

COMMUNITY & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 14 DECEMBER 2021

Audit Wales Report: Regenerating Town Centres in Wales

To consider and comment on the following issues:

1. To consider the findings and recommendations of the Audit Wales national report.
2. To consider the Carmarthenshire County Council response to the recommendations of the national report relevant to the Council.

Reasons:

- We have a duty to consider regulatory report recommendations.

To be referred to Cabinet / Council for decision: NO

CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER:-

Cllr. Emlyn Dole (Leader)

Directorate	Designations:	Tel Nos./ E Mail Addresses:
Chief Executive's Department		
Jason Jones	Head of Regeneration	JaJones@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
Report Author:		
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14 December 2021

Audit Wales Report: Regenerating Town Centres in Wales

BRIEF SUMMARY OF PURPOSE OF REPORT

This national report contains calls for all levels of government to step up to help make town centres sustainable.

It concludes that:

- the growth in out-of-town retail, the progressive loss of 'essential services' from town centres – banks, post offices and public services – and the growth in online shopping have contributed to a steady decline in many town centres. And the pandemic has added to these problems.
- local authorities are well-placed to prioritise and lead on place planning but need to be clear on the purpose of their town centres and involve public sector partners, the third sector, town and community councils, communities and businesses in decisions. Valuing and using information to fully understand problems and identify the best solutions
- local authorities will also have to become increasingly more interventionist to address the challenges facing town centres.

The report makes 6 recommendations in total. Recommendations 4 and 6 are for Local Government and the others are for Welsh Government.

Recommendation 4

The Welsh Government has provided all 22 local authorities with training on how best to use existing enforcement, financial assistance and debt recovery powers, but they are not being consistently nor effectively utilised to support regeneration. We recommend that local authorities take appropriate action, using these existing powers and resources available to achieve the best possible outcome for town centres by:

- *using alternative methods of enforcement before using Compulsory Purchase Orders as a last resort;*
- *integrating enforcement strategies with wider departmental strategies across housing, environmental health, planning and regeneration teams to make more effective use of existing skills and resources; and*
- *ensuring there is capacity and the right expertise to use the full range of powers, working in collaboration with other councils to achieve good outcomes*

Recommendation 6

Town centres are changing, and local authorities need to be receptive to these changes and plan to manage these shifts. We recommend that local authorities use our regeneration tool to self-assess their current approaches to identify where they need to improve their work on town-centre regeneration.

A Carmarthenshire Action Plan response has been prepared and is attached with these papers.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

YES

- 1 Audit Wales Report**
- 2 Carmarthenshire Action Plan response**

IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report:

Signed

Jason Jones - Head of Regeneration

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
YES	No	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

1. Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities

Corporate Strategy

The report's recommendations support the Corporate Strategy and our Well-being Objective - Create more jobs and growth throughout the county.

Regulatory Reports

- National/ Thematic reports are undertaken by regulators to look at all Councils in Wales (in an integrated programme of work consulted and agreed upon with local government) to identify best practice.
 - Most of these reports contain recommendations. Sometimes the recommendations are for Welsh Government and/or local government.
 - Not all recommendations contained in reports may apply to Carmarthenshire as in some instances we could be the area of best practice proposed, be already doing what is identified or it may not be applicable.
- All regulatory report recommendations are entered onto the Council's performance monitoring system (PIMS) and any reasons for discounting recommendations should be explained and recorded. Progress against recommendations is monitored and reported.
- All regulatory reports will now be considered by Corporate Management Team, Cabinet, Governance and Audit Committee and where appropriate relevant scrutiny committees.

Governance and Audit Committee

- The role of the Governance and Audit Committee is to review and assess the risk management, internal control, performance management and corporate governance arrangements of the Council, it is expected that the council's Governance and Audit Committee formally consider all reports of external review bodies – principally; Audit Wales, Estyn and the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).
- As well as actively considering reports, committees are expected to assure themselves that there are arrangements in place to monitor and evaluate progress against any recommendations contained in them. The focus here should be on holding executives and officers to account to ensure that reports and recommendations have been acted upon.

Scrutiny

Some reports may also be relevant for consideration by scrutiny committees.

CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below

Signed:

Jason Jones - Head of Regeneration

1. **Scrutiny Committee** – N/A

2. **Local Member(s)** – N/A

3. **Community / Town Council** – N/A

3. **Relevant Partners** –

Audit Wales completed the review between October 2020 and May 2021.

It used a range of methods:

- **document review:** it reviewed national strategy, guidance, Welsh Government announcements and update reports, local authority plans, local and national performance reporting.
- **interviews:** it interviewed every local authority regeneration lead officer, members of staff of the Welsh Government's regeneration team, a range of representative local, regional and national organisations including the Institute of Welsh Affairs, staff of several universities, One Voice Wales, Community Housing Cymru and the Bevan Foundation for example.
- **focus groups:** it held three focus groups with elected members from across Wales to discuss their town centres.
- **data analysis:** it reviewed available data on town centres in Wales and drew on the work of Understanding Welsh Places, the Office for National Statistics and others.
- **surveys:** it ran four surveys with citizens, town-centre businesses, councillors (both principal and town and community) and local authority regeneration leads. The citizen and business surveys were provided online and supported by a series of social media campaigns to generate interest. A total of 1,984 citizens completed the survey and 442 businesses. It received 228 responses from councillors and 20 of the 22 councils completed the senior officer survey.
- **webinar:** it held a webinar to discuss our emerging conclusions in May 2021 and had attendance from over 160 people.

5. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations – All Departments have been consulted and have had the opportunity to provide comments on their performance and progress.

**CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDER(S)
AWARE/CONSULTED -YES**

Cllr. Emlyn Dole advised

Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Title of Document	Locations that the papers are available for public inspection
<u>Regenerating Town Centres in Wales – National Report</u>	