

CYNGOR GWYNEDD

REPORT TO A MEETING OF GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET

Date of Meeting: 22 November 2016

Cabinet Member: Councillor Ioan Thomas
Cabinet Member for Housing, Customer Care, Libraries,
Deprivation and Equality

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Title of Item: Performance Report of Housing, Customer Care, Libraries,
Deprivation and Equality

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update you on what has been achieved in the field I am responsible for as the Cabinet Member for Housing, Customer Care, Libraries, Deprivation and Equality. This will include outlining the latest with the pledges in the Strategic Plan; where the performance measures have reached; and the latest in terms of the savings and cuts schemes.
- 1.2 I will remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised at meetings of the relevant management teams, which also included a representation from the scrutiny committee.
- 1.3 On the whole, I am satisfied with the performance of most projects and measures for which I am responsible.

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

2.1. In order to ensure effective performance management.

3. STRATEGIC PLAN PROJECTS

3.1. T7 - Working together against poverty

3.1.1. The purpose of this project will be to adopt and implement a Tackling Poverty Strategy in Gwynedd in collaboration with partners and to implement a wide range of plans. Implementing the Strategy will involve interventions in four areas namely: Digital Inclusion (jointly with Digital Gwynedd and Citizens Online), Financial Inclusion, Economic Inclusion (jointly with the Improving People's Access to Work Package) and Responding to Welfare Reform.

3.1.2 The project is now focusing on implementing the work programme. I want to be convinced that the Council's departments are giving full consideration to the strategy and, to this end, I have asked them to highlight their contribution through their daily work.

3.1.3 Other work that is going ahead based on the strategy's priorities is the digital inclusion and financial inclusion work. A series of training sessions on financial and digital inclusion have been held for the Council's front-line staff.

3.1.4 I am eager to keep an eye on National developments in relation to the poverty agenda in light of the recent statement by Carl Sargeant, Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children regarding the Communities First scheme. A report will be submitted to the Leadership Team on the implications of bringing the scheme to an end in due course.

3.2. T9 - Housing Supply Strategy

3.2.1 The purpose of this project will be to implement our strategy to increase the supply and variety of housing in order to ensure that our housing supply is suitable for the needs of the people of Gwynedd. The project will lead to different solutions in different areas.

3.2.2 **Establishing Affordable Housing for Gwynedd residents in rural areas -**

The work of submitting three planning applications is underway with the intention of consulting locally on the Penygroes scheme, which is the most mature of the three, in November. Should the three planning applications be successful, up to 39 homes would be provided throughout Gwynedd. Since the last time I reported, I have received a paper and have met with relevant officers on 27.09.16, to discuss options to deliver the Land Trust model and ensure that it is sustainable into the future. It is intended to establish a project team between the Council and Grŵp Cynefin in order to move matters forward.

3.2.3 **Bringing Empty Homes Back Into Use -** A joint meeting took place with the Empty Homes team and the North Wales Housing Association in order to share information regarding which resources are available with the intention of looking at possibly providing housing and support for homeless people. Since my previous report work is still underway and information

has been shared with owners of empty houses and possible options are being discussed where appropriate. Bringing empty houses back into use is a daily part of the Service's work and a total of 16 empty houses have been brought back into use this year.

3.2.4 **Provision for homeless people** - The Homelessness Service is looking at options of using empty properties in order to have a Supported Housing model in the area. Possible locations will be discussed with Housing Associations in order to discover the cost the plan.

3.2.5 **Provision for older persons to promote independence** - I reported last time that a meeting had been held with the Commissioning Service and Housing Associations to analyse data in terms of the areas identified to see what gaps existed. Unfortunately, no progress has been made since then and I have emphasised the need to address this over the coming weeks.

3.3. C5 - Extending the use of self-service

3.3.1 The purpose of this project is to extend the use of self-service to facilitate access for the people of Gwynedd to the Council's services and at a lower cost than the traditional channels. By the end of March 2017, we will have created a core system for recording and facilitating access to Council services that will include the traditional contact channels and the digital channel for self-service.

3.3.2 Following the decision to develop our own self-service system rather than purchasing a system off the shelf, a draft business plan has been developed over the past few months. I have asked the Project Leader to undertake further work in order to be able to provide an estimate of the initial savings which are likely to arise from the project.

3.3.3 Currently, it is estimated that £200,000 over 3 years will be required to fund this project but it is likely that additional resources will be required. I will be in a position to be able to confirm the actual amounts when this additional work has been completed and I anticipate that I will be in a position to submit the business plan to the Leadership Team in the new year.

3.3.4 In the meantime, it is noted that background and preparatory work to introduce the system is still underway. One example is the joint-work with the Highways and Municipal Department where provision is available for the County's residents to pay for the garden bin service on-line or by phoning the contact centre.

3.4. C8 - Information governance

3.4.1 The purpose of this project is to review our training arrangements for staff who work with personal information to ensure that training is effective and that we are confident that the personal information of the people of Gwynedd is totally safe in our hands. By the end of 2017, we will have assessed the propriety of our information protection arrangements (including the efficiency of our training arrangements) and formulate any proposals that are needed to embed the principles of information security throughout the entire organisation.

3.4.2 Since I last reported on the progress, the training sessions have continued with staff completing the e-learning module. A video has been created specifically for Adults/Children staff in order to be added to the e-learning module.

- 3.4.3 In addition, 90 staff from the Education, Economy, Corporate Support, Consultancy Departments and Hafod Mawddach Home have received classroom training or have attended briefing sessions. Generally, the response to the various training sessions has been positive but, time will tell whether this will result in better arrangements to keep personal information confidential.
- 3.4.4 Over the past months the Internal Audit Service has carried out an audit of Departments' awareness of the work of the Information Management Service and a response was received from 677 out of 2123 employees (32%). In response to the matters highlighted within the audit, an action plan has been drawn up which will focus on Training for Senior Managers/Managers, create more awareness within the Highways and Municipal, Regulatory and Consultancy Departments and raise awareness regarding the need to be tidy in the office.
- 3.4.5 There has been some slippage in the timetable for submitting the protected marks system on e-mails as it was not compatible with the Council's IT security system. The technical problems have now been resolved and the system will be introduced to the Departments one-by-one from January 2017 onwards.

4. MEASURING PERFORMANCE

- 4.1. On the whole, I am happy with the performance of the Housing field and as you are aware, over the past few months, the Housing Service Units have been considering their purpose in relation to the residents of Gwynedd and how their performance should, therefore, be measured.
- 4.2 The **Homelessness Unit** has set out its purpose and has established two main measures (Appendix 1). There has been a decline in terms of the days **it takes to achieve what's important** (78 days this year compared with 69 in 2015/16) and the **length of stay in temporary accommodation** (131 days this year compared with 126 in 2015/16).
- 4.3 It is believed that there is a combination of reasons for the decline in performance such as the fact that some individuals, who are difficult to accommodate for various reasons, remain in temporary accommodation for a long stay which pushes the average higher and higher. In addition to this, recent legislative changes, changes in welfare benefits, higher than usual staff sickness and a general increase in the demand on the system all contribute. For example, the number of referrals the Units has been receiving over the years is increasing - 560 in 2014/15, 648 in 2015/16 and 379 to date this year (but 794 is projected by the end of the year should this year's trend continue).
- 4.4 Work is underway in order to try to respond to this, such as the demand for establishing a permanent Homelessness Prevention Fund to address the increasing need and the new statutory responsibilities as a result of the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 which came into force in April 2015. The 'Prevention Fund', which was supported by a grant which is now coming to an end, was mainly used to pay for a rent deposit or rent guarantee to secure private sector tenancies and also to keep people in their homes to avoid a homelessness application. The Fund assisted with reducing the waiting time for accommodation which prevented more severe and costly situations from evolving and avoided the demand for social accommodation.
- 4.5 Since I last reported to you, the **Supporting People Unit** has introduced measures and data which they feel measure their purpose as a Unit. These will be

confirmed at the next Departmental Management Team and I will then be in a position to add them to my list of performance measures which I will be reporting on (Appendix 1). For example, to date this year, 674 people have received support and of these 216 of them have moved on. Of those who have now moved on, I can report that the needs of 82 of them have been met in full and they do not need support now (38%).

- 4.6 I am pleased to report also that the **Grants and Enforcement Unit** has introduced performance measures which measure their purpose. One example of the measures under consideration is the percentage of the serious hazards and defective hazards that have been improved to an acceptable level via enforcement in rented homes. The performance of this measure is currently 97% but as I have noted in 4.5 these measures and the associated data will be confirmed at the next Departmental Management Team.
- 4.7 I am pleased to report that the performance of the **'Strat6'** measure is performing as expected with 24 affordable units secured to date. I can confirm that this figure includes 16 empty houses back in use and eight social rent houses.

ACTIONS FROM THE LAST CYCLE:

It was agreed that a report needed to be submitted to an Informal Meeting of Cabinet Members which gives a comprehensive picture of the provision across all sectors.

The majority of the activity of the Housing Associations derives from a Social Housing Grant scheme by Welsh Government. This has consistently been on a level of approximately £1.4 million per annum in recent years and is programmed until 2019. I presented information to you as part of my last report on those developments that were currently operational and also ones that were on the horizon. You will also be aware of the Welsh Government target to provide 20,000 houses during the Government's term and, therefore, as part of this commitment, they are increasing the Social Housing Grant and the Housing Funding Grant. This means that there will be up to £3 million of Social Housing Grant in 2017-18 with figures for the subsequent years unconfirmed as yet, and nearly £4 million of Housing Funding Grant allocated to Gwynedd during 2017-2021.

Specifically, in terms of last year (2015/16) I can report the following figures:

48 affordable units completed (homes for 93 people)

211 units completed (21% of these being affordable units) - information submitted by the Planning Policy Unit.

There are over 8,000 social housing stock across the County and currently 2038 applications are on the waiting list. It should be stressed that the waiting list is one way of measuring the 'demand' but does not give us the full picture. Annually, approximately 700 social housing are let via the Common Allocations Policy, which includes new houses and re-lets.

- 4.8 I am generally happy with the performance of the majority of the measures of the Customer Care units (Customer Contact, Registration, Information and the Web Team) though there is some further work to be done before the final purposes and measures can be confirmed. One general point I have raised for a number of the measures when reporting in future is the need to note the matters that have been highlighted when collecting the data for the measures and how it is intended to respond in order to ensure that I have a better understanding of the situation.
- 4.9 The **Information Management Service** is responsible for ensuring that we have firm arrangements in place in order to protect data and information. Three incidents were seen under the measure **Number of information incidents (since 1 April)** and

we have established the reasons why and have put steps in place in order to respond. In order to get a better understanding of the cases I have asked the relevant Manager to consider grading the severity of the cases in future.

- 4.10 The Council's website is an important resource which allows the public to find information and use self-service aspects. The latest information from the **Web Team** shows that the **% of users reporting that they are dissatisfied/very dissatisfied** and the **% who did not find what they were looking for** are low and have remained consistent since the beginning of April.
- 4.11 The **Galw Gwynedd and Siopau Gwynedd Units** seek to provide prompt and accurate assistance for customers to access Council services by providing answers, guidance and service. On the whole, I am happy with the performance of the measures but the increase in the measure **CYSWCW04 - Percentage of calls not being answered by Galw Gwynedd is noted**. There are several reasons for this such as the reduction in the number of officers as a result of savings schemes and the new phone system which shows the Call Centre's number when calls are made from Council offices, which in turn leads to calls back to that number if people have missed the original call. In order to get a better understanding of the situation I have asked the Manager of the Unit to submit a paper to the next meeting highlighting the issues and how the Unit intends to respond. In addition, over the past fortnight, the changes to the garden bin arrangements have led to a significant increase in the work of the Units in question by responding to enquiries and taking payments.
- 4.12 The measures of the **Libraries Service** are collected and reported annually. However, it is intended to consider and refine the measures that are reported upon as the Economy Department reviews its business plan. I will be in a position to report on some of the annual measures in January 2017.

5. OTHER MATTERS

- 5.1 **Refugees** - Two families (of five and seven) have now settled in Gwynedd. The level of support that needs to be provided is high and is likely to remain in the long-term. I am pleased to report that there has been good collaboration with local agencies and voluntary organisations and we have also seen that communities are very willing to contribute goods and time with the families in question. It is anticipated that the next group will arrive in January. Our discussions are continuing also in terms of our response to children without families.
- 5.2 **Equality** - Work is continuing to implement what is included in Gwynedd Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2016-20 and on the following objectives;

Objective 1 – To improve our arrangements to discover and use the opinion of people who share equality characteristics.	Work programme has been created and work has started on contacting groups which represent people who share equality characteristics. The intention is to create a virtual group with whom it will be possible to contact and seek opinion on the changes within the Council.
Objective 2 - To improve our equality impact assessment arrangements.	Work programme has been created and work is ongoing. Discussions have taken place with Learning and Development in order to discuss the best way of offering advice and training to staff. Work to adapt the e-learning module is taking place. The following measures have been created to measure the progress of delivering Objective 2, CG28- The percentage of the Council's strategies, policies and decisions which have received an Equality Impact Assessment and CG29 - The

	percentage of people who agree that the Equality Impact Assessments have helped to make a decision. Work is continuing in terms of defining and developing these measures in order to be able to report on progress.
Objective 3 - To create the circumstances for people from different backgrounds to represent the people of Gwynedd by standing in an election to become an elected member.	<p>The Promoting Diversity in Democracy project is underway and is following the work programme. A video has been created to explain what the work of a Councillor entails. The purpose of the video is to explain what the various elements within the role of Councillor are. The video was launched in June 2016 with a series of press releases and a series of regular messages on the Council's Twitter and Facebook accounts.</p> <p>The response to the video has been successful, with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 1,000 people having watched the video via the Council's Facebook site • Almost another 500 have watched the video via a link through the Council's Twitter site. <p>The video has also been published on the Council's website with an address which is easy to remember, namely www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/BodYnGynghorydd. In addition, the website includes the four following fields, The Role of a Councillor, Am I eligible?, How to stand for election?, After being elected.</p> <p>At the end of the video, individuals are asked to fill in a questionnaire to note whether there are any barriers to them standing in an election.</p> <p>In order to encourage more people from various backgrounds to stand in future, a simple video has been developed which explains the whole range of the Council's work. The video was launched on 15 September to coincide with the National Democracy Day.</p>
Objective 4 - To identify any employment and pay inequalities and to take action to reduce them.	The first part of the objective involves filling in boxes with the equality characteristics of Council staff. An e-mail has been prepared and arrangements have been made with IT to send the e-mail out to those staff who have not responded in order to fill in the data boxes. The e-mail will be sent out before the end of November. Arrangements are underway to obtain responses from staff who do not have access to a Council computer. In addition, arrangements for the pay audit are being planned together with a suitable work programme.

6. SAVINGS/FINANCIAL POSITION

- 6.1. Following recent approval of one additional scheme and re-profiling another one, an increase has been seen in the total of my savings schemes for this year to £509,138. A total of £478,138 (94%) has been realised and it is anticipated that the remainder will be realised before the end of the year.
- 6.2 As I reported to you last time, the expenditure of the capital schemes is going ahead as expected. The majority of the capital schemes in this field are reported via the T9 Housing Supply Strategy project, however, outside this there are schemes such as 'Housing Grants' that are used for disabled adaptations. (£1.1m DFG - Disabled Facilities Grants), £100,000 for minor improvements and £800,000 spent on various projects such as fire safety. Another capital scheme is a grant of £900,000 which is circulated and administered for improvements to housing.

7. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

7.1. None to note.

8. ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

8.1. Views of the Statutory Officers:

i. The Chief Executive:

The report summarises the progress within this varied portfolio and, as well as noting what has been achieved, draws attention to fields of concern, such as the deterioration in terms of the number of days it takes to deliver what is important to the homeless and the length of time spend in temporary accommodation and the percentage of calls that are not answered by Galw Gwynedd. What's important in such cases is that steps are in place to understand what is happening and a plan to change the trend.

ii. The Monitoring Officer:

No comments from a propriety perspective.

iii. The Head of Finance Department:

It is encouraging that the Cabinet Member is confident (in part 6.1 of the report) that the various relevant departments will realise the savings schemes promptly.

8.2. Views of the Local Member:

8.2.1 Not a local matter.

8.3. Results of Any Consultation:

8.3.1 None to note.

Appendices:

Performance Measures