

# REPORT TO GWYNEDD COUNCIL'S CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

<b>Date:</b>	March 17, 2022
<b>Title:</b>	Update on the Housing Action Plan activity
<b>Purpose:</b>	Update the Committee on the activity of the Housing Action Plan
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Carys Fôn Williams, Head of Housing and Property
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr. Craig ab Iago

## 1. Introduction / Background

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on some of the Housing Action Plan's main projects, detailing what has happened, what is currently happening and what is planned for the coming months.

1.2 In its meeting on the 15 December, 2020, the Cabinet approved the **Housing Action Plan 2020/21-2026/27** – a Plan of 33 projects worth £77m in 5 key areas:

- Ensuring no one is homeless in Gwynedd
- Increase the opportunities for Gwynedd residents to get a social housing tenancy
- Support Gwynedd residents to own a home in their community
- Gwynedd homes that are environmentally friendly
- Gwynedd homes having a positive influence on the health and wellbeing of people in the County

1.3 The Housing Action Plan aims to ensure “the people of Gwynedd have access to a suitable home which is of a high standard, affordable and improves their quality of life”.

1.4 Good progress has been made since the Plan was launched in April 2021:

- **89 social houses** have been built
- **41 empty properties** have been brought back into use
- **38 units for the homeless** have been built or in the process of being built
- **13 first time buyers' grants** have been provided for renovation work on empty properties
- **142 disabled facilities grants** have been approved to enable disabled people to continue to live in their home

1.5 According to the Housing Health Cost Calculator, it's estimated that the support given through these grants have saved **£1,227,826 to the NHS**, and **£9,746,668 to society** since 2019.

1.6 By doing all this, over **1754 of Gwynedd residents** have received support to live in a house locally to date.

## 2. A look at individual projects/areas

Area/ project:	Developing our own housing, purchasing private housing and purchasing land for building in the future	Ref.	3a, 3b, 3ff
<b>2.1. Background</b>			
2.1.1. All three of these projects look at increasing the opportunities that are available for the people of Gwynedd to own or rent a house that is appropriate for their needs, either by purchasing private housing and letting them on intermediate rent, purchasing former social housing and let them on social rent			

(projects 2c and 3b in the Housing Action Plan), or purchase land for building in the future (project 3ff in the Housing Action Plan).

2.1.2. By implementing these schemes successfully, at the end of the 6-year period of our Housing Action Plan, the Council will have built approximately 100 houses and will have bought an additional 100 properties that will be available to let to local residents.

2.1.3. It must be noted that the housing market at present is extremely competitive, the result of which means that many of the houses within our budget are sold for much higher than the asking price, or disappear completely before officers are able to view them. The same is also true for land purchasing.

## **2.2. What has happened / is happening now**

2.2.1. The '**Tŷ Gwynedd**' concept, our vision for the kind of housing we intend to build as a part of project 3a (*Developing our own houses in order to increase the opportunities for Gwynedd residents to compete in the housing market*) was launched in February.

2.2.2. Every house under the banner of 'Tŷ Gwynedd' will be energy-efficient, flexible, eco-friendly and will be built sustainably.

2.2.3. The plans for the first development (on the site of the former Ysgol Babanod Coed Mawr, Bangor) has been promoted online and has opened to a month-long public consultation.

2.2.4. In terms of **purchasing private housing and purchasing land**, considerable work has already gone on behind the scenes up to now, for example, officers have visited many properties and land across Gwynedd with a view to purchase them, and continue to do so.

2.2.5. Letters were sent to approximately 300 empty property owners across the County to discuss the potential of selling to us, however only 7 positive responses were received, and only one property was suitable to buy.

2.2.6. Officers are looking to buy another 10 properties, arranging viewings, researching into costs and gathering information at the moment.

2.2.7. In addition to this, the purchase of 3 properties are currently going through the conveyancing process and we hope to be able to complete very soon.

2.2.8. In terms of **purchasing land**, we have land in Llanystumdwy, Llanberis and Rhoshirwaun that we are looking to develop, and officers are currently discussing the purchase of land in the Pen Llŷn area and also in south Meirionnydd. Unfortunately, no more details can be shared at present because of the sensitive nature of the discussions.

## **2.3 What are the next steps**

2.3.1 **Developing our own housing:** The consultation on the 'Tŷ Gwynedd' plans at Coed Mawr will close in mid-March and, depending on the outcome, a full planning application will be submitted in the next few months.

2.3.2 **Purchasing housing and land:** We will continue to search for appropriate housing and land to purchase across the County. To this end, we intend to send letters to more empty property owners (who were not approached during the first exercise) to ask them about the possibility of selling their property to us.

**Tŷ Gwynedd:** <https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Residents/Housing/T%c5%b7-Gwynedd-%e2%80%93-Coed-Mawr-Bangor.aspx>



**Further information:**

<b>Units developed as part of the development</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Number of people helped (max.)</b>	<b>46</b>
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Area/ project:	Consult with communities to establish their housing needs	Ref.	3c
<b>2.4. Background</b>			
<p>2.4.1. When the Housing Action Plan was created, the original intention was to launch a separate housing public consultation, however it was decided at a corporate level that the Housing Needs Consultation would be included as a part of a larger corporate consultation exercise under the banner of ‘Have your Say Gwynedd: Our Area 2035’, led by the Economy and Community Department.</p>			
<b>2.5. What has happened / is happening now</b>			
<p>2.1.1. The Housing and Property Dept. collaborated with the Communication Service on creating the questions in order to ensure that the questioning method would be consistent across the platform and would achieve the most valuable responses.</p> <p>2.1.2. The consultation is now live on the Council’s public website and 247 responses have already been submitted (in less than a week of going live).</p>			
<b>2.6. What are the next steps</b>			
<p>2.6.1. The responses will be analysed with the help of the Research and Analysis Service</p> <p>2.6.2. We hope to take a “snapshot” of the situation in April/May, and we will keep the questionnaire live in order to give as many Gwynedd residents as possible the opportunity to take part so we can get the complete complete picture possible</p>			
<b>Further information:</b>			
Link to the consultation: <a href="https://haveyoursay.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/">https://haveyoursay.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/</a>			

Area/ project:	Grants	Ref.	3dd, 5f, 5ff
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## 2.7. Background

- 2.7.1. The Housing Action Plan includes many schemes involving giving and receiving grants.
- 2.7.2. For example, the grants we give to the people of Gwynedd through projects 5f (*Home Safety*) and 5ff (*Adaptations to make houses suitable homes for individuals with disabilities*) enables disabled people to continue to live safely in their home.
- 2.7.3. We also give grants to first time buyers to allow them to renovate empty properties to an acceptable living standard (project 3dd in the Housing Action Plan).

## 2.8. What has happened / is happening now

- 2.8.1. **5f and 5ff:** During the last year, 142 adaptations were completed. These included 70 adaptations to stairs or install stairlifts, installing 12 ramps, and building extensions or adapting rooms to create purposeful wet-rooms.
- 2.8.2. **3dd:** Recently, £3m was secured towards Empty Properties schemes in order to buy and bring empty houses in Gwynedd back into use. 22 applications are currently open, with another 45 enquiries being processed. These come from all corners of the County, from Bangor to Tywyn, and from Nefyn to Y Bala.

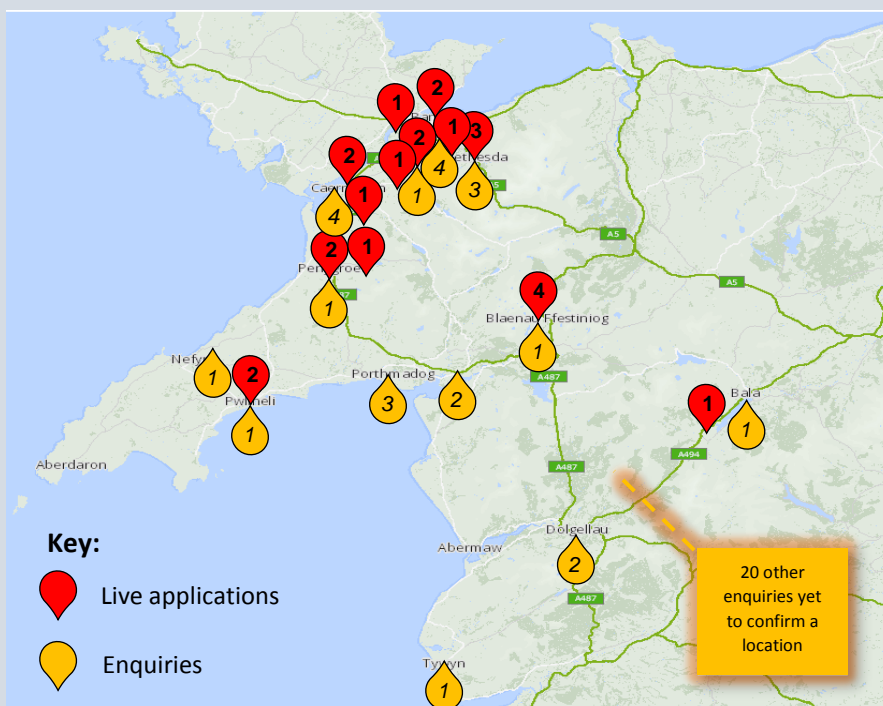
## 2.9. What are the next steps

- 2.9.1. Continue to accept and process applications

## 2.10. Challenges faced

- 2.4.1. Responding to a **significant rise in the prices of specialist materials** (such as stairlifts) that occurred as a result of Brexit and Covid has been a challenge.
- 2.4.2. The market has stabilised somewhat recently, however the time it takes to complete some home adaptations has unfortunately risen as a result.

### First Time Buyers Empty Properties Grants



#### Live Applications:

Bangor (2); Bethesda and Tregarth (4); Blaenau Ffestiniog (3); Bontnewydd (1); Caernarfon (2); Deiniolen (2); Groeslon (1); Llanuwchllyn (1); Penuarfon (1); Penygroes (2); Pwllheli (2); Y Felinheli (1)

#### Enquiries:

Bangor (4); Bethesda (3); Blaenau Ffestiniog (1); Caernarfon (4); Deiniolen (1); Dolgellau (2); Penrhyndeudraeth (2); Penygroes (1); Pistyll (1); Porthmadog (3); Pwllheli (1); Tywyn (1); Y Bala (1)

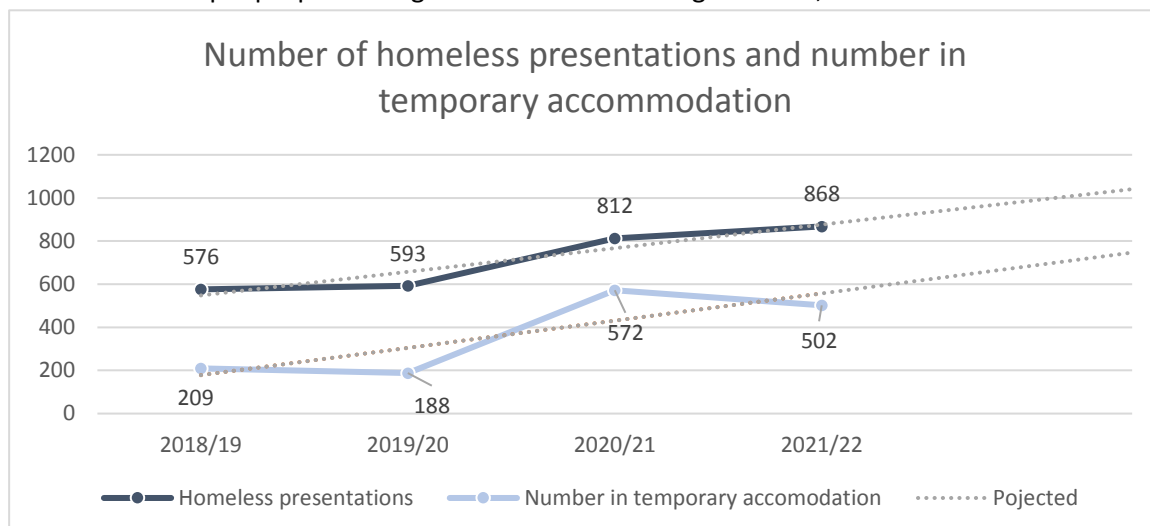
Further information:

#### Key:

- Live applications
- Enquiries

## 2.11. Background

2.11.1. The number of people presenting as homeless is at its highest ever, and has increased 51% since 2018:



2.11.2. On the 14 January, 2022, there were 712 homeless individuals in Gwynedd. 254 of those were in temporary accommodation.

2.11.3. The Welsh Government set a statutory requirement on Local Authorities to house everyone who presented as homeless over the period of the pandemic and, recently, that requirement was made permanent.

2.11.4. This means that the figures are likely to maintain at the current level or increase further (as the projected line in the graph above suggests) and we will probably never see the number of presentations return to its pre-pandemic levels.

2.11.5. The Department responds to every request, and we have been able to increase the capacity of the Homelessness Units recently in order to cope with the higher demand.

2.11.6. In order to cope with this increase, the Housing Action Plan includes many schemes to try to tackle the situation. Many of these projects have started and making good progress, with some having finished.

## 2.12. What has happened / is happening now

2.12.1. Some complete or ongoing developments are detailed below:

### **Tŷ Adferiad, Porthmadog**

Supported housing for homeless women, the first of its kind in Gwynedd. Tŷ Adferiad opened its doors in October 2021, and 6 women are currently receiving support.

<b>Units developed as part of the development</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Number of people helped (max.)</b>	<b>6</b>
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### **Caertref, Segontium, Caernarfon**

4 self-sustaining “pods” for homeless individuals with severe needs. The pods have been built using the *Passivhaus* technology, meaning their energy use is extremely low. The building work has completed and contractors are on-site completing some snagging tasks. The first tenants should be moving in during the next few months.

<b>Units developed as part of the development</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Number of people helped (max.)</b>	<b>4</b>
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### **137 High Street, Bangor**

This development, in partnership with Adra and North Wales Housing, provides supported housing enabling individuals to sustain permanent tenancies in the future.

<b>Units developed as part of the development</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Number of people helped (max.)</b>	<b>12</b>
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### **Site of former Ysgol Glan Wnion, Dolgellau**

Contractors have begun their work and intend to demolish the current building in the next few weeks. This development will offer supported housing for homeless individuals, providing them with the required skills to sustain permanent tenancies in the future.

Units developed as part of the development	5	Number of people helped (max.)	5
<b>Accommodation for a family and individual, Pwllheli</b>			
This work is currently underway, and we hope the work will be completed by the end of March. Once again, this accommodation will help the homeless individual with sustaining permanent tenancies in the future.			
Units developed as part of the development	2	Number of people helped (max.)	3
<b>35 Ffordd y Coleg, Bangor</b>			
This plan converts a property on College Road, Bangor, which had been vacant for many years, into three flats for individuals with severe tenancy support needs. As well as rooms, the building will contain an office, kitchen and a meeting room for specialist staff in the basement. The development will be Managed jointly with North Wales Housing, and will be ready within the next 6-8 weeks.			
Units developed as part of the development	3	Number of people helped (max.)	3
<b>2.13. What are the next steps</b>			
2.13.1. The department was successful in bidding for a grant to be able to put together landlord support packs in order to attract private landlords to help us accommodate homeless people.			
<b>2.14. Challenges faced</b>			
2.1.1. <b>Attracting tenders from contractors</b> over the past year has been a challenge, or when companies tender, this would often be much higher than the budget. For example, although 19 contractors expressed an interest in one tender application, only 2 tenders were received. One was within the budget and the other was 32% higher.			
2.1.2. In order to seek to respond to this situation, the Department has experimented with the size of some tender applications and the initial results seems promising.			
2.1.3. Another challenge is to <b>respond to significantly higher costs for building materials</b> , e.g. wood.			
2.1.4. It is estimated that 20-25% should be added on top of the estimated costs in order to provide a realistic reflection of the current market.			

<b>Area/ project:</b>	<b>One Shop Stop</b>	<b>Ref.</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.15. Background</b>			
2.15.1. The One Stop Shop is designed to respond to the challenges faced by residents when submitting housing related applications.			
2.15.2. 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.			
2.15.3. 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.			
2.15.4. 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.			
<b>2.16. What has happened / is happening now</b>			
2.16.1. The One Shop Stop Team Leader was appointed in February.			
2.16.2. The Team Leader is currently consulting with internal and external partners in order to understand the needs and enquiries.			
<b>2.17. What are the next steps</b>			
2.17.1. The next steps will be identifying different models for operating the new unit which will also include the structure of the team.			
2.17.2. They will also consider technical solutions for consideration. Regular, comprehensive and up-to-date information gathering will be required in one system to provide the appropriate advice.			
2.17.3. Also, staff roles and training will need to be developed so that they can deliver the service effectively.			
2.17.4. Contributions to this scoping exercise will lead to preparing and submitting a report on the different options, and will include recommendations on the way forward.			

### 3. MOVING FORWARD

- 3.15. As is evident from the report above, officers are working hard on delivering the objectives of the Housing Action Plan, and laying the groundwork so that projects are able to continue to move forward effectively.
- 3.16. Having said this, we acknowledge that more needs to be done to **communicate the messages and successes of the Plan.**
- 3.17. Therefore, in addition to the next steps outlined in the tables above, we will be looking at a communication plan for the Housing Action Plan in its entirety.
- 3.18. For the Council's Elected Members, we have already created a web-page on the Members' Intranet so we can publish news, updates and information deriving from the Housing Action Plan. This page will be updated regularly with news, statistics and information regarding developments that could be of use and of interest to Members.
- 3.19. We have also been working with the IT Service on creating a recording system for the Housing Action Plan, which will operate as a database for all the information regarding the Plan. This will give project leaders and managers an up-to-date view of progress and data, as well as identify risks and barriers early in order to find a solution.

We would welcome the opportunity to return to the Care Scrutiny Committee in the future to present updates about the Housing Action Plan.

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