

Housing and Property Department

04 October, 2022



Cabinet Member Performance Report

Councillor Craig ab Iago

Contact Officer: Carys Fôn Williams, Head of Housing and Property

A report to a meeting of the Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of meeting	4 October, 2022
Cabinet Member	Councillor Craig ab Iago
Contact Officer	Carys Fôn Williams, Head of Housing and Property
Contact Number	01341 424368
Subject	Performance Report of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Property

DECISION SOUGHT

To accept and note the information in the report.

THE REASON WHY A DECISION IS NEEDED

In order to ensure effective performance management



1. Introduction



- 1.1 The **purpose** of this report is to update the Cabinet on developments in the fields within my remit as Cabinet Member for Housing and Property. In short, this includes an update on the projects within the Gwynedd Council Plan 2018-2023; the progress of performance measures; and the latest on the financial saving schemes
- 1.2 The homelessness situation continues to worsen, with 720 people currently homeless in Gwynedd. Of course, this is not the Council's wish, and although we cannot undo the situation, the Department is doing all it can to improve the situation for the people of Gwynedd. [See 2.1.1 for the relevant schemes.](#)
- 1.3 We are still facing a housing crisis, and we as a Department are working proactively to provide the people of Gwynedd with as many opportunities as possible to live locally. I'm extremely proud to say that we are celebrating very exciting steps on this journey – we have bought our first parcel of land, and have just received planning permission for our first housing development in 30 years.
- 1.4 The unprecedented situation concerning energy is currently in the news, however fuel poverty has been known to us in Gwynedd for a long time. But, we are serious about tackling the situation for the benefit of the people of Gwynedd, and as a first significant step in the response, we have recently set up a new Energy Service. [More information in 2.1.5.](#)
- 1.5 I would like to remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions between myself and the Department, and have been scrutinised together with the Chief Executive, the Head of Department and all department Managers.
- 1.6 **In general, I am satisfied with the progress of projects led by the Department in accordance with the Council Plan and the performance measures for which I am responsible, and although some services are facing challenges due to the effects of the pandemic and Brexit, and the new effects of the battling in Ukraine, and the increase in the costs of living, I am confident that the Department has suitable plans to address the situation to the best of its ability.**

2. PROJECTS OF THE GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN 2018-2023 (Improvement Priorities)

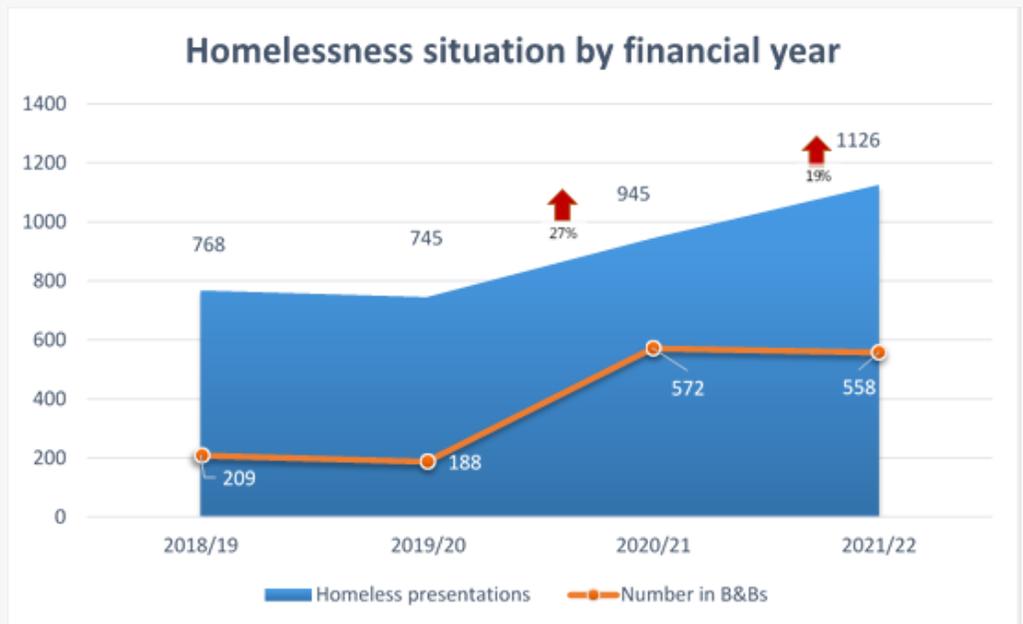
A shortage of suitable homes for the people of Gwynedd: Implementing and delivering projects within our Housing Action Plan in order to increase the opportunities for local people to have a suitable home within their communities.

2.1 I wish to draw your attention to the main plans prioritised by the Department at present.

2.1.1 Homelessness plans

On 1 September 2022, 720 individuals were homeless in Gwynedd. For three years, a steady increase has been seen in the numbers presenting as homeless, with the most recent increase being 19%. Comparing 2018/19 (the last full year before the pandemic) with 2021/22, 48% more people presented as homeless.

This year, we forecast a further increase in the numbers presenting as homeless – the number of presentations to date are similar to the same period last year, as well as new factors such as the increase in the costs of living, an increase in the number of landlords ceasing to rent to tenants, and the unpredictable situation for Ukrainian refugees.



The Department is doing all it can to tackle this unprecedented situation, which varies from developing supported accommodation (project 1a in the Housing Action Plan), to establishing specialist mental health support (project 1d). Here's a few updates.

2. PROJECTS OF THE GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN 2018-2023 (Improvement Priorities)

2.1.1 Homelessness plans

1a

Supported Housing schemes for the homeless



Artist impression of 137 Stryd Fawr, Bangor development



Tŷ Adferiad, Porthmadog



3D design of Glan Wnion, Dolgellau development

Project	Units	Information
Completed		
Tŷ Adferiad, Porthmadog	6	The first supported housing development in Gwynedd to provide specialist support to homeless women
Hostel Noddfa, Deiniolen upgrade	6	The Hostel Noddfa building (a former vicarage) has been fully renovated, meaning it is now able to safely accept a greater variety of service users
Ar y gweill		
35 College Road, Bangor	3	Transforming a former vacant building into supported housing.
Glan Wnion, Dolgellau	5	The old building has been demolished and the work on the foundations has commenced.
137 High Street, Bangor	12	Supported Housing with tenancy support. Working with North Wales Housing and Adra. The work on the structure will begin in September, aiming to be completed by summer 2023.
Accommodation for a family and an individual in Pwllheli	2	Contractors on site, aiming to complete by April 2023.
Pods, Segontium, Caernarfon	4	The pods have been completed, and a few matters are to be discussed with Dŵr Cymru before tenants are able to move in
Total:	38	

2.1.1 Homelessness plans

1ch Private landlords support packages

The Department is currently working on plans to develop support packages for private landlords. The aim of these packages will be to encourage private landlords across Gwynedd to offer tenancies to local people who need housing, rather than letting out their properties on a short-term basis or as holiday lets.

The Department has already succeeded in securing a £2.7m for the purposes of the project and officers are currently putting together a plan. Interest has already been shown by 5 landlords, and because of this interest, the Department is confident it will be able to surpass the target of 4 units set by Welsh Government for 2022/23, and now aims to bring in 8 additional units, bringing the total this year to 12 units.



2.1.1 Homelessness plans

1d Specialist mental health support

Preventing homelessness is a key part of the Homelessness Service, but the number of tenancies at risk because of mental health matters are on the rise.

In order to avoid a situation where these vulnerable individuals lose their tenancies, the Department is increasing its capacity to support and assist them to continue to live in their home.

At present, accessing mental health services in the context of homelessness can be challenging and a long process, which often means that it's too late to prevent someone from being homeless by the time they receive the support.

Through this innovative scheme, which will be run jointly by the Council and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, we aim to help at least 200 individuals to receive the support they need in a timely manner and without adding stress to an already difficult situation.

It is expected that this will have a positive impact on a number of aspects connected with homelessness, including individuals' welfare, the demand on our staff, on temporary accommodation and on supported accommodation.

Recently, a significant step was taken on this important journey by appointing a Mental Health Coordinator who has already begun in post, and a Housing Solutions Mental Health Case Worker will also be appointed very soon.



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Betsi Cadwaladr
University Health Board

2.1.2 Schemes for Purchasing Houses and Land



The Council intends to purchase houses to rent to the residents of Gwynedd, and this will be done in two ways, either by purchasing private houses and letting them at an intermediate rent level, or by purchasing former social housing and letting them at a social rent level. By implementing these schemes successfully, at the end of the 6-year period of our Housing Action Plan, the Council will own approximately 100 houses that will be available to let to local residents.



As well as this, in order to develop our own houses, we intend to purchase suitable development land in locations across the County in due course, as is outlined in project 3ff of the Housing Action Plan.

I have already drawn attention to the hard work that has, and continues to happen on these schemes – work that has to be conducted more often than not behind the scenes due to the sensitive and confidential nature of the work

However I'm very glad to say that the Department has completed the purchase of its first development land as part of the Housing Action Plan, in Morfa Nefyn – a part of the County in dire need of affordable housing for local people.

. The intention is to build 9 houses in phases following the Tŷ Gwynedd principles (more can be seen on this scheme below), which is forecasted to help approximately 40 people rent or buy a home in Morfa Nefyn.

More information can be found here: [Cyngor Gwynedd purchases development land for building intermediate homes in Pen Llŷn \(llyw.cymru\)](https://www.cyngor-gwynedd.gov.uk/development-land-for-building-intermediate-homes-in-pen-llŷn) or by watching the video here: <https://youtu.be/5STnRJroM5s>



2. PROJECTS OF THE GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN 2018-2023 (Improvement Priorities)

We are also considering other sites in different parts of the County for purchasing for the same purposes.

Additionally, we have purchased our first houses under the Housing Action Plan, in Bangor and Llanberis. Our intention is to let these houses on intermediate rent to a person with a local connection and who needs such a house. 8 other houses are going through legal steps at present and although I am not able to share more information at this time, I am confident I will have an update by the next time.

2.1.3 Gwynedd Homebuy Scheme

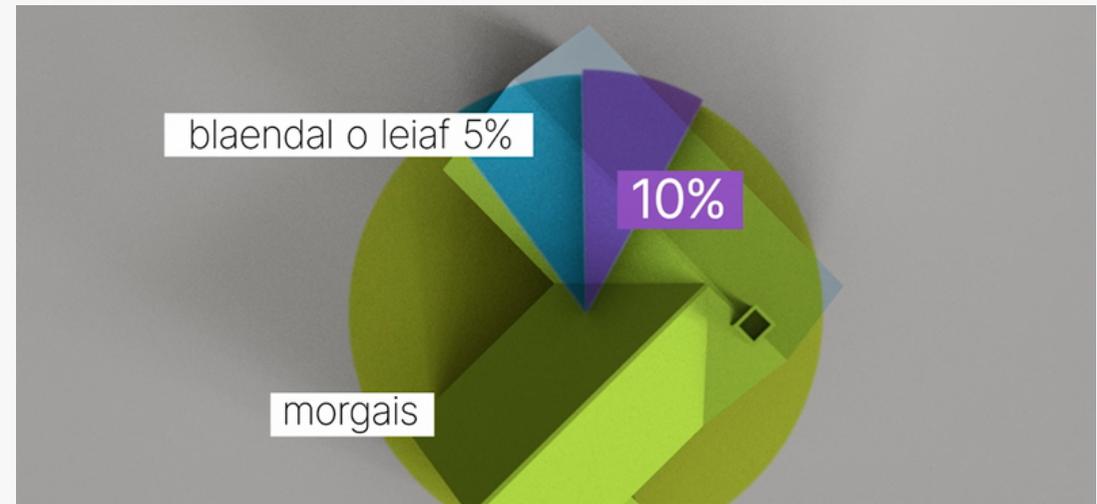


Gwynedd Homebuy Scheme is for first time buyers, or for individuals and families who find it difficult to afford to buy a suitable home on the open market. Interest-free loans can be provided to pay the difference between the property price and what prospective buyers are able to offer as a mortgage and deposit. The aim is to make the houses more affordable to residents who find it difficult to get an adequate mortgage to buy a house on the open market in their local area.

The Homebuy Scheme has been a successful scheme since the beginning, and has helped many people own a property. However, due to limited funding, it could only be operated on a small scale.

Now, by combining funding from the Gwynedd Council Tax Premium Fund, and additional funding from the Government as part of the Dwyfor Second Homes Pilot, I am proud to say that we are able to extend the current scheme, which means that £13m worth of equity loans are available to enable even more people to purchase a home on the open market in their local community. The funding includes an investment of £8.5m from Welsh Government as part of the Dwyfor Second Homes Pilot.

The Scheme was launched on 13 September and I will provide a further update in my next report.



[Watch the Gwynedd Homebuy promotional video here](#)

2.1.4 **Develop our own homes for local people**

Project 3a: Develop our own housing to increase the opportunities for Gwynedd residents to compete in the housing market is an exciting scheme aiming to build innovative houses across Gwynedd, which will be available to purchase or rent at intermediate prices. Every house will be built according to the Tŷ Gwynedd principles, ensuring they are flexible, green, energy-efficient, and are sustainably built.

The first development of 10 houses in the Coed Mawr area in Bangor has just reached a key milestone of receiving planning permission. Officers will now prepare to go out to tender for the construction work.



Coed Mawr, Bangor site designs

2. PROJECTS OF THE GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN 2018-2023 (Improvement Priorities)

In the meantime, officers are considering other suitable sites across the County, and of course our [new land in Morfa Nefyn](#) will be used to build Tŷ Gwynedd houses following the Local Housing Enabler's assessment.

2.1.5 Establishing a new Energy Service

One objective of the Housing Action Plan is to establish a new Energy Conservation Service to respond to the host of applications from community groups asking for support to deliver renewable energy schemes and to improve the ability of Gwynedd residents to avoid fuel poverty. The work is divided into two main avenues at present, namely Decarbonising Homes, and Consulting with the Public on Fuel Poverty. More information can be found on these avenues below.

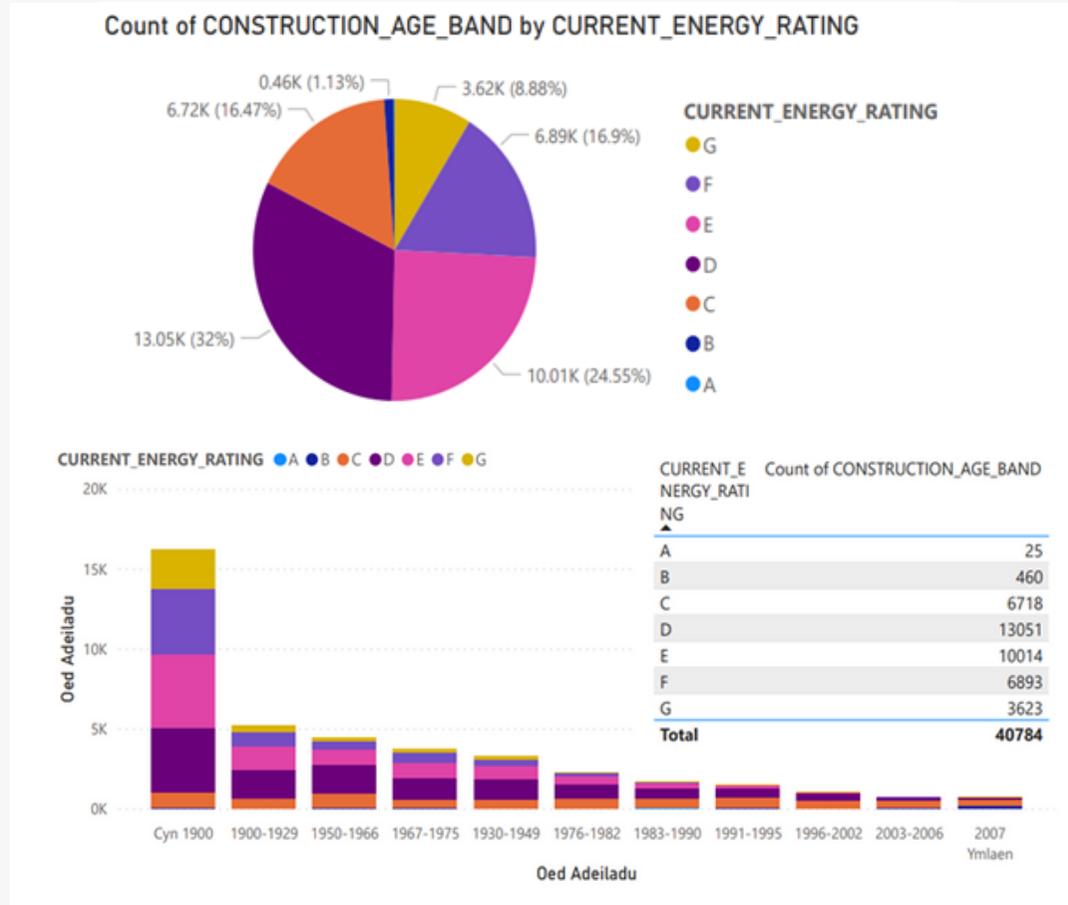
Fuel Poverty Consultation

This work is extremely important in the current climate. According to the most recent data available, Gwynedd is one of the areas with the largest fuel poverty level in Wales. The Service is working hard in the background networking and arranging events across the County as part of the effort to equip the people of Gwynedd with the information and ability to make the most of opportunities available in this field. Additionally, two conferences were arranged recently – one in July and the second in September – to bring together organisations working in the energy field to discuss ideas, advice and possible solutions to help Gwynedd residents.

Decarbonising Houses

Gwynedd's housing stock is among the worst in terms of energy performance in Britain.

The graph on the right and the table below shows that the vast majority of the County's housing stock is in EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) category D or lower, and that most were built before 1900. It's astounding that only 25 homes in Gwynedd have an EPC A rating.



Since establishing the new Energy Service in May 2021, and by signposting available schemes, the following interventions have been achieved in Gwynedd:

- 349 ECO 3 referrals (2021/22)
- 257 Nyth referrals (2021/22)
- 47 houses in Tanygrisiau were issued measures under Arbed 3 before the scheme ended in November 2021

2. PROJECTS OF THE GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN 2018-2023 (Improvement Priorities)

2.2 Easy and clear access to an advice and enquiries service on housing matters: Establish a single front door and help-desk for the public in order to help with housing problems

The Department continues with its aim of establishing a front door/help desk for housing services that will facilitate public access to those services and will help with housing problems more efficiently.

Since my last report, the One Stop Shop Team Leader has been hard at work conducting research by holding conversations with key internal and external stakeholders (including the Housing Associations, agencies in the field and partners from the third sector), in order to understand needs and assess the current demand. When that work comes to an end in the next few weeks, I will present a report to the Council's Care Scrutiny Committee in February which will provide an update on the One Stop Shop.

The research will also look at procuring an information management system. It's important that the system acquired allows the One Stop Shop to collaborate closely with other services in the department (such as Homelessness and Housing Options). Also, we are in the process of establishing a Single Point of Access (SPOA) to refer people to services funded through the Housing Support Grant. To this end, the Department recently held drop-in sessions, inviting anyone who was interested in applying for roles with the service to come for a chat to learn more about the service and the Department's work. Although we will have to wait to see the success of these sessions', much interest was shown and it is hoped that this will lead to strong applications for the roles.



2.3 Other risks



Homelessness

As noted previously, the demand for the Homelessness Units continue to be high, with the numbers of homelessness presentations continue to rise on the same rate as last year.

It will not disappear overnight and the demand on our services will stay for years to come, especially after Welsh Government set a statutory requirement on all Local Authorities to accommodate everyone who presents as homelessness from now on.

However, no confirmation of additional funding has been received from the Government in order to address the increased demand on our services due to this change, and there is real concern that our current budgets will not be sufficient to meet the demand.

The Department and I have already raised these risks on a corporate level, but the risks involving Homelessness are likely to remain until the balance between the demand for housing and supply improves.



Refugees and Ukraine

The war in Ukraine has caused a significant increase in the workload of the Department's Refugees Resettlement Unit.

Plans are ongoing to look again at the structure and resources of the Unit for the future in order to ensure we are in the best place to respond to the increased demand on the service.

It should be remembered that a significant risk exists that Ukrainian refugees may be made homeless if sponsors cease to accommodate them or if Welcome Centre arrangements come to an end.

. It is estimated that, in the worst-case scenario, this could add over 200 individuals to our homeless presentation numbers.



It is forecasted that the significant rise in the costs of energy will have a significant impact on the Council. While the Council's gas prices have been frozen for the period between April 2020–March 2024 (and therefore avoided the world-wide increase in energy prices and saved the Council millions of pounds), the situation is not the same for electricity.

From 1 October 2022, we anticipate a significant rise in the cost of a unit of electricity and preparations for a 400% increase should be made for the unit cost until at least 31 March 2023.

In order to mitigate this increase, the Department has stressed the need for Council building users (offices, schools or other buildings) to take advantage of every opportunity to make the most sensible use of energy, e.g., ensuring that lights are switched off in unoccupied rooms and overnight. To this end, the Department has consulted with the Education Department to notify school Headteachers of best practices, and the Energy Service continues to monitor energy usage across all sites in order to make the best use of our energy.

3. PERFORMANCE

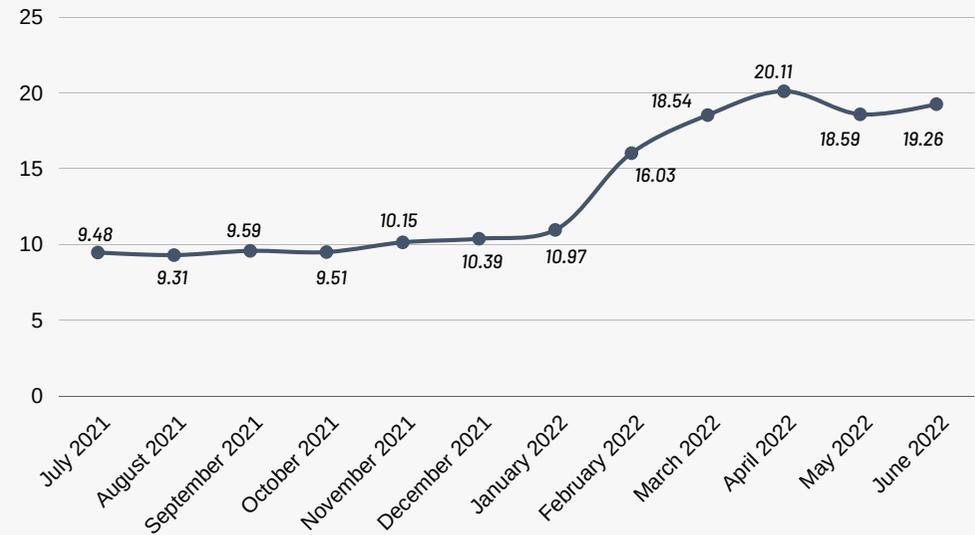
The Department is one of the first to implement the Council's new performance measuring arrangements, where service managers as well as the Head of Department are invited to meetings every two months. In line with this procedure, the latest performance data report was presented on June 2022's data, and the main matters raised in that meeting are summarised below. I would like to note that I am pleased with the Department's performance during such a challenging period.



3.1 The time taken to respond to a request for maintenance work continues to be **over 10 days**, and has consistently increased over the last few months.

However, the rise can be validly explained and I'm not overly concerned.

One of the reasons why the time has reached this level is because officers have had problems gaining access to some sites, such as care homes and schools, due to Covid restrictions.



A noted increase can be seen in February 2022, and this is because the Unit conducted a data cleaning exercise, deleting errors on their information management system.

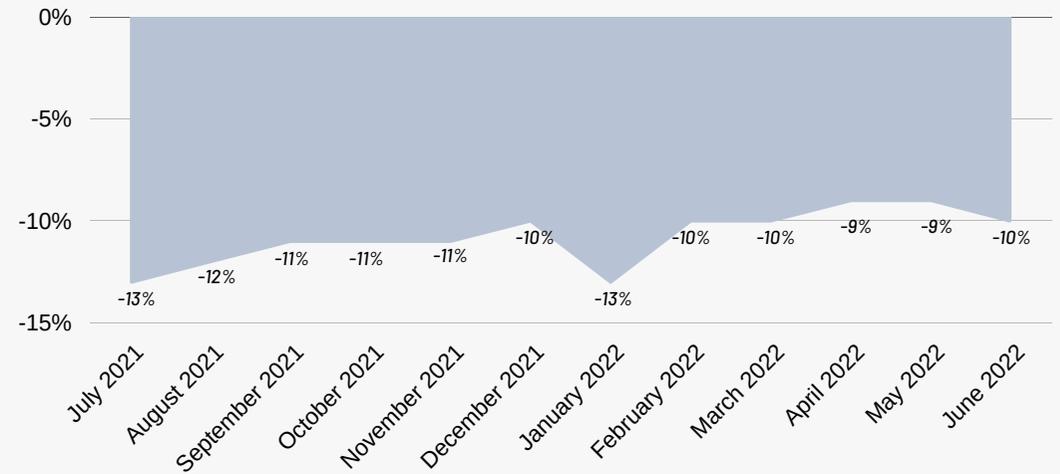
This means completing tasks such as closing calls which have been open for a long time in error, which pushes the figures higher. It was decided to offer the Service a grace period to complete this cleaning exercise before reporting on the data again in order to gain a more accurate view of the situation.



3.2 It is good to see that the percentage change in carbon emissions from Council buildings continues to be constantly below the same period in 2019 (the last regular year before the pandemic) - [see the graph on the right](#).

The Unit uses a new system called Smartspaces which enables them to monitor energy usage across our sites better and in more detail.

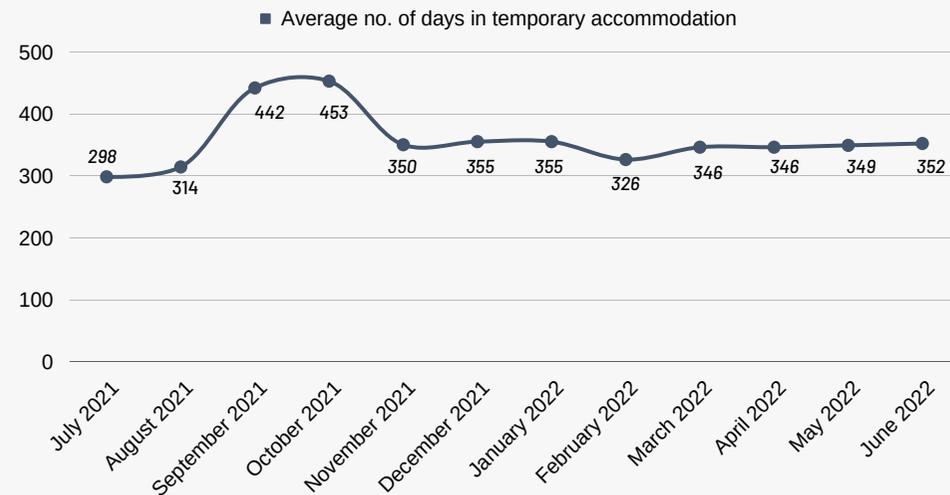
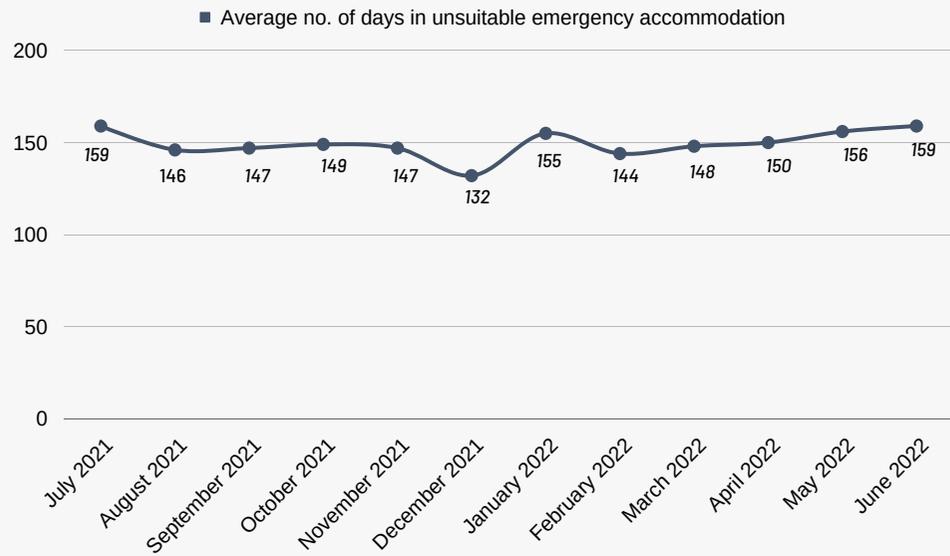
The majority of our schools are performing better than in 2019, and the gas usage in the Headquarters building is down 90% compared to the same period in 2019, because of an unusually cold June in 2019, as well as less heat usage this year.



3.3 The increase in homelessness that I mentioned above is reflected in the Department's performance measures, with the average number of days in unsuitable emergency accommodation (e.g. B&Bs) in June at **159 days**, and the average number of days in temporary accommodation (PSLs) at **352 days**.

There is no easy or quick solution to this problem, however the Housing Action Plan contains plans to develop 38 supporte

accommodation to enable us to move individuals on from emergency accommodation, as well as schemes to encourage more private landlords to let their properties for the benefit of homeless individuals and families. The interest already shown in this scheme makes us confident we will be able to reach our aim of 12 properties by the end of the current financial year.



Housing Action Plan

3.4 Assisting people to be able to live in a home of standard, which is affordable and which improves the standard of life is a main objective of the Housing Action Plan, which is measured by



counting the number of units developed or the number of people helped toward achieving the goal.



The figure at this time is 2088, thanks to proactive work to enable people to stay in their homes and continue to live independently e.g. by adapting homes and fitting ramps etc, and plans enabling people to be able to purchase or rent a home e.g. first-time buyers' grants to renovate empty properties, purchasing properties on the open market and so on. It is anticipated that the target set for the end of the financial year will be met.

4. FINANCIAL/SAVINGS SITUATION

- 4.1 A detailed financial review of the Department's budgetary situation will be presented to the Cabinet later on this month. However, as a pre-warning here, the Department is facing unprecedented financial challenges in temporary accommodation costs this year. The Head of Department and I will be presenting a report to the Leadership Team soon asking for a strategic directive for this situation.
- 4.2 In October this year, it is forecasted that electricity costs will increase on a rate of between 350-400%. This will not only place pressures on the Department's buildings' budgets, but also on all the Council's property.
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VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

THE MONITORING OFFICER

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

HEAD OF FINANCE

The report notes that many of the areas that the Housing and Property Department is responsible for are facing significant financial challenges, and the impact from these financial pressures – whether it is additional demand on the Homelessness Service, the significant increase in electricity costs or the need to provide more housing – will be felt by the entire Council. I am satisfied that the report is a fair reflection of the financial situation, and the Cabinet will receive a report at its meeting on 25 October on the impact of this pressure, and other pressures, on the budget of the Council.