

Adroddiad Blynyddol y Cyngor 2024/25

Crynodeb Gweithredol

The Council's Annual Report 2024/25

Executive Summary



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Introduction from the Leader

I am pleased to present Carmarthenshire County Council's Annual Report for 2024/25, a year that has tested our resilience and adaptability. Across the County, our communities, staff, partners and businesses have worked together to overcome significant challenges, while delivering the best support we can for each one of the 188,000 residents who call Carmarthenshire home.

As ever, the context in which we operate remains complex. Our County continues to grow and change, and as an organisation we work to keep pace with that. We continue to face the harsh reality of over a decade of insufficient public sector funding, which has placed unprecedented pressure on our ability to deliver the essential services our residents rely on. The cost-of-living crisis, a fluctuating economy, and demographic shifts have all added complexity to that increasing demand.

Despite these pressures, the achievements of the past year demonstrate the power of strategic vision, partnership, and innovation. Our commitment to our four well-being objectives has guided every action: giving children the best possible start in life, enabling residents to live and age well, fostering prosperous and resilient communities, and further modernising as a resilient, efficient Council.

In education and early years, we have continued to champion inclusivity, raising standards across our schools and expanding childcare provision, ensuring that every child, regardless of background, can access opportunity.

Our transformation programme in Children and Families Services has delivered significant investment, driving improvements despite an increase in demand. Innovative health and leisure programmes have engaged thousands of people, supporting physical and mental well-being.

For our wider community, addressing poverty and supporting those facing hardship has been a key priority. Through the efforts of our Hwb advisors and Hwb Bach y Wlad service, eligible residents have been supported to claim over £7.5 million in benefits. We have brought empty homes back into use, sustained new tenancies, and made progress in affordable housing, drawing down over £17 million in Social Housing Grants and adding 361 new homes to our stock.

Our robust approach to health and social care has seen results; reducing hospital admissions and enabling individuals to return home faster with the right support in place. The Home First pathway and increased investment in preventative services are key examples of effective integration and early intervention, bringing tangible improvements to the lives of vulnerable residents.

Carmarthenshire's economic recovery and growth have been enabled through securing over £58 million in funding, supporting over 2,300 businesses, and creating or safeguarding thousands of jobs. Strategic projects such as Pentre Awel continue at pace, providing state of the art facilities and innovative opportunities to our communities.

At the same time, our commitment to decarbonisation and biodiversity is unwavering, with a 37% reduction in targeted carbon emissions since our baseline year, and over half of Council homes now meeting higher energy performance standards.



We recognise too the importance of Welsh language and culture to our identity and have responded decisively to the decline in Welsh speakers by implementing new strategies and action plans, supporting staff learning, and championing vibrant arts initiatives.

Throughout, we have maintained a focus on governance, equality, and engagement, listening to our residents and staff, and embedding the sustainable development principle at the heart of everything that we do. The feedback that you provide through the annual Residents Survey is invaluable to us as we prioritise our work and commitments going forward. Modernisation and transformation have accelerated through digital transformation, automation, and smarter ways of working, delivering both efficiencies and improved experiences for those we serve.

I extend my thanks to all who have contributed to these achievements, our dedicated workforce, our partners, and most importantly, the people of Carmarthenshire. Despite facing complex challenges, we have shown that by working as one team, rooted in our core values, we can deliver for our communities, today and for future generations.

As we look to the year ahead, we do so with renewed determination to meet challenges head-on, to innovate, and to ensure Carmarthenshire remains a place where every individual can thrive.

Cllr Darren Price

**Leader of Carmarthenshire County
Council**

Introduction

Carmarthenshire County Council (CCC) is a large and complex organisation, with approximately 8,400 employees and a budget of over £900 million (revenue and capital). We serve around 188,000 residents. Like councils across Wales, we continue to face sustained financial pressures which affect how we plan and deliver services, while maintaining a focus on long-term outcomes for people and communities.

The full annual report provides an overview of the progress made during 2024/25 against the Council's four well-being objectives, designed to address Carmarthenshire's most pressing challenges and maximise our contribution to the **seven national well-being goals**. It is intended to help residents, service users, and stakeholders understand how we are performing. It supports our statutory reporting and self-assessment duties, including those arising from the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021, the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015, and the Social Partnership Duty in the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023.

During 2024/25, our work was guided by four well-being objectives:

1. **Enabling our children and young people to have the best possible start in life (Start Well)**
2. **Enabling our residents to live and age well (Live and Age Well)**
3. **Enabling our communities and environment to be healthy, safe, and prosperous (Prosperous Communities)**
4. **To further modernise and develop as a resilient and efficient Council (Our Council)**

These objectives are supported by outcomes which help us track progress and guide activity across the organisation. Further detail is set out in our **Corporate Strategy 2022–2027**, which was developed following a needs assessment and consultation process.

How we measure progress and learn

We assess progress using a broad range of evidence, including our self-assessment, service and corporate performance information, feedback and consultation findings, and regulatory reports. We also consider trends over time and how Carmarthenshire compares with other local authorities in Wales. To support this, we use a suite of indicators and measures drawn from both population-level information and Council-controlled performance measures, so that we can consider the evidence in the round.

Our well-being objectives provide the strategic framework for self-assessment—helping us understand how our functions, resources, governance and risk management arrangements contribute to outcomes, and what we need to improve. Individual service performance is managed through Divisional Business Plans and our **Performance Management Framework**, based on a Plan/Do/Review cycle.

Key principles that underpin our approach

Our vision is: 'Developing Carmarthenshire Together: One Council, One Vision, One Voice.' Our core values and behaviours shape how we work and make decisions, including working as one team, focusing on customers, listening to improve, striving for excellence, acting with integrity and taking personal responsibility.

Governance is central to how we safeguard public money, comply with legal and professional standards, and secure continuous improvement. Our approach is set out in the **Governance Framework**, supported by our Annual Governance Statement within the **Statement of Accounts**.

We are committed to fairness and equity in everything we do—as an employer, a service provider and a community leader. Our commitments are set out in the **Strategic Equality Plan**, which focuses on achieving measurable equality outcomes and ensuring that everyone can access services and is treated fairly. Our equality objectives for 2024–2028 are:

- Being an employer of choice.
- Enabling our residents to live and age well.
- Embedding Community Cohesion in our organisation and our community.
- Protecting and strengthening equality and human rights.

Well-being Objective 1

Enabling our children and young people to have the best possible start in life (Start Well)

Overview of progress

The Council believes that every child deserves the best start in life regardless of their background. Ensuring that children have a strong early foundation sets them on a path which limits the effects of inequality across health and well-being outcomes, educational achievement, and economic status. For the Council, this is rooted in providing the right support to children and families when and where they need it, focussing on prevention and early intervention, providing access to enriching health and wellbeing initiatives, and an education system which supports children to be the best that they can be.

Over the last year, the Council has continued its efforts to address some significant challenges. Whilst the level of children in poverty has decreased in the County, it is thought that around 30% are still living in poverty. This is not an issue exclusive to Carmarthenshire, and we are committed to doing everything we can to alleviate the effects of poverty for our residents as noted under well-being objective 2. Nutritious free school meals provision remains a priority with 25,000 meals provided every day in Carmarthenshire's schools. This provision also plays an important role in ensuring that children maintain a healthy and balanced diet. In time, this should contribute positively to the level of childhood obesity in the County, which currently sits at 30% for 4 to 5-year-olds. The raft of sport and leisure initiatives, such as 'Actif Anywhere for Schools' and the 'Splash Phase' swimming programme, have significantly increased physical activity engagement among children. Particularly with those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Children and Families Services are under pressure because of high demand particularly due to the complexity of that demand and workforce shortages. In recognition of this, the Council has made significant investments, including a transformation programme with a focus on long-term sustainability for the service. Carmarthenshire continues to have the lowest number of children looked after^[1] compared to other Local Authorities in Wales, and there were slightly less children in foster placements at the end of year compared with the previous year. However, there continues to be a shortage of foster carers both locally and nationally which impacts placement stability. The Council is proactively addressing this through targeted recruitment campaigns. Good progress has been made within Children's Homes, and we have committed to ensuring that all residential care is provided within the County by 2026. Early intervention and preventative services continue to provide high quality support that achieves good outcomes for families, despite the challenges around rising demand and complexity of need.

The childcare offer across the County has increased, and phase 2 of the Flying Start Childcare expansion has been fully rolled out. Phase 3 will be rolled out during 2025/26.

^[1] Per 10,000 of the population

Despite facing funding challenges and the ongoing effects of the pandemic, good progress has been made within Education. Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reforms have been rolled out, broadening specialist support with a positive Estyn inspection follow-up demonstrating the progress achieved. Furthermore, school infrastructure has seen developments through the Modernising Education Programme, including new facilities for Welsh-medium provision and ALN education. Curriculum development in line with the Curriculum for Wales has also remained a priority, promoting inclusive, community-rooted learning with an emphasis on literacy, numeracy, and digital skills.

School attendance remains a concern, with the County reporting the lowest attendance levels in Wales. The County also has a comparably higher level of Electively Home Educated learners who require tailored support. We are proactively addressing these challenges through targeted marketing and support.

Well-being Objective 2

Enabling our residents to live and age well (Live and Age Well)

Overview of progress

Carmarthenshire's demographic pattern is changing positively. People are living longer due to advancements in healthcare and general improvements in living standards. With that in mind, the Council is committed to supporting residents to live and age well.

Whilst gross weekly income continues to improve, approximately 30% of households are thought to be living in poverty, and the rising cost of living continues to be a concern for many of our residents. In response, the work of the Tackling Poverty Advisory Group continues at pace with our Tackling Poverty Plan guiding activity. Significant efforts have been made to ensure that residents are able to access the support they are entitled to through our Hwbs and the Hwb Fach y Wlad service.

Increasing the availability of good quality, affordable homes, as well as sustaining continued investment in existing homes, is a priority for the Council. Access to fit for purpose housing promotes health and well-being and forms the foundation of improved living standards. A focus on acquiring private sector properties, repurposing empty homes, and developing new housing has seen 361 additional homes added to stock over the last year. Efforts to decarbonise existing housing stock has advanced well, which reduces carbon emissions and fuel poverty.

Healthy life expectancy in the County has seen a decrease for both males (59.2 years) and females (57.9 years). This will result in increased demand for services in the future. In recognition of this, we continue with our efforts in terms of early intervention and prevention, which has seen a significant reduction in hospital admissions, improved health outcomes, and shorter hospital stays. This enables individuals to return home sooner with the right support in place. A key priority is reducing reliance on residential care, with a strong focus on expanding supported living options that promote independence.

A wealth of health and well-being initiatives are available to our residents, focussing on increasing accessibility and ensuring that our offer meets the varied needs of service users. Health and well-being initiatives continue to be delivered in innovative ways to ensure that everyone can access preventative initiatives. The number of Carmarthenshire residents with two or more healthy lifestyle behaviours continues on an upward trajectory. These behaviours significantly reduce the risk of chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers, and increase life expectancy for individuals; in turn, this should reduce demand on our health and social care systems.

In recognition that mental health is an increasing concern and priority for all of us, the mental health well-being service provides vital early intervention and prevention support. Mental health support is also considered through sport and well-being initiatives, given the vital role that being active plays in maintaining and improving mental health.

Well-being Objective 3

Enabling our communities and environment to be healthy, safe, and prosperous (Prosperous Communities)

Overview of progress

A stable, well-functioning economy forms the basis for growth, prosperous communities, and improved living standards, where all can take advantage of opportunity. Varied and secure employment opportunities, thriving town centres and businesses, and a skilled labour market are key to securing a healthy economy; and we are committed to driving this forward through a range of interventions. Carmarthenshire's economy has recovered well over recent years, but it is not immune to outward pressures and challenges. Disposable household income remains below national averages and economic inactivity rates remain above average.

A significant amount of inward investment and external funding has been secured to support community projects, businesses, job creation, and town centre regeneration. Several strategic projects and public realm projects are either underway or have been completed which will enhance town centres and surrounding areas for the benefit of local communities. Work at Pentre Awel continues at pace with benefits for surrounding areas already being realised through communities.

Our two employability programmes have continued to support those furthest away from the labour market to access employment, volunteering opportunities, or undertake training. These opportunities are designed to increase confidence and arm people with the skills to access employment which will improve their prospects.

In recognition that the County's businesses are the very foundation of our economy, work continues to offer support through a range of interventions, with a focus on improving access to commercial space, providing networking opportunities, signposting to available funding opportunities, and supporting businesses to take advantage of local supply chains through procurement opportunities.

Carmarthenshire's natural environment is one of its greatest assets. The Council declared its commitment to addressing the climate and nature emergencies and will continue working towards becoming a Net Zero Carbon Local Authority by 2030, addressing the issues that are driving a decline in our biodiversity and support nature recovery. We have seen a 37% decrease in the carbon emissions targeted within the Net Zero Plan. Three significant strategies have been developed to support biodiversity. We have also implemented several interventions to mitigate the effects of flooding.

We have seen good progress within Waste Services, with a continued increase in reuse and recycling tonnage performance, a reduction in waste sent to landfill, and a reduction in waste per person not recycled. This is substantiated by the Waste Service receiving the highest satisfaction levels within the residents' survey for 2024.

Our County is a strategic stronghold for the Welsh language, with almost 40% of residents being Welsh speakers. Our Welsh speaking communities are resilient, but there has been a decline in the number of Welsh speakers over recent years. The Council has led on the development of action plans to support making Welsh the norm in areas like encouraging use with pre-school age children, increasing the proportion of families who successfully transmit the language at home and increasing the number of residents who learn Welsh.

Crime levels in Carmarthenshire are comparably low. Most residents agree that they feel safe in their community, but there is some disparity across the County. Effective partnership working has continued over the year, with a focus on community cohesion and targeted community work.

The Council maintains a vast highway network of over 3,500km across semi-urban and rural areas. Reductions in funding, supply chain pressures, rising public expectation, and deteriorating highways creates a pressured operating environment for the service. This is substantiated by the Highways and Transport service area receiving the lowest satisfaction levels within the Residents Survey for 2024. Consequently, we prioritise maintaining the network, especially during Winter months, to ensure uninterrupted access to essential services that safeguards strategic connectivity. Further work has been completed around major strategic challenges such as the national 20mph campaign, development of regional transport planning, and net zero aspirations.

The number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads continues an upward trajectory and the Council is committed to doing everything it can to make our roads safer through partnership working, raising awareness, and education and training opportunities to improve road users’ skills and behaviours.

The sport, leisure, and tourism offer within the County continues to perform well with overnight and day visitors contributing £683m to the local economy, supporting 6,649 full time jobs. These sectors are strategically important for the County and take advantage of our natural landscape and strong cultural and heritage offer. More importantly, they support and promote our residents and visitors to lead active, healthy, and enriched lives.



Well-being Objective 4

Our Council:

To further modernise and develop as a resilient and efficient Council

Overview of progress

Over the past year, the Council has made substantial progress in modernising its operations and enhancing resilience and efficiency:

- The Transformation Programme has delivered significant cost savings, including over £200,000 from fleet reviews and £2.5 million through improved debt recovery.
- Hybrid working has been successfully embedded, with the sale of Parc Dewi Sant and the use of workspace management tools supporting property rationalisation.
- Technological investments have streamlined operations, with automation and robotics reducing manual workloads and saving over £61,000 through hybrid mail alone.
- In relation to People Management, a new Recruitment and Retention Strategy is in development, and the Council was recognised as 'Employer of the Year' for its support of Welsh language learning.
- Staff engagement remains strong, with improved survey scores indicating pride and advocacy for the Council as an employer.
- The first year of our Digital Strategy has delivered transformative change across the organisation. We've enhanced infrastructure, empowered our workforce, improved service delivery, and embedded cybersecurity at the core of our operations. With strong foundations in place, we are well-positioned to continue delivering smarter, safer, and more connected public services in the years ahead.
- We have also advanced its data-driven decision-making capabilities and invested in digital skills development.