

## Well-being Objective 2

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

#### Overview of Progress

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

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

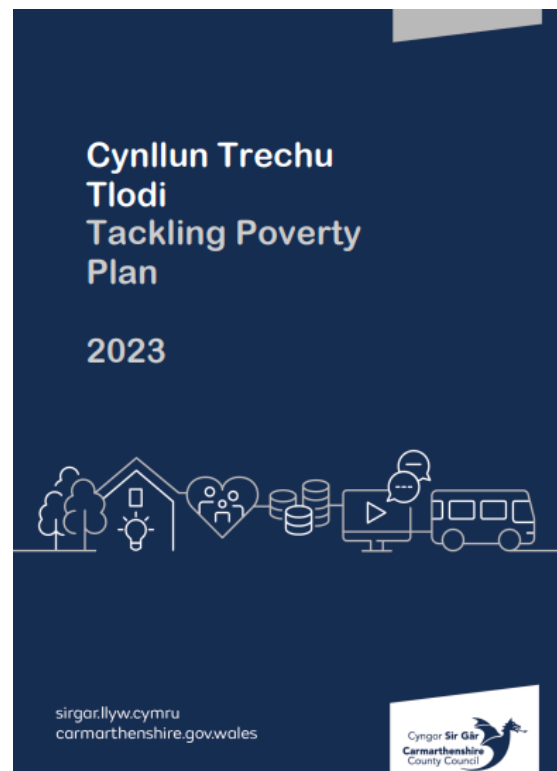
With people living longer, services will see increased demand in coming years. There are also variations in healthy life expectancy between males and females with Carmarthenshire levels below the Welsh average. In recognition of this the development of a prevention strategy substantiates our commitment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

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

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

## In Summary

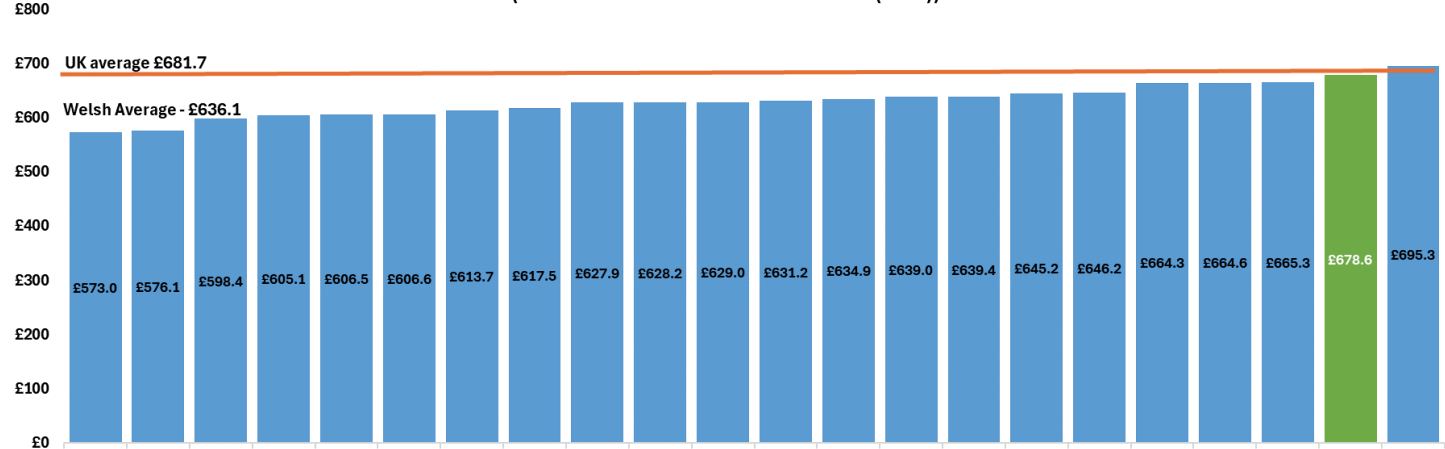
- Over a third of Carmarthenshire households are living in poverty and most residents agree that poverty is a problem in their area. Our Tackling Poverty Plan aims to address and alleviate the pressures and challenges caused by poverty for local residents and communities. However, there is recognition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



# How are we doing?

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

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



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

### Actif Street Football

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

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

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

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

### Social Pricing Policy

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

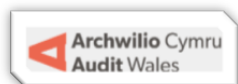
### Tackling Poverty Plan

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

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

Cllr Ann Davies, Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs said:

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



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

## Support & Advice

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

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



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

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

## **Support to Claim**

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

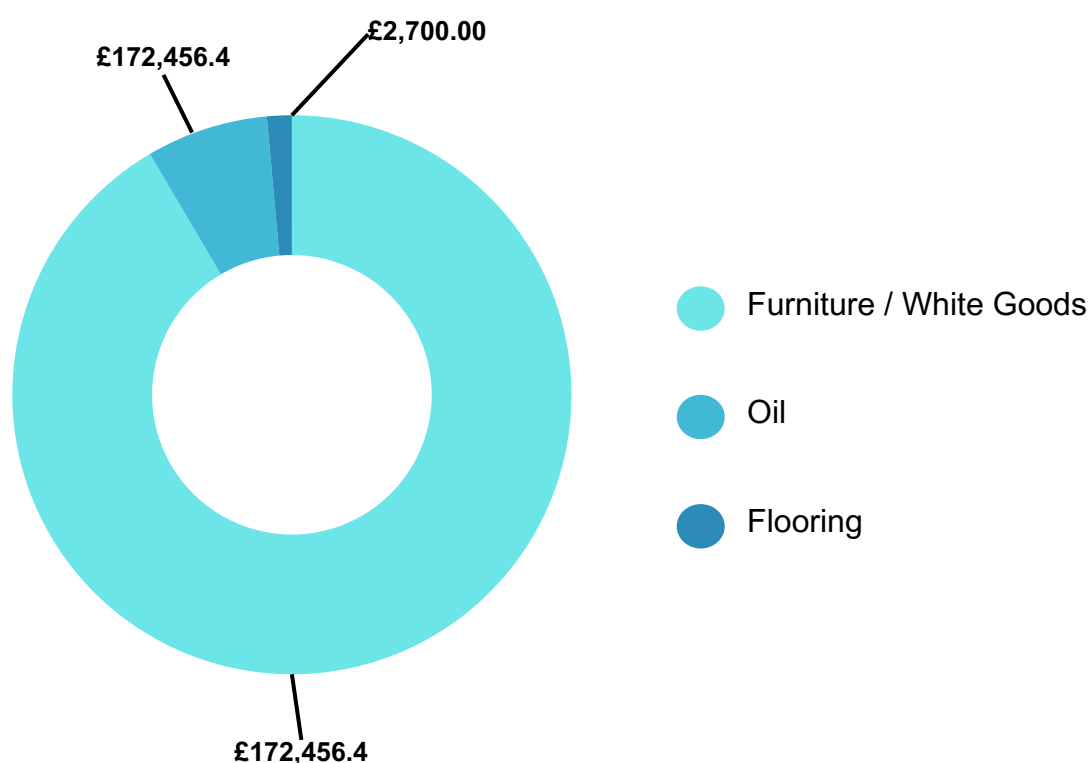
An extra £100k over the last 2 years has been allocated to the DHP fund via the cost-of-living discretionary scheme. In addition, we signpost and refer families to relevant advice and support, including applications for the homeless prevention grant payments, which is an additional discretionary fund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

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

## Pre-Accommodation Support

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

### DAF Grants Awarded



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

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

## **Community Benefits**

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

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

## **Skills Hub**

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

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

## Fit to Employ

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

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

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

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

## Actif Places

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

## Actif Volunteer Platform

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



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

Multiply24

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

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

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

Adult Community Learning



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

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

Employability Programmes

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

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

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

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

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

### **Armed Forces Covenant**

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

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

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

### **Ageing Well Network**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Council Communication**

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

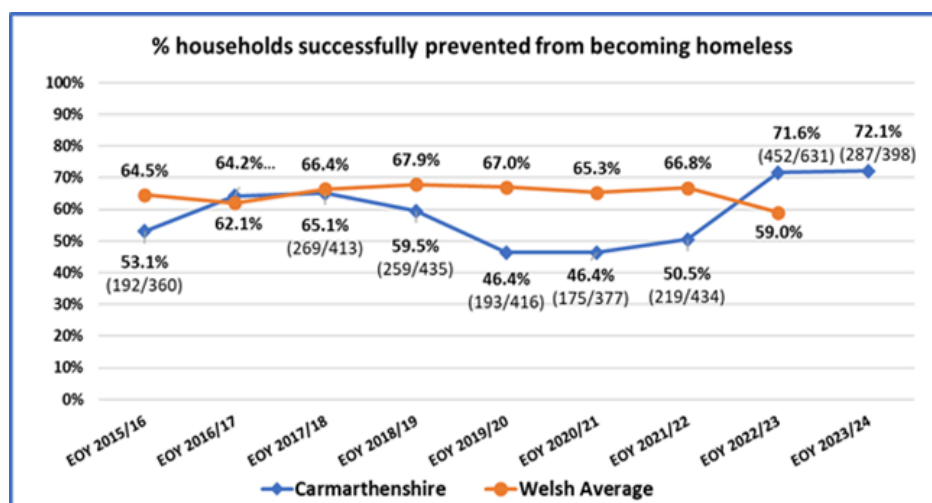
Activity Across all our Hwbs		
	2022/23	2023/24
General Enquiries	36,259	42,684
Appointments	9,933	15,579
Claim What’s Yours - through a Hwb Advisor	1,520	1,916
Hwb Bach Y Wlad Enquiries (Oct 23 - Mar 24)	0	4,814

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

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

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

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



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

## Housing and Homelessness

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

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

## Is anyone better off?

### Hwb Bach y Wlad

**Customer:** Mrs M

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

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

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

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



## How can we do better?

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

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

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

## In Summary

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

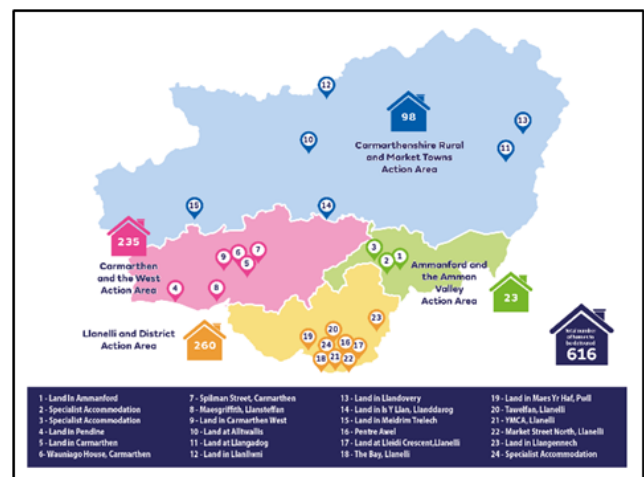
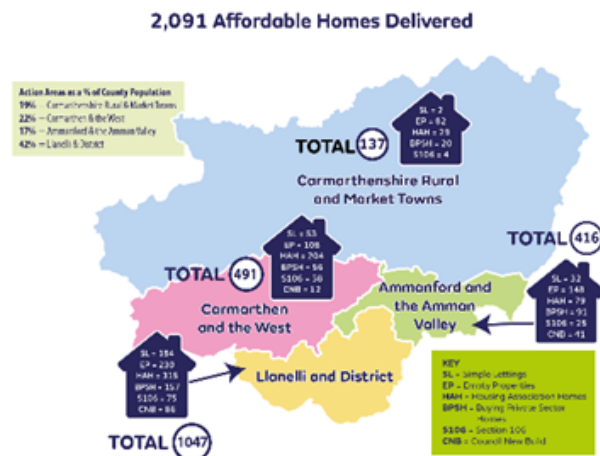
## How are we doing?

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

## Is anyone better off?

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

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

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

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

## How can we do better?

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

## In Summary

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



## How are we doing?

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



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

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

### Social Care & Health Protection Team

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

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

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

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

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

### **Gold Card Scheme**

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

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

### **Carmarthenshire Ambassador Scheme**

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

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

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

## **Discover Carmarthenshire**

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

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

## **Pendine Tourism Attractor Project**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Museum Volunteering Programme**

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

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

## **Training and Guidance**

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

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

## **Prevention Strategy**

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

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

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

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

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

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

The service provides:

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

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

## **Regulatory Verdict & Accolades**

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

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



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

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

## **Adaptations**

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

## **National Exercise Referral Scheme**

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

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

## Accommodation Schemes

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

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

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

## How can we do better?

## Adult Social Care

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

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

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

