

# Cabinet Member Performance Report

Councillor Craig ab Iago

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



Housing and Property Department

14 May, 2024





# A report for the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

<b>Date of meeting</b>	14 May, 2024
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Craig ab Iago
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Carys Fon Williams, Head of Housing and Property
<b>Item</b>	Housing and Property Cabinet Member Report on Performance

## Y DECISION SOUGHT

To accept and note the information in the report.

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## THE REASON WHY A DECISION IS NEEDED

In order to ensure effective performance management

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# 1. Introduction



- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Cabinet on developments in fields in my remit as Cabinet Member for Housing and Property.
- 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=XRQyiclcgvY>
- 1.3 Pressure on the Council's homelessness services remains high, as we continue to depend heavily on emergency and temporary accommodation. The Department does everything within its ability to tackle the lack of accommodation available to Gwynedd residents, for example, one of our supported accommodation developments recently completed – Dôl Sadler. See 2.1.3 for more details
- 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 recently taken the significant step of receiving the Cabinet's approval to purchase the former Government building at Penrallt, Caernarfon, with a view to transform the building into living units for those in need of accommodation. More on this in 2.1.5
- 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. Many key milestones have been reached, and highlights can be found in the rest of this report, including reaching over **20 property purchases** from the open market to let them out to local people, and over **200 affordable homes built** by collaboration with our housing partners on the social housing building programme (the PDP). More on these plans in 2.2.3
- 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. I also had the opportunity in February this year to present an update report on the Housing Action Plan to the Care Scrutiny Committee, where positive and constructive comments were received.



## 2. CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN 2023-2028 SCHEMES

### PRIORITY AREA: A Homely Gwynedd

#### 2.1 1.1. Ensuring that no one is homeless in Gwynedd

2.1.1 Between April 2023 and the beginning of March 2024, 885 homeless presentations were received by the Department, and the number of individuals and families in emergency accommodation remains high, with almost 250 households housed in various areas across the county.

2.1.2 The Department continues to work tirelessly to do everything within its ability to offer solutions to this situation. Here are some details on a few ongoing projects and workstreams:

#### Supported Accommodation Developments

2.1.3 Since reviewing the Housing Action Plan in Hune 2023, scheme 1a aims to develop at least 83 supported accommodation units for homeless individuals across the county. **The latest development, Dôl Sadler in Dolgellau, has recently completed and an open day was held in March** where local elected members, politicians and the public were invited to see the new building. See the publicity material for the visit here: [Post Facebook](#) / [Press release](#)

#### Dôl Sadler - from beginning to completion:



Initial drawings



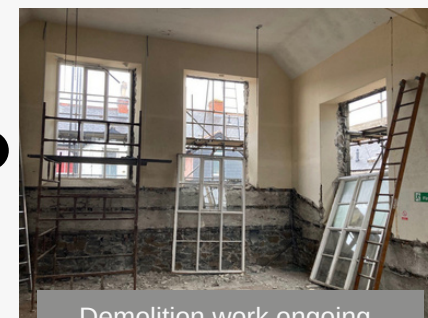
Building the structure, roofing



Open day



The old school



Demolition work ongoing



Work completed



## 2. CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN 2023-2028 Schemes: A Homely Gwynedd

### 2.1.4 Some of the other ongoing projects are:

Prosiect	Unedau	Diweddariad
35 College Road, Bangor	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Main construction work completed; a few minor tasks left including installing an electricity supply – energy company have held us back</li> <li>· Discussions ongoing to set up management arrangements for the site; a date has been set for the Department's staff to visit</li> </ul> <p>Expecting a new completion date from the electricity company</p>
137 High Street, Bangor	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Adra continues to build, project is making good progress</li> <li>· Discussions continues regarding the lease and support arrangements</li> </ul> <p>Expected completion date – July 2024</p>
Accommodation in Pwllheli	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Work on the units has completed</li> <li>· Energy issues holding us back at present</li> </ul> <p>One unit is ready to be let before the end of March, expecting the second unit to be ready soon after.</p>





## 2. CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN 2023-2028 Schemes: A Homely Gwynedd



Crown Building, Penrallt, Caernarfon - former Government building

2.1.5 Recently, a significant step was marked in our efforts to increase the supply of affordable units available to people in need of housing by securing the approval of the Cabinet to purchase the former Government building at Penrallt, Caernarfon. The purchase will complete before the end of the 2023/24 financial year, after which the Department will begin the journey of refurbishing and upgrading the building to provide 46 suitable living units for those in need. You can find the Press Release here: [Press Release - Penrallt](#)

2.1.6 In addition to this, work completed on creating supported housing units for homeless young people at Lle Da (the former NatWest/Gisda building in Caernarfon) at the start of the year. Work continues on the final phase, namely creating a space for a café and community hub for young people. It was my pleasure to welcome my co-Cabinet members and Rebecca Evans AM (WG Finance and Local Government Minister) in December 2023 and January 2024 respectively to see the development and share our plans. The Local Member, Coun. Cai Larsen, was also welcomed in October 2023 – a photo of the visit can be found here [here](#).



### Support packages for private landlords – Leasing Scheme Wales

- 2.1.7 This Scheme has been in place since September 2022, with the purpose of encouraging private landlords to lease their property to us for a guaranteed rent for a period of 5-25 years. The Department has managed to secure a grant of over £2.7m to develop these packages, and we're aiming to bring 100 properties 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 housing demand.
- 2.1.8 I'm pleased to say that we have so far attracted 14 properties onto the Scheme, meaning 22 people have been helped secure a roof over their heads. Officers continue to assess a further 11 properties as well as responding to expressions of interest.
- 2.1.9 I encourage anyone who has a property to let to us or is interested in finding out more about the Scheme to contact the Department by contacting us using the information below:



01766 771 000

*ask for the Homelessness Service*



[cynllunlesucymru@gwynedd.llyw.cymru](mailto:cynllunlesucymru@gwynedd.llyw.cymru)

### Specialist Mental Health Support

- 2.1.10 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.

- 2.1.11 These officers have to-date been successful in helping over 100 Gwynedd residents over the last 18 months and are currently supporting another 40 at present.



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Betsi Cadwaladr  
University Health Board



### Hyfforddiant a threfniadau gwasanaeth

2.1.12 The Homelessness Service recently commissioned an independent practitioner who is an expert in homelessness matters to prepare a training programme to the Service's staff. The programme has been in place since the beginning of the year, with sessions held on various aspects ranging from legal matters to day-to-day processes and will continue over the next few months.

We're confident that the training will ensure officers have the most recent, up-to-date knowledge in terms of relevant laws and legislation, as well as a means of offering the opportunity for professional and personal development.

### White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales

2.1.13 At the end of 2023, Welsh Government launched a public consultation on its White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales, and the Department co-ordinated a response on behalf of the Council by consulting with services and departments both internally and externally. The response shared with the Cabinet in February and subsequently submitted officially to the Government.

2.1.13 Although many elements and principles were to be welcomed in the Paper, concern was expressed regarding issues such as the resources needed (both financial and human) to achieve many of the proposed changes, as well as the practicality and implications of some of them. The full response can be found [here](#).





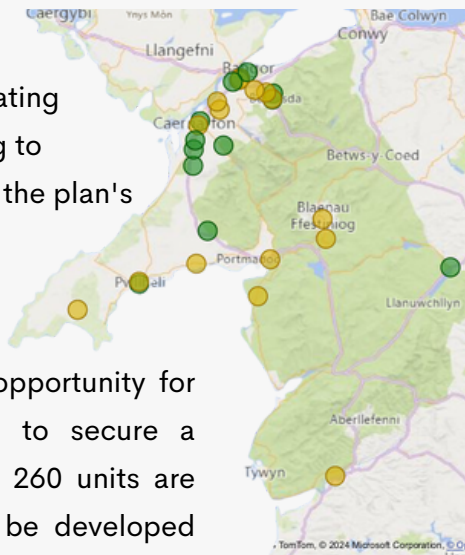
### 2.2 Increasing the supply of housing for local people

- 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.

#### Gwynedd Socials Housing Development Programme (PDP)

- 2.2.2 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.

- 2.2.3 278 houses have so far been built which has provided the opportunity for over 600 Gwynedd residents to secure a social tenancy in their county. 260 units are also in the pipeline which will be developed over the next year.



#### Tŷ Gwynedd

- 2.2.4 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 Six developments are on the main programme:

- Former Llanberis library site (3 units)
- Former Ysgol Babanod Coed Mawr site, Bangor (10 units)
- Maes Twnti, Morfa Nefyn site (9 units)
- Land near Llanrug Schoolhouse (2 units)
- Site at Llanystumdwy (5 units)
- Site at Mynytho (4 units)

- 2.2.6 These six developments are currently at different stages in the process, with designs being prepared by our architects for the Llanystumdwy, Coed Mawr and Maes Twnti sites; the former Llanberis library site was granted planning permission in the autumn of 2023 and we're in the process of receiving initial structural designs for the homes. The Mynytho site is almost ready to be put out to tender in order to appoint architects.



## 2. CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN 2023-2028 Schemes: A Homely Gwynedd

### Buy to Let Scheme

- 2.2.7 I wish to remind my co-Cabinet members of the hard work that has, and is currently being done on this scheme and often has to happen behind the scenes due to its sensitive and confidential nature.
- 2.2.8 I'm very glad to report that 21 properties have been purchased as the map shows. Another 5 is either close to completing or has an agreement to purchase and is with our lawyers.
- 2.2.9 This means that we are on track to complete the number of purchases originally set as a target for 2023/24 and I'm pleased with the Scheme's progress.
- 2.2.10 In February, a successful open day was held at two of our properties at Pwllheli (1 and 2 Craigle) where an opportunity was given to prospective eligible applicants on the Tai Teg register to view the property and speak to Council and Adra officers (where Adra will manage the tenancy). Officers and I had the opportunity to show the homes and talk about the scheme with the Council's Leader and Deputy Leader, Pwllheli local Members, the Chief Executive of the Council and Adra's Chief Executive and senior officers.





Homebuy

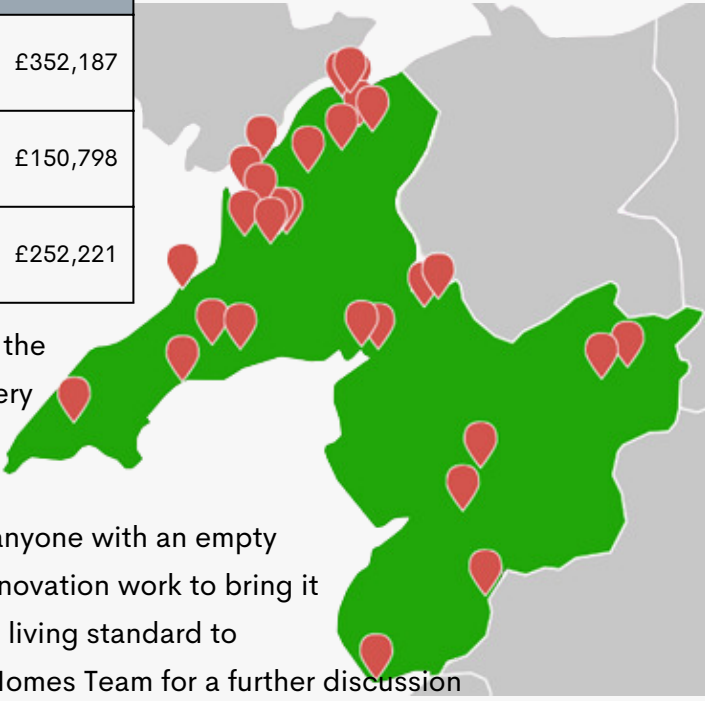
- 2.2.11 This Scheme - a scheme for first time buyers, or for individuals and families who are finding it difficult to afford buying a suitable home on the open market - can offer an interest-free loan to close the gap between the price of the property and what individuals can offer in the form of a 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.
- 2.2.12 Since its launch on 13 September, 25 homes have been bought though the Scheme across the county. To-date another 11 properties are in the conveyancing stage, another 13 applications have been approved and 4 applications are in the preliminary stages.
- 2.2.13 I'm very proud of this Scheme and the way in which it helps the people of Gwynedd who are truly need to buy a home. At the time of writing this report, the Department are in the final stages of discussions regarding reviewing the criteria, with the intention of expanding them to allow even more people who need our help to be eligible for the scheme.

First Time Buyer grants to renovate empty properties

- 2.2.14 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	31	17	£352,187
Dwyfor	11	11	£150,798
Meirionnydd	22	5	£252,221

- 2.2.15 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





### 2.3 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, 4102 energy vouchers have been distributed, equivalent to a total of £167,820 – funding that has gone directly towards helping 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. 106 ECO applications have been approved between January and February this year, and around 27 houses completed by now and have seen an improvement in their Energy Performance Certificate (EPC).

- 2.3.5 I'm happy to say that the Service has been successful in attracting two grants for heating schemes at a number of sites. On grant worth £1.75m has been secured for 'Low Carbon Heating' scheme, and another grant of £150,000 through the Innovate UK scheme to conduct legal preparatory works for community heating schemes.



One of the Energy Summits held by the Energy Service to help Gwynedd residents with energy and fuel poverty issues



### 2.4 1.1. 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 continues to be in 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.

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 In order to respond to the risk and monitor the situation, a group of officers and members meet regularly and, as has previously been noted, schemes are ongoing to try to reduce our usage of unsuitable emergency accommodation, and the costs involved, thus increasing our options to provide suitable accommodation to those finding themselves homeless in Gwynedd. This will in turn help address the high costs incurred when using those types of accommodation.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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

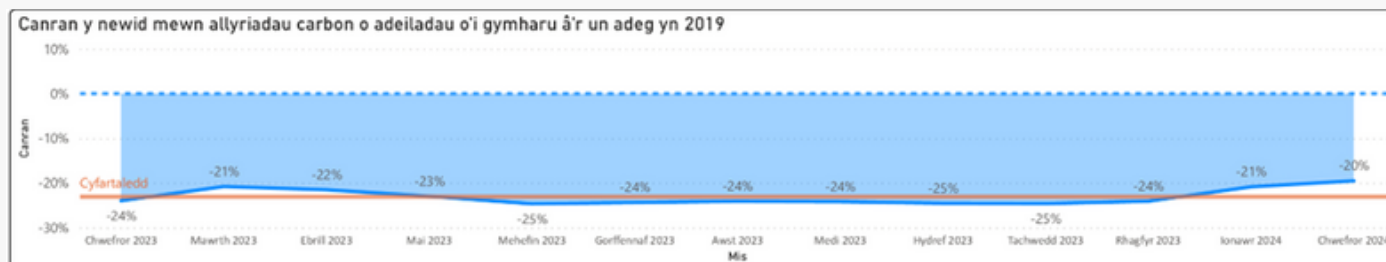
## 3. Other risks

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

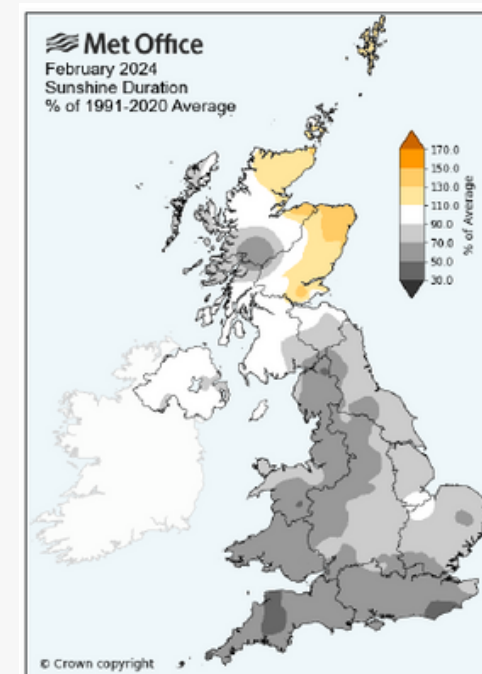


## 4. PERFORMANCE

- 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 over -20%, performing consistently around -24% between May and December 2023. By the end of February this year, the Council's buildings' electricity usage had decreased by 125,885kWh and gas usage has decreased by 748,498kWh, equivalent to 20% less than the same period in 2019. It is noted that the figures for February had been affected by decreased electricity generation owing to a significant decrease in sunny periods in the month compared with previous years. This meant that we had to use more from the grid, but it is expected that the figures will return to the previous pattern soon.

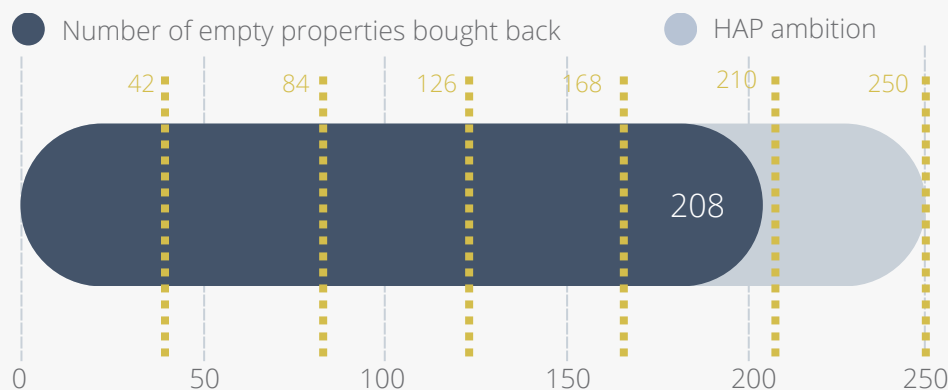




#### Empty Properties

4.3 The number of empty homes that have come back into use following support from the Council has increased to 208, compared with 179 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 67 being allocated since the Housing Action Plan's commencement. As the graph below also shows, we are at the forefront of the annual target noted as part of the Housing Action Plan.

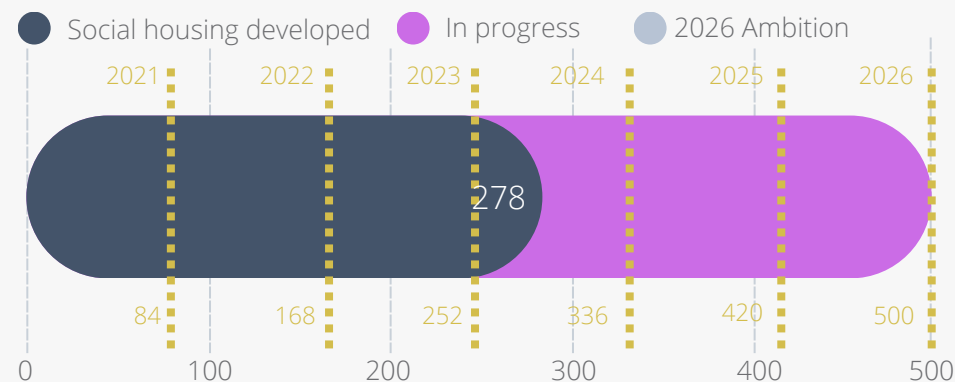
**The number of empty properties bought back into use with the support of the Council (since April 2020)**



#### Social Housing Building Programme (PDP)

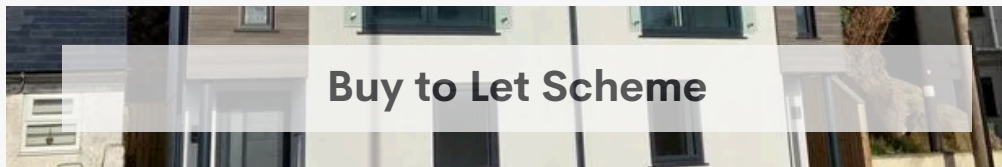
4.4 The Department measures the number of units developed through our partnership with the Housing Associations. The Primary Programme for the Social Housing Development Programme (PDP), funded through WG's Social Housing Grant which is managed by the Council, to-date has built 278 units, with another 262 in the pipeline. Good progress can be seen in those developments which are in progress, and we expect that some will complete in the next few months. Furthermore, the grant budget for 24/25 and 25/26 has been fully allocated. By collaborating closely with our Housing Partners, strong schemes are presented as part of the 24/25 and 25/26 primary programme as well as additional schemes as part of the reserve programme and the potential programme.

**Number of social housing developed to reach the Housing Action Plan ambition**



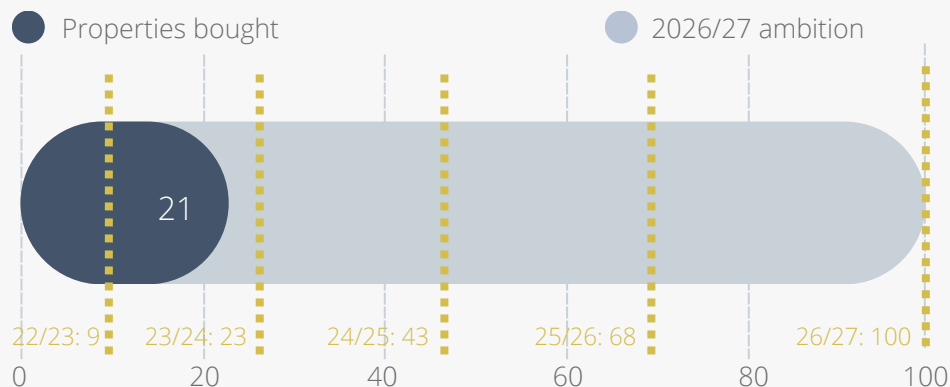


### 3. PERFORMANCE

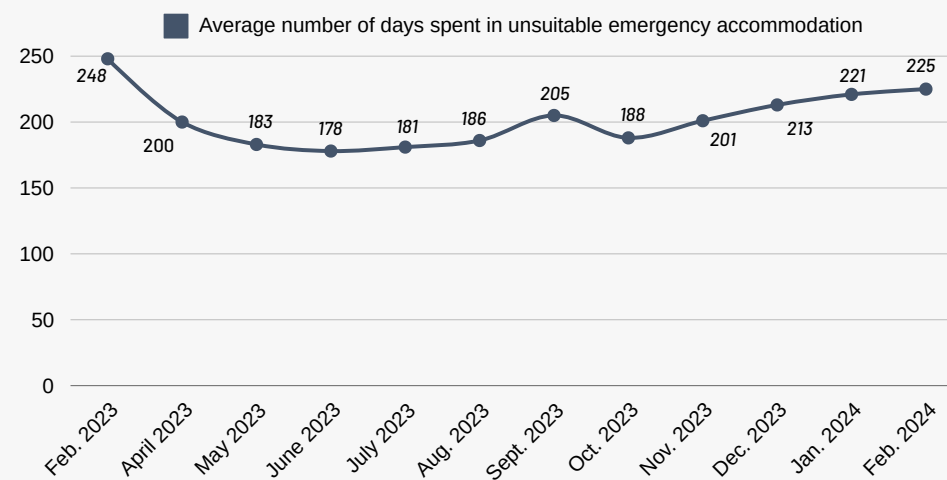


- 4.5 Increasing the opportunities for people to live locally is one of the Department's main priorities and one of the schemes aiming to help with this is the Buy to Let Scheme – which aims to purchase 100 properties from the open market and let them to local people in housing need. 21 purchases have been made to-date, and another 5 are in the conveyancing stage, and I'm very glad to say that that means the Department is on track to reach its target for this year.

#### Number of houses bought through the Buy to Let Scheme



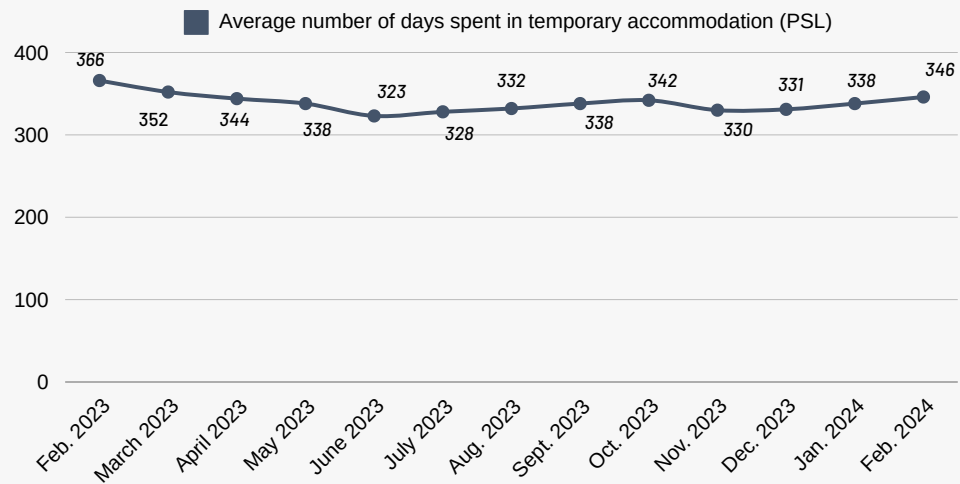
- 4.6 The number of days on average in unsuitable emergency accommodation has increased since the last report – 225 days, and a small increase in the number of days on average in temporary accommodation (private houses that are leased by us) – 336 days. As noted above there is a lack of suitable stock in Gwynedd, hindering the Department's ability to move individuals on from emergency and temporary accommodation to permanent accommodation. 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





### 3. PERFORMANCE

#### Homelessness (continued)



### 5. FINANCIAL/SAVINGS SITUATION

- 5.1 According to the latest review of the Department's situation, an overspend of £67k is anticipated this year – this follows an allocation of £1.2m of Corporate Covid funding, as well as a £3.1m allocation from the Council Tax Premium following the increase from 100% to 150%. In addition, the Department is on track to realise savings of £499k.



# Views of the Statutory Officers

## **MONITORING OFFICER**

No observations to add in relation to propriety

## **HEAD OF FINANCE**

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

