the matters that are important to secure the future prosperity of our rural communities. The consultation closed at the end of April 2018 and a total of 335 survey responses were received and one organisational written response. The main themes emerging from the consultation were concerns relating to:
- Broadband availability
 - Employment opportunities
 - Availability and access to public services
 - Access to transport
 - Future of farming
- A full summary of the findings from the consultation are included in the Appendices.
- 2.5 On the 7 September 2018 the Task Group held a Carmarthenshire Rural Affairs Conference at the Halliwell Centre, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Carmarthen. Over 160 stakeholders attended to share their views and experiences in order to inform the considerations of the Task Group for this final report and recommendations. It was also an opportunity to hear from academics and experienced community and business leaders on their understanding and approach. A summary of the conference considerations are included in the Appendices.

3. Findings & Recommendations

The Task Group have identified a number of key areas that influence the issues facing rural communities in Carmarthenshire. These are noted on the following pages with a synopsis of the key discussion points and evidence raised as part of the Task Group deliberations, along with key recommendations to be implemented. These key areas focus on:

- Economic Development
- Planning and Housing
- Education and Skills
- Broadband and Digital Skills
- Tourism
- Transport and Highways
- Agriculture and Food
- Community Resilience, Access to Services and Third Sector
- Renewable Energy
- Environment and Waste
- The Way Forward.

In addition to these key areas, a number of themes have emerged which act as overarching principles for the whole report and recommendations as matters that are central to the ambition to support and further develop the resilience and prosperity of Carmarthenshire's rural communities. These should be considered as overarching principles across all of the Task Group's recommendations.

1. **The Carmarthenshire Pound:** the importance of supporting direct spend in the local economy, be that public, private or personal spend. The impact that even small levels of spending can have on the local economy can be significant and there needs to be a concerted effort to re-visit the way the public sector procures and spends its finances in order to better support investment in local businesses and organisations. This also applies from a personal spend perspective and there needs to be a drive to promote the impact of how keeping spend in the local economy in the short term will have longer term positive consequences in terms of the social and economic resilience of our rural communities.
2. **Economic regeneration:** this is at the heart of rural sustainability but it needs to be relevant regeneration with a focus on developing suitable core and distinctive sectors for Carmarthenshire. Enabling suitable economic growth will in turn lead to the social, environmental and cultural sustainability of the county's rural towns and surrounding feeder communities.
3. **Housing according to local need:** there is a need to ensure that appropriate housing is available for local need, which includes availability of affordable housing. In order to make our rural communities sustainable we need to enable younger and working age people to be able to live there. The current housing market is driving people out of their indigenous communities and preventing them from returning home. There needs to be a move in local planning policy from larger housing developments in our main towns to an approach which enables a suitable mix and proportion of development in our rural towns and communities to address local housing demand and need.
4. **Infrastructure:** the county's broadband and transport infrastructure have been raised

as key issues which are currently preventing development and increasing isolation. These issues have been raised for a number of years and there is no quick fix to addressing them. However, there is a need to be innovative and respond to local issues with local solutions rather than trying to address the issues with a blanket one-size fits all response. Funding is always going to be an issue on these matters and the Council alone will not be in a position to resolve them, therefore communities, groups, organisations and businesses need to work together to develop a range of solutions to address local needs.

5. **Community life:** Carmarthenshire is fortunate in many respects in that it still has a strong community network and focus through its local schools, community groups, associations, sports clubs and activities. However, this will only be apparent to those who are able and willing to engage with their local communities and many are left isolated and vulnerable with little support or access to such community networks. The nature of rural communities are evolving and with a reduction in service provision due to budgetary constraints there needs to be greater recognition and support to the formal and informal role that community networks and enterprises can play in supporting rural communities.
6. **Welsh language:** 50.2% of the population in Carmarthenshire's rural wards speak Welsh, which is significantly higher than the whole county average of 43.9%. Rural communities therefore play a central role in the future viability of the language and maintaining their resilience and growth will enable the Welsh language to develop and thrive once again.
7. **Agriculture:** the sector has been described by many as the backbone of Carmarthenshire's rural communities from an economic, social, environmental and cultural perspective. Although total levels of direct employment within the sector are relatively low at 2.9%, compared to 19.1% in the Health sector and 15.8% in the retail sector, the wider impact the sector has on rural communities is far-reaching and immeasurable in terms of value. The uncertainty surrounding the possible implications of Brexit on the agricultural sector is a concern. The sector is likely to face a significant period of change over coming years which could influence the shape and nature of farming and the management of our land forever.

3.1 Economic Development

- 3.1.1 For a number of years, Carmarthenshire County Council has identified that economic regeneration is at the heart of sustaining and further developing Carmarthenshire as a county. To date, the main focus of this regeneration work has been on the main town locations of Ammanford, Carmarthen and Llanelli alongside other specific county-wide programmes and projects. In addition, the Swansea Bay City Deal is a significant programme for the whole county, including rural areas, which will influence and make progress towards addressing a number of key issues identified in this report including employment opportunities, broadband infrastructure, skills and housing. These are all important interventions which the Council must ensure benefit Carmarthenshire as a whole.
- 3.1.2 During the course of the Task Group's discussions and representations from stakeholders, the key role of the county's smaller towns or the traditional market towns, has been referred to several times especially in terms of their links with the smaller villages and hamlets that surround them. The demise of services such as banks, Post Offices and other service facilities in these towns has had significant impact with many people now having to travel to the bigger towns to access these services. However, these towns are still well placed to act as a central plank for rural development with the potential for the clustering of business and services in order to address both economic and social issues in order to ensure the future sustainability of our rural communities.
- 3.1.3 In looking at rural socio-economic development there needs to be a clear understanding of the interdependencies between the hamlets, villages, market towns, main towns, county and wider region. In their consultation response to the Task Group, Cymdeithas yr Iaith referred to these interdependencies as '*concentric circles*', a concept which we believe should be taken forward through a place-based multi-agency and multi-stakeholder approach. This cannot be a one size fits all approach as each community will have its own needs but the Council is well placed to act as a facilitator to initiate and take this approach forward.
- 3.1.4 A significant part of this place-based approach will be a greater focus on nurturing the sectors that can be considered the foundations of our local economy - care, food, housing, energy, construction etc. In Carmarthenshire, the agricultural and transport sectors with its associated business network should also be considered as part of our foundational economies. These are the types of services that we as citizens rely on, on a daily basis. These sectors account for four in ten jobs in Wales. The Council, along with other public sector partners, should further develop its approach, engagement and support for these sectors through the wider Foundational Economy lens. In addition, the Council should also ensure that it supports the principles of development within the circular economy model which aims to keep resources in use for as long as possible, extract the maximum value from them whilst in use, then recover and regenerate products and materials at the end of each service life. As well as creating new opportunities for growth, a more circular economy will: reduce waste; drive greater resource productivity; deliver a more competitive Carmarthenshire economy; position Carmarthenshire to better address emerging resource security/scarcity issues in the future; and help reduce the environmental

impacts of our production and consumption in Carmarthenshire.

- 3.1.5 Carmarthenshire has a higher proportion of micro-enterprises (between 0 and 9 employees) accounting for 91.4% of all business stock in the county (compared to 89.2% across Wales). This is particularly prevalent in the county's rural areas. Going forward, support for this sector, through the Council and other agencies will be essential. One of the key issues highlighted by the Task Group was the need for business incubation sites and medium sized business units for progression. In addition, many believe that the cost of undertaking development in rural areas compared to the end commercial value of the development is disproportionate, and is compounded by factors of remoteness and demand, therefore companies need additional support and assurance to anchor their investment in the county's more rural areas. The Council's Rural Enterprise Fund, which provides assistance to enterprises and sole traders for the development of new and existing business premises has been hugely popular and successful, and this approach needs to continue and further develop. Since it was established in 2017, the fund to date has supported 16 projects worth £3.9m and has supported the creation of 130 jobs and provided 70,000 square foot of commercial floor-space.
- 3.1.6 The need to provide support for new and established businesses in the county is fully recognised and there are a number of agencies that the Task Group have heard from that are providing this support. The number of different agencies working within this sphere have raised questions about whether or not the support capacity is being utilised appropriately and if there is enough clustering and signposting between agencies to ensure businesses are offered the most appropriate support but also to ensure that there is no duplication of effort.
- 3.1.7 Supporting entrepreneurship amongst young people has also been identified as a key factor. With many of our young people leaving the county to follow education and employment opportunities we need to nurture and support those who want to stay in the county to develop and raise their aspirations. We must also work to improve the offer for those people, who having followed their education choices elsewhere and want to return to the county to live and work. As David Hieatt emphasised at the Rural Affairs Conference, we mustn't be frightened of our young people moving away but we must do all that we can to *'bring the treasure back'*.
- 3.1.8 The Council also has a significant rural estate with a total of 25 farms located across the county as well as other land and assets. Working with other public sector partners, through the Carmarthenshire Public Services Board, there is a need to fully review these assets to ensure the estate is used in the most efficient and effective way in the future. However, the Task Group urges the Council to maintain ownership of this estate in future, including the associated fishing rights.
- 3.1.9 The Council has a strong track record of accessing and fully utilising funding available through external sources to aid rural development. The current LEADER programme, funded through the Rural Development Plan for Wales, is well placed to support rural development and the Arfor programme will also support business development specifically focused on the Welsh language.

Recommendations

1	<p>That the Council works with the local communities and stakeholders in ten of its rural towns (and surrounding communities) to develop individual plans that will aim to provide a long-term strategic vision to secure economic, cultural, social and environmental sustainability for those towns. The proposed ten rural towns are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Llandovery ii. St Clears iii. Whitland iv. Newcastle Emlyn v. Laugharne vi. Cwmamman (Amman Valley) vii. Llanybydder viii. Kidwelly (Gwendraeth) ix. Llandeilo x. Cross Hands. <p>Whilst each plan will be relevant to the needs of the individual town it is expected that proposals will be shaped by the strategic aims of the Council's Transformations Strategy which focuses on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing existing business • Maximising job creation • Supporting the development of a knowledge economy • Developing distinctiveness of the area • Identifying current and future role and models of service provision in the community • Sustainable energy • Service provision. <p>In addition, the overall programme will need to consider ways in which the Council could develop:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. opportunities (based on demand) to develop business support hubs in town centre locations, which would act as an incubation facility for start-up businesses with fixed or flexible office accommodation for a number of micro businesses; b. opportunities to develop multi-agency public service hubs in town centre locations, which would act as a local point of contact for a number of public sector services; c. opportunities for the Council's economic development and housing teams to work together to support town centre regeneration.
2	<p>That the Council continues to implement existing funding opportunities for rural development and identify external public and private sector funding opportunities to assist with the economic growth aspirations of the ten rural towns and the county's rural businesses.</p>

3	That the Council ensures a focus on the further development of the Foundational Economy sector within Carmarthenshire whilst supporting the principles of the Circular Economy.
4	That the Council works to enable the re-use of vacant or unused buildings on agricultural land and within rural towns and villages, to develop business incubator or commercial accommodation in rural areas.
5	That the Council maintains its rural estate but reviews its use and policy going forward, whilst also working with other public sector partners to identify development opportunities through their rural estate.
6	That the Council continues to make grant funding available to support the growth aspirations of the county's entrepreneurs and rural businesses whilst exploring the feasibility of establishing a local private sector loan fund.
7	That the Council works with other business support agencies and services (e.g. Business Wales, Business in Focus, Farming Connect etc) to enable greater clustering of support and signposting to local businesses.

3.2 Planning & Housing

- 3.2.1 The role that planning plays in supporting the future sustainability of our rural communities has been raised time and again as part of the discussions of the Task Group. There is of course a recognition of the need for sensitive consideration of a number of factors when looking at development in rural areas but the Task Group feels that current planning policy from Welsh Government does not give enough flexibility to enable development, based on local need, in our most rural communities. This stagnation means that rural communities are being left behind in terms of development with opportunities for housing, business and diversification being targeted more towards the main population centres. It is also felt that this is contributing to a steady flow of younger, working age people out of the rural communities to seek suitable housing and employment which in turn is affecting the resilience of these communities.
- 3.2.2 In particular, national planning policy relating to sustainable rural communities (TAN 6) also needs to be reviewed to take into consideration socio-economic changes that rural communities have faced in the last ten years since the TAN was developed, but especially as a result of the likely implications of Brexit on the agricultural sector. The agricultural sector faces a very uncertain period with many of the possible implications of Brexit still unknown. However, planning policy needs to be reviewed in order to enable a more flexible approach to development, based on local need and opportunities in rural areas so that people working within the agricultural sector and wider community are able to diversify and adjust as appropriate.
- 3.2.3 It is also felt that following the recognition in the Planning Act 2015 that impact of development on the Welsh language should be a material consideration, the TAN 20 needs to be amended to reflect the new legislation. It is also felt that the TAN should set out a specific methodology for Welsh Language Impact Assessments of Local Development Plans (LDP) as well as making provision for assessing the impact of development of all sites at the planning application stage, as it is only at this stage that you have the necessary detail to undertake a full and robust assessment.
- 3.2.4 The Council is currently in the process of revising its Local Development Plan and the Task Group feels there is a need to redress the current balance to enable appropriate and suitable development within our rural towns and communities. This development needs to be taken forward based on local need rather than national targets and regulations. There should of course be a thorough consideration and understanding of the impact that any residential or business development may have on the nature and construct of rural communities, especially in terms of its possible positive or negative impact on the Welsh language, and the size of development should also be comparative to the existing community, but suitable development in our rural communities needs to be enabled in order to ensure the sustainability of our rural communities going forward.
- 3.2.5 The availability of affordable housing is also a significant issue in rural communities. In Carmarthenshire, affordable homes are designated based on the median income (as determined by CACI Paycheck which provides gross household income estimates) of specific communities. For example, a typical 3 bedroom house would be classified as affordable if the cost is 3 times the median income for that area plus a 5% deposit. The sale prices of these homes is restricted both at initial sale and subsequent

occupiers. Average residents earnings in Carmarthenshire stand at £26,190 (ASHE) with average house prices in rural wards such as Llangeler standing at £207,635 and Cilycwm at £206,150 (as at February 2019), the availability and location of suitable housing across the county is key. The Task Group welcomes the approach and progress the Council have made to date through the 'Carmarthenshire Affordable Homes Delivery Plan 2016-2020' in delivering their commitment to establish an additional 1,000 affordable homes in the county, with 700 already delivered either through purchase of suitable properties through the private market or supporting the building of new homes. This commitment needs to be fully delivered and further developed through the work of Cartrefi Croeso which has been established by Carmarthenshire County Council as an arm's length company to address local housing need by developing new homes for sale and to rent. The company will have a strong focus on increasing provision of suitable homes across the county and in particular within rural communities. It is also important that the Council looks to further develop its supply of Council houses and the Task Group are very encouraged that proposals are under development to build up to 900 new Council houses to be located across the county according to local need.

- 3.2.6 Second home ownership in Carmarthenshire is at around the 950 properties mark. This is a substantial number in itself but is significantly less than rates in Pembrokeshire (3,000), Ceredigion (2,000) and Gwynedd (4,800). Whilst other councils have introduced measures to increase council tax rates on second homes, there is currently a 'loophole' in national legislation which means that second home owners can switch from Council Tax to a Business Tax. Whilst the Council is aware of the potential negative impact of second homes on the viability of rural communities, the legislative issues need to be resolved before the Council considers its future position on council tax rates for second homes.

Recommendations	
8	To lobby Welsh Government to amend national planning policy, and in particular <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. TAN 6 to enable a more flexible approach to development in rural areas, especially in areas outside of identified settlements, and b. TAN 20 in terms of ensuring the impact of any development on the Welsh language is required as a material consideration, as stipulated in the Planning Act 2015 and that its status in legislation is reflected in the TAN.
9	To lobby Welsh Government to amend planning policy (as part of TAN 6) in relation to the construction of a second dwelling on established farms as the current requirements relating to demonstration of income from the farm to enable development is no longer valid. Given the current and future changing nature of agriculture and possible implications of Brexit, income from the farm will have to be supplemented with income from other sources i.e. extended family members taking up employment outside of the farm setting. Therefore, the total income of the household, as a family unit, needs to be considered rather than farm income alone.
10	That the Council ensures that the revised Local Development Plan:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. enables appropriate scale residential and business development in smaller community areas as needed b. enables appropriate tenure mix in residential developments, based on local housing need c. enables the appropriate allocation of affordable homes within rural areas d. enables tourism and business development in rural areas to support future development and diversification.
11	<p>That the Council amends its planning policy to enable the citing of a new/re-developed farmhouse or dwelling linked to an agricultural property so that it can be located a reasonable distance outside of the working farm yard in order to ensure due regard can be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Health and safety considerations; b. Biosecurity; and c. Lessen the risk of zoonotic diseases (diseases that can be transferred between people and animals e.g. TB).
12	<p>That the Council looks into the feasibility of enabling the establishment/creation of new small-holdings in rural areas, outside identified settlements on the basis of local need and the potential positive contribution to the economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability of the local community.</p>
13	<p>That the Council continues to support and further develop its ambitious Carmarthenshire Affordable Homes Delivery Plan post 2020 to ensure the continuation of increased availability of affordable homes within the county and ensure the proposals for building new Council houses reflect local housing needs in rural areas.</p>

3.3 Education & Skills

- 3.3.1 Education and skills will play a pivotal role in supporting rural development and these key issues have been raised on numerous occasions during the Task Group's considerations. In order to support economic development in the area we need to ensure that we are able to provide the appropriate skills and training to people of all ages living and working in the county. As part of the evidence received from representatives from the business sector it was noted that more needs to be done to encourage and support entrepreneurship amongst our younger people and that it's also important to raise professional aspirations. Maintaining the status quo is not an option for the longer-term sustainability of our rural communities so we need to develop skills to challenge and think innovatively about future solutions, provision and ways of working.
- 3.3.2 This is a core objective of the Swansea Bay City Deal's Skills and Talent initiative which will work with a range of partners from the private sector, higher and further education, schools and the third sector to develop bespoke education and training solutions that address local business and professional needs. In addition to the local schools, Coleg Sir Gâr (including the Gelli Aur campus), University of Wales Trinity Saint David, other education providers and agencies such as Careers Wales will need to play a driving role in taking this project forward.
- 3.3.3 It is also widely accepted that rural community schools face a challenging future. As of February 2019, Carmarthenshire has a total of 1 nursery school and 95 primary schools across the county. 67 of those schools are within rural Carmarthenshire (based on the Carmarthenshire Rural Development Plan definition of rural). There are varying pupil numbers in those schools within the rural areas:
- 17 schools with less than 50 pupils
 - 18 schools with between 51 and 100 pupils
 - 14 schools with between 101 and 200 pupils
 - 11 schools with between 201 and 300 pupils
 - 7 schools with over 301 pupils.
- 3.3.4 Rural schools play a significant role in the life and fabric of the communities in which they are situated. Most of the county's rural schools are Welsh medium and access to a school within close proximity to the community in which they live is also a factor for families with school age children. Whilst recognising this significant role, it must be acknowledged that the Council faces a position of ever reducing budgets and increasing expectations in terms of curriculum provision. However, the Council should remain fully supportive of doing all that it can to support and build the future resilience and sustainability of its rural schools, and will work to Welsh Government's set of procedures and requirements within the School Organisation Code which works on a presumption against closure.
- 3.3.5 In order to address these challenges, the Council has worked with a number of smaller sized schools to introduce a federation model which enables schools to work together. To date, there are a total of 30 federation schools in Carmarthenshire with, 10 schools federated within rural Carmarthenshire:

- 2 federations of 2 schools
- 2 federations of 3 schools.

Further development and formalisation of the federation model is considered to be a suitable way forward when addressing the needs of rural schools and communities.

- 3.3.6 The Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017-2020 states its vision as enabling a bilingual Carmarthenshire which would see all young people, from all walks of life, having the opportunity to be bilingual when they emerge from the education system, proud of their identity and able to celebrate both languages. In order to achieve this the Council will support all schools to move along with Welsh language medium continuum in terms of provision. This will ensure significant growth in Welsh-medium education and training to increase the number of people of all ages who become fluent in both Welsh and English and have the ability to use their languages confidently with their families, in their communities and in the workplace. Delivering this progression will also support the Welsh Government's target to reach 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050.
- 3.3.7 The availability and access to registered childcare in rural areas has also been raised, especially Welsh medium childcare. The Council is required to undertake a 'Childcare Sufficiency Assessment' every 5-years in order to map provision and identify any gaps and the latest findings show that although the number of childcare providers and places has increased since the last assessment in 2013, there is still insufficient full day care, childminders and out of school care in certain areas. With the recent introduction of the Welsh Government's 30-hours per week of free childcare for working parents it is anticipated that this could see an increase in provision or providers. This could be an important business or social enterprise development opportunity in rural areas. It is also recognised that access to childcare and wrap around care provision around school hours will be deciding factors for working parents in their choice of schools going forward and as a result, rural schools need to be in a position to provide a comprehensive package for pupils and parents.
- 3.3.8 This gap in provision within the childcare sector could be a good opportunity for the Council to work with Coleg Sir Gâr (and any other relevant partners) to develop a skills hub model to address the skills shortage in this sector, and other work based and vocational sectors. Work through the Regional Learning & Skills Partnerships will support identification of the skills gap across other sectors and could be a core element of the county's work in supporting the foundational economy sectors as referenced in the economic development section of this report (para. 3.1.4).

Recommendations	
14	<p>That the Council considers the recommendations of the Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish 'A review of the current provision for early year's education, childcare and play opportunities' to be published in 2019 which include recommendations focused on:</p> <p>a. The availability and provision of childcare across the county but especially in the rural areas</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Supporting the childcare sector to increase the availability and provision of Welsh medium childcare across the county c. The availability of after school clubs and wrap around care provision through schools d. Reviewing the Council's admissions policy for full-time education for 4 year olds e. Ensuring all parents and carers receive information about the benefit of Welsh medium education and bilingualism f. Supporting schools and local partners to develop a model which would enable community use of school play facilities outside of school hours. <p>The recommendations would have a significant impact on provision and access to childcare and play opportunities in rural areas as well as supporting the principle of building the future resilience and sustainability of rural schools.</p>
15	That the Council remains fully supportive of doing all that it can to support and build the future resilience and sustainability of its rural schools, and will work to Welsh Government's set of procedures and requirements within the School Organisation Code which works on a presumption against closure.
16	That the Council continues with the progress being made in moving all primary and secondary schools along the continuum in terms of increasing Welsh medium provision.
17	That the Council, through the Swansea Bay City Deal and Regional Learning and Skills Partnership Skills and Talent Project, look to increase careers input at a younger age in schools to inspire and raise aspirations in terms of local employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.
18	That the Council works with Coleg Sir Gâr to consider options for the development of a rural innovation, technology and skills hub model across the county which would work to address the skills shortage in certain sectors focussing on work based/vocational skills.
19	That the Council develops a suite of placement/work experience opportunities with local businesses in order to increase local awareness of career options.
20	That the Council works with partners to develop a tracking system for young people leaving Carmarthenshire for education and employment opportunities with a view to signposting them to employment opportunities to enable them to return to Carmarthenshire.
21	That the Council works with partners to undertake further mapping work on the possible implications of Brexit on certain workforce sectors across the county.

3.4 Broadband & Digital Skills

- 3.4.1 Access to broadband has been raised consistently as a barrier to rural development by most stakeholders providing evidence to the Task Group and by residents through the consultation. Providing and managing a business is now becoming more dependent on broadband connectivity and the speed and reliability of that connectivity is also vitally important. More and more farm business functions such as returns, forms, registrations and other business related functions such as VAT are now required to be completed online. In addition, with the closure of banks in rural towns there is an increasing dependence on access to online banking.
- 3.4.2 In addition to the economic impact, lack of broadband access can also have a social and community impact and can contribute to increasing social isolation and community connectivity. With social media now playing an integral part in communicating community life, lack of online access can have a detrimental effect.
- 3.4.3 Figures provided by Openreach as part of their evidence to the Task Group in May 2018 noted that following roll-out of the Welsh Government Superfast programme, 86% of Carmarthenshire households have access to superfast, however, only 40% of those households were accessing it. There is therefore a need to better understand why take-up rates are so low compared to the availability. It was also noted that the superfast programme would not be able to address access issues for properties in more isolated rural areas and that other delivery solutions would need to be considered such as:
- Fixed wireless (point to point)
 - Enhanced 4G or 5G infrastructure
 - Full fibre
 - Public Authority Anchor Tenancy (using an existing fibre network through a school etc)
 - Self-dig (led by the local community)
 - Structure approach to Universal Service Obligation (cluster groups to work as networks to share the costs of establishing connectivity).
- 3.4.4 The Task Group were made aware that Welsh Government are in the process of rolling out the Broadband Superfast 2 programme which would be a follow on to the initial programme delivered by Openreach and would look to address connectivity issues for the households and communities that had not benefited from the first programme. However, to date there is little information available about the delivery approach for this second programme and timescales for delivery.
- 3.4.5 During discussions, several references were made to the successful [Superfast Cornwall](#) project, which since 2011 has been working on connecting as many residents, businesses and community venues as possible to superfast broadband. As part of the evaluation of the programme it was noted that for every £1 spent on broadband they received £4 in GVA. This was done by deploying broadband infrastructure and delivering an exemplary take up and demand stimulation scheme. The increased GVA came from the creation of new industries, simplification and

lower cost public service as well as retaining people in the county throughout the year, rather than just in the summer months.

- 3.4.6 The Swansea Bay City Deal Digital Infrastructure project will focus on improving access and connectivity, through a range of solutions, in both urban and rural areas. Based on the Carmarthenshire superfast broadband availability statistics noted by Openreach (para. 3.4.3), there appears to be a need to increase awareness of availability and supporting take up as well as developing innovative solutions to address the lack of provision on the 14% of Carmarthenshire households who currently do not have access to superfast broadband.
- 3.4.7 It must also be noted that broadband availability is not the only barrier to connectivity, with digital skills and literacy being raised a number of times as being a significant issue, particularly amongst the older age groups. In their evidence to the Task Group, the Wales Co-operative Centre noted that 18% of Carmarthenshire adults are not regular users of the internet and although there are a number of projects being delivered, such as Digital Heroes and Companies, there is a need to do more in order to ensure people are not digitally isolated.

Recommendations	
22	That the Council urgently works with agencies and through the Swansea Bay City Deal Digital Infrastructure Project to improve broadband infrastructure and connectivity focusing on areas of poor or no connectivity, especially through the 10 Rural Towns programme. Where possible the Council should also develop and implement its own innovative solutions to addressing local need.
23	That the Council improves promotion of grants and support services currently available to businesses and private properties to support their digital connectivity.
24	That the Council works with partners to support the promotion of existing opportunities to develop digital skills and look to introduce additional support where required.

3.5 Tourism

- 3.5.1 Tourism has been identified as a significant growth industry for Carmarthenshire as a whole, and in 2017-18 there was an 8% increase in tourism figures for Carmarthenshire, with the sector contributing £434m to the local economy, and in the region of 6,000 jobs annually. The promotion of tourism is not a statutory service for the Council but given the significant economic contribution the sector makes, and has the further potential to make, the Council plays a key role in promoting Carmarthenshire as a destination for the internal Wales and UK markets, as well as internationally through Visit Wales campaigns.
- 3.5.2 This increase in numbers is a positive contribution to the growing sector in Carmarthenshire but it is also recognised that more could be done to develop and promote Carmarthenshire as a destination in itself. There is a significant opportunity to capitalise on the passing trade of visitors making their way to the coastal areas of Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion, but also the internal regional market, both by developing the Carmarthenshire coastal and countryside offering as well as developing the county's rich natural assets in terms of potential open air activities and the all-weather offering within the county.
- 3.5.3 During discussions at the Carmarthenshire Rural Affairs Conference in September 2018 it was felt that there are a number of opportunities that could be taken forward to further develop the tourism sector in Carmarthenshire including:
- Improving collaboration across the whole sector
 - Improving promotion of existing events
 - Working on getting passing trade to stay
 - Developing the open air offer
 - Developing the sense of place - what's unique to Carmarthenshire
- 3.5.3 The [Carmarthenshire Tourism Association](#) is a key partner in supporting the development of the sector in the county. As a member based organisation, which aims to support businesses from all types and sizes involved in the County's visitor economy, they currently have some 250 members and work on the basis that they are 'led by the trade, for the trade'. Collaboration between agencies such as the Association, the Council and Welsh Government will be key in terms of further developing the distinctive offer that Carmarthenshire provides and supporting promotion of the growing tourism opportunities across the county.
- 3.5.4 Supporting development and diversification into the tourism sector will be key to the sustainability of rural communities and in particular enabling additional income into farms as a result of possible Brexit implications. As a result, there needs to be greater flexibility within local planning policy in order to enable and facilitate appropriate development within more rural settlements (as noted in Recommendation 10d in the Planning and Housing Section).

Recommendations

25	That the Council builds on existing arrangements to work with all interested partners in the tourism sector to create and promote a Carmarthenshire destination offer.
26	That the Council works with all interested partners in the tourism sector and local communities to develop, support and promote a programme of year-round local events/festivals across the County.
27	That the Council works with partners and the private sector to identify opportunities to address the current gap in terms of open air and all-weather provision in the County.

3.6 Transport & Highways

- 3.6.1 The county's transport network was referenced a number of times during the Task Group's consideration, and was a key issue raised during the public consultation with many stating that the lack of public transport provision in the county was a barrier to accessing services. There are a number of challenges to consider when providing a public transport service including demand, rurality and population base. We must also take into account that 90% of households in rural areas own a car. As of November 2018, Carmarthenshire had 67 different transport services with only 10 of those operating on a commercial basis, 39 being fully subsidised and 18 being partially subsidised. Therefore, 85% of services in Carmarthenshire are subsidised to some degree, with the average subsidy in Carmarthenshire per passenger journey being £3.63. Due to the low population density, dispersed settlements, topography, time, distance and levels of car ownership and subsequent costs it is virtually impossible to run a purely commercial service in a rural area.
- 3.6.2 The Council has recognised that this is an issue for a number of years and has established the very successful Bwcabus model in parts of the county. This model of connecting passengers to main line bus services to travel has proved to be well received by users and relatively cost efficient because of the demand responsive aspect of delivery. However, this provision is dependent on grant funding to maintain it and although the Council would like to extend the provision to other parts of the county the current funding position means that this will not be possible without additional funding from new sources.
- 3.6.3 In addition, the Task Group heard about the Council's existing 'Country Cars' scheme which is a community based car sharing scheme where volunteers can provide lifts to Carmarthenshire residents who would otherwise be unable to make essential local journeys. It was felt that more should be done to promote this vitally important service to Carmarthenshire residents who need the support.
- 3.6.4 Community transport has been suggested by a number of stakeholders as being a possible way forward in terms of increasing transport provision with the work undertaken by Dolen Teifi being cited as an example of good practice. Dolen Teifi was created by volunteers with the goal of providing sustainable transport to the people who live along the Teifi Valley from Newcastle Emlyn to Llandysul and Llanybydder. Opportunities to further develop this model across other parts of the county, along with possible community pool car schemes, should be considered as possible solutions to the significant transport issues that some of our most remote communities are facing.
- 3.6.5 As part of this, consideration needs to be given to increasing the county's electric charging infrastructure. Due to developments in technology and the drive to reduce carbon emissions, electric car ownership and usage is likely to increase significantly over coming years, Carmarthenshire should invest in its infrastructure now in order to be well positioned to cater for future demand. A number of projects are currently under way or under development within Carmarthenshire, including the installation of 26 double headed charging points at locations across the county. It is felt that the

10 Rural Towns programme provides a good opportunity to ensure a co-ordinated approach to developing provision strategically across the county, ensuring consistent access to charging points at key locations. Through developing this infrastructure and supporting development of the community transport offer there should also be an impact on the county's carbon emissions.

- 3.6.6 Carmarthenshire has seen a significant investment and surge in its cycling activity over recent years which has numerous benefits in terms of economic, health, environmental and social impacts. Developing a network of offroad cycle paths across the county, based on the Tywi Valley Cycle path project, would be a significant boost to local infrastructure as well as being a draw for cycling tourism in Carmarthenshire. Further development of now redundant railway lines across the county should be considered as a key development opportunity for the future.
- 3.6.7 Carmarthenshire has over 3,500km of highways and the maintenance costs are substantial. The main routes of the A40, A48 and A483 are the responsibility of Welsh Government and are maintained through external agencies such as the Trunk Road Agency. Unfortunately, due to budgetary cut backs faced by the Council, the Highways service in particular has seen approximately 40% reduction in spending since 2012-13. The Council is proactively seeking any sources of funding available, however a recent audit of all A, B, C and U/C road conditions in the county estimates that an investment of at least £15m is required for the most urgent repairs to those roads. Of the urgent repairs identified, £9m is required for C roads and £4m required for the U/C roads, which are the roads typically providing rural connections. The Council has already obtained an additional £3 million grant funding from Welsh Government for road refurbishment and this has primarily been targeted towards improving the main A and B class roads. This is obviously a significant challenge for the Council to address but the Task Group urge the Council to explore all possible funding options so that the conditions of roads in our rural areas are improved and maintained.

Recommendations	
28	That the Council works with partners to develop community transport opportunities across the county, which should consider all feasible means of transport to address local needs.
29	That the Council works with partners to consider further investment in the electric charging points network across the County with a focus on development of the infrastructure as part of the 10 Rural Towns initiative.
30	That the Council builds upon the approach of the Towy Valley Cycle path by looking into the feasibility of developing additional cycle paths on redundant railway lines across the County.
31	That the Council improves promotion of its Country Cars scheme.
32	To lobby Welsh Government to secure longer-term funding for the successful

	Bwcabus model.
33	That the Council explores all possible funding options to support its highways maintenance programme to ensure that the condition of rural roads are improved.

3.7 Agriculture & Food

3.7.1 The continuing uncertainty around the final Brexit deal arrangements is making it very challenging, if not impossible for the agricultural sector and industry to plan appropriately or make any decisions in terms of future policy and approach. However, it is widely recognised that if Brexit does go ahead the agricultural sector will face a significant period of change with Professor Janet Dwyer, in [The Implications of Brexit for Agriculture, Rural Areas and land Use in Wales](#), noting three key implications of the Brexit process, which will have an impact on UK and Wales policy in terms of agriculture and rural areas:

- a. Trade – the UK must determine its future trading relations with the EU and with third countries outside the EU
- b. Future policy/funding for agriculture and rural areas – the UK and its devolved administrations will determine how much can be afforded for agriculture, environmental management and rural development once the UK leave the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) framework.
- c. Nature of the wider UK post-Brexit governance model and general economic situation, which will affect change in rural areas – current devolution in agri-rural affairs is dependent on a common EU framework covering CAP resources, EU Structural Funding and the provisions of EU legislation on the environment, food safety and consumer welfare. What might replace this?

3.7.2 In July 2018, the Welsh Government published its proposal for a new Land Management Programme which would replace CAP in Wales. The proposal outlined two large and flexible schemes which would replace the current CAP funded schemes (Basic Payment Scheme, Glastir and other parts of the Rural Development Programme). The two new schemes proposed would be an:

- Economic Resilience scheme – investment for economic activities, in particular food and timber production.
- Public Goods scheme – direct support for public goods delivery, in particular for the environment.

Having considered the proposals, and listened to the views of the farming unions, the Council responded to the consultation to convey its concerns that it was felt that the suggested approach represents a significant threat to the diversity of the agricultural sector that we have in Wales and could have a disproportionate impact on smaller-scale agricultural operations and traditional family farms, which are an essential part of the Welsh agricultural sector and rural communities. We await the final proposals once the final Brexit position is clearer.

3.7.3 Despite the significant concerns, there is an element of hope for the Carmarthenshire agricultural sector going forward. Carmarthenshire has a good balance of farm types within the county with the main sector being dairy but with a mixture of sheep, beef,

and a growing poultry sector. This diversity could be a benefit to the agricultural sector in Carmarthenshire compared to other areas which are more dependent on certain types of farms. Business adaptation and survival going forward will be dependent on this diversity and the local conditions to enable and support that diversification.

- 3.7.4 As noted, the dairy sector provides a firm foundation to the agricultural industry in Carmarthenshire with over 470 dairy producers in the county accounting for 28% of all Wales producers. One of the main frustrations noted by a number of stakeholders providing evidence to the Task Group was the fact that the vast majority of milk produced in Carmarthenshire is transported out of the county, and indeed out of Wales for processing. A Welsh Government commissioned study into the feasibility of establishing additional dairy processing capacity in South West Wales in November 2015 came to the conclusion that a new processing facility is unlikely to be affordable in the short term due to the high capital costs and would therefore not be commercially viable. With this in mind, the Task Group would recommend looking into the feasibility of developing a micro/macro milk processing facility which could work to a co-operative model and could build on the already strong foundations for local cheese processing by further developing other markets such as liquid milk/cream, yoghurt and ice cream.
- 3.7.5 In addition to the dairy sector, Carmarthenshire also has a vibrant food production sector with a number of local producers and suppliers catering for local, regional, national and international markets. There is an opportunity to further develop this sector by bringing together the individual food producers to develop a network and brand for foods from Carmarthenshire. This could be closely aligned to the Welsh Government's Food and Drink Wales programme. With the possible implications of Brexit the agricultural sector will need to consider and develop additional means of income through diversification and with the appropriate support and facilitation the food sector is ripe for further development in Carmarthenshire.
- 3.7.6 As part of the Task Group's visit to the Wales Food Centre in Horeb, it was suggested that there is a growing need for medium sized food based business and production units in order to supplement the small incubation units available at Horeb and enable business growth. Local demand and opportunities for development of appropriate units across Carmarthenshire should be further considered.
- 3.7.7 In addition, the Council is working with other public sector partners through the Carmarthenshire Public Services Board (PSB), to review its current food procurement arrangements with a longer term view to, where possible, procure more goods produced locally. This is part of a wider programme the PSB is looking to address through further developing opportunities for the sectors providing those basic goods and services we all use every day such care and health services, food, housing, energy, construction, tourism and retailers on the high street – all of which are considered examples of the foundational economy. This will be a key development

for the rural economy in particular as we look to bolster and further develop the local industries that we rely on day in day out.

- 3.7.8 As part of its evidence to the Task Group both the Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW) and the National Farmers' Union (NFU) Cymru noted that the average age of farmers now stands at 61 years of age and there is a concern within the sector about the lack of opportunities for young people and young farmers to join the industry. With land prices and set-up costs, any new starter coming into the industry requires a substantial capital investment to establish themselves. Succession planning is therefore key and Farming Connect provide a range of support and tools to facilitate this. In addition, Farming Connect run the [Mentro / Venture](#) programme which looks to identify and support joint farming ventures in Wales. This is an approach that needs to be further developed across Wales and particularly in Carmarthenshire.
- 3.7.9 The agricultural sector makes a significant contribution to the Carmarthenshire economy with the NFU referring to a 2017 report by Development Economics which notes that for every £1 invested in farm support, farming delivers £7.40 back to the economy through the purchase of goods such as animal feed, vets, machinery, local contractors, food etc. In addition to the economic contribution, the sector plays an important role in the shape of rural communities. Farming provides the backbone to many rural communities, many of those being predominantly Welsh speaking communities and there is a concern that if the agricultural sector is as adversely affected by Brexit as some fear, this could have a seriously detrimental effect on the resilience and future sustainability of many rural communities, not just in Carmarthenshire but across Wales and the UK.

Recommendations	
34	That the Council works with partners to look into the feasibility of developing co-operation led milk processing facilities within Carmarthenshire on a micro/macro basis and agrees a way forward once the findings are known.
35	That the Council works with partners to look into the feasibility of developing a Carmarthenshire brand for locally produced food.
36	That the Council fully engages with the Carmarthenshire Public Services Board programme which is looking to develop opportunities for public sector procurement of locally produced and supplied food as well as ways the public sector can support local food producers to establish, develop and grow their businesses. If this approach is deemed successful and appropriate it could be extended to enable local procurement of other public sector goods and services which will in turn support the Carmarthenshire pound.
37	That the Council considers demand and opportunities for the development of medium sized food based business and production units.
38	That the Council works with and supports other agencies, especially through the

	Farming Connect Mentro / Venture programme, to support the promotion and development of opportunities for shared farming type initiatives.
39	<p>To lobby Welsh Government to ensure that any post Brexit funding programmes established to replace the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Fully respects the agricultural sector's diversity whilst reflecting the economic, social, environmental and cultural contribution the sector makes to rural communities as a whole; b. Does not have a disproportionately negative impact on smaller-scale agricultural operations and traditional family farms c. Responds to the need for economic growth and is more closely aligned to wider Welsh Government economic and skills development plans. <p>We would also ask that the Welsh Government re-considers its plans to withdraw direct payments in the future which could destabilise the industry in Wales as it sets Wales apart from the approach of other countries who would be direct industry competitors.</p>
40	Once the Brexit position is known, that the Council works with partners to consider opportunities to enhance an internal Carmarthenshire/Wales/UK market for beef, lamb, poultry and pork produce.

3.8 Community Resilience, Access to Services & Third Sector

- 3.8.1 Carmarthenshire continues to have a vibrant community, social and third sector network, although it must be recognised that these communities are continuously evolving with changing needs. There needs to be a greater recognition of the important role and contribution that community based organisations, predominantly run by volunteers, make to the resilience and essence of local communities.
- 3.8.2 In recent years, Carmarthenshire has seen a net migration loss in the 15-29 age group and an in migration increase in the 30-65+ age group. On average over the last 5 years Carmarthenshire has seen a net migration loss of 340 people in the 15-29 age group and during the same period an in migration gain of an average of 598 people in the 30-65+ age group. This supports the recognised trend in Carmarthenshire of an ageing population but also has possible implications from a community resilience and cohesion perspective which need to be considered. The importance of our community networks and support structures are therefore key to supporting future population needs. Cultural and linguistic sensitivities must also be recognised with 50.2% of the population in the rural wards speaking Welsh, higher than the county wide average of 43.9%. Developments such as the 'Welcome to Carmarthenshire' pack are important to ensure that the importance of the Welsh language in Carmarthenshire is conveyed to people moving into the county as early as possible so that they may be encouraged to learn the language.
- 3.8.3 One of the community based organisations that was highlighted by a number of stakeholders as being key to rural community life was the [Carmarthenshire Young Farmers' Clubs \(YFC\) Federation](#). With 23 active clubs across Carmarthenshire and over 800 members between the ages of 10-26 and hundreds of voluntary leaders, trainers and supporters, the YFC plays a significant role in creating a sense of community pride and belonging, with all clubs contributing significantly to the vibrancy of their local community. The organisation also has a key part in addressing de-population of young people as the bond created between members and their communities is continuously noted as a factor in young people wanting to remain in the county or return home. The structure of the organisation also plays a significant role in developing the skills and experiences of its members to become future community leaders, something that is very much needed if our rural communities are to continue to thrive. The Task Group feels that the Council could do more to work alongside the YFC to support and engage their members as community champions or connectors going forward.
- 3.8.4 With public sector services facing on-going change over coming years the role that the third sector can play is also likely to increase from a service provision perspective. The [Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services](#) and [Wales Co-operative Centre](#) both identified opportunities in their presentations to the Task Group for further development of the sector through social enterprise and cooperatives especially to support entrepreneurship in a business sense and social inclusion from a community sense. The Council is already considering this in certain services but there

needs to be a greater focus and drive in terms of taking this forward. This approach could also be utilised for further community initiatives and services which could be considered the foundational economy sectors such as local food production and supply, rural community pubs and shops, leisure services etc. This should be a key consideration for the 10 Rural Towns initiative.

- 3.8.5 A number of stakeholders reflected on their growing concerns in terms of social and community issues relating to loneliness and isolation, which seem to be compounded when living in rural areas. This was recognised across all factions of the community but seems to be a particular issue within the agricultural sector due to the working patterns, with long hours and usually lone working. Community networks are essential in responding to these cross county issues but in rural areas in particular, due to the lack of transport and access to services, virtual networks can also be a solution. The Task Group were pleased to hear about a project being developed by the West Wales Care Partnership which is looking to address some of these issues by using the latest technology as part of a person-centred, responsive model of care and support through proactive interaction with individuals. This project is based on a successful model implemented in Bilbao, Spain where social media is used to develop strong online community networks which can then develop to becoming strong networks within the community.
- 3.8.6 It was also noted that rural crime was recognised as being a growing concern in the area with Dyfed Powys Police publishing their first [Rural Crime Strategy](#) in 2017. The main issues relating to Carmarthenshire have tended to focus on theft of sheep, quad bikes, gates, trailers and other farm equipment. In 2017/18 the value of items stolen from rural Carmarthenshire was just over £97,000. The Council needs to work with and support the Police in any way possible to respond to these issues so that Carmarthenshire's rural communities are proactive and well prepared in order to reduce such speculative crime.

Recommendations	
41	That the Council works with partners to develop the approach and use of social enterprises as a potential model for delivery of community led projects and services across the County.
42	That the Council works with partners to develop a more co-ordinated approach to identifying, supporting and developing volunteering across the County.
43	That the Council works with Carmarthenshire Young Farmers Clubs Federation to ensure a closer working relationship and support structure in the future.
44	That the Council works with partners and communities to respond to issues relating to loneliness and isolation.
45	That the Council works with Dyfed Powys Police to address rural crime issues affecting the county and to monitor any trends in terms of community cohesion issues.

46	That the Council revisits the delivery model for leisure facilities and services in rural areas with a view to creating a sustainable and accessible service provision in the future. This should be linked with the Ten Rural Towns programme.
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3.9 Renewable Energy

- 3.9.1 Carmarthenshire is well placed to develop its renewable energy output with opportunities for hydro, solar and wind developments across the county. There will need to be a collective effort across the public, private and community sectors in order to enable this to happen with a more flexible approach required in order to deliver change. Whilst recognising some of the challenges this may bring, there is also a recognised need, supported by the national and local coverage for the need to respond to the climate emergency, to change the current approach and be more aspirational in terms of local development and provision.
- 3.9.2 In February 2019 the Council made a commitment to be a net zero carbon authority by 2030, and an action plan to deliver on this commitment is currently being developed. The Council has a significant property and land portfolio and has already introduced some schemes in terms of solar and wind energy generation. However, more can be done and a review of the possible options for delivery is currently underway. Part of this process will require the Council to generate more energy from renewable sources and to also take action to off-set the carbon emissions it cannot prevent. The Council will look to work with other public sector bodies, through the Public Services Board, to respond to this challenge and ensure it achieves its commitment.
- 3.9.3 There is also a need to increase and support the development of community energy schemes within the county. As well as providing smart and clean energy solutions, there is a means of ensuring profit is kept and re-invested in the local area and saves the local community money. [Carmarthenshire Energy](#) gave evidence to the Task Group and outlined some of the projects they are already delivering within the county and that there is potential and interest to deliver far more.

Recommendations

47	That the Council works with partners to improve promotion of opportunities to increase development and use of renewable energy in the private, public and community sectors.
48	That the Council works with partners to support the development of community energy schemes.
49	That the Council looks to increase the use of renewable energy sources to supply Council properties.

3.10 Environment & Waste

- 3.10.1 Carmarthenshire is an area known for its outstanding natural beauty, from its beaches and coastline, to its agricultural and post-industrial valleys and forestry and mountain tops, the county's natural environment is one of its greatest assets.
- 3.10.2 It is however recognised that this environment is changing and in February 2019 the Council declared a climate emergency and committed to making Carmarthenshire County Council a net zero carbon local authority by 2030. Work is in progress to develop and implement an action plan for the Council and the Task Group fully supports this approach and encourages the Council to work with other partners to take collective action.
- 3.10.3 The Task Group received evidence from a number of stakeholders about the growing concern relating to water pollution incidents in Carmarthenshire, with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) stating that there were 81 confirmed water pollution incidents in Carmarthenshire during 2018. A breakdown of the source of the pollution is as follows:

Premises	Count
On-going investigations to confirm source	2
Agriculture	35
Domestic & Residential	8
Manufacturing	4
Other	1
Premise Not Identified (unable to identify source)	16
Service Sector (e.g. garages, restaurants, electricity companies etc)	3
Transport	3
Water Industry	9

- 3.10.4 Whilst acknowledging the numerous different sources of these incidents, the high numbers of incidents sourced from the agriculture sector must be recognised. However, it must also be recognised that there are a total of 475 dairy farms in Carmarthenshire (as of April 2018) accounting for 28% of the all Wales dairy sector, and whilst the number of agricultural incidents in Carmarthenshire are high, largely due to a small minority of polluters, the vast majority of farmers are very much aware of their responsibility towards protecting our environment and it would therefore be unfair to tarnish the whole dairy sector with the same brush. It is recognised that Farming Connect and NRW provide support, advice and guidance to farmers to take action to prevent pollution and this needs to be adequately resourced. The Council is also committed to support initiatives such as 'Tacllo'r Tywi' which will engage with all interested parties to produce a practical plan for the future management of the river Tywi, and would encourage this approach to resolve any issues on other rivers across the county as necessary. It is also important to recognise that a large proportion of the sources of incidents are from situations other than

agriculture, and the same level of intervention needs to be focused on these areas to address and avoid future pollution incidents.

- 3.10.5 Despite these actions, there is a clear need to target interventions in Carmarthenshire to address all causes of water pollution and we would urge Welsh Government to fund and support direct action in Carmarthenshire, working with local organisations to address the issues currently faced. Some suggestions put forward to the Task Group include funding to support liming of land, capital investment to develop slurry lagoons and pits, and measures to stop rain water accessing the pits etc. Addressing the issues head on in Carmarthenshire could provide a model for future delivery which could prevent the introduction of further regulations on the sector.
- 3.10.6 The Task Group is very supportive of the £10m [Prosiect Slyri](#) that Coleg Sir Gâr is developing with partners which is working to develop a dewatering and purification system to manage slurry on farms. This could be a significant development for the sector in addressing this issue in the future.
- 3.10.7 The Task Group also received information about the proposed NVZ regulations that Welsh Government are planning to introduce which would restrict the period available for spreading slurry to a set schedule within the year. Whilst recognising the need to take action to address the issue the Task Group feel that the initial focus of any direct intervention should be on the known and repeat offenders of slurry mismanagement, rather than impose sanctions on all farmers. There is a concern that the lack of flexibility in the proposed regulations to accommodate periods of weather suitable for the spread of slurry outside of the fixed timeframe could lead to greater pollution if spreading is intensified within the fixed timeframe when the weather may be unfavourable for spreading.
- 3.10.8 Air quality in Carmarthenshire is continuously monitored and according to the 2018 Air Quality Progress Report for the county the main air quality pollutant relevant to Carmarthenshire is Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) and the main source of NO₂ emissions in the county is road traffic. Within Carmarthenshire's rural areas there are currently two Air Quality Management Areas, one in Llandeilo and one in Carmarthen. The Council has prepared detailed action plans to manage and work towards addressing the issues in partnership with a number of agencies. This is something the Advisory Panel, if agreed to be established, would be keen to consider in more detail moving forward.
- 3.10.9 There was also a significant concern from a number of stakeholders about the impact of flytipping in rural areas. The cleanliness and appearance of an area contributes greatly to community pride and sense of place and can have an impact in terms of tourism prospects. However, there were specific concerns in relation to flytipping in rural areas as it can be seen as an easy dumping ground and it being particularly unfair in terms of private landowners having to incur the cost of removing any waste illegally dumped on their land. It was felt that further work needs to be undertaken with communities and enforcement agencies to tackle this issue going forward.

Recommendations

50	To lobby Welsh Government to fund and support direct action in Carmarthenshire working in partnership with local farmers and organisations to address the water pollution issues currently faced.
51	To lobby Welsh Government to re-consider the introduction of the proposed NVZ regulations (aimed at improving water quality by restricting the period available for spreading slurry) and focus direct intervention on repeat offenders of slurry mismanagement rather than impose sanctions on all farmers.
52	That the Council works with local communities to address fly tipping and waste management issues in rural areas, and monitors the impact of recently introduced changes at the Council's recycling centres and landfill sites in terms of levels of fly tipping in rural areas.

3.11 The Way Forward

- 3.11.1 The Task Group very much welcomed the report published by Eluned Morgan AM in 2017 'Rural Wales: Time to Meet the Challenge 2025', however the lack of progress in further developing the suggestions put forward is disappointing. The Task Group very much support the call for the development of a specific plan for rural Wales and in the absence of a national drive on this the Task Group believe that the Council should lead on this work in Carmarthenshire. However, given that most rural areas across Wales are facing similar challenges there is a clear opportunity for Welsh Government to take forward this development nationally to ensure a more strategic approach.
- 3.11.2 On that basis the Council should facilitate continuation of the discussion with interested parties and stakeholders that the work of this Task Group has started to develop. Many attendees of the Carmarthenshire rural affairs conference in September 2018 noted the benefit of bringing together representatives from differing backgrounds but all with an interest in the development of rural Carmarthenshire. This type of engagement and collaboration should continue as an action plan to deliver the recommendations of this report is prepared but also to further the conversation and develop other possible solutions for the challenges faced by rural communities.
- 3.11.3 The Task Group also feel that there is a need to improve knowledge and understanding of rural issues at a national level, especially within Welsh Government. A number of stakeholders who gave evidence to the Task Group noted a sense of frustration at the all too often 'one size fits all' approach expected through national policies and guidance. There is very little recognition of the challenges, pressures and logistics of planning and providing services in rural communities. If our rural communities are to survive and thrive this approach needs to change and the Task Group believe that having a specific national focus through a rural plan or rural deal would be a good way of addressing this. There are significant opportunities for rural development, but all stakeholders need to work together to meet the challenges that rural Carmarthenshire and rural Wales face.

Recommendations

53	To lobby Welsh Government to ensure it gives sufficient focus and resources to the specific needs of rural communities in Carmarthenshire, building on the approach established through 'Rural Wales: Time to Meet the Challenge 2025' and working regionally where appropriate through a potential rural deal.
54	That the Council facilitates an on-going discussion with interested parties and stakeholders to ensure delivery and further development of the Council's rural affairs strategy, working in a multi-agency and multi-sector way.
55	To lobby Welsh Government and other national agencies to improve understanding of the challenges, pressures and logistics of planning and providing services in a rural community and to revisit its definition of deprivation to better reflect issues relating to rurality.

4 Conclusions & Next Steps

- 4.1.1 The Task Group put forward these findings and recommendations following consideration of a wide range of issues facing rural communities. Many of the recommendations presented will not require additional funding to deliver as they suggest a different approach or new way of doing things. However, it is recognised that this will require officer capacity and support to implement. Where appropriate, an indication of likely costs for delivering those recommendations that will require a funding investment have been outlined in the Appendix A. With many of the recommendations, the detailed costs of implementation will be unknown until the recommendation is further developed. In those instances, a detailed business case will need to be prepared and re-submitted for Executive Board consideration at a later date.
- 4.1.2 Once the report and recommendations is considered by the Executive Board and Council, an action plan to ensure progress in implementing the approved recommendations should be prepared and monitored over the next 12-months. It is intended that the approved recommendations are embedded into the corporate and departmental business plans of the Council for implementation.
- 4.1.3 In order to monitor progress in delivering the approved recommendations it is suggested that the Task Group is maintained in an Advisory Panel status to the Executive Board Member for Rural Affairs. In addition to monitoring progress, the Advisory Panel should also consider and review the possible implications of Brexit on rural communities once they become clearer and consider any other matters that influence rural communities as they arise.