

MEETING	Care Scrutiny Committee
DATE	3 April 2025
TITLE	Housing Action Plan – Progress update
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	The Housing Action Plan contributes towards a the Homely Gwynedd priority field in the Council Plan 2023-28
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CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Paul Rowlinson

1. Why does it need scrutinising?

- 1.1. Increasing the supply of housing to local people, ensuring no-one is homeless in Gwynedd and dealing with the energy costs and fuel poverty crisis is a priority in the Council's Plan and projects within the Housing Action Plan aims to respond accordingly.
- 1.2. The Plan was scrutinised in February 2024 therefore it would be timely to request a further progress report in April 2025.

2. What exactly needs to be scrutinised?

- What is the progress?
- Is the plan on track to deliver?
- What is the effect of the plan?

3. Summary and Key Matters

- 3.1. 831 units have been build, purchased or have come back into use since the start of the Housing Action Plan, with 227 of those since the Department last reported to this Committee in February 2024.
- 3.2. Thus far, over £68m has been spent on schemes within the Housing Action Plan (with £10.5m of that from the Council Tax Premium fund), which has helped 8,720 of Gwynedd residents. An overview of the basic figures along with targets can be found in Appendix 1.
- 3.3. We must admit that challenges have been faced along the way e.g. the first two years were very difficult due to the side-effects caused by the pandemic and Brexit; while we have been able to purchase properties quickly, renovating them has taken more time than anticipated due to the lack of resources and contractors; interest rates, construction costs and living costs have all risen sharply since the start of the Plan.
- 3.4. Despite this, we are confident that our projects are on track to achieve the targets set at the beginning and within the set period of time.
- 3.5. By delivering the Housing Action Plan's projects, Gwynedd residents' wellbeing, their ability to attain a tenancy, be home-owners or is positively impacted, as well as ensuring that opportunities are available for people to live in suitable, safe and quality homes. Council resources could also be positively impacted, as our dependency on costly emergency accommodation reduces, and we hope to be able to go part of the way to address the massive demand for homes.

4. Background / Context

- 4.1. The purpose of this report is to offer an update on the progress of the Housing Action Plan's schemes, and their effect on Gwynedd residents.
- 4.2. The Cyngor Gwynedd Housing Action Plan 2020/21-2026/27 was approved by the Cabinet on 15 December 2020, which includes 33 projects across five key areas to ensure that the people of Gwynedd have a suitable, affordable and quality home.
- 4.3. Those five key areas continue to be as relevant today, i.e.:
 - Ensure that no-one is homeless in Gwynedd
 - Increase the opportunities for Gwynedd residents to secure a social tenancy
 - Help the residents of Gwynedd to own an affordable home in their community
 - Housing in Gwynedd is environmentally friendly
 - Houses in Gwynedd have a positive influence on the health and well-being of residents
- 4.4. Many of the projects of the Housing Action Plan are a core part of enabling the Council to deliver the Council Plan 2023-28 – 'Increasing the supply of houses for local people', 'Ensuring that nobody is homeless in Gwynedd', and 'Dealing with the energy costs and fuel poverty crisis', are a key part of the 'Gwynedd Glyd' priority area.
- 4.5. Following changes to the housing situation, the needs of the people of Gwynedd and financial sources over the past years, particularly as a result of Covid-19 and Brexit, an opportunity was taken recently to review the Plan, taking advantage of new opportunities to extend and help even more residents in the county with their housing situation.
- 4.6. The current Plan invests over £180m over the life of the Plan, drawing on many financial sources including the Housing Support Grant, Welsh Government Social Housing Grant, the Council's Asset Management Plan and of course, the Council Tax Premium on Second Homes and Empty Houses.
- 4.7. Funds received from the Council Tax Premium Fund (roughly 27% of the whole Plan's worth) has been fully allocated against projects within the Housing Action Plan, such as supported housing costs, building our own homes, contributing towards residential elements in community plans, bringing empty homes back into use, and ensuring that disabled people are able to continue to live in their current homes.
- 4.8. Being able to include the Premium as a financial source has allowed the Department to attract several extra grants. Priority was given to spending these grants first due to the time limit for spending, and this in turn has allowed us to prioritise premium spend ensuring that it benefits Gwynedd residents as much as possible.

Highlights and progress update

4.9. Good progress can be seen since adopting the Plan in April 2021:

	<i>Difference since last report</i>
• 352 social housing has been built	+111
• 259 empty homes has been brought back into use	+57
• 43 houses have been bought from the open market	+22
• 101 grants have been issued to renovate empty properties	+37
• 746 home adaptations grants have been issued to enable disabled people to continue to live at home	+113

4.10. Through all schemes within the Housing Action Plan, **8,600 people have been helped** to live in a house locally.

Supported housing (1a):

- 4.11. Our first 5 unit supported housing development, **Dôl Sadler** (the former Ysgol Glan Wnion in Dolgellau) completed last year. The project was shortlisted for *Inside Housing Development's* awards in the *Best Supported Housing Development: Rural/Suburban* category.
- 4.12. Several other workstreams are ongoing, including 35 College Road, Bangor (3 units), 137 High Street, Bangor (12 units), and the former Welsh Government building in the Penrallt, Caernarfon area (up to 40 units) where we will eventually locate our new housing hub, as well as continued work on other development sites across the county.
- 4.13. In addition to this, the Department have been successful in receiving significant grant funding through Welsh Government Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme neu TACP.
- 4.14. 17 properties have been approved through the Programme across the county and 34 individuals have been accommodated to date. Furthermore, 6 other properties are in progress at the moment.
- 4.15. We intend to convert the Mona Building, Caernarfon, which was a Council office building until December 2024, into 5 units to accommodate individuals to meet the demand for temporary accommodation in Arfon. Phase 1 i.e. external work, has commenced since the beginning of March, and phase 2 will follow soon.

Building social housing (2a):

- 4.16. The Council is not a stock-holding authority (since the stock transfer in 2010), therefore collaborating with the Housing Associations operating in Gwynedd is crucial in order to meet the demand for affordable housing across the county.
- 4.17. Through Welsh Government's Social Housing Grant, managed by the Council, sites are prioritised where the demand for housing exists in order to meet the demand.
- 4.18. Since the beginning of the Housing Action Plan, 352 social housing units have been built across Gwynedd with another 361 in progress on the Main Programme. This has helped 1,178 people attain a social tenancy.

- 4.19. Indeed, the Council has been commended recently by Welsh Government for the positive collaboration and working relationship that exists between us and the Housing Associations, and we have been frequently successful in attracting extra funding when slippage is available from the national fund.

Tŷ Gwynedd Scheme – building our own homes (3a):

- 4.20. Work on the Tŷ Gwynedd scheme has been gaining momentum, and preparatory work to identify sites, feasibility studies, tendering for contractors, preparing and submitting planning applications have all been in progress over the last few years (and continue to do so on sites across Gwynedd).
- 4.21. Now, contractors are on site at two locations, namely **former Llanberis Library site (3 units)** and **the former Ysgol Babanod Coed Mawr, Bangor site (10 units)** and work is ongoing – the old library was demolished during the summer of 2024, and [work commenced in October 2024](#); and a [turf-cutting ceremony on the Coed Mawr site](#) took place in December 2024.
- 4.22. The development on the **Maes Twnti, Morfa Nefyn (9 units)** site has been approved by the [Council's Planning Committee on 13 January, 2025](#) and sites at **Llanystumdwy (5 units)** and **Mynytho (4 units)** are on different stages of the process and is making good progress.
- 4.23. The team is also considering other appropriate sites across the county to advance the programme and to reach our ambition of constructing 90 homes between now and the end of the Plan.

Buy to Let Scheme (2c/3b):

- 4.24. To date, 43 houses have been purchased and 4 is in progress; 11 are now new homes to local families. This means the target set for this year's purchases (i.e. 43) has already been reached.
- 4.25. Essential renovating/upgrading work is ongoing, and there is potential for up to 161 individuals to benefit.
- 4.26. In terms of letting, 16 houses have been let to local residents, with another 26 in progress and will have been let by the end of the year.
- 4.27. The houses which have been let will generate income from rent, which in turn will be reinvested in the Scheme to purchase more houses, and to ensure stock maintenance.
- 4.28. The Scheme was originally intended to be funded by borrowing. However, with interest rates and costs extremely high following Brexit and Covid-19, the Cabinet approved, in its meeting on 13 June 2023, to earmark and prioritise utilising Premium funds to fund some purchases until the situation regarding borrowing improves.
- 4.29. With interest rates still high, we will ask the Cabinet for approval to allocate more Premium funds to bridge until such a period when rates are better, so that the current pace can be continued while further discussions with the Finance Department are held regarding borrowing.
- 4.30. Work is ongoing continually to identify more suitable properties in order to reach the ambition of purchasing and letting 100 houses within the Plan's lifetime.

Engaging with the community (3c)

- 4.31. Although we know the demand for housing is high, and that firm data supports this for all areas of Gwynedd, engaging with Gwynedd residents is an important part of the Department's work and of the Housing Action Plan.
- 4.32. While there are many ways of doing this, one of the most efficient ways is to go out to the community to speak directly with the people of Gwynedd. To this end, the Department has arranged a series of roadshows, named 'Tai ar Daith' – drop-in sessions inviting the public and councillors to drop by to see us and discuss their housing situation, receive more information or ask questions directly to the Housing and Property Department's officers and other associated internal services such as the Planning Service, along with key external partners like the Housing Associations.
- 4.33. Positive feedback was received about the last series, held in spring 2024, which attracted 158 visitors, and where 96% of responders said they felt they benefitted from the session.
- 4.34. The next series will visit Bethesda, Porthmadog, Tywyn, and Nefyn. More details can be found here: [Tai ar Daith: Housing drop-in sessions](#)

Empty Homes Schemes (3dd):

- 4.35. 259 empty homes have come back into use across Gwynedd thanks to the assistance and support of our empty homes team, including 97 empty homes grants. A total of 319 people have been helped through these grants, including 125 people through the 97 grants.
- 4.36. Recently, an opportunity was taken to enhance the Scheme in response to the changes in residents' needs and the increase seen nationally in general costs. Now, the maximum available grant has increased from £15,000 to £20,000, and that grant is now available to all types of buyers, not first time buyers only.
- 4.37. This is in addition to the steps taken in 2023 to extend the criteria to allow owners of previously empty second homes to also be eligible for support, allowing as many empty houses as possible to come back into use in the county.
- 4.38. Over £1.1m worth of grants have been given so far in all areas of Gwynedd, with the split for Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd as follows:
- Arfon – 49
 - Dwyfor – 23
 - Meirionnydd – 29
- 4.39. Also, scheme 3e which offers a Council tax exemption for up to one year so that empty home owners can complete essential renovation works has been very successful with 123 approved exemptions up to Q4 2024.

Homebuy Scheme (3f):

- 4.40. Since newly launching this scheme in September 2022, 59 households (135 people) have been helped to purchase their home, and another 35 applications are at different stages of the process, across Gwynedd.

- 4.41. To date, £4.5m worth of loans have been provided through this Scheme.
- 4.42. The Council, in partnership with the Dwyfor Pilot, has secured a agreement to increase the permitted maximum property value in the Homebuy Scheme's criteria in some areas of Dwyfor where property prices are high, in order to ensure local residents have the best access possible to the Scheme.

Set up a new Energy Conservation Service (4a)

- 4.43. To give Gwynedd residents the best possible help and support with energy matters, the Department has enhanced its Energy Service as part of the Housing Action Plan, which collaborates with our partners to promote and facilitate energy saving plans, grants, and benefits in order to ensure as many people as possible take advantage of the support available at this challenging time.
- 4.44. The ECO4 Scheme, launched in 2022 and lasts until 2026, is a key part of this. The scheme is funded by Welsh Government, whereby grants are given to help vulnerable households living in low energy performing houses to improve the energy performance and reduce fuel poverty.
- 4.45. Up to now, over £10m of investment has allowed 597 of Gwynedd homes to improve their energy performance – 248 of these rising 4 EPC levels. 449 homes are now on EPC B.
- 4.46. The Department has also been administering a scheme distributing energy vouchers to households with pre-payment meters. These vouchers are available through the charity *Fuel Bank Foundation*, and 4,487 vouchers have been given to-date, worth £188,000.

Adaptations to the homes of disabled adults and children (5d, 5f, 5ff)

- 4.47. The work on adapting homes for disabled people is an important part of the Housing Action Plan to ensure that houses are suitable homes for our residents. These adaptations often mean the difference between being able to continue to live at home or having to move to a care setting such as hospital or care home.
- 4.48. Scheme 5d (Suitable homes for children with severe physical needs) has now helped 14 children with their home situation, with jobs such as extensions, converting bedrooms into wet-rooms, installing ramps etc.

5. Consulting

- 5.1. A briefing session on the progress of the Housing Action Plan was arranged for all Council Members on 19 March 2025. 19 members attended the session where valuable questions and positive comments were received on the whole.
- 5.2. Among the comments made were a recognition of the challenge faced by the Department and the Council in terms of the demand for housing; enquiries about which sites we are looking at to build homes, and a question about the process of renovating the homes we buy to let.
- 5.3. As explained in 4.29, the Department will soon be beginning the [second series of Tai ar Daith drop-in sessions](#) around the county where members of the public,

councillors and anyone who wishes to stop by is welcome to come to speak to officers from a variety of services linked to housing.

- 5.4. We are also glad to have had the opportunity to report on the progress of the Housing Action Plan to this Scrutiny Committee annually since 2022, and always appreciate Members' comments.


6. Future Generations Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2015

- 6.1. The Future Generations Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2015 was at the heart of originally forming the Housing Action Plan in 2019/20, and a specific reference to all of the Act's cornerstones can be found within each Scheme – an example of which is included below:

1a Cynlluniau tai â chefnogaeth i'r digartref

Cyfres o ddatblygiadau 'tai â chefnogaeth' er mwyn gallu cartrefu unigolion, cyplau a theuluoedd sy'n wynebu digartrefedd ac angen llety dros dro ar frys. Bydd hyn yn caniatáu osgoi lleoli pobl mewn llety anaddas (e.e. gwely a brecwast) ac yn galluogi i ni ddarparu'r gefnogaeth sydd ei angen i rhoi cymorth iddynt allu datblygu sgiliau byw'n annibynnol. Gall y gefnogaeth fod ar y safle neu yn symudol ei natur.

Nifer o Unedau 38	Buddsoddiad £4m	Cysylltiad i brif feysydd gwaith y Cyngor: Adfywio Cefnogi Pobl Hinsawdd
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7. Impact on Equality Characteristics, the Welsh Language and the Socio-economic duty

- 7.1. An Impact Assessment was prepared to this end when the Housing Action Plan was originally launched in 2020, and updated when the Plan was reviewed in June 2023 – click this link to read that assessment:
<https://democratiaeth.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/documents/s38130/Atodiad%203%20-%20Asesiad%20Effaith%20Cydraddoldeb.pdf?LLL=1>.
- 7.2. The Plan is considered to have a positive effect on all equality characteristics and the Welsh language by increasing the number and breadth of houses within the county addressing the needs of different communities.
- 7.3. For example, there will be a positive effect on the Welsh language by helping approximately 63% of Gwynedd residents that have been priced out of the market have access to affordable homes, or through loans, grants, tax reliefs etc. The data recently collected by the Housing Association Adra on one of their new estates in Dinas, Llanwnda indicates that 94% of new residents can speak Welsh. A similar review on another new estate in Tregarth indicates that 96% of residents on that estate can speak Welsh.
- 7.4. The Plan also has a positive impact on disabled people, with specific schemes (some highlighted in this report) assisting disabled children and adults with a suitable, affordable and accessible home. This is done by either adapting houses or introduce temporary or permanent specialist units.

8. Next steps

- 8.1. A report will be presented to the Cabinet on 13 May, 2025 which will summarise the progress of the Housing Action Plan, along with outlining next steps in the wake of extending the Plan to 2028/29.
- 8.2. By extending the Plan for another two years, two years' worth of Council Tax Premium will be available and needs to be allocated for the Housing Action Plan.
- 8.3. The extra Premium is intended to be allocated as follows:

Ref.	Scheme	Extra funding (Premium)
1a	Supported Housing (1a)	£2.7m
2c	Buy to Let (2c)	£2.7m
3a	Tŷ Gwynedd – building our own homes (3a)	£2m
3dd	Empty Homes Schemes (3dd)	£700k
New	Smallholdings	£2.1m

- 8.4. As a result, the Department will be able to aim to build, adapt or recover over 500 extra units to the output of the Council by the end of its lifespan.
- 8.5. The total investment will be over £180m across all the Plan's schemes, drawing on several funding sources such as the Council Tax Premium, the Council's Asset Management Plan and the Social Housing Grant.
- 8.6. Should Cabinet approval be given to the next steps, we will move forward to publish an updated Housing Action Plan document.

9. Background information

Cyngor Gwynedd Housing Action Plan 2020/21-2026/27	https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Residents/Documents-Residents/Housing-documents/Housing-Action-Plan.pdf
Report and minutes of the Care Scrutiny Committee 01/02/2024 – Housing Action Plan progress report	Item 5 – Agenda for Care Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 1st February, 2024, 10.30 am
Report and minutes of the Cabinet meeting 13/06/2023 – 'Review of the Cyngor Gwynedd Housing Action Plan'	Item 11 – Agenda for The Cabinet on Tuesday, 13th June, 2023, 1.00 pm

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Overview of all Housing Action Plan schemes' details and progress

11. Responses to the questions received beforehand from Members of the Committee

11.1. Field/subject: Supported housing for the homeless schemes

11.1.1 What are the latest homeless figures and has there been a decrease as a result of the Council's plans?

- During the 2024/25 financial year up to mid-March, 891 households have presented to the Service as homeless, and 564 households were housed in emergency accommodation.
- These presentations figures are roughly the same as last years', however the number in emergency accommodation has slightly reduced compared to 2023/24 (when 662 households were housed during the year).
- This could be due to several reasons, however the hard work and dedicated actions of the Department and Homelessness Service are certainly a factor in this reduction as we aim to reduce our dependency on unsuitable emergency accommodation.
- We will know the final figures at the end of the year, however the data suggests, while presentations remain high, the Department's schemes and arrangements to reduce the dependency on emergency accommodation is working and going in the right direction.

11.1.2 How many supported housing developments have been realised and how many people have benefitted from this?

- 20 supported housing units have been completed since the start of the HAP, including a 5-unit development in Dolgellau, 2 units in Pwllheli and the renovation of our hostels.
- As a result, at least 22 individuals have been helped, and as natural client turnover progresses, more and more individual will benefit from the developments.
- Please see 4.12-4.16 of this report for details on some of the completed schemes and ones currently in progress.

11.2. Field/subject: Innovative Housing Pilot Scheme

11.2.1 What is the latest regarding building 4 "pods" for the homeless from Passivhaus technology?

- These pods were one of the first developments delivered in the name of the Housing Action Plan in 2021: [Tai ecogyfeillgar i roi cartref i bobl fregus yng Ngwynedd | NS4C | Newyddion S4C](#)
- *Passivhaus* principles means that the pods have low running costs, and are environmentally friendly.
- The pods have been a temporary home to 9 individuals since opening, enabling the Department to reduce its dependency on unsuitable accommodation and associated costs.

11.3. Field/subject: Purchase of former social housing and renting them to Gwynedd residents

11.3.1 How many "former Council homes" are on sale that have been purchased and let to be rented by local people?

- Please see 4.25-4.31 of this report for an update on the Buy to Let Scheme.
- As a background to Members, Cabinet approval was given to combine schemes 2c (Purchase of former social housing and renting them to Gwynedd residents) and 3b (Purchasing private housing) in February 2021, and are now one project named 'Buy to Let'. This was also confirmed in a [report](#) submitted to the Cabinet in June 2023.

11.4. Field/subject: Purchasing private housing and intermediate rent housing

11.4.1 How many private housing on sale have been purchased and let to local people on intermediate rent?

- Please refer to the previous response (11.3.1) and paragraphs 4.25-4.31 of this report.

11.4.2 We have received complaints from some constituents that intermediate rent set by the housing associations on behalf of the council have increased significantly. Can you explain why the rent is higher than the intermediate housing rent and why a 5% increase was placed on rent recently?

- Please note that intermediate and social rent levels are two different things and cannot be compared.
- Generally, intermediate rent levels and costs sit above social rent levels, but below open market rent/costs levels.
- We are aware that intermediate rents have increased recently, however this is a matter for the housing associations as the Council does not have influence over the rent levels. However, it appears that the increase is in line with the nationally permitted levels, and any changes will be reflected in individual housing associations' policies.

11.5. Field/subject: First Time Buyers' Grants to Renovate empty homes

11.5.1 How many residents have taken advantage of the opportunity to renovate empty homes to an acceptable living standard? Have you reached the target of helping approx. 70 first time buyers over the last two years?

- Please refer to the update given in paragraphs 4.36-4.40.
- For the second part of the question, we can confirm that 97 grants (which has helped 125 people) have been provided since the beginning of the Plan.

11.6. Field/subject: Purchasing land for building in the future

11.6.1 How many parcels of land has the Council purchased so far

- 4 pieces of land have been purchased so far – in Mynytho, Llanystumdwy, Morfa Nefyn and Caernarfon. These lands enable us to move ahead with building new homes for Gwynedd residents under the Tŷ Gwynedd Scheme banner.
- Availability of suitable land can be a challenge, therefore it's important to note that we make use of land already in our possession – the best example of this is the two Tŷ Gwynedd developments currently on site, namely the former Llanberis library site, and the former Ysgol Babanod Coed Mawr, Bangor site. Other sites are under consideration such as Llanrug, Llidiardau, y Bala and Tywyn.

11.6.2 How many sites have already been developed and how many are ongoing?

- Building contractors are on site at 2 locations at the moment, namely the former Llanberis library site, and the former Ysgol Babanod Coed Mawr, Bangor site.
- More information can be found in paragraphs 4.21-4.24 of this report.

11.7. Field/subject: Empty homes

11.7.1 What are the plans to ensure that empty buildings and homes are part of the plan? (including buildings in the Council's possession)

- Bringing empty homes back into use is a crucial part of the Housing Action Plan since the very beginning. Two main schemes relate to empty homes, namely:
 - 3dd – Empty Homes Schemes (which includes grants to renovate empty properties – please see 4.36-4.40)

- 3e – Council Tax Exemptions for empty homes – a scheme which allows up to a year's extra Council tax exception for empty home owners so that necessary renovation work can be completed
- Please note that other schemes indirectly enable bringing empty properties back into use, such as the Buy to Let Scheme (2c), Homebuy Scheme (3f) and Contribution towards an affordable unit within community regeneration plans (3g).