

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Date of meeting:	May 19, 2020
Relevant Cabinet Member:	Councillor Craig ab Iago
Contact Officer:	Dafydd Gibbard - Head of Housing and Property Department
Title of Item:	Housing Service Structure

Decision sought

The Cabinet is asked to:

- a) Approve the funding of the additional net cost of £150,500 in order to realise the changes to the staffing structure of the Housing Service recommended in paragraph 3.4 and 3.7 of this report, and if in agreement, to
- b) Approve a suitable source to fund the additional net cost of the changes to the structure, either by
 - i. making use of savings already realised by the Department, as outlined in paragraph 3 of this report, or by
 - ii. making use of the income generated from the Council Tax Premium on second homes and empty homes.

1. Background

- 1.1 At the Cabinet meeting on 7 May last year, following the managerial review of the Chief Executive, it was resolved to create a new Housing and Property Department in order to be able to meet our aspiration to give a higher priority to get to grips with the substantial challenge that we face in the housing field. The introduction of second home premium gives the Council an opportunity to try to find new answers that will increase opportunities for Gwynedd residents to be able to secure suitable homes within their communities.
- 1.2 A new Head of Department was also appointed and he commenced in his post in September. As well as starting work to establish what type of plans are likely to maximise the benefit we can realise by using the second home premium, I also asked the Head of Department to prioritise the task of undertaking a review of the current staffing structure within the Department to ensure that it is suitable for the challenge we face.
- 1.3 This work had effectively been completed before the Covid-19 crisis struck us. Although we are currently continuing to prioritise all of our efforts to try to ensure that the

Department can continue to deliver its priority 1 functions during the crisis, we also know that there is a need to prepare to return to our usual priorities in due course. In addition, some of the experiences we have had during the crisis itself, especially in terms of homelessness matters, have confirmed the need for us to ensure that our arrangements are robust in order to face the next phase.

- 1.4 Therefore, the purpose of this report is to highlight the conclusions of the report by the Head of Department and to propose a new structure that will enable us to achieve more and meet our strategic aspirations in the Housing field.

2. Services of the Housing and Property Department

- 2.1 The current unit structure of the Department can be seen in Appendix A.

- 2.2 There are 213 staff members in the Department which is a mix of office staff and workforce, divided as follows:

	Housing Service	Property Service	Department Total
Officers	52	41	90
Workforce in the field	9	114	123
Total	61	155	213

- 2.3 The Property Service fulfils the following functions:

- Arranging building maintenance work
- Telecare service for vulnerable individuals
- Procurement and management of energy supplies
- Reducing carbon emissions
- Maintenance workforce
- Managing Council offices
- Workforce that cleans various buildings
- Twenty First Century Schools buildings programme
- Development and renovation capital schemes for other buildings
- Statutory safety issues (Asbestos, Legionella etc.)
- Investment programme to improve condition of buildings
- Pest Control
- Buying and selling property
- Tenant management
- Industrial units and enterprise centres
- Property valuation

- 2.4 There are five work units within the Property Service with many of the managers responsible for a combination of more than one field of work. There are Team Leaders in

place to assist the Manager in units where the number of staff is high or there are completely different specialities.

2.5 The Housing Service fulfils the following functions:

- Applications for support from the homeless
- Re-house the homeless in private housing and social housing
- Support the tenancies of vulnerable individuals
- Prevent homelessness
- Homelessness hostels
- Rehabilitate prisoners
- Syria Refugees Scheme and the Global Refugees scheme
- Assess applications for social housing on behalf of the Housing Associations (waiting list)
- Travellers' support and management
- Llandegai gypsy site
- Empty housing restoration schemes
- Improving housing condition grants
- First time buyers' grants
- Accessibility adjustments in private homes (DFG)
- Housing Enforcement
- Licensing and managing multi-occupancy properties (HMO)
- Energy grants
- Gwynedd Housing Partnership
- Housing Strategy
- Social Housing Fund
- Affordable Housing
- Strategic projects

2.6 The above functions have been divided between two work units, and two specialist work teams/fields that are currently not part of a work unit. Both managers take responsibility for many different work fields. There are team leaders for some specific work fields but there are a number of officers who are not part of a formal team.

3. **Achieving more in the field of Housing**

3.1 The work of changing our Housing Strategy to become a Housing Implementation Scheme is nearly complete. All Housing Service staff have had an input into the process of challenging different potential schemes which would increase the housing options available for local people. We have consulted extensively with local organisations in the field of Housing and have received input from our partners in the local Housing Associations. The response has been positive and enthusiastic from all directions with a sense that there is an opportunity for us to achieve much more in this field.

3.2 We have held early discussions with the Care Scrutiny Committee and have had great benefit in receiving detailed input from members of a Task Group established by the

Scrutiny Committee to help us. Members of the Scrutiny Committee were very supportive of the type of schemes being considered and they welcomed the higher priority that is now given by the Council to this field. The final step before being able to submit the Housing Implementation Scheme to the Cabinet, namely establishing the practicality and financial viability of the individual schemes, has had to be delayed temporarily during the current crisis but it will be possible to complete this step as soon as we can return to address day to day matters.

- 3.3 Having reviewed the established staffing structure to fulfil current functions in the Department, and knowing that the Housing Implementation Scheme means that we will grasp the opportunity to achieve much more in the field of Housing, the Head of Department believes that a series of amendments is required to the structure of the Housing Service. Not adapting the structure would substantially impair our ability to deliver the Council's aspirations in this field.
- 3.4 See the new structure recommended by the Head of Department in Appendix B. Briefly, it leads to the following changes in the Housing Service:
- a) Combine the vast majority of the day to day executive functions under the new Housing Unit under the guidance of the Senior Housing Manager. This would lead to abolishing the two current managerial posts in the Service.
 - b) Establish specific work teams in the Homelessness field with Team Leaders/Field Leaders assisting the new Senior Manager to lead the individual teams. This will enable homelessness activity to be shared between three teams that will be able to support the Senior Housing Manager to give more focus and resources to face the increasing challenges in this field.
 - c) Homelessness Project Manager (temporary post to be funded by diverting one-off finance that is already under the Department's control) to concentrate on realising the Regional Homelessness Strategy and to give detailed attention to substantial over-expenditure on temporary accommodation.
 - ch) Adapt the post of the Project and Grants Team Leader to include a responsibility for a wider range of new schemes and projects that will derive from the Housing Implementation Scheme in order to maximise the benefit from the second home premium.
 - d) Join the Housing Technical Officers and the Housing Enforcement Officers under the responsibility of one team leader.
 - e) In order to be able to deliver our new Housing Implementation Scheme, the Head of Department recommends establishing a Housing Supply Manager post, and thereby, establishing a new Unit that will lead to the delivery of the Housing Implementation Scheme and maximising the benefit from the second home premium. The Housing Supply Manager will also lead on strategic housing matters, the Housing Options Team (dealing with applications for social housing) and the new Housing Support Grant (previously known as the Supporting People Grant)

- dd) Adapt the post of the Housing Options Team Leader to include leading the work of establishing a new triage service to deal with the entire range of housing needs enquiries, i.e. creating a new 'one-stop shop' for those who have housing related problems.
- e) Upgrading an administrative post as a result of receiving additional responsibilities.
- f) Create the post of a Housing and Property Executive Officer to assist the Head of Department with cross-departmental matters including the management of transformation projects and regeneration schemes in the field of housing.
- g) A part time post to manage and develop the Department's information and technology systems and to support Managers and Team Leaders to identify opportunities to improve systems' efficiency.
- ng) Abolish the empty posts of the Travellers' Liaison Officer, Landlord and Tenant Liaison Officer and Administrative Assistant (TOT).

3.5 The Head of Department is not recommending substantial changes to the structure of the Property Service. As the Head of Department has been responsible for this field of work for some time, he has good knowledge of services' performance and many of them have already been the subject of detailed Ffordd Gwynedd exercises. There have been many changes to the structure in recent years and the Head of Department believes that the current managerial structure is robust and effective.

3.6 Following the establishment of our Housing Implementation Scheme, it is possible that we will ask Managers within the Property Service to use their expertise to assist with some new schemes and fields of work. If that is the case, there will be a need at the time to consider whether it leads to a change in the responsibilities and functions of those individuals in question.

3.7 We already know that an increase in new build schemes will derive from the Housing Implementation Scheme and the Property Development Unit has already started to invest time and resources on feasibility studies, assessing housing development sites and familiarising themselves with the latest grant/statutory requirements in the field of housing to ensure that there will be no unnecessary delay when the Housing Implementation Scheme is in place. We are fortunate that we have a Development Unit that is very experienced in terms of managing new multi-million pound building developments (e.g. Twenty First Century Schools programme) and therefore, the Head of Department recommends adding this field of work to the responsibilities of the Property Development Manager.

3.8 The managerial review of the Chief Executive clearly established the different functions that exist within the Council to be able to realise our aspirations to operate from day to day in accordance with the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd. Changes to the structure of the Housing Service that are recommended by the Head of Department in this report correspond to these functions.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 The recommendations of the Head of Department modernise the staffing structure in the Housing Service and provide the staffing resources required to give more priority and improve our ability to overcome the substantial challenges that we face in the housing field in Gwynedd.
- 4.2 The net cost of realising these changes is £149,000
- 4.3 Following the empowerment of staff to follow the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd, the Department has been able to achieve new savings that have not been allocated as part of the Council's Savings Plan. In partnership with national energy procurement specialists, the Energy Conservation Team has identified a new method to purchase our gas supplies. Traditionally, we have been procuring gas on a joint basis with a number of other public authorities. Following the effort by the Team's officers to hold an auction to procure a gas supplier, we have come to an agreement that will cost £235,000 less per year than the current cost.
- 4.4 In addition, we established a framework to purchase gas after the auction, which is now available for other public authorities to use. The Council will receive a 1% payment from any savings that are realised by another authority if they wish to take advantage of using the 'Gwynedd Framework'.
- 4.5 We also intend to use the same technique to procure our electricity supply soon and this could lead to further savings again.
- 4.6 It would be possible to use the benefit realised by officers' efforts to follow Ffordd Gwynedd principles to fund the additional requirements needed to accomplish the Housing Action plan. Having used the gas procurement savings to fund the changes to the structure of the Housing Service, this would leave £86,000 remaining as annual revenue savings.

5. Next steps and timetable

- 5.1 If the new structure receives the Cabinet's seal of approval, we would move forward immediately with the appointment process. We would also complete the work of drawing up the Housing Implementation Scheme at the earliest opportunity once we could be able to release the resource that is naturally being prioritised at the minute to respond to the crisis.

Views of the Local Member: Not a local matter

Views of the Statutory Officers:

The Monitoring Officer:

I'm satisfied that the recommendation seeking resources for the proposed re-structuring is appropriate. It offers a means of allowing the Housing and Property Department to realise their plans for a new structure.

Statutory Finance Officer

I can confirm that the sum of £150,500 is a correct estimate of the additional net cost of introducing the staffing structure recommended for the Housing Service. The Cabinet does not interfere with staffing matters, but approving financing the cost of £150,500 would enable the Head of Housing and Property to move ahead to implement the new Housing Service's staffing structure (appendix B).

There is sufficient annual energy savings which could be allocated to fund the additional staffing costs, but in the financial climate resulting from the effects of Covid 19, it would be beneficial to have the majority of these energy savings in order to help alleviate the Council's corporate financial situation. There is also sufficient resources from the income from the tax revenue generated from the yearly premium which has been allocated for housing projects. Therefore, the Cabinet will need to weigh up the use of either of the funding sources, or a combination of both.

Appendices

Appendix A and B - Current and proposed structure of the Housing Service