

REPORT TO THE CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Committee:	Care scrutiny committee
Date:	July 1st, 2021.
Title:	Housing provision in the Community for individuals with a Learning Disability.
Purpose:	To scrutinise the programme that the Learning Disabilities Service has put in place to ensure a sufficient provision of suitable housing across Gwynedd for Adults with Learning Disabilities, now and in the future.
Contact Officer:	Alun Gwilym Williams – Senior Manager for Learning Disabilities (South Gwynedd).
Cabinet Member:	Adult, Health and Wellbeing Department - Councillor Dafydd Meurig

1. Introduction / Background

In line with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015, we know that the Council has adopted wellbeing objectives as part of the Gwynedd Council Plan, which includes, amongst other objectives, ensuring that Gwynedd residents are able to *'live in quality homes within our communities'*, and *'live with dignity and independently as long as possible'*. This is relevant to everyone, including individuals with a Learning Disability.

The objective of the Adults, Health and Wellbeing Department is to enable Gwynedd's Adults to *'live my life as I want to live my life'*. Often this means living in a house in the community as independently as possible with support. Additionally, the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014 places a duty on us as a Service to give individuals with Learning Disabilities a voice and control over their lives, and to promote their wellbeing – this very often includes supporting individuals to live independently.

In order to ensure that the need of individuals with Learning Disabilities are being met in full, to give choice and security to every adult with a Learning Disability, and to enable them to live as independently as possible, we need to ensure that there is sufficient provision of suitable housing available across Gwynedd. The demand for supported housing is increasing – recent research by PSSRU/LSE on behalf of DWP predicted that the demand for supported housing in England and Wales was likely to increase from 38,500 units in 2015 to 59,800 units by 2030. The early signs suggest that this predicted trend is consistent with what is happening in Gwynedd.

2. The Challenge

Our starting point as a Service is to find out what is important to individuals with Learning Disabilities and their parents/carers. More often than not, this will involve discussions around living arrangements – where do individuals wish to live in the future, in what town/village, what sort of accommodation, with whom etc. The challenge facing the service is ensuring that we can achieve what matters to individuals and their families in respect of accommodation. Often, suitable housing is not available as a home for individuals with Learning Disabilities as and when needed.

As a Learning Disability Accommodation Project Group, we have collected data around the housing needs of the individuals supported by the Service. We have a database of individuals' needs now and in the future. The database is split into categories of priority – Green, Amber and Red;

Red – Individuals that need a home immediately or within the next year.

Amber – Individuals that will need a home within the next few years.

Green – Individuals that will need a home in the long term (5 years+), including children approaching 18 years of age over the next few years.

Currently, there are approximately 30 individuals in the red category (needing a house immediately, or within the next year). The database is constantly changing as individuals' situations change, but the database gives us as an idea of the gap that needs to be addressed. The reasons behind individuals appearing on the list vary, but the main reasons are:

- Living at home with parents/family, and the situation becoming fragile/braking down. Individuals eager to move on to live independently, but no suitable housing available.
- Individuals with Learning Disabilities living in supported accommodation, and the accommodation has become unsuitable because of safety concerns or a change in need (for example deterioration in physical health).
- Individuals in unsuitable locations such as residential homes or secure units, looking to move to their own accommodation with support in order to maximise independence, but no suitable housing available.

Generally, the biggest challenge we are facing is the provision of single floor/accessible accommodation such as bungalows, for individuals with Physical Disabilities as well as Learning Disabilities. Such housing provision does not become available on the housing register often, so we need to look at alternative ways of meeting the need. Other accommodation types (for example terraced housing, flats etc) are also in demand, but generally as there is more supply of this type of housing across the county, there are more options to meet the need.

The Population Needs Assessment will be compiled over the next few weeks in co-operation with our partners. This will give us an understanding of the needs of the residents of Gwynedd and North Wales over the coming years, and will include any housing needs. The population needs assessment will give us a chance to ensure that the work programme below meets the demand and that we invest suitably where needed.

3. Work Programme

In order to get to grips with the waiting list, and to ensure provision of suitable housing for individuals with Learning Disabilities, the Project Group are working on the following as part of the work programme. A number of the schemes are part of Gwynedd Council's Housing Action Plan:

3.1 Prioritising Voids

When empty rooms become available within Gwynedd's supported housing, the Service gives more thought to who will be offered the tenancy. If the accommodation is specialist/suitable for individuals with Physical as well as Learning Disabilities, priority is given to those adults that require this specialist accommodation, taking into consideration the opinions/aspirations of the individuals in terms of location, co-tenants etc, working in collaboration amongst the social work team.

3.2 Y Frondeg, Caernarfon (Housing Action Plan – 5dd)

The Learning Disability Service has been working with Grŵp Cynefin housing association and the Council's Housing and Estates Department on developing plans for a new provision on the site of Y Frondeg Care Home, Maesincla. The plan is to develop 17 independent living units, where the residents of Y Frondeg as well as 7 other individuals with Learning Disabilities will be able to live in suitable accommodation which will be accessible, and with the appropriate support to maximise their independence. Discussions have re-started on the project with Grŵp Cynefin, in the hope of going out to consultation again soon and moving on with the development within the next year following cabinet approval.

3.3 Penrhos Scheme (Housing Action Plan – 2b)

The Council is working with Clwyd Alyn Housing Association on the provision that will be developed on the Penrhos site in Llanbedrog. The Learning Disabilities Service has been part of the discussions regarding the brief for the site, and the hope is that suitable and accessible accommodation for adults with Learning and/or Physical Disabilities will be included within the new provision, approximately 6 units spread over two houses.

3.4 Purchasing Accommodation on the Open Market (Housing Action Plan – 5ch)

The scheme in question involves buying houses on the open market and making any adaptations required to make them accessible. Discussions have begun with the Housing and Estates Department around moving the scheme forward, but in the meantime, we as a Service are working with the Housing Associations to buy property in partnership. A 4 bedroom bungalow has been identified in Arfon in co-operation with Grŵp Cynefin, and the purchase process is on-going. The intention is to identify similar suitable accommodation in the Dwyfor and Meirionnydd areas as a pilot. If the pilot scheme is successful, it is a scheme that can be expanded to provide a significant number of units in a comparatively short time period.

3.5 Closer working with Housing Associations

During the last year we have developed a closer working relationship with the relevant officers within Grŵp Cynefin and Adra housing associations. Both associations have worked closely with the Service where emergencies have arisen, for example safeguarding cases where accommodation is needed in an emergency. This is despite restrictions on the housing associations in terms of what they can do because of the Housing Register. The housing associations are aware of the need for specialist accommodation, and the hope is that they will take this into account when looking at their developments in the future.

3.6 Working with the North Wales Regional Transformation Team

The North Wales Learning Disability Transformation Team, which is financed by Welsh Government, is looking at housing provision for individuals with Learning Disabilities across North Wales. The transformation team are concentrating specifically on individuals with Learning Disabilities who live Out of County. There is a comparatively small number of individuals with Learning Disabilities open to Gwynedd Social Services living outside of Gwynedd at the moment. Only 4 live outside of North Wales, and all four adults are happy in their current locations and have no aspirations of returning to Gwynedd. We will therefore be working with the transformation team, but the work programme will concentrate on individuals who currently live in specialist accommodation across North Wales, and are looking to return to Gwynedd to live, including children coming up to transition age.

3.7 Suitable Respite Provision

Whilst there is still a waiting list for suitable housing in Gwynedd for individuals with Learning Disabilities, it is essential that the Service is able to offer a respite Service to adults and their families/carers to ensure that the situation at home remains sustainable. A new suitable, modern and accessible respite provision has been developed in Pwllheli, which will be able to offer respite to 4 adults at a time. Covid restrictions have meant that we have not been able to make full use of the unit, but we have been able to offer a respite Service throughout the lockdown period to emergency and priority cases, a Service which has been essential in order to maintain a sustainable environment at home for individuals with Learning Disabilities and their families/carers.

4. Next Steps

As well as following the work programme above, the following steps need to be taken as part of the project over the coming months:

- Create closer links with North Wales Housing Association.
- Further discussions with Adra's housing development team.
- Closer working with the Housing Options Team, to ensure that individuals with Learning Disabilities are recorded fully and accurately on the housing register, and that they are prioritised appropriately and fairly.
- Ensure that our work programme is in line with the needs identified as part of the population needs assessment over the coming weeks and months.
- Learn lessons from the development of Y Frondeg, and look at the possibility of developing a similar provision in Dwyfor/Meirionnydd.

- Revisit the respite provision in the Arfon area. Work with First Choice Housing Association, looking at the current provision at Brookfield, Bangor and evaluating whether the service needs to invest in the current provision/building, or look at alternative provision in the area. The population needs assessment will feed into this decision.
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