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## CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1/02/24

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**Present:** Councillor Beth Lawton (Chair)

**Councillors:** Linda Ann Jones, Menna Baines, Meryl Roberts, Gwynfor Owen, Linda Morgan, Dewi Jones, Angela Russell, Rheinallt Puw, Anwen J Davies, Elwyn Jones, Jina Gwyrfai and R Medwyn Hughes.

**Officers present:** Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor) and Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader).

**Others invited:**

Huw Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services)

**Present for item 5:**

Hedd Thomas (Assistant Head of Housing and Property Department)  
Cara Owen (Lead Project Manager (Housing Action Plan))

**Present for item 6:**

Cllr Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being)  
Cllr Elin Walker Jones (Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families)  
Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)  
Alun Gwilym Williams (Senior Business Manager, Adults, Health and Well-being Department)  
Cadi Morus Parry (Health and Social Care Business Support Apprentice - Observing)

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Einir Wyn Williams, Gareth Coj Parry, Sasha Williams and Eryl Jones-Williams.

### 2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor Gwynfor Owen declared an interest on item 6 if matters about the charity Gorwel or Carers' Outreach were discussed - Gorwel was discussed and he left the meeting for this element.

A declaration of personal interest was received by Councillor Elwyn Jones on item 6 as he was a member of the Board of GISDA that received funding, but it was not a prejudicial interest and he therefore did not have to withdraw from the meeting.

### 3. URGENT BUSINESS

None to note.

#### 4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 23 November 2023, as a true record.

#### 5. HOUSING ACTION PLAN

The report was submitted noting that it provided an overview of the progress seen on the Housing Action Plan. It was highlighted that good progress had been seen since adopting the plan in April 2021 with:

- 241 social houses built
- 202 empty houses had been brought back into use
- 32 homelessness units had been erected or were in the process of being erected
- 64 first time buyers grant had been given to renovate empty houses
- 633 housing adaptations grants had been allocated to enable disabled people to continue living in their homes.

It was generally expressed that the department felt strongly that they offered a variety of support and interventions and, as a result, that the plans met the needs of individuals in different areas of the county.

Members were guided through the projects, beginning with "Developing our own homes, buying private homes and purchasing building land for the future". It was noted that the three projects aimed at increasing the opportunities available for the people of Gwynedd by owning or renting suitable housing for their needs. It was explained that by implementing the buying and building houses schemes successfully during the Housing Action Plan period, the Council would have erected 90 houses and bought a 100 others that would be available to let for Gwynedd residents. It was highlighted that several developments were currently underway, with six developments in locations such as Bangor, Llanystumdwy and Llanberis in different stages of the process.

In terms of the Buy to Let Scheme, it was noted that 18 houses had now been bought with another 6 in the process of being bought. It was explained that these houses were bought across the county and in locations where it would be possible to respond to local people's housing needs. It was added, before letting the property, the houses needed to be brought to an accepted and statutory standard of living, and the department was in the process of discussing their letting arrangements. It was explained in terms of purchasing land, that land had been purchased in Mynytho, Llanystumdwy and Caernarfon for future development. In terms of Social housing, it was expressed that the Council continued to work closely with the Housing Associations to implement a Social Housing Development Programme in the county. We aim to reach a target of building 700 social houses across the county during the term of the plan. It was reiterated to date that 241 houses had been erected, with 279 underway and that the programme was full for 2024/25.

Attention was drawn to the Grants Schemes, noting that the Action Plan included several schemes related to allocating grants to increase the opportunities available for the people of Gwynedd. It was explained that the Council had

recently started a community regeneration grant scheme that provided grants for community groups to provide living units for local people. It was noted since the beginning of the Plan, that 633 adaptations had been made to enable people to remain in their homes. It was explained that this could include minor adaptations such as installing ramps or structural work such as erecting extensions or adapting rooms. Attention was given to the First Time Buyer Empty House Grants, highlighting that empty houses that used to be second homes were now eligible for the grant.

It was highlighted that the situation continued to be complex in the field of homelessness, with about 70 to 100 people presenting themselves as homeless every month and 217 were in emergency accommodation in December 2023. It was emphasised that the housing and accommodation supply and support were not sufficient to respond to the demand and cope with the pressures on the service. It was explained that the department had appointed two specialist officers to support individuals who presented themselves as homeless or at risk of being homeless as a result of mental health problems or substance misuse. It was noted that 52 individuals had received support from the officers.

It was expressed during a previous Scrutiny Committee that the department had acknowledged the need to improve communication between the Members and, as a result, the department had updated a specific page on the Members' Intranet and launched a map showing the locations of some of the main schemes that have either been completed or were underway.

*During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-*

- Gratitude was expressed for the report and it was enquired whether there was concern about the funding available to adapt houses for people with disabilities as it was funded by grants.
  - o Concern was noted as prices had increased, especially following Covid. It was explained that budgets were tight and the figures were not currently sufficient to meet the needs of every individual.
- It was noted that there had been mention of a plan to adapt empty houses and it was highlighted that capital funding was available to purchase, but there was no information about revenue funding to collect rent and maintain the property. It was enquired how the Council would maintain and retain the property.
  - o It was noted through the plans, that the income was used to repay the investment and that funding to maintain and keep the property had been included. In terms of expertise to care for the property, it was explained that discussions were currently underway and there would be an announcement soon. It was emphasised that the Council worked very closely with the housing associations.
- There were enquiries about the trends in terms of homelessness in Gwynedd - that is, are the numbers increasing despite the fact that the county's population was decreasing. Attention was regularly given to the reasons for homelessness, where the individuals came together and let houses for local people.

- It was expressed that the number of homeless people was extremely high, and that there were many different definitions of homelessness. It was highlighted that the nature of homelessness varied but matters such as the breakdown of a relationship and the economic climate were regularly highlighted. It was noted that there was increasing pressure following Covid and legislative change, and that this was not only a problem for Gwynedd but was seen as a national problem.
  - In terms of connections to Gwynedd, it was highlighted that the majority who noted themselves as homeless had a local connection to Gwynedd. It was emphasised that there was a need for them to highlight their connection to Gwynedd to reach a homelessness list criteria. It was explained, if a local connection to Gwynedd was not seen, they could be referred back to the authority where a clear connection was seen. It was also explained that a clear connection to Gwynedd was needed if they were on a social housing waiting list too, in accordance with the Social Housing Policy.
  - In terms of housing for local people, it was explained that some houses had a local person condition, and priority was given to individuals with a local connection when letting social houses. The need to discuss with the legal department was emphasised if there are discussions about imposing a local condition on each home.
- There was an enquiry about the period of the Housing Implementation Plan and whether the plan fulfilled its targets.
    - It was noted that 2026/27 would be the final year of the plan, but that it had developed over the period and some plans would go beyond the period of the plan. It was expressed, as a result of the nature of the plan, a large percentage of the increase would be seen from the middle to the end of the six years. It was emphasised that the department monitored quarterly, but many of the projects were tied in terms of the market's financial climate. Generally, it was noted that the plan had reached most of its targets.
  - It was highlighted that there were fewer housing development plans and a low number of applicants for empty houses grants in Meirionnydd, and asked whether there were reasons for this.
    - It was expressed, in terms of housing development plans, that the report had highlighted six plans beyond Meirionnydd, but the department continued to look for specific sites in Meirionnydd.
    - In terms of empty housing grants, that there was a need to hold specific sessions in the south of the County to try and raise awareness of the grants and target areas where it appeared that the number taking advantage was low.
  - It was enquired, in terms of support for individuals who were homeless as a result of domestic abuse, who provided the support available to them.
    - It was explained that support packages were funded by grant funding and that many providers were used across the County to ensure that the support was offered by individuals with expertise.
  - It was highlighted that the report noted savings to the health service as a

result of supporting individuals to remain in their homes. Disappointment was noted that the Government did not pay attention to this. It was enquired in terms of finance, whether the department made use of every penny of the social housing grants available, and whether the Council received it and passed it on to the Housing Associations. In addition, it was enquired whether it was possible to use the Council's reserves for building social housing, by offering it as a mortgage to the Housing Associations.

- It was noted that £12.3m would be coming to Gwynedd over three years, and that they would make full use of every penny and had also taken advantage of more funding. It was explained that the Council was in a strong situation with several reserves plans ready to go. It was noted that the Council had worked with the Housing Associations to ensure that the Council prioritised where and what type of property would be built. In terms of additional funding, it was noted that the Housing Associations had access to a range of additional funds but the additional funding could impact the rate of the funding available from the Social Housing grant.
- It was expressed that many sites that were the Council's property were currently not being used and it was enquired whether these locations were considered as locations for homes.
  - It was explained that every type of location was considered, and that the department looked at land and buildings that the Council owned. It was reiterated on some occasions that using the locations was costly and it was difficult to convert them into homes. It was highlighted that a property needed to be of a specific standard and within specific regulations. Individuals who had potential locations were asked to contact the department to assess them, and to keep the use of buildings local.
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- It was asked what was the definition of an Empty House, and if receiving an empty house grant to do it up, whether there were any regulations that the individual had to live in the house following receipt of the grant.
  - It was explained that the definition was specific and related to the house's Council tax status. It was noted that there was an expectation for individuals to use the house as a home following this, and not as a second home.
- It was highlighted that the number in emergency accommodation over Christmas was extremely high and it was enquired what type of accommodation was offered by the Council, whether it was cost effective and how quickly individuals moved on from these locations.
  - It was explained that the emergency accommodation included a variety of accommodation, but the majority were hotels and bed and breakfast establishments. It was emphasised that the locations could be unsuitable because of the stock of properties available. It was expressed that the department prioritised creating appropriate temporary accommodation, and the need to work closer with the private sector was also highlighted. It was expressed, on average, that individuals moved out of emergency accommodation within 200 days.

- It was enquired what advice was offered to first time buyers to allow them to be successful when applying against other people.
  - o It was explained that grants were available to facilitate first time buyers and that they had been promoted by local estate agents. This might need to be looked at to ensure that it was being done and perhaps to try and focus on specific locations.
  
- It was proposed to make a request to the Scrutiny Forum for a Scrutiny Investigation into the Social Housing Allocation Policy to see how resilient the system is and to look at the details of the policy.

## RESOLVED

- 1) To accept the report and to note the observations.
- 2) To make a request to the Scrutiny Forum for a Scrutiny Investigation into the Social Housing Allocation Policy to see how resilient the system is and to look at the details of the policy.

## 6. PREVENTATIVE WORK THAT IS COMMISSIONED TO THE THIRD SECTOR

The report was presented by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to discuss the contribution of the third sector. It was noted that they were invaluable and it was critical to scrutinise their work as well as to scrutinise measuring the value of the sector. A huge debt was acknowledged for the work of the third sector, especially with the public sector shrinking as they responded so quickly and flexibly. It was emphasised that there was a need to ensure that the Council received the most value for money to ensure the most effective service.

The committee members were thanked for the enquiry to investigate this field. It was noted that it had been an opportunity to raise awareness of the work taking place. Thanks was also reiterated to the field, by emphasising that they were considered as an extremely important partner to the Council.

It was expressed that the committee's request had been very timely and had allowed the department to review their contracts. It was emphasised that this report only looked at organisations in the care field and organisations that only received contributions for running costs and not for commissioning specific services. Attention was drawn to the fact that the report highlighted matters that had arisen over the previous years, as well as historical matters that would be challenging to come to terms with and to look at how to build on this work. It was noted that a meeting had been arranged a fortnight ago, where the financial situation was discussed and it was announced that funding for 2024/25 would be the same as what was received in 2023/24, as well as highlighting the timetable to discuss the way forward and for future commission work.

*During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-*

- It was highlighted that the report showed the inconsistencies in terms of the

level of detail received on performance information asked about the third sector, and it was asked whether further information had been received.

- It was simply noted that there was a need for organisations to report on what they do with the funding received, it was agreed that there were inconsistencies across the sector, and that there was a need to reconcile the information received.
- It was enquired what were the arrangements in terms of monitoring and whether the Council received value for money.
  - The Scrutiny Committee was thanked for bringing the matter to the attention of the departments, it was noted that a great deal of information came back to the Council but the discussion had motivated both departments to have a strong system to monitor and reconcile across the sector.
- It was highlighted that only some of the third sector organisations were available in the report and some organisations seemed to be missing.
  - It was explained that the report focused on preventative work in the Adults Department and the Children's Department. It was highlighted that other departments such as the Housing and Property Department used third sector organisations to run preventative services, and that they might need input from other departments who overlap. It was emphasised that the organisations were discussed here for the core grants and not for purchasing services from them. It was highlighted that several additional organisations to what was included in this report highlighted how departments commissioned work from the third sector and had highlighted that more work needed to be done.
- It was enquired whether the description of the charity Gorwel's work was a specific description and described the work that they do.
  - It was noted that the department would look at the matter to ensure that it was correct.
- Pride was noted of the work that had been done and that the use of service level agreements was much more professional than what had been offered years ago.
- Concern was expressed about contracts that needed to be signed, as contracts gave assurance to the organisations for the perseverance of plans also funding for 2024/25.
  - It was explained that the departments hoped that this work meant that it would be possible to offer long-term contracts that would enable the organisations to plan ahead. In terms of the financial element, it was explained that the funding would stay the same and that inflation was not being considered for 2024/25.
- It was enquired what elements of statutory services were provided by organisations that offered a preventative service and whether funding was being cut, was there a risk for statutory duties not to be delivered.
  - It was noted that elements of work were being commissioned, such as Carers' Outreach. It was expressed that there was a need to maybe

discuss the statutory elements and to consider them separately. In terms of the Children's Department elements, it was noted that there were two specific fields - as early intervention and prevention that was a part of the Families First programme, and that this work was funded by specific grants.

- It was enquired whether there was an intention to commission preventative work via open competition in the future.
  - o It was explained that it was an option for the Adults department to consider some services but there was a need to ensure that services were similar across the whole county. It was noted that it was an open competition in the Children's department, and that there would be a re-tendering cycle in 2025.
  
- By looking at the Children's department, it was enquired whether there was an intention to commission Barnardo's to do the Family Support Team's work in Arfon and Dwyfor and it was asked why the procedure was different in Meirionnydd.
  - o It was expressed that this had happened because of internal capacity in Meirionnydd and, as a result, it was decided to go to tender.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1) To accept the report and to note the observations while welcoming the idea of a cross-departmental procedure to monitor grants.
- 2) To receive a progress report on the field by the departments in 2025.

## **7. FALLS PROTOCOL**

The report was submitted by noting that the item had arisen following a question asked by the former chair some time ago, which was what people should do if individuals fell in their communities. It was not possible to respond to the question quickly, but after some discussions with the Welsh Ambulance Trust and co-workers in the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board, it was highlighted that there was no national or regional protocol for this matter. It was explained that the "I Stumble" protocol was used by the trust, the Health Board and some other local authorities, but that this protocol looked at how to help individuals if they fall and how to deal with them after they fall. It was highlighted that the protocol did not deal with the question which is how to respond if individuals fell and an ambulance was not available for 8-10 hours, and what advice could be given to a carer.

It was expressed that work had been made to translate and add to the "I Stumble" system, and specifically to the "Very Long Waiting Time?" part. It was emphasised that the observations were superficial, but it was not possible to go into much detail as it was a very difficult situation as every case was different. It was explained that the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board Therapists Regional Director was happy to put a Health Board badge on it. It was added that a consultation on the document would be held to see whether there was a better

way of sharing the information. Following this, it was noted that training would be held for internal carers and external providers.

In addition to this, it was noted that officers within the Welsh Ambulance Trust were very eager to start a pilot in Gwynedd to see whether it was possible to locate equipment to lift individuals that have fallen in suitable locations within the communities, and to train local volunteers on how to use them. It was noted that they were expecting a specific plan in terms of locations etc., and despite it being different to the protocol, it was explained that it had developed as a result of the discussions that had risen.

*During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-*

- Gratitude was expressed for the report, and congratulations was given on creating a clear report, considering that a protocol was not in place before this. It was highlighted that the 'Very Long Waiting Time?' element might need to be in another colour to draw attention to it.
- It was enquired whether there was a timetable to hold training on the protocol jointly with the Health Board, or whether there was a timetable for the pilot scheme.
  - o It was noted in terms of the training, that there was no definite timetable but that there was no reason to delay and it was hoped that it would be possible to hold it during the spring, ready for the summer and autumn.
  - o He noted, in terms of the pilot scheme, that there was no date but the Corporate Director would continue to enquire to put a timetable in place.
- It was enquired whether it was possible to create a page for the public after it was accepted, as it was very important for this information to be shared further as it was useful to everyone.
  - o It was expressed that there was no intention to do this, but did not see any problem with creating it, as it would not cost a lot to create and would be very valuable. It was highlighted that there was a need to think about how to distribute the information to the public.
- It was noted that the former chair Cllr Eryl Jones Williams, as he had noted his apology, thanked for the reported.

## **RESOLVED**

- a) To accept the report and to request the Corporate Director to consider distributing the information to the public if possible.

The meeting commenced at 10:30am and concluded at 2pm

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**CHAIRMAN**