

REPORT TO THE CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date:	September 30 2021
Title:	<i>Siop Un Stop</i> Housing
Purpose:	To receive views and input from the Care Scrutiny Committee regarding the concept of establishing a One Stop Shop for Housing and to identify next steps.
Contact Officer:	Head of Housing and Property – Carys Fon Williams
Cabinet Member:	Cllr. Craig ab Iago

Introduction/Background

1. The Council's Housing Action Plan (*Cynllun Gweithredu Tai*), agreed on 15 December 2020, outlines the Authority's vision to address the shortage of a suitable number of homes available to local people in Gwynedd. The CGT will invest £77 million in 33 projects over the next 6 years. The scheme is now up and running and several workstreams are currently underway.
2. The Plan was developed after input was received from the Care Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 30 January 2020 prior to the proposed spending programme being submitted for Cabinet approval.
3. One of the elements of the Plan is the establishment of a One Stop Shop for Housing for which £480k has been earmarked. Establishing a single access point for Gwynedd residents to access specialist help with their housing requirements will be an innovative element of the Housing Action Plan. At present, an individual may have to seek assistance from several different Council departments or from a number of external bodies. The procedure therefore requires the individual to understand any complexity associated with the process.
4. The purpose of this report is to update the Care Scrutiny Committee on the work being undertaken to develop a more effective service for Gwynedd residents regarding their interaction with the Council in the area of housing. In addition, it seeks to consult the Committee for its views before further work is undertaken on service development.

The rationale together with the current position

5. The One Stop Shop is designed to respond to the challenges faced by residents when submitting housing related applications. There is considerable variation in the type of calls received by the service. This ranges from general enquiries; applications to go on the housing register; adaptations for disabled people; homelessness support; complaints about landlords; any grants for empty homes and energy saving advice. In addition, individuals contact the Council to receive an update on an application or to notify a change in their housing needs.
6. Residents also make housing enquiries relating to services that are not directly under the control of the Council, although these services feed into or run in parallel with Council services.

For example, Tai Teg provides information and support on Affordable Housing schemes in the County on behalf of Gwynedd Council. Clearly, should people contact the Council, we are keen to ensure that all sources of information and advice are available to them.

7. As councillors for your communities, Care Scrutiny Committee members will be aware that some residents who contact the Council are in a vulnerable position. Our aim, therefore, is to simplify the number of ways a customer can contact us to ensure that they reach the right service the first time, regardless of whether the enquiry was online, face-to-face or over the phone. The aim will be to improve our efficiency whilst delivering services.
8. Current enquiries received by the Housing and Property Department go either to Galw Gwynedd or directly to the services. Although many units work closely together, situations arise where an individual may require assistance from more than one unit or department.
9. Creating a single source of information will be a priority to facilitate the individual's experience when contacting the Council with housing enquiries. For example, an individual applying to the Housing Options Team may also need help from the Homelessness Unit. However, directing an individual to more than one place may add to an individual's stress. In addition, a situation may arise where officers may not be aware who has dealt with the enquiry and what advice has already been offered to the individual. The One Stop Shop will keep the relevant information in one place.
10. At present, the other Housing Support Grant (HSG) Teams in North Wales have established Single Pathway (or SPOA) processes for Housing Assistance services - Gwynedd is the only exception. In general, the main purpose of the Grant is to prevent homelessness and to assist people to maintain their tenancy. As part of Gwynedd Council's TSG Programme for 2021/22, an allocation of uncommitted expenditure has been earmarked to consider establishing a similar framework in Gwynedd. Although there are differences in how each Authority has set up this service, the main role of the Pathway is to check the suitability of applications for Housing Support Grant services and to refer the individual to the most appropriate provider. The Single Pathway usually takes no responsibility for assessing the user for the support service, with responsibility remaining with the provider.
11. Therefore, it will be essential to ensure that any process of providing services through a referral system takes place alongside the establishment of a One Stop Shop and that the principle of a single access route to Gwynedd services is maintained.

The proposed service

12. As part of the process of setting up a One Stop Shop, an important task will be to learn more about the customer's journey when they make an enquiry. That is, what was the customer's experience of how the Council handled the enquiry. This will include scrutiny of the number of contacts which are needed within and outside the Department, their experience along the way, and what missed opportunities may have occurred to improve the service.
13. Establishing a One Stop Shop would provide opportunities to improve the way we collect, collate and use this information to better understand our customers and their needs. We will be able to use the information to inform managers about future planning and adaptation of their provision, what additional services we could offer and in what ways could we deliver through the One Stop Shop.

14. It is expected that the establishment of a One Stop Shop will contribute to our plans to run more effective services as well as seeking opportunities to make better use of resources. This will include the consideration of technical solutions. Consistent, comprehensive and up-to-date information will need to be collected in one system to provide the relevant advice. In addition, staff roles will need to be developed and staff trained so that they can deliver the service effectively.
15. Experience shows that people often contact us with needs where different officers are responsible for providing assistance. A central point of contact would save an individual time and money and assist staff in finding solutions. Knowledge contained in the system will enable the Council to gain a better understanding of the housing needs of the people of Gwynedd and to develop high quality services for the future.
16. We have held initial discussions with some of the providers and would like to consult with our partners to ensure that everyone is aware of the intention to set up a One Stop Shop. The Department is keen to seek the Committee's views on the One Stop Shop concept and ensure that it aligns with the support offered by Housing Associations and third party providers.
17. As noted above, money has been earmarked in the Housing Action Plan for the establishment of the One Stop Shop and the Department is hoping to appoint an officer to implement any suggestions received from the Care Scrutiny Committee.

Next Steps

18. The Care Scrutiny Committee's guidance is requested regarding the factors which should be considered in developing the plan for the One Stop Shop service.
19. Following feedback from the Care Scrutiny Committee, it is intended to consult partners on the potential service, including the Housing Associations, agencies in the housing field and third sector partners. All feedback received will assist the process of developing a delivery framework and the commissioning of an information management system over the next few months.