

# REPORT TO THE CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: 30/01/20

Title: Housing Action Plan for 2020 to 2025

Purpose: To seek the views and input of the Scrutiny Committee on the proposals set out in Appendix A of this report, in relation to the preparation of a Housing Action Plan

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Cabinet Member: Craig ab Iago, Cabinet Member for Housing and Property

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## 1. Introduction / Background

- 1.1. In June last year the Council adopted the Housing Strategy 2020 to 2025 with the ambition of “Ensuring that the people of Gwynedd have access to suitable and quality affordable homes that improve their quality of life”.
- 1.2. The Care Scrutiny Committee will also be aware of the decision taken earlier in the year to create the Housing and Property Department, with the aim of maximizing our ability to take advantage of resources arising from the Second Homes Council Tax premium to address the housing challenges facing the County's residents.
- 1.3. The purpose of this report is to update the Care Scrutiny Committee on the work underway to develop specific solutions to these challenges, and to consult with the Committee before the proposed spending program is submitted for approval by the Cabinet later in March this year.

## 2. The main housing challenges in Gwynedd

- 2.1. The Housing Strategy has established the need to tackle the following main challenges:

| Main challenges                               | Summary  |
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| An increase in the number of older people     | The number of people over 80 in Gwynedd is projected to increase by 60% in the next 20 years - the nature and construction of some houses is a barrier to older people continuing to live independently in their home  |
| Lack of affordable housing                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An estimated annual deficit of 580.</li><li>• 60% of buyers have been priced out of the housing market because finding a mortgage deposit is a problem</li><li>• In some communities a property needs 7 times the average income</li></ul> |
| High number of empty properties in the County | There are 1,300 empty properties across the County with many in poor condition   |

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| Lack of Social Housing   | There are 2,000 people on the Housing Register in Gwynedd today  |
| Poor housing standards   | There are 700 annual cases involving poor housing standards in the private sector.   |
| Increase in homelessness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand for the homelessness service has increased by 36% since 2014/15</li> <li>• 2,300 people are supported each year by the Homelessness Service</li> <li>• There is a lack of permanent accommodation options which in turn leads to overuse of bed and breakfast accommodation</li> </ul> |
| Fuel poverty             | It is estimated that 20% of Gwynedd's population is at risk of fuel poverty  |

### 3. Available Resources 2020 /25

3.1. To address these challenges the intention is to produce a Housing Action Plan, a series of specific projects. An integral part of the process of creating a Plan like this is identifying the financial resources that are likely to be available. We cannot deliver without investment and it is unlikely that we will be able to respond to the challenges identified without being prepared to use our financial resources to enable developments to become viable.

| Source   | Value<br>(2020 to 2025) |
|--|-------------------------|
| Income from Second and empty home Council Tax  | £13.5m                  |
| Social Housing Grant   | £11m                    |
| Council Asset Management Plan:<br>Extended Care Housing = £ 2.5M<br>Hostel in the South of the County = £ 0.5M<br>Housing Adaptation Grants = £ 6.5M | £9.5m                   |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>£34m</b>             |

3.2. However, the total resource required to achieve everything we would wish to do is likely to be far beyond the resources available. To realise the objectives we will need to maximize grant contributions and consider prudential borrowing. Work is underway to establish our ability to maximize the resources available through these methods.

3.3. We will also look to strengthen our co-collaboration with the Housing Associations and other partners in Gwynedd with the aim of maximizing the impact of our resources and our joint investment to try and meet the challenges in housing. We are in discussions with external partners to understand more about

their priorities and plans over the next 5 years and will continue to look for opportunities to work together over the period in question.

#### 4. Process for prioritising plans

- 4.1. We need to ensure that we use the resources we have to maximize the impact on the residents of Gwynedd. We have begun the process of trying to identify the schemes that could have the greatest impact in terms of eliminating or reducing the main challenges facing residents in securing suitable homes. Alongside this we have begun to look at how to overcome any barriers to those plans.
- 4.2. During the Autumn of last year we held a meeting with all the staff of the Housing and Property Department to identify what they think in their experience would help overcome the challenges. Over 50 ideas were identified as part of these discussions.
- 4.3. Discussions have been held with the Adults and Children Department as well as other external stakeholders to ascertain their views and aspirations for the period and if there was anything additional to what staff have told us already.
- 4.4. The next step will be to further develop the proposals to facilitate the prioritization of which plans should be adopted and implemented.
- 4.5. A key part of this process is to receive the input and guidance of the Care Scrutiny Committee. The Committee has wide experience in considering the housing challenges and we are keen to tap into this source of information before going any further.
- 4.6. Appendix A contains a long list of ideas proposed so far. The Committee's views are sought on those as well as any other proposal to be considered during the prioritization process.

#### Appendix A

| Ref. | Idea  | Description  |
|------|---|--|
| 1    | Increase the number of affordable homes to local people | We know that one of the main challenges with housing is the difficulty local people have in buying their own homes in Gwynedd. We will aim to develop our own housing which will increase the housing stock in those communities where demand exists. We will consider a range of purchasing models to ensure that these houses are affordable for local people. |
| 2    | Buying former social houses                             | Buying former "council houses" would be a way to increase the amount of social housing available to local people. It   |

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|   |  | would be possible to focus on housing with a local person clause in the first place.  |
| 3 | Increase the number of one bedroom social houses                                   | There is a need for more one bedroom units to enable single people to move from social housing that is too large for them. The introduction of the "bedroom tax" has added to the inability of individuals to cope with the cost of living in a house with vacant bedrooms but there is currently no supply of one bedroom houses available for them to consider relocating.        |
| 4 | Purchase empty houses  | Gwynedd has a higher rate than most of Wales in terms of the number of empty homes in our communities. This is a ready made housing stock suitable for housing local people. We will maximize our efforts in this area and consider buying empty homes and letting / selling them to local people through a variety of different tenure models.                                     |
| 5 | Conversion of Multiple Occupation houses into family homes                         | A combination of the Council buying a house in multiple occupation or financially providing an owner to convert it back into one dwelling. This mainly applies to areas where houses in multiple occupation are vacant because of over-provision or substandard housing a number of unconnected individuals.  |
| 6 | Establish the real housing need in our communities                                 | Although we are aware that the demand for homes is higher than the affordable supply available in Gwynedd, further work is needed to establish and quantify the exact need in each area of the county. This will not prevent us from being able to start our plans but as we move forward we will need to know in advance exactly where the demand for different types of homes is. |
| 7 | Better use of Social Housing Grant to address our priorities                       | By properly establishing our housing needs of local people we can then ensure that we meet the greatest needs first and move from reactive to proactive. We also need to ensure that new developments include flexible housing that can be easily adapted in the future and adapted units for individuals with physical disabilities.   |
| 8 | Refuse applications to impose a local person condition on former "Council houses". | Historically the Council has agreed to lift the local person condition imposed on sales under the Right to Buy in the National Park and AONB scheme. There is room for us to consider being more challenging with such applications and adhering to the original purpose of such clauses.   |

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| 9  | One stop shop for Housing issues                       | Establish one access point for Gwynedd residents to get specialist help with their Housing requirements. At the moment an individual may have to go to seek help from several different departments of the Council or to a number of outside bodies. The procedure is complex and does not offer Gwynedd residents the best help in resolving their housing needs.                |
| 10 | Build social housing                                   | Council to build social housing in locations where the need for housing from local residents is clear. We can achieve this through partnership with the Housing Associations or by building our own.  |
| 11 | Self-build plots                                       | Take advantage of the Welsh Government's plan to prepare sites ready for housing development through a "self build" model. Assist local individuals to go through the self build process.   |
| 12 | Supported housing - homeless                           | Need more 'supported housing' facilities with one bedroom homes with support for homeless people. Support may be on-site or mobile in nature.   |
| 13 | Supported housing - youth                              | As part of our responsibility as Corporate Parent, there is an existing shortfall in the number of homes available to offer to young people leaving our care at the age of eighteen. There is also a shortfall in the number of "supported housing" units for youth housing that require Council assistance to live independently.  |
| 14 | Supported housing - elderly                            | Continue the program of investment in Extra Care Housing and consider smaller scale schemes in other areas, possibly with the support of a "mobile" Warden supporting a number of such sites. This leads to being able to continue living independently for longer.   |
| 15 | Supported housing - adults with learning disabilities  | Modernizing existing provision.   |
| 16 | Homes suitable for children with physical disabilities | In some cases enabling a child to live at home with specialist care facilities requires significant adaptations to their housing. We will consider all possible solutions for Gwynedd residents in such situations, whether by funding major adaptations, securing more specialist provision in new developments or buying / developing specialist housing ourselves if required. |

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| 17 | Flexible house for temporary specialist requirements           | At times we are unable to house some children who are ready to leave hospital care. In cases where there has not been an opportunity to plan suitable housing options in advance a flexible house that could be used to meet the needs of a temporary home would make a significant difference to these families.   |
| 18 | Addition to housing adaptations grants (DFG)                   | The Council is already funding grants to enable adaptations to the homes of people with physical disabilities. As part of our work in this area we are currently offering a loan for adaptations as well as the statutory grant as that is limited to £ 36,000. The Council will continue to manage adaptation schemes in this way giving specialist support to the families to carry out the work. |
| 19 | Grants for multiple occupancy homeowners (HMOs)                | Improve our ability to ensure these buildings are safe and of an acceptable standard for residents by offering grants to improve the building. This goes hand in hand with enforcement work by the Council.   |
| 20 | Home Safety  | Carry out minor adaptations (installing handrails, small ramps etc) to make homes safe for residents to continue to live independently for longer. This work is currently outsourced.   |
| 21 | Emergency enforcement action to deal with emergency situations | Facilitate enforcement where homeowners fail to comply to correct hazards. The money will be used to carry out essential repairs to ensure the health and safety of residents or prevent anti-social behaviour in empty properties.   |
| 22 | First Time Buyers Grants                                       | Grants to help first time buyers to bring empty homes back to standard of living.   |
| 23 | Council tax exemption on empty homes for first time buyers     | Extend the Council Tax exemption period on empty properties and give first time buyers an extra period to carry out essential restoration work before the house can be occupied.  |
| 24 | Loans for urgent works   | Financial sponsorship for low income families to carry out essential home improvement works eg repair electrical fault, prevent roof leak etc.  |
| 25 | Empty Homes - Assistance for Owners                            | Grant for owners of empty homes to bring the house back into use with conditions attached to the grant ensuring that tenants' nomination rights stay with the Council for at least 5 years. This scheme also provides a source of   |

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|    |   | housing for the private leasing scheme offered by the Homelessness Unit  |
| 26 | Interest free loans to improve housing conditions | Financial loans to local people to improve houses in a state of disrepair at present.  |
| 27 | Support packages for private landlords            | Our ability to house homeless individuals is dependent on the support of Housing Associations and private landlords. Private landlords need a support package if they are to be encouraged to offer a tenancy to homeless people. The Government is currently piloting a package of support such as this.  |
| 28 | Penygroes Health Hub                              | A mixed development which would include supported living units together with local health / care services.   |
| 29 | Frondeg, Caernarfon                               | Consider increasing the number of living units in Frondeg, Caernarfon as part of a redevelopment of the site.  |
| 30 | Specialist Tenancy Support                        | Supporting tenants to remain in their homes is an essential part of our strategy to prevent homelessness. If we cannot prevent homelessness then we will need to further increase our temporary accommodation options and provide more homes and support, which is costly. The percentage of tenancies threatened by mental health issues is increasing year on year and there is a need to increase the expertise within the team to assist these vulnerable individuals to avoid losing their tenancy. |
| 31 | Be prepared to deliver                            | If we are to fulfil our aspiration to meet the challenge of providing suitable homes for Gwynedd people then we will need to invest to ensure that we have the capacity to deliver and realize this area. This will mean increasing the resource currently available to accelerate our ability to deliver.   |
| 32 | Purchase of building land for the future          | We already have some development sites in our ownership that will enable us to start our plans in some areas where the need for local residents is clear. But if we are to continue after that, we will need to be prepared to respond quickly to buying construction land when the opportunity arises in the right locations.   |
| 33 | Be prepared to innovate                           | Establish a process of assessing new opportunities throughout the life of the scheme to ensure that we do not miss out on opportunities to apply for grant funding,  |

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|  |  | realize windfall opportunities, develop new business cases,<br>assess innovative approaches to housing development etc. |
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