

GWYNEDD COUNCIL

REPORT TO A MEETING OF GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET

Date of Meeting:	3 October, 2017
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Craig ab Iago, Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Leisure
Contact Officer:	Iwan T. Jones, Corporate Director
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Title of Item:	Housing, Culture & Leisure Performance Report

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update you on what has been achieved in the field for which I, as Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Leisure, have responsibility. This will include outlining the latest and the pledges in the Strategic Plan; the position of the performance measures; and the latest in terms of the savings and cuts plan.
- 1.2 I will remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised at meetings of the Economy and Community and the Adults, Well-being and Housing management teams, which also included a representation from the scrutiny committee.
- 1.3 As I am a new member to the Cabinet, over the past months I have been familiarising myself with the work of the Housing, Leisure, Youth, Libraries, Museums and the Arts and Libraries and Information services. It has been a busy period getting to know the staff, projects and measures. I look forward to working closely with these services over the coming years.
- 1.4 Several of these services had been through a period of change and re-modelling, and I have highlighted some of the risks arising in my report. I am happy with the performance in general, and eager to see us continue to succeed, despite all challenges facing us in the next few years. My priority in the next few months is to ensure cross-departmental collaboration to tackle poverty and deprivation in particular.

2. DECISION SOUGHT

2.1 To accept and note the information in the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

3.1. In order to ensure effective performance management.

4. STRATEGIC PLAN PROJECTS

4.1. E3 Working Together against Poverty

4.1.1. The purpose of this project is to implement a tackling poverty programme in Gwynedd jointly with partners. By the end of the project, individuals will have access to the guidance and assistance they need to meet the challenges of their individual circumstances.

4.1.2. I believe there is scope for this project to make a big difference to the lives of individuals in the County, especially in light of all the changes taking place in the welfare and benefits fields. As the changes to Universal Credit come into effect by April 2018, I am eager to work with the Department to see what we can achieve in identifying those individuals / homes affected by this. There are approximately 300+ households here in Gwynedd which are likely to be affected, but there is a challenge here in terms of the resources to target all of these households.

4.1.3. I believe there is scope here for us to for us to work better with other external agencies such as Job Centre Plus in order to target these households and offer them a holistic package. Although some work has been completed internally with front line staff such as social workers, educational welfare officer and the Gyda'n Gilydd team who are in contact with these households, the support also needs to be more effectively coordinated jointly with other external agencies. Given the above, I see that there is a potential here for us, jointly with others, to make a real difference to these households, by targeting and coordinating more effectively than has been happening in the past.

4.1.4. Since April, this project has concentrated on conducting 'Pennywise' events across the County. These events enables Gwynedd residents to make the most of their money and receive further information about any benefits / grants available to them. The sessions have been very successful with 67 people attending. One example of the type of information shared in the sessions was Welsh Water successfully reducing the water bills of eight customers during one session, with the aim of saving £250 for every customer.

4.1.5. As mentioned in 4.1.2, sessions have also been arranged for front line staff, to provide them with more information about Universal Credit and the resulting changes. The staff attending includes care workers, social workers, educational welfare officers and the Gyda'n Gilydd team.

4.1.6. The Department for Education, Children and Families, Housing, Finance and Economy has a leading role to play in moving this agenda forward, and my priority is to ensure that joint working takes place to tackle poverty and deprivation.

4.2. E4 Housing Supply Strategy

4.2.1 The purpose of this project is to implement our strategy to increase the supply and variety of housing in order to ensure that our housing supply is suitable for the needs of the people of Gwynedd. The project will lead to different solutions in different areas.

4.2.2 Establishing Affordable Housing for Gwynedd residents in rural areas -

A Planning Application for a site in Penygroes will be submitted in September with a local consultation plan about to commence on the application. The Penygroes scheme includes an element of affordable housing and social housing. There is an agreement in place with Grŵp Cynefin to proceed with this scheme; however, further legal and financial discussions are required in order to secure the affordable element of the scheme.

4.2.3 **Bringing empty homes back into use** - The empty houses initiative continues with a number of new projects in the pipeline, in an attempt to increase the number of housing brought back into use for the homeless and those on Council waiting lists. It is also hoped that the proposed council tax system will reap benefits, and that the additional money could be recycled to increase the number of empty houses brought back into use.

4.2.4 **Provision for homeless people** - The emphasis on preventing homelessness continues, and this is having a positive impact. However, the challenge of identifying property for some specific groups - single homeless people being one of these - continues. It must also be noted that the new responsibilities within the Act places an additional burden on staff time, as detailed records of the process of assessing eligibility for services have to be kept. An additional challenge derives from the substantial change in benefits that will have a major impact on single people aged under 35 years with the risk that the benefits received will be less than private and social rent, meaning that a deficit will have to be found which will place pressure on tenancy sustainability.

4.2.5 The department has looked at the potential of modernising the Homelessness hostels provision and increasing the supply of temporary property, but as you are aware, this scheme has not been able to move forward due to the need for additional financial investment. I am aware that the Department is investigating the possibility of submitting an application for a Welsh Government financial grant jointly with Gisda and the local housing associations in an attempt to identify alternative methods and models to provide housing in the County. This could involve developing units developed off the site. I look forward to updating you further on this development.

4.2.6 **Provision for older persons to promote independence** - As previously reported, a meeting has been held with the Commissioning Service and Housing Associations in order to analyse the data regarding the areas identified as priority and to see what gaps exist. A further study has now

been completed by the unit and notes five communities where a provision for older people is required. Nevertheless, the unit is reporting that the resource that had been earmarked for Extra Care does not exist and that another resource will need to be identified in order to drive this work programme forward as intended.

5. MEASURING PERFORMANCE

- 5.1. **Appendix 1** reports on performance measures associated with my portfolio. I have already referred to some of these measures whilst discussing the above projects.
- 5.2 In terms of the Economy and Community Department, my portfolio includes the Leisure Service, Youth, Community Regeneration, Museums and the Arts, Archives and Libraries and Information.
- 5.3. Several of these services have, or are going through a period of change and re-modelling. The purpose of every service has now been agreed, and meaningful measures have been decided. I'm going to go through these measures by service.
- 5.4. The **Leisure Service** provides Healthy Living and Sports programmes which provide a range of inclusive physical activities and Healthy Living Centres facilities in the county. The service has adapted and refined its measures since April in order to capture the information most important to the people of Gwynedd and clearly explain the direction of the work.
- 5.5. I am satisfied with the service's performance, as the figures and several of the measures show good progress since April 2017, compared with previous years. I want to draw attention to the **% of 11 year old children who have attained the National Curriculum Standard for swimming**. The figure for July shows that **84% of young people have successfully achieved the standard**. This is an increase from last year as the service has carried out targeting work with those schools where a high percentage of their children did not pass. The service has is also developing a Swimming Development Plan which will provide direction and a clear work programme to further develop swimming in the county. Nevertheless, it is difficult to persuade some schools to attend swimming lessons due to the time and cost. This is something I am eager for the service to consider further, jointly with the Education Department.
- 5.6. The service is also responsible for implementing the exercise referral and Dementia Go programmes. The department has drafted measures which assess the quality of life score of the people who take part in these programmes (**HAM3 & HAM4 – Appendix 1**). Both measures show a strong result since April compared with last year. As good preventative work is done by the Dementia Go Team and the Exercise Referral Team, I am of the opinion that the service needs to do further work to continue with this effect. There is no doubt that the work of such programmes saves money for the health and social care sector in the long term, and want the service to map the elements to avoid costs to these programmes.
- 5.7. The purpose of the **Library and Information Service** is to secure the access of Gwynedd residents to support, resources and information which gives them the opportunity to learn and gain skills, read and enjoy. The service has been through a period of change and has now reached a fairly stable period. Different models

in regards to community libraries are continuing to be developed, however, I am eager for the service to consider the best community models, in addition to considering the viability of maintaining a rural volunteers model.

- 5.8. The performance of the service's measures is quite stable so far. The figure for the **number of visits to libraries during the year** is lower for 2016-17 (3,908) compared with the previous year, but there are definitive reasons for this including reducing the opening hours of some libraries. I am not overly worried about this as the figure seems to be increasing this year, with 2,260 visits up to July 2017.
- 5.9. The **Museums and Arts Service** runs two museums in Gwynedd and is responsible for the collections and creating exhibitions at both, namely: Storiell and the Lloyd George Museum. Much of the field's work targets health, well-being, education and tackling loneliness projects. The service is working on developing an application for a Resilience grant in order to experiment with income streams and a volunteering scheme for the Lloyd George Museum. **Since April, 96% of customers have stated that they are happy with the service provided.**
- 5.10. The purpose of the **Youth Service** is to ensure access for young people (aged 11-25) to a range of informal learning experiences that give them opportunities to gain skills, to venture, to enjoy and to play a full part in their communities. The service is going through a period of change, and has been engaging on a new delivery model for the county. I will submit a specific report on this for you in the coming months. On a positive note, the service has successfully ensured that **4051 young people receive accreditations through the service during the year.** This compares favourably with the figures of previous years (15/16 - 2807, 14/15 - 2049). The indicators collected by the service will change as a result of the re-modelling.
- 5.11. The **Community Regeneration Service** supports people and local enterprises to play a key role in the regeneration process. Over the past months, the service has been planning for the future of the Communities First programme, including formulating an exit plan, arrangements for closing down and transferring and diverting to other programmes. The service is continuing to work on its measures.
- 5.12. In terms of the Housing Service, the **Homelessness Unit** has set out its purpose and has established two main measures. Some decline can be seen in the time it **takes to achieve what is important (TAI 002)** (100 days in quarter 1 compared with a 69 average for 2015/16 and 54 in 2016/17). The **length of stay in temporary accommodation (TAI003)** (89 days) also shows some decline when comparing with 2015/16 but it compares well with last year and with other authorities that also report that there is pressure.
- 5.13. It is believed that there is a combination of reasons for the decline in performance such as the fact that some individuals, who are difficult to accommodate for various reasons, remain in temporary accommodation for a longer stay which pushes the average higher. In addition to this, recent legislative changes and changes in welfare benefits have contributed to this.
- 5.14. Welsh Government presented homelessness statistics at the end of July 2017. These figures provide an overview of the national homelessness picture over the past two years since the changes to the Housing Act and the shift in emphasis to work in a more preventative way. The figures confirm the local picture we are seeing in Gwynedd, namely the increase in homelessness and a trend that this will continue. The number of referrals to the Unit has increased substantially - 560

in 2014/15, 648 in 2015/16 and 722 in 2016/17 which again reflects the national trend.

- 5.15. In addition, Gwynedd has a higher level of families on a low income in comparison with Anglesey and Conwy, and a higher percentage are affected by the Housing Allowance cap. The level of Local Housing Allowance in parts of Dwyfor and Meirionnydd is amongst the lowest in Britain. If the Allowance is frozen on the current level until 2020, the allowance could be insufficient to meet social property rent.
- 5.16. As I have previously noted, the work on the **'Working Together against Poverty'** programme will attempt to overcome some of the obstructions arising as a result in changes to Welfare Benefits. In addition, the Housing Department has commissioned research from 'Policy in Practice' in an attempt to identify the impact of the change in the benefits system on the people of Gwynedd. The report highlights the substantial challenges on the horizon. As I have already noted, Gwynedd will transfer to Universal Credit in April 2018 and to this end, the Economy Department and the Housing Department are attempting to identify the households that will be most affected by the proposal in order to effectively target early intervention. Benefit changes are likely to affect some communities much more, and it is expected that Gwynedd will be an area that will suffer. We can see from the 'Policy in Practice' work that this impact will be greater within communities including Bethesda, Peblig and Tywyn. By 2020, 94% of the people of Gwynedd who claim benefits will be worse off as a result of the change in the arrangements.
- 5.17. Information about the measures of the **Supporting People Unit** was not available during the departmental meeting. The data is collected regionally every six months and this information was not available and was premature for our meeting. Therefore, I have not had an opportunity to scrutinise this information in detail. Nevertheless, the picture is similar with increasing pressure relating to the increase in referrals and the increase in the complex nature of referrals. Benefit changes are placing pressure on our service users and our users need more support in terms of budgeting.
- 5.18. Since January, a percentage of the Supporting People grant has been earmarked to develop two new services. One joint project with Shelter Cymru offers assistance on debt management. The second joint project with Gisda offers 'drop-in' sessions in Caernarfon one day a week with the aim of offering early intervention in order to prevent homelessness. We are also looking to increase responsive support for individuals with complex or dual needs with an emphasis on people with mental health problems.
- 5.19. The **Grants and Enforcement Unit** has introduced performance measures which, in their opinion, measure their purpose. One example of the measures under consideration is **the percentage of the serious hazards and defective hazards that have been improved to an acceptable level via enforcement in rented homes (TAI011)**. The performance of this measure is currently **53%**. A request has been made for the unit to reconsider its measures in order to ensure that we are measuring the correct things. I believe that there is a need to separate the **average number of days taken to issue a Disabled Facilities Grant (PSR002)** measure for complex cases and simpler cases, in order to ensure a clearer picture of what is being achieved.

- 5.20. I am pleased to report that the performance of the **'Strat6' Number of affordable units secured for Gwynedd** measure is performing satisfactorily. The Department is anticipating that we will meet our target of 50 affordable units in the 2017/18 year.
- 5.21. Obviously, the Housing Service is facing a number of challenges as a result of legislative and benefit changes as well as the additional pressure and potential rent inflation as a result of the Wylfa Newydd development. These matters will receive my attention regularly over the coming months.

6. FINANCIAL/SAVINGS SITUATION

- 6.1. The Economy Department has realised all of its schemes for 2017/18. In general, the Department is also making acceptable progress towards realising the remaining schemes for 2018/19 and 2019/20 as well.
- 6.2. There are two schemes I am monitoring in the leisure service and the youth service. The scheme **to run leisure facilities more efficiently** is considering options and I am confident that they will find a way to realise them. This saving is attached to the alternative project model and I will report further on the options to the Cabinet and the full Council in October 2017.
- 6.3. The Youth Service is considering efficiency savings of £70,000, which are also attached to re-modelling the service for the future in order to achieve the cut of £200,000. Although I do not foresee a problem in achieving this saving, I am eager to monitor this whilst it develops. At the moment, there has not been a slippage in the realisation timetable, and I intend to submit further information to you on the re-modelling before the end of March 2018.
- 6.4. All the efficiency savings and cuts scheduled within the Housing Department scheduled to be achieved in 2016/17 have been realised.
- 6.5. Although very acceptable progress has been made towards realising the majority of the schemes for 2017/18, there is concern that there will be a slight slippage in realising up to £90,000 of the cuts. This derives from :
- a) Substantial changes in the Benefit system, Benefit Allowances and arrival of Universal Credit, is putting pressure on the service and has led to an increase in demand.
 - b) The impact of new legislation causing a squeeze especially in the field of Homelessness where a transitional grant has also ended.
 - c) Elements of grant-funded jobs have affected the structure.
- 6.6. I will be working with the Adults Department, and specifically the Housing Service, over the coming weeks to seek a solution to the challenges resulting from the above, and enable them to work within their budget.

7. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

- 7.1. None to note.

8. ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

8.1. Views of the Statutory Officers:

i. Monitoring Officer:

"No Comments from a propriety perspective."

ii. Head of Finance Department:

"I am satisfied that the contents of part 6 of the report are a fair reflection of the progress with savings schemes in the housing, Leisure and culture Services."

8.2. Views of the Local Member:

8.2.1 Not a local matter.

8.3. Results of Any Consultation:

8.3.1 None to note.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Measures of the Cabinet Member for Housing, Leisure and Culture

