

CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE THURSDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2022

Present: Councillor Eryl Jones-Williams (Chair)

Councillors: Menna Baines, Anwen J. Davies, Jina Gwyrfai, Dewi Jones, Elwyn Jones, Beth Lawton, Linda Morgan, Gwynfor Owen, Gareth Coj Parry, John Pughe, Rheinallt Puw, Meryl Roberts, Angela Russell and Sasha Williams.

Officers in attendance: Bethan Adams (Scrutiny Advisor), Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor) and Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for item 5:

Jason Killens (Chief Executive of the Welsh Ambulance Service) and Estelle Hitchon (Director of Partnerships and Engagement, Welsh Ambulance Service).

Present for item 6:

Catrin Thomas (Assistant Head of Supporting Families) and Steffan Llyr Williams (Youth Service Manager).

Present for item 7:

Councillor Craig ab Iago (Cabinet Member for Housing and Property), Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department) and Gareth Wyn Parri (Housing Options Team Leader).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors R. Medwyn Hughes, Linda Ann Jones and Einir Wyn Williams as well as Councillor Elin Walker Jones (Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received for item 6 from Councillor Rheinallt Puw who noted that his daughter worked in the Youth Service. This was not a prejudicial interest, and he did not withdraw from the meeting.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous Committee meeting held on 29 September, 2022, as a true record.

5. PRESENTATION BY THE AMBULANCE SERVICE

Jason Killens, Chief Executive of the Welsh Ambulance Service and Estelle Hitchon, Director of Partnerships and Engagement, were welcomed to the meeting. Members were given a presentation which reported on the performance of the Welsh Ambulance Service.

Details were given on statistics such as the response times to red calls (risk to life calls) at Betsi Cadwaladr, noting that the percentage response to these emergency calls within 8 minutes had dropped since October 2022 from 62% to 47% by October 2021 and had now stabilised at approximately 45% by September 2022. It was acknowledged that this meant that some patients were waiting much too long for an ambulance.

It was noted that the main reason for the drop in the response times was the substantial increase in lost hours when transferring to hospital, which affected the ability to respond to emergency calls promptly. It was noted that this delay when transferring had increased over time and had been at its worst in September 2022. Details were also given of other challenges such as increasing staff sickness and absences leading to capacity problems and challenges relating to attracting staff and filling posts.

Reference was made to patient safety and civil reportable incidents, which detailed the deaths and serious harm that could have been avoided, and comparison was drawn between the situation of Betsi Cadwaladr and the rest of Wales. The numbers were lower compared with the whole of Wales, but on average, 2 patient safety issues were recorded every month as a result of very long delays, clinical errors and patients waiting in ambulances outside the hospitals.

Information was received on the current review being undertaken of demand and capacity within the service, and details were given on what was being done in an attempt to improve the situation, such as recruiting and training more staff, reviewing the list of duties and changes to arrangements such as rapid response vehicles, e.g., staffed by senior paramedics. It was believed that these measures would help with the response time problems.

To close, they ran through a future response model which focused on transforming the emergency medical services by placing more emphasis on consultation, treatment and referrals, instead of transporting patients to hospitals.

During the discussion, the following observations were submitted by members:-

- Members expressed gratitude for the presentation and commented that it conveyed a bleak image of the ambulance service and for the people who lived in North Wales, particularly in the rural areas.
- A request was made for an explanation of the role of the first responders, noting that their service was essential to rural areas in the County such as Tywyn, particularly considering the current situation and discussions about the air ambulance service.
- Reference was made to the lack of locum staff, and it was asked whether it was possible to increase staff numbers in the Tywyn area. Members expressed their admiration towards the existing staff who worked under strain. Reference was made to staff who had recently joined Tywyn but there was a tendency for them to be transferred to other locations, leaving Tywyn without adequate staff. It was added that the ambulance service was very important to the area, considering that there were not many doctors in the area and no minor injuries unit in Ysbyty Tywyn. It was noted that a number of first responders who were volunteers had stopped because

they often had to wait with patients for 4-6 hours before an ambulance arrived and a number of them had other jobs to go to.

- Reference was made to examples of older people falling and fracturing bones in the community and no first responders being available to assist them, therefore they faced hours waiting for an ambulance. It was believed that the risk to patients was increasing due to the unacceptable waiting time for ambulances.
- Concern was expressed about the ambulance service transporting patients to hospitals in Bangor, Wrexham and Glan Clwyd and then being held back in these locations or being sent to calls in nearby locations, therefore there was no supply to respond to calls in the local community. It was also noted that the transfer time should take 15 minutes but now it took on average more than 2 hours and in some cases patients could be waiting in the back of the ambulance for 12 hours, which was a concerning situation and meant that the fleet was not available in local stations. It was added that it was not uncommon nowadays to see over 10 ambulances waiting outside Ysbyty Gwynedd.
- It was asked how many lives were being lost as a result of ambulances not arriving or long delays when they were needed and concern was expressed that the national health service appeared to be broken.
- It was agreed and emphasised that collaboration was needed across the Health and Social Care sector and that the current situation of patients and ambulance workers waiting outside accident and emergency departments for up to 12 hours, sometimes more, was unacceptable.
- It was asked how much pressure was being put on the Government in an attempt to improve the waiting times outside hospitals. It was also noted that there were 100 fewer beds in Ysbyty Gwynedd today compared to when the Hospital was built.
- The service received directly by the paramedics was praised.
- Disappointment was expressed in the previous comments received from the Chief Executive of the Welsh Ambulance Service regarding the air ambulance and his support to the recent proposals on moving the location of the air ambulance in Gwynedd. It was believed that insufficient consideration was being afforded to rural needs.
- It was agreed that better collaboration was needed between the Government, the Health and Care Service and the ambulance service. It was noted that the lack of beds in the hospitals and in the community was a problem and that the problem of recruiting carers contributed to the shortcomings in terms of being able to discharge patients from the hospitals. It was added that the Government should provide better support, it was believed that the salary levels of carers were not sufficient, and this was a matter for the Government.

In response to the observations and questions from members above, it was noted:-

- That the role of the community first responders was essential and the value that they offered was acknowledged. It was added that many volunteers had been lost since the pandemic period, it was assumed that the numbers had halved across north Wales. An aspiration was expressed to increase the voluntary workforce and reference was made to recent efforts to invest in additional capacity to train and recruit more volunteers.
- That the air ambulance was not a part of the Welsh ambulance service. It was noted that they responded to 999 calls with the ambulance service and not instead of the ambulance service. Nevertheless, the Chief Executive of the Welsh Ambulance Service noted that he was aware of the proposals relating to the air ambulance

service and that he was supportive of them. He believed that the proposals would ensure that more patients who required urgent critical care obtained better access to the service, therefore the proposals appeared to be sensible.

- That 73 additional staff had been allocated to the workforce across North Wales as well as a number who were currently in training and would be ready to take up jobs after Christmas. It was reported that there had been a substantial growth in the front-line service over the past 2-3 years.
- That the ambulance service's fleet in Wales was used or assigned to a call 80% of the time. Considering the losses to the fleet such as the delay when transferring to the hospitals, this explained why the response time to calls had increased. It was acknowledged that the waiting time was unacceptable but that the ambulance service was trying to be efficient. It was added that the collaboration of the Health Service and Local Authorities was essential as these authorities had a role to deliver such as discharging patients who were medically fit from the hospitals. It was noted that the challenges that existed across the Health and Social Care system had led to the pressures on the ambulance service.
- That they were aware of pressures in the social care field for Local Authorities and were identifying what needed to be resolved across the system. It was reported that the ambulance service was seeking to collaborate to improve situations. It was noted that as a result of the increasing and ageing population that this had contributed to the demand on a variety of services relating to the Health and Care field.
- That the hospitals had a role to play. It was elaborated that the responsibility of the ambulance service was to transport the patients who genuinely needed to go to hospital A&E departments so they could not do much in relation to lack of capacity, staff and space within the hospitals. It was added that the health field's responsibility was to enable patients to move quicker through the hospitals and then the Local Authorities to help with hospital discharges. It was noted that there was a need to improve the shortcomings in the system.
- That they were attempting to improve the service in the calls control rooms in order to avoid sending an ambulance if it was not necessary and were then attempting to improve the care available in the community to avoid transporting patients unnecessarily to the hospitals.
- That the Wales ambulance service was providing information, statistics and feedback to stakeholders, including the Government, weekly and monthly. It was noted that they were emphasising the harm that could be avoided as a result of the current situation and that they were firmly of the view that change was needed. It was added that 36% of the fleet was currently unable to respond to calls and they would not be able to respond unless something changed, which was a matter for the Government. It was noted that the ambulance service was focusing on what was within its control and was using the resources available in terms of staff and money as efficiently as possible.
- That they were proud that the excellent work of the paramedics under difficult circumstances was acknowledged by Councillors and in the community. It was reiterated that the paramedics or call handlers were not to blame, but that they unfortunately continued to receive verbal abuse from some members of the public.
- He was unable to comment on individual cases regarding the ambulance service's response time, but assurance was given that the ambulance service's system targeted the patients where there was an immediate risk to life first, e.g. cardiac arrest, and they were prioritised over calls where there was no direct threat to life, e.g. fractures following a fall. It was noted that these were not easy decisions to

make, but they had to make the choice when only one fleet was available, and two calls were received.

- It was acknowledged that the waiting time and the service received in the community was unacceptable and was cause for concern; however, assurance was given that the ambulance service was doing everything within its ability to improve the provision. It was noted that the situation was affecting staff morale and leading to more sickness amongst staff, which led to further problems in terms of staff recruitment and retention. It was noted that there was too much pressure across the system.

The Ambulance Service's staff were thanked for answering the Members' questions and it was hoped that the situation would improve. To close, it was asked whether the strikes of the nurses and ambulance service would affect rural areas. The Chief Executive of the Wales Ambulance Service confirmed that the ambulance service would have substantial problems when attempting to respond to calls in the community, should the strikes go ahead. Members were thanked for their questions.

RESOLVED:

There was no vote since this item was to provide information only.

6. YOUTH SERVICE

The report was submitted by the Youth Service Manager. An overview of the main points was also received, as well as the background of remodelling the Youth Service following the Cabinet's decisions back in 2018. The new model had been established in September 2018 and it was reported that the Service had been reporting on the progress of the remodelling and performance through the Performance Challenging process.

It was noted that the Service had submitted a Progress Report on the first year of the remodelling to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in January 2020, but soon after the Covid restrictions had come into force. It was expressed that the report included information on the impact of the pandemic on the remodelling as well as the service's current situation.

Reference was made to the current structure of the Youth Service, and it was added that the voice of young people was central to the Service. It was noted that the report referred to the feedback of young people about the Service, as well as what the Youth Service was doing in response to this feedback.

It was reported that information could be seen in the report on the strategic themes of the Service, which focussed on Health and Well-being across all projects, the Welsh language, equality and inclusion. The work taking place with partners and third sector organisations to meet the needs of young people was highlighted. To close, reference was made to the challenges facing the Service in the future which had been included in the report such as recruitment and the complex and severe needs of young people which had emerged over the last few years.

During the discussion, the following observations were submitted by members:-

- A comment was made that the youth clubs were currently being funded through the Community and Town Councils. Reference was made to the report which noted that the clubs that currently existed were successful, with a high number attending. It was

noted that these were not new clubs, but rather old clubs that were being reopened by the Community and Town Councils after 4 years of being closed.

- It was believed that there were strengths to the new structure, but it was questioned whether it had been a failure in one element, considering the above.
- It was expressed that consistency and stability was important to young people and it was questioned whether there was room for the Council to reconsider its provision. It was added that providing space for the young people to feel safe and that they belonged was important and an enquiry was made about the Council's role in providing permanent stable clubs instead of supporting Community and Town Councils.
- The projects being offered by the Youth Service were welcomed, and it was noted that there were very successful projects in some areas. Advantage was taken of the opportunity to thank the Youth Workers within the Council who did excellent work and appreciation was expressed for this work.
- It was expressed that it would be nice to keep the new model, but also bring the old model of clubs back; although it was understood that this was difficult in terms of the financial situation. It was believed that the young people needed the stable provision of a club, but there was certainly a place to continue with the project element.
- Concern was expressed in terms of consistency across the County, and reference was made to the effort in the South of the County to seek to re-establish a club and recruit; however, unfortunately the efforts had failed, which meant that there was no provision in the South of the County. It was emphasised that consistency was important in the County, and it was asked about the link with Schools and whether it was consistent.
- Reference was made to the difficulties of engaging with children and young people to find out what exactly they needed. It was noted that the report referred to a figure of 5,500 of young people participating; a question was asked about the threshold of participation and what counted as participation. It was also asked what the figures were in terms of working closely with the young people to hear their views.
- It was believed that it was unfair that the Council did not do more in the rural communities and there was concern that these communities were losing out. It was reiterated that a service was needed in the rural communities, particularly considering that there were more provisions and things to do in the towns in any case, compared with rural communities or small villages.
- Advantage was taken of the opportunity to congratulate Llanrug Youth Club, which was going from strength to strength and a safe place for the young people of the village to go to.
- It was expressed that closing the Youth Clubs had been a step back, although they acknowledged that there had been a need for a change in direction at the time.
- It was asked how the Service was consulting with those who did not attend clubs.
- It was expressed that the Weekly Programme did not convey all the work that was being done by the Service.
- It was asked how many youth clubs had been open before the change in 2018.
- Concern was expressed about the substantial drop from 38 clubs in 2018 to 9 clubs by the beginning of 2023, and it was questioned whether the ability to engage with the young people had been lost, particularly those who did not engage much with the Schools.
- It was acknowledged that there were excellent and flexible elements to the new system.
- It was asked whether it was possible to ask all young people in the County whether they wanted a youth club in their area.

- It was questioned whether it was possible for the Council to have a greater influence over the use of the Welsh language at the clubs and activities.
- Gratitude was expressed for a comprehensive and full report.

In response to the above-mentioned observations and questions from members, it was noted:-

- That the element of expanding the provision in the community was a positive development in order to reach a broad range of young people across the communities. It was noted that the Youth Service were looking at projects to correspond with this and listen to the voice of young people in terms of their needs. It was noted that there was an obvious need in the community and that the increase in the figures over the last two quarters reiterated this. Nevertheless, it was emphasised that it was important for the Council to be able to offer a service separately in order to ensure that every area across Gwynedd could obtain access to the Youth Service through projects and address all needs across the County.
- For clarity, it was confirmed that five community clubs were currently operational across the County, with another four putting their names forwards to open; therefore it was hoped that there would be nine operational clubs in the County by Christmas. It was noted that the figure of 24 in the report referred to the number of workers.
- That there had not been sufficient time to trial whether the joint community static clubs between the Council and Community Councils had been successful or not; more time was needed to assess this. It was added that there was a need for more time and effort to support the Community Councils that were trying to open local volunteer clubs and staff them, and that the Youth Service had now moved reserves to enable this. It was reported that it would be useful to receive feedback from the community councils that had been successful with the clubs, and those that had attempted to recommence but had failed.
- That the Council were trialling a different workforce to support the more socially natured clubs as there were recruitment challenges, therefore work was in the pipeline in an attempt to address this.
- That the Youth Service had sought to think of different ways to obtain a provision in areas such as Tywyn, e.g., commissioning a community cinema and funding it over Christmas so that there would be some kind of provision there for the young people.
- That Schools were working differently and relying on the voice and needs of young people in the Schools. The hope was that the work being done in the Schools was transitioning to the community and that further work was being done in the community.
- That participation meant anyone using the service more than once across a broad range of projects, from those where the service was intense to community clubs and fun days. A young person could attend or gain access to the Service once only, e.g., to have a chat and then feel that they had gained what they needed or a young person could return to a variety of projects; both cases would count as one engagement. It was explained that the measures were different between the old model and the new model; the Service was now trying to measure how many young people they reached and were trying to reach more young people and measure whether they were receiving what they wished.
- That transport was a greater challenge recently, compared with the pre-pandemic period. This meant that some areas had had to change their provision times.

- That the Service wanted to develop the element of engagement with young people who did not attend clubs, e.g., travel problems or no provision in their communities. It was reported that the Service was approaching Schools for feedback and had a Young People's Voice Board, which was very successful, and they were eager to receive more feedback and data about the young people who did not already engage. It was added that the Service was working closely with our Welfare Officers for the young people who did not engage at School. It was noted that engagement was also happening outside the School through clubs where needs could emerge themselves, then the Service could contact with the young people and work with them. It was explained that the voluntary element continued to be important and central to the Youth Service.
- In terms of engagement, it was noted that the Service was making use of social media and WhatsApp groups, which was a new digital way of engaging. It was reiterated that this shift to digital means of communications had been driven by the young people. This means that the link existed digitally and then the Service attempted to encourage them to attend sessions.
- That there was a need to make the best of the resource available and seek to make this resource go as far as possible. There was a need to accept that there was a limit to what could be achieved due to budgetary issues.
- That the weekly programme was only one way to convey what the Service was doing, and it tended to focus on the social element in the evening instead of the activities taking place between 3:30-6:00pm. It was acknowledged that the weekly programme did not reflect everything that was on offer. It was added that young people did not have to be involved with the service, therefore, the demand varied and there were challenges in terms of staffing, funding and identifying locations or rooms to hire to hold activities.
- The starting point before arranging any community event would be to conduct a dialogue with the young people about what they wished to see in the area and being able to assess the need.
- At their peak, 74 youth clubs existed across the County before the restructuring, but they had deteriorated naturally in numbers by 2018. It was confirmed that 38 clubs were operational by 2018 and that was the number when they ended.
- That asking young people an open question about whether they wanted a club did not provide a realistic picture. Instead, it was felt that it would be better to ask more specific questions such as what you want or wish to see. It was added that many young people wanted trips as they had not had these opportunities since pre-Covid times. As a result, it was reported that the Service had been holding many trips, e.g., ten-pin bowling or shopping trips. It was reiterated that messages from the young people were being passed on to the Service and that a lot of emphasis had been placed on having fun and on the social element over the past year.
- That the provision being offered by the Youth Service was almost always through the medium of Welsh or certainly bilingually. The importance of giving the young an opportunity to use Welsh in a more informal way outside school was reiterated. It was noted that the service was working closely with Hunaniaith and the Urdd and was working closely with some Schools such as Friars to develop the Welsh-medium provision.

In terms of Mental Health work, it was reported that this was one of the Youth Service's priorities, particularly the well-being element, and that there was a lot of collaboration with agencies such as CAMHS. It was acknowledged that mental health levels had increased over the past years. A report was provided on the well-being festival that had been held at

the beginning of the year, which had been very popular and had received positive feedback. Reference was also made to the Meddwl Ymlaen Project, which had received funding for five years. The voices of young people would give structure to the project and much collaboration between various agencies would happen over the project period.

Reference was made to the Youth Service's imminent move to the Education Department and concern was expressed, due to the Education Department's financial constraints and busy nature, that this important Service would become lost in the new Department. There was a wish to express to the Cabinet Member for Education that the Youth Service needed to be prioritised, ensuring that it would receive due attention under the Education Department. It was agreed to add this to the decision.

There was a wish to express thanks to the Youth Service about the report and for Committee members for their questions.

DECISION

- a) To accept the report that provided an update on the developments of the Youth Service.**
- b) To ask the Cabinet Member for Education to consider the observations of the Committee about the importance of the Youth Service, ensuring that it will receive due attention under the Education Service after the Service soon transfers to this Department.**

7. HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY

A foreword was received from the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property who referred to the increasing emphasis on housing local people in the new Housing Allocation Policy. Pride was expressed in the numbers of local people who received property off the Common Housing Register.

The opportunity was taken to remind the Committee of the homelessness situation in the County, noting that the waiting time for a social property could be years. It was noted that this was unfair and reflected the reality that there was not enough social housing in the County. It was reported that it took years to increase the stock, and although improvements had happened in this field, there was an insufficient number of properties available to meet the demand for social housing.

The Head of Housing and Property Department expressed that the report submitted to the Committee was an interim report with the proposal to report in full to the Committee later on in the new year. It was noted that this was as a result of potential changes afoot as a result of policy and legislation changes by Government and expectations on Local Authorities to prioritise specific aspects in the homelessness field.

An overview was provided of the progress since starting to implement the new Housing Allocation Policy two years ago by the Housing Options Team Leader. It was explained that the new process of prioritising applicants was based on placing applications in priority Bands, which had replaced the old system of awarding points to applications. It was noted that this system simplified the process and was a combination of the scale of applicants' needs, as well as a connection to Gwynedd.

It was reported that the Housing Options team was working closely with the Housing Associations and let around 600-650 properties in a year. It was explained that the demand was substantially higher than the supply of housing that became empty. It was added that

as a result of the Policy changes that 96.5% of lettings had been made to applications who had a connection to Gwynedd, compared with 90% before the new Policy was implemented.

Reference was made to the challenges experienced as a result of Covid, increasing living costs and the substantial increase in the number facing homelessness in the County. This had led to an increase in the register, with over 3,300 applications now waiting for social properties. It was reiterated that the supply had not increased as quickly, which showed the demand for social property.

During the discussion, the following observations were submitted by members:-

- Gratitude was expressed for the report.
- It was asked what changes were afoot as a result of the change in Government Policy and whether these would affect the Gwynedd connection element in the Policy.
- Concern was expressed that the Policy change would encourage people to move into the area and then receive priority since they were homeless.
- It was asked whether people from outside the County presented themselves as homeless here.
- Reference was made to cases where people were in category or band 2, but the Members felt that they should be in band 1. Members were welcomed to raise matters about specific individuals with the Housing Options Team Leader at the end of the meeting.
- Concern was expressed about family members helping individuals who faced homelessness, since this help in reality made it more difficult for them to be re-housed.
- A comment was made about the housing shortages, and it was asked whether this shortage meant that allocations were all from band 1 only, and that applications in band 2 did not have much of a chance.
- Reference was made to the numbers living in three-bedroom houses by themselves; it was asked whether they were offered any sort of incentive or otherwise to encourage them to move in order to release these houses to families.
- It was asked whether the connection to communities continued to exist within the new Policy.
- A question was asked about the income of the people who were registering on the housing register, and whether there was a threshold, e.g. on their savings. It had been commented previously that income and savings restrictions existed where people were not included on the register.
- Concern was expressed about applicants being offered properties in locations where they did not want to live and being penalised on their application if they refused the property.
- It was asked how many families were in temporary accommodation in the County. It was also asked whether caravan sites were being considered instead of hotels or B&Bs.
- It was asked whether the Council was reconsidering buying properties. It was highlighted that empty 3-4 bedroom houses were currently for sale on the open market and the Council could buy them and use them as temporary accommodation; this would save money in the long-term.
- A question was asked about private empty homes, e.g., second homes, and whether the Council could help lease these houses or find tenancies for them.

In response to the observations and questions from members above, it was noted:-

- That there were no signs that changes to the Housing Allocation Policy due to the legislative change, would affect the local connection element. It was reported that it was likely that the changes would relate to attempting to maximise the number of homeless people being housed.
- It was believed that there would be a change of focus in terms of which categories would be considered as urgent needs, which would include homelessness and other needs, e.g., medical and well-being. It was explained that there may be a need to give higher priority to homelessness needs than other needs. It was added that the Government had other strategies such as Rapid Rehousing which would be used by the Council in an attempt to reduce the use of temporary property, which would reduce costs as well as pressures on other services which supported tenants in temporary accommodation.
- It was reiterated that people from Gwynedd were the majority of the homeless people on the waiting list and that there was a connection to Gwynedd. It was noted that the numbers presenting as homeless from outside the County was very low. It was explained that of the 3,335 applications on the Register than 35 were in band 1B, namely an urgent housing needs but no local connection, therefore the percentage was very low. It was elaborated that 1,300 lettings had been made from the new Policy and only 17 of these had come from band 1B.
- It was added that the decision regarding changing the constitution of the bands was a Cyngor Gwynedd decision, since it was Council Policy. Nevertheless, the Policy had to be implemented within the Government's guidelines and regulations. It was reported that no sign had come from the Government to date about a change in the local connection element within the bands.
- It was confirmed that conducting a homelessness assessment within 56 days was a part of the legal framework and was statutory. It was noted that the assessment or application to be on the Common Housing Register by the Housing Options Team was separate to the homelessness assessment. The importance for the Housing Options Team to receive full information from applicants so that they could make an assessment in accordance with the Policy and give the correct priority to the application, was emphasised. Reference was made to the internal review that would be carried out within the Housing Department to ensure that the needs of the people of Gwynedd were addressed to the future and to revise lessons that had been learnt over the past years.
- It was reported that 16% of the housing register, which equated to over 500 applications, came from band 1A. Of the 1,300 who had received a property, it was noted that 40% of them had come from this band. It was added that 45% of the applications that had received a property had come from band 2, which meant that the applications in band 2 had a good chance of receiving a property.
- With regards to the point of under-occupancy, it was explained that the role of the Housing Options Team was difficult in terms of encouraging people to move to smaller houses because the Council did not have a housing stock. It was added that the role of housing associations was difficult since people had signed tenancy agreements and so nobody could be forced to move to smaller properties. It was noted that when under-occupancy happened and there was an urgent need for the property, then the application was placed in band 1A. The next step, which was also difficult, was trying to find a smaller property for these people, particularly considering the lack of bungalows for the elderly. It was reiterated that communication and working closely with Housing Associations was essential in order to convey the needs and the type of stock required in different areas.

- It was explained that the community connections continued to exist within the new Policy, and this determined how high the application would appear in a specific band.
- In terms of income, it was explained that this element now evolved weekly with the cost-of-living crisis. It was noted that housing associations had charitable status and were supposed to house people on low incomes. In the past, it may have been easier to identify a definitive threshold, but now there was a need to assess based on needs and treat every case individually before reaching a conclusion.
- The importance of applicants being able to only choose the areas in which they wished to live was emphasised, and for them to consider their choices carefully since applicants who refused a property in their chosen locations faced a penalty. It was explained that this matter could be complicated further when the applicants were homeless and in a temporary property when they were expected to expand their chosen areas. It was added that the Housing Options Team tried to be flexible.
- It was confirmed that 250 people were in temporary accommodation in Gwynedd and the figure had been increasing, at a substantial cost to the Council of millions a year. It was added that the Homelessness Unit housed people in caravans, but availability was a problem and barriers such as licensing and winter site closures meant that applicants or families had to be moved more than once.
- It was noted that the Housing and Property Department was in the process of buying some former social housing as well as old large buildings to convert them into flats that would be used as temporary accommodation. It was reported that the Department was looking to expand this work.
- It was explained that the Department had already sent letters to 1,500 empty houses in Gwynedd and had received 170 responses offering to sell the houses or asking for help to arrange an establish tenancy for the property. It was reported that the Department was currently working through the responses.

Gratitude was expressed for all of the work being done by the Department and the Housing Options Team under difficult circumstances, considering the lack of social housing in the County. Members were also thanked for their questions.

It was highlighted that the Head of Housing and Property Department had expressed a desire to return in the new year in order to provide a further update to the Committee. The Head of Housing and Property Department would provide an update to the Committee when the new legislation would be confirmed, and after receiving further guidance from the Government.

DECISION

a) To accept the report, noting the observations made during the meeting.

b) A further report would be submitted on the proposed changes to the Housing Allocation Policy in the new year, so that members have an opportunity to provide their input.

8. CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME 2022/23

A short report was provided to the Members showing the Committee's latest work programme over the next months. It was explained that the work programme would need to be adapted as a result of items slipping and a new item had been brought to the attention of the Committee. It was noted that the item on the Gwynedd Population Needs Assessment had slipped and a request had been made for it to be included in the February meeting of the Committee. Also, Care Inspectorate Wales was eager to attend the February meeting of the Committee to submit the findings of the report.

As a result, the February and April agendas would be heavy, therefore, it was suggested to prioritise items for both of these committees, as well as consider items for June. It was recommended to include the Gwynedd Population Needs Assessment, the Care Inspectorate Wales report, the Staff Recruitment and Retention in the Care Field report (Children and Families Service) and the report on the Housing Action Plan, as items for the February Committee meeting.

It was also suggested to ask for a report via e-mail for some items for the purpose of updating the Committee, and then after receiving the report from the Departments to see whether there was a need to scrutinise the item or not. It was agreed to do this with the One Stop Shop and Looked After Children Placement items.

Things were kept as they were for the April meeting for the time being, in anticipation of the outcome after receiving other updates via e-mail.

A comment was made asking for the Departments to try and keep their presentations short; it was confirmed that this message would be conveyed to the Departments.

DECISION

To adapt the work programme in order to prioritise items for the February meeting of the Care Scrutiny Committee and to adapt a revised work programme.

The meeting commenced at 10:30 and concluded at 15:50

CHAIR