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## CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 18 DECEMBER 2025

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### **Present:**

#### **COUNCILLORS:**

Elwyn Jones, Jina Gwyrfai, Menna Baines, Elin Walker Jones, Sian Williams, Meryl Roberts, Berwyn Parry Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Einir Williams, Rheinallt Puw, Angela Russell and Gwynfor Owen.

#### **Officers present:**

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

#### **Present for item 7:**

Councillor Paul Rowlinson (Cabinet Member for Housing and Property), Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department), Lowri Cadwaladr Roberts (Assistant Head of Housing and Property Department), and Sion Elwyn Hughes (Senior Executive Officer - Housing and Property Department).

#### **Present for item 6:**

Councillor Menna Trenholme (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families), Aled Gibbard (Assistant Head of Children and Supporting Families Department), Sharon Williams Carter (Assistant Head of Children and Supporting Families Department), Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services).

#### **Present for item 7:**

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being), Aled Davies (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department), Mari Wynne Jones (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department) and Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services).

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillors Gareth Coj Parry, Gwynfor Owen, Linda Morgan, Elin Walker Jones, Einir Wyn Williams.

### **2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No declarations of personal interest were received.

### **3. URGENT ITEMS**

None to note.

### **4. MINUTES**

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 20 September 2016, as a true record.

## 5. HOUSING AND PROPERTY CABINET MEMBER PERFORMANCE REPORT

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property and the Head of Department. It was highlighted that the report included information about the department's performance from April to the end of September 2025. The Cabinet Member explained that he would report on the latest figures to give a correct picture to committee members as the original meeting had been postponed. The statistics for the number of empty houses that have come back into use due to Council support in Gwynedd was corrected as well as the number that have come back into use via the empty homes grant. Reference was made to the measures, and it was noted that 306 houses had come back into use because of the Council's support, with 123 of these via the Empty Homes Scheme grants. It was noted that the figures had increased by the end of November to 321 houses that had come back into use, and 128 via the Empty Homes Scheme, this reflected a huge success. It was stated that the Empty Homes Schemes continued to be successful, and were at the forefront in Wales in terms of bringing empty homes back into use for local owners.

Concern was expressed that the current system for grants applications was rather bureaucratic. It was noted that many people waited a long time during the process and could not commence the work required before they moved in. It was asked whether it was possible to amend elements of the grant to speed-up the process? It was suggested that an additional measure should be introduced to identify what took so much time. It was also noted that the deadline of 6 months by which time the owners had to undertake the work was unfair, bearing in mind how busy contractors were, especially in rural areas. It was asked whether it was possible for people to get a time extension? In response, details were given about the grant provision, and it was noted that it was specifically to provide a financial support grant for people to restore essential features in housing to make the houses warm and safe. Because of this, it was emphasised that it was difficult to create a scheme that was suitable for all.

Details were given of the projects underway in the department, to act on the pledges in the 2023-28 Council Plan. The successful progress made during last year was reported on, noting that the department was on its way to delivering every goal. Members were guided through the report as they were updated on the progress of each project to achieve the objectives of the Council Plan.

It was noted that the Tŷ Gwynedd Scheme was making good progress as part of the Homely Gwynedd scheme. It was noted that the Dol Afon Goch development had nearly been completed, and the lettings process was underway. It was stated that the development of the former Ysgol Babanod Coed Mawr, Bangor, was also making good progress with structural work underway. It was noted that 433 social housing units had been let through the Social Housing Construction programme and the partnership with the Housing Associations, which demonstrated that they were on track to achieve the target of 500 by the end of the financial year. The developments of the Buy to Let Scheme were elaborated upon, noting that they had successfully purchased 51 homes to date, 20 of which had been let to local people.

The work of the Energy Service was detailed noting that the residents' support team offered vouchers to pay for energy. It was confirmed that 5,788 vouchers had been distributed since the start of the scheme, worth £239,565. It was noted that the team was busy holding conferences and promotional events, home visits and referring individuals for additional support such as foodbanks, Age Cymru, CAB, etc. There was pride in the team's work, and it was noted how essential the service was during the winter.

Information was provided on the ongoing work to tackle homelessness in Gwynedd, and it was noted that the 137 Bangor High Street site was now open, with individuals having moved there in August and September 2025. It was confirmed that a company has been appointed to carry out mechanical and electrical works on the former Crown Building, Penrallt. The purchase of Tŷ Glyn in Bangor had been completed and it would be suitably modified by the department before aiming to open during 2026. It was noted that the ambitious designs for the Crown building in Caernarfon had now arrived, and that work was underway to develop the project. It was noted that there will be a supportive element for residents at Tŷ Glyn, with various services coming into one safe and suitable space. It was noted that S4C had commissioned a series to follow the work of the homelessness team, which highlighted the good work carried out by the team. It was noted that again this year the team had raised money to give Christmas gifts to children living in emergency accommodation, and the department prided itself on the team's generosity, dedication and efficiency in supporting Gwynedd residents to find accommodation.

Concern was expressed that many people in Gwynedd were still waiting for a house, and it was recognised that the need was challenging to address. It was confirmed that the department was acting on this to reduce the numbers, and in the new year a portal would be launched for residents to track their applications and receive updates. It was expanded that they would be able to share relevant information directly with the portal, which would speed up the process of processing their applications. It was added that it would be possible to receive current statistics through the portal, which would provide constant and transparent updates to residents on the waiting list. It was noted that developments were underway to add a feature that assists Councillors to speak directly on behalf of their constituents.

It was asked what the expenditure on the Tŷ Gwynedd project was, in comparison to other projects such as letting Social Housing. It was highlighted that the projects addressed different needs and provided various benefits to residents in different circumstances. The purpose and attributes of the projects were outlined, by comparing their differences. It was noted that the Tŷ Gwynedd project provided support to residents who wished to own a house, and therefore the Council provided financial support for them to do so at a discount. Reference was made to Tai Gwynedd, which was being developed in Llanberis, stating that they would provide a household for 3 local families who had already been identified. It was explained that a significant grant percentage was being given for the development of Social Housing. It was acknowledged that the cost of developing Tai Gwynedd was greater, but it was reiterated that it was for a

different purpose. The pressure on the Council as a result of high rental prices from private sector landlords was recognised.

It was noted that the Department was looking at the Housing Action Plan in its entirety with a view to progressively develop and improve the scheme. Reference was made to the increase in the council tax premium, and a member expressed concern because of the 150% increase. Concern was expressed about empty houses in Gwynedd, particularly houses that have been vacant for a long time. In response, it was clarified that this was a matter for the Finance Department as they dealt with the register. It was recognised that this issue was challenging, and it was noted that it was a political issue to put pressure on the Westminster Government to address the lack of information in the system.

It was asked how many empty houses had been purchased by the Council and remained empty? In response to this, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the figures had been included in the report. It was confirmed that 28 houses were currently not let and that 5 of these were ready for letting. It was noted that 15 houses were currently being refurbished, and work programmes were being developed for the other 8 houses.

Details were given of the 'drop in' sessions' and the One Stop Shop, which provided support for a range of different residents. It was noted that the sessions were held during and after normal working hours, to provide a service to people at a convenient time. It was expressed that they managed to reach a large number of people. It was asked how many people attended the sessions, and whether the vast majority were employed or on benefits? It was confirmed that the department would collect and share the figures with committee members soon.

In response to an enquiry, details of the specialist housing group that provided a household for residents with additional needs were provided. It was noted that officers and occupational therapists were working together to develop bespoke features and provisions in the houses to meet unique needs. It was noted that the cross-departmental project had been very successful, and that the housing associations had contributed significantly to it and shared the burden. It was noted that this was quite unique to Gwynedd in order to meet the need. It was suggested that more attention should be paid to these developments, and that a press release should be drafted to publicise the innovative work being carried out by the department.

## **DECISION**

- 1. To accept the report**
- 2. To ask the Finance Department to correspond with the valuation office agency to get a list of all the empty houses in Gwynedd.**
- 3. To ask the Cabinet Member to send a letter to the government to express concern about high rent in the private housing sector and press upon them to introduce measures to ensure that the list is affordable and reduces homelessness.**

- 4. To encourage the Housing and Property Department to publicise new specialist housing developments for people with specific needs.**

## **6. ADULTS, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING CABINET MEMBER PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The report was presented by the Cabinet member for Adults, Health and Well-being and the Head of Department. It was noted that the report was based on the performance of the Adults department up to the end of August. It was acknowledged that the data and figures were now dated since the original date of this committee meeting, as this data changed daily. The Cabinet Member confirmed that he was reporting on the data contained in the report. The Cabinet Member thanked all department staff and in particular the large number of staff who will be working over the Christmas period. The various key partners of the department, the third sector and the volunteers were all thanked. The department's main projects were outlined noting that the department continued to deliver despite the local and national challenges, with the increasing demand and limited capacity.

Members were guided through the report, demonstrating how the department was operating to deliver on the pledges in the 2023-28 Council Plan. An overview of the day-to-day work of the department was given and information was shared about the external audits that have taken place in the period in question. An overview was given of the impact of the challenges raised in the Llechen Lân report, which highlighted the financial and operational pressures in the health and care system.

Details were given of the project to modernise care resources to meet future needs. It was noted that upgrading the residential homes at Hafod Mawddach and Cefn Rodyn had been completed, and the dementia unit at Bryn Blodau had been opened. It was noted that the dementia unit was about to open at Plas Hedd and confirmation of the opening date was expected shortly. It was noted that discussions were developing in relation to the provision of Extra Care Housing in Caernarfon, and the site had been identified. It was highlighted that the next outline business plan for the Penyberth site had recently been approved by Cabinet. It was confirmed that construction had commenced on suitable care housing development at the Penyberth site, with a view to being ready by October 2026. It was also confirmed that the refurbishments to the Dolfeurig site were progressing and that significant developments had taken place over the last few months. It was elaborated that a resource had been identified to commence work on Extra Care Housing in the Dolgellau area and that work had commenced.

Details were shared about the increasing use of technology in the department, to improve the ability of Gwynedd residents to access care support. The telecare provision was detailed on the Council's website, which allowed the people of Gwynedd to see what was happening within their communities. It was stated that over 80% of the county's telecare devices had been transferred to new digital devices, at no further cost to the county's residents. It was noted that this was groundbreaking, and this supported individuals to be independent. Reference

was made to the development of the direct payments service and that this was ongoing. It was noted that new packages were offered a digital account, equivalent to a 'virtual wallet'; to be able to easily manage their direct payment packages.

A report was provided on the developments that had taken place as the Council worked with Health Services to enable people to live their best life in the community. It was confirmed that the Mental Health Service and the workforce had been established at the Council's offices in Caernarfon and Penrhynedd. It was noted that progress would be monitored over the coming months. Details were given of the effective collaboration between the Ysbyty Gwynedd Discharge Team and the Community Resource Teams. Praise was given to the good work and effective collaboration between the agencies. Information was shared about the work of the Team, as they prioritised ensuring that individuals were discharged from hospital promptly, so that they are less likely to deteriorate and consequently increase their care needs. It was explained that this avoided overprovision and therefore reduced the strain on the health service and care provisions.

The Career Pathways for residents with learning disabilities were expanded upon. The developments, training opportunities and work available for individuals in need of support were detailed, noting that the Learning Disability Career Pathway Co-ordinator worked across Gwynedd and Anglesey to promote opportunities and support individuals into paid work. It was noted that 3 support Officers were also working to promote and support individuals, and that this had been a success since the start of the project in 2023.

The progress of the Llechen Lân Project was elaborated upon. It was noted that the research and report had been completed, reporting that other counties in Wales had shown considerable interest in the findings. It was emphasised that this work had been vitally important to look ahead to the future. Action had been ensured on the recommendations in the Llechen Lân report with several notable milestones now reached. It was noted that the recommendations would continue to form part of the Adult Department's plan which would be developed over the coming months.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that he remained Chair of the Regional Board and emphasised that the good collaboration taking place between the counties and agencies was moving projects forward quickly and successfully. Reference was made to the unpaid carers in Gwynedd and their tireless work in caring for Gwynedd residents, and it was highlighted that they needed support. It was confirmed that work was being developed to support unpaid carers.

The department was thanked for their work in supporting the county's most vulnerable residents. The developments were commended, and the challenges facing the department due to the challenging nature of the health and care area were recognised. They were thanked for the developmental work in Penrhos.

Concern was expressed about the number who remained on the waiting list for domiciliary care in Gwynedd and the shortage of nursing bed provision. It was

acknowledged that the situation was worse in some areas, and it was explained that this tended to be due to the changing nature of domiciliary care. The areas of Bethesda, Dyffryn Nantlle, Tywyn and Pen Llŷn had been identified as areas of concern. This was recognised as challenging for the department and it was confirmed that the waiting list had come down since August. It was explained that staff shortage factors, due to illness and reliance on external provision, contributed to this. It was reported that the department was co-ordinating and taking action to ensure that fewer people were waiting for domiciliary care.

Concern was expressed about the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) assessment figures and the domiciliary care waiting list. In response to the concerns, it was confirmed that the members had received training (DOLS). It was noted that two new officers had been appointed to support the work of reducing waiting lists in the department. It was explained that recruiting to the posts had been challenging, and individuals with experience in the field, who were keen to complete further training, had to be appointed. It was confirmed that they had attended the appropriate training and were close to completing the qualification. It was confirmed that the numbers on the waiting list had reduced, and it was hoped that they would be reduced further by the next committee meeting.

In response to an enquiry, it was confirmed that there had been a change in direct payment processes. It was asked what the identified barriers were in using these. In response, it was confirmed that this system was now run in-house within the Council. It was noted that social workers had been trained to promote direct payments, which was identified in the Llechen Lân report as the way forward. It was emphasised that the voice of the individual was crucial to this, and that the new system gave them more power and freedom to choose their own care in a way that was convenient for them. It was confirmed that this system was available to people who already had a care package. The barriers that arose with the new system were identified and it was recognised that support needed to be provided to individuals who did not have the capacity to act financially or who had no one to act on their behalf.

The flexibility and dedication of staff was praised while recognising that they often worked extra, long hours and often travelled across the county to provide care for residents. Their willingness to ensure that there was no true crisis of care in the county was applauded. It was recognised that staff were under exceptional stress and that the department was trying to respond to this by providing and offering them constant support. It was emphasised that attracting and recruiting staff was a challenge, which meant that the Council at times had to rely on staff from external agencies. It was expressed that the needs of residents were also intensifying, which increased the demand for care. It was explained that safeguarding staff and residents was a priority for the department, and that this was part of the work in looking at the condition of the residential homes and renovating them where necessary.

With the increase in Health Board employees using masks in hospitals to protect against winter infections such as norovirus and flu, it was asked if there was a plan in place to protect staff? It was confirmed that the Council had received a message from the Health Board about employees wearing masks in hospitals, and it was explained that there was not yet a demand for this in the community, but of course, people were free to choose to do what was suitable for them.

Details were provided on the Care Academy which had been launched to address staff shortages in the care sector. It was noted that it offered a professional developmental pathway for individuals wishing to pursue a career in care, while offering practical experience and opportunities for expert-led development. It was noted that a new cohort would be welcomed to the academy in the new year.

In response to an enquiry, it was confirmed that social workers now worked one day a week at Ysbyty Gwynedd. It was noted that this gave them the opportunity to work closely and continuously with patients, as part of the wider effort to discharge patients from hospitals earlier, through the Hospital Discharge project. It was explained that this gave them the opportunity to develop a close relationship with the patients and to identify their needs sooner. It was noted that this allowed them to provide proportionate and appropriate support in the community and reduced the increasing demand on hospitals. In response to an enquiry, it was confirmed that discussions were ongoing to expand the project to provide support for Gwynedd residents who attended Bronglais and Maelor hospitals in the future. A progress report on the falls protocol was requested to confirm that a protocol was in place to protect Gwynedd residents.

## **DECISION**

- 1. To accept the report.**
- 2. To recognise the good work being done in the department expressing concern about the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) assessment figures and the domiciliary care waiting list.**
- 3. To ask for a progress report on the falls protocol.**

## **7. CHILDREN AND FAMILIES CABINET MEMBER PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Chair asked what was the latest with the work programme responding to the Child Practice Review – Justice Through Our Courage and when would the committee receive a report on the work programme? In response, the Corporate Director confirmed there would be an extraordinary meeting of the Committee in January 2026. The process was explained, noting that the Council had established a Board and Response Plan, which had been revised and renewed since the Child Practice Review was published, and it was confirmed that there would be an opportunity for scrutiny at the extraordinary meeting. It was ensured that the Department was committed to act and respond fully to the recommendations. A request was made by members of the Committee for an extraordinary meeting of the Full Council to give all members the opportunity to scrutinise this all-important Plan.

The report was presented by the Cabinet member for Children and Families. An update was provided on what had been achieved by the children's department up to the end of September. It was noted that the Children and Supporting Families Department had two projects in progress in the Council's Plan, the Autism Plan and the Children's Residential Provision Development Scheme in small group care homes.

The Autism Plan was detailed, noting that the work was thriving and the demand for a service continued to rise. It was noted that the consultation system between the Autism Team and the social workers was working effectively, and several cases of early intervention and specialist support had resulted in a decrease in need and status, with many cases closed following intervention.

It was noted that the staff training programme continued and was developing with different levels of training, and the exact level to be achieved depended on the post. It was elaborated that the team was now training employees to facilitate and run support and educational groups and programmes for parents and carers as well as identity groups for autistic young people. It was reported that the 'Cuppa and Chat' groups for parents and carers and a Neuro club for young people continued to be successful. It was noted that the Niwro Cymru App, which had been developed by Awtistiaeth Gwynedd to provide information, advice and support to the community, was now available. It was noted that the funding for the scheme expired in 2027 and therefore consideration would need to be given to how to ensure future continuity of service from a sustainability perspective.

The plan to develop residential provision for children in care in a small group home, which had developed significantly, was detailed. It was noted that a home in Morfa Bychan was now operational, with two children living there. In response to an enquiry, it was confirmed that there was room for two children only in the home, to ensure a homely household for the children in line with the national strategy. It was explained that developments were taking place at the Deiniolen site, noting that a deputy manager had been appointed along with five residential workers for the second house in Deiniolen. It was confirmed that the staff had commenced in their posts. It was noted that the department was still awaiting official registration of the homes, and this was expected soon from Care Inspectorate Wales. It was explained that other counties in Wales were developing residential provisions for children, which placed pressure on Care Inspectorate Wales, therefore, there was now a waiting list for registration. It was hoped that both houses would be fully registered by February 2026. It was noted that the Department was in the process of purchasing a house in Cricieth and hoped that the work would be completed in 2026. It was noted that there was an effort to provide a residential home as part of the residential provision scheme in the Meirionnydd area, but it was highlighted that there were restrictions due to the housing market and the difficulties of finding a suitable home for the children.

The Department's day-to-day work was detailed, noting that there were 283 looked after children in Gwynedd. It was expressed that the Department had seen positive developments, with 4% of children leaving care and returning home in the last year. It was evidenced that the voice of the child and young people was a priority for the department, noting that the child's voice and opinions were

heard in 94% of case conferences. It was noted that the number of young people entering the Youth Justice Service had fallen by 13% fallen by -13%. It was reported that Gwynedd Family Service had been successful in extending a 2-year-old childcare scheme with 9 additional provisions enabling more families to receive support.

Concerns were raised about the number of referrals received by the referrals team. It was reported that 2025 had been the busiest year since its inception. The Derwen Service was reported to be under pressure, with over 500 open cases. It was noted that the 16+ Team also continued to report that demand for services was at its highest, with 238 cases open. It was explained that the number of cases and staff shortages created concern and high work pressure. The measures in place to address the challenges were outlined, noting that 5 bids to fund 7 posts in the operational teams had been successful. It was noted that this had ensured additional support for the Derwen service and provided consistency to support services for children and families in Gwynedd.

During the discussion, the following comments arose.

- It was expressed that Gwynedd had more looked after children than any other county in Wales. In considering this, the good work that was going on in the department to meet the need in the county was praised, thanking all the staff for their tireless work in supporting the children and families of Gwynedd.
- It was suggested that new measures should be developed to manage and monitor looked after children and that they are regularly seen by Council staff, as part of the Council's responsibilities as a corporate parent
- It was suggested that measures showing progress should be developed with a Response Plan to the Child Practice Review report, for this Committee to monitor and measure performance.
- A question was asked about the success of foster carer recruitment campaigns and what was the situation with the number of foster parents in Gwynedd at present. In response, details were given of the recruitment campaigns, and it was noted that they were successful in attracting an increasing number of foster parents. It was noted that there are approximately 70 foster families in Gwynedd, but it was stated that the Council continued to make use of external agencies due to the increasing and ongoing demand. It was elaborated that the Council works regionally and works collaboratively across the 6 counties of North Wales to provide foster care.
- It was recognised that it had been a challenging time for the Children and Families Department and the concerns about the stability and management of the department were recognised. The department was thanked for their hard work to ensure the welfare and safety of children. It was expressed that the Council was working to develop a stable position in the department, noting that the employees were constantly receiving support, occupational health services and counselling. It was explained that the Cabinet would soon consider a financial bid to respond fully to the Children's Plan Review.

## **DECISION**

- 1. To accept the report.**
- 2. To ask the Chair of the Council to consider convening an extraordinary meeting of the Full Council to give every member an opportunity to discuss and scrutinise the Response Plan to the 'Our Bravery Brought Justice' Child Practice Review.**
- 3. To request that the department develops new measures, showing that looked-after children are regularly seen by Council staff and another showing progress with the response Plan to the Our Bravery Brought Justice Child Practice Review.**

## **8. COMPLAINTS TASK AND FINISH GROUP BRIEF**

A presentation was given on the complaints task and finish group brief. It was confirmed that the Scrutiny Forum had approved the resources to hold the Task and Finish Group. Five members were elected to be in the group, with one reserve member.

## **DECISION**

- 1. To adopt the brief.**
- 2. To elect Councillors Elwyn Jones, Sian Williams, Menna Baines, Angela Russell and Elin Walker Jones to be members of the task and finish group. Councillor Beth Lawton was elected as a reserve member.**

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and ended at 13.10pm.