

# GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET

## Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

<b>Date:</b>	28 January 2020
<b>Title of Item:</b>	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property
<b>Purpose:</b>	To accept and note the information in the report
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Craig ab Iago
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Dilwyn Williams, Chief Executive

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update my fellow members on the performance of the services within my remit as Cabinet Member for Housing. This includes outlining the latest developments of pledges within the 2018-2023 Gwynedd Council Plan; and the latest on the savings and cuts schemes.
- 1.2 This is the first report on the work of the Housing and Property Department since it became operational in September 2019.
- 1.3 I would like to remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised at the management team meetings of the Housing and Property Department, which also included representation from the Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.4 I am generally satisfied with the progress of the projects within the Council Plan and the performance measures for which I am responsible.

### 2 THE DECISION SOUGHT

- 2.1 To accept and note the information in the report.

### 3 GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN PROJECTS 2018-2023

#### 3.1 A Housing Strategy for the People of Gwynedd 2019-2014

The '2019-2024 Gwynedd Housing Strategy' was adopted by the Council at its meeting on 18 July 2019, and the work to realise elements of it has already commenced.

During the current financial year, we are conducting a cost-benefit assessment of the plans in the Strategy in order to ensure that we are targeting the activities that have the greatest impact on the residents of Gwynedd.

In the meantime, we have also started to fund plans such as Purpose Built Accommodation (smaller pod units); bringing empty properties back into use; and a scheme for vulnerable people to restore and improve the condition of their houses. The work to realise the Strategy is core to all of the Department's work, and therefore further details can be seen in the description of the 'Performance' below.

## 4 PERFORMANCE

### HOUSING

- 4.1 Since 2015/16 when the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 came into force, the **Homelessness Service** has seen a gradual increase in the number of individuals presenting themselves to the Council as homeless (from 560 in 14/15 to 768 in 18/19).
- 4.2 The service attempts to prevent homelessness in the first place, but if it becomes a reality for individuals, they then endeavour to find somewhere else for them to live. Over the period since the beginning of the year **an average of 166 days were taken for us to resolve the problem issued to the service** but this includes the prevention work and the work of finding another place to live. As implementation time is irrelevant to the field of prevention, I have asked the service to remove this element out of these implementation time figures.
- 4.3 **Homelessness was successfully prevented in 73% of the cases**, and although this often takes more time, it leads to a better outcome for the person or family. The service is aware of the numerous obstacles that prevent them from improving these figures, and are acting on them [the figure was 71% in 2018/19 which placed us close to the highest quartile throughout Wales].
- 4.4 One of the greatest barriers that people in temporary accommodation face when attempting to move to permanent accommodation is the lack of one-bedroom accommodation for single persons. Affordable accommodation, especially for under 35s, remains a general obstacle to reducing the likelihood of becoming homeless in the first place. A number of the schemes within the Gwynedd Housing Strategy, such as Supported Housing for Young People, or the Supporting People scheme, will contribute towards attempting to minimise this problem.
- 4.5 I believe that we need to carry out further work to fully understand which areas have the greatest demand for accommodation, and to see whether we can intertwine the work of planning accommodation with local economic regeneration schemes.

- 4.6 There is an exciting new project that has been underway since March 2019, jointly with the third sector agencies Cais and Grŵp Cynefin. This is an eight-bedroom accommodation in Bangor offering support for prison leavers with profound needs who have been sleeping rough. By collaborating with our partners, we can succeed in offering the provision our residents need, **and the project was successful in the 'Cymorth Cymru' awards, in the homelessness prevention category, which was held in November 2019.**
- 4.7 Bringing empty houses back into use is one solution to the shortage of suitable homes. The **Housing Supply and Enforcement Service** is again this year continuing to attempt to boost the numbers, and since April **56 empty homes came back into use** as a result of intervention by the Council, thus creating homes for 115 people. The underspend of grant funding in other counties in north Wales means that the Department is able to submit applications for additional grant funding by Welsh Government to spend on bringing more empty homes back into use this year.
- 4.8 The service is also conducting risk assessments in order to remove hazards in private rented homes and social housing, and up to the end of December 500-600 inspections were completed which **led to hazard removal work in 215 homes**, thus protecting 620 individuals. I am in discussions with the service to see whether it is possible to ensure that the residents of Gwynedd are aware that they are able to contact us if they are concerned about the condition or safety of any rented home, and that this can be done without any worry that they are endangering their tenancy.
- 4.9 The Service is also responsible for providing grants to modify houses for people with disabilities in order to ensure they can continue living in their homes. **54 cases have been completed so far this year, which took an average 252 days to be completed.** Although this is slightly higher than last year (but an improvement on previous years) and puts us in the middle of the performance of other councils, I have felt for some time that this average time is unacceptable. The Service is aware that a lack of availability of occupational therapists is part of the problem, but I have consequently asked them to conduct a Ffordd Gwynedd review to investigate the work-flow thoroughly in order to identify all factors that are a barrier to prevent becoming more effective.
- 4.10 We also provide smaller 'enablement' grants which help to enable a person to live independently in his/her own house. Since the beginning of the financial year 70 grants were awarded and this **work is completed in 78 days on average.**
- 4.11 We receive **Social Housing Grants** funding from Welsh Government, which contributes towards adjusting or building affordable homes. We saw an increase in the grant this year from £2.1m, but it is a concern that the Government has already stated that there will be a reduction in the grant for 2020/21. This grant has **already funded 17 affordable units in Gwynedd** this year, with 81 further units to be completed by the end of the year. We also have back-up plans for a total of 243 other units that we could build, should more funding become available.

## PROPERTY

- 4.12 All of the property service's units continue to show stable performance, with the **time taken to complete a request for maintenance work at a consistent level of 6.9 days since the beginning of the year**. Whilst the satisfaction level with the work completed is high, some have expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of communication between contractors and site managers, and I would like to reinforce the need to communicate with contractors when our new framework agreements are launched in the new year.
- 4.13 The time taken to **install Telecare equipment has also remained stable since the beginning of the year, and this takes 4.1 days on average** (compared to approximately 53 days when the service was taken over). There is work in the pipeline to attempt to further reduce the time.
- 4.14 The Council's **Carbon Management Plan** has led to reducing carbon emission levels in the Council's buildings, **with a reduction of 3.15% in September 2019 compared to 12 months earlier**. It must be borne in mind that for every 1% reduction, the Council's financial saving is approximately £40,000. We have also already started planning for 'Carbon Management Plan 3' that will be operational from 2020/21 onwards.
- 4.15 The **percentage of buildings with the full range of security systems in place** has increased since the beginning of the calendar year to 82% (from 76% at the beginning of the financial year). It must be noted that we are measuring the *new* buildings that have received an annual inspection. Ideally, of course, we should be adhering to the programme; however, by failing to do so, historical inspections continue to be valid and the service is confident that there are no health and safety problems in our buildings. The reason that this figure is not at 100% is due to staffing issues, with the sickness of one staff member having led to a gap in our service. This situation has highlighted a problem that we must face in terms of planning our workforce in future, which is the risk of failing to employ workers with the required technical and linguistic skills. We are looking into the possibility of training staff in-house, and are glad that professional trainees will join the team in March. Staffing issues, namely problems recruiting competent staff, are also relevant for the Estates Unit, and therefore resolutions need to be sought soon.
- 4.16 The **pest control service** continues to receive excellent feedback with **customers consistently giving a score of 10 out of 10 for the service**, and the service is still commercially viable. There have been some recent examples where the score given had fallen to 9; however, the reason for this was due to a delay in invoicing, and arrangements are in the pipeline to improve our processes.
- 4.17 The **Estates Service** is clearly under pressure (with the **monthly average score given by clients over the period varying between 7 and 9 out of 10**). This involves the time taken to complete work and communicate what is happening, rather than the quality of the work itself. The service has suffered

from substantial staff turnover over the years (with individuals often moving on to jobs with higher salaries). I have challenged whether the problem is a lack of basic resources, or the fact that full staffing levels have not been achieved for a significant amount of time. The Service is confident that if it had continuously full staffing levels, the shortcomings would not manifest themselves. The Service is taking steps to attempt to resolve the problem by changing the distribution of responsibilities; continuing to advertise vacant posts and considering whether trainees would help the situation.

## **5 FINANCIAL POSITION / SAVINGS**

- 5.1 There is one savings scheme that dates back to 2017/18, which is 'Reviewing the current structures and locations of the Housing Service', where £41,000 of savings have already been made, but £89,000 remains and it has since become clear that the plans in question to achieve this will not realise these savings. The Department is, therefore, restarting the process of identifying alternative savings schemes.
- 5.2 One of the savings schemes of the current financial year is 'Reducing the Dependency on Temporary Accommodation by Investing in Purpose Built Accommodation', and one of the schemes that would contribute towards realising the saving was to erect four accommodation pods in Caernarfon. There was some delay before the accommodation's building work commenced, as Cadw needed to carry out work on the site. Therefore, it is possible that the work will not be completed by the end of the current financial year, but I am confident that the plan will be completed satisfactorily, and that the £25,000 saving will be realised.

## **6 NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE**

- 6.1 None to note.

## **7 ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION**

### **7.1 Views of the Statutory Officers:**

#### **i. The Monitoring Officer:**

No observations regarding propriety.

#### **ii. Head of Finance:**

I am satisfied that the content of Part 5 of the report is a fair reflection of the situation. In terms of the inability to realise fully the savings from the plan to review the structures and locations of the Housing Service, it is reasonable to allow time for the Head of the new department to develop an alternative plan

## **7.2 Views of the Local Member:**

7.2.1 Not a local matter.

## **7.3 Results of Any Consultation:**

7.3.1 None to note.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Performance Measures