

CAPITAL STRATEGY

2024 - 2025

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Carmarthenshire
County Council



CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024-25

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 2021.

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 to help the council deliver departmental strategies and wider plans.

CARMARTHENSIRE'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 Corporate Vision and 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).

CARMARTHENSIRE'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 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,

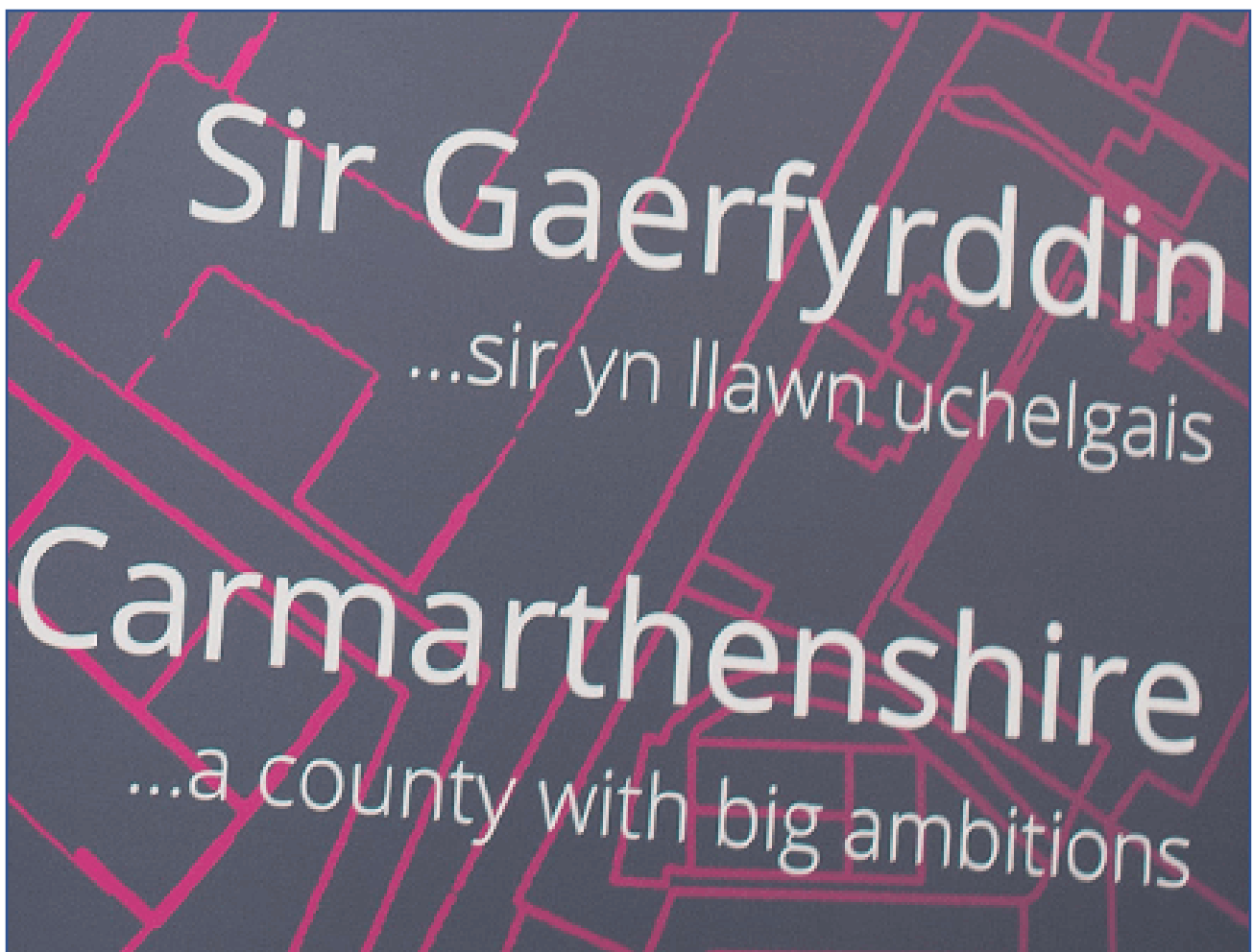
- A clear framework for making capital expenditure decisions is provided,
- A corporate approach to generating capital resources is established,
- Access to enough long-term assets to provide services are acquired and retained,
- Invest to Save initiatives to make efficiencies within the Council's revenue 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:

Capital Programme Approvals

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 for inclusion in the capital programme by following a process 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.



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



Overview of General Fund Capital Programme

Capital Budgets by Department:	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000
Communities	4,192	2,000	2,500
Place and Infrastructure	17,002	17,624	2434
Education & Children	29,493	20,857	6,214
Chief Executive	5,339	4,237	4,745
Regeneration	16,980	11,294	2,201
City Deal Projects	13,924	12,863	0
Total Budget	86,930	57,581	18,094

Financed by:	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000
Borrowing	27,148	18,704	5,013
Unhypothecated General Capital Grants	6,065	6,065	6,065
External Grants & Contributions	36,556	27,127	3,714
Reserves	14,025	4,404	500
Direct Revenue Financing	2,700	516	490
Capital Receipts	436	765	2,112
Total Funding	86,930	57,581	18,094

OUR PRIORITIES

Cabinet have set out their aspirations for Carmarthenshire in ta Cabinet Vision Statement 2022-2027. The capital programme has been developed and approved to support this vision for the future.

Carmarthenshire's Sustainable Communities for Learning

Modernising schools building through our Sustainable Communities for Learning 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.

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, and a new 4G Pitch in Ammanford.

- Developing a new Working and Cycling Path from Carmarthen to Llandeilo along the former railway line. A major investment which will bring significant benefits to the rural economy in the medium to long-term and improvements in health and wellbeing for residents. We aspire to develop further projects of this type.

Reviewing our Estate and Better ways of Working

A desire to embrace and compound new ways of working, 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 in recent years. 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.

Decarbonisation

In a commitment to future generations, we will see decarbonisation measures rolled out across our built estate and our Fleet. Grant funding is also made available for local business to embrace renewable energy. 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 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 longer-term plans for the development of the Ammanford distributor road will improve traffic flows and enhance retail investment opportunities.

Digital Transformation

Information Communication Technology (ICT) is crucial to our future ways of working. Our 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

Carmarthenshire's Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024-2027 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). The purpose of this Plan is to explain the vision and detail of our Housing Investment Programme, and what it means for tenants. Maintaining and delivering the new 'Welsh Housing Quality Standard' (WHQS) is a statutory duty which Carmarthenshire exceeds by maintaining our Carmarthenshire Homes Standard+. Providing more affordable homes has always been important to us, but now with the cost-of-living crisis and the steep rise in homelessness it is more important than ever. We have already delivered over 1,600 additional homes and our new development programme will support the delivery of a further 2,000 homes, supporting the regeneration of our town centres, rural towns and villages and our major regeneration sites including the Transforming Tyisha programme. We have also accelerated our buying private sector homes programme and remodelled some of our existing stock, helping to increase supply quickly meeting the needs of some of our most vulnerable individuals and families.

In addition, the Council plans to continue to invest over £61m in maintaining tenants' homes over the next three years.

- The Council recognises the importance of strategic asset management in providing the foundation for its investment plans so within

the HRA Business Plan has highlighted five key themes for future investment:

- Supporting tenants & residents
- Providing more affordable homes.
- Decarbonising our stock and services
- Investing in our homes & our estates.

HRA CAPITAL SPENDING AND FUNDING

HRA Capital Budgets:	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000
Support Tenant and Residents	2,920	3,000	3,350
Provide more affordable homes	17,405	17,886	16,840
Affordable Warmth & Decarbonisation	5,789	6,542	7,818
Investing in Homes maintaining CHS+	10,090	10,707	10,907
TOTAL	36,204	38,1352	38,915

Financed by:	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000
Welsh Government Grant-MRA	6,225	6,225	6,225
Welsh Government Grant - Other	9,308	10,970	12,334
Direct Revenue Financing	5,000	5,000	5,000
Capital Receipts	0	0	11,625
Borrowing	15,671	15,940	3,731
TOTAL	36,204	38,135	38,915

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 2021), 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 Cabinet 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.