

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of meeting:	13 OCTOBER 2020
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Gareth Wyn Griffith
Contact officer:	Dafydd Wyn Williams – Head of Environment Department
Contact Number:	32371
Subject:	Update – Voluntary Code for the control of to let signs in Bangor

THE DECISION SOUGHT

The Cabinet accepts the information in the report that confirms the outcome of the monitoring work and the success of the Voluntary Code for the management of to let signs in Bangor, adopted by the Cabinet on 16 October 2018.

REASONS FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

In accordance with the Cabinet's decision of 16th October 2018 to report back to them following the monitoring work.

INTRODUCTION AND RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At its meeting on 16 October 2018, the Cabinet adopted the Voluntary Code for the control of to let signs in Bangor, delegating powers to the Senior Planning and Public Protection Service Manager (now the Assistant Head of the Environment Department) to put arrangements in place to implement the Voluntary Code.
- 1.2 As part of that decision, it was required that the success of the Voluntary Code was monitored and assessed before the end of March 2020, and the conclusions reported back to the Cabinet before September 2020. The Covid-19 situation has led to a slight slippage in the timetable.

- 1.3 A copy of the Voluntary Code is appended to this report. **[Appendix 1]** and all the background information can be viewed under Item 7 on the following link:

<https://democratiaeth.gwynedd.llyw.cymru//ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MId=2431&Ver=4&LLL=1>

- 1.4 Essentially, this work stemmed from concerns expressed by the Assembly Member, Gwynedd Council Local Members, Bangor City Council, The University (including the Student Union, Student Pad and BUSG) and the Police, regarding the number of 'To Let' signs on HMOs that are mainly, but not necessarily, houses that provide student accommodation. The concerns related to the serious negative visual impact on specific areas and also to the negative impact this has on the image of the City and the University as a place to live, work and study.
- 1.5 As part of the process of seeking a solution, the Council contacted the various letting agencies that operate in Bangor in order to explain the above concerns and conduct discussions, and consequently a Draft Voluntary Code was prepared for consultation. The response was extremely positive, and a number of agents removed their signs even before the Voluntary Code was formally adopted.
- 1.6 As part of the report submitted to the Cabinet on 16 October 2018, it was noted:

'In relation to the main streets where numerous signs were previously concentrated, namely College Road, Caernarfon Road and Deiniol Road, it was seen that no sign was erected. In Orme Road, where 29 signs were erected in February 2018, it was seen that only one sign was erected there by three individual companies, and that this was in line with the requirements of the Code. The only area where signs continue to be erected is on Farrar Road, and it appears that those are all displayed by the same company.'

2. UPDATE

- 2.1 Following the adoption of the Voluntary Code in October 2018, this was confirmed with the relevant stakeholders, with the expectation of full compliance by the end of March 2019.
- 2.2 Initially, the Planning Service received a low number of enquiries about how to implement the Voluntary Code but subsequently, if they had not already done so, the majority of the agents acted in accordance with the requirements of the Voluntary Code. This enabled the Planning Service to target the company/companies that did not comply with the requirements of the Voluntary Code. Following the targeting work, the situation improved significantly.
- 2.3 Having monitored the situation regularly and received positive feedback, and having formally reviewed the situation during summer 2020 (visited the streets subject to the Voluntary Code), it is obvious that:
- Adopting the Voluntary Code has been extremely successful. **Appendix 2** includes recent photographs of the worst affected streets, such as College Road, Caellepa, Victoria Street, Deiniol Road and Orme Road.
 - Only a few signs of the type allowed under the Voluntary Code have been erected.

- The majority of agents have not erected 'To Let' signs although the Voluntary Code allows one sign of a specific type and size to be mounted flush to the wall at the front of the property.
- Some agents have erected smaller signs (the size of a house number plaque) that has an even smaller visual impact than those allowed under the Voluntary Code.
- Some signs (but a very low number) have been recently erected by new companies or private landlords that had not participated in the discussions regarding the Voluntary Code. It will therefore be necessary to contact them to explain the situation and to inform them about the Voluntary Code in order to ensure its continued success.

ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

The consultation steps took place prior to the submission of the Voluntary Code to Cabinet for approval in October 2018, and no subsequent consultation has taken place as part of the process of monitoring the success of the Voluntary Code.

NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

Contact new landlords and agents to inform them of the Voluntary Code and continue to monitor and ensure compliance with the Voluntary Code for the control of to let signs in Bangor.

VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Monitoring Officer:

The report underlines the advantages of co-operation and voluntary arrangements as an alternative option to avoid the need for formal action.

Head of Finance:

I understand that the Cabinet is asked to accept the outcome of the monitoring work for information. Hence, I have nothing to add to the report from a financial propriety perspective

Appendices

- APPENDIX 1 Voluntary Code
- APPENDIX 2: Street photographs