Pembrokeshire County Council
Cyngor Sir Penfro

## Pembrokeshire County Council

# Annual Self-Assessment 2025-26

**Consultation version, July 2026**

**Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. / This document is also available in Welsh.**

## Introduction

This is Pembrokeshire County Council's fifth annual self-assessment as required under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act. The Act introduced performance requirements for local authorities and central to this is a duty to report annually on performance through a process of self-assessment. The Act requires each council in Wales to keep under review, through self-assessment, the extent to which it is meeting the 'performance requirements', which is the extent to which:

- It is exercising its functions effectively
- It is using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively
- Its governance is effective for securing the above

A self-assessment report must be produced in respect of each financial year and published as soon as is reasonably practicable after the end of the financial year on which it is reporting. **As such this is the Council's self-assessment report for the 2025-26 financial year**.

The report sets out the Council's conclusions on the extent to which it has met the performance requirements during that financial year, and any actions it intends to take, or has already taken, to increase the extent to which it is meeting the performance requirements.

To provide a clear structure and focus, our self-assessment report is aligned to and designed around the Council's statutory Well-being Objectives which are set out in the Corporate Strategy 2025-2030, as approved by Council in March 2025. These are

WBO1 **Our Future** – enabling the best start in life for our children and young people, equipping them with skills for the future

WBO2 **Our Place** – prosperous places, with clean, safe and sustainable environments, where people can live well and thrive

WBO3 **Our Community** – caring for people, and enabling active, resourceful and connected communities

WBO4 **Our Council** – a financially sustainable, well-governed Council, with a workforce equipped to support the people we serve

In addition, a final section covers key corporate or organisational priorities not covered under the Well-being Objectives listed above.

Self-assessment is an evidence-based analysis, understanding what a range of quantitative and qualitative information at the Council's disposal reveals about how it is exercising its functions, using its resources and governing itself. We have asked ourselves 3 key questions to assess performance under each sub-theme. These are:

- How well are we doing? (*Assessing current performance using both qualitative and quantitative information.)*

- How do we know? (*Providing appropriate evidence to demonstrate the above.)*

- What can we do better and how? (*Identifying forward looking improvement actions.)*

The self-assessment draws on a range of internal and external sources, ensuring a broad evidence base to inform the actions the Council will take to increase the extent to which it is meeting the performance requirements in future. Below are a range of examples of the type of information we have drawn on as an evidence base:

- Service plan self-assessment sections
- External regulatory reports
- External service reviews
- Corporate Performance Scorecard
- Citizen engagement and consultation exercises
- Annual Governance Statement
- Budget outturn report
- Other statutory reports e.g. Director of Social Services Annual Report

## Well-being Objective 1: Our Future – enabling the best start in life for our children and young people, equipping them with skills for the future

*Assessment of current performance – how well are we doing?*

- We have focused on improving literacy standards amongst younger pupils. In autumn 2025, around 2,800 pupils were assessed under the New Group Reading Test (NGRT), which showed modest improvement in middle to high reading outcomes. However, some weaknesses remained in early reading years. In quarter 4, Schools and Learning O&S and Cabinet both endorsed a strengthened local authority approach to improve early reading through the Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) programme. This will be supported by up to £200,000 going into the 2026-27 financial year.
- We have aimed to improve support for numeracy and mathematics among all pupils across Pembrokeshire. GCSE outcomes showed positive improvements in a number of secondary schools, including Greenhill, Harri Tudur and Penrhyn Dewi. However, data shows that there are still more improvements to be made, with attainment gaps in maths disproportionately affecting girls and Free School Meals (FSM) pupils.
- We have worked on increasing parental engagement in children's learning, particularly in Early Years. In partnership with Carmarthenshire County Council and Ceredigion County Council, we have developed a Regional Parent Champion Network to strengthen how parent voice is integrated within Early Years and family support services. This model is being co-designed and implemented by Children in Wales. Eight Pembrokeshire parent volunteers have also been recruited across Pembrokeshire to act as 'Signposting Champions' in their local communities, which will help to improve families' access to information, advice and support.
- An Attendance Strategy has been implemented to try and improve attendance levels across schools. Whilst actions and approaches from the Strategy have remained on track, there has been minimal impact on attendance so far. From September 2025 to March 2026, attendance remained fairly static when compared to the previous year, with 92.38% attendance in primary schools and 89.07% attendance in secondary schools. Attendance figures were also included in the Corporate Performance Scorecard 2025-26 papers to Cabinet on 1st June 2026.
- During the 2025–26 academic year, three schools in Pembrokeshire were placed in Estyn special measures. These schools are receiving intensive support from the Local Authority and Partneriaeth to secure the urgent improvements required and to strengthen leadership, teaching and learner outcomes. Additional ACP grant funding has been directed towards these schools to support their improvement journeys, including the brokering of strong school-to-school support arrangements with effective partner schools to build capacity and share best practice. Strong improvement plans are in place and progress is being monitored closely through robust challenge and support arrangements.
- Updated child poverty data was published in March 2026. It indicates that 23.4% of children in Pembrokeshire are living in relative poverty, higher than the Welsh national average of 21.2%. According to the WIMD 2025, Pembrokeshire also has more education deprivation than the national average. This particularly impacts the

communities of Milford: Hubberston 2, Pembroke Dock: Llanion 1, Pembroke: Monkton, which fall within the 10% most educationally deprived LSOAs in Wales. To alleviate this, the Education Directorate has been supporting the implementation of actions from the PSB's Poverty Strategy. This includes the PWR Project, Education Support Fund, SPF People and Skills programme and Family and Community Engagement Project (FaCE). In particular, £22,065 of the Education Support Fund was used in 2025-26 to support families in Pembrokeshire needing urgent support towards school-related costs (such as uniform, kit and equipment). Additionally, 166 families have participated in FaCE programmes across the county, helping parents and carers to better support their child's learning and progression at home.

- On March 13th the PSB's third Tackling Poverty Summit was held at The Pavillion in Haverfordwest. Approximately 100 professionals gathered to participate in the event, and feedback was extremely positive- in particular in relation to the quality of speakers and relevance of the agenda.
- A report was taken to Schools and Learning O&S in November 2025 to provide an update on mental health and wellbeing in schools. It outlined that the mental health and well-being needs of young people have increased significantly over the last 10 years, primarily due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of measures are being undertaken in Pembrokeshire to support mental health needs, including refreshing the Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, training teaching assistants to become Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs), continuing to carry out Trauma Informed Schools (TIS) training, and connecting schools to the Health Board's School In-Reach (SIR) service.
- We have continued to progress the Sustainable Communities for Learning (SCfL) programme and school re-organisation throughout 2025-26. Progress on the redevelopment of Milford Haven schools has been on schedule, with the Strategic Outline Case approved by Cabinet in July 2025. In December 2025, approval was granted by Welsh Government to progress to the Outline Business Case (OBC) stage. Proposals include the co-location of the English medium primary and secondary schools, as well as the establishment of a new Welsh medium primary school to address the demand in the wider Milford Haven area.
- From November 2025 to January 2026, we consulted on the discontinuation of three Pembrokeshire primary schools: Manorbier, Clydau and Cilgerran. This decision was taken following Council's consideration of a School Modernisation Working Group report in May 2025, which highlighted the extent of surplus school places set against a considerable decline in pupil population:
    - The consultation reports for Manorbier and Clydau schools were taken to Council in March 2026, highlighting that respondents overwhelmingly disagreed with proposals to close the schools. Due to the number of surplus school places, as well as significant damage caused to the original Manorbier school building in the 2022 fire, Council agreed that the Director of Education should be authorised to publish a Statutory Notice to discontinue the schools.
    - The consultation report for Cilgerran school was taken to Council in May 2026. The majority of consultation respondents disagreed with proposals to close the VC school and reopen as a 3-11 Community School. Due to a significant decline in pupils numbers across the Preseli area, as well as high surplus capacity at Cilgerran school, Council agreed that the Director of

Education should be authorised to public a Statutory Notice to discontinue the school and establish the same as a 3-11 Community School.

- We developed proposals to establish a new Welsh medium school in Milford Haven, due to growing demand, as well as a need to reduce travel requirements and address the current lack of Welsh medium provision in the local area. The proposals were approved by Council in May 2026, and the school organisation process will be commenced throughout 2026-27 to advance this work further. This work will also support the Council in delivering its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.
- We have invested in our Youth Service and remodelled a significant portion of the ground floor of County Hall and refurbished as a Youth Centre. The Youth service views this investment as akin to a custom build specification that will provide opportunities to deliver a broad range of 11-25 services. We are further developing use of the space by working with a range of internal and external stakeholders, including DWP Job Centre colleagues to establish a Youth Hub model in line with national policy. This will also support our own NEET strategy, working in close collaboration between the Youth Service, Futureworks (our Employability and Skills provision) and Adult Community Learning.
- In 2025-26, we conducted a more proportionate and consistent safeguarding response, underpinned by improved front-door practice and multi-agency decision-making. A new service manager for front-door and preventions was appointed in August 2025, and we commenced more partnership working, specifically with police, to further reduce demand at the front door. These practices helped to reduce:
    - The number of children on the Child Protection Register – 131 in March 2025 to 70 by March 2026.
    - The number of children entering care – An average of 6.5 children per month by the end of 2025-26, compared to an average of 25 children per month at the beginning of the previous year.
- From March 2025 to March 2026, the number of children in residential care reduced by around 15%. In order to further develop our residential children's home capacity, we acquired an additional property to be converted into a four-bed children's residential home. Additionally, our existing residential home (West Lodge) and respite provision (Holly House) received outstanding Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspection reports during the year. An update report on children's residential care was also taken to Social Care O&S in January 2026, noting that there have been significant efforts to improve residential care for young people over the last two years. This ensures that children are receiving high quality care and support to achieve the outcomes that are important to them.
- We are committed to keeping children safely within their own families by supporting kinship care and special guardianship. To do this, we have strengthened our in-house fostering service by introducing an increased foster carers allowance and a discretionary council tax discount. At its 16th March 2026 meeting, Cabinet approved the eligibility criteria for the foster carer council tax discretionary scheme, and this will be piloted starting in 2026-27. In addition, we have appointed a new Recruitment Officer who has significantly increased the number of enquiries, initial visits and fostering assessments being undertaken.
- The 0-25 Preventions Programme is a key work programme under the Transformation and Innovation Board and aims to introduce place-based approaches

to prevent children entering care, addressing risky adolescent behaviour and improving parental support. In particular:

- A place-based preventions team has been established in Milford Haven to build relationships with the community and create stronger connections with local schools.
- The Edge of Care team has delivered positive outcomes, and team expansion to 11 practitioners is now complete. 171 children across 108 families have been supported over the past year, and most of these children (88%) were remaining at home or with their family networks rather than entering care, which is providing a significant benefit to the Council in terms of cost avoidance.
- The 'Blues' and 'Bouncing Back' programme was delivered to around 400 year 8 pupils across two secondary schools. There have been measurable improvements in emotional well-being, coping and confidence, as well as reductions in depressive symptom scores.
- The Parent Advocacy Network was moved into the Picton Centre, and a series of regular parent cafes will be held starting from April 2026. These will support parents with issues such as well-being, isolation and confidence.

- Youth Justice data indicates that First Time Entrants (FTE) into the service are beginning to reduce following a post-pandemic increase. There was a total of 23 FTE's in 2025 (January to December), a 13% decrease from 2024 and a nearly 38% decrease from 2023. However, many offences are now being dealt with by Out of Court Disposals. 2025-26 has also seen an increase in high profile Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) incidents, which will be targeted moving forward by implementing a local multi-agency strategy to reduce youth related violence and large scale ASB.

*Evidence – how do we know?*

- Education Improvement Service Plan 2026-27
- Schools and Learning O&S meeting, 5th February 2026 - Approaches to Early Reading in Pembrokeshire: Evidence-based Options for Phonics Provision
- Cabinet meeting, 16th March 2026 - Committee Referral - Approaches to Early Reading in Pembrokeshire
- Early Years Service Plan 2026-27
- Inclusion Service Plan 2026-27
- Cabinet, 1st June 2026 - Corporate Performance Scorecard 2025-26, Appendix A
- Cabinet, 1st June 2026 - Corporate Performance Scorecard 2025-26, Appendix C, Corporate Performance Commentary Report
- UK Parliament – Constituency Data: Child Poverty
- Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2025 - Education
- Schools and Learning O&S report, 27th November 2025 – Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools
- Culture, Leisure and School Modernisation Service Plan 2026-27
- Cabinet meeting, 7th July 2025 - Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme Milford Haven Schools Redevelopment – Strategic Outline Case

- Cabinet report, 27th May 2026, Sustainable Communities for Learning Rolling Programme Milford Haven Schools Redevelopment - Outline Business Case
- Council meeting, 8th May 2025 – School Modernisation Working Group
- Council meeting, 5th March 2026 – Consultation Report relating to the proposal for the discontinuation of Manorbier Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled School.
- Council meeting, 5th March 2026 – Consultation Report relating to the proposal for the discontinuation of Ysgol Clydau.
- Council meeting, 14th May 2026 – Consultation Report relating to the proposal for the discontinuation of Cilgerran Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled School and establishment of the same as a 3-11 community school
- Council meeting, 14th May 2026 – Planning for the Future of Welsh Medium Education in the Milford Haven Area
- Children's Services Service Plan 2026-27
- Cabinet, 1st June 2026 – Corporate Performance Scorecard 2025-26, Appendix B, Social Services and Housing Directorate Scorecard
- Social Care O&S report, 29th January 2026 – Children's Residential Care Update
- Cabinet meeting, 16th March 2026 – Final Criteria for Mainstream Foster Carer Council Tax Discretionary Scheme
- Draft Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2025-26
- Youth and Community Education Service Plan 2026-27

*Improvement actions – what can we do better and how?*

- Enhance Early Years literacy outcomes by implementing a structured programme of literacy rich activities, professional development and sector support.
- Implement the new 'School Readiness' initiative to ensure that children entering reception class are better prepared to be in school.
- Continue to implement the Council's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme to improve school learning environments, prioritising projects in Milford Haven, Preseli and Neyland PRU.
- Delivery of improvement in Individual School Balances though greater engagement from schools in budget management and recovery process and implementation of robust Licenced Deficit Agreements.
- Increase in-house residential and foster carer capacity to meet demand.
- Introduce Family Group Conferencing and accelerate reunification work in Children's Services.
- Continue to develop and invest in the preventions approach for children, young people and families, to support earlier intervention, stronger coordination and continuous learning.
- Produce a 5-year strategic work plan for Youth Justice by September 2026.

## Well-being Objective 2: Our Place – prosperous places, with clean, safe and sustainable environments, where people can live well and thrive

*Assessment of current performance – how well are we doing?*

### General

- Alongside ten other councils, we undertook the *Let's Talk* residents' survey last summer (results were reported to November 2025 Cabinet).
    - 57% of people agreed or strongly agreed that their local area is well looked after, the highest percentage across other councils, but people who lived in our main towns were much less likely to agree/strongly agree.
    - 63% of people agreed or strongly agreed that their local area has a clean environment, the highest percentage across other councils, but again, people living in our main towns were much less likely to agree/strongly agree.
    - 72% of people felt safe or very safe when outside in their local area after dark, the highest percentage across other councils. People in our main towns were less likely to feel safe or very safe than those in other areas.
    - Satisfaction rates with services that have the greatest impact on place, such as housing, highways and transport, leisure and regeneration, were mixed but were consistently higher than for other Welsh councils. Satisfaction rates were highest for waste management and leisure, cultural and tourism where over half of respondents were satisfied, and lowest for housing and regeneration where fewer than one out of five respondents were satisfied.
- During 2025-26, we started to amend how services within the council are managed and organised so that we can give a greater focus to work collaboratively across the council, with people at the heart of the process, to plan for the future development of distinctive and vibrant places.

### Environmental Services

- We started to implement our new Environmental Services Strategy by introducing kerbside collection of small electrical items (diverting the valuable elements these often contain from incineration so that they can be re-used) and undertaking preparatory work for reuse shops in our six waste and recycling centres. These will be open by mid-summer 2026.
- We continued to perform very well for recycling. Provisional quarterly 2025-26 recycling figures are very close to or above the 70% statutory target and we are confident that our verified 2025-26 recycling figures will both meet the target and be the highest amongst the highest in Wales. We did not send any waste directly to landfill; the Withyhedge landfill site is not operated by the Council, and we cannot prevent waste being sent there by other councils in Wales.
- Whilst the percentage of missed collections remains low and reduced by 8% compared with 2024-25, we recognised the need to strengthen the resilience of the waste service in 2025-26. We recruited more people and held a Recruitment Open Day, resulting in 100 people applying at the event and 138 applications in total. We have also held monthly crew meetings to improve communication in the service. We put interim vehicle arrangements in place and, in parallel, a rigorous procurement

process has commenced to facilitate the phased replacement of our ageing refuse and recycling vehicle fleet and provide a more sustainable long-term solution.

- Our waste service relies heavily on support from the Council's fleet management services. An independent review of the Council's transport and fleet operations was undertaken by external consultants and this found that current arrangements are not consistently delivering the required standards of regulatory compliance, asset management, and operational efficiency. A comprehensive and wide-ranging action plan has been developed to address this which has been identified as a significant issue in our Annual Governance Statement (see Our Council section).

### Housing

- We made positive progress in 2025-26 with our housing development programme, delivering 221 units in total. Schemes that had already started such as Glasfryn Phase 2 (11 units) and the former Cleddau Bridge Hotel scheme (35 units) have been progressing well. A number of complex schemes that had experienced delays are now underway including: Brynhir Tenby (125 units), Havens View (24 units) and Haverfordia (sheltered housing 26 units). Welsh Government has committed to support these schemes with £43.8m worth of grant with match funding being provided by the Housing Revenue Account.
- In addition to the 221 new homes the council is building, we continue to increase our housing stock through a number of other initiatives such as: Off The Shelf Purchases (25 units in Hook and Rosemarket), via Section 106 obligations (an agreement to purchase 21 units under construction in Saundersfoot), and purchase of suitable existing homes (34 properties).
- Our approach to developing new homes has involved the community, and regular community events have been held during the planning development process for all schemes. Following commencement on site, further 'meet the contractor' events have been held so that the local communities can ask any further questions. We have also developed local letting policies, for instance at Hook where we involved the community council, and this will go some way to meet the local demand and help young local families stay in their local area.
- We worked on our Choice Homes housing allocations policy throughout 2025-26 which was developed in collaboration with ateb, Wales & West Housing, Barcud and Codi (formerly Pobl) Housing Associations. The policy was agreed in June 2026 and will come into effect in October 2026.
- We commenced the first stage of a Tenancy Management Restructure in order to create a person centred, proactive, and preventative rather than reactive service. A pilot was undertaken on the Mount Estate where the team worked with the Police, waste management and other partners in order to improve community cohesion and reduce anti-social behaviour.
- The Tenants' Financial Support Team actioned 1,441 referrals for people struggling with rent and bills, with £460k revenue generated. The team has moved to a more preventative model of working practice, seeking early intervention with tenants to prevent the escalation of debt.
- For building maintenance, the introduction of Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2023 represents a step change in regulatory expectations. This will require robust property level and component level data collected by comprehensive condition

surveys.  It will also require software development and data management capability. In response we have:

- Established a Compliance Programme Manager.
- Expanded our capacity to deliver major schemes.
- Expanded our energy efficiency teams.
- Created a void property team as well as one that specialises in damp/condensation issues.
- Strengthened the workforce. Ten new apprentices were recruited into building maintenance in September 2025, building on the successful intake of four apprentices in September 2023.  A total of 28 staff and apprentices are currently undertaking degree apprenticeships at various stages.  This approach is strengthening the workforce pipeline and reducing future recruitment risk, although it does not negate the immediate need for additional experienced officers.

### Public Protection

- Throughout the year, we monitored air quality around Withyhedge Landfill site following concerns from the local community and introduced a dedicated complaint line. Monitoring results were reported to Services O&S and overall levels of 'bad egg gas' ($H_2S$) were low, as well as a reduced level of complaints compared to 2024-25.
- Improvement in Food Safety and Standards and capacity issues were addressed through recruiting two qualified and experienced Environmental Health Officers and two other officers finishing their training and qualifying as Registered Environmental Health Practitioners. The service is on track to meet its recovery timetable by mid-2027.
- Recruitment issues in Trading Standards persist. We are tackling this through a 'grow your own' approach of training staff. Throughout 2025-26, key priorities were taking action on the sale of illegal vapes and tobacco, and prolific rogue traders.
- The animal health team has continued to prioritise serious complaints relating to the welfare of livestock and investigating illegal dog breeding and importation. Work has included supporting Animal and Plant Health Agency response to large avian flu outbreak and a number of high-profile prosecutions.

### Infrastructure

- We worked with other local authorities in south-west Wales to prepare for bus reform which will be introduced from April 2027. In collaboration other councils in south-west Wales and Transport for Wales, we consulted on proposed improvements to the bus network in summer 2025.
- We continued to work on active travel proposals (walking, wheeling and cycling) and consulted on proposed routes, existing ones and asked for comment on which routes people would like to see introduced or improved.
- Following a consultation in 2024, a review of 20mph limits commenced in June 2025 on a settlement-by-settlement basis.  The review led to proposals to change speed limits but further consultation with local residents was undertaken prior to formal change.

## Property

- During 2025-26, the property team took time to review its structures following the appointment of a new Head of Service. The Property Team had previously undergone an extended period without a settled leadership.
- We have accelerated our acquisitions and disposals processes by reviewing the Council's Estate to identify underused or vacant properties that are no longer required for service delivery and could be transferred internally or disposed of to generate capital receipts. An example is the Asset Re-Categorisation of Properties report considered by Cabinet at its 16 March 2026 meeting.

## Planning/Biodiversity

- The Annual Monitoring Plan, that will be produced for the 13th year of the current Local Development Plan, is due to be published later in the 2026/27 year. This will contain more detailed information on the performance of the planning system.
- We continued to progress our replacement Local Development Plan. Following Council endorsement, the Plan was submitted to Welsh Government for its independent examination. This process has commenced but Inspectors have called an Exploratory meeting with the Council due to concerns relating to nutrient neutrality.
- Nutrient neutrality requirements for the Cleddau catchment were worked on throughout the year, and Cabinet endorsed an action plan to address this issue in October 2025. This is the Council's highest risk, as it has the potential to have a significant impact on development and on Pembrokeshire's economy. As the majority of nutrients in affected rivers originate from agriculture, there is also a question on whether pausing development is likely to be effective in returning rivers to good ecological health. A report to Services Overview and Scrutiny on 25th June 2026 gives a comprehensive update on nitrogen neutrality.
- We are required to report annually on biodiversity in line with section 6 of the Environment Act. In summary, overall delivery against the Section 6 Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Plan has been strong. Of the 24 actions identified for this reporting period, three are no longer applicable. Of the remaining 21 actions, 10 have been delivered in full and 10 in part. While a high proportion of actions have been implemented, the review indicates that several have only been achieved at a basic or compliant level, rather than demonstrating the level of ambition and best practice sought.
- We maintained good performance on application turn around and for planning enforcement (which is needed to maintain confidence in the planning system). However, a small but growing number of applications are 'caught' by nutrient neutrality requirements including some major applications (including new affordable housing) and are stalled.
- We worked with other councils and planning authorities in the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee to progress its Strategic Development Plan. We consulted on its Delivery Agreement, one of the first stages in agreeing this regional plan aimed at addressing issues such as housing need, travel-to-work patterns, economic opportunity areas, and the delivery of major infrastructure projects.

## Regeneration

- Based on claimant count figures (a measure of unemployment) the overall rate in Pembrokeshire changed little between 2024-25 and 2025-26. However, like all other Welsh councils, the rate for people aged 16 – 24 increased and one in five unemployed people in Pembrokeshire is now aged 16-25. Addressing young people not in education, training or employment is part of our approach to prevention.
- We did not renew the Pembrokeshire Recovery and Regeneration Strategy 2020-2030, but we contributed to the development of the South West Wales Regional Economic Delivery Plan which is based around three key themes: renewable energy and the net zero economy; building a strong business base; and growing the 'experience' offer. Our Place based approach will inform future regeneration work within Pembrokeshire
- We continued to support the Celtic Freeport through its preparatory stages. Through the Council's Accelerated Change Programme, £186k to support the Freeport Team for 12 months was agreed and Cabinet discussed a third tax site at its November meeting. In April 2026, the Welsh Government and UK Government agreed on the Celtic and Anglesey Freeport Outline Business Cases, meaning it is now live and open for business and seed corn capital can be accessed. More information about the Freeport can be found in its Five Year Strategy, agreed in June 2026.
- We are one of the partners for Swansea Bay City Deal, a £1.3 billion regional investment programme which is in its delivery phase. In December 2025, Cabinet agreed a change to its decision-making processes, aligning it with the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee, thereby reducing duplication and streamlining governance. The performance of Swansea Bay City Deal is evaluated and an independent review found that it "is well supported, governed, and managed with strong alignment of all participating partners. Benefits are already being evidenced and there are additional benefits potentially not being captured or celebrated."
- Retail Vacancy rates are one way the health and vitality of our towns can be assessed. The 2025 retail survey found the towns of Fishguard, Milford Haven, Narberth and Pembroke have a lower vacancy rate than the national UK average. The vacancy rate in Milford Haven has fallen significantly, from 21% to 12% following a similar drop from a 12-year high of 30% in 2022. Pembroke also shows small signs of improvement with vacancies dropping from 20% to 16% and Fishguard with a 3% drop to 14% since 2023. The vacancy rate in Milford Waterfront shows a dramatic increase to 27%, although it is a small centre. Vacancy rates in Haverfordwest (26%) and Pembroke Dock (18%) have remained about the same. Key town centre projects undertaken in 2025-26 are listed below:
  - Excellent progress has been made in progressing the Heart of Pembrokeshire project, a multi-million-pound programme to regenerate Haverfordwest town centre focusing on Haverfordwest Castle, a new a new visitor/heritage attraction and revitalising the town's economy, culture, and public spaces. The new striking signature bridge opened in August 2026 and creative waymarkers were installed in June 2026.
  - The Tenby Brewing Company agreed headline terms to lease the old Marychurch Foundry at Western Quayside in August 2025, joining Waldos which opened the previous year as a business trading in the area.

- We agreed to further investment (via a £1m Town Centre Loan fund) to repurpose the former Wilko building located on Old Bridge, Haverfordwest. This investment is necessary to attract a new tenant for this key site in order to maintain the momentum for the town's regeneration.
- Good progress has been made on Haverfordwest Transport Interchange which is due to open in autumn 2026. It will have around 280 spaces (which are wider for easier parking) along with electric vehicle charging points and solar panels on the car park roof. The area around the interchange will be upgraded to promote active travel, such as walking and cycling, and bus access at Haverfordwest railway station will also be improved.
- Designs for the Milford Haven Interchange were unveiled in September 2025 which was approved by Network Rail in July 2025. Further information about the project, which is due to completed in mid-2027, is available on the dedicated webpage.
- We continued to progress South Quay Pembroke, a difficult and complex project to renovate a derelict building in a prominent position close to the castle. The project is due to complete in March 2027 and will house a new library and community café, and a healthcare, social services and supported employment facility. We were successful in obtaining additional funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for a one-year Community Programme Coordinator post to deliver a vibrant calendar of events and activities at the new Centre, and a volunteering programme and educational resources for schools. The Henry Tudor Trust will operate the new heritage centre, and it is expected to receive around 30,000 visitors a year.

### Culture and Leisure

- We achieved excellent growth across leisure centres with activity usage growing by 45,313 visits compared with 2024-25. 1,388,444 visits were recorded, a 2% growth above the annual target. We refurbished the fitness suites at Tenby, Pembroke, Milford Haven, St Davids & Fishguard Leisure Centre. Customer satisfaction improved over the past 12 months whereas our comparators saw a decrease in overall customer satisfaction.
- Following condition surveys for Tenby and Pembroke swimming pools, in March 2026 Cabinet approved a Leisure Investment Programme addressing not just Tenby and Pembroke pools, but also an agreement to invest in producing the detailed the design for a new leisure centre in Milford Haven as part of the development of the new English medium primary and secondary school.
- Given the size of the funding required for the Leisure Investment Programme, Cabinet agreed to different governance arrangements for capital funding by incorporating Leisure capital schemes within the existing Sustainable Communities for Learning Schools Programme Board. A further report will be presented to Cabinet in autumn 2026 which will review and prioritise capital schemes up to 2041-42 as modelling suggests that potential requests for capital programme exceed the resources available (see Our Council section).
- Improvements were undertaken at Haverfordwest library in January 2026. This included an improved children's library, enhanced digital and visitor information services and an improved customer flow through the building by modifying

entrances and exits. In 2025-26, visits to libraries (which provide a wide range of services) were very similar to the previous year. Issues of digital material increased a little, issues of books and other physical material decreased a little. Last year, the library service was successful in agreeing partnership funding agreement with Milford Town council and in Fishguard, a benefactor provided significant funding to support the library.

### *Evidence – how do we know?*

- Environmental Services Service Improvement Plan 2026-27
- Planning Service Improvement Plan 2026-27
- Culture, Leisure and school modernisation Service Improvement Plan 2026-27
- Property and Construction Service Improvement Plan 2026-27
- Housing, Building Maintenance and Public Protection Service Improvement Plan 2026-27
- Section 6 Biodiversity report
- South Quay, Pembroke Press release 18 March 2026
- Draft Delivery Agreement for a Strategic Plan Press release 20 Jan 2026
- Investment in 2 – 6 Bridge Street (former Wilko building) Cabinet 16 March 2026
- Leisure investment programme Cabinet 16 March 2026
- Significant improvements to Milford Have public transport Press release 25 Sept 2025
- Asset Re-Categorisation of Properties report Cabinet 16 March 2026
- Introduction Of Kerbside Soft Plastics Collections Cabinet 6 July 2026
- Major consultation exercise on Active Travel Press release 26 Jan 2026.
- Joint approach to tackle anti-social behaviour Press release 16 June 2025
- Revised allocations policy for social housing Press release 24 June 2026
- New houses in Hook included in Council affordable homes plan. Press release 31 March 2025
- Asset Re-Categorisation of Properties Cabinet 16 March 2026

### *Improvement actions – what can we do better and how?*

- Introduce the recycling of soft plastic as an additional waste stream collected from the kerbside and complete actions in our Environmental Services Strategy.
- Implement the comprehensive and wide-ranging action plan for transport and fleet operations. This will require additional resource capacity, alongside appropriate structural and cultural changes, to ensure that revised arrangements are robust, embedded and capable of delivering ongoing compliance and operational resilience.
- Progress our Local Development Plan through its Examination stage to adoption by Council (anticipated by March 2027) alongside key Supplementary Planning Guidance. This will result in an updated framework for planning decisions that reflects the county's needs and development opportunities.
- Progress the Celtic Freeport following agreement of its Outline Business Case
- As part of adopting the Local Development Plan, find a way forward for developments affected by nutrient neutrality requirements. Options for this include a mitigation package using land owned by the Council alongside a local nutrient

credit trading system, as well as working with partners on a nutrient Catchment Recovery Plan for Afon Cleddau.

- Introduce a place making approach to service delivery across the council. This will complement the Local Development Plan and provide a holistic view on future of towns to include education, transport, regeneration, and health. The approach will be underpinned by a series of town plans, developed following engagement with a wide range of stakeholders.
- Implement a Corporate Landlord model to improve the management of the council's property and assets. This will also enable the council to have much better information on the condition and on-going costs of its property.
- Resolving nitrate neutrality issues is key to development in Pembrokeshire as well as to our affordable housing programme. In addition, building costs for affordable housing continue to grow faster than the increase in grant we have received from Welsh Government. This is constraining our ability to increase house building programmes for both the Council and our Registered Social Landlord partners.
- Progress our Leisure Investment Programme. As part of the agreed programme, Cabinet agreed to receive a number of update reports including on the outcomes of a review to consider the most appropriate operating model for Leisure Services.

## Well-being Objective 3: Our Community – caring for people, and enabling active, resourceful and connected communities

*Assessment of current performance – how well are we doing?*

- The Council produces an Annual Report of the Director of Social Services. The most recent version, focused on the 2024-25 financial year, was taken to Cabinet in October 2025. The draft report for the 2025-26 financial year will be considered by Cabinet in autumn 2026. It notes that:
    - Staff have improved carer awareness and promotion and have increased the visibility of services and opportunities for unpaid carers of all ages.
    - Social Care has developed their own key priorities to help support the delivery of the Council's well-being objectives:
        - Enhancing a preventative approach across the Directorate
        - Working towards sustainable accommodation solutions.
        - Developing our workforce.
        - Using digital as an enabler when it adds value.
    - A review of the 'Adult Care front door' has been established to look at the role of the Contact Centre and Community Hub in providing information, advice and assistance to customers. This work has been successful in reducing the number of new contacts into Adult Services and the amount of people waiting for assessments. Key objectives include:
        - Developing an efficient process so people are receiving timely and appropriate support to their enquiries.
        - Minimising hand-off between partners and ensuring the 'front door' is located within the appropriate agency.
        - Utilising a strength-based approach to improve outcomes.
        - Supporting the delivery of strategic goals for Strengthening Communities and Preventions agendas.
        - Utilising digital tools and technology to drive efficiency and future sustainability.
    - Recruitment within Children's Social Care and Adults Mental Health continues to be a challenge. The services are strengthening their employment offer to attract and retain high-quality candidates.
    - A wide range of training is provided to staff to improve workforce development. These training activities ensure that Social Care staff have the skills and knowledge needed to support residents effectively.
- The Social Services and Housing Directorate Scorecard is reported quarterly to Cabinet, alongside the Corporate Scorecard. The 2025-26 scorecard update was presented to Cabinet on 1st June 2026. For Adult Care:
    - The number of adults awaiting a social services and well-being assessment decreased significantly over the course of the year – 302 adults waiting in March 2025 to 134 by March 2026. This is partly due to changes in the Adult Care front door, a new approach to ensure people are given the appropriate information and support at the right time.
    - There was a substantial reduction in referrals of people that, following assessment, we determined had no eligible needs – decreased from 507 in

    2024-25 to 147 in 2025-26. This is also due to improvements in the front door, helping the Council to better manage demand and ensuring that less social worker time is being spent on assessments that do not result in a benefit for customers.
    - The amount of time adults waited for their assessments to be allocated reduced throughout the year – 66% of adults were waiting 91+ days in March 2025, whereas only 35% were waiting 91+ days by March 2026.
    - The number of adults waiting for domiciliary care fluctuated throughout the year, although 2025-26 did see an overall increase when compared to the previous year – 44 people were waiting for domiciliary care in March 2025, compared to 51 people waiting by March 2026.
    - The number of people in receipt of domiciliary care increased during the year – from 728 in March 2025 to 773 by March 2026 (6% increase). Going forward, in-house domiciliary care will be refocused, with one service covering the whole of Pembrokeshire.
- It has been another challenging year for homelessness and prevention services, whilst presentations have reduced there remains a steady level of cases particularly for applicants requiring 1 bedroom and 4+ bedroom accommodation. Sickness and staff retention remain concerns for the service. A range of solutions such as the Leasing Scheme Wales, Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) and the Housing Development Programme have made some impact on moving customers through their homeless journey.
- The Integrated Housing Team is firmly established as a core preventative component of the homelessness system, intervening earlier and reducing escalation to crisis and statutory responses.
- Both the number of homeless people being supported by the housing team, and the number of people being recorded rough sleeping have remained relatively stable throughout the year.
- The Migrations team have continued to support Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), as well as families within the Ukrainian, Syrian and Afghan resettlement schemes. Dedicated housing officers are supporting all migrants to ensure they are offered suitable, settled, affordable accommodation. This accommodation can be sourced anywhere in the country.
    - 445 people have been supported under the Ukrainian Resettlement Scheme since its introduction, with 182 people remaining in the county at the end of 2025-26. 59 Ukrainian people are being hosted by households and 93 are living in private rented accommodation.
    - 29 Afghan people are being supported under the Afghan Resettlement Scheme.
    - 22 Syrian people are still living in Pembrokeshire following their arrival over 5 years ago under the Syrian Resettlement Scheme.
    - The Migration team and Children's Services are supporting 64 UASC under the age of 25. The teams are working collaboratively to move more people into independent living accommodation.
- The Strategic Commissioning Plan 2025-2035 was developed and approved by Cabinet in June 2025. This details the supply and demand pressures for Social Services over the next 10 years and sets out an action plan to help mitigate these.

The Plan notes that early intervention and prevention is critical, but growing Pembrokeshire's range of statutory services is a priority to ensure the most appropriate interventions are available to people when they require it.

- The Public Services Board (PSB) Strengthening Communities Sub-Group has continued to support communities across Pembrokeshire to be more resourceful and sustainable. Membership of the group includes colleagues from Health, Social Care, PAVS, MAWW Fire, PLANED and Welsh Government. The sub-group provides an update on its work at each PSB meeting, and key pieces of work throughout 2025-26 have included:
    - The launch of the Volunteering Strategy in June 2025. The strategy was developed by PAVS, with input from Pembrokeshire Volunteer Organisers' Network (PVON), town and community councils, local communities, Pembrokeshire County Council and other PSB members. The PSB approved the strategy in May 2025, and Cabinet agreed to support the strategy at its June 2025 meeting. The Strategy sets out eight strategic objectives to support volunteering initiatives and recognise volunteer contributions. It highlights the importance of co-production, collaboration and partnership working across all sectors when working with communities.
    - Pembrokeshire Community Hub and Connectors – The Hub dealt with 6,094 enquiries in 2025-26, a 25% increase from the previous year. The enquiries were in relation to support with accessing activities and groups (18%), food (14%), living independently at home (14%) and social connections (14%). Throughout the year, Community Connectors also supported 1,171 individuals across Pembrokeshire with a range of issues such as transport, carer support, financial support and social connections.
    - The Lifestyle Medicine project, delivered in partnership with Hywel Dda UHB, Pembrokeshire County Council Leisure Services and the PAVS Community Connector Service. This project offers 9-week courses, providing emotional support to people who would benefit from improving their lifestyle and addressing the underlying causes of people's health conditions.
    - Additional funding was secured for 2025-26 to further develop the Most Significant Change (MSC) programme of work, including training. 93 individuals received training from a range of voluntary, community and statutory organisations, including different departments within Pembrokeshire County Council. 30 stories have been collected and submitted, focusing on the themes of communities, children and young people, and health and wellbeing. There is ambition to expand MSC into other organisations and teams, and this will remain a key area of work going into the next financial year.
- An Age Friendly Communities Strategy was developed throughout the year and was adopted by Cabinet in May 2026. The strategy aims to create a foundation for improving the well-being of older people across Pembrokeshire, developing a community suitable for later life that benefits all ages and abilities. Following engagement with older people, organisations and statutory services, a number of key themes were identified, and partners will bring together an action plan to support these moving forward:
    - Transport and physical access

    - Information, communication and digital exclusion
    - Health and care access
    - Housing, home adaptations and cost of living
    - The built environment – safety, accessibility, lighting and public toilets
    - Social connection, activities and community spaces.
- The Enhancing Pembrokeshire Grant has allowed PCC to work in partnership with communities and organisations to mitigate the impact of second homes on the local area. £167,000 total funding was available through the grant for the 2025-26 financial year, up to £15,000 per community project. By the end of March 2026, 331 projects had been supported by the fund. A full list of projects supported can be found on the Council's website. Examples from 2025/26 include:
    - Aberjazz – inclusive, high-quality workshops year-round to support disabled participants, develop local musicians, and engage young people through educational partnerships like the Pembrokeshire music service.
    - Blue Horizons CIC –an enhanced, inclusive surf therapy programme (You, Me and the Sea), supporting people in Pembrokeshire with complex additional needs.
    - Newport Memorial Hall –improving the hall conditions and facilities through an upgrade of chairs, sound and lighting equipment, and refurbishment of the stage floor and surrounding walls.
- The Unpaid Carers Strategy was refreshed and relaunched in 2025 by the West Wales Regional Partnership Board. Membership of the Board consists of regional partners, including the Health Board, the voluntary sector, those with lived experiences, and Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire County Councils. An update report on 2025-26 progress towards the Strategy was presented to Social Care O&S in June 2026. It outlined a number of projects undertaken to support carers throughout the year, including:
    - Scolton Manor Carers Pass – free parking pass and refreshments (291 passes issued).
    - Bluestone Breaks Offer – delivering breaks to Bluestone for unpaid carers and up to five of their family members (6 lodges booked for mid-week breaks in May/June 2025).
    - Respite Project – supporting carers to book residential respite (2 respite beds funded for 2025-26).
    - Timeout for Carers – grants to voluntary and community groups to provide breaks for unpaid carers, in partnership with PAVS (482 individuals supported across 13 projects).

*Evidence – how do we know?*

- Cabinet, 6th October 2025 – Annual Report of the Statutory Director of Social Services 2024-25
- Draft Annual Report of the Statutory Director of Social Services 2025-26
- Cabinet, 1st June 2026 – Corporate Performance Scorecard 2025-26, Appendix B, Social Services and Housing Directorate Scorecard

- Cabinet, 1st June 2026 – Corporate Performance Scorecard 2025-26, Appendix C, Corporate Performance Commentary Report
- Business Operations and Migration Service Plan 2026-27
- Commissioning and Supported Employment Service Plan 2026-27
- Social Services Strategic Commissioning Plan 2025-2035
- Minutes of the Pembrokeshire Public Services Board
- Cabinet meeting, 2nd June 2025 – Volunteering: A Strategy for Pembrokeshire 2025-2030
- Volunteering: A Strategy for Pembrokeshire 2025-2030
- PSB agenda pack - 15th July 2026
- Cabinet meeting, 27th May 2026 – Age Friendly Communities Endorsement by Pembrokeshire County Council
- Pembrokeshire's Strategy for Working Towards an Age Friendly County 2026-2036
- Enhancing Pembrokeshire Grant Funding Criteria
- West Wales Strategic Plan for Unpaid Carers 2025-2030
- Social Care O&S, 11th June 2026 – Unpaid Carers, Appendix A, Pembrokeshire's Progress on Delivering the Strategy 2025-2026

*Improvement actions – what can we do better and how?*

- Increase timelier access to community reablement provision through further developments of the front door of adult services.
- Develop further, a plan for an Integrated Wellbeing Centre.
- Continue to embed the collaborative communications approach across social care, health and the voluntary and community sector, to support timely transfers of people from hospital, back into their communities.
- Increase the availability of Personal Assistants to deliver care for people with a Direct Payment.
- Continue to improve the front door of Adult Care, promoting best practice for access into services and enhancing the skills of social care teams. This will help to further reduce the number of new contacts and ensure teams can focus on assessments that will provide the most benefit to customers.
- Support the public consultation for the Regional Learning Disability Strategy and develop an associated action plan for implementation.
- Continue collecting and submitting stories for the Most Significant Change process through the PSB Strengthening Communities Group, broadening participation and embedding it into other organisations and teams.
- Develop a partnership action plan for the implementation of the Age Friendly Communities Strategy.
- Support the development of the next PSB Well-being Assessment in preparation for its publication in 2027.

## Well-being Objective 4: Our Council – a financially sustainable, well-governed Council, with a workforce equipped to support the people we serve

### *Assessment of current performance – how well are we doing?*

### General

- Alongside ten other councils, we undertook the *Let's Talk* residents' survey last summer (results were reported to November 2025 Cabinet). A number of the questions relate to the Council as a whole.
    - Only 28.9% of survey respondents indicated that they were fairly or very satisfied with the way Pembrokeshire County Council runs things and 36% said they trusted the council. These figures are around average when compared with other Welsh councils. People who lived in our main towns and younger people were less likely to be satisfied compared with the headline figure.
    - 55% of respondents thought the council provides services of a high quality (which is above the average for other councils) but again, people living in our main towns were much less likely to agree/strongly agree.
    - 42% of people thought the council provides services that represent value for money, around the Welsh average.
    - Just over a quarter of respondents thought the council takes residents' views into account when making a decision or acts on the concerns of local residents. Whilst these results emphasise that the more work is needed around engagement, they are also higher than the Welsh average.
- The Council continues to embed the Vanguard methodology across the organisation and is seeing positive results in many areas, including education, social care and IT. Vanguard is a systems thinking organisational approach which helps leaders understand and improve systems from the user's perspective and is aimed at improving processes, tackling failure demand, reducing transaction costs and creating capacity. The approach has seen approximately £900k in directly attributable financial savings to date which represents a significant return on the initial investment. Longer term it is hoped that the methodology becomes 'business as usual' as the default way of managing and delivering Council services.
- During the year, Cabinet took the opportunity to review and revise its Programme for Administration to reflect on progress made since the original document was approved in January 2023. The revised document places a greater focus on outcomes which have been delivered to date, as well as a review of the forward-looking aims and aspirations to ensure that these are still relevant and that issues which have emerged since the production of the original document are picked up.
- Information on the Council's financial position is reported quarterly to Cabinet, the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Governance & Audit Committee. The 2025-26 Budget Outturn report was considered by Cabinet at its 6 July 2026 meeting. This contains a wealth of information, including performance data.
- Previous self-assessments have commented that Councils are facing significant budget pressures that cannot be addressed by Councils alone. This was also the situation for the 2025-26 year, and it is unlikely that council funding will be reformed in the short term in order to resolve budget pressures. Whilst the new Welsh

Government has said it is committed to making Council Tax fairer, it is unclear whether a planned revaluation of homes as part of council tax reform will take place in 2028.

- The rate of inflation impacts on the Council's real spending power over the medium term. Throughout the second quarters of 2025-26 inflation (CPI) was at 3.8% before falling to around 3.3% at year end. The current uncertainty surrounding the impact of the war in the middle east and the continuation of higher fuel and energy pricing has resulted in an upward revision of inflation assumptions for 2026-27, increasing to 3.5% instead of falling to 2% by the end of the year as predicted. Work is underway to identify how to bridge the funding gap for 2027-28 and the MTFP 2027-28 to 2029-30.

### Resources/Finance

- The budget setting process for 2026-27 was similar to previous years, including consultation with stakeholders, Trade Unions and a number of members' seminars, which worked through how the funding gap for 2026-27 of £14.7m would be met. We advanced the meeting date for deciding the 2026-27 Budget by two weeks to allow more time for extended discussion, and further details are in the 2026-27 Council budget / Medium Term Financial Plan report . A balanced budget for 2026-27 was delivered.
- The Council's net expenditure for 2025-26 was £321.0m, having accounted for appropriations to and from reserves, with an underspend of £5.6m. Details were reported to 6 July Cabinet. A summary is below:
    - Education budgets outturn position shows an overall underspend of £0.464m (0.4%), supported in part by additional grant income received late in the year. However, school balances have reduced significantly, with £1.257m of balances used during 2025–26 as a result of increased staff costs. There has been a notable increase in the number of schools in deficit.
    - Social Care & Housing budgets outturn position shows an overall underspend of £2.409m (1.7%). Across Children's and Adult Services, the overall position reflects a mix of underspends driven by strong demand management and increased income contributions. There is a clear strategic shift toward more independent, cost-effective care models and prevention, which is delivering short-term savings, but pressures continue due to increasing complexity and cost of care packages.
    - Chief Executive budgets outturn position shows an overall overspend of £0.573m (25.6%) this is largely due to the time required to implement the restructure changes required to deliver the £1.4m efficiency target and increased pressures in Law and Governance
    - Resources budget outturn position shows a £0.052m (0.7%) overspend. Vacancy management savings within the support services have been used to offset the increased cost of software.
    - Place budget outturn position shows an overall underspend of £1.095m (3.8%) largely driven by significant underspends in Highways & Transport due to vacancies, lower costs, and additional grant income.

    - Slippage in the Capital Programme has resulted in delayed borrowing costs. An underspend of £3.937m in Capital Financing Costs and offset by reduced Investment Income of £0.118m has contributed towards the net budget underspend for 2025-26.
    - Additional Council Tax income has resulted in £2.4m more than anticipated being collected during 2025-26 as a result of an increase in the Council Tax base. This is a cash rather than budgetary saving.
- A key action for the 2026-27 budget and beyond is understanding and prioritising the financial implications of capital schemes which are on the horizon. In 2025-26, services were engaged in initial prioritisation which will allow work to profile and review affordability, due to be considered by Cabinet in autumn 2026.
- The publication of our Statement of Accounts for 2024-25 is still on-going. This was due to receiving the asset valuations and the implementation of an international accounting standard that sets out how organisations must account for leases in their financial statements (IFRS16), as well as staff shortages. The draft Statement of Accounts was published on 12 November 2025, and Audit Wales commenced the audit of accounts on Monday 17 November 2025. Whilst this is substantially complete, there were delays due to the sickness absence of two key members of the Council's Finance team. It is likely that Governance and Audit Committee will consider the 2024-25 accounts at its September meeting.
- During 2025-26, we made good progress on replacing our financial management system. The new system (TechnologyOne) will improve reporting and, over time, reduce demand on the finance team. The new system is due to go live from 1 April 2027.
- We developed a staff training programme within Finance with the objective of growing our own professional accountants to support succession planning in the future.
- Our council tax collection rate for 2025-26 was 94%, down from 95.1% in 2024-25 and the second lowest in Wales. The reason for the decrease in performance was that the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) transferred a large number of properties into Council Tax from Business Rates, often resulting in a substantial back-dated bill for second homes council tax premium. Some of these properties' owners are appealing the VOA's decision, but there is a substantial backlog in the VOA hearing these appeals. As Pembrokeshire has a high number of holiday lets, our council tax collection rate is affected more than most other local authorities.
- Collection rates for housing rents (99.03%) and non-domestic rates (99.38%) improved. We also increased the total debt collected and 2025-26's figure was 94.2%, an increase from 89% in 2024-25. Debt recovery has been strengthened by streamlining processes, recruiting additional staff and analysing debt to enable a more targeted and effective collection approach.
- The revenues and benefits service continued to progress digital transformation (Citizens Access and automation).

### Human Resources

- Workforce planning activity has taken place across the organisation and has begun to influence thinking around critical roles, future capability and succession.

- We implemented a more structured and proactive approach to colleague engagement, building on learning from the 2022 staff survey and responding positively to the 2025 survey through leadership workshops, directorate engagement and the establishment of a Staff Engagement Working Group. The results are being used to identify key areas for action, part of our "You Said, We Did" approach. An action plan is expected to be published this summer.
- Leadership development activity, including regional partnership working, has supported internal progression into senior roles. In Social Care, learning and development oversight has improved significantly through better recording and monitoring, increasing organisational visibility of workforce development activity.
- The introduction of on-line manager-led sickness correspondence has improved efficiency and reduced administrative workload. Progress has also been made in developing and piloting digital recruitment processes as part of broader system optimisation work.
- The Council has a long-standing constructive relationship with its recognised Trade Unions and continues to work collaboratively through the Social Partnership Forum on a range of key workforce issues to ensure staff voices are heard in decision making processes, particularly on issues relating to employment conditions, staffing changes such as restructures and policy development and workforce wellbeing.
- A new People Strategy has been produced which sets out how the Council will plan, support, and develop its workforce to deliver its strategic objectives. The strategy will play a central role to ensure the Council can attract, develop, engage and retain the people needed deliver these objectives now and in the future.

## Audit, Governance and Risk

- We have continued provision of robust assurance over governance, risk management and control arrangements. The 2025-26 Annual Governance Statement (AGS) was considered by Governance and Audit Committee on 7 July 2026. The AGS identified seven cross-cutting priorities for improvement which are reflected in this self-assessment: financial stability; transformation and innovation; timeliness of statement of accounts; contract management; our County Farms estate; school improvement and workforce capacity, recruitment and retention. In addition, the AGS found a specific significant governance issue relating to fleet management and operations.
- We increased fraud detection and financial recoveries, reflecting effective and targeted counter fraud activity.
- We maintained strong performance in complaints handling, Freedom of Information and data protection, despite rising demand. We anticipate that the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales will publish its report into complaints in the 2025-26 year during the consultation period for this self-assessment. We will include its findings in the final edition of this report if timescales allow.
- We continued development and support of risk management processes across the Council. The corporate risk register is reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.

### Procurement

- During 2025-26 a significant piece of work for our procurement team was ensuring organisational compliance with revised contract procedure rules, a requirement of the Procurement Act 2023 which came into effect in February 2025. This has major implications on how procurement is conducted within the Council and, throughout the year, training and capacity building across the Council was undertaken.
- Some parts of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 came into force at the end of 2025-26 and work to meet these new duties, such as producing a socially responsible procurement objectives and a new procurement strategy, commenced in 2025-26. Socially responsible procurement objectives were agreed by Cabinet at its July 2026 meeting, and a full strategy will follow later in 2026.
- A practical but important way the council supports businesses is by paying invoices promptly and in 2025-26, we performed well and paid 99.8% of invoices within 30 days in the context of £200m annual third-party expenditure.

### IT

- The Council relies heavily on IT, and keeping systems secure and functioning properly requires significant investment. In 2025-26, all council laptops were upgraded to Windows 11 so that they can be kept secure more easily. We have a rolling programme of replacing devices and last year 3,900 replacement devices were issued across schools.
- We have worked in partnership with broadband providers and Swansea Bay City Deal to improve coverage and connectivity. From a starting point of just 5% in 2019, Pembrokeshire reached 75% gigabit capable coverage in June 2026. Work in future years will focus on extending coverage further, particularly in harder to reach rural areas.
- AI and Digital is a key workstream in the Transformation and Innovation programme and a number of projects are currently being delivered to ensure the Council is taking advantage of advancements in technology. Examples include the development of a new website and intranet, enhanced customer digital solutions for housing repairs, revenues and benefits and adult social care referrals. The Council has also worked with a technology partner over the past 12 months to assess the state of AI readiness and to identify how and where AI could most effectively be deployed to improve services, reduce costs and take pressure off employee workloads.

### Democratic services and law and governance

- The strength and transparency of decision making is key to the Council's purpose. A review of the democratic services function was considered by Democratic Services Committee on 2nd July 2026. A report on the 2025-26 work of our five Overview and Scrutiny Committees, which oversee decision making and contribute to policy development, was considered at their June 2026 cycle.
- The number of formal meetings held was little changed in the year, with more delegated Director decisions being recorded but fewer informal meetings (e.g. panels

and working groups). The number of decisions that were called in increased to five. This is much higher than in most local authorities. Our Panel Performance Assessment report observed that the call-in mechanism was used frequently, despite being intended for exceptional circumstances.

- Members of the public continued to engage with the council's formal decision-making processes. The number of petitions received increased from 14 in 2024-25 to 18 in 2025-26, but the number of number of submissions to council and to Overview and Scrutiny committees reduced. Webcast meetings were viewed 23,376 times, 9% less than in 2024-25, and three quarters of views were of the website archive.
- Examples of outcomes from overview and scrutiny committees' work in 2025-26 include: maintaining a focus on the scrutiny of the council's net zero plans by re-establishing a working group, ensuring back-bench member representation on the Transformation and Improvement key board, highlighting disrepair in some of the Council's county farms, highlighting concerns over the use of asymmetric weeks by some schools, establishing a politically balanced Rural Communities Working Group, facilitating public engagement on local environmental quality issues, and contributing to the development of initiatives such as community co-location pilots.
- Our Panel Performance Assessment found that there was a lack of clarity around our overall scrutiny function and recommended the Council should undertake a comprehensive review of its scrutiny function to ensure it is fit for purpose and adds value across the organisation.
- The council continues to deliver its Participation Strategy and during 2025-26, a working group focusing on the induction of new members was established that has refreshed the Diversity and Democracy Action Plan, and considered updates to the Diversity and Democracy Pledge, the Fair Campaign Pledge, the Democracy webpages and the prospective candidates' information packs. The group's work will continue into 2026-27.

*Evidence – how do we know?*

- Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2025 – 2026 Policy and Pre-decision Overview and Scrutiny Committee 16 June 2026
- Revised Programme for Administration Cabinet 6 October 2025
- Inflation statistics Inflation and price indices - Office for National Statistics
- Democratic Services Function report, Democratic Services Committee 2 July 2026
- County Council Budget Outturn Monitoring Report 2025-26. Cabinet 6 July 2026
- Annual Governance Statement 2025-26. Governance and Audit Committee 2 July 2026
- Corporate Risk Register April 2026
- People Strategy 2026-30
- Participation Strategy 2022-27 Policy and Pre-decision Overview and Scrutiny Committee 18 November 2025
- Pembrokeshire reaches 75% gigabit broadband coverage Press release 3 June 2026

*Improvement actions – what can we do better and how?*

- Closure of Accounts – Statement of Accounts. Ensure these are published by statutory deadlines with robust assurance and an unqualified audit opinion from Audit Wales.
- Address financial challenges by setting: a balanced 2027-28 budget, a balanced 2027 to 2030 Medium Term Financial Plan, addressing school balances and prioritising capital scheme up until 2041.
- Deliver our People Strategy 2026 – 2030, adopted by Cabinet at its 6 July 2026 meeting. This sets out how we will attract, develop, engage and retain the people we need to deliver the Council's priorities now and in the future. The issues it addresses include succession planning and recruitment and retention challenges; creating a workplace where everyone feels respected, valued and able to excel and enhancing employee well-being and maintaining robust job evaluation processes. Recruitment and retention issues are a common theme throughout this self-assessment as well as a priority for improvement in our Annual Governance Statement.
- Agree and implement our Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy.
- Complete our review of our scrutiny function, one of our PPA recommendations agreed by Council in March 2026. Consideration of whether to adopt new structures is due to conclude by March 2027.
- Complete actions in our Participation Strategy in advance of the May 2027 local government elections for Pembrokeshire County Council and Pembrokeshire's 77 town and community councils.

## General

This final section provides a broad narrative on some key corporate or organisational areas of work from the past 12 months. More detail on some of these areas are covered in earlier sections of the report.

### Panel Performance Assessment (PPA)

Section 92 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 places a duty on Councils to arrange for an external panel to conduct a Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) at least once each electoral cycle. A PPA is an independent, organisational-level assessment undertaken by expert peers, designed to support Councils in actively seeking external challenge and assurance, and embracing different perspectives around how they are performing and where they can improve.

The Council's first PPA took place between 14 – 17 October 2025 and the independent Panel was comprised as follows:

Independent Chair: Phil Roberts - Former Chief Executive of Swansea City and County Council
Senior Elected Member: Cllr Anthony Hunt - Leader of Torfaen County Borough Council
Local Government Senior Officer: Emma Palmer - Chief Executive of Powys County Council
Peer from the wider public, private or voluntary sectors: Andrea Street OBE

During the visit, the Panel undertook a range of interviews, workshops and focus groups involving Cabinet, non-executive Members, Senior Leadership Team, Extended Leadership Team, managers, non-managers, trade unions, and representatives from various stakeholder groups and key partners of the Council. The Panel also had sight of a broad range of key Council documents, data, external reports and other evidence sources to help inform their view on how the Council is performing.

The final report from the Panel concluded that the Council is exercising its functions effectively and meeting its statutory performance duties as set out in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act. Overall, the report strikes a positive tone with the Panel recognising "a well-run council, with appropriate performance management frameworks in place underpinned by appropriate values and behaviours. These behaviours had an impressive degree of recognition through the organisation, down to operational managers and the frontline staff interviewed." The report comments favourably on many aspects of the Council's work, such as the cohesive and committed political and senior officer leadership, effective governance, strong partnership working, and in the Council's response to date to the ongoing financial challenges.

The Panel made seven recommendations in the report where it felt the Council can further improve and develop, and these can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Improving the overview and scrutiny function
- Strengthening corporate capacity
- Building on the existing culture of collaborative leadership
- Reviewing economic development capacity
- Exploring alternative approaches to resource prioritisation

- Improving communication and engagement
- Establishing cohesive programmes to deliver transformation

In line with the legislation, the Council was required to publish a response and action plan to the Panel's recommendations. At the meeting of Council in March 2026 the Panel's recommendations were accepted and the response and action plan to address these was formally approved. Progress on delivering the action plan during 2026-27 will be reported in next year's version of this report.

### Transformation and Innovation

The Council's transformation programme has been ongoing since 2016-17, though in more recent years the programme lacked some focus and required review. In view of this, and in the context of the extremely challenging financial climate and continuing focus on achieving significant efficiencies, budget savings and service change across the organisation, it was recognised that the Council's approach to transformation needed to be refreshed, reshaped and reenergised.

Accordingly, in April 2025 Cabinet agreed to strengthened governance and programme management arrangements through the establishment of a new Transformation and Innovation Board with its core purpose being to provide strategic leadership and co-ordination of the delivery of existing and emerging change programmes, and to ensure these are delivered with sufficient purpose and pace. The Board also provides oversight of projects related to the above delivered through the Accelerated Change Programme (ACP), to ensure these achieve the positive improvements and financial impact anticipated.

The programme is focused on four key thematic areas as set out below:

Preventions (0-25 years old) - developing an integrated, place-based prevention system that tackles needs early, strengthens community assets, and reduces escalation into statutory services. This approach delivers better outcomes for children, young people and families while improving efficiency across services. The 0–25 Preventions Programme provides the strategic framework, bringing together Accelerated Change Programme (ACP) funded initiatives as sub-programmes that feed learning and practice into the wider system.

AI and Digital - delivery of transformative change across the Council by embedding digital and artificial intelligence capabilities into service delivery, with a specific focus on driving digital innovation, enhancing customer access, maximising value and efficiency, strengthening governance and ethics, and promoting a culture which embraces digital and artificial intelligence solutions.

Vanguard/Target Operating Model - implementing a systems thinking organisational approach, using the Vanguard methodology, to identify and reduce failure demand, remove duplication and bureaucracy, and in so doing, freeing up resource and creating capacity. The methodology is being rolled out throughout the Council to ensure opportunities are taken full advantage of, with early adopters in social services and housing yielding positive results.

Decarbonisation and Adaptation - strengthening governance arrangements for climate related oversight and decision making, integrating and embedding climate considerations into everyday operations and creating resilience to manage climate risks to service delivery and communities, across the four key areas of: corporate assets, domestic assets, transport and adaptation.

The Council's PPA report (see above) contained recommendations in relation to the transformation and innovation programme which will be progressed via the Board during 2026-27.

### Welsh Language

Our commitment to the development of the Welsh language in the county is reflected in the Corporate Strategy 2025-30, the new Welsh Language Strategy 2026–31 and the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022-31. This section summarises key headlines taken from our Welsh Language Standards Annual Report for 2025-26 which was approved by Cabinet in July 2026.

7,680 calls made into our contact centre during the year were in Welsh, which represents 2.88% of total calls received. The number of calls made in Welsh increased by 11.26% or 777 calls received in comparison to the previous year. Average queue times for all callers has increased significantly during the year, though the wait time for Welsh language callers is considerably less than those made in English. An additional five members of staff have been recruited to the contact centre to help reduce the queue time, two of whom are fluent Welsh speakers.

There has been an increase in both the number of users of the Welsh language pages of the Council's website, and in the number of page views during the year. The Council will be launching a new website during 2026-27 and it is anticipated that this will further increase usage due to improved accessibility, visibility and searchability. My Account is the online Council account that offers a wide range of online services such as making payments, reporting problems and residents can sign up to receive notifications for a range of service delivery options. The number of users indicating a Welsh language communication preference has remained relative static over the past three years.

There have been seven complaints relating to the Welsh language in 2025-26, which included road signage being poorly translated, a planning notice being available in English only, and social media account without a link to promote the corresponding Welsh language page. Four complaints received during 2025-26 are still ongoing, where final determination has not been made by the Welsh Language Commissioner. Three of these complaints relate to whether sufficient consideration or "conscientious consideration" was given to the Welsh language when making a decision or consulting on a decision. The Council will review and update both the Consultation Protocol and Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) paperwork during 2026-27 to further strengthen guidance and resources to ensure decision-making complies with the Welsh language policy making standards.

During the year, the Welsh Language Strategy Delivery Group have reviewed the current Welsh Language Strategy 2021-26 to inform the development of the next 5-year strategy which will run from 2026-2031, which will be approved by Council in July 2026. The 2026-31 Strategy's objectives will align with *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers* Strategy and reflect the Welsh Government Strategic Themes: increase the number of Welsh speakers, increase the everyday use of Welsh, and create favourable conditions (infrastructure and context).

Work is underway to improve Welsh language workforce data to support workforce planning and annual reporting. We will align workforce skills assessment with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, a widely used framework to describe language skills (basic, independent and proficient levels). This is in line with the *Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025* which sets the target for all pupils to develop oral skills measured against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The Council has continued to support and promote the Welsh language and culture through a range of initiatives throughout the year, such as the St David's Day parade for Pembrokeshire school children, a St David's Day staff coffee morning, and participation in the Urdd Eisteddfod. Perhaps most significantly, the Council has been actively preparing alongside key partners and stakeholders to host the 2026 national Eisteddfod in Pembrokeshire in early August, which will mark its 850th anniversary. This event presents a unique and privileged opportunity to support and promote the Welsh language across communities, one which we hope will have a lasting impact on the use of the language and the celebration of our culture, in our county.

### Equalities

The Council meets its duties and responsibilities to the equalities agenda through its Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28. The plan is monitored by the Strategic Equality Action Plan Group which meet quarterly. Cabinet approved the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report in December 2025 and agreed that a separate equality annual report be used to meet reporting requirements in future years rather than relying on reporting through the annual self-assessment report. This will provide a more focussed and transparent stand-alone report for Equality monitoring and reporting purposes.

The Equality in Employment Report for 2025–2026 was published in June 2026. The report sets out the Council's equality in employment position, based on workforce data as of 31 March 2026, and fulfils statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 (Wales) Regulations. Positive developments include an increase in female representation in senior leadership roles, a slight improvement in disability declaration rates, with recruitment activity increasing significantly during the year. The report identifies an ageing workforce and data completeness as areas requiring continued attention and will be areas for improvement over the coming year. A new HR Strategy includes a strengthened focus on workforce and succession planning to ensure continuity and retention of organisational knowledge.

The Council continues to publish Gender Pay Gap data which provides information on pay for men and women as well as people from different ethnic origins. In 2025-26, women working in Pembrokeshire County Council earnt 100p for every £1 earnt by men based on median hourly pay – our gender pay gap. It is pleasing to report that based on median hourly pay, women in the Council earnt the same as men and is evidence that the Council's gender pay gap has narrowed considerably (for example, in 2017-18 women earnt 77p for every £1 earnt by men).

The sub-group of the Strategic Equality Action Plan Group, the Pembrokeshire Anti-racist Action Plan Group, was established in March 2024 to provide a more focussed approach in progressing this agenda. A key priority in 2025-26 has been awareness raising and training. Members of the Council's senior leadership team, heads of service and chief officers completed anti-racist training during June and July 2026. The training aimed to strengthen understanding of racism and structural inequality in a local government context to inform leadership decisions. The training was commissioned by the Welsh Local Government Association and funded by Welsh Government as part of their Anti-racist Wales Action Plan.

The Council's Integrated Impact Assessment process and paperwork continues to evolve and will be reviewed to incorporate new guidance and resources received in early 2026-27 from the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Equalities and Human Rights Commissioner.

## Public Services Board

The Council is one of four statutory partners of Pembrokeshire's Public Services Board (PSB), and as such the Council plays a key leadership role in the work of the partnership. The PSB is a strategic partnership established under the Well-being of Future Generations Act and is comprised of representatives from key organisations from the public, private and third sectors in the County.

The PSB is required to publish a Well-being Plan once every five years, setting out its statutory Well-being Objectives and the actions it will take to improve well-being for people and communities in Pembrokeshire. The most recent Well-being Plan was published in May 2023 and is focused on the delivery of three key work streams:

- Strengthening Communities
- Reducing Poverty and Inequalities
- Realising net zero and decarbonisation, managing climate adaptation and tackling the nature emergency

The PSB has a 'spotlight' session on one of the project areas at each of its meetings on a rotational basis. Update reports for each of the work streams is also considered at each meeting and an annual report is produced in respect of each year.

A key piece of work for the PSB to undertake during 2026-27 is to produce its next Well-being Assessment. This is a statutory requirement under the Act which requires the PSB to look at what well-being means for people and communities in Pembrokeshire in the context of economic, environmental, social and cultural factors. Once approved, the Well-being Assessment effectively acts as the evidence base for the development of the next version of the PSB's Well-being Plan, in terms of establishing the objectives and priorities for the PSB over the next five-year period.