

REPORT TO A MEETING OF GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET

Date of Meeting:	29 January 2019
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Craig ab Iago, Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Leisure
Liaison Officers:	Iwan T. Jones, Corporate Director Morwena Edwards, Corporate Director
Contact Telephone Number:	01286 679685
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, am responsible. This will include outlining the latest on 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 would 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 representation from the scrutiny committee.
- 1.3. I am generally satisfied with the performance, and am eager to see us continuing to succeed despite all the challenges the departments will face in the near future. My priority during the next period will be to ensure that the Housing Department moves forward to draw up a Strategy that will set a clear direction for the Housing field in future.

Contact:

01286 679729 • 01286 679490

cabinet@gwynedd.llyw.cymru



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. The purpose of the **Suitable and Affordable Housing** project is to get a detailed understanding of the nature of the demand for housing within our communities so that we can plan for the future and make a difference. To this end, the Housing Department has been working on assessing Housing needs in Gwynedd and has consulted on the findings during the previous quarter. The work of completing the Housing Needs Assessment will form a strong foundation for the Housing Strategy for the People of Gwynedd (2018-2023) that is about to be submitted to the Cabinet next month. The Strategy sets a clear goal for the field of Housing in its entirety, with affordable and suitable housing driving our plans for the future.
- 4.2 The project to **Identify and Promote Housing Plans and Enterprises** aims to improve access for residents to assistance related to housing needs, and it identifies plans and enterprises available to help them. The challenges facing people vary greatly, and it is essential that we put what matters to people at the heart of our interventions. Again, the Housing Strategy for the People of Gwynedd addresses this. The Department will review the support available for people within the Housing field to ensure it is in keeping with what matters to people and that it is provided as effectively as possible.

5. MEASURING PERFORMANCE

- 5.1 **Appendix 1** reports on performance measures that are associated with my portfolio in the Economy and Community Department. There, I am responsible for the Leisure, Youth, Community Regeneration, Museums and the Arts, Archives and Libraries and Information Services.
- 5.2 The purpose of the **Libraries and Information Service** is to ensure that Gwynedd residents have access to support, resources and information, which gives them the opportunity to learn and acquire skills, read and enjoy. It is very encouraging to learn that 99% of users are satisfied with the service they receive.
- 5.3 The Bethesda Library leasehold has now been transferred to Partneriaeth Ogwen as part of the More than Books strategy, thus ensuring a future for the library service in Dyffryn Ogwen.
- 5.4 I am delighted that 2,422 children in Gwynedd have taken part in the Gwynedd Libraries Summer Reading Challenge during 2018, with 1,681 completing the challenge. This means that the children have visited their library at least three times during the summer holiday and up to the end of September, and have read at least six books. 46,851 children's books were read over the challenge period and over 1,000 children attended the *Hwyl Haf i Blant* activity arranged by Gwynedd Libraries. Compared with the national figure for Wales, Gwynedd came fifth (out of 22) in the number of participants. The results of the Challenge are very positive and show that local libraries are a vital resource to enabling access.

- 5.5 Excellent work has been taking place in Penygroes following some tension that had arisen between the needs of young people and other users of the library. A meeting of representatives from the area's children and young people services was held, and the group is looking to collaborate across sectors in order to support the leisure and learning offer for young people in Dyffryn Nantlle.
- 5.6 The **Museums and Arts Service** runs two museums in Gwynedd and is responsible for looking after collections and creating exhibitions at both, these are: Storiel and the Lloyd George Museum. A HLF grant has been secured in order to consider options for securing the future of the Lloyd George Museum. I am eager to review the Storiel business model, in order to ensure the best use of the resource in a sustainable way.
- 5.7 Neuadd Buddug closed at the end of December 2018 and resources will transfer to the school in January to provide a community arts resource.
- 5.8 The purpose of the **Archives Service** is to safeguard our public records and ensure people have access to them, by providing two Archives in Gwynedd. It is encouraging that 97% of users are very satisfied with the service. A reduction in the Schools Archives Service budget has been listed as a possible cut. I would like to draw your attention, however, to the importance of this service for our schools. It offers opportunities to gain relevant skills, as recommended in the Curriculum, and develops young audiences to become interested in the history of their community in order to create a feeling of belonging and to strengthen their identity.
- 5.9 The **Community Regeneration Service** supports people and local enterprises to play a key role in the regeneration process. I am pleased to see the team breaking new ground in Barmouth, by holding a pilot to transfer assets in Barmouth. The business planning work has been completed with agreement locally on the way forward.
- 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 gives them opportunities to acquire skills, to venture, to enjoy and to play a full part in their communities.
- 5.11 A new staffing structure is now in place and recruitment is ongoing. Staff are reporting that they are very happy in their work "I love my job". It is highly encouraging that 1,107 young people have received support from the service to date, through a range of activities including engagement work, volunteering in their communities, cookery skills and sports. There has been a great response from young people and parents, "I thought I'd give you feedback after my son attended a session in Penygroes last Thursday evening. He and his friends had thoroughly enjoyed themselves - in my son's own words when he got into the car - "Oh, mam. That was class!" (e-mail from a parent).
- 5.12 I recently had the honour of welcoming and launching the Post-16 Youth Service and it was great to hear from young people about their successes as a result of support from this team.
- 5.13 The work of supporting Community Councils continues. Social clubs have now been established and are open in Nefyn, Caernarfon, and Llanrug and recruitment work continues in Bryncrug, Porthmadog, and Blaenau Ffestiniog.

- 5.14 The **Leisure Service** manages a network of 12 centres across Gwynedd. Work is ongoing to establish the Byw'n Iach Cyf. Company, with much effort going into the process, it's nice to see that the service is learning from the process. Work is continuing on schedule, and the service will transfer on April 1st 2019.
- 5.15 I wish to draw your attention to the risk of losing a substantial income from the centres due to the deteriorating condition of the 3G pitches. We have already seen the effect with the closure of the Plas Ffrancon 3G pitch. It poses a risk to the Service's financial performance; therefore, a plan needs to be in place for renovation arrangements. I am pleased to see an improvement in the performance of Plas Ffrancon after the completion of the Quest Assessment.
- 5.16 The Leisure Service also provides **Healthy Living and Sports programmes** that provide a range of inclusive physical activities. Changes have been made to the grant arrangements from Sports Wales. In December, Local Authorities and partners across the North Wales Region agreed to move forward to prepare a regional grant proposal for the future.
- 5.17 I am very pleased that there will be changes to the NERS plan funding model in Gwynedd. This gives flexibility to offer all NERS activities in all locations, thus ensuring that all Gwynedd residents have access to the same offer.
- 5.18 The Gwynedd Young Ambassadors Scheme remains successful with 255 Ambassadors giving up hours of their time to volunteer with the plan. I am delighted that eight Ambassadors have represented the Authority at the National Conference in Cardiff; and Hannah Hughes, who is responsible for the scheme, earning the title of Young Ambassador Officer of the year.
- 5.19 The purpose of the **Working Together to Tackle Poverty** project is to review our arrangements in the field of Poverty in order to ensure we target our efforts at the places where it will make the greatest difference. This project was transferred from the Economy Department to the Children and Supporting Families Department this year.
- 5.20 As the timetable for introducing Universal Credit in the County has slipped, it was decided to keep this project live up to the end of March 2019 in order to continue to support people to cope with changes to benefits. Work is progressing under the guidance of the Gwynedd Welfare Reform Group. A marketing campaign was launched through Newyddion Gwynedd and social media channels in order to raise awareness and inform residents about how to prepare for the changes. Universal Credit became operational in Gwynedd in December 2018.
- 5.21 The Council will continue to provide financial support assistance (PBS) for new Universal Credit claimants until the end of March 2019. CAB will subsequently offer the provision. The Council continues to implement the Discretionary Housing Payment fund and 1,370 applications have been approved this year to date.
- 5.22 An agreement needs to be reached about the way forward with this project, with consideration given to the interrelationship with the Supporting Families Strategy.
- 5.23 The Cabinet will already be aware of the increasing demand for the Homelessness Service following the inception of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. There is also evidence to suggest that this increase will continue, with a very high proportion of single people who are homeless or at threat of becoming homeless. There has

been a 36% increase in the number of households receiving a service between 2014/15 and 2017/18.

- 5.24 The Homelessness Unit reported at the performance meeting that a high proportion of those presenting to the Council as being homeless, were prison-leavers. To this end, the Unit has developed a prisoner rehabilitation programme, which is a new way of working that puts the individual at the centre. The Rehabilitation Officer is one point of contact that provides a service within prisons and after individuals have been released. We work closely with our key partners and during 2017/18 the Officer worked with 120 individuals, of whom 41% were given accommodation. The greatest obstacle for the majority of this group of individuals is the shortage of one-bedroom properties with support for vulnerable single people leaving prison.

'A' is in his 50s and has a long history of offending and substance misuse. He has suffered abuse in the past. A received a service through the Rehabilitation Plan. A initially lived at one of our hostels, but after receiving support he succeeded in gaining tenancy through the Gwynedd Dispersed Housing and Support plan. He was given assistance to understand house rules, his rights and responsibilities as a tenant, help with budgets and financial capacity, and he is now managing his tenancy exceptionally well.

The effect of assistance and stable accommodation on A is huge. He no longer offends, and is happy to receive expert support for his substance misuse. A is not yet ready to find work, but is willing to receive support to participate in education.

- 5.25 In responding to this barrier, the service works jointly with Cais, the third sector agency, to find property for single, vulnerable people in the Bangor Area. This scheme will provide accommodation and intensive support, with an emphasis on developing the skills of the person to enable him/her to live independently.
- 5.26 Another development in the field of homelessness is the 'intensive support for rough sleepers'. The Service is collaborating with North Wales Housing and with the aid of a Welsh Government grant, a support officer has been appointed to encourage people to work together to help solve their problems, and support them to move on to stable accommodation.

A single person had been sleeping rough by a shop doorway in town for some months. The homelessness service had received several phone calls from the public and the shop's owner concerned about the person's health. It became evident that the individual was unwell; he had profound mental health needs and his physical health was also very poor. The support officer visited the person daily, very early in the morning, and managed to establish a relationship with the individual. He, consequently, received help and had hospital treatment for his medical condition. Contact was maintained whilst he was in hospital and arrangements are in hand to provide him with accommodation once he is ready to leave hospital.

- 5.27 To this end, the Department has submitted an application for funding from Welsh Government's Innovative Housing Fund, and has been successful in attracting funds to develop flexible 'pods' units. These units will provide homes with support for the most vulnerable people in our society for whom it is difficult to find placements. The aim is to develop four pods for four individuals. Work will commence early in the new financial year.

- 5.28 The **number of calendar days taken on average to issue a disabled facilities grant (247 days)** measure shows some slippage. Nevertheless, the unit has interviewed 96 people who have had modifications carried out over the first two quarters of the year. 90% stated that they were very satisfied with the modifications, and 86% very strongly agreed that their quality of life had improved.
- 5.29 The modifications unit has been closely scrutinising cases and reports that the greatest obstacle to completing modifications on time is the current shortage of occupational therapists available to carry out the necessary assessments. Furthermore, the Unit believes that it would be possible to provide earlier preventative intervention that would obviate the need for complex assessments, at which points conditions have become worse. The unit has proposed several solutions to try to address the matters that will be considered over the coming weeks.
- 5.30 The **Empty Homes Team's** 'Grants for First-time Buyers' scheme has been hugely successful. Over the past nine months, the Team has received 115 applications for this grant, and has already approved over £1.5 million of the grant to 85 of these applications. This will house almost 200 individuals and families. Since its inception, the Team has seen an increase in the number of applications for mortgage deposits, available to help first-time buyers gain access to the housing market.
- 5.31 The Cabinet will be aware that there is a high number of empty houses around the County and that the Department is working to bring some of these houses back into use for the residents of Gwynedd. There are approximately 1300 empty houses across the County. There has been an increase against the **PSR/004 measure: The percentage of private sector dwellings that have been empty for more than six months on 1 April which were returned to occupation during the year as a result of direct action by the local authority**. By the end of this performance period, 14 houses have come back into use, with 33 people from Gwynedd being housed.

6. FINANCIAL/SAVINGS SITUATION

- 6.1 In terms of the more effective running of leisure facilities scheme, Cwmni Byw'n Iach Cyf will be responsible for managing the leisure facilities provision from 1 April 2019.
- 6.2 £100,000 of the 2018/19 savings from the HAM4 scheme: the more effective running of leisure facilities, has been achieved. However, on 16 October 2018 the Cabinet approved the re-profiling of £156,500 of the savings, as the leisure facilities provision would not transfer to Byw'n Iach Cyf until 1 April 2019. The £131,410 for 2019/20 is on track to be achieved on time.
- 6.3 Within the field of Housing, since reporting to the Performance Challenge Team in September, I can confirm that the Department is on track to achieve savings of £89,000.
- 6.7 The Likely Expenditure of 2017-18 Capital Plans is £4.1m. This includes £950k on grants for the disabled to adapt their homes (which includes a £150k Government grant); £1.35m on first-time buyer schemes and bringing empty homes back into use; and a Welsh Government grant of £1.36k to develop a Gypsy site; 250k for the TRIP Programme (Targeted regeneration investment programme) which is a joint initiative with Anglesey Council, £440k on other matters, including enforcement matters.

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 observations in relation to propriety.

ii. Head of Finance Department:

I confirm the accuracy of the financial figures presented in part 6 of the report.

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 -

Leisure and
Culture
Performance
Measures

Appendix 2 -

Housing
Performance
Measures

Background Documents:

None.