

Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2023-24

Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire

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Chair's Foreword



Councillor Deryk Cundy
Chair – May 2023 to February 2024



Councillor Rob Evans
Chair – March -May 2024

As the Chairs of this Committee for the 2023/24 municipal year, we are pleased to present this Annual Report for the Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee for 2023/24. 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, and we feel this Committee has continued to constructively play its part in terms of scrutinising performance and contributing to key council policies and decisions.

The forthcoming year will no doubt again be challenging but, we are confident 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. We are sure the Committee will also continue to work closely with the Council's Senior Managers and Staff to ensure that 2024/25 will be a productive year.

We would also like to thank all members of the Committee for their contributions and dedication during 2023/24.

Councillor Deryk Cundy / Councillor Rob Evans
Chairs of Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee 2023/2024

1. Introduction

The Scrutiny function is a key element of the County Council's governance arrangements and decision-making process. Although not a decision-making body, Scrutiny is at its most effective when it grasps the potential to influence and inform decisions made by both the Council and partner bodies across the county.

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*".

This report highlights the work undertaken by the Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee during the 2023/24 municipal year. It aims to provide members with an opportunity to reflect on its achievements, identify areas of best practice and highlight areas for improvement to further enhance the scrutiny function. Additionally, this report may facilitate discussion on items which could be identified for inclusion within future work programmes.

The Committee is chaired by Councillor Deryk Cundy and is made up of 13 Elected Members. Cabinet Members attend meetings as required in order to address the Committee on areas within their respective portfolios.

Support is provided by the Democratic Services Unit and other Council officers, as and when required.

2. Overview of the Work of the Committee in 2023/24

2.1 The Role of Scrutiny

The Scrutiny Committee remits were updated by Council following the May 2022 elections and each Scrutiny Committee became responsible for the overview and scrutiny of specific Cabinet Portfolios and their respective services. The Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of the following three Cabinet portfolios and service areas:

Homes

Housing Policy	Homelessness
Private Sector Housing	Housing Maintenance and Repairs
Housing Adaptations	Affordable Housing and Housing Options
Tenancy Support (Housing Support Grant)	

Rural Affairs, and Planning Policy

Rural Affairs and Community Engagement	Rural Regeneration
Markets, Marts and Allotments	Planning Enforcement
Local Development Plan	Planning Services (Planning Department)
Access to Rural Services	Ten Towns Initiative
Equalities - Community	

Regeneration, Leisure, Culture and Tourism

Leisure Centres	Museums
Libraries	Country Parks
Tourism	Economic Development
Economic Recovery Plan	Regeneration Strategy

In accordance with its areas of responsibilities, the Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee will seek to:-

- Examine how well the Cabinet and Council are performing,
- Hold the Cabinet to account and seek to promote open and transparent decision-making,
- Monitor the performance of the Council's services and functions,
- Review decisions made by the Cabinet where appropriate,
- Assist the Cabinet in the development, monitoring and review of policy,
- Scrutinise, as a key element of the consultation process, the proposed revenue budget strategy and capital investment programmes,
- Enable the participation of external organisations and partners in consideration of issues that may impact upon the delivery of Council and countywide priorities.

2.2 The Forward Work Plan

Scrutiny plays a key role in promoting accountability in the decision-making process of the Local Authority. It is also useful in ensuring that Council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging partnership working with external agencies.

In order for Scrutiny Committees to take on greater ownership of their own Forward Work Plans, a pre-decision method of scrutiny was introduced in September 2022 which allows Scrutiny Committees to decide which reports from the Cabinet Forward Work Plan they wish to come before them. As per normal process, Committees are also able to identify their own topics and Cabinet are still able to invite a Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise a decision which was in the pipeline.

The Committee utilised the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny's Gateway framework to develop its Forward Work Plan for the 2023/24 municipal year which was reviewed on a regular basis. This provided a manageable, flexible, and robust approach to scrutiny and ensured that the areas for review were considered on a priority basis and in a timely manner.

In this regard, the Committee determined that some periodic reports in relation to performance and budget monitoring could be circulated to members outside the formal meeting programme. This process enabled any relevant matters identified by members to be placed on the formal agenda for further consideration, as appropriate. The benefits of such an approach led to an improved level of debate and input during Scrutiny Committee meetings. In the main, meeting agendas were consistent with those outlined in the Forward Work Plan.

2.3 Meetings of the Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

Meetings are scheduled on a 6-8 weekly basis to consider issues and reports included in its FWP. The Committee held 7 formal meetings during the 2023/24 municipal year and all meetings were conducted in accordance with the provisions set out within Section 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

To complement the work undertaken during formal meetings, the Committee also undertakes other scrutiny functions such as Task and Finish, One Day Scrutiny and site visits to establishments falling within its remit, together with development sessions and workshops.

2.4 Performance Monitoring / Strategic Issues

One of the principal roles of the Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee is to monitor the performance of services and functions within its remit. Accordingly, the Committee reviews performance monitoring reports and various strategies and plans to provide a balanced assessment of performance across the relevant service areas.

2.4.1 Carmarthenshire County Council Annual Report 2022/23

In September, 2023 the Committee received, by e-mail, the Council's Annual Report 2022/23 produced in accordance with the relevant provisions within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021. The report detailed the progress made with the Council's 4 Well-being Objectives (WBO), as agreed in the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2022-27. The report focused upon the 2 Well-Being Objectives falling within the Committees remit, namely:

WBO 2:	Enabling our residents to live and age well (Live and Age Well)
WBO 3:	Enabling our communities and environment to be healthy, safe and prosperous (Prosperous Communities)

Outcome:

While no observations were submitted by members to the e-mail consultation, the Annual Report was considered by the Cabinet on the 30th October 2023 where its approval was recommended to Council and subsequently adopted at its meeting on the 8th November, 2023.

2.4.2 2023/24 Performance Reports relevant to the Committee

In accordance with the protocols established by the Committee, quarterly performance monitoring reports relevant to the Committee's remit were considered by the committee as follows:

- December 2023 – Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring 2023/24
- April 2024 – Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring 2023/24

The reports enabled members to monitor performance in respect of the Well-being Objectives relevant to the Committee's remit and aligned to the Authority's Corporate Strategy. The information provided a self-evaluation of performance in accordance with the reformed legislative framework enshrined within Part 6 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Members were afforded the opportunity to raise any concerns or matters which required further consideration, in accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

2.4.3 Actions and Referrals

During the course of the municipal year, requests for additional items were made by members of the Committee to assist them in discharging their scrutiny role. Updates on Actions and Referrals were presented to the Committee at its meetings held in December 2023 and March 2024 which detailed the progress made in relation to these requests.

2.5 Revenue & Capital Budgets

2.5.1 Budget Monitoring Reports

In accordance with the protocols established by the Committee, quarterly reports on the departmental and corporate revenue and capital budgets were considered and or circulated to members as follows:-

- September 2023 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 30th June 2023;
- September 2023 – in respect of the Revenue Budget Outturn Report 2022/23
- November 2023 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st August 2023.
- January 2024 – in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st October 2024
- April 2024 – In respect of the budgetary position as at 31st December 2024

The reports enabled members to monitor expenditure in each service area and the progress made in connection with any capital works. Members were afforded the opportunity to raise any concerns or matters which required further consideration at the Committee's formal meetings, in accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

2.5.2 Revenue Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27

In addition to monitoring the current revenue and capital budgets, the Committee was also consulted on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27 at its meeting in January 2024. The report provided the Committee with the proposed Revenue Budget Strategy for 2024/25, together with indicative figures for the 2025/2026 and 2026/27 financial years.

Outcome:

As part of the Authority's widespread consultation undertaken on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2024/25, the Committee considered and endorsed the Strategy at its meeting held on the 26th January 2024. The Strategy was subsequently agreed by Cabinet on the 19th February 2024 and adopted by Council on the 28th February 2024

2.6 COMMUNITIES DEPARTMENT

2.6.1 Emergency Social Housing Allocation Update Report on the operation of the new allocation policy

In June 2023 the Committee received, in accordance with the decision made at its meeting on the 26th January 2023, a monitoring report on the effectiveness of the Emergency Social Housing Allocation Report developed by its Task and Finish Group.

As part of the monitoring process, the committee raised a number of issues that included the timetable for the introduction of a New Allocations Policy and the numbers of properties directly matched and advertised on Canfod Cartref

Outcome:-

The monitoring report was received

2.6.2 Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Annual Report for 2022/23

In June 2023 the Committee received its 2022/23 Annual Report produced in accordance with Article 6.2 of the Council's Constitution providing an overview of its 2022/23 work programme and key issues addressed whilst also incorporating any issues referred to, or from Cabinet, Task and Finish Reviews and development sessions.

As part of its discussions on the report, the Committee referred to the provision of an alternative outdoor education offer and sought clarification on the future use of the current outdoor residential facility at Pendine. It was reminded that having been consulted on the proposed alternative outdoor education offer at its December 2022 meeting, a report was being prepared for consideration by the Cabinet. It requested the report be submitted to the Committee prior to Cabinet

Outcome:

The Annual report was received.

The report on the Pendine outdoor residential facility was circulated to members by e-mail for consideration in November 2023 for observations. As the policy was largely as agreed by the Committee in December 2022, it did not progress to Cabinet and was implemented.

2.6.3 Housing Service Charge Policy Review

In September 2023 the Committee considered the Housing Service Charge Policy Review presenting the following 3 options for implementation of a future Service Charge Policy for payments made by Contract Holders (tenants or leaseholders) for additional services provided by the Council for shared communal areas or facilities within council owned blocks of flats, sheltered schemes or supported housing projects that were over and above the general rent.

- Option 1: Do Nothing - Keep the existing Service Charge Policy in place with a cap of any possible annual increase in its overall rental charge (including Service Charges) to a maximum rise of £3 per week.
- Option 2: Gradual incremental removal of the Cap - Review and amend the existing policy with a view to introducing incremental increases over a 3-year period to bring all service charges in line with full cost recovery. The cap will only come into effect where charges exceed the agreed weekly cap.
- Option 3: Remove the Cap - Remove the cap completely from the existing policy with contract holders meeting the full cost of usage from 2024/25.

The Committee having considered the three options felt that Option 2 should be adopted, subject to regular review, but that in view of the potential impact it could have on tenant's ability to pay/fall into arrears, agreed to recommend to Cabinet that officers provide assistance / support to tenants to manage their budgets where necessary.

Outcome:

The Committee recommended to Cabinet that Option 2 be adopted. While the report was initially scheduled for consideration by Cabinet on the 13th November, 2023, it was subsequently incorporated within the Housing Revenue Account and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25 considered by the Scrutiny Committee on the 13th December 2023.

The Housing Revenue Account and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25 report was considered by Cabinet on the 15th January 2024 and adopted by Council on the 24th January 2024

2.6.4 Applying Intentionality to Priority Need (Homelessness Order)

In September 2023 the Committee considered a report on the Council retaining intentionality for all 10 priority need categories listed under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (as detailed within the report and adopted by the Council in July 2015) and to also apply intentionality to a 11th category of Street Homeless, as introduced by the Welsh Government in October 2022.

The Committee as part of its consideration raised a number of questions on the report including the council's legal duty to provide temporary accommodation and the type of evidence / criteria required to prove intentionality.

Outcome:

The Committee recommended to Cabinet approval of the report retaining intentionality for all 10 priority need categories listed under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (as detailed within the report and

adopted by the Council in July 2015) and to also apply intentionality to a 11th category of Street Homeless. Cabinet adopted the report at its meeting on the 16th October, 2023

2.6.5 Leisure, Culture and Outdoor Recreation Strategy

In September 2023, the Committee received for consideration the post consultation review final report on the Council's proposed Leisure, Culture and Outdoor Recreation Strategy prior to its formal consideration by the Cabinet.

The Committee raised a number of issues on the report including the potential to install batteries at Leisure Centres to store excess energy generated by solar power, service investment over the period of the strategy, income generation, promotion of the Welsh Language and improving the level of fishing provision.

Outcome:

The Committee endorsed the Strategy and recommended its adoption to Cabinet which was subsequently endorsed by Cabinet on the 13th November, 2023

2.6.6 Establishment of a Task and Finish Group on Adaptations

In November 2023, the Committee discussed the establishment of a Task and Finish Group on the operation of the Adaptations Service within the Housing Property and Strategic Projects Division

Outcome:

The Committee agreed to the establishment of the Task and Finish group comprising 6 members, politically balanced.

2.6.7 Housing Revenue Account and Housing Rent Setting 2024/25

In December 2023, the Committee considered the Housing Revenue Account and Housing Rent Setting for 2024/25, 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 and Housing Rent Setting proposals were adopted by Cabinet at its meeting on the 15th January 2024 and by Council on the 24th January 2024

2.6.8 Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024-27 Carmarthenshire's Housing Investment Programme

In December 2023, the Committee considered the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024-27 Carmarthenshire's Housing Investment Programme. The Plan covered the following 5 main themes:

- Theme 1 – Our Estate and Tenancy Management Offer.

- Theme 2 – Investing in Homes.
- Theme 3 – Promoting affordable warmth and decarbonising our housing stock.
- Theme 4 – Delivering more homes.
- Theme 5 – The Local Economy, Community Benefits and Procurement

The Committee raised a number of issues on the report which included the introduction of a new estate and tenancy management offer, a pilot ‘handyperson’ scheme, void reduction times and the installation of air source heat pumps and solar panels as part of the Council’s £616k funding from the Swansea Bay City Deal – Homes as Power Stations Fund

Outcome:

The Committee resolved to recommend the report to Cabinet and Council which was adopted by Cabinet at its meeting on the 15th January 2024 and by Council on the 24th January 2024

2.6.9 Tenant Incentive Scheme

In January 2024, the Committee received, as part of the pre-decision pre decision process on policy development, a report on whether the Council should introduce an incentive scheme for its tenants and to what form those incentives should take. The report detailed a range of incentive options for consideration and included:

- Encouraging tenants to downsize to a smaller property.
- Encouraging departing tenants to leave their property in a good condition and with no rent arrears.
- Encouraging the take up of direct debits.
- Recognising when tenants help improve our services.
- Encourage or reward tenants who keep to their Contract Conditions (tenancy).

Outcome:

The Committee endorsed the introduction of an incentive scheme. Further work was now being undertaken on the scheme mechanics and eligibility criteria etc and would be reported back to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for consideration on introducing a pilot scheme.

2.7 Chief Executive’s Department

2.7.1 Shared Prosperity Fund Update

In November 2023 the Committee, in accordance with a request made at its Forward Planning Session in April 2023, received an update report on the progress of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) in Carmarthenshire detailing:

- Governance and Local Decision Making
- Programme Management Team
- Implementation and Delivery
- Financial Claiming and Monitoring

The Committee noted that the Council’s allocation from the Fund was £38.6m and that since its launch on the 6th March 2023 a total of £19.68m Anchor and Strategic projects had been

approved together with a further £5.5m for the Adult Numeracy Programme Multiply bringing the current total to £25.18m

Outcome:

The Committee received the update report

2.7.2 Update on the Arfor 2 Programme

In November 2023, the Committee in accordance with a request made at its Forward Planning Session in April 2023, received an update report on the progress of the Arfor 2 Programme within Carmarthenshire that provided opportunities to support the economic regeneration of the County whilst contributing to the growth of the Welsh Language.

It was noted that the key strategic objectives of Arfor 2 were:-

- To create opportunities for young people and families (under 35 years old) to stay in or return to their indigenous communities – supporting them to succeed locally by engaging in enterprise or developing a career.
- To create enterprising communities within Welsh-speaking areas – by supporting commercial and community enterprises that aim to preserve and increase local wealth by taking advantage of the identity and unique qualities of their areas.
- To maximise the benefit of activity through collaboration– to ensure that good practice and lessons learnt are shared and that there is on-going monitoring to ensure continuous improvement.
- To Strengthen the identity of communities with a high density of Welsh speakers – by supporting the use and visibility of the Welsh language, encouraging a sense of place and local loyalty.

Outcome:

The Committee received the update report.

2.7.3 Pentre Awel Progress Report

In April 2024 the Committee received a progress report on the Pentre Awel Project and an assurance the project was being delivered to target and time scale.

The Committee raised a number of issues relevant to the sites development which included:

- The revenue implications - where it was assured that based on the original business plan and full occupancy, the costs associated with the site's operation would be met via rental and leasing costs.
- The budgetary implications for the Leisure Services Division in operating the New Leisure Centre. It was informed that in view of the centre's greater income generating potential the development would not adversely impact on the budget, provision for which had been factored into the budget.
- The creation of community ambassadors
- The provision of a publicly operated nursing home
- Bus provision to the site

- Road Order to reduce traffic speed along the main road adjacent to the Development.

Outcome:

The progress report was received.

2.8 Place and Infrastructure Department

2.8.1 Conservation Area Appraisals - Update

In June 2023 the Committee received an update report on the proposed extension of 10 Conservation Areas in Carmarthenshire, initially considered at its meeting in April 2023. It was reminded that at that meeting it had agreed to approach the Welsh Government on the issue of restricting the installation of solar panels on the front elevation of roofs in Conservations Areas. The update report however recommended that course of action be not pursued but that, as an alternative, the Place, Sustainability and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee be requested to look at the broader issue of energy efficiency and generation of energy in relation to the historic housing Stock of the County.

Outcome:

1. The Committee endorsed the proposal and resolved to request the Place, Sustainability and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee to look at the broader issue of energy efficiency and generation of energy in relation to the historic housing Stock of the County.
2. The Place, Sustainability and Climate Change Scrutiny Committee at its October 2023 meeting accepted the referral and requested a report providing data and information on the energy efficiency and generation of energy in relation to the historic housing stock of the County be added to the Committee's Forward Work Plan.

2.8.2 Revised Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan 2018-2033 Integrated Sustainability Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment (Including Addendums) – Further Consultation

In January 2024 the Committee considered a report on whether the Council should enter into a further consultation period on the Revised Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan 2018-2033, Integrated Sustainability Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment (Including Addendums), to reflect the ongoing procedural challenges in meeting the requirements of the habitat regulations arising from Natural Resources Wales' guidance on phosphate levels in protected riverine Special Areas of Conservation and water quality, the need to ensure the Plan's preparation and the consideration of its scope and content was procedurally compliant in legislative and regulatory terms.

Outcome:

The Committee approved the recommendation for further consultations to be undertaken. That was subsequently also adopted by Cabinet on the 29th January 2024

2.8.3 Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) Revised Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan 2018-2033

In January 2024 the Committee considered a report on whether the Council should enter into a further consultation period on the following Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Revised Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan 2018-2033

- Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation
- Welsh Language
- Open Space Requirements for Integrating Open Space within New Residential Developments

In endorsing the SPG's for consultation the Committee raised the issue of Member involvement and agreed that it would be beneficial for members to receive a seminar on Section 106 Agreements to assist them in understanding both their role, as Elected Members, and the legal parameters of those Agreements.

Outcome:

The Committee endorsed the further consultations to be approved by Council.
Arrangements are to be made for the Seminar which, at the date of writing, had yet to be finalised.

3 Other Scrutiny Activity

3.1 Task & Finish

The purpose of a Task & Finish Group is to contribute to the development of new policy or to undertake a piece of investigative scrutiny work. Such groups have been instrumental in strengthening the policy development / investigative roles of scrutiny during the past few years.

During the municipal year, as part of its investigative role, the Committee undertook a Task and Finish Group to review the operation of the Adaptations Service within the Housing Property and Strategic Projects Division

The aims and scope of the Task & Finish Review were to:

- Review the operation of the Adaptations Service
- Identify means of examining the current backlog of work and processes with a view to improving service delivery for the public and contract holders (tenants)
- Formulate recommendations for consideration by the Cabinet.

The membership of the Task & Finish Group comprised 6 elected members appointed to reflect the political balance of the Council as a whole, as far as possible:-

Plaid Cymru:	Councillors K. Howells, B. Jones and R. Sparkes
Independent Group:	Councillor H. Shepardson
Labour Group:	Councillors D. Cundy and M. Palfreman

The Group met on 5 occasions between December 2023 and May 2024 which culminated in the formation of two recommendations.

The Group's final report is to be presented to the Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee in May prior to submission to the Cabinet for consideration in the summer of 2024

3.2 Site Visits

The Committee undertook a number of Site Visits during 2023 – 2024 to familiarise itself with areas of responsibility falling within its remit i.e:

- 23rd June 2023 – Abergwili Museum, Carmarthen Archives, Pendine attractor Project and Pendine Outdoor Education Centre
- 14th July 2023 – Pembrey Country Park, Burry Port Harbour and Park Howard, Llanelli
- 2nd February 2024 – Town centres at Ammanford, Carmarthen and Llanelli
- 16th April 2024 – Pentre Awel Development, Llanelli

Outcome:

The Committee gained first hand knowledge of the subject areas within its remit which would prove advantageous in any future discussions/ reports on those areas.

3.3 Development Sessions

During the 2023/24 municipal year, Committee Members were invited to the following development sessions/seminars facilitated by the Authority:

- 21st June – Housing Repairs
- 7th August – Hywel Dda University Health Board – Consultation on Urgent and Emergency Children and Young People Services at Withybush and Glangwili Hospitals
- 13th September – Tackling Poverty Support
- 8th November – Treasury Management
- 22nd November – I.T. Digital Strategy and Artificial Intelligence
- 30th November – Geodiscoverer Training
- 6th December – Place and Infrastructure – Service Updates
- 7th December – Geodiscoverer Training
- 8th December – Digital Transformation
- 9th January 2024 – Artificial Intelligence and Digital Strategy
- January – Various Budget Consultations
- 23rd/26th February / 7th March – Introduction to Anti-racism Training
- 6th March – Flooding Responsibility
- 8th May – Corporate Safeguarding

In addition to the above Corporate Development sessions / seminars, the Committee also held the following bespoke sessions:

- 10th October – Redevelopment of the Tyisha Ward in Llanelli – This session involved a powerpoint presentation on the Transforming Places Project for the Tyisha Ward covering the following main headline points:

- Background to the Project
 - The Team undertaking the project.
 - Steering Groups and Workshops
 - Housing and Regeneration
 - Environment and Transport
 - Crime and Disorder
 - Children, Family and Community
 - Looking Ahead
- 2nd February 2024 – Alternative Town Centre Uses . The Committee, as part of the pre-scrutiny approach to policy development, undertook site visits to the three main town centres within the County at Ammanford, Carmarthen and Llanelli to gain an insight into the issues facing the centres prior to considering a report on Alternative Town Centre Uses at its May 2024 meeting
 - 9th February 2024 – New Social Housing Allocation Policy to replace the existing emergency temporary policy – This session was part of the pre-scrutiny approach to policy development with the committee being consulted on the Council’s emerging Social Housing Allocation Policy as a follow up to the Committee’s Task and Finish Group’s development of the Emergency Allocation Policy adopted by Cabinet in April 2023. It noted that following a formal 12 week consultation process, to commence in April 2024, a draft policy would be submitted to its July meeting prior to approval by Cabinet and Council in September and October 2024 for full implementation in December 2024

4. Impact

4.1 How has Scrutiny Made a Difference This Year?

The majority of decisions made by the Authority are made by the Cabinet. Scrutiny offers the other 65 non-executive Councillors an opportunity to influence those decisions and act as a “critical friend”. Pre-decision Scrutiny is particularly influential in this regard as it provides Scrutiny Committees with the opportunity to consider and comment upon policies and emerging issues before they are considered by Cabinet. Scrutiny also assists in ensuring that Council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging effective partnership working with external bodies.

Scrutiny plays a key role in improving the services used by the people and children of Carmarthenshire. The scrutiny function is also useful in ensuring that Council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging effective partnership working with external bodies. The involvement of local residents, community organisations and partners is an important part of the scrutiny process and Councillors are committed to responding to the views and concerns of residents.

Pre-decision Scrutiny affords all Scrutiny Committees the opportunity of providing input before the reports are considered by Cabinet and this is the voice of the people. During the 2023/24 municipal year, the Communities, Homes and Regeneration has made a positive impact in a number of ways, including:

- The Development of an Emergency Social Housing Allocations Policy
- The Development of the Outdoor Leisure and Recreation Strategy
- By undertaking its gatekeeping role in monitoring the work of the Cabinet

5. Public Engagement

The Scrutiny function provides the opportunity for public participation in the Authority's activities whereby members of the public can request items to be placed on the Committee's meeting agenda. Carmarthenshire residents, or those who own a business or are employed within the county are also permitted to ask questions at meetings of the Scrutiny Committee.

Whilst the Committee did not receive any suggestions of possible topics from members of the public during 2023/24, the Committee's Forward Work Plan included a range of topics which required public consultation/participation.

In order to promote public awareness of Scrutiny Committees and the ability of the public to put forward topics for discussion, the Forward Work Plans of the Authority's Scrutiny Committees and details of how the public can become involved, are published on the Authority's website:-

<https://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/committees-meetings/scrutiny/#.Xp7Am6aQxMs>

During the municipal year, the Authority's Communications division provided digital marketing support to the Scrutiny function and proactively promoted details of forthcoming items which may be of interest to the public in an attempt to raise public awareness and participation. The public are invited, via a number of different avenues, to get involved in the Scrutiny process and to highlight any issues of concern.

6. Challenges

The Departments falling within the Communities, Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committees remit (Communities, Chief Executives and Place and Sustainability) continued to be under pressure throughout the municipal year as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and budgetary pressures. Nevertheless, the departments have adapted and developed innovative solutions during unprecedented circumstances to continue to provide services to the residents of Carmarthenshire. The Committee has continued to be constructive in its role in scrutinising performance which has facilitated the departments and positively contributed to policies and decisions. It has been a balancing act for the Committee in undertaking its scrutiny duty without impacting on the resourcing of front-line services.

7. Future Work

The Committee has made significant progress during the municipal year and will continue to concentrate on topics where members' input will result in positive outcomes to drive forward service improvement. To ensure that the best use is being made of meeting time, the Committee is keen to continue implementing the principles of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in order to achieve a streamlined and focused scrutiny process.

The work of the Committee during the 2024/25 municipal year was considered at a Forward Work Planning Session on the 16th April and will be regularly reviewed as part of the monitoring of the Forward

Work Plan during the course of the year.

In order to enhance the Authority's Scrutiny function, members will continue to attend development sessions, seek officers' advice where appropriate and make full use of informal pre-meeting discussion.

8. Support for the Scrutiny Function

Support for Carmarthenshire County Council's Scrutiny function is provided by the Democratic Services Unit, based within the Administration and Law Division of the Chief Executive's Department. Support for the scrutiny function includes:-

- formulating and despatching agendas for Scrutiny Committee meetings in accordance with the Forward Work Plans;
- 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 any issues arising from those meetings are actioned;
- giving support and advice in relation to the functions of the Council's Scrutiny Committees to members of the Council and its officers;
- managing the strategic development of Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire by engaging in national and regional Scrutiny networks and initiatives, supporting the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum and meetings of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny with the Cabinet;
- advising and supporting the implementation of the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021, as and when guidance is published;
- managing the co-ordination and development of the Scrutiny Committees' Forward Work Plans 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 Plans, Task & Finish reports and Annual Reports, please 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.

9. Attendance

Attendance by members of the Communities Homes and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee during the 2023/24 municipal year is shown in the table below. A total of seven meetings were held during the 2023/24 municipal year.

Scrutiny Committee Member	No. of meetings attended	%
Cllr D. Cundy	7	100
Cllr. A. Davies	7	100
Cllr. B. Davies	2	29
Cllr. H. Davies	7	100
Cllr. T. Davies	7	100
Cllr R. Evans	5	71
Cllr. K. Howell	6	86
Cllr. B. Jones	7	100
Cllr. D. Owen	5	71
Cllr. M. Palfreman	6	86
Cllr. H. Shepardson	6	86
Cllr. R. Sparks	5	71
Cllr. M. Thomas	5	71
Substitutes	No. of meetings attended	
Cllr. J. Lewis	1	
Cllr K. Broom	3	
Cllr L. Davies	1	
Cllr A. Evans	1	
Cabinet Member	No. of meetings attended	
Cllr. L.D. Evans	7	
Cllr. A. Davies	4	
Cllr. G. John (Up to August 2023)	0	
Cllr A. Lenny	5	
Cllr H.A.L. Evans (From September 2023)	4	
Cllr E. Thomas	1	