

# Adroddiad Blynyddol y Cyngor 2023/24

Gorffennaf 2024

# The Council's Annual Report 2023/24

July 2024



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## Introduction from the Leader

It's the time of year again where we reflect on our progress over the last year through our Council Annual Report. As I write this introduction, I consider where we were as an organisation this time last year and where we are now. We have continued to deliver services to the approximately 188,000 people that call Carmarthenshire home, improving things where we've been able to and delivering some innovative projects, however, significant challenges continue to influence the way that we work.



As is the case for all Welsh councils we find ourselves in an extremely challenging financial position. We now have less money to deliver services at a time where demand for our help and support is increasing. This is concerning and frustrating in equal measure but does present an opportunity for us to think and do things differently. Our Transformation programme to ensure our services are as efficient and effective as possible is working right across the Council to support this, and is underpinned by the guiding principle to provide the best possible services to our residents and service users.

Our consultation activity with residents tells us that the cost-of-living crisis is still a challenge, which is why our activity to support in any way we can continues. Our 'Hwb Bach y Wlad' service offers cost of living support and guidance to residents living in the most rural parts of the County. This is complemented by the support offered by Hwb advisors in the three main town centres. It's been encouraging to hear the individual stories of those we've helped.

Developments at Pentre Awel in Llanelli have continued at pace, with wider benefits to the community now being realised. Local businesses have benefitted from contracts, jobs have been created and training programmes for apprentices, graduates and trainees have been supported. This one-of-a-kind project promises to be transformational for the County and I look forward to seeing how it progresses over the coming year.

The economic regeneration of the County continues with re-developments including the YMCA building in Llanelli, Llandeilo Market Hall and Parc Gelli Werdd in Cross Hands being of note. These spaces offer a mix of residential, office and retail space which support the local area through attracting investment, supporting businesses and creating jobs.

An external inspection of our Education Services commended our clear vision and strong leadership which has a robust impact on improving education provision and learner outcomes. An identified culture of self-evaluation shows our commitment to continuously reviewing the service to ensure children and young people have the best start in life. Attendance has improved, free school meals are provided to all relevant age groups and teachers and pupils continue to co-design a learning curriculum that is based on the Curriculum for Wales. We also fully recognise the financial pressures facing our schools and will continue to work with school leaders to address these on-going challenges.

Access to Healthcare Services is a priority for our residents and whilst much of this is outside the Council's remit we have made strides in developing preventative services. Investment in mental health support services has enabled us to establish a well-being pathway across the County which provides an inclusive and preventative approach with further work on preventative initiatives being developed in collaboration with partners.

We have developed a range of actions to tackle the climate and nature emergencies and are making progress where we can, but also recognise that there are significant challenges to address. We remain fully committed to making progress and look forward to continue working in collaboration with our local and national partners including Welsh Government on this agenda.

As has been the case in past years, despite the challenges, we continue to make good progress in a number of areas and to be as innovative and resilient as possible in the face of significant pressures and demands. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our staff, elected members, partner organisations and a wide range of stakeholders for their continued support and effort as we attempt to make further progress to improve the lives of the people that we serve.

**Cllr Darren Price**

**Leader of Carmarthenshire County Council**

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# Introduction

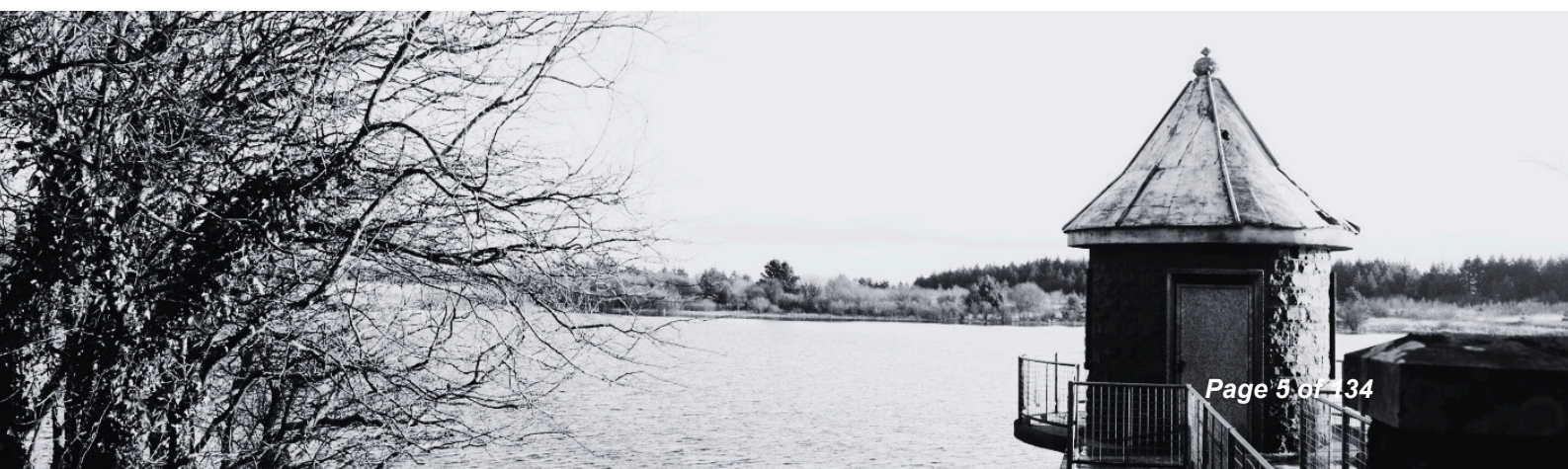
Carmarthenshire County Council (CCC) is a large, complex organisation with a workforce of approximately 8,350 employees and a budget for 2024/25 of over £900 million. In the face of unprecedented pressure due to the inadequate funding of public services year on year for over a decade, we continue to face unprecedented pressure in the delivery of services to the approximately 188,000 people who call Carmarthenshire home. In doing this we strive to make progress against our four well-being objectives.

The purpose of this annual report is to provide an overview of the progress we've made during 2023/2024 against these well-being objectives, which are:

- 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 designed to address the most pressing challenges for the County whilst maximising our contribution to the seven national well-being goals. Each objective has a set of outcomes which support us to measure our progress and guide our activity as an organisation. These will be referred to throughout this report however, our Corporate Strategy for 2022-2027 provides a detailed overview. They were developed in 2022/2023 following an extensive needs assessment and period of consultation.

Whilst the primary purpose of this report is to provide residents, service users and key stakeholders with a good understanding of how we've been performing it also satisfies the statutory duty placed on us through the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021 and the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015, as indicated overleaf:



## Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015

## Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021

Requirement	How we meet our statutory obligations		Requirement
Demonstrate the extent to which our well-being objectives are contributing to the achievement of the well-being goals	This will be outlined in the Annual Report for each Well-being Objective and outlined in Appendix	a) Service Divisions complete an Annual self-assessment.	<p>The Act requires each council in Wales to keep under review, through self-assessment, the extent to which it is meeting the 3 'performance requirements', that is the extent to which:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is exercising its functions effectively.</li> <li>2. It is using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively.</li> <li>3. Its governance is effective for securing the above.</li> <li>4. We must consult on the 'Performance requirements</li> </ol> <p>Conclusions as to the extent to which the performance requirements were met during that financial year</p>
Take all reasonable steps to meet our well-being objectives	Annual report updates are provided under the outcomes detailed for each WBO. Progress is also monitored against the population indicators and performance measures identified for each WBO.	b) Identified areas for improvement are addressed by an Action Plan	
Demonstrate well-being objectives are consistent with the sustainable development principle	We include a Case Study within each Well-being Objective	c) We consult with residents, business, staff, and Trade Unions on the extent to which we meet the requirements.	
		d) Common themes are identified and an overall self - assessment is drawn together which is included in the Annual Report	
	Our Annual Governance Statement supports this assessment		
	Each Well-being Objective concludes with an Action Plan		Any actions to be taken, or that have already been taken, to increase the extent to which performance requirements will be met

## Annual Report

## Measuring Progress & Self-Assessment

Our well-being objectives are firmly rooted in a principle which promotes a focus on all public bodies working together to progress outcomes that improves the quality of life of citizens and communities, both now and in the future.

To effectively measure our progress against achieving our objectives we look at a range of data and evidence including the findings of our self-assessment and the findings of regulatory reports to build as comprehensive a picture as possible of our progress both in terms of trends over time and in relation to how we compare with other local authorities in Wales.

For us to do this effectively we have developed a data suite of indicators and measures, which, when considered together cover a wide range of different sources allowing us to reflect on the evidence available to us in the round. The range of data covers the following and will be referred to throughout this report and can be viewed in full in Appendix 5:

### Population Indicators

In the main include publicly available data that have been identified to develop an understanding of trends and Carmarthenshire's position relative to the other local authorities in Wales. Sources include (but are not limited to): [National Survey for Wales](#), Annual Population Survey, Public Health Wales, Welsh Government, Department for Work and Pensions.

### Performance Measures

Inclusive of statutory returns, internal Council measures and primary intelligence in the form of consultation findings that we utilise to measure and monitor performance on a regular basis. These are the direct responsibility of the Council. Our well-being objectives also frame our approach to self-assessment. This approach provides the context within which we exercise our functions, use resources, and ensure governance is effective:

- It ensures that our self-assessment is strategic, focusing on the organisation, rather than individual services and on the extent to which the Council is achieving its well-being objectives and intended outcomes.
- It allows us to reflect at a strategic level on how all our functions (including corporate activities) are contributing to the achievement of our well-being objectives, how we are operating and what action we need to take to improve further and continue to provide effective services now and for the long-term.
- Using well-being objectives as the overarching framework encourages a more holistic view of Council performance, recognising that many services 'join-up' and contribute to one or more well-being objective. We continue to manage individual service performance via Divisional Business Plans. This forms an important part of the Council's approach to performance management as detailed in our [Performance Management Framework](#) which is based on a Plan/Do/Review cycle.

# Key Principles

## Core Values and Behaviours

The Council's vision underpins everything that we do as an organisation.

### **'Developing Carmarthenshire Together: One Council, One Vision, One Voice.'**

When considered together, the vision and our core values and behaviours help us to make the right decision and shape how we work together to deliver services and do the best job that we can.

Our six core values form the overarching principles which frame our twenty behaviours, these behaviours describe the individual actions and approaches for how we work and treat others. Our values are as follows but can be viewed in full along with our behaviours [here](#);

- Working as one team,
- Focus on customers,
- Listen to improve,
- Strive for excellence,
- Act with integrity,
- Take personal responsibility.

## Governance

As a Council we are responsible for ensuring that our business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards. We must also ensure that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently, and effectively and to secure continuous improvement in this regard.

We are responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the Governance of our affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of our functions, including having appropriate arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council sees Corporate Governance as “doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.” The [Governance Framework](#) comprises the systems, processes, cultures, and values by which we are directed and controlled and also the way it accounts to, engages with, and leads the Community. It enables us to monitor the achievement of our strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

Our Annual Governance Statement as included in our [Statement of Accounts](#) details how we have complies with the various elements of our Governance Framework.

## Equality and Diversity

The Council is committed to ensuring that we are fair and equitable to all in everything that we do. Our Strategic Equality Plan sets out the principles of our commitment to equality and diversity and outlines how we intend to fulfil our responsibilities as an employer, a service provider and as a community leader.

As a public body we need to ensure that everybody has equal access to our services and is treated fairly by our services. The fundamental principles of human rights also need to be at the core of service delivery. We are required to focus on achieving measurable equality outcomes through specific improvements in policies and the way our services and functions are delivered.

We are committed to treating our staff, and the people of Carmarthenshire, fairly. We will make sure that we do not discriminate against people because of their age, disability, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, belief or non-belief, social class, gender, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, responsibility for dependents or for any other unfair reason.

We are committed to ensuring the delivery of excellent public services to everyone living, working, studying, and visiting Carmarthenshire. This is underpinned by our four equality objectives for 2024-2028:

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





## The Council

At the local elections in 2022 Carmarthenshire's residents returned 75 county councillors representing our 51 wards. The Council's Cabinet consists of 10 of these Councillors, which includes the Council's Leader, and they have responsibility for ensuring progress against our well-being objectives. Each Cabinet member has a portfolio for which they're responsible, as follows:



**Cllr Darren Price**

Council Leader



**Cllr Linda Evans**

Deputy Leader and Cabinet  
Member for Homes



**Cllr Philip Hughes**

Cabinet Member for  
Organisation and  
Workforce



**Cllr Alun Lenny**

Cabinet Member for  
Resources



**Cllr Ann Davies**

Cabinet Member for  
Rural Affairs and  
Planning Policy



**Cllr Aled Vaughan Owen**

Cabinet Member for Climate  
Change, Decarbonisation  
and Sustainability



**Cllr Edward Thomas**

Cabinet Member for Transport,  
Waste and Infrastructure



**Cllr Hazel Evans**

Cabinet Member for  
Regeneration, Leisure,  
Culture and Tourism



**Cllr Glynog Davies**

Cabinet Member for Education  
and Welsh Language



**Cllr Jane Tremlett**

Cabinet Member for Health  
and Social Services

# About the Council - Key Statistics



**75**  
County Councillors  
representing  
**51**  
community wards



Just over  
**8,300**  
employees  
Split over  
**5**  
departments



Budget of over  
**£900m**  
(revenue and capital)



Keeping our website updated (Over  
**4.5 million**  
user sessions by the public on our  
website per annum)



Taking over  
**175,000**  
calls & responding to over  
**40,000**  
electronic enquiries annually in our  
contact centre



Deal with over  
**310,000**  
invoices a year



Determine an average of  
**1,400**  
Planning Applications  
a year



Responsible for the  
highway network in  
Carmarthenshire of  
**3,500 km**



over  
**78,000**  
tonnes of municipal  
waste collected during  
the year



We manage just over

**9,300**

Council houses



Over

**3,500**

clients supported with  
a Social Care Service



We have

**18**

libraries in the County  
(including mobile and  
community run)



We run

**6**

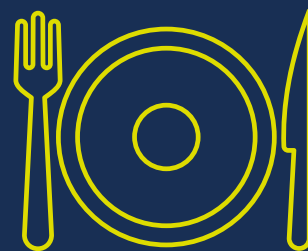
leisure centres in the  
County



Helping as many as possible of our

**8,000**

businesses in the County



**18,000**

school meals a day



Our registrars on average annually  
record around

**2,500** Deaths,

**2,500** Births

and over

**700**

Marriages and Civil Partnerships



**1** nursery school,

**94** primary schools,

**12** secondary schools,

**1** special school and

**1** pupil referral unit

which provide education for over

**27,000**

pupils



# Well-being Objective 1

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

### Overview of Progress

Supporting our children and young people to have the best possible start in life provides a strong foundation on which to limit inequalities. What happens in these early years has a long-term effect on health and well-being outcomes, educational achievement, and economic status. With 34.6% of Carmarthenshire's children thought to be living in poverty, it is crucial that every child has access to the same the opportunities regardless of their background and that they receive the right support when and where they need it.

The Council is committed to doing its very best in this regard, with a focus on prevention and early intervention and a well-functioning education system which recognises that all children are individuals. An external inspection of our Education Services commended our clear vision and strong leadership which has a robust impact on improving education provision and learner outcomes. An identified culture of self-evaluation shows our commitment to continuously reviewing the service to ensure children and young people have the best start in life.

We continue our efforts to keep children at home with their families where possible, evidenced by the County's comparatively low rate for Children Looked After. We are also taking proactive steps to address the identified shortage of foster carers in the County. The number of children on the child protection register has increased, but the level is still significantly below the Welsh average. Strategic planning is focussed on prevention and joined up thinking, with a notable example being the Regional Maternity and Early Years Strategy.

We recognise that the childcare offer in the County needs to improve, and appropriate steps continue to be implemented to address this. More areas will benefit from funded childcare places through the Flying Start childcare expansion and a Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan has been developed with a focus on increasing the offer generally coupled with a focus on strengthening the Welsh-medium offer.

Our education service delivers a well-rounded curriculum taking account of the individual needs of each learner. Pupils with additional learning needs are well supported through our strategic focus on providing an inclusive education offer and schools have responded well to reforms. Whilst attendance saw a dip following the Covid period we are seeing some signs of recovery; however, this is very much an ongoing priority to ensure further and sustained improvement. Attendance is closely monitored for whole school as well as for specific groups of pupils such as those entitled to Free School Meals and pupils with additional learning needs.

Teachers and pupils co-design a rounded curriculum that is based on the Curriculum for Wales. There is a focus on learning experiences which have raising educational standards at their core, effectively developing literacy, numeracy, and digital skills as well as bilingual Welsh and English skills. Areas for celebration and improvement were noted in a recent Estyn inspection which are reflected within this report.

Carmarthenshire has the highest childhood obesity levels in Wales with 30.5% of 4-5 year olds being overweight or obese. The Council's commitment to doing all it can to support in addressing this issue is evidenced by the range of Actif initiatives in place to ensure that children and young people have access to activities which improve their health and well-being. In addition, the roll out of the universal primary free school meals offer continues to progress well, ensuring that children are provided with nutritious and balanced meals which support their development.

## In Summary

- The Council is committed to enabling children and young people to have a positive start in life, evidenced by the multifaceted approach to supporting the well-being and development of children and young people in the community.
- Whilst there has been an increase in the number of looked after children, our rates are comparably low in the context of other local authorities.
- The number of looked after children in foster placements has increased with the shortage of foster carers being a challenge, however, proactive efforts are being made to address this through collaboration with Foster Wales and a national recruitment campaign.
- In recognition of the importance of being active at a young age the 'Amser Actif' programme develops primary school children's confidence and physical skills, showing significant improvements in movement and manipulative skills among participants.
- Achievements have also been seen in school swimming, with a notable percentage of participants achieving the 'safe swimmer' standard.
- The Social Care and Health Protection team has worked to improve vaccination uptake among school pupils.
- Our key focus is on ensuring children are safe through our investing in prevention and early intervention as well as innovative approaches to safeguarding. We have a strong workforce who are trauma informed and work in an attachment aware model which keeps children and young people at the forefront of what we do using signs of safety keeping families together wherever possible.



## How are we doing?

- We continue to have the lowest number of looked after children per 10,000 population under 18 years of age in Carmarthenshire compared to other authorities in Wales, and well below the Welsh average of 116.33. Our figure at the end of March 2023 was 51.80 per 10,000 population, this equates to 190 looked after children. At the end of March 2024 this increased to 259, a 36% increase. The comparative data for this per 10,000 population will not be available until late 2024, but we have been low in the context of other local authorities for many years.
- There were 209 looked after children in foster placements as at 31 March 2024, compared to 149 the previous year. There continues to be a shortage of foster carers both locally and nationally which impacts on placement stability. The department works collaboratively across the region with Foster Wales and a national foster carer recruitment campaign received significant media attention.



## Outcome: Reducing the inequalities faced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds which may affect their later life chances

### Disability Service

The 0-25 Disability service has co-produced a Transition Guide with and for young people with disabilities and their families to support them to navigate through the transition process to adulthood. This dynamic electronic guide will be available via our website and other internet platforms following its launch.

### Regional Adoption Service

Mid and West Wales Regional Adoption Service (MWAS) continues to develop its practice and over the last few months has been focusing on the Welsh Early Permanence (WEP) framework and around contact by achieving several placements where children have continued to have on-going direct contact with birth parents and siblings post adoption. Mid and West Wales Adoption continues to find adoptive placements within the region for children from the region. However, there is a general decline in enquiries in Wales from people who would like to adopt, and the number is down this year. A new marketing recruitment officer has been appointed and is working alongside the National Adoption Service with a focus on the recruitment of adopters especially for sibling groups.

### Sport & Leisure Initiatives

'Amser Actif' aims to develop primary school children's confidence, motivation, and physical skills by engaging pupils in fun activities, particularly those who don't participate in sport and physical activity outside of school. Targeting schools with a high percentage of Free School Meals and low percentage of Hooked on Sport figures, 5 schools engaged with the 8-week programme, where an Actif Communities Coach delivered sessions and assessed 97 children on their development of which 17 were Additional Learning Needs (ALN) pupils. 51 sessions were delivered in total with 637 participations resulting in a dramatic improvement across skills. Pupils that took part in the sessions showed an increase in motivation and confidence when taking part.

In 2024, Actif Sport and Leisure received funding through the Rural Innovation Fund to recruit a "digital delivery" community sport and activity coach and offer 29 schools free access to Actif's 'Actif Anywhere for Schools' platform. These 29 schools were identified based on their rural locations, levels of economic deprivation and 'hooked on sport' data. The schools will be able to access a timetable of livestreamed sport and activity sessions as well as a bank of on-demand classes to enhance children's (and teachers') health and well-being. This is set to launch fully in September and will eventually be rolled out across all the County's schools, and beyond.

The 2022/2023 academic year (up to August 2023) saw 3,524 primary aged pupils taking part in the Actif Leisure's School Swimming Programme. 25% overall achieved the 'safe swimmer' standard. We continue to offer free swimming sessions at the weekend for those aged under 16, with additional sessions available during the school summer holidays. 2,377 took advantage of these sessions in 2023/24, a slight increase on the previous year (2,237).

## **Vaccination Uptake**

The Social Care and Health Protection team worked in conjunction with education colleagues and school nurses to improve vaccination uptake in pupils in primary and secondary school. The Health Protection Support and Advice Officers contacted non-responders to increase vaccine uptake for the influenza vaccine. In total 773 phone calls were made by the team with 306 phone calls to non-responders in primary schools and 467 phone calls secondary school non-responders.

**Outcome: Families from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to access health and well-being provision within their local areas.**

## **Looked After Children**

As previously noted, there is a shortage of foster carers both locally and nationally which impacts on placement stability. Development is continuing to increase the range and type of placements for children looked after through the department's residential strategy and fostering marketing and recruitment strategy.

We have been developing our supply of in-house supported and residential accommodation placements to aid the ambition to rebalance the market and take profit out of children's care. Two properties have been purchased and a third is being identified. Our in-house Supported Lodgings Scheme which supports young people post-16 has continued to develop, with 7 providers now established to offer placements. These developments will help children remain in their local communities and prevent the need for out of county placements. There is a need to develop further placements to increase the offer and link the support with the overall capacity for placements across Carmarthenshire.

## **Sport & Leisure Initiatives**

Actif Sport & Leisure offer and facilitate a wide range of opportunities for children and families to access activity to improve their Health and Well-being. This includes our high value 'household membership' enabling up to 2 adults and 4 children to join under one membership achieving better value for money. The number of household memberships grew by 182 (11%) over the course of the year.

Actif have an excellent relationship with social services and provide opportunities for children under the care of social services to access its after-school and holiday activity programmes. 359 children have benefitted from this during 2023-24.

During 2023-24 Actif secured £435k of Shared Prosperity funding to roll out health, fitness, and children's activity to 8 of the County's community halls and across the Llanelli area.

## **Going Places**

In 2023/24 Carmarthenshire Museum was selected to be part of an innovative 5-year collaboration with ArtFund and UK museums on Going Places, a community engagement and exhibition programme. During this first year, the partnership received £500k to build the case for national funding for sustainable touring exhibitions and pioneering new ways of working with communities to create museum activity programmes. The long-term nature of the project will be transformational in Carmarthenshire with the priority placed on co-designing services with young people, and cultural skills development for children and young people in rural communities.



### Free-Swimming Initiative

In recognition that most people attending the free-swimming initiative sessions can already swim, those that cannot swim may feel excluded. Considering this we offered free swimming lessons to children who had been identified during their school swimming lessons as under-achieving and unlikely to achieve the 'safe swimmer' status by the time they leave primary school. 56 young people took part in these additional swimming lessons at Llanelli Leisure Centre during the school summer holidays. They were able to further develop their aquatic competence and confidence upon which they can build and continue to enjoy aquatic activities, including the free-swimming sessions.



### Adoption Mid and West Wales

We had a stall at the Urdd Eisteddfod in Llandovery. The focus of the week was on the support we provide for families and more specifically about engaging with children. Children enjoyed playing with the many games and activities we had, which were designed for families to build closer attachments with their children.

We provided advice and support to many adoptive families from across the region and further afield, supported schools to better support adopted children in class, and spoke to a number of people who were thinking of adoption as a route to starting a family.

### Youth Justice

'Outstanding' rating awarded to Carmarthenshire Youth Justice Team

HM Inspectorate of Probation have rated Carmarthenshire County Council's Youth Justice Team as 'Outstanding' in their inspection of youth offending services in Carmarthenshire, published in March 2024. The inspection covered three broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service; the quality of work done with children sentenced by the courts; and the quality of out-of-court disposal work.

**Gill Adams, Principal Manager of Carmarthenshire Youth Justice Team wins the Butler Trust Annual Award** presented at a ceremony in London on Tuesday, 19 March 2024 by HRH The Princess Royal (Princess Anne). Gill was recognised for her unstinting dedication to youth justice for many years and her wider role as Principal Manager of Youth Support Service in Carmarthenshire.

The Butler Trust Awards are the only UK-wide awards specifically for people working in custodial and community justice settings.



In order to ensure families can access the support they need at the right time, we will develop a multi-agency early help strategy. We will also introduce a policy for allocating resources to support disabled children and their families which is equitable and transparent.

To ensure a sufficient supply of in-house foster placements to meet the range of needs of children looked after in Carmarthenshire, we will increase the capacity of the fostering service to manage current and future demand, to improve recruitment and retention rates and support for Foster Carers. To meet the range of needs of children looked after in Carmarthenshire, we will implement a strategic programme for residential services including the acquisition, refurbishment, and development of three new children's homes.

Our Actif Club provision works closely with children's services to provide opportunities to engage with children during school holidays to give them a variety of physical activity opportunities. We have seen a significant increase in recent years of the number of children signposted to this service from children's services, so we need to maximise efforts to match that demand.

## In Summary

- The preventative work conducted in Carmarthenshire and our ongoing commitment to keeping children at home with their families where possible is evidenced by our comparatively low rate for Children Looked After.
- Our Family Support Strategy is under review to become an Early Years Strategy, ensuring early intervention services meet the needs at the right time.
- The Regional Maternity and Early Years Strategy has been launched, with local priorities for maternity and early years transformation being implemented.
- Flying Start childcare expansion is being rolled out to provide quality funded childcare to more areas, with a focus on promoting Welsh language and culture.
- In recognition of the importance of a sufficient childcare offer and the depleting number of childcare places in the County between 2022/23 and 2023/24, a Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan has been developed.
- Additionally, efforts are being made to ensure a stable workforce within children's services, with a re-alignment of the management team, implementation of an experienced practitioner progression framework, and recruitment of new social worker trainees.

## How are we doing?

- 8.5% of children in care in Carmarthenshire during 2023/24 had to move 3 or more times during the year, this equates to 22 out of the 259 children, compared to 7.4% (14 out of the 190) in 2022/23. There was a 36% rise in the number of Children Looked After on 31 March 2024 to 259 compared to 190 the previous year.
- There are 213 registered childcare providers offering 4,214 childcare places delivered by childminders, day nurseries, cylchoedd meithrin, Flying Start, After School Clubs and Holiday Clubs. Our 5th Statutory Childcare Sufficiency Assessment summary report continues to be shared with prospective childcare providers and is also available on the Family Information Service website.
- 10,461 individuals were supported from the Families First programme, of which 6,234 (60%) were new individuals.
- 78.1% of child attendance at an allocated Flying Start free childcare placement for eligible 2-3-year-olds to prepare for school readiness which exceeded the target of 75%.
- 97% of families with additional social welfare needs linked to poverty, living in a Flying Start area receiving time specified interventions from the wider Flying Start Team.
- 1.5% of unauthorised absence at an allocated Flying Start free childcare placement for eligible 2-3-year-olds to prepare for school readiness. It is encouraging to see families reporting absence and engaging with childcare settings in reporting absence.





**Outcome: Improved availability of early years education and childcare settings across the county, particularly in rural areas; with a particular focus on providing and strengthening Welsh-medium childcare.**

We continue to promote Welsh language development opportunities for the childcare workforce and language support initiatives for parents such as Clwb Cwtch. Information and support is shared through various media, events, training programmes and other resources to try and increase Welsh childcare provision across the County. The Early Years Welsh Language Officer has collaborated with CWLWM's umbrella organisations to support providers and families with their Welsh language development, and many have shown interest/signed up for CWLWM's Welsh Promise programme of Delivering a bilingual integrated service that will ensure the best possible outcomes for children and families across Wales.



We currently have 81 registered childminders with a total of 660 childcare places. This has reduced from 90 childminders (717 places) last year. Long-term childminding recruitment and sustainability has been difficult during 2023-24 whilst every effort has been made at various events. The timeline to gain relevant qualification and registration at a time when living costs are impacting family household income has affected recruitment into the sector.

### **Flying Start Childcare**

Flying Start childcare phased expansion has continued to be rolled out to provide quality funded childcare to more areas across Carmarthenshire. Over 1,170 post-codes have been added so far and 12 of the identified 13 areas are now fully enrolled into Flying Start. The aforementioned Early Years Welsh Language Officer has started working with all childcare providers across Flying Start promoting Welsh language and culture. Our Flying Start App is a success and has been refined making it easier for parents to access helpful information and advice and to find out what is happening in local communities.

### **Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan**

The Childcare Sufficiency Action Plan for 2023-24 is in progress and was submitted to Welsh Government in June 2024.

## **Outcome: Keeping children at home with their families whenever possible.**

### **Special Guardians**

Preventative work is being undertaken so children have access to support at the right time, keeping families together where it is safe to do so and prevent the need to become looked after and despite numbers rising, we have one of the lowest rates in Wales. We have reviewed the support provided to Special Guardians to promote this as an alternative to becoming looked after with the support of families/friends. A standardised payment system to Special Guardianship Orders carers was initiated from April 2024.

### **Families First**

Nine Families First projects continue to provide essential preventative support for children, young people, and families across the County. A range of interventions have been delivered including language and play, paediatric first aid, Star programme, parenting after trauma, life skills to mention but a few, as well as organised parties, food hampers, well-being packs, clothing, various trips, fun days, and activities.

### **Family Support Strategy**

The Family Support Strategy is being reviewed and in its initial stages of development as an Early Years Strategy to ensure early intervention support services meet the needs of children, young people, and families at the right time utilising opportunities for integrating services.

### **Maternity & Early Years Strategy**

A Regional Maternity and Early Years Strategy has been launched and Carmarthenshire Operational Group has implemented local priorities for maternity and early years transformation.

## **Outcome: Families facing difficulties are supported to provide stable, safe and secure home environments for their children.**

Families First projects continue to develop and build greater links within communities and maintain stronger working partnerships with other providers and local businesses including mental health services, health visitors, the police, fire service, schools, Hywel Dda University Health Board, Coleg Sir Gâr, Flying Start, Communities4Work.

## Childcare Offer

The 30 hours Childcare Offer for Wales enables eligible working parents of 3–4 year-olds to access 30 hours a week of funded early education and childcare for 48 weeks a year. During 2023/24, 1,019 applications have been approved for Carmarthenshire and £2,400,840 payments to childcare providers which represents a considerable saving for many local working families who may have struggled to afford to pay for childcare. It has also helped sustain local childcare providers by providing a guaranteed regular income.



## The Early Years Integration Team

The Early Years Integration Team is a joint project between Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDUHB) and Carmarthenshire County Council covering 11 electoral wards in the rural Cwm Gwendraeth area representing 1,250-1,300 children aged 0-5 years and around 1,020 families (based on health visitor caseloads). The multidisciplinary team is made up of Health Visitors and Midwives working in Cwm Gwendraeth, Family Support Workers, Play Worker, Preparation for Parenthood Support Worker, School Link Assistant, and a Community Connector who work to identify and maintain relationships with partner agencies and the community. It is underpinned by theories of transformation to strengthen the community by supporting families with young children so that they are informed, confident and able to access support when needed. As universal providers, the Health Visitors and Midwives have direct contact with all pregnant women and all families with at least one child under five years delivering the All-Wales programmes of care, identifying families in need of support. This support ranges from maternity care to health visiting, one-to-one support or easily accessible groups, in venues across the area, working closely with communities and third and public sector agencies, all of whom are vital to the work. Families are supported from the antenatal period through to seven years old, including the sometimes-tricky transition into school. Now entering its 4th year, having evolved from humble and uncertain beginnings at the height of the Covid lockdown to expanding and delivering a well received, well utilised service.



## Food and Fun 2023

Food and Fun is an exciting school-based education programme run across 12 days during the school summer holidays funded by WLGA. It is delivered by school staff and partners along with support from Carmarthenshire County Council and health professionals. The programme provides food and nutrition, education, physical activity, enrichment sessions and healthy meals to children in areas of social deprivation. Food and Fun successfully ran in 6 schools within Carmarthenshire over the 2023 summer holidays in Ysgol Y Bedol, Ysgol Pontyberem, Ysgol Penrhos, Ysgol Betws, Ysgol Bro Banw and Ysgol Llandeilo. Approximately 200 children aged 3-11 years benefitted from attending the Food and Fun programme.



Quality Mark certificate is awarded which confirms a school as a Food and Fun facilitator. A bronze award is awarded to schools during their first year, silver award during their second year and gold for schemes that have ran for more than 3 years.

**How can we do better?**

We will be working towards addressing the gaps in the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022-27, including promoting and further developing Welsh Medium childcare. We shall also implement the phased expansion of Flying Start in line with Welsh Government guidance.

We will aim to implement key priorities in the Maternity and Early Years Operational plan and the Regional Maternity and Early Years Strategy in partnership with Hywel Dda University Health Board and the Voluntary Sector, in order to move towards an integrated delivery model.

We will ensure an effective family support service that supports families to make the changes children need so that fewer children progress to a child protection pathway, and children can remain/return safely home. We want to improve early permanence arrangements by establishing parity of fees and allowances for Special Guardian (SGO) carers with foster carers to promote connected carers becoming SGOs; keeping children with their families and out of care.

We will be developing the dryside junior provision in our Actif Facilities to provide sustainable opportunities for children to be active, using insight to measure success. Also, we will support and develop 50 new community organisations to provide sustainable physical activity opportunities e.g. Us Girls, Disability, Youth Clubs.



## In Summary

- Attendance has improved in 2023-24, and an Attendance Strategy is in the final stages of development, with further refinement and development of support resources for schools ongoing.
- Numbers of Year 11 and 13 leavers not in Education, Employment, or Training have increased during the year. The Youth Support Service has delivered post-16 transition youth work in line with the Welsh Government Youth Engagement and Progression Framework.
- We continue to strive to make sure that every child and young person is valued and valued equally and to deliver our ambitious priorities.
- As one Education and Children's Services team we have worked effectively to ensure that our children and young people were successfully supported to access their education and all the services they required.
- This was evidenced by the various inspections undertaken during 2023/24. Estyn's Inspection of our Local Authority Education services noted: 'Carmarthenshire's education services are led robustly by senior leaders and elected members, who share a clear vision for education within the authority. This is supported by an open and positive culture and self-evaluation and improvement planning processes that are rigorous, on the whole. Through this, leaders have a positive effect on improving education provision and learners' outcomes in most of their areas of responsibility and are able to set a clear direction for further improvement in the future...'

## How are we doing?

- The Council maintains 1 nursery school, 94 primary schools, 12 secondary schools and 1 special school which provide education for over 27,000 pupils.
- Our 2023 residents survey received almost 4,000 respondents, with most agreeing that local schools provide children and young people with a good education with a score<sup>[1]</sup> of 0.41. This is a slight decline on the 2022 score of 0.52 but continues to be an overall agreement.
- There is a significant increase in the number of Year 11 leavers not in Education, Employment or Training during 2023/24 with 2.3% (46 out of 1,987) compared to 1.9% (36 out of 1,914) the previous year.



[1] Average Index Score: A score below 0 indicates overall disagreement; a score between 0 and 1 indicates overall agreement, and a score between 1 and 2 indicates overall strong agreement.

## **Outcome: Pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) are fully supported.**

The Inclusion Service is an integral part of the Local Authority's front-line service to children and young people. It is a service which has statutory responsibilities and provides support and intervention where necessary.

The Authority has implemented the Welsh Government's ALN Transformation Programme to support a new ALN system that is person centred, and supports learners with personalised learning to achieve effective outcomes, however this is against a backdrop of austerity and covid recovery. The Council's central support team ensure that schools build capacity to identify needs early, make the correct provision and then monitor and review this provision. Schools have required significant support by the ALN Service to fulfil this expectation due to budgetary cuts and new expectations on ALN Coordinators and class teachers. Increased demand for specialist provision resulting from unforeseen demand for autistic placements necessitated the use of departmental resources identified for growth to respond in a timely manner to develop new specialist provision to fill identified gaps in Welsh medium ASD provision and secondary ASD specialist provision. This situation has meant that resources to support the building of capacity in our mainstream schools for meeting the needs of learners have had to be directed to specialist provision thus impacting the department's ability to meet targets for strengthening inclusive practices.

The Council's strategy on Additional Learning Needs (ALN) states that inclusive education means providing all children and young people with appropriate personalised curriculum and networks of support. We are committed to the belief that 'inclusive learning' is the best practice in teaching and learning. We place a strong emphasis on supporting schools within the following key areas:

- Accurate assessment of strengths and needs;
- Planning effectively to build on strengths and address areas of need;
- Adopting pedagogical approaches to optimise individual learning;
- Involving children in setting their learning goals and evaluating their progress towards agreed targets;
- Engaging with parents to inform them of their children's progress and to involve them in supporting their children's learning;
- Evaluating individual children's progress and the progress of groups and classes;
- Refining the approach to teaching and learning in light of evaluation;
- Maintaining systematic records to report progress and to enable reflective practice.

In the last year the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reforms and the new ALN system was embedded within schools and has been largely welcomed by schools, practitioners, stakeholders, parents, and carers. School Additional Learning Needs Coordinators are enthusiastic and committed to identifying needs at an early stage and making sure the correct interventions are in place to ensure pupils make the expected progress. Headteachers however feel that budgetary cuts are affecting their ability to make appropriate and timely provision for all learners.

Half termly clusters of schools meet to ensure steady progress in the monitoring and reviewing of provision to meet the requirements of the Code is being made by all schools as evidenced by the ALN sections of Estyn reports. The ALN Departments differentiated model of support requires considerable input and guidance by central officers, however this has to be balanced against the positive impact it has on our schools. Ongoing we recognise that the time allocated to support schools may impact the department's ability to monitor and review provision in schools as set out as a statutory function of the local authority in the ALNET Act and Code.

Carmarthenshire schools have worked hard to develop workforce capacity and to deliver transformation within the time set by Welsh Government. The schools undertake Person Centered Practice (PCP) approaches and identify needs early to make prompt and effective provision. They understand their responsibilities in relation to creating effective Individual Development Plans for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

For learners that no longer are identified with ALN, Carmarthenshire schools implement strategies to continue to meet their needs and provide ongoing progress monitoring as appropriate and they continue to receive suitable targeted support. As expressed above, this is challenging during times of austerity, budget cuts and increased expectations on the system delivery in schools.

The Central Inclusion Team supports with cluster working, school-to-school working, sharing of practices and specialist resources. ALN School Support Visits delivered by the ALN Advisory Team offer ongoing support with tracking and tailored school visits to address ALN transformation and quality assurance.

Through the support of central services, the close working relationship and guidance documentation has supported schools to apply the act and the code ensuring consistency in determining ALN and Additional Learning Provision.

The ALN Department has grown in capacity over recent years following growth allocation, however the Carmarthenshire ALN Department remains small in comparison to the ALN teams in other local authorities. Challenges arise when staffing is compromised which then leaves the department vulnerable in terms of meeting its statutory duties.

Carmarthenshire provides parity of provision in Welsh and English - resources, assessments, staffing and sufficiency of specialist provision and following the Estyn Inspection Carmarthenshire was successful in hosting the National Lead Programme for Welsh Government and is working with the Welsh Language Lead to develop Welsh language tools and resources.

## Physical Literacy Programme

The Physical Literacy programme was extended to the Additional Learning Needs Unit in 2023 to ensure that every child within the County, regardless of their ability, has an opportunity to become more confident when taking part in physical activity and sport. With a whole school approach, staff from 3 units were given training on how they can adapt activities to suit the needs of their pupils, followed by ongoing support from the Active Young People Officer. There are a further 6 units on board with the programme for the summer term.

Schools were also invited to the first INSPORT Series Event, organised by Disability Sport Wales and supported by the Active Young People Team. The event provided inclusive sport and physical activity opportunities for disabled young people, with 57 pupils from across the County taking part.





## Outcome: Increased school attendance rates and access to education for vulnerable pupils.

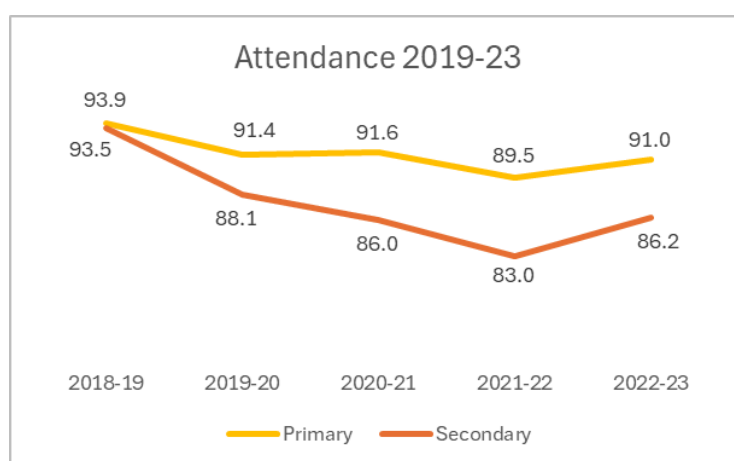
One of the recommendations of Estyn's Inspection of our Local Authority Education services was:

*'To improve pupils' attendance in the authority's schools.'*

Improving attendance is one of the new Cabinet's priorities. Although the authority has identified attendance as an important area that is in need of attention, improvements across schools have been varied. There has been strong progress in a minority of schools, although the authority's overall school attendance rates remain stubbornly low following the pandemic.'

Attendance improved in the last full academic year, 2022-23, compared to the previous year. However, it is recognised that further and sustained improvement will be needed in future years and, as such, this will remain an ongoing priority.

An attendance data dashboard has been developed to support monitoring of attendance in all schools, both for whole school as well as individual groups of pupils such as those entitled to free school meals and children with Additional Learning Needs. This has now become the main means of acquiring and sharing attendance data and all schools are provided with a county-wide data digest twice a year to benchmark their progress against similar schools and those in their clusters.



Training for school staff responsible for improving attendance has been established as an annual event to share good practice and to co-construct school-based strategies.

An attendance media campaign has been developed alongside the authority's Marketing and Media Department to communicate a positive message to parents and communities around attending school. A cross-department Attendance Strategy is being developed involving a range of key stakeholders including, School Improvement, Youth Service, Additional Learning Needs, Behaviour Support Service and Education Psychology Service and will be complete in academic year 2023-24. Further refinement and development of supporting resources for schools will take place on an ongoing basis through 2023-24.

The above graph shows the significant impact of the Covid pandemic on school attendance in Carmarthenshire as in all local authorities and demonstrates the gradual recovery since then. Our aim is to restore school attendance to at least 2019 levels and to improve from there.

## **Vulnerable Learners**

The Education and Children's Services Department's Strategic Progress is to be operationally and strategically steered through a series of collaborative 'Focus Groups', aligning to the department's business plan. The Inclusion and Engagement Focus Group aims to ensure a proactive, inclusive education system for all including all vulnerable groups. The attendance of all vulnerable groups is monitored via the dashboard referred to above and reported to the Departmental Management Team and relevant Focus Group as above. Attendance of all groups of learners is a key focus area in discussions between the Education Support Team and schools.

## **Elective Home Education**

Our Elective Home Education (EHE) team have strengthened our local procedures to ensure schools, families and learners are clear on their responsibilities when EHE is considered. A change to the 'exit form' allows us to better understand the reasons why parents are choosing this form of education, and information about the child prior to them becoming EHE.

- Carmarthenshire currently has 657 Elective Home Educated learners (this number fluctuates and tends to be higher at the end of the summer term).
- Staff have worked effectively with families and during 2023/24 - 79.25% of these children received an annual visit.
- Several young people have sat a range of GCSE's with attainment being good.
- The Elective Home Education grant provided by Welsh Government is used effectively to provide activities and resources to families so that the young people have a more enriched learning experience.

## **Emotionally Based School Avoidance**

Carmarthenshire has produced a 'best practice' training and toolkit for schools and support agencies in respect of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). The toolkit project is developing the understanding of EBSA across schools, providing psychological input and around EBSA presenting needs. 11 (of 12) secondary schools engaged between January 2023 and March 2024. We are working on increasing awareness within schools and with other agencies through training and consultation support.

Secondary schools are showing a better understanding of EBSA-presenting behaviours and are working to support pupils where there are emerging EBSA needs rather than waiting for needs to become entrenched.

## **Minority Ethnic Achievement Team**

The Minority Ethnic Achievement team continue to provide:

- Targeted guidance and support for schools with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Welsh as an Additional Language (WAL) learners.
- General pedagogical guidance for schools (training and resources).
- Specific advice for schools with refugee or asylum seeker families.
- Supporting induction process in schools for new arrivals.
- Providing first language support for new arrivals in Arabic, Polish and Ukrainian.
- Assist in home language GCSEs.
- Translation/interpretation for families.
- Developing links with local Ethnic Minority support organisations such as School of Sanctuary, Ethnic Youth Support Team, Show Racism the Red Card to raise awareness, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

## **The Gypsy, Romany Traveller Service**

- We have developed close relationships with parents regarding the education of their children, support and advice given to them as well as signposting to other agencies.
- Providing support for Gypsy, Romany Traveller pupils in schools from Teaching Assistant.
- Close working relationships with other departments within the County to ensure Gypsy, Romany Traveller pupils have the support they need.
- Termly monitoring of attendance.

## **Trauma Informed Approach**

This is becoming embedded across our schools where the approach sees the appointment of an 'emotionally available adult' from within the school to link with the child/young person and family which is making a difference in how supported families are feeling.

## **Outcome: Deliver a rounded curriculum raising educational standards.**

### **The New Curriculum**

Teachers and pupils co-design a learning curriculum that is based on the Curriculum for Wales. Learning experiences in our schools in Carmarthenshire are inclusive and purposeful, successfully aiming to reduce the impact of poverty.

Increasingly, learning experiences are purposefully linked to the local community, our Cynefin, ensuring that pupils develop a rich understanding of their locality and their heritage.

Our schools effectively support child and young people to become ambitious capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives, effectively developing their Welsh and English bilingual skills. A broad range of learning experiences ensure that our children and young people develop their enterprising skills and creative thinking, making sure that they are well informed about Wales and the world.

Engaging learning experiences and activities ensure that our children and young people develop as healthy confident individuals, maximising the opportunities to learn in school, outdoors and within our local environment.

The areas of learning and experience include a focus on languages literacy and communication, science and technology, mathematics and numeracy, expressive arts, humanities and health and well-being.

The curriculum also develops pupils' knowledge of human rights, developmentally appropriate relationships and sexuality, diversity, and respecting differences, as well as providing opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and knowledge of careers and the workplace.

Schools are well supported to strengthen their teaching practices and to ensure that the needs of all learners are met effectively. As a result, the quality of teaching is sound or better in many schools, ensuring that pupils' progress is in line with teachers' high expectations. Pupil progress and standards are monitored collaboratively, and support brokered to ensure that schools are well equipped to address their developmental priorities. Key areas of focus continue to be pupils' skill development in literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, including their application of these skills across a broad range of subject areas. The progress of individual pupils remains the key focus, with person centred planning underpinning the planning of learning experiences across many schools in Carmarthenshire. Most pupils, including those with Additional Learning Needs and in specific groups, achieve good progress in their early years' skills development, their numeracy, literacy, and digital skills over time.

## Estyn Inspections

### Summary of Estyn Outcomes 2017-2024



Since March 2022 there has been a new inspection framework and Estyn no longer provides summative judgements for individual inspection areas. Inspectors can still place a school into Estyn Review if they judge that the school would benefit from a short period of time to improve a few aspects of their work. The two statutory categories of follow-up remain unchanged. This is when schools need significant improvement or require special measures. We want to reduce the proportion of schools requiring follow-up activity following Estyn inspection.

Academic Year	Number of Inspections	No Follow Up	Estyn Review	Significant Improvement	Special Measures
2017-18	17	13	3	1	
2018-19	14	5	6		3
2019-20	13	7	6		
2020-21 (Covid)	No Inspections				
2021-22 (Inspections re-start New Framework)	13	11		1	1
2022-23	21	17	3		1
2023-March 24	13	10		1	2

Since Estyn re-started inspecting schools post Covid in March 2022, many of our schools have had no follow-up or a few in a category. In nearly all cases, there is close alignment between Estyn's outcomes and the department's understanding of the school's strengths and areas of improvement. Six good practice Case Studies were identified in our inspections from September 2023-March 2024. The school placed in Significant Improvement in March 2022 and the one placed in Special Measures in June 2022 were judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to their recommendations and were removed from the categories in December 2023.

Between September 2023 and March 2024 there were 13 inspections, 10 requiring no follow up, 1 Significant Improvement and 2 Special measures. The schools requiring follow up had been identified as schools causing concern, however, measures instigated had not ensured sufficient progress prior to the Estyn inspection.

## Attainment

In general, GCSE and A-Level exam results were below the pre-pandemic level (Academic Year 2018/19). However, as we transition back to pre-pandemic assessment arrangements, some support remained in place for learners who sat exams in 2022/23. This support was in the form of advance information and a supportive approach to grading. Due to the varying examination arrangements in place since 2018/19, caution must be exercised when comparing outcomes between subsequent years. Most schools are ensuring effective pupil progress over time from initial starting points.

- In Carmarthenshire, 67.8% of all entries have been awarded an A\*-C grade, with 21.7% of entries achieving an A\*-A grade.
- A total of 96.6% of A-level students in Carmarthenshire achieved A\*-E.
- Through a combination of exams and assessments, applicable to different courses, a total of 29.4% of A-level students across Carmarthenshire have received A or A\* this year; whilst 88.7% of AS students in Carmarthenshire achieved A-E grades.



## Physical Literacy Programme

In response to local and national insight data, the Actif Communities Team developed a 'Physical Literacy' programme to improve the quality of school sport and physical activity. This was achieved through a whole-school approach via a package of school staff training, mentoring and support. 62 Primary Schools received training for their entire staffing workforce as well as follow-up mentoring session to embed the learning and provide further support.

Feedback from school staff demonstrate an increase of 30% in confidence and competence levels with improved understanding of the importance of physical literacy. This in turn has had a positive impact on the pupil's physical development and confidence to inspire them to be Hooked on Sport for Life.





## Young Sports Ambassador Programme

The Young Sports Ambassador Programme in both Primary and Secondary Schools continues to go from strength to strength. 330 Bronze Ambassadors from 90 primary schools and over 40 Silver and Gold Ambassadors from 9 secondary schools (in the 2023/24 academic year) have inspired and led the next generation to be more active. Young Ambassadors receive training, resources, and continued support to ensure they are competent and confident in delivering extra-curricular activities in their schools, with around 51,000 participations recorded in the Autumn and Spring terms.



## Cycling Programme

Actif's cycling programme for schools ensures that children learn the skill of riding a bike confidently in a safe environment. As part of the offer, schools can access balance and peddle bikes on loan for a year, along with training and support from the team. In 2023/24, 15 schools accessed the programme, with just over 5,000 participations from extra-curricular sessions, where the children had the opportunity to learn to ride a bike and once successful, children are encouraged to continue to cycle outside of school.

Huge positive differences are being noted in staff confidence levels, ensuring sessions are delivered competently and of high quality.

All 12 secondary schools now have access to 20 bikes for their school, which are used in the summer term during curricular and extra-curricular time. Youth workers also use bikes for intervention groups.



## Outcome: Nutritious free school meals for all primary school pupils.

The Catering Service is responsible for providing school meals in all Carmarthenshire schools including:

- Serving around 18,000 meals every day.
- Compliance with national standards including healthy eating, food hygiene and allergens.
- Free breakfast service in nearly all primary schools.

We offer a menu which is compliant to Welsh Government regulations and achieves the highest grade available for compliance and nutritional balance. Menus are nutritionally analysed using Saffron recipe development software.

We continue to work with parents, schools, and external stakeholders to manage special diets and allergies. This includes individual care plans for pupils, 1-1 meetings with parents and a robust system of work to ensure a healthy, safe dining environment. We go above current guidance and work to include pupils not currently covered by the groups identified by Welsh Government as being entitled to a special diet menu (i.e. Additional Learning Needs students, pupils with sensory issues etc.)

### Free School Meals

The Welsh Government announcement regarding extending Free School Meals entitlement for all primary school children required a significant amount of planning, financing, and investment to build capacity and prepare for the implementation of the commitment. School meal provision for the Authority's 97 settings is provided via 3 central production kitchens, 85 production kitchens attached to settings as well as deliveries between production kitchens and 15 dining centres.

Universal Primary Free School Meals has been offered to Nursery and Reception pupils since September 2022; Year 1 since January 2023; Year 2 since April 2023; Years 3 & 4 since September 2023; Year 5 since February 2024; with Year 6 starting in April 2024.



## Outcome: Increased bilingual and Welsh medium education.

Our vision is to ensure Welsh-medium progression right through statutory education to the world of work or further and higher education. We are increasing the proportion of each year group that receives Welsh-medium education in accordance with the Welsh Government's new designations. We have strengthened and expanded the provision for learners through Language Centres with specific provision for latecomers and improving standards. We ensure that learners with ALN have linguistic opportunities equal to their mainstream peers.

Our Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and action plan are arranged under 7 main outcomes:

1. More nursery/three-year-olds educated through the medium of Welsh.
2. More reception class/five-year-olds being educated through the medium of Welsh.
3. More children continue to improve their Welsh language skills when transferring from one phase of their statutory education to another.
4. More learners studying for Welsh qualifications (as a subject) and subjects through the medium of Welsh.
5. More opportunities for learners to use Welsh in different contexts at school.
6. An increase in the provision of Welsh-medium education for pupils with Additional Learning Needs in accordance with the duties specified by legislation.
7. An increase in the number of teaching staff who can teach Welsh (as a subject) and through the medium of Welsh.

### **Linguistic Categorisation of Schools**

We worked with schools to transition them to the new linguistic categorisation system. In line with guidance, we have taken the lead by identifying a category that best reflects the current linguistic situation of each school. We have also set each school an aspirational category which is the category to aspire to within 10 years. 80% of schools agree with their proposed category and a series of conversations and meetings with the schools who wanted more time to consider the situation was held.



## **Outcome: Schools for sustainable community learning that are fit for 21st Century.**

### **School Building Conditions & the Modernising Education Programme**

Due to investment 72% of Carmarthenshire schools are graded as "Good" or "Satisfactory" for school building condition, as compared to 63% in the previous year. However, further investment is challenging as the cost of upgrading or building new schools has escalated significantly placing increased pressure on a limited capital budget. It will be impossible to deliver all of the County Council's aspirations.

We are continuing to progress the Modernising Education Programme (MEP) Review which will result in a revised strategy to help manage our work programme, a prioritised list for investment and consultation, which will ensure that we continue to meet the needs of Education in the 21st Century. In addition, Welsh Government will also be undertaking decarbonisation assessments of the Local Authority's school estate. Assessments will include developing an outline strategy for decarbonisation of each school site. We will use this information to identify how we can make our schools more energy efficient. We have consulted on our draft MEP Strategy. We are currently considering the feedback.

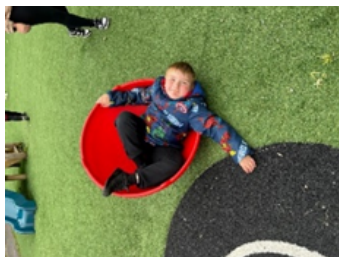
After successful completion of its extensive investigations, Carmarthenshire County Council can confirm that there are no traces of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) identified within any of our school settings. This focus confirms our commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of our learners and education staff.

We are currently undertaking a lessons learnt exercise from previous schemes and Covid to ensure that our schools for the future brief is relevant. We are also looking at carbon neutral principles and the teaching methodology that underpins the new curriculum.

In addition to the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) works completed in 2022-2023, we have further developed ALN works in Model School and Glan-y-Môr School with the use of a second ALN grant received from Welsh Government. This has helped to enhance and develop the ASD provision that can be provided at both schools, through fit for purpose accommodation and facilities.

## Is anyone better off?

### Sensory Resources



“As a school, we are very thankful for the sensory resources. The red spinning cones are very popular, and the children love them”.

**Ysgol Y Felin**



“The children enjoy exploring the textured mats and this has supported with their focus, attention and observational skills.”

**Ysgol Y Felin**



“The sensory cones help the children relax and they support our pupils with regulating their behaviour.”

**Ysgol Y Felin**



“The surprise e-mail saying that we received some sensory resources helped us with our vision in making our centre a lot more pupil friendly for our more sensory learners.”

**Canolfan Bro Tywi**



“Our pupils independently request to go into the dark den. They enjoy exploring the lights and objects and we now have some lovely intensive interaction activities happening in our dark den.”

**Ysgol Y Model**



“One of our pupils’ requests to go on the sensory mats each morning when she arrives at school. She enjoys the sensory feedback on her feet.”

**Ysgol Y Model**



“We place a few sensory objects in their individual sensory boxes. Some pupils bring the resources to us to communicate that they would like to use them. The resources have supported staff in recognising what pupils like and enjoy and have helped us to build a deeper relationship with our pupils”.

**Ysgol Y Model**

“The resources that were provided has inspired us to plan more sensory activities into our daily routine. The resources have already had a positive impact on our pupils’ wellbeing and their academic attainment.” **Canolfan Bro Tywi**

“As a centre, we have been able to create individualised sensory circuit plans for our pupils using the sensory resources”.

Balancing is fun. I like  
playing with the toys.  
It helps me to be  
calm.



Children, teachers, and staff of Pembrey School returned from their half term break to a brand-new building on Tuesday, 20 February 2024.

The new primary school building, for learners aged 3-11, has a capacity for 270 primary pupils and 30 nursery places and has been delivered as part of Welsh Government and Carmarthenshire’s Modernising Education Programme, B and B investment.

Constructed on land adjacent to the old school site, the new school provides state-of-the-art facilities and accommodation for pupils and staff. The Flying Start facility, which was located in a separate mobile classroom on the former school premises, has been accommodated within the new school building under one roof.





An Estyn Inspection on Education Services in Carmarthenshire took place in July 2023, a Report was published in September 2023 with the following recommendations:

R1: Improve pupils' attendance in the authority's schools.

R2: Strengthen school improvement processes, particularly for secondary schools.

R3: Refine approaches to self-evaluation and improvement planning.

We are addressing these recommendations by implementing an action plan.

We will implement our Attendance Strategy to work alongside schools to increase school attendance rates and improve access to education for vulnerable pupils. We will try to ensure that the standard of learning and teaching in our schools is of a high quality to support our learners to make appropriate progress. We will work with schools to deliver a full and rounded curriculum which aspires to raise educational standards and ensures that pupils understand and celebrate their local history, geography, and culture.

We shall review all school pupil admission dates and age-ranges across the County. We will also undertake a comprehensive review of post-16 provision including all stakeholders in order to achieve a learner centred provision in line with the Curriculum for Wales (CfW).

## Well-being Objective 2

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

#### Overview of Progress

Enabling our residents to live and age well is a priority for the Council in recognition that the County's greatest asset is the people who live here. Whilst gross weekly income has improved substantially in the County, over a third of households are still thought to be living in poverty and material deprivation is rising. Considering this, the Council recognises the need to support households to alleviate the effects of poverty and the rising cost of living. Our dedicated Tackling Poverty Plan details the wide-ranging support initiatives and our commitment to doing all that we can to ensure residents access the support they are entitled to and access appropriate services.

Good quality affordable homes as well as continued investment in existing homes promotes health and well-being and forms the foundation of improved living standards. Housing affordability in the County compares positively with national averages, however, we recognise that more can be done to improve access to suitable housing allowing residents to live in the area of their upbringing. We continue to deliver against our Affordable Homes Delivery Plan and our Housing Regeneration Development Programme. In addition, to address the second home crisis, we will be charging a premium on second homes and long-term empty properties. Our work on existing homes and improving the availability of new provision across our rural and urban communities will be key to enabling community resilience and cohesion. Positively, our continued efforts have seen sustained improvement in the percentage of households successfully prevented from becoming homeless.

With people living longer, services will see increased demand in coming years. There are also variations in healthy life expectancy between males and females with Carmarthenshire levels below the Welsh average. In recognition of this the development of a prevention strategy substantiates our commitment to a whole population approach to prevention, which is expected to reduce demand for statutory intervention. Our long-term aim is to help people to maintain their independence at home for as long as possible, prevent unnecessary admissions to hospital and support timely discharge from hospital to ensure that those that need good hospital care can access it. Positively, there has been a notable improvement with fewer people waiting in hospital for domiciliary care. Collaborative efforts and integrated services between Health and Social Care have also been strengthened, which is positively impacting hospital flow and reducing waiting lists.

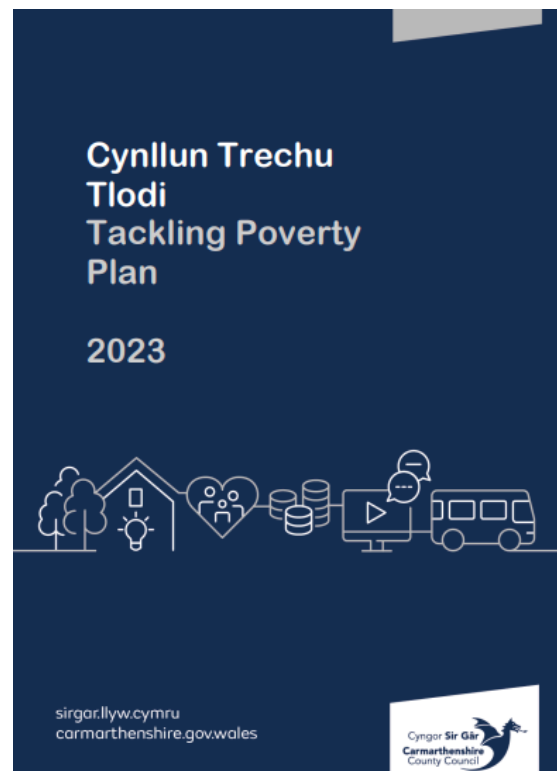
In recognition that Adult Mental Well-being scores are on a downward trend, investments have been made in Mental Health Services to deliver a well-being pathway across the County, focussing on early intervention and prevention.

The number of adults with two or more Healthy Lifestyle Behaviours has increased slightly, which is positive and is reflective of the number of health and well-being services available to our residents. In providing these services recognition has been given to accessibility with many activities delivered in an innovative way. The National Exercise Referral Scheme Wales has seen a dramatic increase in referrals, with 1,537 received during 2023/24, and a high completion rate of over 70% for the 16-week program.



## In Summary

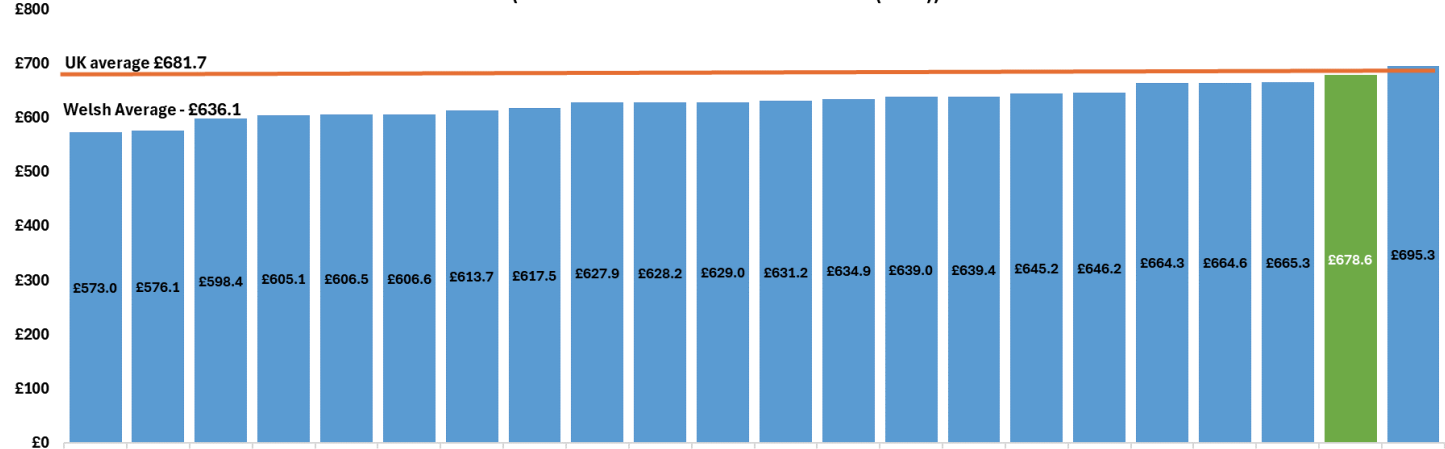
- Over a third of Carmarthenshire households are living in poverty and most residents agree that poverty is a problem in their area. Our Tackling Poverty Plan aims to address and alleviate the pressures and challenges caused by poverty for local residents and communities. However, there is recognition that many of the contributory factors to poverty are complex and deep-rooted.
- Housing affordability in Carmarthenshire compares positively with other local authorities. This is important as access to affordable and appropriate housing is crucial to maintaining a good quality of life. In line with this, homelessness prevention has also improved.
- Gross weekly income has improved substantially in the County. However, this does not always translate to an improved standard of living when considered against inflationary pressures and a general rising cost of living. This is corroborated by Disposable Household Income data which provides an indication of 'material welfare' and remains below the Welsh average.



# How are we doing?

- 34.6% of all households in Carmarthenshire are living in poverty, this translates to around 28,700 households. This is a slight increase since last year which mirrors trends seen nationally.
- There has been a significant increase in the average Gross Weekly earnings in Carmarthenshire, from £617.80 (2022) to £678.60 (2023) with the second highest figures in Wales. Carmarthenshire figures have been higher than the Welsh average for the last few years. We continue to be below the UK average of £681.70.
- Our 2023 residents survey indicated that there was overall agreement to the statement; ‘Poverty is a problem in my area’.

Average Gross Weekly Pay for full-time earnings 2023  
(Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS))



## **Outcome: Help and support to alleviate the effects of the 'cost of living' crises and poverty in the County.**

### **Actif Street Football**

Since launching in Llanelli in January 2024, Actif Street Football has already significantly contributed to alleviating the effects of the cost-of-living crisis and poverty in Carmarthenshire. With 21 players registered through Actif Street Football, the sessions are now expanding opportunities into Ammanford. These sessions have provided a supportive environment for community members facing financial hardship, loneliness, and isolation. Participants have access to hot meals, showers, and face-to-face support from both peers and professionals, fostering a sense of community and mutual assistance.

The initiative has enhanced self-esteem and control among participants, leading to meaningful engagement and positive outcomes. For example, one participant secured housing through the Youth Accommodation Panel after sharing his story at a session. Another individual received early intervention and support from the Pre-Accommodation Development Office following a relationship breakdown, preventing a potential homelessness case.

Moreover, Actif Street Football has facilitated collaboration with other local authority departments, improving the efficiency of information sharing and support services. This holistic approach has benefited not only the participants but also the broader community.

Additionally, partnerships with organisations such as Mind and the Wallich project have expanded the impact of the sessions. Inspired by the success of Actif Street Football, the Wallich project is considering similar initiatives in other local authorities, demonstrating the programme's potential for broader application and impact.

### **Social Pricing Policy**

Actif continued to operate its social pricing policy, providing concessionary access for students, families, older adults, armed forces personnel and veterans, looked after children and carers, along with assistance for Ukrainian refugees at the start of the year. This resulted in 8,364 people taking out a membership at Actif's facilities during 2023-24.

### **Tackling Poverty Plan**

In July 2023 we published our [Tackling Poverty Plan](#) detailing our efforts to address and alleviate some of the pressures and challenges caused by poverty for our local residents and communities. We recognise that the current cost of living crisis is having a significant impact on our residents, but we also recognise the longer-term generational impact that poverty has so we are keen to address the root causes of poverty and find ways to support our residents to lift themselves out of poverty. We must acknowledge that we as a Council won't be able to resolve poverty ourselves – many of the factors contributing to the situation need to be addressed at a Wales and UK level. However, we do have a leading role in supporting our residents and communities to help themselves, by removing barriers to access support and empowering people to do for themselves.

In addition, the Carmarthenshire Public Services Board (PSB) has identified tackling poverty and its impacts as one of its well-being objectives and as a Council we will work with our public sector partners and other stakeholders on areas of collective responsibility to make progress on this objective

Cllr Ann Davies, Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs said:

*As a Council, we are committed to supporting all of our residents to get the help, support, and advice that they need, particularly as we all face challenges as a result of the increased cost of living. We want to encourage everyone to seek support if they need it.*



**PROGRESS UPDATE:** Audit Wales published a National Report 'Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales in November 2022. This report looked at the challenge poverty poses in Wales and how government is responding. It acknowledged that effectively tackling poverty is not easy and is exceedingly difficult for both Welsh Government and councils in Wales. The report identified best practice and several recommendations that we have in the main achieved in Carmarthenshire, with further actions arising from our Tackling Poverty Plan being taken forward.

## Support & Advice

We have been continually enhancing, communicating, and working closely with around 25 partner organisations in supporting customers with the rising cost of living as part of our tackling poverty agenda. This has helped to enhance understanding each other's roles in supporting customers with the rising cost of living. During the last 12 months we have built on the way we work with our partners, and this has improved with the events we've attended and the referrals to and from various partners to ensure our customers have the best support available. The working relationship with Working in Carmarthenshire, Communities For Work Plus (C4W+) and Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) has been greatly valued by all and we hope we can extend and build on this during 2024/25.

September 2023 saw the launch of Hwb Bach y Wlad, an extension to our Hwb customer service centres (in Llanelli, Carmarthen and Ammanford). Hwb Bach y Wlad enables specialist Hwb Advisors to offer wrap around financial and well-being support to the diverse needs of our rural residents, with tailored packages of support depending on a person's circumstances. These new Hwbs will make it easier for residents in more rural areas to access a range of services. Our Hwb Advisors offer targeted support in Kidwelly, Llandeilo, Llandovery, Crosshands, Cwmaman, Laugharne, St Clears, Whitland, Newcastle Emlyn and Llanybydder through a regular schedule.



Securing Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) funding to deliver Hwb Bach y Wlad in our ten towns is proving to be a great success with the service receiving many compliments. More than 1,900 individuals have been identified during the last 12 months, supporting with financial and well-being advice during what remains to be a cost-of-living crisis for so many of our residents. We very much hope following the SPF funding that we can sustain Hwb Bach y Wlad as part of our core staff model due to its popularity and support. However, it is important to note that currently the Hwb Bach y Wlad is only funded until December 2024.

The Hwb customer service centres in Llanelli, Carmarthen and Ammanford remain to attract a high footfall and support many with their everyday enquiries as well as supporting our residents with financial and well-being support. Through the cost-of-living discretionary scheme, three personal budgeting support officers have been appointed to assist those who might struggle with their monthly spend. This has been well received and is a great addition to the offer of support available to our residents within the Hwbs. In addition to this, we have established strong working relationships and streamlined our processes for a consistent approach for our residents to access all the food banks.

## **Support to Claim**

We continue to support families to claim all the support they are entitled to, and we actively pursue information to enable the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme claims to be processed as quickly as possible. We actively encourage take up of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and work closely with our Housing Team and Housing Associations.

An extra £100k over the last 2 years has been allocated to the DHP fund via the cost-of-living discretionary scheme. In addition, we signpost and refer families to relevant advice and support, including applications for the homeless prevention grant payments, which is an additional discretionary fund administered by the Housing Team. Our Personal Budgeting Support Officer within the Revenue Services Team has undertaken proactive work for those falling into arrears with their Council Tax, working closely with the Hwbs. We helped customers by either: receiving a Personal Budget Support (PBS) appointment, referred to the Recovery Team to discuss payment arrangements, had a Direct Debit set up ensuring regular payments, or were signposted to Claim What's Yours.

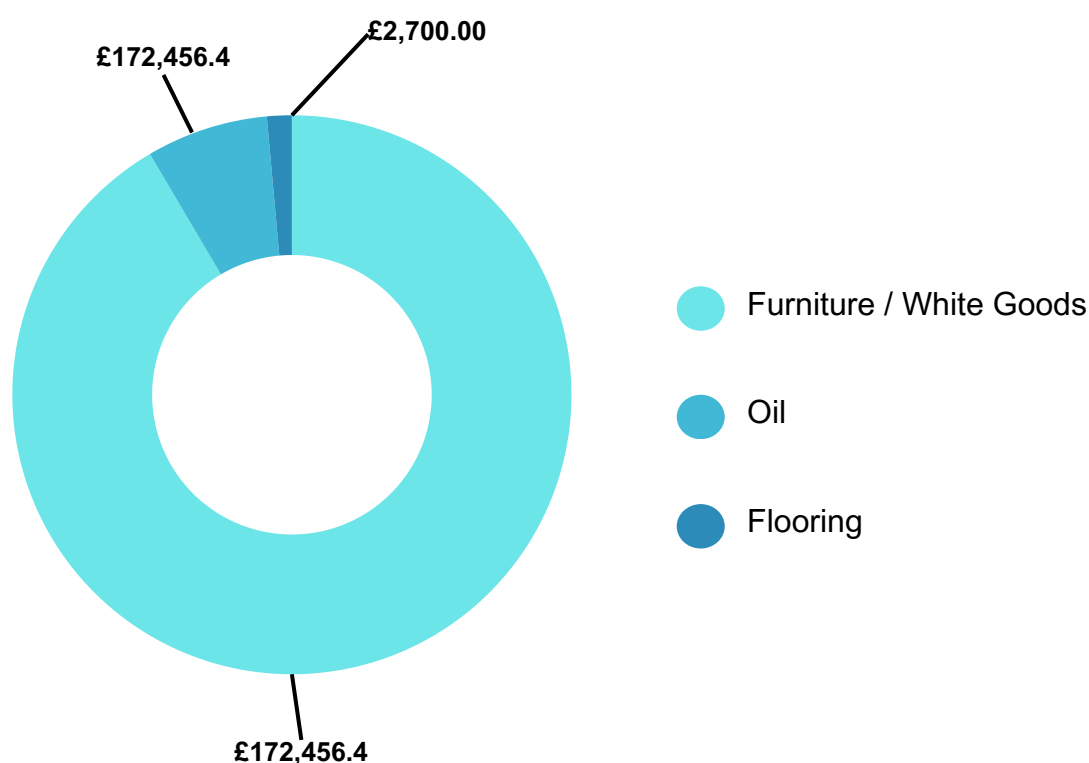
The Schools Essential (Pupil Development Grant Access) Claim Form became an additional Transactional Council Service that was made available to the public online during the year. If a child already gets free school meals, there could be more help available via The Pupil Development Grant which provides financial assistance to families on low incomes for the purchase of school essentials. Funding of up to £125 is available to each eligible child, with those children in Year 7 who are entitled to £200.



## Pre-Accommodation Support

- For the financial year 2023/24, the Pre-Accommodation Support team supported a total of 776 new tenants' cross tenure helping achieve £793,180 of supported savings in the form of income maximisation and grants.
- Pre-Accommodation staff helped with income maximisation and completing several benefit applications that financially impacted the tenants. We are trusted partners to apply to the Welsh Government Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) providing grants for white goods, off grid fuel and Emergency Assistance Payments, as well as verified assessors for Welsh Water, which enables us to apply for reduced water rates to qualifying households. During 2023/24 the team successfully applied for the greatest number of these grant applications within Carmarthenshire.

### DAF Grants Awarded



- Pre-Accommodation support has been expanded into the Private Rented Sector and have supported 73 tenancies through Housing Support Grant funding.
- Private Rented Sector Support Officers are located in the 3 main Job Centre Offices, taking referrals for anyone making a claim for Universal Credit and have housing costs.
- We have provided specific training to:
  - 36 vulnerable at-risk young people,
  - 58 young people through home ready over 6 training sessions in Job Centres,
  - 29 households from Referrals from Gateway, Housing Options Advisor, etc.
- We provided Home Ready training in schools for the first time reaching over 270 pupils from Queen Elizabeth High School, Ysgol Gyfun Emlyn, and Ysgol Gyfun St John Lloyd.
- We provide training as part of a module for University of Wales Trinity Saint David as part of a Youth Workers course.
- We have an established partnership working with the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) to provide training to young jobseekers as part of their claimant commitment.

**Outcome: People are supported to take advantage of local opportunities whether it be through starting a business, gaining qualifications, or gaining meaningful employment.**

### **Community Benefits**

We continue to pursue Community Benefits through our Procurement Tendering Activity. Via awarded contracts we require appointed suppliers and contractors to deliver meaningful targeted recruitment and training opportunities, elements of this requirement is to engage disadvantaged groups, including the long term unemployed. Working with employment programmes including Workways+ and Communities for Work+ we encourage suppliers to provide short term work experience placements to encourage individuals back into the workplace. Innovative solutions for delivered recruitment opportunities are developed via the Carmarthenshire Employability Network (CEN) which meets monthly.

Through collaborative working we have set up a monthly Employment Hub on-site at Pentre Awel. The Hub is delivered by Acorn Recruitment in partnership with Bouygues UK. On a monthly basis, Acorn will deliver an employability session to people referred from the CEN. This removes much of the dependency of vacancies being advertised to the group and referring agencies/projects sending CV's blindly. Acorn work closely with BYUK's sub-contractors and have a good understanding of the timeline of packages and therefore can slot people into vacancies accordingly. At present there have been a few recruited through this process but this will 'ramp up' over the coming months as the build gets out of the ground and more trades arrive on site.

### **Skills Hub**

Through our Community Team for Learning Disabilities, our Skills Hub has opened and is delivering workshops in woodwork, pottery, and daily living skills to individuals with a disability or mental health condition who face barriers when trying to access training and work opportunities. The Hub makes people feel valued, increases independence, reduces social isolation, and maximises potential. Our Promise and our Purpose: Communities Supporting adults to grow, develop and feel safe, belonging to their community.

Funding has been agreed via the regional innovation fund for two additional supported employment posts which will create additional capacity to support people into employment. Future plans include exploring the potential of a social enterprise and collaborating with further education to offer accredited training and alternatives to residential college for young people with a learning disability. The Skills Hub is also expanding and can provide day opportunities for those with emotional and mental health issues.

## Fit to Employ

During 2023-24, Fit to Employ engaged with 20 participants over two 8-week courses, offering opportunities for sports involvement and skills development.

Participants acquired various skills, including communication, resilience, problem-solving, patience, leadership, coaching, and team building. They expressed pride in attending every session, completing certifications like the Tag Leaders Award, and overcoming personal challenges. All participants reported positive emotional outcomes, developing confidence and skills crucial for their personal and professional lives.

The project has successfully facilitated pathways to employment and education, enabling participants to secure coaching roles and engage in pre-employment training. Logbook results showed that 100% of participants either improved or maintained their emotional well-being, with none scoring "Sad" after sessions.

Each project concluded with a celebratory event where participants shared their achievements with family and friends, inspired by guest speakers.

## Actif Places

Our SPF funded Actif Places project has been developed to empower community venues across the County to increase provision and access to services locally. One of the key objectives of the project is to identify, upskill and mentor individuals within rural areas to increase their employment potential within the leisure industry i.e. fitness and health instructing, sports coaching, enhancing digital skills, first aid, manual handling, etc.

## Actif Volunteer Platform

The Actif Volunteer Platform aims to facilitate volunteering opportunities across Carmarthenshire by connecting people who want to volunteer with organisations wanting volunteers within the field of sport and leisure. Our goal is to benefit local communities by making it as easy as possible for people to give of their time, energy and skills through volunteering and help us in our mission to improve well-being through inspiring our population to be active for life. Volunteering is a fantastic way to make a positive difference in our communities while also helping connect people, create opportunities for people to learn new skills, gain experiences, and enhance their well-being. This is part of a wider campaign to improve links between the community into paid employment.



Outcome: Improved opportunities for all residents in literacy, numeracy, and digital skills to upskill for employment.

Multiply24

Multiply24 is delivered in partnership with Coleg Sir Gâr and Adult Learning Wales and focuses on outreach and flexible learning delivery, focusing on hard to reach/rural settings.

The project identifies and engages with people over 19 years old and adults that have low levels of numeracy skills – empowering them to undertake numeracy courses and achieve level 2 maths qualifications. This will ultimately achieve better labour market outcomes for the participants and upskill the existing workforce.

Multiply24 aims to achieve equity of access through hybrid learning, learning through coaching and mentoring and mixed reality teaching – using Virtual Reality tools to recreate real life contexts to develop the confidence levels of the participants.

Adult Community Learning



Report on the adult learning in the community provision of Carmarthenshire Adult Learning in the Community Partnership (March 2024)

FINDINGS:	JUDGEMENT:
The Carmarthenshire Adult Learning Partnership works appropriately together to provide a suitable range of courses for learners across the County. In most cases, learners make suitable progress and develop and improve their knowledge and skills. The partnership delivers courses in an appropriate range of good quality venues. Across the partnership, tutors give learners strong levels of support.	<div>Excellent</div> <div>Overall, the Estyn Inspection report is excellent and accurately reflects the quality and standards in teaching and learning.</div> <div>! Two Recommendations are in place around strategic partnership working and Welsh medium provision. A robust Post Inspection Action Plan is in place and good progress is being made against the actions required.</div>

Employability Programmes

There are two Employability Programmes operating in Carmarthenshire namely Communities for Work Plus (C4W+) and Carmarthenshire Working, identifying key training and skills opportunities through engagement with businesses and identifying key skills required. These programmes have delivered a wide range of support to people across the region during 2023/24 including 240 individuals into jobs; 41 into volunteering and 66 with training/qualifications, they have also supported 213 businesses.

## **Outcome: Recognise and seek to limit the disproportionate barriers faced by marginalised groups in accessing services and support which allow them to live and age well.**

Our aim as a Council is to support and promote age friendly communities where people can age well and live a high-quality later life. Creating age-friendly communities provides us with an opportunity to ensure that age is not a barrier to living well. It allows us to create an environment where older people can participate in society and be valued for the positive contributions they make, somewhere that people can feel included and participate in the activities they value and somewhere that they can stay living in their homes as long as possible, feeling safe, comfortable, and secure.

The number of people aged 65 and over in the County has increased by 18.9% since the 2011 Census. This increase amongst the older age groups has been the most dramatic observed, particularly those aged between 60 – 74 years and 85 years and over, where increases of 24.1% and 32.4% respectively were reported which reinforce the model of an ageing population. By 2039 it is projected that nearly 1 in 3 Carmarthenshire residents will be aged 65 and over which is why it is important that we consider the impact of an ageing society now.

The ageing population of Carmarthenshire presents a challenge for all communities within the County to become more age-friendly to support people to be able to live well as they grow older. We, as a provider of public services, have a responsibility to ensure that our residents live fulfilled lives through providing everyone with the opportunity to 'age well' and fully participate in community life.

### **Armed Forces Covenant**

We are committed to the Armed Forces (AF) Covenant, ensuring the needs of service personnel, veterans, and their families are met with dedicated support and recognition.

Integral to this commitment is the inclusion of an armed forces question in all public consultations. This not only raises awareness of our AF Community, but also ensures that the unique needs and perspectives of service personnel, veterans, and their families are consistently considered in policy and service developments.

Stakeholder engagement has been strengthened through termly meetings with armed forces representatives, fostering a collaborative environment for addressing issues and enhancing the support network for the military community. These regular meetings serve as a platform for sharing updates, discussing challenges, and coordinating efforts to improve the quality of life for those who have served, which implements the covenant principles.

### **Ageing Well Network**

Carmarthenshire's Ageing Well Network was established in 2021 with the aim of bringing together organisations working to support people to age well. The network is designed to unite and inform the community we have here in the County, through discussing key issues.

Members receive monthly newsletters which provide useful articles on the projects and activities running across Carmarthenshire as well as the help and advice which is available from the Council and other providers.



**Actif’s 60+ Physical Activity & Sport Programme**

In 2023-2024, just under 160,000 attendances took part in our Actif’s 60+ physical activity and sport programme which saw residents across the County get active in a variety of sessions including chair-based activities, curling, sport circuits and exercise to music.

Some participants have reported the following feedback “The exercise program is certainly working well for us. There is an improvement to our health and well-being, and everyone says that their balance is improving. We all have different needs due to health issues and one of us stated today that she could now tie her shoelaces without having to sit down! Others can put their socks on without sitting down. We are getting stronger week by week”.

Our 60+ Free-swimming initiative continues to be offered in our four swimming pools. Additionally free swimming is offered to veterans in the armed forces. Over 20,000 free swims took place in the 2023/2024 period.

**Council Communication**

Our Marketing and Media team have continued to promote the existing range of cost-of-living support available to residents. A cost-of-living advice leaflet was distributed with the annual Council Tax notification, and we continue to include further advice with all council tax bills and reminder letters that are issued throughout the year. The leaflet provides a range of information on the help and advice available to support residents with the cost of living in Carmarthenshire. This includes information on the wide range of support provided in our three main Hwbs and Hwb Bach y Wlad (funded up to December 2024), as well as contact details of key contacts and partners. In addition to this we also regularly attend key events throughout the County and promote the information available to our residents on specific grants such as the School Essentials Grant, which provides funding towards school uniform and other essentials, along with social media promoting means tested Free School Meals as well as Universal Free School Meals.

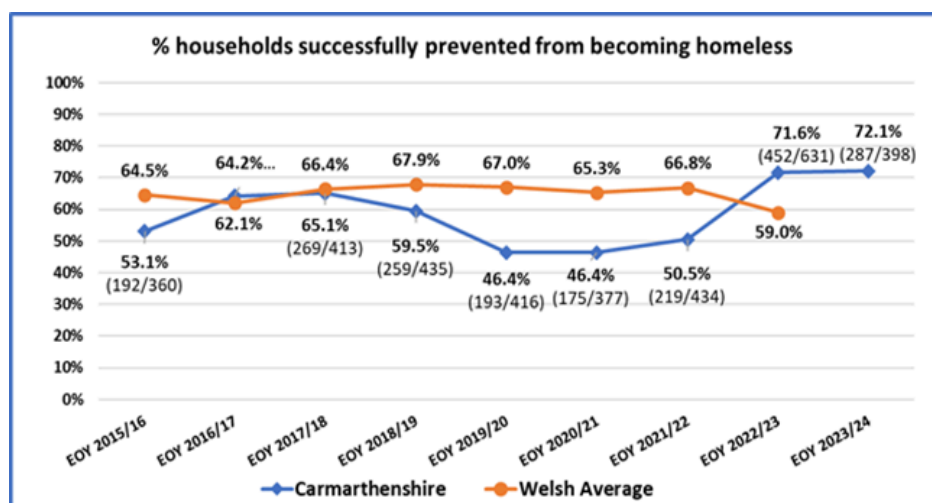
Activity Across all our Hwbs		
	2022/23	2023/24
General Enquiries	36,259	42,684
Appointments	9,933	15,579
Claim What’s Yours - through a Hwb Advisor	1,520	1,916
Hwb Bach Y Wlad Enquiries (Oct 23 - Mar 24)	0	4,814

## Outcome: A reduction and working towards an end to homelessness.

Whilst we are doing all we can, we must continue to improve the way we respond to the current housing pressures through innovative working practices, support, flexibility and investment. Failure to do so will result in us not meeting housing need, daily service demands and significantly increased costs. There will also be potential community cohesion issues in managing asylum seekers, ex-offenders with many of the demand being unplanned. Based on a further analysis of current risks we have now increased the risk rating score to reflect the pressures.

Housing and homelessness demand remains significant (we currently have between 40 and 50 homelessness presentations every week) and there will be pending additional demands around ex-offenders and asylum seekers in the coming months. Availability of suitable temporary accommodation also continues to be a challenge and there has been a recent increase in the use of establishments such as Travel Lodge and Premier Inn for short term placements. This could result in budget/cost pressures during 24/25 but this is being monitored on a monthly basis.

We do however, continue to improve the prevention of households from becoming homeless, with finding suitable / sustainable options to over 70% of families and individuals that come to us for help. This has been achieved through several interventions including:



- Improving advice at the first point of contact through the Housing Hwb Team;
- Continually reviewing and evolving changes to operational practices in line with the increasing demand;
- Utilising the Emergency Allocations Policy to directly match our homes to those in the greatest need;
- Maximising the use of the funding available from Welsh Government to prevent homelessness in the first instance but where we could not prevent homelessness use funding to source alternative accommodation;
- Working with the private rented sector to maintain and increase the supply of good quality, affordable homes that can be easily accessed by those on lower incomes.

## Housing and Homelessness

In the medium to long term our ambitious Affordable Homes programme that includes a range of solution will provide significantly more homes through a range of methods- new build, buy back, bringing empty homes back into use etc. We are also proactively looking at land acquisition for larger sites that will enable more scale and quicker delivery.

There is no doubt that the housing pressure situation is a significant challenge, and risk, for Councils across Wales and the UK moving forward.

## Is anyone better off?

### Hwb Bach y Wlad

**Customer:** Mrs M

**Reason for visit:** Child Maintenance Enquiry. Single mother, no income other than Child benefit, one child, separated from partner due to experiencing domestic abuse at home.

**Hwb Advisor helped Mrs M with...**

- Child Maintenance – Process started,
- Carmarthen Domestic Abuse Service Support in place,
- Family Information Service – Team Around the Family,
- Council Tax Single Person Discount - £380.39 deducted from bill,
- Citizens Advice Bureau referral - Universal Credit - £1,147.28 income every 4 weeks,
- Discretionary Assistance Fund awarded – £67 emergency electricity top up voucher,
- Free School meals and uniform grant - £125,
- Council Tax reduction - £650.16 off bill reduced bill to £40 per month,
- Food voucher provided and delivery of food parcel,
- Household support fund – Rent and council tax arrears over £8K,
- Welsh Water Help U Scheme – Reduced bill to £291.30 saving £228.70,
- Employability referral - Support continues.

**Outcome:** Mrs M is in a better position, getting regular support and better off by £1,230.15 per month.



## How can we do better?

We will continue to implement and update the Tackling Poverty Plan to respond to the current challenges faced by residents and communities.

We will continue to deliver new investment programmes for Council House stock based on the stock condition surveys and our decarbonisation ambition. Together with continuing to develop schemes that increases options for provision of temporary accommodation (including supported provision).

We will further develop our Hwb Bach y Wlad in all County rural market towns, so that as many residents as possible have access to services, information, and support by also conducting specific events and bespoke activities within some rural schools through the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). It is important to note that this is currently funded until December 2024.

## **In Summary**

- The average time to complete council housing repairs increased significantly during 2023/24 due to a backlog from the Covid period, lack of materials, and contractor capacity. However, these issues have been addressed, and the long-term backlog has mainly been cleared.
- The percentage of rent lost due to council properties being empty has significantly reduced, which is an improvement. This was achieved through various changes, including a new letting standard, with further improvements planned.
- We continue our pro-active approach to housing advice, options and prevention of homelessness. We are facing unprecedented housing pressures and whilst we have done well to respond quickly to the increasing demands, we need to continue to make sure we make this response sustainable for the long term. Significant housing pressures in a range of areas remain e.g. Welsh Government's "No one left out" approach, introduction of Renting Homes Act in July 2022, delivering our resettlement commitments and on-going concerns in relation to asylum seekers, particularly unaccompanied children. We also need to increase our options for Temporary Accommodation in and around our main population centres of Carmarthen, Llanelli and Ammanford.
- The housing regeneration development programme continues to deliver a significant amount of more affordable homes for rent and sale, this will not only support the increasing housing demand but also contribute to economic growth, sustainable communities, and the green economy. In 2023/24, the program focused on buying private sector homes, bringing empty homes back into use, and developing new homes. Developments at Spilman Street, Carmarthen and the old YMCA building in Llanelli are examples of this.
- To address the second home crisis, the Council has decided to charge a premium on second homes and long-term empty properties, with the rates set to increase over the coming years.

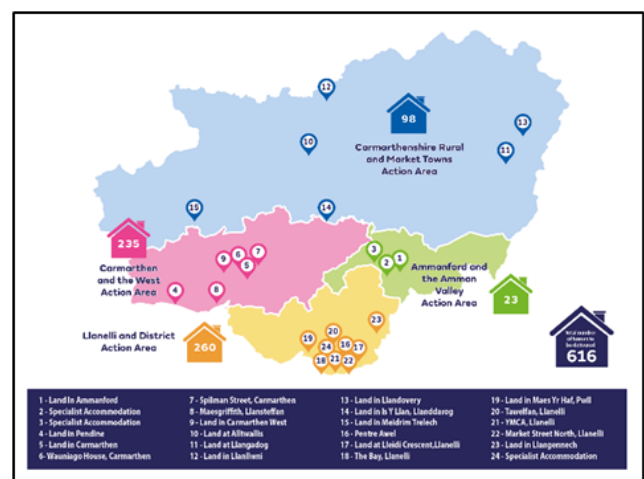
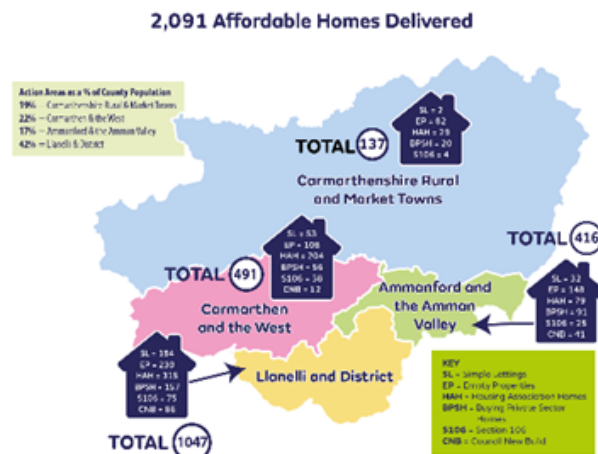
## **How are we doing?**

- It took an average of 27.6 calendar days to complete all council housing repairs during 2023/24, this was a significant increase on the previous year's average of 6.3 days. The main reason was the active targeting and clearing the backlog of oldest jobs occurred from work that was unable to be completed during Covid, as well as lack of materials and contractor capacity. The number of repairs completed has also risen significantly with an increase of 52% from under 21,000 jobs in 2022/23 to over 31,000 jobs in 2023/24. The backlog of old jobs has mainly been cleared and a new Property Works Framework and our plans to increase capacity to undertake more responsive work in-house should help us improve turnaround times.
- The % rent lost due to council properties being empty has now reduced to 2.2%, compared to 3.5% the previous year. This now means that nearly £1m per annum additional rent is being generated from the additional 250 homes that are now available. There have been several changes introduced over the last 21 months to drive improvement e.g. a new letting standard and introduction of an in-house team of operatives to undertake void works in addition to external contractors. We will continue to implement further improvement actions over the months to come.
- We have been able to house over 1,000 households into existing or new affordable homes during 2023/24.

## Outcome: Availability of good quality and energy efficient affordable homes in the County.

- Under the Rented Homes (Wales) Act, we have issued 7,500 contracts to tenants.
- We have delivered over 2,000 additional affordable homes since the beginning of our ambitious plan to increase the supply of affordable homes in the County. Good quality affordable homes are the bedrock of healthy and sustainable communities. We have continued to exceed targets every year and our focus now is to buy additional land to ensure we increase the supply of homes at pace.
- Our housing regeneration development programme sets the vision to support the delivery of over 2,000 homes for rent and sale over the next 5 years (February 2022 - December 2027). The plan is based on meeting housing need and stimulating economic growth across the County creating jobs, building strong sustainable communities, and growing the green economy.

The programme for 2023/24 delivered 331 additional homes which focused on buying private sector homes for general and specialist housing need, bringing empty homes back in to use and developing new homes, including the conversion of the former Spilman Street council offices into 12 apartments.



It is important that this plan links with wider corporate and departmental priorities such as Town Centres, Rural Ten Towns and key regeneration projects e.g. Pentre Awel, Tyisha, Carmarthen West and Waunfango House (Carmarthen). A significant amount of additional grant monies has also been drawn down from Welsh Government and have achieved full Social Housing Grant spend of £17m during 23/24.

- We have also been further developing our Decarbonisation Plan for our existing Council homes which puts us ahead of the game when compared with the rest of Wales. All these activities will contribute significantly to the creation of job and training opportunities for local people in the next few years. It will also assist in the development of the supply chain around new technologies.



- We are introducing a new Estate and Tenancy Management offer that will see increased visibility and accessibility to housing officers on our estates, a new handyperson service and a sustainable plan to regularly engage with tenants on what matters to them. Our tenant satisfaction rate has decreased during 2023/24 (similar to trends across to all other social housing landlords in Wales) and we want to ensure we proactively respond to this. We are, however, well placed in terms of our approach to the collection of current tenant income, particularly in the context of the current cost of living crisis. We have developed a strong pre-accommodation team that helps to sustain tenancies and maximises tenants access to what they are entitled to e.g. benefits, white goods etc. Our Private Sector Housing Team continues to make progress, particularly in developing a new “Landlord Offer” that will hopefully result in sustaining existing private landlords to meet continued housing need as well as attracting new ones. The number of empty private homes remains a challenge and will have continued focus during 2024/25. There has also been a huge improvement in the management of the Penybryn Traveller site and our general services to the Gypsy and Traveller community.
- Over the next three years our current pipeline of Council new build developments will deliver over 600 homes. Our new build homes will meet the individual needs of our communities and include houses, bungalows, and apartments for both individuals and families. All our new build developments follow a clear set of design principles that create new communities that are sustainable with a real sense of place.
- Whilst supporting the Cabinet vision statement to consider the greater use of the additional powers afforded by Welsh Government to tackle the second home crisis, we have decided to use our discretionary powers to charge a premium on second homes and long-term empty properties. A premium of 50% will be charged in 2024/25 on second homes with a view to increasing the premium to 100% from April 2025; and on long term empties a 50% premium will be charged for properties empty for more than 1 year and less than 2 years, 100% for 2 to 5 years and 200% for properties empty over 5 years.

## Is anyone better off?

We are fully aware of the continued difficulties many of our existing and prospective tenants are facing. As a result, we have tried to balance rent affordability and the additional income we require (by increasing rent annually) with what we need to invest in our homes, to make them cheaper to run, (including new decarbonisation and energy efficiency technologies) as well as delivering additional new homes for our tenants of the future.

By reducing our council house voids, increasing the supply through our new build, buy back and working with private sector and other social landlords we have allocated 778 (70% through Council Stock and 30% from other social landlords) of homes to families and individuals, many of which would have been at the point of destitution.

*“Sarah- If it wasn’t for the help that I received initially from the Council to find me an immediate place to live and then shortly after, a secure tenancy that I could afford, my family and I would be on the street. My children now have a safe place to live, where they feel settled and I’ve had the support to manage my finances properly”.*

*“X- I was 19 at the time, transgender and had recently been made homeless because of abuse by a family member. I was placed in a supported housing project where I felt safe and got on well. I realised that I could live with and trust other people by being in that environment and having that support and then got successfully rehoused in one of the Councils converted shared houses”*

## How can we do better?

- We will continue to further develop options around access to affordable homes by developing a greater range of low-cost home ownership options. This will ensure that as part of the affordable housing options we are able to offer a real alternative to the rental market for individuals and families who’d like to own their own home but can’t afford to purchase a home at open market values.
- Our housing officers will be more visible on estates to ensure that we continue to support council tenants who are experiencing difficulties but also to ensure tenancy conditions are enforced where tenants choose to disregard their responsibilities
- We will continue to be pro-active as we can in bringing empty private sector homes back into use not only to potentially increase the availability of affordable homes but also tackle the local “eyesore” that are sometimes associated with them being empty.
- We will also continue to maximise rental income across homes, garages, and service charges; and we will tackle the second home crisis by implementing a charge premium on second homes and long-term empty properties. We will continue to develop a universal support model through our Hwbs, by signposting and triaging, thus increasing the availability of direct access to specialist services such as Housing Options.

## In Summary

- There has been a notable improvement with fewer people waiting in hospital for domiciliary care.
- The National Exercise Referral Scheme Wales has seen a significant increase in referrals.
- The delivery time for Disabled Facilities Grants has slightly improved, and the number of adaptations completed has increased.
- Collaborative efforts with health colleagues have been strengthened, particularly through the Home First team, which has won several awards and is positively impacting hospital flow and reducing waiting lists.
- A Prevention Strategy is being developed across our Communities Department, focusing on a whole population approach to prevention, which is expected to reduce demand for statutory intervention.
- Investments in Mental Health Services have established a well-being pathway across Carmarthenshire, focusing on early intervention and prevention.



## How are we doing?

- As at the end of March 2024 there were 7 people waiting in hospital for domiciliary care, this is an improvement on the figure of 35 as at end of March 2023.
- The number of referrals to the National Exercise Referral Scheme has increased significantly, with 1,537 received during 2023/24, which is the highest level since the scheme started. Over 70% (316/450) of those that started the scheme completed the 16-week programme during 2023/24, this is the highest rate of completion since data recording commenced.
- The average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant continues to be high at 273 days during 2023/24, although this is a slight improvement on 277 days the previous year. There was a 14% increase in the number of adaptations completed in the year compared to 2022/23. The backlog of oldest jobs which occurred from work that was unable to be completed during Covid, as well as lack of materials and contract capacity have now improved, but the demand for adaptations are high, with work required for more complex needs.



## Outcome: Seamless integrated services between Health and Social Care.

- Whilst Adult Social care is not formally integrated with health, there is a strong commitment to collaborative working. The Community teams are co-located with health colleagues, collaboration with Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDUHB) is critical to the development of our divisional objectives and we are working together to progress several strategic imperatives e.g. transforming mental health and learning disability services, suicide, and self-harm prevention.
- We have successfully established a triage arrangement for intermediate care with health colleagues - The Home First team. This is having an impact on hospital flow and reducing waiting lists.
- We have developed a range of supported accommodations to reduce the reliance on residential care. This improves outcomes, promotes independence and choice for individuals. This programme of work has impacted on savings targets, by reducing over provision in some cases. We have established a new governance structure for this work which was identified as an area of improvement last year. Seven housing schemes have been opened with more to follow. Approximately 32 individuals have stepped down from residential care.
- The Council continues to make a significant contribution to the work of the Regional Safeguarding Board and takes a lead role in several of its associated subgroups.
- The Carmarthenshire Local Safeguarding Operational Group which meets quarterly, evidences the continued commitment of all local agencies to work together to improve safeguarding.

### Social Care & Health Protection Team

The Social Care and Health Protection Team helped to manage incidents of Covid-19 in care homes. During a Covid-19 incident at a care home the team will offer support visits, Teams meetings, and phone calls to provide infection prevention and control advice to help reduce the spread of infection and protect staff and residents in the care home. There was a total of 32 Covid-19 incidents across 28 Care Homes during 2023-2024.

The Social Care and Health Protection Team working in collaboration with Public Health Wales and Hywel Dda University Health Board, were trained in the contact tracing of TB (Tuberculosis) close contacts and utilised in collecting key information through telephone calls and following a carefully predetermined script to identify whether an individual would be eligible for screening, as a contact of a case of TB. 520 calls were undertaken contacting 283 people over a period of seven months. Over 32% of those people called were eligible for screening.

## **Outcome: Accessible, inclusive, sustainable services, which promote and facilitate learning, culture, heritage, information, well-being, and leisure.**

Our transformation journey in learning disability day opportunities has been wholeheartedly embraced by the staff team who are constantly being innovative including activities in collaboration with leisure.

- The newly established Skills Hub in Cross Hands offers arts and crafts, woodwork, skill development and accredited training for people with a learning disability or mental health. The next phase of the Skills Hub is to progress volunteering and supportive employment schemes which is a significant step in providing people with learning disability and mental health real opportunities to maximise their potential.
- A Care Inspectorate Wales inspection report in February 2024 for Tir Einon Respite Centre for learning disabilities noted how much they value the tremendous work undertaken by the service and the positive work it has on their loved ones with the care provided at an exceptionally high standard.

### **Gold Card Scheme**

Carmarthenshire Gold Card Scheme allows residents who represent our country, as unpaid athletes within their chosen sport, to access facilities within Actif's Leisure Centres, free of charge, to supplement their current training programme. During 2023/24 Actif received 80 Gold Card applications, of which 78 were awarded. Applications reflect the diverse range of sports available within the County, with 28 different sports featuring.

Throughout 2023-24 Actif have supported sports clubs and organisations with grant applications for the Be Actif Wales Fund (BAWF) and the Sport Wales 'Energy Saving Grant' (ESG) scheme. This has resulted in 18 Carmarthenshire sports clubs receiving a combined total of £41,157 this past financial year through the BAWF. Additionally, 5 Carmarthenshire clubs also received funding through the ESG, resulting in a further total of £94,466 of investment.

### **Carmarthenshire Ambassador Scheme**

Launched in 2023 by the County Council after a successful Visit Wales supported pilot in North Wales, the Carmarthenshire Ambassador scheme aims to develop the community's knowledge on the history and culture of the County as well as things to do. As well as increasing community pride and awareness of what is locally available it is also helping local communities support local businesses in gaining more income from visitors. A series of online modules have been created on subjects ranging from Castles and Gardens, Language, Culture and History, Walking and Cycling Trails and individual Towns across three different levels allowing participants to gain a bronze, silver, and gold level certification.

Available through a bi-lingual website, the modules have been written and designed by the tourism development officers to be informative and fun with a quiz to complete at the end of each module. A Welsh language and culture module was launched as part of our activities to support the Urdd whilst local town input has been through forums and 10 towns project.

With continued promotion, numbers have now reached over 400, including those working directly in tourism such as hotels, students at Coleg Sir Gâr, film scouts, library and contact centre officers as well as town-based hospitality workers. Each is awarded a certificate with some now using the scheme as part of their staff induction process.



## **Discover Carmarthenshire**

The Discover Carmarthenshire social media channels have been used almost daily to communicate things to do and see across the County to both residents and those visiting. Using both organic posts created by the tourism development officers and some paid for advertising using Shared Prosperity funding, we have been able to increase followers to the Facebook account to 22,000 and reach to over 3million, and over 65,000 Instagram accounts were reached from January to March. Bilingual videos and eye-catching photos are used to communicate free places to go, accessible walks, cycling routes and local food and drink. Additional radio campaigns have been part of the communication plan with all interest being funnelled to the County's main "things to do" website.

We have successfully promoted over 200 community events throughout the year as well as supporting 48 of them with management guidance. A Summer and Winter edition of the popular Sir Gâr Visitor Guide was written, designed, and printed in the year, with 120,000 distributed to key targeted locations including cafes, libraries, and hotels. The guide provides valuable visual support to over 100 businesses and is sought after by residents seeking to explore their own County as well as those staying.

## **Pendine Tourism Attractor Project**

The Caban guest accommodation and the Museum are built side-by-side using sustainable building technologies and renewable energy features. The external Events Arena and Exhibition Esplanade have already hosted an extensive calendar of events to complement the existing regular annual events in Pendine such as The Vintage Hot Rods and Straight-liners. An exciting children's play area, dune garden with signage informing of the adjacent Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Special Areas of Conservation and improved parking complete the project.

Additional funding sources to enhance the visitor offer and experience include:

- ° A sandsport arena,
- ° EV charging points,
- ° EBike charging points,
- ° Secure bicycle lockers,
- ° Additional 30 carparking spaces.

Previously, tourism trade in Pendine has been seasonal with most businesses closing at the end of October and reopening in Spring. This facility being open year-round and with a year-round calendar of events attracts visitors both overnight and day visitors through the quieter season giving the other businesses in Pendine which are tourism dependent the opportunity to extend their trading months, there sustaining and retaining their staff too.

Local businesses have reacted positively to the new facilities and are keen to work together to promote each other's businesses, events etc and extend opening into the quieter seasons.

The community has reacted positively and are keen to enjoy the facilities, have input into the year-round calendar of events and be a part of the new vibrant and sustainable coastal resort which hosts a variety of tourism businesses from cafes and ice cream parlours to beach and surf hire and outdoor pursuits and encourage new businesses to invest in Pendine.

Both the Museum of Land and Speed and Caban with external enhancements have achieved the Visit Wales VAQAS (Visit Quality Assured Visitor Attraction) award.



## **Museum Volunteering Programme**

The museums' volunteering programme was launched in November 2023, recruiting 15 volunteers in the first four months. Following an open day with Coleg Elydir Trust we also developed a programme of volunteering opportunities for their learners with additional support needs. This work has benefitted from involvement with the Strategic Volunteering in Leisure Project and the Tempo Time Credit reward scheme, which the Museum of Land Speed is supporting. Our community outreach included visiting a dementia and macular degeneration support group to help shape a reminiscence service and memory box loan scheme, fostering a wider partnership with Amgueddfa Cymru's Museums Inspiring Memories Project and the National Wool Museum.

**Outcome: Accessible, inclusive, sustainable services, which promote and facilitate learning, culture, heritage, information, well-being, and leisure.**

## **Training and Guidance**

The Social Care and Health Protection Team provided Infection Prevention and Control training to 124 care home staff across Local Authority and private care homes as well as to 196 Local Authority Domiciliary carers.

Training sessions were also delivered to 734 staff across 44 Local Authority and varying types of private care homes. The aim of the session was to provide in person training to staff to refresh their knowledge in donning and doffing PPE and hand hygiene.

## **Prevention Strategy**

A Prevention Strategy is being developed within our Communities Department. We now have a Senior Manager working across integrated services and adult social care to develop a whole population approach to prevention. It is envisaged this will reduce demand for statutory intervention and maximise the potential of individuals.

The prevention of suicide and self-harm and the mental health of children and young adults is an ongoing priority. A mapping exercise is being progressed to identify support and services as well as the barriers for those seeking help. This work will help towards informing the strategy.

All teams in Adult Social Care have achieved or are working towards the Investors in Carers scheme. The scheme requires evidence that carers are being supported to continue in their caring role. This work is a key element of our developing prevention strategy.

## **The Health Well-being Service**

The investment in Mental Health Services has enabled us to establish a well-being pathway across Carmarthenshire which focuses on early intervention and prevention.

The Health Well-being service has been established which acts as a preventative service, aiming to provide support to people before they reach crisis point. A service that is inclusive and acts promptly to ensure people get the right care and support they need, when they need it. The service takes a multidisciplinary approach to tackle people social stressors, liaising with GP's, housing, probation, social work teams across Carmarthenshire.

The service provides:

- An inclusive approach to mental health support,
- Utilises a strength-based and preventative approach,
- Aimed to improve the resilience and mental health of adults across Carmarthenshire.

Demand for this service is growing with some positive outcomes being reported from those who have accessed this service.

## **Regulatory Verdict & Accolades**

- Delta Wellbeing were successful at the Great British Care Awards 2024 winning the 'Putting People First' award. A recent Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Inspection noted that Llesiant Delta Wellbeing was a great place to work and were well supported by the management.
- A recent CIW Inspection in November 2023 noted of the Home Care Service that the customers and their relatives spoke highly of the care workers and the care they provide.
- A recent CIW Inspection of Awel Tywi Residential Care Home in June 2023 stated the staff were well trained, knowledgeable about the people they care and support.

Audit Wales published a local report '**Follow-up review of Corporate Arrangements for Safeguarding – Carmarthenshire County Council**' in October 2023. The report looked at whether as a Council, we had effective arrangements for Corporate Safeguarding in place, to ensure that all its employees play their part in safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of children and adults who may be at risk of harm.



The review focussed on the Council-wide corporate arrangements for safeguarding. It was not a review of specific safeguarding[2] arrangements in Education or Social Services.

The report identified that the Council had not addressed all the recommendations in the 2015 national report on corporate safeguarding and there were weaknesses in its corporate safeguarding oversight and assurance arrangements that need addressing so the Council can assure itself that risk is minimised. Five recommendations were made, and we responded and addressed these by agreeing an action plan with several actions now complete.

## **Adaptations**

We completed 894 adaptations within Council homes and private homes through the Disabled Facilities Grant during 2023/24. This represents an increase of 40% compared with 2 years ago. The demand for adaptations is high, with a 58% increase in demand over the same period and the work required is increasingly for more complex needs.

## **National Exercise Referral Scheme**

Actif Sport & Leisure deliver a wide range of health interventions in partnership with Hywel Dda University Health Board and National Public Health Teams. The National Exercise Referral scheme (NERS) 16-week exercise intervention for individuals with a chronic conditions, pre-diabetes programme that includes exercise and nutritional advice that is specifically targeting individuals that are classified as being pre-diabetic and our Proactive Falls Prevention programme that targets people that are at risk or fear falling and provide them with strength and balance to prevent them from falling.

[2] Safeguarding is defined as 'Preventing and protecting children and adults at risk from abuse or neglect and educating those around them to recognise the signs and dangers'

### Accommodation Schemes

Within Adult Social Care, we have developed several accommodation schemes which have significantly improved the quality of life for individuals with a learning disability. Below are testimonies from two people who have moved in to one of the new properties.

K said, "It is good living there, I like sewing, diamond art, swimming at the leisure centre, the walking group, Dance Gold and have started back at yoga, they are all close by at the leisure, staff come with me to help make sure I am safe crossing the roads I see some of my friends there. I see my family on weekends." I asked about living in the home and K said "I like my bed, my room and clean it and help with the shopping. I love all the things I do here." "Today I am going to Techniquet with the others living here and the staff, we are going on the train."

A parent commented; "He volunteers a couple of times at the Hospital and when I called earlier this week, he had no time to talk as he was heading out to do the household food shop, he is like a changed man, he is flourishing and enjoying having greater independence."

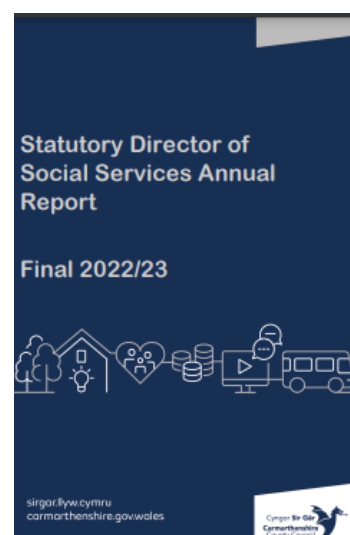
## How can we do better?

### Adult Social Care

The prevention agenda is one we need to progress at pace during 2024. There are examples of innovative practice in our day services where we have utilised community and leisure facilities to prevent people needing to attend a building-based service. We also have examples of creative intervention by our community teams such as the well-being pathways in the Community Mental Health teams to provide information and support at an earlier point to prevent the need for statutory intervention, but we have much to do in this area to be able to meet future demand.

One of the areas that requires an increased focus this year is suicide prevention as we have seen a significant increase in the number of suspected suicides in Carmarthenshire and across the region. In 2023, we established a Rapid Response to suspected suicide which enables us to reach out immediately to those affected and offer support. We also obtained grant funding to employ an officer to undertake a mapping exercise to identify support and services as well as the barriers for those seeking help. This work will inform our developing prevention strategy.

Last year we recognised the need to improve our engagement with carers in the development of services, so earlier this year we hosted a conference to ensure a co-productive approach to inform this work.



## Well-being Objective 3

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

#### Overview of Progress

A healthy and well-functioning economy provides the foundation for sustainable growth, improved living standards and the development of prosperous communities. The Council recognises that fair and meaningful employment, a thriving business base and well skilled labour market are the foundations of a healthy economy and are committed to driving this agenda forward. Economic recovery following a challenging Covid period continues at pace, however some challenges remain. Disposable household income remains below national averages and economic inactivity rates remain above averages.

Businesses continue to be supported through a range of interventions, including improved access to commercial space, networking opportunities, access to funding and an increased focus on ensuring businesses can take advantage of local supply chains and procurement opportunities. Wider regeneration activity has seen improvements to our town centres with the aim of increasing footfall and attracting inward investment.

Our employability schemes continue to support those furthest away from the labour market and jobs are actively being created through Council intervention to ensure that people can access opportunities to improve their lives. Training and upskilling to create a future proofed workforce continues with uplifts seen in the numbers of those qualified to level 4 and above.

The delivery of Pentre Awel continues at pace which will have far-reaching benefits for the County, some of which are already being realised through Community Benefits.

Work continues to address one of the common barriers faced by individuals looking to return to or find employment by seeking to increase the availability of childcare in the County where demand is not being met.

The Natural Environment is a core component of sustainable development. 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. A slight increase in Nitrogen Dioxide levels has been observed, however, this is still lower than the Wales average. The first phase of the Waste Strategy has been implemented and changes have resulted in an increase in reuse and recycling tonnage performance which has already surpassed the national target which was expected by 2025. Furthermore, the percentage of waste sent to landfill has reduced, working towards the National target of Zero Waste to landfill by 2025.

Areas of the County are susceptible to the negative effects of the climate emergency, especially flooding. The Council has implemented interventions through the Flood & Water Management Act and Shoreline Management Plan to mitigate against the effects of flooding, which is a growing concern among residents.



The County remains a key strategic stronghold for the future of the Welsh language, with the social and economic benefits of bilingualism being widely recognised. Our 'Strategy to Promote the Welsh Language in Carmarthenshire 2023-28' sets out what we will do to work towards restoring the Welsh language in the County by increasing the numbers of those who can speak Welsh, increasing the situations where people can speak Welsh, raising the status of the language, supporting communities to maintain the language and by having a positive effect on population movements.

Total Crime in Carmarthenshire has reduced by over 14% during 2023/24 which is positive. We recognise the importance of effective partnership working to sustain these low rates which is evidenced by the activity of the community safety work, Community Cohesion Team and the collaborative working required with regards to the Serious Violence Duty.

Transportation and highways play a key role in supporting and sustaining our communities, providing the vital infrastructure which connects people to one another, supports access to services and supports a thriving economy. The Council prioritises maintaining the highway network within its means, however, special provision is made during the winter time to ensure uninterrupted access to essential services.

The County is vast and mixed in terms of its rural/urban landscape, this poses challenges, which are difficult to address, especially with depleting resources. We have continued our work to enhance road infrastructure and develop transport solutions for the more rural areas of the County.

There has been a significant increase in the number of people killed or seriously injured (KSI) on Carmarthenshire roads, with a 66% increase from 2022 to 2023. We are committed to making roads safer through partnership working, awareness, education, and training to improve road user skills and behaviour.

Sport, leisure, culture and outdoor recreation are the heartbeat of our communities. These services provide a range of health and well-being activities, facilities, and programmes to support our residents and communities to lead healthy, safe, and prosperous lives. Similarly, the promotion of our County as an attractive and commercially viable place to visit and invest in is a key economic and well-being factor. Overnight and day visitors to the County contributed £597m to the local economy supporting 6,652 full time jobs. In addition, visits to libraries and leisure centres are up significantly on the previous year. Several innovative leisure and well-being initiatives are also delivered through a variety of mechanisms to ensure people have a wide range of options and opportunities to lead active and enriched lives.





## In Summary

Carmarthenshire's economy has seen improvement in recent years, following a period of uncertainty and recovery following the pandemic. There is recognition of this as we move towards a refreshed economic vision which aims to focus on the opportunities available to us and the challenges that we must overcome to realise real economic growth.

- The county continues to exhibit above average levels of economic inactivity, and employment rates remain below national averages. Unemployment rates have increased slightly but remain lower than national averages.
- There has been a decrease in business births and an increase in business deaths, however the Council is committed to providing support to businesses to ensure their sustainability and ability to diversify and upscale.
- Over the long term, Carmarthenshire's GVA (Gross Value Added) has grown relatively slowly. However, the recent picture is more positive since the pandemic, and there has been a narrowing of the gap between Wales and the UK, but there is still some way to go to reduce the gap to the level at the start of the millennium.
- Qualification levels have improved and there are now less people with no qualifications at all.
- Significant funding was secured by Economic Development, reflecting a significant achievement in external funding and private sector investment.
- Overnight and day visitors contributed a considerable amount to the local economy supporting thousands of full-time jobs.



## How are we doing?

- Employment rates have improved slightly in Carmarthenshire as at end of March 2024 to 72.0% compared to 71.7% at the end March 2023, although they continue to be below the Welsh and UK averages of 73.5% and 75.4% respectively. Unemployment figures increased slightly to 3.0% in March 2024 compared to 2.9% March 2023. This is better than the Welsh and UK averages of 3.5% and 3.8% respectively. Economic Inactivity<sup>[3]</sup> in Carmarthenshire remains high despite a slight improvement from 23.3% in March 2023 to 21.7% in March 2024, this is above the Welsh average of 20.3% and well above the UK average of 17.7%.
- 46.3% of those aged 18-64 in Carmarthenshire are qualified to Level 4 or above (December 2023), this is an improvement on the previous year of 40% and above the Welsh average of 45.0%. Developing skills and qualifications improves employability prospects, boosts career prospects and creates a well-skilled and able labour market. It also ensures that we have a workforce that is fit for the future. Those with no qualifications in Carmarthenshire reduced to 5.3% in December 2023, compared to 7% the previous year and well below the Welsh average of 7.9%. Carmarthenshire is well underway to meet Welsh Government's National Well-being Indicator Milestone - of 'the percentage of working age adults with no qualifications will be 5% or below in every local authority in Wales by 2050'.
- Business births have reduced from 820 in 2021 to 630 in 2022, and Business deaths have increased from 650 in 2021 to 700 in 2022.
- 955 Direct and Indirect Jobs were created with Regeneration assistance during 2024/25, this is a reduction on the previous year's figure of 1,466 but some delays to commencement of significant direct delivery and third party grant funded construction projects means that these will now be realised during 2024/25.
- 158 individuals were supported through Council employability schemes to earn the real living wage during 2023/24, this is a decline in number compared to 204 in the previous year. Many of the clients supported were still receiving advice and guidance at the end of the financial year as they experience multiple barriers and have complex needs. Therefore, additional support is needed before they access employment opportunities.
- Over £35m of funding was secured during 2023/24 by Economic Development via Private Sector Investment and various successful applications for external funding.
- Overnight and day visitors contribute £597m to the local economy supporting 6,652 FT jobs.

[3] Economically inactive are defined as people who are not in employment or unemployed, the above data excludes students and persons 65+, therefore could be inactive due to looking after family or long-term sick etc.

### Outcome: Businesses supported, and employment provided.

- In 2023, there were around 8,000 businesses in Carmarthenshire. Over 91% of businesses were 'micro' enterprises employing fewer than nine people - a somewhat higher share of the overall business stock than in Wales or the UK.
- 3,071 business enquiries were supported with regeneration team assistance during 2023/24. This is significantly higher than the target of 1,159 and far exceeds the previous year's result of 1,237.
- 60 jobs were created through Community Benefits in our Construction projects (21st Century School programme, housing and regeneration projects) and 669 jobs created with regeneration assistance across the County.
- 2,762 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths) pupil engagements through Community Benefits in our Construction Projects (21st Century School programme, housing and regeneration projects).



### Markets

Support is provided to businesses in the local indoor and outdoor markets in Carmarthen and Llanelli each with 80 and 56 tenancies respectively. In Carmarthen vacancy rates have improved during the year with the number of vacant units decreasing from 8 to 3.

In Carmarthen, a considerable amount of effort was made to advertise and accommodate changes as requested by traders. A key development in the market has been the introduction of new businesses which are attracting new footfall.

In Llanelli, vacancy rates have been kept to below 10% for some considerable time. Prompt re-advertising of stalls and shops have led to filling vacancies quickly. However, owing to lowering levels of footfall, tenancy rates may increase in the future and will need to be monitored.

### Town Centres

Regeneration of our town centres continues to be a key priority for the Council. In July 2021 the Carmarthenshire Economic Recovery Plan was endorsed by the Cabinet. Specific town centre plans for Ammanford, Carmarthen and Llanelli followed in January 2022. The projects currently being progressed are all aligned with actions and proposals contained within these town centre recovery plans.

In each of the primary town centres Ammanford, Llanelli and Carmarthen, we have Task Forces and a Town Forum in place. These groups bring together the key stakeholders within the town centres on a quarterly basis to discuss projects, gain input, consideration, and support for each other to develop the town centres. Opportunities for funding is highlighted, progress on each individual stakeholder activity is provided and endorsement for potential future activity is requested. Each of the towns has its own set of key performance indicators which are monitored on an annual basis, these include number of vacant properties, levels of investment from stakeholders and footfall figures.

Delivery of Welsh Government's Transforming Towns funding (April 2022 – March 2025) and UK Government Shared Prosperity Funding (April 2023 – March 2025) is in progress. Both funds provide an opportunity to concentrate on the primary town centres and the main objectives involve increasing vibrancy, reducing the number of vacant / underutilised commercial units, and increasing the amount of footfall.

Construction progressed well during 2023/24 on the former YMCA in Llanelli. On completion there will be 4 retail units, 4 office spaces and 8x2 bedroom apartments. The commercial space will be released to the open market for tenants. The retail units will lend themselves to start up units for local people to take the next step in their business journey.

Construction on the Market Street North site in Llanelli recommenced in September 2023 with an anticipated 18-month (65 weeks) build programme. The development will provide 340sqm commercial floorspace in 5 commercial units with capacity to accommodate 17 jobs and 10 residential units.

### **Pendine Tourism Attractor Project**

One of 13 projects creating a series of 'must see' destinations across Wales, the Pendine Tourism Attractor Project has been part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund through Welsh Government and Carmarthenshire County Council.

This was a major project for the Council's Regeneration section, securing £millions from several sources to create a high-quality destination that aims to encourage business investment and employment in the locality.

On the seafront of Pendine overlooking its fabulous 7-mile sandy beach, **The Caban** hotel is the perfect space in which to relax, unwind, and discover the local area. The excellent location affords the guests the luxury of being able to easily access the breath-taking beach and coastline, and the venue hosts a year-round calendar of themed events to suit all ages and all interests.

Open year round, the accommodation comprises 14 ensuite rooms ranging from twin/double, triple, family, and ground floor accessible rooms as well as an on-site restaurant with a varied menu served throughout the day.

In addition to the accommodation and licenced restaurant Caban has an accessible changing room and beach friendly wheelchair hire (via a separate fund), both available and marketed to the public as well as external public conveniences.

Opened in 2023, Caban is proving to be a very popular destination for both visitors and the residents who use the restaurant regularly to meet up and socialise.

**Jobs** – presently 12 permanent staff:

- ° 8 x Full Time (5 from Pendine, 2 from St Clears, 1 from Carmarthen)
- ° 4 x Part Time (2 from Pendine, 2 from St Clears)
- ° 5 x casual (2 from Pendine, 3 from Carmarthen)

Also currently recruiting so will increase to 16 permanent staff.

An additional four local people have acquired employment at the Museum of Land Speed, also located at Pendine.

**Outcome: People are supported to take advantage of local opportunities whether it be through starting a business, gaining qualifications, or gaining meaningful employment.**

- Through our delivery of Community Benefits over 3,595 weeks of targeted recruitment and training was delivered in 2023/24 through the Council's 21st Century Schools programme, as well as housing and regeneration projects across the County.
- We are delivering the £30 million Skills and Talent Programme and have financially supported 21 projects to date with the aim of creating a skilled future workforce. The programme's aims are to deliver at least 2,200 additional skills; support around 14,000 individuals with higher-level skills within 10 years and create at least 3,000 new apprenticeship opportunities.
- The Regional Learning and Skills Partnership have worked alongside partners to continue to update a Skills Barometer to map current provision and skills gaps both now and in the future. The programme is progressing well with the first brand new Degree Apprenticeship in User Experience being delivered by University of Wales Trinity Saint David - this compliments the level 2 - 5 apprenticeship offer being delivered through Gower College. This Framework is the first to be delivered in the whole of Wales and has been a requirement of Industry for many years.

Further activities include:

- Helped industry cluster groups grow and have created a promotional booklet to showcase their vision, benefits, and operations.
- Developed an interactive Explore Engineering website in collaboration with the private sector. They have also produced a short film series to inspire young learners and adults to consider engineering as a career choice.
- Organised several events, including "Let's Talk GenZ" workshops, a Future Skills for the Future Workforce event focused on digital skills, and a Retrofit Conference titled "Keep Contracts Local" in the construction cluster.
- Collaborated with BT to bring the BT immersive space to learners in Carmarthenshire, allowing them to explore different scenarios using cutting-edge technology.
- Participated in the Choose Your Future careers event, which aimed to provide insights into various career options and pathways for students, allowing them to learn from industry professionals and gain a better understanding of the world of work.



## Llandeilo Market Hall

Llandeilo's 'Old Market' is a new development providing 1,249m<sup>2</sup> of mixed office, business including a destination cafe and event space in the heart of Llandeilo.

Steeped in history, the building has undergone just over £4 million of redevelopment work through the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns funding programme with funding also coming from the European Regional Development Fund (£1.4 million and £300,000 respectively) and the Council, to create a spectacular multi-use premises for businesses and events.



With 20 business units created, 18 are currently occupied by 17 businesses including barbers, occupational therapy, and Solar renewables, with the remaining 2 units currently under offer.

Features of the building includes full fibre broadband up to 900mb download speeds, 8 passenger/disabled lift to the first floor, one parking space per unit, two electric vehicle recharging spaces for the building, gas or electric heating with wall mounted radiators and communal WCs and kitchens on the ground and first floors.

The facility will also be a venue for festivals and events held throughout the year, local community groups to use for concerts, ceremonies etc as well as a permanent venue for local markets. To further position the town as a quality and culturally rich Welsh place to live and visit, the facility has been named 'Yr Hen Farchnad'.

## Parc Gelli Werdd

Work was completed early in 2024 on the development of Parc Gelli Werdd, a development of offices and industrial units within 3 buildings providing 32,500 sqft for letting at Cross Hands, Carmarthenshire. Response levels of tenant interest in the units has been very positive, with 9 of the units and 5 of the offices are to be occupied shortly, with ongoing enquiries for the remaining 6 units and 6 offices.



The project:

- Delivers Economic Development by providing a mix of office and industrial floor space to local businesses to establish and grow and will accommodate up to 113 jobs.
- Contributes to the improvement of employment opportunities for local communities including young people in providing future jobs, thus keeping people in the area.
- Has delivered 1,390 targeted recruitment and training weeks, 255 apprentice weeks involving 9 apprentices, provided 94 opportunities for people considered disadvantaged as well as delivering of construction-based programme to the local school.
- Contributes to developing capacity in green technology skills and supply of products for delivering low carbon developments.
- Maximises ecological enhancement as part of the development in advance of the strategic site development, mitigation, compensation, and enhancement of land in Carmarthenshire. Sustainable drainage systems adopted using swales that allow controlled flows leading into a wider drainage regime.
- Maximises Social Value by incorporating inclusive design principles together with accessibility, equality and placemaking requirements and via social clauses in building contracts.
- Adopts an innovative approach and collaboration, contributing to the decarbonisation of commercial property and its long-term impacts and the identified priorities for communities in the area.

## **Outcome: Businesses are supported to take advantage of local supply chains and procurement opportunities.**

### **Promotion**

Our Corporate Procurement and Economic Development Units work closely to promote opportunities to Carmarthenshire businesses. Several Procurement and Business Surgeries have been delivered, offering procurement advice and guidance to potential suppliers, advice on business grants to those eligible, future tender exercises to promote them to local businesses who might be interested in tendering, and wider business support. We have held live tender workshops during 2023/24, and a getting tender ready workshop for the South West Wales Regional Contractors Framework 2024 tender in construction.

The surgeries are held at a variety of locations across Carmarthenshire accommodating the 3 main towns and 10 Towns.

### **Property Maintenance**

As a result of our strategic procurement practices for outsourced work, 63.73% of spending was directed to companies within Carmarthenshire last year, with an additional 29.35% going to other Welsh companies.

To enhance our contract management, oversight, and overall productivity, a new job management system has been implemented within the Property Maintenance team. This technology-driven solution is expected to streamline operations and improve service delivery.

## Pentre Awel

On Pentre Awel, Zone 1 Commercial regular meetings are held between Bouygues UK's commercial team and the Council to optimise the supply chain opportunities promoted for local suppliers to have the opportunity to bid for sub-contracting work. Bouygues maintain a live Procurement Plan outlining the sublet opportunities and these have been shared with the Council's Economic Development team.

Furthermore, we continue to work with Bouygues to pilot a means of collating supply chain spend and tracking main contractor and sub-contractor locations and the location of individuals employed on site.

Economic and Community Benefits are tracked during the construction phase by Bouygues to optimise the supply chain opportunities promoted for local suppliers to have the opportunity to bid for sub-contracting work.



During the year, the following headline benefits have been achieved:

<b>Local Supply Chain</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 72% of activity procured awarded to Welsh suppliers with 9% within the SA postcode area. Local suppliers include Shufflebottom Ltd, Owens Group, Dyfed Recycling Services and Dyfed Steels.</li></ul>
<b>Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 93.5 hours of engagement of local schools and 9 Community Ambassadors.</li></ul>
<b>Jobs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 38 new entrant jobs created</li><li>• 1,990 person weeks of Targeted Recruitment and Training (TR&amp;T) for the project but falls short of the target of delivering 4,680 person weeks by late 2024. Work is ongoing by increasing employability hubs held on site to improve.</li><li>• Several job vacancies were not filled due to a labour shortage in construction and other skill sets, which has resulted in 463 TR&amp;T weeks not realised.</li></ul>
<b>Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 31 apprentices/shared apprentices</li><li>• 4 graduates</li><li>• 19 trainees</li><li>• 13 work experience (in education)</li><li>• 586 pupil interactions achieved</li></ul>

## WHAT HAS HAPPENED ACROSS PENTRE AWEL DURING 2023/24...



## Property Design

We successfully launched the Carmarthenshire Construction Professional Services Framework (2023) for a term of four years. This provides an agile route to market for a range of professional disciplines to assist us in developing our ambitious work programmes. This framework has been crucial in allowing us a supporting avenue to additional technical expertise during the Council-wide recruitment freeze.

The tender for the new South West Wales Regional Contractors Framework 2024 (SWWRCF) will be launched and will serve as our principal route to market for all major works construction projects in Carmarthenshire. The SWWRCF will also be utilised by our neighbouring authorities in South West Wales, as well as other named institutions and participating bodies.

**Outcome: People feel empowered to lead active and healthy lives through access to fit for purpose services and provision.**

### **Ammanford Sports Facilities**

November 2023 saw the official opening of a brand new 3G floodlit all-weather pitch as part of a £2m investment in sports facilities in Ammanford. Ysgol Dyffryn Aman and the wider community will also benefit from a 6-lane synthetic running track, and re-surfaced 2G Hockey all-weather pitch. The £300k+ resurfacing of the existing all-weather pitch was made possible through a combination of school, local authority, and external funding and was part of the second phase of works and investments being undertaken at the site.

Delivering a new 3G sports pitch in Ammanford is part of a wider strategy for all-weather pitch provision across the County that will benefit communities for future generations. The investment is all-important in developing the Council's 'sport for all' approach to support a broad range of participation in sports, from beginners to elite.

**Outcome: Look to improve the availability and affordability of early years education and childcare settings across the County, to address one of the common barriers faced by individuals looking to return to or find employment.**

### **Education**

There are currently 42 schools providing part time education for 3-year-olds. 3 of these schools provide additional full wrap around care on site. There are also 27 pre-school settings delivering part-time education, 15 of these settings are also approved Flying Start childcare settings.

The Early Years advisory team provide regular effective training to support all staff to implement the early years nursery curriculum successfully in all schools and settings.

The Modern Education Provision (MEP) team are currently working towards addressing the gaps in 3-year-old education following the Primary Rising 4s consultation.

### **Childcare**

Our 5th Statutory Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) summary report continues to be shared with prospective childcare providers and is also available on the [Family Information Service](#) website. There are 213 registered childcare providers offering 4,214 childcare places delivered by childminders, day nurseries, cylchoedd meithrin, Flying Start, After School Clubs and Holiday Clubs.

The Childcare Team have continued to support private childcare settings to remain open and have closely monitored the number of settings that have closed/re-opened following the impact of increased living costs. Providers continue to be concerned about long term sustainability. We continue to direct providers to access grants that are accessible to providers to support their sustainability. The team support providers in early identification of grants and help in submitting applications where required.



## Grants and Funding

- Sustainability Grant 2023-24: Supported 83 childcare providers with a total of £43,443.10 for sustainability/hardship.
- Additional Sustainability Grant 2023-24: Opened in January 2024 for those not successful in the previous round; 25 approved applications received £18,750 in total.
- Holiday Playscheme Grant 2023-24: In July 2023, 11 holiday clubs received grants totalling £12,050 to support sustainability and registration of holiday playschemes.
- Childcare and Early Years Capital Small Grant 2022-25: Secured £470k for 2023-24; 87 applications from various childcare providers were successful.

The [Family Information Service](#) (FIS) website is reviewed and updated regularly providing families with financial support information through childcare choices, tax free childcare, universal credit, Flying Start and the Childcare Offer. Providers can access further information on external grants and subsidised mandatory and best practice training.

The team are working towards addressing the gaps to increase childcare where demand is not being met. Childminder numbers have declined nationally across Wales in recent years. Childminding promotion has been undertaken through radio promotion and local events. All potential childminders are directed to Pacey to commence Introduction to home-based childcare (IHC) and Preparing for Childminding Practice (PCP) Qualification course. Childminder qualification costs is supported through the Commercial Clients Group (CCG) Training and Support Programme and has been welcomed and for a few childminder assistants, a considered progression in becoming a childminder.

The Childcare Team in collaboration with the Regional Care Career Connector commenced delivery of the We Care Wales Introduction to Childcare within Carmarthenshire secondary schools, promoting childcare career opportunities to years 8 and 9 as they consider their chosen subjects and to years 10 and 11 who are studying Health and Social Care.

## Welsh Language Offer

We continue to promote Welsh language development opportunities for the childcare workforce sector through promoting CAMAU as well as umbrella organisations language support initiatives for parents such as Clwb Cwtsh. Information is shared with providers through our website and through regular email communications. Work is currently being undertaken to collate all Welsh language support resources in one area on the [Family Information Service](#) page.

## Childcare Offer

The Team promoted and publicised the Childcare Offer throughout the County. Digital promotion through the Family Information Service (FIS) and social media platforms have continued. In 2023-24 there were 1,143 Carmarthenshire Childcare Offer applications received and processed through the National Digital service. 156 Childcare providers are approved on the Childcare Offer National Digital service.



## Business Networking

Stori Cymru is an example of a business that was supported through a business engagement event. As part of the Business Engagement Sir Gâr Project funded through the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund our aims are to support new and existing businesses to build and strengthen local supply chains, inter-trading, unlocking public sector contracts, supporting enterprise, and providing learning and trading opportunities for businesses.



As part of the networking session, we had asked James Owen (Stori Cymru Cyf.) to deliver a short presentation on 'the power of storytelling' to inspire local businesses at the event. There were 25+ attendees present at the event for an opportunity to connect with other Carmarthenshire businesses. During the networking, James was introduced to another local company who were looking to develop a project, for which James could deliver. The subsequent conversation resulted in them successfully working together to deliver the project.

James stated "In November 2023, I had the privilege of attending the Swansea Bay City Deal Networking event at Yr Egin, an occasion that proved successful for both me and my business. The event provided a vibrant platform for engaging with a diverse array of business owners, directors, and fellow entrepreneurs across South West Wales. Among the many enriching conversations I had, one of those stood out. I was introduced by a representative from the Council to a local company in Llanelli that needed my services. This initial contact paved the way for a successful collaboration, resulting in a successful business opportunity with more to follow.

As a small business owner in Llanelli, the chance to share the stage with large multimillion-pound companies is very humbling. I do believe my local authority does want to help local businesses to succeed and prosper."

We will support essential learning opportunities in literacy, numeracy, and digital skills for residents, supporting post-16 learners in upskilling for employment and progression. This initiative is in line with the Welsh Government's National Well-being indicator Milestone, aiming to reduce the percentage of working-age adults without qualifications to 5% or below across all local authorities in Wales by 2050.

We will maximise the community benefits stemming from the Pentre Awel development in Llanelli, which promises the creation of 1,800 well-paid jobs.

We are establishing a network to facilitate business connections, maintain a directory of local businesses, link enterprises with potential funding sources, and provide advice and information. This network will support both new and existing businesses, ensuring they have the resources and guidance needed to thrive.



## **In Summary**

- Over the last six years we have reduced our carbon emissions by over a third. This is strong progress in the pathway to meeting our commitment to Welsh Government's ambition for net zero Welsh public sector by 2030 and in working together with local and national partners to meet the legal commitment to achieve a net zero Wales by 2050.
- Carmarthenshire has invested in low carbon energy projects, with a significant increase in energy generation compared to the previous year. Figures compare positively with national averages.
- Areas of the County are susceptible to the negative effects of the climate emergency, especially flooding. The Council has implemented interventions through the Flood & Water Management Act and Shoreline Management Plan to mitigate against the effects of flooding, which is a growing concern among residents.
- We are making a difference to many communities with our flood risk analysis and business case developments. We have a better understanding of risks in many communities through the development of our Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy. All developments must have sustainable drainage which is managing flooding for both new developments and the surrounding community.

## **How are we doing?**

- Carmarthenshire is one of the most proactive counties in Wales in terms of investment in low carbon energy projects. This substantiates the forward-thinking approach that we adopt with regards to addressing the threats posed by the climate and nature emergencies. The most recent data for 2022 indicates that there was a total of 8,104 projects in Carmarthenshire generating 333MW of energy. This is the third highest level in Wales and an increase on 2021 figures.
- Flooding is a concern in Carmarthenshire, and according to Natural Resources Wales (2019), over 15,000 Business and Homes are at Risk from either River, Tidal or Surface Water Flooding, with over 5,400 of these are at Medium or High Risk. The increasing threat of the climate and nature emergencies places greater emphasis on the need for suitable and proportionate flood defences to protect those at greatest risk. Through the Council's Flood & Water Management Act and Shoreline Management Plan several interventions have been completed, including the installation of new defences and upgrades made to existing defences. According to the National Survey the level of concern about flooding expressed by Carmarthenshire respondents has increased from 36.2% in 2018/19 to 49.3% in 2022/23. This exceeds the Welsh average of 44.7%.
- In our 2023 residents survey, the largest proportion of respondents indicated 'neither' when asked whether the climate emergency is being addressed locally. This might suggest that people are unaware of the measures put in place. For those that did answer, slightly more people disagreed than agreed.



## Outcome: Continue to work towards becoming a Net Zero Carbon Local Authority by 2030.

### A breakdown of the Council's Energy Consumption

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2023/24 vs 2022/23		
					Progress	% change	Comment
Consumption (kWh)	63,684,34	67,694,14	63,869,17	61,377,960	Improved	-3.90%	This is a combination of Non-domestic buildings and street lighting, both of which have improved
Mileage (miles)	6,679,056	6,773,772	7,272,186	8,420,699	Declined	15.80%	Whilst total fleet mileage has increased, both fuel consumption (litres) and CO2e emissions have reduced
Carbon Footprint (tCO2e)	17,590	18,124	16,984	16,741	Improved	-1.40%	This is a combination of Non-domestic buildings, street lighting, fleet and business mileage all of which have improved other than the business mileage

### Reducing carbon emissions of our vehicle fleet

We have been successful in gaining £431,632 of funding from the Welsh Government to procure 40 brand new electric vehicles for its front-line services. In total, 30 electric vans and 10 electric cars have been purchased to replace diesel vehicles and are delivering our services currently. Our proportion of electric fleet has increased from 1% to 8% of the fleet.

### Carmarthenshire Local Area Energy Plan

Welsh Government have funded the development of Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) for every local authority in Wales. Local Area Energy Planning is a detailed, comprehensive process designed to identify the most effective pathway(s) to decarbonising the local energy system by 2050. The process is led by Local Government and developed collaboratively with defined stakeholders.

Carmarthenshire's LAEP has been finalised shaping our future and joins together collaborative working with the community and stakeholders. Our Plan aims to enable the optimisation of energy use, reduce reliance on a single source of energy, and increase the use of clean and renewable energy sources. The goal is to create more liveable and sustainable communities in Carmarthenshire by addressing issues such as energy affordability, reliability, and sustainability.



## Local Places for Nature

This is a Welsh Government funded project and is delivered between the Local Nature Partnership and the Council. The project is working across Wales to restore and enhance nature in our public green spaces, delivering “nature on your doorstep” – where people live, work and access public services. Outputs achieved include:

- A total of 2,110 trees and shrubs have been planted in 2023/24 across 13 different sites across the County (2,000 hedgerow whips, 110 standards). 10 of these sites incorporated, or were dedicated to, heritage fruit trees plantings. Included within this were 5 different Council housing estate sites.
- Purchase of additional grass cutting ‘cut and collect’ machinery and trailers to enable improved grassland management by changing mowing practices on public open space, Housing land, Estate land, Schools, and Town & Community Council land where we work as contractors.
- Work with a consultancy to assess the grassland estate to identify the appropriate grassland management regime. This is linked to a proposed grassland management policy on amenity grassland in the County.



## Low Carbon Heat Grant

Building upon the large number of energy projects already undertaken across the corporate estate and an earlier Welsh Government grant funded feasibility study, we have recently secured £3.9m in Welsh Government Low Carbon Heat Grant funding to replace fossil fuel boilers with air source heat pump technology at six schools.

The grant, which covers 90% of the overall £4.4m project cost, has also allowed us to enhance building insulation, and, in one case replace all existing single paned metal framed windows with modern, double-glazed, heat retaining equivalents.

Heat pump technology is currently more expensive to operate than typical gas heating systems. This informed our decision to invest in off-grid sites, which, through their reliance on oil and LPG, were already expensive to heat.

To further reduce electricity demand, solar Photovoltaics (PV) panels are also being installed at five of the six schools utilising our Net Zero capital budget and it is intended to add panels to the sixth, in conjunction with planned near future roof replacement works.

## Climate Change & Nature Emergency Strategy

We are currently developing a Climate Change & Nature Emergency Strategy to recognise the wider role we have in addressing these Emergencies. Our aim is that the Strategy will complement the Council's Net Zero Plan which focusses on our own indigenous carbon emissions.

## **Wales Transport Strategy: Decarbonisation**

We continue to work with communities and regional and national partners to develop programmes that support the decarbonisation aims set out in Wales' Transport Strategy. We have been successful in applying for funding to support several programmes this year including, public transport programmes, road improvements, active travel, electric vehicle infrastructure programmes and safe routes in the community.

## **Revised Local Development Plan**

As part of the preparation of the Revised Local Development Plan we are seeking to embed a series of policies aimed at promoting the principles of sustainable development. This includes embedding requirements which supports and complements our Net Zero Plan as well as the response to the nature emergency.

## **Electric Vehicle Charging**

We now have 54 electric vehicle (EV) charging points across Carmarthenshire at Carmarthen, Llanelli, Ammanford, Llandeilo, Burry Port, Llandovery, Cross Hands and several at other carparks, leisure centres and community centres. Having a network of EV charging points across the County has saved 710 tonnes of Co2 in 2023/24.

## **Project Ecology**

The Rural Conservation Section's Project Ecology work has been expanded in 2023/24 focusing on supporting Housing and Communities with the ecological requirements of their projects. By the end of 2023/24, 40 officers across the Housing teams had received training in Protected Species issues relevant to their work. Project Ecologists are also contributing to the ecological aspects of the Tywi Valley Cycle Path, ensuring that legislative requirements are met.

## **Pentre Awel Carbon Reduction**

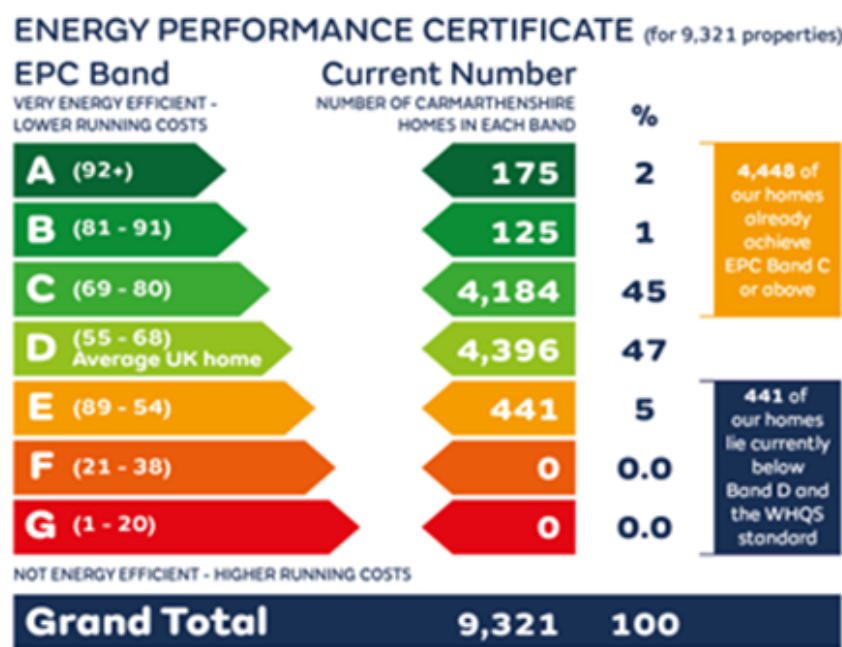
One great success so far has been the installation of solar panel powered site offices and cabins. When not powered by the sun, they convert to a hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) powered generator – this alone has reduced the carbon footprint of this part of the project by 76% in around 15 weeks on site. All the onsite CCTV systems have also been converted to solar powered.



The Pentre Awel project site has fully converted to HVO fuel. Working with local contractor Alun Griffiths, we have sourced a local HVO fuel provider, and although HVO is more expensive than white diesel, it can reduce carbon emissions by up to 90%, and has therefore been 100% adopted for Pentre Awel.

Promoting affordable warmth and decarbonising our housing stock

Our aim is to make all our homes energy efficient and achieve a minimum Band C energy performance rating as quickly as possible. Nearly 50% of our homes have already achieved this standard. Future investment in our existing homes will be based on using a Fabric First approach that improves the thermal performance of our homes and introducing non fossil fuel heating systems. This approach will promote affordable warmth for our tenants.



Our new build council homes embrace decarbonisation. Our homes are energy efficient, well insulated and have the latest innovative technologies and support the Council's Net Zero Carbon principles. They help reduce our carbon emissions by on average 70% and create affordable warmth for tenants growing the green economy and creating sustainable Communities.

Leisure Services Green Champions

Within Leisure Services a group of Green Champions have been formed who meet monthly to look at how we can reduce the carbon footprint of our facilities and share best practice. A matrix of projects has been developed. Working in conjunction with corporate colleagues we have identified projects in facilities that are the largest consumers of energy to try and redress and make our facilities more efficient and sustainable both in terms of the green agenda and from a financial perspective.

**Outcome: Improve current and explore new developments to limit the effects of flooding and other environmental threats which affect our residents and service users.**

### **Revised Local Development Plan**

A Strategic Flood Consequences Assessment was undertaken to guide and inform the future distribution and location of development including housing and employment and future decision making. This defined the extent of projected flood risk incorporating climate change assumptions and forms key evidence in support of the preparation of the Revised Local Development Plan including its publication for full public consultation.

### **Local Flood Management Strategy 2024-2030 (LFRMS)**

We have developed and consulted on our new Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS). The Strategy sets out our high level aims and objectives pertaining to managing flood risk management over the next 7 years and highlights our aim of reducing the risk of flooding to people, businesses, and communities. We will do this by modernising our approach to Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM), improving our data to support better decision making, championing sustainable drainage and nature- based solutions, while promoting community adaption, partnership working and empowering communities to become more resilient.

In parallel with our LFRMS we are also developing our flood risk management plan that will focus on our 30-communities at greatest risk of flooding. The plan will be a more tactical / operational document and will focus on the actions to reduce the flood risk in the short, medium, and long term.

### **Flood Schemes**

We have continued to develop our flood risk management capital works programme. In 2023/24, we were again successful with our Welsh Government grant applications and 9 new Welsh Government grant funded schemes worth approximately £1 million were developed.

In total the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management capital works programme in 2023/24 included 15 Welsh Government funded schemes and 8 other schemes which, subject to successful business cases and funding bids, will bring flood risk management benefits to more than 680 homes and 145 businesses.

In 2023/24 we completed schemes at Newcastle Emlyn and Dafen (Llanelli). These schemes represent a significant investment, and they benefit 64 properties and businesses in those areas. We will continue with a minimum of 2 projects per year, subject to funding and continue to develop our pipeline of works in the communities at greatest risk.

## **Sustainable Drainage Systems**

We are also continuing to drive and champion true sustainable drainage in the County. Applications have continued to grow in the 5-years since this legislation was enacted and now all new developments greater than 100m<sup>2</sup> in the County must be accompanied by a sustainable drainage system. The systems not only manage flood risk, with an allowance for climate change, but they also ensure multiple benefits including pollution control and biodiversity enhancement. In 2023/24, 397 new residential units and 48 commercial dwellings, covering an area of approximately 30 hectares, had sustainable drainage systems approved.

## **Flood Incident management and investigation**

1 in 6 properties in Carmarthenshire, over 12,600 in total are at risk of flooding. With 12 named storms this Winter season, 2023/24 has been the joint most stormy period since 2015. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have recently suggested that it is the wettest Winter in 180 years. Across Carmarthenshire the flood and coastal protection business unit recorded 384 incidents, 68 (18%) of which we Category-1 internal flooding. October and the Christmas/New Year period saw the worst flooding with short duration high intensity rainfall impacting on multiple communities. We are continuing to work with these communities and partner organisations including NRW and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water to ensure that we understand the causes and risk and implement holistic robust mitigation where possible.





### Flood Consultations

Holding public consultation events has become a key part of the way we manage flood risk in Carmarthenshire. We hold public events to better understand the flood risk first hand from those who have experienced it. The residents and businesses play a key part in firstly informing us of the flooding mechanism but most importantly they should be involved in the solutions and interventions going forward.

Post significant flooding in Ferryside and Llansteffan over Christmas and the New Year, 4 community events were held. Over 100 people attended these events and have helped inform us and our partner agencies about the mechanisms of flooding. Furthermore, post flooding in previous years, a community flood group has been established in Kidwelly and representatives from the group, plus the local members, routinely meet with members of the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management team to discuss the ongoing interventions and actions.

As a part of our capital works programme, we arrange community meetings to provide education and updates on our work, in addition to gleaning information. In the last year, we have delivered events in Pen y Fan (Llanelli), and Llangennech where we are developing business cases to support bids to Welsh Government for funding for capital works.

### How can we do better?

We will finalise the Section 19 flood investigation report for the flooding events at Llansteffan in December and January and ensure the delivery of the corresponding action plan. This is in conjunction with the implementation of the Flood Risk Management Plan-2 (FRMP2) for the period 2024-2030. We aim to develop the capital work programme up to 2030, in line with the objectives outlined in FRMP2.

We plan to develop and execute a two-year programme aimed at enhancing flood community resilience, adaptation and engagement. In communities identified as having the highest flood risk in Flood Risk Management Plan-2, we will organize events to educate residents about their flood risk and sustainable management practices. These events will also serve to increase general awareness of flood risk management processes and the responsibilities of stakeholders.

The broader environmental goals include continuing and intensifying efforts to achieve Net Zero Carbon status for the Local Authority by 2030, this involves delivering the Carmarthenshire Local Area Energy Plan and managing the development of the Climate Change & Nature Emergency Strategy.

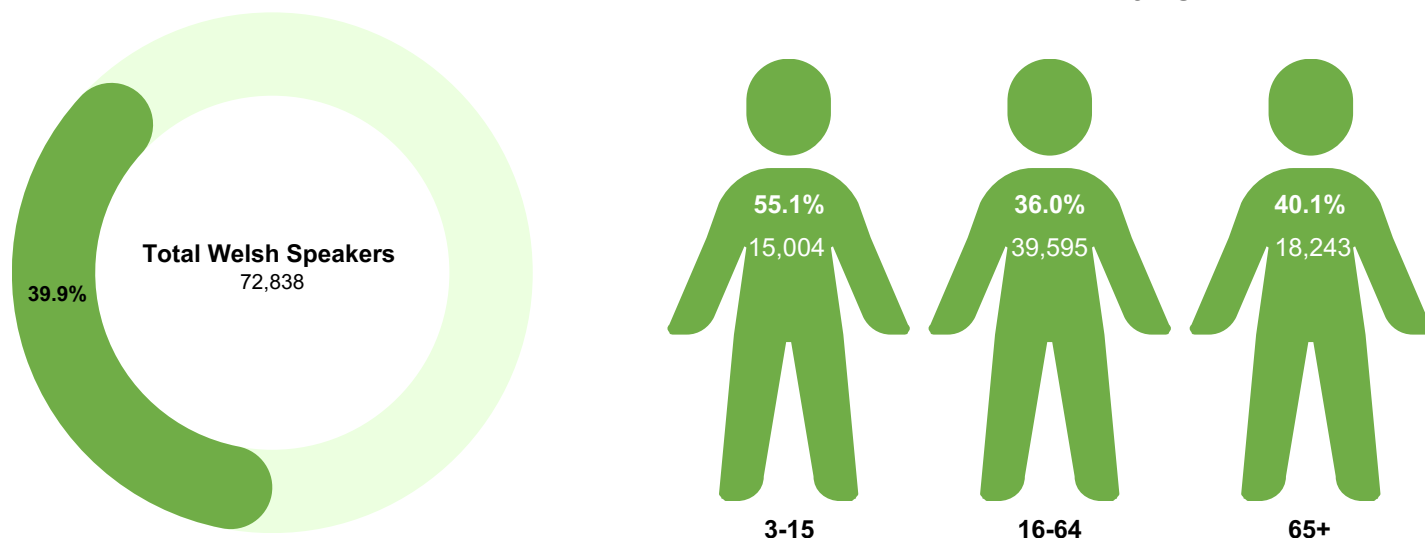
## In Summary

- Welsh language and culture make Carmarthenshire unique. Our Welsh speaking communities are resilient; however, there has been a significant decline in the number of speakers across the County. These Results have further increased the importance of promoting and normalising the use of the Welsh language.
- As Carmarthenshire experiences the highest percentage loss of Welsh speakers of all the counties of Wales for the second decade running, firm and confident action as outlined in the 'Carmarthenshire Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2023-2028' must be taken to stop this declining trend.

## How are we doing?

- The Census data for 2021 indicates that Carmarthenshire is home to 72,838 Welsh speakers, 39.9% of the population.

Welsh Speakers by age



- In our 2023 residents survey, most respondents agree that it is important to promote and protect the Welsh language.
- 242 members of staff attending various levels of Welsh Learning courses between September 2022 and June 2023 (Academic Year), this is higher than the previous year of 227.



## Outcome: Increase in the number of Welsh speakers.

- Our 'Strategy to promote the Welsh Language in Carmarthenshire 2023-28' sets out what needs to be done to work towards restoring the Welsh language in the County by increasing the numbers of those who can speak Welsh, increasing the situations where people can speak Welsh, raising the status of the language, supporting communities to maintain the language and by having a positive effect on population movements.
- We want to see an increase in the proportion of Carmarthenshire residents who can speak Welsh and use their Welsh consistently. We want to see the Welsh language as a working and operating norm in the County's public institutions and increasingly prevalent in the County's businesses. We want our young people to see a future for themselves in the County in sustainable and prosperous Welsh communities, economically, culturally, and socially. We want everyone to be proud of the Welsh language in Carmarthenshire.
- The Education and Children's Services Department is committed to increasing the use of the Welsh language in its daily administration. They have set a vision in terms of supporting and encouraging our staff to move along the language continuum. As part of this work, we have worked closely with Bangor University, through the ARFer project, to provide support and interventions through a digital platform.
- We have promoted our Welsh Language services through a specific campaign, held by the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office. "Defnyddia dy Gymraeg" was a campaign across the whole of Wales, to encourage Welsh speakers and learners to use their language skills when accessing services.
- We have published a 'Grants and the Welsh language' policy to support and encourage any organisations who access grants through the Council to embed and promote the language in their projects.
- We have continued to work closely with the Carmarthenshire Welsh Language Strategic Forum, looking at key areas such as Housing, Planning and the Regeneration of our communities.
- We have worked closely with Pentre Awel to assess the potential impact of the development on the Language and have created a detailed action plan to promote and embed the Welsh language in all aspects of the planning and delivery - in our recruitment, services and the academic and research opportunities.
- We have seen a slight increase in the number of complaints received in relation to lack of Welsh medium services and two investigations have been held into our compliance, following feedback from our residents.
- We have worked closely with businesses across the County, through the Arfor 2 programme, to support the use of the Language. Businesses have also been asked to encourage their staff to learn Welsh through the National Centre for learning Welsh. 38 local businesses have registered for the Beginners Work Welsh. The businesses will be working towards the Welsh Language Commissioner's 'Cynnig Cymraeg' framework and many have received grant funding to increase bilingual provision in their services.

## **Outcome: Increased confidence and use of Welsh as a thriving language.**

We are continuing to implement the Welsh Language Standards across the Council with regular dialogue with the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office. During the year we have undertaken targeted messaging with Council services on identifying and recording linguistic choice of service users, further to feedback from an investigation held by the Commissioner's Office. Messages about the Standards are conveyed to staff through presentations by the Policy and Involvement Team and through the communication streams maintained by Marketing and Media.

### **Welsh Language County Strategic Forum**

The Welsh Language County Strategic Forum, which includes representation from the County's language promotion organisations and public bodies has also continued with its role of developing a programme of promoting the Welsh language in the County. During the year, the second Welsh Language Promotion Strategy has been published and detailed action plans are being prepared to support each Objective. The vision for the Strategy is:

"To make Welsh the main language of the County. Our aim is to restore Welsh to a language spoken and used by the majority of our inhabitants consistently, and in all aspects of life".

### **Museum Masterpieces**

During 2023/24, the Masterpiece Tour partnership between the National Gallery, London, Carmarthenshire Museum and two other regional venues, showcased paintings by Rembrandt and Verrocchio in Abergwili resulting in record museum visitor attendances. The masterpiece exhibitions were curated thematically, from inspiring new commissions of Welsh poetry and art to Carmarthenshire's rich history and stories of healing and protection.

Over 17,000 people visited the museum, which was an 18% increase on the previous year and an 81% increase compared with the last operational year prior to closure during the pandemic. We asked over 1,000 visitors about their experience and almost 80% of respondents said that they felt visiting the museum had increased their sense of well-being, and 98% rated their experience as 'excellent' or 'good'. The museum received its first VAQAS (Visit Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme) award since 2014.

### **Theatres Welsh language programming**

Theatrau Sir Gâr's produced its first ever, full in-house production and this done through the medium of Welsh in May 2023. The production aimed to provide an entertaining, mainstream theatre experience to help support Welsh language audience development, and to support early and mid-career creatives and inject much needed new blood into the Welsh theatre sector.

It opened with two performances at Y Ffwrnes, Llanelli, then toured to 9 other venues across Wales before closing with a performance at Y Lyric, Carmarthen (12 performances in total). The production attracted 717 audiences, averaging 60 attendances per venue. The skills and learning from this project have been invaluable, including new partnerships forged with Canolfan Dysgu Cymraeg, new press and media contacts, and an increased confidence and knowledge of working bilingually and embedding access and inclusion.



Sibrwd (Welsh to English translation) was available at every performance, and 3 (BSL) British Sign Language interpreted performances were scheduled. The production also provided two placement opportunities to early career deaf or disabled creatives through the Connect and Flourish Project with Taking Flight.

A 5-star review was achieved by Buzz magazine stating "It's a Welsh-language play that skilfully integrates English captioning, embraces humour and satire, and offers an alternative to the "Wales is full of sad, working-class people in sad, working-class hovels" narratives that have been thrust upon us repeatedly..."

### **Actif Anywhere**

Adding to the existing 'Actif Anywhere' platform, which provides health and fitness sessions online in an OnDemand and Livestreamed basis, Actif were recognised for extending this concept to create an equivalent school's platform. This has created the only bilingual platform in Wales, which is being rolled out across Carmarthenshire, with plans to extend Wales-wide, and was shortlisted at a national awards ceremony in recognition.

### **Tourism Ambassador Scheme**

With a combined reach of over 5million, the [Discover Carmarthenshire](#) Facebook and website accounts are two of the most popular channels for both residents and those seeking to visit the County. Tourism business roadshows and newsletters to the business sector actively promote the take up of schemes such as Helo Blod, with officers including it in their visitor information services to event organisers. A new Tourism Ambassador scheme has a specific Welsh language module which was launched last year as part of activities to support the National Urdd Eisteddfod. Our role in acting as the first point of call for the Welsh film requests has built up an excellent relationship with the Welsh medium production sector, making it easier for them to film in the county and thus increase awareness of the County and what it has to offer.





### **Encouraging all schools in Carmarthenshire to compete in the Urdd Eisteddfod 2023**

The Urdd Eisteddfod, one of Europe's biggest youth festivals, came to Carmarthenshire in May 2023 and to celebrate this, the Council set a challenge for every school in the County to compete in the Eisteddfod.

We led a partnership to support the schools to compete, particularly the schools that are not used to competing in the Eisteddfod. Promotional materials explained that there were all sorts of competitions available; from singing, narrating, and acting on stage, to dancing, arts and crafts and even hair and beauty. There were competitions open to all and some open only to Welsh learners. Organisations which supported the project included Menter Iaith Gorllewin Sir Gâr, Menter Dinefwr, Menter Cwm Gwendraeth Elli, Yr Egin, Yr Atom, the Council and Coleg Sir Gâr.

Whilst this was the eighth time that the Urdd Eisteddfod visited Carmarthenshire, it was the first time that Llandovery hosted the festival. The Eisteddfod attracts in the region of 100,000 visitors a year and historically contributes up to £6 million to the local economy of the host county, with the hospitality industry benefitting hugely.

### **How can we do better?**

We will continue to collaborate with departments, providing advice and support on the implementation of the Welsh Language Standards. In line with this, we will prepare a new Welsh Language Skills Strategy, which is designed to ensure our workforce possesses the necessary skills to deliver services in Welsh to our residents.

In partnership with the National Centre for Learning Welsh, we will continue to encourage and support our staff in either learning or enhancing their Welsh language skills. We will work closely with the Welsh Government, to deliver key strategic projects to empower our communities and develop the use of the Welsh language in our workplace.

We are in the process of developing an assessment framework for our businesses. This framework will assist them in establishing a baseline of evidence regarding the development of the language. It is envisioned to evolve into an information hub, providing businesses with access to a wealth of Welsh language learning resources, including videos, templates, and more.

## In Summary

- Total crime in Carmarthenshire reduced during 2023/24. Effective partnership working will support in sustaining these low rates.
- The residents survey for 2023 indicated that most respondents like living in Carmarthenshire.
- Most people agreed that they feel safe in their community. However, there was some disparity within local community areas, for example Llanelli exhibited an overall negative score.

## How are we doing?

Business Survey Statement	Average Index Score (AIS)		Comments
	2022	2023	
I like living in Carmarthenshire	1.32	1.16	Scores were highest for the Tywi and Teifi community areas and lowest in Llanelli. It is also interesting to note that scores were lowest amongst the younger age group.
I feel that I can live the life I want to live without the fear of judgement or prejudice	0.71	0.49	The score has decreased slightly from the previous year. Agreement to this statement was lower amongst members of the LGBTQ+ community and respondents who have disabilities. It is positive for Carmarthenshire as a place and its people that overall residents feel that they can be themselves. This is an integral part of feeling a sense of belonging and is one of the main contributors to overall happiness.
I feel safe in my community	0.78	0.55	Carmarthenshire has one of the lowest crime rates of all the counties in Wales and a positive score to this statement reflects this. However, there is disparity within local community areas, with Llanelli exhibiting an overall negative score of -0.08 which represents a significant of disagreement, but it should be noted that this survey took place during the situation at the Stradey Park Hotel, and local residents took the opportunity to share their views through this consultation.

- 99.13% of food establishments in Carmarthenshire met food hygiene standards during 2023/24.
- Unfortunately, only 49% of high-risk Trading Standard businesses that were liable to a programmed inspection during 2023/24 were inspected. The reason for this is that during the second half of the year, there was an increase in reactive high-risk criminal investigations and high-profile proactive work to tackle the sale of illicit vapes and the underage sale of vapes which required resources to be redirected from routine inspections. All outstanding premises were prioritised in the first quarter of 2024-25.

## Outcome: Sustain low crime rates whilst continuing effective partnership working to address increasing rates evident in some areas of the county.

### No Cold Calling Zones

Trading Standards (in partnership with Dyfed Powys Police) implement No Cold Calling Zones throughout the County that prohibit cold calling in areas with high proportions of elderly or vulnerable persons and/or a history of distraction burglary. To date, 56 zones have been established in streets/housing complexes and one No Cold Calling Village (Cilycwm). Zones reduce incidents of doorstep crime and distraction burglary, thereby protecting vulnerable persons and enabling them to feel more confident and safer in their homes.

Our zones are subject to ongoing monitoring and periodic reviews, with joint crime prevention visits undertaken by Trading Standards, Housing Officers, and Local Neighbourhood Policing Teams. The most recent review indicated that two-thirds of residents feel safer in their own homes following the implementation of a zone.

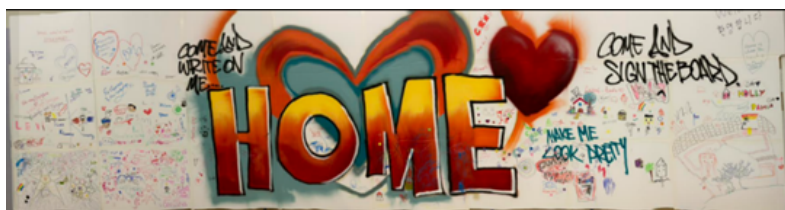
### Community Cohesion Team

The Mid and South West Wales Community Cohesion team are one of 8 regions funded by Welsh Government to achieve a consistent approach to cohesion across the country. The Cohesion Team works across Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Powys and supported several campaigns as well as training and capacity building projects during 2023-24:

- In June 2023, the team worked with Aberystwyth University on a public workshop during Welsh Refugee Week, around trauma informed practice and how we can support our younger refugees sensitively.
- In October 2023, to raise Hate Crime Awareness, the team shared social media posts and coordinated hate crime training in schools for pupils and school governors.
- For Holocaust Memorial Day in January 2024 the team shared social media awareness messages and buildings were lit purple to raise awareness.
- Social media campaigns were held in February 2024 to raise awareness of LGBT History.
- Cohesion in our Communities sessions showcasing good practice with other community groups such as cost of living advice sessions, Welsh pronouns, and a multicultural food around the world event.
- Organised and coordinated a Wales wide webinar as part of Victim Supports, Countering Hateful Extremism Wales meeting.
- Coordinated training for Elected members, front line staff and schools around refugees and asylum seekers and Hate Crime Awareness.
- The cohesion team have continued working to support refugees and Asylum seekers regarding tension monitoring, support and training, including work relating to specific community tensions.
- The Community Cohesion team raise awareness of Hate Crime and how to report it, ensuring people understand what constitutes a hate crime and working with organisations like Victim Support to develop campaigns, training, and projects.

The Community Cohesion Regional team ran a Small Grants fund to encourage community groups and organisations to apply for funding. There were 2 successful projects in Carmarthenshire, these were:

1. **Foothold Cymru**, which coordinated an event in Llanelli strengthening community bonds among young people and their families from diverse backgrounds.



The purpose of the event was to unite communities. At the heart of the event was a collaborative project, a 5-meter-long graffiti wall was created by local artist 'Jenks', that captured the essence of "home". It promoted the idea that our shared values transcend our differences and celebrated 'there is more that unites us than divides us'

2. **Llanelli Multicultural Drop** extended the provision of the drop-in group run by the Llanelli Multicultural Network (LMCN) to support people from diverse minority ethnic communities and to promote the benefits of a multicultural society that everybody can feel proud of, celebrate, and share their cultural heritage.

### **Serious Violence Duty**

The Serious Violence Duty was introduced by the UK Government in 2023 to tackle serious violent offending. The duty essentially places a responsibility on all regions to establish strong collaborative partnerships to better understand serious violent offending, what the drivers are and what plans we have to intervene and prevent this offending. The Dyfed Powys region now has its own needs assessment and accompanying strategy.

There is a significant amount of good work being done, especially in specific crime types that affect our region, such as domestic abuse offending and serious violence against women and girls. The budget for the Serious Violence Duty is not a significant one but will be utilised during 2024-25 in terms of being future orientated and legacy making.

There is a focus on establishing strong 'working together' principles that involves all contributing agencies who play pivotal and important roles in driving down serious violent offending. By working closely together, being creative in how we tackle this type of offending and by challenging harmful cultural norms we will make a difference to how our communities feel about public safety and our collective ambition to support victims and tackle criminal behaviour.

### **Social Value**

Actif provides a range of options to engage adults and young people in positive activity habits that research recognises impacts upon physical and mental health, mental well-being, individual development, and social and community development (which includes reduced cost of crime and social capital benefits, e.g. improved networks, trust, and reciprocity). Termed 'Social Value', Actif's leisure centre database is integrated with a research centre that estimates a social value of over £4m resulting from people's participation in activity at centres, of which over £1m is attributable to social and community development.

### **Public Spaces Protection Order in Llanelli**

In January 2024, the Council introduced a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in an area of Llanelli Town Centre to address alcohol and drug-related crime and disorder. The Order will remain in place for three years and will be reviewed regularly during that period.

The introduction of the new PSPO follows a review of the previous Order with the Police, an analysis of drug and alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour in the area, engagement with key stakeholders and a public consultation exercise. The review found that the previous Order had been effective in reducing alcohol-related anti-social behaviour. As a result of the review, the geographical area covered by the Order was extended.

### **Transforming Tyisha**

Tyisha has historically had the highest crime rate in Llanelli with most calls in relation to anti-social behaviour and violence, along with high levels of drug and alcohol misuse. Several interventions have been developed by the Transforming Places Team, in partnership with the Police, to improve the state of crime in Tyisha.

In partnership with the Police, an Environmental Visual Audit was conducted to help us to design out crime on our housing developments and look at measures such as fencing, layout, and additional security to improve community safety.

The fencing project is now complete with 90% satisfaction. The remaining 10% would have liked the fencing a little higher, though this was avoided to ensure good amenity for the area.

### **Complex Case Enforcement**

The community informed the Community Wardens of ongoing incidents in relation to block of flats within Clos Sant Paul. The intelligence provided suggested drug dealing and anti-social behaviour linked to a single flat within the block.

An extensive investigation took place in collaboration with Dyfed Powys Police with evidence gathered allowing for the eviction of a problematic tenant. The property was retained as a 'sensitive let' ensuring a guarantee of respite was provided to the block's tenants following this period of disruption.

Through, listening and working with the community, the ward now has 3 neighbourhood watch groups and an active resident's group. Through the interventions by the team and Police, crime rates have improved by 34% since 2021.



In collaboration with the Public Services Board (PSB), we are committed to enhancing community engagement and best practices in recruitment from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities. This includes working with relevant external groups to boost representation and provide clear guidance for these communities on the Council's website.

We will audit and refine our direct communication methods with hard-to-reach residents to ensure inclusivity.

We plan to include any emerging recommendations from the national standards audit and the HMIP inspection of youth justice into a comprehensive action plan. This plan will undergo monitoring by the Youth Justice Management Board.

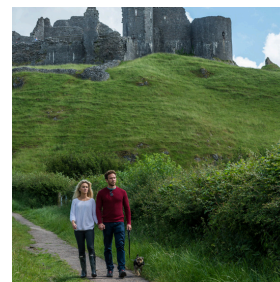
Our ongoing goal is to review and potentially implement safer routes and traffic calming measures throughout Carmarthenshire's towns and villages. As we anticipate the results of the Welsh Government's proposed 20mph speed limit pilot study, we will consider these findings before the Welsh Government makes a final decision on the widespread adoption of the 20mph initiative across Wales.

## In Summary

- There was a significant increase in library and leisure centre visits.
- A number of initiatives and large-scale developments provide access to opportunities which meet the varying needs of residents and visitors.
- These initiatives have contributed to the well-being of residents and visitors by promoting health, reducing environmental impact, saving costs, fostering social interactions, and improving urban infrastructure, leading to a higher overall quality of life.

## How are we doing?

- Overnight and day visitors contribute £597m to the local economy supporting 6,652 full-time jobs.
- There were over 660,000 visits to our libraries during 2023/24 (in person and online), this is a 28% increase on the previous year. This was achieved through various events in our libraries all over the County such as Clip Corner in Carmarthen Library offering access to thousands of radio and TV programmes from the archives of BBC, S4C & ITV Wales, Santa visits, wreath and bauble making, chess club and film shows, together with World Book Day visits, Mother's Day and Easter Craft sessions and watercolour painting sessions. Our digital visits continue to remain high with customers benefitting from our range of digital eBooks, audiobooks, newspapers, magazines, and training apps.
- The number of visitors to our leisure centres during 2023/24 reached 1.6m for the first time, this is 21% up on the previous year and higher than to pre-Covid levels. This has also been mirrored in the uptake of memberships and learn to swim in association with good growth in community-based activity. Investment has been ongoing into the facility infrastructure and the development of class programmes in rural sites has seen significant growth of membership at those locations notably St Clears and Llandovery. Membership has also grown in Carmarthen, Amman Valley, and Llanelli Leisure Centres. The new pitches at Amman Valley have also seen an uplift in regular bookings and footfall. Focus on retention and loyalty has helped to see retention improve plus using refer a friend across the year has been a great driver.



**Outcome: People feel empowered to lead active and healthy lives through access to fit for purpose services and provision.**

### **West Wales Walking for Well-being**

West Wales Walking for Well-being created six vibrant walking groups, each attracting a healthy number of participants weekly. These groups are designed to promote physical and mental health through regular walking activities. To ensure the success of the programme, volunteers are trained to become walk leaders. The leaders receive comprehensive support from the Actif Adult Officers, who provide a robust support package. This package includes leadership training, resources on safety and route planning, and ongoing assistance to maintain high standards of group management and engagement. The collaborative effort between the trained volunteers and the Actif Adult Officers creates a supportive and enjoyable environment for all walkers, fostering a sense of community and well-being. The initiative not only encourages regular physical activity but also helps participants build social connections, contributing to their overall quality of life.

### **Community Cycling**

Actif's community cycling initiative provides town and community councils the chance to enhance local cycling prospects through access to e-bikes and hybrid bikes. In 2023-2024, Llanarthne and Pontyberem benefited from this program, receiving the bikes for a 10-week period. During this time, they organised several led rides and bike hire sessions, encouraging residents to explore cycling as a healthy and sustainable mode of transportation.

The initiative aims to make cycling more accessible and enjoyable, promoting physical activity and reduce carbon footprints. By offering both e-bikes and hybrid bikes, the programme caters to a wide range of participants, from those seeking an easier ride to those looking for a more traditional cycling experience.

### **Road Cycling Routes**

Walking and cycling are key "brilliant basics" of our off-season proposition to those seeking a UK short break. As a legacy of the hosting of the Tour of Britain events, tourism development officers created six "icon" road cycling routes visiting all areas of the County and promoted them extensively using created digital videos, advertising partnerships with industry leading magazine such as Bike Radar and supported via specific vibrant web sections of the Discover Carmarthenshire website. These are also promoted to residents through the wider promotion of the Discover Carmarthenshire website. New web sections have been created in Spring 2024 for Mountain Biking and traffic free cycling with the former being promoted through a partnership with top selling magazine MB Monthly.

## **Walking Routes**

A portfolio of 21 mapped walking routes has been created covering all areas of the County with supporting videos, photos, and text. Promotional activities were delivered to increase visibility against competition such as the Cotswolds and Peak District.

## **Sporting Events**

Several cycling events were provided marketing support including Gritfest, Battle on the Beach and Daffodil Ride, with logistical and event management guidance provided to five events including Llanelli 10k and Triathlon.

## **Museum of Land Speed**

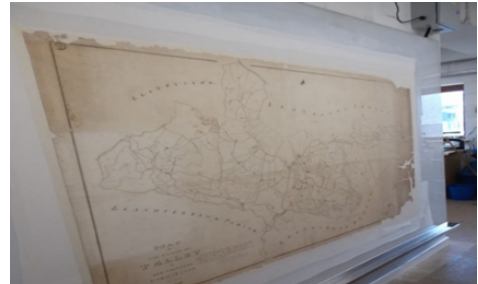
The Museum of Land Speed (opened in May 2023) and welcomed over 13,000 visitors in its first year. It tells the iconic story of Pendine Sands and its long association with land speed record breaking attempts reaching as far back to the 1920s with Parry Thomas in 'Babs' and Malcolm Campbell in Bluebird, up to modern days record breaking attempts by Idris Elba, Zef Eisenberg, and Guy Martin. Entering the venue via a retail space the stories are told through a number of interactive displays including a video cave where visitors can experience the thrill of riding in Babs at high speed along Pendine Sands.

A dedicated area tells the story of the Ministry of Defence's history in Pendine and there is a flexible exhibition space which can be used for various purposes, for example, automotive design students can showcase their designs. Upstairs a 40-seater conference room (for public and corporate hire) has commanding views down the 7-mile beach.

### Talylychau Tithe Map project

Following the reopening of the Carmarthenshire Archives last year, a magnificent Tithe map and a linked written apportionment (award) for the parish of Talylychau was deposited with the archive service. Dating from 1839, these documents are extremely valuable sources of information about the parish of Talylychau in the 19th century.

Unfortunately, the documents were in a very poor condition and were in urgent need of repair. Thanks to a generous grant of £3,450 from the Welsh Government, the archives staff were able to send the documents away for professional conservation treatment, and also create an enjoyable learning experience for the children of Ysgol Gynradd Talylychau.



Over the course of 5 bilingual sessions, 29 children from Ysgol Talylychau took part in an exciting creative experience both at the archives and at the school. These sessions were developed and led by local artist, Seren Stacey and the staff at Carmarthenshire Archives. The aim of the initiative was to promote a greater understanding of both the children's Cynefin, and the role and relevance of the Carmarthenshire Library and Archives.

This engaging experience culminated in the creation of 2 wonderful artworks which were unveiled in the archive search room by Cllr. Gareth John, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Leisure, Culture & Tourism.

## How can we do better?

We are committed to developing a diverse and inclusive sports environment with our 'sport for all' approach, ensuring everyone from beginners to elite athletes can participate. Our support extends to all Community Sports Clubs, aiding them in becoming self-sustaining entities.

We are conducting a feasibility study for a new skateboard park and enhancing the BMX Pump track at Pembrey to further enrich our community's sporting facilities.

We are revitalizing our Cycling Strategy to evaluate our progress and establish new objectives for the coming five years. This includes the construction of a cycle and pedestrian path connecting Carmarthen to Llandeilo, which will not only benefit local residents but also boost tourism and the economy in the surrounding towns and villages throughout the County.

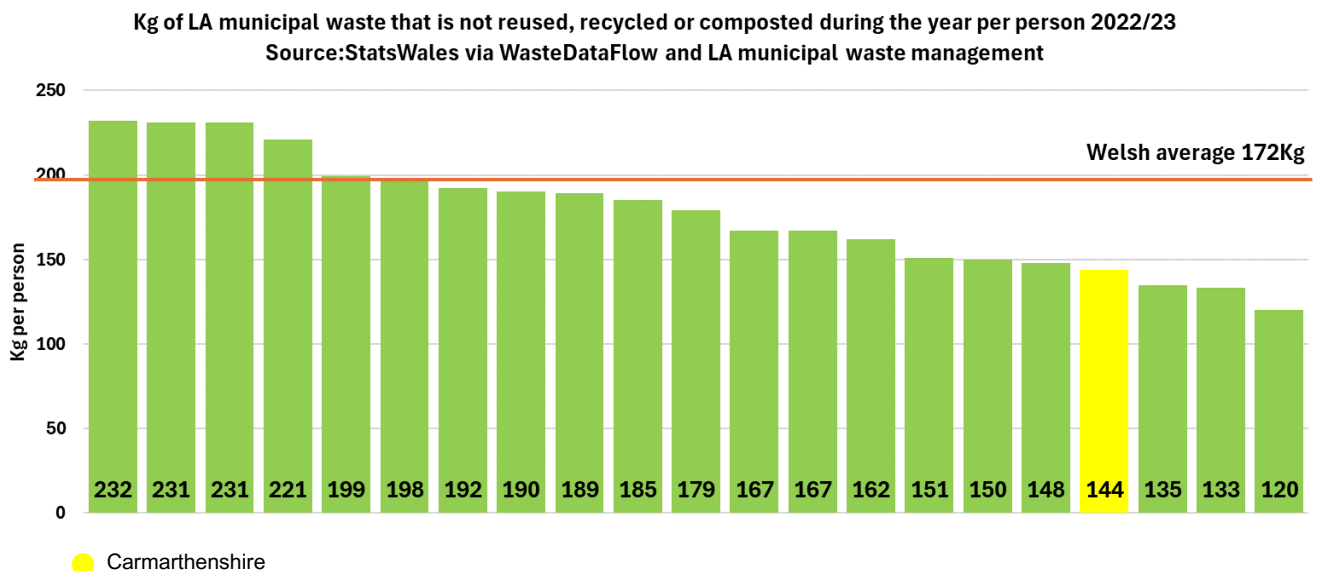


## **In Summary**

- The first phase of the Waste Strategy was implemented in January 2023 these changes have resulted in an increase in reuse and recycling tonnage performance, surpassing the National Target which was expected by 2025.
- The average municipal waste per person not recycled has reduced.
- The percentage of waste sent to landfill has reduced, working towards the National target of Zero Waste to landfill by 2025.
- The Council has implemented a new kerbside collection system, increased kerbside glass collection, and engaged in comprehensive community outreach to promote recycling and sustainability.
- The expansion of our Eto reuse projects also directly supports this priority by promoting resource efficiency, recovery, repair, and a circular economy within the County.
- The Local Environmental Audit and Management System (LEAMS) surveys show a slight decrease in street cleanliness and an increase in litter levels.
- The Council has improved the average number of days taken to clear fly-tipping incidents, despite an increase in the number of incidents.

## How are we doing?

- Our recycling figure for 2023/24 has improved to 70.49%, already exceeding the National Target of 70% due by the end of March 2025. The most recently published comparative figures for 2022/23 show the average recycling rates across Wales was 65.71% at which point we were below the Welsh average at 65.25%.
- The % of waste sent to landfill has reduced further during 2023/24 and is now down to 2.01%, this is well underway to meeting the National target of Zero Waste to landfill by 2025.
- Our 2023 residents survey received almost 4,000 respondents, although the majority tend to agree that their local environment is pleasant and well looked after there is a relatively high proportion which disagree. Some comments highlighted issues in relation to street cleansing, waste, litter, and verge/hedgerow maintenance are possible contributing factors.
- The average municipal waste per person not recycled has reduced further to 121Kg at the end of 2023/24, compared to 144Kg in 2022/23. The most recently published comparative figures for 2022/23 show that Carmarthenshire were better than the Welsh average and had the 4th best figures in Wales. The 2023/24 comparative data will not be published until January 2025.



- Our bi-monthly Local Environmental Audit and Management System (LEAMS) surveys conducted during 2023/24 to check the cleanliness of our streets, show a decrease in cleanliness at 71.5%, compared to 72.7% the previous year, with an increase in the levels of litter found in the streets.
- The average number of days taken to clear fly tipping incidents has improved to 2.3 days during 2023/24 despite a 5% increase in the number of incidents from 1,615 to 1,701.

## Outcome: On track to meet the national recycling targets.

### Recycling

- Our recycling figure for 2023/24 increased to 70.49%, already exceeding the national target of 70% due by end of March 2025. This success is credited to a new kerbside collection system with features like weekly collections for dry mixed recycling and food waste, and separate collections for glass and black bags. This system aligns with the Council's vision for implementing a modern waste service that is compliant with Welsh Government's Blueprint collection methodology. The garden waste subscription service is also contributing to the overall recycling figures, with over 12,500 customers and over 5,500 tonnes of garden waste collected at kerbside during the season.
- Kerbside glass collection was initially implemented to 95% of households during the waste service change in January 2023. During 2023/24 we increased our provision by a further 1,000 properties with a further increase planned during 2024/25. To provide a cost-effective service in line with the expanded kerbside service we have carried out a rationalisation of our glass bring sites, with remaining bring sites at strategic locations around the County whilst further expansion of the kerbside service is implemented.
- A comprehensive community engagement schedule was put in place during 2023/24 to promote recycling and achieve our aspirations of increased recycling capture. We have:
  - o Delivered five presentations to members and partners.
  - o Supported 20 community led events to promote recycling, reuse, and sustainability.
  - o Engaged directly with 10,000 households through either a telephone call, letter, email or face to face engagement via a community recycling advisor to support kerbside recycling compliance. Further direct support was provided to 1,889 households who required it, via one-to-one support.
  - o Employed six waste wardens to strengthen the education and enforcement procedure in place, increase full compliance and reduce recycling contamination.
  - o Developed a four-stage education and enforcement process to encourage residents to participate fully in the recycling scheme.
- This year the service faced significant challenge in preparing and developing a solution to the new Workplace Recycling Regulations which came into effect in April 2024. As a service we worked with relevant organisations such as Wrap Cymru, Natural Resources Wales and CWM Environmental designing a local service to ensure all businesses and council buildings were prepared for the new legislation. This involved offering direct support and advice to schools, businesses and third sector organisations. Developing and sharing best practice to achieve effective recycling systems across the commercial sector, aligning with Wales's broader waste management goals.

## Circular Economy

The Council is promoting a Circular Economy through several initiatives through our collaborative “Eto” project:

- Canolfan Eto Nantycaws:
  - o A reuse workshop and shop that receives donated items from our recycling centres and repair and upcycle them for resale.
  - o Education centre.
  - o Paint reuse facility where unused paint is recycled/re-blended for resale.
  - o Our reuse shop in Nantycaws – Canolfan Eto is now online for purchase of goods.
- Eto in the Community is a scheme aimed at strengthening community support and taking Eto into communities.
- In March 2024, we organised an event (hosted by Sero), for local groups and volunteers and Town and Community Councils to share ideas and opportunities for community project growth with a focus on collaboration and growth.
- Through Shared Prosperity Funding we have provided £5,000 funding to four projects in the Ten Town areas of: Kidwelly, Llanybydder, Newcastle Emlyn and Llandeilo for innovative and sustainable project ideas to promote circular economy activity in their areas.
- In partnership with CWM Environmental we have organised school and community group visits to ‘Canolfan Eto’ to share ideas on repair, reuse, and recycling and how we as a Council prioritise effective resource management and how individuals can maximise their impact in this area too.

Is anyone better off?

## Circular Economy in practice

We have partnered with local recycling company Nappicycle to launch a trial project to surface our roads with recycled nappies. The first project diverted 4 tonnes of nappies which is approximately 80,000 nappies from landfills. The recycled nappy fibres are just as effective as conventional materials and with no additional cost. This project is a prime example of local circular economy in action.



To enhance the recycling initiative awareness among residents, we aim to deliver a community engagement programme that will reach 5% of households. Our goal is to maintain our performance with regards to the Welsh Government's statutory recycling performance target of 70% in the 2024/2025 financial year.

To educate school children on the importance of repair, reuse, and recycling initiatives, we will develop an educational resource pack and an electronic booking system for scheduling 'Eto' site visits.

We plan to undertake a review to expand glass kerbside collection provisions to more households not currently served by this collection. By 2026, we will plan and initiate the next phase of the wider waste service change, adopting the Welsh Government blueprint for the kerbside sort of recycled material and enhancing the recyclable materials collected at kerbside.

We will enable communities to proactively implement sustainable projects, developing a wider circular economy strategy through existing community networks and facilitate further infrastructure development to support circular economy aspirations. In partnership with CWM Environmental, we will create a detailed action plan to increase Eto's reach, focusing on expanding provisions for reuse, repair, and upcycled items accessible across communities in the County. Lastly, we will enhance public engagement to gather resident opinions on wider waste services and future developments, considering their opinions and recommendations for service improvement.



## In Summary

- The Council prioritises maintaining the highway network, especially during Winter, to ensure uninterrupted access to essential services. However, the road surface condition deteriorated in 2023/24, with a significant increase in reported defects.
- We have continued to work through major strategic challenges such as the national 20mph campaign, development of regional transport planning and the trajectory towards net zero carbon aspirations.
- We have been proactive in delivering change and have successfully brought in grant funding to support service delivery. However, we face challenges with reducing capital and revenue budgets combined with rising public expectation, supply chain pressures and deteriorating asset condition which is leading to a difficult operating environment for Highway and Transportation services.

## How are we doing?

- No road condition surveys were completed during 2023/24 but were completed during the early part of 2024/25, these will be reported in the 2024/25 Annual Report. Therefore, the following results are based on the 2022/23 surveys, results for each of the road categories improved from the previous year:
  - **3.1%** of our **A** Class were in poor condition (3.6%)
  - **2.4%** of our **B** Class were in poor condition (2.8%)
  - **10.1%** of our **C** Class were in poor condition (11.7%)
- Our 2023 residents survey received almost 4,000 respondents, whilst many agreed that they can access the services that they need, a similar number of respondents indicated 'neither', with a further significant number of respondents disagreeing with this statement. This has resulted in a shift from overall agreement of a score[1] of 0.05 to overall disagreement with a score of -0.05 when comparing this year's results with last year's. Location based trends align with those seen for the next statement on access to good public transport, with the lowest scores evident in the Tywi and Gwendraeth areas.
- With regards to the statement 'there are good transportation links around me', the residents survey score declined from -0.41 to -0.45. Further analysis indicates that scores were lowest from respondents living in the Tywi (-0.94) and Gwendraeth (-0.66) community areas. This is to be expected given these areas include some of the County's most rural wards.

## Outcome: Look to improve access to services through enhanced transportation networks and infrastructure.

We are actively investing in enhancing public transportation and infrastructure across the county. Initiatives include:

### Connecting Communities

**Phil Bennett Bridge:** Funded by the Welsh Government Active Travel Fund and supported by Transport for Wales, this new bridge connects our communities and enhances accessibility delivering direct access to the Parc Trostre retail hub, enriching the area's overall connectivity.

### Addressing Rural Transport Needs

**Bws Bach y Wlad Bus Service:** We have developed an initiative to bridge the gap in public transport accessibility for residents in North Carmarthenshire's rural areas. It directly responds to the discontinued Bwcabus service, ensuring residents can connect to economic opportunities and fostering regional growth and development.

### Enhancing Road Infrastructure

**A484 Sandy Road Improvements (Phase 1):** This completed project has yielded several benefits for Llanelli. The redesigned Sandy Road roundabout and its approaches promote a shift towards active travel options like cycling and walking. This improves air quality, reduced traffic congestion, improves public transport journey reliability and overall road safety

### A, B & C Road Maintenance:

While improvements have been made to A, B, and C class roads this year, the Council acknowledges the need for further funding to address the condition of unclassified and rural roads. Through the Welsh Government Resilient Roads fund, we secured £1.08m of funding to carry out major repair works across the County. This funding supported us on several significant Emergencies, including 5 collapsed road embankments, a failed retaining wall and 2 collapsed culverts.

### Upgrading Carmarthen Bus Station

Renovation works worth £1.125 million funded by the Welsh Government Local Transport Fund grant, the Carmarthen Bus Station Improvement Scheme represents the Council's commitment to supporting a high-quality public transport service.

## **Maintenance**

We prioritise maintaining the highway network throughout the year, particularly during Winter, to ensure residents have uninterrupted access to essential services and vulnerable residents receive care and support. Strategic routes are treated with salt as part of their Winter maintenance plan to maintain the flow of vital services and supplies.

Road surface condition continued to deteriorate in 2023/24. The number of customers reported surface defects and potholes increased by 175%, with a significant increase during the very wet winter period, making up 35% of all reported highway defects. Reductions in preventative maintenance programmes leave our roads vulnerable to rapid deterioration, increasingly as weather extremes become more frequent.

## **Implementing 20mph Speed Limits**

The Welsh Government's legislative change in lowering speed limits on restricted roads from 30mph to 20mph presented a significant workload for the Council. A dedicated project board ensured smooth implementation. Stakeholders, including community and town councils, were consulted through online briefings and a public webpage. Nearly 4,000 public notices were placed, and over 170 work packages were issued to modify existing signage and implement new 20mph and 30mph speed limit signs.

## **Tywi Valley Path Development**

Work continues on the Tywi Valley Path, a challenging project co-funded by the Welsh Government and the UK Government's £16.7 million levelling-up funding.

### **Training to promote Road Safety and to encourage Safe Active Travel to Adults**

We have delivered our Biker-down! training to 77 adults together with our training partners. The course aims to reduce the number of motorcyclists killed and seriously injured in road accidents and is delivered by Operational Firefighters / the Fire Bike Team from Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service. The course comprises of three modules which are Managing an Accident Scene; First Aid; and The Science of Being Seen.



The course gives participants a better understanding of what to do if they come across a road traffic collision and how to manage it safely.

We have delivered Dragon Rider training to 44 adults together with our training partners. Our training consists of a classroom-based session at designated Fire and Rescue stations in Carmarthen, Llanelli and Ammanford as well as outdoors sessions, using a variety of roads throughout the County and neighbouring counties to meet the motorcycle training needs of our individual riders, based on the advanced Police rider manual, Roadcraft.



### **Training to promote Road Safety and to encourage Safe Active Travel to School Children**

We have delivered kerb craft initiatives to 1,064 pupils where we teach children from age 5-7 how to be safer pedestrians by taking them on the real roadside and showing them how correct decision-making and behaviour can really help them to stay safe.

We have also delivered cycling courses [Level 1 to Level 3] to 1,195 primary aged pupils to promote road safety training and campaigns to encourage safe active travel.



## Carmarthen Bus Station Service User Perspective

We engaged with all users of Carmarthen Bus Station following the completion of the re-development works in December 2023. From the results, we found that 62% of respondents believed the changes had promoted a safer station. The new look bus station had a rating of 7 out of 10 on average. The improvement that had the most satisfactory aspect for the users were the new shelters.



How can we do better?

We will foster economic growth through the development and delivery of infrastructure programmes. This includes co-developing the Regional Transport Plan, which aims to create a sustainable, low-carbon transport system that not only supports economic growth and investment but also enhances rural accessibility. This plan is in alignment with the Wales Transport Strategy.

We are collaborating with regional and national partners to develop the South West Wales METRO, which will offer an integrated transport system that promotes carbon reduction, economic activity, and social inclusion across the region.

To address the increasing deterioration of our highway network, we are reviewing the Highway Capital Investment Programme. We are also investing in infrastructure that will facilitate the transition to electric vehicles for Fleet Services.

A key initiative is the review of School Transport, where we are considering the risks associated with franchising.

We will be piloting Transport Surgeries to foster better engagement with the public.

We are developing a robust car parking strategy that aligns with our economic goals and sustainable transportation objectives.



## Well-being Objective 4

### Our Council:

### To further modernise and develop as a resilient and efficient Council

#### Overview of Progress

The Council, like all other public services, faces significant financial pressures, increasing demand and workforce challenges over coming years as well as responding to the net-zero agenda, the impact of demographic change and inequality.

Budgetary pressures mean that some services have experienced significant real-terms funding reductions over recent years whilst demand increases, and the complexity of that demand increases as well.

This is having a significant impact on our workforce who are faced with increasing demand at a time of reduced resources. Recruitment pressures in certain areas continue and budgetary pressures mean that any vacancies have to be considered carefully before being filled. Additionally, the Council is experiencing a significant increase in stress-related sickness absence, with an exponential increase of staff being referred to our Well-Being Support Service. The increase in sickness absence compounds the current workforce pressures. Staff commitment and resilience is to be commended but current pressures cannot be sustained long-term and work is on-going to address workforce pressures going forward.

Thinking in a long-term and joined up way is difficult when faced with such challenges and depleting resources, however, we recognise that to continue our important work in service-delivery we must do things differently, fully maximising the opportunities that the sustainable development principle offers.

We are actively modernising and developing as a resilient and efficient organisation to ensure our future sustainability. There is a strong emphasis on planning and supporting the development of a skilled and agile workforce, maximising opportunities within digital transformation to improve service delivery, reduce costs, and enhance customer experience and satisfaction.

Our Transformation Strategy supports the strategic objectives of our new Digital Strategy for 2024-2027 to deliver a better experience for customers. This includes the implementation of electronic signatures, hybrid mail solutions, and the rollout of robotics technology in specific processes, which has led to productivity improvements and cost savings. Work is also on-going to introduce a Commercialisation Strategy, to allow us to capitalise on income generation, to help address the financial challenges ahead of us.

Significant investments have been made to enhance operational efficiency and agility. We have also focused on upgrading on-premises environment to provide enhanced resilience.

The new Digital Strategy for 2024-2027 emphasises leveraging digital, data, and technology to enhance public services, aiming to create a digitally inclusive environment that empowers every resident.

## How are we doing?

We place significant emphasis on the importance of the views of our residents. As such the primary way of measuring progress against WBO 4 is through our annual resident's survey. The results for 2023 are provided below with a comparator for the previous year. These statements relate directly to the Council and our performance.

	AIS Scores 2022	AIS Scores 2023
I can access Council services through my preferred language	1.40	1.37
When I access Council services, I find the staff to be approachable and friendly	0.82	0.77
I can easily access up to date information about Council services	0.50	0.46
I find contacting the Council simple and easy	0.31	0.28
The Council Provides good quality services overall	0.27	0.17
The Council lets people know how it's performing	-0.10	-0.12
The Council provides opportunities for me to participate in decision-making	-0.19	-0.19
The Council makes good use of the financial resources available to them	-0.33	-0.46
Investment is focused in the correct areas	-0.41	-0.57

Of the nine statements posed in relation to the Council and its performance, respondents agreed or strongly agreed with 56% of them. This is consistent with trends seen for the previous year.

However, whilst this is the case, eight of the nine AIS scores saw slight decreases on the previous year's result which suggests that on balance disagreement levels were slightly higher for 2023.

Several findings from the evidence received, namely:

- Most respondents believe that the Council provides good quality services overall. However, many residents took the opportunity to share comments to the contrary with the main themes aligning with evidence received last year. These themes include:
  - o Unreliable and infrequent waste collection;
  - o Perceived lack of town centre regeneration;
  - o Poor road conditions i.e. potholes;
  - o Lack of street cleansing;
  - o Long waits for housing repairs;
  - o Increased litter and fly-tipping;
  - o Lack of public transport;
  - o Lack of street lighting;
  - o A perceived underperforming social care service.

- Most respondents find staff to be approachable and friendly when they access Council services
- The Council's communication process is mainly effective in terms of allowing residents to access up to date information about our services and most agree that they find contacting the Council simple and easy. However, there are some issues with direct contact processes such as on occasions when residents utilise the main switchboard, utilise email to connect with officers or wish to speak directly with officers within individual departments. These findings are consistent with the previous year.
- On the whole respondents believe that the Council does not make good use of the financial resources available to us and that investment is not focussed on the right areas. These were the two lowest scoring statements, a consistent trend with last year.
- Similarly to last year, statements on Council communications in relation to performance and opportunities to participate in decision-making received mixed responses. Overall, more people disagree with these statements, however, a significant number reported 'neither' which may indicate a wider issue with the type of information shared with residents on these themes and how this information is shared.

**Outcome: To further modernise and develop the Council's ways of working.**

**Going Paperless**

One of the key aims of the Council's Transformation Strategy is 'to make better use of technology to deliver smarter, efficient service processes and to deliver a better experience for customers'. The Customers and Digital workstream is overseeing the implementation of an on-going programme of work which is seeking to rationalise and/or automate several paper-based processes. The use of electronic signatures and hybrid mail solutions is being rolled out across several services and this is already delivering a more cost-effective and productive way of working with over £100k being saved in the last year.

**Robotic Process Automation**

Digital Transformation funding is being used to support the roll out of robotics technology in relation to specific processes. Robotics technology is being used to undertake two back-office processes within Human Resources and has recently been deployed within the Free School Meals and School Essential Grant processes. The automation of these processes is already realising benefits to the services in terms of productivity improvements whilst also realising significant benefits to customers as requests are processed immediately. Scoping exercises are currently being undertaken to identify and prioritise the next processes to be automated using robotics technology.

**Mobile Agile working**

Over the past year, we have worked to ensure that our end-user devices, including laptops, smartphones, and tablets, are not only fit for purpose but also provide a seamless and efficient experience for our users. Our strategy has been to deploy technologies that enable a truly agile approach to work, allowing users to connect, communicate, and access resources from the most appropriate locations.

**Systems & Cloud**

We are using technology to better serve our residents, drive efficiencies across our services and enable staff to access data, systems and services from any device, any location, at any time. It is our ability to access resources, systems, and data from anywhere at any time that underpins the organisation's service delivery and our approach to mobile and agile working. In the past 12 months, we have undertaken significant cloud migrations and upgrades which have been pivotal in enhancing our operational efficiency and agility, and service delivery. We have also focused on upgrading our on-premises environment, platform, and software to provide enhanced resilience.

These system upgrades and migrations are a testament to our dedication to leveraging technology to improve service delivery, enhance data gathering and analysis, and provide our workforce with the tools they need to excel. Examples include:

- **Schools ICT:** We have migrated 18 schools from legacy telephony platforms onto fully digital and future proofed voice platforms in preparation for the UK's legacy analogue voice switch off. This is not only future proofing the schools, but also providing a range of cost savings. We have replaced several hundred devices across our schools as part of the Welsh Government funded HWB investment, ensuring that all learners across the County have equitable access to digital resources.

## **Cyber resilience**

Over the past year, the Council has taken significant steps to bolster our cyber security posture. We have recognised the increasing challenge of cyber threats and have responded by investing in new technologies and resources to enhance our defences. We have increased our focus on disaster recovery, ensuring robust and resilient infrastructure, and have implemented cyber incident exercises and procedures to prepare for potential threats.

## **Digital Transformation Strategy 2024 – 2027**

Carmarthenshire's new Digital Strategy for 2024-2027 has been developed and launched over the past 6 months. It is a comprehensive plan that emphasises leveraging digital, data, and technology to enhance public services. With the strapline "designed for people, enabled by technology," it aims to create a digitally inclusive environment that empowers every resident. The Strategy builds upon continuous improvement and strategic advancements, setting a clear direction for digital innovation, data-driven decision-making, and technology-led services that are accessible to all. It demonstrates a commitment to harnessing digital data and technology to deliver efficient, transparent, and responsive public services for the citizens of Carmarthenshire over the next 3 years.



**Outcome: Support the development of the Council as a modern, diverse, inclusive, and responsive organisation and be an ‘Employer of Choice’.**

- The Council’s new Workforce Strategy has several key actions and initiatives that are aimed at attracting, recruiting, and retaining diverse talent as well as ensuring we are an employer of choice.
- 85 (0.94%) of Council employees are from minority ethnic communities at the end of March 2024 compared to 71 (0.86%) at the end of March 2023.
- There has been an improvement on the average sickness absence of Council employees during 2023/24, reducing from 11.6 days to 11.1 days, but results remain higher than pre-Covid levels.



Our People Management division provides advice and support for managers, who have the responsibility to manage attendance. The Health and Wellbeing team support with proactive initiatives and bespoke interventions. Occupational Health professionals provide medical opinion for employees who are referred and provide recommendations to managers on reasonable adjustments, prognosis, and fitness for work.

Future-proofing the Workforce

Given the service pressures facing Children’s Services, a review across the service has been undertaken to ensure we have a stable workforce who are qualified, equipped and supported to provide support to children and families. As well as a re-alignment of children and families services management team an experienced practitioner progression framework has been implemented and new social worker trainee posts created. Since October 2023, 48 social workers in children and families have progressed through the framework, and the recruitment of 10 trainees is also underway.

Across the whole Council there are currently 107 apprentices on formal recognized apprenticeship schemes, with 4 more being recruited to meet workforce planning aspirations through the Amdani project. This project offers apprentices the opportunity to learn through the medium of Welsh and use their Welsh language skills to offer a bilingual service to customers. Over 65 work experience placements have been supported, along with 6 Cyfle shared apprenticeships and a shared Technical Apprentice working within the Theatres in partnership with the Wales Millennium Centre. The Care Academi has 12 people on the program, with 4 progressing on the fast-track route to do their Social Work Qualifications starting September 2024. One has gained employment within Social Care services, while another has left to pursue studies at university. A further 6 trainees are being recruited for September 2024. The Leadership Academi has had 30 staff undertake it, with the application process now open for the September intake.

Outcome: Listen to our staff through regular staff engagement and empower them to improve their own service areas.

We received just under 1,500 responses to our staff survey during 2023/24, the scores and year on year comparisons can be seen below. The comments provided by staff were analysed and steps being taken to address any matters raised.

Employee Engagement Survey	Average Index Score (AIS)		Comments
	2022	2023	
The number of people that are proud to work for the Council	1.04	1.08	The result of 1.06 shows that there is an overall strong agreement that our staff feel proud to work for the Council and has improved slightly from 2022/23.
The number of people that would recommend the Council as an employer	1.04	1.1	The result of 1.10 shows a slight improvement on the previous year and continue to be an overall strong agreement that our staff would recommend the Council as an employer.

## **Outcome: Ensure local and regional partnership working is efficient and effective and adds value to the work of the Council.**

### **Carmarthenshire Public Services Board (PSB)**

The PSB brings together several different organisations providing services to the public who are working together for the benefit of Carmarthenshire. They have a longstanding, successful track record of partnership working and continue to build on that.

The PSB promotes a positive culture of working together, concentrating collective energy, effort, and resources on providing efficient and effective services to local communities. They will continue to do this by working collaboratively to add value to each other's services and will look at innovative approaches and new and different ways of working to achieve this.

Following the publication of the Carmarthenshire Well-being Assessment, the PSB built on the evidence base to prepare a Well-being Plan for 2023-28. The plan outlines the PSBs ambition for the County and how they wish to see real improvements in the economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being of our residents.

We have progressed work on this front by developing a new delivery framework, to ensure progress on the well-being objectives through the establishment of several multi-agency task and finish groups. These groups will drive forward the delivery of the next steps identified in the PSB's Well-being Plan. To date, the following groups have been set up:

- o Under the 'Tackling Poverty and its impacts' well-being objective a focus on identifying and actioning opportunities for PSB organisation staff to Make Every Contact Count (MECC) with improved signposting and referral to support services and build on advice services and support for residents through the Council Hwb, by developing opportunities for collaboration across PSB organisations.
- o Under the 'Ensuring a sustainable economy and fair employment' well-being objective the aim to plan for our future workforce by working collaboratively to promote job and career opportunities in the public sector.
- o Under the 'Responding to the climate and nature emergencies' well-being objective a focus on increasing collaboration on Electric Vehicle EV Charging Infrastructure at public sector venues.

## **Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28**

During 2023-24, we have worked with partners across Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, and Powys to involve our residents in the review of the Strategic Equality Plan. All the planning work, survey preparation and liaison with partners was held across the four counties, with key public sector bodies working together to increase the number of voices heard in our work.

## **Swansea Bay City Deal**

The Swansea Bay City Deal is an unprecedented investment of up to £1.3 billion by 2033 creating 9,000 jobs across a portfolio of nine headline projects and programmes throughout the counties of Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot, and Pembrokeshire.

Aligned to three themes of economic acceleration, energy and smart manufacturing, and life science and well-being, the portfolio is in full delivery. This will provide opportunities for many existing and new regional businesses, as well as residents across the region.

## **PARTNERIAETH**

PARTNERIAETH was established following the abolition of Education through Regional Working (ERW) service to support schools in partnership with Swansea and Pembrokeshire councils. A new Joint Committee was established, and a Legal Agreement was developed to manage the work of the new entity. Core staff have been restructured to create a team of officers to support and complement school improvement activities in the three counties. Work continues to strengthen governance, monitoring and holding PARTNERIAETH to account for its contribution to school improvement in the region.

## **South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC)**

The South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) has been established as a regional corporate body by Welsh Ministers. Membership consists of the executive leaders of Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, and Swansea councils, along with a member of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority.

The CJC published its Corporate Plan for 2023-2028 which recognises its functions and responsibilities within South West Wales in terms of economic well-being, energy, transport, and strategic planning, conveying the progress made to date as well as set out future ambitions. To this end, the Corporate Plan includes a Vision for South West Wales 2035, as well as 3 well-being objectives and an equality objective.

## **Outcome: Increased public engagement through engagement, participation and consultation.**

The Council has a well-established method of engaging with citizens and other key stakeholders across all key Council functions. There are several network groups which represent a range of interests from the youth forum to the ageing well network. We also strive to ensure that we engage and seek the views of those with specified protected characteristics as recognised by The Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011.

We are progressing with introducing a Corporate Customer Charter which will now be completed during 2024/25. Good customer service is expected from all our service areas, and we should be striving for this, particularly in the current climate of decreasing budgets and increasing workloads. Tempered with high customer expectation, primarily due to the speed and ease of mobile technology. Our aim is that this new customer charter will put our customers at the heart of everything we do.

There has been an increase in participation of online consultations. When evaluating comparable consultations, the Budget consultation in 2020 which consulted on specific proposal received 2,004 responses, whilst in 2023 the consultation received 4,294. The increase in participation is attributed to the closer relationship developed with the Media and Marketing team ensuring that consultations are promoted on social media and the corporate website and are sent to all key stakeholders.

The Council has recently launched a new section on the corporate website which helps promote and display the results of each consultation in a bid to ensure that there is better clarity and transparency. The next Annual report will therefore be able to highlight the changes we have made to highlight the progress of each consultation and the results and actions administered off the back of each survey.



## Annual Consultation Activity

In accordance with the statutory obligation placed on us through the Local Government and Elections Act, the Council consulted with residents, businesses, staff, and trade unions on the degree to which we are meeting our performance requirements. An update on the activity for 2023 is provided below:

Survey	Update
<b>Residents Survey: 2023</b>	<b>We received just under 4,000 responses to our Residents Survey during 2023</b> , this is an increase of 1,748 responses on the previous year. Consultation findings were analysed and summarised into a series of reports and presented to various Council fora. The main findings and the need for development are detailed on our website <a href="#">Carmarthenshire Residents Survey 2023 - Consultation Outcome</a> along with any arising actions and activity we intend to take in response.
<b>Staff Survey (People Management): 2023</b>	In total <b>1,475 members of staff chose to take part in the survey</b> , which is approximately 18% of our entire workforce, this is a slight reduction compared to the 2022 staff survey, however, it remains a reliable statistical sample. <b>Overall, the results are positive</b> with all indicators attracting a positive rating of <i>Strongly Agree</i> or <i>Agree</i> and showed an improvement on the 2022 results (See Outcome 3 above for some details). The comments received were analysed and results was published on our Intranet and circulated to staff.
<b>Business Survey: 2023</b>	We received <b>110 responses to our Business Survey during 2023</b> , this is an increase of 74 responses on the previous year. Analysis and findings deduced were summarised in a report which included an indication of how results compare with those received for the previous year.
<b>Trade Union Survey: 2023</b>	We received a response from 3 of our Trade Unions in our 2023 survey, this is two less than in 2022. This may be indicative of specific unions feeling as though they had already shared their views with the Council through engagement activity related to the Estyn inspection. The evidence gathered has been summarised in a report considered.

## Budget Consultation

Residents, businesses, community, and voluntary organisations had their say on a range of new policy saving proposals, that were drawn from across all services of the Council. A total of 11 budget proposals were presented for consideration. These were considered alongside more than 100 detailed managerial proposals, such as procurement arrangements, staffing structures and internal and back-office functions.

## Net Promoter Scores

Actif has long adopted the Net Promoter Score (NPS) methodology for capturing customer feedback. Proactively contacting leisure centre customers, almost 1,800 scores/comments were received through 2023-24 to indicate their opinion of their customer experience and any comments to explain or help us improve.

With this insight, our NPS score for 2023-24 averaged 45%, exceeding the international benchmark (40%) and almost matching the national benchmark (47%), Newcastle Emlyn and Llandovery Leisure Centres scoring 76% and 78% respectively.

## **Outcome: A more commercial approach to the delivery of Council services with a view to increasing the level of income generated.**

### **Estates & Asset Management**

We continue to review our various property portfolios to take advantage of opportunities to increase income and reduce liabilities to develop resilience both financially and environmentally. The rural portfolio was the subject of a review in 2023-24.

- One outcome was the disposal of a farmhouse and ancillary land for £725,000 whilst retaining the majority of the land holding which was relet to provide an uplift of approximately 80% in revenue on the asset.
- We also continued our work on the Administrative Estate in relation to making better use from hybrid working arrangements.
- St David's Park, Carmarthen was sold, and greater use made of core accommodation in the Town Centre in Carmarthen and Llanelli with the latter creating additional income from partner organisation by sharing space.
- We also continue to undertake work on behalf of partner organisations with valuation advice provided to Mid and West Wales Fire Authority, generating fee income for our service.

### **Leisure**

Actif is continuously seeking to increase income via programme and product innovation, membership sales, etc. As a result, there was a 16% increase in income from £4.7m in 2022-23 to just under £5.5m in 2023-24. This is largely attributable to major focuses on the two key business areas of fitness and aquatics, responsible for around two thirds of Actif's sales-related income.

Significant efforts to recruit and train additional swim teachers, for example, has grown the ability to meet demand for swim lessons, taking our learn to swim membership from 2,480 (March 2023) to 2,998 (March 2024), or 21% growth/additional £20k per calendar month.

In fitness business terms, efforts have been made to maximise spaces available (e.g. adding fitness equipment to peripheries of studio spaces to allow gyms to expand outside of class times) and run successful marketing campaigns to generate sales and retention. As a result, membership has grown from 3,511 (March 2023) to 3,997 (March 2024), or 14% growth/additional £25k per calendar month.

## **Outcome: Make better use of digital technology to further transform our services into smarter, efficient service processes and to deliver a better experience for customers.**

During 2023/24 an additional 8 transactional Council services were made available to the public online. Over 60 transactional services have been added online in the last 10 years, which is an additional way to access these services. There were over 4.5m user sessions to the Council's website during 2023/24 an increase of 37% compared to last year.

An 'Options' menu has been added to our telephone lines that directs customers to parts of the organisation that they require. This has reduced double handling with the calls going directly to the required team rather than being passed on through the contact centre, this in turn has reduced the number of calls coming through the contact centre but has also increased the speed of answering calls from an average of 6.32 minutes in 2022/23 down to 1.05 minutes at the end of 2023/24. Also, customers are choosing other means of contact e.g. email, social media, online forms etc. rather than the telephone.

There was a 37% increase in the number of complaints received by the council during 2023/24 with 1,958 compared to 1,430 the previous year, with the highest number of complaints received by Waste services and Housing repairs however, this reflects the public facing nature of services. Just under 61% of all complaints received were dealt with on time.

## **Outcome: Embrace and promote agile working, hybrid meetings and new ways of working across the organisation, by being more sustainable and creative to improve Council services.**

The Council is promoting agile and hybrid working, which improves Council services and supports staff well-being and productivity. The Council has invested in digital tools and platforms including cloud-based computing platforms and other digital infrastructure to support remote work and virtual meetings.

Furthermore, new guidance on agile and hybrid working has been implemented. This initiative reduces travel costs and emissions, improves work-life balance, enhances innovation, increases resilience and adaptability, and results in better service delivery and satisfaction.

The Council is rationalising its accommodation portfolio by reducing and improving the Council's buildings. This initiative is enabled by hybrid working, which reduces the need for office space. The Council has developed a new accommodation strategy and plan, which sets out the vision, objectives, and actions for a more efficient and effective use of the Council's estate. This initiative reduces property costs and expenditure, improves asset performance and utilisation, enhances health and safety standards, optimises space and facilities, and increases income and receipts.

These initiatives are part of the Council's broader efforts to modernise its operations in line with the Transformation Strategy. These initiatives are expected to deliver significant benefits for the Council, its staff, and the public.

We are therefore going to further promote the use of more sustainable staff travel options with a view to delivering financial and environmental savings next year.

## **Outcome: Deliver organisational change that supports key Net Zero Carbon targets**

### **Asset Management**

The Council's Strategic Land Use Group reviews our holdings and intended disposals. Its focus is to balance current requirements and future needs. Opportunities that our assets can potentially provide for energy generation, tree planting, phosphate mitigation, enhancing biodiversity, food production and community needs are considered by the group.

### **Property Design**

We continue to collect data to report on carbon methodology, working collaboratively with the corporate sustainability team and in compliance with Carmarthenshire's Net Zero Carbon Action Plan. Our aim is to develop comprehensive datasets that capture carbon impacts during construction and residual carbon emissions when our buildings are in use. This will enable us to formulate a strategy for sustainable physical regeneration in Carmarthenshire and provide data for Welsh Government funding applications.

## **Outcome: Ensuring the Council is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively.**

Following the Welsh Government's below-inflation funding settlement of 3.3%, the Council must bridge a shortfall of over £22million in its forthcoming 2024/25 budget.

Welsh Government acknowledged that they faced the "most stark and painful budget choices for Wales in the devolution era" as they prepared their draft budget, which includes the all-important Revenue Support Grant (RSG) allocated to local authorities. The 3.3% rise in the RSG, which makes up around three-quarters of our funding, falls well short of the contribution needed by the Council to maintain services as they are presently provided.

"I'm grateful to the 4,300 residents who responded to the Budget Consultation and the young people who filled the Council Chamber to tell us what's important to them. Based on the responses, the Cabinet discussed at great length the options we'd presented to the public and propose allocating an extra £2m to defer cuts in several services. It pains me to say that the coming couple of years look bleak for all councils as the pressure on public spending looks set to increase. But whatever happens, I can assure the people of Carmarthenshire that we will do our utmost to protect the essential services upon which we all depend."

Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr. Alun Lenny

The huge pressure on local councils due to inadequate funding of public services has increased year on year for over a decade and is now at an unprecedented level. In Carmarthenshire, we are about £120m worse off than we were in 2010.

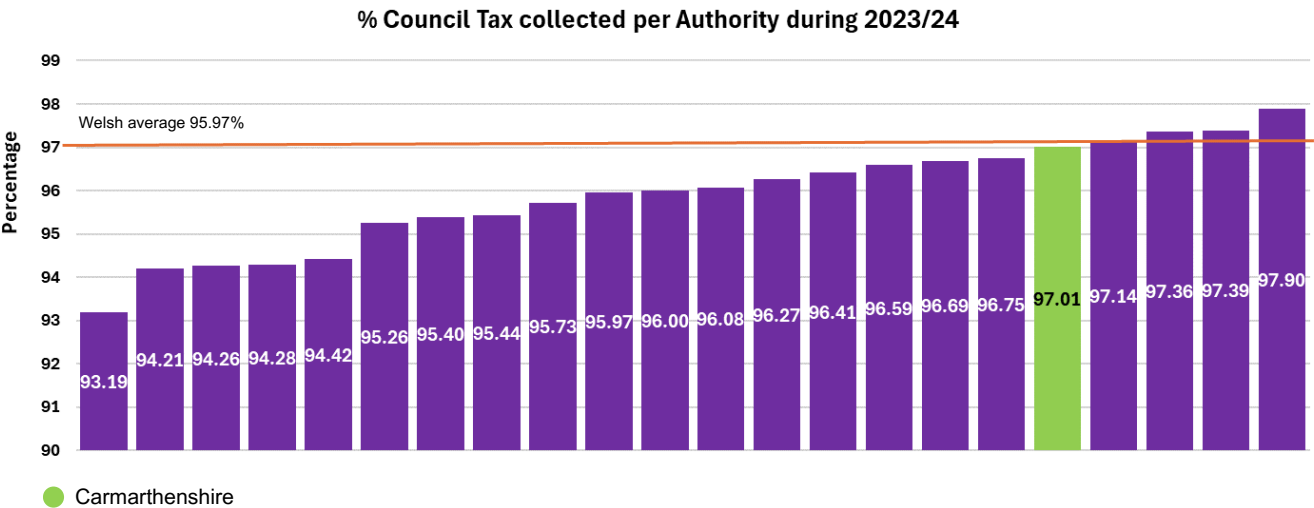
Carmarthenshire County Council’s 5-year Capital Programme, which will see £193m of investment within the County over the next 5 years was approved by County Council in February 2024. The new programme will see £61m directed towards the Council’s continued commitment for improving school buildings, £12m toward Disability Facilities Grant to help transform the quality of life for many people in their own homes, £34m for regeneration projects to boost economic activity and £16m to complete the City Deal backed Pentre Awel project - which includes a new leisure centre for Llanelli. £43m has been allocated towards improving Carmarthenshire’s local economic highways infrastructure and recycling infrastructure, whilst £21m has been earmarked for critical digital IT hardware and infrastructure.



“In recent years we have delivered a huge programme of capital investments for the people of Carmarthenshire. Investments in our schools, in our transport links and infrastructure, and our cultural and leisure facilities; across the board we have delivered despite facing unprecedented challenges from the rising costs and reductions in government funding.

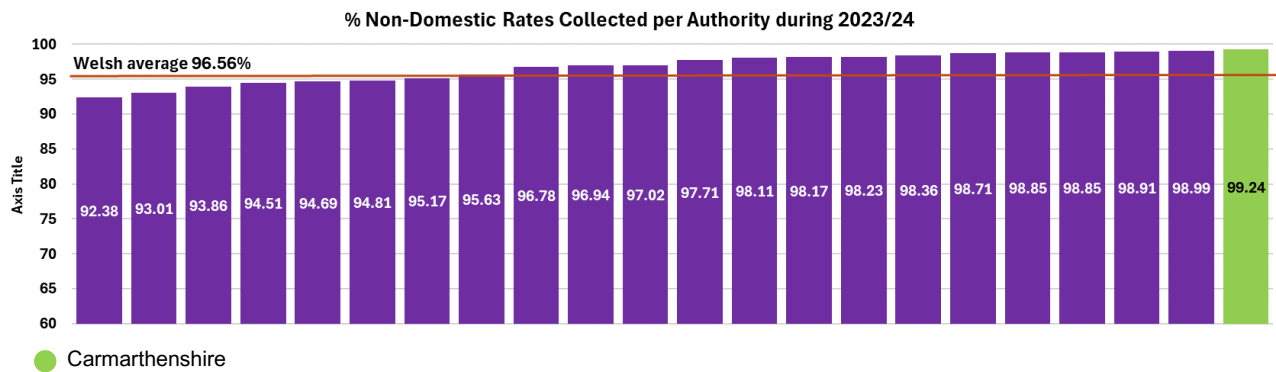
Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr. Alun Lenny

- 97.01% of Council Tax was collected during 2023/24, slightly declined on last year (97.33%) although we have the 5th highest collection rate in Wales and above the Welsh average of 95.97%. We take a proactive approach to recovery and have provided relevant support and advice to those falling into arrears to ensure the best possible way forward regarding repayment arrangements.





- 99.24% of non-domestic rates due for the financial year was collected by the Council, this is an improvement on 97.97% the previous year and the highest collection rate in Wales.



- With increased access to online services, this has created a natural shift for on-line payments with many customers contacting us, submitting forms and documents and paying for our services electronically with a 5.72% increase in the number of online payments from 59,995 transactions in 2022/23 to 63,427 during 2023/24.
- Whilst supporting the Council's commitment to 'consider the greater use of the additional powers afforded by Welsh Government to tackle the second home crisis', the Council has determined that it will use its discretionary powers to charge a premium on second homes and long term empty properties; a premium of 50% will be charged in 2024/25 on second homes and on long term empty properties 50% premium will be charged for properties' empty for more than 1 year and less than 2 years, 100% for 2 to 5 years and 200% for properties empty over 5 years.
- Just under 95% of invoices were paid within 30 days during 2023/24, this is off target and a decline on 2022/23, but there has been a 5% increase in the number of invoices paid compared to the previous year.

## Outcome: Embedding the sustainable development principle in all that the Council does.

The principles and requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act underpins everything that we do as an organisation. This ensures that the sustainable development principle is at the heart of strategy development and implementation.

The sustainable development principle forms the basis of our approach to annual self-assessment and the requirements of the Act underpinned the approach to both the development and subsequent implementation of the Transformation Programme.

Carmarthenshire County Council Annual Audit Summary 2023  
(published April 2024)



This report shows the work completed by Audit Wales since the last Annual Audit Summary (March 2023). The audit summary forms part of the Auditor General for Wales' duties.

The Auditor General gave an unqualified true and fair opinion on the Authority's financial statements for the 2022-23 period. This means that the Auditor General found the financial statements to be accurate, complete, and in accordance with the relevant accounting standards. Overall, the Auditor General's opinion indicates that the Authority's financial statements were deemed to be reliable and trustworthy.

The audit also found that the Council has applied the sustainable development principle in the setting of its new well-being objectives. However, it also identified that the Council could strengthen its arrangements for citizen involvement and monitoring the progress of these objectives. This suggests that while the Council has taken steps to establish well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle, there is room for improvement in terms of engaging citizens and effectively monitoring the progress of these objectives.

## Sêr Ni Nursery and Llwyhendy Children Centre welcome Care Academi Students

Sêr Ni Llwynhendy and Sêr Ni Bynea Nursery are in the first group of Social Care settings to host Care Academi Students in Carmarthenshire Local Authority. Dean Watkins was the fourth student to be welcomed at Sêr Ni settings in the first year of the delivery of Care Academi 2022/23. The Care Academi students were able to directly experience life in a Nursery setting within the vocation of the Socail Care. The teams at the Nursery settings have supported and encouraged learning and participation in all aspects of service delivery. The children at Nursery have all embraced the students and grown connections with the students through the world of play and learning. Dean Watkins' placement ended just before the Summer holidays after a successful eight weeks where he become a valid member of the team. Carmarthenshire Care Academi offers an exciting opportunity to grow a career in social care.



## Core Business Enablers

In addition to the identified thematic and service priorities, there are a range of core business enablers which underpin the Council's daily functions and our delivery of services. Several are detailed within this section; however, ICT, Marketing & Media, Finance, People Management, Policy & Performance, Estates and Asset Management and Business Support have been interwoven within the content in well-being objectives 1-4 above.

### Legal

- We have ensured legality and probity in the Council's decision-making.
- We work within a statutory framework governing such things as the way meetings are run, the way decisions are taken and the legislation behind each decision which needs to be taken.
- We handle as much of the legal work needed by the Council in-house as we can, although there will be some occasions when we need to send work to external lawyers.
- Areas of focus during 2023/24 was supporting the work of the Regeneration Team in relation to the Shared Prosperity Fund, our Housing colleagues in bringing empty properties back into use, playing a key role in the Debt Recovery Project, advising on the Council's submissions to the National Covid-19 inquiry and implementing changes to court procedures in child protection cases.
- The range of legal work undertaken includes not just court and tribunal cases, but also advising Council committees, drafting legal documentation, and giving legal advice.

### Planning

- 87.5% (1,202 / 1,373) planning applications were determined on time during 2023/24, this is a slight decline on 89% last year.
- Of the 27 planning appeals received during 2023/24, 19 were dismissed (70.4%). This is an improvement on the previous year with 66.7%, it exceeds the Welsh Government Performance Framework for 'Good' of 66%.
- 22 out of the 33 Major planning applications determined in the year were completed within the time required to give a result of 69.7%, this is lower than target (80%) and a decline on last year (72.4%), but the determination of 10 historic cases impacted on the overall result. It should be noted that the Welsh Government rating of 'Good' is 60%.
- The average number of days taken to take positive planning enforcement action during 2023/24 has increased significantly to 306 days (211 days the previous year), this is mainly due to concentrating on the backlog cases, however, as these historic cases are closed, they continue to skew the average days.
- Our Planning Enforcement performance made a significant improvement on planning enforcement cases investigated within 84 days from 68.8% in 2022/23 to 84.3% in 2023/24.
- An Assurance Rating of 'High' was received during an Internal Audit inspection on Planning Enforcement to ensure that the systems and procedures in place for Planning Enforcement are robust.

## Procurement

- We spend an excess of £376 million per annum on goods, works and services, this has a significant impact on the quality of life for the community. It is vital we have a strategic approach to procurement to ensure that goods, works, and services are procured as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- Under the new Procurement Act (2023), from October 2024, the Council is required to publish a pipeline of planned tenders over £2m (this first pipeline must be published 1 April 2025 – within 56 days of that deadline). The Procurement Unit will continue to engage with departments to accurately capture all tenders over this value in readiness for this deadline.
- A variety of supplier engagement initiatives and events were held in 2023/24 to accommodate a programme of tender exercises. The £160m Professional Works Framework is an example of a tender that adopted a wide variety of supplier engagement initiatives to attract local contractors to tender, to promote the tender requirements and to enhance tender submission's by offering tender support.
- In 2023/24 we supported the Swansea Bay City Deal's Digital Infrastructure Programme to appoint a provider for the design, build and operation of a dark fibre network linking key sites within the Swansea Bay City Deal (SBCD) Connected Places Programme to facilitate and invest in provision of a gigabit capable connectivity and associated infrastructure to key strategic sites and economic growth across the Region. The tender has been awarded to Virgin Media and contracts are currently being exchanged. We are also working with the SBCD Infrastructure Team to support with the rollout of Dark Fibre 2 (£4m) and the Rural Infill Project (£6m) which aims to bring superfast broadband to hard-to-reach rural areas.
- We work with departments to incorporate ways to reduce the carbon impact of procured goods, works or services. A Sustainable Risk Assessment (SRA) is completed for all tenders over the value of £25k (in accordance with our Contract Procurement Rules) which helps identify opportunities to embed actions into the tender to improve sustainability.

## Internal Audit

- Internal Audit is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve the organisation's operations.
- 89% of the planned Internal Audits were completed during 2023/24. Despite some resource constraints, the Audit Plan progressed very well throughout the year and all 30 final reports were issued within 10 working days of the management responses being received.
- A review of our Internal Audit service by an external assessor for the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards was conducted during 2023/24, which concluded that the service was conforming to the standards.
- Internal Audit reports to the Council's Governance and Audit Committee, providing regular progress updates, with every Internal Audit Report is provided to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee.
- We have a Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP) in place, which assists to drive efficiency and improvement. Knowledge sharing and support bases have been embraced both with internal working groups within the Council, and externally through liaison with neighbouring authority Internal Audit teams and the Welsh Chief Internal Auditors group.



## Democratic Services

- Democratic Services manages the Council's decision-making process. The Council constitution which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent, and accountable to local people. Some of these processes are required by law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose.
- 3,099 member enquiries were received during 2023/24, a 21% reduction the previous year (4,365). Over 76% were responded to within 7 working days, an improvement on previous year (73%).
- The service was instrumental in delivering the recommendations of the Member Enquiries Review and implementation of the new Online Members Portal which was launched in February 2024 and provided a new and improved platform for members to log and monitor Councillor Service requests and enquiries.
- The service continues to administer joint working arrangements for Wales Pension Partnership Joint Governance Committee, the Dyfed Powys Police and Crime Panel, and Y Partneriaeth. It also has responsibility for administering Llesiant Delta Wellbeing Governance Group and CWM Shareholders Board.

## Electoral Services and Civil Registration

- Our electoral services are underpinned by a legal framework which establishes how elections are delivered. It sets out who is allowed to vote and the various ways they can cast their vote and have their say. We have a strong Election Project Team that help support us in delivering safe, transparent, and open elections.
- We continue to administer all types of elections (scheduled or snap elections) and with the introduction of the Modern Democracy app, it ensures accuracy of the ballot paper accounts.
- We continued work with data matching of our records against Council Tax, Housing Benefits, Payroll and Education records to ensure the Electoral Register is up to date. We will be one of few Welsh Authorities that will take part in an Automatic Registration Pilot that will commence in the Autumn of 2024.
- We commenced a statutory review of our Polling Districts and Polling Places, the aim of which is to ensure we have the right voting facilities within each electoral division, taking account of new developments and looking for alternative venues, that have suitable disability access.
- The Council's Registration Service has the statutory function of providing a responsive service to the public for the registration of births, stillbirths, deaths; notices of marriage and civil partnership and consequent ceremonies; production of legal documentation and the approval of premises for marriages and partnerships; it is also responsible for citizenship ceremonies. The Service offers a range of non-statutory ceremonies and also delivers on request, the 'Tell Us Once' service on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- 15 Citizenship Ceremonies were conducted during 2023/24 all completed within 60 days of the Home Office invitation, these covered 76 Adults and 9 children, compared to 50 Adults and 4 children during 2022/23.
- There were 2,461 birth registrations recorded during 2023/24, an increase on 2,395 in 2022/23 and 2,447 death registrations recorded, this is lower than 2,721 in 2022/23.
- The number of marriages and civil partnerships have reduced from 800 in 2022/23 to 706 in 2023/24 although this is a 13% decrease in marriages and 44% increase in civil partnerships.

## Risk Management

- 94% of response to letters of claim were completed within 6 working days of receipt at the Risk Management Section during 2023/24, this covered issuing acknowledgement letter to claimant / claimant's legal representative, and referral of claim to appropriate insurer.
- The Risk Management Steering Group invested £250k during 2023/24 in areas to reduce the risk of claims or expensive litigation. Such as towards driver training, a temporary Contract Management – Health Review Project Officer position, and funded safeguarding and security fencing in some of our schools within the County.
- Data from the Corporate Risk Register is reported to the Governance and Audit Committee on a six-monthly basis following bi-monthly review and critical assessment of the risks by Corporate Management Team.
- Risk Management Action Plan for Improvement is in place and monitors progress on Audit Wales, Internal Audit and Transformation Board recommendations.