

MEETING	Care Scrutiny Committee
DATE	25 September 2025
TITLE	Empty Homes
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	Council Plan 2023-2028 - Gwynedd Glyd
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CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Paul Rowlinson

1. Why does it need to be scrutinized?

- 1.1 To ensure that suitable schemes are in place to tackle empty homes, as well as reporting on the progress that has been made to date in relation to individual schemes to assist Gwynedd residents.

2. What exactly needs to be scrutinized?

- 2.1 The following issues will form the main areas of scrutiny:

- Number of vacant homes in the county
- A grant scheme to help buyers renovate vacant homes to an acceptable standard and bring empty homes back into use to help young people and first-time buyers
- Progress on the target to bring 282 empty homes back into use
- Forward consideration of whether it would be appropriate to charge a higher level of tax premium on houses that have been vacant for years

3. Summary and Key Issues

- 3.1 The grant scheme was originally launched in 2018 as the 'First Time Buyers Grant', assisting first time buyers with renovating empty properties.

- 3.2 On 15 December 2020, the grant scheme was extended as part of the Gwynedd Housing Action Plan approved by the Cabinet. This included a £4m investment to the scheme and setting a target to bring 282 empty properties back into use.

- 3.3 Since 2020, the scheme has been amended further to reflect feedback received from Gwynedd residents which includes the following changes:

- To include former second homes as well as empty properties – to provide an opportunity to support local individuals who need help renovating former second homes that also need work.
- Increase the amount available from £15,000 to £20,000 – to reflect increases in material and labour costs to complete the work.

- Expand the scheme to ensure that more than first-time buyers are eligible – this enables anyone with a local connection to apply for the grant if they are first-time buyers or not, giving more people the opportunity to renovate their home and stay within their communities.
 - Amend the criteria so that an applicant requires a local connection to the county of Gwynedd instead of a local connection to the ward / area the house is located.
- 3.4 Since the launch of the Housing Action Plan, 299 empty properties have been brought back into use, exceeding the target of 282 originally set.
- 3.5 In light of the Housing Action Plan being extended to 2028/29, an additional £750,000 investment is being made to the scheme.
- 3.6 The Housing and Property Department is continuing to consult with Gwynedd residents and is currently trialling further changes to the scheme from 1st August which includes:
- Raising the maximum household income for the scheme to £60,000 for individuals and £80,000 for couples who wish to apply to the scheme.
 - Assess if a property is eligible for the grant by using Council Tax Bandings (A-D)
 - Raising the maximum grant award from £20,000 to £25,000.

4. Background / Context

- 4.1 The Empty Homes Grant was established in 2018 in response to the number of empty properties within the county. The purpose of the grant is to assist individuals to complete works on empty properties, to bring them up to a reasonable standard and back into use. The grant was initially known as the First Time Buyers Grant and received 134 applications from first time buyers resulting in an Investment of £1.3m. The scheme was closed temporarily from June 2019 as there was no additional funding available.
- 4.2 As noted above, the grant was then included in the Department's wider Housing Action Plan that was approved by the Cabinet on 15 December 2020. A further £4m was invested in the scheme and a target of bringing 282 units back into use was set.
- 4.3 It is important to note as part of delivering the grant scheme, the Empty Homes Team are monitoring feedback received by the public in order to identify ways to improve and amend the scheme criteria to meet the requirements and needs of Gwynedd residents in order to maximize the number of individuals who can benefit from the grant.
- 4.4 Following feedback by residents, the scheme was amended in 2023 to include homeowners who bought former empty second homes to be eligible for the grant. This allowed us to encourage as many empty homes to get back into use as possible as well as offering more opportunities and support to Gwynedd residents. One example of this is a specific case in Trefor, where the original grant application was refused as the property was a second home prior to being bought, however

due to the changes in the criteria the new owner was now eligible for grant. Below is a quote from the owner of the property, Sion:

“The house I bought used to be my friend’s home and I remember coming here to play when I was a child. The house was sold around 15 years ago and became a second home. The house was available on Airbnb, which was a shame as so many young local people wanted to stay in the area and wanted a house. The grant means so much to me. I did apply for the grant when I bought the house but was refused. I was happy when the Council contacted to notify me of the change in criteria. It’s going to be a huge help to renovate the house and move in a lot quicker. Otherwise it would of taken years to complete the works on my own.”

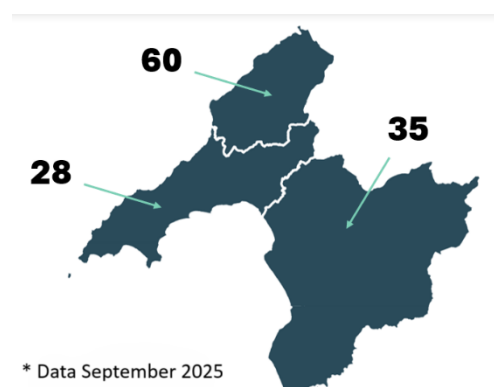
For more details regarding Sion’s story please visit the link below:

[Sion's story - Cyngor Gwynedd launches a revised version of the first-time buyers grants.](#)

- 4.5 Recently, an opportunity was taken to amend the scheme again in response to the needs of our residents and the increase in costs of materials and labour seen throughout the country. The maximum grant award was increased from £15,000 to £20,000 and the grant was made available for every type of buyer, not just a first time buyer.
- 4.6 A total of 299 empty homes have been bought back into use since April 2020 across all our Empty Homes schemes, which means that we have reached and exceeded the target of 282 units that was set for the scheme, assisting several Gwynedd residents across the county.

123 properties have received a grant to renovate their empty properties as part of scheme 3dd in the Housing Action Plan with the breakdown for Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd as follows:

- i. Arfon – 60
- ii. Dwyfor – 28
- iii. Meirionnydd – 35



- 4.7 The residents who have benefited from this scheme have been able to remain in their local communities whilst also being able to raise the standard of their homes. The quote below is from another resident to has received the grant:

"We are looking forward to settling down in our home in Chwillog and begin our new chapter as a family with a baby on the way. The Empty Homes Grant has assisted us to complete the necessary works on the house such as installing new Windows, re-build the chimney and electrical works, a lot faster than if we had to complete the work ourselves, allowing us to get the house ready for our family in time. Without the grant we wouldn't be where we are now – that's certain! It means we can carry on working on the house and make it a home for many years to come.

The house had been empty for over a year before we moved in, and the previous owner, a local lady, really wanted to sell it to local people. The two of us were raised near Chwillog and it means a lot to us being able to stay close to our families and raise our child in the area we know and love."

- 4.8 Owain ab Myrddin has also benefited from the grant scheme by renovating his house in Nefyn. According to Owain:

"The grant was a huge help for me to renovate my home in Nefyn. If it wasn't for the grant, I would not have bought a house with so much work required as my first home! It had been a second home for around 10 years before I bought it, and it really needed a lot of work to bring it up to a liveable standard. I had to deal with damp, install new windows and doors, fix the roof, re-wire the house, install a new heating system and insulation... and a lot more on top of that.

It is really important for local people to have opportunity to live in their communities and this grant has supported me in renovating the house and having a home I'm proud of. This is the area I've been raised, the area where most of my family and friends live, and the feeling of community is very strong here. When thinking about the future, I'm excited to be living in this house for years to come following all the hard work."

Owain has also shared his story with BBC programme Countryfile. Owain's story can be found by following the link below (Episode aired 14th September 2025 ' The Archers' 21:50 minutes into the episode):

[Countryfile - BBC iPlayer](#)

4.9 Here is an example below of a property that has benefited from installing new Windows and doors through the grant:



Left: Picture taken of property before installing new windows and doors Right: Picture taken following completion on the work

- 4.10 It is important to note that the scheme not only assists with bringing properties back into use but also has a positive effect on the wider community, contributing £1.47m into the local economy, and on average supporting 3.5 local Contractors per grant application, attracting an additional £229,000 of private investment into the local economy.
- 4.11 There are an additional 42 approved applications with £465,000 allocated to complete the works along with 17 applications currently going through the application process.
- 4.12 During May 2025, the Cabinet decided to extent the Housing Action Plan and as a result, the grant scheme has also received an extension until 2028/29, alongside an additional investment of £780,000. As a result of extending the scheme, it has also been renamed and is now known as the 'Gwynedd Empty Homes Grant Scheme'.
- 4.13 It is important to note that the Welsh Government's Empty Homes Grant is coming to an end in September 2026 with the Government refusing any applications made after December 2025. There are currently 1,306 empty properties in Gwynedd, highlighting the importance of extending the scheme and supporting residents with their homes.
- 4.14 In future we will be continuing to monitor feedback from Gwynedd residents. We are currently trialling further changes to the scheme which include:
- Raising the maximum income threshold to £60,000 for individuals and £80,000 for couple who wish to apply for the grant.
 - Use Council Tax banding to assess the eligibility of properties for the grant, by awarding the grant to Properties rated between A and D banding.
 - Increase the maximum award of the grant to £25k to reflect the increase in building materials and labour costs.

The trial period began on the 1st August and will last for 3 months. We will be monitoring the effects of this change in criteria during this period.

- 4.15 In addition to the grant scheme, we are also working with the Council Tax Team to extend the council tax exemption period for empty properties as part of scheme 3e on the Gwynedd Housing Action Plan. This exemption if applied for an extra year for first time buyers to complete the essential renovation works on the property before moving in, including cases where an exemption period has already been granted to the previous owners.
- 4.16 Since the launch of the scheme in 2020, the scheme has assisted 142 first time buyers with an investment of £199,088 made so far (data dated 1st of July 2025).
- 4.17 Following the Cabinet's recent decision to extend the Housing Action Plan the partnership will continue between the Housing and Property and Finance Department to deliver the scheme over the next few years.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 As noted above the Department has considered feedback received by the public to improve the scheme and ensure that it's available for Gwynedd residents that require the support.
- 5.2 Feedback is also collected during events such as 'Tai ar Daith' (Housing drop-in sessions) which was held for the second year running this year (visiting Bethesda, Porthmadog, Tywyn and Nefyn) as well raising awareness of the scheme during the National Eisteddfod in Boduan in 2023. In person events like these also allow us to discuss the schemes with Gwynedd residents allowing them the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the support that is available.
- 5.3 It is important to note that the Empty Homes Team have also attended events organised by other partners to raise awareness of the support available. This includes an event organised by Welsh Government to share information with local Estate Agents operating within the county regarding the opportunities and support available for Gwynedd residents.
- 5.4 It is important to note that the Welsh Government Empty Homes grant is coming to an end in September 2026, with the closing date for all applications in December 2025. This highlights the importance of the Council providing it's own grant in order to assist residents.

6. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:

- 6.1 The aim on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by aiming to complete 7 of the well-being goals: a prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal Wales with cohesive communities, vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language and a globally responsible Wales.
- 6.2 The schemes above are part of the Housing Action Plan that was structured with the well-being goals in mind, with the goals noted clearly on each page (see appendix 1).
- 6.3 As noted above we will continue to listen to feedback by Gwynedd residents and continue to attend events that will allow us to discuss our schemes with residents in person.
- 6.4 We are currently trialling further changes to the Gwynedd Empty Homes Grant Scheme that will allow new opportunities for Gwynedd residents. We will be monitoring applications during the trial period to establish if these changes are effective.
- 6.5 Due to the nature of the outcomes of the scheme of renovating empty properties within the county, contributing to the areas local economy, the scheme does support the prosperous Wales goal within the act. In addition to this the schemes also assist individuals to create homes and stay within their communities which also contributes towards the healthier Wales goal.
- 6.6 Both the Empty Homes Team and the Enforcement Team have been working closely together to deliver the grant scheme in addition to taking part in a group held across different departments to tackle problematic properties. The Departments working together in this Group are:
- Housing and Property (Empty homes and Enforcement)
 - Economy
 - Legal
 - Planning (Enforcement)
 - Building Regulation
 - Finance / Council Tax
 - Eryri National Park
- 6.7 This partnership work also contributes towards the prosperous Wales goal of the Act as the group assists in tackling the problematic properties and creating more opportunities for residents.

- 6.8 The Empty Homes Team is also a part of the North Wales Regional Empty Homes Group again, working with other counties in the North.
- 6.9 In addition to this, the team also work in partnership with the company Fraser & Fraser which support the team to contact problematic properties in the county at no additional cost to the Council.
- 6.10 As noted above we are continuing to trial amendments made to the scheme whilst following the Ffordd Gwynedd principles.

7. Effects on Characteristics of Equality, Welsh Language and Socio-Economic Duty

- 7.1 The above plans schemes form part of the Housing Action Plan. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out from the Housing Action Plan in its entirety (Appendix 2).
- 7.2 An Impact Assessment to this effect was originally produced when the Housing Action Plan was launched in 2020, and again when the Plan was reviewed in June 2023.
- 7.3 The above Schemes are considered to have a positive impact on each of the equality features and the Welsh language by increasing the number and range of housing within the county for the needs of different communities.
- 7.4 As part of the criteria for the scheme applicants must prove that they have lived in Gwynedd for at least the last 5 years or if they do not currently live in Gwynedd, that they have lived here for a period of 10 years continuously in the past.

8 .Next Steps

- 8.1 As set out above we are in the process of trialling changes to the scheme criteria since 1st August which are:
- Use of Council Tax bands A-D for empty property eligibility
 - Maximum salary of £60,000 for individual applicants and £80,000 for couples.
 - Increase the maximum grant amount to £25k to reflect the increase in material and labour costs.
- 8.2 We will be monitoring the impact of these changes for a period of 3 months.

- 8.3 If the trial period is successful, we will look to incorporate the changes as part of the criteria from November 2025.
- 8.4 We will continue to consult with the public and collaborate with other departments through the methods set out above to ensure that the schemes are effective.
- 8.5 We will continue to implement Empty Homes Schemes (3dd and 3e) and continue to promote the schemes through the Department's marketing methods including the use of social media and at face-to-face events.

Background Information

[Empty homes](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Housing Action Plan

[Housing Action Plan 3.0](#)

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment

[CYNNAL ASESAD EFFAITH CYDRADDOLDEB](#)