
CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
03/04/2025

Attendance:

Councillors:

Beth Lawton (Chair), Jina Gwyrfai, Elwyn Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Sian Williams, Rheinalt Puw, Gwynfor Owen, Menna Baines, Gareth Coj Parry, Berwyn Parry Jones and Anwen J. Davies

Officers present:

Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Iwan Edwards (Democracy Services Officer).

Present for item 5:

Councillor Paul Rowlinson (Cabinet Member for Housing and Property), Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department), Hedd Morlais Glyn Tomos (Assistant Head of Housing and Property Department) and Siôn Elwyn Hughes (Senior Executive Officer - Housing and Property Department).

Present for item 6:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being) and Aled Davies (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department), Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services), Mannon Emyr Trappe (Assistant Manager for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Mental Health and Community Safety).

Present for item 7:

Councillor Dilwyn Morgan (Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being), Menna Trenholme (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families), Dylan Owen (Statutory Director of Social Services), Aled Gibbard (Assistant Head of Children and Supporting Families Department) and Lucy Hemmings (Practice Lead - Children's Autism and Family Support).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Angela Russell, Linda Morgan, Meryl Roberts and Einir Wyn Williams

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received from Councillor Gwynfor Owen on items 6 and 7. He withdrew from the meeting for these items.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 20 February 2025 as a true record.

5. HOUSING ACTION PLAN

Submitted - a report by the cabinet member for Housing and Property providing an update on the progress of the Housing Action Plan. It was explained that increasing the supply of housing for local people, ensuring that no one is homeless in Gwynedd and tackling the energy cost crisis and fuel poverty, was a priority within the Council Plan. It was explained that the Plan was now halfway through its life and therefore it was timely to provide an update to the Committee and to review the plan.

Reference was made to section three of the report which contained a brief summary of the key issues of the scheme and a table which gave an overview of the main progress figures of the Plan. It was explained that the aim, overall, was to deliver 1,966 units and now over 830 had been completed – which was 42% of the aim. In addition, it was noted that this had helped 15,500 individuals from Gwynedd. In terms of spending the budget of 152 million, it was confirmed that they had spent over 60 million. It was believed that the fact that they had almost accomplished half of the plan definitely showed that they were on the right track.

It was acknowledged that the Plan had faced challenges along the way e.g. the first two years of the Plan as a result of the side effects of the pandemic and Brexit. In addition, it was explained that while they had managed to buy houses quickly, the renovation had taken longer than expected due to a lack of resources and contractors. In addition to this, interest rates, construction costs and living costs had all increased significantly since the inception of the Plan. However, it was emphasised that they were confident that the Plan's projects were on track to achieve the ambition set at the outset of the Plan and within the timeframe.

A visual presentation was provided on Powerpoint showing what the progress and impact of the plan had been so far. It was explained that there were five areas to the Plan. The first was to ensure that no one is homeless in Gwynedd. It was explained that the Council was trying to help the homeless people of Gwynedd by opening up more accommodation and providing more support. As an example, a photo of accommodation that had now been completed in Dolgellau in 2023, constructed using the former school's stones, was shown. It was mentioned that the building had been short-listed in last year's 'Inside Housing' Awards.

It was also reported that there were plans to adapt the former Crown Building in Caernarfon to create up to 40 self-sufficient flats and supported accommodation. It was explained that the building had been purchased in March 2024 and that the architect was in the process of drawing up the final designs. It was mentioned that there were plans to arrange a visit for Members in the coming weeks so that they would have the opportunity to tour the building.

The second area was presented, namely increasing the opportunities for affordable tenancy with reference to the social housing building programme support scheme, which was within this area. It was noted that they were working with partners, the Housing Associations, to build affordable housing across the county and manage the Welsh Government's Social Housing Grant by prioritising the Buildings Programme.

It was mentioned that vacant housing schemes allocated grants and loans to bring vacant housing back into use. It was noted that an increase in building costs had caused a change in this plan with grants of up to £20,000 now available, up from £15,000 at the start of the plan. In addition, it was explained that the plan had also been modified to ensure that it was available to more people.

To conclude the presentation, an overview was given of the additional budget that would be available for the plan moving forward. It was explained that this additional premium would be allocated to the five different areas within the plan, e.g. An additional £2.7 million for Accommodation and Support and £2.1 million for Smallholdings.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

A question was asked about the plan to adapt the Crown Building in Caernarfon, i.e., where the building's tenants would be parking. In response, it was explained that there was a two-storey car park over the road to the building which would be available to tenants of the building.

It was asked if the 'Adferiad' company had something to do with 'Tŷ Adferiad' in Porthmadog and whether it was possible to get more details about 'Tŷ Adferiad'. In response, it was noted:

- They were more than happy to have a one-to-one discussion with the member to explain exactly what was taking place in 'Tŷ Adferiad' and invited the member to visit the site. It was emphasised that it was an excellent scheme.

The member noted that he had not seen anything in the Plan referring to helping people who were struggling to pay mortgages. It was believed that a little help for these people would prevent the difficulties and help reduce the demand for housing in the county.

In response, it was noted:

- That it was something local authorities had been examining on a national level. It was explained that the Welsh Government had a mortgage rescue package, and the department referred people to different agencies who could provide help but did not have a specific scheme to help with mortgages.

The member referred to point 3a of the report, namely the Tŷ Gwynedd Scheme, stating his concern with the progress of the Scheme. It was noted that there had been no significant development with the three sites to date, with only £360,000 of the £9 million budget being spent. Reference was made to another development in Bangor by a Housing Association which had been approved around the same time. It was noted that the Housing Association's estate had now been built and they were now occupied. As a result of the concern, he noted that he would like to see a review of the scheme.

In response, it was noted:

- That they were happy to share the model and costs with the whole Committee so that members could see the difference between the Tŷ Gwynedd Scheme and the developments of Housing Associations.
- It was accepted that progress in the developments had been slow. It was explained that problems with infrastructure, drains and energy had contributed to this delay. However, it was noted that it was a very popular project with significant interest from people to buy houses through the scheme. It was mentioned that they were new, nice, sustainable and energy efficient houses.

It was asked whether the department would be willing to revisit the Tŷ Gwynedd Scheme to get assurances that it was something the Council should do and if it was worth the money. In response, the cabinet member for housing and property stated:

- That he was happy to discuss the Scheme with the Head of Department and the rest of the Officers to consider the points raised.

Concern was expressed regarding empty houses in Gwynedd. It was asked whether the Council would consider employing workers itself to carry out work in areas where contractors were not available. In response, it was noted:

- That the department had used in-house workers where they had brought empty houses back into use. It was mentioned that it would be something the department could consider in the future.

Clarification was sought on the Empty Housing Scheme, specifically if one year from a will's probate was required to be eligible for the exemption. Furthermore, it was noted that 123 exemptions had been approved in the last quarter of last year and it was asked how this compared to the previous period. In addition, it was asked whether it was realistic to consider an extension to the year people get to carry out the restoration work. In response, it was noted:

- That the Empty Housing Scheme was very popular.
- As for the number of exemptions that had been approved over the scheme period, it was mentioned that the number had been quite consistent. It was confirmed that they would try to obtain the exact figures and report back to the committee.
- It was confirmed that the department would examine and consider an extension to the 12 months that people received to carry out restoration work.

The Member congratulated the Department for its excellent work, particularly with the area of Tai Teg where the department had already surpassed its target and had spent a quarter of the funding. It was enquired if there were plans to set new targets and continue the things that were working well in the current scheme. In response, it was noted:

- The scheme would be extended for two years, and the targets would also be adjusted, so the original targets would not continue.

It was asked if it was possible to collect data about applicants who spoke Welsh to monitor the situation in the future. In response, it was noted:

- That the department was currently receiving legal advice in relation to the linguistic element in the housing allocation policy and that discussions were ongoing. It was mentioned that they had gone as far as they possibly could in terms of the letting element for local people and what the department was able to do.

Attention was drawn to 1ch of the report, namely the support packages for private landlords and to 3ng which was the Help to Sell Local project. An update was requested on the progress of these two projects. In response, it was noted:

- That the Private Landlord Support Packages scheme was very popular and that it was pleasing to report that the scheme had provided support to 64 individuals to date.
- It was explained that Cyngor Gwynedd was one of the councils that made the most use of the Packages for the whole of Wales.

The Member noted that he represented a fairly rural area and saw from the plans that the developments in question were in more populated areas. It was asked whether the department was considering more rural communities for the developments. It was noted that it would benefit small schools where numbers were reducing. In response, it was noted:

- That the department considered all communities in Gwynedd and sought to ensure that the housing supply matched the need for housing.

It was noted that homelessness numbers remained high, and it was asked if the demand varied across the county. In response, it was noted:

- That the demand for housing varied across the county but there was no area in the county where there was no great demand for housing.

It was noted that there was a major problem with under-occupation in Gwynedd with over 1,000 people living in houses with more bedrooms than considered necessary. It was enquired if there was anything that could be done to encourage people to move to more suitable housing. In response, it was noted:

- The Council was unable to force people to move out of their homes, but that work was being undertaken to try and persuade people to move into more suitable housing. It was explained that this helped people who would be moving as they subsequently did not have to pay bedroom tax, and it freed up the housing for families who really needed more space.

DECISION

- a) **To accept the report**
- b) **To ask the cabinet member to re-visit the Tŷ Gwynedd scheme to consider whether it provides value for money and should the money be invested in another project within the Housing Action Plan.**

6. GWYNEDD MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

Submitted - a report by the cabinet member for Adults, Health and Well-being, providing an update on the progress of the new Mental Health Service working model. It was noted that a report had been submitted to the committee back in June 2023 with plans to end the Integrated Team with the Health Board and create a new working model. It was explained that the Mental Health Service had been established in May 2024 and the service had been operating for almost a year now.

It was noted that establishing a new service meant that mental health social workers employed by the Council provided a mental health and social service within the community with a focus on what was important to the individual and in recovery. It was mentioned that the service now fulfilled the statutory duties of the Council and focused on the four elements of the Social Services and Well-being Act.

It was explained that the teams had been split into the Arfon and South Gwynedd areas with the Arfon team based at Headquarters and the South Gwynedd team based at the Galw Gwynedd site. It was stated that locating the offices within the Council had been a positive step as this made collaboration with other services in the department and the

Council much easier. It was noted that the team employed two senior employees for the service and that this significant investment had been key to ensuring that the service was in a position to meet individuals' needs in a timely manner.

It was reported that the National Survey for Wales had stated that there was an expectation to see an increase in cases of common mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression between now and 2040. In addition, it was noted that the survey showed that there was an overall decline in mental well-being and that the need for support was likely to increase. It noted that a study also showed that more young people had experienced greater anxiety since the COVID pandemic. It was explained that 439 individuals were currently open to the service.

It was mentioned that they had held several meetings to consult with the workforce to discuss the best way forward to remodel the service. It was noted that the workforce was key to ensuring that robust procedures were in place for the new service. It was also stated that Betsi Cadwaladr Senior Management had been given the opportunity to provide input, but no response had been received.

It was noted that it was approaching a year since the service had opened so there were plans to send questionnaires to individuals who had or continued to receive support from the service. It was explained that these findings would inform the development of the service and anecdotal information indicated that individuals felt that it was easy to contact the service and that an assessment could be obtained soon. It was felt that the remodelling of the service had had a very positive impact on the well-being of the department's staff, and they felt that the person came first and not the process and felt that they belonged to the Council.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

It was noted that the number of carer assessments was 12 and it was asked if these numbers were low considering that 439 cases were open. As a second question, the member asked what consultation had been undertaken with the service users prior to remodelling. In response, it was noted:

- That they recognised that the number of carer assessments was low, and that work was currently underway to try and increase the numbers.
- They had not consulted service users at the time but intended to obtain the opinion of the individuals about the service in the future.

It was enquired whether the department anticipated that the team currently in place was large enough to deal with future challenges. Also, an enquiry was made about examples of the third sector partners that collaborated with the department. In response, it was noted:

- They anticipated that the demand for a service would increase over the next few years and that they were examining alternative ways to support individuals. It was explained that the team already had groups that supported individuals which meant that several people were being cared for at the same time. Furthermore, it was noted that the department was examining technology improvements to try to meet the increase in future demand.
- They collaborated closely with their third sector partners such as Canolfan Felin Fach and Tan y Maen.

It was enquired whether there was a need to focus more on preventative work to try to bring down the numbers that needed service. In response, it was noted:

- This was a big part of the work undertaken by the team. It was explained that the groups being set up now would support that work in the future.

Clarification was sought about the role of the Council and the Health Board's role in the new model. In response, it was noted:

- That the Mental Health Team focused on the social element of the mental health need where the Health Board dealt with the clinical side. It was explained that people could refer themselves to the new service or they could be referred by another person if there was permission. Furthermore, the team received referrals from various other agencies as well.
- An additional question was asked about how the department advertised their service. It was explained that there was information on Cyngor Gwynedd's intranet and GPs could also provide information to people.

DECISION

To accept the report

7. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE AUTISM TEAM'S WORK PROGRAMME

Submitted - a report by the Cabinet Member for the Children and Supporting Families Department. It was noted that the report had been submitted to the Scrutiny Committee in 2023 on the Autism Plan. It was explained that a Task and Finish Group had been set up because of the need to examine the plan in more detail. The findings of the Task and Finish Group had been presented to the Scrutiny Committee in April 2024 and it was decided to request a progress report within a year.

It was noted that the Autism Team was now well established and had made significant progress over the past year. It was explained that the Team had been set up to try to address a gap in service where autistic individuals did not meet the criteria of some services.

DECISION

- To accept the report.**
- To encourage the Cabinet Members to write to the Welsh Government asking for permanent funding for the Autism Team.**

8. MID WALES HEALTH AND CARE JOINT COMMITTEE SCRUTINY GROUP

Submitted - a report by the Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser providing background on the Mid Wales Health and Care Joint Committee Scrutiny Group. It was noted that the purpose of the report was to ask members to elect a member to represent the Scrutiny Committee on the Mid Wales Health and Care Joint Committee Scrutiny Group.

DECISION

To elect Councillor Beth Lawton to represent the Committee on the Mid Wales Health and Care Joint Committee Scrutiny Group.