

Health & Social Services Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2025-26

Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire

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Cyngor **Sir Gâr**
Carmarthenshire
County Council



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Chair's Foreword



I am pleased to present this Annual Report for the Health & Social Services Scrutiny Committee for the 2025/26 municipal year.

Scrutiny is a vital part of the Council's governance framework, providing constructive challenge, transparency and accountability. While the Committee is not a decision-making body, it plays an important role as a *critical friend* to the Cabinet, helping to shape policy, improve performance and ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of the residents of Carmarthenshire.

During the year, the Committee has considered a wide range of matters relating to adult social care, children and families services, safeguarding, prevention, integrated health services and wellbeing. Members have maintained a strong focus on performance monitoring, strategic planning and financial sustainability at a time when services across health and social care continue to face significant demand and workforce pressures.

Pre-decision scrutiny has remained a central feature of the Committee's work. This approach has enabled Members to influence the development of key strategies and reports before they are considered by Cabinet, strengthening decision-making and ensuring that issues such as governance arrangements, delivery timescales and outcome monitoring are given due consideration.

I would like to thank my fellow Committee Members for their commitment, professionalism and constructive approach throughout the year, and to acknowledge the willingness of Cabinet Members, officers and partner organisations to engage openly with the scrutiny process. I am also grateful to the Democratic Services Unit for the support provided to enable the Committee to discharge its responsibilities effectively.

As we look ahead to the 2026/27 municipal year, the Committee will continue to focus its work on those areas where scrutiny can add the most value, support service improvement and help address the ongoing challenges facing health and social services. Members have resolved to play particular attention to the progress being made in the provision of appropriate accommodation, first point of access to social care and integrated community health and care. We remain committed to continuous improvement in the way scrutiny is undertaken, a focus on outcomes and to playing a positive role within the Council's governance arrangements.

Councillor Gareth John
Chair of the Health & Social Services Scrutiny Committee

1. Introduction

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

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

This report highlights the work undertaken by the Health & Social Services Scrutiny Committee during the 2025/26 municipal year. It aims to provide members with an opportunity to reflect on its achievements, identify areas of best practice and highlight areas for improvement to further enhance the scrutiny function. Additionally, this report may facilitate discussion on items which could be identified for inclusion within future work programmes.

The Committee is chaired by Councillor Gareth John and is made up of 14 Elected Members. Cabinet Members attend meetings as required in order to address the Committee on areas within their respective portfolios.

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

2. Overview of the Work of the Committee in 2025/26

2.1 The Role of Scrutiny

The Scrutiny Committee remits were updated by Council following the May 2022 elections and each Scrutiny Committee became responsible for the overview and scrutiny of specific Cabinet Portfolios and their respective services. The Health & Social Services Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of Cabinet's Integrated Health and Children and Adult Social Services portfolio and the respective service areas as detailed below:-

Adult Social Services	Youth Justice
Residential Care including in-house residential homes	Ageing Well
Home Care including in-house home care and reablement services	Assessment and Care Management
Learning Disabilities	Older People and frailty
Mental Health	Age Friendly Champion
Direct Payments	Physical Disability and Sensory Impairments
Integrated Services to include NHS liaison and collaboration between health and social care	CYP Board Member

Dementia Care	CAHMS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
Children's Social Services	Corporate Parenting
Safeguarding Adult & Children's Services	Community Support Services
Corporate Safeguarding	Fostering Services
Adoption Services	Respite
Care Inspectorate Wales	Prevention Strategy
Older Peoples Commissioner	Supporting Families
Commissioned Services	Complex Needs Transition
Early Years, Family Support and Prevention	Carers

In accordance with its areas of responsibilities, the Health & Social Services Scrutiny Committee will seek to:-

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

2.2 The Forward Work Plan

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

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

The Committee utilised the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny's Gateway framework to develop its Forward Work Plan for the 2025/26 municipal year which was reviewed on a regular basis. This provided a manageable, flexible, and robust approach to scrutiny and ensured that the areas for review were considered on a priority basis and in a timely manner.

In the main, meeting agendas were consistent with those outlined in the Forward Work Plan.

2.3 Meetings of the Health & Social Services Scrutiny Committee

Meetings are scheduled on a 6-8 weekly basis to consider issues and reports included in its FWP. The Committee held 6 formal meetings during the 2025/26 municipal year and all meetings were conducted in accordance with the provisions set out within Section 47 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

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

2.4 Performance Monitoring / Strategic Issues

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

2.4.1 Carmarthenshire County Council Annual Report 2024/25

In October, 2025 the Committee considered the Council's Draft Annual Report for 2024/25 which had been produced in accordance with the relevant provisions within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021. The report detailed the progress made with the Council's 13 Well-being Objectives (WBO) together with the Council's self-assessment against the performance requirements of the previous financial year. The Committee focused upon the 4 Well-Being Objectives falling within its remit, namely:

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

Outcome:

The Committee noted the report.

2.4.2 Draft Divisional Business Plans 2026/27

In February 2026 the Committee received for consideration the draft Divisional Services Business Plans relevant to the Social Services & Housing Directorate & Education & Leisure for 2026/27, as follows:-

- Adult Social Care
- Business Support & Commissioning
- Children's Services
- Integrated Services

These plans set out the strategic actions and measures to be implemented within each Division in order for the Council to progress with its well-being objectives, thematic priorities and service priorities. This provided the Committee with an opportunity to consider and comment upon the priorities outlined for the Division.

Outcome:

The Committee received the Draft Business Plans 2026/27.

2.4.3 Draft Local Authority Social Services Annual Report 2024/25

In accordance with the statutory requirement for the Director of Social Services to provide an annual report on delivery, performance and improvement plans for Social Services, a report was considered by the Committee in June 2025.

Outcome:

Officers were requested to provide additional information and data relating to the Welsh Language for inclusion in the report.

It was also noted that the report contained limited information on the Authority's work in relation to substance misuse, and officers were asked to expand on this area.

2.4.4 2025/26 Performance Reports relevant to the Committee

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

- October 2025 – Quarter 1 Performance Monitoring (01/04/25 – 30/06/25)
- February 2026 – Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring (01/04/25 – 30/09/25)

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

2.4.5 Actions and Referrals

During the municipal year, Committee Members identified and requested additional information to support the effective discharge of their scrutiny responsibilities. Updates on Actions and Referrals were circulated to the Committee by email, outlining the progress made in response to these requests.

2.5 Revenue & Capital Budgets

2.5.1 Budget Monitoring Reports

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

- October 2025 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 30th June 2025; and
- October 2025 – Revenue Budget Outturn Report for 2024/25
- November 2025 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st August 2025.
- February 2026 – in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st October 2025.
- March 2026 - in respect of budgetary position as at 31st December 2025.

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

2.5.2 Revenue Budget Strategy 2026/27 to 2028/29

In addition to monitoring the current revenue and capital budgets, the Committee was also consulted on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2026/27 to 2028/29 at its meeting in February 2026. The report provided the Committee with the proposed Revenue Budget Strategy for 2026/27, together with indicative figures for the 2027/2028 and 2028/29 financial years.

Outcome:

As part of the Authority's widespread consultation undertaken on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2026/27, the Committee considered the Strategy and resolved to receive the revenue budget strategy, proposals for delivery of efficiency savings and the charging digest for Health & Social Services.

2.6 Social Services

2.6.1 Adult Social Care Sustainability Services

In June 2025 the Committee received the Adult Social Care Sustainable Services report which provided a high-level overview of the demographic demand pressures, market sustainability issues and workforce challenges across adult and older people social care services together with the potential financial implications for the Authority.

Outcome:-

The Committee noted the potential impact of population demand pressures on the Council's future budget-setting process, together with the resulting ongoing revenue implications.

2.6.2 Annual Report on Adult Safeguarding & Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards

In June 2025 the Committee reviewed the report which detailed the role, functions and activities undertaken by the Authority in relation to Adult Safeguarding and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards during the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years.

Outcome:

The Committee received the report.

2.6.3 Draft Prevention Strategy for Carmarthenshire – Living Well in Carmarthenshire.

In November 2025, the Committee considered the Draft Prevention Strategy – Living Well in Carmarthenshire. The Strategy set out a ten-year vision to embed prevention and early intervention at the heart of health and well-being services across Carmarthenshire, with the aim of shifting the focus from reactive care to proactive, community-based support that empowers individuals and strengthens resilience across all age groups.

The Committee recognised that the Strategy was in draft form and requested that it be updated and returned for further consideration.

In March 2026, the Committee considered an updated version of the Draft Prevention Strategy, which had been revised in response to the Committee's recommendations made in November 2025. It was noted that the governance and reporting arrangements remained unclear, and it was requested that a clear governance structure be incorporated into the Strategy prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

Outcome:

November

1. The Committee recommended that the report be reviewed to incorporate detail as to the anticipated timescales for incremental delivery.
2. The Committee requested that the next steps and associated challenges be clearly outlined in the strategy.
3. The Committee requested that the updated strategy be reviewed by the Health & Social Services Committee prior to submission to Cabinet.

March

1. Resolved to recommend to the Cabinet that the strategy be approved subject to the inclusion of a clear monitoring, reporting and governance structure.

2.6.4 Domiciliary Care Performance Update

In November 2025 the Committee scrutinised the Domiciliary Care Performance Update report. The Committee noted that there had been an improvement across the board in terms of all 4 key metrics, with commissioned hours returning close to that seen pre-pandemic. Consequently, there had been an overall growth in the number of hours commissioned for domiciliary care and a trajectory of reduction in hours & people waiting across the community.

In May 2026 the Committee scrutinised the second of two Domiciliary Care Performance Update report in the municipal year.

Outcome:

1. November - the Committee noted the performance update.
2. May - the Committee noted the performance update.

2.6.5 Suicide Prevention

In February 2026, the Committee received for consideration a report which provided an update on suicide prevention efforts in Carmarthenshire.

Outcome:

The Committee received the report.

2.6.6 The Mid & West Wales Safeguarding Children & Adults Board Annual Report 2024-2025

In March 2026, the Committee received for consideration a report which outlined the progress made against the outcomes set by CYSUR and CWMPAS through the joint Annual Strategic Plan for 2024–25.

Outcome:

The Committee recommended that the Cabinet approve the Mid & West Wales Safeguarding Children & Adults Boards Annual Report 2024-2025.

2.7 Children & Families Services

2.7.1 Children and Families Services Transformation Programme Update

In October 2025 the Committee reviewed the latest update and noted that a reduction in the use of agency staff had been achieved.

In February 2026 the Committee reviewed the latest update and noted that a review in November 2025 had resulted in the reduction of meeting frequency of the board and reports.

Outcome:

1. The Committee agreed that the report be received and requested that regular progress update reports be submitted in the 2026/27 municipal year.
2. Requested that the Director of Social Services & Housing note the concerns raised by the committee regarding the reduction in reporting frequency.

2.7.2 Annual Youth Justice Plan 2025/27

In November 2025 the Committee reviewed the Authority's Annual Youth Justice Plan for 2025/27. The Plan had been developed and agreed with youth justice partners and designed in line with the recently published Youth Justice Plans: YJB Practice Guidance (March 2023) and the Youth Justice Blueprint.

Outcome:

1. The Committee recommended that Cabinet review the existing funding arrangements and consider an increase to the core funding allocated to the Youth Justice Team.
2. The Committee requested that the report be updated to include supporting data relating to the work undertaken to meet the statutory obligations for the provision of Welsh-medium services.

2.7.3 An Early Help Strategy for Children, Young People and Families In Carmarthenshire 2025-27

In March 2026 the Committee evaluated the Early Help Strategy for Children, Young People and Families in Carmarthenshire 2025-27 document. The strategy outlined the approach to Early Help and set out the vision to intervene early in meeting the needs of children and their families. The accompanying Families Connected report demonstrated the significant cost benefit of the Early Help approach, including projected cost avoidance for 2025 and the potential for future cost savings across the Social Services and Housing Directorate.

Outcome:

1. The Committee recommended that the Cabinet approve the Early Help Strategy for Children, Young People and Families in Carmarthenshire 2025-27 and the;
2. Families Connected: Intensive, Immediate Multi-Agency Support to Young People 14-18 and their Families report.

2.7.4 An Active and Healthy Start (Task & Finish Update)

At its meeting in May 2026, the Committee received an update on progress made in respect of the actions arising from the Task & Finish report *An Active and Healthy Start*.

Outcome:

The Committee received the update and requested further updates every 6 months.

3. Other Scrutiny Activity

3.1 Task & Finish

The Committee did not undertake a Task & Finish review during the 2025/26 municipal year.

3.2 Site Visits

The Committee did not undertake any site visits during the 2025/26 municipal year.

3.3 Development Sessions

During the 2025/26 municipal year, Committee Members were invited to the following development sessions/seminars facilitated by the Authority:-

Date	Development Session / Seminar
19/06/25	Planning Enforcement Training
09/07/25	Planning Publicity Process
17/07/25	Wales Pension Partnership
23/07/25	AI Awareness & Strategy Session
01/08/25	Clinical Services Plan Consultation – Hywel Dda University HB
10/09/25 & 12/11/25	Thinqi e-learning system drop-in sessions
12/11/25	Town Centre Placemaking Plans
03/12/25	Clinical Services Plan Update – Hywel Dda University HB
10/12/25	Annual Update from Mid & West Wales Fire Service Ahead of Budget Setting
07/01/26	Fire Training
05/02/26 & 11/02/26	Preventing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace
20/02/26	Development of National Significance (DNS) Briefing
04/03/26	Armed Forces Day
09/03/26	Gwellianau A48 Improvements
16/03/26	Ask & Act Training

In addition to the above Corporate Development sessions / seminars, members attended several budget seminars as part of the Council's consultation process on the 2026-27 Revenue Budget and the five-year capital programme.

The Committee also held the following bespoke sessions:

Date	Development Session / Seminar
24/07/25	RPB Awareness Session
02/02/26	Llesiant Delta Wellbeing
22/04/26	Forward Plan

4. Impact

4.1 How has Scrutiny Made a Difference This Year?

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

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

Pre-decision Scrutiny affords all Scrutiny Committees the opportunity of providing input before the reports are considered by Cabinet and this is the voice of the people. During the 2025/26 municipal year, the Health & Social Services Scrutiny Committee has made a positive impact in many ways, including:-

- requested that Cabinet review the existing funding arrangements and consider an increase to the core funding allocated to the Youth Justice Team.
- maintained oversight of Children and Families Service Transformation Programme and budget
- requested that the Draft Prevention Strategy for Carmarthenshire – Living Well in Carmarthenshire be updated to include detail on anticipated delivery timescales, together with a clear monitoring, reporting and governance framework, prior to submission to Cabinet for approval.
- recommend that the Draft Local Authority Social Services Annual Report 2024/25 incorporated further information on the Authority’s work in relation to substance misuse

5. Public Engagement

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

Whilst the Committee did not receive any suggestions of possible topics from members of the public during 2025/26, the Committee's Forward Work Plan included a range of topics which required public consultation/participation.

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

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

During the municipal year, the Authority's Communications Division provided digital marketing support to the Scrutiny function and proactively promoted details of forthcoming items that may be of interest to the public, with the aim of increasing public awareness and participation. Members of the public are invited, through a range of channels, to engage with the Scrutiny process and to raise any issues of concern.

6. Challenges

Both the Social Services & Housing and Education, Children & Family Services Departments continued to experience significant pressures throughout the municipal year as a result of sustained demand on services. Nevertheless, the departments adapted and developed innovative solutions in response to unprecedented circumstances to meet the needs of service users in Carmarthenshire.

The Committee continued to adopt a constructive approach in its role of scrutinising performance, which has supported service areas and positively influenced policy development and decision-making. The Committee has sought to strike an appropriate balance between fulfilling its scrutiny responsibilities and avoiding any adverse impact on the resourcing of front-line services.

7. Future Work

The Committee has made significant progress during the municipal year and will continue to focus on those topics where Members' input can deliver positive outcomes and drive service improvement. To ensure the most effective use of meeting time, the Committee is committed to continuing to apply the principles of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to support a streamlined and focused scrutiny process.

The Committee's work programme for the 2026/27 municipal year will be considered at a development planning session on 22 April and will be kept under regular review through ongoing monitoring of the Forward Work Plan.

To further strengthen the Authority's Scrutiny function, Members will continue to participate in development sessions, seek officer advice where appropriate, and make effective use of informal pre-meeting discussions.

8. Support for the Scrutiny Function

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

- formulating and despatching agendas for Scrutiny Committee meetings in accordance with the Forward Work Plans;
- providing support and constitutional advice to the Scrutiny Committees and to members of those Committees as well as producing minutes of their meetings and ensuring any issues arising from those meetings are actioned;
- giving support and advice in relation to the functions of the Council's Scrutiny Committees to members of the Council and its officers;
- managing the strategic development of Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire by engaging in national and regional Scrutiny networks and initiatives, supporting the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum and meetings of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny with the Cabinet;
- advising and supporting the implementation of the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021, as and when guidance is published;
- managing the co-ordination and development of the Scrutiny Committees' Forward Work Plans in conjunction with Scrutiny Committee members;
- managing and co-ordinating Scrutiny review work, including the administration of scrutiny Task and Finish Groups, assisting in writing reports in conjunction with the Groups and assisting in the implementation and monitoring of completed reviews.
- Assisting with the Scrutiny Member Development Programme.

For more information on Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire including Forward Work Plans, Task & Finish reports and Annual Reports, please visit the County Council's website at: www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/scrutiny.

To contact the Democratic Services Unit, please call 01267 224028 or e-mail scrutiny@carmarthenshire.gov.uk.

9. Attendance

Attendance by members of the Health & Social Services Scrutiny Committee during the 2025/26 municipal year is shown in the table below. A total of **six** meetings were held during the 2025/26 municipal year.

Scrutiny Committee Member	Meetings Attended	%
Cllr. Bryan Davies	6	100
Cllr. Crish Davies (up until 03/03/26) Rejoined 13/05/26	3	50
Cllr. Karen Davies	6	100
Cllr. Michelle Donoghue	4	66
Cllr. Alex Evans	6	100
Cllr. Meinir James	5	83
Cllr. Gareth John	6	100
Cllr. Hefin Jones (up until 12/11/25)	0	0
Cllr. Denise Owen	5	83
Cllr. Louvain Roberts	4	66
Cllr. Russell Sparks (joined 12/11/25)	4	66
Cllr. Fiona Walters	4	66
Cllr. Phil Warlow	6	100
Cllr. Janet Williams	6	100
Cllr. Steve Williams	5	83

Substitutes	Meetings Attended
Cllr. Tyssul Evans	1
Cabinet Member	Meetings Attended
Cllr. Jane Tremlett (Integrated Health and Children and Adult Social Services)	6
Cllr. Alun Lenny (Resources)	3