

Cabinet Member Performance Report

Councillor Paul Rowlinson

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



Housing and Property Department

8 April, 2025

Photo: Tai ar Daith event, Caernarfon - April 2024



A report for the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Date of meeting	8 April, 2025
Cabinet Member	Councillor Paul Rowlinson
Contact Officer	Carys Fôn Williams, Head of Housing and Property
Item	Housing and Property Cabinet Member Report on Performance

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. Executive Summary



1.1 The **purpose** of this report is to update Cabinet on what has happened in my areas as Cabinet Member for Housing and Property. In summary it will include an update on projects within the Council's Plan 2023–2028, where the performance measures are on, and an update on financial savings plans.

1.2 **In general I am satisfied that significant progress is taking place with projects led by the Department in accordance with the Council Plan and the performance measures for which I am responsible. The Department continues to face challenges, but I am confident that the Department has suitable plans to handle the situation to the best of its ability.**

1.3 While the pressure on the services and resources of our homelessness team remains high, three developments are now offering homes for our county's most needy people, as well as other exciting schemes underway to try and tackle the situation, including the Penrallt building, and the Mona Building, Caernarfon. I'm also pleased to note that the latest data suggests that there is less reliance on emergency accommodation in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24. See 2.1.4 to see more.

1.4 Demand for all types of housing remains high, therefore, and the need for ambitious and innovative schemes to meet this need is as alive as ever. I am pleased with the direction of the Department in responding proactively to address this problem, with schemes such as Supporting the Social Housing Construction Programme, Tŷ Gwynedd, Buy to Let and Empty Homes Schemes directly addressing this demand. I would like to draw particular attention to the fact that two Tŷ Gwynedd developments are now on site, and others are on the near horizon. Read more about these plans in 2.2.1.

1.5 All of the issues set out here are constantly discussed by myself, the Chief Executive, Head and Service Managers of the Department. Indeed, I had my first encounter as a new Cabinet Member to scrutinise the performance measures in January this year as well as attending a presentation of an update on the Housing Action Plan to a Briefing of Council Members on 19 March, where supportive and positive comments towards the Plan were received.

2. CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN 2023-2028 SCHEMES

PRIORITY AREA: A Homely Gwynedd

2.1 Ensuring that no one is homeless in Gwynedd

2.1.1 In the 2024/25 financial year to mid-March, 891 households have presented as homelessness to the Service, and 564 households were placed in emergency accommodation. These presentation figures are similar to last year's, however the numbers in emergency accommodation have fallen slightly compared to 2023/24 (when 662 households were accommodated during the year). I would like to note that this may be due to a number of reasons, however the hard and deliberate efforts of the Department and the Homelessness Service are a key factor in this reduction as we seek to reduce our reliance on unsuitable emergency accommodation.

2.1.2 There many work streams currently ongoing to ensure that no one is homeless in Gwynedd – here is a summary of the main ongoing projects:

2.1.3 **Supported housing developments:** Our aim as part of scheme 1a of the Housing Action Plan is to develop 83 supported units for homeless individuals in locations across the county.

Supported accommodation developments

2.1.4 The first development completed in Dolgellau last year – Dôl Sadler is now home to 5 people, and a two-unit accommodation in Pwllheli has also completed, and is home to two households. Many other developments are in progress, namely:



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

Project	Units	Update
35 College Road, Bangor	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This development's schedule has slipped significantly as a result of finding faults in the renovation work by an external contractor. Steps are in place to make amends however this will take time
137 High Street, Bangor	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction completed and an open day was held in November, 2024 Discussions continue to discuss welfare and support arrangements with North Wales Housing.
Penrallt building – former WG offices, Caernarfon	up to 40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feasibility assessments have been carried out, design work in progress, as well as condition and structural surveys in preparation for going out to tender Visit has been scheduled for Caernarfon local members and Cabinet Members in April
Mona Building, Caernarfon	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closed the building as an office in December Attracted grant to complete work on the external structure as part of phase 1 – work commenced in early March Preparatory work on phase 2 (conversion of the internal building) in progress



Penrallt Building, Caernarfon



Mona Building, Caernarfon



137 High Street, Bangor on completion (photo: Adra)

2.2 Increasing the supply of housing for local people

2.2.1 The demand for housing continues to exceed the number of suitable homes we have in Gwynedd, which is why this priority has been, and continues to be, one of the Department's main aims in the Council's Plan.

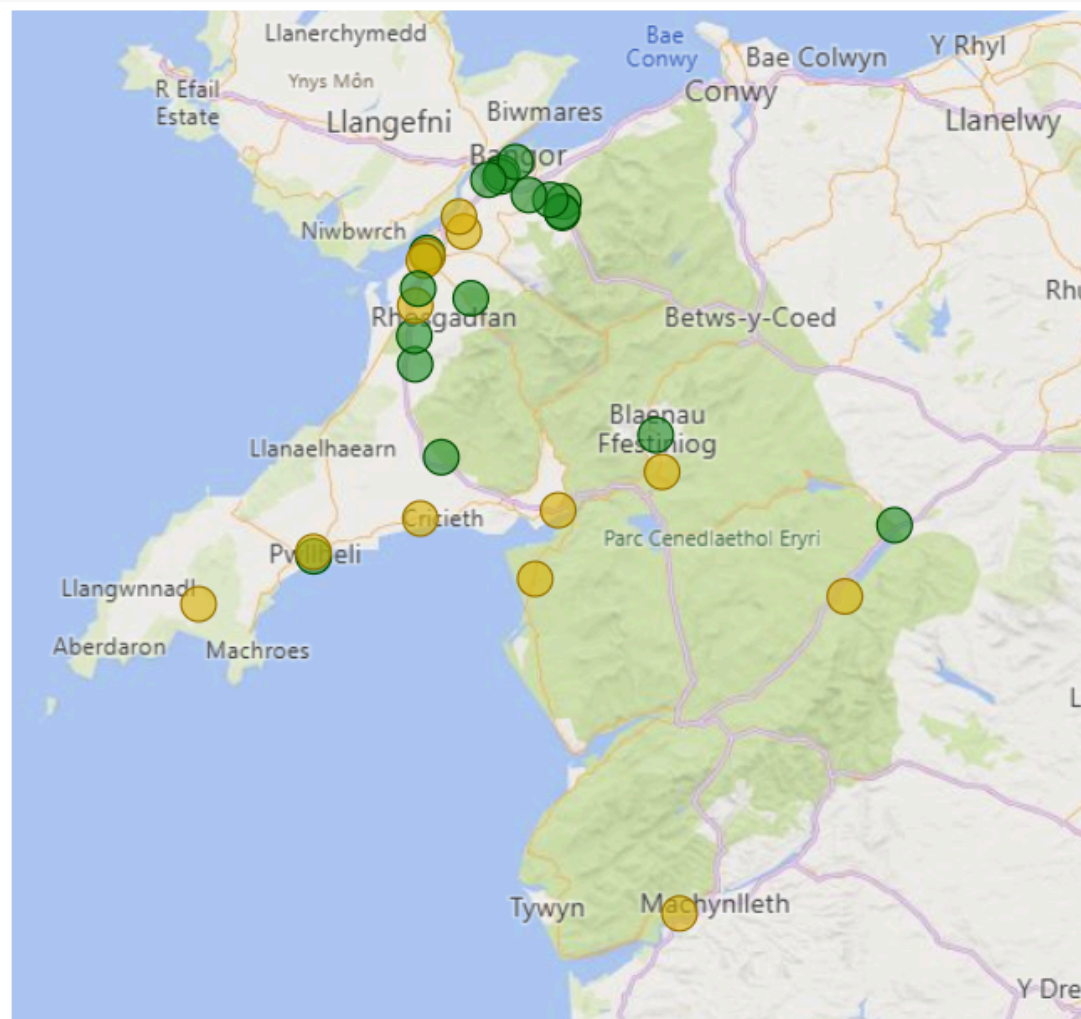
2.2.2 **Gwynedd Social Housing Development Programme (PDP):** As part of the Gwynedd Social Housing Development Programme, which is also part of project 2a of the Housing Action Plan, we continue to work closely with Housing Associations to support the construction programme and aim to build 700 new homes over the life of the Plan.

Gwynedd Social Housing Development Programme (PDP)

2.2.3 352 affordable homes have now been built since the start of the Housing Action Plan which has offered 1,178 Gwynedd residents the opportunity to access social tenancy in their county. There are also over 361 units in the pipeline that will come forward over the next year.

2.2.4 This is great news for the people of Gwynedd who really need housing – without these developments, they would not be able to live in a stable, quality home, with a secure tenancy.

2.2.5 I would like to specifically note my pride in the data which shows that 97% of social housing lettings go to someone with a local connection to Gwynedd. A further sample of recent lettings shows that an average of 60% of lettings go to someone who has a connection to the community they wish to live in.



2.2 Increasing the supply of housing for local people

Tŷ Gwynedd

- 2.2.6 The vision for Tŷ Gwynedd has resulted in an exciting scheme which will see the Council build quality, affordable, future-proof and cheap to run homes.
- 2.2.7 Work is continuing in Llanberis, which will turn the site of the old library into 3 homes for families from Gwynedd. Although a few issues have arisen recently, I am satisfied with the progress of the work and that there are robust arrangements in place to manage the work.
- 2.2.8 Since the last report, development on the site of the former Coed Mawr Infant School, Bangor, which will build 10 houses, has begun and a turf-cutting ceremony was held in December 2024.
- 2.2.9 More good news came in January as the development of Tŷ Gwynedd Maes Twnti, Morfa Nefyn received planning permission to build nine homes. Cyngor Gwynedd gets green light to build nine homes in Morfa Nefyn. Work has begun on appointing a contractor to undertake the work, and I expect the tender will be published in the coming weeks.
- 2.2.10 Two other developments in progress on the main programme, namely:
- Site in Llanystumdwy (5 units)
 - Site in Mynytho (4 units)

- 2.2.11 Of course, to reach this plan's ambition of building 90 homes by the end of the Housing Action Plan's lifespan, other sites are regularly considered, including sites that we already own across the county. This could be oral discussions, desktop assessments, or sometimes going out to conduct assessments on the ground.
- 2.2.12 All developments under the **Tŷ Gwynedd** banner will build adaptable, green, energy-efficient, sustainably built houses, and will be available to buy or rent at an intermediate rent to meet the demand for this type of tenancy.

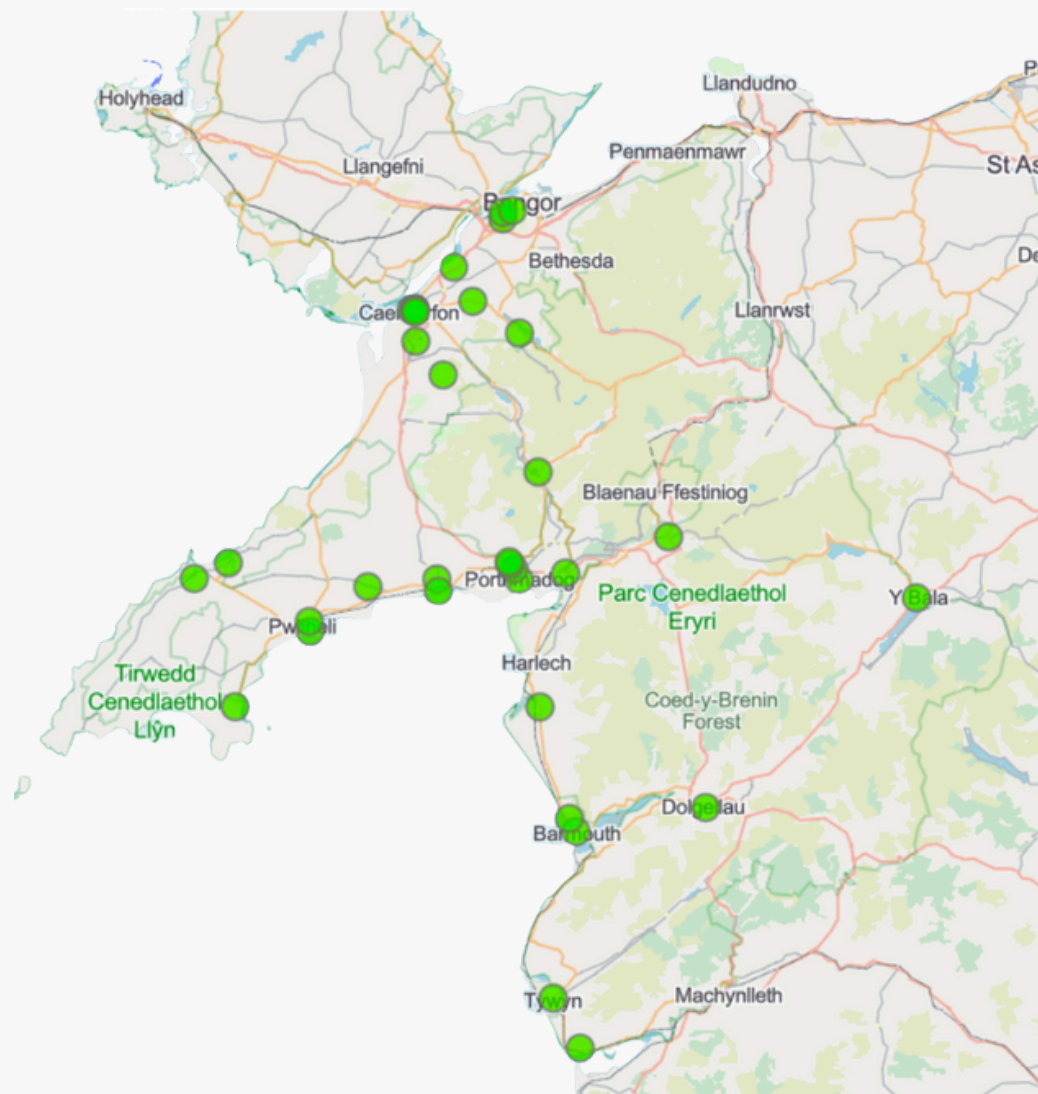


With Liz Saville Roberts AS and Councillor Gareth Jones at the Maes Twnti site, Morfa Nefyn

Buy to Let

- 2.2.13 43 houses have been purchased as the map on the right shows. The latest purchases include locations such as Chwilog and Cricieth.
- 2.2.14 In addition to that there are 3 other purchases in the pipeline.
- 2.2.15 As always, in addition to the above further opportunities are being considered and negotiated on an ongoing basis. Work is underway to upgrade several houses we own, with contractors on site in 13 properties, and others either in the process of tendering for contractors or preparing to do so.
- 2.1.16 There are now 11 properties let to local residents in locations such as Pwllheli, Llanberis and Penrhyndeudraeth.
- 2.2.17 I recognise that there have been some delays before some houses can be let – this is often due to a lack of contractors applying for work, or complications arising during the renovation work. Steps are now underway to try to resolve this, such as looking at internal capacity, or grouping properties for tender so that a package of work is available to potential contractors.

- 2.2.18 Despite this, I am pleased to report that we have passed the ambition (of 43) for the number of purchases set as an ambition for 2023/24 and I am very pleased with the progress and direction of the Plan as a whole.



Buy to Let

Empty homes

Arfon - 49

Dwyfor- 23

Meirionnydd - 29

2.2.19 Through the Council's support, 259 empty homes have come back into use since the start of the Housing Action Plan. Recently, the opportunity was taken to expand the Scheme in order to respond to changes to the needs of our residents and the increases in costs that are seen nationally. As a result, the grant now available has increased from £15,000 to £20,000, and the grant is now available to all types of buyers, not just first-time buyers. My co-Members are reminded that the grant has already been extended so that it's available to homeowners who have purchased properties used to be second homes as well, in order to encourage as many empty homes as possible back into use in the county.

2.2.20 This includes 97 houses where their owners have received grants to refurbish the house to an acceptable standard of living.

2.2.21 Over £1.1m worth of grants have been allocated to date, across the county, with locations and breakdown for Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd detailed on the map on the left.

2.2.22 In addition, scheme 3e which offers a Council tax exemption for up to a year for empty homeowners to undertake essential restoration work has been very successful with 123 exemptions approved up to the last quarter of 2024.

2.3 Dealing with the energy cost crisis and fuel poverty

- 2.3.1 Tackling the energy cost crisis and fuel poverty is one of the Department's top priorities in the Council's Plan in the wake of the increase in energy costs, which means that many people in the county are being pushed into fuel poverty, which can pose a real risk to the health of some of our residents. In order to provide support and assistance to the people of Gwynedd, the Department has established an Energy Service for residents as part of the Housing Action Plan which works with our partners to promote and facilitate energy saving schemes, grants, and benefits to ensure that as many people as possible take advantage of the support available at a very challenging time.
- 2.3.2 There are two main streams of work, Decarbonisation of Housing, and Public Consultation on Fuel Poverty – both aiming to tackle the problem in practice and in the approach that maximises our capacity and resources.
- 2.3.3 The Service is extremely busy, and manages to provide vital support and advice to some of our residents. For example, in November and December 2024, the team helped 661 people through a combination of telephone advice, face-to-face attendance at events as well as home visits.
- 2.3.4 In addition, since the start of the scheme, 4,487 energy vouchers have been distributed, equivalent to a total of £188,609 – money that has gone directly to help the residents of Gwynedd who are most in need.

- 2.3.5 The Department is also involved in the ECO 4 Scheme and the Nyth Scheme – schemes that provide support to improve the energy efficiency of housing. A total of 597 homes across Gwynedd have now seen an improvement in their Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) – 71 since the last report.
- 2.3.6 To date an investment of over £10m has succeeded in improving the energy performance of 597 homes in Gwynedd, with 248 having raised 4 energy levels, or enabled 449 homes to achieve energy certificate grade B.
- 2.3.7 This has made a real difference to people in terms of their energy costs, by ensuring that the people of Gwynedd can afford to heat their homes, and helping many to get out of fuel poverty. It also enables housing to be more comfortable, and improves the health and well-being of our residents.



An example of a property that has benefited from solar panels through the eco grant

2. CYNGOR GWYNEDD PLAN 2023-2028 Schemes

PRIORITY AREA: AN EFFICIENT GWYNEDD

2.4 Adopting a Property Assets Management Plan to ensure that our estate is fit for purpose for future working

- 2.4.1 It remains our intention to adopt a new Property Asset Management Plan which will outline the Council's plan in terms of using its buildings to provide services. The last Property Asset Management Plan was adopted in 2016, and there has been a significant change in working arrangements and service provision since then.
- 2.4.2 The Department continues with regular discussions to look at the management and rationalisation of the estate in accordance with the Council's priorities and the needs of the services provided for the residents of Gwynedd.
- 2.4.3 The work to review policies has been completed and discussions have taken place with a large number of Departments. Discussions are currently underway in relation to the reform of the Delegated Rights Clauses for procurement and disposal, and the changes in the revised Policies will need to be addressed along with consideration of the impact of the cuts programme results on the content of the Scheme.
- 2.4.4 As part of this priority work, the adaptation of our offices is ongoing, with staff from the Mona building already relocated. As per the current schedule, it is anticipated that all departmental adjustments will be welcomed by the end of April 2025.



3. OTHER RISKS

There are a few risks to the Department that I need to highlight at the moment.

- 3.1 **Responding to the pressures on our resources in the area of homelessness** remains a significant challenge for the Department, and the risk to our budgets of not being able to respond to demand, or the risk to our budgets due to the high costs associated with our use of emergency accommodation remains at the top of the Department's list of risks.
- 3.2 However, a group of officials and Members have met regularly over the past year and a half, and good progress has been made since on trying to reduce our use of unsuitable emergency accommodation, and associated costs. Plans mentioned at the beginning of this report will mean that our options for providing suitable accommodation for the homeless will increase again over the next year and thus enable us to reduce our costs. Extensive work on the efficiency of our internal processes and arrangements has also taken place and continues to be underway, and we are certainly going in the right direction with all of this.
- 3.3 That said, it must be noted that I do not foresee that this risk will disappear completely for some time, despite the Department's efforts to reduce its probability or impact.
- 3.4 It is anticipated that the Council's energy costs will remain unstable, and although we have established our own gas purchase framework which has significantly reduced costs, the gas and

electricity contracts are rolling from one year to the next and we are dependent on our broker to provide expert advice to enable us to be in the best position possible. So far the advice that has been received has put us in an advantageous position. We will be meeting our broker again soon to see if it is timely to lock-in for a while.

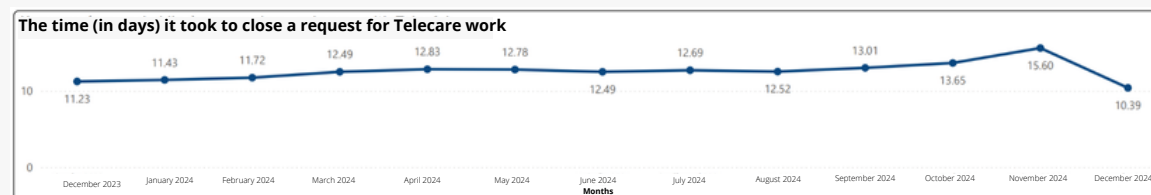
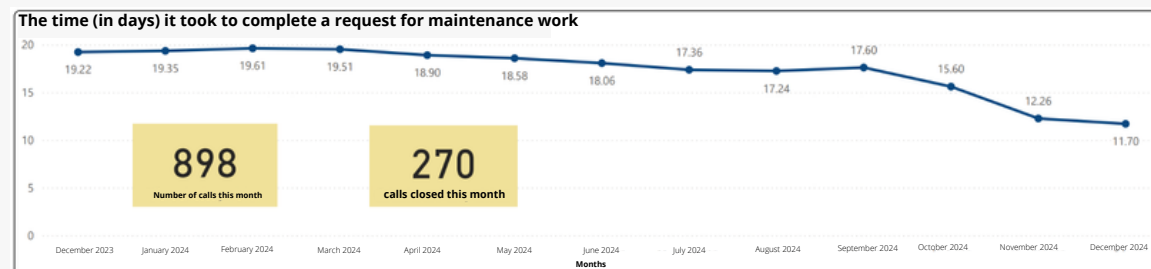
- 3.5 The Department continues to emphasise the need for users of Council buildings (offices, schools and others) to take every opportunity to make the most sensible use of their energy, especially over the winter period ahead. The Energy Service will continue to monitor energy consumption across our sites in order to make the best use of the energy.
- 3.6 There is no doubt that Gwynedd is in a housing crisis, and that has been known for some time as a result of the lack of housing we have in the county. The Housing and Property Department is leading the way in trying to increase the county's housing stock by either doing the work with the resources we have in-house, or by collaborating with our partners. To that end, this aim has been included as a priority in Gwynedd Council's Plan 2023-28.
- 3.7 A key part of this work is the construction of social and intermediate housing, however opposition to such planning applications is now seen. As a result, there is a risk that we will not succeed in our aim of increasing the supply of housing in Gwynedd.

4. PERFORMANCE

- 4.1 Here are some of the key matters arising from the last performance report submitted by the Department on December 2024 performance. The information does not refer to all services in the Department, only those that we feel need to be brought to your attention. I would like to say that I am very satisfied with the performance of the Department.

Maintenance

- 4.2 Over the last period there has been a high number of emergency calls to the Maintenance Unit – due to periods of inclement weather. Despite this, there has been an encouraging reduction in the days taken to respond to calls. The improvement in response time stems from a change in the unit's arrangements over the past few months. On the other hand, although there has been a drop in the number of Telecare calls during November, the number of calls has increased steadily over a period of one year reflecting an increase in demand for the service, with the number of

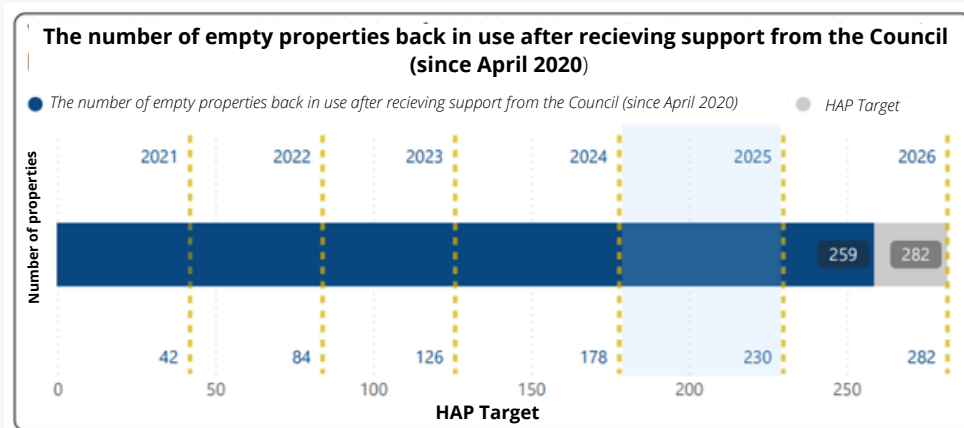


calls for December 2024 having doubled compared to the data for December 2023. The work of updating the Telecare devices from analogue to digital technology is ongoing, and I note that it will likely have an impact on our figures going forward. Over 700 devices have now been digitally replaced, and work is expected to continue towards the spring.

4. PERFORMANCE

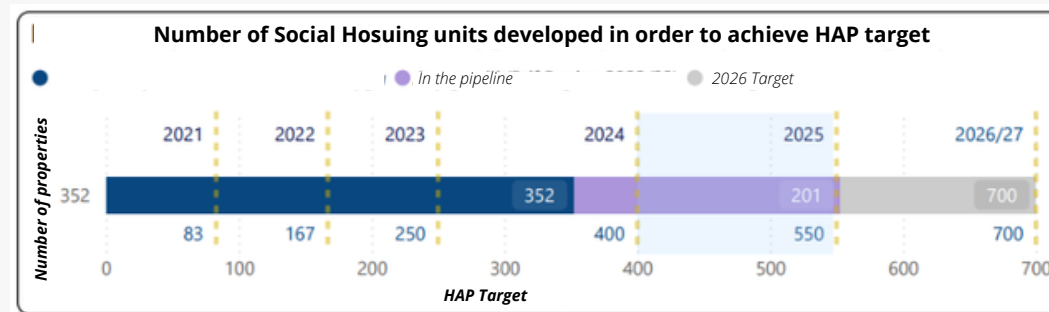
Empty homes

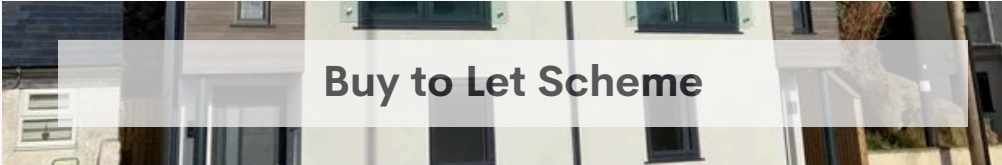
- 4.3 The number of empty homes that have come back into use as a result of Council support has increased again over recent months to 259 (compared to 236 when last reported). This includes 97 homes that have received a First Time Buyers grant as part of the scheme 3dd of the Housing Action Plan. Indeed, since the Scheme was expanded, we have seen an increase in the number applying for the grant, and the availability of up to £20k is also helping more people with rising construction costs. We anticipate that this pattern of progress will continue. One of the successes of this scheme is that giving grants to owners also supports local contractors to carry out repairs. On average, over 3 local contractors are deployed to complete the work on each application, and I'm very glad to report that.



Housing Development Programme (PDP)

- 4.4 The Department measures the number of units that have been developed through a partnership with the Housing Associations. The housing development programme (PDP) Main Programme, funded through the Welsh Government's Social Housing Grant and managed by the Council, has now built 352 units, with a further 201 in the pipeline. Good progress continues to be made on the schemes in progress and the budget for the next 3 years has already been earmarked for various schemes across the County. We continue to work closely with our Housing Partners to develop contingency plans for the years beyond that and to be able to have mature plans in place so that we can take advantage of any opportunities to attract funding will become available as it already is happening.

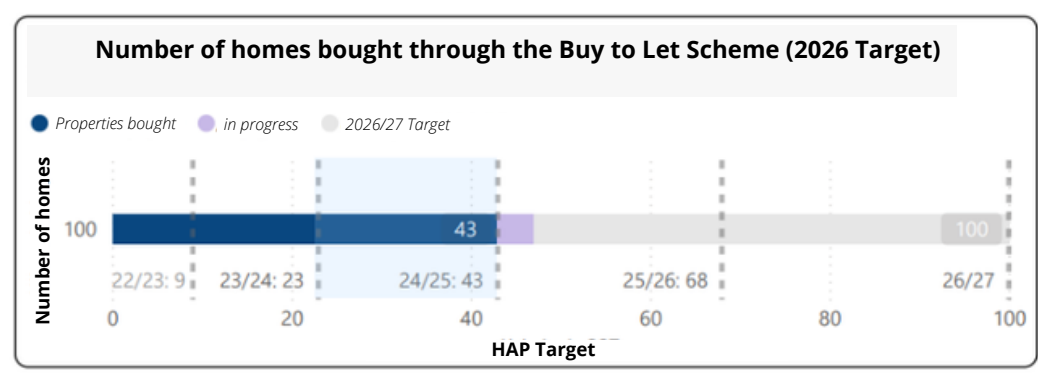




4.5 **43 properties have been purchased** through the Buy to Let Scheme to date and we are pleased that our ambition for a number of purchases in the 2024/25 financial year (43) has already been met.

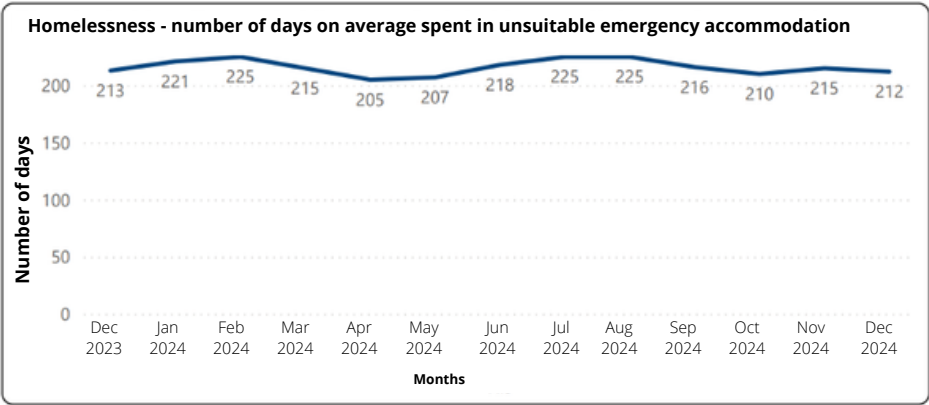
Work is underway to upgrade a number of the homes we own, with contractors on site at 14 properties, and others either in the process of tendering for contractors or preparing to do so.

The second 'part' of this Scheme is letting, and now 11 properties have been let to local residents in locations such as Pwllheli, Llanberis and Penrhyndeudraeth.



4.6 As already stated, homelessness remains one of the Department's busiest services, and deliveries remain high – indeed, there has been a significant increase over the Christmas period due to a number of factors, including inclement weather. For example, between 24/12/2024 and 02/01/2025 5 people were accommodated, with 2 of those due to the severe weather protocol. Without offering accommodation to these, they would have been out on the street in dire conditions.

4.7 The Department measures the **average days spent in emergency accommodation**, which has stabilised over the past year at an average figure of between 205-225 days. This figure is not low enough of course, but I am satisfied that the Department is doing everything within its ability to move individuals and families forward as soon as possible from emergency accommodation. Indeed, without the continued support of Homeless Service officers, this figure would be much higher.



5. FINANCIAL/SAVINGS SITUATION

- 5.1 According to the latest review of the Department's position, an underspend of £303k is forecast this year. In addition, the Department aims to realise savings of £261,230 in 2024/25. Two plans face a slight delay, but all others are on track to come to fruition this year.

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.

