

Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report

2020 - 2021

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, I am pleased to present this Annual Report for the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee for the 2020/21 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 been a particularly challenging period for the Council due to the covid pandemic and I feel that this Committee has continued to constructively play its part in terms of scrutinising performance and contributing to key council policies and decisions.

Although a number of meetings at the start of the year were cancelled due to the lockdowns imposed the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 came into force on the 22nd April 2020 allowing the Authority to make arrangements for meetings to take place remotely. This obviously had its own challenges but we were able to discuss and scrutinise a wide variety of topics. 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 be equally challenging, but I am confident that we will continue to focus on how to improve services effectively and efficiently. This will obviously involve new ways of working and meeting as we take on board the ramifications of the pandemic.

I am looking forward, once again, to the challenge of chairing this Committee and with the assistance of my Vice Chair and the rest of the Committee hope we will have a positive impact on the outcomes for the residents of Carmarthenshire. We will continue to work closely with the Council's senior managers and staff to ensure that it is a productive year ahead.

As Chair of the Committee I also Chair the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Forum which discusses improvements to the scrutiny function for consideration by the Council's Constitutional Review Working Group and acts as a forum for sharing and disseminating scrutiny good practice. As a result of the Covid19 pandemic much of the anticipated Scrutiny work planned for 2020/21 was put on hold as delegated decisions were taken by officers during this emergency period. As far as Scrutiny Committees were concerned the opportunity was taken over the summer – in agreement with the Executive Board, to re-set Scrutiny and to webcast Scrutiny meetings. The revised process puts the Executive Board Members centre front in terms of accountability. In anticipation of the new scrutiny arrangements, we also agreed a series of virtual Scrutiny training sessions for members which were hosted by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. These training sessions concentrated

on the essential skills required to undertake scrutiny effectively and also skills for on-line meetings as we moved to webcast scrutiny for the first time. Although Scrutiny Committee meetings were inevitably suspended for some months, arrangements were put in place to ensure that the political groups were aware of Council business, one of these initiatives being the scheduling of weekly on-line meetings between the 4 Political Groups' Leaders, and the standard "call in" and questions without notice facility remained fully operational for Executive Board meetings from June 2020 onwards.

It has been a challenging time for both elected members and officers in changing how we work and getting to grips with new technology in order for meetings to be held remotely. The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum agreed that the first round of virtual meetings had gone well and that virtual meeting feedback and improvements would be a standing item on our Forum agenda for the foreseeable future'.

On a final note I would like to thank all members of the Committee and officers for their contributions and dedication during 2020/21.

Cllr. Giles Morgan
Chair of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

1. Introduction

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

The main aims of the report are to highlight the work that has been undertaken by the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee during 2020/21. It outlines the potential future work of the Committee. The document may also facilitate discussions on other items that could be included within future work programmes.

The Committee is chaired by Cllr. Giles Morgan 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 Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee during 2020/21 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 2020/21

2.1 Number of Meetings

The Scrutiny Committee held 6 meetings in the 2020/21 Civic Year. The meetings scheduled between April - October 2020 were cancelled due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

2.2 The Work Programme

The Scrutiny Committee develops its own Forward Work Programme (FWP) which, for 2020/21, was not confirmed by the Committee until its meeting on 2nd December 2020 due to the cancelled meetings.

The Forward Work Programme (FWP) was mainly based on key areas identified as objectives within the Council's Corporate Strategy 2018-23 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 Act established Public Service Boards (PSB) for each Local Authority in Wales.

To ensure that PSBs are democratically accountable there was a requirement on Councils to designate an overview and scrutiny committee to scrutinise the work of the PSB. As the Council's designated Scrutiny Committee in this regard the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee has continued in its role of scrutinising the work of the PSB and holding it to account on its performance in meeting the objectives of the Local Well-Being Plan. In this regard the Committee regularly received the minutes of meetings of the PSB.

The following sections will provide a snapshot of the main areas of the Committee's work.

2.3 Covid 19 – Service Update Reports

At its meeting in December 2021, the first since the imposition of lockdown restrictions in March 2020, the Committee received update reports detailing the reaction and performance of services within its remit to the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.4 Revenue & Capital Budgets

The Committee received quarterly reports on the departmental and corporate revenue and capital budgets. These reports enabled members to monitor the level of spend in each area and the progress made in any capital works.

As well as monitoring the current budget the Committee was also consulted on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2021/22 to 2023/24. The report provided the Committee with the current proposals for the Revenue Budget for 2021/22 together with the indicative figures for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years.

Members accepted the report and endorsed the Charging Digest.

The Committee was consulted on the Five -Year Capital Programme 2021/22 - 2025/26.

Outcome:

County Council approved the Revenue Budget Strategy and the Five-Year Capital Programme.

2.5 Treasury Management and Prudential Indicator Reports

The Committee received updates outlining the activities within the Treasury Management Function, in line with the requirements of the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy approved by the County Council on the 3rd March 2020.

2.6 2020/21 Departmental and Corporate 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 half-yearly performance monitoring reports and various action plan monitoring reports. The performance monitoring report provides a balanced picture of performance across the relevant service areas. The Committee considered the performance reports for its remit at its meetings in February 2021.

2.7 Sickness Absence Monitoring

In March 2021 the Committee considered a report on Sickness Absence Monitoring which detailed half-year [Quarter 2] departmental sickness absence data for 2020/21 along with benchmarking and performance ranking tables. The report also included a breakdown of the key causes for absence to enable the Committee to scrutinise the council's performance in relation to managing attendance. One of the outcomes of the report was the arranging of a Members Development Session which focussed on the covid 'live feed' staff sickness absence monitoring system.

2.8 Carmarthenshire Public Services Board (PSB)

In December 2020 and February 2021 the Committee, as the designated scrutiny committee appointed to scrutinise the work of the PSB, considered the minutes of meetings of the Carmarthenshire Public Services Board.

2.9 Annual Report 2019/20 on the Welsh language

In March 2021 the Committee considered the Annual Report in relation to the Welsh language and compliance with the Welsh Language Standards during 2019-20. The Report had been produced in order to comply with the Welsh Language Commissioner's monitoring arrangements.

2.10 Digital Transformation Strategy 2021-24

In April 2021 the Committee considered and endorsed the Digital Transformation Strategy 2021-24.

2.11 Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2019-20 and Action Plan 2020-24

In March 2021 the Committee considered the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2019-20, together with the Action Plan for 2020-24, which detailed how the Council had implemented its Strategic Equality Plan and fulfilled its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Specific Duties for Wales.

2.12 Corporate Complaints Policy

In March 2021 the Committee endorsed the Corporate Complaints Policy in accordance with the requirements of the Complaints Standards Agency/Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

2.13 Swansea City Deal / Llanelli Wellness and Life Science Village

The Committee received an update on the Swansea City Deal portfolio and its constituent programmes / projects including the proposed Llanelli Wellness and Life Science Village at its meeting in February 2021.

2.14 Departmental Business Plans

In April 2021 the Committee considered the Chief Executive and Corporate Services Departmental Business Plans 2021-22 which outlined the priorities for the departments and identified how they supported the 5 Ways of Working and the 7 Goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Committee also considered extracts of the Environment Departmental Business Plan 2021-22 relating to the Property Division which were relevant to the Committee's remit.

3. Other Scrutiny Activity

3.1 Task and Finish

The Committee did not undertake a task and finish review during 2020/21.

3.2 Site Visits

The Committee did not undertake any site visits during 2020/21.

3.3 Development Sessions

The following member development sessions / member seminars were held during 2020/21:

- Microsoft Teams Training for online meetings – numerous sessions June 2020
- Zoom Training for online meetings – December /January
- Mod.Gov New App training (Delivered by Civica) – October
- Scrutiny Training (Delivered by Centre for Governance and Scrutiny) October
- On-Line Scrutiny (Delivered by Centre for Governance and Scrutiny) November
- Section 106 Agreements and Unilateral Undertakings – February
- Covid Vaccination Briefing (Hywel Dda University Health Board) - February
- Introduction to Ash Dieback Disease and the County Council's Roles and Responsibilities – March
- Growing Carmarthenshire: Progressive Procurement, food supply chains and Future Opportunities – March
- Rural Enterprise Dwellings – March
- One Planet Developments - April

In addition to the above, several budget seminars were held during January as part of the Council's consultation process on the 2021/22 Revenue Budget and the five-year capital programme.

4. Challenges

In undertaking its work the Committee has faced several challenges, which have included items not being reported in line with the FWP, level of detail in reports – sometimes too much detail sometimes too little and the time lapse in receiving financial reports though the latter was being addressed insofar as financial procedures permitted.

5. Future Work

The Committee has made significant progress and will continue to concentrate on topics where Member's input will result in positive outcomes to drive forward service improvement. The future work of the Committee will be detailed in its Forward Work Programme which will continue to be monitored during the course of the forthcoming year.

6. 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. This includes:

- Providing support and constitutional advice to the Council's 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 the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Executive Board Forum;
- Advising and supporting the implementation of the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 as guidance is published;
- Managing the co-ordination and development of the Scrutiny forward work programmes in conjunction with Scrutiny members;
- Managing and co-ordinating Scrutiny review work, including the operation of scrutiny task and finish groups, authoring reports in conjunction with the groups, and assisting in the implementation and monitoring of completed reviews;
- Managing the Scrutiny member development programme;
- Despatching agendas for Scrutiny Committee meetings a minimum of 4 working days prior to the meeting.

For more information on scrutiny in Carmarthenshire including 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

7. Attendance

Attendance by members of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee during the 2020/21 year is shown in the table below. A total of 6 virtual meetings were held between December 2020 and April 2021 – with 4 scheduled meetings between April and October 2020 being cancelled due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

| Scrutiny Committee Member | No. of meetings attended out of possible | % |
|----------------------------------|---|----------|
| Cllr. S.M. Allen | 6 | 100% |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------|
| Cllr. K. Broom | 5 | 83% |
| Cllr. D. Cundy | 6 | 100% |
| Cllr. H. Davies | 5 | 83% |
| Cllr. T.A.J. Davies up to 3/2/21 | 1 [out of 2] | 50% |
| Cllr. W.R.A. Davies from 2/3/21 | 4 [out of 4] | 100% |
| Cllr. J. Edmunds | 5 | 83% |
| Cllr. J. K. Howell | 6 | 100% |
| Cllr. G.H. John | 6 | 100% |
| Cllr. A.C. Jones | 6 | 100% |
| Cllr. K. Madge | 4 | 66% |
| Cllr. A.G. Morgan | 6 | 100% |
| Cllr. J. G. Prosser | 4 | 66% |
| Cllr. D.E. Williams | 5 | 83% |
| Substitutes | No. of meetings attended | |
| Cllr. W.T. Evans | 2 | |
| Cllr. K. Lloyd | 1 | |
| Cllr. B.D.J. Phillips | 1 | |
| EBM | No. of meetings attended | |
| Cllr. C. Campbell | 2 | |
| Cllr. E. Dole | 2 | |
| Cllr. P. Hughes-Griffiths | 1 | |
| Cllr. David Jenkins | 5 | |
| Cllr. M. Stephens | 3 | |

8. Glossary of Terms

CIPFA - The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

PSB - Public Service Board

FWP - Forward Work Programme

TIC - Transform, Innovate & Change

WBFGE – Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015