

Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report

2021 - 2022

Scrutiny
in Carmarthenshire



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Cyngor **Sir Gâr**
Carmarthenshire
County Council



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Chair's Foreword



As the Chair of this Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year, I am pleased to present this Annual Report for the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee for the 2021/22 municipal year. This report provides a comprehensive summary of the work undertaken by the Committee during this period and provides an opportunity to reflect on this work.

The past year has again been a challenging period for the Council due to the covid pandemic and I feel this Committee has continued to constructively play its part in terms of scrutinising performance and contributing to key council policies and decisions.

The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 which came into force on the 22nd April 2020 allowed the Authority to make arrangements for meetings to take place remotely. This obviously had its own challenge in changing how we worked, as both elected members and officers, in adapting to new technology to enable meetings to be held remotely but, we were able to discuss and scrutinise a wide variety of topics and play a constructive part in scrutinising performance and contributing to key council policies and decisions. These included the standard and regular monitoring reports as well as new policies and strategies being introduced by the County Council.

The forthcoming year will no doubt again be challenging as the Council recovers from the impact and on-going implications of the Coronavirus. I am confident though that the Committee will continue to focus on how to improve services effectively and efficiently and will have a positive impact on the outcomes for the residents of Carmarthenshire. I'm sure the Committee will also continue to work closely with the Council's Senior Managers and Staff to ensure that 2022/23 will be a productive year.

I would also like to thank all members of the Committee for their contributions and dedication during 2021/22.

Councillor Fozia Akhtar
Chair of Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee (2021/22)

1. Introduction

Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution requires all scrutiny committees to "*prepare an annual report giving an account of the Committees activities over the previous year.*"

The main aims of the report are to highlight the work that has been undertaken by the Community Scrutiny Committee during the 2021/22 municipal year. The document may also facilitate discussions on other items that could be included within future work programmes.

The Committee was chaired by Cllr. Fozia Akhtar and is made up of 13 Elected Members. Support is provided to the Panel by the Democratic Services Team and other Council officers as and when required.

This report provides an overview of the work of the Community Scrutiny Committee during the 2021/22 municipal year. It gives Members the opportunity to reflect on the achievements during the year and to identify what worked well and where improvements could be made. This analysis is instrumental in developing scrutiny

2. Overview of the work of the Committee in 2021/22

2.1 Number of Meetings

The Scrutiny Committee held 5 meetings during the 2021/22 municipal year.

2.2 The Forward Work Programme

The Scrutiny Committee develops its own Forward Work Programme (FWP) and in the main, meeting agendas were consistent with those outlined in the FWP, which was confirmed by the Committee at its meeting on the 1st July 2021.

The Forward Work Programme was mainly based on key areas identified as objectives within the Integrated Community Strategy and Improvement Plan together with standard items such as performance and budget monitoring reports, action plan monitoring reports and specific requests from the scrutiny committee itself. Additional reports were also requested by the scrutiny committee during the year and the Forward Work Programme was amended accordingly.

The development of the concept of the Forward Work Programme and the process for its agreement, has allowed each scrutiny committee to determine its own work agendas. The benefits of such an approach has led to an improved level of debate and input during scrutiny committee meetings.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 put long term sustainability at the forefront of how public services are designed and delivered and it places emphasis on public bodies to work in partnership with each other and the public to prevent and tackle problems.

The Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee's key responsibilities are for:

- Housing – Social and Private Sector
- Planning Policy
- Regeneration including physical and rural development
- Economic Development
- European and Externally Funded Programmes
- Libraries
- Arts and Theatres
- Museums and Archives
- Countryside facilities
- Sports, Leisure and Recreation

To compliment the work undertaken during formal meetings, the Committee also undertakes other scrutiny functions such as task and finish, visits to establishments falling within its remit together with member development sessions

2.3 Performance Monitoring / Strategic Issues

Performance Monitoring Reports - One of the principal roles of Scrutiny Committees is to monitor the performance of services and functions within its remit. They undertake this work mainly through the consideration of performance monitoring reports and various action plan monitoring reports. The performance monitoring reports provide a balanced picture of performance across the relevant service areas. The Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee received the Performance Monitoring Reports for the Council's 2021/22 Wellbeing Objectives for the period 1st April 2021 to 30th September 2021 at its meetings on the 30th September 2021 (Quarter 1) and 14th December 2021 (Quarter 2). It was noted at the meetings that 2021/22 was the first year the Council would self-evaluate and report on under the terms of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, especially Part 6 thereof relating to Performance and Governance

Carmarthenshire County Council Annual Report 2020/21 - As part of its performance monitoring role, the Committee received relevant information from the Council's key strategies and plans. One of the key areas relating to the Council's management is the Annual monitoring of progress achieved against the Council's well-being objectives detailed within the 2020/21 Report. With that in mind, the Committee, in July 2021, considered the Annual report detailing the progress and adaptations made during the year for each of the Council's 15 Well Being objectives, adopted in June 2018, as amended, to reflect developing priorities and the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, Brexit and climate change. The Committee noted that while it was considered good practice to ensure the Corporate Strategy was up to date and resources allocated to priorities, the Improvement Objectives must be published annually

in accordance with both the Local Government (Wales Measure 2009) and The Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Outcome:

The Cabinet at its meeting in September 2021 recommended to Council that the Annual Report 2020/21 be approved which was subsequently adopted by the Council in October 2021.

Departmental Draft Business Plans 2022 - 2023 – In February 2022 the Committee considered the Departmental Draft Business Plans 2022 - 2023 for those areas of the Communities and Chief Executive Departments falling within its remit providing a summary of the key actions and measures required to support the delivery of the Corporate Strategy and the Council's Well-Being Objectives. This provided the Committee with an opportunity to consider and comment upon the priorities outlined for the departments.

The Committee also noted that production of the Environment Department Business Plan had been delayed following the Departure of the Director and subsequent appointment of two interim directors

Outcome:

The Committee received the Communities and Chief Executive's Departmental Business Plans falling within its remit

Actions & Referrals - During the course of the municipal year requests can be made by members for additional items to assist in discharging their scrutiny role. Actions & Referrals updates are presented to Committee bi-annually providing an update on progress in relation to these requests.

2.4 Revenue & Capital Budgets

Budget Monitoring Reports - The Committee received quarterly reports on the departmental and corporate revenue and capital budgets. Due to a heavy agenda, the January 2022 report was e-mailed direct to Committee members. These reports enabled members to monitor and challenge the level of spend in each service area and the progress made in connection with any capital works.

Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2022/23-2024/25 - As well as monitoring the revenue and capital budgets, the Committee was also consulted on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25. The report provided the Committee with the proposed Revenue Budget Strategy for 2022/23 together with indicative figures for the 2023/24 and 2024/2025 financial years.

Outcome:

As part of the widespread consultation undertaken on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2022/23 to 2024/25, the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee considered the Strategy at its January meeting and endorsed the budget proposals, as submitted. The Budget Strategy was subsequently adopted by the Cabinet and Council at their meetings in March 2022, subject to some amendments and a reduction in the planned council tax levy

2.5 Policy for Anti-Social Behaviour and Breaches of Tenancy 2021

In July 2021 the Committee considered proposals for the adoption of a policy detailing the approach to be adopted by the Neighbourhood Team within Environmental Protection for processing complaints for Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Breaches of Tenancy Conditions and their prioritisation into the following three categories:-

- Category A – Urgent or serious cases -to be dealt with as quickly as possibly (aim to contact within 24 hours)
- Category B – Serious Issues- aim to contact within 5 working days
- Category C – Low Level – aim to contact within 10 working days

Outcome:

The Committee recommended adoption of the policy which was subsequently approved by the Council's Cabinet at its meeting held on 26th July 2021

2.6 Tyisha/Station Road Area

In August 2022, at a special meeting, the committee considered a report on the Council's proposals for the Tyisha/Station Road area of Llanelli. That report detailed the work undertaken to date, including the demolition of the vacant flats in the "4 Ty's" together with outlining other key priorities for moving the programme of change forward. One of the key objectives aimed to develop a transformational plan to address the significant issues affecting the Tyisha community and making the area a vibrant place to live and work.

Outcome:

The proposals were received and accepted by the Committee and subsequently approved by the Cabinet at its meeting held on the 13th September 2021.

2.7 Cartrefi Croeso

In August 2022, at a special meeting, the Committee considered a report on the future of Cartrefi Croeso, the Council's Local Housing Company established in 2018 to support the delivery of affordable homes for sale and rent to ensure a range of available housing options were available to meet both affordable housing needs and aspirations of supporting economic growth and strategic regeneration. The report detailed the progress achieved by the company to date and the proposals for the Council to take on its future roles thereby making the company 'dormant'. That proposal had arisen due to changes introduced since its establishment, one of which related to the Welsh Government's decision to lift the HRA borrowing restrictions thereby enabling the Council to become more ambitious and to build up the appropriate skills and capacity in the number of homes it could deliver

Outcome:

The proposals were received and accepted by the Committee and subsequently approved by the Cabinet at its meeting held on the 13th September 2021.

2.8 Primary Town Centre Economic Recovery Plans – Ammanford, Carmarthen and Llanelli

The Committee, in September 2021 was consulted on Council proposals for the introduction of Economic Recovery and Delivery Plans, post covid, for the three primary towns within Carmarthenshire of Ammanford, Carmarthen and Llanelli. The plans set out the impact of covid, highlighting key issues/opportunities and providing a delivery framework of be-spoke interventions for each centre. It was envisaged the plans would be owned and delivered by the stakeholders in the three towns' respective Task Force/Forum, with the Council working with potential funders in both Welsh Government and Westminster to lever funding when opportunities arose and to utilise corporate funding identified within the council's capital programme to facilitate implementation of the three plans.

Outcome:

The Committee endorsed the Recovery Plans which were subsequently adopted by the Cabinet on the 17th January 2022

2.9 Annual Monitoring Report 2019/21 Adopted Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan

In September, the Committee received the 2019/21 Annual Monitoring report on the Adopted Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan, produced in accordance with statutory requirements for its submission to Welsh Government, and publication on the Council's website by the 31st October. The report covered an extended two year period reflecting the impact of Covid 19, and its associated restrictions, upon the recording, availability and reporting of data

In considering the report the Committee raised a number of issues, including:

- the impact current of Natural Resources Wales' (NRW) regulations on phosphates on water quality were having on development and regeneration not only in Carmarthenshire but Wales wide
- the provision within the LDP for additional official gypsy and traveller sites within the County
- the impact of Brexit and Covid on the increased cost of building materials for the construction industry and the potential impact on the provision of affordable homes

Outcome:

The report was approved for submission to the Welsh Government and subsequently adopted by both the Cabinet and Council at their meetings held on the 11th October and 10th November 2022

2.10 Audit Wales Report: Regenerating Town Centres in Wales

In December, the Committee considered Audit Wales' National Report on Regenerating Town Centres in Wales that produced 6 recommendations for all levels of government in Wales to help make town centres sustainable with recommendations 4 and 6 specifically relating to the role of local government.

The Committee commented on a number of areas within the report of both national and local significance. Those included the Council's 10 Towns Initiative, provision of capital funding, increased competition from internet shopping and the streamlining of grant processes

Outcome:

The report was received and the Council's Action Plan produced in response to the report was approved.

2.11 Actif Sport & Leisure's 'Actif' Anywhere platform

In December, the Committee considered a report on developments within the Leisure Services Division that were leading the way in terms of digital development to enable the population to access and participate in digital activity across the life course and health spectrum not only in Carmarthenshire but in Wales, the U.K. and Worldwide. Whilst it was not intended to replace activity within physical buildings, the platform's primary aim was to provide a greater mix and flexibility of choice/provision for people to become more active

Outcome:

The report was received.

2.12 Update on the Outdoor Education Offer in Carmarthenshire

In December, the Committee was consulted on a report providing a backdrop to current Outdoor Education Provision within Carmarthenshire, including, a review of assets, financial resources, staffing activity and how the service would need to re-model and evolve in the short, medium and long term within existing resources

The Committee re-emphasised it's support for the retention and development of the existing facility at the Pendine Outdoor Education Facility

Outcome:

The report was adopted with an additional recommendation to pursue all grant opportunities to fund improvements to the Pendine Outdoor Education Centre.

2.13 Housing Revenue Account Budget and Housing Rent Setting for 2022/23

In January, the Committee considered the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget and Housing Rent Setting for 2022/23, presented as part of the budget consultation process. The report reflected the latest proposals contained in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, being the primary financial planning tool for delivering the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard Plus (CHS+).

The Committee endorsed the report and proposed rent increases to the Cabinet and Council for consideration as part of the budget submission to the Council

Outcome:

The Housing Revenue Account Budget and Housing Rent setting proposals were adopted by the Executive Board and Council at their meetings in February and March, 2022 respectively

2.14 Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2022-25 Carmarthenshire Housing Investment Programme

In February, the Committee considered the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2022-25 Carmarthenshire Housing Investment Plan, the five main themes of which were:

- Supporting Tenants and Residents
- Investing in Homes and Surrounding areas
- Providing more homes
- Decarbonisation of the Housing Stock
- The Local Economy, Community Benefits and Procurement

The Committee raised a number of issues on the report that included: void levels, impact of the NRW'S Phosphate Regulations on Development and Regeneration within the County. The Committee endorsed the report to the Cabinet and Council for consideration as part of the budget submission to the Council

Outcome:

The report was accepted by the Cabinet and Council at their meetings in February and March 2022 respectively.

2.15 Housing Regeneration and Development – Five Year Delivery Plan

In February, the Committee considered a proposed Five Year Delivery Plan detailing the Authority's plans to support the delivery of over 2,000 additional homes across the county over the next five years. The plan would build on the success of current affordable housing delivery plans, would support economic growth by investing over £300m into communities directly supporting the actions in the Economic Recovery Plan, supporting Business, people and places

The Committee recommended the Plan's adoption to the Cabinet and Council

Outcome:

The Plan was adopted by the Cabinet and Council in their February and March meetings.

2.15 Task and Finish

The Committee did not undertake a Task and Finish exercise in 2021/22

2.16 Site Visits

Whilst a number of site visits were included within the Committee's 2021/22 Forward Work Programme, it was unable to undertake those due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions.

2.17 Development Sessions

The Committee held one service specific development session during 2021/22 on the Draft Leisure Strategy to help inform its development prior to consideration by the Council in 2022.

The following all member development sessions / member seminars were held during 2021/22:-

- Historic Buildings and Carmarthenshire's Net Zero Carbon Commitment - May
- The Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency – June
- Microsoft Teams Training for online meetings – numerous sessions - June
- Hywel Dda University Health Board – Covid Briefing - September
- Planning Service Seminar – September
- Welsh in Education Strategic Plan Workshop - October
- Planning Service Phospates Briefing -November
- Overview of Budget proposals – budget consultation seminar - January
- Digital Connectivity - February

In addition to the above, several budget seminars were held during January as part of the Council's consultation process on the 2022/23 Revenue Budget and five year capital programme.

2.18 Referrals

In July 2021, the Committee, as part of its consideration on the Council's Annual Report for 2020/21, raised and referred to the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee an issue relating to the lack of pavements on public highways to facilitate safe walking, with there being over 300 applications for pavements outstanding

Outcome:

The Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in March 2022 received a report on the provision of footpaths and noted that the £250k capital budget provision enabled delivery of a maximum of three schemes per annum.

3. Challenges

One of the significant challenges faced by the County in 2021/22 was the impact of the Covid Pandemic on the provision of services to the residents of Carmarthenshire.

4. Future Work

The Committee has made significant progress and will continue to concentrate on topics where Members' input will result in positive outcomes to drive forward service improvement. To ensure best use is being made of meeting time and with the benefit of the added value of pre-meetings, the Committee is keen to achieve a more streamlined scrutiny process.

The future work of the Committee will be considered as part of the Forward Work Programme planning session. The FWP will continue to be monitored during the course of the year, together with the Executive Board FWP.

5. Support for the Scrutiny Function

Support for Carmarthenshire County Council's Scrutiny function is provided by the Democratic Services Unit, based in the Administration & Law Division of the Chief Executive's Department.

Support for the Scrutiny function includes:

- Formulating, in accordance with the FWP, and despatching agendas for Scrutiny Committee meetings a minimum of 4 working days prior to the meeting;

- Providing support and constitutional advice to the Scrutiny Committees and to members of those Committees as well as producing minutes of their meetings and ensuring items arising from those meetings are actioned;
- Giving support and advice in relation to the functions of the Council's Scrutiny Committees to executive and non-executive members of the Council and its officers;
- Managing the strategic development of Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire through engaging in national and regional Scrutiny networks and initiatives, supporting the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum and meetings of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs with the Executive Board;
- Advising and supporting the implementation of the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 as and when guidance is published;
- Managing the co-ordination and development of the Scrutiny Committees' forward work programmes in conjunction with Scrutiny Committee members;
- Managing and co-ordinating Scrutiny review work, including the administration of scrutiny task and finish groups, assisting in writing reports in conjunction with the groups and assisting in the implementation and monitoring of completed reviews;
- Assisting with the Scrutiny member development programme.

For more information on Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire including forward work programmes, task and finish reports and annual reports, visit the County Council's website at: www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/scrutiny

To contact the Democratic Services Unit, please call 01267 224028 or e-mail scrutiny@carmarthenshire.gov.uk

6. Attendance

Attendance by members of the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee during the 2021/22 municipal year is shown in the table below. A total of 5 meetings were held between May 21 and April 2022 against the scheduled 8.

Scrutiny Committee Member	No. of meetings attended	%
Cllr F. Akhtar	4	80
Cllr. Ann. Davies	5	100
Cllr. Anthony Davies	5	100
Cllr. H. Davies	3	60
Cllr C. Evans	4	80
Cllr R. Evans	5	100
Cllr. J. Gilasbey	5	100
Cllr. B. Jones	5	100

Cllr. H. Jones	5	100
Cllr. S. Matthews	3	60
Cllr. H. Shepardson	5	100
Cllr. G. Thomas	4	80
Cllr. D. Thomas	4	80
Substitutes	No. of meetings attended	
Cllr. M.J.A. Lewis	1	
Cllr M. Charles	2	
Cllr G. John	1	
Cllr D. Cundy	1	
Cabinet Member	No. of meetings attended	
Cllr E. Dole	4	
Cllr. L.D. Evans	4	
Cllr. M. Stephens	4	
Cllr. P.H. Griffiths	5	
Cllr D. Jenkins	2	
Cllr H. Evans	2	
Cllr C. Campbell	3	