

# GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



## Report to a meeting of the Gwynedd Council Cabinet

<b>Date of meeting:</b>	21 December 2021
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Dafydd Meurig, Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being (Chair of the Supporting People Board)
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Morwena Edwards, Corporate Director Catrin Thomas, Assistant Head (Children and Supporting Families Department)
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<b>Title of Item:</b>	The Supporting People Programme

### 1. THE DECISION SOUGHT

- 1.1 Cabinet members are requested to approve one-off resources for two years, which are £193,217 in 2022/23 and £155,990 in 2023/24 from the Covid Recovery Fund towards the Supporting People Programme.
- 1.2 We have already diverted and identified resources for this year (2021/22) via service budgets across the Council and by maximising our existing grants.

### 2. THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

- 2.1 The supporting people field is currently changing rapidly due to socio-economic instability as a consequence of the Covid crisis. We are seeing that more people from Gwynedd need our support to protect them from poverty and its impacts on their lives.
- 2.2 We have responded to the needs of our residents in the best way we can within our current resources; however, we need a long-term investment to maintain this and ensure that we can continue to respond to this variable agenda.

### 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The 'Supporting People's Wellbeing' Programme looks at our arrangements and provisions to support vulnerable people to cope with the challenges of life so that they can thrive, be safe and healthy.

- 3.2 The programme contributes to the delivery of our corporate priority to reduce inequalities and tackle poverty in the county, as noted in the Council's Plan.
- 3.3 We have reviewed the programme's scope since the pandemic in order to ensure that we respond to what is important to our residents in the current period, and to respond to the change in the challenges our residents currently face.
- 3.4 Therefore, this year we are focusing our efforts on supporting residents who are:
- a) facing homelessness;
  - b) unpaid carers to their loved ones;
  - c) facing poverty;
  - d) digitally excluded.
- 3.5 We will also focus our efforts on working across services and with our partners on interventions to promote wellbeing for children, young people and people of all ages; and how we can support the resilience of communities.
- 3.6 We will continue to look at models and our ways of working to ensure that residents obtain access to the broad range of support available across our services, in order that they receive support in a timely, coordinated way and locally within communities.
- 3.7 Task and Finish Groups are driving this important agenda forward with action plans for these specific fields across our departments. However, in reviewing the programme's scope we have identified gaps in our arrangements, capacity and provisions to realise what is required, to address people's needs to support our residents.

#### **4. THE RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION**

- 4.1 The Council and its partners have been actively supporting people, particularly the groups noted in 3.4 above, since before the pandemic. We adapted our services and provisions, as well as establishing new ones throughout the Covid crisis, to ensure that we give the support needed to our residents.
- 4.2 An Emergency Community Resilience Group was established to bring Council departments, the Health Board, CAB, Adra, Cynefin and Mantell Gwynedd together to support people to cope with the challenges of the pandemic. The Group developed provisions during the crisis to respond to residents' needs as they arose such as a Covid Helpline, Programme to Support Residents who were Shielding, Grants for Community Covid Groups, a volunteers recruitment and deployment programme, befriending and keeping in touch programmes, emergency food provision. Several of these provisions have now ended, as the

need has been satisfied, or they have continued through our day-to-day work and that of our partners.

- 4.3 Over the last 12 months we have also modified and recovered a number of the programmes that address supporting people who are facing poverty, such as Sure Start, 30 hours Childcare Offer, housing benefit, discretionary housing payments, council tax reduction provision, free school breakfast and lunch, pupils' learning grant and other grants to schools, employability programmes such as Communities for Work and the Young People's Engagement and Development Framework, and fuel poverty programmes such as Warm Wales.
- 4.4 Likewise, several other provisions that were operated in Gwynedd by local and national partners have re-commenced.
- 4.5 These programmes have been recovered to a very different socio-economic context. The work referred to in this report deals mainly with mitigating the short-term impacts of poverty - as the crisis has had an affect on people's normal circumstances and as we have seen an increase in the cost of living during the same period. We will continue to work through our economic development plans, work and employability, education, health and housing to prevent and tackle long-term poverty.
- 4.6 There is a close connection here with the Council's efforts to support the people of Gwynedd to play a full part in the world of work through Gwaith Gwynedd's team within the Economy and Community Department. We continue to invest in strategic plans that involve ensuring that the local economy offers employment opportunities that satisfy the needs of our residents.
- 4.7 We continue to see an increase in the number of residents who seek support to assist them to maintain a tenancy and to prevent homelessness. Although there are several different reasons why residents face homelessness, financial issues, due to arrears, unable to pay rent, lack of income and increasing costs, is one of those reasons. We need to ensure that the various programmes available in the county interweave with the Housing Support Grant, and assist us to deliver the Housing Action Plan and prevent people from becoming homeless due to poverty.
- 4.8 Similarly, we are already aware which groups of people are most likely to suffer poverty, and which groups have been disproportionately affected by the crisis. Children, families with caring responsibilities, low income families, disabled people, people of ethnic minorities, women, unemployed single young people, low income households at risk of losing a home, are all groups of people who are at risk of suffering from poverty or are currently suffering poverty.
- 4.9 In doing this, it will assist us to ensure that when we make decisions, we will give due attention to the need to reduce the inequalities of the outcomes that derive from socio-economic disadvantage.

- 4.10 The Council and our partners continue to seek cooperation to respond to the gaps in our current provisions relating to food affordability; maximising income, claiming benefit and financial advice; and digital inclusion.
- 4.11 We have already maximised the Hardship Fund, Recovery Fund and various Preventative Grants to support our work in these areas.
- 4.12 We need a better understanding of the poverty pattern in Gwynedd and the provisions in response that are in place. By strengthening our understanding, and our cooperation arrangements with our partners, we can divert programmes to the right places, and plan jointly to address gaps to ensure the correct support for the people of Gwynedd.

### **Food Poverty**

- 4.13 The Council has supported the food banks with food supplies, together with capital and revenue grants towards running costs; over the last 12 months we have also drawn resources from several national grants to support 20 Community Food Schemes throughout the county. The Schemes involve growing and providing food and meals, reducing food waste and developing cooking skills.
- 4.14 The Banks and Community Schemes continue to be operational throughout the county with many reporting an increase in the number of residents who contact them for food support. We have recently contacted all the schemes to identify their needs over the coming winter. We will maximise the Social Care Recovery Fund, the Children and Communities Grant, the Hardship Fund and the Brexit Grant to support these efforts and to support the plans to address the needs of our residents.
- 4.15 A number of the food schemes have stated their wish to be part of a county network to be able to share resources, support each other and look at opportunities for collaboration. A number of the schemes have stated their wish to work more closely with some of the Council's services to refer residents that come to them to the support they need, especially housing, mental health, care, benefits and income, work, debts, substance misuse.
- 4.16 We need to ensure that we have the capacity to support the network of food schemes to enable them to continue to support vulnerable residents in our communities.

### **Maximising Income, Benefits and Financial Advice**

- 4.17 A number of households that have never used the benefits system before, or food banks or any other source of support, are now trying to navigate their way through these for the first time.

- 4.18 We also know that changes in the Welfare System continue to be challenging for a number of residents, and the latest change to Universal Credit has had an impact on 9,800 households in Gwynedd, with over half of these being households with children.
- 4.19 There is historical under-claiming with the Pension Credit benefit. Claiming this by eligible persons could avoid poverty, promote older people to continue to live independently in their own homes and reduce the demand on Adults Care Services.
- 4.20 The Council has collaborated on 'Claim what's yours' campaigns, and campaigns to raise awareness of local Financial Advice Services jointly with CAB and the Council's Benefits Service.
- 4.21 Several **financial and debts advice services** continue to work virtually and this is a barrier for many without digital ability/connectivity. The recovery of centres and face-to-face work is underway, but not at the speed to address the demand. We support CAB and resources have been identified via the Social Recovery Grant to assist the advice service to recover more quickly.
- 4.22 We need to ensure that these residents claim the financial support available to them through various benefits. We need to ensure that Gwynedd residents know what is available to them, how to claim and support and guide them through these services.

### **Fuel Poverty**

- 4.23 Fuel costs to keep homes warm have increased significantly, and this has an impact on the income of Gwynedd residents, pushing many families into poverty or further into poverty.
- 4.24 The Council is working with the Welsh Government on how we improve housing conditions so that we can impose the low carbon measures that will, in turn, lead to a reduction in fuel poverty. We are working with the private sector on an Eco scheme to expand the number of houses that receive support measures. We are also looking at expanding the scheme to cover entire areas in light of Arbed am Byth. The Council's partners include Nest, Warm Wales, and community groups such as Twrog Energy and Y Dref Werdd to develop low carbon schemes in order to respond to the fuel poverty challenge.
- 4.25 The ECO Scheme, Energy Wardens (led by Adra on behalf of the Housing Partnership), several community groups and CAB support residents with advice on suppliers, switching suppliers and tariff, managing debts to suppliers and improving the skills of residents on current energy use. We are setting up a Housing Helpdesk as part of the current Housing Action Plan, and Gwynedd

residents will be able to gain access to support and solutions to their fuel poverty issues there.

- 4.26 Welsh Government has announced the Winter Fuel Support Scheme for low income households of working age. We will be administering the payments through the Benefits Service.
- 4.27 We need to ensure that arrangements are in place to maximise these programmes to help us to deliver the Housing Action Plan, together with ensuring that these provisions are linked to broader tackling poverty programmes.

### **Digital Inclusion**

- 4.28 The crisis has forced residents and services to use and depend on virtual and online contact. The previous work of Digital Gwynedd identified groups of residents that are digitally excluded, and the circumstances of the pandemic has led to the exclusion of more people.
- 4.29 The Council, the Health Board, Adults and Community Education Partnership, volunteer partners and community groups have all sought to respond to this challenge during the crisis via various schemes involving learning digital skills; learning how to use devices; borrowing equipment and devices; digital advice for residents; recycling and renewing equipment for low income households etc.
- 4.30 Through the Digital Inclusion Framework, the Welsh Government provides the Digital Communities Wales programme that is operational here.
- 4.31 These provisions do not involve the provision of broadband infrastructure, provision of public services or the skills and education agenda. These areas receive separate attention via other policy areas namely Economy, Education etc.
- 4.32 We want to collaborate with our partners to ensure that groups that are digitally excluded can take advantage of the available provisions.
- 4.33 The Council had worked for a few years with the national charity Citizens Online as part of a scheme by the Big Lottery Fund to provide and co-ordinate support to reduce digital exclusion. A successful bid was submitted for nearly £155,000 by Citizens Online to restore their activities in the county through the Council to the UK Government's Community Regeneration Fund. This scheme will be operational until June 2022.

## **5. NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE**

- 5.1 Appointment of an Inclusion Coordinator and Inclusion Support Officer. Through this investment, we will achieve the following:
- Establish a Tackling Poverty Action Plan jointly with our partners
  - Establish a food poverty network in the county

- Resume our planning and collaboration arrangements across partners such as the Financial Inclusion Group, Welfare Group and the Digital Inclusion Group
- Local campaigns to promote benefits, specifically to target low income households, and families via schools
- Expand the local support for residents to apply for benefits and gain access to financial support
- Support residents with emergency food provision and financial support

## 5.2 Financial profile:

	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>
Inclusion and Poverty Coordinator	47,241	47,950
Support Officer	36,488	37040.
Benefits Promoters	55,000	55,000
Schools' Benefits Promoter	36,488	
Operational Costs	18,000	16,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>193,217</b>	<b>155,990</b>

## 6. VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

### i) Monitoring Officer:

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

### ii) Statutory Finance Officer:

I can confirm the accuracy of the financial figures that appear in paragraph 5.2. I have no objections to the decision sought.