



# Housing and Property Department



The Housing and Property Department is a new department, established during 2019, with the aim of facilitating the Council's ability to face one of the county's greatest challenges, which is to ensure an adequate supply of suitable, good-quality housing to address the needs of a changing population.

The department is also responsible for managing the Council's property assets in order to ensure they are suitable for providing services to the county's residents.

## Housing Matters

### 'Homes for the People of Gwynedd' Strategy 2019-24

### Improvement Priority 4



The demand for social and affordable housing for the residents of Gwynedd currently outweighs the supply available, and an increasing number of people are becoming homeless or are at risk of homelessness in Gwynedd. Our response to date does not address the needs of the local population now nor for future generations. In response to this challenge we have already drawn up a Housing Strategy which aims to optimise our supply of housing in Gwynedd, to improve their standards and also improve access to housing by strengthening the support that is available to people to enable them to live independently in their communities.

The Housing Strategy notes that a lack of supply is clearly a problem and the situation is not helped by the fact that around 10% of the county's housing stock are second homes. As a result, we have placed a premium of 50% on the Council Tax that owners of such houses are expected to pay and have also commissioned some research to consider which legislative changes are needed in order to gain better control of the situation.

What we have seen as a result of adopting a second-homes premium is that some owners use the provision in existing taxation legislation to move the house into the Business Tax regime - meaning the Council does not benefit from the premium and therefore loses the opportunity to take action in order to attempt to do something about the reduction in supply. We are leading the work of bringing this issue to the Government's attention and pressing for a change in legislation to ensure that this cannot happen in future.

During 2020/21 we will be using the principles that have been established in the strategy to draw up a programme of specific schemes in order to try:

- to ensure that the people of Gwynedd are able to find a suitable home
- to ensure that no one is homeless in Gwynedd
- to address the health and well-being needs of the people of Gwynedd
- to ensure that Gwynedd homes are environmentally friendly
- to continue to press on the Government to change the legislation relating to second-home taxation.

Thus far, the Council has been using the Welsh Government's Social Housing Grant to facilitate the Housing Associations' ability to build more houses for local people. In the future we will be looking to use our own resources to expedite our capacity to meet the challenge in this field.

Number of new units developed with the Social Housing Grant



## Homelessness

The Homelessness Service provides advice and assistance to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The team is discharging the Council's statutory duty to meet the requirements of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. Their work includes:

- helping to prevent homelessness before it occurs
- assessing the accommodation and support needs of individuals and families who are threatened with homelessness
- helping to find somewhere else to live when an individual or family faces becoming homeless
- providing temporary accommodation in emergency cases, and securing accommodation for those in priority need.

Number of people the Homelessness Unit helped during the year



## Temporary Accommodation

Number of homeless people who were provided with emergency temporary accommodation



2016/17 -	247
2017/18 -	289
2018/19 -	339

The service provides many temporary accommodation places until a permanent property becomes available for homeless people, including two Council-owned hostels, 67 properties leased by private owners, and 21 properties leased by Housing Associations. Accommodation was provided to 339 families/individuals in 2018/19.

## Tenancy support



Since many homeless people are vulnerable, support is provided to ensure that individuals can retain their tenancy and avoid becoming homeless again. Support is provided on a number of issues such as claiming benefits, support for the maintenance of accommodation, understanding rights and responsibilities, and applying for grants for furnishing a property.

## Social Housing Register



The Gwynedd Housing Options Team administrates the Common Housing Register and works in partnership with the social housing providers in the county, namely Adra, Grŵp Cynefin and North Wales Housing. The team's primary aim is to prioritise

access to social housing on the basis of the most need in our communities and to provide advice to residents on the housing options that are available in Gwynedd. With the support of the Gwynedd Housing Options Team, over 600 families managed to secure a new social tenancy in 2019.

Number of families given new tenancies in social housing during the year



2017 - 580

2018 - 610

2019 - 687

## Refugee relocation scheme

Since 2016 Gwynedd has contributed to the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement programme. The Council committed to welcome and provide housing for up to 40 individuals who had been forced to flee war-stricken Syria. We have now fulfilled our promise as a Council and take pride in the fact that we have helped eight families to settle in Gwynedd.



As a result of this programme's success, the Council has now committed to welcome up to 20 of the most vulnerable refugees identified by the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as part of the Worldwide Refugee programme over the next three years.

## Travellers' site

There is a statutory requirement on every Local Authority to meet the need for suitable sites for travellers. We have been managing a purpose-made site in Llandegai for many years, and following the receipt of grant aid from the Welsh Government, a £1.8m investment was made there recently to improve the facilities and expand the provision to meet the demand within the county.

## Housing Enforcement



The purpose of the Enforcement Team is to ensure good-quality, warm and safe housing for tenants within the County. We are responsible for enforcing standards in 9,000 private-rented houses and 8,500 social houses in Gwynedd.

We are also in charge of the HMO Licensing Scheme which checks that such houses reach the expected standards. At present, 900 houses in multiple occupation have received a licence from us following a detailed inspection process.

The unit also works jointly with Rent Smart Wales to maintain a national register of rented housing, inspects dwellings for Home Office cases, deals with over 300 complaints annually relating to cases of nuisance, deals with problems resulting from empty houses and deals with approximately 20 annual cases of illegal eviction.

## Housing Alterations

This unit is responsible for promoting the independence and well-being of Gwynedd residents by providing timely and high-standard alterations to the homes of children and adults with physical disabilities. Around £1.3m a year is invested on schemes such as creating accessible bathrooms, installing ramps outside the house, building extensions etc. Around 30 of these are referrals received from hospitals so as to enable patients to return home. We also fund around 900 minor alterations a year, such as installing handrails, mobile ramps and other small alterations.

The unit administers interest-free loans for repairing houses that are in a poor state and which are owned by residents on low incomes, and there is significant and constant demand for these loans.

## Empty Homes



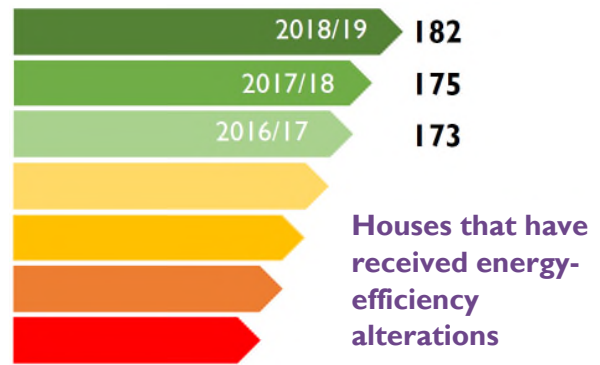
There are approximately 1,300 empty houses in Gwynedd at present, and we have an important role to play in attempting to bring these houses back into use in order to contribute towards the amount of affordable housing that is available to local people. Since 2008, over 500 empty houses have been brought back into use through methods such as offering grants to first-time buyers, providing loans to landlords and the use of enforcement powers. This led to us being able to provide a home to over 1,000 local people in houses that had formerly been empty for some time.

Our success in this field has attracted outside investment, such as £1.45m of Welsh Government funding in 2018-2021 for the north of the county. During the next few years we will continue to give priority to this area of work and will also be looking to use our resources to buy empty homes when such opportunities arise.



## Fuel Poverty

Most of the Government's resources in this field are directed towards the Housing Associations but the Council has also been able to make a valuable contribution in this important field. We have a number of schemes that are funded from various sources, with the aim of assisting those who are most likely to suffer fuel poverty.



## Property Matters

**The purpose of the Property Services is to ensure that we have properties that are suitable to provide the Council's services, and to manage our property assets effectively and efficiently.**

The Council owns 967 buildings located on 478 sites across the county. These are mostly buildings used to provide services to the residents of Gwynedd but we also own and use non-operational properties to promote the Council's objectives e.g. economic development, the provision of social care etc. Many of these non-operational properties are leased to local businesses and other organisations, which generates an annual revenue income of around £1.1m for the Council.

## Maintenance



The Buildings Maintenance Unit provides a 24/7 help-desk to deal with approximately 8,000 requests for repair work to buildings per year. Many of these are requests for work that require an urgent response to prevent the building from having to close.

In order to carry out this work we work in partnership with a number of local contractors, but we have also developed an in-house team of tradesmen who can undertake building work, joinery, plumbing etc. We will develop the in-house team further this year by adding two electricians.

## Property Safety

We ensure that our buildings are safe to use for providing services to the residents of Gwynedd by ensuring that we comply with the various statutory duties and ensuring that we have an effective maintenance programme. We manage risks relating to asbestos, Legionnaires' disease, Radon and fire risks and ensure that electrical, gas, oil, water etc. systems are safe for the thousands of residents who spend time in our buildings every day.



## Property Development



The new Ysgol y Garnedd which will open in September 2020

The purpose of the unit is to develop new buildings or convert and renovate existing buildings to improve the service provided to the residents of Gwynedd.

By working closely with the Education Modernisation Team, the Property Development Unit has completed a £51m programme of new school buildings over the past 6 years, and a new £56m programme is now being developed over the course of the next five years.

The team is also undertaking a programme of improvements and extensions to the county's care homes and a programme of early years units to address the need in several individual communities throughout Gwynedd.

## Estate Management

Our purpose is to ensure that the Council receives the best value in managing its portfolio of property assets, and ensuring that only those assets which are genuinely needed are retained. Over the past 10 years we have been able to reduce the size of the Council's property estate by over 25%, ensuring that our spending on the maintenance and provision of buildings is kept to a minimum, in order to release financial resources for the provision of front-line services.

### Cumulative income from property sales



The Estates team is also responsible for managing all the Council's leases including the Smallholdings Estate and the Industrial Properties portfolio which includes the Intec and Mentec Enterprise Centres, generating an annual rental income of over £1.1m.

## Managing Offices



The Offices Team provides office space for approximately 1,500 staff in 7 large buildings, including all the related services associated with this such as care-taking, cleaning and security arrangements for all the buildings and their users.



## Cleaning Service

We also provide a **cleaning service** for a large number of the various buildings used to provide the Council's front-line services. We are also a provider for external organisations.

## Energy Conservation Unit

Following the adoption of our Carbon Management Plan, the Energy Team is implementing a number of projects to **reduce carbon emissions**. The work carried out by the team to reduce our energy use has created annual revenue savings of over £1.1m for the Council. We have started working on identifying how we can contribute further to the Council's aspiration to tackle the climate crisis.

The programme for raising awareness amongst school children has been an important part of this work, using characters such as Sbarci and Fflic - [www.sbarciafflic.org](http://www.sbarciafflic.org)



## Pest Control and Dog Wardens



We offer pest control services for the control and culling of all sorts of pests, through contracting and by responding to daily calls by the public for assistance to control pests in their homes or businesses.



We also provide the statutory service of looking after stray dogs.

## Telecare



We provide a service for the installation and maintenance of telecare equipment to the residents of Gwynedd. This is a hugely popular service amongst vulnerable individuals and their families, where the use of Assistive Technology enables people to continue to live independently in their own home.

The department's day to day work contributes towards the following Gwynedd Well-being Objectives, ensuring that residents can:

Enjoy happy, healthy and safe lives

Live in quality homes within their communities

Live in a natural Welsh society

Live with dignity and independently for as long as possible

Take advantage of the beauty of the County's natural environment.