



Cyngor Sir
CEREDIGION
County Council



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn y Gymraeg

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Introduction

WHAT IS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY?

Scrutiny Committees form part of the way in which local government in Wales operates. As well as the establishment of a decision-making executive, the Local Government Act 2000 requires the establishment of one or more scrutiny committee to hold the decision makers to account, drive improvement, act as the voice of the community and play a role in assisting in policy development and review.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) advocates four key principles in support of effective Member scrutiny:

- i. Provide 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy makers and decision makers,
- ii. Enable the voice and concerns of the public and its communities to be heard,
- iii. Be carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny process, and,
- iv. Is evidence based and drives improvement in public services.

The Statutory Guidance for County and County Borough Councils in Wales on Executive and Alternative Arrangements (2006) sets out that *Overview and Scrutiny committees are an essential and integral part of executive arrangements*.

In January 2017, the Welsh Government published a White Paper entitled Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed. The White Paper sought views on proposals for mandatory regional working to deliver a range of services, address workforce issues and implement electoral reform. Welsh Government has since published a subsequent Green Paper explaining its ambitions and proposes a statement of intent for a stronger and more empowered local government in Wales. These proposals set out an approach for the future of local government "to deliver stronger, more resilient and sustainable public services with democratic accountability at its core".

We have during this period held hybrid meetings, therefore scrutinised both in the Council Chamber and remotely.

CALL-IN OF DECISIONS



When a decision is made by the Cabinet, an individual member of Cabinet or a Committee of the Cabinet or under joint arrangements, the decision shall be published, including where possible by electronic means, and shall be available at the main offices of the Council normally within 2 working days of being made. Members will be sent copies of the records of all such decisions within 2 working days, by the person responsible for publishing the decision. That notice will bear the date on which it is published and will specify that the decision will come into force, and may then be implemented, on the expiry of 5 working days after the publication of the decision, unless any three members of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee whose terms of reference relate to the Cabinet decision (as described in Article 6 of Part 2 of the Constitution) or six Elected Members of the Council and the Chair of that Committee, object to it and call it in. Further information in relation to the call-in process is available by referring to the Council's Constitution page 211. <http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/your-council/about-the-council/the-councils-constitution/>

Ceredigion County Council received no call-in of decisions during this reporting period:

COMMITTEES

There are 5 thematic Overview and Scrutiny Committees, namely:

- Co-ordinating



thrive

- Thriving Communities



- Learning Communities



- Healthier Communities



- Corporate Resources

Under section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000, there are a given wide-ranging power of review and scrutiny, and the ability to make reports and recommendations on any matters relevant to the area and its inhabitants. The guidance sets out the role of Councillors exercising overview and scrutiny as being:

- i. to hold the executive to account for the efficient exercise of executive functions – especially the performance of the executive as measured against the standards, objectives and targets set out in the policies and plans which it is implementing,
- ii. to assist in the improvement and development of the Council's policies by evaluating whether they are achieving their stated objectives, whether those policies and the way they are being implemented reflect the needs and priorities of local communities and by reporting and making recommendations to the executive or the Full Council,
- iii. to review and make reports on issues which affect the authority's area or its residents, and,
- iv. to examine whether the systems the executive has in place to deliver its functions are robust and are being properly observed.

In addition, they can review the discharge of non-executive functions and report on matters of more general local concern. This could link with the authority's power

under Part 1 of the Act to promote economic, social, and environmental well-being, by identifying areas which the executive could address using this power.

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 sets out a clear role for an authority's scrutiny function in its improvement processes: as part of its role in holding local decision makers and policy makers to account, and in its policy development role. This should extend to:

- i. scrutiny of the processes that an authority has gone through in the discharge of the general duty to improve,
- ii. scrutiny of the fitness of the organisation to discharge the general duty to improve,
- iii. scrutiny of the processes that the authority has gone through in the selection of its improvement objectives, including a review of the level of engagement with stakeholders,
- iv. scrutiny of the monitoring of the progress of the delivery of the authority's improvement objectives,
- v. promoting innovation by challenging the status quo and encourage different ways of thinking and options for delivery.

Under Section 35 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Local Authorities are required to ensure their Overview and Scrutiny Committees has the power to scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, by the Public Services Board (PSB) for the Local Authority's area in the exercise of its functions.

During the previous reporting year, members of the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny considered and discussed matters pertaining to the Scrutiny of the Ceredigion Public Service Board (PSB).

In order to comply with legislation and to ensure that effective Overview and Scrutiny arrangements are put in place for the Ceredigion PSB, it was agreed that Ceredigion County Council's Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee take responsibility for taking an overview of the overall effectiveness of the Board.

The Ceredigion County Council Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the following approach for taking an overview of the overall effectiveness of the PSB:

- Review or scrutinise the **decisions made or actions taken** by the Board by:
- Acting as a formal consultee for the Assessment of Local Well-being
- Acting as a formal consultee for the Local Well-being Plan
- Receiving the Annual Progress Report
- Receiving PSB minutes
- Receiving performance monitoring reports.

- i. Review or scrutinise the Board's **governance arrangements** by:
 - Receiving the PSB Terms of Reference following each Mandatory Meeting of the Board (A 'mandatory meeting' of the Board must be held no later than 60 days after each subsequent ordinary election of councillors).
 - Inviting members of the Board to give evidence in respect of the exercise of joint functions, (but only in respect of the exercise of joint functions conferred on them as a statutory member of the Board under the Well-being of Future Generations Act).
- ii. Make reports or recommendations to the Board regarding its functions or governance arrangements.
- iii. Refer matters to the relevant Thematic Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider further, as appropriate.
- iv. Present the recommendations from Scrutiny to Cabinet, the PSB and the relevant sub-group.

Scrutiny Committees can undertake their work in one of the following ways:

- i. Consider a topic during a formal meeting,
- ii. Establish a Task and Finish Group to investigate a topic in more detail,
- iii. Consider at a Work Stream (please see under Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny heading on page 39 below), and
- iv. Undertake site visits.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees focused on areas where they could have the greatest influence on outcomes for people of Ceredigion. This has led to a variety of topics being reviewed, some which are still ongoing.

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have worked hard to create a culture where transparency, involvement and accountability are welcomed and where challenge is seen as a vital and positive part of improving outcomes. It remains essential that Overview and Scrutiny continues to contribute positively to supporting the delivery of the Council's priorities through its critical friend role.

Self-evaluation of Scrutiny

A review of the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny is undertaken annually. The questionnaire can be completed online. 15 out of a possible 38 responses were received to the 2022/2023 questionnaire.

Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee met on 8 occasions during the municipal year 2022/2023.

Standard items considered at each Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee includes an update on developments in the Scrutiny function, and an update by the Chairs on the work of their committees. This provides a clear focus for the work of the themed Committees.

Key Issues considered

The role of the Co-ordinating Committee is to oversee all the Overview and Scrutiny Committees Forward Work Programmes to ensure that they are relevant and reflect the corporate priorities and focus on key areas. The Committee also ensures that the Forward Work Programmes are coordinated to avoid duplication, ensuring they are realistic and manageable within the resources available, and that they will add value. Each Committee agree to consider their individual Forward Work Programmes.

The Committee considered the following items:

CONTEST – The UK Government’s Counter Terrorism Strategy.

The report had been presented to provide Members with an update on the arrangements in place in Ceredigion, across the region and nationally to deliver CONTEST, and to be aware of the contribution of council staff in this important work.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

It was agreed to note the updated provided.

Performance Management Policy Statement and Introduction to Performance Self-assessment arrangements as required by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The following comments were conveyed: -

- Clarification on the process in relation to who would audit the auditor and what the appeals process was on these assessments was sought. In response, it was reported as this was a self-assessment process, vast amount of relevant and supporting evidence to comply with the requirements of the assessment would be collated in accordance with its Action Plan. Once completed the draft assessment would be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee for consideration and recommendations considered accordingly, prior to Cabinet approval.

- That the annual self-assessment of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees could also feed into this self-assessment. It was urged that Members respond in an open and transparent way in this assessment in order that any issues could be resolved.
- That the Chairs of all Overview and Scrutiny Committees attend the Quarterly Performance Board meetings that were due to recommence, in order that they could consider any issues/risks that required to be considered on their Forward Work Programme. It was reported that these meetings gave an overview of the Council in its entirety.

The Committee agreed to endorse the Draft Performance Management Policy Statement and Performance Self-assessment arrangements (as required by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021).

Regular reporting of the Ceredigion Public Services Board (PSB) meetings

The Assessment of Local Well-Being

Ceredigion Local Well-being Annual Report 2021-2022

Draft Ceredigion Local Well-being Plan 2023-28.

Under Section 35 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Local Authorities are required to ensure their Overview and Scrutiny Committees have the power to scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, by the Public Services Board for the Local Authority area in the exercise of its functions. The Public Services Board (PSB) is required to produce and publish annual reports relating to the delivery of their Wellbeing Plans. It is a statutory requirement of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 that annual reports are scrutinised by local PSB Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Chief Executive of CAVO also attending Scrutiny meetings during the year.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee:

- received the draft minutes of the Ceredigion PSB meetings;
- received the Assessment of Local Well-being for Ceredigion;
- agreed that Members encourage the public and Town and Community Councils to complete the questionnaire PSB Local Well-being Plan Engagement Survey (Town and Community Council had received the questionnaire on email)
- received the draft Ceredigion Local Well-being Plan 2023-28.

Strategic Equality Plan Monitoring Report 2021-22

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on Local Authorities to consider the needs of all individuals when carrying out our day-to-day work. The Act includes specific Public Sector Equality Duties for Wales which require the Council to set Equality Objectives within a Strategic Equality Plan, which must be reviewed every four years.

The promotion and use of the Welsh Language is set out in the Welsh Language Measure 2011, rather than the Equality Act. However, the Welsh language requirements are considered alongside the protected characteristics of the Equality Act to encourage a holistic approach.

An action plan ensures the delivery of the Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24, grouped under five Equality Objectives.

Key points were highlighted to the Committee.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following discussion, Members agreed to receive the Council's Strategic Equality Monitoring Report 2021-22 and recommend that Cabinet endorse the report.

Gender Pay Report 2022 and Workforce Equality Report 2022

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following discussion, Members agreed to receive the Gender Pay Report 2022 and the Workforce Equality Report 2022

Self-Assessment Report 2021/22

Part 6 of the new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 replaces the old Local Government Measure (Wales) 2009 and introduces a new Self-Assessment based performance regime for Principal Councils. The new performance regime is intended to build and support a culture in which councils continuously seek to improve and do better in everything they do, regardless of how well they are performing already. It is the expectation of the Act that councils will always be striving to achieve more and seek to ensure best outcomes for local people and communities. One way of doing this is to continuously challenge the status quo and ask questions about how they are operating.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

During discussion, the following were noted:

- Ensure that community benefits continue to be secured and that they prove beneficial,
- Support local contractors to work together on tenders for bigger contracts,
- Members suggest investigating establishing arms-length services.

Following discussion, Committee Members agreed to receive the Self-Assessment Report 2021/22 including the Annual Review of Performance and Well-Being Objectives.

Regular reporting of the CYSUR/CWMPAS Combined Local Operational Group Safeguarding Quarterly Reports

The CYSUR Local Operational Group Safeguarding Report quarterly reports were considered by the Committee. The reports provide management information on action taken under the All Wales Child Protection Procedures. The Reports include information provided by other agencies in relation to safeguarding the welfare of children in Ceredigion. Management information is discussed by members of the CYSUR (Ceredigion) Local Operations Group in order to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the safeguarding children arrangements in Ceredigion and the outcomes achieved. The multi-agency meetings provide an opportunity to identify

and act upon any performance and other issues within this area of work. Performance information is also provided to the Mid and West Wales Regional Safeguarding Board which is also an opportunity to analyse performance, trends and issues across the Region.

The Adult Safeguarding Service quarterly reports were considered by the Committee. The reports highlight activity and performance of the Adult Safeguarding service and provides statistical data that enables a comparative analysis between activity in different quarters and previous years as well as noting key achievements and work undertaken during the year. The report also highlights key areas of work and improvement during this financial year.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee noted the contents of the report and the levels of activity within the Local Authority. Members regularly raised questions in relation to the content and data of the reports which were answered by officers and can be found in the minutes.

Covid-19 Command Decisions Log.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the Gold Command Covid-19 meetings decisions Log for the periods as presented.

Report on the Council's use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA)

The Coordinating Committee Members are responsible for reviewing the Council's use of RIPA. Reports are presented to the Committee on a 6 monthly basis.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Members agreed to note the report contents.

Report on the review of the RIPA Policy and the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office Inspection

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following discussion, Committee Members:

- Noted the contents of the Draft Amended Corporate RIPA Policy and Procedures Document,
- Noted the contents of the IPCO Inspection Report,
- Noted the contents of the SRO's response to the IPCO Inspection Report,
- Noted the contents of the Updated RIPA Activity Request Email, and,
- Noted the contents of the IPCO Quarterly Newsletter Autumn 2022.

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2021/2022

The Report highlighted the key issues that had been considered by the five overview and scrutiny Committees during 2021/2022. There is a statutory duty on Local Authorities to publish an annual report relating to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Annual Report is published in the Overview and Scrutiny webpage on the Council Website.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Members agreed to note the information contained within the report prior to it being presented to Council.

Draft Corporate Strategy 2022-27

A new Corporate Strategy was required to set out the Council's new Corporate Well-being Objectives (corporate priorities) and ambitions for the next five years and how the Strategy illustrates how the Council will seek to enhance the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being for the citizens and communities of Ceredigion and maximise its contribution to the seven National Well-being Goals in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Leader also stated that the Authority has a challenging time ahead.

The proposed Corporate Well-being Objectives are:

- Boosting the Economy, Supporting Businesses and Enabling Employment
- Creating Caring and Healthy Communities
- Providing the Best Start in Life and Enabling Learning at All Ages
- Creating Sustainable, Green and Well-connected Communities

It was explained that the objectives had been identified through extensive analysis of evidence and engagement with residents, including the ambitions of the new political administration, the Ceredigion Assessment of Local Well-being and the public consultation on the draft strategy.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

A concern raised by a Committee Member was whether the Authority can afford the ambitious target outlined in the report. It was confirmed that they are deliverable at this present time.

Concern was raised with regards to Phosphates in that it could restrict the BOOSTING THE ECONOMY, SUPPORTING BUSINESSES AND ENABLING EMPLOYMENT objective from progressing. It was confirmed that there is a specific group who monitors the phosphates situation carefully and whom are in continuous discussions with Natural Resources Wales. The Chief Executive also confirmed that Phosphates is currently identified as a risk and is on the Authority's risk register so can confirm it has every due regard. It was also monitored by the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year.

Further queries arose to which officers investigated and returned the replies to the Committee. The Committee reconvened at a future date to further consider their responses and the recommendation prior to presenting to Cabinet and Full Council.

The Committee agreed to recommend that Cabinet endorse the draft Corporate Strategy 2022-2027, including the Corporate Well-being Objectives, subject to consideration of recommendations made by the Committee.

The Armed Forces Covenant Duty, as laid out in the Armed Forces Act 2021

The Committee were advised of the current situation in that delivering its current commitments, the Council does pay due regard to the requirements of the Armed Forces Community, and it has sought to positively build upon its commitment since its initial pledge. This has led to direct amendments being made to Council policies as part of its commitment to the Covenant. This is particularly evident in the Work-life balance policy that supports flexible working options and recognises the clear need for armed service personnel and reservist to have additional authorised periods of absence to support their additional commitments.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

In addition to the work that the Council already undertakes, it is proposed that the following additional steps are taken to prepare for the duty:

- Explore opportunities to improve data capture by services. The Regional Armed Forces Liaison Officer will advise on the categories that individual services will need to be using.
- It was noted there is grant funding available for children of up to £2,000 per child depending on requirements,
- Employees and Elected members to be encouraged to book the Armed Forces Covenant awareness sessions via CERINET.

Update on the Cylch Caron project

Council officers and the Hywel Dda University Health Board County Director provided an update on the Cylch Caron Project. This is a partnership project between Ceredigion County Council and Hywel Dda University Health Board, along with Welsh Government.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Main points arising from discussion were as follows:

- A new planning application will need to be submitted once a new partner has been appointed. The phosphate element remains a risk. The design may also differ from the original design.
- Could local construction support be used whenever possible? There is potential to encourage the new partner to employ local contractors,
- It was confirmed that once the tender process is complete, there will be a requirement to review the funding package in collaboration with Welsh Government,
- In response to a question, it was confirmed that it is imperative that the scheme is delivered,
- In response to a question, it was confirmed that the land is secured.

It was agreed that Officers would return with a further update once the tendering process has been completed.

Report on Amendments to the Whistleblowing Policy

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed to recommend that Cabinet approves the amendments to the Whistleblowing Policy.

The draft 2023/24 Budget

The Leader presented the report on the draft budget for 2023/2024 including the three-year capital programme, outlining that this is a provisional settlement.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Members agreed the overall budget position as shown in the budget report to Cabinet and made requests for further detail to be presented at the thematic scrutiny committees considering the budget.

The Committee monitor budget implications throughout the year and receive regular financial updates when considering reports.

Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee met six times during the municipal year 2022/2023.



Key Issues considered

The function of this committee is to fulfil all the functions relating to Corporate Services (to include human resources, customer services, ICT, treasury management and legal services), Inclusion/Equal Opportunities, Civil Contingencies, Business Continuity, Estates Management and Civil Registration.

Following the Local Elections held in May 2022, the first meeting was held on the 27th of May 2022 solely to elect a Chair and a vice Chair for this Committee. Councillor Rhodri Evans was elected as Chair with Councillor Geraint Hughes elected as vice-Chair.

On the 21st of June, 2023, the newly elected Leader of the Council, Councillor Bryan Davies, presented the report Draft Hybrid Working Strategy and Interim Hybrid Working Policy. It was reported that the Covid-19 pandemic saw the abrupt enforcement of a national lockdown that included the requirement to remain at home and work from home wherever possible. These measures necessitated that much of the office staff working within the Council would work in a significantly different way. Staff responded quickly and positively to this change. In the main, the positive response was because of steps already taken towards a more agile and smarter way of working, including the investment in digital equipment and software, and the enhancement of the existing flexible working arrangements already in place.

It was reported that having responded well to the initial challenges posed by the pandemic, focus shifted to how the Council could learn and build from the experience. The 'Way We Work' project was established to review the remote working practices adopted during the pandemic. The project aimed to explore the appetite for long-term change within the workforce whilst ensuring that service delivery remained the primary focus. The project allowed the opportunity to explore

the extent of a shift in the wider strategic vision of where, when, and how the organisation undertook work.

As part of the project, a significant staff engagement exercise was undertaken to gather feedback, experiences, ideas, and future workplace requirements to support strategic decision-making.



OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

It was AGREED to recommend that Cabinet endorse the Hybrid Working Strategy and the Hybrid Working Policy subject to consideration of the following amendments:

- Para 3.1.1 – that line managers should **aim** to hold interviews remotely in the Recruitment & Selection Policy,
- Para 3.1.2 – line managers are permitted to hold interviews face-to-face if they believe that there is justification to do so the Recruitment & Selection Policy,
- Para 3.2.2 – managers should monitor the use of their e-mails and the e-mails of their teams after 9pm and prior to 6am to ensure that pressure is not placed upon staff to work beyond these hours in the Work Life Balance Policy,
- A recommendation that the employee review takes place after 6 months.

Cabinet considered the above recommendations at its 26th July 2022 meeting and agreed that the employee review should take place after 12 months rather than the 6 months suggested by Scrutiny.

The Committee also received a report on Corporate Bonds and Sureties Policy. It was proposed that the Council introduced a corporate bonds policy for officers to have a clear, fair, and consistent approach to approving and entering bonds with third parties. The report had been presented to ensure that bonds could be easily accessed and utilised if necessary and that bonds secured with third parties were only entered into with third parties with high credit ratings to protect the Council's position.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Members were asked to consider the following recommendations:

- (i) a bond received in cash was the Council's preference,
- (ii) a bond which was secured by a third party requires the third party to have a credit rating Moody's of A3 or a credit rating with Standard & Poor's or Fitch of A-

(iii) to recommend to Cabinet to approve the Bonds and Sureties.

Committee Members agreed that Cabinet should endorse the recommendation to ensure that bonds can be easily accessed and utilised if necessary and that bonds secured with third parties are only entered into with third parties with high credit ratings to protect the Council's position.

Consideration was given on the 3rd of October 2022 to the County Farms Estate update. The following was provided by Officers, presented to Members by the Cabinet Member, Councillor Clive Davies.



- Introduction
- County Council Farm Estate
- Previous conclusions
- Current issues on the Council Farm Estate
- Approach for future tendencies.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following discussion, it was agreed that a Task and Finish group would be established to consider specific issues within the County Farms in depth and report back to the Committee accordingly. At the time of writing this annual report, this task and finish groups is still ongoing, and its findings will be reported in the Annual Report 2023/2024.

Consideration was also given to the Asset Development/Empty Properties report presented by the relevant Cabinet Member, Councillor Clive Davies and the Corporate Manager. The following information was presented:

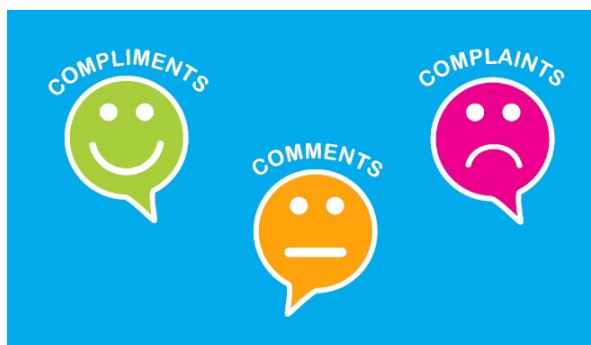
- BACKGROUND: Strategic Context & *Approach and Resources*
- Work since March 2020
- Demand
- Empty Properties Action plan
- Future workstreams- Strategic Projects, Re-balancing of assets, *Disposal / Development of assets. Assessment of priorities.*

It was agreed to recommend the following to Cabinet:

1. Retain the Asset Panel,
2. That a report in relation to the purchase of the Cardigan Car Park be presented on the 19th of December 2022 Corporate Resources Committee meeting,
3. Consider employing outside Agents to sell Council Assets to gain a greater audience of Purchasers, and,
4. That a progress report upon the work going forward on Council Assets be presented to a future meeting.

Cabinet noted the report.

At the same meeting the Complaints/Compliment and Freedom of Information Annual Report for the period 2021-2022.



OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Committee Members agreed to recommend that Cabinet:

- (i) to note and endorse the contents of the Annual Report of Compliments, Complaints and Freedom of Information Activity – 2021/2022 and note the Ombudsman’s Annual Letter for 2021-2022; and
- (ii) that greater detail in Section 4 on lessons learnt be provided in the next report to Scrutiny.

The recommendations were agreed by Cabinet, and greater detail will be presented to the Committee during the 2023-2024 reporting period.

Consideration was given to the Victim Support Hate Crime report. It was stated that Victim Support developed a Hate Crime Charter for organisations to sign up to, to create a network of allies to support its work with victims, and to raise awareness of Hate crime and methods of reporting across Wales.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

It was reported that the next steps if Cabinet agree to sign up to the Charter was that a meeting would be set up with Victim Support to discuss relevant steps. Some organisations had focused on staff training, some on dissemination of information, others on a mixture of the two. Upon becoming an ‘active’ partner, organisations can use the Trustmark on their websites, promotional materials etc.

It was agreed to recommend to Cabinet that the County Council sign up to commitments listed in the Victim support Hate Crime Charter.

Consideration was given to the report upon Tackling Hardship Strategy. The report set out the steps taken by Ceredigion Public Services Board (PSB) to provide a co-ordinated response to the increased risk of hardship in Ceredigion due to the impact of Covid-19. Progress was monitored by the PSB Poverty sub-group. It had been agreed that the Tackling Hardship Strategy 2020-22 would be extended to 2023 to bring it into line with Ceredigion PSB Local Well-being Plan which comes to an end in 2023.

Three key objectives of Ceredigion Tackling Hardship Strategy were: -

- To develop a shared understanding with partner agencies of the evolving impact of COVID-19 on hardship in Ceredigion through the collation and analysis of data.
- To co-ordinate and consolidate collaborative efforts with partner agencies to promote and take advantage of all available help and assistance
- To identify gaps in support and evolving hardship needs to develop early effective intervention that will strengthen individual and community resilience as we adjust to the impact of COVID-19.
- A progress report on this strategy was reported annually, measuring the Red, Amber, Green status of actions that were under the responsibility of the PSB Poverty Sub-group. The Action Plan was divided into three separate pillars: Essential living costs. Physical and emotional well-being and Community resilience

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

It was agreed that the next steps were to:

- Continue to develop the data dashboards to ensure that the Council had a shared understanding of the evolving impact of hardship in Ceredigion.
- Review the list of partners that contribute to the action plan.
- It was anticipated that poverty levels would continue to rise in Ceredigion, but because of the rising cost of living rather than the direct impact of Covid. This was likely to require a change of focus and the action plan would be reviewed to reflect this.
- Ensure that the work of this sub-group feeds into the Local Well-being Plan 2023-28.

Consideration was given to the 'Talking, Listening and Working Together', Ceredigion County Council's Engagement and Participation Policy that sets out the corporate approach to engagement and participation with the people of Ceredigion. The Committee considered the previous draft Policy on the 14th of October 2021, and it was approved for public consultation during the winter period that year. However, the consultation was delayed due to the requirements of Part 3, section 41 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, pertaining to consultation and review of the Council's Public Participation Strategy. The draft Engagement Policy was subsequently revised to include Participation and presented to Cabinet in July 2022. Cabinet agreed public consultation during Summer 2022. The final policy had been revised to reflect the findings.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following discussion and consideration of the policy, Members agreed the following and recommend that Cabinet:

- Receive and endorse the Engagement and Participation Policy – Talking, Listening and Working Together.

Consideration was given to the Ceredigion Senior Coroner's 2021 Statistical Return at the December meeting. It was reported that the Senior Coroner for Ceredigion prepares an annual report ('Statistical Return') on deaths reported to the coroner,

which was sent to the Ministry of Justice for publication as part of the Coroners' Statistics on the UK Government website.

The Report of the Chief Coroner to the Lord Chancellor (combined Report of the Sixth Annual Report 2018-2019 and Seventh Annual Report: 2019-2020) includes a Model Coroner blueprint. This recommends that the Senior Coroner also presents a brief annual report ('Local Authority Report') to the Chief Coroner and the Council each July, which should be published on the Council's website, and include relevant statistics on current/concluded cases (with comparison figures for previous years), an update on Coroner work and relevant issues, a summary of the coroner's team and staffing arrangements, and any future planning. This report was not presented to the Council by the Senior Coroner for last year due to workload commitments, court sitting availability and a staff vacancy.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

An update had been provided from the Coroner's Office on their work on organ donation:

"A successful multiple organ donation was orchestrated by Mr Steve Lloyd, Coroner's Officer, Dyfed-Powys Police, who worked with the Welsh Specialist Nurses for Organ Donations and Mr Jason Shannon, Wales's first Lead Medical Examiner. Mr Lloyd's exceptional efforts and expertise resulted in multiple lives saved, including that of an 8-month-old baby. The experience and knowledge gained from this recent incident places Ceredigion's coroners on an even better footing for future opportunities to facilitate organ donation and to save lives."

It was agreed to note the content of the report.

As mentioned earlier in this report, it was reported at the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on the 19th of October 2022, that Committee Members had raised concerns about the acquisition of the Feidr Fair site in Cardigan. It was agreed that a report be presented at this meeting.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

It was agreed to note the report for information, and the message reiterated that the Local Member should always be informed of any developments in their Ward as Councillor Elaine Evans had not been informed in this instance.

Consideration was given to the Development Group and Other Supporting Group report (review of existing arrangements and terms of reference). The report had been requested on the 17th of October 2022.

Members received the background information, the reason for reviewing arrangements, the proposed way forward, Membership and Terms of Reference.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following discussion, Committee Members agreed that Cabinet consider the following recommendations:

- Membership of the Asset Panel should continue as it was currently, consisting of the relevant Cabinet Members and Chair and vice Chair of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was essential to ensure

ongoing consultation with relevant Local Member(s). Membership arrangements to be reviewed should the current political balance change.

- Staffing capacity issues to be reviewed within the Estates Service. The Authority needs to ensure that each sale/rental of land and property was considered on an individual basis, prior to the asset being deemed surplus to requirements and offered on the open market. All open market disposals should be widely and actively marketed to ensure that best value is achieved.

CABINET'S DECISION:

1. To agree membership of the Development Group.
2. To agree the proposed Terms of Reference for the Development Group, Capital Monitoring Group, Asset Management Group and Corporate Project Management Group.
3. To note the feedback from the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Reason for the decision:

1. To provide better strategic oversight and management of the Council's Development Programme.
2. To improve arrangements for delivering the Council's Corporate Strategy.
3. To make efficient and effective use of time and resources.

The Revised Customer Services Charter was received also at the December meeting which outlines the different methods of communicating with the Council, Phone, Electronic (Web, Email), letters and Face to Face. The charter gives the customer indication of when they should expect a reply and ensure that the customer is communicated with in the language and method of their preference.

CUSTOMER CHARTER

RESPONDING TO TELEPHONES

- All calls should be answered bilingually, with **Welsh and English**. Each conversation will continue in the caller's **preferred language**.
- It is expected that calls from service users are **answered promptly**.
- Simple enquiries and requests for service should be dealt with immediately.



RESPONDING TO LETTERS, E-MAILS AND REQUESTS FOR SERVICE VIA THE WEB AND SOCIAL MEDIA



- All correspondence requesting services should be acknowledged **within 2 working days of receipt**.
- Replies should be sent as soon as possible but **within a maximum of 14 days of receipt**.
- Replies should be in the **language and medium of the original correspondence**.



- Where a fuller, more complex reply is needed give an indication as to **when you will provide a full response**.
- If a reply takes longer than expected, **keep the service user informed**, explaining the reasons why.
- Where possible requests for services received through Social Media pages will be **redirected to the Clic team**.

STANDARDS OF COMMUNICATION

- All correspondence should be written in **plain language**, and in the **language of the original enquiry**.
- A **corporate letterhead** must be used for all letters. Ensure you are using the latest version by accessing letterheads via the icon on your desktop.
- The Council has adopted the principle to use a standard font **Arial, minimum type size 12** in all correspondence.
- Documents, leaflets, electronic resources etc. should be **provided in an alternative format if requested** e.g. providing a document in large print, braille, audio, easy read or Children and Young People's version.
- Welsh is an official language in Wales! This means **Welsh language must not be treated any less favourably than the English language** and Welsh speakers should have access to their services in their language of preference.



The Charter gives the customer the assurance that the Council will deal with all equally, in a fair and polite way and keep the citizen informed about its services and events. The Charter welcomes both positive and negative comments about its services and how it can improve. The revised charter is now in line with the Complaints policy for the number of days to respond to any enquiry.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following discussion, Members agreed to recommend that Cabinet approve the

revised Customer Charter as presented.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bryan Davies, presented the report on the draft budget for 2023/2024 including an updated multi-year capital programme, outlining that this is based on the Welsh Government (WG) provisional settlement, and advised Members that the WG final settlement is due on the 28 February 2023.



OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed that:

1. It had considered the overall Budget position as shown in the Budget report in Enclosure A.
2. It had considered the relevant elements of the Budget Cost pressures falling under this Scrutiny Committee.
3. It had considered the relevant elements of the Budget Savings proposals falling under this Scrutiny Committee.
4. It had considered the relevant elements of the Fees & Charges proposals falling under this Scrutiny Committee.
5. The majority of Committee Members voted in favour of a 7.3% increase for Council Tax levels. The Committee is therefore recommending an increase of 7.3% in Council Tax for 2023/2024, which is option 3b) of the recommendations, as follows:

3b) A 7.3% Council Tax increase (including 1.3% in relation to the proposed Fire Authority Levy increase) and a 23/24 Budget requirement of £180.101m).

6. No further feedback was made by the Committee on the draft 2023/24 budget.

Consideration was given to the Community Housing Scheme Proposal. It was reported that Affordable Housing in Ceredigion was a key priority of the Corporate Strategy, the Wellbeing Plan, the Housing Strategy and the Local Development Plan and the Council deploys significant resources in creating and managing affordable housing.

Members were requested to consider the Community Housing Scheme Proposal. 'Community Housing' seeks to support people to meet their affordable housing needs in their local communities by creating a pathway to home ownership. The Council made a commitment to support such a scheme in March 2022.

During discussions, it was suggested that Officers consider the following points:

- That the Council undertake their own formal structural survey on the subject property, to assess its condition, prior to a formal offer,
- That any formal offer to lend by the Council was conditional on any works identified in the Council' survey. Works should then be undertaken within a given amount of time – suggest possibly six months,
- The report (attachment A of the agenda papers) stated that 'the Council loan can be for a period no longer than the period of the associated mortgage' - consideration of the repayment of the loan needs to be given to those with no mortgage so that repayment was made either upon first sale or transfer of the property.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

It was agreed to recommend that Cabinet approve the Community Housing Scheme, subject to consideration of the following:

- (i) alternative options in relation to the Commuted sums secured under section 106 agreements, this could include upfront commuted sum payment to help support delivery of affordable housing in the County, and
- (ii) including Councillor involvement in the Task and Finish Group membership.

A Hybrid Working Strategy and Interim Hybrid Policy was agreed in July 2022, to be trailed for 12 months. The strategy sets out the vision and associated approaches that would be taken to ensure Ceredigion County Council had a workforce with the skills and ability to be working in a way that was fit for our organisation's future, in workspaces that meet its needs.

The Interim Hybrid Working Policy had been developed to provide detailed information around what hybrid working means for the Council. It supports employees and their managers in implementing hybrid working by providing practical advice and information, enabling employees to work from the office or home effectively, productively, and safely.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Hybrid Working Strategy and Interim Hybrid Working Policy were heavily influenced and informed by ongoing engagement with staff and managers. Continued engagement had shown significant support for developing the way staff work and how service was delivered. Feedback has shown that staff were more productive and digital ways of working had enhanced access to services for many customers.

As part of the trial, desk and meeting room usage had been monitored and data collected had helped inform changes within these areas. A short presentation of the type of data being collected was presented. From the data, it's also becoming clearer that there would be significant opportunities to provide new public facing services or accommodate other uses at Canolfan Rheidol in Aberystwyth and Penmorfa and County Hall in Aberaeron. There may be opportunities to rationalise and use other Council properties in different ways as well.

As an example of the opportunities, the Council and Hywel Dda had agreed that part of the ground floor at Canolfan Rheidol be used to provide physiotherapy outpatient services. This would be on a temporary basis whilst the hybrid trial period continues, and the Council considers the best longer term alternative use of space in its offices.

An engagement survey seeking views from the public on the potential reuse of the buildings had recently ended. This along with discussions with stakeholders would help inform options for the future use of offices at the end of the trial.

It was agreed to note the current position and receive an updated report at a future meeting.

A report on the Amended Code of Conduct of Local Government Employees, Declarations of Interest Form and Declaration of Hospitality Form information was received and presented to Committee Members for consideration.

It was reported that a review had been taken upon the following: -

- Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees ('the Code')
- Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees ('the Code')
- Officer Declaration of Interests form
- Officer Declaration of Hospitality & Gifts Form

In reviewing these documents, a small Scale DPIA was prepared. The documents had been approved by Leadership Group and circulated to relevant Trade Unions for their views.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

All the changes were presented to Members.

it was AGREED to recommend to Cabinet to approve:

- (i) the Code of Conduct of Local Government Employees.
- (ii) the Declarations of Interest Form; and
- (iii) the Declarations of Hospitality Form

Healthier Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Healthier Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on six separate occasions during 2022/2023.



Key Issues considered

The Corporate Lead Officer for Porth Cynnal Specialist Services regularly attends Committee meetings to present the quarterly Independent Reviewing Service Performance Management Reports which included national and local standards, and targets used to measure outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. The Independent Reviewing Officer has regard as to whether the child/young person's human rights being breached in any way and, if so, considers a referral to CAFCASS Cymru. This action was not required at any of the review meetings in the period. These reports are considered within Multi Agency LAC Quality Assurance Meetings which meet on a quarterly basis; these meetings provide an opportunity to identify and act upon performance and other issues in relation to this area of work.

These reports are also circulated and reviewed by Local Authority's Corporate Parenting Group, which is Chaired by Councillor Alun Williams, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Through Age and Wellbeing.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The importance of the Independent Reviewing Service was recognised, and Members were pleased to receive assurance that the needs of Looked After Children were met and are continuously improved. Members congratulated the service' staff and expressed their gratitude for their commitment and hard work.

The 27th of May 2023 Committee meeting was held to Elect a Chair and Vice-Chair to the Committee. Councillor Caryl Roberts was elected as Chair with Councillor Ceris Jones elected as vice-Chair.

The Corporate Manager presented the background to the Housing Support Programme 2022-2026 as outlined in the report. The 4 background papers required under the current grant guidance were referred to, and it was noted that the 4-year plan identified 4 strategic priorities and actions in moving forward. He clarified that the plan encompassed all housing needs, and it was underpinned by the overarching strategy.

In response to a query surrounding the new regulations for renting that will come into force on 1 December 2022, it was explained that landlords were leaving the market and others were increasing rent and bonds for the most vulnerable. There was a lot of anecdotal information circulating, but it was generally the picture across Wales.

In terms of 'no fault' evictions, Housing Options Service had a gateway service, and they were able to signpost people to the correct support. The Council are a part of Leasing Scheme Wales and aims to work closely with private landlords.

Members have seen an increase in enquiries from people who have received notices to leave private rented accommodation due to various reasons. Not only does this affect people's mental health but it reduces the availability of rental accommodation. Ceredigion's Housing Options Service were commended for its support.

Members were reminded to direct residents to the Housing Options Service if in need of support with finding alternative accommodation. It was appreciated that there was a lack of affordable housing and that the housing allowances did not reflect private market rents.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to recommend the Housing Support Programme and a Statement of Needs for Cabinet approval.

A report on the proposed fees for The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021, the background and the current situation was presented to the Committee. It was noted that the proposed fees were in response to the increase in people selling pets privately and online rather than purchasing from a pet shop. A reference to the Current Situation was provided, which included that an introduction to the legislation was presented through the Democratic process in November 2021 and Lucy's Law, which was already in place in England. The proposed fees listed in the report reflects the additional work the authority must undertake and the level of input from officers.

Reference was made to what is in and out of the scope: Selling Animals as Pets including the Business Test, in scope criteria, Guideline indicators of running a business of selling animals as pets, out of scope criteria and Guideline indicators of "out of scope" activities as outlined in the report.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following a lengthy discussion, it was agreed to recommend the report and the proposed fee structure for Cabinet approval.

The Regional Dementia Strategy developed by the West Wales Care Partnership (WWCP) Regional Dementia Steering Group was presented by Alun Williams, Cabinet Member for Through Age and Wellbeing. WWCP brings together organisations from the statutory, third and independent sectors with a remit of integrating and transforming health, care, and support in the region. Funding provided by Welsh Government (WG) was managed through the Dementia Steering Group and would be instrumental in delivering agreed priorities within the Strategy. A Population Needs Assessment recently presented at Cabinet indicated an increase in the number of people aged 80+ due to the post-war baby boom reaching this age and so this strategy would be key in moving forward. An overview of the WWCP Dementia Strategy was provided to the committee, with reference to the current provision, best practices, feedback from structured interviews with stakeholders and carers and the approach to implementing the dementia wellbeing pathway.

Donna Pritchard, Corporate Lead Officer, referred to the Next Steps from a regional and county perspective. Regionally, 6 work streams had been identified which included Community Engagement, Hospitals and Training and Recruitment. There was representation from the local authority on all work streams. It was noted that well-being connectors would work in the community and would work closely with Porth Cymorth Cynnar. The local authority had secured funding from WG to commission consultants to support developing a plan to deliver the key outcomes noted in the strategy.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note the report for information and make the following recommendations to Cabinet prior to approval:

1. The importance of ensuring the preferred language of service users was considered in the service provision
2. Utilization of current resources including buildings
3. Suitable transport and ensure service provision was as local as possible
4. The importance of day centres available locally to service users

Cabinet agreed Scrutiny's recommendations.

At the same meeting, Heddwyn Evans, Corporate Manager, presented a report with the findings of Ceredigion County Council's 2022 Air Quality Progress, so as to fulfil Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 Local Air Quality Management. In terms of statutory monitoring duties placed on Ceredigion County Council, there was a requirement to report on both Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) and Particulate Matter (PM₁₀) annually. Other pollutants contained in the regulations were exempt from mandatory reporting unless there was evidence of a local issue that needed to be addressed. Given Ceredigion's rural location and lack of heavy industries, the authority was not subject to exceedances in relation to the pollutants exempt from mandatory reporting. By using diffusion tubes, 11 sites were currently monitored in

Ceredigion for NO₂. If levels of NO₂ reached an annual mean objective of 40µg/m³, a Local Air Quality Management Area would be declared. In terms of PM₁₀, it can cause adverse health issues however the monitoring of PM₁₀ has been consistently good in Ceredigion.

Due to restrictions and different priorities during the Covid-19 pandemic, sampling was paused hence the 6 months of reporting in the report. From a Quality Assurance and Quality Control perspective, Diffusion Tube Bias Adjustment Factors were used on the spreadsheet provided by Defra to adjust measurements, to ensure results were consistent across the county. Reference was given to the trends in annual mean NO₂ concentrations during the last 5 years of monitoring included in the report. It was highlighted there had been a reduction nationally last year due to less traffic during the pandemic. It was highlighted that air pollution in Ceredigion was the second lowest in Wales.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Chair highlighted the importance of communicating the county's success to the public in a press release.

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note the content of the report and recommend to Cabinet that the report is published on the council website, and submitted to DEFRA, in line with statutory requirements.

Cabinet accepted the Committee's recommendation.

Councillor Matthew Vaux, Cabinet Member for Partnerships, Housing, Legal and Governance and Public Protection, presented a report on the Trace and Protect service (TTP) in Ceredigion and explained that the purpose of the report was to provide an update on the Trace and Protect service for Ceredigion. In July 2022, a new but temporary service delivery model for the Trace and Protect Service was established, within the Hywel Dda Region. The new service was set up in response to the objectives outlined in "Together for a Safer Future: Wales' Long-term Covid-19 Transition from Pandemic to Endemic" and the expectations from Welsh Government (WG) regarding the use of the significantly reduced contact tracing funding for 2022-23 i.e., 40% of 2021/22 budget. To account for the reduced budget and reduction in staff numbers (15-20% of the 2021/22 staff complement), Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion TTP services combined to achieve economies of scale and build resilience across both local authorities. The combined team works alongside the Carmarthenshire TTP service. It was reported that Ceredigion had a very effective track and trace team during and since the pandemic as reflected in the report.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by officers. The main points raised were as follows:

- Following the directive given by WG, the focus of the track and trace team was now on the most vulnerable in the community. Funding had been provided by WG for a further year to continue with this service.

- As community testing was ceased in 2022, concerns were raised that fewer people were prepared to test as home testing kits were expensive to purchase.
- In December, the Covid-19 case rate had increased slightly which was not surprising, however, figures had reduced again by January.
- Two Specialist Environmental Health Officers who were redeployed as a matter of priority during the pandemic to support the Covid team had returned partly to their role within the Public Protection Team.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bryan Davies, presented the report on the draft budget for 2023/2024 including an updated multi-year capital programme, outlining that this is based on the WG provisional settlement, and that the WG final settlement is due on the 28 February 2023. The Leader advised the Committee Members that the higher-than-expected Provisional settlement increase from Welsh Government for 2023/2024 of 8.1% (on a cash basis) is welcomed. This should ensure that for the 2023/2024 financial year, services to residents in Ceredigion can be protected as much as possible, whilst acknowledging this is still an extremely challenging Budget.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

1. It had considered the overall Budget position as shown in the Budget report in Enclosure A.
2. It had considered the relevant elements of the Budget Cost pressures falling under this Scrutiny Committee.
3. It had considered the relevant elements of the Budget Savings proposals falling under this Scrutiny Committee.
4. It had considered the relevant elements of the Fees & Charges proposals falling under this Scrutiny Committee, save that the Scrutiny Committee recommended that Cabinet agree to extend the previous Cabinet decision of 22nd February 2022, for another year for the 2023/2024 period, as follows:
 - **To delegate authority to the CLO Porth Cymorth Cynnar, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Leisure and Wellbeing Centres, to vary the Fees & Charges for the Wellbeing Centres for 2023/2024, to run short term/time limited promotional offers.**
5. The majority of Committee Members voted in favour of a 7.3% increase for Council Tax levels. The Committee is therefore recommending an increase of 7.3% in Council Tax for 2023/2024, which is option 3b) of the recommendations, as follows:
 - 3b) A 7.3% Council Tax increase (including 1.3% in relation to the proposed Fire Authority Levy increase) and a 23/24 Budget requirement of £180.101m).**
6. No further feedback was made by the Committee on the draft 2023/24 budget.

Consideration was given to the draft Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028 at the April 2023 meeting. Under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, local authorities had a strategic role to play in the way the local housing market functions. One of the keyways for this to be delivered was through a Local Housing Strategy. The intention was for the Local Authority to play a lead role in developing an approach to housing across all tenure and ensure the delivery of appropriate housing and related services to meet local need.

The current Local Housing Strategy had been in place since 2018 and was a 5-year plan. As a result, the Housing Strategy had been reviewed and updated. The review had involved Senior Officers of the Housing Team, key Partners, and Corporate Managers from across the Porth's together with data collection and analysis.

The updated Housing Strategy sets out the vision for a further 5 years: 'There will be sufficient, suitable, and sustainable accommodation to meet residents'

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following discussion, it was agreed:

- (i) to recommend to Cabinet the approval of the draft strategy and to begin on its formal consultation; and
- (ii) that Cabinet considered Members recommendation that Cabinet write to Ms Elin Jones, Senedd Constituency Member and to the four Regional Senedd Cymru Members, expressing concern that providing sufficient housing according to need in Ceredigion was not possible due to all regulations requiring LPAs under the Habitat Regulations, to consider the phosphorus impact of proposed developments on water quality within the SAC river catchment. This had a significant impact on the current housing crisis and should be considered.

Cabinet agreed to write to Ms Elin Jones, Senedd Constituency Member and to the four Regional Senedd Cymru Members and at the time of writing this report, a response is awaited.



The Mid Wales Joint Health and Social Care Joint Scrutiny Group established continues to scrutinise the Mis Wales Joint Committee previously the Mid Wales Healthcare Collaborative. Current arrangements are being reviewed and will be discussed in the September 2023 meeting.

Meetings are normally held on the afternoon following each meeting of the Board meetings. The Chair, County Director and Programme Manager, and Lead Directors attended those meetings. This is a Joint Scrutiny Working Group comprising Local Authority Members from Gwynedd County Council and Ceredigion County Council and previously Powys County Council. Powys, however, withdrew its Membership at the end of 2019.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

This provides an opportunity to examine various functions, to scrutinise decisions taken, and to consider whether service improvements can be put in place and to make recommendations to this effect. The Working Group met on four occasions during this reporting period.

Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 5 occasions during the municipal year 2022/2023.



Key issues considered

The Forward Work Programme was monitored and updated at each Committee meeting as a standing item on each agenda.

Lifelong Learning and Skills Service and Canolfan Eos and Canolfan Aeron (Pupil Referral Units)

The Committee received a report on the five services within Porth Cymorth Cynnar, namely -

- Early Intervention Service
- Support and Prevention Service
- Wellbeing Centres' Service
- Lifelong Learning and Skills Service
- Canolfan Eos and Canolfan Aeron

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed:

- i. to note the update provided;
- ii. to congratulate both services on their excellent work;
- iii. that Members of the Committee visit Hyfforddiant Ceredigion in the near future; and
- iv. that following discussion with staff at Canolfan Eos and Canolfan Aeron, that Members visit both Canolfan Eos and Aeron at a time which was suitable for all.

Self-evaluation and Improvement Planning - Schools and Culture Service

The report had been presented in order to ensure that the Committee members understand the service's self-evaluation processes and their role within those processes. It was reported that the Schools and Culture Service had arrangements in place which ensured regular self-evaluation. These arrangements form part of the corporate business planning arrangements. A grid was presented to illustrate the

self-evaluation processes and the role of the Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in those processes.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed:

- i. to establish a workstream which responds to the Schools and Culture Service's three Level 1 Business Plan recommendations; and
- ii. to establish a workstream to contribute to the service's self-evaluation processes.

Mid Wales Education Partnership - Business Plan

An update on the priorities of the education partnership between Powys and Ceredigion for 2022-23 was provided by the Cabinet Member. It was reported that the Mid Wales Education Partnership between Powys and Ceredigion Local Authorities was formed in September 2021. It was based on a Memorandum of Understanding between the two counties.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed to approve the Mid Wales Education Partnership Business Plan for 2022-23 as presented.

Update on a new Area School in the Aeron Valley

The Committee received an update on the tendering process. A Shadow Governing Body for the new school was currently being established.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed to note the update provided, however, Members urged that the work commence as soon as possible due the raising costs of building materials following the pandemic.

Curriculum for Wales - update

The Cabinet Member reported that Primary schools in Wales would begin implementing the Curriculum for Wales in September 2022, and its implementation would become statutory in the secondary sector from September 2023. The Curriculum for Wales Co-ordinator provided an update on the range of support for schools in implementation, and the continuing priorities for 2022-23.

Verbal update on the provision of free school meals

Ceredigion County Council would be offering Free School Meals from the Autumn term onwards to all Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 children. This was following the Welsh Government's announcement to offer Free School Meals for primary school pupils across Wales, starting with Reception classes from September 2022. In response to the current rising cost-of-living, this was a positive step forward in ensuring that no child goes hungry while in school and tackling poverty in our County.

From Monday 5 September 2022 onwards, all Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 Children in Ceredigion schools would be offered Free School Meals, extending the offer beyond what needs to be done by September.

Co-opted Members for Ceredigion County Council's Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee - representatives of Parent-Governors

A recruitment exercise took place during May 2022 and to appoint 2 parent governor representatives to the Committee.

Regional Skills Partnership Overview Report 2021 – 2022

The report had been presented in order to provide Members of the Committee with an overview and update on progress of the Mid Wales Regional Skills Partnership.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee noted the report.

2022 GCSE and A Level results

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was not possible to compare the 2022 results with previous years.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed to note the report for information and to congratulate the pupils, teachers and staff on these excellent results following the pandemic.

Welsh Government School Improvement Guidance

The report had been presented to the Committee in order to share information regarding a key document on School Improvement which would have implications on how the School improvement Service was implemented in Ceredigion. The document would be statutory from September 2024. The aim of the document was to:

- Strengthen the effectiveness of self-evaluation and improve planning within schools.
- Cease with the use of the national school categorisation system and replace with a similar support system without publishing school categories
- Strengthen and provide clarity regarding the split between evaluation activities / improving the accountability of the system
- Earmark the roles and responsibilities of the various bodies clearly in a self - improvement system

The guidance sets out what schools and others in the education system 'must' and 'should' do under the framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability. References to what schools and others 'must' do are underpinned by a statutory obligation. Those actions which the guidance states that schools and others 'should' do is best practice in accordance with the guidance. By issuing school improvement guidance on a non-statutory basis now, we want schools, local authorities, regional consortia, Estyn and diocesan authorities to implement and test the approaches to school improvement and accountability it sets out. They would then evaluate their impact. Following this we plan to update the guidance, building on learning in 2022

to 2023 and 2023 to 2024, and issue it as statutory guidance to come into force in September 2024. A list of the principle messages were then outlined to Members.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed to note the report for information.

Estyn Inspections, Summer Term 2022

The reports of the three schools that had recently been inspected was reported to the Committee.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

It was agreed to note the information presented and that the reports were very positive. Congratulations were extended to all schools on their achievements.

The current referral pathway to a diagnosis of autism

The purpose of the report was to provide information on the current pathway to a diagnosis of autism, the challenges and how the Schools Services was meeting the needs of children and young people who have or were awaiting a diagnosis. It was highlighted that autism was a lifelong condition and symptoms differed from one person to another.

Members asked many questions relating to their area of interest which were answered in turn by Officers. The main points raised were as follows:

- It was emphasised that a diagnosis of autism did not affect children and young people's educational provision in Ceredigion, and rather, support was put in place immediately if any symptoms of autism were identified.
- SCAT team meet every 6 weeks to discuss referrals; health leads the work as they are the only body able to provide a diagnosis of autism. A cautious approach was key to ensuring the correct diagnosis was given to each child and young person.
- Referrals should be undertaken by a GP or School Nurse.
- 70% of Ceredigion's schools have Autism Awareness Certificates and Champions (list to be shared with members in due course).
- Concerns were raised with the NHS's long waiting lists; members were encouraged to raise this at any given opportunity. It was noted that Welsh Government (WG) had recently undertaken a Capacity Review where it was identified that health boards nationally were struggling with assessments and so, there had been a pledge for additional funding.
- The importance of inclusivity was raised to ensure each child and young person had an equal opportunity to access mainstream education in the first instance. If not suitable, specialists' units were located on some school campuses and the proximity enabled children and young people to access mainstream lessons where necessary.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed to note the following:

1. To be informed on the current referral pathway to a diagnosis of autism in Ceredigion.

2. To be informed on how the Schools Services is meeting the needs of children who have or who are waiting for a diagnosis.

Deprivation and Equity Strategy

The Cabinet Member for Schools, Lifelong Learning and Skill explained that since the Covid-19 pandemic, the gap in attainment and opportunity between disadvantaged and more privileged learners has widened. Outcomes at GCSE suggest the deprivation gap in education in Wales is currently around 24 months' worth of academic progress. The cost-of-living crisis is only serving to widen any pre-existing attainment and opportunity gap found within education. It was highlighted that the Minister for Education and Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles, has spoken regularly about his commitment to supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. An overview of the current situation as noted in the report was provided.

Members asked many questions relating to their area of interest which were answered in turn by Officers. The main points raised were as follows:

- Concerns were raised that although the Minister for Education and Welsh Language was supportive of schools, there continued to be budget cuts. The £8 million in school reserves would reduce significantly with the increase in school wages and energy costs. Officers have already raised concerns with WG.
- It was highlighted that all children and young people should have an equal opportunity to succeed in school. The strategy included many practical points to support families from disadvantaged backgrounds, although it was acknowledged that funding was a factor.
- School attendance was deemed very important for many reasons. Following work from the department, primary school attendance has improved, with some work needed again on secondary school attendance.
- No child or young person should be cold in the classroom. If this was the case, members were requested to send evidence to the department.
- To prepare young people for work experience and for later in life, a pilot scheme has been undertaken in Cardigan where the school worked closely with the community and businesses locally. In addition, the new curriculum allowed schools to teach life skills to support young people with independence whilst Seren, a WG initiative supported young people with aspirations to reach their full academic potential.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed to:

1. adopt the contents of the Ceredigion strategy for schools on Deprivation and Equity.
2. an annual report on progress against the Ceredigion Deprivation and Equity Strategy be presented to the Schools, and the Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Ceredigion Youth Council Meeting Minutes

The Ceredigion Youth Council Meeting Minutes were regularly presented to Committee during the year. The importance of ensuring that the views of young

people were fed into the democratic process in Ceredigion was deemed very important.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

It was agreed that Ceredigion Youth Council minutes were presented to both the Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, for information, each term.

Update on the grants available to schools

The grants available to schools were outlined to the Committee. It was noted that overall, schools would rather receive support with core funding as opposed to grants. It was noted that schools have received maintenance grants through the years to improve buildings. All schools have an agreement booklet which sets out clearly what the school and the authority have responsibility for. In addition, the authority has a maintenance programme in place based on the survey undertaken by Faithful+Gould, with emergency work given priority. Members were advised to contact the education department if they felt emergency maintenance work was required in a school but had not been included in the programme. It was highlighted that there were difficulties attracting businesses to tender for work, however, if grants had not been used by the end of the financial year, other arrangements were in place.

It was reported that no funding for Band C of the 21st Century Schools and Colleges programme would be available. The authority was required to present information in 18 months of the need for any extensions, significant work beyond the authority's Capital programme or new schools for the next 5 years to WG.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed to note the current position.

Report on the draft Budget for 2023/24

The Committee met to consider the Service budget for those service areas that are within the Committee's remit.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed that:

1. It had considered the overall Budget position as shown in the Budget report in Enclosure A.
2. It had considered the relevant elements of the Budget Cost pressures falling under this Scrutiny Committee.
3. It had considered the relevant elements of the Budget Savings proposals falling under this Scrutiny Committee.
4. It had considered the relevant elements of the Fees & Charges proposals falling under this Scrutiny Committee.
5. The majority of Committee Members voted in favour of a 7.3% increase for Council Tax levels. The Committee is therefore recommending an increase of 7.3% in Council Tax for 2023/2024, which is option 3b) of the recommendations, as follows:

3b) A 7.3% Council Tax increase (including 1.3% in relation to the proposed Fire Authority Levy increase) and a 23/24 Budget requirement of £180.101m).

6. It was agreed to recommend to Cabinet that if further money becomes available from Welsh Government that does not have specific terms attached to it that it is ringfenced for schools.

Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022-32 - Action Plan

Consideration was given to the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022-32 - Action Plan. In accordance with section 84 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 every Local Authority in Wales was expected to submit a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) to the Welsh Government.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed to recommend to Cabinet:-

- i. to adopt the Action Plan for the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022-2032, to be implemented from the beginning of the Summer term 2023 and to review it annually;
- ii. that the Action Plan would be monitored through the WESP Language Forum meetings and the Bilingual Futures Committee;
- iii. that an annual report on progress against the Action Plan for the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan was presented to the Language Forum, the Bilingual Futures Committee, the Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to the Cabinet; and
- iv. in accordance with the School Organisation Code, that the Local Authority starts the process of changing the language medium in the Foundation Phase at Comins Coch, Llwyn yr Eos, St Padarn's, Plascrug and Cei Newydd schools. Additionally, a consultation regarding changing the admission age at three schools namely Comins Coch, St Padarn's and Cei Newydd would coincide with this. These consultation periods would commence on 15th September 2023.

Sustainable infrastructure principles for education

In November 2018, the Welsh Government updated its statutory code in terms of school organisation and introduced a presumption against closure clause for rural schools. The definition of a rural school has been determined by the Welsh Government using the rural and urban categories of the Office for National Statistics, and as a result, 28 schools in Ceredigion have been defined as rural schools.

Following the Cabinet's decision on 15 September 2021, the School Review Policy was abolished and the handbook was adopted to match the Welsh Government's School Organisation Code. A workshop was held to present the handbook. With the Education Development Document up to 2020 having come to an end, it is timely to present a document that outlines the principles of the service for the future. Currently, the statutory code requires Local Authorities to follow a series of more detailed procedures and requirements when drawing up a proposal to close a visible school, when consulting on that proposal, and when deciding whether the proposal to close a rural school should be implemented. Before deciding whether to proceed with a consultation, a proposal paper must be prepared and submitted to the

Learning Communities Work Stream. Following the meeting of the Scrutiny Work Stream, the proposal paper is submitted to the Cabinet to consider whether to:

- a) Approve the proposal and proceed to conduct a statutory consultation
- b) Reject the proposal
- c) Offer an alternative option

The proposal paper would then be presented to the Learning Communities Scrutiny Committee before holding a Statutory Consultation.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed to:

- i. recommend that the Cabinet approve the Sustainable infrastructure Principles Document for education; and
- ii. confirm the membership of the cross-party work stream which would discuss any proposal papers brought forward in accordance with the School Organisation Handbook.

Update in relation to Elective Home Education

The following information was outlined to the Committee:

- Legal Background
- Number of pupils who were Elective Home Educated
- Illustration of Ceredigion
- Home visits completed in the last 12 months
- Number of pupils who have become home educated
- Number of children who had returned to school
- Duties
- School Attendance Orders
- Safeguarding
- Working with Parents

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following questions from the floor, it was agreed to note:

- (i) the current numbers of home educated children in Ceredigion; and
- (ii) how Schools Services were reviewing the provision of home educated children

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy

The Committee received information on the recent changes to Sex Education and the

introduction of RSE in Curriculum for Wales (CfW). This was to ensure that as a Local Authority (LA) they had suitable RSE policy that could be adopted and adapted by schools to support them in embedding the new curriculum and provide support, information, consistency and clarity. The following information was presented:

- Background
- What is RESE?
- Policy Content
- Current Situation
- Support to Schools

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

It was agreed:

- i. to adopt the contents of the Ceredigion RSE policy; and
- ii. that any comments proposed by the Welsh Government were included as amendments to the RSE.

Workstreams

The Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee established four workstreams for raising awareness, training purposes, exploring topics in greater detail and for identifying aspects which require further scrutiny. The workstreams have been reviewed and updated during 2022. The members of the Learning Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are divided between the workstreams and the Chairman and Vice Chair attends and contributes to all three.

- Ensure that local and national priorities are delivered effectively
- Ensure equity for all pupils
- Ensure an effective and efficient infrastructure to meet our priorities

The workstreams report back to the main Committee.

The workstream undertook visits to two primary schools within the County as part of their work. At the first school Members learnt about the school's journey in adopting a Curriculum for Wales. The workstream Members were taken on a tour of the school, visiting a class from each year from reception to year 6 where they had an opportunity to observe lessons and speak to teachers and pupils. Members then had an opportunity to discuss what they'd seen and ask any further questions of the head teacher and deputy head teacher.

At the second school visited the Committee received a presentation by the Headteacher about the school's journey in adopting a curriculum for Wales. The workstream Members were taken on a tour of the school, visiting each class from reception to year 6 where they had an opportunity to observe lessons and speak to teachers and pupils. Members then had an opportunity to discuss what they'd seen and ask any further questions of the head teacher and deputy head teacher.

The workstream Members were grateful for the opportunity to visit Plascrug School and Ysgol Bro Sion Cwilt where they gathered an insight into the schools and the journey of adopting the curriculum for Wales, including the lessons learnt along the way. Key points noted were:

- Encouraged schools to question what they did,
- Build on good practices,
- The focus on the individual child,
- The importance of the pupil voice,
- Thankful for the support provided by the Council officers,
- Allows teachers the freedom to know their children,
- Allows flexibility,
- Better opportunities for the individual, preparing them for life.

Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 6 occasions during the municipal year 2022/2023.



Key issues considered:

The Forward Work Programme is monitored and updated at each regular Committee meeting as a standing item on each agenda.

Ceredigion Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy and Action Plan

The Cabinet Member explained that the recommendation by Ceredigion County Council Carbon Management and Climate Change Group (20/06/2022) was for the committee members to consider the draft Strategy and Action Plan prior to presentation to Cabinet for formal adoption. It was noted that the Strategy was in the process of being developed.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The main points raised by members were as follows:

- In terms of funding, £420,000 was received from the Welsh Government's Ultra Low Emission Transformation Fund (ULEVTF) in the 2021/22 Financial Year. Grant funding of up to £300,000 has also been allocated to the Council by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). A sum of £273,171 from the UK Government has been awarded to enable a second phase during the 2022/23 financial year (£204,878.20 (75%) from the Office of Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) On-street Residential Charge-point Scheme (ORCS) with the remaining £68,293 (25%) to be provided as match-funding by the WG).
- Due to uncertainty around whether the match-funding (25%) would be given, WG were aware that there were no private investors in the county.

Hopefully, written confirmation from WG of the funding would be sent in due course. Consideration of other sources of funding remained key.

- Silverstone Green Energy has assisted the Council following a tendering process to install and operate the public EVCPs at Penmorfa and Canolfan Rheidol. An agreement is in place to ensure both the company and the Council have a share of the profit, which was impacted by the slow take-up.
- The Strategy is key to the Council's 2030 net zero carbon ambition and delivery of the Council's Net Zero Action Plan. It would also provide access to people who wish to charge their vehicles.
- No consideration was given to installing EVCPs at schools including the new area school in Dyffryn Aeron; Officers confirmed there was currently a condition that EVCPs should be provided to the public.
- Subject to planning, members felt the Council should consider opportunities to create renewable energy within the county.
- Concerns that the installation of EVCPs would not reduce the number of vehicles on the road as per Llwybr Newydd transport strategy.
- Concerns were raised around the National Grid's capacity to provide electricity as this would limit where EVCPs can be installed. Concerns also around the security of the supply of energy, especially in the current climate and from where was the energy provided by the DNO sourced.
- Working together would be key in avoiding the installation of numerous EVCPs at the same location.
- Consideration to other sources of fuel (e.g. HGO) was raised; officers confirmed they were continually considering options.
- Lack of education around the benefits of Electric Vehicles (EVs) to the environment.
- As dealers register EVs centrally and not to their owner's addresses, a true account of the number of EVs in the county is not available.
- The different types and availability of specific EVCPs; an officer explained that there seemed to be a universal charger and also adapters for different vehicles. EVCPs apps have been developed that help drivers search for chargers. Communicating information to the public around EVCPs will need to be considered in moving forward and information will need to be included in the apps.
- In response to a query about the definition of on-street residential charging, the officers clarified it meant providing charging points off-street for on-street vehicles.
- From a safety perspective, it will be important to give the public enough warning of any upcoming installation work.
- Due to concerns around the location of the EVCPs in Aberaeron; officers agreed to discuss the matter with the elected member.
- Issues were raised with the EVCPs in Penmorfa appearing on the app; officers explained that they would raise this with Silverstone Green Energy.
- Concerns raised around the intensive mining related to lithium batteries.
- In terms of charging on the street, it was explained by officers that regulations were in place around what could/ could not be done therefore

the focus was on ensuring people had the facilities to do so safely. A charging system would need to be set up in due course.

Following a lengthy discussion, Members agreed to approve its presentation to Cabinet for formal adoption by the Council.

Review of Waste Management Services- consultancy support

The purpose of the report was to seek support for a proposed way forward for the review of Ceredigion County Council's waste service.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The main points raised are as follows:

- The appointment of independent consultants to undertake the work would follow the usual processes.
- A new fleet of vehicles will need to be in place by 2027-28- due to the complex technology required and the need to consider different options, the work needs to begin imminently.
- Staffing pressures were highlighted- although the team is near capacity, the service runs at 70% staffing levels due to annual leave, training and illness. In addition, the Council are not immune to the lack of HGV drivers and technicians- there are training programmes to attract staff. As the waste service is a priority for the department, staff in other roles with HGV licences are shared and agency staff are used occasionally.
- Concerns that the same routes are impacted on Bank Holidays as most are on Mondays. As staff were not contracted to work bank holidays, revising staff contracts was suggested and also a retained scheme similar to the fire service. Further suggestions were welcomed by the officer.
- Members reported that they increasingly receive calls from the public around waste collections. The officer suggested directing the public to Clic or the Council's website, where efforts were made to share information around changes to services including performance indicators.
- In response to a member's question about electric lorries, the officer explained that the staff had trialed a lorry and it had gone well but at present, the lorries were worth around £450,000 each. Consideration should be given if the lorries become more affordable.
- Concerns around where waste was sent to following collections; the officer felt that many issues should be considered internationally but the county had a role to influence change. The level of waste in Ceredigion is not enough to warrant an investment in technology to deal with it.
- As more LAs adopt the WG Blueprint, there were risks that fewer grants would be made available for LAs who decide against adopting it.
- In terms of whether officers would be able to undertake the work proposed for consultants and to contact LAs who have already adopted the kerbside sort, the officer advised that there was no capacity in the team given the workload and managerial responsibilities on staff.
- The officer clarified that some machinery was leased. It was important to be dynamic and consider the best opportunities available at the time with the support of the Finance and Procurement department.

- Inspection of the vehicles was done internally every 6 weeks and if required, any further work was done locally. The only vehicles that were returned to the dealers for work were those under warranty or if expertise was needed. The longer the lorries were off the road, the greater the impact on services.
- It was highlighted that a change in services would raise problems and so consulting with members who represent Ceredigion's residents was vital throughout the process before decisions were made. 1500 responses were received following the last public consultation.
- The effectiveness of kerbside sort in different areas (e.g urban vs rural) and type of properties (HMO vs detached house) within the county would vary.

Members expressed their gratitude to the staff, who worked throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and for their continued efforts.

Following a lengthy discussion, members agreed to the following:

- Note the current situation, identified risks and need for a service review
- Note the appointment of independent consultancy service to undertake the service review, in close liaison with the waste service
- Note that the service review will be limited, in broad terms, to the scope set out in this report
- Agree that the Committee takes an active role in the project and a leading role in the political engagement and approvals process.

Overview of Highways and Environmental Services

Officers gave a presentation to the Committee on the services and functions provided, outlining the following:

- Core Services
- Key Functions
- Service Priorities
- Front Line Workforce
- Performance Indicators
- Service Requests
- Budgets- Historic
- Staff and Budget Reductions
- Challenges and Priorities

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following questions by the Members of the Committee, members agreed to note the services and functions provided by Highways and Environmental Services, and that it provided a useful tool to identify areas for future scrutiny.

Progress on delivering the Economic Strategy

The background, the actions implemented within the strategy and the future areas of focus as outlined in the report, which included the challenges in the 4 areas (People, Places, Enterprise & Connectivity) of intervention in the Economic Strategy were presented to the Committee.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The main points raised were as follows:

- Concerns were raised around whether grant capital funding from Welsh Government (WG) would continue in the same capacity as in recent years for rural areas given the current economic climate. The Arfor Innovation Fund by WG had recently been launched but funding was yet to be released. Acknowledgement was given to Ceredigion and Powys County Council's success in securing the Full Deal Agreement for a £110m capital investment programme.
- Work continued in Lampeter and Llandysul to bring town centre assets into economic use and to enhance green infrastructures.
- The project involving pop-ups in vacant stores was deemed important for new independent businesses. Hopefully, this project would be expanded beyond Aberystwyth.
- Work needed to be carried out to develop town centres, especially Aberystwyth into multi-purpose spaces. Consideration should be given to non-domestic tax payment exceptions as a way of attracting businesses to town centres.
- The department worked hard in applying for grants, sometimes in a very short timeframe. The importance of ensuring that any grant funding was relevant to the Economic Strategy was key.
- It was noted that the Food Centre Wales' Helix programme was currently in a 2 out of a 3-year contract with WG, and it was 1 of 3 centres in Wales. An open day for the public and businesses was suggested.
- Following concerns around the county's connectivity, it was noted that 88% of properties had a broadband speed of over 30Mb yet continued to be behind other areas of Wales. WG was undertaking open market reports to understand the current situation so the rollout of fibre to the property had slowed a little. Members were welcome to contact the Cabinet Member or officers if they had any queries.
- At present, there was no one in the Towns Development Officer post.
- In response to suggestions for vinyl to be placed on empty shop windows, there were opportunities under the Transforming Places Programme to apply for grants to improve properties. Members representing towns were encouraged to contact officers to discuss.
- Concerns were shared around whether WG was committed to developing Mid-Wales. It was noted that having a clear strategy in place was key in pursuing investment opportunities such as Mid Wales Growth Deal. Officers had a good relationship with WG and there were frequent discussions to ensure policies benefitted the region.

Ash Die Back

A report was presented to the Committee in response to recommendations that had been made by the Committee in the previous municipal year.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The main points raised were as follows:

- Initially, the project programme has been to carry out the work over 10 years to, with most of the work done between the third and sixth year. Dependent on the budget and contractor availability, hopefully, the work could be completed sooner, although dealing with the airborne disease would be ongoing.
- Most trees adjacent to and abutting highways and public rights of way are owned by the landowner, who has a responsibility to carry out inspection of their trees. If an officer during inspections deemed a tree to be unsafe on land not owned by the authority, a Section 154 Notice of the Highways Act would be issued to the landowner. As a result, landowners would need to hire contractors within 14 days. The authority would be able to assist with the process if required.
- In terms of priority, there were 4 classes of deterioration with trees in class 4 prioritized with notices. Some trees in Class 1 and 2 would gain resistance and survive, which was important to maintain the native stock.
- In the event there was a tree preservation order in place, a notice of application for the removal of a tree would need to be done.
- Concerns were raised that the agriculture sector in Ceredigion had not been consulted with helping with the work of cutting trees in exchange for the chip. There were questions around economies of scale as felling individual trees as opposed to woodland had different requirements.
- Members felt that undertaking the work in-house would not have made business sense although long-term, the equipment would have been in the authority's possession.
- To ensure everyone had an opportunity to tender for the work, members felt that transparency was key in setting the matrix. A Tree works contractor framework was in the process of being developed and a meet the contractor event would be held to assist with the online tendering process.
- NRW were the enforcement agency if more than 5 cubic metres of timber per quarter was removed without a felling licence.
- Due to public protection concerns, it was suggested that work was done to communicate the problem to the public and to emphasise that responsibility lay with landowners if affected trees were on their land. Following up on notices served was key to ensuring public safety.

Net-Zero Action Plan - Progress Update

The purpose of the report was to provide a progress update as to the actions set out within the Net Zero Action Plan.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The main points raised were as follows:

- Concerns were raised by members that the grid capacity was not sufficient to serve the county and support the authority's commitment to becoming Net Zero by 2030. It was noted that this issue was raised often in meetings and by neighbouring authorities too. National Grid and Scottish Power sat on boards working on local energy plans, however, they had limited budgets and would invest in places they deemed necessary.
- Although employees commuted less with homeworking, concerns were raised that more houses would need to be heated during the day in the winter. It was

noted that home-working emissions were accounted for in WG's Emission Reporting.

- Electricity generated from solar panels installed on council buildings was used by the buildings first with the remainder exported to the grid. If installations had a feed-in tariff payment, payments were made centrally to the authority. Generally, there was a 10-year payback on investments.
- A land management review had been done on Canolfan Rheidol and Ysgol Bro Teifi by WG; the findings were yet to be received. Consideration would be given in due course to batteries to store excess energy.
- It was noted that the aim of becoming Net Zero by 2030 was ambitious considering the situation financially. At present, WG would not penalise the authority for not achieving Net Zero by 2030, but this was the aim nationally for public sector bodies.
- In terms of the authority's fleet, converting vehicles to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) which was more expensive would be investigated along with hydrogen. It was noted that HVO was roughly 20% better than diesel but at present, by using the methodology provided by WG, there would only be a marginal improvement in the figures.
- It was noted that tree planting would be considered long-term to offset carbon and for every tree cut on council-owned land due to Ash Dieback, 3 trees would be planted in their place. In terms of the figures, trees were accounted for under land-based emissions.
- Other local authorities used the same system to collate data for reporting purposes. Hopefully next year, WG will provide an improved methodology to enable authorities to have a better understanding of the situation as at present, the more money that was spent, the more carbon that was generated.
- The authority was only able to report on the council's land holdings. Other bodies such as NRW included land in their ownership in their reports.

Members agreed to note the progress in relation to actions set out within the Net-Zero Action Plan.

Update on Phosphate Situation

A detailed update was provided to the Committee on the phosphate situation with further updates provided during the year.

Development Management

Audit Wales had completed a review of the Planning Service in Ceredigion. The report set out 10 recommendations relating to governance arrangements and to improving service capacity. The Committee considered the Council's response and progress against each of these recommendations.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The arrangements considered were expected to make a noticeable difference in the backlog level and time take to deliver decisions over the next 3-4 months but was likely to take up to 12 months to reach optimum levels. The Committee would continue to monitor and receive update reports.

The Leader of the Council, presented the report on the draft budget for 2023/2024 including an updated multi-year capital programme, outlining that this is based on the Welsh Government (WG) provisional settlement, and advised Members that the WG final settlement is due on the 28 February 2023.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

The Committee agreed that:

1. It had considered the overall Budget position as shown in the Budget report in Enclosure A.
2. It had considered the relevant elements of the Budget Cost pressures falling under this Scrutiny Committee.
3. It had considered the relevant elements of the Budget Savings proposals falling under this Scrutiny Committee.
4. It had considered the relevant elements of the Fees & Charges proposals falling under this Scrutiny Committee, save that the Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that the proposed Car Parking Fees & Charges in Tregaron and Llandysul are removed, so that there would continue to be no Car Parking charges in those towns from 01/04/23 and that the potential £40,000 cost associated with this should be funded from the £400k Provision set aside for Pay and Energy Inflation risks.
5. The majority of Committee Members voted in favour of a 7.3% increase for Council Tax levels. The Committee is therefore recommending an increase of 7.3% in Council Tax for 2023/2024, which is option 3b) of the recommendations, as follows:
 - 3b) A 7.3% Council Tax increase (including 1.3% in relation to the proposed Fire Authority Levy increase) and a 23/24 Budget requirement of £180.101m).
6. It was agreed that the Committee would place the following item on the forward work programme of the Committee: To give consideration to the option of allowing 2 hours free parking before 11am.

Waste Collection Service

The Chair called a special meeting to receive the reasons why the disruption to the Waste Collection Service occurred in December 2022, and to try and find a way forward to resolve the issues impacting the service.

The following were considered:

- Key Matters to Explore
- Staffing Levels
- Contractual Arrangements
- Waste Collection Budget
- Potential Outsourcing
- Fleet Maintenance
- Communication
- Household Waste Sites
- Clic Enquiries
- Work Currently in Progress
- Potential Future Options
- Explore opportunities for digital solution

- Review of operational staff contracts (9-12 months)
- Review of alternative delivery options
- Decrease resource and budgetary pressures on the service
- Increase budget provision for waste collection

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Several exciting and innovative ideas had been suggested and the aim was to provide a consistent service, which would be measured particularly during bank holidays and the Christmas period.

Active travel update April 2023 and use of former railway lines for cycling / walking

The purpose of the report was to give an update on the developments since the previous report/ discussion. A meeting had been held with Lee Waters MS, Deputy Minister for Climate Change on the 1st of December 2022 to provide an overview of Active Travel in Ceredigion. At present, there were only three Welsh Government-designated Active Travel Settlements in Ceredigion under the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 (namely Aberystwyth, Cardigan and Lampeter) and therefore, there was an aspiration to expand on this. Thanks were extended to the service for progressing with the work to improve the accessibility of Active Travel and safety for the county.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Officers, Professor Stuart Cole CBE and the Cabinet Member. Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note the report.

Ceredigion Bus Network

It was explained that WG managed a large proportion of the transport system in Wales and at present, the transport industry faced a challenging time. An overview of the contents of the report was provided including the local and wider context. Professor Stuart Cole CBE was invited to share his expertise with the Committee.

OUTCOME AND/OR IMPACT

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note:

1. The acute and numerous pressures and challenges the transport industry as a whole is experiencing which is exacerbated locally.
2. The subsequent pressure arising on the Council and the Service in seeking to manage the situation, which includes stakeholder expectations and the timelines associated with decisions and actions being implemented.
3. The action taken by the Service to manage the situation and reduce what will still be a significant in-year over-spend in 2022/23.
4. The approach being adopted with a view of delivering services within the budget allocation.

Performance Board

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the five thematic Overview and Scrutiny Committees attend meetings of the Performance Board.

This provides a forum where members of the Performance Board come together to:

- obtain a holistic view of the Council's performance;
- identify and explore high level cross-cutting issues that affect more than one service area e.g. the welfare reform;
- critically challenge areas of poor performance; and
- identify service improvement opportunities, risks to service delivery, and resource implications.

This allows the Chairman and Vice Chairman to be able to identify topics which require further attention by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and for its inclusion on the Forward Work Programme of the Committee.

**Lisa Evans, Standards & Scrutiny Officer
Dwynwen Jones, Overview & Scrutiny Officer**