

# GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



## A report to a meeting of the Gwynedd Council Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** 8 March 2022

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Craig ab Iago

**Contact Officer:** Carys Fôn Williams

**Contact Number:** 01341 424368

**Subject:** PERFORMANCE REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND PROPERTY

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### THE 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 my fellow members on developments in the fields within my remit as Cabinet Member for Housing and Property. This includes outlining the latest developments against pledges within the 2018-2023 Gwynedd Council Plan; the progress of performance measures; and the latest on the savings and cuts plans.
- 1.2 I will remind you that all matters have already been the subject of discussions and have been scrutinised at a meeting of the Housing and Property Department's Management Team, which also included representatives from the Communities Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3 In general, I am satisfied with the progress of projects that the department is leading on in accordance with the Council Plan and the performance measures for which I am responsible.

## 2. PROJECTS of the GWYNEDD COUNCIL PLAN 2018-2023 (Improvement Priorities)

- 2.1 **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.**

The Housing Action Plan was approved by the Cabinet on 15 December 2020. Since then, officers have been working diligently on the 33 projects contained in the Action Plan, and a



vast number of the projects are currently in the pipeline, and some of them are about to be completed. I wish to draw attention to a few projects below.

### 2.1.1 Homelessness plans

The increase in the number of homeless people continues to be incredibly high and to be a substantial strain on staff. On 14 January, 2022, 712 individuals were homeless in Gwynedd, which is a 51% increase on the number in 2018/19. See the latest data in the following table:

Year	Number of homelessness presentations
2018/2019	576
2019/2020	593
2020/2021	812
2021/2022	868 (10 months)

As one can imagine, all this means that the demand on the Homelessness Unit's services continue to be consistently high. At the beginning of the pandemic, the Welsh Government revoked the clause of 'prioritising need' when considering homelessness referrals, making it a requirement for Local Authorities to house everyone who presented themselves homeless and ensure that nobody slept out on the street. Now, the Welsh Government has decided to make this a permanent step, which means that homelessness presentations will remain at the current levels, and are likely to increase, which means, probably, that we will not see the numbers returning to pre-pandemic levels again.

The Department has now been able to increase the capacity of the team that gives support to individuals to establish tenancies in order to move on in an attempt to cope with the increase. Very recently, we have also managed to increase the capacity of the preventative team to reduce the presentations that reach the Department in the first place. Currently, we are managing to prevent 19% cases of homelessness, which is amongst the highest in Wales.

I am also glad to report that work is progressing very well to increase the number of units for the homeless in Gwynedd.

Tŷ Adferiad (accommodation with specialist support for women) opened in Porthmadog in October 2021, and the six units are now full and are providing the necessary support to the residents. In December 2021, 4 innovative "pods" were completed to house homeless individuals in Caernarfon, and the first tenants will move in during the coming weeks. Work is in progress to create 16 supported units for the homeless in Bangor, and it is intended to complete the first units during the next months.

This table summarises the projects that are in the pipeline or which have been completed over the past months:

Project	Number of units	Timetable
35 College Road, Bangor	3	On the site, work to be completed in February 2022
Pods, Segontium, Caernarfon	4	Construction work completed. First tenants moving in in February 2022.
137, High Street, Bangor	12	Aimed for completion by October 2022.



Specialist accommodation with support for women	6	Completed and opened since October 2021, with every unit full
Accommodation for a family and an individual in Pwllheli	2	On the site, to be completed by March 2022
Glan Wnion, Dolgellau	5	Appeal approved after Snowdonia National Park refused the original Planning Application. The contract will commence at the end of January 2022.
Tŷ Adferiad, Porthmadog	6	Work completed and five tenants are currently receiving support with the intention of filling the last room soon
<b>Total:</b>	<b>38</b>	

Nevertheless, we anticipate, in the short-term and certainly, the demand will be greater than what we will be able to meet, but I am confident that the Department will do the best that it possibly can with the resources that are available to house the homeless in the County and reduces our reliance on temporary accommodation.

### 2.1.2 House Purchase and Land Purchase Plans

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 purchase former social housing and letting them at a social rent level. It is outlined under plans 2c (Purchasing former social houses and renting them to Gwynedd residents) and 3b (Purchasing Private Homes) in the Housing Action Plan.

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.

Extensive work has been done behind the scenes on these plans already, and officers have visited a vast number of properties across Gwynedd over the months since the Plan was launched, and currently, we have 15 houses in mind to purchase over the coming months. Letters have been sent to hundreds of owners of empty homes in Gwynedd to discuss the potential of selling to us, and officers are continuing to discuss and negotiate in order to purchase lands. As it happens, the market situation means that a number of these properties / lands are sold within a few days of them being put on the market. Nevertheless, we have lands in Llanystumdwy, Llanberis and Rhoshirwaun which we intend to develop, and officers are currently discussing land purchases in the Pen Llŷn and south Meirionnydd area, but due to the sensitive nature of the market and discussions, we cannot disclose further details at this time.

The Help to Buy scheme has seen an investment of £1m this year, and currently helps 12 persons/families/applicants to buy houses. We are looking to extend the scheme with funds from the Housing Action Plan and through further funding from the Welsh Government, with details to be confirmed in March.

### 2.1.3 Develop our own houses for local people

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.

The plan's promotional material has been released on social media and on the Council's website, including a conceptual video and an explanation of what Tŷ Gwynedd is and in order to give individuals who could be eligible to apply for them an opportunity to do so when the time is right.

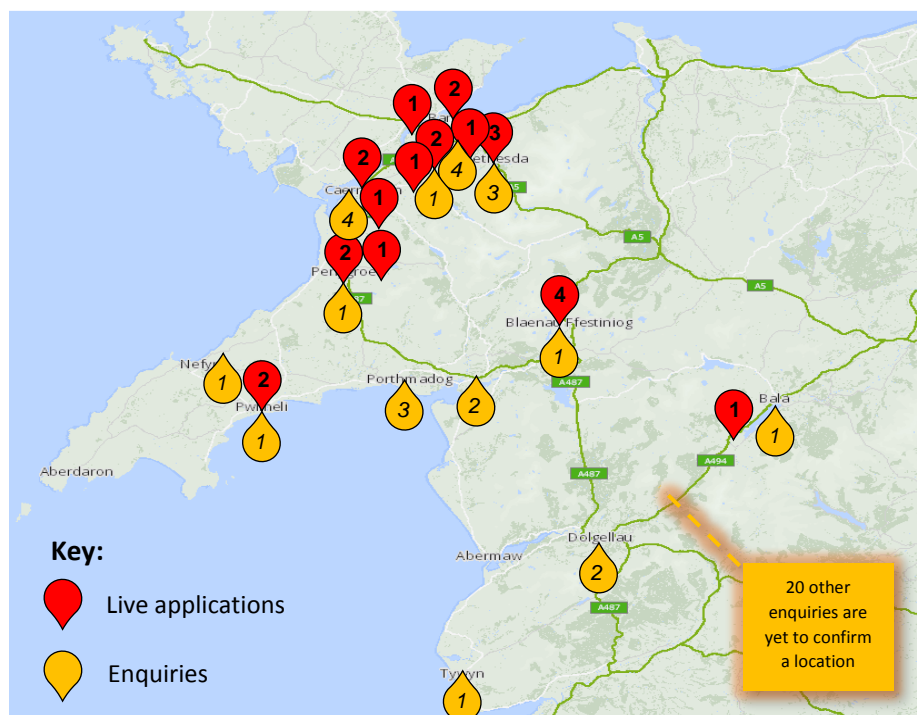
The first development, namely 10 houses in the Coed Mawr area of Bangor, will be the subject of a consultation in mid-February 2022, and will be open for a month. Then, subject to the consultation's findings, we intend to submit a full planning application at the beginning of the spring.

Once the housing scheme on the Coed Mawr site, Bangor, is established, the scheme will proceed to consider other sites across the County, starting with two sites in Dwyfor.

#### 2.1.4 Grants

The grants we give to the people of Gwynedd in order for them to make adaptations to houses, allow the disabled individuals of the County to continue to live safely in their homes. 142 alterations were completed over the last year, such as 70 adaptations to stairs or installation of stair-lifts and the installation of 12 ramps as well as erecting extensions or alterations to current rooms in order to create bespoke wet rooms.

Recently, we managed to attract £3m towards Empty House schemes in order to buy and bring empty houses in Gwynedd back into use. The map below shows the location of current active applications as well as the enquiries the Unit has received.



## Locations

Live applications			
Bangor (2)	Bethesda and Tregarth (4)	Blaenau Ffestiniog (3)	Bontnewydd (1)
Caernarfon (2)	Deiniolen (2)	Groeslon (1)	Llanuwchllyn (1)
Penisarwaun (1)	Penygroes (2)	Pwllheli (2)	Y Felinheli (1)
Enquiries			
Bangor (4)	Bethesda (3)	Blaenau Ffestiniog (1)	Caernarfon (4)
Deiniolen (1)	Dolgellau (2)	Penrhyndeudraeth (2)	Penygroes (1)
Pistyll (1)	Porthmadog (3)	Pwllheli (1)	Tywyn (1)
Bala (1)			

The Housing Support Grant has now increased to £6.8m per annum (an increase of £1.6m). This budget has been confirmed for the next three years (i.e. up to 2024/25). Similarly, the Social Housing Grant has seen a substantial increase, with the budget now at £9.43m per year. We are hopeful that a similar amount will be available for the next 3 years and no confirmation has been received of this yet. Finally, the Council has managed to attract around £650,000 over the 4 projects thus far from the new Land and Buildings Development Fund (the former Land Release Fund). The intention with this grant is to seek to release assets and overcome land-related problems in order to facilitate housing developments.

### 2.1.5 Consultation with communities to ascertain the actual need for housing

One of the Housing Action Plan's project is to 'Consult with communities in order to establish their housing needs', which is now part of broader consultation work under the guidance of the Economy and Community Department. The first part of the consultation, namely holding initial conversations with Community Councils, Regeneration Groups etc. has ended, and the second part, namely the full and public consultation, is being launched in February. The questions regarding the housing field will establish the housing needs of the various housing communities of the County, which will enable us to prioritise these areas with our schemes.

The initial analysis undertaken of our responses in step 1 shows that housing is one of the main fields that will need to be considered, and we will consider the observations given on individual areas so that we can find a solution that will work on local levels.

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

The Department intends to establish a front door/help-desk for housing services that will facilitate public access to those services and will help with housing problems more efficiently.

The One-Stop-Shop Team Leader will commence in post in February 2022, and will hold conversations with a number of stakeholders and partners across the Department, the Council and externally (including the Housing Associations, agencies in the field and partners from the third sector), in order to investigate the enquiries that reach us and external agencies, and tie this into the implementation of the One-Stop-Shop in due course. The research will lead to preparing and submitting a report on the various options, including a recommendation on the way forward.

All research gathered will also feed the process of developing a provider framework and commission an information management system over the coming months. In addition, it is intended to introduce arrangements to establish a Single Point of Access (SPOA) for Housing Support Grant services.



Although there are differences in the way that every Authority has established this service, the main aim of the SPOA will be to verify the eligibility of applications to receive a Housing Support Grant and refer the individual to the most appropriate provider.

### 2.3 **Allocating social housing to local people: Create a new allocations policy for the county which will give greater priority to local people.**

The Local Allocation Policy addresses the housing needs of residents who have a connection with Gwynedd, but it will also need to be based on statutory criteria to identify housing needs. The Common Allocation Policy was introduced in October 2020, following a period of consultation and scrutiny both internally and with external partners.

Work is currently underway to review the implementation of the policy and implement it for a 12 month period to ensure that it acts in accordance with the original objectives.

The demand for social property is substantially higher than the supply, and although this has existed for some time, we have realised that there has been a substantial increase in service requests over the past two years. This, as well as the increase in the homelessness field, poses a challenge to the service as we attempt to house and assist the most vulnerable and needy.

One of the Department's performance measures is the percentage of all social housing allocations allocated to a person with a local connection. In December 2021, 97% of allocations had been allocated to a person with a local connection. The figure has been consistently at 95% during the past year, excluding June, which stood at 92%. The Policy also sets a tier of priority for applicants within a band with a community connection; this reinforces the emphasis on addressing the housing needs of local people.

This work is now incorporated into the Department's day-to-day work, and we will not report on this as a part of our improvement priorities from now on.

### 2.4 **Other risks**

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

- 2.4.1 As noted previously, the demand for the services of the **Homelessness Units** remains consistently high, with the homelessness departments continuing to grow. This is unlikely to go away and the need for temporary accommodation will continue for years to come, as seen in the table of homelessness presentations above. The Government announced that local authorities need to house everyone who presents as homeless from now on, therefore, considering that the demand is very likely to continue at a high level, there is a substantial risk that the supply of temporary accommodation and permanent tenancies that currently exist is insufficient to meet the demand.

As a result of this additional need to house everyone that presents as homeless, over the past financial year, it is also estimated that temporary accommodation costs will be close to £2 million. The increase in costs seen as a result of the pandemic have been currently addressed through the Government's Hardship Fund. As a result of the announcement that the Hardship Fund will not continue beyond the next financial year, and in order to address these higher costs, the department has submitted a bid in accordance with the Council's bidding arrangements (a final decision is expected on the application in March), as well as confirmation of additional funding from Welsh Government of around £475k. However, there



is a genuine risk that this funding will not be sufficient and that we will not be able to fund this type of demand in the future.

The Homelessness-related risks are likely to be with us until the balance between the demand for housing and the supply will improve.

- 2.4.2 The Department also continues to see the impact of Covid-19 and Brexit on **programmed building and maintenance projects**. Over the past year, the Department has found it difficult to attract contractors to tender for work, or when companies tender, this would often be much higher than the budget. For example, although 19 contractors expressed an interests in one tender application, only 2 tenders were received. One was within the budget and the other was 32% higher. It is estimated that 20-25% should be added on top of the estimated costs in order to provide a realistic reflection of the current market.

This mainly causes 3 risks:

- Failure to deliver on time
- Failure to achieve within the budget
- Failure to spend grant funding - risk of it being clawed back if it is not spent within the agreed timetable

In order to seek to respond to this situation, the Property Development Unit has experimented with the size of some tender applications and it is expected to see those results in the coming months when the application for tenders will close.

Although the market has now somewhat stabilised, material prices continue to be much higher than they were and a number of projects have faced a delay as a result of that, and the lack of availability of goods or specialist equipment that come from overseas, such as stair-lifts or chips for electronic devices.

The situation of prices and contractor availability has been highlighted in a number of conversations with Welsh Government, whether for capital projects in the Housing field or the 21st Century Schools project. I am also aware that this is affecting a number of other Council departments and other Local Authorities.

- 2.4.3 The **impacts of climate change** also continue to be a risk. The Department is doing good work in the climate change field, specifically by reducing the carbon emissions from Council buildings. Since the first Carbon Management Plan was introduced in 2010, the Department has managed to ensure that our carbon emissions have reduced by 58.3% (2020). However, as a result of a change in the carbon reporting methodology of the Welsh Government, there is a possibility that we will see a deterioration in this figure in the short-term until we have established a reliable pattern to use the new method. This new methodology is more comprehensive and includes elements that were not previously included, such as water and biomass, among others.

I wish to draw attention to one innovative element that the Department has achieved in the energy field, which is to establish **an Energy Framework** in partnership with Beond between April 2020-2024. There are 16 suppliers on our Framework, and the arrangements included within it, namely '*reverse auction technology*' are unique in the energy field.





A number of local authorities and organisations across Britain will use the Framework, including: Portsmouth Council; Gosport Borough Council; Reigate and Banstead Borough Council; Wyre Council; Citizen's Housing; Peabody Trust; North Wales Police; North Wales Fire Service and Buckinghamshire Council.

As a result of this arrangement, the Council gains a good reputation in the field, and it is estimated that savings of £932k will be realised by March 2024 on our gas costs. In addition to this, the Council generates an income from the arrangement, namely £24,926.15 in 2020 and £18,800.13 in 2021. This income in turn will assist us to invest further in our services, e.g. recently the funding helped us to conduct the Tanygrisiau heating viability study.

- 2.4.4 At the request of the Welsh Government, we have been collaborating with the Education Department and Gwynedd schools to **monitor carbon dioxide levels in the County's classrooms** in order to obtain a picture of schools' ventilation situation as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. Arrangements were made to share monitoring devices with all of the County's schools and the schools were asked to read and record their results over a two-week period before Christmas. The Department has conducted a detailed analysis of the data submitted in December, which shows that the situation is slightly more encouraging than what was originally assumed - it is shown that only a small number of rooms in a few schools cause concern and require further research.

However, it must be noted that data was not received from some of the County's largest schools during the first monitoring period (with a number noting the difficult situation facing schools before Christmas in relation to Covid as a reason for that). Arrangements were made to share monitoring devices with all of the County's schools and the schools were asked to read and record their results over a two-week period before Christmas. It is possible that this new data set could highlight problems at the schools, which could mean that we will need to provide ventilation systems in some locations, and there is a risk, as a result, that the energy use of our schools will increase which, in turn, will mean that our carbon emissions will also increase.

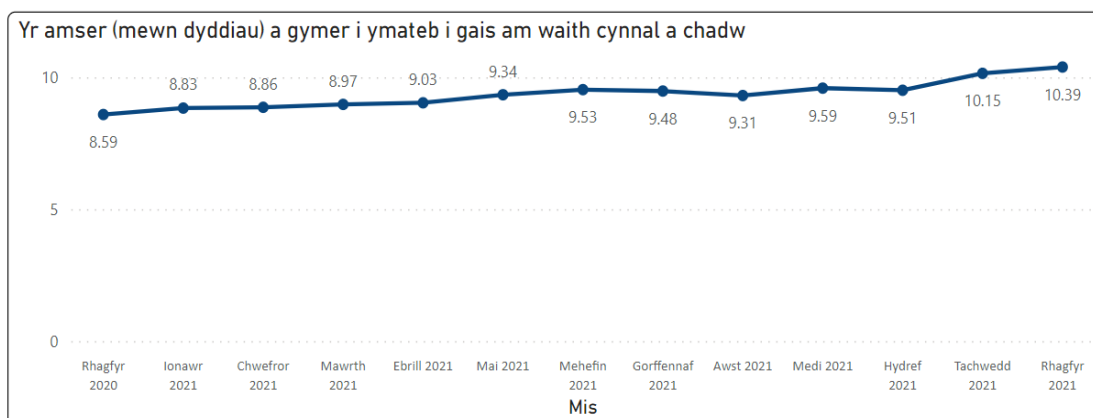
### 3. PERFORMANCE

The main issues resulting from my meetings regarding performance measures are summarised in the Section below. The following does not refer to each of the Department's Services and Units, only those which I feel need highlighting at present. I challenge all of the measures once a month, and I am satisfied with the performance on the whole.



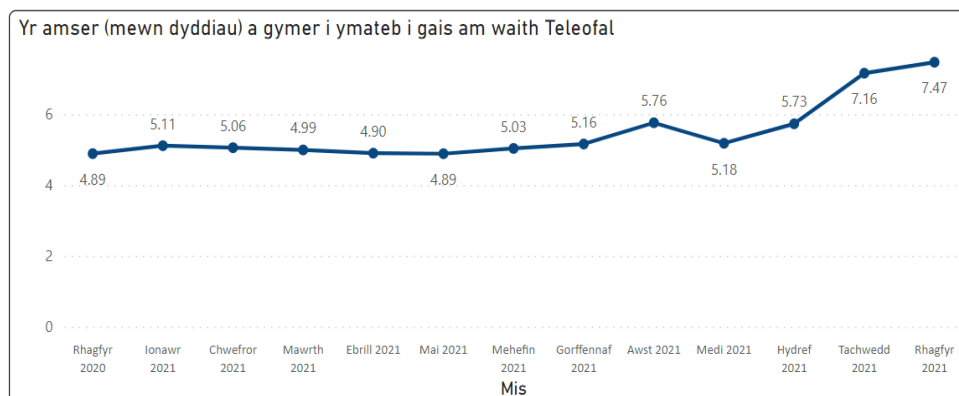


3.1 The time taken to respond to a request for **maintenance** work has continued to increase over the past months, and since the beginning of the pandemic. It had stabilised at around 7 days pre-Covid, but it is now almost over **10 days**. Although this appears to be astounding, there are valid reasons for the increase and therefore I am not concerned. Currently, the main challenge is the difficulty in gaining access to sites such as care homes and schools for contractors, and to the in-house workforce as a result of the Covid restrictions. The Unit has also seen the impact of the pandemic and Brexit on the availability of goods, which has led to longer periods before Contractors can complete their work on occasions.



Similarly and for the same reasons, the impact of this can be seen on the number of days taken to respond to the request for **Telecare** work, with the average number of days at over **7 days** by now, compared with an average of 4 days pre-Covid.

3.2 It is always a pleasure to see and share positive feedback from the customers of our different Units. The Department will regularly conduct a **customer satisfaction** exercise regarding the service offered by the Pest Control, Maintenance, Offices, Cleaning, Estates and Enforcement and HMO Licensing Units. For example, in October last year, the staff of the Cleaning Unit were thanked for their contribution towards the success of Padarn Country Park and for sustaining the Green Flag Award (an award given to the best parks in Wales). I believe that it is important for all types of feedback to be shared with the staff in order to maintain the standard or look for opportunities to develop the service we offer.

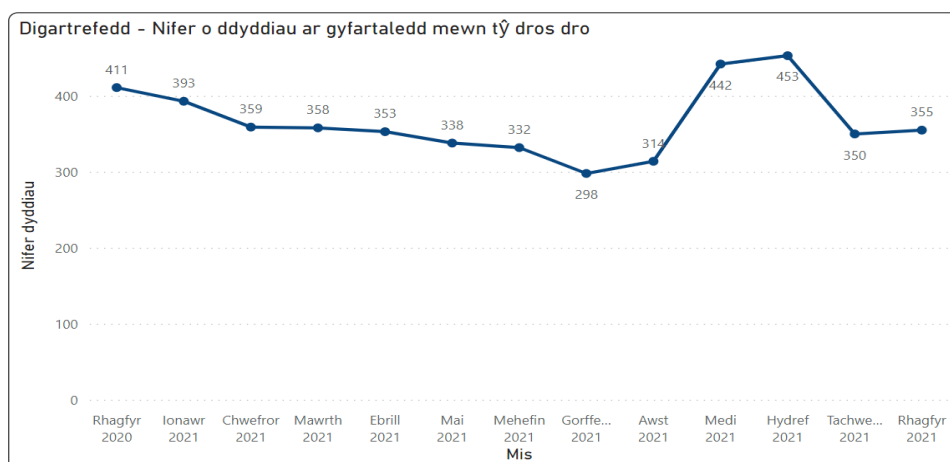
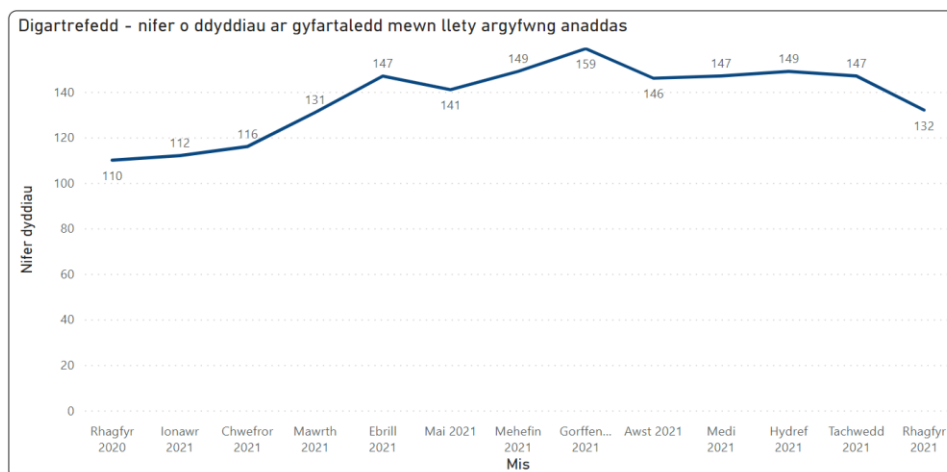


3.3 The **Property Development Unit** have faced difficulties in attracting contractors to apply for some tenders, as well as the high prices we receive when Contractors submit prices. As I already mentioned, the Unit has attempted to resolve this situation by cutting down contracts into smaller sections, in the hope of attracting more to apply, and we are starting to see this coming to fruition, although it is too soon to say whether this will be a continuing pattern. Many projects to improve the condition and suitability of schools have also been delayed, but



I accept that these matters are beyond the Unit's control, and the projects that are progressing in accordance with the timetable noted and which are within the Unit's control stand at 89%.

- 3.4 The increase in **homelessness** I already mentioned is reflected in the Department's performance measures, with the average number of days in unsuitable emergency accommodation (e.g. bed and breakfast) in December at **132** days, and the average number of days in a temporary house (private houses that are leased by us) stands at **355** days. The hope is that the increase in the team's capacity to support individuals to maintain their own tenancy will lead to more individuals moving on earlier, and reduce the reliance on unsuitable emergency accommodation and temporary accommodation.



- 3.5 **The average number of days on a waiting list for a social house** has reduced slightly over the past months - **666 days**. The demand for social housing is high, but also contributing to this high figure are the examples of applicants who have been on the register for a long time under the old points system, who are now given more priority in the new banding system.

#### 4. OFFICES

The Facilities Service, which is responsible for our offices, will continue to play a key part, jointly with other departments, to look at the Council's future working arrangements. As a part of this work, we will continue to look at the options to reduce the estate as a result of a change in working arrangements. This work is progressing and we do not currently know how our future working arrangements will affect the demand for office space.



## 5. FINANCIAL POSITION/SAVINGS

- 5.1 The Department has two Savings schemes to deliver in 2021/22. The fees for inspecting and licensing HMOs have increased from £140 to £180 per room and the department is on track to deliver these savings.
- 5.2 The Department is also on track to deliver the savings of reducing reliance on temporary accommodation by investing in bespoke accommodation. As a result of Covid-19, slippage was seen in the programme, however the pods in Caernarfon are now ready and other units in Bangor will be ready by April. However, the Welsh Government's policy of 'housing everyone' during the pandemic has impacted this specific saving, as Gwynedd has seen unprecedented homelessness presentations since the beginning of the pandemic. This had not been factored in when the original savings were submitted.

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### VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

#### The Monitoring Officer:

*No observations to add in relation to propriety.*

#### Head of Finance:

*The contents of the report are consistent with what was reported to Cabinet on 18 January in terms of the 2021/22 savings plans, namely that the Housing and Property Department have two schemes remaining to be delivered during the current financial year but that they are on track to be realised. I can confirm that the additional unprecedented pressures on the Homelessness Service have been considered in drawing up the 2022/23 budget, and the situation will be reviewed continuously.*

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