

ACTION PLAN FROM THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – (Updated 09.05.16)

A. PREVENTATIVE WORK

1. Changes in the Welfare System	Update
<p>Findings – There is a need to enable people to avoid becoming homeless in light of changes to the Welfare System.</p>	<p>Raising awareness is a continuous challenge. The `Universal Credit 'is not fully rolled out in Gwynedd to date. We are looking at working in partnership with the Housing Associations to raise awareness of the service provided by credit union as a secure method of paying rent.</p> <p>Item to be placed on the Housing Partnership agenda 22:06:16 to discuss and identify potential measures.</p>
<p>Evidence –</p> <p>Information about the challenge of welfare changes, bedroom tax, a likely reduction in Direct Housing Payments and the move to Universal Credit. Evidence from the Bevan Foundation Report “Summer Budget 2015: What it means for Wales (July 2015)” summarising:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The shortage of affordable housing is likely to be exacerbated as the link between benefits and housing costs is broken. • There could be significant issues for young unemployed people who lose their entitlement to help with housing costs. • How people and markets respond to the changes remains to be seen 	
<p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member –</p> <p>It is recommended that the Senior Housing Manager leads on:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ensuring publicity to the likely impact of the changes and available support. b. Encouraging use of the Universal Credit System to protect rent payments 	
2. Mediation Services	Update
<p>Findings –</p> <p>There is a real need to improve access to mediation services in order to promote preventative work to address matters that could soon lead to homelessness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping of services re: access to mediation services has taken place. • Gisda and Y Bont can provide a service (Spot Purchase). A
<p>Evidence – Evidence from agencies and users that they find it difficult to get access to mediation services.</p>	

<p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member –</p> <p>It is recommended that the Preventative Services Group and the Young People Accommodation Group map the services / referral process for service with a view to drawing up proposals to improve the provision.</p>	<p>mediation package will cost on average between £700- £900.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagartref (Anglesey) has received confirmation from the Welsh Government that they can provide a Nighstop service in Gwynedd which can also offer mediation. Gwynedd Council staff will receive an introduction to the service at their meeting next team which is on 17/05/16.
---	--

B. ACCESS TO THE SYSTEM

3. Housing Service Structure	Update
<p>Findings –</p> <p>There is a need to research the Structures of Housing Departments in other Authorities e.g. Housing Options Team / Homelessness all in one team providing housing options</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The unit has received information from Conwy and Anglesey Council. • Conwy Council provides service as noted in Appendix A. • Anglesey Council is currently working on changing the way they work and are looking at 'bands'. • The two councils have a Homelessness and Housing Options Team as one team. • This already exists in Gwynedd and we have
<p>Evidence –</p> <p>Observations were received about the structures of other authorities and the possibility of having one team providing options in order to make the service simpler and more cohesive for users.</p> <p>** Note - Gwynedd was one of the first councils to establish an Options Team</p>	
<p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member –</p> <p>It is recommended that the Strategic Housing Unit collects information about the structures of other Councils with a view to drawing up proposals to rationalise and simplify.</p>	

	prepared documents for our partners so that they understand the procedure. See Appendix B.
4. Council Forms and Documents	Update
<p>Findings –</p> <p>There is a need to simplify forms in the field and look at the arrangements to complete them, bearing in mind the vulnerable circumstances of some people who complete them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Options team has updated the form which is now more user friendly with instructions on the side to help individuals complete the form.
<p>Evidence –</p> <p>Housing Options Team (HOT) forms are difficult for users who are homeless or in a supported accommodation organisation to complete. Users do not always have the relevant evidence documents, and as a result, the application is incomplete and the applicant is not placed on the waiting list.</p>	
<p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member –</p> <p>It is recommended that the Housing Options Team re-examine their forms and simplify them</p>	
5. Establishing a Single Referral Point	Update
<p>Findings –</p> <p>There is a need to establish a comprehensive approach as people seek access to the system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We visited Conwy and Denbighshire Council. Gwynedd would need between £60k and £100k to establish similar structures and there is no money or justification to spend in the current climate. • A referral form has been developed in partnership with the Gwynedd providers and is being translated at the moment.
<p>Evidence –</p> <p>Users’ observations about having to complete more than one referral interview with different teams and partners and provide the same information twice. A clear impression by the Investigation that, although the different service elements were working well, there is scope to increase the feeling of “one service for the users’ benefit</p>	
<p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member –</p> <p>It is recommended that the Strategic Housing Unit, the Gwynedd Homelessness Forum</p>	

<p>and the Supporting People Unit collect information about other authorities' arrangements to look for good practices in terms of establishing a single Referral Point for services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The referral form was sent to the Homeless Forum for comments - providers are happy with the draft form. • The form will be used under a pilot scheme to begin with as we may need to change / adapt. • We will need to develop an Information Sharing Protocol as part of the referral form.
<p>6. Customer Care at the Offices</p>	
<p>Findings –</p>	<p>Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An assessment against the 'Equal Ground' (Shelter) document has taken place. Working group has been established and a meeting has been scheduled with Shelter in June. • The issue in the Arfon Office has been addressed. It now provides a safe and private place for staff to hold meetings with individuals. • Unfortunately the Structure of the Housing Options Team does not allow staff to meet with the candidates. But in exempt situations e.g. if a disability has been identified, they staff will meet with the individual.
<p>There is a need to improve provision for individuals who present themselves to the Homelessness Team at the Penrallt Office in Caernarfon</p>	
<p>Evidence –</p> <p>Comparison with the Shelter 'Equal Ground Standard' document in terms of customer experience at the Penrallt Office in Caernarfon There are deficiencies particularly with the interview provision in terms of privacy and confidentiality</p>	
<p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member –</p> <p>It is recommended that the Senior Housing Manager leads work to:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. improves the property used by the Homelessness Team at the Penrallt Office to interview individuals. b. ensure a face-to-face interview with the Housing Options Team as well as the existing telephone arrangement 	

SUPPLY

7. Information about available properties	Update
Findings – <p>There is a need to improve the information available in order to refer people to suitable properties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private Sector Development Officer in post since November 2015 and has contacted the private landlords. • Computer is available in the safe room and work is on-going to try and located computers in the other meeting rooms.
Evidence – <p>Confirmation through interviews that there is no up-to-date list of available private properties at hand for the Homelessness Team.</p>	
Recommendation to the Cabinet Member – <p>It is recommended that the Senior Housing Manager leads on:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. establishing a database of available private and public properties that could be referred to immediately or at least an up-to-date list of properties that could be available by private and public landlords in order to question them further. b. having access to a computer in the interview room in order to look at it immediately with the applicant. 	
8. Developing the Private Sector	Update
Findings – <p>There is a need to develop the private sector and have affordable rents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officer has been appointed to liaise with the private sector. Work continues on developing the packages that can be offered to the landlords. • A meeting will be arranged with the landlord to discuss Rent Smart Wales.
Evidence - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private sector rents are higher than the Local Housing Allowance. • Service users having difficulty obtaining a deposit and / or paying the difference in rent from their benefits 	

<p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member –</p> <p>It is recommended that the Homelessness and Supply and Enforcement Teams:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. re-start meetings with private landlords b. develop a Gold / Silver / Bronze Scheme for landlords to receive tenants 	
<p>9. Improving the range of properties</p>	<p>Update</p>
<p>Findings –</p> <p>There is a need to improve the range of available properties to meet the need.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very difficult to gain property in Bangor as landlords will receive around £ 110 per week for one bedroom from students. We continue to hold discussions in order to obtain suitable properties. • We are in discussion with CCG regarding the provision of property and considering moving to leasing in order to get more control. We are also exploring the potential of increasing the number of properties that have fallen since transferring the stock. • Housing Solutions Team work in partnership with the Empty Homes team to bring stock back into use in Gwynedd. • Housing Options Team work in partnership with the Housing Associations to reduce the number of properties that are hard to let. Most of the hard to
<p>Evidence –</p> <p>Confirmation from interviews about properties that are difficult to let in some areas and where there is an insufficient provision of properties in other areas. Particular attention was given to the high number of vacant properties under the control of Gwynedd Community Homes Evidence presented to the Gwynedd Council Planning Committee by Councillor Lesley Day on what seems to be over-provision of accommodation targeting students in the Bangor area when measured against the need, in an area where there is a “sleeping out” problem.</p>	
<p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member –</p> <p>It is recommended that the Housing Service:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. encourage landlords to adapt properties that are difficult to let in order to make them more suitable for the need and make use of available properties (e.g. student properties in Bangor). b. the Department should hold early discussions with Gwynedd Community Homes to address the reasons for the number and to co-operate on seeking creative solutions to that problem c. continue to target the work of the Empty Homes Team to meet the needs of homeless cohorts. 	

	let properties are the over 55+ schemes or 3 bedroom houses in a rural area.
10. Provision for 25+ year old people	Update
Findings – There is a lack of accommodation provision for single 25+ year old men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-going - see point 5 above. • Discussions are taking place with Housing Associations to develop stock in line with the identified needs.
Evidence – Users noting that there is insufficient provision if you are a single man and 25+. Does not appear to be a priority for social housing.	
Recommendation to the Cabinet Member – It is recommended that the Homelessness and Housing Options Teams collaborate with the Private Sector to try to increase the supply for single 25+ year old men.	

CH. TEMPORARY PROVISION

11. Emergency Accommodation for young people	Update
Findings – There is a need to investigate short term emergency placements e.g. by looking at the stock of Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd and the possibility of establishing a 'Night Stop / Crash Pad' scheme in Gwynedd.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions have taken place with Digartref (Ynys Mon) to operate their Nighstop scheme in Gwynedd. An application was submitted to Welsh Government for consideration on using the S180 money they currently receive. • The application has been approved by Welsh Government and work is about to start between Gwynedd Council and Digartref (Ynys Mon)
Evidence – There is a lack of provision for emergency temporary accommodation, especially for young people	
Recommendation to the Cabinet Member – It is recommended:- a) that the Preventative Services Group and the Young People Accommodation Group investigate the possibility of extending the 'Night Stop / Crash Pad' provision in the	

county. b) that the Housing Service holds a specific discussion with Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd regarding use of their stock for homelessness purposes.	
12. Storage for Personal Belongings	Update
Findings – An investigation should be conducted into establishing a temporary storage for personal belongings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The team have been monitoring the demand for this service and currently there is no evidence that they provision is needed. If Gwynedd Council have a duty towards an individual under the Homeless Act then arrangements are in place to store the property of individuals.
Evidence – Observations from users and employees in the field about a lack of storage provision while individuals are between placements and no budget to pay directly.	
Recommendation to the Cabinet Member – It is recommended that the Homelessness Team investigates the possibility by creating a business case to attract a further budget to fund such provision and the possibility of using the Council's own resources to store.	

HOSTELS

13. The Council's Provision of Hostels	Update
Findings – There is a question about the existing location of the Council's hostel in Corris but there is a need to look at the facilities at both Council hostels and a need to invest and modernise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Review is in the pipeline to explore the hostels sustainability - focused on Corris first.
Evidence – Following visits, there is a need to improve the facilities. The Corris site does present a problem with accessibility but the main problem on both sites is the facilities. There is also an issue at the Corris site with access to the building for elderly and disabled users	
Recommendation to the Cabinet Member –	

<p>It is recommended that the Senior Housing Manager and the Homelessness Team seek resources to address the accessibility and facilities issues that could, in the case of Corris, lead to looking for another location</p>	
<p>14. Hostel Fees</p>	
<p>Findings –</p> <p>Research on inconsistencies in the fees of hostel services is required</p>	<p>Update</p> <p>Rent cost and Service Charges have been received by:-:</p>
<p>Evidence –</p> <p>Each hostel (Council and its partners) has a different rent amount and service charge. There is a real problem of affordability for those on benefits (Appendix 8 shows the levels of benefit it is possible to pay)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Mary's - NWAHA • Pendinas - NWAHA • Plas Llwyd - NWAHA • South Gwynedd refugee – Gorwel
<p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member –</p> <p>It is recommended that the Supporting People and Homeless Teams explore different rents set by the organisations / the Council</p>	<p>We are waiting for information from :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council's Hostels - Rhianfa and Noddfa • Bangor Womens Aid and • GISDA <p>Waiting on the evidence before an evaluation can be completed.</p>
<p>15. Hostels of the Council and Local Communities</p>	
<p>Findings –</p> <p>Local Members need to familiarise themselves with the hostels in their areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An invitation has been extended to the local Councillors and remains open for them to visit the hostels.
<p>Evidence – During visits to Council hostels, it was noted that some local councillors had not visited the establishments.</p>	
<p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member –</p> <p>It is recommended that the Senior Housing Manager makes arrangements for local councillors to visit the establishments.</p>	

16. Hwb' Provision	Update
<p>Findings –</p> <p>There is a need to investigate the possibility of developing a provision such as the Hwb / Hafod (Denbigh) in Gwynedd</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Brief has been developed and sent to the Housing Agencies • Grwp Cynefin has expressed an interest in working together on the project • Financial model report was submitted for consideration to the cabinet and it was approved. Please note: this list was not prioritised and therefore no confirmation received on where the Hwb/Hafod project was on the list. <p>Gwynedd Council youth service is looking at its site in Caernarfon and exploring the possibility of submitted an application for funding to change the building. There will be no accommodation/Support units and on-site.</p>
<p>Evidence –</p> <p>Members of the Investigation have seen the innovative development of Hwb and Hafod in Denbigh.</p>	
<p>Recommendation to the Cabinet Member –</p> <p>It is recommended that the Preventative Services Group and the Young People Accommodation Service, jointly with Economy, discuss whether or not it is possible to develop a business case to establish such provision with a Registered Social Landlord as a partner.</p>	

Appendix A

Cartrefi Conwy

1. Stock transfer 8 years ago
2. 3,200 applications when the team was established and within 8 months of sorting the list is now down to 820 applicants.
3. 12 months ago the Homeless Department/Tenancy Support Team/Allocations& private sector leasing scheme/Homefinder came together – the team that administers the housing list.
4. Access to service via visits or contact phone number 0300
5. 3 members of staff who deal with calls and visits regarding Homefinder (the register)
6. we do not send application forms but complete the form on the phone with the applicant or complete the form during a visit- we do not print forms- the process takes around 20 minutes per application
7. During the 20 minutes we are able to assess the need for housing and if they are eligible to be included on the register
8. If not eligible advice and information regarding other possible options- private sector/ enforcement if the property is in a poor condition etc.
9. Information is requested from the applicant in band 1 only at this stage which includes the client noted below. The officers from the homeless team will conduct the enquires by contacting DWP
 - a) Some move on the supported housing
 - b) Some require a smaller property due to bedroom tax changes
 - c) Some with serious health issues (Letter from GP) – exploring the possibility of employing an Occupational Therapist
 - d) Those who are victims of domestic abuse (no local connection recruitment required for the client group)

10. They do not ask for any supporting documents during the assessment period by those identified in Band 2/3 and 4 and would go on the register straight away – the supporting documents would be collected by the Housing Association before the individuals was offered the specific accommodation.
11. They meet with the Housing Associations every fortnight to discuss cases that need to be reviewed – meetings work very well in regards to partnership working.

Private Sector Scheme - 3 Officers in the team

12. 2 x Officer manage 80 Private Sector leasing Scheme properties for individuals who are Homeless (lease Agreement) – agreement is with the landlord that the team provide the support for the individuals.
13. 1 x Officer manages the Bed and breakfast scheme – i.e. supports them to move on to more suitable temporary accommodation.
14. They have 25 units at present (Social Lettings Scheme) with the intention to increase to 50 in the next year. Scheme which is very similar to a Lettings Agency. Management Agreement is in place and Cartrefi Conwy charge a % fee on the rental income/collect the rent and manages the property.
15. Exploring the possibility of moving to the Open Housing system in the near future.

Appendix B

Contact Arrangements:-

- 1. New application for a property or an application to transfer to another property:** -to apply for a property or transfer you must contact the Housing Options Team 01286 685100 OpsiyndauTai@gwynedd.gov.uk . The team will send out an information pack to the individual /s and provides advice and information about their housing options in Gwynedd.
- 2. Housing Associations:** - If already in a property and the tenant is at risk of losing their property for whatever reason – you will need to complete a reasonable steps form in accordance with the Comprehensive Agreement in place and send it to: - tai@gwynedd.gov.uk. The Housing Solutions team (Homeless) and the Housing Association will work in partnership to try and prevent the person from becoming homeless.
- 3. People threatened with homelessness:** - individuals who are in danger of losing their property. i.e has been warned by the landlord to vacate the property (Social or Private Property). opsiyndautai@gwynedd.gov.uk
- 4. Accommodation and Support:** -If the service user is in supported Accommodation and at risk of becoming homeless, then the reasonable steps form must be completed in accordance with the protocol and sent to tai@gwynedd.gov.uk . The Housing Solutions team (homelessness) and the Supported Housing provider will work in partnership to try and prevent the person from becoming homeless.
- 5. Homeless and presents to agencies / associations:** -if someone is homeless (ie not in Social/Private or Supported Housing Accommodation you should contact the Housing Solutions team (Homeless) on 01766 771000 and ask for the relevant area office to arrange a meeting for the individual / s. The individuals will need to contact the Housing options team to register for a property (detail stated above).

6. **Homelessness and presents to the Council:** -if an individual/s present to the Council Offices (Bangor / Caernarfon / Dolgellau or Pwllheli) the Housing Solutions Officers (Homelessness) will deal with the individual/s.

Deddf Tai (Cymru) 2014 / Housing (Wales) Act 2014

S62	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yr dyletswydd i asesu / The duty to assess
S66	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Y dyletswydd i atal digartrefedd / The duty to help to prevent homelessness
S73	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Y dyletswydd i helpu i gael llety diogel / The duty to help secure accommodation
S68	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Y dyletswydd i ddarparu llety dros dro (argyfwng) / The duty to provide interm (emergency) accommodation
S75	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Y dyletswydd i sicrhau llety – y dyletswydd `terfynol' / The duty to secure accommodation – the `final' duty.