

CAPITAL STRATEGY

2021 - 2022

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Carmarthenshire
County Council



CAPITAL STRATEGY 2021-22

PURPOSE AND AIMS

The Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities was updated by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in December 2017.

This Code dictates that “authorities should have in place a capital strategy that sets out the long-term context in which capital expenditure and investment decisions are made and gives due consideration to both risk and reward and impact on the achievement of priority outcomes.”

The Capital Strategy shows how this Council makes capital expenditure and investment decisions in line with service objectives and properly takes account of:

- Stewardship / good professional practice
- Value for money
- Prudence / risks considered
- Sustainability
- Affordability

It sets out a framework for the self-management of capital finance and examines the following areas:

- Capital expenditure and investment plans
- Treasury Management
- Prudential Indicators
- Commercial activity
- Knowledge and skills

The above considerations help to support local strategic planning, local asset management planning and effective option appraisal.

Through this Capital Strategy elected members and other stakeholders will see how future capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activities will contribute to the provision of services, together with a summary of how associated risks are managed

and the implications for future financial sustainability. It also highlights the governance framework required to ensure the Strategy is delivered.

ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

It is important to set out the external environment in which Carmarthenshire County Council is currently operating. One of the key factors that impact directly on the capital programme is the reduced revenue funding for local government. Owing to the pressure on public finances, the funds allocated from the Welsh Government to this council to run its services is substantially lower than in recent years. Carmarthenshire will continue to identify, plan, fund and invest longer term in non-current assets in order to help the council deliver departmental strategies and wider plans. 2020 was an unprecedented year. The response to the Covid-19 pandemic has given rise the need to reprioritise our capital strategy and capital programme to reflect the desire to boost local businesses and local economies.

CARMARTHENSHIRE'S STRATEGIC RESPONSE

In considering capital implications, the authority takes into consideration the requirements of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Act requires that we must carry out sustainable development, improving the economic, social environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act requires us to look at the long-term prevention of recurring problems, integrating our approach, collaborating with others and involving stakeholders. Carmarthenshire's Well Being objectives have a direct impact on the Council Capital Strategy. Some of these include:

- Start Well - help to give every child the best start in life and improve their early life experience
- Live Well - increase the availability of rented and affordable homes

- Age Well - support the growing numbers of older people to maintain dignity and independence in their later years
- In a Healthy and Safe Environment - improve the highway and transport infrastructure and connectivity

This Capital Strategy supports Carmarthenshire's Well-being Objectives. Consideration is also increasingly given to the authority's *Net Zero Carbon Plan*.

WHAT IS CAPITAL EXPENDITURE?

Capital expenditure is expenditure on non-current assets such as Property, Plant and Equipment, Investment Properties and Heritage Assets. This would include the acquisition or construction of new assets, together with any subsequent expenditure on major upgrades or development work to those assets.

Expenditure which adds to and does not merely maintain the value of an existing asset, should be treated as capital, if it yields benefits to the authority and the services it provides for a period of more than one year.

Capital expenditure is defined by legislation as:

- the acquisition, reclamation, enhancement or laying out of land,
- the acquisition, construction, preparation, enhancement or replacement of roads, buildings and other structures,
- the acquisition, installation or replacement of moveable or immovable plant,
- machinery, apparatus, vehicles and vessels.

An understanding of what constitutes capital expenditure is fundamental to realising the benefits that an authority can obtain under the Prudential framework. Unless expenditure qualifies as capital it will normally fall outside the scope of the framework and be charged to revenue in the period that the expenditure is incurred. If expenditure meets the definition of

capital, there may be opportunities to finance the outlay from capital receipts (funds raised from the sale of surplus assets e.g. a former school site) or by spreading the cost over future years' revenues (i.e. through Minimum Revenue Provision).

CARMARTHENSHIRE'S APPROACH TO CAPITAL INVESTMENT

A [Managing Capital](#) procedure document has been adopted as a policy for the Authority. Within this document Carmarthenshire's approach to capital investment is conveyed. A sub-strategy that feeds into the Authority's overall Corporate Strategy is the Capital Programme. The Programme is closely linked to various other sub-strategies such as the Corporate Asset Management Plan, Local Transport Plan, Digital Transformation Strategy and the Service Departments' Business Plans. The 'Managing Capital' document explains that the aim is to deliver projects and outputs that meet the set objectives. The Capital Programme is prepared and approved on a five-year forward plan basis in order to:

- Provide a detailed implementation plan to enable the high-level objectives to be realised,
- Provide a financial commitment to allow enough time to adequately plan,
- design and implement future schemes and projects,
- Provide an overview of the likely future commitments arising from current schemes.

Carmarthenshire's Capital Strategy defines and outlines its approach to capital investment and is fundamental to the Council's financial planning processes. It aims to ensure that:

- Capital expenditure contributes to the achievement of the Council's strategic plan,
- An affordable and sustainable capital programme is delivered,

- Use of resources and value for money is maximised,
- A clear framework for making capital expenditure decisions is provided,
- A corporate approach to generating capital resources is established,
- Access to enough long-term assets to provide services are acquired and retained,
- Invest to Save initiatives to make efficiencies within the Council's revenue budget are encouraged,
- An appraisal and prioritisation process for new schemes is robust.

GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

It is important given the risks surrounding Capital Projects that the appropriate Governance framework is in place:

All capital expenditure must be carried out in accordance with the financial regulations. The expenditure must comply with the statutory definition of capital purposes as defined within this document and wider financial standards. The Capital Programme approved by Full Council as part of the Council's annual budget report sets the capital funding availability for the Council, the prioritisation of funding and the schemes receiving entry into the Capital Programme. All schemes are formally approved into the capital programme by following a process as set out in the financial regulations. Officers are not authorised to commit expenditure without prior formal approval as set out in the financial regulations. Each scheme must be under the control of a responsible person/project manager.

Capital Programme Approvals



How it all works



This Strategy is intended to maximise the financial resources available for investment in service provision and improvement within the framework of the Medium-Term Financial Plan. Whilst at the same time ensuring that each business case has a robust self-sustaining financial model that delivers on the wider outcomes of the strategy.

Sources of Funding



Capital Programme



Overview of General Fund Capital Programme

Capital Budgets by Department:	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000
Communities	6,675	2,000	2,000
Environment	19,247	8,181	5,376
Education & Children	33,651	29,632	13,897
Chief Executive	2,451	465	465
Regeneration	18,973	4,500	4,500
City Deal Projects	46,096	14,100	0
Total Budget	127,093	58,878	26,238

Financed by:	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000
Borrowing	12,959	7,905	6,925
Unhypothecated General Capital Grants	5,941	5,941	5,941
External Grants & Contributions	63,239	35,682	12,460
Reserves	38,121	9,334	896
Direct Revenue Financing	1,616	16	16
Capital Receipts	5,217	0	0
Total Funding	127,093	58,878	26,238

OUR

Executive

PRIORITIES

Board have set

out their aspirations for Carmarthenshire in the document “Moving forward in Carmarthenshire: the next 5 years”. The capital programme has been developed and approved to support this vision for the future to become a reality. In addition, we have revised our priorities to include an economic stimulus package for local businesses as a direct response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Modernising Education

A modernising education programme is the flagship policy which has seen over £200million invested to date, in the building of new schools and upgrading others, with a further commitment to fund future investments of £129million,.

Health & Wellbeing

Improving the health and wellbeing of residents is a key aspiration and to this end we are committed to delivering:

- A new leisure centre for Llanelli as part of the Swansea Bay City Deal Pentre Awel Wellness Project,
- Developing Carmarthenshire as a national hub for cycling. To this end we have already seen investments in a new BMX track and a closed road circuit in Pembrey, which have

complemented the existing facilities at the Brechfa Forest and the velodrome in Carmarthen.

Agile Working / New ways of Working

An agile working approach across the authority coupled with a desire to embrace and compound new ways of working, fast-tracked in 2020 as a consequence of the pandemic, will enable us to make the best use of resources and identify any redundant assets that could be sold; raising income from capital receipts to fund strategic capital projects.

Helping Local Businesses

Many businesses have seen a downturn in fortunes because of the pandemic. A dedicated economic stimulus and business support package together with wider regeneration funding, will boost local economies. It includes specific investment in a growth plan for our smaller ten satellite towns.

Cultural Heritage

Building on our transformation plan for the museum provision. Major refurbishments at the county museum at Abergwili, Parc Howard, and a new Museum of Speed at Pendine, together with a new county archive and storage facility at “Y Stordy” will ensure that our valuable cultural learning and tourism resource is improved for residents and visitors and maintained for future generations. Further investment in culture will see the redevelopment of the Oriel Myrddin Gallery in Carmarthen. This will also build on our commitment to see the wider regeneration of the “Old Town Quarter” within the County Town.

Decarbonisation

In a commitment to future generations, we have repurposed funding of £500k for grants to businesses to embrace renewable energy initiatives and decarbonisation projects, to act as a catalyst for wider investments from the private sector in this area.

We will also see growing investments in electric car charging infrastructure across the county.

Highways

The economic prosperity of our towns is enhanced by improvements to road infrastructure.

The new Carmarthen western link road has provided much needed improvements to traffic flows, access to the new S4C headquarters at “Yr Egin” and the planned Phase 2 of that development and created development opportunities for new housing and retail.

The Cross Hands economic distributor road coupled with associated developments at the Cross Hands strategic employment site will boost the economy in the Gwendraeth Valley. The development of the Ammanford distributor road will improve traffic flows and enhance retail investment opportunities.

Digital Transformation

A commitment to continued investment in ICT coupled with a digital transformation programme aims to ensure that Carmarthenshire services are fit for purpose in the digital age. The county will also benefit from the rollout of enhanced regional connectivity as part of investments by the Swansea Bay City Region.

Housing

The Carmarthenshire Home Standards Plus (CHS+) Business Plan 2021-2024 details the Council’s priorities, plans and actions for council housing in Carmarthenshire for the future years. The plan covers all housing services and assets in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). It sets out the objectives of the CHS+ and what this means for tenants and leaseholders across a range of housing activities. The CHS+ is 100% compliant with the Welsh Government’s own standard of social housing quality, the ‘Welsh Housing Quality Standard’ (WHQS). Against a background of the

borrowing cap being lifted by central government for local authority HRA borrowing, Carmarthenshire has delivered 1000 Affordable Homes by March 2020, a year ahead of the scheduled target of 1000 by 2021. We are working with research partners to inform our decarbonisation strategy, which will be embedded in future investment programmes. The Council is implementing a 10-year Housing Transformation Master Plan which will “play a pivotal role in not only developing additional affordable homes but will allow us to significantly contribute to key Council developments and regeneration initiatives to grow the economy across the County.”

In addition, the Council plans to continue to invest over £56m in maintaining tenants’ homes over the next three years.

A local housing company, Cartrefi Croeso, was established in 2018 with the aim of realising

new opportunities, to offer families an alternative to social housing by delivering a mix of new affordable homes for sale or rent, and to take advantage of the commercial skills of local organisations.

- The Council recognises the importance of strategic asset management in providing the foundation for its investment plans so within the CHS+ Business Plan has highlighted four key themes for future investment which will include developing plans in relation to decarbonisation. These themes are:
 - Supporting tenants & residents
 - Investing in our homes & the environment.
 - Providing more homes.
 - Community Benefits & procurement.

HRA CAPITAL SPENDING AND FUNDING

HRA Capital Budgets:	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000
Maintain the standard	13,592	11,950	12,071
Support Tenant and Residents	4,123	3,569	2,530
Provide more affordable homes	17,793	18,840	12,850
Decarbonisation	200	1,380	1,500
Support the delivery of CHS+	1,925	1,686	1,639
TOTAL	37,633	37,425	30,590

Financed by:	2021/22 £'000	2022/23 £'000	2023/24 £'000
Welsh Government Grant-MRA	6,228	6,228	6,228

Welsh Government Grant-IHP & Other	1,600	1,700	1,700
Direct Revenue Financing	11,333	9,882	10,347
Borrowing	18,472	19,615	12,315
TOTAL	37,633	37,425	30,590

TREASURY MANAGEMENT

The Council produces a Treasury Management Policy and Strategy which is approved by full Council annually as part of the budget setting process. There are close links between the Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy.

The capital programme determines the borrowing need of the Council, essentially the longer-term cash flow planning, to ensure that the Council can meet its capital spending obligations. This management of longer-term cash may involve arranging long or short-term loans or using longer term cash flow surpluses. On occasion any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet Council risk or cost objectives.

PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

Under the Local Government Act 2003 and the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (revised in 2017), local authority capital spending and its borrowing to fund that spending is limited by what is affordable, prudent and sustainable. The Prudential Code sets out several indicators that enables the authority to assess affordability and prudence.

These indicators are included in the annual Treasury Management Policy and Strategy.

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY

Our commercial portfolio consists of a variety of asset types, namely: Retail Units, Industrial

Estates, Farms, Ground leases and Provision & livestock Markets. The portfolio generates revenue through rental receipts with opportunities to enhance income through rent reviews and renewals depending on the terms of each agreement. The Council has 20 Industrial estates located around the County with a total of around 400 units, together with 26 farms, 2 Provisions markets and 3 Livestock Markets. There are 104 Ground leases and Retail units (other than those forming part of the provisions markets).

In addition to generating a commercial return the portfolios meet corporate objectives of encouraging and supporting business and employment development, rural initiatives and town centre regeneration. In many instances the support of these broader aims is as important and income generation, and it's the Council's role to balance commercial returns with economic development objectives and corporate priorities.

Each portfolio will be managed uniquely considering its objectives, however, the underlying principle is that the Council makes the best use of its resources by increasing returns wherever possible, taking on board wider corporate priorities.

RISK APPETITE

Risk appetite can be thought of as the amount of risk an organisation is willing to accept, tolerate or be exposed to, in pursuit of its strategic and organisational objectives. The Council recognises that its appetite for

different types of risks will vary and needs to reflect both its capability and its ability to exercise control.

By virtue of its statutory responsibilities for public services and associated functions, the Council often has limited choice in whether to accept or tolerate risk. Clearly there are some types of risks where the Council's tolerance will be extremely low, or risk averse, for example, those that could:

- Endanger the safety of service users, employees, members or the general public
- Damage the Council's reputation or financial standing
- Lead to breaches of laws and/or regulations
- Threaten the future operations of the Council.

In some circumstances, the Council is willing to accept a different level or type of risk in pursuit of its strategic objectives. For example, capital schemes typically invoke risks such as achievement of timescales and financial targets, management of contractors and satisfaction of service requirements.

In other areas, the Council's appetite for risk has evolved in response to the changing and challenging environment in which local government now operates. For example, in response to reductions in central government funding, the Council has been willing to consider commercial income generating ventures and invest to save proposals in addition to service reductions and efficiencies to secure financial stability.

It is not possible to articulate the Council's appetite for every form of risk it may encounter or to predetermine which risks are acceptable or not acceptable. Instead, this strategy aims to inform and strengthen the decision-making process, to ensure that:

- Risks, as well as benefits and opportunities, are always considered, identified and reported

- Risks are assessed and recorded consistently, in accordance with the Council's risk management methodology
- Proposals which are likely to involve higher or more challenging levels of risk, such as creation of new partnerships, investments in major projects, or commercial activities, are subject to a robust and detailed risk appraisal process
- Risks which are likely to impact the achievement of one or more corporate objectives or to carry significant financial implications are escalated to the senior management team and the Executive Board for review and approval.
- Exposure to risks for which the Council's tolerance is low, such as the examples given above, is minimised.

REVENUE IMPLICATIONS

Serious consideration is given to the implications a project will have on the revenue budget, both in the short and long term. It may be that a scheme may produce savings in terms of ongoing maintenance in some instances. In other cases, the scheme may enhance the level of service to our customers but could add to the maintenance requirements of the service in the long term, particularly in the case of additional assets. There may be a need to provide additional resources such as finance, personnel, property, or ITC equipment, or there may be efficiency savings.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The Capital and Treasury Management functions are managed by a team of professionally qualified accountants with extensive Local Government finance experience between them. They all follow a Continuous Professional Development Plan (CPD) and attend courses on an ongoing basis to keep abreast of new developments and skills.

The Council's Section 151 Officer is the officer with overall responsibility for Capital and

Treasury activities and views the strategy to be prudent and affordable and fully integrated with the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan, Treasury Management Strategy and other Strategic Plans.

All the Council's commercial projects have project teams from all the professional disciplines from across the Council and when required external professional advice is taken. The Council Members are involved at a very early stage of a project's life cycle and internal and external training is offered to members on an annual basis to ensure they have up to date skills to make capital and treasury decisions. A register is also kept on member attendance.