

CYNGOR GWYNEDD CABINET



Report to a meeting of the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Date of meeting:	7 November, 2023
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Craig ab Iago
Contact Officer:	Carys Fôn Williams
Item:	PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND PROPERTY

THE DECISION SOUGHT

To accept and note the information in the report.

THE REASONS 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. Briefly, this will include an update on the projects of the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-2028, the progress of performance measures, and the latest on the financial savings schemes.
- 1.2. **Generally, I am very satisfied with the progress of the projects that the department is leading on in accordance with the Council Plan and the performance measures for which I am responsible. There is no doubt that unprecedented challenges are facing us, I am however confident that the Department has suitable plans to address the situation to the best of our ability, as explained in this video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRQyiclgvY>
- 1.3. The homelessness situation in Gwynedd remains challenging and the pressures and demands on our services remain high. Ensuring that no one is homeless in Gwynedd is a priority in the Council Plan 2023-2028, and several schemes, namely supported accommodation and packs for private landlords, are currently in the pipeline in order to reduce out dependency on unsuitable emergency accommodation. See 2.1.1 regarding these plans.
- 1.4. In an effort to increase the housing stock available to the Council by moving persons from temporary accommodation to permanent accommodation, the Department has started to implement Leasing Scheme Wales: Gwynedd. This is a scheme that encourages private landlords to lease their property to us for a guaranteed rent for a period of 5-20 years. This in turn helps us



to reduce our dependency on temporary accommodation. More about Leasing Scheme Wales: Gwynedd in 2.1.6.

- 1.5. The housing crisis is as prominent as ever, and the department is still working pro-actively to give as many opportunities as possible for the people in Gwynedd to live locally through the Housing Action Plan. Key milestones and highlights can be seen in the rest of the report, for example we have purchased 16 houses from the open market to let them out to local people, and the Home Purchasing Scheme is making good progress. More on these schemes in 2.2.9.
- 1.6. As everyone is aware, increasing energy costs means that a number of people in the county cannot afford to keep their houses warm, and consequently there is a genuine risk to the health of some of our residents. I'm very happy that the Department staff are at the forefront helping the people of Gwynedd to benefit from the support available at this very challenging time. More on this in 2.3.
- 1.7. All matters noted here are regularly discussed and have been scrutinised by me jointly with the Chief Executive, the Department Head of Service and Service Managers as well as representatives of the Care Scrutiny Committee.

2. PRIORITY PROJECTS OF THE CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN 2023-2028

PRIORITY AREA: A WARM GWYNEDD

2.1. Ensuring that no one is homeless in Gwynedd

- 2.1.1. Currently, 677 individuals are homeless in Gwynedd and it remains a matter of concern that so many people in Gwynedd are facing such a challenging situation. The number of individuals and families in emergency accommodation continue to be high, with 237 households located in different sites across the County.
- 2.1.2. The Department is doing everything within its ability to offer solutions to this situation, and also to raise awareness of the field amongst the people of Gwynedd. For example, a video was published recently that included one of the Homelessness Service's officers demolishing some of the most common myths about homelessness. The video can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/33luTloiqY0>
- 2.1.3. Here are some details on a few projects and the work-stream the Department has in the pipeline:
- 2.1.4. **Prevent Homelessness:** Some individuals and families contact the Homelessness Service declaring that they are at risk of homelessness, e.g., when a landlord gives notice to bring a tenancy to an end. On average, officers are currently managing to prevent about 34% of homelessness cases within the statutory time period.
- 2.1.5. Although we do not like seeing people approaching us in this situation, I encourage anyone in a similar situation or if they know someone in this situation to contact us as soon as possible to give the officers an opportunity to help prevent the individual from becoming homeless in the first place.
- 2.1.6. **Support packages for private landlords:** This is a scheme that has been in place for a year by now, and its purpose is to encourage private landlords to lease their property to us for a guaranteed rent for a period of 5-20 years. The Department has managed to attract a grant of over £2.7m to develop these packages, and we are aiming to bring 100 houses onto the



Scheme over the next ten years. This means that the Council will have more private sector rented houses in use to deal with the increasing demand. We have now been able to attract 18 properties to the Scheme, and there is work on the horizon to update 4 of these.

- 2.1.7. I am very pleased to say that the first tenants have moved into 4 properties, which means we have helped 14 people to secure a roof over their heads. Officers continue to assess 4 other properties and continue to respond to expressions of interest.
- 2.1.8. **Specialist mental health support:** Another way the Service prevents homelessness is by providing support for individuals with mental health problems to avoid a situation where these vulnerable individuals lose their tenancies. Since September 2022, two specific officers for supporting mental health have been appointed which increases the Services capacity in this field and further reinforces the connection and joint working between the Health Board and ourselves.
- 2.1.9. These officers have already been successful in helping 4 people in Gwynedd and are currently collaborating with over 40 others.
- 2.1.10. **Supported accommodation developments:** Scheme 1a of the Housing Action Plan aims to develop 38 Supported Housing units for homeless persons in locations across the county. The first of these has been completed since I last reported, namely Caertref - innovative pods for the homeless in Caernarfon, and 4 individuals currently call them home. This development was recently nominated for the '*Best supported housing development - rural/suburban*' Inside Housing prize.
- 2.1.11. Some of the other plans in the pipeline are:

Development	Units	Update
35 College Road, Bangor	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main renovation has been completed with minor issues left including the installation of electricity • Discussions afoot to establish site management arrangements • Expected to be completed by November 2023
Former Ysgol Glan Wnion site, Dolgellau	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction work has been completed, snagging and external work e.g. handrails, installing CCTV and electricity afoot • Expected to be completed by November 2023
137, High Street, Bangor	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adra have started the building work • Discussions are ongoing to discuss the well-being and support arrangements • Anticipated that the work should be completed by March 2024
Accommodation in Pwllheli	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main upgrading work completed • Energy matters held it back but installations taking place mid October • Expected to be completed by November 2023
Lle Da (NatWest/Gisda building)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main work on the units completed • Minor issues to be completed e.g., electricity supply • Work ongoing on additional aspects that are part of the scheme

2.2. Increasing the supply of housing for local people

- 2.2.1. I take every opportunity to reiterate the message that Gwynedd is in a housing crisis. The demand is much higher than the suitable housing supply within the county to home our people, and that's why this priority is included as a specific priority in the new Council Plan.



The aim of the priority is to increase the opportunities for Gwynedd Residents to ensure an affordable, suitable home that improves their quality of life.

- 2.2.2. **Gwynedd Social Housing Development Programme (PDP):** As part of the 2a Project in the Housing Action Plan, we are collaborating with local Housing Associations to build more social housing by accelerating the building programme, aiming to construct 700 new houses over the plan's lifespan.
- 2.2.3. 179 houses have already been built which has provided an opportunity for over 300 people in Gwynedd to secure a social tenancy in their county. 150 units are also in the pipeline which will be developed over the next year.
- 2.2.4. **Tŷ Gwynedd / Purchase of land:** Scheme 3a: *Developing our own houses in order to increase the opportunities for Gwynedd residents to compete in the housing market* is an exciting scheme that aims to build innovative housing across Gwynedd that will be available to buy or rent at intermediate rent levels. Every house will be built based on essential principles under the 'Tŷ Gwynedd' banner, ensuring that they are flexible, green, energy-efficient and sustainably built.
- 2.2.5. Since I reported last time, two schemes have made marked progress, namely the former Llanberis Library (3 homes), and Maes Twnti, Morfa Nefyn (9 homes). The Llanberis site received planning permission in September 2023, and architects have been appointed to develop plans for the Maes Twnti site over the summer. Maybe some of my co-members had the opportunity to visit Cyngor Gwynedd's tent at the National Eisteddfod in Boduan, where there was an opportunity to walk 'virtually' through houses that have been approved in Llanberis by using a Virtual Reality set (VR).
- 2.2.6. However, work on the development of the old Ysgol Coed Mawr, Bangor (10 houses) is currently delayed due to levelling matters and sustainable drainage but the Department is currently working around the restrictions and barriers.
- 2.2.7. Recently, land was purchased in Mynytho that, subject to receiving planning permission, will be used for the Tŷ Gwynedd development and land purchases in Llanystumdwy and Caernarfon have been completed.
- 2.2.8. Officers continue to look at and assess suitable land for building in the future.
- 2.2.9. **Buy to Let:** I wish to remind my fellow members of the hard work that has, and continues to be undertaken on these schemes that often has to happen behind the scenes due to its sensitive and confidential nature.
- 2.2.10. I am very pleased to report that 16 houses have been purchased as the following map indicates, with another 5 either close to completion or subject to contract and in solicitors' hands. Our intention is to let the houses on affordable rent to a person with local connections and in need of such a house.
- 2.2.11. Although there are signs that the housing market is starting to slow down, we are still seeing strong competition for some properties, and I would like to ensure my fellow members that we are not competing with the people of Gwynedd for these homes and that officers withdrew from purchasing 7 properties recently in order to avoid such situations.

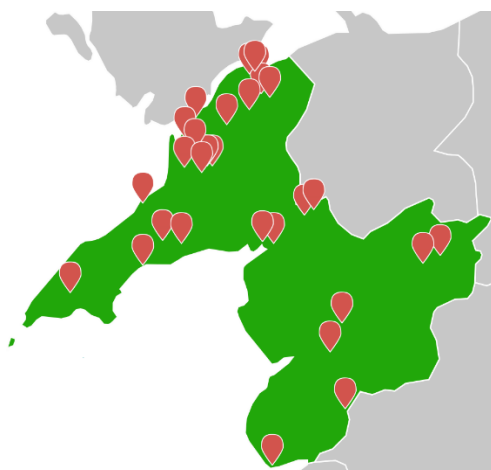


2.2.12. **Buying a Home:** This Scheme - a scheme for first time buyers, or for individuals and families who are finding it difficult to afford buying a suitable home on the open market - can offer an interest-free loan to close the gap between the price of the property and what individuals can offer in the form of a mortgage and deposit. The aim through this is to make houses affordable to residents who are having difficulty to get a sufficient mortgage to buy a house on the open market in their local area. The scheme is funded through a combination of funding from Cyngor Gwynedd's Council Tax Premium fund and funding from the Government as part of the Dwyfor Second Homes Pilot.

2.2.13. Since its launch on 13 September, 31 houses have been approved across Gwynedd, another 15 have been approved and are currently searching for suitable properties, and 7 applications are in the application process.

2.2.14. Recently, the Department's officers jointly with partners from Tai Teg and the Dwyfor Pilot, have increased efforts to communicate more on the opportunities available through this Scheme, for example, [a video explaining this scheme](#) and they are currently working on creating a case study which will, hopefully, give suitable prospective applicants a taste of the process and it's benefits.

2.2.15. **First Time Buyers' Grants to renovate empty houses:** Another part of the department's efforts to get to grips with the housing crisis is to offer support for local people to renovate empty houses, by providing first time buyers with a grant to bring a house that was previously empty to an acceptable living standard. The map on the left shows the locations where



individuals or families received a grant from us and the table below shows the split in terms of completion status for Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd.

	Completed	In progress	Expenditure to date
Arfon	25	7	£313,620
Dwyfor	9	2	£124,883
Meirionnydd	16	7	£194,495

2.2.16. As can be seen that the figures overall are very healthy, although a little low in Dwyfor, and we encourage anyone with an empty house that needs renovation work to bring it up to an acceptable living standard to contact the Empty Homes Team for a further discussion.

2.2.17. As with every scheme in the pipeline by the Department, officers try to be aware of any changes and additional needs that could arise as time progresses. An example of this is that the Department announced an adaptation to this scheme at the National Eisteddfod in Boduan this year, which means that homes that used to be empty second homes were now eligible to also receive the grant. 3 people that wouldn't have received the grant before that, have now received our support following this change. One of their stories can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/HPk7T9dgMSE>

2.3. Dealing with the energy cost crisis and fuel poverty



- 2.3.1. Increasing energy costs means that many people in the county cannot afford to keep their houses warm, and consequently there is a genuine risk to the health of some of our residents. It is my pleasure to say that the department has established a new Energy Service which collaborates with our partners to promote and facilitate energy saving schemes, grants and benefits in order to ensure that as many people as possible take advantage of the support available at such a challenging time.
- 2.3.2. The two main work-streams (namely De-carbonising homes and Consulting with the public on Fuel Poverty) were making good progress and fuel poverty conferences that have been held in several communities across Gwynedd to give a helping hand and practical advice to people with their situations.
- 2.3.3. For example, since the commencement of the scheme, 2603 energy vouchers have been distributed, which is equivalent to £95,867 - funding that has gone directly to help the people of Gwynedd.
- 2.3.4. The Department is also a part of the ECO 4 Scheme and the Nest Scheme - schemes that provide support to improve the energy efficiency of housing. 236 ECO applications have been approved between March and August this year, and around 57 houses completed by now and have seen an improvement in their Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). 248 referrals had been presented to Nest since June 2023, and 67 houses have received measures to improve their energy efficiency, such as new boilers.
- 2.3.5. An innovative project is underway to establish a heating network in Tanygrisiau also, and we have been successful in the first step of the process of applying for capital funding for realising this scheme through Innovate UK. The scheme will be looking at providing cheaper heating for residents by using local renewable sources. We will be informed in the next few weeks if we have been successful or not.

PRIORITY AREA: EFFICIENT GWYNEDD

- 2.4. **Adopting the Property Assets Management Plan to ensure that our estate is fit for purpose for future working.**
 - 2.4.1. There is an intention to adopt a new Property Assets Management Plan that will outline the Council's plan in terms of using our buildings to provide services. The last Property Assets Management Plan was adopted in 2016, and a substantial change has occurred in working arrangements and service delivery since then.
 - 2.4.2. The Department have started having regular discussions to look at the management and rationalising the estate in accordance with the Council's priorities and service needs provided for Gwynedd residents.
 - 2.4.3. The department is also a key part of the discussions to make any necessary adaptations to our offices to ensure they are suitable for new ways of working in the future.

3. Other risks

I need to bring a few risks faced by the Department to your attention.

- 3.1. As previously noted, the pressure and demand on the **Homelessness Service** continues to be high and the costs associated with out dependency on emergency accommodation is a cause

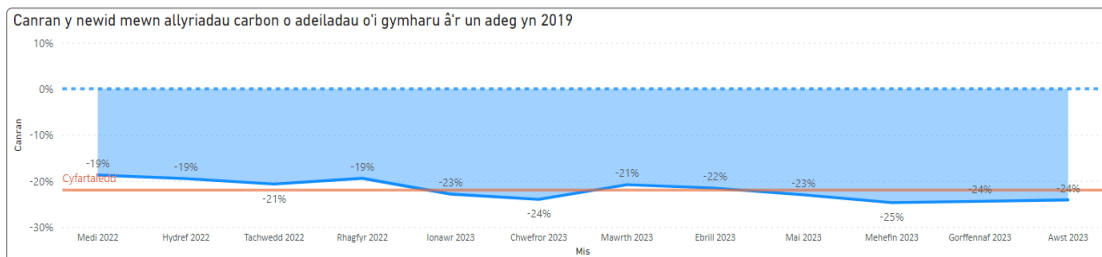


for concern for me and the Department, especially whilst funding sources from the Government have come to an end.

- 3.1.1. As has already been stated, there are plans underway to try and reduce our use of unsuitable emergency accommodation, and associated costs, and by doing so, increase our options to provide suitable accommodation to those who are homeless in Gwynedd. This in turn will also address some of the high costs associated with such accommodation.
- 3.1.2. The **Refugee Resettlement Unit** has been at the forefront of supporting refugees that arrive in Gwynedd from Ukraine, and the Unit ran the Welcome Centre in Bangor, jointly with partners until the Government closed it in June. Since then, several refugees have been re-established with sponsors across the County through the Sponsors Scheme, under the Welsh Government's funding. However, whilst most sponsors receive Monthly Thank you payments (£500), if the scheme is extended or replaced with something similar, there is a risk for homelessness to increase again.
- 3.1.3. It is anticipated that **the Council's energy costs** will remain unstable and there is a risk of this having a substantial financial effect on the Council. In relation to gas, the framework comes to an end in April 2024 and the forecasts predict an increase of around 125% on the cost per unit.
- 3.1.4. In moving forward, and to alleviate this financial hit, the Department is emphasising the need for Council building users (be they offices, schools and others) to take advantage of every opportunity to make the most sensible use of their energy, for example, to ensure that they switch off lights when the room is not in use and overnight. To this end, the Department has consulted with the Education Department to inform headteachers of these good practices and the Energy Service will continue to monitor energy use across our sites to make the best use of energy.

4. PERFORMANCE

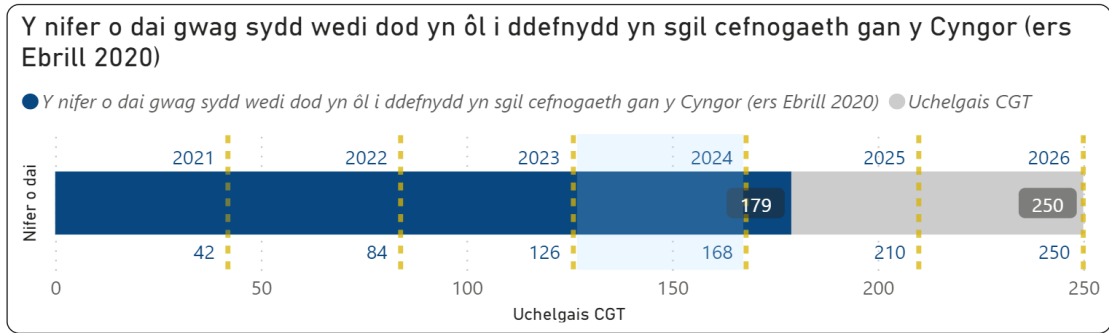
- 4.1. Here I outline some of the main issues resulting from the previous performance report presented by the Department in August 2023. The information does not refer to all services in the department, only to those we feel that need to be brought to your attention. I wish to state that I am satisfied with the Department's performance during such a challenging period.
- 4.2. The Council's carbon emissions, under the supervision of the **Energy Conservation Service**, has been consistent under 18%, with a further gradual decline during 2023. The carbon emissions between January and August this year were 1 million tonnes less than for the same period in 2019, which is equivalent to 24% less. We have never seen such a decrease in gas levels over one summer before which is as a result of the energy officers hard work.



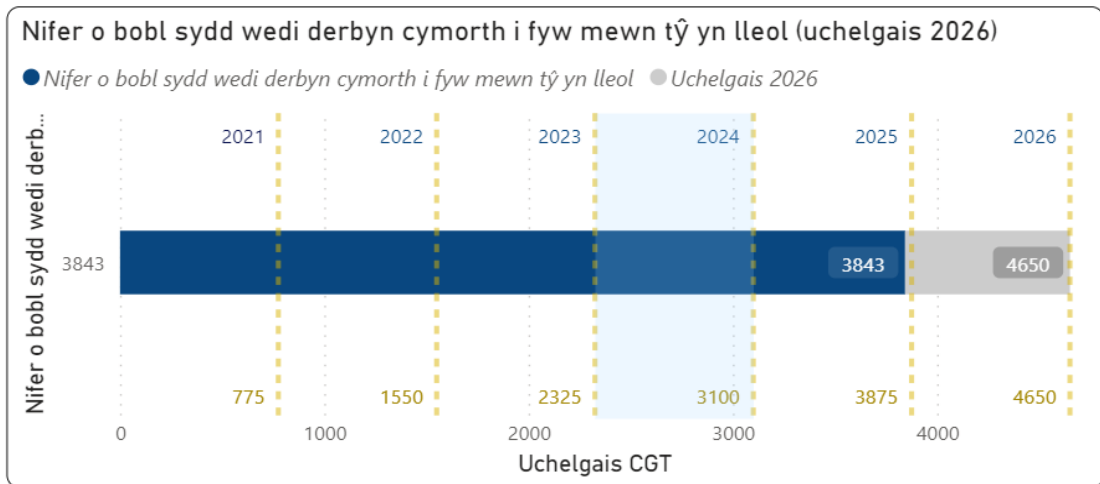
- 4.3. The number of **empty homes that have come back into use** following support from the Council has increased to 179, compared with 104 when it was reported last time. This is through a combination of several schemes that are available from us to support the people of Gwynedd to renovate a dormant house into a home, and the most popular are the first-time buyers grants to renovate empty houses, with 11 being allocated in August this year. As



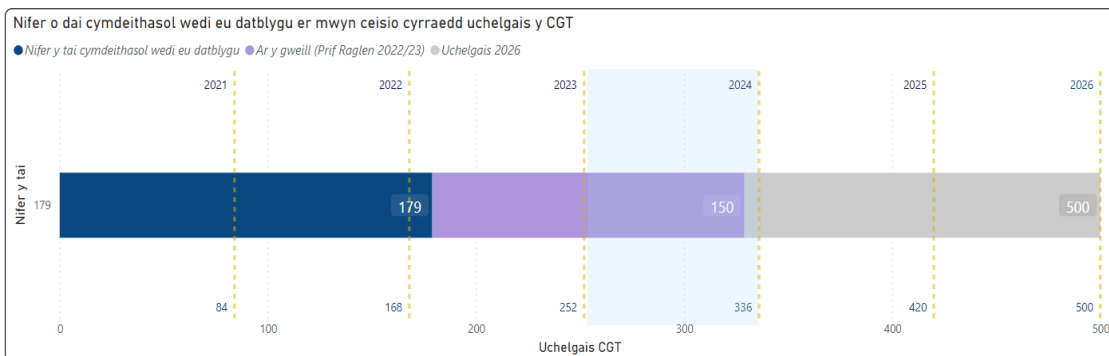
the graph below also shows, we are at the forefront of the annual target noted as part of the Housing Action Plan.



4.4. The Department is measuring the **number of people that have received support to live in a local house** through the support of the Housing Action Plan. This figure is very heartening, with 3843 opportunities created through a number of schemes such as the Buy to Let, Buying a Home, building Social Housing through the PDP, additional Council Tax exemption for individuals that own and renovate empty houses, interest-free loans to improve the condition of homes and grants to make houses suitable homes for individuals with disabilities.



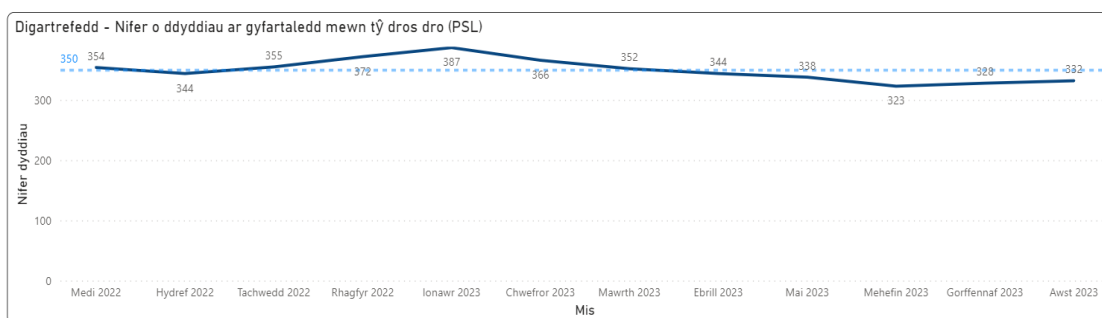
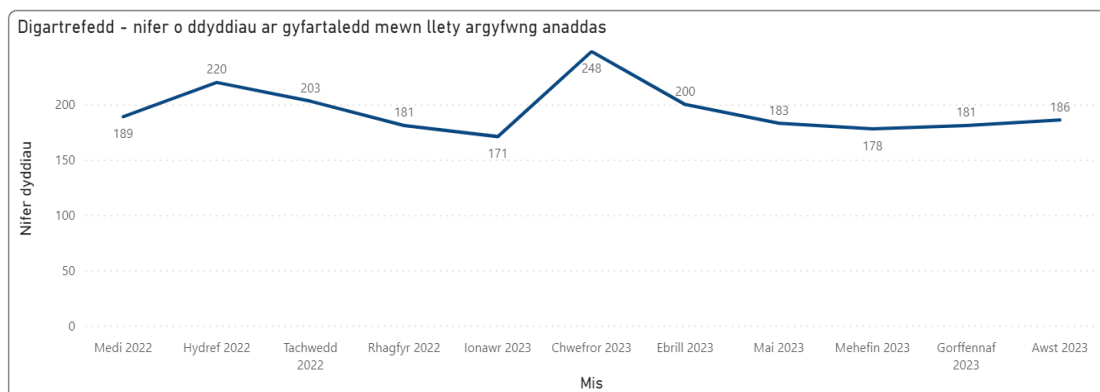
4.5. As seen above, increasing the opportunities local people have to live locally is one of the Department's priorities. Another way of doing this is by working with Housing Associations on the Social Housing Development Programme by providing finance to the associations to build residential units across the county in accordance with local needs. Since the commencement of the plan, 179 affordable houses have been built here in Gwynedd. The £12,304,577 of Social Housing Grant attracted for 22/23 will provide 123 social houses and 21 intermediate houses.



4.6. The **number of days on average in unsuitable emergency accommodation** has stabilised since May, with an average of **182 days** over the last four months, and the **number of days on**



average in temporary accommodation (private houses that are leased by us) was **332** days (slight decrease since the last time I reported). Although there is no easy or swift solution to this issue, the package of schemes in the Housing Action Plan and the efforts of the Homelessness Service officers to prevent homelessness, are trying to get to grips with the situation. This is in addition to the plans we have to reduce our expenditure and dependency on temporary accommodation.



5. FINANCIAL POSITION/SAVINGS

- 5.1. Following the recent review of the department's situation, it was foreseen that there was a £61K overspend this year - this is a result of an allocation of £1.4m of one-time Corporate Covid funding, as well as an allocation of £3.1m of Council Tax Premium following the increase between 100% and 150%. In addition, the department is on track to realise savings of £499k.

VIEWES OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Monitoring Officer:

No observations to add in relation to propriety.

Head of Finance Department:

I am satisfied that the report is a fair reflection of the financial situation of the Housing and Property Department.

