

MEETING	Care Scrutiny Committee
DATE	13 June, 2024
TITLE	Developing a residential provision in a small group for looked after children
REASON TO SCRUTINISE	The Council has earmarked this as a priority project in the Council Plan
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CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Elin Walker Jones

1. Why does it need scrutiny?

1.1 Developing a residential provision for looked-after children in small group homes needs to be scrutinised as the project is part of the Council's Plan (A Caring Gwynedd). By scrutinising the development of the project it looks at where the project is in terms of planned pledges for the 23/24 and 24/25 financial years.

2. What exactly needs scrutiny?

2.1 There are three questions that need to be scrutinised with the Small Group Homes Scheme which are:-

1. What exactly will the provision be and how many children will benefit from the scheme?
2. Is the project adhering to the timetable and is it within budget?
3. Does it mean that it will be possible to use fewer out-of-county care providers in the future?

3. Summary of the Key Matters

3.1 This report looks at the background of the scheme to answer the three questions above that need to be scrutinised with the Small Group Homes Scheme. The report will look at the risks for completing the scheme, the fiscal situation will answer the third question about using fewer out-of-county providers via this scheme. It will provide information on what has already been achieved in year 1 of the scheme and what we have planned for the future as well as similar developments taking place regionally and nationally. Although no public consultation for the scheme was necessary, we as a department have been involved in the area's public meeting to answer questions that arose from individuals living in Morfa Bychan. The placement of two looked-after children in each house will respond to questions raised in the report with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, as well as equality, the Welsh language and the Socio-Economic Duty as Gwynedd children are allowed to stay as close to their community as possible. Also receiving a service and accommodation through the medium of Welsh, the first language of many looked-after children in Gwynedd. To finish we will look at the next steps and what has been planned with the house that has already been purchased in Morfa

Bychan. We hope that soon we can open our doors to two more houses in areas across the County. This scheme improves the experiences of the children in the Council's care that have intensive and complex needs who currently have to leave the county or Wales in order to receive suitable provision.

4. Background / Context

- 4.1.1 Developing a residential provision in a small group for looked-after children is part of the Council's plan and is by now in its second year. The overview for the project is to improve the experiences of Council looked-after children who have intensive and complex needs, who currently must leave the county or Wales to obtain suitable provision. We will develop registered residential homes for small groups of up to two children in one home, which will allow them to receive care in Gwynedd, attend local schools, and fully participate in the life of their communities. All milestones for year 1 of the scheme have been delivered with one milestone continuing into the second year, namely developing a Statement of Purpose and policies for the development as the unit will need to register with Care Inspectorate Wales. This is because during Quarter 4 the first house for the Scheme was purchased in Morfa Bychan and it is now that the process of registration is taking place.
- 4.1.2 The reason why the Council has put in place a scheme to provide a residential home for small groups is to make sure that the children of Gwynedd can live in Gwynedd, stay in their community and receive a Welsh-medium education. It is also in line with what the Welsh Government is trying to implement which is the removal of profits from the care of looked-after children. This will bring the Department's out-of-county overspend, due to unregulated locations, down significantly and make sure that we provide care through Cyngor Gwynedd.

4.2 Risks

- 4.2.1 We have until the end of 2027 to complete the project for three registered residential homes. Although this seems a long way off there are still risks as part of the scheme. A risk has been identified namely a failure to identify a suitable second building that complies with the requirements of Care Inspectorate Wales, or with the potential to comply following modifications. There is also a risk that the time-schedule of having the first child in the first house by September 2024 will fail due to other factors e.g. Care Inspectorate Wales registration takes longer than expected. The other risk identified is the appointment of staff and if it is not possible to appoint the first time then a timetable to train staff will take longer than expected.

4.3 The Financial Situation

- 4.3.1 The scheme is being funded through RIF/HCF grant monies and 2 million has been earmarked for the scheme. It is hoped that this will fund at least three houses for small group home provision in different areas within the County namely Meirionnydd, Arfon and Dwyfor. But it will be dependent on the housing market in the Meirionnydd and Arfon area to complete the scheme.
- 4.3.2 With the first house in Morfa Bychan, a report has gone to Cabinet to fund the jobs at this house and there is also a means to staff the second house. For the 24-25

financial year, HCF funding can fund jobs but to make the jobs permanent the money needs to be transferred from an out-county pot for the project. It will work because they will bring looked-after children from Gwynedd back to the County by placing them in one of the residential homes. For us to be able to register the house with Care Inspectorate Wales we will need work to be done on the house such as fire doors and a sprinkler system. We are currently working with the Housing and Property Department to do this with a timetable to open the doors of the residential home in September 2024.

4.4 Regional and National Developments

4.4.1 The scheme of small group residential homes has also been identified in counties across North Wales and more widely. We have already been in discussions with Anglesey and Conwy Councils and have been sharing ideas that there is value in sharing training for staff, if possible.

4.5 What has been achieved - Year 1 of the scheme

4.5.1 When the scheme commenced goals had to be set for the first year and progress on these action points was reported at Performance Challenge meetings over the year. Below are the achievement goals for Year one of the scheme:-

- Appointment of Project Manager
- Complete a Business Case for establishing a SGH
- Submit a Capital Bid for buying / adapting properties
- Buy / adapt properties.
- Develop a Statement of Purpose and policies for the development as they will be required to register the unit with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

4.5.2 For year one, all of the above have been delivered with the first property purchased in March 2024. A registration application is also nearly complete to be sent to Care Inspectorate Wales.

4.6 Future Priorities

4.6.1 As a department we have also made future priorities for the plan by looking at what needs to be done in the second year and to set goals for the following years.

4.6.2 The priorities we have stated for the second year are:-

- Appoint a Manager for the first house at Morfa Bychan.
- Make adaptations to the first house for the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) registration
- Registration with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) for the first house - working towards June 2024 up to the start of September 2024
- Opening the doors of the first house in Morfa Bychan in September 2024 and have the first child placed there

- Quarter 1 24/25 – examination of the housing market in 3 specific areas namely Arfon (Bangor), Pwllheli and Meirionnydd
- End of quarter 2 24/25 – identify the second house
- End of quarter 3 24/25 – purchase the second house
- Identify a third house to buy or submit a planning application for a piece of land in the Arfon Area already owned by the Council.

4.6.3 Following a report that received attention by the Cabinet on 14 May, we are now going to move on to advertising a post for the first house in Morfa Bychan. We are also in discussions with the Property Department to make modifications to the house to bring it up to the registration requirements of Care Inspectorate Wales. We hope that the first child will be in the house by the end of September, if everything adheres to the recorded deadlines. We have also organised a children's residential home staff recruitment event on the 26 June from 3pm-7pm. at the Royal Sportsman's Hotel in Porthmadog to attract individuals to apply for the position of deputy manager and residential workers for the home in Morfa Bychan.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 When the house in Morfa Bychan was purchased as the first house as part of the small homes group scheme there was a public meeting in Morfa Bychan to discuss the issue. The Assistant Head of Resources Aled Gibbard and Councillor Elin Walker-Jones attended to consult with residents living in Morfa Bychan.
- 5.2 At the end of the meeting, everyone who attended felt content with the scheme and welcomed it and were pleased to see young people involved in the local community. Communication has continued following the public meeting with an individual who opposes the development and questions the wisdom of locating it in Morfa Bychan. However, it is important to look at the accessibility factors of the development from where the house is located as well as the condition of the building. As well as looking at the cost to renovate the building to meet Care Inspectorate Wales' registration requirements. The house is located close to several public facilities located in Morfa Bychan and Porthmadog and education can be accessed close by.
- 5.3 No developmental planning permission is required for the scheme. There was no need to arrange a public consultation meeting regarding the development, but Aled and Councillor Elin Walker-Jones felt it was important to attend the area's public meeting to let residents know what was going on in Morfa Bychan and to answer questions about the scheme.
- 5.4 As the scheme is part of the Council's Plan, updates on the development is being reported at the Children and Supporting Families Department Performance Challenge and Support meetings. A consultation with Morfa Bychan residents had also been undertaken before submitting the report to Cabinet.

6. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

6.1 Have you **included** residents / service users? If not, when and how do you plan to consult with them?

6.1.1 Morfa Bychan residents have already been consulted through a formal meeting in the area. When a decision is made regarding which individuals will be suitable for this type of provision then they will also consult with the young people.

6.2 Have you considered **working together**?

6.2.1 Although it is Cyngor Gwynedd that is leading the scheme because it owns the small residential houses, Health is involved in the discussions to make sure they are aware of the scheme. A Looked-after Child Nurse for the area has been invited to see the house and we are working with the Education Department and the local Secondary School to assist young people who want to live in the house to settle in their new area.

6.3 What has been done or will be done to **prevent** problems arising or worsening in the future?

6.3.1 We are seeking a second and third house around the County to prevent children and young people having to move out of Gwynedd for residential care or being placed in unregulated settings.

6.4 How have you considered the **long-term** and what will people's needs be in years to come?

6.4.1 Having looked on statistics within the Department in the last 5 years' service demand has increased from the Children's Department and although we as a Department try our best to keep families together in line with the strategy there are times when it is impossible due to safeguarding issues and therefore children come into care. By prioritising residential provision for young people this then reduces the pressure on the department to have to place children / young children away from their community and in unregulated settings and placement with for-profit providers.

6.5 To ensure **integration**, have you considered the potential impact on other public bodies?

6.5.1 Yes, we have discussed this with the relevant public bodies and the scheme if it applies to them.

7 Impact on the Equality Characteristics, Welsh Language and Socio-economic Impact

7.1 The main purpose of residential provision development is to keep looked-after children in Gwynedd as close to their home area as possible. In this way they get to live in a Welsh area and also get education and social opportunities through the Welsh language.

8. Next Steps

8.1 The next steps for the future are to appoint staff for the house in Morfa Bychan, obtain registration from Care Inspectorate Wales, train staff and be able to embark on looking at the second and third houses by the end of the financial year. If everything keeps within the time schedule it is hoped that our residential home will be opened as a small group home scheme development by the end of September 2024.

9. Background information

9.1 The development of residential provision for children in small group care has already been discussed at the following meetings:-

17.05.2023 - Corporate Parent Panel

20.06.2023 - Leadership Team

14.05.2024 – Cabinet - [Agenda for The Cabinet on Tuesday, 14 March, 2024, 1.00pm. \(gov.wales\)](#)