

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET

Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date:	23 July 2019
Title of Item:	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Housing
Purpose:	To accept and note the information in the report
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Craig ab Iago
Contact Officer:	Morwena Edwards, Corporate Director

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update my fellow members on developments in the fields within my remit as Cabinet Member for Housing. This includes outlining the latest developments of pledges within the 2018-2023 Gwynedd Council Plan; the progress of performance measures; and the latest on the savings and cuts schemes.
- 1.2 This is the first performance report for me as a Cabinet Member for the Housing Service only, without reporting on the culture and leisure fields. I am very eager to tie in the work of the Housing Service with work that is taking place in other departments such as Adults and Children, in order to coordinate Council support for our most vulnerable residents in the best possible way.
- 1.3 I would like to remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised at the management team meetings of the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, which also included representation from the Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.4 I am generally happy with the progress of the projects within the Council Plan and the performance measures for which I am responsible.

2 THE DECISION SOUGHT

- 2.1 To accept and note the information in the report.

3 GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN PROJECTS 2018-2023

- 3.1 **A Housing Strategy for the People of Gwynedd 2019-2014**

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The Housing Needs Assessment in Gwynedd has been completed and it forms a strong foundation upon which to develop our new Strategy. This Strategy is being discussed by us as a Cabinet and will go before the Full Council meeting on 18 July. I am confident that the Strategy will respond to the needs identified in the assessment, and I am very pleased that the Cabinet has already earmarked funds to support the implementation of the plan.

4 PERFORMANCE

- 4.1 Although the new Strategy will endeavour to reduce the number of people who become homeless, we also know, of course, that demand for emergency and permanent accommodation will remain. Since 2015/16 when the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 came into force, there has been a gradual increase in the number of individuals presenting themselves to the Council as homeless. This peaked at 768 in 2018/19.
- 4.2 Our Homelessness Unit recognises that the **TAI002** measure, **Time taken to achieve what matters**, shows a year-on-year increase since 2015/16 in the number of work days taken to deliver the needs of the client. Nevertheless, I am pleased to report that the number of days individuals spend in temporary accommodation has fallen over a two year period, from an average of 104.44 days to 89.57 days. One of the greatest barriers that people in temporary accommodation face when attempting to move to permanent accommodation is the lack of one-bedroom accommodation. Affordable accommodation, especially for under 35s, remains a general obstacle to reducing the likelihood of becoming homeless in the first place.
- 4.3 A great deal of challenges and obstacles remain, and these prevent the Service from resolving problems facing our homeless residents, or those at risk of becoming homeless. Other than the lack of one-bedroom properties, these vary from the increased use of bed and breakfast accommodation, individuals being excluded from the housing register because of historical behaviour, or the failure to prove the ability to maintain a tenancy. Rather than punishing people, I have asked that the Service look at how we can help people, and how we can work with other agencies to support these individuals where required.
- 4.4 These problems led me to request that the Homelessness Unit reconsider all the obstacles and provide details and a timetable about which obstacles can be resolved, and which cannot. I will provide more information about this in my next performance report.
- 4.5 Similarly, I have asked that the Unit reconsider the information it gathers for the performance measures, and assess whether the current measures are allowing us to improve our service for the residents of Gwynedd. I will report on this development in my next performance report.
- 4.6 Therefore, we must acknowledge the increasing demand and pressure on the service; likewise, that many of those applying for accommodation have complex and profound needs. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of

successful proactive work that we should celebrate, such as the exciting new project that has been underway since March, jointly with the third sector agencies Cais and Grŵp Cynefin. This is an eight-bedroom accommodation in Bangor offering support for prison leavers with profound needs. By collaborating with our partners, we can succeed in offering the provision our residents need. I therefore look forward to seeing this plan succeed.

- 4.7 Before I submit my next performance report, the General House Letting Policy that the Cabinet recently adopted will have come into force. I intend to ensure that we are able to measure the effects of this new Policy from the outset. In my next report, therefore, I hope to communicate the way the Policy affects the demand for accommodation and our homeless population. Partners will also have a key role in this respect, by providing the right sized accommodation in the right places.
- 4.8 As you are aware, bringing empty houses back into use is one solution to the shortage of suitable homes. Our **Empty Homes Team** continues this year in its endeavours to increase the numbers. Between April and the end of June, five empty houses were brought back into use because of the Council's intervention. During 2018/19 61 empty houses were brought back into use and the target for this year is 90. I would expect most of them, however, to be ready by the end of the year, but I will keep an eye on this target.
- 4.9 One of the Department's major successes is the implementation of the **First Time Buyers Grants** scheme. 300 individuals and families were housed by the end of 2018/19. Our success in securing £1.45 in Welsh Government funds over three years from 2018-23, under the Empty Properties Targeted Regeneration Investment Programme, has meant that we have been able to continue with this important work, and the full amount has already been earmarked. Welsh Government is of the view that we are proactive in planning for the use of these funds, which gives us an opportunity to apply for more funding this year to further expand the scheme.
- 4.10 A very exciting new project is afoot, and it is likely that you will have seen the rightful praise it received in the press: it is the provision of four one-bedroom pods at the Segontium site in Caernarfon. The aim of this scheme is to address the demand for single unit accommodation for people with complex needs. Welsh Government funding was secured to construct them and they will, hopefully, be ready by the end of March 2020.
- 4.11 I am also pleased to announce further increase in the Welsh Government grant funding for **Social Housing Grants**, which brings the total available to £4m. We already have plans in place for the grant and, through collaborating with our partners in different housing associations, we will be able to begin the construction of new developments in 2019/20 in Bangor, Tywyn and Aberdyfi.
- 4.12 In pursuance of Welsh Government's carbon-free targets, we will ensure that these new homes have an EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) A rating.

Although the Government announced a 'climate emergency' in April 2019, and expressed its wishes that Local Governments become 'carbon neutral' by 2030, I challenge its decision that states that a new gas pipeline is needed to supply 300 houses in Tanygrisiau. I believe we need to consider all the options in terms of their environmental impact, cost, and sustainability when planning for the future.

- 4.13 It is clear that homelessness issues often go hand in hand with broader health or social issues; therefore, in looking at our future work, I shall consider the ways we can collaborate with partners in the field of health and social care. As a Council, we have five local teams working across the county to provide comprehensive health and welfare care. And, I have asked the Service to hold discussions with these teams, and others such as GPs or hospital staff, on how we can best present information about housing options to those residents who need it.
- 4.14 Furthermore, a full report on the performance measures related to my portfolio can be found in **Appendix 1**.

5 FINANCIAL POSITION / SAVINGS

- 5.1 Looking back at the final figures for 2018/19, there was an overspend in the funding of temporary accommodation for homeless people. The average across the year increased from 27 to 30, and it is clear, therefore, that we must shoulder these additional costs. Until we begin implementing the new housing strategy, it is difficult for us to manage the demand.
- 5.2 Since our costs are increasing, we intend to attract more income during 2019/20. We will use the housing strategy to apply for grants to support several elements of the vital work of the implementation plan.
- 5.3 It became clear that the Service's savings scheme, 'Reviewing the current structures and locations of the Housing Service', needed to be reassessed. £41,000 of savings have already been made, and we are progressing well with £50,000, but £39,000 remains, which poses a substantial risk to full or partial delivery. By the time of my next performance report, I will have details on the way the Service intends to re-profile the plan or offer an alternative implementation plan.

6 NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

- 6.1 None to note.

7 ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

7.1 Views of the Statutory Officers:

i. Monitoring Officer:

No observations regarding propriety.

ii. Head of Finance Department:

The report portrays a fair picture of the Housing Service's progress regarding implementing its savings scheme, with a portion of the savings scheme already realised or on track to be delivered. Nevertheless, I note (in section 5.3 of this report) that there is a substantial risk to full or partial delivery, and an alternative plan needs to be put in place in order to close the gap.

Finance Officers will assist the responsible Cabinet Member to monitor the performance against this plan, and we will report on this performance and alternative plans in the next financial review.

7.2 Views of the Local Member:

7.2.1 Not a local matter.

7.3 Results of Any Consultation:

7.3.1 None to note.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Performance Measures