



# Housing and Property Department



The Housing and Property Department is a fairly new department, established during 2019 with the aim of facilitating the Council's ability to face one of the biggest challenges in the county, 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.

Together with the day to day work outlined below, this Department leads on the following priority projects:

- 1) **A shortage of suitable homes for the people of Gwynedd:** Implementing and delivering projects within our Housing Plan in order to increase the opportunities for local people to have a suitable home within their communities - Improvement Priority 4.
- 2) **Easy and clear access to an advice and enquiries service on housing matters:** Establish a single front door and helpdesk for the public in order to help them with their housing problems - Improvement Priority 4.

## Housing Matters

The Council uses Welsh Government's Social Housing Grant to facilitate the Housing Associations' ability to build more houses for local people. Our Housing Action Plan sets a challenge to try to build 500 new social houses by 2026. We now have a new Local Housing Allocation Policy, so that Gwynedd's residents will be given priority for the tenancy of these new houses.

Number of new units developed with the Social Housing Grant



## Homelessness

The Homelessness Service provides advice and support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The team fulfills 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

Number of people the Homelessness Unit helped during the year



- helping to find somewhere else to live when an individual or family are homeless or facing homelessness
- providing temporary accommodation in emergency cases, and securing accommodation for those in priority need.

## Temporary Accommodation

Number of homeless people who were provided with emergency temporary accommodation



2018/19 - 339

2019/20 - 401

2020/21 - 816

The service provides many temporary accommodations until a permanent property is available for homeless people, for example two hostels in the Council's ownership that provide self-contained living units and support from staff to enable to individual to live independently and learn life skills. At present, there are 57 properties leased by private owners, and 27 properties leased by Housing Associations. Accommodation was

provided to 816 families/individuals in 2020/21. The number who are facing homelessness has been increasing consistently for some years and this pattern continues, putting increasing pressure on the service to deal with the need to accommodate people at short-notice.

## Tenancy support



Since many homeless people are vulnerable, support is provided to ensure that individuals can maintain 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. We are currently supporting 150 individuals across Gwynedd.

## Housing Support Grant

The early intervention grant programme is the Housing Support Grant, established in 2019 which helps prevent people from becoming homeless, stabilise their situation in terms of housing, or help individuals that could become homeless to find a home and retain it.

The Housing Support Grant brings together three existing grants, namely the Supporting People Programme, Homelessness Prevention Grant and Rent Smart Wales.

The services that are funded by the grant enhances the statutory service and assists to ensure that the general offer helps people find the right homes and gives them the right support to succeed. It supports vulnerable people to address problems such as debts, employment, tenancy management, substance misuse, violence against women, domestic and sexual abuse, and mental health issues.

## 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 group's primary aim is to prioritise access to social housing on the grounds of the greatest 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, 543 families managed to secure a new social tenancy in 2020/21.



The new Common Housing Allocation Policy, that has been operational since October 2020, prioritises the residents of Gwynedd for social housing and replaces the old points system for allocating housing.

## Refugee relocation scheme



Since 2016 Gwynedd has housed and provided support for 8 families (40 individuals) to resettle in Gwynedd under the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement programme. The scheme has been very successful and we take pride in seeing these families resettle in their new communities.

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 (now known as the 'United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme') over the next three years. Because of the pandemic, it was not possible to implement the scheme over the last year but we will take advantage of the opportunity to implement the scheme wherever practical.

Following the recent events in Afghanistan, we have been collaborating closely with the Home Office and continue to do so, and currently 5 individuals who have fled Afghanistan have been housed in Gwynedd and are receiving support to resettle within the community through the Re-locating Afghans Support Policy Plan.

## 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-built site in Llandygai 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 housing and 8,500 social housing in Gwynedd.

We are also in charge of the HMO Licensing Scheme which checks that such houses reach the expected standards. At present, 181 houses in multiple occupation have received a licence from us following a detailed inspection process.

During 2020/21, the Covid-19 pandemic had an effect on the service of this unit, as many other units, and it was not possible to conduct inspections and visit sites in the same way, and this is reflected in the data for the year.

The Unit also works jointly with Rent Smart Wales to maintain a national register of rented housing, and in a normal year, inspects dwellings for Home Office cases, deals with complaints relating to cases of nuisance, deals with problems resulting from empty houses and deals with cases of illegal eviction.

The Covid-19 restrictions prevented us from holding most inspections, however we have been holding inspections on urgent matters and have recommenced with the general inspections since the rules have relaxed. We are waiting for the figures next year to reflect the number of inspections completed in a normal year.

Number of people assisted by resolving hazards in their homes

2018/19 - 1,454

2019/20 - 807

2020/21 - 107



## 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. as needed. Around 15 of these are referrals received from hospitals so as to enable patients to return home. We also fund around 750 minor alterations a year, such as installing handrails, mobile ramps and other small alterations.

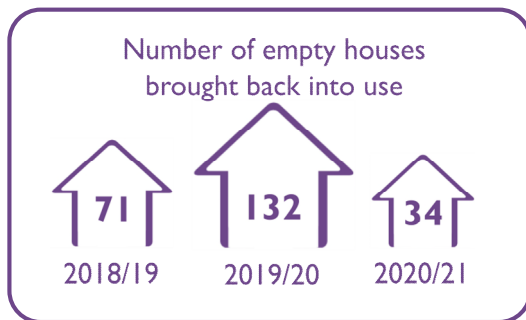
The unit administers interest-free loans for repairing houses that are in a poor state and which are owned by residents on low incomes, and there is significant and constant demand for these loans.

During 2020/21, there was a reduction in the number of alterations completed due to the effects of Covid-19 and Brexit, with contractors and/or Gwynedd residents self-isolating, individuals not happy to allow contractors into the house to complete work due to Covid, or lack of availability of materials outside of Wales.

Number of houses modified for people with physical disabilities



## 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 number of affordable housing that is available to local people. Since 2008, over 600 empty houses have been brought back into use through methods such as offering grants to first-time buyers, providing loans to landlords or private house owners, and the use of

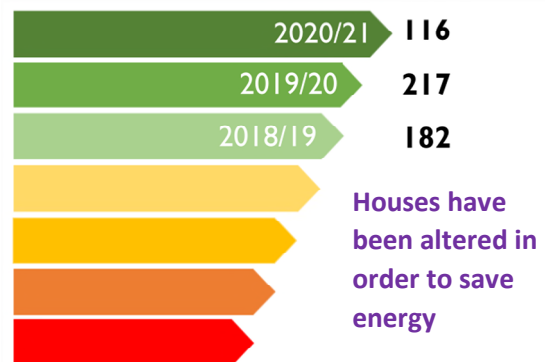
enforcement powers. This led to us being able to provide a home to over 1,000 local people in houses that had formerly been empty for some time.

During 2020/21, the Housing Action Plan was established, a plan that explains how we will implement our Housing Strategy over the next six years. The Plan has been operational since April 2021 and this will be driving the work on empty houses from now on. Consequently, a fall is seen in the figures of empty houses that have been brought back into use in 2020/21, however we trust that this figure will rise regularly during the next years.

## 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.

Fuel costs to keep homes warm have increased significantly, and this has an impact on the income of Gwynedd residents, pushing many families into poverty or further into poverty. The Council is collaborating with the private sector on an Eco and Nyth plan to extent the number of houses that receive support measures.



The Council is collaborating with the Welsh Government on how we improve the condition of houses in order to install the low carbon measures that will in turn lead to reducing fuel poverty. We are in the process of establishing a one stop shop that offers a convenient point of contact for people who need support and answers to their fuel poverty problems.

We are ensuring that arrangements are in place to maximise these programmes to help us to deliver the Housing Action Plan, together with ensuring that these provisions are linked to broader tackling poverty programmes.

In 2020/21, the number of ECO applications had reduced, partly as a result of Covid-19 and the fact that companies can't visit Gwynedd homes as easy.

## Property Matters

**The purpose of the Property Service 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 965 buildings located on 477 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 10,000 requests a year for building repairs. 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, electrical and plumbing work.

### 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, Legionnaire's 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



A concept design of the new school in Cricieth that will open in September 2023

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.

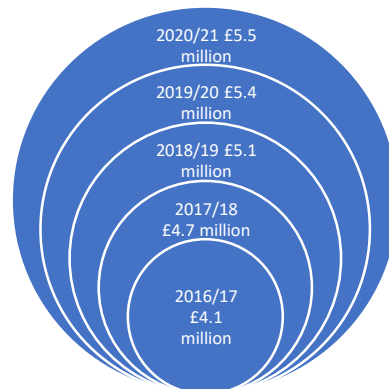
By working closely with the Education Modernisation Team, the Property Development Unit has completed a £60M programme of new school buildings over the past 8 years, and a new £47M programme is now being developed over the course of the next four years.

The team is also undertaking a programme of early year units and the County's language centres to meet the need in many individual communities across Gwynedd. In addition, the team has embarked on the delivery of a programme of Housing Action Plan developments, in response to the housing needs of Gwynedd's residents.

## 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 we genuinely need are retained. Over the past decade 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. This will continue as opportunities arise, but by now we also procure property and consider any assets that are no longer required for providing a service to deliver the Housing Action Plan.

### 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 seven 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. We also let office space to external tenants.

## 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

Reduction in CO2 emission:  
from the Council's activities



\*since adopting the Carbon  
Management Plan in 2010

Following the adoption of our Carbon Management Plan, the Energy Team is implementing a number of projects to **reduce carbon emissions**. Since the adoption of the Carbon Management Plan in 2010, up to 2020 we have succeeded in reducing the carbon emissions from our activities by 58.3%. In accordance with Welsh Governments changes, the Council will report using new methodology from now on, and this will be reflected in next year's figures. The work carried out by the team to reduce our usage 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 emergency.

Our Energy Conservation unit has succeeded to establish an energy purchase framework that enables us to secure a cheaper price for our electricity and gas. By doing this we will save approximately £916,000 over four years. In addition, the framework creates an income for the Council as other councils and organisations use it.

A programme to raise awareness among school children has been an important part of this work and we have used characters such as Sbarci and Fflic to do so. [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 contracts 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.

This Department's day-to-day work contributes towards the Gwynedd Well-being Objectives, ensuring that Gwynedd residents can:

Enjoy happy, healthy and safe lives

Live in quality homes within our communities

Live in a natural Welsh society

Live with dignity and independently for as long as possible

Benefit from the beauty of the County's natural environment.