

Head of Service Overview

Robin Staines – Head of Housing

Jonathan Fearn – Head of Property

The Housing Services division focuses on delivering two main objectives:

- 1. Providing timely and accurate housing advice***
- 2. Delivering the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard Plus, including increasing the supply of affordable homes***

There have been substantial improvements in both service areas over the past year. The housing options service has been reconfigured to ensure we can meet the demands of the 2014 Housing Act which requires us to prevent homelessness. Our newly established housing options hub in Eastgate ensures we can offer appropriate and timely housing advice on a wide range of housing issues and problems. We have developed a multi agency approach with colleagues in Shelter, Care and Repair and the Wallich to ensure the right type of advice is readily available.

After our commitment to tenants was launched in 2005, it was pleasing to note that every tenant who wanted the Homes Standard has now had the works complete. We are now planning for the future sustainability of the Standard, as required by the Housing Act. The Housing Revenue Account business plan has now been developed to ensure we can deliver over 1,000 new affordable homes over the next five years. This ambitious plan will go some way to meeting the housing needs of the county. We are currently undertaking further fieldwork to inform our long term research study into the effects of housing on health. These results will be available shortly for members. It was also pleasing to note that the service was recognised at the annual housing awards for our work on fuel clubs and time credits.

Providing timely and accurate housing advice

The Housing Advice and Options Team is responsible for providing a whole range of advisory services and housing solutions including:

- Housing advice and preventing homelessness.
- Temporary accommodation and social lettings.
- Access to social housing via our Housing Choice Register.
- Energy efficiency.
- Support to disabled people, including assessing individual needs and adapting homes.
- Support to landlords and tenants - particularly in relation to improving the private rented sector.
- Practical advice such as finding a builder, home maintenance, and loans and grants for improvements.

Key developments include:

1. Preventing homelessness

We have implemented the requirements of the new Housing Act successfully. A key issue to this has been the prevention of homelessness. The Welsh Government funding (£300,000 for 2015/16) for the transition period has been critical. We have recruited several temporary staff members who have now been inducted and trained.

We also now co-locate with Shelter Cymru at our East Gate offices in Llanelli and this partnership will reap further benefits.

For the period April-March 2015/16 we have:

- Recorded 3,286 enquiries in line with our new duties under the Act.
- Undertaken early intervention under our duty to provide advice. As a result we have resolved 1,867 cases.
- Prevented homelessness where there has been a direct threat of homelessness in 184 cases.
- 236 cases where homelessness has been resolved.
- Accepted a full homelessness duty to 113 households. This is exceptional performance when you consider that during 2014/15 we had a full duty to over 400 cases.

As can be seen, the implications of the new Act in relation to preventing homelessness are bedding in, but this is very much subject to continue transitional funding from the Welsh Government. Any reduction in this funding will have an impact on our capacity.

2. Adaptations/Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)

Current performance is highlighted under our performance framework measures – Report B. Over the last 12 months we have also been looking, however, at the wider impact of adaptations/DFGs for health and social care. A report will be provided on this in the near future.

3. Review of Access to Social Housing Policy

The open public consultation has now finished on our draft revised allocations scheme. We are arranging to meet with the political groups to feedback the consultation findings over the next month and have further discussion on the policy before the consultation outcomes are reflected within the final policy document. The policy, amongst other things, will:

- Reduce the number of “bands” on the Housing Choice Register (from four to two)
- Provide greater weighting to things like local connection with Carmarthenshire and housing people who live within the locality
- Look to further develop local priorities

We will still have a primary duty to house people who are most in need e.g. the homeless, but we want to work with all partners to develop a new policy that works for the people of Carmarthenshire, and is easy and simple to understand.

4. Empty homes

We continue to be proactive around bringing private sector empty homes back into use using advice, enforcement and administering loans to owners. The Welsh Government's loan scheme, Houses to Homes, has proven particularly useful.

We have committed our initial allocation of £1.3m and have committed a further £200,000 of an additional £600,000 award from the Welsh Government. During 2015/16 we brought back into use 153 properties which hit our target. Carmarthenshire's target for returning empty properties during 2016/2017 is 160 properties, 28 of which are targeted to be used as Affordable Homes, in line with the newly published Affordable Homes Delivery Plan. Activity will pick up in the second half of the year as work which is initiated early in the year is completed, and we strive to develop a new Affordable Homes Leasing Scheme.

5. Social Lets

We operate a scheme where we manage private sector homes for landlords. We currently manage 135 homes which we use to re-house households who are homeless or are under threat of being homeless. We are looking to develop this service in line with our plans to increase the number of affordable housing and are targeting owners of empty houses as a potential source.

The new Housing (Wales) Act 2014 gives local authorities the power to discharge their homeless duties into the private rented sector. We have been successful in obtaining Welsh Government funding to help develop links with private sector landlords so we have more homes available to us.

6. Rent Smart

This is the body set up by Welsh Government to administer the licensing of all landlords and agents in Wales. The scheme was launched in November. We will be working with Rent Smart Wales on how to make landlords in Carmarthenshire aware of their new responsibilities.

Delivering the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard + (CHS+)

The CHS+ has focused on three main areas:

- Supporting Tenants and Residents in their homes
- Investing in existing tenants' homes
- Providing more homes

Key developments include:

1. Achieving and maintaining the CHS+

In December 2015 we achieved our commitment to tenants to deliver the CHS+ to tenants who wanted to have the work carried out to their homes.

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Over the last 12 months we carried out the following CHS works to complete the programme:

- 440 homes had internal refurbishment e.g. new kitchens and bathrooms
- 199 homes had rendering works
- 61 homes had external wall insulation works
- 76 homes had roofing works

Whilst we are extremely proud of delivering the standard we know that this investment now needs to be maintained in the future.

Our Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, agreed by Council in February 2016, shows how we will go about doing this. Our approach to the future will be replacing things like kitchens and bathrooms based on need to do so, not at a pre-determined time. We will also be carrying out an exercise to ask tenants, who had previously declined all or some of the work (about 750 homes), whether they are now in a position to have the CHS works carried out. For tenants where their circumstances have changed and now want the work completed, we will develop a programme over the next couple of years.

It should be noted that we now have a statutory duty, under the new Housing Act, to maintain the standard in future years.

2. Housing Repair Review

Following a TIC review of our housing repair service, Housing and Property set up a joint team in late November 2015 and is currently operating within a pilot ward in Glanymor, South Llanelli.

The Review has initially focused on the responsive repairs service which produces a high volume of minor, often urgent, repairs.

Using multi-skilled in-house operatives who are equipped to deal with a wide range of repairs, we are developing a customer focused approach to deliver a more efficient, respectful and flexible service which minimises waste and inefficiency and builds stronger relationships with our clients.

3. Tenant “Homecheck”

The tenant “MOT” visit has also been piloted as part of the Housing Repairs Review. The purpose of the visit, which has now been rebranded as ‘Homecheck’ is:

- Ensuring tenants are taking care of their home and adhering to the tenancy agreement
- Identifying any support that tenants may be needed to maintain their tenancies.
- Confirming compliance with the CHS and identifying maintenance requirements which can be used to inform future investment decisions.
- Improving relationships with tenants so that we can better understand what matters.

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The purpose of the Pilot is to ensure we understand fully the frequency of when visits need to be carried out and our capacity to deliver. We had completed visits to 20% of the homes within the Glanymor ward by the end of March 2016.

4. Rents Current and Former Arrears

End of Year performance is highlighted under our performance framework measures – Report B

5. Tenant Participation

We have been proactive in developing new initiatives to encourage tenant participation and to support Tenants and Residents in their homes. Initiatives such as Time Credits that offer volunteers a reward for given an hour of their time and Fuel Clubs which offer member's savings on their fuel bills by buying fuel in bulk.

Carmarthenshire Time Credits developed as a partnership between Carmarthenshire Homes Standard plus, SPICE and Carmarthenshire Communities First. Up until April 2016 there were 900 members and 69 groups that earned a total of 36220 hours. Evaluation undertaken in July 2015 showed that:-

52% of members have gained some work experience through earning Time Credits.

12% of members have become employed since earning Time Credits.

81% said that Time Credits have had a positive influence on their lives.

Carmarthenshire Time Credits won the 2015 Welsh Housing Award for Empowering Communities and continues to grow and develop. With more partners and members joining and to develop, for example the introduction of Community Champion Training.

We have started 15 Fuel Clubs with a total membership of over 2400. The clubs have been linked to credit unions and given energy advice to help tenants and residents save money on their fuel bills. The largest club has 730 members and saves on average £4900 per month. The Fuel Club project won 2015 Welsh Housing Award for New Idea of the Year.

6. DWP continue to give briefings to Social Landlords in Carmarthenshire on the roll out of Universal Credit (UC). Full roll out is not expected to begin until October 2017. In the meantime officers, Social landlords and DWP are meeting on a regular bases to prepare for full role out of UC.

We have 18 tenants who are in receipt of Universal Credit. The actions we are taking include:

- Ensuring our staff receive regular briefings and training on UC and Welfare Reforms
- Build on existing procedures to deal with the shortfall between rent and HB/Universal Credit
- If the tenant is deemed vulnerable ensuring Alternative Payment Methods are in place
- Liaise with Housing Benefits to identify claimants who are likely to be affected

Exploring with tenants whether there is scope to support increase in hours to avoid the benefit cap or mitigate the effects of reduced Universal Credit work allowances.

7. The Affordable Housing Commitment and Delivery Plan

We have now published our Affordable Housing Commitment and Delivery Plans for the period to 2020/21. We have looked at a variety of solutions to deliver more affordable homes. The approach may be different across the County based on what is needed and what we can realistically deliver in different areas.

We know we need around 2,000 additional affordable homes over the next five years, just to meet the highest housing need. As a result, we are looking at the following solutions:

- Social lets
- Bringing empty homes back into use
- Buying back existing homes
- New build
- New homes through the planning system.

We have also committed to looking at an alternative delivery model to be even more ambitious in delivering even more homes. Proposals will be presented to members in the near future as to how we intend to do this.

For 2015/16, however, we delivered an additional 236 homes. The mix of these is listed below:

- 111 extra care homes (61 in Carmarthen, 51 Ammanford)
- 13 homes through buying existing homes (Countywide)
- 12 homes for low cost home ownership through section 106 agreements (3 in Gorslas, 4 in St Clears and 5 in Llanelli)
- 13 new bungalows at St. Pauls, Llanelli
- 37 homes through Housing Association schemes (12 homes in Gwynfryn, Ammanford and 25 homes at the Avenue, Llanelli)
- Additional 15 homes through social lets (Countywide)
- Around 35 homes bringing empty homes back into use (Countywide)

Ian Jones, Head of Leisure

1. Service Overview

Leisure is a much valued, front line service providing a range of health and well-being related facilities, activities and programmes, all aimed at getting:

More people, More active, More often.

We want Carmarthenshire to be a place:

- That is the most active and healthy in the UK
- Where every person is an active participant at a 'Community Club' or 'Leisure / Cultural Facility'
- Where every child is hooked on Leisure / Cultural activity for life

The service aims to deliver 6 key Outcomes for residents and visitors to the County:

- Outcome 1: Supporting independence
- Outcome 2: Keeping Safe
- Outcome 3: Improving Health & Well Being
- Outcome 4: Information, Advice and Signposting
- Outcome 5: People achieve their potential (Workforce and users)
- Outcome 6: Well Managed, sustainable, efficient services that contribute to a prosperous economy

The service is non-statutory in the main, although elements of the service are classed as statutory, namely: Library services; elements of Archives and Museums Services, and KS2 swimming provision for primary schools.

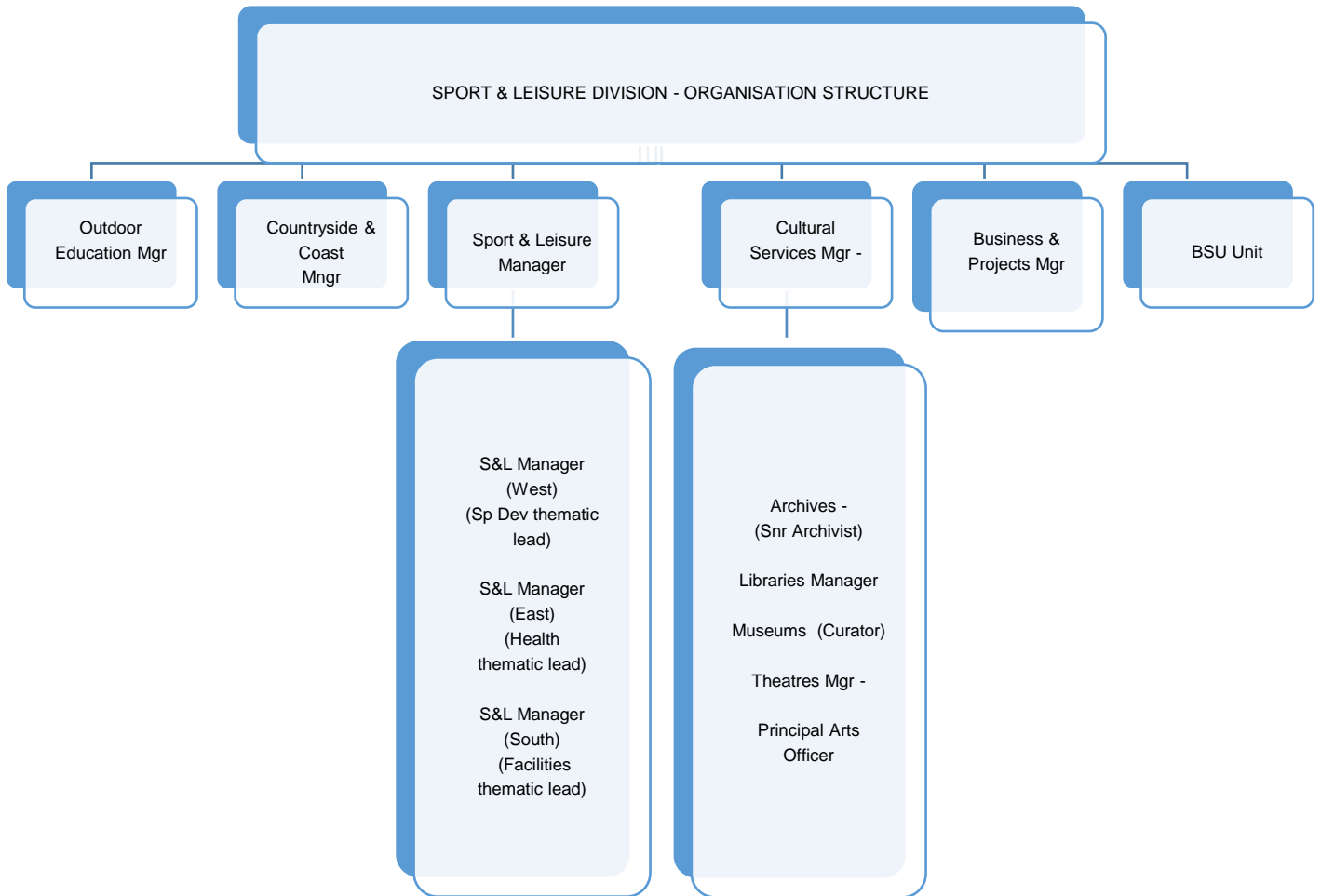
For 2016-17, the division has a budget turnover of £26.250m with a total expenditure of £18.979m and an income target of £7.271m. Non controllable expenditure amounts to £5.249m resulting in a controllable expenditure of £13.729m, and a net controllable budget of £6.796m. The service as a whole employs 164 F/T staff and 105 P/T staff.

The division is facing considerable financial challenges and will have to deliver efficiency savings of £349k this year (16/17); £280k (17/18); and £448k (18/19). The division is doing its utmost to protect front-line services however it is becoming increasingly difficult without affecting front line services and staffing. Despite these difficulties, the department's employees continue to deliver an excellent service. Many of the services provided are recognised as sector leading.

The Head of Leisure also chairs the Culture, Countryside and Leisure Officers of Wales (CCLOW) group, which is currently undertaking work at a national level tying in with the Welsh Government's agenda to deliver services more efficiently, and to review opportunities for more collaboration within the sector.

Having been part of the former Regeneration & Leisure Department for a number of years, the service has now bedded down well within the Department for Communities.

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2. Strategic Service Priorities for 2016/17 and progress to date

Action & Progress update	When by	By Who
Service Head		
<p>Develop plans for new Llanelli Leisure Centre linked to wellness village and life sciences hub</p> <p><i>Draft specification agreed for new leisure centre, awaiting corporate steer on agreed site</i></p>	March 2017	HOS
<p>Implement the new Countryside Structure</p> <p><i>Structure presented to staff and due to be signed off in August. 3x new senior posts included to assist with strategic development of service</i></p>	September 2016	HOS
<p>Review Pendine Outdoor Education Centre provision and local regeneration master plan.</p> <p><i>Options paper being prepared by centre manager looking at re-development of site (increasing capacity) or possible re-location options</i></p>	March 2017	HOS
<p>Complete Cycling Strategy for Carmarthenshire to include focus on: Events; Development and Infrastructure.</p> <p><i>Draft strategy written and will be presented to CMT / members in late Summer 2016</i></p>	March 17	HOS
<p>Continue to invest time in regional collaboration and working.</p> <p><i>HOS chairs the national Chief Leisure and Cultural Officers group for Wales, putting Carmarthenshire at the forefront of collaborative working across Wales</i></p>	March 2017	HOS / Leisure Managers
<p>Deliver Cycling infrastructure schemes at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carmarthen Park Velodrome - Closed Circuit track facility - Assist with Tywi Valley cycleway scheme - <i>Velodrome re-surfacing and safety fencing will be undertaken in Spring of 2017</i> - <i>Closed Circuit site options appraisal completed. Lease and legal agreements to be drawn up for construction in 2017</i> - <i>Tywi Valley cycleway steering group established and Carmarthen to Nantgaredig route being progressed via Environment Dept with input from Leisure</i> 	March 2017	HOS / Business & Projects Manager

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Business and Project Manager

Workplace champion post in place and working towards sustainable delivery model <i>Interviews taking place in July 2016</i>	March 2017	Business & Projects Manager
Pro-active H&S management with ongoing site / service reviews throughout the year <i>Full review of H&S policies and procedures at Pembrey Country Park and the MCP scheduled for July / Aug 2016. All other service area reviews ongoing</i>	March 2017	Business & Projects Manager
Finalise Customer contact / consultation strategy, using user / non user surveys. <i>Staff conference held in June 2016 with focus on Customer Journey and the Welsh Language standards. Customer consultation strategy in draft.</i>	January 2017	Business & Projects Manager

Outdoor Recreation Services

Work with Environment Dept. to undertake dredge and wall repairs at Burry Port Harbour <i>Report commissioned via Atkins consultant and due to be finalised and report back to CMT / members in September</i>	December 2016	Senior Outdoor Recreation Mgr
New wakeboarding franchise at North Dock, Llanelli <i>Franchise agreed, awaiting private operator to install system for Summer months</i>	May 2016	Senior Outdoor Recreation Mgr
Review outdoor events strategy for the County, linking with Tourism <i>This work will form part of the work plan for the new Senior Outdoor Recreation Manager post-holder</i>	March 2017	Senior Outdoor Recreation Mgr
Development of Carmarthen Wetlands scheme <i>First stage approval given for £160k RCDF grant bid approved, now progressing to stage 2.</i>	March 2017	Senior Outdoor Recreation Mgr
Complete £250k capital investment into Pembrey Country Park <i>New £50k playground installed. Masterplan for site going to EB in late July. Priority areas: new shower / toilet block for campsite; new entrance / barrier system; new catering visitor centre offer. Temporary catering arrangement in place for Summer 2016, pending current tender process.</i>	February 2017	Senior Outdoor Recreation Mgr

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Sports and Leisure services

<p>Complete legal agreements with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DIBC - Llandysul Canoe Centre; - NCE Pool - <i>Dinefwr Indoor Bowls asset transfer agreed</i> - <i>Canoe Centre agreement being updated via Corporate Property</i> - <i>Newcastle Emlyn Pool Lease being finalised via corporate property</i> 	<p>Dec 2016</p>	<p>Snr S&L Mgr</p>
<p>New fitness equipment in place at main leisure sites</p> <p><i>New equipment in Llanelli Leisure Centre; New fitness rig in CLC with soft play moved to NCELC. RE-furb and replacement of all fitness equipment at CLC due to be completed by end Sept '16. AVLC re-furb of wet-side changing rooms, fitness area, and new equipment, due to be completed by late Autumn</i></p>	<p>October 2016</p>	<p>Snr S&L Mgr</p>
<p>Work with Carbon Trust to review and improve energy efficiency of buildings.</p> <p><i>Process ongoing with site specific assessments being undertaken and recommendations followed up e.g. new pool covers installed at LLC</i></p>	<p>March 2017</p>	<p>Snr S&L Mgr</p>
<p>New Aquatics plan in place and being implemented including Learn to Swim for u5's</p> <p><i>New U5 lessons introduced at main sites. Full review being undertaken with Swim Wales.</i></p>	<p>October 2016</p>	<p>Snr S&L Mgr</p>
<p>Culture Services</p>		
<p>Ensure Y Ffwrnes Social Enterprise areas are fully occupied</p> <p><i>Tender documents agreed, with closing date for bids agreed for October. Occupation in late 2016 / early 2017 subject to bids</i></p>	<p>July 2016</p>	<p>Snr Cultural Services Mgr</p>
<p>Replacement of mobile Library fleet and service</p> <p><i>New vehicles due to be delivered in early Autumn</i></p>	<p>Sept 2016</p>	<p>Snr Cultural Services Mgr</p>
<p>Co-locating of Llandeilo Library into Civic building</p> <p><i>Due to be completed by end of September 2016</i></p>	<p>June 2016</p>	<p>Snr Cultural Services Mgr</p>
<p>Review of Cultural Services Structure and Museums function in particular</p> <p><i>New Museums development Manager post currently being advertised</i></p>	<p>July 2016</p>	<p>Snr Cultural Services Mgr</p>

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<p>Progress ACW funded scheme looking at re-development of Oriol Myrddin</p> <p><i>Stage 1 of ACW supported bid approved. Stage 2 application to be submitted by June 2017</i></p>	<p>March 2017</p>	<p>Snr Cultural Services Mgr</p>
<p>Progress HLF funded Tywi Gateway scheme at Carmarthen Museum (PIMS)</p> <p><i>Stage 1 development phase bid supported. Stage 2 application in by end Aug '16 with decision by end of Dec '16</i></p>	<p>March 2017</p>	<p>Snr Cultural Services Mgr</p>
<p>Review of Archive service / accommodation (PIMS)</p> <p><i>Finalising plans for co-location of Archive at rear of Carmarthen Library. Anticipate new facility being open in 2018</i></p>	<p>March 2017</p>	<p>Snr Cultural Services Mgr</p>
<p>Agree master plan for Parc Howard Museum in conjunction with user group and Environment dept</p> <p><i>Masterplan re-visited, with aim of sensitive commercial development to sustain park into the future. Working with Environment dept (who manage park) to progress with scheme, including review of by-laws.</i></p>	<p>March 2017</p>	<p>Snr Cultural Services Mgr</p>
<p>Undertake a review of the Theatres structure</p> <p><i>Review in progress, with aim to complete by end of Dec 2016, and fully implement by 1st April 2017.</i></p>	<p>March 2017</p>	<p>Snr Cultural Services Mgr</p>

Llinos Quelch – Head of Planning

CANOLFAN TYWI CENTRE – The Tywi Centre has run the Building our Heritage construction skills bursary programme. To date, 13 students have successfully gained their NVQ Level 3 in Heritage Plastering, Masonry or Carpentry and a further 12 have been recruited to the programme and have completed their qualifications within the year. Students were given 4 weeks of intensive training at the Tywi Centre and then placed with ‘Placement Providers’ in the heritage construction industry across Wales to gain on-site skills and experiences. In addition 10 women have completed a 6 month course, introducing them to heritage construction and have all achieved their Level 3 Awards in the Repair and Maintenance of pre-1919 traditional buildings. The programme was primarily funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and received match funding from the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) as well as in-kind support from Carmarthenshire County Council (CCC) and the National Trust.

As a conclusion to the Foundations in Heritage Bursary Project, a similar programme to that mentioned above, the Tywi Centre has held 2 sister conferences over the last 12 months: one in Llandudno and a second at Cardigan Castle. The conferences were entitled: The Future of Heritage Construction in Wales: Training, Mainstreaming, Collaboration, and served to give the Tywi Centre a mandate from the industry and its partners to continue to develop heritage skills training in Wales. It is anticipated that closer working partnerships will be developed with Cyfle and Coleg Sir Gar over the next 6 months to embed Heritage craft skills awareness into mainstream construction training mechanisms.

The Tywi Centre continues to investigate delivering training and consultancy services to generate income in order to sustain the Centre. Discussions are being initiated by the Centre to identify an appropriate trading mechanism. The CCC legal team is also engaged in this structural reorganisation of the Tywi Centre.

Development Management

Brechfa Forest Grid Connection – On 24th June 2015 Western Power Distribution had their application for a 132kv electricity distribution line connection between Brechfa Forest West Wind Farm to an existing connection point west of Llandyfaelog (10km south of Carmarthen) accepted for consideration by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS). RWE Innogy UK Ltd (RWE), the developer of the wind farm has decided to defer the connection between Brechfa Forest East and Brechfa Forest West wind farms.

To inform the Planning Inspectorate’s assessment of the application the Head of Planning presented a Local Impact Report (LIR) to planning committee on 5th November 2015. The purpose of the LIR was for the Council to advise PINS on what local impacts it considers the proposed development would have on the local area by reference to specific issues. The LIR was a technical, evidence based document that PINS and Secretary of State must have regard to when assessing the application. The Local Authority also submitted a Written Representation setting out the views of the Council – this was in addition to the LIR and was at the request of the Planning Committee and was in response to the Council passed the following motion on 10th July 2013.

‘That Carmarthenshire County Council finds it totally unacceptable that the proposed Brechfa Forest wind farm(s) National Grid connection should be made via an overhead line supported by wooden pylons. As the Council itself has no statutory power in this matter, we ask the UK Energy Secretary to ensure that the connection cable is laid underground for its entire length’.

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The Examination stage of the process commenced on 7th October 2015 and ended on the 6th April 2016. PINS submitted its recommendation to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on 6th July 2016 (<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/Wales/Brechfa-Forest-Connection/>) who will have three months to make the decision. A decision is now pending.

TIC Review: The TIC reviews have been successfully rolled out across all office areas in relation to the Development Management Team, and this has seen an improved consistency in process across all areas. The review has prompted thoughts on further improvements that can be made e.g. mobile working, and these have now linked to further TIC projects that are being introduced. A revisit of the review has occurred in June 2016 and this has identified further improvements to be investigated and instigated during 2016/17. A small internal working group is being set up to monitor the delivery of workstreams to achieve those newly identified improvements.

A Task and Finish Review of **Planning Enforcement**, made up of members of Community Scrutiny and Planning Committee completed its report and the recommendations, (23) were accepted by the Executive Board. Two meetings of the Planning Committee and the Community Scrutiny Committee have been held to date to consider progress against the recommendations. It has been noted at those meetings that significant progress had been made in certain areas, although there were still other areas of clarity and progress needed. A key example of this was improved liaison with Dyfed Powys Police (DPP), and a resolution was made to outline concerns to the Executive Board that limited progress had been made in this regard, and to pass those thoughts on to the DPP Commissioner. A Multi Disciplinary Enforcement Group has been set up, Chaired by Cllr Jim Jones to bring together the various strands of enforcement authority wide. The group has met on a number of occasions since late 2015 and provides opportunities for collaboration and identification of effective enforcement solutions.

Legal Challenges – Wind turbine applications continue to be something of a focus in this regard, although there have also been challenges around retail developments. Although the decision was received in 2016/17 (June), the Authority has lost its legal challenge in relation to a one planet development proposal near Whitland. This was an application considered during 2015/16 and was refused contrary to officer recommendation. This is the first legal challenge the Authority has received with regard to this type of development and has included an award of costs against the Authority.

Planning Legislation - The recent period has seen the passing of a large number of secondary legislations to support the new Planning Act by Welsh Government (WG) which was introduced in 2015. The 'package' as a whole is geared towards changing the culture of Local Planning Authorities to being perceived as enabling organisations that are able to produce positive and pragmatic decisions in a timely manner. A key element of this is the role played by colleague departments within the County Council, with an emphasis placed on early involvement of the planning department, and also ensuring that consultations on planning applications are providing a positive and substantive response within a specified timescale. Officers have been engaged in disseminating the current understanding in relation to these new requirements both within the Council (colleagues and Local Members) and also externally with agents and developers. The full impact of these changes is yet to be understood with most changes having only been introduced during March of 2016.

Fees: October 2015 also saw the first fee increase in relation to planning applications in Wales for at least 6 years – however the fees only go part way to cost recovery. Statutory pre application fees were introduced across Wales for the first time, coming into force in March 2016. The impact of

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these new pre application fees on the process will need to be monitored during 2016/17. Only larger planning applications are required to go down the pre application process, therefore although fees have been introduced for developments of all scale it is only the larger scale developments that are guaranteed to result in pre application fees to the Authority. A set level of information is set out in Statute with regard pre application advice. Over and above that the Authority will need to give consideration to whether additional fees should be applied.

Building Control

A new fee structure has been produced and introduced on the 01-05-15. The fees after passing through the scrutiny board have been a success in terms of simplifying and harmonising the way the fees are set out thus reducing the time needed to explain and check the fees submitted with applications. The fees are there to enable fairer and more transparent setting of charges based upon the principle of cost recovery. By relating charges to estimates of actual work, and the cost of providing the services, through professional and administrative staff, the fee schedule will be able to more closely follow commercial models for estimating and charging for services which should improve the competitiveness of the Local Authority Building Control in the marketplace and provide more direct competition with approved inspectors. The emphasis and limitation on authorities set out in the regulations will also provide renewed focus on the removal of unnecessary cost from the service, to ensure that a “competitive” fee is charged.

The Unit is undertaking the trial of tablet computers with the emphasis on trying to establish a better communications route to site based officers and where necessary advise on improvements to the system allowing the system to be tailored to how the department operates. It is hoped to reduce the amount of paper and documents produced to form a conventional paper file.

The Unit has maintained its position as a CIOB Chartered Building Consultancy and has established a network of more than [70 local partners](#) including agents, consultants and other construction professionals to ensure the delivery of a high standard of service. In conjunction with Coleg Sir Gar regular training seminars/workshops are hosted for the benefit of customers to provide advice and assistance in understanding and interpreting existing and proposed changes to legislation. Annual [Building Excellence Awards](#) were also held, the aim is to celebrate the success of design and construction teams that have produced outstanding buildings within the County as part of a National initiative that rewards good building practice. Two schemes from the [Carmarthenshire Building Control Awards](#) (Charles Church – Machynys and TRJ – Ffwrnes) went forward to the Wales LABC Awards held at the Millennium Centre, Cardiff during the Autumn of 2015. These two schemes then went on to represent Carmarthenshire at the National LABC Awards in London during November 2015, receiving national recognition. The Awards scheme whether it's County, regional or nationally is a prized marketing tool for the department and our long standing membership with the LABC has been invaluable in terms of promoting our Unit. It also provides a technical resource, a common interpretation and a voice in National Government.

Mineral and Waste Unit

South Wales Regional Aggregates Working Party: The Unit secured grant funding, available for 2015/16, to continue to provide the dedicated Secretariat and technical services for the effective functioning of the South Wales Regional Aggregates Working Party (SWRAWP). This has now also been secured for 2016/17 (<http://www.swrawp-wales.org.uk/>).

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Waste Monitoring Lead Authority South West Wales: The Planning Division has also secured the contract as Lead Authority for managing the collection and collation of data on waste sites throughout South West Wales. The report is currently being collated and will be submitted within the next few weeks.

Collaborative Working: The Authority continues to provide a service to a number of authorities in South and West Wales through Service Level Agreements (SLAs); the following SLA's are currently in place:

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority – until April 2017;

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority – until April 2017;

Pembrokeshire County Council – until April 2017;

Powys County Council – until April 2017;

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council – until April 2017;

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (planning applications only up until October 2015 but extended thereafter to include site monitoring and enforcement) – until July 2017;

Vale of Glamorgan Council - 1st October 2015 until October 2018;

The Unit therefore covers elements of minerals and waste matters for 7 different Authorities at the close of 2015/16. The Unit also provided a technical expert witness to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council in an Appeal Public Enquiry. The Appeal was dismissed.

Minerals and Waste TIC Review: the team got together to undertake a 3 day review of the current process using the Vanguard/Systems Thinking approach. This provided the team with the opportunity to experience the service from the 'customer perspective', to identify what issues were impacting upon current performance, and what within the current system was causing this to happen. The re-design stage of the review was due commence in October 2015, however with the additional SLAs taken on during that period along with the complex Blaenau Gwent appeal this has been put back and is now being rescheduled to commence in Summer 2016..

Staffing: a Development Management Assistant has been appointed (September 2015) in order to address the Unit's additional workload. This will also assist in addressing recognised risks within the service in terms of resilience in the long term.

Forward Planning Team

Further Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) have been prepared in accordance with the commitments given within the LDP. Consultation on the following five draft SPGs concluded on the 8th April 2016:

- Placemaking and Design;
- Archaeology and Development;
- Leisure & Open Space Requirements for New Developments;
- Natural Environment and Biodiversity; and
- Rural Development.

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The SPGs along with consultation responses are due to be reported to Executive board on the 25th July and to Full Council in September 2016. The recommendation will be for adoption with minor amendments to reflect some of the observations received during the consultation period.

Emphasis has now moved from LDP preparation and adoption to monitoring, review and implementation which will involve a greater focus on the delivering the plan's objectives and provisions. The first Annual Monitoring Report will be submitted in October 2016 based on monitoring of the LDP during 2015/16. The collation and updating of evidence however is an ongoing requirement not only to ensure that the LDP and its policies and provisions can be effectively monitored, but also in supporting the determination of planning applications. One such example is the update to the Carmarthenshire Retail Study which has recently been undertaken and will inform future decision making across Carmarthenshire.

In support of the delivery of the LDP's objectives, and to ensure the Council receives best value by maximising effective use of the skills and expertise available in-house, the team has established a 'planning consultancy' service. This role has already seen work undertaken for Corporate Property and Economic Development in providing development briefs to assist in the delivery and marketing of sites, and in preparing planning applications for submission thus reducing the use of external consultants. Examples include:

- Brynmefys, Llanelli: Identification of a sustainable regeneration scheme at the town's northern gateway;
- Former Burry Port Junior School : An options appraisal approach building upon a prime town centre location;
- Former Tegfan Nursing Home : An options appraisal approach outlining key policy considerations;
- Former Glanmarlais Nursing Home : An options appraisal approach outlining key policy considerations;
- Former Tawelan Nursing Home : An options appraisal approach outlining key policy considerations;
- Western and Eastern Sites Ffos Las: A policy advice note to guide future tourism related development;
- Heol Y Bwlch, Bynea, Llanelli: A policy advice note to guide the potential for employment generation opportunities on a previously developed site;
- Yr Ynys, Llanelli: Identification of a housing led regeneration scheme.

A forward work programme for the preparation of briefs and for planning applications has been prepared and agreed with Corporate Property for a number of Council owned sites. The potential for linkages to work undertaken within other service areas has also been identified. Regional working also features as part of the team's work as the authority has secured a contract with the Welsh Government and grant award for the production and monitoring of a Waste Planning Monitoring Report for the South West Wales.

Work is also on-going on assessing the feasibility of introducing a Community Infrastructure (CIL); the Planning Act 2008 and the CIL Regulations 2010 have introduced this new regime for funding infrastructure to support new development, as outlined in the LDP. Introduction of CIL is not a mandatory requirement for local authorities. However, the new legislation effectively scales back the scope of Section 106 legal agreements, limiting them to affordable housing and 'on site' mitigation measures, therefore if the Council does not implement a CIL it will potentially lose out on collecting contributions from developers to fund vital infrastructure.

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The District Valuers Service have been commissioned to undertake a viability study to inform the deliberations of adopting a CIL Charging Schedule. The study will provide an evidence base of land, sales and rental values, construction costs and development viability for a range of land uses across Carmarthenshire (excluding the Brecon Beacons National Park area). This will form key evidence in informing the Council in considering whether the introduction of CIL would be viable in Carmarthenshire. The viability assessment will form a central element of the CIL evidence base and will, as appropriate, inform further evidence including an infrastructure delivery plan and the Preliminary and Draft Charging Schedule. Consultation on the Preliminary and Draft Charging Schedule, Viability Report and Infrastructure evidence is due to take place over the Summer (2016) with reporting back to Executive Board and Full Council to occur late 2015.

Rural Conservation

Caeau Mynydd Mawr Project - The Cross Hands area has been designated as one of the three growth centres in Carmarthenshire's LDP which involves the development of strategic economic site and housing development in accordance with the development Sustainable Settlement Strategy. The area is also suitable habitat for the Marsh Fritillary butterfly which is a feature of the Caeau Mynydd Mawr Special Area of Conservation (SAC). In implementing the project the post holder assists in the delivery of key economic objectives while ensuring that development is compliant with EU legislation. This is consistent with SPG contained within the LDP. The post is funded by receipts secured through Section 106 agreements under the Planning Act as set out in the SPG. Receipts from development are in place to cover the salary of the project officer up until 2021, consistent with the LDP period.

During this year we have achieved the following:

- Installation of 1435m of fencing to allow grazing on neglected sites or better management of sites which are already grazed;
- Reintroduction of grazing by cattle or horses on 5 sites and better management of grazing on 1 site;
- Provision of water for stock on 3 sites;
- Stock handling and access facilities on 4 sites;
- Improving access to 2 sites to facilitate management works and to give access for grazing stock;
- Scrub clearance and removal of scrub trees to open up and restore grassland at 4 sites.

We currently have 16 management agreements in place, which includes 75.13ha of habitat suitable for breeding marsh fritillary.

Trees - The Arboriculture Officer manages Carmarthenshire's 212 Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), processing application for works to existing TPOs and placing new orders when appropriate, and taking enforcement action when trees have been removed without permission. The Officer also manages applications for works to trees in Conservation Areas, and responds to queries from other departments, elected members and the general public. Development of the Tree Safety Strategy is continuing with further CCC owned sites being assessed. Regular survey of trees on CCC properties is required in order for CCC to comply with the Occupier's Liability Acts 1957 and 1984. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 also places a duty on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practical, that employees and members of the public are not put at risk.

Coed Cymru works with woodland owners and timber users throughout Wales, encouraging the sustainable management of broadleaved woodlands for biodiversity, timber production and

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recreation. Carmarthenshire Coed Cymru Officers provide a free advisory service covering woodland management, grants, selling and adding value to timber and developing timber products.

Officers advise on woodland projects in a diverse range of woodlands, from small farm woodlands to National Nature Reserves, the National Botanic Garden of Wales and Wildlife Trust sites. They also advise Corporate Property on woodland issues, help manage woodland in our Country Parks and other recreation sites and are currently working on the Council's tree strategy with the Arboriculture Officer. Advisory visits are made in Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion where funding for this is available.

Work in the period included:

- Inspecting tree planting, hedgerow management and other work on thirty Soil and Water Management Project schemes. Over £62,000 was paid to landowners under this WG Nature Fund project.
- Starting work on an 18-month project funded by the Woodland Trust to offer advice and support to owners of Planted Ancient Woodland Sites. The project aims to restore the ancient woodland features of these woodlands.
- Planning habitat restoration projects at Pembrey and Llyn Llech Owain Country Parks. Both projects involve the thinning or removal of conifers to restore woodland and non-woodland habitats.
- Assisting the development of a new IT package for the Council's Tree Safety Strategy and inspecting trees on Council property.
- Advising on and drawing up Glastir Woodland Creation plans for several woodlands, preparing felling license applications and providing advice for woodlands with Chalara ash disease and Phytophthora larch disease.
- Providing woodland advice on the Coed Cymru stand at the Royal Welsh Show and Eisteddfod Genedlaethol and leading several woodland guided walks.
- Inspecting work on Tywi Afon yr Oesoedd sites for audit purposes.

Common Land - Carmarthenshire has the third largest area of Common Land in Wales, some 15,000ha (37,000 acres) covering 6.35% of the County. The county has 120 commons and village greens, and there 49 ownerless commons in Carmarthenshire which the local authority has the power to protect. The Authority has a statutory duty to keep and maintain a register of Common Land under the Commons Registration Act 1965 and the Commons Act 2006. Since 1st April 2015 738 searches have been completed, and 21 apportionments completed.

The Common Land officer is continuing to work with the Biodiversity Officer in delivering the Heritage Lottery funded Carmarthenshire Bogs Project that is attracting £43,000 of grant aid. All six sites covered by this project are areas of common land with no known owners: as such the Council is expected to protect these sites from illegal activities (scheme runs until December 2016). With this grant the Council is working to improve the conservation status of these commons.

It is anticipated that the WG will implement Section 19 & 22 of the Act in autumn 2016. Under this piece of legislation members of the public will be able to make applications to remove wrongly registered land from the register and also make applications to register new common land which was not registered under the 1965 Act. It is unclear at present how much extra work this will entail however if the experiences of the pioneer Authorities in England are replicated in Wales then the numbers of applications in the first year is likely to be low (under 5) but the probability that each application will result in a hearing or public enquiry is very high.

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Landscape - Carmarthenshire's landscapes, its uplands, river valleys and coasts, are justly recognised as being of high quality and the protection and enhancement of these landscapes are objectives of the LDP; the Unit's role is to help to deliver these objectives. The Landscape Officer advises on the landscape and visual aspects of development within the county. Renewable energy schemes remain a large part of the work load. Collaborative work with the landscape officers from the other South Wales LAs has resulted in the development of a number of guidance documents being produced. A Sensitivity and Capacity study of Carmarthenshire's landscapes is on-going and when complete it will assist in the assessment of cumulative impact of these developments in the landscape.

Biodiversity - The Unit continues to facilitate the Carmarthenshire Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) Partnership, which draws together all the organisations involved in nature conservation in the County. Practical projects are supported by Natural Resources Wales and this year the Biodiversity Officer is delivering 12 projects across the county, some involve practical conservation, while others will raise awareness of biodiversity issues and develop biodiversity best practice within other CCC departments consistent with CCC's NERC Act 2006 duty, and new duties set out in the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. In addition the second phase of the Carmarthenshire Bogs project has been grant aided by Heritage Lottery Fund (£43,000 of grant aid towards £52,600 of eligible costs), and this project will run until December 2016 on six sites that support bog vegetation which are also areas of Common Land. Building on the success of the Monmouthshire Meadows Group Carmarthenshire is setting up a group for those with an interest in managing traditional meadows, a number of events and training have already been organised. This group will be run by landowners with support from the Carmarthenshire LBAP Partnership.

Hedgerows - The Rural Conservation Unit within the Planning Service is responsible for implementing the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 and determining applications to remove hedgerows as well as investigating alleged breaches. Enforcement action is a significant part of this work, with one breach in 2015 involving the removal of nine hedgerows totalling 1.3km. These are to be replanted.

Wendy Walters – Assistant Chief Executive - Economic Development

The **Community Scrutiny Committee** has already received a copy of the **Head of Service Annual Report for Economic Development** at the **Community Scrutiny** on the **24th March 2016** (Item 8 – Page 69).