



Rural Agenda

What is the current provision in the County to improve social inclusion and how can it be improved?

**A Scrutiny Investigation
by a group of Corporate
Scrutiny Committee
members**

Published: April 2014



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CHAIR'S FOREWORD



This report presents the main matters highlighted by the Scrutiny Investigation into the Rural Agenda – Providing Services for the consideration of the Council Leader.

Following the elections for Gwynedd Council in May 2012, the elected councillors were asked which matters were causing their electors the most concern. It became apparent that the matter of maintaining services across the County in a challenging period was causing some concern for the citizens of Gwynedd. It was a matter of interest to members of the three scrutiny committees.

The Investigation was established by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 31 January 2013, and this Report is submitted for the attention of the Scrutiny Committee on 27 March 2014. The main matters raised by the scrutiny members are addressed in the new Strategic Plan for 2013-17 – Supporting the people of Gwynedd to thrive in difficult times. Considerable emphasis is placed on the matters in question in Priority CC2 – Reducing the Impact of Poverty and Deprivation and Priority CC3 – Promoting Sustainable Rural Communities. I would like to thank the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive, as the executive officer of these priorities, for their contributions to the Investigation.

The procedure of scrutiny members undertaking independent scrutiny investigations is still in a developing phase. In order to improve the evidence base for the final report, additional work was commissioned to hold Focus Groups in three areas across the County (from the 18 areas in Gwynedd that score very low in terms of Access to Services in the WIMD (2011) assessment. This work was pivotal when reaching the conclusions and recommendations that are submitted for the consideration of the Council Leader.

We came to a relatively obvious, but significant, conclusion, namely that we consider that the whole of Gwynedd is a 'rural area', although parts of the County are more populated than others. The most important factor is *how many people are affected* and not the *density* of deprived population. This is true for Gwynedd and the whole of Wales. Therefore, it was considered that conveying the main messages of the Investigation to the Welsh Government as well as the Council Cabinet was completely relevant.

Finally, it is my pleasure to thank my fellow members of the Scrutiny Investigation and the officers for their valuable contributions and support along the way.

Councillor Elwyn Edwards

Chairman
Rural Agenda Scrutiny Investigation

March 2014

SUMMARY

MAIN FINDINGS

- 1.1 In the short, medium and long term, the most important element in terms of maintaining social inclusion and access to services is maintaining an economy that is as prosperous as possible and employment across the County.
- 2.1 There is a responsibility on Gwynedd Council and the Welsh Government to collaborate effectively when planning and providing statutory and non-statutory services for residents across the County.
- 3.1 It is neither practical nor sustainable to provide all Council services in the traditional manner, and holding a constructive and thoughtful dialogue with the Third Sector and Communities in Gwynedd is essential if quality bilingual services are to be maintained across the County.
- 4.1 There is no clear evidence to show that access to shopping services is causing serious difficulties to those questioned in rural areas, but being unable to have convenient access to some basic materials is a matter of concern for some.
- 5.1 Those questioned did not have positive experiences of using public services. However, it was not evident whether or not a number of those questioned were regular users of public transport services.
- 6.1 On the whole, banking services are not available in the countryside outside the main centres such as Pwllheli and Bala.
- 7.1 Considerable differences were discovered between the three areas (Meirionnydd, Arfon and Dwyfor) in terms of access to health services, with serious concerns by those questioned in Pen Llŷn in particular in terms of the safety of the service on weekends.
- 8.1 No specific concerns were noted about Gwynedd Council's education provision through the schools. There was a feeling that support services for pupils in schools had improved and that small and large schools had advantages and disadvantages.
- 9.1 There is a community spirit in the three areas in question. A number of various activities that took place in the communities were noted although some villages were more active than others.

- 10.1 Evidence was obtained from the Focus Groups that those present were aware of increasing pressures on the Council and other organisations to provide services with fewer resources. Although there is a willingness to consider receiving services in alternative ways, people were unclear regarding what was on offer.**
- 11.1 The extent of the situation's severity in this field or how it could be resolved is completely unclear. Certainly, there is a need to examine this element carefully.**
- 12.1 A role could be developed for Community Councils, wherever possible, to provide banking/post/medical services in public houses/village halls once a week.**
- 13.1 There are examples of successful plans that increase inclusion in Gwynedd. We have limited our work in this field to list 'specific plans' to improve inclusion and to obtain opinions at the focus groups. It is unclear how successful these initiatives have been. Those who contributed to the focus groups were aware of some schemes and praised them.**
- 14.1 We note examples of good practice outside the County. Again, we have not been able to assess how successful these schemes were in terms of increasing inclusion, but we deem that addressing them when developing specific schemes will be of benefit.**

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Engagement

- 15.1** The Council's new Engagement Strategy is a good starting point and there is a need to ensure that Cabinet Members give priority to gathering opinions and evidence from citizens and to carefully consider the impact on service users in rural areas when planning and providing services.

The Economy

- 15.2** You are required to agree with the Welsh Government on the direction and implementation of the Economic and Spatial Strategy for Gwynedd and Anglesey as a starting point to fund structures (to include highways and transport) as the main driver to plan access to services across the County.

Alternative Services

- 15.3** The Welsh Government needs to clearly show what is the way forward as soon as possible. The Investigation obtained some evidence that the residents of Gwynedd are willing to consider changes to their services, but there is a need to step up the pace to alleviate fears and to plan and provide high quality services in alternative ways.

Shop Locally Services

- 15.4** Target private and third sector businesses that currently operate in the communities to support them to develop a convenient shopping service as a focal point for the local community, with the aim of them becoming self-supporting by 2016 before the end of the Council's Strategic Plan's lifespan in 2017. Then, you can undertake a detailed assessment in order to establish the way forward for Gwynedd's subsequent Strategic Plan.

Transport

- 15.5** There is a need to plan public transport on two tiers:

TIER A: To agree with the Welsh Government on Service Centres across the County and regionally, by planning public transport to connect Gwynedd's main population locations.

TIER B: The Council needs to re-design services from the populated main centres to rural areas. In accordance with the reference in the Williams Report, we deem that this work is the role of the new community councils and that three innovative schemes should be undertaken instead of a group of councils showing a willingness to act on this between now and 2016. Then, a detailed assessment should be undertaken of the three schemes.

Health in Pen Llŷn

- 15.6 The Welsh Government needs to provide a temporary urgent solution to the local residents' opinion about the lack of safety of the health service in Pen Llŷn on weekends.**

Realistic Expectations

- 15.7 Undertake further research to see whether there is evidence that maintaining health and other services 'from afar' creates more intensive health problems or other difficulties in the medium and long term for service users. If evidence of this comes to light make an appropriate provision to mitigate the impact when planning services.**

Build on Good Practice

- 15.8 Build on the care provision that exists in Gwynedd to improve access to services by identifying and assessing the quality of services that are currently provided by the Third Sector and Private Sector across the County. Plan alternative services over a period of three years or more by providing appropriate guidance and support.**

FULL REPORT

Aim of the Investigation

To identify examples of successful plans to increase inclusion in Gwynedd.

To note and consider examples of good practice outside the County.

To submit recommendations to the Council Leader to act on directly or as a partner to improve inclusion.

The Evidence considered

The following were appointed by the Communities Scrutiny Committee as members of the Investigation Group:

- Councillor Lesley Day
- Councillor Elwyn Edwards
- Councillor June Marshall
- Councillor Gareth Thomas
- Councillor Eirwyn Williams

Agreement was reached on the main categories for the Focus Groups.

A presentation was given by the Information and Research Manager on the context. At a meeting with the Council Leader and the Leader of the Strategic Plan Project (Harry Thomas, the Chief Executive), agreement was reached on the way forward with the investigation.

Here is a summary of the work of the investigation:

Date	Gathering Evidence
20.02.2013	Informal meeting to discuss the scope of the brief
18.04.2013	To elect a Chair, and to agree on the brief and the work programme
04.06.2013	To consider the presentation of the Information and Research Manager on a detailed analysis of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 'Access to Services' zone in the context of Gwynedd.
23.07.2013	To consider the List of Stakeholders

07.10.2013	Focus Group with the people of Llandderfel and Llanuwchllyn 1 and 2 areas.
09.10.2013	Focus Group with the people of Tregarth and Mynydd Llandygai and Pentir 2 areas.
10.10.2013	Focus Group with the people of Aberdaron, Botwnnog, Tudweiliog, Llanengan, Llanbedrog and Abersoch areas.
24.01.2014	The Investigation Group considering the findings deriving from the focus groups.
	General research into good practice in Gwynedd and in areas outside Gwynedd throughout the period of the Investigation.

FINDINGS

The Economy

- 1.1 **In the short, medium and long term, the most important element in terms of maintaining social inclusion and access to services is maintaining an economy that is as prosperous as possible and employment across the County.**
- 1.2 In the context of Gwynedd and west Wales in general, the fact that the Gross Domestic Product is 75% below the UK average is a huge challenge especially in the current economic climate.
- 1.3 When developing the 'Rural Development Plan for 2014-2020', the Welsh Government and the UK Government need to consider in detail how vulnerable the economic situation is in rural areas.
- 1.4 It is essential that any potential financial support to develop and maintain the economy is used appropriately in the County. A clear and agreed Economic Strategy is required that co-ordinates appropriately with the Local Development Plan for Gwynedd and Anglesey.¹
- 1.5 In the same manner, there is a need for slick and appropriate collaboration between the Welsh Government, the Gwynedd and Anglesey Local Services Board and the Anglesey and Gwynedd Councils not only to co-ordinate services but also to maximise the economic value of the public pound for the benefit of Gwynedd residents and communities.

The public sector in Wales spends £4.3 billion per year. This is a substantial driver that could give a key boost to move the rural economy forward between 2014 and 20.²

Responsibilities

- 2.1 **There is a responsibility on Gwynedd Council and the Welsh Government to collaborate effectively when planning and providing statutory and non-statutory services for residents across the County.**
- 2.2 A very simple, yet very complicated point! To this end, the recent publication of Sir Paul Williams' Report on the work of the [Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery](#) (January 2014), reiterates this.

¹See Appendix 1 – Gwynedd's Response to the Rural Development Plan

² Welsh Government Website – [eProcurement Services across the Welsh Public Sector](#)

2.3 It is worth noting that the Williams Report is a thorough consideration of local service planning and delivery. Yet again, it is difficult to conclude that even this Commission has managed to answer one of its main objectives:

'Propose an optimal model of public service governance and delivery in Wales...'

2.4 Therefore, it is worth noting at the start that we also failed to reach an unambiguous conclusion regarding the best model for service planning and delivery in Gwynedd, but there are many examples of good practice that deserve our attention.

2.5 One unclear element in this piece of work in some services is to identify the relationship in the grey area between statutory and non-statutory services from the customer's perspective and the significance of this to the Council and its partners in terms of directing resources.

2.6 Indeed, it is unavoidable that the Council, when planning services in the context of the continuous reduction in resources from the Welsh Government faces increasingly challenging situations in terms of securing access to services for the residents of the County.

2.7 The *Williams Report* gives some attention to these elements from both directions – a reduction in resources and managing the demand for services. This is a central theme in the Council's current strategic work and is covered under the heading *'The Gwynedd Way'* submitted to the full Council on 23 February 2013.³

2.8 Obtaining clarity from the Welsh Government regarding their support to this new way of working is essential to purposeful service planning for Gwynedd citizens in the coming years. If planning or delivering a non-statutory service leads to a reduction in demand, then it could be considered that this in reality is 'wise expenditure' of 'statutory' resources in a 'non-statutory' field. The matter is addressed specifically in the Gwynedd Council Strategic Plan 2013-2017 under Priority DT5 – Reducing the Demand on Services through Prevention and Early Intervention.⁴

One simple example of this would be to spend on keeping citizens healthy and preventing illness.

2.9 Recommendation 7 of the [Williams Report](#) (p350) suggests that potential flexibility will be available to achieve this:

The Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales must:

- *Consider the need to secure citizen-centred outcomes directly when legislating;*
- *Review existing legislation to ensure it simplifies public-sector decision-making rather than imposing undue constraints on it or creating complexity, and either repeal such provisions or clarify their meaning and interaction.*

2.10 It is recommended to focus on obtaining clarity on this without delay.

³ ['The Gwynedd Way – Results of Sustainable Service in a Challenging Period'](#). Gwynedd Council Meeting 28/2/13

⁴ [Gwynedd Council Strategic Plan 2013-2017](#), page 51, Priority DT5

- 2.11 Some specific observations were received from the residents at of some of the focus groups held across the County which showed that some of Gwynedd’s residents were aware of the need to provide services in a different way.

Here are some comments from the Llŷn Peninsula regarding obtaining a balance between avoiding health problems rather than curing diseases:

The health profession is starting to come around to getting people healthier rather than treating diseases – starting to prescribe exercise etc.

Easier said than done – difficulty in persuading people to live healthier lives rather than problems in relation to awareness.

Need to start with children – clubs and concessions etc. in order to get them into good habits in terms of keeping healthy.

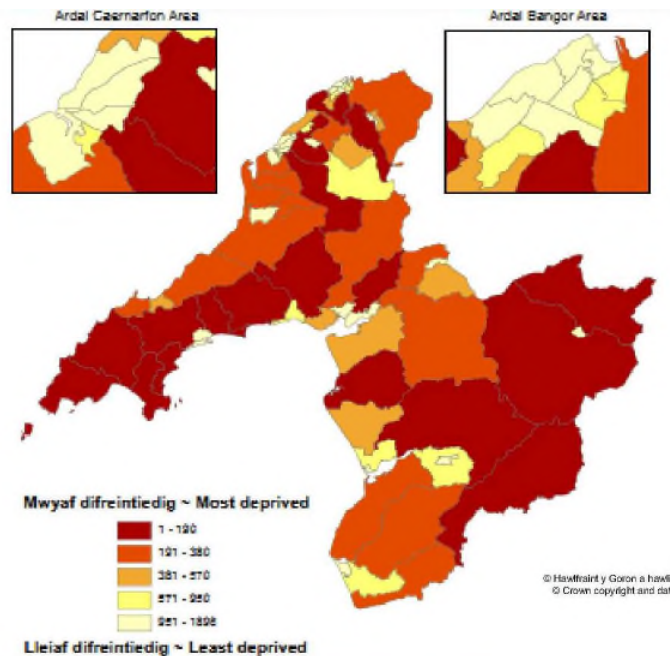
Change in Services

- 3.1 **It is neither practical nor sustainable to provide all Council services in the traditional manner, and holding a constructive and meaningful dialogue with the Third Sector and Communities in Gwynedd is essential if quality bilingual services are to be maintained across the County.**⁵
- 3.2 The background to the discussion on facilitating access to services was presented by the Council’s Information and Research Manager. Consideration was given to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation which aims to provide a general illustration of deprivation across Wales.
- 3.3 The Index considers 8 different elements (zones) that are considered as contributors towards the population’s deprivation at various degrees. These eight elements (zones) are the standards and levels of: Income, Employment, Health, Education, Community Safety, Physical Environment, Suitable Housing and Access to Services.

WIMD Zones	
Income	23.5%
Employment	23.5%
Health	4%
Education	14%
Access to Services	10%
Community Safety	5%
Physical Environment	5%
Housing	5%
Overall Index	100%

⁵ [Gwynedd Council Strategic Plan 2013-2017](#), Page 42, Priority CC3

- 3.4 Although each of these elements contribute towards social inclusion, the decision made by the members of the investigation was to focus on the last element – Access to Services.
- 3.5 This does not mean that the other seven elements are less relevant in terms of social inclusion. Indeed, the members of the investigation are of the opinion that all elements tie-in together and influence each other. Note in particular the due high weighting placed on income level and the level and standard of employment as the two main elements in relation to maintaining and improving social inclusion. It was considered that more longer term planning would be required and possibly a regeneration in the economic climate to be able to impact on substantial improvements in these fields.
- 3.6 It was considered that more effective influence could be had on the other elements in the medium term. Therefore, in order to focus on a specific field, the emphasis in the remainder of this report will be on a detailed analysis of the observations made in the focus groups. It cannot be alleged that these groups provide a full picture of the situation in their areas; however, they provide a useful snapshot of people’s perceptions in their communities of access to services.
- 3.7 After receiving an analysis from the Research Unit of the access to service zone, it was discovered that eighteen areas in Gwynedd were considered as amongst the most deprived in Wales. It was decided to select 8 of these areas grouped in 3 different locations to hold focus groups with local residents, namely the areas of Llanuwchllyn and Llandderfel; Tregarth and Mynydd Llandygai and Pentir 2; Aberdaron, Botwnnog, Tudweiliog, Llanengan, Llanbedrog and Abersoch.



- 3.8 The Welsh Government is currently consulting on the indicators for the next Index of Deprivation (end of 2014). They are proposing to change the ‘travel time’ indicator which is

based on a combination of using a bus and/or walking. Implementing this change would mean that the measure would be similar to the methods used in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland to calculate 'access to services'.⁶

- 3.9 24 people came together for the three events, and thus it was possible to air the matters better than could be done by conducting a questionnaire.

Focus Groups

Here is a summary of the main observations made in terms of the impact on the Citizen.

Basic Shopping Services

- 4.1 There is no clear evidence to show that access to shopping services is causing serious difficulties to those questioned in rural areas, but being unable to have convenient access to some basic goods is a matter of concern for some.
- 4.2 The items in small shops are usually more expensive and there is less choice. It is not possible for small shops to keep a stock of fresh foods, so the main value of small shops is to keep a stock of preserved goods and possibly some milk and bread.
- 4.3 In order to have sufficient choice and better prices, the citizens questioned said that they shopped in supermarkets or online and received home deliveries by the supermarket vans.
- 4.4 A food selling van which travels to villages is a good idea and is possibly a business opportunity that could be encouraged.
- 4.5 A successful example was noted where a local public house offered a service which provided basic foodstuffs, electrical goods, gardening equipment and the Daily Post.
- 4.6 A negative element of shopping in supermarkets and medium-sized shops was that the social and friendly element was lost. It is likely that losing this social interaction will lead to broader problems such as loneliness and ill-health.
- 4.7 Some felt that maintaining small shops required a community commitment which meant being prepared to pay more for items in order to ensure that the service continued. Others were of the opinion that unless the business could compete then it was unsustainable, and that supporting such business could place pressure on the more profitable shops in the towns which maintained local employment.

⁶ [Welsh Government Consultation](#) – Proposed Indicators for WIMD 2014

Transport

- 5.1 Those questioned did not have positive experiences of using public services. However, it was not evident whether or not a number of those questioned were regular users of public transport services.
- 5.2 It was noted that the frequency, times and routes of bus services caused difficulties; and sometimes, a lack of buses meant that there was no room on them and that they would pass by without picking up passengers.
- 5.3 The customer care of some drivers was lacking, in particular towards young people and passengers that could not provide the exact fare for a ticket.
- 5.4 Although those questioned had not used the 'O Ddrws i Ddrws' service, one noted that she transported people as a favour. It was suggested more broadly that better use would be made of resources to provide more community transport services with the third sector and CIL De Gwynedd rather than running bus services that usually run empty.
- 5.5 There was concern that the Council's parking fees were incomprehensibly expensive.
- 5.6 Some considered that young people were as needy in terms of the need to travel free of charge as older people and the elderly.
- 5.7 The provision of safe cycle routes was fragmented – better links with the villages were required.
- 5.8 The information for timetables was not easy to obtain.
- 5.9 There was a need to coordinate with the needs of pedestrians and tourists.
- 5.10 Create a system for people who travelled regularly in their own cars to offer an informal service to assist people to be mobile.
- 5.11 Develop a system of arranging transport to central hubs in order to get the customers to the buses and provide people with mobility without competing with public transport.

Financial Services

- 6.1 On the whole, banking services are not available in the countryside outside the main centres such as Pwllheli and Bala. It was noted that the service had also disappeared from some towns such as Cricieth. The main impact of this is that it is not possible to:
 - withdraw cash
 - pay money into bank accounts
 - check bank account balances

- 6.2 It was noted that an ATM grant scheme had been running for a period of time in Sarn Mellteyrn, but the service had been terminated when the grant ended. In some locations, it is possible to withdraw cash with a card from the Post Office.
- 6.3 The lack of cash withdrawal facilities was causing considerable concern for the Pen Llŷn Focus Group. The need to travel to Pwllheli to withdraw cash meant that it was more likely that rural residents would go to the town to withdraw cash and then shop, leading to even less expenditure in the small rural shops.
- 6.4 Those who were questioned had little interest in using online services. The convenience of being able to withdraw comparatively small amounts of money (£5) at a time was important to some. In addition, the element of trust in dealing with people face to face gave peace of mind to some.
- 6.5 The Post Office came to Llanuwchllyn Hall for two hours every Tuesday. Older people use this service to receive their pension. A concern was noted that people who reached pension age were now forced to receive a direct payment into their bank account.

Health Services

- 7.1 Considerable differences were seen between the three areas (Meirionnydd, Arfon and Dwyfor) in terms of access to health services, with serious concerns by those questioned in Pen Llŷn in particular in terms of the safety of the service on weekends.

Llanuwchllyn and Llandderfel Areas

- 7.2 There was a feeling that the service at Bala Surgery was convenient.
- 7.3 Travelling to Llangollen, Penrhyndeudraeth or Ruthin for dental services was convenient.
- 7.4 Travelling to Wrexham to the hospital was not convenient on public transport.

Tregarth and Mynydd Llandygai and Pentir 2 Areas

- 7.5 Mixed response to online and over the phone medical services.

Aberdaron, Botwnnog, Tudweiliog, Llanengan, Llanbedrog and Abersoch.

- 7.6 Serious concerns by the residents of this area regarding the protection of health service provision on weekends. The standard is fine but the lack of information and access to service is a cause for concern.
- 7.7 Although holding consultations in dispersed and rural locations, e.g. village halls, public houses or a room in a house was a possibility, sometimes there was a need to maintain confidentiality by going to a central neutral location.
- 7.8 Using public transport to reach appointments conveniently was a problem.
- 7.9 The role of community nurses and leisure services in health promotion was welcomed.

Education

- 8.1 **No specific concerns were noted about Gwynedd Council's education provision through the schools. There was a feeling that support services for pupils in schools had improved and that small and large schools had advantages and disadvantages.**
- 8.2 Although young people left full-time education with good qualifications, there were insufficient opportunities to use them locally for employment.
- 8.3 In terms of the provision of evening and occasional classes, there was a feeling that the activity and support from the Workers Education Association and Coleg Harlech to hold courses was disappearing.

Socialising

- 9.1 **There is a community spirit in the three areas in question. A number of various activities that took place in the communities were noted although some villages were more active than others.**
- 9.2 The opportunity to extend the use made of some buildings that were a central location for activities by offering services from there such as a shop or post office was noted.
- 9.3 Numerous observations were received in Pen Llŷn regarding the Leisure Centre in Pwllheli. There were strong feelings regarding the need for the Centre to engage better with the area's residents.

Demand for Services and Expectations

- 10.1 **Evidence was obtained from the Focus Groups that those present were aware of increasing pressures on the Council and other organisations to provide services with fewer resources. Although there is a willingness to consider receiving services in alternative ways, people were unclear regarding what was on offer.**
- 10.2 People's expectations of services on the whole are sensible and moderate. One of the most obvious features noted was the fear about the future of the services as the financial pressures increased. To this end, there were signs that the residents shared the concerns of Council members and other organisations that planned and provided services.
- 10.3 There was a need to develop the engagement work and information sharing further, not only in terms of the planning but also in terms of having convenient access to information about the services offered. This would be a means to improve ownership of the services and to profile them more effectively.

- 10.4 In addition, people's understanding of the 'Gwynedd Way' concept that was submitted in the Council's Strategic Plan was encouraging.
- 10.5 One specific element that requires detailed attention soon is the negative risk of providing online and telephone based services on vulnerable individuals.

Transport

- 11.1 **It is completely unclear what is the extent of the situation's severity in this field or how it could be resolved. Certainly, there is a need to examine this element carefully.**
- 11.2 One element of this suggests that this is the most important part in terms of ensuring access to services. It could be argued that this is the starting point for planning services.
- 11.3 On one hand you have the option of restricting the number of public transport routes substantially and increase the frequency of journeys. Then you could seek funding from another source to fund the third sector / community councils to maintain the on-call service at a reduced cost to collect passengers to reach specific bus stops on the routes.
- 11.4 On the other hand, you have the necessity of having private car transport, and you could consider an initiative for car owners to transport passengers who do not have a car to services.

Multi-purpose Centres

- 12.1 **A role could be developed for Community Councils, wherever possible, to provide banking/post/medical services in public houses/village halls once a week.**
- 12.2 Village halls or another suitable building should be developed as the heart of the community by running various services from them. Although there would be costs associated with this, this was the way forward and there would certainly be people from the community who would be willing to give some of their time to help such a venture.
- 12.3 People do not know what is going on, who these people are or who to contact and this could be a role for the community councils.

Good Practice in Gwynedd

- 13.1 There are examples of successful plans to increase inclusion in Gwynedd. We have restricted our work in this field to list a small number of various types of schemes to improve inclusion and to obtain views at the focus groups. It is unclear as to how successful these enterprises are. Those who contributed to the focus groups were aware of some schemes and praised them.

Comprehensive list:

<http://mantellgwynedd.com>

Here are a few interesting examples:

<http://www.oddrwsiddrws.co.uk/>

<http://www.cildegwynedd.co.uk/>

<http://www.caban-cyf.org/>

<http://www.canolfan-talysarn.org.uk/>

<http://www.institiwtcorris.org.uk/cymraeg/welcome/index.php>

Good Practice outside Gwynedd

- 14.1 We note examples of good practice outside the County. Again, we have not been able to assess how successful these scheme were in terms of increasing inclusion, but we deem that addressing them when developing specific schemes will be of benefit.

The list of plans and groups that operate across Wales and beyond is enormous. It is comparatively easy to gain access to basic information about them on the Web.

Here are some of our favourites:

<http://www.cydcymru-egni.com>

[Pub is the Hub \(Cadwyn Clwyd\)](#)

[Torfaen Footpath Volunteers](#)

[Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site Voluntary Ranger Service](#)

<http://www.wheelstowork.org/>

<http://www.whitmore.village.uk.net/newsletter/newsletter2.html#rural>

RECOMMENDATIONS

We note recommendations for the Council to act on directly and as a partner to promote better inclusion by facilitating access to services. We consider that the Welsh Government is one of the key partners, along with local and regional partners.

Engagement

- 15.1 There are good examples of organisations in the public, third and private sectors that plan and provide services with a view of putting the customer first. However, it is evident from the Investigation's work that we do not have a clear picture of the requirements of the residents of Gwynedd as a whole in terms of facilitating access to services. We are of the opinion that there is a need to undertake significant further work to create a clear profile of the current situation across the County.

Engagement is needed and meaningful consultation, where appropriate, with residents and service users when planning and developing services on a strategic level and on a level of providing services on a day to day basis.

Use networks that already exist if they are appropriate rather than making special arrangements for engagement.

Plan carefully and ensure that you provide sufficient time for preparing prospective service providers, service users and residents when planning services.

The Council's new Engagement Strategy is a good starting point and there is a need to ensure that Cabinet Members give priority to gathering opinions and evidence from citizens and to carefully consider the impact on service users in rural areas when planning and providing services.⁷

The Economy

- 15.2 There are no clear signs that Gwynedd's vulnerable economic situation is likely to improve substantially in the short or medium term. There will be a need to converge any public or other financial resources effectively in order to maximise their value within the County.

You are required to agree with the Welsh Government on the direction and implementation of the Economic and Spatial Strategy for Gwynedd and Anglesey as a starting point to fund structures (to include highways and transport) as the main driver to plan access to services across the County.

⁷ [Gwynedd Council Engagement Strategy 2013-2017](#)

Alternative Services

- 15.3 It is inevitable that the increasing financial pressure on public services means that the nature of services will change. The Council has already addressed this in its Strategic Plan and the need to act has arrived.

The Welsh Government needs to clearly show what is the way forward as soon as possible. The Investigation obtained some evidence that the residents of Gwynedd are willing to consider changes to their services, but there is a need to step up the pace to alleviate fears and to plan and provide high quality services in alternative ways.

Shop Locally Services

- 15.4 There is no evidence to show that people in rural areas have great concerns in relation to access to shops. However, the weaknesses in terms of the opportunity to socialise by shopping in the local community create a difficult situation and could possibly lead to more stress and health problems. In addition, obtaining easy access to cash is difficult.

This is an example where early intervention to prevent more serious and costly problems later on could be beneficial and an effective use of scarce resources. It's possible that supporting small private business and social enterprises that are already up and running would be an effective way of implementing the 'Gwynedd Way' in this case.

Target private and third sector businesses that currently operate in the communities to support them to develop a convenient shopping service as a focal point for the local community, with the aim of them becoming self-supporting by 2016 before the end of the Council's Strategic Plan's lifespan in 2017. Then, you can undertake a detailed assessment in order to establish the way forward for Gwynedd's subsequent Strategic Plan.

Transport

- 15.5 A number of valuable messages were received by the Focus Groups about the importance of transport as the main factor in terms of ensuring equal access for all to services.

There is a fundamental complexity in this field, mainly because of the 'necessary' use of cars in order to live a 'normal' life according to the usual practices of the twenty-first century in a 'developed' society such as Wales.

In our opinion, in the short and medium term, there is a need to consider that the use of a personal vehicle or the vehicle of a relative or a friend in Gwynedd communities is a vital requirement in order to ensure equal and fair access to services across the County.

Furthermore, we are of the opinion that public transport services that can address the needs of more residents in some communities cannot be maintained. Consequently, there are serious implications. We are of the opinion that people are not treated fairly in terms of ensuring access to services in Gwynedd.

In addition, more flexibility is needed in terms of planning the public transport services in order to support economic development.

There is a need to plan public transport on two tiers:

TIER A: To agree with the Welsh Government on Service Centres across the County and regionally, by planning public transport to connect Gwynedd's main population locations.

TIER B: The Council needs to re-design services from the populated main centres to rural areas. In accordance with the reference in the Williams Report, we deem that this work is the role of the new community councils and that three innovative schemes should be undertaken instead of a group of councils showing a willingness to act on this between now and 2016. Then, a detailed assessment should be undertaken of the three schemes.

Health in Pen Llŷn

- 15.6 The observations received in relation to health services demonstrated quite different situations in the three areas in question. With this in view, we consider that further consideration should be given to the situation in Pen Llŷn at once. (See Recommendation 15.7).

In the Llanuwchllyn-Bala area the main issue that was highlighted was the need to improve the access to regional health services in Wrexham. (See Recommendation 15.5 above).

Although the provision of health services in the Pen Llŷn area is already being considered by the Welsh Government as part of the future re-organisation plans, we consider that the clear evidence obtained from concerns about the safety of the weekend provision is a matter that should be formally submitted to the Welsh Government.

The Welsh Government needs to provide a temporary urgent solution to the local residents' opinion about the lack of safety of the health service in Pen Llŷn on weekends.

Realistic Expectations

- 15.7 In the Pentir area the potential of creating difficulties 'down the line' in terms of providing 'online' services was identified. We did not obtain clear evidence of this in this Investigation. However, we consider that this is a matter that should be discussed carefully as it could lead

to serious implications in terms of re-designing online services and undertaking health assessments over the phone etc.

One of the main positive elements from the Investigation was the fact that those who participated in the focus groups were fully aware of the need to change and plan and provide services in different ways. It is time to act and to be innovative.

One of the essential elements for planning and providing services in alternative ways is the need to use technology and new developments in an effective manner. However, it is vital that people have faith in the new arrangements and that we take advantage of the opportunities to improve services by providing them using alternative methods.

Undertake further research to see whether there is evidence that maintaining health and other services ‘from afar’ creates more intensive health problems or other difficulties in the medium and long term for service users. If evidence of this comes to light make an appropriate provision to mitigate the impact when planning services.

Build on Good Practice

- 15.8 At the beginning of the Report it is noted that this is merely a snapshot of the situation of access to services in Gwynedd. Unfortunately, we have not been able to give careful consideration to the current provision across the County.

We understand that you are in the process of mapping the general provision of social enterprises in Gwynedd and you will be considering this when planning to improve the sustainability of services.

This work will be valuable in order to identify the nature, form and quality of the current provision. Historically, Gwynedd pioneered with some elements of alternative services by social enterprises through successful collaboration with the Central Government. The Vanguard Scheme in the field of people with learning disabilities in the last century was a good example of this.

The desire to be enterprising and innovative continues to be evident in Gwynedd communities.

Build on the core provision that exists in Gwynedd to improve access to services by identifying and assessing the quality of services that are currently provided by the Third Sector and Private Sector across the County. Plan alternative services over a period of three years or more by providing appropriate guidance and support.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the following for providing evidence, valuable support and their willing cooperation:

The local residents of the areas of Llanuwchllyn/Llandderfel, Tregarth, Mynydd Llandegai and Pentir 2, Aberdaron, Botwnnog and Tudweiliog, Llanengan, Llanbedrog and Abersoch

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Background documents

Gwynedd Council Strategic Plan 2013-17

Rural Development Plan 2007-13

Rural Development Plan draft 2014-2020

Joseff Rowntree Investigations

Deep Rural Localities, Wales Rural Observatory, October 2009, Getting the Measure of Rural Deprivation in Wales – May 2012 – Commissioned by the Local Government Data Unit on behalf of

WLGA Rural Forum

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Wales Transport Strategy (2008)

Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities (2007)

Economic Development and the Welsh Language (2006)

Making the Connections

National Survey for Wales 2012-13

Improving Rural Services – Service Priority, Accessibility and Quality in Rural Scotland – May 2006 – Scottish Executive

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