

REPORT TO GWYNEDD COUNCIL'S CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date:	February 1, 2024
Title:	Update on Housing Action Plan activities
Purpose:	Update the Committee on activity relating to the Housing Action Plan
Contact Officer:	Hedd Tomos, Assistant Head of Housing and Property
Cabinet Member:	Cllr. Craig ab Iago

1 Introduction / Background

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on some of the Housing Action Plan's main projects, detailing what has happened, what is currently underway and what is planned for the coming months.

1.2 The Housing Action Plan aims to ensure "the people of Gwynedd have access to a suitable home which is of a high standard, affordable and improves their quality of life".

1.1 Good progress has been made since the Plan was launched in April 2021:

- **241 social houses** have been built
- **202 empty properties** have been brought back into use
- **32 units for the homeless** have been built or are in the process of being built
- **64 first time buyers' grants** have been provided for renovation work on empty properties
- **633 home adaptation grants** have been approved to enable disabled people to continue to live in their own home

1.2 According to the Housing Health Cost Calculator, it is estimated that the support given through these grants has saved **£2,113,897 to the NHS**, and **£17,449,219 to society** between 2019 a 2022.

1.3 By doing all this, over **4550 units have been built or people have received help** to live in a house locally to date.

2. A review of individual projects/areas

Area / project:	Developing our own housing, purchasing private housing and purchasing land for building in the future	Ref.	3a, 3b, 3ff
2.1. Background			
2.1.1. All three of these projects involve increasing the opportunities that are available for people in Gwynedd to own or rent a house which is appropriate for their needs, either by building our own homes under the banner of the Tŷ Gwynedd Scheme (3a), purchasing private housing as part of the Buy to Let Scheme (3b), or purchasing land to build in the future (3ff).			
2.1.2. By implementing these schemes successfully, at the end of the 6-year period of our Housing Action Plan, the Council will have built 90 housing units and purchased another 100 which will be available to let to local residents.			

2.2. What has happened / is in progress

2.2.1. The 'Tŷ Gwynedd' concept, our vision for the kind of housing we intend to build as a part of project 3a (Developing our own houses in order to increase the opportunities for Gwynedd residents to compete in the housing market) was launched in February.

2.2.2. Every house under the banner of 'Tŷ Gwynedd' will be energy-efficient, flexible, eco-friendly and will be built sustainably.

2.2.3. Several developments are currently underway:

- Former library site (3 units)
- Former Ysgol Babanod Coed Mawr site, Bangor (10 units)
- Maes Twnti site, Morfa Nefyn (9 units)
- Land near the former schoolhouse, Llanrug (2 units)
- Site in Llanystumdwy (5 units)
- Site in Mynytho (4 units)

2.2.4. The six projects above are at various stages of development, with drawings being currently produced by our architects for Llanystumdwy, Coed Mawr and Maes Twnti sites; the former Llanberis Library site received planning permission in autumn 2023 and we are currently in the process of receiving initial structural drawings for the houses. The site at Mynytho will be imminently going out to tender in order to appoint architects.

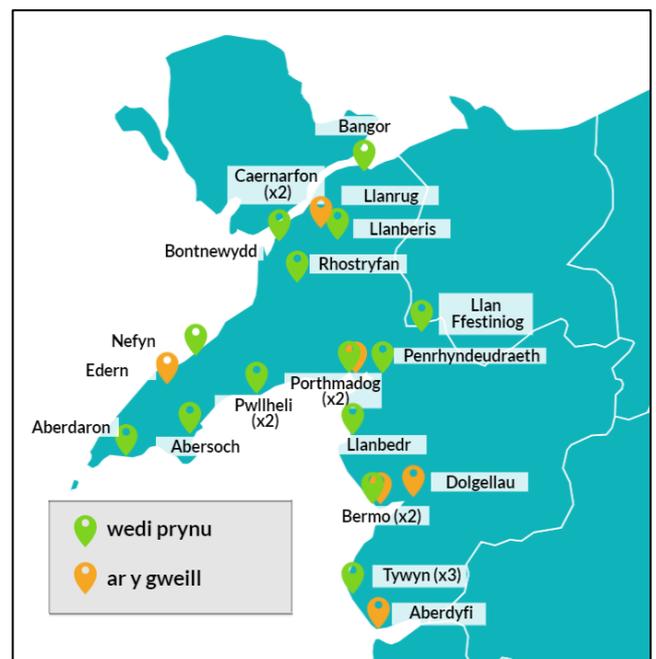
2.2.5. In terms of the **Buy to Let Scheme**, 18 houses have been purchased to date, with another 6 in the process of being purchased. As the map on the right shows, these houses are being purchased all over the county in locations where they can meet the housing needs of local people.

2.2.6. Before being able to let the properties to tenants, they must be brought up to acceptable and statutory living standards, and this work has already been completed for 3 properties, work is currently ongoing in 2 others and 3 are in the process of procuring a contractor.

2.2.7. We are currently discussing letting arrangements, with the intention of holding an open day for eligible applicants to come to see two properties which will be available soon.

2.2.8. In terms of **purchasing land**, since we last reported, we have purchased land in Mynytho, Llanystumdwy and Caernarfon to develop in the future. More information on these purchases can be found [here](#).

2.2.9. In terms of **social housing**, the Council collaborated closely with the Housing Associations to implement the ongoing Social Housing Development Programme (PDP) in the county. This Programme, which is



funded by Welsh Government through Gwynedd’s Social Housing Grant, aims to reach the Council’s target of building 700 social houses across the county during the Plan’s lifetime.

2.2.10. To date, 241 social units have been built, with a further 279 in the pipeline on the Main Programme, which corresponds to a spend of £12.3m in 2023/24. We are also delighted to report that the 2024/25 programme is fully allocated for 6 developments with the potential to build 150+ units over the next two years on the programme.

2.3 Next steps

2.3.1 **Tŷ Gwynedd:** We are working towards tendering for contractors to begin work on the former Llanberis library site during spring this year and we are very close to submitting a formal planning application for the Maes Twnti site at Morfa Nefyn. **Work on other sites is making good progress and formal planning applications will be submitted before the autumn.**

2.3.2 **Property and land purchases:** We continue to search for suitable properties and land to purchase across the county. To this end, we intend to correspond with more empty property owners (ones not contacted during the last cohort) to enquire whether they would consider selling their property to us.

Tŷ Gwynedd – some draft plans:



Further information:

Units developed as part of the development

3

Number of people helped (max.)

13

Area / project:	Grants	Ref.	3dd, 5f, 5ff
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2.4. Background

2.4.1. The Housing Action Plan includes many schemes involving giving and receiving grants to increase the opportunities available for Gwynedd residents to live in the county.

2.4.2. For example, the grants we give to people in Gwynedd through projects 5f (*Home Safety*) and 5ff (*Adaptations to make houses suitable homes for individuals with disabilities*) enables disabled people to continue to live safely in their own home.

2.4.3. We also provide grants to first time buyers to allow them to renovate empty properties to an acceptable living standard (project 3dd in the Housing Action Plan).

2.4.4. Very recently, we have opened grants for residential elements in community regeneration schemes (scheme 3g in the Housing Action Plan) which provides grants for community groups who provide residential units

to local people. Two groups have already expressed interest and application forms have been shared. We have received forms from one group and the information submitted is currently being considered.

2.5. What has happened / is in progress

2.5.1. **5f & 5ff:** Since the beginning of the Housing Action Plan, 633 adaptations worth £4.4m have been made enabling residents to remain in their home. This figure includes small adaptations such as installing stairlifts or ramps to ease movement or access to homes, or larger structural works such as extensions or adapting current rooms into purpose-built wet rooms.

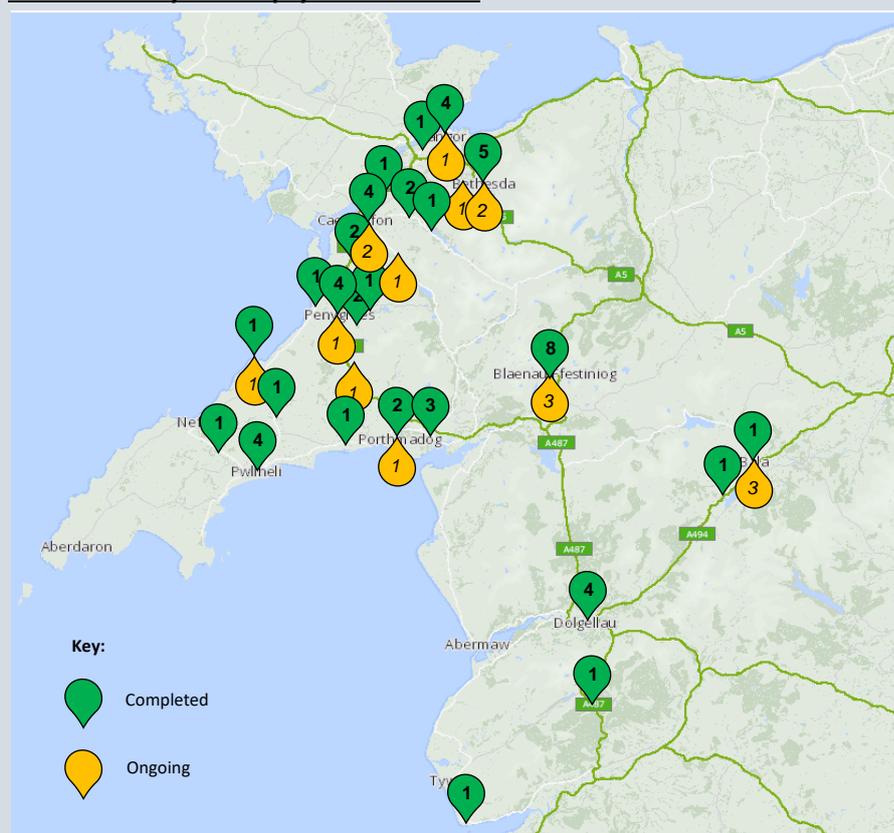
2.5.2. **3dd:** 142 people have been helped by this grant since the beginning of the Plan, which has brought 64 empty homes back into use across the county. Other interventions and means of support the grants team offer to Gwynedd residents includes home improvement loans, the Houses into Homes scheme, and supporting homeowners with materials costs by confirming VAT exemptions/discounts where eligible.

2.5.3. In the National Eisteddfod in Boduan in August 2023, an exciting adaptation to our First Time Buyers' Empty Homes Grant was launched, which means that empty homes which used to be second homes are now eligible for the grant.

2.6. Next steps

2.6.1. Continue to receive and process applications

First Time Buyers' Empty Homes Grant



Completed applications:

Aberdyfi (1); Bangor and Penrhosgarnedd (4); Bethesda and Tregarth (5); Blaenau Ffestiniog and Tanygrisiau (8); Boduan (1); Bontnewydd (1); Caernarfon (4); Chwilog (1); Corris (1); Cwm y Glo (2); Deiniolen (1); Dolgellau (3); Groeslon (1); Llandwrog (1); Llanfachreth (1); Llanllyfni (2); Llanuwchllyn (1); Penrhyndeudraeth (3); Penygroes (4); Porthmadog (2); Pwllheli and Llwyn Hudol (4); Treborth (1); Trefor (1); Y Bala (3); Y Felinheli (1); Y Ffôr (1)

Ongoing:

Bangor (1); Bethesda (2); Blaenau Ffestiniog (1); Caernarfon (2); Glasinfryn (1); Pantglas (1); Penygroes (1); Porthmadog (1); Trefor (1); Waunfawr (1)

Further information:

Area/ project:	Homelessness – supported accommodation and other schemes	Ref.	1a, 1b, 1ch, 1d, 4b
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2.7. Background and context

2.7.1. According to the latest data, between 70 and 100 people present as homeless in Gwynedd monthly, and on 31 December 2023, 217 were housed in emergency accommodation in the county.

2.7.2. Alongside this situation, the supply of supported accommodation is not sufficient to answer the demand and to cope with the pressure currently seen by the Homelessness Service.

2.7.3. To this end, plans are in place to develop suitable supported accommodation for those who need our support, as well as other projects which aims to tackle issues associated with homelessness such as mental health support and working with private landlords to offer suitable living units. More details can be found below.

2.7.4. In November 2023, Welsh Government released a White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales, and the Council is currently considering the proposed changes and their potential effects. The Government will be reviewing the responses received as part of the recent public consultation, and more details will be released shortly.

2.8. What has happened / is in progress

2.8.1. More details can be found below on completed or ongoing supported accommodation developments:

Tŷ Adferiad, Porthmadog

Supported housing for homeless women, the first of its kind in Gwynedd. Tŷ Adferiad opened its doors in October 2021, and 6 women are currently receiving support.

Units developed as part of the development	6	Number of people helped (max.)	6
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Caertref, Segontium, Caernarfon

4 self-sustaining “pods” for homeless individuals with severe needs. The pods have been built using the *Passivhaus* technology, meaning their energy use is extremely low. The building work has been completed and contractors are on-site completing some snagging tasks. Four people are currently housed in the pods and are receiving support from the Homelessness Service.

Units developed as part of the development	4	Number of people helped (max.)	4
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137 High Street, Bangor

This development, in partnership with Adra and North Wales Housing, provides supported housing enabling individuals to sustain permanent tenancies in the future. It is expected that the construction work will be completed during the spring this year, and the property will be handed over shortly afterwards.

Units developed as part of the development	12	Number of people helped (max.)	12
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Site of former Ysgol Glan Wnion, Dolgellau

This development will offer supported housing for homeless individuals, providing them with the required skills to sustain permanent tenancies in the future. The building work has been completed over the last 12 months, and an open day will be held shortly to enable local members and the public to come over to see the site.

Units developed as part of the development	5	Number of people helped (max.)	5
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Accommodation on Ala Road, Pwllheli

This small but important development will support homeless individuals and families to sustain permanent future tenancies and the area is in great need of this kind of accommodation. Renovation work had to be undertaken on the property, and we are delighted to report that one flat is ready for its first tenant, whilst the other flat will shortly be ready once issues with electricity supply are solved.

Units developed as part of the development	2	Number of people helped (max.)	3
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35 Ffordd y Coleg, Bangor

This plan converts a property on College Road, Bangor, which had been vacant for many years, into three flats for individuals with severe tenancy support needs. As well as rooms, the building will contain an office, kitchen and a meeting room for specialist staff in the basement. The development will be co-managed with North Wales Housing Association. Energy supply issues are holding us the project at present, however we anticipate that the energy supplier will provide solutions in the near future.

Units developed as part of the development	3	Number of people helped (max.)	3
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1d – Specialist mental health support

2.8.2. As part of scheme 1d of the Housing Action Plan, the Department has set up specialist support for cases associated with mental health.

2.8.3. Two officers were appointed, one in autumn 2022 and the other in January 2023, to support individuals who present as homeless or are at risk of being homeless as a result of mental health related problems.

One officer works in the Substance Misuse Team at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, while the other is employed by the Council. Both officers work closely together and the arrangement allows ease of access and effective collaboration between both institutions.

1d: Support packs for private landlords

2.8.4. It is well known that the supply of housing in Gwynedd is lower than present demand. This creates problems for the Homelessness Service when trying to secure permanent accommodation to move individuals on from temporary/unsuitable emergency accommodation.

2.8.5. Since September 2022, the Department has been running the Leasing Scheme Wales: Gwynedd – a national scheme funded by Welsh Government enabling the Council to offer guaranteed rent to landlords, and steady accommodation to tenants. This in turn helps individuals in temporary accommodation move on to a suitable, permanent home.

2.8.6. To date, 20 individuals have received support in 10 properties. 7 other properties are at various stages of development, whether going through renovation work or being assessed.

2.8.7. We hope to encourage more landlords to approach us over the next period, and we will be conducting marketing and communication activities to this end.

2.9. Next steps

2.9.1. Generally, we will continue to develop supported accommodation across the county. Specifically, completing work at 35 Ffordd y Coleg, Bangor, and holding an open day on the former Ysgol Glan Wnion site, Dolgellau.

2.9.2. We have also been holding initial discussions regarding developing further supported units in the Arfon area as part of schemes 1c and 1dd of the Housing Action Plan.

Area / project:	One Stop Shop	Ref	6
2.10. Background			
2.10.1. As part of a report submitted to the Care Scrutiny Committee on September 21, 2023, the Committee was updated on the work to develop a service for Gwynedd residents regarding their housing enquiries.			
2.10.2. Through establishing a One Stop Shop, the Department will introduce a system which can respond in one central place to the needs of residents when submitting housing enquiries. Currently, there are a number of contact points within the Department for the public to access different services in the Housing and Property area which may mean that not all their needs are met.			
2.10.3. In addition, in order to improve customer experiences, the establishment of a One Stop Shop will enable a better understanding of the general needs of our customers, together with highlighting to managers if more of our resources need to be invested in specific areas.			
2.11. What has happened / is in progress			
2.11.1. Engagement sessions with key partners (e.g., housing associations and third sector organisations) were held over the last 18 months to identify if there are opportunities to strengthen the current arrangements and whether there will be any potential impact on the nature of the contact that individuals currently have with the organisations.			
2.11.2. An initial public consultation was held in January 2023 to receive feedback regarding residents' general experiences relating to their contact with the Housing Department.			
2.11.3. We have procured a new system for the administration and management of housing options information, and the scheduled work is progressing the arrangements to set up the system, including a trial period and specific dates for relevant training. The aim is for the system to be operational by summer 2024.			
<u>Single Point of Access (SPOA) Housing Support Grant</u>			
2.11.4. As part of the process of setting up a One Stop Shop, the Council has decided to establish a Single Point of Access (SPOA) for some of the projects and services that are funded through the Housing Support			

Grant. The internal arrangements for staffing are funded through the Housing Support Grant and the officers sit within the One Stop Shop.

2.11.5. The new system has now been active since December 2023, and we are reviewing the implementation of the arrangements with providers.

2.12. What are the next steps?

2.12.1 We will continue to work with the external company building the new Housing Options system, and when construction is complete (around the start of the next fiscal year), to test and implement the system.

2.12.2 We will continue to collaborate with IT Services on the installation and operation of the FFOS system.

2.12.3 We will continue discussions on the operation of the One Stop Shop alongside other internal services within the Department and beyond, and also with external partners such as Housing Associations.

2.12.4 We will continue to deliver staff training to ensure that services are provided effectively.

3. OTHER ACTIVITIES

3.1. The last time we reported, we acknowledged that there was a need to strengthen how the Scheme's messages and successes are communicated, as well as updating Members.

3.2. There is now a specific page for all the Housing and Property Department's activities on the Members Intranet where news items, updates and information are published. Individual pages for each of our main developments are being created (e.g., houses that are bought) in order that a local member is able to see recent developments in their ward.

3.3. In addition, in October 2023, a map was launched on the Members' Intranet which shows the locations of some of the main schemes that have either been completed or are underway. It is anticipated that this map provides Members with easy, clear and direct access to information about our plans. The map will be updated as new datasets become available.