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Cyngor Sir
CEREDIGION
County Council

Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa,
Aberaeron, Ceredigion SA46 0PA
ceredigion.gov.uk

27 September 2022

01545 572070

Dear Sir / Madam

I write to inform you that a Meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be held Hybrid (Council Chamber) on Monday, 3 October 2022 at 10.00 am (there will be a break for lunch between 12:30pm and 13:30pm) for the transaction of the following business:

1. **Apologies**
2. **Disclosures of personal interest (including whipping declarations)**
Members are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and prejudicial interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Members Code of Conduct. In addition, Members must declare any prohibited party whip which the Member has been given in relation to the meeting as per the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.
3. **County Farms Update (Pages 3 - 8)**
4. **Asset Development/Empty Properties report (Pages 9 - 16)**
5. **Complaints/Compliments and Freedom of Information Annual Report 2021-2022 (Pages 17 - 54)**
6. **Victim Support Hate Crime (Pages 55 - 60)**
7. **Tackling Hardship Strategy (Pages 61 - 80)**
8. **Engagement and Participation Strategy - Talking, Listening and Working Together (Pages 81 - 108)**
9. **To confirm minutes of the previous meeting and to consider any matters arising from those Minutes. (Pages 109 - 114)**
10. **To consider the Forward Work Plan 2022/2023 (Pages 115 - 118)**

Members are reminded to sign the Attendance Register

A Translation Services will be provided at this meeting and those present are welcome to speak in Welsh or English at the meeting.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Edwards', written in a cursive style.

Miss Lowri Edwards
Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services

To: Chairman and Members of Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The remaining Members of the Council for information only.

Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO: Corporate Resources Scrutiny Committee
DATE: 3 October 2022
LOCATION: Hybrid / Council Chamber
TITLE: COUNTY FARMS – an update

1. Introduction

The Corporate Resources Scrutiny Committee has previously considered the current position of the County Council farm portfolio in Ceredigion, with a view to scrutinising the Council's policy in relation to their future development and operation.

This paper is an update on the on-going work programme to review and develop the farm estate.

2. The County Council Farm estate

The County Council farm holding is made up of 16 parcels of land (plus another farm held by an education trust and controlled by the charitable Trustee committee).

Six farms or parcels of land (5 farms and 1 bare land holding) are Farm Business Tenancies under the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995.

Seven farms or parcels of land (6 farms and 1 bare land holding) are Agricultural Holdings under the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986. One parcel (allotments in Aberaeron) is let under a licence, whilst two other parcels are untenanted.

Three farms have succession rights attached to them, although these are all on rolling yearly tenancies, determinable by either party following a 12 months' notice period.

The estate currently generates an annual income for the Council of around £60,000. Until recently, the majority of farm rents had not increased for over 10 years and were considered low compared to land values and rents paid by farm tenants to private property owners. Rents of agricultural holdings can be reviewed every three years in accordance with The Agricultural Tenancies Acts.

The current total encumbered value of the farm estate is just over £2m, with the unencumbered value put at £4.2m

3. Previous conclusions

The following has been previously presented to Scrutiny Committee as a representation of the options facing CCC in relation to the farm estate. All options are based on a policy of keeping a Council farm estate with view to playing a role in supporting one of Ceredigion's key industries. This policy and ambition is articulated in CCC's Economic Strategy 2021-35, formally adopted by CCC Cabinet in March 2021:

'Creatively use the County Council's assets and skills to support business start-up and growth (e.g., Food Centre Wales, Council land etc.)'

'Strengthen / capitalise on key opportunities for our key sectors – Food / Farming, Agritech etc..'

The options set out were as follows:

3.1. *Do nothing / minimum.*

Ceredigion CC will invest small amounts of money, within normal budget parameters to address urgent requirements. Tenancies would be transferred to Farm Business Tenancies when they become available, i.e. when farms become vacant (where no succession is in place).

3.2. *Proactively seek to renew tenancies with new FBTs.*

The purpose of pursuing this option would be to ensure all farms are utilised to their maximum possible effect.

3.3. Option 3.2. with further investments to make the existing units more viable and attractive.

Availability of funding is likely to be a limiting factor.

3.4. Seek alternative use for the existing estate where possible.

Options may include investing in renewables or tree planting to generate income and to achieve the Council's climate change action targets.

3.5. Sell parts of the farm estate in order to invest in improving other parts of the estate.

Unencumbered sales of some farms may generate sufficient income to invest in other units that would be viable, more in line with the average size of holding, and thus more in line with the objectives of providing viable opportunities for young farmers to gain experience and establish a career / business in Ceredigion.

3.6. Sell part of the estate to establish a small number of demonstration farm units.

This option would seek to achieve the council's objective of helping new farmers gain experience of farming in a different way. Young farmers may be offered apprenticeships to work on council-owned farm enterprises that also serve to demonstrate the potential for new technologies and innovations (working with Aber Innovation and other partners). This would also be an asset for existing farm businesses in Ceredigion to see emerging technologies in operation.

For each of the options highlighted, there are financial, legal and operational implications that would need to be analysed and considered, depending on the direction the Council would wish to take in exploring the strategic direction.

4. Current issues for the farm estate

4.1. The Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations

At the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, it was reported that the new Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations by the Welsh Government were likely to have an impact on the farms.

The holdings' tenants will be responsible for compliance with the regulations through their management practices; however at least two of the farms will require investment in slurry storage infrastructure in order to comply with the regulations, and responsibilities here lie with CCC as landlord.

The two units - both dairy farms – are required to demonstrate plans to meet their obligations under the regulations. Discussions are on-going with both businesses to plan the investment that will be required to help them meet the August 2024 deadline.

4.2. Changes to the statuses of farms in the portfolio

Four of the units subject to an FBT will reach the end of their current tenancy agreement period over the next four year (one per from 2023).

The tenant of another unit, which is currently subject of an Agricultural Tenancy has given notice to surrender the tenancy, and as such will become vacant at the end of September.

As previously stated, the proposed approach in each case will be driven by the overarching policy of keeping the units and seeking ways of making them more viable, potentially generating more income or otherwise helping to deliver corporate objectives.

In determining the future use of the farms as they come to the end of an FBT term, each unit will be explored to ascertain opportunities for:

- 4.2.1. exploiting options for renewable energy generation (to operate alongside the farm business)
- 4.2.2. delivering phosphate mitigation measures (e.g. fencing of water courses, tree planting, laying of reed beds)
- 4.2.3. diversification options that may become part of the 'offer' for new tenants.
- 4.2.4. collaborative working with Aberystwyth University and Trinity St. Davids' University to provide extension opportunities for research and development work being carried out (e.g., on general farm practices / agri-tech or regenerative agriculture). This may

be subject to the ability to access revenue funding streams through UK Shared Prosperity Funds, for which a programme has been included in the draft proposals).

5. Approach for future tenancies

In order to facilitate this development, CCC's approach to attracting new tenants will be based around tendering opportunities, where potential tenants will be asked to submit a business plan, as has been done previously, and demonstrate how the objectives for the unit can also be delivered side-by-side with the core farming business, in order to meet viability and corporate objective challenges.

Actions have been undertaken against the current policy, and taking into account within it, some of the options previously considered.

PURPOSE OF REPORT : To share progress on the work to develop options for the Council Farm network.

REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION: To consider the needs of our County Farms structure so that they can remain viable

BACKGROUND: Members on the Task and Finish Group require further information on the County Farm Estate, and the impact of new Environmental regulations, and have requested regular updates on progress.

CURRENT SITUATION: New Pollution control regulations are likely to place further challenges on the viability of the County Farm structure. Further work is required to understand the extent of the challenge. This paper sets out the latest progress, options for projects involving the Council farm network to inform the discussion and enable Scrutiny Committee to give feedback into the process.

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If not, please state why

N/A – this would be completed where further detailed assessments on the options are developed

WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS:

Summary:
Long term:
Integration:
Collaboration:
Involvement:
Prevention:

RECOMMENDATION (S): That the Scrutiny Committee considers the report and provides suitable direction for consideration and implementation.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

To help ensure that the appropriate investments are made to protect the Council's assets for the future and to ensure the future viability of the farms.

Contact Name: Russell Hughes-Pickering, Arwyn Davies

Designation: Corporate Lead Officer, Corporate Manager

Date of Report: 26 September 2022

Acronyms:

Appendices:

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Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO: Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 03.10.2022

LOCATION: Council Chamber, Ceredigion County Council, Penmorfa, Aberaeron.

TITLE: An update on Asset Development work / Empty Properties

PURPOSE OF REPORT: To update Scrutiny Committee on the programme to develop Ceredigion County Council's assets

REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION: For update.

BACKGROUND:

Strategic Context

Ceredigion County Council (CCC)'s approach to develop its portfolio of assets is underpinned by the Corporate Strategy, and specifically the Economic Strategy approved and formally adopted by Cabinet in March 2021 as its framework for action to support economic growth in Ceredigion. The strategy also sets the context within which future decisions are made on activities to support economic growth in Ceredigion.

One of the four pillars of action within the Economic Strategy focuses on how CCC and other public / private assets across the County can be developed to play a more effective role in supporting economic growth. Actions include:

- Working towards the development of our strategic harbour sites.
- Working with partners in each of the towns to realise locally driven ambitions to support the development of the towns across the three regions of the County.
- Seek opportunities to develop Strategic employment sites in Ceredigion
- Explore opportunities for using Council and other assets to boost the supply of affordable housing in Ceredigion
- Provide opportunities to improve, and encourage access to, green assets in Ceredigion.

Across each of these actions, there have been and there will emerge opportunities to exploit CCC's own physical and green asset base so that the assets we own and manage:

- more effectively deliver against our corporate objectives
- are a net driver of income for CCC, for example through leases, rentals and fee for hire / licencing of assets for short term activity.

Approach and Resources.

The objectives set out above can be achieved, in the context of CCC's assets, in one of the following ways:

- i. Investment in existing assets to make them more marketable / responsive to current demand.

- ii. Investment in current assets to meet wider corporate objectives or in response to recognised local need (for example as expressed in a place plan)
- iii. Acquisition of new assets that enable CCC to meet its Corporate Objectives, including for example, investments to improve town centres (underpinned by place planning work) and to enhance employment opportunities.

To achieve this, CCC uses the following instruments:

- i. Its own Capital funding as part of the capital programme
- ii. Externally secured capital funding programmes (e.g., Welsh Government, UK Government)
- iii. Externally sourced revenue funding to cover professional development costs of projects.
- iv. Its own staff resources for project / programme management.

Prioritisation within the programme, and hence the application of human resources is determined by:

- i. A current list of assets that are surplus to requirements, currently empty or under-utilised. This list is subject to internal consultation to determine whether there are suitable alternative uses for these assets.
- ii. The Corporate objectives set out above, and the scale of impact achievable through the action.
- iii. The availability of, and associated timescales governing, external capital and revenue stream.

Work since March 2020

The following 10 projects represent a flavour of the work programme officers have been, and are currently engaged in, specifically involving CCC assets.

Project	Brief background and rationale	Current Status
Aberystwyth Levelling-Up fund project delivery	£10.8m programme of improvement to the Aberystwyth Harbour, South Prom and Old College area to further enhance Aberystwyth as an attractor destination. As part of the programme, the investment will see enhancements to CCC's assets through in-harbour investments in pontoons and bringing forward redevelopment plans for the garages on South Marine Terrace. The project will also include a new bridge to improve connectivity between key parts of the harbour infrastructure to improve connectivity with the town. The opportunity was generated by the availability of UK Government Levelling Up Funds, for which the CCC submitted a successful competitive application.	Funding agreements in place or being finalised with project partners. Survey work and early concept development work commenced for the garages site.

Aberaeron Harbour Strategic development	The development of a circa £11m investment programme to develop the Harbour infrastructure in Aberaeron harbour to create a Marina, and to create opportunity for further investment in the immediate surrounding area. This is a proposed Mid Wales Growth Deal investment. A key action set out in the Economic Strategy.	Early stage of development – a detailed Strategic Outline Case for investment has been submitted for consideration by the Programme Office and Growth Deal Board.
Manufacturing Innovation Centre development, Horeb	A £10m + investment in Food Centre Wales to develop a unique facility that will enable the development of at least 5 new mid-size, cutting-edge food businesses in Mid Wales. The development would be sited on the Horeb Business Park estate, home of Food Centre Wales, on land purchased by CCC in 2019	Early stage of development – a detailed Strategic Outline Case for investment has been submitted for consideration by the Programme Office and Growth Deal Board.
Redevelopment of Cardigan Market Hall, Cardigan	This is an iconic building in Cardigan, owned by CCC and leased out to the Cardigan Building Preservation Trust, which is project managing a major redevelopment of the building to improve its infrastructure and provide better accessibility. This is seen as key project in Cardigan. The market hall, as well as being an iconic building in a prominent town centre location, has been influential in providing new businesses with an opportunity to trade, and build a customer base before moving into town centre retail spaces. This is widely seen as a successful part of the town's development in recent years. The project is part funded by CCC, as well as a range of other sources, some facilitated by CCC officers.	There are two phases to the project – enhancement to the access block and the redevelopment of the main hall, and both phases are currently being delivered concurrently with the project largely aiming to be complete by the middle of next year.
Acquisition of 10 / 11 Harford Square, Lampeter	This is the site of the former Spar shop in Lampeter, which had remained empty since Spar closed its doors in 2017. This was identified locally, and by the County Council as a key site for the town that would have a detrimental impact on the town if it remained empty in the long term. An opportunity arose to secure funding to purchase the property in order to re-purpose it and bring it back to viable commercial / residential use.	Further survey work has been undertaken on the property since its purchase, and interest has been shown in the use of the ground floor space. Further plans will be developed to enable the use of the upper floors too. Some delay would be expected due to Phosphate mitigation requirements.

<p>Acquisition of former Printworks building, Llandysul</p>	<p>This was identified locally, through place planning work as an ideal location for regeneration to provide a future town centre community / events space as well as a location for new businesses to be able to establish in the town centre. An opportunity was identified to purchase the building and the adjacent car park with the view to further developing the concept.</p>	<p>Detailed planning / development work is yet to commence. Consultants have been appointed, who will work with the local community to build on the place planning work to further refine the ideas for the space.</p>
<p>Renovation of 11 and 52 Terrace Road, Aberystwyth</p>	<p>These are two properties in Aberystwyth that are in the ownership of CCC, and have recently been repurposed, renovated and decorated, and are now currently back on the market. Early interest would suggest that demand for this type of property remains strong, and we would expect to secure the market rate for properties that are now of a higher standard.</p>	<p>Further properties also being worked on. One, the former Gas Works building on Park Avenue has attracted interest from a proposed tenant, who has in turn secured Transforming towns programme funding to invest in the property.</p>
<p>Improvements to land assets to protect values and enable future development</p>	<p>This is relatively low-level activity that aims at protecting land areas that are owned by CCC, and to carry out regular maintenance work to improve their marketability or suitability for wider corporate priority uses.</p>	
<p>Pwll Cam reconfiguration and planting, new path planting at Wellington Gardens, Aberaeron. Green Infrastructure project – Market Street, Lampeter</p>	<p>External funding was secured to fulfil one of the ambitions identified locally to improve the environment within Aberaeron and Lampeter town centres through enhanced green infrastructure. These were relatively small projects that are welcomed locally as part of improving in-town green spaces.</p>	
<p>Targeting of properties on the Empty Properties action plan (see below) to support housing opportunities.</p>	<p>CCC, with the support of Welsh Government regeneration team, has developed an Empty Property action plan, that sets out the priority properties across the County, on the basis that they have stood empty / have been underutilised for some time and thus have a detrimental impact on the townscape. Various funding opportunities have been secured, which can be put to use in acquiring properties where an alternative viable use can be identified. One example, the Land and Buildings Development fund from Welsh Government can be used to bring such assets into use as residential properties.</p>	<p>Work is on-going with the Housing service to identify potential properties on the Empty Properties action plan register that could be brought back to use as residential properties.</p>

The team is also involved in other projects, involving assets outside of CCC's control, but that deliver on the corporate objective of supporting the development of town centre, specifically through direct support for private or public partners in accessing grant funding, such as Transforming Towns funds, Levelling Up funding and Community Renewal funds (and subsequently Shared Prosperity fund)

Demand

The service is well placed to understand where the demand for commercial assets currently lies, and this information is used to inform discussion as to further development of CCC's asset portfolio (as described in brief below).

Current demand patterns would suggest that:

- There is a lower demand for large, town centre retail space
- Demand currently remains healthy for smaller, (outside Zone A) town centre properties.
- Demand for industrial / commercial employment sites / assets is relatively high and is largely unmet, as there is very little availability of industrial property or land that is easily and flexibly available to enable businesses to grow.

Empty Properties Action plan

As briefly described in the table above, CCC, with the support of a specialist consultant funded by Welsh Government, has recently developed an Empty Property action plan.

Welsh Government has developed an Empty Property Enforcement Programme and is working with Local Authorities to develop a national action plan for tackling empty properties that sets priorities and targets to be taken forward. The Welsh Government's Transforming Towns agenda enables a focus on town centres through an Empty Property Management Fund. The financial support package is available to Local Authorities who wish to undertake enforcement action on prominent town centre empty properties.

The fund is a 15-year loan programme (rolling fund) from Welsh Government, which is repayable in full at the end of the term. The funding is only available for town centre empty properties. Access to this fund is available to all Local Authorities that attended an Empty Property Enforcement course and produced their own for dealing with long-term empty properties.

This funding is in addition to other existing funding sources already available to progress actions on empty properties, which include:

- H2H: Houses into Homes - Empty Property Loans
- HIL: Home Improvement Loans
- PRS: Private Rented Sector Leasing Scheme
- LBDF: Land and Building Development Fund – 2M (to spend in 22-23 to purchase empty properties and assist in their refurbishment.).
- Transforming Towns Place Making Grant Mid Wales (TTPMG) Thematic: Maximum £250k available (with a 70% intervention).

Future workstreams

Strategic projects

The projects and programme already described will take a substantial amount of the staff resource available to deliver them effectively. The service will shortly be recruiting more staff to ensure that we are able to effectively deliver the ambitious programme set out, that will deliver significant economic gains for CCC.

Our strategic programme will further be enhanced by the existing revenue-funded projects to support the further development of town centre visioning and action planning – new opportunities will be identified, and action will be required to secure funding streams to realise them.

Re-balancing of assets

Based on what we are seeing in terms of demand patterns (and notwithstanding that this can, and is likely to change, in view of current and emerging economic pressures), we can see that our asset base is not entirely aligned with supporting our key economic priorities. This is something we wish to address through partnership working with Welsh Government, other funders and strategic partners across the public and private partnership.

We know there to be a particular shortage of industrial / commercial space across a range of sectors, and this is seen by many employers as a limiting factor for growth.

Disposal / Development of assets.

CCC also has a relatively long list of over 40 assets that are either currently empty, unused, surplus to requirements or potential sites for development (Appendix 1).

Some preparatory work has already been undertaken on how some of these assets could be utilised to deliver wider Council ambitions, e.g.:

- facilitating access to affordable housing for local people (e.g., Ciliau Aeron plots)
- exploring the options for the development of live / work units (specifically linked to former schools, where a local community use is not identified)

Assessment of priorities.

In light of the prioritisation given to the larger, strategic projects, the work in these sites has been moving at a slower pace than initially envisaged. Our approach would be to continue to focus on the more strategic assets that will deliver larger economic benefits, whilst prioritising other assets on the basis of those that can deliver against the wider corporate objectives as outlined. For other assets, where no suitable other viable use can be identified or where there is a clear benefit to keeping the asset in the long term, we may look at seeking authority to dispose of them, with the appropriate democratic approval.

WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS:	Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? Yes, dated 04.02.20. Summary:
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Long term: Developing sites will help facilitate investment opportunities within the County, which will in turn provide job opportunities, strengthen a sense of place and contribute to the local economy.

Integration: Developing sites/buildings/land will help benefit our local economy and create a sense of place in our Towns, thus having a positive impact on where we live.

Collaboration: The Asset Development Policy 2020 seeks to work holistically with all service areas of the Council; externally, where appropriate, with Housing Associations, Local Community and Private sector developers to redevelop sites.

Involvement: There has been extensive involvement of local communities across the County (in the six towns) in preparing place plans, and there is on-going dialogue to further develop the thinking and to input into the development of the towns,

Prevention: Timely intervention and investment in property avoids further costs down the line and helps to create more positive environments in towns.

RECOMMENDATION (S): For info.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S): For info.

Contact Name:	Russell Hughes-Pickering
Designation:	Corporate Lead Officer
Date of Report:	20.09.2022

Appendices: Appendix 1 Asset Development Working list

Asset Development - Working List							22.09.2022
Strategic Site		Urban / Rural Service Centre / Linked Settlements	Geographic area	UPRN	Site Location	LDP Candidate site ref:	Site in Teifi Phosphate Catchment area (SAC)
	1	USC: 03 Aberystwyth	North	B00025000	12 Cambrian Place, Aberystwyth	-----	
	2	USC: 03 Aberystwyth / Llanbadarn Fawr	North	E02304000	Cwmpadarn School, Llanbadarn Fawr	Submitted by JS Sep 2019 Ref: CS00255	
	3	USC: 03 Aberystwyth / Waunfawr	North	C00910000	Hafan Y Waun, Waunfawr	Submitted by AH Sep 2019 Ref: CS00214	
	4	USC: 03 Aberystwyth	North	B00211000	Riverside Terrace, Aberystwyth	-----	
	5	USC: 03 Aberystwyth	North	D06294000	Arriva Site	JS Submitted Sep 2019 Ref: CS007BC	
	6	USC: 03 Aberystwyth	North	B00164000	11 Terrace Road, Aberystwyth	-----	
	7	USC: 03 Aberystwyth	North	-----	Aberystwyth Prom Development Land, Victoria Terrace	-----	
	8	USC: 03 Aberystwyth / Penparcau	North	H12653000	Land adj. to Ysgol Llwyn Yr Eos, Penparcau	-----	
	9	USC: 03 Aberystwyth	North	J01391000	Aberystwyth Harbour & Surrounds, Aberystwyth.	Submitted by AH Sep 2019 Ref: CS00217	
	10	RSC: 09 Bow Street	North	B09050000	Tregerddan, Bow Street site	-----	
	11	RSC: 14 Llanilar	North	HGLND08709	Gwarfein Llanilar, Aberystwyth	JS Submitted Sep 2019 Ref: CS00254	
	12	RSC: 14 Llanilar	North	B24082000	Llanilar Station Yard	-----	
	13	RSC: 18 Penrhyncoch	North	HLND13553	Maes Seilo, Penrhyn-coch	-----	
	14	RSC: 21 Talybont	North	H10817000	Maes y Deri, Talybont	JS Submitted Sep 2018 Ref: CS00122	
	15	USC: 01 Aberaeron	Mid	tbcb	Pengarreg Farm, Aberaeron	Submitted by JS Sep 2019 Ref: CS00246	
	16	USC: 01 Aberaeron	Mid	D06401000	North Beach Kiosk + Land, Aberaeron.	Submitted by JS Sep 2019 Ref: CS00249	
	17	USC: 01 Aberaeron	Mid	No UPRN Retained land from ST	Oxford Street, Aberaeron.	-----	
	18	USC: 01 Aberaeron	Mid	J01392000	Aberaeron Harbour, Yacht Club + Car Park, Aberaeron.	Submitted by JS Sep 2019 Ref: CS00248	
	19	USC: 05 Lampeter	Mid	B09127000	Maes y Deri, Lampeter	JS Submitted Sep 2018 Ref: CS00123	
	20	USC: 05 Lampeter	Mid	tbcb	10/11 Harford Square, Lampeter	-----	
	21	USC: 07 Tregaron	Mid	-----	Land at Min y Gors, Tregaron.	-----	
	22	USC: 07 Tregaron	Mid	-----	Land to the south of Bryntirion, Tregaron,	-----	
	23	USC: 07 Tregaron	Mid	E02356000	Former Tregaron Primary School, Tregaron.	Submitted by AnH Sep 2019 Ref: CS00222	
	24	RSC: 15 Llanon	Mid	HGLND08701	Hafan yr Efail, Llanon	JS Submitted Sep 2018 Ref: CS00124	
	25	RSC: 15 Llanon	Mid	B09041000	Old Cow Shed, Llanon	-----	
	26	USC: 02 Cardigan	South	C00622000	Former Meugan Centre, Cardigan	-----	
	27	USC: 02 Cardigan	South	B09528000	Old builders store, Morgan Street Car Park, Cardigan	-----	
	28	USC: 02 Cardigan	South	-----	Feidrhennfordd Land, Cardigan.	-----	
	29	USC: 04 Newcastle Emllyn	South	B09527000	Brynderwen Offices Adpar	-----	
	30	USC: 04 Newcastle Emllyn	South	"	Former Depo + land to rear of Derwen Gardens, Adpar.	Submitted by JS Sep 2018 Ref: CS00125	
	31	USC: 06 Llandysul	South	E04059000	County Playing field, Llandysul.	JS Submitted Sep 2018 Ref: CS00115	
	32	USC: 06 Llandysul	South	tcbb	Former Teifi Units, Llandysul.	-----	
	33	RSC: 08 Aberporth	South	J01377000	Brynglas, Aberporth	JS Submitted Sep 2018 Ref: CS00120	
	34	RSC: 10 New Quay	South	HGLND08715	Land next to Afon Evan, New Quay	Submitted by JS Sep 2019 Ref: CS00253	
	35	RSC: 10 New Quay	South	No UPRN	New Quay Shelter, New Quay	-----	
Linked Settlements Sites							
	36	Linked Settlement to USC: 01 Aberaeron	Mid	No UPRN Retained land from ST	Parc yr Hydd, Ciliau Aeron	-----	
	37	Linked Settlement to USC: 03 Aberystwyth	North	HGLND08706	Brongwinnau, Comins Coch	JS Submitted Sep 2018 Ref: CS00117	
	38	Linked Settlement to RSC: 12 Felin Fach	Mid	E02284000	Former Cilcennin Primary School.	-----	
	39	Linked Settlement to USC: 04 Newcastle Emllyn	South	E02320000	Former Beulah Primary School.	-----	
	40	Linked Settlement to USC: 04 Newcastle Emllyn	South	E02345000	Former Trewen Primary School.	-----	
	41	Linked Settlement to USC: 06 Llandysul	South	H14151000	Llys Cerdin, Ffostrasol	-----	
	42	Linked Settlement to RSC: 08 Aberporth	South	B09213000	Llangrannog Car Park	-----	

Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO: Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 3rd October 2022

LOCATION: Hybrid/Council Chamber

TITLE: Annual Report of Compliments, Complaints and Freedom of Information Activity – 2021/2022

PURPOSE OF REPORT: To provide the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a comprehensive overview of the Compliments, Complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) activity (including Environmental Information Regulations - EIR) received by the Authority during the previous financial year. This report also provides information about the complaints activity referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales during 2021/2022. A copy of the Ombudsman's Annual Letter to the Authority, dated 9th August 2022, is included as an appendix to this report.

REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION: For information prior to presentation of the report at the Cabinet Committee meeting on 1st November 2022.

BACKGROUND:

This report provides information relating to the work of the Council's Complaints and FOI Service between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022. The report itself (accompanying this cover report) is contained within Appendix 1, which includes specific information on the number and type of compliments received, the different complaints stages, performance and outcomes relating to these and information on compliance with FOI and EIR legislation. There is also a section regarding the contact received by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales ("the Ombudsman") during the reporting period. The Ombudsman's Annual Letter to the Council is included as Appendix 2, which provides further details in relation to all Ombudsman activity for Ceredigion, as well as for other Council's across Wales.

This is the third consecutive report where there have been no Ombudsman investigations commenced or formal reports issued in relation to complaints made against the Council. However, it is acknowledged that there has been a significant rise in complaints referred to the Ombudsman, as well as cases that were closed following the Ombudsman's intervention (i.e. 'Early Resolution' agreements)

This report reflects several challenges experienced during the reporting period i.e. the complexity of complaints received, a general increase in activity following the pandemic in complaints, FOI, Ombudsman referrals and referrals to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), as well as the challenges associated with the delivery of the Complaints and FOI Service itself.

These challenges have inevitably had an impact on the Council's ability to meet its performance objectives in relation to prescribed timescales, which has subsequently resulted in a greater level of contact from the Ombudsman and the ICO.

Brief overview of all activity managed by the Complaints and FOI Service during 2021 - 2022:

- ↓ 224 Compliments were received
- ↓ 357 Enquiries were processed by the Complaints & FOI Service
- ↑ 133 Complaints were received: Stage 1 = 73 Stage 2 = 60
- ↑ 52 'Contacts' received via the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
- ↑ 780 FOI & EIR requests processed by the Complaints & FOI Service

Summary

- There were significantly fewer Compliments received during this reporting period (down by 72%). This reduction can be mitigated, in part, by the vast influx of compliments received in 2019-2020 (a 50% increase on the year before). Several factors may have affected the Council's ability to capture compliments including the lack of resource to prioritise this activity. Further, work will be undertaken by the Complaints and FOI Service to streamline the way compliments are processed, so good practice can be capitalised upon, and accurate figures recorded.
- Fewer Enquiries were managed by the Complaints and FOI Service but there was a 29% rise in complaints. This suggests that it was not possible to pro-actively resolve concerns without needing to engage in formal complaints procedures. In addition, unplanned absences and vacancies within the Complaints and FOI Service will have contributed to the inability to manage cases as effectively as in previous years.
- Stage 1 complaints rose by 16% and the Council saw an increase of 30% in complaints that were investigated at Stage 2 (formal stage). Compliance with prescribed timescales was also lower than expected, though it is acknowledged that Stage 2 complaints often require additional time to investigate thoroughly. This is entirely acceptable providing complainants are regularly updated on any developments.
- As acknowledged above, the Ombudsman received 63% more complaints about Ceredigion County Council than in previous years, and 13 of these were resolved by way of Early Resolution agreements. However, the Ombudsman did not refer any complaints for formal investigation and as such, no formal reports were issued by them.
- Two complaints were received in relation to the Council's compliance with the Welsh Language Measures, both of which were resolved at the informal stage.
- Refuse Collection and Household Waste Sites continues to be the main reason for complaints received at Stage 1; closely followed by Planning (including Planning Enforcement) and Council Tax and Housing Benefit. These three services account for 40% of all Stage 1 complaints received, but as previously reported, these services are predisposed to attracting complaints.

- 49% of all complaints were upheld; 32% of cases were not upheld and the remainder were either ongoing or had been discontinued by the complainant. It is acknowledged that further work is needed to improve on learning the lessons arising from complaints, this will be taken forward by the Complaints and FOI Service.
- Compliance with Freedom of Information (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) timescales were at the lowest level reported, at 67% and it is acknowledged that vast improvements are required in this regard. A rise in referrals to the ICO was also evident, up from 4 cases to 9, during 2021-2022. It is most likely that the poor performance with meeting the statutory timescales was the main contributing factor, but the increase equates to only 1% of all requests received.

Areas to focus on

- **Improving corporate adherence with timescales prescribed in complaints and FOI/EIR policies/legislation**
- **Improving system for capturing compliments and data surrounding lessons learned**
- **Continuing with open, transparent, and citizen-centred approach to resolving concerns**

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If not, please state why – No IIA has been completed because there is no service change proposed within this report.

WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS:

Summary:

Long term: N/A
Integration: N/A
Collaboration: N/A
Involvement: N/A
Prevention: N/A

RECOMMENDATION (S):

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the contents of this report in advance of its presentation at the Cabinet meeting on 1st November 2022.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

To ensure Members are aware of the performance of the Authority in respect of Compliments, Complaints and Freedom of Information.

Contact Name: Marie-Neige Hadfield
Designation: Complaints and Freedom of Information Manager
Date of Report: 12th September 2022

Acronyms:

FOI – Freedom of Information

EIR – Environmental Information Regulations

PSOW – Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

CLO – Corporate Lead Officer

ICO – Information Commissioner's Officer

CSA – Complaints Standards Authority

Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

Annual Compliments, Complaints and Freedom of Information Report
1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report will provide information relating to the numbers of compliments, complaints and requests made under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 that were received by the Council during the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022. **This section** will provide an overview of how compliments, complaints and FOI requests are managed within the Council. **Section 2** provides information about the Compliments received and **Section 3** shows some trends, themes and performance regarding the numbers, timescales and outcomes of Complaints received during the reporting period. **Section 4** gives details of the Lessons Learned. **Section 5** relates to all cases involving the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (*“the Ombudsman”*) and **Section 6** looks at FOI activity and any cases referred to the Information Commissioner’s Office (*“ICO”*). **Section 7** provides a Summary and Conclusions of the data provided in the report and a breakdown of the complaints data is given in **Section 8**. Due to the significant increase in Ombudsman activity, particularly cases that were resolved as a consequence of Ombudsman involvement, all cases resulting in ‘Early Resolution’ are also included in Section 8 – including the Summary Reports issued by the Ombudsman in relation to these complaints.
- 1.2 The recording systems in place for compliments, complaints and FOI requests have been updated to reflect the organisational structure, which has simplified the reporting process.
- 1.3 The Complaints and FOI Service is a small team (3.8 staff members) who follow three different complaints policies and two branches of information access legislation:
- Model Concerns and Complaints Policy (corporate)
 - Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014
 - Complaints procedures for school governing bodies in Wales (Circular 011/2012)
 - Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)
 - Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR)
- 1.4 Whilst school governing bodies are responsible for their own complaints and FOI activity, the Complaints and FOI Team provides advice and assistance when required and will occasionally assist in more complex cases, where procedures allow.
- 1.5 As a consequence of recent changes in legislation the Concerns and Complaints Policy (corporate) was reviewed and ratified by the Council committee of elected members on 23rd September 2021.
- 1.6 Following the formation of the Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) under the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) 2019 Act, all public authorities across Wales were required to report their complaints activity to the Ombudsman’s office on a quarterly basis. This information is available on the Ombudsman’s [Complaints Standards Authority webpage](#)
- 1.7 The Council continues to work positively with the Ombudsman and a section of this report provides an analysis of all Ombudsman activity, including the outcomes of Early Resolutions (at the end of this report). This includes the outcomes reached by the Ombudsman’s office following their assessment of all complaints made to them in relation to Ceredigion County Council. It must be noted that this is the third consecutive reporting period whereby there have been no formal investigations launched by the Ombudsman’s office into complaints made against the Council.

- 1.8 Pro-active resolution of all complaints remains a high priority within the Council and every effort is made to achieve satisfactory outcomes for the citizens and service-users that bring their concerns to our attention. Due to the continued efforts and positive collaboration between staff and managers across the Council and the Complaints and FOI Team, it is far more effective to resolve concerns at 'enquiry' stage, without needing to initiate the formal complaints procedure. As a consequence, a total of **357** enquiries were received during this reporting period.
- 1.9 Complaints being considered under Stages 1 and 2 of the respective complaints policies continue to be managed in accordance with the underpinning ethos for corporate complaints: *'Investigate once, investigate well'*. It is recognised, particularly in respect of Stage 2 complaints, that complex cases may take longer than outlined in the policy (i.e. 20 working days); however, in such circumstances, the complainant is usually notified of any delays and kept updated as to the status of their complaint. Information concerning the Council's performance with regard to compliance with timescales is provided within this report, but the priority remains to ensure a robust and meaningful investigation is undertaken – even if this takes longer than the prescribed timescales. It is accepted that challenges associated with service provision have resulted in the Complaints and FOI Service being unable to maintain effective communication with complainants in some instances.
- 1.10 The Corporate Lead Officer (CLO) for Policy, Performance & Public Protection is responsible for all complaints and FOI activity within the Council and will escalate matters of concern to the relevant member(s) of the Leadership Group. In addition, the CLO is the Council's nominated Senior Officer for the offices of the Ombudsman and the Information Commissioner in relation to complaints and FOI activity, respectively.
- 1.11 The Council's Complaints and FOI Service is responsible for the design and delivery of all complaints training as well as the monitoring of all complaints and FOI activity. This includes liaising with the Ombudsman's office and the Information Commissioner's Office ("ICO") when cases are referred to them by service-users. Unfortunately, due to the challenges associated with the pandemic, no in-house complaints training was delivered during this reporting period. However, the Ombudsman's Complaints Standards Authority delivered Complaints Investigation Training to the majority of Corporate Managers in February 2021.
- 1.12 As expected, the coronavirus pandemic continued to have an impact on service provision across the Council, with many services undertaking additional duties compared with pre-pandemic times. As reported previously, as a consequence, the Council's priorities and resilience has been tested but despite this, officers remained committed to ensuring service improvement as a direct consequence of complaints.

2. COMPLIMENTS RECEIVED

2.1 Compliments

All compliments received from service-users are recorded and monitored on a regular basis and should be viewed as an opportunity to share good practice wherever possible. Compliments should be responded to individually and shared with the people directly involved.

2.2 An opportunity also exists to share compliments far wider within the Council when positive working practices are identified that could be adopted in other areas.

2.3 The table below shows the number of compliments that were recorded by each Service during 2021/22.

Service	2021/22
Policy, Performance & Public Protection	5
Schools	4
Economy & Regeneration	14
Finance & Procurement	5
Highways & Environmental Services	25
Customer Contact	29
Porth Cynnal	27
Corporate	6
Porth Gofal	77
Porth Cymorth Cynnar	29
Democratic Services	2
Legal & Governance	1
Total	224

2.4 Examples of compliments received

“I can honestly say that the work carried out is a massive improvement on what it was like before the work was undertaken. This is a fantastic outcome, and I would like to say a big “Thank you”.” – Economy & Regeneration

“Thank you to the traffic wardens who keep the traffic clear and the refuse gang who keep our bins emptied.” – Highways & Environmental Services

“The staff were so friendly and professional made our day very special. Thank you so much!” – Customer Contact

"I just wanted to say a huge and heartfelt thank you to you personally for taking care of [service user]. I wasn't able to visit much but it was very reassuring to know that they were in the best possible place thanks to you and your colleagues." – Porth Gofal

"I wanted to share with you how grateful for all the help this last year. Felt very supported. Thanks again." – Schools Service

"You are brilliant in the way you are supporting Service User." – Porth Cynnal

"Thank you for your kindness and patience." – Finance & Procurement

"Please convey my thanks to all the people involved in resolving my concerns." – Policy, Performance & Public

"With thanks for your generous work throughout the year." – Porth Cymorth Cynnar

"I'd like to extend thanks to you and the members of staff in Ceredigion." – Corporate

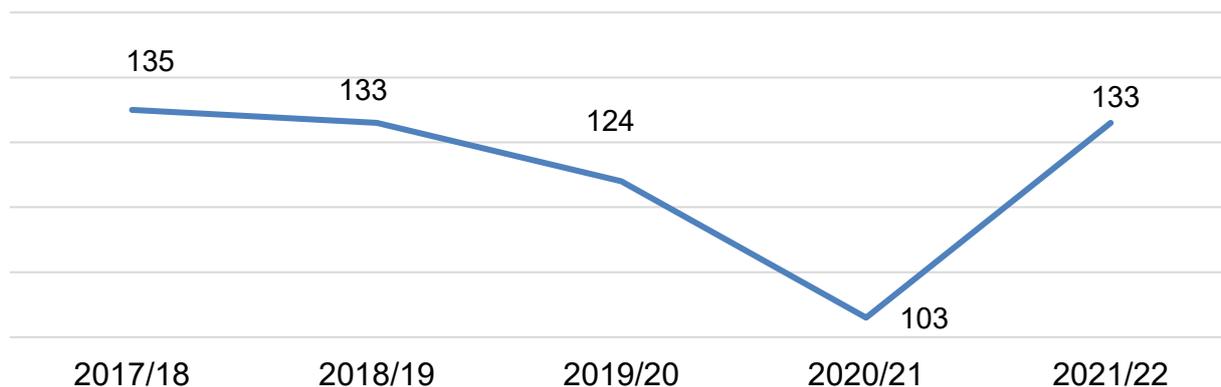
- 2.5 Compliments received from care homes and day centres are included within the current reporting system, which is well established across the Council's Social Services.
- 2.6 The process for collecting, recording and monitoring compliments was due to be reviewed during this reporting period; however, as a consequence of the pressures within the small Complaints and FOI Service, this work will be undertaken in the forthcoming year (2022-2023). The benefit of such work would ensure that Council officers are aware of the clear and defined processes in place for dealing with compliments and championing good practice across the organisation.

3. COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

3.1 Total number of complaints received

The chart below shows the total number of complaints received during 2021/22 that were processed in accordance with the two-stage complaints policies. Comparisons are given in respect of previous years. This does not include the number of enquiries or service requests that were received by the Complaints and FOI Service, which were directed to the relevant service(s).

Total Number of Complaints Received



3.2 Number of complaints made by stage

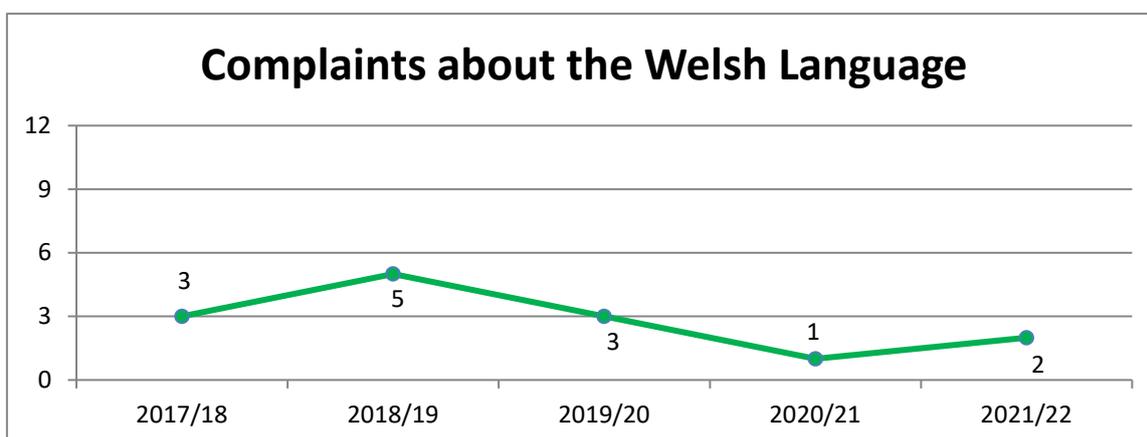
The number of complaints made against the Council under each stage of the Complaints Policy for the last five years is shown in the table below. These figures include complaints made in relation to Welsh Language provision.

Year	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total
2017/18	96	39	135
2018/19	92	40	133
2019/20	85	39	124
2020/21	61	42	103
2021/22	73	60	133

3.3 Welsh Language Complaints

During 2020/21 the Council received two complaints specifically relating to the provision (or lack thereof) of Welsh Language services across the Council. One complaint was referred to the Council by the Welsh Language Commissioner.

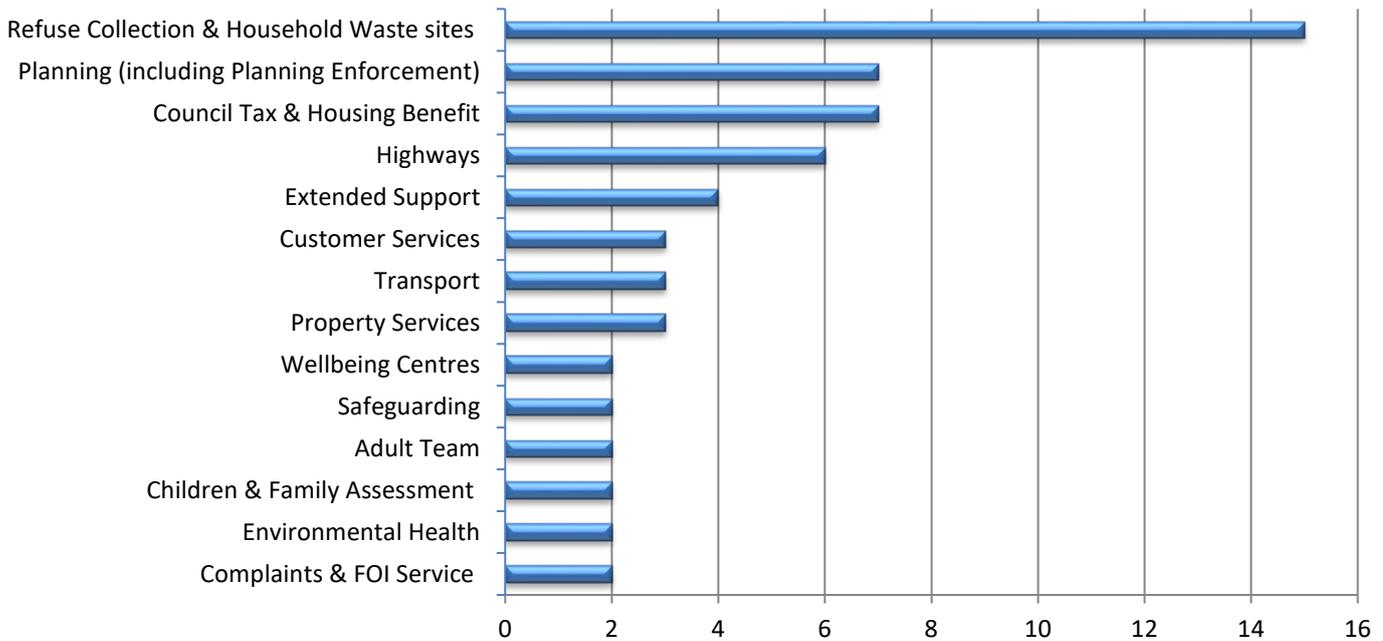
3.4 The number of complaints received during the reporting period is shown below, along with comparison data for previous years. The Council has fully implemented its requirements under the Welsh Language Standards.



3.5 Top Ten Sections with highest number of complaints in 2021/22

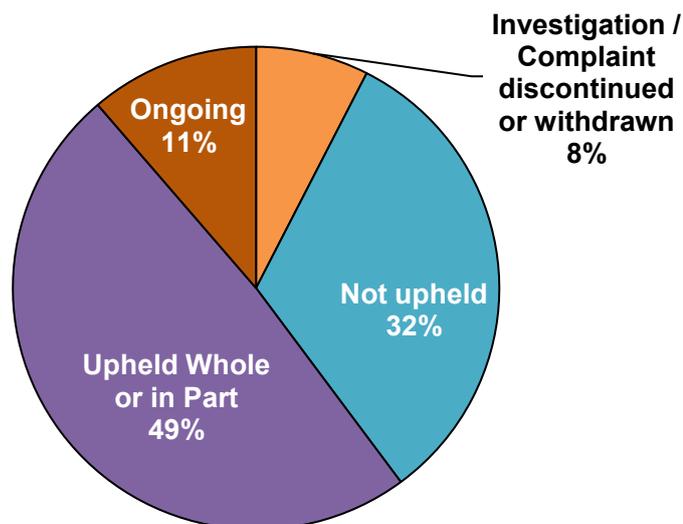
The chart below shows the top ten sections of the Council that receive the highest number of complaints at Stage 1. In accordance with Welsh Government guidance, ascertaining the subject areas complained about the most enables identification of trends – both internally and for national comparison.

Top 10 Stage 1 Complaints by Section



3.6 Complaint Outcomes

See below the outcomes recorded against all complaints for the reporting period.

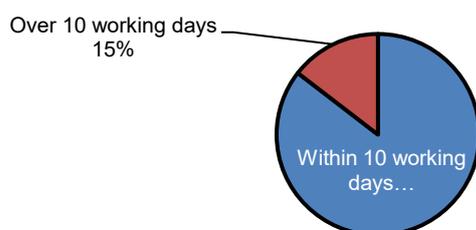


3.7 Timescales

The Council is required to respond to all complaints in a timely manner and in any event, within the timescales stipulated by policy. The charts below demonstrate the Council's performance with regard to meeting **Stage 1 (10 working days)** and **Stage 2 timescales (20 working days)** under the corporate policy. It is important to note that there is a degree of flexibility afforded under Stage 2, particularly in the interests of ensuring thorough and robust investigations are undertaken, which often take longer to complete.

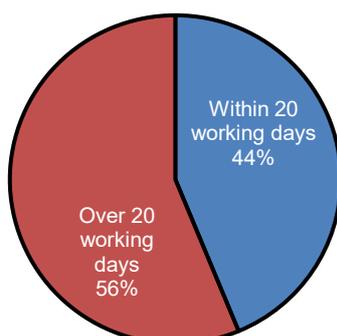
3.8 Stage 1 – A total of **73** Stage 1 complaints were received during the reporting period. Under the corporate policy, Stage 1 complaints should be completed within **10 working days**, and under the Social Services complaints procedures complaints should be completed within **15 working days** which includes the offer of a meeting / discussion with the relevant service manager. A total of **53** of the **62** corporate complaints at this stage were addressed within the prescribed timescales. As per the Concerns and Complaints policy, Stage 1 complaints were immediately escalated to Stage 2 if the ten-working-day timescale was exceeded.

Stage 1 Performance with Stage 1 Timescales (corporate policy)



3.9 Stage 2 – A total of **60** complaints were received at Stage 2. Of these, **12** were managed under the statutory Social Services Policy, which allows 25 working days from the 'Start Date' as opposed to **20 working days** under the corporate Concerns and Complaints procedure. Performance in respect of the corporate policy is provided below. With regard to the 12 Social Services complaints, **three** remained open beyond the end of the reporting period (i.e. these cases were closed after 31st March 2022) and all but one of the remaining **9** took longer than the allotted time to conclude, which is permitted, providing the Statutory Director of Social Services provides written approval for an extension to be given.

Performance with Stage 2 Timescales (corporate policy)



4. LEARNING LESSONS FROM COMPLAINTS

4.1 The table below consists of a sample of some of the lessons learned from complaints during 2021/22.

Service Area	Issue	Lessons Learned
Highways & Environmental Services	Complaint regarding accessibility at Household Waste Sites.	Household Waste Sites implemented accessible 'drop off' areas for those who are unable to access the skips directly.
Porth Cynnal	Concerns raised regarding Children Services	All Social Workers working with children and families were reminded of their responsibility to share the outcomes of a Section 47 enquiry with parents, in line with the National Safeguarding Procedures for Wales.
Public Protection	Lack of response from the Service regarding a food safety issue	Further training provided to staff regarding the use of the information system.
Complaints and FOI Service	Failure to maintain communication with complainants	Ensure service users receive regular updates if there is a problem resolving their complaint within prescribed timescales.

5. COMPLAINTS MADE TO THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

- 5.1 The Ombudsman's Annual Letter for 2021/22 was received on 9th August 2022 and is included as an appendix to this report.
- 5.2 The Ombudsman's expectation is that complainants will exhaust the Council's own complaints procedures before contacting their office for independent consideration of their complaint. However, in exceptional circumstances the Ombudsman does have discretion to undertake a direct investigation. Usually, complaints which have not yet been considered by the Council will be recorded by the Ombudsman's office as '**Premature**' contacts and these will be referred back to the Council to investigate under its own complaints procedures.
- 5.3 As a matter of course, all formal responses issued at Stage 2 of the Council's complaints procedures (corporate and Social Services policies) include advice that complainants can refer their case to the Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied with the Council's findings, or the handling of their complaint.
- 5.4 The Council has limited control over service-users contacting the Ombudsman directly, though this would normally be addressed during staff training (i.e. advising people about how they can complain if they are unhappy with the service provided).

5.5 It is useful to note that the Ombudsman provides data according to the number of ‘contacts’ received by service-users as well as the number of ‘cases closed’ during the reporting period. This method will account for any discrepancies in the number of cases being reported on (particularly if some straddle multiple reporting periods).

5.6 Number of complaints made to the Ombudsman in 2021/22 by primary subject (as categorised by the Ombudsman)

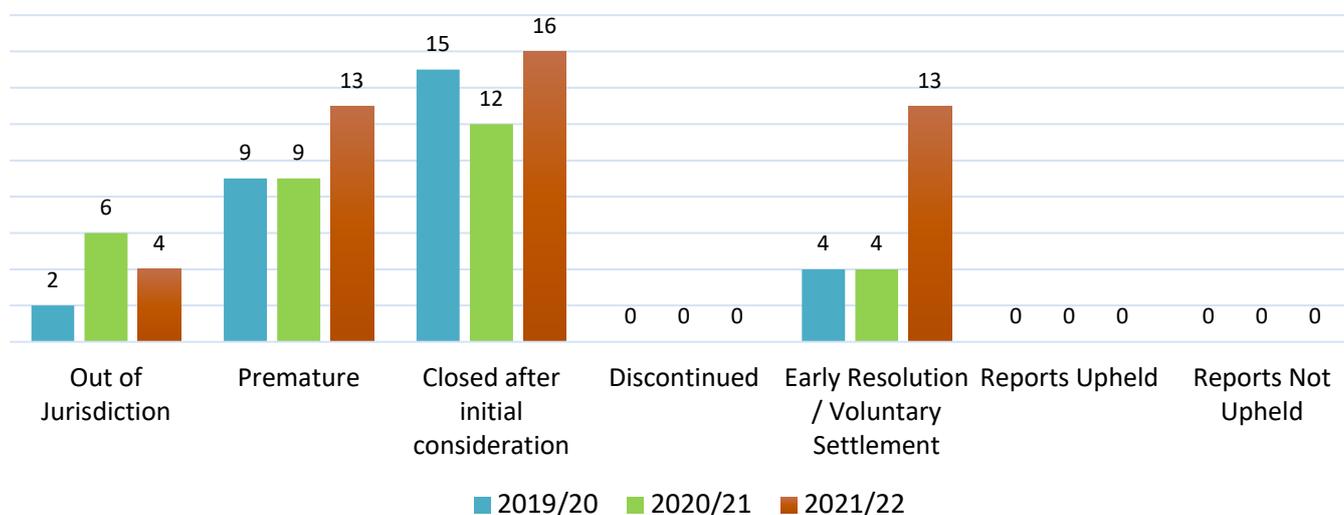
The chart below shows the number of complaints made by members of the public to the Ombudsman, which is demonstrated in the Ombudsman’s Annual Letter.

Subject	No. of Ombudsman complaints 2019/20	No. of Ombudsman complaints 2020/21	No. of Ombudsman complaints 2021/22
Complaints Handling	4	5	14
Planning & building control	6	8	10
Adult Social Services	4	5	6
Environment & Environmental Health	4	1	5
Roads & transport	1	2	5
Children's Social Services	5	3	3
COVID-19	-	3	3
Education	1	0	2
Finance and Taxation	2	2	2
Communities, facilities, recreation and leisure	1	0	1
Multi-Service Complaints	0	0	1
Benefits Administration	1	1	0
Licencing	2	0	0
Housing	0	2	0
TOTAL	31	32	52

5.7 The Ombudsman received **52** complaints about the Council during the course of 2021-2022, which is 20 more cases than the previous year. Despite this, the Ombudsman has not commenced an investigation into any of these cases. However, **13** Early Resolution agreements were reached, in order for the Council to be able to resolve the complaint to the Ombudsman’s satisfaction. More information on these complaints can be found at the end of this report (pages 19 – 23) including the official summary reports compiled by the Ombudsman.

5.8 This chart provides comparison data for the outcomes of all cases closed by the Ombudsman during the period covered in this report and the two previous years:

PSOW Complaint Outcomes



5.9 Ombudsman Cases resulting in Early Resolution

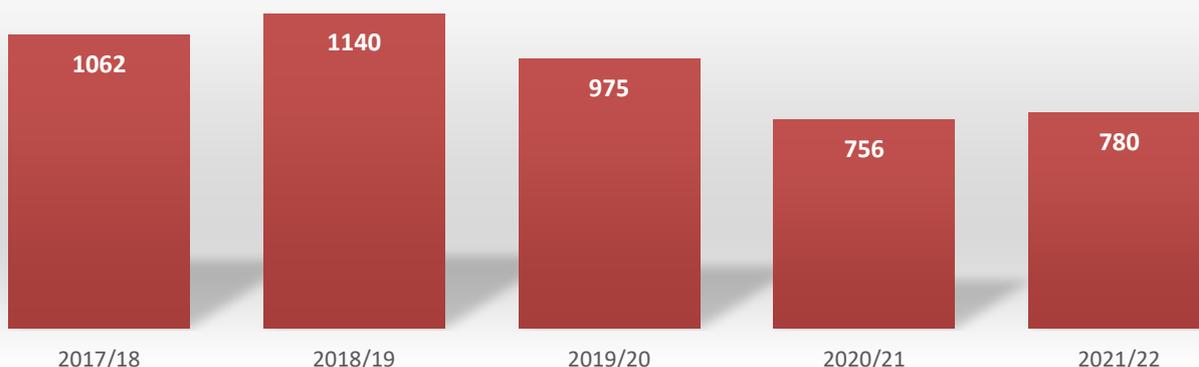
As referred to above, whilst there were no formal investigations undertaken by the Ombudsman for a **third** consecutive term, the number of complaints requiring additional action following consideration by the Ombudsman rose significantly to **thirteen** (compared with only **four** in 2020-2021). In these instances, the Ombudsman provides the Council with an opportunity to review its management of the case and agree to a course of action that should resolve the complaint.

5.10 The exponential rise in Early Resolution cases is as a consequence in the general increase in complaints received during the reporting period and the significant challenges faced by Council services during this time. In addition, the Complaints and FOI Service, which sits within the Policy, Performance & Public Protection Service, has faced several challenges during this reporting period as a result of unplanned absences, as well as vacancies within the Service. This was a significant contributory factor to the shortcomings in complaints handling referred to in the Ombudsman’s letter.

6. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACTIVITY

- 6.1 The Council's compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) falls within the remit of the Policy, Performance and Public Protection Service. As with compliments and complaints activity, the FOI (and EIR) service was also centralised and makes up the Council's Complaints & FOI Service.
- 6.2 The Corporate Lead Officer for Policy, Performance & Public Protection is responsible for undertaking all Internal Reviews, which is essentially the complaints mechanism for FOI and EIR activity. Following the Internal Review stage, applicants have the right to refer their request to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for further consideration.
- 6.3 Information requests received under FOI and EIR may be refused for various reasons providing there are lawful exemptions or exceptions (respectively) preventing disclosure. In such situations, the Council issues a Refusal Notice which provides clear information to explain the decision not to disclose the information being requested. It must be noted here that FOI and EIR relate to **recorded** information held by the Council and as such, there is no right to receive answers to questions which would require the creation of new information or records.
- 6.4 During this reporting period the Council received a total of **780** requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) or Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). Of these, **eight** cases were escalated to the Corporate Lead Officer (CLO) for Policy, Performance & Public Protection requiring Internal Review. Four of the cases related to complaints that a response had not been provided within the 20-working-day timescale. With these cases, the information requested was provided as part of the Internal Review response. The exemption applied was maintained in two of the cases, and the remaining two cases remained open at the end of the reporting period.
- 6.5 The number of FOI and EIR requests (combined) that were received during 2020/2021 is demonstrated below along with comparison data for earlier reporting terms.

FOI & EIR Activity



6.6 The chart below shows the number of requests received by each service and what percentage this equates to in respect of the total number of requests received by the Council.

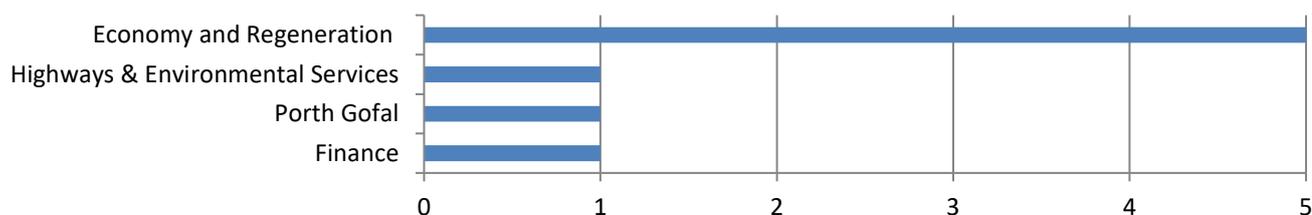
FOI & EIR Activity by Service

Service	FOI		EIR	
	Number of Requests Received	% of Total Requests Received	Number of Requests Received	% of Total Requests Received
Schools	57	7%	-	-
Finance & Procurement	132	17%	-	-
Democratic Services	13	2%	-	-
People & Organisation	40	5%	-	-
Porth Cymorth Cynnar	8	1%	-	-
Porth Cynnal	70	9%	-	-
Porth Gofal	79	10%	-	-
Policy, Performance & Public Protection	99	13%	4	20%
Highways & Environmental Services	117	15%	6	30%
Economy & Regeneration	70	9%	10	50%
Customer Contact	55	7%	-	-
Legal & Governance Services	6	>1%	-	-
Multiple Services	14	2%	-	-

6.7 The Council has a statutory responsibility to respond to all FOI's within 20 working days. The Council's overall compliance with this timescale for 2020/21 was **67%**.

6.8 A total of **eight** Internal Reviews were requested in 2021/22, all of which are shown below grouped according to service. This is an increase on the 7 received during 2020-2021.

Requests for Internal Review by Service



6.9 A total of 9 referrals were made to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) during the reporting period, the majority of which related to the Council's delay in providing information within the statutory timescale.

7. SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 This report demonstrates that the Council continues to face significant challenges since the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic, which stem from a variety of factors. Service continuity, the introduction of additional functions since the pandemic and the general pressures associated with the way services needed to be delivered during this period have all had an impact. It is evident that there has been a rise in complaints and FOI activity, including referrals to the Information Commissioner's Office; however, of most significance is the substantial increase in complaints received via the Ombudsman. This section will provide some analysis in respect of the data referred to within this report.
- 7.2 In summary, the main headlines of this report are as follows:
- ↓ **224** Compliments were received
 - ↓ **357** Enquiries were processed by the Complaints & FOI Service
 - ↑ **133** Complaints were received: **Stage 1 = 73 Stage 2 = 60**
 - ↑ **52** 'Contacts' received via the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
 - ↑ **780** FOI & EIR requests processed by the Complaints & FOI Service
- 7.3 There were significantly fewer compliments recorded during 2021-2022 compared with the previous reporting period (down by 72%). However, this cannot be interpreted in isolation, because there was almost a 50% increase in compliments recorded during 2020-2021 (in comparison with 2019-2020). This may be due to services being unable to prioritise passing any compliments to the Complaints and FOI Service to be recorded. A more likely explanation, however, is that the Complaints and FOI Service was unable to undertake its planned review of the management of compliments across the Council during this reporting year (see para. 2.6 above), as a consequence of the pressures experienced by the Complaints and FOI Service throughout the year.
- 7.4 Although the Enquiries managed by the Complaints and FOI Service had decreased slightly, there was a 29% rise in complaints received by the Council. This could be attributed to the lack of capacity within the Complaints and FOI Service to drive forwards a pro-active approach to resolving concerns at the earliest opportunity. It is also recognised that the absences and vacancies encountered within the Complaints and FOI Service will have been a significant contributory factor to the inability to manage cases as effectively as in previous years.
- 7.5 Stage 1 complaints rose by 16% and the Council saw an increase of 30% in complaints that were investigated at Stage 2 (formal stage). Compliance with prescribed timescales was also lower than expected, though it is acknowledged that Stage 2 complaints often require additional time to investigate thoroughly – providing complainants receive communication about any delays. Regrettably, the capacity to communicate with complainants and provide regular updates was beset by difficulties due to the pressures on the services, as referred to above.
- 7.6 Consequently, this resulted in complainants escalating their complaints to the Ombudsman far earlier, which ultimately led to the increase in general activity referred to the Ombudsman, as well as the substantial number of Early Resolution agreements.

- 7.7 It must also be noted that the complexity of the contact received by the Complaints and FOI Service during 2021-2022 was far greater than experienced in previous years. For instance, a number of Enquiries received, required substantial input from the Complaints and FOI Service, because they did not necessarily fall under the scope of the complaints policies. Such cases still generated a considerable amount of work (i.e. to explain why the complaints process could not be engaged, for whatever reason) as well as attempts to liaise with colleagues to resolve the issues being raised. For example, complaints about actions taken by the Council entirely legitimately (i.e. in accordance with policy and legislation) cannot be considered under the complaints policies, because they are considered to be a 'properly made decision'. In addition, a number of complaints were received whereby the complainant did not have the consent of the service-user, or their complaint related to the actions of third parties, as opposed to the Council. Such cases still require resolution of some sort and, in some instances, investigations will be undertaken, albeit outside of the complaints processes.
- 7.8 Two complaints were received in relation to the Welsh Language during 2021-2022, both of which related to instances whereby the service-users' preferred language of choice (Welsh) was not observed. Both complaints were promptly and satisfactorily resolved at Stage 1 and the relevant services involved in these cases had implemented measures to raise staff awareness and ensure future compliance with the Welsh Language Measures.
- 7.9 As referred to previously, the number of complaints referred to the Ombudsman was unprecedented, as was the number of Early Resolution agreements, demonstrating an increase of 63% and 70%, respectively. On a more positive note however, 35% (16 complaints) of cases referred to the Ombudsman were closed following initial consideration, supporting the actions that were taken by the Council during its management of the complaint. A further 13 cases were premature (28%) meaning that the complainant(s) had not yet exhausted the Council's complaints process, and 4 cases (9%) were out of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.
- 7.10 Further analysis of all Ombudsman activity shows that 72% of cases did not require any intervention at all by the Ombudsman. Whilst it is acknowledged that there were far more cases resulting in Early Resolution agreements during 2021-2022 (13 in total); considering the additional 20 Ombudsman cases received over the course of the year, and the Council's ability to fulfil the agreements without invoking a formal investigation demonstrates the determination of officers to put things right.
- 7.11 Refuse Collection and Household Waste Sites continues to occupy the top of the list in terms of the service which received the highest number of Stage 1 complaints, closely followed by Planning (including Planning Enforcement) and Council Tax and Housing Benefit, having received 7 Stage 1 complaints each. The top three services share 40% of all Stage 1 complaints received by the Council. As previously reported however, the nature of these services predisposes them to attract high numbers of complaints.
- 7.12 A smaller proportion of complaints were upheld during 2021-2022; 49% compared with 54% in 2020-2021. This is positive and indicates that despite the increase in the number of complaints during the year, fewer were justified. That being said, fewer complaints were not upheld too, mainly due to 11% of cases remaining open at the end of the reporting year, and a further 8% having been discontinued by complainants during the process.

- 7.13 It is acknowledged that further work is needed to capitalise on the opportunities arising from complaints, in particular, with regard to learning lessons and sharing good practice across the organisation. This will be further explored in the forthcoming reporting year and it is anticipated that this will be evidenced within next year's annual report.
- 7.14 There is always room for improvement with regard to compliance with prescribed timescales – both in complaints and FOI/EIR. The number of FOI/EIR responses issued within the 20 working-day timescale has dipped to the lowest level recorded in recent times. As with last year, it is believed that this is due to a combination of factors including the lack of capacity on the part of services to be able to prioritise FOI above existing work commitments; being unable to obtain hard-copies of some documents; lack of capacity within the Complaints and FOI Service (which undertakes the majority of the administrative task surrounding FOI activity; i.e. recording, acknowledging and distributing new requests and issuing all responses and applying any exemptions/exceptions and/or redactions as required).
- 7.15 Combined with a slight increase in the number of FOI/EIR requests received, there was also a rise in cases that were referred to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). A total of 9 cases were referred to the ICO, which equates to 1% of all requests received. However, there is still room for improvement in this regard, particularly in terms of compliance – as referred to above.
- 7.16 In conclusion, compliance with the statutory timescales for complaints and FOI must be prioritised moving forwards, and as a consequence, FOI compliance and Ombudsman activity are both included in the Complaints and FOI Service's performance measures for 2022-2023.
- 7.17 The content of this report is less positive when compared with the Council's performance in relation to complaints and FOI over recent years. The increase in activity, across both services, is consistent with what other Local Authorities are experiencing – as acknowledged in the Ombudsman's Annual Letter. However, resources and effective working practices will be reviewed, to deliver a more efficient and transparent service to our citizens and service-users. This will be a priority for the Complaints and FOI Service for the forthcoming year.

Marie-Neige Hadfield
Complains and FOI Manager

31st August 2022

8. DATA

ITEM 1: BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINTS BY SERVICE

Service and Departments	Stage 1	Stage 2	TOTAL
Schools			
➤ Schools	0	3	5
➤ ALN	0	1	
➤ Childcare Offer	1	0	
Finance & Procurement			
➤ Council Tax & Housing Benefit	7	3	10
Democratic Services			
➤ Corporate Service Support	1	0	3
➤ Electoral Services	2	0	
People & Organisation			
➤ Payroll	0	1	1
Porth Cymorth Cynnar			
➤ Wellbeing Centres	2	1	3
Porth Cynnal			
➤ Adult Team	2	1	24
➤ Children & Family Assessment	2	2	
➤ Safeguarding	2	6	
➤ Extended Support	4	5	
Porth Gofal			
➤ Fostering	1	0	5
➤ Porth Gofal Triage	1	0	
➤ Homelessness / Housing (Inc. DFG, Eco Flex)	1	2	
Policy, Performance & Public Protection			
➤ Food Safety	1	0	11
➤ Trading Standards	0	1	
➤ Environmental Health	2	2	
➤ Complaints & FOI Service	2	2	
➤ Licensing	1	0	
Highways & Environmental Services			
➤ Highway Maintenance / Improvements	6	2	36
➤ Mooring	0	1	

Service and Departments	Stage 1	Stage 2	TOTAL
➤ Refuse Collection & Household Waste Sites	15	9	
➤ Transport	3	0	
Economy & Regeneration			
➤ Coast and Countryside	0	1	23
➤ Planning (including Enforcement)	7	7	
➤ Complaint against Staff	0	1	
➤ Property Services	3	0	
➤ Covid-19 – Misc.	0	1	
➤ TPO	1	0	
➤ Estates	1	1	
Customer Contact			
➤ Customer Services	3	0	5
➤ Registration	1	0	
➤ ICT & Information Management	1	0	
Legal and Governance services			
	0	0	0
Multiple Service / Corporate			
	0	7	7
TOTAL NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED	73	60	133

ITEM 2: COMPLAINT OUTCOMES

Outcome	2021/22
> Investigation / Complaint discontinued or withdrawn	10
> Not upheld	43
> Upheld Whole or in Part	65
> Open / Ongoing	15
TOTAL	133

ITEM 3 – OMBUDSMAN CASES RESULTING IN EARLY RESOLUTION AGREEMENTS

Report Issued	Case Ref.	Service(s)	Ombudsman Report Details
28/04/21	202005090	Porth Cynnal	<p>Mr X complained that his computer equipment, which had previously been provided following the Council's assessment of his needs, was no longer fit for purpose. The Ombudsman noted that Mr X had mentioned that he was also homeless and no longer resident in the Council's area due to his safeguarding concerns about them but was seeking a reassessment of his needs.</p> <p>The Ombudsman was concerned that there was a lack of clarity around whether Mr X intended to return to the Council's area and correspondingly whether there was a duty to assess him and consider his homelessness. The Ombudsman considered that it was reasonable for Mr X to confirm his intention about returning to the Council's area, before considering whether there had been maladministration by the Council.</p> <p>The Ombudsman considered that the matter was open to early resolution, once this had been confirmed by Mr X. This would confirm whether the Council had a duty towards Mr X. If it did, the Ombudsman was pleased to note that the Council agreed within 8 weeks to commence a reassessment of Mr X's needs (including communication needs) and as part of this, consider his homelessness status.</p>
13/05/21	2020006242	Porth Cynnal	<p>Ms X complained that the Council had not responded to her concerns regarding the care she had been providing to her friends. Ms X said that support she had requested had not been supplied.</p> <p>The assessment found that the Council had not formally responded to Ms X's complaint. The Council agreed to do so but would first contact the complainant, within 10 working days, to clarify her complaint. The Council agreed to provide an update to this office on its progress with formal consideration of the complaint within 20 working days. The Council also agreed to identify any social care needs that the complainant or her friends had (subject to the necessary consents) and to take steps to put in place any appropriate support services as soon as possible.</p>
22/06/21	202100516	Porth Cynnal	<p>Miss X complained that Ceredigion County Council ("the Council") failed to address her complaint about Social Services in a timely manner.</p> <p>In considering Miss X's complaint, the Ombudsman was concerned about the significant delays in responding to her complaint, that she had not received a response, and was inconvenienced by the Council's actions. He decided to settle the complaint without an investigation.</p> <p>The Ombudsman sought and gained the Council's agreement to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer Miss X a 'time and trouble' payment of £150.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Miss X with a formal apology for the failures identified in relation to the handling of her complaint. • Investigate her complaint in accordance with the Social Services complaints procedure. <p>The Council agreed to carry out these actions within 4 weeks.</p>
28/07/21	202102361	Policy, Performance & Public Protection (Complaint Handling)	<p>Mr X complained about the delay in the Council responding to his complaint and Freedom of Information request ("FOI"), submitted to it in March and April 2021 respectively.</p> <p>The Ombudsman decided that within 20 working days the Council should provide a response to Mr X's complaint and an update in respect of his FOI request.</p> <p>The Ombudsman considered this to be an appropriate resolution to the complaint.</p>
09/08/21	202101675	Economy & Regeneration	<p>Mrs A complained about Ceredigion County Council's actions in relation to planning and enforcement issues in relation a housing development on land adjacent to her home and in particular, that the ground levels had been raised. Mrs A further complained about delays in complaint handling, the Council's poor communication and that questions raised were not fully answered.</p> <p>The Ombudsman found that there was insufficient evidence of maladministration in the planning or enforcement process to warrant investigation. There appeared to be unexplained delay in the complaints handling process, but an apology had already been provided by the Council. However, the complaint response lacked detail and explanation about how the decision had been reached and the Council had not responded to additional questions raised by Mrs A.</p> <p>The Ombudsman decided to settle the complaint without an investigation. He sought and gained the Council's agreement to provide Mrs A, within 20 working days, with a fuller complaint response, addressing the specific concerns raised with the planning department including a better explanation as how the ground levels were calculated, a written response to the queries raised with the Complaints Department by and an apology for the Council's failure to address the supplementary questions raised.</p>

20/08/21	202102036	Porth Cynnal and Policy, Performance & Public Protection (Complaint Handling)	<p>Miss X complained that the Council had not provided her with a response to her Social Services complaint which had been submitted to it in November 2020.</p> <p>The Ombudsman was concerned that Miss X had not received a formal response to her complaint and that she had been inconvenienced by the Council's actions. He decided to settle the complaint without an investigation.</p> <p>The Ombudsman sought and gained the Council's agreement to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Miss X with an apology for the delay in responding to her complaint • Provide Miss X with an explanation for the delay • Provide Miss X with a complaint response • Offer Miss X £200 in recognition for the time and trouble in making her complaint <p>The Council agreed to complete the recommendations within 2 weeks.</p>
17/09/21	202102202	Economy & Regeneration and Policy, Performance & Public Protection (Complaint Handling)	<p>Mr X complained that Ceredigion County Council ("the Council"), acting as planning authority, had failed to take enforcement action regarding an unauthorised development on neighbouring land, which he reported in 2019. The Council had then (in 2020), granted retrospective planning consent which it later confirmed to be an error on its part (as it had intended to refuse the application). Since, Mr X said that the landowner had been allowed additional time by the Council to acquire further land to meet the terms of the permission granted but had seemingly not done so within the time permitted. Mr X further complained that the Council had failed to keep him informed and had failed to explain to him why it had not taken further action against the developer for failing to acquire the land or what it proposed to do.</p> <p>In considering the complaint, the Ombudsman acknowledged the error that the Council accepted had happened. He was concerned about the delay that had since occurred as well as the lack of update information provided to Mr X. He considered this to amount to maladministration and to be a serious injustice to Mr X, given he had first raised concerns in 2019. Recognising his jurisdictional limitations in planning matters (in that he cannot question professional judgement, or direct the Council to take enforcement action), the Ombudsman considered the complaint capable of being resolved on the basis of the following action, as an alternative to investigation.</p> <p>The Council agreed, within 1 month to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Apologise in writing to Mr X (through a Senior Officer) for the maladministration that had occurred. (b) Provide Mr X (separately or combined within the above) with a detailed explanation as to what had happened since the Council's decision to allow time for land acquisition, and how the issue is to be determined and brought to a conclusion. (c) Offer Mr X redress in the total sum of £1,500 for the injustice caused to him by the maladministration, as well as his time and trouble in pursuing his complaints with both the Council and the Ombudsman.

21/09/21	202102648	Economy & Regeneration	<p>Mr X complained that Ceredigion County Council (“the Council”) had failed to undertake a timely assessment of an alleged planning breach and to, if appropriate, take enforcement action.</p> <p>The Ombudsman contacted the Council and secured its agreement to, by no later than 1 November 2021, both respond to the complainant about its findings in respect of the alleged breach, and to offer both an explanation of and apology for the delay in doing so.</p>
06/10/21	202104213	Finance & Procurement and Policy, Performance & Public Protection (Complaint Handling)	<p>Mr X complained that the Council had not responded to his complaint submitted to it in April 2021 regarding issues with his council tax payments.</p> <p>The Ombudsman decided that the Council should provide Mr X with a stage two response (within 3 weeks) which should include an explanation for the delay. The Council will also perform an assessment to determine whether Mr X has lost out financially because of the delay. It will also consider a time and trouble payment for having to follow up on this matter and for contacting the Ombudsman.</p> <p>The Ombudsman considered this to be an appropriate resolution to the complaint instead of conducting an investigation.</p>
21/10/21	202104158	Economy & Regeneration	<p>Mr X complained that the Council failed to communicate progress about enforcement action in a timely manner. Mr X also complained about a lack of response to his complaint letter sent to the Council in June 2021.</p> <p>The Ombudsman decided that the Council should contact Mr X to discuss his complaint and obtain as necessary a copy of his complaint letter. It will then issue its formal (“stage two”) response in line with its internal complaint process within 20 working days.</p> <p>The Ombudsman considered this to be an appropriate resolution to the complaint instead of conducting an investigation.</p>
25/01/22	202106308	Porth Cynnal and Policy, Performance & Public Protection (Complaint Handling)	<p>Miss X complained that the Council failed to meet her son and her child’s needs. Miss X was also unhappy that a stage 2 investigation was not carried out in a timely manner after a request was put to the Council.</p> <p>The Ombudsman was concerned that the Council had not escalated Miss X’s complaint to a stage 2 investigation (under the Social Services Complaints Regulations) when requested and contacted the Council to resolve this. The Ombudsman therefore asked the Council to issue Miss X with an apology for not escalating her complaint on request, and to appoint an Independent Investigation Officer to undertake a stage 2 investigation.</p> <p>The Council agreed by 28 February to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) apologise to Miss X for failing to escalate her complaint and (ii) to escalate Miss X’s complaint to stage 2 and to appoint an Independent Investigation Officer to undertake the investigation.

07/02/22	202106906	Policy, Performance & Public Protection (Complaint Handling)	<p>Miss X complained that the Council failed to respond to her complaint about social services, and further failed to respond to her letters.</p> <p>The Ombudsman decided that the Council should contact Miss X (within 5 days) to establish if she would like her complaint dealt with at stage 1 or 2 of the social services complaints procedure. Thereafter, it should handle Miss X's complaint in accordance with the statutory timeframes. It should also apologise to Miss X for failing to respond to her letters.</p> <p>The Ombudsman considered this to be an appropriate resolution to the complaint instead of conducting an investigation.</p>
23/03/22	202107539	Policy, Performance & Public Protection (Complaint Handling)	<p>Ms X complained that the Council had failed to investigate and respond to her complaint about an increase in nursing home fees.</p> <p>In considering the complaint, the Ombudsman was concerned that the Council had not responded to Ms X despite informing her in August 2021 that enquiries were being made. As an alternative to an investigation, the Ombudsman asked the</p> <p>Council to complete the following in settlement of Ms X's complaint:</p> <p>By 21 April 2022,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Provide Ms X with an apology for failing to respond b) Provide Ms X with a full response to her email

Ask for: Communications

 01656 641150

Date: August 2022

 communications@ombudsman.wales

Cllr. Bryan Davies
Ceredigion County Council
By Email only: bryan.davies@ceredigion.go.uk

Annual Letter 2021/22

Dear Councillor Davies

I am pleased to provide you with the Annual letter (2021/22) for Ceredigion County Council which deals with complaints relating to maladministration and service failure, complaints relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct for Councillors and the actions being taken to improve public services

This is my first annual letter since taking up the role of Public Services Ombudsman in April 2022, and I appreciate that the effects of the pandemic are still being felt by all public bodies in Wales. Our office has not been immune from this, with records numbers of cases being referred to us over the last two years. The strong working relationships between my Office and local authorities continues to deliver improvements in how we are dealing with complaints and ensuring that, when things go wrong, we are learning from that and building stronger public services.

Complaints relating to Maladministration & Service Failure

Last year the number of complaints referred to us regarding Local Authorities increased by 47% (compared to 20/21 figures) and are now well above pre-pandemic levels. It is likely that complaints to my office, and public services in general, were suppressed during the pandemic, and we are now starting to see the expected 'rebound' effect.

During this period, we intervened in (upheld, settled or resolved at an early stage) a similar proportion of complaints about public bodies, 18%, when compared with recent years. Intervention rates (where we have investigated complaints) for Local Authorities also remained at a similar level – 14% compared to 13% in recent years.

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Complaints relating to the Code of Conduct for Councillors

We also received a high number of Code of Conduct complaints last year, relating to both Principal Councils and Town and Community Councils. A record number (20) were referred to either the Adjudication Panel for Wales or local standards committees, due to evidence of a breach of the Code.

Supporting improvement of public services

In addition to managing record levels of complaints, we also continued our work using our proactive powers in the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019. Specifically undertaking our first Own Initiative Investigation and continuing our work on the Complaints Standards Authority.

October 2021 saw the publication of the first own initiative investigation in Wales: [Homelessness Reviewed](#). The investigation featured three Local Authorities and sought to scrutinise the way Homelessness assessments were conducted. The report made specific recommendations to the investigated authorities, as well as suggestions to all other Local Authorities in Wales and Welsh Government. Some of these recommendations will bring about immediate change – updating factsheets and letter and assessment templates to ensure that key equality and human rights considerations are routinely embedded into processes for example – all the recommendations were designed to bring about tangible change to people using homelessness services in Wales.

The Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) continued its work with public bodies in Wales last year. The model complaints policy has already been adopted by local authorities and health boards in Wales, we have now extended this to an initial tranche of Housing Associations and Natural Resources Wales. The aim being to implement this work across the Welsh public sector.

In addition to this, the CSA published information on complaints handled by local authorities for the [first time](#) – a key achievement for this work. The data for 21/22 showed:

- Over 15,000 complaints were recorded by Local Authorities
- 4.88 for every 1000 residents.
- Nearly half (46%) of those complaints were upheld.
- About 75% were investigated within 20 working days.
- About 8% of all complaints closed ended up being referred to PSOW.

The CSA has now implemented a model complaints policy with nearly 50 public bodies, and delivered 140 training sessions, completely free of charge, during the last financial year. The feedback has been excellent, and the training has been very popular - so I would encourage Ceredigion County Council to engage as fully as possible.

Complaints made to the Ombudsman

A summary of the complaints of maladministration/service failure received relating to your Council is attached, along with a summary of the Code of Conduct complaints relating to members of the Council and the Town & Community Councils in your area.

In light of the new duties on political leaders and standards committees to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of their members, we look forward to working with you, your Monitoring Officer and standards committees to share any learning from the complaints we receive and to support your authority's work.

I would also welcome feedback on your Governance & Audit Committee's review of your authority's ability to handle complaints effectively so that we can take this into account in our work and support its work on the handling of complaints.

Finally, can I thank you and your officials for the positive way that local authorities have engaged with my Office to enable us to deliver these achievements during what has been a challenging year for everyone. I very much look forward to continuing this work and collaboration to ensure we further improve public services across Wales.

Further to this letter can I ask that your Council takes the following actions:

- Present my Annual Letter to the Cabinet and to the Governance & Audit Committee to assist members in their scrutiny of the Council's performance and share any feedback from the Cabinet and the Governance & Audit Committee with my office.
- Continue to engage with our Complaints Standards work, accessing training for your staff, fully implementing the model policy, and providing complaints data.
- Inform me of the outcome of the Council's considerations and proposed actions on the above matters by 30 September.

This correspondence is copied to the Chief Executive of your Council and to your Contact Officer. Finally, a copy of all Annual Letters will be published on my website.

Yours sincerely,



Michelle Morris

Public Services Ombudsman

cc. Eifion Evans, Chief Executive, Ceredigion County Council.

By Email only: Eifion.evans@ceredigion.gov.uk

Factsheet

Appendix A - Complaints Received

Local Authority	Complaints Received	Received per 1000 residents
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	14	0.20
Bridgend County Borough Council	55	0.37
Caerphilly County Borough Council	60	0.33
Cardiff Council*	182	0.50
Carmarthenshire County Council	54	0.29
Ceredigion County Council	52	0.72
Conwy County Borough Council	27	0.23
Denbighshire County Council	34	0.36
Flintshire County Council	99	0.63
Gwynedd Council	39	0.31
Isle of Anglesey County Council	29	0.41
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	27	0.45
Monmouthshire County Council	20	0.21
Neath Port Talbot Council	45	0.31
Newport City Council	40	0.26
Pembrokeshire County Council	39	0.31
Powys County Council	55	0.42
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	51	0.21
Swansea Council	71	0.29
Torfaen County Borough Council	18	0.19
Vale of Glamorgan Council	61	0.46
Wrexham County Borough Council	71	0.52
Total	1143	0.36

* inc 17 Rent Smart Wales

Appendix B - Received by Subject

Ceredigion County Council	Complaints Received	% Share
Adult Social Services	6	12%
Benefits Administration	0	0%
Children's Social Services	3	6%
Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure	1	2%
Complaints Handling	14	27%
Covid19	3	6%
Education	2	4%
Environment and Environmental Health	5	10%
Finance and Taxation	2	4%
Housing	0	0%
Licensing	0	0%
Planning and Building Control	10	19%
Roads and Transport	5	10%
Various Other	1	2%
Total	52	

Appendix C - Complaint Outcomes (* denotes intervention)

County/County Borough Councils	Out of Jurisdiction	Premature	Other cases closed after initial consideration	Early Resolution/ voluntary settlement*	Discontinued	Other Reports- Not Upheld	Other Reports Upheld*	Public Interest Report*	Total
Ceredigion County Council	4	13	16	13	0	0	0	0	46
% Share	9%	28%	35%	28%	0%	0%	0%	0%	

Appendix D - Cases with PSOW Intervention

	No. of interventions	No. of closures	% of interventions
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	0	13	0%
Bridgend County Borough Council	7	54	13%
Caerphilly County Borough Council	7	58	12%
Cardiff Council	45	159	28%
Cardiff Council - Rent Smart Wales	1	16	6%
Carmarthenshire County Council	7	49	14%
Ceredigion County Council	13	46	28%
Conwy County Borough Council	2	24	8%
Denbighshire County Council	4	33	12%
Flintshire County Council	15	94	16%
Gwynedd Council	6	41	15%
Isle of Anglesey County Council	3	28	11%
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	2	26	8%
Monmouthshire County Council	2	21	10%
Neath Port Talbot Council	5	45	11%
Newport City Council	4	36	11%
Pembrokeshire County Council	2	40	5%
Powys County Council	7	55	13%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	3	45	7%
Swansea Council	10	76	13%
Torfaen County Borough Council	2	20	10%
Vale of Glamorgan Council	9	62	15%
Wrexham County Borough Council	4	67	6%
Total	160	1108	14%

Appendix E - Code of Conduct Complaints

County/County Borough Councils	Discontinued	No evidence of breach	No action necessary	Refer to Adjudication Panel	Refer to Standards Committee	Withdrawn	Total
Ceredigion County Council	2	2	0	0	0	0	4

Appendix F - Town/Community Council Code of Complaints

Town/Community Council	Discontinued	No evidence of breach	No action necessary	Refer to Adjudication Panel	Refer to Standards Committee	Withdrawn	Total
Llanfair Clydogau Community Council	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Llangoedmor Community Council	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Llansantffraed Community Council	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
New Quay Town Council	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Trefeurig Community Council	-	-	-	-	-	-	0

Information Sheet

Appendix A shows the number of complaints received by PSOW for all Local Authorities in 2021/2022. These complaints are contextualised by the number of people each health board reportedly serves.

Appendix B shows the categorisation of each complaint received, and what proportion of received complaints represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix C shows outcomes of the complaints which PSOW closed for the Local Authority in 2021/2022. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix D shows Intervention Rates for all Local Authorities in 2021/2022. An intervention is categorised by either an upheld complaint (either public interest or non-public interest), an early resolution, or a voluntary settlement.

Appendix E shows the outcomes of Code Of Conduct complaints closed by PSOW related to Local Authority in 2021/2022. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix F shows the outcomes of Code of Conduct complaints closed by PSOW related to Town and Community Councils in the Local Authority's area. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for each Town or Community Council.

Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO: Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 3 October 2022

LOCATION: Hybrid

TITLE: Victim Support Hate Crime Charter

PURPOSE OF REPORT: For Ceredigion County Council to consider signing up to and endorsing the Victim Support Hate Crime Charter

REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION: To be advised on the background and benefits of signing up to the Victim Support Hate Crime Charter

BACKGROUND:

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.

Hate crime can have a devastating effect on victims and the charity has seen a stark increase in demand for its hate crime support services, up to 70%, during the pandemic. This rise was driven largely as a result of racial and homophobic related incidences. In response to this rise in demand, Victim Support launched the Hate Crime Charter, which commits organisations to deliver rights for victims, as well as supporting them in identifying and reporting hate related crimes and incidences.

Ceredigion County Council are already committed to raise awareness of Hate Crime and how to report it. Work undertaken through the Community Cohesion team and many council departments underpins a desire to ensure that hate crime is not acceptable, that people understand what hate crimes are, and what action victims, bystanders and communities should take when they happen. Signing the Victim Support Hate Crime Charter will consolidate the good work already undertaken by the local authority and provides a framework to ensure that a full commitment at all levels of the organisation is achieved.

No person in Ceredigion should have to tolerate prejudice or hate crime. Everyone has the right to respect, and everyone should be able to go through their day without being insulted, harassed or attacked. It is vital that victims of hate crime are supported, and that perpetrators are held to account.

The charter sets out the rights of victims, and the commitments of organisations who sign the charter, in playing a part in tackling hate crime, providing support and information for victims, and to raise awareness of hate crime among staff and the communities we work with.

CURRENT SITUATION:

Organisations that adopt the charter are committing to ensuring that staff and volunteers are all expected to abide by the charter's promises whenever they come into contact with those affected by hate crime and work to build strong and inclusive communities. Organisations will also be required to undertake some key actions related to Hate Crime Awareness. These are not prescribed and can be developed in appropriate ways according to the needs of the organisation and the communities they serve. Examples of the work that organisations who sign the Charter can undertake include:

- An internal awareness raising campaign on Cerinet and through the Team Ceredigion weekly emails (during Hate Crime Awareness Week or other key points in the year).
- Encouraging/Mandating staff to attend training (eg front-facing staff, managers and elected members).
- Circulating Hate Crime information to staff.
- Circulating the Hate related Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Factsheet to housing staff and other neighbourhood workers.
- Included Hate Crime within ASB policies.
- Ensuring Hate Crime leaflets are available in key places (Victim Support can provide leaflets, places might be in the Well-being Centres, Libraries, Leisure Centres and Office Buildings).
- Amended HR policies to cover hate acts in the workplace.
- Hate Crime Training for line managers / supervisors.
- Hate Crime Awareness Week events.

Next steps

If Ceredigion County Council chose to sign up to the Charter, a meeting will be set up with Victim Support to discuss relevant steps. Some organisations have focused on staff training, some on dissemination of information, others on a mixture of the two. Upon becoming an 'active' partner, organisations are able to use the Trustmark on their websites, promotional materials etc.

For more information visit <https://www.reportheate.victimsupport.org.uk/hate-crime-charter/>.

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If not, please state why No as the proposal is to sign-up to a charter. It does not refer to a policy or service change.

WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS:

Summary:
Long term:
Integration:
Collaboration:
Involvement:
Prevention:

RECOMMENDATION (S):

That the scrutiny committee makes a recommendation to Cabinet that Ceredigion County Council should sign up to the Hate Crime Charter.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

To consolidate the good work already undertaken by the Local Authority around Hate Crime and provide a framework to ensure a full commitment at all levels of the organisation is achieved.

Contact Name: Kay Howells
Designation: Mid and South West Wales Community Cohesion Coordinator
Date of Report: 13 September 2021
Acronyms:

Cefndir

Lansiwyd y Siarter Troseddau Casineb yn 2022 yn ystod Wythnos Ymwybyddiaeth Troseddau Casineb fel ffordd o ymgysylltu â sefydliadau mawr a bach i helpu i greu amgylchedd gwell i ddioddefwyr a thystion Troseddau Casineb.

Mae'r Siarter yn tynnu sylw at hawliau dioddefwyr a meysydd cymorth allweddol sy'n gwneud gwahaniaeth gwirioneddol i'r rhai y mae troseddau casineb yn effeithio arnynt.

Proses gofrestru

Mae yna broses dri cham i gofrestru i'r siarter:

- 1) Cofrestru gan ddefnyddio'r ffurflen cofrestru **YMA**
- 2) Ymuno â sgwrs gyda staff Ymgysylltu allweddol o'r Ganolfan Cymorth i Ddioddefwyr Casineb Cymru. Byddwn yn eich helpu i edrych ar eich gweledigaeth y tu ôl i lofnodi'r siarter a pha gymorth y gallwn ei gynnig i'ch helpu i gyflawni hynny.
- 3) Unwaith y bydd camau cadarnhaol wedi'u cymryd, byddwch yn derbyn y Nod Ymddiriedaeth er mwyn i chi allu dangos eich ymrwymiad yn fwy cyhoeddus.

Y Nod Ymddiriedaeth

Mae'r Nod Ymddiriedaeth yn symbol o ymrwymiad sefydliad i'r Siarter a dioddefwyr Troseddau Casineb. Mae'n dangos eich bod chi fel grŵp neu sefydliad yn mynd ati i gyflawni'r ymrwymadau a wnaethoch.

Mae grwpiau a sefydliadau sy'n cyflawni'r Nod Ymddiriedaeth yn gallu ei arddangos ar eu sianeli cyfryngau cymdeithasol, gwefan, llofnodion e-bost, cylchlythyrau a chyfathrebiadau eraill. Cadwn yr hawl i dynnu defnydd y Nod Ymddiriedaeth yn ôl ar unrhyw adeg.

Cyswllt

I gofrestru ar gyfer y Siarter, defnyddiwch y ddolen cofrestru uchod neu cysylltwch â'ch Swyddog Hyfforddi ac Ymgysylltu lleol;

Gogledd Cymru trudy.pease@victimsupport.org.uk

De Cymru & Gwent claire.guthrie@victimsupport.org.uk

Canolbarth a De-orllewin Cymru becca.rosenthal@victimsupport.org.uk

Os ydych yn sefydliad Cymru gyfan, nad ydych yn siŵr ym mha ardal yr ydych yn eistedd neu os oes gennych ymholiadau cyffredinol am y Siarter, cysylltwch â'r Rheolwr Ymgysylltu a Hyfforddiant Cymunedol Troseddau Casineb Becca Rosenthal: becca.rosenthal@victimsupport.org.uk

Gadewch i ni wrthwynebu troseddu casineb gyda'n gilydd

Background

The Hate Crime Charter was launched in 2020 during Hate Crime Awareness Week as a way of engaging organisations big and small in helping to create a better environment for victims and witnesses of Hate Crime.

The Charter brings to the forefront victims' rights and key areas of support that make a real difference to those affected by hate crime.

Sign-up process

There is a three-step process to signing up to the Charter:

- 1) Sign up via the registration form [HERE](#)
- 2) Join in a conversation with key Engagement staff from the Wales Hate Support Centre. We will help you to look at your vision behind signing the charter and what support we can offer to help you to achieve that.
- 3) Once positive steps take place you'll be awarded the Trustmark for you to display more publicly your commitment.

The Trustmark

The Trustmark is a symbol of an organisation's commitment to the Charter and victims of Hate Crime. It demonstrates that you as a group or organisation are actively delivering on the commitments that you have made.

Groups and organisations that achieve the Trustmark are able to display it on their social media channels, website, e-mail signatures, newsletters and other communications.

We reserve the right to withdraw the use of the Trustmark at any time.

Contact

To sign up to the Charter, please use the registration link above or contact your local Training & Engagement Officer;

North Wales trudy.pease@victimsupport.org.uk

South Wales & Gwent Claire.guthrie@victimsupport.org.uk

Mid & South West Wales becca.rosenthal@victimsupport.org.uk

If you're a pan-Wales organisation, you're not sure which area you sit or you have general enquiries about the Charter, please contact Hate Crime Community Engagement & Training Manager Becca Rosenthal: becca.rosenthal@victimsupport.org.uk

Let's stand up to **hate crime** together

Victim Support Hate Crime Charter

The charter sets out in detail the rights of victims, and the commitments of organisations in playing a part in tackling hate crime, providing support and information for victims, and to raise awareness of hate crime.

The Right to be Treated with Respect

We will treat you with respect and as an individual in your own right. We will celebrate diversity and inclusion in our organisation and communities that we work with.



The Right to Privacy

We will ensure your data is kept securely and not shared with anyone without your consent. You always have the right to request any data we hold about you, or request its deletion from our records complying with General Data Protection Regulations.



The Right to Make a Complaint

We will provide guidance on how to make a complaint if you are not happy that your rights have been adhered to.



The Right to Information

We will make sure information about hate crime and accessing support is available to you in a way that you can understand. We will work with communities and organisations to raise awareness of hate crime.



The Right to be Heard

We will listen to you and acknowledge the impact the Hate Crime has had on you. We will do this whether you wish to report the incident to the Police or not.



The Right to Free and Confidential Support

We will provide guidance on accessing free and confidential support from Victim Support that is tailored to you and your needs. We will signpost you to other specialised services if required ensuring you get the support to help you cope and recover from the impact of Hate Crime.



The Right to Report Hate Crime

We will help you report the Hate Crime to the police, either directly or through Victim Support's National Hate Crime Report and Support Centre, where you can remain anonymous. We will record the hate element as the motivating factor to the Police or Victim Support.



Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO:	Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	03/10/2022
LOCATION:	Hybrid: Council Chamber / Virtual
TITLE:	Tackling Hardship Strategy Annual Report 2021-22
PURPOSE OF REPORT:	To present the latest updates towards our Tackling Hardship Strategy.
REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION:	To monitor progress made in tackling the effects that poverty has on residents in Ceredigion.

BACKGROUND:

This report sets 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 is monitored by the PSB Poverty sub-group. It has been agreed that the Tackling Hardships Strategy 2020-22 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 are:

- 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 in order to promote and take advantage of all available help and assistance
- To **identify gaps** in support and evolving hardship needs in order to develop early effective intervention that will strengthen individual and community resilience as we adjust to the impact of COVID-19.

We report on the progress of this strategy annually, measuring the Red, Amber, Green status of actions that are under the responsibility of the PSB Poverty Sub-group. The Action Plan is divided into three separate pillars:

- Essential living costs
- Physical and emotional well-being
- Community resilience

CURRENT SITUATION:

Progress has been made in all three pillars of the action plan and some demonstrable improvements are evidenced through the data in our Tackling Hardship Data Dashboard. Poverty remains of high concern in Ceredigion and continued work is needed to alleviate the impact this has on people. Since the reporting period of this report, we have seen a worsening cost of living crisis which we will closely monitor in the coming months.

Conclusions and findings of the Tackling Hardship action plan report:

People are generally struggling with mounting debt and the percentage of people in Wales who are concerned about being able to pay bills one month from now reached a high of 35% in March 2022.

Child poverty in Ceredigion is higher than average and has seen the second highest increase nationally since 2014-15.

Childcare places have continued to fall. This is a real concern, particular in light of the recent announcement of free childcare for all 2-year old children, and the reliance of the working population on childcare.

More people are needing help and support with mental health issues. Problems with staff recruitment makes it more difficult for providers to respond to the issues. Access to specialist services is still extremely difficult.

Staffing issues presented the greatest challenge to schools remaining open due to a severe lack of supply staff.

Increasing constructions costs and a limited supply of contractors is creating challenges in terms of developing and delivering affordable homes.

Next Steps:

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

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If not, please state why No, this is a progress report that does not involve a policy change.

Summary:

Long term: The strategy aims to alleviate the long-term impact of poverty on residents in Ceredigion

Integration: This strategy integrates with the Local Well-being Objectives of the Public Services Board (PSB) and the Local Authority. It supports the work of our Strategic Economic Duty.

WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS:

Collaboration: This piece of work is delivered in partnership between departments of the Local Authority and members of the Public Services Board.

Involvement: Front line staff feed into the updates and actions detailed in this report. These members of staff work with residents who are most affected by poverty, they ensure that the needs of this people are met in this work.

Prevention: By committing to Tackling Hardship in Ceredigion we aim to prevent issues that arise through living in poverty from occurring in the first instance.

RECOMMENDATION (S):

To receive and endorse the Tackling Hardship Annual Report 2021-22.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

The report is an accurate description of progress made by the Tackling Hardship Action Plan in the financial year 2021-22.

Contact Name: Cathryn Morgan
Designation: Equalities and Inclusion Manager
Date of Report: 12/09/2022
Acronyms:



CEREDIGION TACKLING HARDSHIP STRATEGY 2020 - 2023

PROGRESS REPORT MARCH 2022

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Introduction

This report sets 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. It outlines the work that partners and colleagues have delivered in 2021-22 to maximise support with essential living costs, gain optimal physical and emotional wellbeing and to ensure supportive and connected communities throughout Ceredigion.

The Tackling Hardship Strategy 2020-22 was published in August 2020 as a successor to Ceredigion Combatting Poverty Strategy 2016-20. It was agreed that the strategy will 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:

- 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 in order to promote and take advantage of all available help and assistance
- To **identify gaps** in support and evolving hardship needs in order to develop early effective intervention that will strengthen individual and community resilience as we adjust to the impact of COVID-19.

An action plan is delivered by a range of partners and public sector teams, listed at Appendix B. The Action Plan is divided into 3 separate pillars for implementation:



We wish to acknowledge the commitment and support that colleagues and partners have demonstrated and thank them for their continued recognition of the importance of working collectively to tackle hardship in Ceredigion.

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010

Section 2 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 puts a statutory duty on Welsh authorities to prepare and publish a strategy that will contribute to the eradication of child poverty in Wales. The broad aims for contributing to the eradication of poverty are:

- to increase income for households with children;
- to ensure that children are not materially deprived;
- to promote and facilitate paid employment for parents of children;
- to provide parents of children with the skills necessary for paid employment;
- to reduce inequalities in educational attainment between children;
- to support parenting of children;
- to reduce inequalities in health between children and between parents of children;
- to ensure that all children grow up in decent housing;
- to ensure that all children grow up in safe and cohesive communities;
- to reduce inequalities in participation in cultural, sporting and leisure activities between children and between parents of children;
- to help young people participate effectively in education and training;
- to help young people take advantage of opportunities for employment;
- to help young people participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.

Public Services Boards may publish their strategy as an integral part of their Local Well-being Plan. However, Ceredigion Public Services Board has chosen to publish a separate strategy in order to keep a specific focus on issues relating to poverty in Ceredigion.

The Tackling Hardship Strategy is monitored by Ceredigion PSB Poverty Sub-group which meets four times per year. Matters relating to Child Poverty are scrutinised by the Children & Young People Services Provider Forum that meets one week before the PSB Poverty Sub-group in order that issues can be escalated to the Poverty Sub-group immediately.

1

ESSENTIAL LIVING COSTS

(Help for those experiencing financial hardship)

Financial support was offered directly to individuals and businesses who were struggling. This included a focus on training and employment, so that the local workforce was ready and able to return to work when Covid restrictions eased and that local employers were ready to reopen for business.

Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Early Help service

The team responded to **714** referrals for practical and financial support. Lists of food deliveries, food banks, grants and other resources were published on the Council website. **250** winter coats were provided to young people aged 0-25.

Porth Gofal: Financial Assistance and Social Housing

The Warm Homes Fund, ECO Flex are administered by the Local Authority to help tackle fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency; the Local Authority also signposts to the Welsh government Nest scheme. Some grant schemes were suspended during lockdown which resulted in fewer installations, however: **246** first time central heating systems were installed, **50** broken boilers were replaced, and **433** applications were received for ECO Flex grants during the year.

1,405 applications were made for Social Housing and **12%** of applicants cited 'financial concerns' as one of their reasons for needing assistance (14% in 2020-21). Increasing construction costs and a limited supply of contractors has resulted in a challenging year in terms of developing and delivering affordable homes. Despite this, **132** affordable housing units were delivered in 2021-22 (68 for the rental market, 8 for 'rent to own' scheme and 56 Extra Care housing units).

Care Leavers were given additional hardship financial support which has ensured that many have been able to keep their tenancies.

Housing Support Provider: Care Society

Practical support is offered to those who are homeless or potentially homeless – food parcels, income maximisation, advice on the Social Housing Register and temporary or private rented housing options. The **57** units of temporary accommodation are generally fully occupied but it is becoming more difficult for people to afford service charges and other essential costs due to rising prices. People are generally struggling with mounting debt.

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme

5,617 people were in receipt of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme in March 2022, a 6% decrease from the previous year. The average speed of processing new claims was just under **19** days and **7** days for any changes needed.

Despite the additional pressures in prioritising the Covid 19 Self Isolation Support Scheme and Winter Fuel Payments the speed of processing averages remain within the Housing Benefit UK averages for 21/22. **£337,443** worth of Discretionary Housing Payments have been paid out to support those experiencing financial difficulty and help safeguard tenancies.

Free School Meals and Pupil Deprivation Grant

Incorporating Free School Meal assessments alongside other benefits has streamlined the process for those entitled. Free School Meals claimants have continued to increase from 953 (Sept 2019) to **1,783** (March 2022). All schools now operate a cashless catering system. BACS payments or vouchers for £19.50 per week per pupil eligible for free school meals were provided over each school holiday (this scheme is due to end on 31/08/2022). Ongoing payments of Pupil Deprivation Grant for school uniform and equipment is provided to relevant year groups.

Childcare

Childcare places have continued to fall. This is a real concern, particular in light of the recent announcement of free childcare for all 2 year olds, and the reliance of the working population on childcare. **1,596** childcare places were available in March 2022 (a reduction of 74 places since March 2020). **£364,472** was made available to the sector to alleviate the impact of the pandemic and to support the delivery of the Childcare Offer.

Training, Employment & the Local Economy

The Council's Employment Support Team has expanded. **42** of their clients were successful with job outcomes and **18** people completed employability qualifications, including HGV qualifications, to support their job searching process.

Employers now regularly attend the two Jobcentres in Ceredigion to offer face to face job interviews to DWP customers. Kickstart has been embraced by employers in the area and a range of vacancies have been made available to 18 to 24 years old DWP customers. This provides vital evidence of employability when the young person goes on to a different employer.

The Council's Public Protection Team have advised a wide range of businesses on measures required to comply with coronavirus restrictions. **2,659** advisory visits have been made to premises this year.

Ceredigion Citizens Advice

Accessible services continued through the year as well as energy advice training for frontline staff and members of the public via video conferencing. **832** individuals were helped with 5,655 enquires.

£528,840 of additional income was secured for clients and **£132,024** worth of debts written off. The largest area of benefits work is benefits for people with a disability and the advice service responded to over 800 requests for help with Personal

Independent Payments (PIP), Attendance Allowance (AA) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

2

PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

(Help for those experiencing exhaustion, stress and anxiety)

Targeted and universal support was offered to individuals who were experiencing stress, exhaustion and anxiety as a result of the pandemic. The longer term aim is to increase the amount of support available to improve emotional and mental well-being and to provide respite to those who needed it.

Policy and Performance Service

Ceredigion County Council Corporate Well-being Objectives were reviewed and amended to focus attention on the need to recover from the pandemic, in terms of supporting the economy, safely re-opening services and protecting people from poverty.

Ceredigion Family Centre Network

637 families were supported by the **Family Centre Network**, initially online, but as restrictions eased, through face to face sessions. **420** resource and activity packs were distributed to families and **32** referrals were made for targeted support from Team around the Family, Speech and Language team, Mind, Citizens Advice Bureau, Childcare for Employment (PaCE), Flying Start and Carers' support.

Schools Services

Well-being has been a priority in the majority of schools' Development Plans. Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) are teaching assistants trained to provide emotional and social skills support to children. **95%** of schools now have a trained ELSA. Face to face school counselling resumed in September 2021 and **194** pupils have engaged since the start of term.

DASH Ceredigion offer recreation opportunities for disabled children/young people and respite for families. The lack of out of school childcare provision led to a big decline in use of Ymuno support, with no new referrals and only **3** children receiving support in 2021-22. The pandemic resulted in a reduced number of DASHAway Weekends during the year and a term time youth club for smaller groups of young people with a disability. **36** children attended Sumer Playscheme activity days and **2** children received one-to-one support.

Hywel Dda University Health Board and Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Carer support

179 Carers were supported and **537** applications were received for the Carers Fund. 139 Adult Carer cards and 11 Young Carer cards have been issued, giving those who carry the card an easy way of verifying their caring responsibilities, access to

benefits and discounts and priority shopping times during the pandemic. The Carers Unit Spring magazine focused on ways to improve Mental Health and well-being.

Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Support and Prevention

Over 300 wellbeing packs were distributed to children and young people as part of the Winter of Wellbeing initiative. Outreach and detached youth work has been developed in partnership with Dyfed Powys Police and Choices. **498** young people were supported this year: 60% due to challenging behaviour, 20% for reasons of emotional and mental wellbeing and 20% for reasons of substance misuse, social isolation or other.

Ten local voluntary youth organisations were funded to develop emotional and mental wellbeing support and provision for young people. **143** young people benefitted from a range of indoor and outdoor creative arts, music and drama activities.

Area 43

North and South Ceredigion GP Clusters have commissioned Area 43 to provide a counselling service to young people aged 13-30. They also offer emotional support to young people in Cardigan and opened a youth café to provide a place for relaxation and also as a site for information, signposting to services and direct service provision for young people aged 14-25.

Hywel Dda University Health Board: Community Development Outreach

823 people engaged with the team and various public health messages are now available in 19 different languages. **70** individuals were signposted or referred for specific health issues and **38** people received one-to-one support.

A new text-based service – ChatHealth – is now available to support the emotional and mental well-being of young people aged 11-19. The service is cited as very accessible and was used by a homeless young person to access support without the need for referral by a GP or other professional. Kooth is another new online counselling and emotional well-being service for young people aged 11-18 years.

Schools and Culture: Theatr Felinfach

A range of online drama sessions were offered for children and young people during the period of lockdown. Older members of the Fun and Leisure group took part in a Keeping in Touch postcard project. The Christmas pantomime was successful, despite Covid restrictions, offering 266 participation opportunities and attracting audiences of over 800 people. Face to face participatory work began in earnest in Spring 2022 with opportunities for young people to work with professional artists in art, dance, history and drama. Over **13,000** on-line and face to face opportunities to participate were provided during the last 6 months of the year.

Porth Cymorth Cynnar, Well-being Centres

National Exercise Referral Service (NERS) activities recommenced in Autumn 2021. Clients are now offered face to face and virtual activities. A phased approach to the reintroduction of the scheme has been adopted in response to the coronavirus transmission rates in the county and numbers able to attend activity sessions have gradually increased in response to Welsh Government guidelines. **150** people are now regularly active on the scheme but there is a waiting list of 105 clients.

A new category of “Passport Membership” has been introduced for individuals in receipt of a means tested benefit at a cost of £15 per month individual and £30 a month for families which provides unlimited access to fitness suite/exercise classes / swimming at council operated facilities.

Environmental Services

Improvements to walking and cycling routes have continued. Schemes delivered include Gwbert Road, Cardigan, Lampeter University path upgrade, Waunfawr footway scheme, Penglais secondary school traffic calming and Llwyn yr Eos primary school footway upgrades. The Active Travel Network Map Review was approved, and the Future Route maps submitted to Welsh Government by March 2022

Porth Cynnal – Mental Health & Substance Misuse Services

116 active cases were open to the Mental Health team (Jan-Dec 2021) and over **137** Mental Health Act assessments/ activities were undertaken. **121** packages of support, domiciliary care and placements were provided. The ‘Breathing Space’ scheme provides financial respite from debts when someone is in mental health crisis or an inpatient. This scheme is promoted widely by the team.

The Substance Misuse team has a fluctuating case load of about **50** clients. The majority of their clients are experiencing alcohol misuse; there has been an increase in the number of older adults that are identified by Alcohol Liaison Nurses in the hospital. **61** referrals were received (2021-22) and 18 cases were closed. 14 showed an improvement at closure, 2 had stayed the same and 2 had worsened.

Housing Support Provider: Care Society

As a consequence of the pandemic coupled with the growing cost of living crisis, mental health issues are manifest. A lot more people are needing help and support and there are problems with recruitment. Access to specialist services to help directly with these issues is still extremely difficult.

Penparcau Community Forum

Over 100 bags of food can be collected for pick up outside Penparcau Hub. Deliveries of 35-45 bags of food, flowers and company are made to those who need it around Penparcau. The most vulnerable receive a visit and a phone call at least once a week on top of the food deliveries. They now operate 7 days a week and

have signed up to the CAB scheme which has installed a phone and a laptop at the Centre in order for people to contact CAB remotely.

3

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

(Making sure that people are able to access services)

The following activities were designed to foster local community response teams and identify barriers to accessing services. The longer term aim was to further strengthen community support networks and address barriers faced by those unable to access services online or by telephone.

Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Early Help and CAVO

Ceredigion 'Connect to Kindness' campaign has built up gradually. The social media group now has **676** members, 11 'Kindness Connectors' have been recruited and 26 activities are registered on the Ceredigion 'Connect' page. **1,735** national and local services for Ceredigion citizens were listed on Dewis Cymru website in March 2022 (a slight decrease from 1,811 resources in September 2021).

238 individuals signed up to the delta Wellbeing Project that supports them to remain independent in their own home for longer and **17** tablets were distributed to clients. **16** iPads were loaned to parents with pre-school children

Ceredigion Council Customer Contact

Cash offices remain closed in March 2022. Ceredigion Libraries are open for Click and Collect and access to PCs by appointment. Access has been reduced to 60 minutes to allow for Covid restrictions. A comprehensive online library service is available, but the aim was to extend availability of internet on Library vans and to extend computer appointments to 2 hours.

Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Community Well-being & Learning

Dysgu Bro and Hyfforddiant Ceredigion Training started term online. Free sessions to access online learning were offered and digital kit loaned to learners who needed it. The aim was to work with ALN service for schools to provide transitional learning for those with additional learning needs, this has not been possible however as the Centres are still closed.

The tender process for building work on Lampeter Wellbeing Centre is nearing completion. It's anticipated that building work will commence in July 2022 and completed in early 2023. 3D Layout Plans of the Wellbeing Centre are on display in Lampeter Leisure Centre.

Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Support & Intervention

The mobile youth outreach provision has engaged with 4 communities and **32** young people who had been identified as at risk due to their current living situation and associated behaviours.

The team continues to work collaboratively with Ceredigion Actif, Sport Wales, Ceredigion Training and other key partners to provide opportunities for projects, activities, tasters and workshops, for example: taster day sessions in carpentry, mechanics, hairdressing, beauty and plumbing for year 11 leavers and post-16 provision with Ceredigion Training.

Schools and Culture Services

Pupils suffering from Covid related anxiety or that were self-isolating were provided with learning resources for home learning. All schools were provided with a digital revision aid to help them prepare for an unexpected closure and absenteeism is closely monitored in order to offer the appropriate support as soon as possible. Staffing issues presented the greatest challenge due to a severe lack of supply staff. Some schools and many classes were closed for periods during this time frame. Every possible measure was taken to keep schools open.

CCC, Economy & Regeneration – Digital Development

While Ceredigion has seen improvements in digital infrastructure over the past 12 months and some areas experience some of the quickest broadband speeds in the UK, there are areas of the County that still fall below the levels of other areas of Wales and the UK in regard to superfast broadband and mobile connectivity.

26.5% of the region currently has access to Ultrafast Broadband (100mbps+) compared to Wales (48%) and the UK (68%), while 8.5% of premises in Ceredigion cannot access a connection of more than 10Mbps compared to only 2.25% for Wales and 1.8% for the UK experiencing this issue.

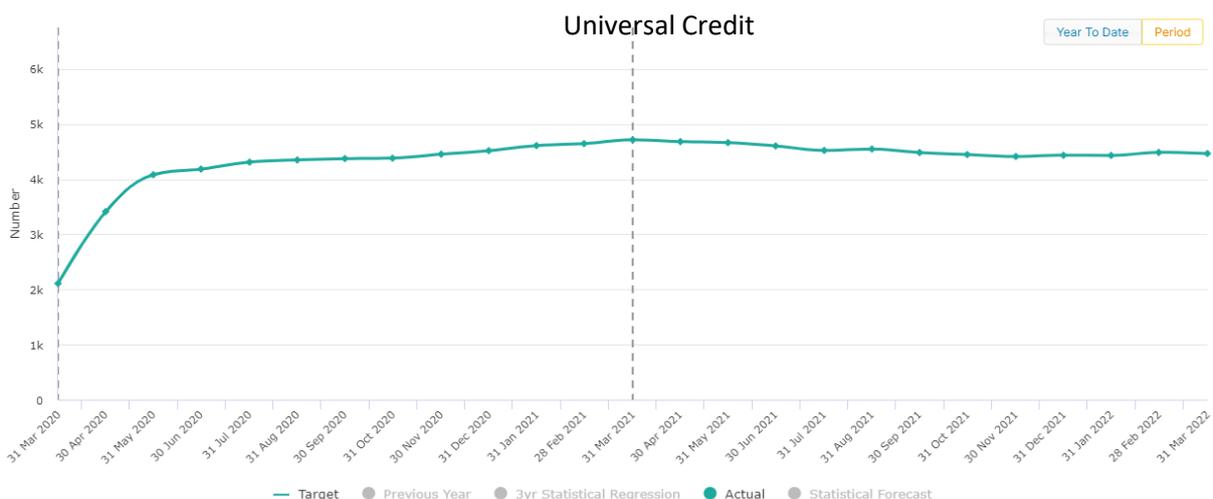
Despite these figures Ceredigion currently has 26.5% coverage of Fibre to the Premises (FTTP), allowing download speeds of up to 1gbps (1000mbps), which is greater than the Wales average of 26% and the highest level for a rural Local Authority and several other Local Authorities in Wales,

What the Data tells us - did we make a difference?

A great deal of support has been provided by colleagues and partners to mitigate the impact of hardship caused by the pandemic. We must however rely on hard data to tell us if we are making a difference. A series of data dashboards have been created that enable the PSB Poverty sub-group to monitor the efficacy of the support provided. These capture live data from websites such as DWP and Office for National Statistics. The dashboards will be demonstrated at a national showcase event in Autumn 2022, hosted by Welsh Government and Wales Centre for Public Policy.

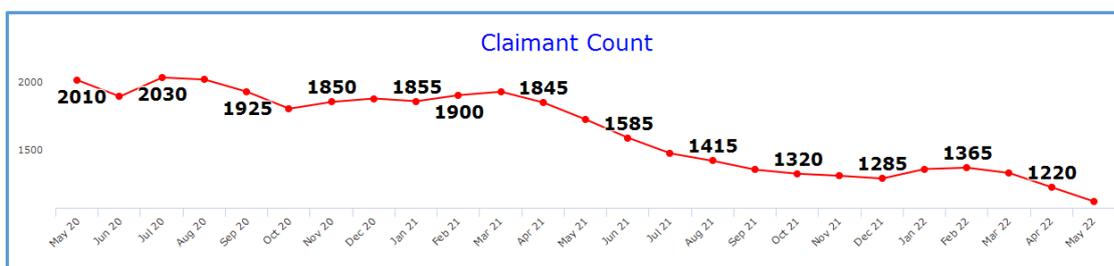
Universal Credit

The number of people on Universal Credit in Ceredigion saw a sharp increase in March/April 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic. They continued to increase gradually to March 2021 but numbers have now started to decrease. The figure at March 2022 remains 112% higher than recorded in March 2020. It is likely that, with the increased cost of living, the number of people in receipt of Universal Credit will not reduce in the near future.

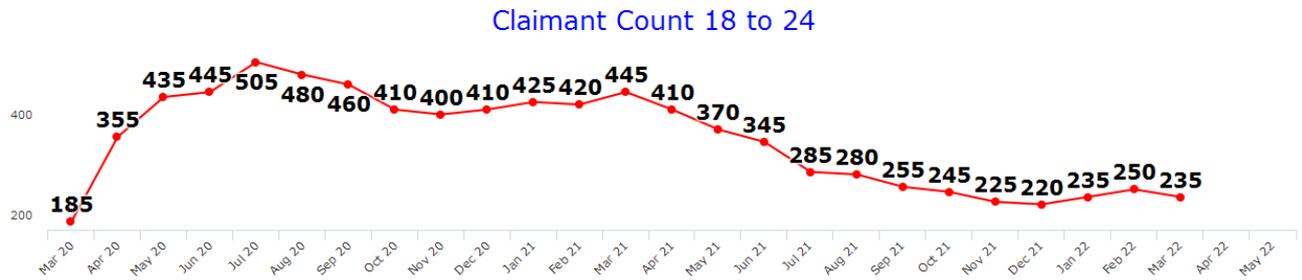


Claimant Count

The Claimant Count is a measure of the number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed. The number of claimants also increased when the pandemic first impacted the UK, and, similar to Universal Credit figures, had decreased significantly by March 2022, however they remain 60% higher than in March 2020.



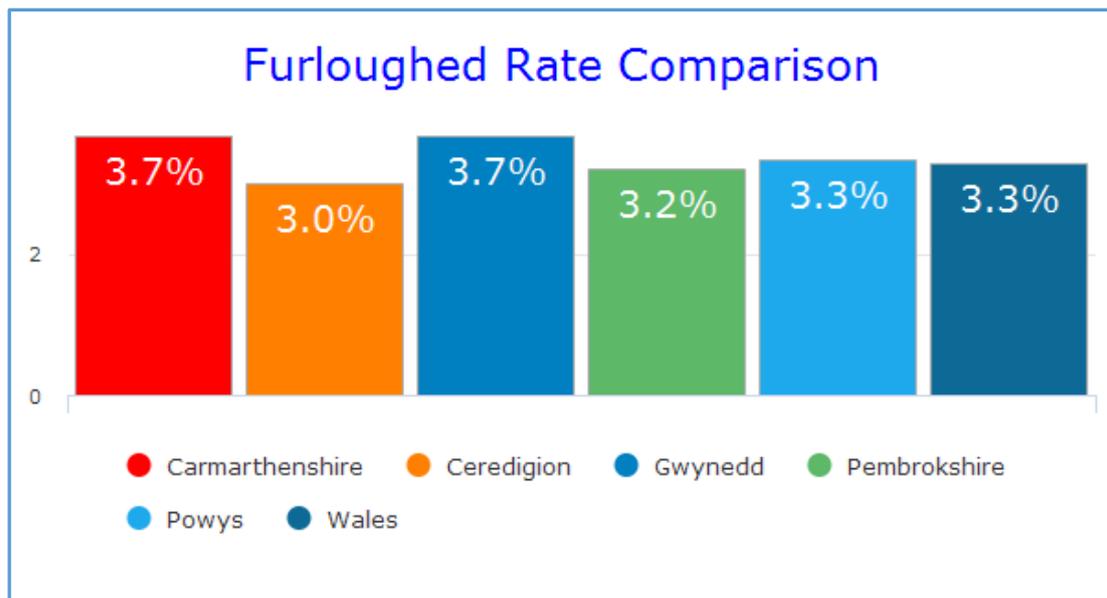
Youth Employment



The impact of Covid on young people has been of particular concern and so we monitor the number of 18-24 year old claimants. Previously, this cohort was showing a similar trend to the overall claimant count, however it now shows a faster return to employment rate; with a percentage change of 27% more claimants between March 2020 and March 2021. 185 young people were claiming benefits for reason of being unemployed in March 2020, this increased to 445 young people at March 2021 but reduced to 235 at March 2022.

Furlough Scheme

At its height in July 2020, 20% of those eligible for the furlough scheme in Ceredigion had taken it up. (4,700 of 23,700 eligible individuals). The scheme began to taper in July 2021 and employers were asked to contribute towards the cost of furloughed employees' wages. At the close of the scheme in September 2021, 3% of those eligible for Furlough were still supported by the scheme (a total of 700 people). This is generally in line with the mid-Wales region.



It is more difficult to measure impact on well-being locally. Since March 2020, the Welsh Government has funded a survey of public views on the coronavirus (Covid 19). The study is conducted online by Ipsos MORI with adults in Wales aged 16 to 74. We are confident that attitudes nationally are generally reflected at a local level.

People's perceived threat of Covid has diminished significantly. In March 2020 78% of people felt that Covid posed a high or very high threat to the country. Understandably, this had reduced to 29% by March 2022. Interestingly, people's perceived threat of Covid to themselves was much lower. 43% felt that Covid posed a high or very high threat to themselves in March 2020, and this had reduced to 20% in March 2022.

People were also asked if they felt that they would be able to pay bills one month from now. In April 2020, 31% of people were extremely or very concerned about being able to pay their bills. The percentage fluctuated between 18% and 31% over the next two years but March 2022 saw a high of 35%. This is when the cost of food and fuel had started to increase, and it is apparent that factors other than the pandemic have started to impact on people in Wales.

The National Survey for Wales is run by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of the Welsh Government. The survey runs continuously across Wales each year, covering around 12,000 people aged 16 and over. People were asked whether there were plenty of people they can rely on when they have problems. The pandemic may have helped people to feel more supported, since 69% felt that they had people they could rely on in 2019-20 and this had increased to 78% in 2021-22. 22% of people still felt that they 'did not' or 'more or less' had someone to rely on, however.

Finally, child poverty in Ceredigion is higher than average and has seen the second highest increase nationally since 2014-15. In Ceredigion 3,459 children are living in poverty. This is a key regional issue affecting Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire as well. The proportion of all three areas in West Wales is higher than average, and all three have increased since 2014-15.

Conclusion and Findings

The percentage of applicants to the Housing Register who cited 'financial concerns' as one of their reasons for needing assistance has reduced very slightly, from 14% in 2020-21 to 12% in 2021-22. However, there are reports that it is becoming more difficult for people to afford service charges and other essential costs due to rising prices. People are generally struggling with mounting debt and the percentage of people in Wales who are concerned about being able to pay bills one month from now reached a high of 35% in March 2022.

Support with benefits for people with a disability is Ceredigion Citizen Advice service's largest area of work.

The scheme that funds the payment of £19.50 per week per pupil eligible for free school meals during school holidays is due to end on 31/08/2022. Child poverty in Ceredigion is higher than average and has seen the second highest increase nationally since 2014-15.

The number of Universal Credit claimants in March 2022 remains 112% higher than recorded in March 2020. It is likely that, with the increased cost of living, the number of people in receipt of Universal Credit will not reduce in the near future. The number of people claiming for reason of unemployment remains 60% higher than in March 2020.

Childcare places have continued to fall. This is a real concern, particular in light of the recent announcement of free childcare for all 2 year olds, and the reliance of the working population on childcare. The pandemic and lack of out of School Childcare provision is also impacting on access that disabled children have to childcare, recreation and leisure opportunities.

There are 105 people on the waiting list of the National Exercise Referral Service (NERS) and there has been an increase in the number of older adults experiencing alcohol misuse.

498 young people were supported by the Council's Support and Prevention service this year: 60% due to challenging behaviour, 20% for reasons of emotional and mental wellbeing and 20% for reasons of substance misuse, social isolation or other. A lot more people are needing help and support with mental health issues, and it is difficult to recruit staff, which makes it more difficult for providers to respond to the issues. Access to specialist services to help directly with these issues is still extremely difficult.

Increasing constructions costs and a limited supply of contractors is creating challenges in terms of developing and delivering affordable homes.

Staffing issues presented the greatest challenge to schools remaining open due to a severe lack of supply staff.

Cash offices remain closed in March 2022. Access to libraries in March 2022 was limited to 60 minutes to allow for Covid restrictions. A comprehensive online library service is available, but the aim was to extend availability of internet on Library vans and to extend computer appointments to 2 hours.

The number of national and local services for Ceredigion citizens listed on Dewis Cymru website in March 2022 decreased a little, from 1,811 resources in September 2021 to 1,735 resources in March 2022.

While Ceredigion has seen improvements in digital infrastructure over the past 12 months and some areas experience some of the quickest broadband speeds in the UK, there are areas of the County that still fall below the levels of other areas of Wales and the UK in regard to superfast broadband and mobile connectivity.

Next Steps

1. Continue to develop the data dashboards to ensure we have a shared understanding of the evolving impact of hardship in Ceredigion through the collation and analysis of data.
2. Review the list of contributing partners (see Appendix B). We know that there are opportunities to work collaboratively with more partner agencies in order to promote and take advantage of all available help and assistance.
3. The action plan is a live document designed to be updated during the life of the Hardship Strategy. It's anticipated that poverty levels will continue to rise in Ceredigion, but as a result of the rising cost of living rather than the direct impact of Covid. This is likely to require a change of focus and the action plan will be reviewed to reflect this.
4. Ensure that the work of this sub-group feeds into the Local Well-being Plan 2023-28

Appendix A: Contributing Partners

Hywel Dda University Health Board, Partnerships, Diversity & Inclusion
Ceredigion County Council, Porth Cymorth Cynnar, Community Wellbeing & Learning
Ceredigion County Council, Finance & Procurement
Area 43
Ceredigion County Council, Porth Cynnal
Plant Dewi, Family Centre Network (Borth, Llandysul, Lampeter, Tregaron)
Ceredigion County Council, Porth Gofal
Cymdeithas Gofal The Care Society
Ceredigion County Council, Policy, Performance & Public Protection
Ceredigion County Council, Economy & Regeneration
Ceredigion County Council, Schools & Culture
Ceredigion County Council, Customer Contact
Ceredigion County Council, Highways & Environmental Services
DASH
Department of Work & Pensions (DWP)
Coleg Ceredigion
Ceredigion Citizens Advice
Penparcau Community Forum
Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations (CAVO)

Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO:	Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	03/10/2022
LOCATION:	Hybrid: Council Chamber/Virtual
TITLE:	Engagement and Participation Policy – ‘Talking, Listening and Working Together’
PURPOSE OF REPORT:	To present the revised Engagement and Participation Policy – ‘Talking, Listening and Working Together’ for consideration.
REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION:	To ensure that the Local Authority is meeting statutory engagement requirements and to make recommendations as appropriate when the policy is presented to Cabinet on 4 October 2022.

BACKGROUND:

‘Talking, Listening and Working Together’, Ceredigion County Council’s Engagement and Participation Policy sets out our corporate approach to engagement and participation with the people of Ceredigion. The previous draft policy was considered by Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 14th of October 2021 where it was approved to go out to public consultation over the winter of 2021-22.

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 Act stipulates that the consultation and review must be undertaken as soon as is reasonably practicable following an ordinary election of Councillors to the Council.

The draft Engagement policy was subsequently revised to include Participation and presented to Cabinet in July 2022. Cabinet agreed that the draft Engagement and Participation policy should go out to public consultation over the summer of 2022. The final policy has been revised to reflect the findings of the consultation and is now presented for overview and scrutiny.

CURRENT SITUATION:

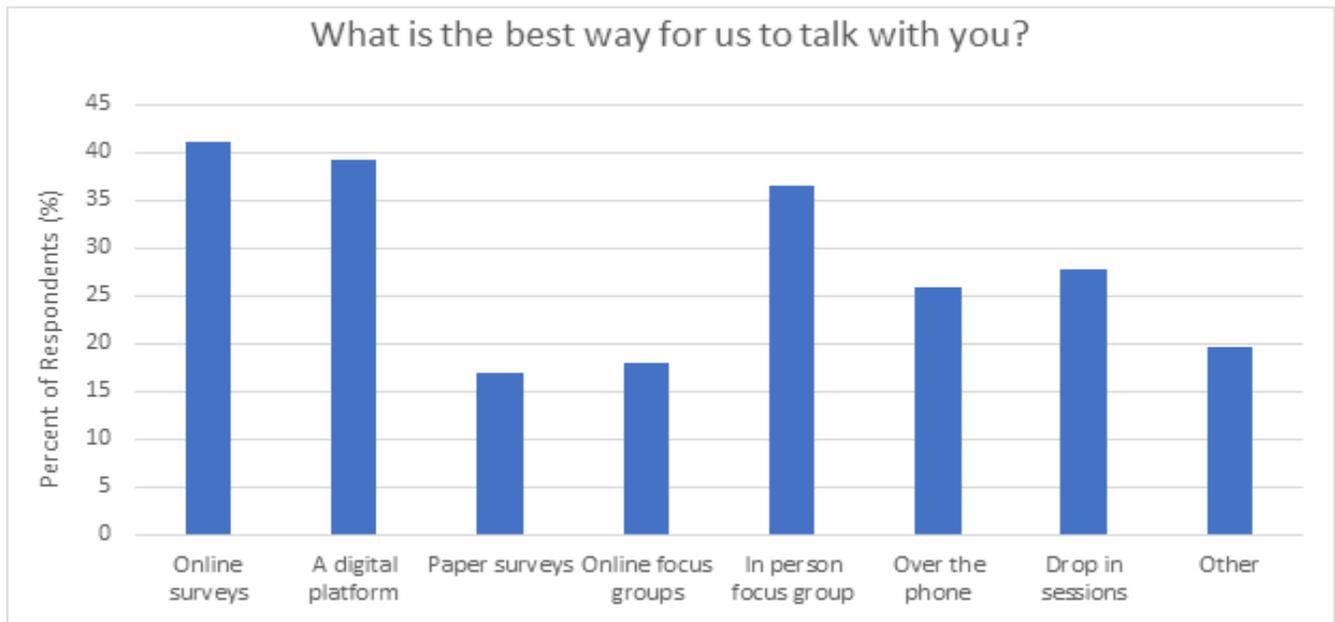
112 responses (0.2% of the total population) were received from the consultation, all through the online survey. This response was disappointing.

Results of the consultation show us there is room for improvement in the way that the Council

engages with the public with 64% of respondents saying that they are 'Unhappy' or 'Very Unhappy' with the way that Ceredigion County Council engages with them. 12% were Extremely Happy or Happy and 24% were neutral.

Residents were then asked if they were happy with the way that we have said we will engage with them in coming years. Results were slightly improved, with 52% of respondents saying that they were 'Unhappy' or 'Extremely Unhappy' with the content of the Engagement policy. 19% are Extremely Happy or Happy and 29% are neutral.

Responses to the survey indicate that our mixed method approach continues to be relevant with the needs of our residents, as shown by the summary below.



The following changes have been made to the Engagement and Participation Policy to reflect the feedback that we have received through the consultation exercise.

- Investigate the feasibility of setting up in-person focus groups across the county with an emphasis on engaging with existing groups that are known and utilised by residents.
- Create a clearer emphasis on the need to feedback the results of engagement with residents.
- Create performance measures to monitor our progress towards our aim of improving engagement and participation across Ceredigion.

We are pursuing the goal of continuous engagement. This will enable us to check in with residents across Ceredigion regularly and ask whether they are happy with the way that we engage with them. Full results of the consultation exercise can be found at Appendix B.

The revised Engagement and Participation Policy – 'Talking, Listening and Working Together'

is attached at Appendix A.

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If not, please state why

Yes

Summary:

Long term:

Our engagement will include conversations about people's long term ideas, needs and issues as well the engagement that takes place over the short term. Good engagement with children and young people needs to happen in order that the needs of future generations can be met.

Integration:

Engagement is a cross-cutting theme in our Corporate Strategy. An aim of this Engagement Policy is to mainstream engagement across Ceredigion County Council. We will also work with other public bodies on the integration of the National Well-being Goals and Organisational Well-being Objectives through the Public Services Board.

WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS:

Collaboration:

We are active partners in a range of engagement partnerships that exist or are becoming established. This will enable us to share best practice, resources and to carry out shared engagement activities.

Involvement:

Involvement is synonymous with engagement. We aim to involve all relevant stakeholders. This could be people across Ceredigion or specific stakeholders, including people with the Protected Characteristics as outlined in the Equality Act and seldom heard groups. We will use the best method of engagement depending on the situation. We will engage in a timely way in which the views of stakeholders can influence outcomes and decisions. We will also provide feedback to stakeholders on any engagement that we carry out.

Prevention: Engaging with people and service users is a very effective way to identify, eliminate and reduce the effects of any problems or for people to be part of the solution in overcoming barriers. When engagement takes place at a very early stage this can prevent problems from happening at all.

RECOMMENDATION (S):

To receive and endorse the Engagement and Participation Policy - Talking, Listening and Working Together.

To make recommendations as appropriate when the policy is presented to Cabinet on 4 October 2022.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

Our current Community Engagement Policy dates from 2012 and has been reviewed to take account of new methods of engagement and recent legislation and guidance.

Contact Name: Cathryn Morgan
Designation: Equalities and Inclusion Manager
Date of Report: 12/09/2022
Acronyms:

Siarad, Gwranddo a Gweithio Gyda'n Gilydd

Polisi Ymgysylltu a chyfranogi Drafft

Cyngor Sir Ceredigion

Mai 2022

Talking, Listening and Working Together

Draft Engagement and Participation Policy

Ceredigion County Council

May 2022



Author and service: CM, Policy and Performance

Date approved by Cabinet:

Integrated Impact Assessment:

Publication date:

Policy Review Date:

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FOREWORD

We value the contribution that local people can make to develop and evaluate Council services that will work well for us all.

Our Engagement and Participation policy and accompanying action plan sets out how we will talk and listen with all of those who live, work or study in Ceredigion, including marginalised groups of people or seldom heard voices.

This means engaging and consulting about the way we do things, promoting awareness of how people can become a member of the Council and making sure that local people can easily give us their views about a decision before, and after, it is made.

We will continue to adopt new and emerging best practice, for example by developing digital engagement platforms and working on engagement with our partners on the Public Services Board. We will not forget that some people cannot or prefer not to use digital services and we will maintain the more traditional ways of communicating with our citizens.

We want to make it easier for everybody in Ceredigion to have a voice, we want to build and maintain relationships with our communities, and we want to ensure that all engagement undertaken by the Council is effective, efficient and consistent.

There are difficult times ahead and we must work together to make best use of the resources available to us.

Councillor Bryan Davies
Leader, Ceredigion County Council



Introduction

It is vital that Ceredigion County Council engages effectively with the people of Ceredigion. This means that good engagement is the responsibility of everyone who works for the Council. Communication is two-way and it is important that we listen to and take on ideas from the public as well as giving out clear information. This Policy sets out how we will do this.

We are committed to engage effectively and this is underpinned by a range of legislation including the:

- The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- The Equality Act 2010,
- The Welsh Language Measure 2011
- Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

We will also follow best practice and national standards, for example the Children and Young People's National Participation Standards and the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales.

This policy sets out our corporate approach to engagement with the people of Ceredigion.

Ceredigion: Who we are, where we live and what we do



Ceredigion has a population of 73,000. Aberystwyth is the largest town with a population of around 16,200, followed by Cardigan (4,200) and Lampeter (3,000). Aberaeron, Llandysul and Tregaron are smaller towns. 62% of the population live in villages or scattered rural settlements. With 41 people per square kilometre, Ceredigion has the second lowest population density in Wales. Although being overall rural in nature, the towns are important centres for the wider population. Ceredigion also has several internationally significant bodies, for example Aberystwyth University, the Lampeter Campus of the University of Wales Trinity St David, and the National Library of Wales.

Our population is 96.7% white, with 47.3% able to speak Welsh. 21% of people have a long-term illness or are disabled and 11% provide unpaid care. 15% of the population are children and young people under 16. 25% of the population is aged 65 or over.

Geographical communities

We will engage with citizens in specific locations as well as across the county. This engagement could take place in our towns as well as the wider rural setting.

Communities of interest

We will also make sure that we engage with relevant communities of interest. This is where people have a shared characteristic, experience, or interest, for example carers, or those with specific expertise.

Protected characteristics

These are characteristics that are protected by the Equalities Act 2010. It is essential that we reach out to these communities so that we can capture their lived experiences, which will better inform our understanding of the impact of our actions. This feeds into our requirement to carry out [Integrated Impact Assessments](#).

- o Age
- o Disability
- o Gender reassignment
- o Pregnancy and maternity
- o Race – including ethnic or national origin, colour, or nationality
- o Religion or belief – including lack of belief
- o Sex
- o Sexual orientation
- o Marriage and civil partnership' (in terms of discrimination in employment).

Ceredigion County Council Political Profile

Ceredigion is made up of 34 electoral wards which are represented by 38 members (councillors) who are elected by the people of Ceredigion every 5 years. The Council has adopted the “Leader and Cabinet” style of governance. The Cabinet comprises the Leader of the Council and 7 Cabinet Members with a range of portfolios.

There are also five thematic Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to look at the services and issues that affect people in Ceredigion. The process provides the opportunity for Councillors to examine the various functions of the council, to ask questions on how decisions have been made, to consider whether service improvements can be put in place and to make recommendations to this effect.

Ceredigion County Council Services

The council currently employs around 2,200 members of staff or the full time equivalent of about 1,500 staff across 12 Service areas.

- Schools and Culture
- Legal and Governance Services
- Finance and Procurement
- Democratic Services
- People and Organisation
- Porth Cymorth Cynnar, Community Wellbeing and Learning
- Porth Gofal, Targeted Intervention
- Porth Cynnal, Specialist Services
- Highways and Environmental Services
- Economy and Regeneration
- Customer Contact
- Policy, Performance and Public Protection

Engagement and Participation Policy Aims

The aims of this policy are:

- 1. To mainstream effective engagement and participation across Ceredigion County Council.**
- 2. To ensure that we engage with the people of Ceredigion in the best way.**
- 3. To meet our statutory duties and responsibilities under legislation.**
- 4. To keep up to date with the latest innovations and best practice in the field of engagement.**

Background

We have a statutory duty to carry out effective engagement in order that it can inform effective decision making. Our duties are laid out in the following legislature. We have also considered the following national principles as a manner of best practice.

Legislation

- [The Equality Act 2010](#)
The Act brought together and replaced previous anti-discrimination laws. Under the Act, Ceredigion County Council must involve and engage with people who have the Protected Characteristics listed above.
- [The Welsh Language Measure 2011](#)
In Wales, the Welsh language should not be treated any less favourably than the English language. People in Wales should be able to live their lives through the medium of the Welsh language if they choose to do so. The official languages of the Council are Welsh and English. When carrying out engagement we must work in accordance with the requirements of the Welsh

Language Standards. This includes the delivery of engagement bilingually. During consultations, we will seek the public's views on any effects that decisions would have on the Welsh language and opportunities to use the Welsh language.

- [The Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)
Engagement cuts across the five ways of working laid out in the Act and places a duty on Ceredigion County Council to consider the needs of future generations when making decisions.
- [Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#)
The Act aims to provide local government with new ways to support and serve their communities and to reinvigorate local democracy in Wales. Part 3 of the Act places a duty on Ceredigion County Council to promote and encourage participation in council decision making, including the publishing of a public participation strategy. Part 6 of the Act requires us to undertake a review (self-assessment) of the extent that we are exercising our functions effectively, and whether we are using our resources efficiently. Engagement and consultation are an integral part of the self-assessment process, as required by the Act and in the setting of our Corporate Well-being Objectives

National Principles and Standards

- [Children and Young People's National Participation Standards](#)
- The National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales – link to be provided.
- [Five Principles of Co-production](#)
- [The Gunning Principles \(see Appendix B\)](#)

Ceredigion County Council Strategies and Plans

Engagement is embedded in the core framework of Local Government; this policy aligns with and supports the following current strategies:

[Ceredigion County Council Corporate Strategy](#)

Engagement is a cross-cutting theme in our Corporate Strategy 2017-22. The Strategy states that, 'Our policies for the future will encourage collaboration and partnership working with all interested stakeholders. We consider effective interaction with our communities as an essential component to securing a healthy and vibrant society.'

[Ceredigion County Council Corporate Communications Strategy](#)

The strategy aims 'to provide effective communications with residents, customers, staff, members, partners and stakeholders that support corporate priorities.' The strategy sets out our approach to effective communications and engagement. The Communications Team must be informed of all engagement.

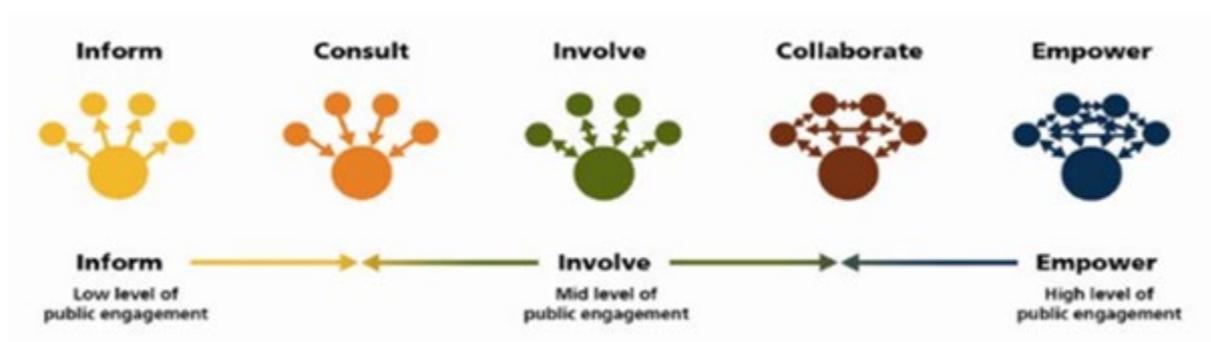
How we intend to Engage

Ceredigion County Council's Engagement and Participation Policy adopts an approach of applying the best method of engagement according to the situation. We will use several different methods of engagement to ensure that we engage with all people in Ceredigion in the most suitable manner.

Levels of Engagement

There is no 'one size fits all' solution to engagement. We will engage with the people of Ceredigion in the best and most suitable way for any situation. The model below outlines our engagement approach. The model that is based on the involvement principle laid out by the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.

The ways in which we engage will vary. This will range from informing and consulting, through to involving, collaborating, and empowering. The level of participation by the public increases across this range.



The table below outlines the Five Levels of Public engagement and appropriate examples of when to use them:

Ceredigion County Council's Levels of Engagement

We will use the best engagement for the right situation.

	Purpose	We will	Examples of when to engage
Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will keep you informed. We will not withhold relevant information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public health emergency Details on services and provision
Consult	To obtain public feedback on proposals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will consult at the beginning of the process and at all relevant stages of the process. We will keep you informed. We will listen to and acknowledge your concerns and aspirations. We will be open to your influence. We will provide feedback on how your input has influenced the outcome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting an annual budget Changes to service provision Developing new policies Changes to school provision
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will keep you informed. We will work with you to consider your concerns and aspirations. We will provide feedback on how your input has influenced the outcome. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting well-being objectives Budget challenge Developing new policies
Collaborate & Empower	<p>To partner with the public when making decisions and developing services, including defining the issue, developing alternatives, and identifying and delivering preferred solutions.</p> <p>To explore ways in which we can place decision making and service delivery in the hands of the public.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will look to you for ideas and innovation in formulating solutions. We will incorporate your ideas and recommendations into the decision-making processes as far as is reasonably possible. We will work with you and support you through the process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carrying out Integrated Impact Assessments. Co-production projects Community asset transfer Participatory budgeting

Methods of Engagement

Continuous Engagement

We will continuously engage with residents in Ceredigion through meeting with stakeholder groups and having direct conversations with those who use our services. We are developing a digital engagement platform to assist with the continuation and collection of these conversations.

It is important that the public are aware of how the council works and the decisions that are being taken at any given time.

The Communication team promotes awareness of Council activities via social media and press releases which are shared with news outlets. All press releases are also available on the Council website.

The Council's website is reviewed regularly with an aim to improve sections relevant to information for members of the public.

Details of forthcoming Council meetings are publicised via social media, and forward work plans are published in a timely manner to ensure that members of the public are aware of items for consideration at forthcoming meetings. Members of the public can attend Council meetings online. Council and Cabinet meetings are broadcasted, and available electronically for a reasonable period after the meeting.

There is a mechanism for local people to feed into the Overview and Scrutiny process, this is published on the Council's website. Details of forthcoming agenda items are also published on the Council's website.

Ceredigion Council Cabinet is notified of all petitions received by the Council. We are developing an e-petition system, including a petition scheme that sets out how the Council intends to handle and respond to petitions. Members of the public can present their application or objection to the Development Control Committee, details of which is available on the Council's website.

Specific Engagement

We want people to have a strong voice and be able to effectively influence our decision making, especially when we make changes to services or develop new policies. We frequently consult with the people of Ceredigion. Current examples can be seen on the consultations page of our website:

<http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/your-council/consultations/>

We also use other various means as detailed below:

- Online surveys
- Engagement Events
- Roadshows
- Focus Groups
- Forums

During Covid-19 some forms of engagement were more challenging. We will investigate the feasibility of setting up in-person focus groups across the county with an emphasis on utilising existing groups that are known and utilised by residents.

Integrated Impact Assessments

When we make plans to create a new policy or change the way we do things we must consider the impact this will have on our citizens, including those who have protected characteristics. An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) brings together the relevant legislations and sets out how we will take due regard, (give appropriate weight), to making decisions. Appendix A explains more about 'due regard.'

When we carry out an IIA:

- We are considering relevant evidence to understand the likely or actual effects of policies or practices on those who are vulnerable within our communities, including those who are experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
- We are thinking about where we might be able to reduce negative impacts.
- We are identifying missed opportunities and capitalising on positive impacts.
- We are considering the rights of the child.

Accessibility

We are committed to ensuring that **all** residents in Ceredigion can access information and have an **equal opportunity** to share their views. As such we need to specifically consider the following demographics and how best to engage with them. Some examples are set out below:

People with Disabilities

When we publish information or create a piece of online engagement, we need to consider how people can access it.

People with visual impairments may require documents in large print or use a screen reader to access information and engage. We need to consider how documents, web pages, surveys etc will be read out on a screen reader. An example of this is using a correct hierarchical heading structure or providing alternative text to images.

People with hearing impairments may need subtitles on any video content.

Some people may also require information in an easy read format. An easy read document uses plain language and simple sentences to accurately portray what may be in a full document.

Non-Digital Communication

Not everyone has access to a computer or the internet. All our engagement exercises must consider how to engage with non-digital users as a matter of priority. Examples of this are in-person discussions, telephone discussions and provision of paper copies of relevant documents.

A lead contact will be provided on engagement documents in order that the public can contact them by telephone via Clic, the council contact centre.

Children and Young People

We have a duty to young people to ensure that we are reaching out to them in a way that encourages their participation and as outlined in the Statutory Guidance for the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – Annex B.

Recognising the Children and Young People's National Participation Standards as a framework for participation; we will continue to facilitate opportunities for participation with younger people and ensure that we educate and advocate for their right under Article 12 of the UNCRC.

[Children's Rights - Children's Commissioner for Wales \(childcomwales.org.uk\)](http://childcomwales.org.uk)

Our County Youth Council and Youth Forums will continue to act as platforms for children and young people views across Ceredigion, and we will represent those views to local and national decision-making bodies. Specific youth forums and groups such as 'Give us Support,' will ensure a channel for children and young people who are marginalised, vulnerable or have a special interest in a particular issue, to have a voice and to access their rights as set out in the UNCRC.

We will ensure that appropriate feedback is provided through a range of channels that will include reports, presentations and on social media outlets.

We will continue to develop and embed children and young people's participation into all aspects of planning, delivering, and reviewing services that directly have an impact on children and young people.

Our children and young people's participation offer will give consideration to the Welsh Language in both promotion and facilitation and will ensure that all children and young people are able to participate through the medium of the Welsh Language if that is their language of choice.

Other Languages

It is important that we make sure that everyone can access our engagement materials regardless of their proficiency in Welsh and English. Consideration should also be given to other languages that are spoken in Ceredigion, particularly when carrying out a large engagement campaign

To help those who speak other languages access the materials we can utilise QR codes so that they can be forwarded directly to the materials in their language. All Council teams have access to WITS (Welsh Interpretation and Translation Service) which can be used for simultaneous translation and interpretation of documents.

Efficiency

It is important to avoid **consultation and engagement overload**. Often people give up their free time and travel distances to attend engagement events. We, or our public services partners may already have relevant data from previous engagement

or surveys. We may also be able to utilise data and information collected from continuous engagement.

Stakeholders

Carrying out a stakeholder analysis will help to identify key stakeholders and their levels of influence. We will also ensure that engagement is inclusive across the diverse make up of our communities. We will include people with protected characteristics and marginalised or seldom heard people and communities in our engagement.

Engagement with Elected Members

Elected Members are leaders within their communities and can provide important links to engage with a wide range of people. In addition to matters of interest to their wards, Elected Members may sit on several different Council Committees in addition to full County Council.

Engagement with Elected Members should be via the appropriate Corporate Lead Officer. Members must be informed of all engagement or consultation and in particular any engagement or consultation that affects their wards or their responsibilities. Officers must follow protocol when engaging with Elected Members and observe Pre-Election Protocol timescales.

Prior to Council elections, a communication campaign will provide information on how to become a Member of the Council, and information is also provided on the Council's website.

Engagement with Staff

We employ around 2,200 people. Our staff have a very wide base of experience and come from a diversity of backgrounds. We engage with our staff by a number of means including staff news bulletins. A new intranet site has been developed which improves staff engagement and involvement. Human Resources directly engage with staff and unions on employment matters.

Evaluation, Feedback, Drawing Conclusions and Making Recommendations

We will feedback the results of our engagement. We will publish our engagement reports on the consultation page of the Ceredigion County Council website within an acceptable time frame. The feedback will summarise an evaluation of our engagement. It will also demonstrate how the engagement exercise was considered by our decision makers and how it influenced the final decision.

Equality and Inclusion Team

The Equality and Inclusion team oversees a framework of stakeholder groups, the Integrated Impact Assessment process, and a consistent approach to engagement across Ceredigion County Council. The team is available to support and advise all Council services on engagement and participation.

Digital Platform

One of the ways that we will be looking to improve engagement is by use of a digital platform. A digital platform will give us the power to create a cohesive series of engagement. It will enable us to organise engagement across the Council services.

Some examples of tools that can be utilised in a digital platform are:

- Surveys
- Story walls
- Ideas sharing
- Timeline of engagement

It is hoped that through utilising these tools we can improve our communication with citizens in Ceredigion.

Measuring Success

To measure the outcome of the implementation of this policy we will monitor:

- Site hits and registrations on our digital platform
- The number of responses we receive to public engagement exercises
- National Survey for Wales questions regarding Local Democracy

Our aim is to achieve successful continuous engagement with our residents. Part of this will be to ask residents if the way in which they are being engaged with has been successful and suited their needs. In this way we can continually evolve the way that we engage to suit the needs of all our residents.

Timescales for Feedback

We will publish feedback in a suitable place within a suitable timescale. This could include publishing reports on our website and providing direct feedback to groups or organisations involved in our engagement. The feedback will summarise an evaluation of our engagement and demonstrate how the engagement influenced the decision maker and the final decision.

Ceredigion County Council Engagement & Participation Policy – Action Plan				
Aim 1	Action	Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
<i>To mainstream effective engagement and participation across Ceredigion County Council.</i>	To develop an Engagement toolkit and deliver training on its use to all Corporate Managers.	A corporate understanding and management of engagement.	March 2023	Equalities & Inclusion team
	To maintain a timetable of consultation and engagement exercises carried out by all Council Services.	Effective co-ordination of engagement across all Services. Reduced 'consultation fatigue.'	Ongoing	Equalities & Inclusion team
	To publish an Engagement Annual Report to monitor the developments as we change how we engage with the public.	To enable the Council to evaluate progress set out in this policy.	Ongoing	Equalities & Inclusion team
Aim 2	Action	Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
<i>To ensure that we engage with the people of Ceredigion in the best way.</i>	To revise and update our list of Stakeholder groups.	Improved engagement with residents who have protected characteristics.	March 2023	Equalities and Inclusion team
	To develop the use of online engagement platforms and maintain the use of non-digital engagement methods.	Improved levels of engagement with Ceredigion residents.	March 2023	All Corporate Managers
	To improve the way that we feedback to those who have participated in our engagement exercises.	Reduced citizen dissatisfaction with the Council.	March 2023	All Corporate Managers

Aim 3	Action	Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
<i>To meet our statutory duties and responsibilities under legislation.</i>	To ensure a mechanism is in place so that the public can attend Council meetings in person or remotely via a hybrid meeting system.	To facilitate access for local people to decisions made by the council.	June 2022	Democratic Services
	To revise and update our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) tool.	Appropriate engagement is carried out that can influence strategic decisions and policy changes.	January 2023	Equalities and Inclusion team
	To establish an e-petition system and publish a protocol that sets out how the Council intends to handle and respond to petitions.	Ceredigion residents who take the time to submit petitions to the Council have a positive experience.	Subject to Publication of Guidance by WG	Democratic Services
Aim 4	Action	Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
<i>To keep up to date with the latest innovations and best practice in the field of engagement.</i>	To review and revise this Engagement and Participation Policy.	Keep this policy up to date with the latest developments and innovations.	Ongoing	Equalities and Inclusion team
	To keep an engagement toolkit up to date for all staff to use.	All council staff can access the latest developments in terms of best practice.	Ongoing	Equalities and Inclusion team
	To liaise with Engagement and Equalities colleagues across Wales.	Best practise is shared across Wales.	Ongoing	Equalities and Inclusion team

Appendix A

Brown Principles can be used in court to determine whether a public body has shown 'due regard' to legislation and relate closely to the IIA process. Following the principles is an effective way of delivering best practice as well as helping to ensure that our engagement and decision making is legally robust.

Brown Principles and Due Regard
Knowledge Are the decision makers aware of their duty to have due regard?
Sufficient Information Do the decision makers have sufficient information to allow intelligent consideration?
Timeliness Was the IIA carried out while the proposal was under consideration before any final decision had been made?
Real Consideration (decision making) Has there been conscientious consideration?
Accountability (no delegation) Public bodies are responsible that third parties carrying out functions on their behalf comply with IIAs (Integrated Impact Assessment).
Monitoring and Review Do the aims of the IIA continue beyond the planning and decision-making phases through to implementation, monitoring and review.

Appendix B

The Gunning Principles set out the legal expectations of what is appropriate consultation with an emphasis on 'fairness.' The principles can be used in court to determine whether a public body has shown fairness in its engagement, consultations and decision making.

The principles also give a good practical framework for public engagement. Engagement must take place at an early stage and with enough information for people to consider. Engagement and consultations must also be available for a sufficient period. Information and results from the engagement must be able to influence the decision-making process. The Gunning Principles underpin this Engagement Policy.

They were coined by Stephen Sedley QC in a court case in 1985 relating to a school closure consultation (R v London Borough of Brent ex parte Gunning). Prior to this, very little consideration had been given to the laws of consultation. Sedley defined that a consultation is only legitimate when these four principles are met:

Consultation must take place when the proposals are still at a formative stage
You must not have already made up your mind

Sufficient reasons must be put forward to allow for intelligent consideration and response.
Have people been given the information and opportunity to influence?

Adequate time must be given for consideration and response.
Is the consultation long enough bearing in mind the circumstances?

The product of consultation must be conscientiously considered when finalising the decision.
Decision makers undertaking a process that demonstrates they were open to influence before decisions were made.



Consultation Report

Engagement and Participation Policy

Introduction and Context

Ceredigion County Council has updated the Engagement and Participation Policy, with a particular focus given to continuous engagement. The policy sets out clear direction on how and when we engage with residents in Ceredigion.

This report details the consultation exercise undertaken and the consequent changes made to the policy following the responses received.

Method

The consultation exercise was kept short and succinct and was undertaken for a period of 8 weeks to give residents time to read the materials and contemplate their response before answering three short questions. In order to improve the way that we engage with all people we created a summary of the policy and a response survey that are easy to read, using plain language, short sentences and straight forward formatting.

Digital Approach

We utilised the 'Have your Say' Ceredigion platform to host the consultation documents. The summary and survey were hosted on the home page of the 'Have your Say' site, meaning that it was accessible without the need to sign in.

The link to the platform was shared via our social media channels, by email to Town and Community Council Clerks. The information was also posted on Ceredigion Council Consultation webpage.

We ensured that the webpage was accessible for screen reader users and laid out in an easy-to-follow format.

Paper Copies

Paper copies of the policy and survey were distributed to the leisure centres and libraries in Ceredigion. Town and Community Councils were invited to contact us to request paper copies as needed.

Social media use

We used social media to direct residents to the 'Have Your Say' platform. Information was shared on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. We also collated the comments on the social media posts to make sure that we captured as many views as possible.

Contact Details

Contact details of the Equalities and Inclusion Team were visible on the paper copies to ensure that we were available to assist the completion of the survey and answer any questions.

Results

112 responses (0.2% of the total population) were received from the consultation, all through the online survey. In addition, the social media posts received 39 comments and 41 shares. This response was disappointing.

The survey was brief, consisting of only three questions, which can be considered as two sections. In the first section we endeavour to measure how residents perceive the situation now, compared to how they feel about our plans laid out in the policy.

To aid us in assessing if there is a change of opinion between current engagement practice and our future plans, we have calculated an Average Index Score (AIS). This gives us a way of weighting the strength of opinion in the responses and the scores can be directly compared. The disadvantaged posed by using an AIS is that there are many ways that a single number could be obtained.

Example: 10 people are asked whether they 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'have no opinion', 'disagree', or 'strongly disagree' that Wales will win the six nations.

To calculate the AIS:

If 3 people strongly agree (each response is worth 2 points), their combined score is **6**;

if 3 agree (each response worth 1) their score is **3**;

if 1 has no opinion (this response is worth no points), his score is **0**;

if 1 disagrees (each response worth -1), his score is **-1**;

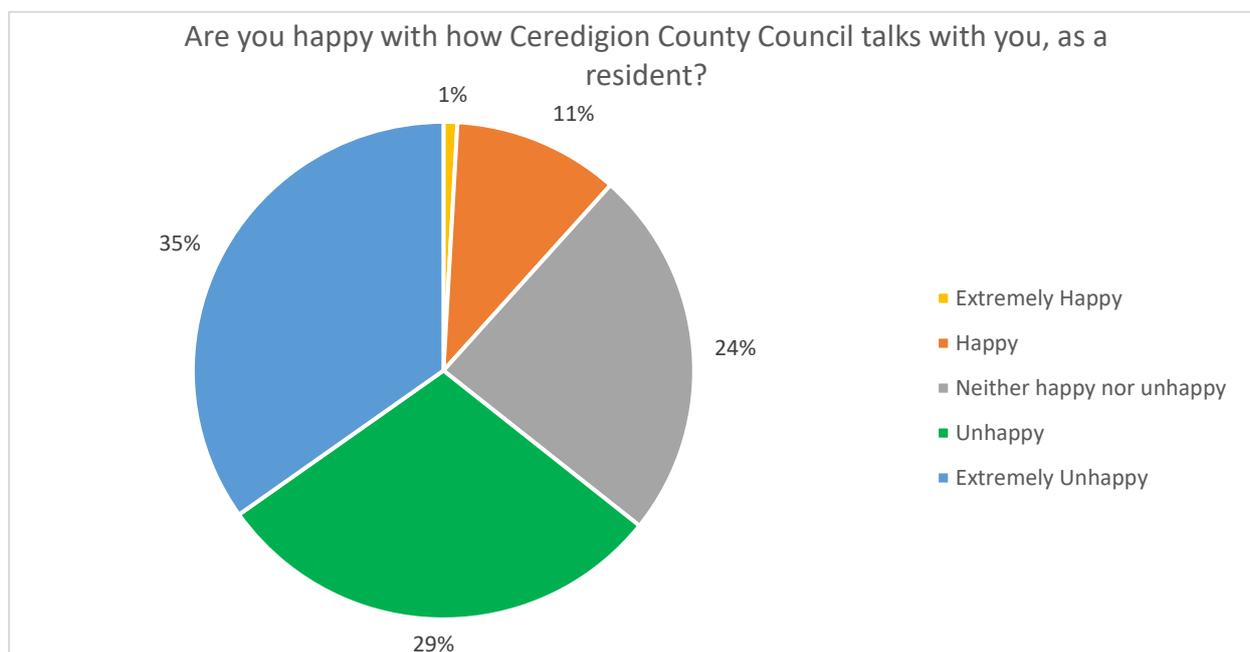
if 2 strongly disagree (each response worth -2) their combined score is **-4**

The total score is calculated by adding all the numbers in bold: **6 + 3 + 0 -1 -4 = 4**;

The **average index score** is arrived at by dividing the total score by the number of responses (10 in this case):

Question 1

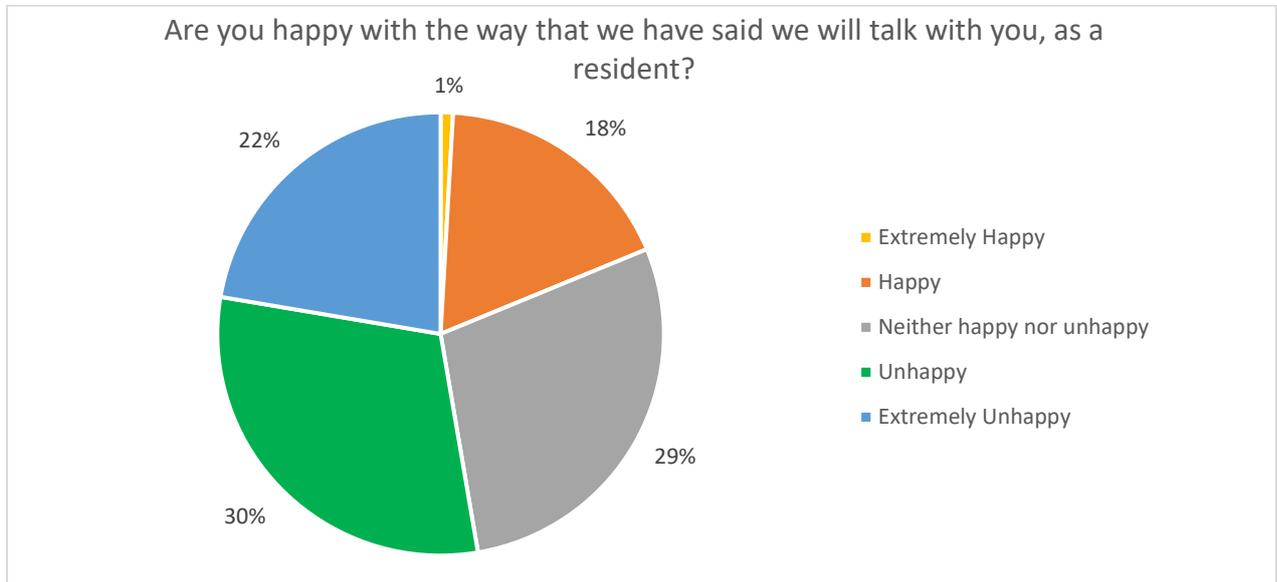
Question 1 was designed to determine how residents currently feel about how Ceredigion County Council engages with them.



The AIS for this question was -98, this demonstrates the strength of feeling present in the responses.

Question 2

Question 2 was designed to capture if there was any change in opinion when considering how the council plans to engage with residents in the coming years.



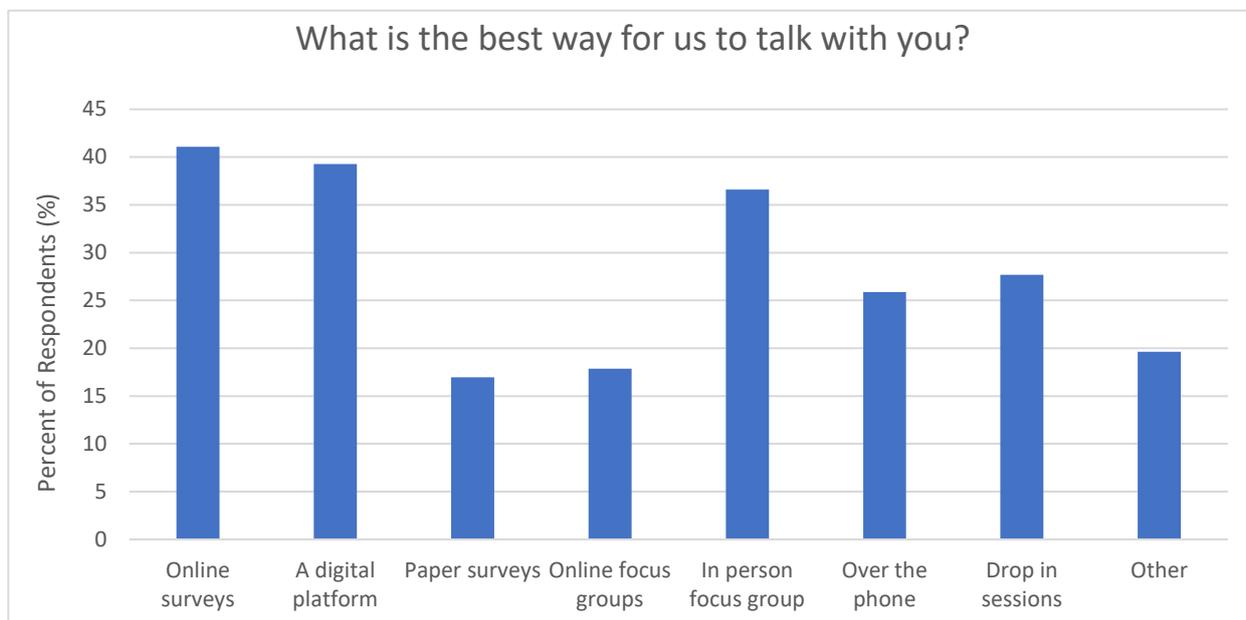
There is a demonstrable change in opinion when considering what we have said we will do to engage with residents going forward. A small majority still feel 'Unhappy' or 'Extremely Unhappy' with the way that we will engage with them at 52%.

The AIS for this question is -63, a 35-point increase from the previous question. This demonstrates that while the majority feel negatively, the strength of this opinion is significantly less.

There was a strong response in both questions of those who were neither happy nor unhappy with the way that we engage. This will be something to continue to monitor as part of our aim of continuous engagement.

Question 3

We want to make sure that the way we design our engagement exercises suit residents, are accessible and capture responses representative of our demographics. We asked residents what method was the most suited to their individual needs.



This shows us that a mixed method of online and in-person engagement, paper surveys and talking on the telephone continues to be the best way for us to engage with residents.

Qualitative Responses

We entered a free text field to ensure that residents could share specific feedback in terms of how they would like us to engage with them in the future. Here is a synopsis of those results:

- Hold engagement exercises outside of working hours.
- Be accessible over the phone, via email and in the office.
- Offer face to face appointments at a time to suit us.
- Attend sessions organised by local community groups.
- Use groups that residents trust such as WWDAS and Daybreak.
- Send written material through the post.

Social Media

As well as considering qualitative material submitted through the survey, we have looked through the feedback that has been given via comments on our social media posts. Some of these expressed disappointment in the responsiveness of Ceredigion County Council. It was clear that residents want to feel heard and that the Council is responding to what they tell us.

In total the social media posts received:

- 17 likes
- 5 laughing reactions
- 39 comments
- 41 shares

Conclusions

It is recognised that the number of responses is disappointing, in response to those who have taken time to respond. We have implemented the following changes to our Engagement and Participation Policy to reflect the valuable feedback that we have received:

- Investigate the feasibility of setting up in-person focus groups across the county with an emphasis on engaging with existing groups that are known and utilised by residents.
- Create a clearer emphasis on the need to feedback the results of engagement with residents.
- Create performance measures to monitor our progress towards our aim of improving engagement and participation across Ceredigion.

We are pursuing the goal of continuous engagement. This will enable us to check in with residents across Ceredigion regularly and ask if they are happy with the way that we engage with them and what improvements we could potentially make. We want residents to feel valued and that they can influence local decisions.

Cyngor Sir Ceredigion County Council - Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

An integrated tool to inform effective decision making



This **Integrated Impact Assessment tool** incorporates the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Sustainable Development Principles, the Equality Act 2010 and the Welsh Language Measure 2011 (Welsh Language Standards requirements) and Risk Management in order to inform effective decision making and ensuring compliance with respective legislation.

1. PROPOSAL DETAILS: Policy change

Proposal Title	Talking, Listening and Working Together – Engagement and Participation Policy of Ceredigion County Council
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Service Area	Policy and Performance	Corporate Lead Officer	Alun Williams	Strategic Director	Barry Rees
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Name of Officer completing the IIA	Cathryn Morgan	E-mail	cathryn.morgan@ceredigion.gov.uk	Phone no	01545 570881
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Please give a brief description of the purpose of the proposal

‘Talking, Listening and Working Together’, Ceredigion County Council’s draft Engagement and Participation Policy sets out our corporate approach to engagement and participation with the people of Ceredigion. Our current Community Engagement Policy dates from 2012 and needs to be replaced to take account of new methods of engagement and recent legislation and guidance.

This revised policy has been written in compliance with the Equality Act 2010, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The aim is to improve the way that we engage with the public.

Who will be directly affected by this proposal? (e.g. The general public, specific sections of the public such as youth groups, carers, road users, people using country parks, people on benefits, staff members or those who fall under the protected characteristics groups as defined by the Equality Act and for whom the authority must have due regard).

The general public.

VERSION CONTROL: The IIA should be used at the earliest stages of decision making, and then honed and refined throughout the decision making process. It is important to keep a record of this process so that we can demonstrate how we have considered and built in sustainable development, Welsh language and equality considerations wherever possible.

Author	Decision making stage	Version number	Date considered	Brief description of any amendments made following consideration
Michael Smith	Scrutiny	1	14/10/21	
Cathryn Morgan	Scrutiny	2	12.09.2022	

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COUNCIL STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES: Which of the Council's Strategic Objectives does the proposal address and how?				
Boosting the Economy	<p>Engagement is a cross-cutting theme in our Corporate Strategy 2017-22. The Corporate Strategy states that, <i>'Our policies for the future will encourage collaboration and partnership working with all interested stakeholders. We consider effective interaction with our communities as an essential component to securing a healthy and vibrant society.'</i></p> <p>The proposed updated Engagement and Participation policy therefore addresses all four of the Council's Strategic Objectives.</p>			
Investing in People's Future				
Enabling Individual and Family Resilience				
Promoting Environmental and Community Resilience				

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NOTE: As you complete this tool you will be asked for **evidence to support your views**. These need to include your baseline position, measures and studies that have informed your thinking and the judgement you are making. It should allow you to identify whether any changes resulting from the implementation of the recommendation will have a positive or negative effect. Data sources include for example:

- *Quantitative data - data that provides numerical information, e.g. population figures, number of users/non-users*
- *Qualitative data – data that furnishes evidence of people's perception/views of the service/policy, e.g. analysis of complaints, outcomes of focus groups, surveys*
- *Local population data from the census figures (such as Ceredigion Welsh language Profile and Ceredigion Demographic Equality data)*
- *National Household survey data*
- *Service User data*
- *Feedback from consultation and engagement campaigns*
- *Recommendations from Scrutiny*
- *Comparisons with similar policies in other authorities*
- *Academic publications, research reports, consultants' reports, and reports on any consultation with e.g. trade unions or the voluntary and community sectors, 'Is Wales Fairer' document.*
- *Welsh Language skills data for Council staff*

2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES: How has your proposal embedded and prioritised the five sustainable development principles, as outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, in its development?

Sustainable Development Principle	Does the proposal demonstrate you have met this principle? If yes, describe how. If not, explain why.	What evidence do you have to support this view?	What action (s) can you take to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to the principle?

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<p>Long Term Balancing short term need with long term and planning for the future.</p>	<p>Our engagement will include conversations about people's long term ideas, needs and issues as well the engagement that takes place over the short term. Good engagement with children and young people needs to happen in order that the needs of future generations can be met.</p>	<p>Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 guidance documents.</p>	<p>Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.</p>
<p>Collaboration Working together with other partners to deliver.</p>	<p>We are active partners in a range of engagement partnerships that exist or are becoming established. This will enable us to share best practice, resources and to carry out shared engagement activities.</p>	<p>Partnership meetings (e.g. Ceredigion Public Services Board and sub-groups, Ceredigion Children and Young People Service Provider Forum).</p>	<p>Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.</p>
<p>Involvement Involving those with an interest and seeking their views.</p>	<p>Involvement is synonymous with engagement. We aim to involve all relevant stakeholders. This could be people across Ceredigion or specific stakeholders, including people with the Protected Characteristics as outlined in the Equality Act and seldom heard groups. We will use the best method of engagement depending on the situation. We will engage in a timely way in which the views of stakeholders can influence outcomes and decisions. We will also provide feedback to stakeholders on any engagement that we carry out.</p>	<p>Meetings with stakeholders and stakeholder groups (e.g. Disability Forum, Carers Alliance, Youth Council).</p>	<p>Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.</p>
<p>Prevention</p>	<p>Engaging with people and service users is a very effective way to identify, eliminate and reduce the</p>	<p>Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales)</p>	<p>Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.</p>

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<p>Putting resources into preventing problems occurring or getting worse.</p>	<p>effects of any problems or for people to be part of the solution in overcoming barriers. When engagement takes place at a very early stage this can prevent problems from happening at all.</p>	<p>2015 guidance documents.</p>	
<p>Integration Positively impacting on people, economy, environment and culture and trying to benefit all three.</p>	<p>Engagement is a cross-cutting theme in our Corporate Strategy. An aim of this Engagement Policy is to mainstream engagement across Ceredigion County Council. We will also work with other public bodies on the integration of the National Well-being Goals and Organisational Well-being Objectives through the Public Services Board.</p>	<p>Ceredigion County Council Corporate Strategy. Ceredigion PSB Local Well-being meetings.</p>	<p>Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan/</p>

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3. WELL-BEING GOALS: Does your proposal deliver any of the seven National Well-being Goals for Wales as outlined on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015? Please explain the impact (positive and negative) you expect, together with suggestions of how to mitigate negative impacts or better contribute to the goal. We need to ensure that the steps we take to meet one of the goals aren't detrimental to meeting another.

Well-being Goal	Does the proposal contribute to this goal? Describe the positive or negative impacts-	What evidence do you have to support this view?	What action (s) can you take to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to the goal?
3.1. A prosperous Wales Efficient use of resources, skilled, educated people, generates wealth, provides jobs.	Mainly neutral, but there will be a positive impact if good engagement is carried out with local businesses and stakeholders.	National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales	Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.
3.2. A resilient Wales Maintain and enhance biodiversity and ecosystems that support resilience and can adapt to change (e.g. climate change).	Mainly neutral, but there will be a positive impact if good engagement is carried out with stakeholders.	National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales	Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.
3.3. A healthier Wales People's physical and mental wellbeing is maximised and health impacts are understood.	Mainly neutral, but there will be a positive impact if good engagement is carried out with stakeholders.	National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales	Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.
3.4. A Wales of cohesive communities Communities are attractive, viable, safe and well connected.	Good engagement will improve trust between the Local Authority and members of the community, this will improve community cohesion.	National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales	Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.
3.5. A globally responsible Wales Taking account of impact on global well-being when considering local social, economic and environmental well-being.	Mainly neutral, but there will be a positive impact if good engagement is carried out with stakeholders.	National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales	Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.



<p>3.6. A more equal Wales People can fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances.</p> <p><i>In this section you need to consider the impact on equality groups, the evidence and any action you are taking for improvement.</i></p> <p><i>You need to consider how might the proposal impact on equality protected groups in accordance with the Equality Act 2010?</i></p> <p><i>These include the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or beliefs, gender, sexual orientation.</i></p> <p>Please also consider the following guide:: Equality Human Rights - Assessing Impact & Equality Duty</p>	<p>Describe why it will have a positive/negative or negligible impact.</p> <p><i>Using your evidence consider the impact for each of the protected groups. You will need to consider do these groups have equal access to the service, or do they need to receive the service in a different way from other people because of their protected characteristics. It is not acceptable to state simply that a proposal will universally benefit/disadvantage everyone. You should demonstrate that you have considered all the available evidence and address any gaps or disparities revealed.</i></p>	<p>What evidence do you have to support this view?</p> <p><i>Gathering Equality data and evidence is vital for an IIA. You should consider who uses or is likely to use the service. Failure to use <u>data</u> or <u>engage</u> where change is planned can leave decisions open to legal challenge. Please link to involvement box within this template. Please also consider the general guidance.</i></p>	<p>What action (s) can you take to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?</p> <p><i>These actions can include a range of positive actions which allows the organisation to treat individuals according to their needs, even when that might mean treating some more favourably than others, in order for them to have a good outcome. You may also have actions to identify any gaps in data or an action to engage with those who will/likely to be effected by the proposal. These actions need to link to Section 4 of this template.</i></p>																
<p>Age Do you think this proposal will have a positive or a negative impact on people because of their age? (Please tick ✓)</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="69 1093 786 1471"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Positive</th> <th>Negative</th> <th>None/ Negligible</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Children and Young People up to 18</td> <td style="text-align: center;">✓</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>People 18-50</td> <td style="text-align: center;">✓</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Older People 50+</td> <td style="text-align: center;">✓</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible	Children and Young People up to 18	✓			People 18-50	✓			Older People 50+	✓			<p>It will have a positive effect as it sets out specific actions that we will take to engage with people of all ages.</p>	<p>The policy sets out how we will continue to engage appropriately with children and young people.</p> <p>It also addresses the risk of digital exclusion, by ensuring a mix of online, in-person and paper based engagement.</p> <p>The development of better ways to engage online will make it easier for people to</p>	<p>Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.</p>
	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible																
Children and Young People up to 18	✓																		
People 18-50	✓																		
Older People 50+	✓																		

Cyngor Sir Ceredigion County Council - Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

An integrated tool to inform effective decision making



					have their say out of working hours.	
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Disability Do you think this proposal will have a positive or a negative impact on people because of their disability? (Please tick ✓)				It will have a positive effect as it sets out specific actions that we will take to engage with people with a disability.	The policy sets out the importance of providing documents in alternative formats on request, for example large print or Easy Read. It also addresses the risk of digital exclusion, by ensuring a mix of online, in-person and paper based engagement. The policy has taken into account feedback received from the Disability Forum coordinator on how we can improve the way we engage with people with a disability.	Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.
Hearing Impairment	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Physical Impairment	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Visual Impairment	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Learning Disability	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Long Standing Illness	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Mental Health	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Other	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			

Transgender Do you think this proposal will have a positive or a negative impact on transgender people? (Please tick ✓)				It will have a positive effect as the Council does not currently engage with transgender people as a specific group.	The policy sets out how we will improve engagement with specific stakeholder groups, including transgender people.	Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.
Transgender	Positive	Negative	None/			

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			Negligible	and this needs to be addressed.		
	✓					
Marriage or Civil Partnership Do you think this proposal will have a positive or a negative impact on marriage or Civil partnership? (Please tick ✓)				This policy is about how the Council engages with the general public. People who are married or in a civil partnership are protected in the workplace by the Equality Act 2010. Equal rights in the workplace is covered by Ceredigion Council's Work Live Balance Policy (currently under review).		
Marriage	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
			✓			
Civil partnership	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
			✓			
Pregnancy or Maternity Do you think this proposal will have a positive or a negative impact on pregnancy or maternity? (Please tick ✓)				It will have a positive effect as the Council does not specifically engage with people who are pregnant or have recently given birth and this needs to be addressed.	The policy sets out how we will improve engagement with specific stakeholder groups, including people who are pregnant or have recently given birth.	Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.
Pregnancy	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Maternity	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Race Do you think this proposal will have a positive or a negative impact on race? (Please tick ✓)				It will have a positive effect as the Council does not specifically engage with people from different ethnic	The policy sets out how we will improve engagement with specific stakeholder groups, including people from different ethnic backgrounds.	Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.
White	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			

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	✓			groups and this needs to be addressed.		
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Asian / Asian British	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Other Ethnic Groups	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					

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Religion or non-beliefs Do you think this proposal will have a positive or a negative impact on people with different religions, beliefs or non-beliefs? (Please tick ✓)				It will have a positive effect as the Council does not specifically engage with people who have different religious beliefs and this needs to be addressed.	The policy sets out how we will improve engagement with specific stakeholder groups, including people who have different religious beliefs.	Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.
Christian	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Buddhist	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Hindu	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Humanist	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Jewish	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					

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Muslim	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Sikh	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Non-belief	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Other	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					

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Sex Do you think this proposal will have a positive or a negative impact on men and/or women? (Please tick ✓)				It will have a positive effect as the Council does not specifically engage with men and women as different stakeholder groups and this needs to be addressed.	The policy sets out how we will improve engagement with specific stakeholder groups, including men and women separately.	Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.
Men	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Women	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					

Sexual Orientation Do you think this proposal will have a positive or a negative impact on people with different sexual orientation? (Please tick ✓)				It will have a positive effect as the Council does not specifically engage with people with different sexual orientation and this needs to be addressed.	The policy sets out how we will improve engagement with specific stakeholder groups, including people with different sexual orientation.	Implement the Engagement Policy and associated Action Plan.
Bisexual	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Gay Men	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					



Gay Women / Lesbian	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					
Heterosexual / Straight	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible			
	✓					

Having due regards in relation to the three aims of the Equality Duty - determine whether the proposal will assist or inhibit your ability to eliminate discrimination; advance equality and foster good relations.

3.6.2. How could/does the proposal help advance/promote equality of opportunity?

You should consider whether the proposal will help you to: ● Remove or minimise disadvantage ● To meet the needs of people with certain characteristics ● Encourage increased participation of people with particular characteristics

The updated policy aims to be inclusive and accessible and therefore will promote equality of opportunity.

3.6.3. How could/does the proposal/decision help to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, or victimisation?

You should consider whether there is evidence to indicate that: ● The proposal may result in less favourable treatment for people with certain characteristics ● The proposal may give rise to indirect discrimination ● The proposal is more likely to assist or impede you in making reasonable adjustments

The updated policy will help to reduce discrimination, harassment and victimisation by supporting inclusivity and accessibility across the protected characteristics by ensuring that their voice is heard and feeds into decisions taken by Ceredigion County Council.

3.6.4. How could/does the proposal impact on advancing/promoting good relations and wider community cohesion?

You should consider whether the proposal will help you to: ● Tackle prejudice ● Promote understanding

If people feel that their voices are heard and that they are able to influence decision making, this will contribute to a sense of belonging and higher levels of community cohesion.

Having due regard of the Socio-Economic Duty of the Equality Act 2010.

Socio-Economic Disadvantage is living in less favourable social and economic circumstances than others in the same society.

As a listed public body, Ceredigion County Council is required to have due regard to the Socio-Economic Duty of the Equality Act 2010. Effectively this means carrying out a poverty impact assessment. The duty covers all people who suffer socio-economic disadvantage, including people with protected characteristics.

3.6.5 What evidence do you have about socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome in relation to the proposal?

Describe why it will have a positive/negative or negligible impact.



The updated policy will help to promote participation and aims to include all stakeholders including people at a socio-economic disadvantage.

What evidence do you have to support this view?

People being effectively involved in decision making will help to drive improvements which would have a positive impact on socio-economic factors.

What action(s) can you take to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?

Implement the Engagement and Participation Policy and associated Action Plan.



3.7. A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language Culture, heritage and Welsh Language are promoted and protected. <i>In this section you need to consider the impact, the evidence and any action you are taking for improvement. This in order to ensure that the opportunities for people who choose to live their lives and access services through the medium of Welsh are not inferior to what is afforded to those choosing to do so in English, in accordance with the requirement of the Welsh Language Measure 2011.</i>				Describe why it will have a positive/negative or negligible impact.	What evidence do you have to support this view?	What action (s) can you take to mitigate any negative impacts or better contribute to positive impacts?
Page 120	Will the proposal be delivered bilingually (Welsh & English)?	Positive Yes	Negative	None/ Negligible	This is a Corporate policy and will be published bilingually. Engagement and participation exercises will be delivered bilingually.	Compliance with the Council's commitment to the Welsh Language Standards.
	Will the proposal have an effect on opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language?	Positive ✓	Negative	None/ Negligible		
	Will the proposal increase or reduce the opportunity for persons to access services through the medium of Welsh?	Positive ✓	Negative	None/ Negligible		
	How will the proposal treat the Welsh language	Positive	Negative	None/ Negligible		

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no less favourably than the English language?	✓			bilingually. Engagement and participation exercises will be delivered bilingually.	the Welsh Language Standards.	
Will it preserve, promote and enhance local culture and heritage?	Positive ✓	Negative	None/ Negligible	Enabling people to feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area can increase a sense of belonging that relates to increase appreciation of local culture and heritage.		



4. STRENGTHENING THE PROPOSAL: If the proposal is likely to have a negative impact on any of the above (including any of the protected characteristics), what practical changes/actions could help reduce or remove any negative impacts as identified in sections 2 and 3?

4.1 Actions.

What are you going to do?	When are you going to do it?	Who is responsible?	Progress

4.2. If no action is to be taken to remove or mitigate negative impacts please justify why.
(Please remember that if you have identified unlawful discrimination, immediate and potential, as a result of this proposal, the proposal must be changed or revised).

4.3. Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing.

How will you monitor the impact and effectiveness of the proposal?

The Engagement and Participation Policy Action Plan includes an annual reporting process.

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5. RISK: What is the risk associated with this proposal?

Impact Criteria	1 - Very low	2 - Low	3 - Medium	4 - High	5 - Very High
Likelihood Criteria	1 - Unlikely to occur	2 - Lower than average chance of occurrence	3 - Even chance of occurrence	4 - Higher than average chance of occurrence	5 - Expected to occur

Risk Description	Impact (severity)	Probability (deliverability)	Risk Score
The Engagement and Participation Policy is not adopted.	3	1	4
The Engagement and Participation is not implemented effectively	3	2	6

Does your proposal have a potential impact on another Service area?

The proposal is cross-cutting across all service areas.



6. SIGN OFF			
Position	Name	Signature	Date
Service Manager	Diana Davies		
Corporate Lead Officer	Alun Williams		
Strategic Director	Barry Rees		
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Matthew Vaux		

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Minutes of the Meeting of CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held Hybrid - Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron / remotely via video conference on Tuesday, 21 June 2022

PRESENT; Councillor Rhodri Evans (Chair), Councillors Euros Davies, Ifan Davies, Elaine Evans, Eryl Evans, Geraint Wyn Hughes, Hugh R M Hughes, Ceris Jones, Caryl Roberts and Carl Worrall

Also in attendance: Councillors Bryan Davies, Leader of the Council and Gareth Lloyd

Officers in attendance: Mr Geraint Edwards, CLO- People and Organisation , Mrs Angharad Rees, Human Resource Officer, Miss Lowri Edwards- CLO- Democratic Services, Mr Russell Hughes-Pickering, CLO- Economy & Regeneration, Mr Stephen Johnson, CLO -Finance & Procurement, Mr Steve Hallows, Service Manager Highways Department, Mrs Louise Harries, Solicitor, Mrs Nia Jones, Corporate Manager- Democratic Services and Mrs Dana Jones, Democratic and Services Officer

(10.00 - 12:15pm)

1 **Apologies**

Councillor Endaf Edwards, Paul Hinge together with Councillor Gareth Davies (Cabinet Member) apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.

2 **Disclosures of personal interest (including whipping declarations)** **Members are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and prejudicial interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Members Code of Conduct. In addition, Members must declare any prohibited party whip which the Member has been given in relation to the meeting as per the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.**

Councillor Elaine Evans and Eryl Evans declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item 4, prior to the vote being taken on this item.

3 **Draft Hybrid Working Strategy and Interim Hybrid Working Policy**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Bryan Davies presented the report upon the 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 the majority of the office staff work within the Council in a significantly different way. Staff responded quickly and positively to this change. In the main, the positive response was as a result 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 in order to support strategic decision-making. An estimated 74% of the working from home workforce participated in at least one of these engagement activities. Themes emerging from the staff engagement exercise and national research, trends and highlights had informed the development hybrid working strategy.

The staff engagement exercise indicated that there were many benefits from home-working but also recognised that there were challenges for some staff. The benefits reported included virtual meetings, increased productivity, improved collaboration, elimination of office distractions and interruptions. The identified challenges included poor broadband connectivity, training and inducting new staff, a lack of separation between work and home living in the "office", feelings of isolation due to less social encounters, and inadequate workspace in their home.

Using research findings and staff engagement evidence the Hybrid Working Strategy was developed setting out the principles and implementation process of a hybrid working model that maintains the required high level of service delivery whilst also providing employees with greater flexibility in balancing their work and home lives. The needs of the service would always be the over-riding priority when considering any hybrid working possibilities. It was recognised that this level of flexibility, due to the nature of some roles or other constraints, would not be achievable for all staff but that there would remain a commitment to explore how a level of flexibility can be built into roles across the organisation. During the initial stages of implementation, Customer Contact services would remain online and over the phone. The reception desks at Canolfan Rheidol and Penmorfa would also remain closed initially whilst other face-to-face services would be phased in as part of the implementation process. ."

It was stated that the strategy introduced a set of priorities including a) agile and mobile ways of working; b) environmental and financial sustainability; and c) providing a better customer experience. In addition, a set of parameters were identified within which the hybrid working model could be built, such as 'where our staff can work as efficiently remotely or in the office they can choose where they work on any given day'; 'hybrid working staff having no permanent personal space in the office, other than in exceptional

circumstances'; and 'our meetings with colleagues and external partners would be virtual wherever possible'.

In order to identify different types of roles across the corporate workforce four workstyles were introduced: Fixed – a role which requires the post holder to attend the workplace due to the nature and requirements of the role and therefore not suitable to hybrid working. The remaining three were all types of hybrid working - Flexible Hybrid, Limited Hybrid and Roaming. Categorising roles in this manner assists in determining ICT equipment requirements, training and development methods and office demands. Corporate managers in each service would place each role within their teams into one of these categories. The categorising would depend on the role and nature of their work.

The Corporate Lead Officer, Economy & Regeneration reported that to support the implementation of the hybrid working model three workstreams had been created, each chaired by a Corporate Lead Officer, and who report to a Ways of Working Project Board. The workstreams were:

Workplace Design – Responsible for redesigning workspaces to increase inclusivity, flexibility and to support new ways of working for the workforce and customers.

Digital Solutions – Responsible for reviewing and improving digital solutions to support collaboration, hybrid working and improved customer service.

Policies, Procedures and Training – Responsible for developing new, and reviewing existing, policies and procedures to support new ways of working.

The Interim Hybrid Working Policy had been developed to provide detailed information around what hybrid working means for the Council. It would support 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.

The proposal was that the policy was in place for a period of 18 months to allow for hybrid working to be trialled as the managers and our workforce identify an effective new way of working post-pandemic. At the end of this period, the interim policy would be replaced by a Hybrid Working Policy and other policies would be reviewed to ensure that they were fit for purpose in a new landscape.

The policy had been subject to consultation with the recognised Trade Unions and who had been involved in the development of the document from the early stages. Their feedback and suggested amendments had been incorporated where appropriate.

The main policy headlines had been set out below:

- Hybrid status was a benefit which the employee can apply for where their roles had been designated as hybrid suitable (Flexible Hybrid, Limited Hybrid & Roaming)

- Hybrid working employees may choose to attend workplace (or hub) on a daily basis but would only have to access to a hot desk booked via a desk booking system.
- To achieve hybrid status employees must demonstrate or agree to:
 - Sufficient broadband speed
 - Accommodate the necessary equipment for productive working
 - Ensure maintenance of information security
 - Safe working environment
 - Return to workplace if disruption to connectivity
 - Only work from recorded remote working locations
 - Attend the work location if required
- No contractual changes during period of Interim Policy. The contractual work location would stay the same and there would be no travelling expenses to attend work location or hot desk hub
- No working from home allowance payable as this would be a voluntary arrangement
- Hybrid status may be withdrawn under certain circumstances
- Recruitment/interviews would be virtual interviews by default unless there was a strong justification for face to face interviews.

The purpose of all staff policies and procedures was set out the behaviours, processes and procedures required of staff, how they could gain advice or support and, where applicable, the consequences of not adhering to the policy and/or procedure.

Following questions and comments from the floor, it was AGREED to recommend to Cabinet to endorse the Hybrid Working Strategy and the Hybrid Working Policy subject to 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 in order 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

4 **Corporate Bonds and Sureties Policy**

It was proposed that the Council introduced a corporate bonds policy in order for officers to have a clear, fair and consistent approach to approving and entering into 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.

It was AGREED:-

- (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

5 To confirm minutes of the previous meeting and to consider any matters arising from those Minutes.

It was AGREED to confirm the minutes of the previous meeting.

6 Forward Work Programme

The Forward Work Plan was agreed as presented subject to the following items to be considered at future meetings

- Community Housing Proposal- to proceed with its implementation and to consider Council land available to provide housing
- Council Tax Second Homes Premium – To receive an update on the Council decisions, 03 March 2022:
*“4.a) The level of Council Tax Second Homes Premium charged to be set at 25% (with effect from 1 April 2017); and,
b) that all monies raised from the 25% Council Tax Second Homes Premium (net of the Council Tax refunds), be ring -fenced and used to support the Community Housing Scheme.”
b) That all monies raised from the 25% Council Tax Second Homes Premium between the period 01/04/2017 to 31/03/2022 (net of Council Tax refunds), to be ring-fenced and used to support the Community Housing Scheme.
c) That all monies raised from the 25% Council Tax Second Homes Premium from 01/04/2022 (net of the Council Tax refunds), to be ring-fenced and used to support the Community Housing Scheme.
d) That from 01/04/2022, all monies raised from the 25% Council Tax Empty Homes Premium (net of the Council Tax refunds), be ring-fenced and used to support the Community Housing Scheme
e) That Council decision 16/03/2017 minute 8.b) Council Tax Premiums on Second Homes, be revoked*
- County Farms
- An update on the use of empty properties within the Authority
- A report upon the recruitment policy/process of the Authority in appointing and making the Council an “employer of choice”
- The efficiency of ICT and software within the Authority

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 3 October 2022

Chairman: _____

Date: _____

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Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO: Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 3 October 2022

LOCATION: Hybrid

TITLE: Draft Forward Work Programme 2022/23

PURPOSE OF REPORT: Review the current work programme of the Committee

REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION: The forward work programme of the Committee is reviewed and updated at each meeting

BACKGROUND:

Overview and Scrutiny Committees oversee the work of the Council to make sure that it delivers services in the best way and for the benefit of the local community.

The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to look at the services and issues that affect people in Ceredigion. The process provides the opportunity for Councillors to examine the various functions of the council, to ask questions on how decisions have been made, to consider whether service improvements can be put in place and to make recommendations to this effect.

Scrutiny plays an essential role in promoting accountability, efficiency and effectiveness in the Council's decision making process and the way in which it delivers services.

The main roles of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees:

- Holding the cabinet and officers as decision-makers to account
- Being a 'critical friend', through questioning how decisions have been made to provide a 'check and balance' to decision makers, adding legitimacy to the decision making process
- Undertaking reviews of council services and policy
- Undertaking reviews to develop council services and policies
- Considering any other matter that affects the county
- Ensuring that Ceredigion is performing to the best of its ability and delivering high quality services to its citizens
- Assessing the impact of the Council's policies on local communities and recommending improvement
- Engaging with the public to develop citizen centred policies and services

Effective Overview and Scrutiny can lead to:

- Better decision making
- Improved Service Delivery and Performance
- Robust Policy Development arising from public consultation and input of independent expertise
- Enhanced Democracy, Inclusiveness, Community Leadership and Engagement
- Adds a clear dimension of transparency and accountability to the political workings of the Council
- Provides an opportunity for all Members to develop specialist skills and knowledge that can benefit future policy making and performance monitoring processes
- Creates a culture of evidence based self-challenge

CURRENT SITUATION:

Questions to consider when choosing topics

- Is there a clear objective for examining this topic?
- Are you likely to achieve a desired outcome?
- What are the likely benefits to the Council and the citizens of Ceredigion?
- Is the issue significant?
- Are there links to the Corporate Strategy
- Is it a key issue to the public?
- Have the issues been raised by external audit?
- Is it a poor performing service?

Choosing topics

Overview and Scrutiny Committees should consider information from the Corporate Strategy, Improvement Plan, Strategic Plan, Service Plans, the Corporate Risk Register, budget savings – proposals and impact, Quarterly Corporate Performance Management panel meetings and departmental input in choosing topics and designing their Forward Work Programmes, as well as any continuing work.

RECOMMENDATION (S):

To review and update the current Forward Work Programme.

Contact Name:	Dwynwen Jones
Designation:	Overview and Scrutiny Officer
Date of Report:	15 September 2022
Acronyms:	FWP – Forward Work Programme

Committee	Item (description/title)	Invited Speakers	Purpose i.e. monitoring, policy, recommendation
Corporate Resources			
21 June 2022	Draft Hybrid Working Strategy and Interim Hybrid Working Policy Corporate Bonds and Sureties Policy		
3 October 2022	A.M. County Farms update Report on Empty Properties/Buildings P.M. Complaints, Compliments and FOI Annual Report Engagement and Participation Strategy – Talking, Listening and Working Together Tackling Hardship Strategy Victim Support Hate Crime	Marie-Neige Hadfield Cathryn Morgan	Cabinet 1.11.22 Cabinet 4.10.22
19 December 2022	Coroner Report October 2022		

17 February 2023 1.30pm	Budget preparation		
13 March 2023			
Future meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on Clic • Update on SMART towns in the future • Update on Digital Connectivity when new Officer in role. • Community Housing Proposal- to proceed with its implementation and to consider Council land available to provide housing • Council Tax Second Homes Premium – To receive an update on the Council decisions, 03 March 2022: <i>“4.a) The level of Council Tax Second Homes Premium charged to be set at 25% (with effect from 1 April 2017); and,</i> <i>b) that all monies raised from the 25% Council Tax Second Homes Premium (net of the Council Tax refunds), be ring -fenced and used to</i> 		

	<p><i>support the Community Housing Scheme.”</i></p> <p><i>b) That all monies raised from the 25% Council Tax Second Homes Premium between the period 01/04/2017 to 31/03/2022 (net of Council Tax refunds), to be ring-fenced and used to support the Community Housing Scheme.</i></p> <p><i>c) That all monies raised from the 25% Council Tax Second Homes Premium from 01/04/2022 (net of the Council Tax refunds), to be ring-fenced and used to support the Community Housing Scheme.</i></p> <p><i>d) That from 01/04/2022, all monies raised from the 25% Council Tax Empty Homes Premium (net of the Council Tax refunds), be ring-fenced and used to support the Community Housing Scheme</i></p> <p><i>e) That Council decision 16/03/2017 minute 8.b) Council Tax Premiums on Second Homes, be revoked</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A report upon the recruitment policy/process of the Authority in appointing and making the Council an “employer of choice” • The efficiency of ICT and software within the Authority 		
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