

Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report

2020 - 2021

Scrutiny
in Carmarthenshire



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Cyngor **Sir Gâr**
Carmarthenshire
County Council



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Chair's Foreword



As the Chair of this Committee, I am pleased to present this Annual Report for the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee for the 2020/21 municipal year. This report provides a comprehensive summary of the work undertaken by the Committee during the reduced six month committee cycle period from November 2020 to April 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic and provides an opportunity to reflect on this work.

Although a number of meetings at the start of the year were cancelled due to the lockdowns, the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 which came into force on the 22nd April 2020 allowed the Authority to make arrangements for meetings to take place remotely. This obviously had its own challenges, but we were able to discuss and scrutinise a wide variety of topics and play a constructive part in scrutinising performance and contributing to key council policies and decisions. These included the standard and regular monitoring reports as well as new policies and strategies being introduced by the County Council.

The forthcoming year will no doubt again be challenging as the Council recovers from the impact and on-going implications of the Coronavirus. I am confident though that we will continue to focus on how to improve services effectively and efficiently.

I am looking forward to the challenge of chairing this Committee for 2021/22 and, with the assistance of my Vice Chair and the rest of the Committee, hope we will have a positive impact on the outcomes for the residents of Carmarthenshire.

I would also like to thank all members of the Committee for their contributions and dedication during 2020/21.

Councillor Fozia Akhtar
Chair of Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

1. Introduction

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

The main aims of the report are to highlight the work that has been undertaken by the Community Scrutiny Committee during the reduced six month committee cycle for 2020/21. It outlines the potential future work of the Committee. The document may also facilitate discussions on other items that could be included within future work programmes.

The Committee is chaired by Cllr. Fozia Akhtar and is made up of 13 Elected Members. Support is provided to the Panel by the Democratic Services Team and other Council officers as and when required.

This report provides an overview of the work of the Community Scrutiny Committee during the reduced 2020/21 municipal year. It gives Members the opportunity to reflect on the achievements during the year and to identify what worked well and where improvements could be made. This analysis is instrumental in developing scrutiny

2. Overview of the work of the Committee in 2020/21

2.1 Number of Meetings

The Scrutiny Committee held 5 meetings during the 2020/21 municipal year.

2.2 The Forward Work Programme

The Scrutiny Committee develops its own Forward Work Programme (FWP) and in the main, meeting agendas were consistent with those outlined in the FWP, which was confirmed by the Committee at its meeting on 13th November 2020.

The Forward Work Programme was mainly based on key areas identified as objectives within the Integrated Community Strategy and Improvement Plan together with standard items such as performance and budget monitoring reports, action plan monitoring reports and specific requests from the scrutiny committee itself. Additional reports were also requested by the scrutiny committee during the year and the Forward Work Programme was amended accordingly.

The development of the concept of the Forward Work Programme and the process for its agreement, has allowed each scrutiny committee to determine its own work agendas. The benefits of such an approach has led to an improved level of debate and input during scrutiny committee meetings.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 put long term sustainability at the forefront of how public services are designed and delivered

and it places emphasis on public bodies to work in partnership with each other and the public to prevent and tackle problems.

The Community Scrutiny Committee's key responsibilities are for:

- Housing – Social and Private Sector
- Planning Policy
- Community Regeneration including physical and rural development
- Economic Development
- European and Externally Funded Programmes
- Libraries
- Arts and Theatres
- Museums and Archives
- Countryside facilities
- Sports, Leisure and Recreation

To compliment the work undertaken during formal meetings, the Committee also undertakes other scrutiny functions such as task and finish, visits to establishments falling within its remit together with member development sessions

2.3 Performance Monitoring / Strategic Issues

Performance Monitoring Reports - One of the principal roles of Scrutiny Committees is to monitor the performance of services and functions within its remit. They undertake this work mainly through the consideration of performance monitoring reports and various action plan monitoring reports. The performance monitoring reports provide a balanced picture of performance across the relevant service areas. The Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee received the Performance Monitoring Report for the Council's 2020/21 Wellbeing Objectives for the period 1st April 2020 to 30th September 2020 at the meeting on the 2nd February 2021. It was noted at the meeting that due to the Covid pandemic the Departmental Action Plans were not being monitored to allow services to concentrate on dealing with emergencies, but that a full half year Covid pandemic Impact Assessment had been produced in lieu and considered by the Committee at its November 2020 meeting.

Corporate Strategy 2018/23 – Update April 2021 - As part of its performance monitoring role, the Committee received relevant information from the Council's key strategies and plans. One of the key areas relating to the Council's management is the monitoring of progress achieved against the Council's well-being objectives detailed within the 2018/23 Corporate Strategy. With that in mind, the Committee, in February 2021, considered an update on the Strategy, as at April 2021. The report detailed the progress being achieved against the Council's Well Being objectives, adopted in June 2018, as amended, to reflect developing priorities and the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, Brexit and climate change. The Committee noted that while it was considered good practice to ensure the Corporate Strategy was up to date and resources allocated to priorities, the Improvement Objectives must be published annually

in accordance with both the Local Government (Wales Measure 2009) and The Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Outcome:

The Executive Board at its meeting in March 2021 recommended to Council that the Corporate Strategy and Well-being objectives adopted in June 2018 be adjusted to reflect developing priorities, the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, Brexit and climate change. Council approved the update report at its meeting in May 2021

Departmental Draft Business Plans 2021 - 2024 – In April 2021 the Committee considered the Departmental Draft Business Plans 2021 - 2024 for those areas of the Communities, Chief Executive and Environment Departments falling within its remit providing a summary of the key actions and measures required to support the delivery of the Corporate Strategy and the Council's Well-Being Objectives. This provided the Committee with an opportunity to consider and comment upon the priorities outlined for the departments for the three year period.

Outcome:

The Committee received the three Departmental Business Plans

Actions & Referrals - During the course of the municipal year several requests for additional items are made by members of the Committee to assist them in discharging their scrutiny role. Actions & Referrals updates are presented to Committee which provide an update on progress in relation to these requests. Due to the reduced Committee Cycle this report was presented to the February meeting

2.4 Revenue & Capital Budgets

Budget Monitoring Reports - The Committee received quarterly reports on the departmental and corporate revenue and capital budgets. Due to time constraints the December report was e-mailed direct to Committee members with subsequent reports having been considered at the February and April meetings. These reports enabled members to monitor and challenge the level of spend in each service area and the progress made in connection with any capital works.

Revenue Budget Strategy Consultation 2021/22-2023/24 - As well as monitoring the revenue and capital budgets, the Committee was also consulted on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2021/22 to 2023/24. The report provided the Committee with the proposed Revenue Budget Strategy for 2021/22 together with the indicative figures for the 2022/23 and 2023/2024 financial years.

Outcome:

As part of the widespread consultation undertaken on the Revenue Budget Strategy 2021/22 to 2023/24, the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee considered the Strategy at its February meeting and endorsed the budget proposals, as submitted. The Budget Strategy was subsequently

adopted by the Executive Board and Council at their meetings in March, subject to some amendments and a reduction in the planned council tax levy

2.5 Impact of Covid 19 on services covered by the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

In November, the Committee considered four separate reports from each of its service departments providing an update on the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on services falling within its remit i.e:- Communities (Homes and Safer Communities and Leisure Services), Chief Executive (Regeneration) and Environment (Planning and Property)

Outcome:

The Committee received all four reports

2.6 Local Development Orders Carmarthen Town Centre and Ammanford Town Centre

In December the Committee considered a report on the Council's proposals to introduce Local Development Orders (LDO) for Ammanford and Carmarthen Town Centres similar to that previously adopted for Llanelly Town Centre. The report detailed the potential role LDO's could play as part of broader regeneration proposals within a Town Centre context in both supporting the Vibrant Places Initiative and ensuring they were resilient to the economic effects of COVID-19. The proposals also had due regard to the Council's Corporate Recovery Plan and the Welsh Government's Planning Guidance – 'Building Better Places'.

It was noted that a LDO provided a Local Planning Authority with an opportunity to streamline the planning process by removing the need for developers/applicants to make a planning application to the Authority and for development proposals to be submitted as a LDO application in lieu, thereby allowing an authority to act proactively in response to locally specific circumstances within its geographical area.

Outcome:

The proposals were received and it was noted they would be subject to a six week consultation period prior to consideration by the Council on whether to proceed with their introduction. At the time of writing this report Council had not yet considered the outcome to the consultation

2.7 Revised Carmarthenshire Local Development Plan 2018-2033 Representations Received and Focused Changes

In December, the Committee considered a report on the preparation of a Revised (replacement) Local Development Plan for Carmarthenshire, in accordance with the Council's resolution on the 10th January, 2018. The report detailed the responses received to the formal consultation process and sought

to set out a series of proposed Focused Changes to recommendations received, along with those that may have emerged as a result of changes in legislation, guidance, evidence or, in the interests of clarity and meaning.

Outcome:

The Executive Board and Council at their meetings held in December 2020 and January 2021 respectively endorsed the report and granted approval for its public consultation.

2.8 Pendine Outdoor Education Centre

The Committee, in December, considered a report on the key issues affecting the Pendine Outdoor Education Centre and suggested ways forward in delivering high quality outdoor education in Carmarthenshire. The Committee expressed its support for the centre's retention and future development and raised a number of points in support thereof.

Outcome:

The Committee's comments will be used to inform the debate on the format for the future provision of outdoor education within the county.

2.9 Pendine Attractor Project

In December the Committee received a report on the development of the £6.7m Pendine attractor project detailing proposed delivery timelines, future governance arrangements, high level financial forecasts, key actions and future communications.

Outcome:

The report was received

2.10 Housing Revenue Account Budget and Housing Rent Setting for 2021/22

In February, the Committee considered the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget and Housing Rent Setting for 2021/22, presented as part of the budget consultation process. The report reflected the latest proposals contained in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, being the primary financial planning tool for delivering the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard Plus (CHS+).

The Committee raised a number of issues on the report that included: rent arrears arising from the introduction of Universal Credit, the proportion of tenants in receipt of housing benefit and the decarbonisation of council homes. The Committee endorsed the report and proposed rent increases to the Executive Board and Council for consideration as part of the budget submission to the Council

Outcome:

The budget Housing Rent setting proposals were adopted by the Executive Board and Council at their meetings in February and March, 2021 respectively

2.11 The Carmarthenshire Homes Standard Plus (CHS+) Business Plan 2021-24

In February, the Committee considered the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard Plus (CHS+) Programme Plan for 2021-2024. Members were advised of the plan's four key aims to:

- explain its provision over the next three year and what it meant for tenants
- confirm the financial profile based on current assumptions for delivery over the plan period
- to show how the Housing Investment Programme could help stimulate the economy and recovery from Covid-19
- Produce a business plan for the annual application to the Welsh Government for Major Repairs Allowance for 2017/18 equating to £6.1m

The Committee raised a number of issues on the report that included: void levels, impact of the pandemic on the Council's house building programme, levels of homelessness within the county and the preparation of a 10 year Affordable Housing and Regeneration Masterplan. The Committee endorsed the report and proposed rent increases to the Executive Board and Council for consideration as part of the budget submission to the Council

Outcome:

The report was accepted by the Executive Board and Council at their meetings in February and March 2021 respectively.

2.12 Community Cohesion Action Plan

In February, the Committee considered the Community Cohesion Action Plan for the Mid and West Wales Region, comprising the local authorities of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Powys which comprised the following four main themes:

- Theme A – Identifying and mitigating community tensions (hate crime, extremism, anxiety and anti-social behaviour) relating to Brexit;
- Theme B – Foster Good Relations;
- Theme C – Ensure Equality of Opportunity;
- Theme D – Administration and Reporting to support work under themes A-C.

The Committee noted the action plan would be revised by March 2021 for the 2021/22 financial year as part of Welsh Government Grant conditions

Outcome:

The Committee endorsed the report.

2.13 Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020

In April, the Committee received the Welsh Government's assessment on the operation of Carmarthenshire's Library Service for 2019/20. It was noted that the Service met all of its 12 core entitlements in full.

Outcome:

The report was received

2.14 Carmarthenshire Archive's Forward Plan

In April the Committee received the Draft Carmarthenshire Archives Forward Plan detailing the services' aims and objectives for the period 2021-24 which included submitting an application in 2023 for accreditation under the National Archives Accreditation Scheme. The Plan's key objectives were to:-

- Collect, care for, document and develop the country's archives in whatever format and provide access to them in imaginative, innovative and inclusive ways;
- Ensure the service was accessible, sustainable and friendly, reaching beyond its visiting audiences, and all with the highest standards of customer care;
- Offer visitors and volunteers engaging and informative experiences, as well as creating new and compelling opportunities for learning.

Outcome:

The report was received

2.15 Task and Finish

The Committee did not undertake a Task and Finish exercise in 2020/21

2.16 Site Visits

Due to the impact of the Covid Pandemic, the Committee was unable to undertake any site visits as part of its 2020/21 Forward Work Programme.

2.17 Development Sessions

The Committee held no service specific development sessions during 2020/21.

The following all member development sessions / member seminars were held during 2020/21:-

- Microsoft Teams Training for online meetings – numerous sessions June 2020
- Zoom Training for online meetings – December /January
- Mod.Gov New App training (Delivered by Civica) – October
- Scrutiny Training (Delivered by Centre for Governance and Scrutiny) October
- On Line Scrutiny (Delivered by Centre for Governance and Scrutiny) November
- Section 106 Agreements and Unilateral Undertakings – February
- Covid Vaccination Briefing (Hywel Dda University Health Board) - February
- Introduction to Ash Dieback Disease and the County Council's Roles and Responsibilities – March
- Growing Carmarthenshire: Progressive Procurement, food supply chains and Future Opportunities – March
- Rural Enterprise Dwellings – March
- One Planet Developments - April

In addition to the above, several budget seminars were held during January as part of the Council's consultation process on the 2021/22 Revenue Budget and five year capital programme.

2.18 Referrals

No referrals to other Committees/Executive Board were made during 2020/21

3. Challenges

One of the significant challenges faced by the County in 2020/21 was the impact of the Covid Pandemic on the provision of services to the residents of Carmarthenshire. Council staff were redeployed to assist other departments and service users.

4. Future Work

The Committee has made significant progress and will continue to concentrate on topics where Members' input will result in positive outcomes to drive forward service improvement. To ensure best use is being made of meeting time and with the benefit of the added value of pre-meetings, the Committee is keen to achieve a more streamlined scrutiny process.

The future work of the Committee will be considered as part of the Forward Work Programme planning session. The FWP will continue to be monitored during the course of the year, together with the Executive Board FWP.

5. Support for the Scrutiny Function

Support for Carmarthenshire County Council's Scrutiny function is provided by the Democratic Services Unit, based in the Administration & Law Division of the Chief Executive's Department.

Support for the Scrutiny function includes:

- Formulating, in accordance with the FWP, and despatching agendas for Scrutiny Committee meetings a minimum of 4 working days prior to the meeting;
- 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 items arising from those meetings are actioned;
- Giving support and advice in relation to the functions of the Council's Scrutiny Committees to executive and non-executive members of the Council and its officers;
- Managing the strategic development of Scrutiny in Carmarthenshire through engaging in national and regional Scrutiny networks and initiatives, supporting the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Forum and meetings of the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs with the Executive Board;
- Advising and supporting the implementation of the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 as and when guidance is published;
- Managing the co-ordination and development of the Scrutiny Committees' forward work programmes 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 programmes, task and finish reports and annual reports, 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

6. Attendance

Attendance by members of the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee during reduced 2020/21 municipal year is shown in the table below. A total of 5 meetings were held between 13th November 2020 and 12th April 2021 against the scheduled 5.

Scrutiny Committee Member	No. of meetings attended	%
Cllr F. Akhtar	4	80
Cllr. Ann. Davies	5	100
Cllr. Anthony Davies	5	100
Cllr. H. Davies	3	60
Cllr C. Evans	4	80
Cllr R. Evans	5	100
Cllr. J. Gilasbey	5	100
Cllr. B. Jones	5	100
Cllr. H. Jones	5	100
Cllr. S. Matthews	3	60
Cllr. H. Shepardson	5	100
Cllr. G. Thomas	4	80
Cllr. D. Thomas	4	80
Substitutes	No. of meetings attended	
Cllr. M.J.A. Lewis	1	
Cllr M. Charles	2	
Cllr G. John	1	
Cllr D. Cundy	1	
Executive Board Member	No. of meetings attended	
Cllr E. Dole	4	
Cllr. L.D. Evans	4	
Cllr. M. Stephens	4	
Cllr. P.H. Griffiths	5	
Cllr D. Jenkins	2	
Cllr H. Evans	2	
Cllr C. Campbell	3	