
CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 25 SEPTEMBER 2025

Present:

Councillors:

Elwyn Jones (Chair), Jina Gwyrfai, Beth Lawton, Eryl Jones-Williams, Sian Williams, Rheinallt Puw, Gwynfor Owen, Angela Russell, Meryl Roberts, Einir Wyn Williams, Elin Walker Jones, Menna Baines, Gareth Coj Parry, Berwyn Parry Jones and Anwen J. Davies.

Officers present:

Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor), Courtney Leigh Jones (Civic and Democracy Services Officer).

Present for item 5:

Councillor Menna Trenholme (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families), Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being), Aled Gibbard (Assistant Head of Children and Supporting Families), Mari Wynne Jones (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department).

Present for item 6:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being) and Mari Wynne Jones (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department), Sian Edith Jones (Assistant Head of Adults Services), Lynne Lloyd Jones (Adults Services Project Manager) and Rhian Green.

Present for item 7:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being), Mari Wynne Jones (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department), Craig ab Iago (Local Member), Sian Griffiths (Well-being Team Leader).

Present for item 8:

Councillor Paul Rowlinson (Cabinet Member for Housing and Property), Hedd Morlais Glyn Tomos (Assistant Head of Department for Housing and Property) and Gareth Moriarty Owen (Enforcement and Projects Manager) and Catrin Thomas (Corporate Director).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Geraint Wyn Parry and Linda Morgan.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received from Councillor Eryl – Jones Williams for item 6. This was not a prejudicial interest and therefore he did not withdraw from the meeting for the discussion.

A declaration of interest was received from Councillor Jina Gwyrfai for item 8. This was not a prejudicial interest and therefore she did not withdraw from the meeting for the discussion.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 12 June 2025, as a true record.

5. ANNUAL REPORT ON THE CHILDREN AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES DEPARTMENT AND THE ADULTS, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING DEPARTMENT'S COMPLAINTS, ENQUIRIES AND EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE PROCEDURE FOR 2024-25

The report was presented by Councillor Menna Trenholme, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families.

She gave a reminder that the report was in accordance with the Social Services' Complaints Procedure Regulations and the Welsh Government's Representations Procedure Regulations. It was noted that it was an opportunity to review how the department dealt with the concerns of Gwynedd residents. The importance of the report in measuring the performance of departments was outlined and how lessons could be learnt from each case in order to improve services for the people of Gwynedd.

It was noted that the Adults Department had received 42 informal enquiries and 23 formal complaints. The Children's Department had received 28 informal enquiries and 25 formal complaints. It was confirmed that a large proportion of the enquiries had been resolved promptly and it was confirmed that there had not been any inquiry by the Ombudsman in 2024-25.

It was confirmed that the Adults Department had received 106 expressions of gratitude and the Children's Department had received 95. The main themes learnt in the report were outlined and the importance of clear communication, supporting staff to deal with complainants in difficult situations and continuing to address the pressures on domiciliary care were emphasised.

It was noted that there was a marked increase in the use of the Welsh language in the Adults Department. The department's intentions in looking ahead to 2025/26 were outlined which included:

- sharing lessons on a regular basis with the management team
- continuing to chair the North Wales Customer Care Officers Group

- encouraging the sharing of compliments alongside complaints
- promoting the completion of e-learning training
- rolling out the awareness raising campaign with posters in residential homes and public buildings.

It was emphasised that it was the people of Gwynedd and not the number of complaints that was important to both departments. It was noted that complaints were an opportunity for the department to learn, improve and strengthen the department's commitment to delivering quality services.

In opening the discussion to members, it was highlighted that enquiries to both departments had increased significantly, however it was noted that the number of complaints had remained constant. The department emphasised that considerable effort had been made to make staff aware of the complaints procedure and to try and get solutions before the enquiry became a complaint.

A question was asked about the increase in the number of freedom of information requests and what was the main reason behind this increase. The response given was that there were several reasons for the increase in requests such as public press coverage, requests from the police for background information, some for research purposes and it was noted that some were requests that could be presented annual. With increasing numbers, it was explained that a lot of officers' time was spent searching for and sharing the information.

It was noted that it was pleasing to hear that the report was about people rather than numbers, and that the examples brought the report to life. However, more information about the complaints was requested. The response given was that more information could be shared but only in the right forum as these issues were highly sensitive. It was agreed to create a working group to look at complaints in greater detail and possibly look at specific themes in order to maintain confidentiality.

It was highlighted that some of the examples indicated that there were no lessons to be learnt from the complaint, and it was asked if there was a reason for this. It was explained that the concerns were very wide-ranging, but that these complaints needed to be looked at specifically and that the department would report back to the member.

The huge increase in threats to staff was highlighted, and it was asked what was being done to protect staff. It was noted that this was a priority in the department and that risk assessments were being carried out at an individual level to ensure alternative arrangements if necessary. It was noted that this element could be scrutinised in the future in terms of ensuring that procedures were in place.

DECISION

- To accept the report**
- To establish a working group to look in more detail at complaints, enquiries and expressions of gratitude for further consideration**

6. HOSPITAL DISCHARGE PROJECT

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Adults and Well-being, Councillor Dilwyn Morgan, the Head of Adults Department, and the Head of Adults Health and Well-being, Mari Wynne Jones.

It was reported that the project encompassed the important work of the multi-agency network in supporting residents to return home from hospital. The current arrangements of the Community Resources Teams in supporting adults after they are discharged from hospital were outlined. It was explained that the Teams supported adults with physical needs, ill-health, age-related conditions and dementia. Details were shared of the care pathways available to patients in the context of the principles of the Social Services and Well-being Act. It was emphasised that individuals' personal resources and strengths were at the centre of care and support needs assessments and plans, to ensure that individuals received bespoke care.

It was confirmed that the principles were based on the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. It was noted that the legal framework was used to identify a person's personal outcomes and to assess their care and support needs. The importance of encouraging people to return home from hospital for their own good was emphasised, noting that it was a matter of concern that "an extra 10 days in hospital equated to 10 years of muscle ageing in people over the age of 80". It was emphasised that the project aimed to ensure the best possible care by supporting people to stay at home in their communities, to promote individual independence and alleviate the pressures on social care and community services that were already hard pressed.

It was elaborated that the project was being implemented in response to a report published by Senedd Cymru, investigating the role of local authorities in supporting people to leave hospital in a timely manner. It was explained that there was a lot of work undertaken between the Council and the Health Board to try and improve the journey for individuals upon leaving hospital. It was noted that the Association of Social Directors had produced a paper framing the national context in Wales and the importance of collaboration between the different agencies. It was highlighted that NHS Wales used specific codes to determine the pathway of individuals who are discharged from hospital, based on the principles of Discharge to Recover then Assess (D2RA). Details were given of the four streams.

The Project Manager detailed that this was a Pilot Scheme that would run for a period and the developments would hopefully be rolled out across the county. An overview was given of the project's objectives in the context of the Llechen Lân (A Clean Slate) report and the Ffordd Gwynedd way of working. It was explained that there would be a greater demand for care and support with an increasing older population. It was confirmed that the work resulting from the project would ensure that there was an appropriate resource to address the increasing long-term challenges.

During the discussion, the report was welcomed, and thanks was given for the work to support the residents of Gwynedd. However, disappointment was expressed that the project was limited to patients returning from Ysbyty Gwynedd. Members expressed their frustration that the project did not include patients from Gwynedd returning from other hospitals across England and Wales. It was emphasised that Gwynedd was a large county, and that residents were often referred to Maelor Hospital in Wrexham and Bronglais Hospital, Aberystwyth. It was noted that these residents often came from Meirionnydd, and therefore that the project was not inclusive of all residents in the county. It was acknowledged that there were limitations to the report, and it was noted that there would be a commitment to develop and roll out the work across the county.

Details were given of the work of the Care Academy since its launch in November 2024. It was noted that the Academy trained young people and this was a scheme that contributed vastly to encouraging people to get jobs in Care in Gwynedd. It was explained that the local authority did not employ physiotherapists, and it was confirmed that the Cabinet Member for Adults Health and Well-being would mention this during regional discussions with the Health Board.

It was confirmed that the Council had received a Care Pathways Transformation Grant in 2025, worth £1,149,449. It was explained that the purpose of the grant was to support activity towards carrying out timely assessments and providing care packages to ensure people could be discharged from hospital. It was noted that the fund would be used to strengthen community care services to support people to stay healthy in their homes. It was confirmed that the grant would strengthen the capacity for assessment and review and would sustain and extend the domiciliary care provision, particularly in some challenging areas of Gwynedd. It was noted that the Grant would also enable workforce developments to adopt the Moving with Dignity approach. It was noted that this approach ensured that care was delivered in a manner that prioritised an individual's dignity, independence and safety whilst making the best use of the available resources. It was expressed that the department welcomed the additional funding but that the Local Government budget was still low and the department was still operating under pressure. It was confirmed that the project ensured timely assessments and person-centred care.

During the discussion, several Members noted that the process of receiving care and medication was often not timely enough for residents across the county. A discussion was had around residents' frustration in trying to get a GP appointment. It was noted that this often resulted in patients deteriorating rapidly and having to go to hospital because of a lack of action at the start. It was also noted that the lack of physiotherapists in Gwynedd, particularly in the Pen Llŷn area, seriously added to the pressure of enabling patients to return home from hospital. It was emphasised that residents were suffering due to the lack of care available in more rural areas within the county, which was distressing for patients and their families having to travel to receive care and support. It was stressed that there were not enough nursing beds available locally for people in their communities and that the lack of palliative care across the county was startling.

The content of the report was praised and it was asked if it would be possible to have more specific examples of patient histories in future. It was emphasised that the patient was the most important person in this discussion and the important work going on within the project for the people of Gwynedd was praised. The hope that patients and the people of Gwynedd would benefit significantly from the project was echoed, and that the work would be developed and rolled out across the county.

DECISION

To accept the report and ask for a progress report in 18 months.

7. WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

A report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being and the Head of Department.

It was noted that this report was extremely interesting and formed another part of the big picture. It was explained that the work in this scheme helped to keep people out of hospitals and services in the Dyffryn Nantlle area. It was explained that the scheme was not entirely unique but a further step for their community hubs which were to be found across the county.

The officer elaborated that it was a simple scheme, which brought people together and to work with the community to respond to the challenges of delivering preventative services at a local level. It was noted that it helped residents in the Dyffryn Nantlle area to freely access the support they needed without having to approach several different agencies. It was added that the aim was to empower those who work and live in the area to help individuals in their community. It was emphasised that the Council was one of many partners involved in the scheme, and that the Council's role was to facilitate the work of setting in motion the necessary conversations.

It was stated that 3 main things had guided the development of this partnership. The first involved commissioning research from the National Development Team for Inclusion to discuss with organisations in the area to see what the situation was in terms of supporting people and if there was a desire to develop something a little different to support people within their communities.

The second involved members of the Leadership Team setting a challenge to consider what the Council could do in terms of helping people to access the support they needed without having to approach every agency or individual Council departments. This led to a multi-departmental workshop to discuss the issue which resulted in all departments allocating time for staff working in Dyffryn Nantlle to come together for further discussion.

The third involved establishing Lles Nantlle to draw in different organisations such as the surgery, Cynefin, Adra and local organisations such as Yr Orsaf. By coming together it was possible to create a vision, get to know one another but more importantly understand each other's work in order to work together to respond to

the demand. It was emphasised that they were not coming together to talk but rather to understand what was happening in the area. A Coordinator had now been appointed for a period of 6 months who will work at Yr Orsaf in Penygroes. It will be possible to call into the Lounge for a chat with officers where their contacts can be used to respond to needs.

It was emphasised that the organisations were clearly committed to be involved in this scheme which was developing and evolving through continuous learning. It was explained that it involved more than just delivering individual services but rather creating a collaborative environment that led to innovation to fill gaps in care. It was noted that this model was positively inspiring which would lead to a healthier community.

The Local Member for Penygroes noted his experience of being part of the scheme. It was noted that it had developed from a meeting where there was an awareness that there was a different way of working in a community. He highlighted that there was a strong desire in the area to implement this and that this was the first time that such meetings had taken place, with more and more people becoming involved and continuing to attend meetings. A positive feeling of transformation was expressed, where the community played a vital role with the Council coordinating rather than leading. He emphasised that it was a community project to keep people away from services and to live a prosperous, resilient and viable life in their communities - something that needed to be emulated across the county.

In discussing the report it was asked whether the project was for the whole area of Dyffryn Nantlle or just Penygroes, and when Y Lolfa would be open to the public. It was noted that it was for Dyffryn Nantlle and that they hoped that Y Lolfa could open in October.

When discussing Y Lolfa it was asked who would be available there for residents – would there be different organisations there from week to week? It was explained that there were no definite arrangements in place as yet, but it was noted that those meetings where everyone had familiarised themselves with each other's work had enabled officers to become aware of everyone's role and how different agencies could help with different problems.

Regarding the Lles Nantlle meetings, it was asked what kind of items were being put on the agenda. It was noted that a specific framework was being followed by a company specialising in providing community-led support. It was also explained that the meetings were facilitated and not formal. It was highlighted that discussions had identified that different agencies were coming across the same barriers and that therefore they could work together to overcome these.

A question was asked as to how the scheme was being funded and if there were resources to roll it out further. It was explained that the budget was very small with contributions from several of the organisations and that there was a need to look for funding after the 6-month period. In terms of moving forward and rolling this out across the county, it was noted that the report was being put before them today for forward scrutiny to see whether there was support for such schemes.

It was highlighted that there was a similar scheme in Bangor where a Community Hub had opened in the City Centre. The officers who had helped to deliver such a scheme in Bangor were also thanked.

DECISION

- a) To accept the report.**
- b) To encourage the implementation of the scheme in other parts of the county.**

8. EMPTY HOMES

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property, Cllr. Paul Rowlinson.

Reference was made to the housing crisis facing Gwynedd, noting that the significant number of empty houses added to the current problems. It was noted that the management of empty houses was one of the main priorities in the Council's Plan and the Housing Action Plan. It was noted that the Council Tax Premium had been levied on houses in Gwynedd that had been vacant for 12 months or more, to encourage owners to restore the property and bring the houses back into use. It was elaborated that the Council offered a number of schemes that supported people to renovate empty houses to bring them up to a safe standard of living. It was confirmed that 123 homes in Gwynedd had benefited from the Empty Homes Grant. It was noted that this had a positive impact on the local economy through the use of local contractors.

It was confirmed that first-time buyers often received an exemption from the Empty Homes Premium for one year, to facilitate the restoration of the property. However, a Member noted concern about the Empty Homes Premium and the period of the payment exemption for one year. It was expressed that Gwynedd was a unique area where there was a vast difference between areas across the county. It was noted that sympathy should be felt with those who inherit a house as part of a loved one's estate, noting that the stress of selling a property could be distressing during a difficult time. Attention was drawn to the difficulties encountered by residents when trying to sell property in some areas due to the increase in house prices, and it was therefore noted that this should be considered when setting and implementing the policies.

In response to an enquiry on the number of second homes that have been renovated into homes, it was confirmed that the grant had funded the renovation of several existing second homes to an acceptable standard of living, which had provided homes for local people in the county. It was noted that the department had already achieved the target of bringing 282 empty homes back into use in Gwynedd, with 299 homes having come back into use as a result of support from the Council through the Empty Homes Grant. However, it was noted that 1,306 homes remained empty in Gwynedd to date, which reflected the ongoing work facing the department in Gwynedd.

In response to an enquiry about the number of long-term empty houses that had been empty for years, it was explained that the owners received correspondence

from the department to encourage them to bring the property back into living use. It was confirmed that the department targeted areas where houses had stood empty for a while using figures from the tax department. It was noted that this was a fundamental part of the cross-departmental work being carried out by the Enforcement Unit, within the Housing Action Plan, which operates on empty buildings which are problematic in the county.

Concern was expressed that some houses had been empty in Gwynedd for a while - getting lost in the system with owners therefore not paying any taxes or premium on the property. Frustration was expressed about the process of seizing empty properties within the county. This was recognised as being a challenge for the department but it was confirmed that the team was working with other Council departments to meet the targets set out in the Housing Action Plan.

The findings and recommendations of the Bevan Foundation Report were highlighted along with the emphasis on the need to renovate empty properties to increase the housing stock and house people in need of housing. It was asked whether any empty properties were treated in the same way as empty houses, within the Housing Action Plan. It was confirmed that the situation would need to be confirmed with the tax department.

The Bevan report was cited in noting concern about the rigidity of the Welsh Government's policy standards designation when renovating homes and properties for living use. A question was asked as to whether Cyngor Gwynedd based its Empty Homes Grant policy on the same standards as the Welsh Government. In response, it was confirmed that the Council based and complied with the designated standards within Cyngor Gwynedd's Empty Homes Grant framework to approve property renovation to bring empty homes into safe use and to an acceptable standard of living within the county. It was noted that the focus would be on dealing with internal and external works, plumbing and electrical works, etc. to bring the houses to an acceptable standard of living. It was noted that the department regularly monitored the work approved, to ensure appropriate use of the grant. It was confirmed that a restriction would be placed against the property on the land register for a period of 5 years, stating that the owner would be expected to repay an allocation to the Council if they sold the property within a 5-year period.

It was noted that the department had already achieved the target of renovating vacant homes in the county for the year. It was asked if there was a new target or if the target had increased as a result of this. It was explained that the department continued to work efficiently and was delivering good work within the Council's cross-departmental network to realise the plans. It was noted that the Scheme had already been expanded since 1 August, as part of a pilot period, to allow more people to be eligible for the Empty Homes Grant, with more local people ultimately benefitting from the support. It was noted that they were in a 3-month trial period, and that the changes would be formally incorporated from November 2025 onwards. It was confirmed that the department would continue to promote schemes through the use of social media and events. The negative impact of empty housing on communities, culture and the Welsh language was emphasised, and the Council's commitment to address the filling of second homes was reinforced.

DECISION

To accept the report.

9. CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME 2025/26

It was agreed to adopt the forward programme with a view to scrutinise the Council's response to the Child Practice Review, led by Jan Pickles, when it is timely to do so.

The meeting began at 10:30 a.m. and concluded 13:30 p.m.