

Annual Report 2025-26

Cyngor **Sir Gâr**
Carmarthenshire
County Council

Contents

Chair's Foreword	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Overview of the Work of the Committee in 2025/26	4
2.1 The Role of Scrutiny	4
2.2 The Forward Work Plan	5
2.3 Meetings of the Education, Young People & the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee	6
2.4 Performance Monitoring / Strategic Issues	6
2.4.1 Carmarthenshire County Council Annual Report 2024/25	6
2.4.2 2026/27 Business Plans	7
2.4.3 Performance Reports relevant to the Committee	7
2.4.4 Headteacher Group Updates	8
2.4.5 Update on Estyn Report Publications	9
2.4.6 Actions and Referrals	9
2.5 Revenue & Capital Budgets	9
2.5.1 Budget Monitoring Reports	9
2.5.2 Revenue Budget Outturn Report 2024/25	9
2.5.3 Revenue Budget Strategy 2026/27 to 2028/29	10
2.6 Modernising in Education Programme Strategy	11
2.6.1 Modernising Education Programme: Proposal to change the age range from 4-11 to 3-11 at the following primary schools – Cwrt Henri, Llanybydder, Tumble and Y Ddwyllan	11
2.6.2 Modernising Education Programme: Proposal to Reconfigure Nursery Provision in Ammanford	11
2.6.3 Modernising Education Programme: Proposals for Ysgol Llansteffan, Ysgol Meidrim, Ysgol Y Fro and a consultation document for Ysgol Pontiets	12
2.6.4 Modernising Education Programme Update	13
2.6.5 Modernising Education Programme: School Buildings Maintenance and New Build Design- Challenges, Actions and Strategic Improvements	13
2.6.6 Modernising Education Programme: Proposal to relocate Ysgol Heol Goffa to a new site and increase its capacity to 150	14
2.7 Estyn	15
2.7.1 Update on Estyn Report Publications	15
2.7.2 An Evaluation of Estyn Inspections across Carmarthenshire Schools, Pupil Referral Units and Specialist Settings	15
2.7.3 Estyn Local Authority Lead Inspector (LALI) visit	15
2.7.4 Update on School Attendance following Estyn Recommendation	16
2.8 Schools	17
2.8.1 Quality Assurance of Schools and Pupil Referral Units	17
2.8.2 Education Services Transformation Update	17
2.8.3 Music Service Provision in Carmarthenshire	18
2.8.4 Carmarthenshire LA Post 16 Education	18

2.9	Welsh Language.....	19
2.9.1	Update on the Welsh for Adults Provision	19
2.9.2	Progress Update on the implementation of the Council's Welsh Language Strategy 19	
3	Other Scrutiny Activity	20
3.1	Task & Finish	20
3.2	Site Visits	20
3.3	Development Sessions	20
4.	Impact	22
4.1	How has Scrutiny Made a Difference This Year?	22
5.	Public Engagement	24
6.	Challenges	24
7.	Future Work	24
8.	Support for the Scrutiny Function	25
9.	Attendance	26

Chair's Foreword



As Chair, I am pleased to present the Education and Young People's Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report for the municipal year 2025-26.

First of all I would like to convey our thanks to Councillor Emlyn Schiavone for being chair until 10.12.2025, and also to Vera Kenny who was a very loyal member for many years before retiring on 14.10.2025. And a warm welcome to Councillor Russell Sparks who is a new member of the committee since 25.2.2026.

You will see that under the different headings in the report, the Committee has scrutinised a wide range of relevant issues, paying particular attention to the Department's Business Plan as well as aspects of forward planning in the area of budgeting as examples. Then, at the end of each section you will see a statement of the 'Results'. This clearly shows the committee's conclusions and what it approves.

Another feature of the year was the 'workshops' held, providing an opportunity for officers to present and share information and to further discuss with members the different arrangements relating to school attendance, budgets and other issues.

The Committee's detailed and consistent scrutiny assists the Authority in developing the services and delivering their policies for the future as set out under 4.1.

We would like to thank the Director of Education and his officers and staff for their willing co-operation at all times at all meetings, and in general as well.

Councillor Peter Hughes-Griffiths
Chair of the Education and Young People 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 Education and Young People 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 Peter Hughes-Griffiths and is made up of 14 Elected Members and 5 voting Co-opted Members (3 elected parent governor members, 1 representative from the Church in Wales and 1 representative from the Roman Catholic Church). 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

Each Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the overview and scrutiny of specific Cabinet Portfolios and their respective services. The Education and Young People Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the scrutiny of Cabinet's Education portfolio* and the respective service areas:-

Schools and Education Services from 3 - 19	Schools Safeguarding and Attendance Team
School Improvement, Organisation and Performance	Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and Forum
Educational Psychology	Adult Community Learning including Welsh for Adults

School Support and Governor Services	Youth Support Service
Nursery Education and Standards	School Admissions
Young People Not in Education, Employment & Training (NEETS)	Behavioural Services
Regional Consortia	School attendance
Carmarthenshire's School Investment Programme	Education data and systems
Inclusion (ALN)	Music Service
Estyn	School Catering Services
Healthy Schools	Post 16 Education & Funding and Regional Learning and Skills Partnership

** The Council, at its meeting on 12th November 2025, amended the remit of the Committee to reflect the updated Cabinet Member portfolio.*

In accordance with its areas of responsibilities, the Education and Young People 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.

Scrutiny Committees operate a pre-decision method of scrutiny which enables the Education and Young People Scrutiny Committee to take ownership of its Forward Work Plan and determine which reports from the Cabinet Forward Work Plan it wishes to consider. Scrutiny Committees may also identify their own topics, relevant to their remit, for review; furthermore, the Cabinet may invite relevant Scrutiny Committees 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 municipal year which was reviewed on a regular basis. This provided a manageable, flexible, and robust approach to scrutiny and ensured that the areas for review were considered on a priority basis and in a timely manner.

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

2.3 Meetings of the Education, Young People & the Welsh Language Scrutiny Committee

Meetings are scheduled periodically to consider issues and reports included in its Forward Work Plan. The Committee held 6 formal meetings during the reporting period 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 may 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 Education and Young People 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 received for consideration the Council's Annual Report 2024/25 on the Council's Corporate Strategy 2022-2027 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 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 Service and Thematic priorities falling within its remit and raised matters pertaining to the:

- allocation of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) funding to ensure that the areas of greatest needs were met;
- range of strategic approaches implemented to support schools to improve attendance levels;
- increasing number of Elective Home Educated (EHE) pupils in Wales;
- Authority exceeding its targets in terms of the number of children who were able to swim, however the cost of school transport was recognised as a challenge for schools.

Outcome:

The Cabinet, at its meeting on 15 December 2025, took consideration of all feedback received and recommended to Council that the Annual Report 2024/25 be approved. The Council subsequently adopted the report at its meeting held on 28th January 2026.

2.4.2 2026/27 Business Plans

In January 2026 the Committee received for consideration the draft Business Plans relevant to the Education and Leisure Department for 2026/27, as follows:-

- Education Services Plan
- Inclusion Services Plan

The 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 the priorities outlined for the Division and the review the proposed actions and measures for appropriateness in delivering against the Council's Corporate Strategy and maintaining the Council's key functions.

The Plans set out clear priorities, evidence-based actions, and a robust approach to improvement for the year ahead in order to progress towards its long-term vision to 2032: *to ensure that every learner in Carmarthenshire is happy, safe, thrive, and achieving their full potential.*

Outcome:

The Committee endorsed the Draft Business Plans relevant to the Education and Leisure Services department for 2026/27.

2.4.3 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 circulated by email to members as follows:-

- June 2025 - Quarter 4 Performance Monitoring 2024/25
- October 2025 – Quarter 1 Performance Monitoring 2025/26
- January 2026 – Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring 2025/26
- March 2026 – Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring 2025/26

The information provided a self-evaluation of performance in accordance with the legislative framework enshrined within 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.

Outcome:-

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.

2.4.4 Headteacher Group Updates

The Committee considered the Headteacher Group update in January 2026. Members were appraised of the pertinent issues considered at the meetings within the areas of school management, education policy, and local authority initiatives. The meetings provided a vital platform for school leaders to discuss challenges and work collaboratively to find solutions and share best practices.

Outcome:-

A Development Session was held in March 2026 whereby representatives from the Carmarthenshire Association of Secondary Heads (CASH) and Carmarthenshire Association of Primary Heads (CAPH) met with the Committee to discuss challenges and opportunities within schools which enabled members to review and contribute to the work of the groups. Further information is set out at section 3.3 of this report.

2.4.5 Update on Estyn Report Publications

Correspondence detailing the latest relevant Estyn report publications was circulated to the Committee by email in June 2025, October 2025, December 2025, January 2026, March 2026 and May 2026 in respect of its inspection and thematic reports pertaining to education and training.

Outcome:-

The reports appraised the Committee of developments/emerging issues and provided an opportunity for members to raise any matters for further consideration.

2.4.6 Actions and Referrals

During the course of the municipal year, requests for additional items were made by members of the Committee to assist them in discharging their scrutiny role. Updates on Actions and Referrals were presented to the Committee at its meetings held in June 2025, December 2025 and May 2026 which detailed the progress made in relation to these requests.

2.5 Revenue & Capital Budgets

2.5.1 Budget Monitoring Reports

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

- October 2025 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 30th June 2025;
- December 2025 - in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st August 2025;
- January 2026 – in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st October 2025;
- March 2026 – in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st December 2025

The report in respect of the budgetary position as at 31st February 2026 was originally scheduled for the Scrutiny Committee in May 2026, however due to changes to the democratic meeting cycle the report was delayed and is scheduled for June 2026.

The budget monitoring reports for October 2025, December 2025, and March 2026 were circulated to the Committee by email to afford Members the opportunity to raise any concerns or matters which required further consideration at the Committee's formal meeting, in accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rules. The budget monitoring report for January 2026 was considered as part of the formal agenda and enabled members to monitor expenditure in each service area and the progress made in connection with any capital works.

2.5.2 Revenue Budget Outturn Report 2024/25

In addition to monitoring the current revenue and capital budgets, the Revenue Budget Outturn Report 2024/25 was considered by the Committee in October 2025 which provided the Committee with an end of year financial position. The summary position showed that the Education, Children and Family Services division reported a £1,151k overspend at year end against its approved budget. The Committee also noted that the division had met its

target of delivering £805k of Managerial savings and had delivered £100k of Policy savings against a target of £2,589k at year end.

The end of year financial position for schools showed an overall deficit balance of 1,838,176. The Committee raised concerns that the deficit expenditure of some schools remained at a critical level and had potential to destabilise the Authority's wider finances. The Committee reviewed the ongoing work undertaken by a consultant headteacher to provide support, advice and challenge tailored to individual schools and was pleased to note that positive results had been derived thus far for primary schools in terms of supply staff, subscriptions and licensing costs. The challenges for secondary schools included the curriculum offer, low pupil numbers and bilingual provision.

The Committee highlighted the ongoing challenges in recruiting headteachers to some schools, which could impact upon the effective management of school budgets, and this was a particular challenge for smaller schools. It was also recognised that the condition of school buildings could also adversely affect budgets.

Outcome

A Development Session was held in March 2026 whereby the Consultants appointed to assist both primary and secondary schools met with the Committee to discuss challenges and opportunities within schools to address school budgets. Further information is set out at section 3.3 of this report.

The monitoring of school budgets will continue to be a focus area for the Committee as part of its Forward Work Plan for 2026/27.

2.5.3 Revenue Budget Strategy 2026/27 to 2028/29

At its meeting in January 2026 the Committee was consulted on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2026/27 to 2028/29. The report provided the Committee with the proposed Revenue Budget Strategy for 2026/27, together with indicative figures for the 2027/28 and 2028/29 financial years.

The Committee reviewed the actions taken to address schools' delegated budget pressures, including enhanced support for primary schools and developing measures for secondary schools. A modest improvement in the overall budgetary position was noted, however it was acknowledged that although overspends were reducing, full eradication was unlikely, which reinforced the need for continued implementation of the Modernising Education Programme. The Committee highlighted the need for appropriate training for school governing bodies in accordance with their roles and responsibilities in terms of budget management and accountability for the financial performance of schools. The Committee also emphasised the need for timely financial reporting in light of the challenges posed by delays in receiving budget forecasts.

The Committee considered issues relating to Adult and Community Learning, the proposed increase in cafeteria charges, and the financial impact of Universal Free School Meals on the Pupil Development Grant, with officers providing assurances that further information, ongoing reviews, and continued representations to Welsh Government were in progress.

Outcome:

As part of the Authority's widespread consultation undertaken on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2026/27 to 2028/29, the Committee considered the Strategy and endorsed the budget proposals, as submitted. The Budget Strategy was subsequently adopted by the Council at its meeting in February 2026, subject to some amendments.

2.6 Modernising in Education Programme Strategy

The Authority's Modernising in Education Programme (MEP) Strategy was approved by the Cabinet in November 2024. The aim of the MEP Strategy is to deliver an education system reflective of the geographical nature of the county and which provides learning environments fit for teaching and learning in the 21st Century. The Education and Young People Scrutiny Committee have a key role in monitoring its implementation.

2.6.1 Modernising Education Programme: Proposal to change the age range from 4-11 to 3-11 at the following primary schools – Cwrt Henri, Llanybydder, Tumble and Y Ddwylan

The Authority's revised primary school admission arrangements following the removal of the Rising 4s policy resulted in an increase in the demand for non-statutory education and wrap-around care. To address the gaps in early education provision identified within certain communities, the Committee, at its meeting in June 2025, considered proposals to change the age range of the abovementioned primary schools.

The Committee reviewed the proposals in respect of the selection process for the schools put forth for consideration, staffing and financial implications, future plans and the consequential impact upon local communities. Members, in the main, indicated their support for the proposals put forth which sought to maintain future pupil numbers within schools and ensure an equitable provision across the county.

Outcome:-

Following a period of consultation and taking cognisance of the comments made by the Education and Young People Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet, at its meeting in January 2026, unanimously resolved to initiate a statutory notice to implement the proposals.

2.6.2 Modernising Education Programme: Proposal to Reconfigure Nursery Provision in Ammanford

The Committee, at its meeting held in June 2025, considered a report which set out proposals to reconfigure the nursery provision in the Ammanford area from September 2026. The Authority proposed to discontinue Ammanford Nursery School whilst also extending the age range at Ysgol Bro Banw and Ysgol Gymraeg Rhydaman from 4-11years to 3-11 years. This reconfiguration would offer the minimum of 10 hours non-statutory Early Years education entitlement and provide greater equity of provision across Carmarthenshire.

The Committee noted concerns regarding the impact of the proposed changes on parents previously receiving six hours of free childcare but acknowledged that the reconfiguration aimed to ensure equitable provision across the county. It was reported that the changes could temporarily create capacity pressures in nurseries, and the Authority was working with private providers and local schools to address these issues. Members were also assured that the Authority continue to monitor demand for the Welsh-medium stream at Ysgol Bro Banw in line with its vision to expand Welsh-medium education.

Outcome:

Following a period of consultation, and taking cognisance of the comments made by the Education and Young People Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet, at its meeting in January 2026, unanimously resolved to initiate a statutory notice to implement the proposals.

2.6.3 Modernising Education Programme: Proposals for Ysgol Llansteffan, Ysgol Meidrim, Ysgol Y Fro and a consultation document for Ysgol Pontiets

The Committee considered the Modernising Education Programme (MEP) proposals for Ysgol Llansteffan, Ysgol Meidrim, Ysgol y Fro, and a Consultation Document for Ysgol Pontiets.

The proposals aimed to address issues such as extremely low pupil numbers which were not projected to increase dramatically, high surplus places with a high number of pupils living within catchment attending other schools, unsustainable financial or projected financial deficits and varied standards of education. Following analysis of all options, the discontinuation of each school had been determined as the preferred option. It was highlighted that Ysgol Llansteffan, Ysgol y Fro, and Ysgol Meidrim were categorised as rural schools which would require additional steps to comply with the School Organisation Code (2018).

The Committee reviewed the financial implications which noted anticipated annual revenue savings of £342,064 and a potential capital receipt of £695,000 from the disposal of redundant school buildings. The Committee also considered implications associated with the Additional Learning Needs provision, the Welsh continuum, transportation to alternative schools and capacity at receiving schools. Some weaknesses in respect of the Stage 0 shaping discussions were expressed and the need for meaningful engagement with staff, pupils, families and the wider community was also emphasised in going forward.

The Committee referred to the need to respond to the challenges in respect of unsuitable school buildings, low pupil numbers, standards of education, recruitment difficulties and budgetary constraints. The Committee concluded that there was a need to make strategic, informed decisions in a timely manner to enable the Authority to progress the education provision for the benefit of the county's pupils.

Outcome:

The Cabinet, at its meeting in November 2025, considered the feedback provided by the Education and Young People Scrutiny Committee and resolved to proceed with the formal consultation on Ysgol Meidrim and Ysgol y Fro.

Following consideration by the Education and Young People Scrutiny Committee in October 2025, and the Cabinet in November 2025, the full Council, at its meeting in March 2026, resolved to implement the proposal to discontinue Ysgol Llansteffan from 31 August 2026 as laid out in the Statutory Notice.

2.6.4 Modernising Education Programme Update

In October 2025 the Committee considered a progress report on the implementation of the MEP Strategy since its approval by the Cabinet in November 2024. The MEP strategy was designed to deliver on the Local Authority's School Modernisation and reorganisation aspirations and set out the Authority's strategic investment and rationalisation plan to transform school provision across Carmarthenshire. The MEP strategy would be achieved in collaboration with Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning (SCfL) programme by way of developing and improving buildings, infrastructure and spaces that are appropriately located, designed, constructed or adapted to foster sustainable development for the people and communities of Carmarthenshire.

Outcome:

The Committee gained a valuable insight of the progress made by the Authority in implementing the Modernising Education Programme including key updates in terms of school refurbishments, major investment schemes, reorganisation proposals, Welsh Government Grant funding, Equality Act works, site/traffic works and the catchment review.

Following a request made by the Committee, a workshop was held in January 2026 which provided an opportunity for the Committee to input into the catchment review in terms of transport, Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP), and post-16 learning provision considerations.

2.6.5 Modernising Education Programme: School Buildings Maintenance and New Build Design- Challenges, Actions and Strategic Improvements

The Committee, at its meeting in December 2025, considered the challenges associated with maintaining school buildings in Carmarthenshire, the measures implemented to alleviate pressures on schools, and actions taken to streamline the design process for new build schools following lessons learned from previous projects.

The report highlighted the diverse school estate within the county, which included a significant proportion of buildings constructed before modern standards for energy efficiency and accessibility. The Committee acknowledged the council's commitment to ensuring safe, sustainable and inspiring learning environments while balancing financial pressures and statutory obligations.

It was emphasised that the Authority's schools footprint included building stock that was not conducive to providing learning environments fit for teaching and learning in the 21st Century. In accordance with its Modernising Education Programme (MEP) Strategy the Authority aimed to develop and improve buildings, infrastructure and spaces that are appropriately located, designed, constructed or adapted to foster sustainable development

across the county. In response to comments made, it was confirmed that this could include the provision of area schools.

Outcome:

The Committee concluded that the council's approach to school building maintenance and new build design was evidence-based, proactive, and aligned with Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning programme. While significant challenges remained in terms of aging infrastructure, compliance, and resource constraints, the measures implemented and ongoing initiatives demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement, sustainability, and the creation of inspiring learning environments for Carmarthenshire's children and young people.

The comments and observations made by the Committee were noted by the Cabinet Member and Officers for consideration in the delivery of the Authority's Modernising Education Programme.

2.6.6 Modernising Education Programme: Proposal to relocate Ysgol Heol Goffa to a new site and increase its capacity to 150

The Committee considered a report in May 2026 regarding the future provision of education at Ysgol Heol Goffa, following an independent review commissioned by Carmarthenshire County Council which had identified concerns regarding the poor condition of the current school building.

The preferred option identified in the review proposed the development of a redesigned, more cost-effective new school building and the Committee recognised that this proposal would provide a viable and sustainable solution for future provision. The proposal would also support the Authority's statutory duties under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and would provide a future-proof model of specialist education.

The Committee noted that the proposed development would be eligible for 75% funding from the Welsh Government through the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, subject to approval of the full business case.

The Committee considered the detailed information set out within the consultation document and associated impact assessment appended to the report and discussed funding mechanisms, alternative ALN provision and collaboration with other agencies to support the needs of learners with ALN.

Outcome:

The Committee concluded that the development of a new special school represented the most effective and financially sustainable option to meet current and projected demand and noted that a statutory process would be required to relocate the school and increase capacity in accordance with the guidelines set out in the School Organisation Code (2026).

The Committee unanimously resolved to recommend to Cabinet that the proposal to relocate Ysgol Heol Goffa to a new site be endorsed and to increase its capacity to 150 from September 2029 when occupation of the new school building is proposed.

2.7 Estyn

2.7.1 Update on Estyn Report Publications

Correspondence detailing the latest relevant Estyn report publications was circulated to the Committee by email in June 2025, October 2025, December 2025, January 2026, March 2026 and May 2026 in respect of its inspection and thematic reports pertaining to education and training.

Outcome:-

The reports appraised the Committee of developments/emerging issues and provided an opportunity for members to raise any matters for further consideration.

2.7.2 An Evaluation of Estyn Inspections across Carmarthenshire Schools, Pupil Referral Units and Specialist Settings

At its meetings held in October 2025 and March 2026, the Committee reviewed the Estyn inspection outcomes within the county for the past five years. The reports detailed the new inspection framework adopted by Estyn in September 2024 and provided a summary of the strong or effective practice identified by Estyn inspectors to be shared with others.

The Committee reviewed the main themes which had emerged from the Estyn recommendations which demonstrated the progress made by the division. The Committee was assured to note that all recommendations were analysed and used to inform the business planning and the strategic focus of the department.

Outcome:-

The Committee gained an insight into the quality and standards of education and training within the County's schools. The reports identified strengths and areas for improvement within schools to enable the provision of relevant support measures to be targeted according to areas of need.

2.7.3 Estyn Local Authority Lead Inspector (LALI) visit

In October 2025 the Committee received for consideration a report which detailed the outcome of the enhanced Estyn Local Authority Lead Inspector (LALI) visit undertaken in June 2025. The inspection focused upon Authority's provision of support to schools to enable pupils to progress to their full potential and the developments made to address delays by the Authority in respect of its plans to re-organise and modernise education in full.

At the Committee's request, a further update was provided in March 2026. The reports detailed the progress made in respect of curriculum development and the support provided for schools. The reports confirmed that the Authority had continued to deliver professional learning programmes focused on curriculum design, planning, evaluation and assessment

and collaborative structures had been established to support progression and consistency across secondary settings.

In terms of the progress made regarding the Modernising Education Programme (MEP), the Authority had initiated several statutory processes aimed at reorganising and modernising educational provision.

Outcome:-

The LALI visit provided feedback on key focus areas to support the Local Authority on its improvement cycle. The Committee reviewed and endorsed the actions undertaken by the Authority to address the considerations identified by the inspection.

2.7.4 Update on School Attendance following Estyn Recommendation

At the Committee's request, a workshop was held in September 2025 which provided an opportunity for members to review the impact of the team's workstreams on school attendance figures [section 3.3 refers]. This was followed by a formal report being considered in March 2026 whereby the Committee reviewed the actions taken to improve school attendance in Carmarthenshire since Estyn's 2023 recommendation, noting the endeavours made to strengthen data analysis, staff training and engagement with schools and families. Attendance levels stood at 90% in February 2026 and continued to be monitored through enhanced analytical systems and Power BI tools. The Committee reviewed the Education Welfare Service's tiered interventions for pupils with low attendance levels and its wider operational activity, including school visits, casework, updated guidance and support for the "Miss School, Miss Out" campaign. Consideration was also given to collaborative initiatives relating to vulnerable learners, youth engagement and curriculum links, and acknowledged the forward plan which focussed on improving transition points, addressing specific attendance codes, continuing training and collaboration and responding to forthcoming pupil-voice findings to inform future strategy.

Outcome:

The Committee highlighted the systemic issues which affected school attendance levels, including the financial situation of families, economic inactivity and other contributory factors such as the unavailability of school transportation and the inability of schools to meet the needs of neurodivergent children. It was recognised that a coordinated and flexible approach was needed across the council in order to tackle the wider issues affecting school attendance and to implement measures to support families and schools in overcoming these barriers.

The Committee endorsed the measures implemented to date and will consider further updates going forward to support the Authority in addressing the Estyn Recommendations.

2.8 Schools

2.8.1 Quality Assurance of Schools and Pupil Referral Units

In March 2026 the Committee reviewed the Local Authority's approach to quality assuring schools and Pupil Referral Units within the context of updated Welsh Government guidance, the principles underpinning school improvement and the Authority's strategic framework for supporting educational settings. The Committee was assured to note that the School Improvement Strategy aligned with national expectations and Estyn inspection areas, and how collaborative improvement - both within clusters and across schools - had been facilitated through the work of Education Support Advisers.

The Committee considered the impact of financial, resource and capacity pressures on school improvement, noting the role and wellbeing of Education Support Advisers, the positive engagement of school leaders, and the benefits of collaborative working. Members also reflected on the challenges facing School Governing Bodies in addressing financial sustainability and the range of professional learning and leadership development available to them. The implementation of the Four Phase Model of Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing Support to provide consistent support for learners and staff across the county was also welcomed by the Committee.

Outcome:

The Committee gained a valuable insight into the quality assurance process for schools and Pupil Referral Units and endorsed the mechanisms in place within the Authority to monitor school performance, share best practice to support schools in achieving coherent progression for learners across the 3–16 continuum.

The Committee supported collaborative improvement as a core approach to secure sustainable school improvement, strengthened teaching and learning, leadership, and equity, inclusion and wellbeing through shared practice and collective capacity.

2.8.2 Education Services Transformation Update

In May 2026 the Committee considered an update on delivery to date against the schools workstream of the Council's Transformation Strategy Work Programme which sought to:

- improve the understanding and use of data and information to support schools in increasing financial efficiency and sustainable budget setting;
- Implement the findings of the agency and focused review of school budgets reports;
- Investigate approaches to cluster/ shared school structures and back-office functions to support the utilisation of economies of scale and efficiency of operation across the school portfolio;
- Improve the effectiveness of financial planning and monitoring in schools through development of skills and use of appropriate systems and technology;
- Use transformation to support the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme.

The Committee reviewed the progress made in respect of the delivery of the projects which summarised the status of each review and showed that most projects had been completed or were progressing as planned. Whilst slower progress had been made in respect of the implementation of electronic ordering and invoice matching to improve the effectiveness of financial planning and monitoring in schools, additional temporary resource from the Transformation team had been agreed to support this project.

Outcome:

The Committee will continue to monitor the actions to assist schools in identifying cost reductions and better ways of working and support the development of more sustainable school budgets and help protect front line provision.

2.8.3 Music Service Provision in Carmarthenshire

In May 2026 the Committee received for consideration a report which provided an overview of the statutory and non-statutory delivery of the music service within Carmarthenshire County Council. The report outlined the scope of provision across schools and communities, including curriculum support, instrumental and vocal tuition and ensemble opportunities.

The update highlighted how the service aligned with national priorities, including the National Plan for Music Education and the Curriculum for Wales. In addition, the Committee was appraised of recent developments, partnerships and achievements, together with the service's ongoing role in supporting learners, schools and the wider community across Carmarthenshire.

It was concluded that the Carmarthenshire Music Service continued to deliver a high-quality, inclusive and strategically aligned provision to support over 2,500 learners across the county. Through strong partnerships with schools and Coleg Sir Gar and full alignment with national priorities, the service was well positioned to meet the expectations of the National Plan for Music Education while contributing meaningfully to the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales.

Outcome:

The Committee commended the music service provision within the Council for its sterling contribution to the development of learners across Carmarthenshire and emphasised the importance of music education for reasons pertaining to health and wellbeing, confidence building, cultural appreciation, cognitive development and creativity. The Committee concluded that funding for the service should be protected in light of the array of benefits derived from music education.

2.8.4 Carmarthenshire LA Post 16 Education

In May 2026 the Committee received for consideration a report which provided an update on the Authority's three-year strategy for Post-16 education, including sixth form provision. The strategy had been developed within the context of the new regulatory body for tertiary education, demographic changes and the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP).

The Committee reviewed the ongoing and future collaboration with partner schools, further education providers and higher education institutions, together with plans to review Post-16 provision in 2027 in light of learner outcomes, destinations, and performance data.

Outcome:

The Committee endorsed the Authority's endeavours to maintain subject choice, support learner outcomes, and ensure the long-term sustainability and equity of Post-16 education across the county.

A further update will be provided to the Committee during 2026/27, with representation from Coleg Sir Gar would to discuss recent developments in respect of the post-16 learning offer.

2.9 Welsh Language

2.9.1 Update on the Welsh for Adults Provision

During the reporting period the Committee received two updates to monitor progress following the transition of the Welsh for Adults provision from Carmarthenshire County Council to the National Centre for Learning Welsh.

The Committee reviewed the transition of the service in terms of staffing, service provision, partnership initiatives and enrolment figures and noted that the National Centre for Learning Welsh had appointed Aberystwyth University to deliver the courses on its behalf.

The Committee noted the positive performance in terms of enrolment figures, learner retention and progression. The planned expansion of course delivery was also welcomed by Members, together with the collaborative work of the Welsh Language Strategic Forum in promoting Welsh language initiatives across the county.

Outcome:

The report highlighted that the National Centre for Learning Welsh had monitored the transfer of the Welsh for Adults provision closely and the Committee was satisfied with the delivery arrangements within Carmarthenshire.

2.9.2 Progress Update on the implementation of the Council's Welsh Language Strategy

In October 2025 the Committee received for consideration a report which set out the progress made in implementing the Council's Welsh Language Promotion Strategy, together with an update on the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP).

The Committee reviewed the developments by the Welsh Language Strategic Forum in overseeing the implementation and monitoring of the strategy and endorsed the action taken and planned in terms of digital technology, housing, adult Welsh learning, and collaboration with the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office. Key developments in terms of the WESP implementation included the appointment of a Welsh Language Development Manager, integrating WESP into the County Strategic Welsh Language Forum, and launching partnerships with organisations such as the National Centre for Learning Welsh. The

Committee considered the key initiatives undertaken and planned to expand Welsh language immersion centres, conduct language competency audits, and promote Welsh-medium education through targeted campaigns.

Outcome:

Overall, the Committee endorsed the progress achieved and the proposed actions to support the long-term growth of Welsh language use across the county.

3 Other Scrutiny Activity

3.1 Task & Finish

The Committee did not undertake a Task and Finish review during the reporting period.

3.2 Site Visits

During the reporting period the Committee undertook the following Site Visits:

- Carmarthenshire Secondary Teaching and Learning Centre (CSTLC) – Carmarthen site
- Carmarthenshire Secondary Teaching and Learning Centre (CSTLC) – Burry Port site

The visits provided the Committee with an insight into the impact of the learning environment upon the development of pupils.

Outcome:

Further Site Visits will be considered for 2026/27 which will facilitate the Committee in its consideration of the Modernising Education Programme (MEP).

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:

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

Date	Development Session / Workshop
01/09/2025	<u>School Absenteeism</u> The Committee gained an insight into the prevalence of attendance issues across schools and gained an awareness of the range of programmes of support in place for learners. Outcome: The Committee endorsed the measures implemented to date and will monitor the situation going forward to support the Authority in addressing the Estyn Recommendation pertaining to attendance.
12/01/2026	<u>Divisional Delivery Plans - Education and Leisure Department's Priorities</u> A workshop was held to consider the Divisional Service Delivery Plans to enable members to be appraised of the main risks and focus areas relevant to the Scrutiny Committee's remit. Outcome: The workshop provided context to the information set out in the Plans. The Committee subsequently endorsed the Business Plans relevant to the Education and Leisure Services department for 2026/27 at its meeting on 20 January 2026.

20/01/2026	<u>Catchment Area Review</u> A workshop was held to provide Committee with initial proposals in terms of the school catchment area review within the context of the Modernising Education Programme, Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, Housing Developments, financial and transport efficiencies. Outcome: The verbal feedback provided to Officers at the workshop assisted in shaping the processes adopted by the Local Authority, within the confines of legislative requirements.
16/03/2026	<u>Headteacher Groups</u> The Development Session provided an overview of the collaborative work, current challenges and opportunities faced by schools. Outcome: The Development Session with Headteacher Group representatives provided an opportunity for members to review and contribute to the ongoing workstreams.
16/03/2026	<u>School Budgets</u> A Development Session was held to provide an overview of the progress made to support schools in improving their budgetary positions. Outcome: The development session provided the Committee with an insight into the ongoing work to provide support, advice and challenge tailored to individual primary and secondary schools. In light of the concerns raised in respect of the level of deficits within delegated school budgets the Committee emphasised that fundamental changes were required to address the situation going forward. The Committee will monitor the situation by way of further updates as part of its Forward Work 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 affords

Scrutiny Committees the opportunity to consider and comment upon policies and emerging issues before they are considered by Cabinet and this is the voice of the people. Scrutiny also assists in ensuring that Council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging effective partnership working with external bodies.

The Education and Young People Scrutiny Committee endeavours to undertake meaningful work which contribute towards policies, decision making and improved services for the people and children of Carmarthenshire. The scrutiny function has also played an important role in ensuring that Council policies reflect current priorities, as well as promoting efficiency and encouraging effective partnership working with external bodies. The involvement of key stakeholders, including local residents, community organisations and partners are an important part of the scrutiny process and Councillors are committed to responding to the views and concerns of residents.

During the municipal year, the Education and Young People Scrutiny Committee has scrutinised a broad and diverse range of topics relevant to its remit and has made a positive impact in many ways, including:-

- Supporting the Authority in its endeavours to improve the budgetary position of schools by way of overseeing the evaluation of the current budget practices, identification of best practice and the implementation of monitoring mechanisms going forward.
- Reviewing the Authority's arrangements and ambitious priorities to ensure that the children, young people and learners of all ages within Carmarthenshire are happy, safe, and thriving, and fulfilling their personal, social and learning potential.
- Shaping the development of Strategies such as the Modernising Education Programme (MEP).
- Monitoring the implementation of the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy.
- Highlighting improvement opportunities in service delivery, including contributing to the Education Services Transformation Programme review to inform the Authority's policies and procedures going forward.
- Raising public awareness of key Council services – including what's working well, and where improvements are required.
- Providing an arena for decision-makers, stakeholder and public collaboration.
- Undertaking its gatekeeping role to ensure that the budgetary and performance issues within its remit are being addressed and managed effectively.
- Holding Cabinet Members to account and provide constructive challenge and input into a range of policy and service issues.

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 the reporting period, 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 have a role in promoting details of forthcoming items which may be of interest to the public in an attempt to raise public awareness and participation. The public are invited, via a number of different avenues, to get involved in the Scrutiny process and to highlight any issues of concern.

6. Challenges

The department for Education and Leisure continued to be under pressure throughout the municipal year as a result of budgetary constraints. Nevertheless, the department has adapted and developed solutions to meet the needs of children and young people across Carmarthenshire. It has been a balancing act for the Committee in undertaking its scrutiny duty without impacting on the resourcing of front-line services.

During the reporting period, some items were not reported in line with the Forward Work Plan set by the Committee. This has highlighted the need for the timing of scrutiny activity to be reviewed in conjunction with Officers to ensure topics are being discussed at the right time to enable meaningful discussion, engagement and maximum impact and value.

The time lapse in receiving financial and performance reports has also been identified as a challenge where it has been identified that the improved timeliness of financial and performance monitoring information would better support effective scrutiny.

7. Future Work

The Committee utilise the principles of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in order to achieve a streamlined and focused scrutiny process. Scrutiny topics for the forthcoming 2026/27 year was considered by the Committee at a Forward Work Planning session on 17 April 2026 and will be regularly reviewed during the course of the year.

The Committee will continue to concentrate on topics where members' input will result in positive outcomes to drive forward service improvement. Furthermore, in order to enhance the Authority's Scrutiny function, members will continue to attend development sessions, seek officers' advice where appropriate and make full use of informal pre-meeting discussion. Some of the focus areas for the Committee during the forthcoming municipal period include:

- Implementation of the Modernising Education Programme.
- Understanding the continued pressures faced by all services under its terms of reference; and the impact of the introduction of new/additional legislation affecting services and wider partners.
- Continuing to monitor Recovery in Schools, particularly in relation to budgets, attendance and attainment, behaviour, mental health and well-being across services and beyond.
- Continuing to look at the impact of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reform on Schools, including ensuring that capacity can meet demand in this area.
- Monitoring performance, particularly capacity and demand for services and quality assurance processes.

8. Support for the Scrutiny Function

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

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

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

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

9. Attendance

Attendance by members of the Education and Young People Scrutiny Committee during the 2025/26 municipal year is shown in the table below. A total of five formal meetings were held during the reporting period. It should be noted that Committee Members are also invited to attend development sessions, workshops and site visits throughout the municipal year.

Scrutiny Committee Member	Meetings Attended	%
Cllr. Sue Allen	6 [of 6]	100%
Cllr. Liam Bowen	4 [of 6]	67%
Cllr. Kim Broom	6 [of 6]	100%
Cllr. Lewis Davies	6 [of 6]	100%
Cllr. Peter Hughes-Griffiths	5 [of 6]	83%
Cllr. Betsan Jones	6 [of 6]	100%
Cllr. Hefin Jones	5 [of 6]	83%
Cllr. Jean Lewis	6 [of 6]	100%
Cllr. Martyn Palfreman	6 [of 6]	100%
Cllr. Emlyn Schiavone*	3 [of 3]	100%
Cllr. Russell Sparks*	2 [of 2]	100%
Cllr. Edward Skinner	5 [of 6]	83%
Cllr. Janet Williams	6 [of 6]	100%
Cllr. Steve Williams	6 [of 6]	100%
Vacancy	N/A	N/A
Parent Governor Representatives	Meetings Attended	%
Mr Anthony Enoch	6 [of 6]	100%
Deborah Elias	4 [of 6]	67%
Vacancy	N/A	N/A
Church Representatives	Meetings Attended	%
Ms Mari Hughes	5 [of 6]	83%

Mrs Vera Kenny*	2 [of 2]	100%
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Cabinet Member*	Meetings Attended	%
Cllr. Glynog Davies (Education)	6 [of 6]	100%
Cllr. Alun Lenny (Resources)	2 [of 2]	100%
Cllr Carys Jones	1 [of 1]	100%
Substitute	Meetings Attended	%
Mansel Charles	1 [of 1]	100%

***Notes:**

Cllr Emlyn Schiavone served on the committee until 10.12.2025

Cllr. Russell Sparks appointed on 25.02.2026

Mrs. Vera Kenny served on the committee until 14.10.2025

Cabinet Members attend meetings as and when required.