

# Carmarthenshire County Council Annual Report

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of the Leader of Council  
Cllr. Kevin Madge  
May 2015



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# Introduction

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Once again it is my great pleasure to present my Annual report for 2014/15.

**T**he purpose of the report is to reflect upon the work of the council over the past 12 months. I want to highlight the many challenges that we have experienced and also the excellent achievements of the council over this time. This time last year, I stated that 2013/14 had been one of the most challenging years for local government that I could recall. 2014/15 has been just as demanding. But as we all endeavour to achieve more with less, I believe that we are now an improved council. So, at the outset I want to thank our officers for their unstinting commitment to the work of the Council.

These are certainly turbulent times for local government. Since the publication of the Williams Commission early in 2014 we have all focused on the suggestion that the number of councils should be reduced and that this should be achieved through mergers, using existing boundaries. The report went on to say that these changes should be implemented "quickly and decisively". At a recent meeting of Council, there was near unanimous support for keeping Carmarthenshire as a stand-alone unitary authority. In the next two months or so we will find out what Welsh Government's new proposals will hold for Carmarthenshire.

Since my last annual report, there have been some significant changes to our corporate management

team. With the departure of so many senior officers, the council has lost a wealth of experience and knowledge. I wish them well. But the good news is that we have appointed some equally talented replacements.

On a personal note, one of the highlights of the last year was the granting of the Freedom of the County to former councillor W David Thomas OBE. The accolade is the highest a council can bestow and he is the first individual to receive it. Mr Thomas, more affectionately known as Dai Trelech, resigned from the council due to declining health after 50 years serving his community as a councillor. His letter of resignation was presented to Full Council where members paid tribute to him, and proposed that he be granted the Freedom of the County. Dai is one of those I learned so much from, he gave me great advice. He carried out his duties up until the end; he has a record of 50 years dedicated work for Carmarthenshire and Wales. At the subsequent by-election, Jean Lewis became the new Plaid Cymru Councillor for Trelech.

In December we mourned the passing of Cllr. George Edwards. George had represented the Hengoed ward for Labour since the 2012 council election. In a keenly fought by-election held in February, Penny Edwards, George's widow was returned as a Labour councillor for the ward.

# Council Finance

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Every local authority in Wales has been struggling over recent years to make ends meet financially in the face of severe austerity measures. For a number of years the Council has had to come to terms with the difficult funding scenario that it has faced, and has recognised the need to do things differently and prioritise how it wishes to spend its increasingly scarce resources. The medium term financial plan agreed by Council in 2014 was certainly based on a tough financial settlement which was made worse by the ever increasing demands in certain service areas of the Authority, such as Social Care. However the Authority has always been able to set a balanced budget despite decreasing resources, whilst at the same time maintaining service standards to a large degree.

In preparing the budget for 2015-16 we have spent almost six months consulting with the public and members where we closely examined the way in which services are delivered which included within its proposal the use of over £1 million of reserves. The culmination of this process was the budget meeting of the council on 24th February.

The budget has been developed against the backdrop of the two most difficult financial settlements from the Welsh Government since the Council's inception in 1996. This year Council tax will rise 4.85% for residents in Carmarthenshire.

# Our Workforce

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I have been very impressed this year again with the hard work and commitment shown by the officers who work for this council. Everyone has had to do more with less and working more efficiently. Fortunately, and despite the financial difficulties facing the authority, we have, in the main, been able to avoid compulsory redundancies.

I am particularly pleased that around 2,000 of the lowest paid council staff are set to get a pay rise

from September 2015. The move is part of our ongoing commitment to introducing the Living Wage. The lowest wage earners will now start on spinal point nine at £7.30 per hour. This will bring salaries closer to the Living Wage which now stands at £7.85 per hour.

# Council publishes annual report and improvement plan

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Carmarthenshire County Council's Annual Report and Improvement Plan shows that, despite further budget cuts, the delivery of services continues to improve. Every year, all 22 councils in Wales must report on 44 areas of performance compared against a national set of measures to highlight where services have been improved, maintained or declined.

In Carmarthenshire 26 results have improved, five have been maintained and 13 have declined. Overall results are up on the previous year despite budget cuts, demonstrating the extent to which the council has redirected resources to front line services.

When surveyed in March 2014, the county's 400 strong Citizen's Panel showed that satisfaction with the services provided by the council has increased over the last two years, with 58% saying they are satisfied, 23% dissatisfied and 19% undecided.

The report also sets out the key improvements planned for 2014/15, which include delivering value for money and directing resources to priority services; supporting the growing number of older people to maintain their dignity and independence; improving council housing stock and increasing access to good quality rented and affordable homes.

## The key improvements for 2014/15 were:

- Support the growing number of older people to maintain dignity and independence in their later years;
- Improve the Council housing stock and assist local people to gain access to rented and affordable homes;
- Improve School Attainment;
- Tackle Poverty;
- Improve Governance, decision making, openness and transparency.

Over the years we have aimed to produce a comprehensive, fair and balanced Annual Report and Improvement Plan, according to our regulators, being a notable exception in Wales for the range of sources we include from performance data to satisfaction data to regulatory judgement, and our combined Annual Report 2013/14 and Improvement Plan for 2014/15 aims to continue this tradition.

During 2015 the Wales Audit Office (WAO), will carry out a corporate assessment of our council. This assessment is carried out every four years. It will look at every aspect of our council and will examine and challenge some of the fundamental aspects of our corporate governance. The process will be one that we will experience as a whole council. A report will be presented to council once the assessment has been completed and WAO findings produced.



50+ Forum

# Local Democracy, Openness and Accountability

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## Constitutional Review

In November of last year the Council considered the findings of the Peer Review undertaken by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). As a consequence, a cross party working group was established in order to consider the recommendations of the review, as well as the recommendations of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee's Task and Finish Group report on the Council's Consultation and Engagement Mechanisms.

The working group, Chaired by Councillor Terry Davies, has met on eight occasions and, following consideration of all 39 recommendations, it has requested other bodies, the Carmarthenshire Local Service Board, the authority's Executive Board, the Democratic Services Committee and the Chair and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Committees Forum, consider the recommendations that apply to them.

The group is currently working through detailed changes to the constitution and has already made adjustments to the way in which the council works, the agenda, debates, minutes of Scrutiny Committees, supplementary questions and so on. It is the group's intention to present a report at the annual meeting in June when all constitutional changes proposed will be considered.

I feel that there have already been changes in the culture of the council with Executive Board members in particular being more answerable at Council and in general, being held to account.

I am grateful to the members of the working group for their work to date and I feel sure that we will have a better council as a result of their deliberations.

## Local Government White Paper

Earlier this year, the Welsh Government published its White Paper "Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People". It sets out the Welsh Government's vision for the future of Local Government, in which councils will be more inclusive and accountable, and which shares power and responsibility with the communities they serve. The published document proposes fundamental reforms that will ensure strong performance, robust democracy, good governance and effective delivery of key services such as

education, social services, waste and planning. Whilst it is acknowledged that Local Government needs to adapt in order to meet the changes of the future, such changes need to be measured and realistic in such challenging financial climate. Change for the sake of change is not what we need. The Council has debated this paper and we have provided a full and detailed response as part of the consultation.

## Communication and engagement with the public

As organisations across the world embrace the advantages of using modern technology, the expression “Channel Shift” is becoming more and more frequently used. It describes the way in which organisations such as Carmarthenshire County Council are ‘shifting’ services from more expensive channels or methods of delivery e.g. from ‘face to face’ and ‘phone’ towards the web where costs are cheaper and access to services more flexible. It is the aspiration of every local authority to cut costs whilst at the same time improving customer services.

Of course, placing information up on the web is not new. But now, the Council wants to take this a stage further and that is why we have launched the digital campaign “YOUR COUNCIL doitonline”. Our aim is to encourage more people to contact the council via the iLocal pages on the website, and social media. Whatever people want to do –

whether it is to pay for a service, report something, or find out information – it is available online. The My House feature also lets people know where their nearest services are, such as schools, surgeries, car parks, libraries, playgroups, recycling centres and a whole host of other services. Our residents can pay their council tax or business rates online, order and pay for a compost bin, or arrange collection of bulky goods.

Requests can be made on iLocal for a number of things including housing repairs, disabled facilities grants, new council tax bills, leisure centre memberships and bus timetables. Residents can report issues such as fly-tipping, dog fouling, littering, benefit fraud, anti-social behaviour, faulty street lights and many other things online. People can sign up to alerts if they wish to be kept updated on local services and information.



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## Working with Town and Community Councils

During the past year we have continued with the programme of the Executive Board meetings in local communities, where we met representatives of the Town and Community Councils. These meetings have been very beneficial as we share ideas and priorities for our local areas, and to identify opportunities for collaboration.

In the same way, the Liaison Forum meetings with Town and Community Councils in the county have

continued; organised in partnership with One Voice Wales. The Forum discusses a wide range of issues including the Planning Bill, Public Places and Protection Orders consultation on the Budget Council. We aim to ensure that the link between the Council and the Town and Community Councils is further strengthened, particularly in terms of consultations and opportunities to share information with local communities.



## Welfare Reform and Tackling Poverty

We have begun work on developing a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to Tackling Poverty. We recognise the cross cutting nature of the causes, symptoms and effects of poverty in Carmarthenshire and as a result we are working to devise a Tackling Poverty Action Plan which draws together the work of numerous projects and activities from across Council

departments under the three priority areas of: preventing poverty; helping people into work; and, improving the lives of those living in poverty. We will look to add value to this work by working across LSB partner organisations to ensure that the interventions we put in place to support our residents and communities has the most effective impact on everyday lives.

## Welsh Language



We continued the good work of the Welsh Advisory Panel chaired by Councillor Mair Stephens. We have already seen progress in the field of Education and through our and others' intervention, the Welsh Government are amending the Planning Bill to make it clear that the impact on the Welsh language will be a consideration at development stage. A county wide Strategic Forum has been established with a range of partners working for the benefit of the Welsh language in Carmarthenshire. The Forum is using the detailed analysis of the 2011 Census results undertaken by Dr Dylan Phillips to plan targeted interventions on a multi-agency basis.

The First Minister Carwyn Jones visited Llanelli in January to announce that the Canolfan 13 'Y Lle' project would benefit from £110,500 from the Welsh Government's Capital Investment Fund Bwrw Mlaen. The council secured the funding and will work with third sector partners to develop a multi-purpose Welsh language centre. The First Minister visited the premises in Old Castle Road which will be renovated as a centre to promote the Welsh language in Llanelli.

The centre, being developed by a social enterprise, will be home to a number of services, including a community café and bar facilities, offices, function rooms for events and meetings, youth clubs and a rehearsal / recording studio for young bands. The First Minister emphasised that encouraging people

to use the Welsh Language in their daily lives and in their local communities is at the heart of the Welsh Government's commitments within Bwrw Mlaen. Y Lle will play a key role in promoting the use of the language in the town, offering opportunities for people to practice their Welsh and boost their confidence levels.

I very much welcomed this funding which will enable us to work with partners and develop a centre dedicated to the promotion of Welsh as a living language which forms an important part of everyday life in our communities. The University of Wales Trinity Saint David were also successful in their bid to purchase a building on King Street, Carmarthen, in order to develop a similar Welsh language centre. The centre will also host a presence from S4C in readiness for the 'Egin' and the relocation of the channel to Carmarthen in 2018.

I especially feel that education is critical in safeguarding the future of the language and our commitment to this is evident in the investment in Welsh medium schools, including the new Ysgol Gymraeg Ffwrnes which opened in February.

This is very good news for the Welsh language in Carmarthenshire. As a Council, we aim to strengthen collaboration between local organisations. Together, we can deliver the recommendations agreed as part of the "Welsh language in Carmarthenshire" report, and turn the tide in terms of the 2011 Census results.



## Eisteddfod

On a personal note, the highlight of last year was the success of the 2014 National Eisteddfod hosted by Carmarthenshire in Llanelli and its benefits for the county. The Eisteddfod, which was last held at the Festival Fields site in 2000, attracted between 15,000-20,000 people each day and fine weather ensured that ground conditions were excellent.

The Eisteddfod week was the culmination of a two year community project, described as Wales' leading mobile regeneration scheme, which brought together people from across the county to take part in a wide range of activities and events promoting the National Eisteddfod.

The festival was an outstanding success both on and off the Maes and we are confident that the county will reap the benefits from this week for years to come. Visitors were impressed with the

accurately named Pentre Cyngor Sir Gâr which was located on a prominent central site aligned with the Pavilion, ensuring a steady throng of visitors throughout the day enjoying the 'village' amenities of a food store well stocked with Carmarthenshire produce, a theatre stage, Fun and Learning tent and miniature golf course.

Our staff worked closely with the Eisteddfod for 18 months leading up to the big event hoping this would be one of the most successful ever and it certainly was. The co-operation between the Eisteddfod and the council was excellent.

I would like to thank our staff who worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the Eisteddfod for their hard work and commitment. They ensured that the 2014 Eisteddfod was one of the best ever.



# Education and Children's Services

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I have always felt that education and safeguarding children should be amongst of the Council's top priorities and this has been reflected in the budget that we have set for next year. Over the last 10 years we have invested an unprecedented amount of money in building new schools and modernising many others so that our children have the perfect environment for learning.

In my own locality Ysgol Dyffryn Aman is barely recognisable as work progresses on a £21 million revamp. These works are scheduled to be completed by September 2015. Nearby at Ysgol Maes Y Gwendraeth, construction work has been going on since April 2014 and the new sports hall was handed over in January 2015. The scheme continues at pace in readiness for occupation by the school in September 2016. Construction at Ysgol Bro Dinefwr has progressed very well since

Huw Lewis, the Welsh Government's minister for Education cut the first clod in January 2014. Work on the brand new school should be concluded in time for pupils to move in at the start of the Spring Term in January 2016.

Earlier this year, pupils moved in to their brand new school at Ysgol Gymraeg Ffwrnes. Welsh Education Minister Huw Lewis officially opened the new school in early February. The £14.6million School was built through Carmarthenshire's Modernising Education Programme (MEP) and opened its doors ahead of schedule. It is already one of the most ground-breaking schools in Wales, having become the first BREEAM outstanding school in Wales during design stage due to its high environmentally-friendly features, including rainwater harvesting, external planting areas, solar panels and renewable energy sources.



Cllr Kevin Madge at Ysgol Dyffryn Aman



The school, built by Llanelli-based firm WRW Ltd, was funded by a £10.22million Welsh Government grant and £4.38million from the council's capital programme. The Welsh medium school is a two form entry for 420 children, plus a nursery, and will help manage the increasing demand for Welsh medium education in the Llanelli area. The official opening took place on 6th February. This fantastic achievement has been recognised nationally, as a finalist in the 2015 Constructing Excellence Awards.

Ysgol y Strade is but a short walk away from Ysgol Gymraeg Ffwrnes and earlier this year it was their turn to celebrate with the completion of an extension which is part of a bigger £8.25million scheme. The extension will house a new science, design and art block providing pupils with state of the art accommodation. It formed phase one of the scheme which is again being delivered through the County's Modernising Education Programme. Phase two involves refurbishment of the existing art, science, technology and design classrooms. They will be converted into normal classrooms which will be used instead of the mobile accommodation currently provided. This is yet another investment in education in the Llanelli area.

It also reflects the Council's effective action in meeting growing demand for Welsh medium education in the town, and the need for more secondary school places. It follows the opening of the new Ysgol Gymraeg Ffwrnes which will help satisfy demand in the primary sector. This scheme will help provide modern, high quality accommodation for Strade pupils. The scheme is due for completion by the autumn of 2015 and is being funded by 50% through the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools grant scheme and 50% from the council's MEP programme.

Five business cases were submitted to Welsh Government during 2014/15 and four have been approved. This has enabled construction to commence on the Burry Port and Carreg Hirfaen schemes which are progressing well. It also means that work can commence on the Llanelli Vocational Village Project in 2015/16.

The MEP capital plan (detailed in the MEP Annual Report) is on target to invest around £40.8 million across school infrastructure improvement projects in 2014/15, in varying stages of project development or delivery.



Ysgol y Ffwrnes

# Federation Regulations

Carmarthenshire became the first council in Wales to create a federation between two secondary schools following the implementation of the Federation of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2014 in May of last year. The

Federation of Bryngwyn and Glan Y Môr Schools from 1st September 2014 is a significant achievement and has allowed both schools to develop further.

## Exam Results

Whilst new modern buildings provide the environment for learning, schools are all about people and we in Carmarthenshire are proud of the teachers who deliver top class education year in year out. Thanks to their determined efforts, once again Carmarthenshire students did the county proud, topping the Welsh average A Level grades. Some 99.4% of students gained A\* to E grades compared with the Welsh average of 97.5%, showing a continuation of the high standards set in previous years, with 100% pass rates in many subjects. In the combined top grades of A\* and A, Carmarthenshire pupils performed higher than the national average achieving 23.7% compared to 23.3% across Wales.

Amongst numerous subjects at A\* to E grade, Carmarthenshire had a pass rate of 100% including Welsh, both first and second language, English - language and literature, further maths, design and technology, history, geography, art and design and business studies.

Students have also excelled at AS Level, with 88.5% passing with A to E grades, compared to the Welsh average of 85.7%.

The County's GCSE results were also higher than the national average and the best ever achieved in Carmarthenshire. Figures showed that 70% of pupils achieved grades A\* to C, an increase of 1.9% on last year and higher than the Welsh average of 66.3%. Some 7.3% gained A\* compared to 5.3% nationally, with 21.4% of pupils awarded A\* and A, compared to the Welsh average of 18.4%. A\* - G grades demonstrated an increase of 0.4% with a resounding 99.4% of Carmarthenshire pupils successful at these levels.

These results represent the considerable effort and achievement of our young people, all of whom deserve our warmest congratulations. We have worked hard with schools and with the Regional Improvement Service, to drive forward improvements and to support learners within Carmarthenshire to reach their full potential.



Glan y Môr pupils celebrating their GCSE results



## £1.1 million Burry Port Youth Centre officially opened

In September, Children's Commissioner for Wales Keith Towler officially opened a new £1.1million youth and leisure facility at Glan-y-Môr School in Burry Port. He praised the vision and commitment of everyone involved in the project, which was

delivered through Carmarthenshire County Council's Modernising Education Programme. Burry Port now has a purpose built youth club which will mean so much to the young people of Burry Port and Pembrey.

## Carmarthenshire Youth Conference

In November 2014, over 150 young people from across Carmarthenshire took part in the Youth Council's 11th annual conference. The event, which focused on domestic abuse, also celebrated the 25th anniversary of Universal Children's Day. The conference named "Abuse at home, you're not alone" was organised in partnership by Carmarthenshire Youth Council and Carmarthenshire County Council. Young people from schools, colleges and youth projects had the opportunity to discuss issues and share their views and experiences of domestic abuse with

professionals and decision makers. Organisations such as Welsh Women's Aid, Victim Support, Dyfed Powys Police and Hafan Cymru supported the conference.

This year's event had a real buzz about it. Young people took part in workshops and got involved in discussions on the normally hidden issue of domestic abuse. The Youth Council will now be working with decision makers such as the Children and Young Peoples Partnership to ensure that young people's voices are heard.



Carmarthenshire Youth Conference



## Children's Services

Once again the Council's children's services received a positive evaluation from the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW), which highlighted a number of areas of good practice. The service was subject to specific inspections by the CSSIW and Wales Audit Office on its safeguarding policies and practices and both of these commented positively on performance, whilst recommending actions to improve provision even further.

The service has successfully established a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in partnership with Dyfed Powys Police and this is strengthening collaboration to keep children safe from harm.

During the year a significant expansion of the Flying Start programme was completed, with new

or extended provision established in communities at Carmarthen, Bynea, Dafen, Pwll, Pembrey, Burry Port, Pantyffynnon, Garnant, Glanamman and Trimsaran. Capital investments were completed in some areas to create new facilities to house new family support programmes which are in the process of being established and will over the years to come help families to overcome the limiting effects of disadvantage.

The service's targeted prevention work with families, through programmes such as Flying Start, Families First, Integrated Family Support Services and other core functions is beginning to succeed in reducing the number of children becoming looked after, which has fallen by over 10%.



Family Support Service



# Health and Social Care

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In Carmarthenshire, a third of the population is aged over 65 and this number is predicted to grow by 18% by 2020. Inevitably, people in this age group are more likely to require Health and Social Care services. Managing this increase in demand at a time of financial austerity is challenging. The Authority's emphasis has changed in recent years with greater priority being given to supporting people to maintain their health and independence. Enabling older people to live independently depends on the combined efforts of the Local Authority services, third sector organisations and, for many, their families, friends and neighbours. Older people assist each other and it should not be underestimated how much mutual support people of advanced age give each other.

The majority of older people do not have any contact with Social Care services. Strengthening communities, improving the physical environment to be 'age friendly' and encouraging people to access the range of community opportunities available will support older people. Older people have times when their ability to manage is affected by health problems, accidents or even changes in their home circumstances. The ethos of services now is that people should be assisted to regain, or develop, their skills. It may not be possible to attain complete recovery but the majority of people appreciate not being 'written off'. A range of professionals can be involved to help people achieve their goals. The Reablement service has extended to provide a service to people who have high level needs as well as those who only need a short term service. Some people require reablement in a residential setting. The 8 convalescence beds in Maes Llewellyn Home in Newcastle Emlyn and 12 beds in Llys y Bryn Home in Llanelli continue to allow people to recover sufficiently to return home.

Most people want to stay in their own homes where they can exercise choice and control. There are a range of services that are provided by the Council directly, including a Housing support service for older people, third and independent sector. The increase in the use of domiciliary care has been positive. However, it has led at times to problems in meeting demand as the service was not available. Measures have been put in place to correct this. These include working with Yr Hwb, care agencies, Coleg Sir Gar and the Job Centre to improve recruitment; encouraging people to recruit their own personal assistants using Direct Payments; rationalising rotas to reduce travelling time. Lack of capacity has resulted in delays in discharging people from hospital which has negatively impacted on the performance on Delayed Transfers of Care (DToC).

There has been a significant reduction over the past few years in the number of people the Council supports in residential care. This decline is slowing because of the higher levels of need in the older population. Much of the residential care that is commissioned is provided by the independent sector. The team of contract monitoring officers work with care providers, CSSIW and care management staff to ensure that processes are in place to deliver good care and also to identify and rectify problems if there are any. The construction of extra care housing in Carmarthen on the site of the Argel Care Home is progressing well. Building has also started on the extra care housing in Ammanford and the development on the site of the St Pauls care home in Llanelli will lead to people being able to live in their own flats with care provision. Local Authority staff will transfer from the care homes in Carmarthen and Ammanford when they close to provide this new model of care in the autumn of 2015.

The Welsh Government has released funding under the Intermediate Care Fund to develop new models of working that will provide more

effective support for people. Carmarthenshire has received funding for a range of services.

- A Rapid Response domiciliary care service has been established to respond immediately to prevent hospital admissions, support people to stay in their own home and to facilitate early hospital discharges.
- A multi disciplinary team are working in the two general hospitals to improve the links between the community and acute sector. They are developing models that assist to avoid admission and reduce lengths of stay in hospital, improving the well being of older people for whom hospital admission can have negative consequences.
- Additional storage space in the Community Equipment Store is being provided by the construction of a mezzanine floor. This will add capacity to respond to requests for equipment to maintain people safely at home.
- Four additional dementia support workers have been recruited to provide a service to support people who have dementia to live safely and well at home.
- Three additional social workers and three occupational therapists have been funded to work with people who have complex needs to ensure that their needs are met and that all professionals who are working with that person and their family have contributed to their care plan.

The funding was only available until March 31st 2015 but it has provided an opportunity to test new ways of working.

The financial position will necessitate the critical review of all services that are provided for older people and younger physically disabled people and difficult decisions will

need to be made. However, the progress that has been made in assisting people to be independent and socially included in their communities should ensure that the people with higher levels of need continue to be supported.

# Housing

## Tenants move in to new council bungalows

One of my proudest moments since becoming Leader of Carmarthenshire County Council was to see tenants moving in to five new council bungalows in Seaside, Llanelli.

The bungalows, part of a £1.5million first phase investment in homes to meet the needs of older people in Carmarthenshire, are amongst the first to be built by the council since the 1980s. The

bungalows, named Clôs Y Gilfach by local schoolchildren from the nearby Copperworks Infants School, provide modern and spacious accommodation for older or disabled people. In turn, they have helped free up larger homes for families. The official opening of the Clôs Y Gilfach bungalows follows another seven that have been built in Kidwelly.



Clôs Y Gilfach Seaside Llanelli

## New apartments for older people in Llanelli

I am also delighted that work is progressing on a major development of apartments for older people in Llanelli. The £1.4million scheme will redevelop the former St Paul's residential care home, creating 13 one-bedroom apartments designed to support

independent living. Work is expected to be complete by the end of 2015. The scheme will link in with the neighbouring Waddle's Court Sheltered Housing Scheme.



## Tackling Empty Homes

We are also trying to tackle the problem of empty or derelict homes throughout the county. Identifying it as one of their key priorities, a task and finish group has been formed to investigate and scrutinise the way the council deals with the issue, given the scale of the problem and level of housing need in the county.

Carmarthenshire has been at the forefront of this issue, being one of the first in Wales to employ a dedicated empty homes advisor and the first to

use a rare legal order – an Empty Dwelling Management Order - to take over an abandoned property, renovate it and recover costs by renting it out through its in-house social lettings agency. The task and finish group heard about the action being taken on several empty homes, and also about the Welsh Government Houses into Homes scheme which supports owners to finance the renovation of long-term empty homes.

## Suspending the right to buy

Carmarthenshire County Council has become the first authority in Wales to suspend its Right to Buy scheme. The Housing (Wales) Measure 2011 allows local authorities to apply for permission to suspend the Right to Buy and Right to Acquire locally to help tackle housing pressures. Carmarthenshire Council was the first local authority to ask the Welsh Government to suspend Right to Buy. This decision will help alleviate the demand on our housing register and support our vision to make more good quality homes available for local people. We also welcome other measures that Welsh Government is seeking to introduce to

further protect much needed affordable housing across Wales. This comes at the same time as we reach the completion of our £220million Carmarthenshire Homes Standard programme to improve homes and communities. With the support of Welsh Government, we are now looking forward to building on that standard with CHS+, which will further improve the wellbeing of our tenants through best use of new technology and renewable energy. Keeping more homes in our ownership means that more local people will benefit from this ambitious scheme.



Affordable housing. Maes Y Deri Carmarthen

# Regeneration and Leisure

Over the last 12 months the Regeneration team have been instrumental in creating and safeguarding hundreds of jobs in the county through their support for businesses and enterprise:

<b>Jobs created</b>	<b>362</b>
<b>Jobs safeguarded</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>Jobs accommodated</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Enterprises created</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Land developed or improved</b>	<b>2.74ha</b>
<b>Floor space developed</b>	<b>5,957 sq ft</b>
<b>External funding secured</b>	<b>£15,194,699</b>
<b>Private sector investment secured</b>	<b>£3,815,401</b>
<b>No. into volunteering</b>	<b>733</b>
<b>No. into jobs</b>	<b>430</b>
<b>No. into training</b>	<b>1517</b>

## 100 people helped towards work or training

More than 100 people have been helped towards work or training in Carmarthenshire thanks to a programme started last year. The Lift Programme was launched in March 2014 and to date has worked with over one hundred clients. They have been supported on a one-to-one basis to increase their chances of finding paid employment. Lift supports individuals from workless households in the Carmarthenshire Communities First Cluster to secure employment and training opportunities. The Lift team provide employment support training including support with applications, interview skills, CV writing and job searching. The team also commissions vocational training, working in a person-centred approach to identify the needs of clients.



The Hub, Llanelli Town centre

# West Wales and the Valleys Programme

The Welsh Government Finance Minister, Jane Hutt AM, announced the formal approval of both ERDF & ESF Operational Programmes for Wales during the latter part of 2014. The new EU Programmes will allocate £1.6bn of EU funds to West Wales and the Valleys - a budget similar to the previous Convergence Programmes - with a strong emphasis placed on jobs and growth. The Programme is significantly different this time around with much greater emphasis placed on research and development.

ERDF funds will help support the Region's continued transformation into a sustainable and competitive economy by investing in research and innovation, SME competitiveness, renewable energy and energy efficiency, connectivity and urban development. The ESF will be used to tackle poverty through sustainable employment, increase skills and tackle youth unemployment.

## Rural Development Plan (RDP)

LEADER is part of the RDP and is the term used to describe a local development approach in rural areas which is implemented by local partnerships. LEADER support will be centred on innovation, networking and acting as a test bed for trialling new ways of working. In line with the Welsh Government's broad framework, LEADER funding must focus on the following themes:

1. Adding value to local identity and natural and cultural resources
2. Facilitating pre-commercial development, business partnerships and short supply chains
3. Exploring new ways of providing non-statutory local services
4. Renewable energy at Community level; and
5. Exploitation of digital technology

Responsibility for the management and delivery of LEADER will be devolved to local areas via a LEADER

partnership, known as a Local Action Group (LAG). The existing rural Partnership, 'Grŵp Cefn Gwlad' will undertake this role in Carmarthenshire. As an Authority we will be responsible for the administration of the programme at a local level.

Grŵp Cefn Gwlad has also appointed Carmarthenshire County Council and the team at the West Wales European Centre (WVEC) to act as the administrative body on their behalf. As part of this function, the WVEC will be responsible for the day to day management of a funding allocation for Carmarthenshire of £4.35m, on behalf of the wider partnership. Whilst no formal decision has been made in relation to the funding package, WVEC, in conjunction with Grŵp Cefn Gwlad, is currently working to identify the type of initiatives needed within rural Carmarthenshire in readiness for the formal approval, which it is hoped will be granted later on in the year.



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu  
Gwledig: Ewrop yn Buddsoddi  
mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig  
The European Agricultural Fund for  
Rural Development: Europe Investing in  
Rural Areas



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



## Rural funding for north of county

RDP Sir Gâr's Rural Community Inclusion (RCI) project has recently funded several projects in the north of the county to improve quality of life in that area. Haven Group, based at the Ebenezer church in Halfway near Talley, has set up a community support programme for people of all ages. This includes a Dementia and Alzheimer's group, facilities for the tea and tots group and improved equipment for the children and youth group.

Neuadd Bro Fana have improved the site at Parc Bro Fana to develop community events, with the construction of a path and the provision of picnic tables, goal posts, nets and litter bins for local residents to enjoy a safe recreation area within the village.

At Llansawel Hall a digital projector, a wall hung screen and speakers were funded in order to

enhance some existing community activities and allow some new services to be developed such as film clubs, family nights and presentations, Autistic Adults support group and virtual exercise classes. Further to this Cylch Meithrin Llansawel created an outdoor area, providing a safe and creative environment for the children to play in whilst satisfying their developmental needs and received a grant to produce marketing materials and signage which will help to promote the Meithrin to prospective parents in the area.

I'm delighted that the RCI project has been able to support these groups. It's a real boost to community activities in the north of Carmarthenshire.

## S4C



We were all delighted with the announcement last year that S4C had decided to move its headquarters from Cardiff to Carmarthen. The Welsh language broadcaster had also

considered the option of moving to Caernarfon or staying in Cardiff. Our officers have had an integral role in developing the successful bid to bring S4C to Carmarthen, offering advice in areas such as European funding, business development, physical

infrastructure and planning. Our work with the Project Team at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David continues.

S4C will build a new centre based on the Trinity Saint David University site campus which will be a hub for creative industries, for language-based projects and for links to education. This will be an important injection of not just jobs, but also status for the Welsh language in west Wales. It will mean a new headquarters for S4C on the outskirts of Carmarthen and about 50 posts moving here. The target is to be operational on the site in 2018.

## Appointment of City Region Chair welcomed

One of the most significant events of the last twelve months was the appointment of telecommunications billionaire Sir Terry Matthews as Chair of the Swansea Bay City Region. His appointment has already provided a real boost for the region. Sir Terry is one of the top business people in the world and his record of success speaks for itself. This is very positive for West Wales and the Swansea Bay region.

Sir Terry, who developed the Celtic Manor Resort and brought both the Ryder Cup and the NATO conference there, is considered to be one of Wales' most successful entrepreneurs. The city region, established in 2014, covers Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea and Neath Port Talbot.



Sir Terry Matthews with Dyffryn Aman pupils

## Local development plan is adopted

At the end of 2014, we formally adopted our Local Development Plan (LDP). The adopted Carmarthenshire LDP supersedes the previous Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and will provide certainty and clarity for communities and developers alike in relation to the use of land within Carmarthenshire. The LDP presents a spatial vision for the future of the County and a framework for the distribution and delivery of growth and development. The Plan period runs from 2006 through to 2021 and makes provision for over 110ha of employment land and to meet a requirement for 15,197 homes. It also makes provision for regeneration and how proposals for

retail development, renewable energy, recreation, tourism, waste and minerals will be considered, whilst also allowing the potential to protect and enhance areas of natural and built importance.

The adoption of the LDP follows an extensive preparatory period and informed by exhaustive evidence gathering and consultation. This process culminated in the detailed examination in public by an independent Planning Inspector where the views and inputs of interested parties, groups and organisations were expressed on the Plan and on a range of topics affecting communities across the county.

## A state of the art library for Ammanford

Ammanford Library has been given a new look and extra services. A host of improvements are planned such as self service RFID machines, with a large number of new books added to stock and new DVDs and CDs. Borrowers will also have free access to the world's largest online news-stand – Zinio which hosts a collection of popular titles with no holds, no checkout periods, and no limit to the

number of magazines downloaded. In addition there will be a new adult lending library, IT facilities, and a gallery suitable for exhibitions and conferences, as well as a teenage zone, children's library and meeting rooms. The revamp has enhanced the library as a community, learning and cultural hub for the town and its surrounding area.

## Ffwrnes Theatre

I was particularly pleased to hear that the new Ffwrnes Theatre in Llanelli has been voted the best public service building in Carmarthenshire. The theatre, which has welcomed thousands of visitors since opening its doors in 2013, has been awarded the title at this year's Carmarthenshire Building Control Excellence awards.

Ammanford building contractor TRJ who delivered the 500 seat theatre project were credited for creating a low energy and sustainable building at the Carmarthenshire County Council awards held in Machynys Peninsula Golf Club. Among its

sustainable technologies include an ultra efficient LED lighting, roof mounted photovoltaic panels to convert sunlight into electricity and solar panels converting sunlight into heat and hot water. Additionally a combined heat and power unit reduces the reliance on the carbon intensive grid. Electricity and a lighting system ensure the minimum amount of energy is used throughout the £15m theatre. The construction also helped local building apprentices to gain valuable experience, with over 250 apprenticeship weeks completed and 72 NVQ weeks completed.



Ffwrnes Llanelli



## Queen's Baton Relay

We were very proud to be one of only a handful of Welsh counties to be honoured with the baton visit over its short time in the county last May. The relay drew unprecedented crowds who poured onto the streets to watch the Queen's message pass through Llanelli, Carmarthen, Ammanford and Laugharne and attracted huge media attention at the same

time. The baton bearers were made up of former Carmarthenshire sportspeople who represented Wales at the Commonwealth/Empire Games and Olympic Games. Sky TV star, Julian Lewis Jones, Welsh Tenor, Wynne Evans, MBE Non Evans and Big Brother winner 2013, Same Evans also played a part.

## Dylan Thomas Centenary celebrations

The mobile writing shed has been extraordinarily successful since its launch by Edwina Hart AM and Hannah Ellis last year. The shed has travelled 10,000 miles, visited 50 schools and attended festivals such as the Hay Literature Festival, the Royal Welsh Show and the Eisteddfod in Llanelli and its invite

to the NATO summit in Newport. Some 50,000 visitors entered the shed, whilst it is estimated that it was seen by 1.8 million people attending the events, all generating additional publicity for Carmarthenshire.

## Pembrey Country Park / Millennium Coastal Park / Pembrey Ski Centre

Over 400,000 visitors have graced the park this year, an increase of around 60,000 on the previous year. The installation of 130 electric camping pitches, a new Facebook page and attractions such as ski tubing and croquet has seen record numbers visit with over 25,000 people coming through the gates during the four-day Easter period. The park continues to attract high profile organisations with the advert for the latest Audi TT car model being

filmed on Cefn Sidan beach. Also hit TV series Davinci Demons was filmed here. We continue to link with schools and colleges who visit the park as part of the students learning. We're also delighted to have a new £106,000 playground has opened at Llanelli's North Dock from Section 106 funding. This has already increased the numbers visiting the flagship area and has been welcomed by locals.



Pembrey Country Park

## Work progressing well on Cross Hands West

Work is progressing well on the Cross Hands West site which will create hundreds of jobs and provide housing and health facilities. The multi-million-pound development includes planning consent for a new Sainsbury's store; a 250-home residential scheme; new bus bays and access for Ysgol Maes y

Gwendraeth; petrol station; highways work; a health centre; and refurbishment of Cross Hands Workingmen's Club. The land is being developed through a Joint Venture partnership between Carmarthenshire County Council and property developers George LB.

## Cross Hands East

Construction works are continuing on site to deliver 8.5ha of employment land incorporating primary site infrastructure, landscaping and flexible development plateaus. The majority of the earthworks and the main access road are completed with the contractor now focussed on

the construction of a main roundabout (by Shufflebottoms), paving, kerbing, landscaping, demolitions and accommodation works. It is estimated all works will be completed by June 2015.

## Carmarthen Regeneration Masterplan

The authority is continuing to work closely with the newly established Carmarthen Town Centre Regeneration Forum to develop and deliver a master-plan for the economic regeneration of Carmarthen and linked economic areas that will cover the period 2014 – 2030. The master-plan is not only a detailed vision and direction document for the town but is an example of exemplary consultation between the numerous stakeholders to the town.

The ambitious yet achievable aspiration plan presents proposals that focus on: the Growth of Marketing and Tourism; improving the public realm and built environment; movement & infrastructure improvements; and future commercial opportunities. On the back of the establishment of the Town Forum and the development of the master-plan, initial funding has been secured from the Welsh Government's Town Centre Partnership Scheme for a £98,000 project that will enable the Forum to deliver some of their master-plan projects over the next two years including the development and promotion of a new brand image for Wales' Oldest Town.



Carmarthen

# Environment

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## Job creation and safety aims of the transport plan

More than a thousand jobs and vastly improved road safety have been incorporated in capital transport improvement proposals planned in Carmarthenshire. The transport package of improvements across Carmarthenshire, costing about £35million for the next five years and beyond, have been prepared by the county council as part of its Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the Welsh Government.

Three major infrastructure projects have been included - the Cross Hands economic link road; the Carmarthen West link road, and improving Ammanford's economic regeneration infrastructure. There are also proposals to improve Llanelli railway station.

The LTP has been approved by each of the South West Wales councils and the Swansea Bay City region. This is really exciting news driving forward much needed improvements to key county transport infrastructure. We have looked at job creation opportunities with improved transport links and easing congestion at these sites across the county. The completed plans were submitted to Welsh Government before the end of January 2015.

The Cross Hands economic link road consists of a new highway of single carriageway from Black Lion Road to the A476 north-east of Gorslas. It also incorporates phase two of the economic link road from Black Lion Road to Gorslas forming a direct access to Cross Hands East which will help with the creation of about a thousand jobs. The link road

will ease congestion at the A48 Cross Hands Roundabout, which is part of the Trans European Network, as well as improving safety at the six-way junction at Gorslas.

In terms of short to medium term priorities, the council has identified Carmarthen West Link Road. It is a new road from the A40 dual carriageway to College Road near Parc Dewi Sant and the University of Wales Trinity St David, essential for development in the area. Such is the importance that we place on this scheme, the Council has agreed to pre-fund construction of the road, with the money to be recovered from the developers and partner organisations, to ensure this was delivered as soon as possible before the S4C development opens. Construction is due to begin shortly.

Carmarthen West is identified as a Strategic Site within the council's adopted Local Development Plan and is allocated for mixed use development. The Planning and Development Brief for the site sets guidance for the delivery of 1,100 houses, the largest housing scheme in Carmarthenshire's development plan, together with a new link road, primary school, employment space, a small retail centre, open space and affordable housing.

A number of studies are underway in the Ammanford area to explore potential improvements at junctions to improve access to and from the M4 and the Upper Amman Valley, helping to reduce congestion at the junction of Wind Street and Tiryddail Lane.



## Trunk road improvements in Llandeilo

The prospect of a new by-pass for Llandeilo seems to be getting ever closer. The new road, when built, will remove the heavyweight of traffic choking the town and its pollution trail. The bypass will open up great new potential for the much loved town of Llandeilo. The County Council continues to engage in talks with the Minister to secure early delivery of important highways infrastructure across the County. I have had regular meetings with Ministers. The authority's officers in recent discussions have been reassured that the Welsh Government recognises the case for both the Llandeilo bypass and for improvements around Ammanford. Discussions continue with the Welsh European Funding Office and the Trunk Road Agency to secure delivery of the road

improvements. Both road schemes are recognised as important to the economy of Carmarthenshire communities and the wider Swansea Bay City Region and work is ongoing to secure as early a delivery as possible for the projects.

Included in the Prioritised National Transport Plan, Llandeilo's bypass will remove through traffic from Llandeilo Town and have the benefit of improving air quality in Rhosmaen Street where nitrogen dioxide increases have risen way above the European intervention level. The Llandeilo By-pass Forum, with Welsh Government, local councils and group representation, has driven the urgency for the bypass and meet to help deliverance of the scheme.



Llandeilo congestion

## Bwcabus

In March I had the pleasure of meeting Finance and Government Business Minister Jane Hutt AM on her visit to Carmarthenshire to celebrate the success of the Bwcabus rural transport scheme. The pilot project, run in partnership by Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion county councils, is a demand-responsive public transport system providing rural communities with access to employment, training, health and other essential services. Bwcabus was established six years ago as a pilot scheme, with the aim of providing an effective solution for public transport in rural parts of Wales.

The pilot was funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the Welsh Government,

worth a total investment of £2.7m, and having achieved its aims, the Minister was invited to celebrate its success. Both Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion county councils are grateful for the financial support provided by the EU and the Welsh Government in helping to deliver this innovative pilot project. Bwcabus has thrived over the last six years and its success has won several prestigious transport awards. Bwcabus is more than just a mode of transport to get people from A to B. It has helped lift rural communities out of isolation and deprivation by giving people the opportunity to travel more freely and connect to locations where economic opportunities exist.



Bwcabus



## New £1 million Bridge is a lifeline for the community

A new £1million bridge has been completed near the village of Rhandirmwyn. It replaces the old Galltybere Bridge, which had been subject to a three tonne weight restriction, and is a lifeline for the local community. The new two span bridge is 45 metres in length and has been built downstream of the Galltybere Bridge, which dates back to approximately 1925 and was the only means of access for a number of properties. The construction works were carried out on behalf of the council by TRJ (Betws) Limited. The project was made possible thanks to funding made available through the Local Government Borrowing Initiative (LGBI).

The new bridge can accommodate traffic up to 40 tonnes which is vital for rural communities such as this. This new bridge has been needed for some time and fortunately with the aid of LGBI funding it has now been made possible. Local authorities were able draw down a total of £170 million over three years as part of the LGBI to fund capital highway projects. The Welsh Government provided revenue support to finance the cost of interest and capital repayments over a 22-year time frame. A total of £12.4 million was made available to Carmarthenshire.



Galltybere bridge Rhandirmwyn



## Waste Management

We have continued to increase our recycling rates whilst reducing the amount of waste we send to landfill, achieving 60% recycling against a national target of 56%. We have come a long way since 2003 when we were recycling just 9.4% of our rubbish. Of the 77,823 tonnes of household rubbish produced last year, only 14,092 tonnes – that's 18% - was sent

to landfill. These results are down to the hard work of our recycling officers and advisors and the efforts of householders in separating and recycling their waste. A new Waste Strategy which is currently being developed will set out how we intend to further increase recycling towards our 2024/25 target of 70%.





## Litter and Dog Fouling

Keeping Carmarthenshire clean and safe is a key priority and anyone who is caught dropping litter, fly-tipping or failing to clean up after their dog can be fined. Our environmental enforcement officers carry out patrols across the county, particularly in

high footfall areas and visitor hotspots. Last year a total of 272 fixed penalty notices were issued by officers for various environmental crimes. We are also continuing to educate the public through various awareness-raising campaigns.



# Conclusion

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A report such as this can hardly do justice to the efforts and achievements of the council over the last year and I have only been able to touch upon some of the highlights.

I also want to thank all elected members of the council for the way in which they represent their local residents. They show passionate commitment to their local communities and stand up for their interests on various scrutiny committees and working groups.

As I have mentioned several times in my report the financial challenges that we have had to face in recent years have had an impact on all services and we have had to take some very difficult decisions. But our aim has always been to deliver the best possible services to the people of Carmarthenshire. None of this could have been achieved without the

hard work of our staff and I offer them my heartfelt appreciation and gratitude.

Local Government in Wales looks set to be completely transformed over the next few years. In Carmarthenshire we have already undertaken a peer review that will bring about many changes. At the end of this process I am confident that we will become an even more open and transparent local authority. The Welsh Government will also introduce many other reforms that will have a radical impact on local government. Whether our county remains intact or we face merger with neighbouring authorities, our focus as councillors must continue to be on the delivery of services for the benefit of the people of this area that we still want to call Carmarthenshire.