

Adroddiad Blynyddol y Cyngor 2023/24

Crynodeb Gweithredol

The Council's Annual Report 2023/24

Executive Summary



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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

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 (revenue and capital). 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 the 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, a detailed overview of these can be found in our Corporate Strategy for 2022-2027. They were developed in 2022/2023 following an extensive needs assessment and period of consultation.

Whilst the primary purpose of the annual 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.

The Annual Report in its totality provides a balanced overview of the challenges that we face as an organisation i.e. budgetary pressures, increased and more complex demands and workforce pressures framed against a backdrop of significant whole-population challenges such as the climate and nature emergencies and the cost-of-living crisis. We are doing okay but we have tried to be realistic and transparent about what is a very challenging outlook for us (and all councils in Wales) moving forward.

Overall, 47% of our measures and indicators included in the Annual Report have seen an improvement in comparison to the previous year. 45.3% did not improve and 7.7% are measures without a target for improvement. The most significant improvements have been seen in WBOs 2 and 3 and less so in WBO 1 and 4. This is indicative of pressures on Social Care Services and wider pressures on us as an organisation to drive forward transformation priorities amidst rising pressure on the need to maintain the status quo in light of depleting resources. This is substantiated by improvement to 72.2% of our measures and indicators within our core business enablers. Maintaining business as usual and service delivery to our residents and service users has taken precedence.

When we consider actions and measures together 74% were on target, suggesting that overall functions performed effectively.

This summary report provides a high-level overview of the progress made against each of our wellbeing objectives. For a more detailed overview please see the full [Annual Report. LINK](#)

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.

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.

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.



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.