

CYNGOR GWYNEDD CABINET



Report to a meeting of the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Date of meeting: 14 February, 2023
Cabinet Member: Councillor Craig ab Iago
Contact Officer: Carys Fôn Williams
Contact Number: 01341 424368
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 2018-2023, the progress of performance measures; and the latest on the financial savings schemes.
- 1.2 We are continuing to face significant challenges in the homelessness field, however, our aim as a Council is to ensure that no one is homeless in Gwynedd, and the Department is doing as much as possible to make the situation better for the people of Gwynedd. See 2.1.1 regarding these plans.
- 1.3 We are continuing to face a housing crisis and are still working pro-actively to give as many opportunities as possible for the people of Gwynedd to live locally through the Housing Action Plan. Several of the key milestones have been achieved on this journey, for example there are exciting developments in terms of the social housing development programme, our new energy service is assisting a number of people in Gwynedd with their energy bills and several houses have been purchased.
- 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 -1ch.
- 1.5 I would like to remind you that 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.

1.6 **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.**

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.**

I wish to draw your attention to the principal plans the Department is currently prioritising.

2.1.1 Homelessness plans

Currently, 669 individuals are homeless in Gwynedd and the forecast is that the numbers presenting themselves as homeless this year are consistent with, if not higher than last year. Persons in temporary accommodation continue to be high, with 211 persons located in different sites across the County and once more we predict that the numbers that will have been in temporary accommodation over the year as a whole will be similar to last year's numbers.

We have recently seen a marked increase in the numbers that present themselves homeless as a result of landlords issuing a 'section 21 notice' to tenants, namely a notice to inform the tenants that the landlord is ending the letting of the property and terminating the tenancy. Between January and December 2022, 169 notices were issued - an average of 14 a month. In order to monitor the situation, we started to gather the reasons given for issuing the notices (if the tenants knew), and 78% of the cases were because the landlord wanted to sell the property. This mainly affected families (51%) and single persons (43%).

The Department is striving to do everything within its control to offer solutions to this situation, mainly through the Housing Action Plan that includes a variety of projects from developing supported accommodation (project 1a), to establishing specialist mental health support (project 1d). I wish to draw attention to a few updates:

1a: Supported housing for the homeless schemes

Scheme 1a of the Housing Action Plan aims to develop 38 Supported Housing units for homeless persons in locations across the county.

Some of the plans in the pipeline are:

Development	Units	Update
35 College Road, Bangor	3	Developing a redundant building into supported accommodation The main renovation has been completed with minor issues left Discussions afoot to establish site management arrangements
Glan Wnion, Dolgellau	5	Developing the former Ysgol Glan Wnion into supported accommodation There is a roof on the new building and work is proceeding well Rough weather has impacted a little on the time-schedule, but there is currently no cause for concern
137 High Street, Bangor	12	Tenancy supported accommodation. Adra are the builders, and North Wales Housing will manage the site The work of constructing the structure commenced in September

		2022, and it is anticipated that the work will be completed by summer 2023 Discussions ongoing to discuss the lease and communication about the development
Accommodation in Pwllheli	2	<u>Conversion of a vacant house into two separate units, 1-bedroom flat for the ground floor</u>
		2-bedroom flat for the first/second floor Contractors are on site, the work is approximately 65% completed and it is hoped to be finished by April 2023.
Pods, Caernarfon	4	We have managed to overcome issues regarding water with Welsh Water with most of the pods We will furnish them over the next few weeks and it is hoped that tenants can move in during the next few weeks.

1ch: Support packages for private landlords: Leasing Scheme Wales: Gwynedd

The last time it was reported that the Department was working on plans to develop support packages for private landlords to encourage them to offer tenancies to local people who need housing, rather than letting them for short-term periods or as holiday accommodation. The Department managed to attract a grant of over £2.7m for this project and the scheme has now been launched since 8 November 2022. Since then, we have received several forms expressing interest from landlords across the county. The original target of 4 units was set by the Welsh Government for 2022/23, but as a result of the high amount of interest the scheme has attracted, we are confident that we will easily pass this target, and we are now aiming to bring an additional 19 units into the scheme.

1d: Specialist mental health support

Homelessness prevention is an integral part of the Homelessness Service, however, the percentage of tenancies under threat due to mental health issues have been increasing. In order to avoid a situation where these vulnerable individuals lose their tenancies, the Department has increased its capacity to be able to assist and support individuals to remain in their homes.

In September 2022, a Mental Health Coordinator was appointed to work as a contact point between the Council's homelessness team and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board. Before Christmas, a Senior Mental Health Case Worker was appointed and commenced the post at the start of January this year, this will further reinforce the connection and the joint-working between both organisations.

Through this, getting access to mental health services in the context of homelessness will be a more seamless and easier process, this entails that we can be more pro-active and prevent someone from becoming homeless before it is too late.

2.1.2 House Purchase and Land Purchase Plans

It is known by now that the Council intends to buy houses for rent to Gwynedd residents, aiming at the end of the Housing Action Plan to own approximately 100 houses that will be available to let to local residents. It is also intended to buy suitable development land to develop our own houses, as noted in scheme 3ff of the Housing Action Plan.

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.

However, I am very pleased to report that 8 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 intermediate rent to a person with local connections and in need of such a house.



2.1.3 Gwynedd Homebuy scheme

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. By combining money from Cyngor Gwynedd's Council Tax Premium Fund and

additional finance from the Government as part of the Dwyfor Second Homes Pilot, equity loans to the value of £13m are available to give even more of an opportunity for people to buy a home on the open market in their local community. The finance includes an investment of £8.5m by the Welsh Government as part of the Dwyfor Second Homes Pilot. Since its launch on 13 September, 15 Units have been approved across Gwynedd, and another 6 are at various stages in the process. The applicants come from areas across the county including Llanystumdwy, Edern, Porthmadog, Felinheli, Harlech and Llanrug.

2.1.4 **Developing 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.

Work on the first development, namely 10 houses on the site of the former Ysgol Coed Mawr, Bangor, has commenced and a building control plans valuation tender has taken place. The hope is to be on site in the second quarter of 2023.

Officers are also working on other sites such as Tŷ'r Ysgol, Llanrug and the former Llanberis library site, that is currently subject to a planning permission application. There are also other sites in Pen Llŷn and south Meirionnydd under consideration.

2.1.5 **Establishing a new Energy Service**

A new Energy Conservation Service has been established to respond to the host of applications from community groups asking for support to deliver renewable energy schemes and to improve the ability of Gwynedd residents to avoid fuel poverty. There are currently two main work-streams, namely De-carbonising homes and Consulting with the public on Fuel Poverty. The cost of living is at the forefront of the minds of many Gwynedd residents, and this service is on the front-line assisting with enquiries and giving practical support.

Providing help with energy bills

Up to now over 570 persons have received help with their energy bills from the energy conservation team, by receiving energy vouchers to go towards paying prepaid electricity and/or gas meters. The feedback officers have received is proof that this service makes a real difference to the people of Gwynedd. This is one example:

"We would like to thank Ffion and Meilyr from the bottom of our hearts for their never-ending advice and for ensuring that the vulnerable residents of Dolgellau have benefited significantly from the opportunity to apply for fuel vouchers. I hasten to commend your willingness to work so hard in such a short period of time - your zeal towards the work is high praise to the department and ensures that Gwynedd residents receive the best possible advice and care."

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 people with housing problems:**

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

Since I last reported to you, a number of exciting developments have occurred or are in the pipeline.

System - Officers have held a number of meetings to discuss the possibilities for a system for the One Stop Shop, including the internal IT Service. A member of staff from the service will demonstrate the system to us soon to determine if it addresses our needs.

Staffing - Two SPoA Officers have commenced with the service and are assisting with the work of discussing with partners. These officers will play a key role in the operation of the one stop shop once it is up and running.

Research - On 13 January a questionnaire was circulated to ask the views of the public regarding the customer care service and the department's plan for the one stop shop. Simultaneously, officers are continuing to hold discussions with partners and third sector organisations in readiness for the launch of the new service. In addition, work is being undertaken to identify the work flow and mapping processes to ensure that we put the appropriate steps in place in a timely manner.

2.3 Other risks

There are a few risks for the Department and I currently need to highlight these.

2.3.1 As noted previously, the demand for the services of the **Homelessness Units** remains high, with the number of homeless persons continuing at the same rate as seen last year.

The lack of promise of funding from the Government to address the higher demand on us as a result of this is a matter of concern, and we have highlighted this corporately, however, the homelessness-related risks are likely to be with us until the balance between the demand for housing and the supply improves.

To address this, we are considering a number of options to reduce our use of temporary accommodation and increase our options to provide suitable accommodation to those who are homeless in Gwynedd. This in turn will also address some of the £6.4m overspend that has already been reported in relation to temporary accommodation.

2.3.2 The **Refugee Resettlement Unit** has been at the forefront supporting refugees arriving in Gwynedd from Ukraine in the Welcome Centre. However, the Government has stated that the Centre will close in the next few months and there is a substantial risk that these refugees will be made homeless if permanent accommodation cannot be found for them before this. Together with the Ukraine Sponsors scheme, it is estimated that ending both these schemes, the worst scenario, can add over 200 persons to our numbers who present themselves as homeless.

2.3.3 It is anticipated that a **huge increase in energy costs** will have a significant impact on the Council. Whilst the Council's gas prices have been locked for the period April 2020 - March 2024 (and has therefore avoided the global increase in energy costs saving millions for the Council), the situation is not the same with electricity.

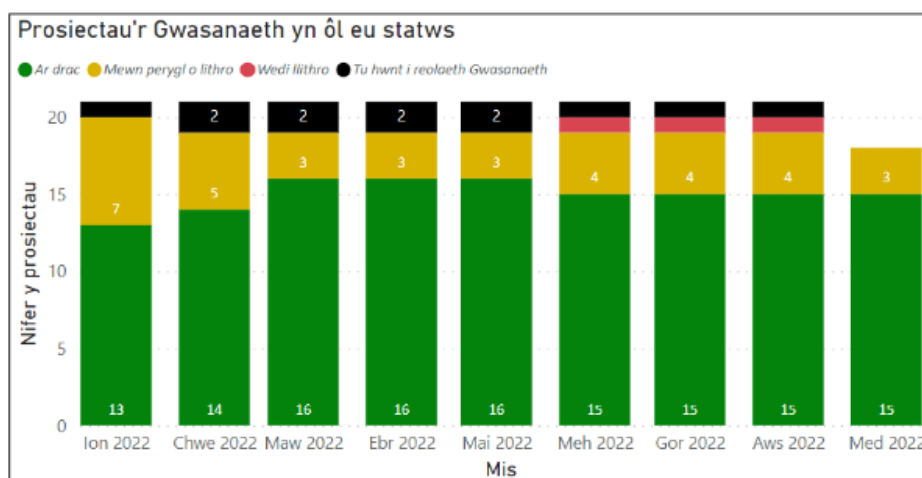
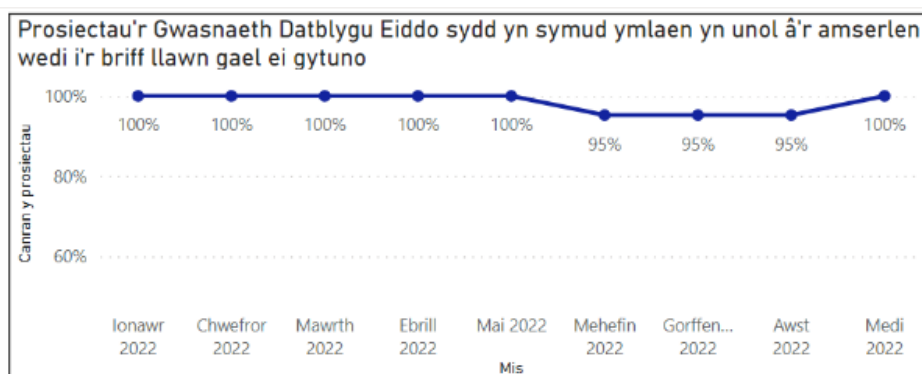
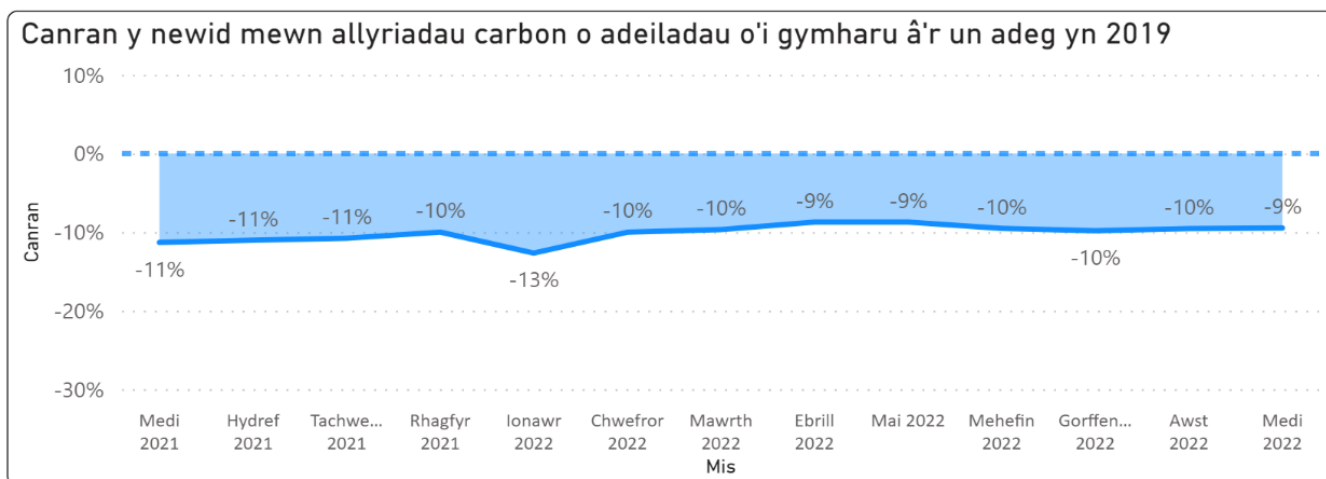
We anticipate that between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023, there will be a significant increase in the cost of a unit of electricity. To alleviate this financial hit, the Department is emphasising the need for Council building users (be they offices, schools and others) to take advantage of every opportunity 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. PERFORMANCE

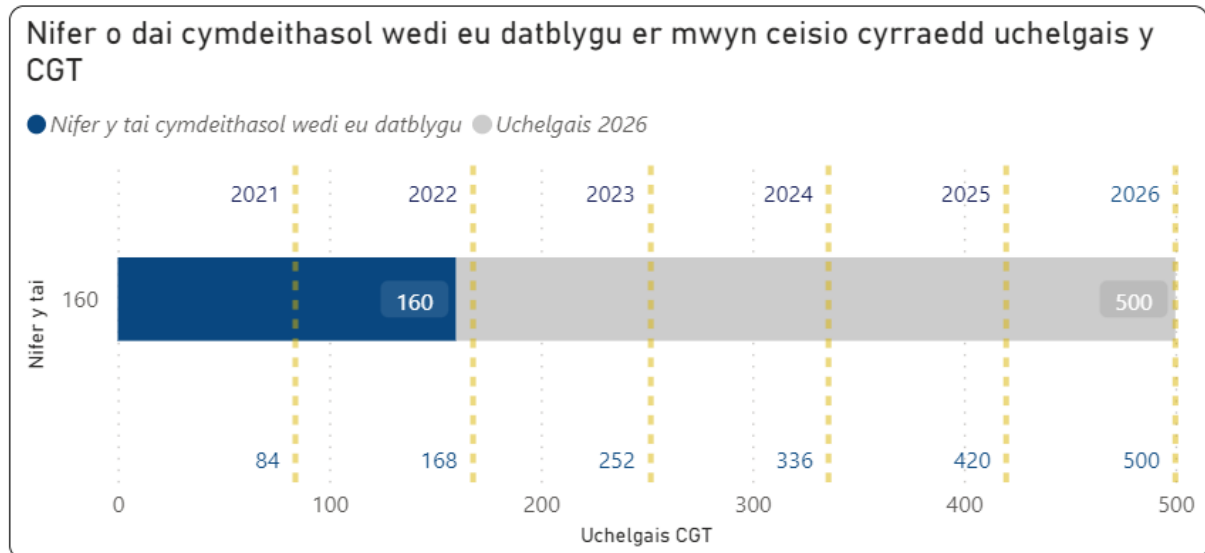
The Department has been one of the first to implement a new system of challenging the Council's performance, where service managers and the Head of Department are invited to discuss performance in two-monthly meetings. In accordance with this procedure, the previous performance report on the September 2022 data was submitted and the main

matters raised at that meeting are summarised below. I wish to state that I am satisfied with the Department's performance during such a challenging period.

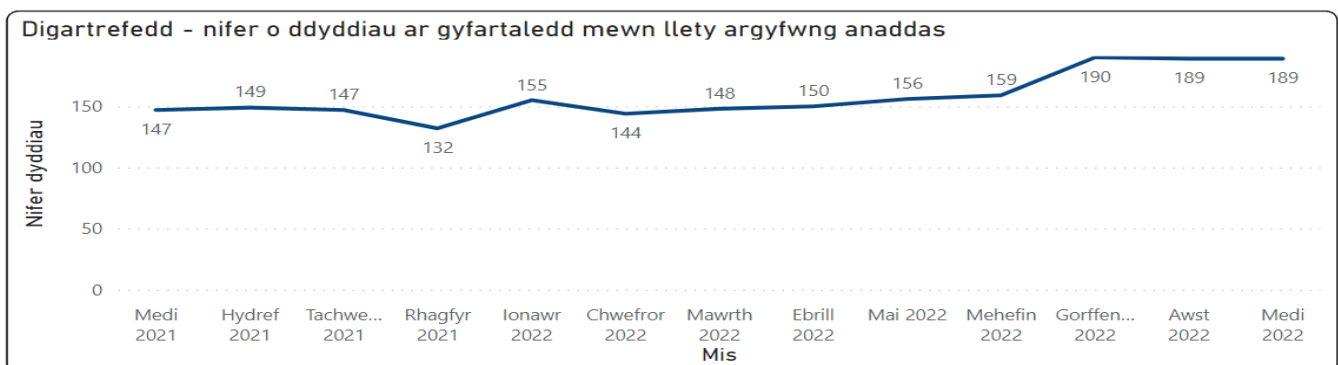
- 3.1 The percentage of change in **carbon emissions from Council buildings** has stabilised for months at around 10%. The Unit is using a new system called *Smartspace*s that enables them to better monitor energy use across our sites and in greater detail, and will strive to encourage a change in behaviour by trying to encourage people to be pro-active in switching off lights, equipment that is not being used, etc.

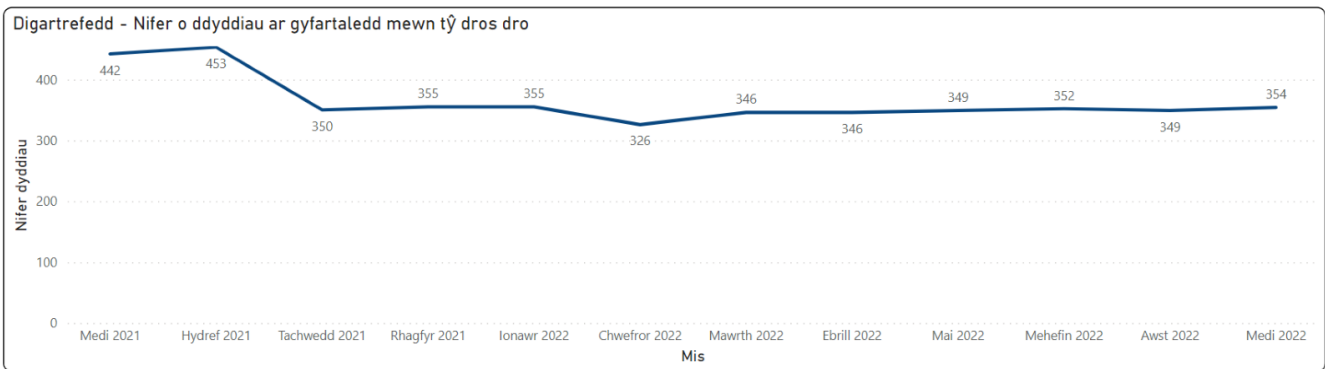


3.2 It is pleasing to note that 100% of the **Housing and Property Development Service's** projects are progressing in accordance with the agreed time-schedule. The Department has adapted how we show the data measure of this Service by showing the status of the projects as well as the percentage of projects that are progressing in accordance with the time-schedule. It is hoped that this gives a better overview and reflects the situation more accurately.



3.3 As seen above, increasing the opportunities local people have to live locally is one of the Department's priorities. One way to do 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, 173 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. In addition, £13,535,035 of Social Housing Grant has been earmarked for the 2023/24 Programme with over £10,000,000 already allocated for different schemes across the County.





3.4 The increase in **homelessness** I mentioned above is reflected in the Department's performance measures, with the average number of days in unsuitable emergency accommodation (e.g. bed and breakfast) although stabilising, continuing to be high - **189** days, and the average number of days in a temporary house (private houses that are leased by us) standing at **354** days. Although there is no easy or swift solution to this issue, the plans of the Housing Action Plan to develop 38 supported accommodation units to enable persons to move from emergency accommodation, together with schemes to encourage more landlords to let their property for the benefit of homeless persons and families are trying to get to grips with the situation. This is in addition to the plans we have to reduce our expenditure on temporary accommodation.

3.4 The main aim of the Housing Action Plan is to assist people to live in good quality, affordable homes that improve their quality of life and this is measured by calculating how many units have been developed or how many persons have received assistance to realise this aim. Currently this figure is **2720**, this derives from pro-active work to enable people to stay in their homes and continue to live independently, e.g. by making adaptations and installing ramps etc., and schemes that enable people to buy or rent houses, e.g. grants to first time buyers to renovate empty housing, buying houses on the private market, etc. It is anticipated that we will reach the target set for the end of the financial year.

4. FINANCIAL POSITION/SAVINGS

Following a recent review of the department's budgetary situation submitted to the cabinet on 24/01/2023, it was noted that there were implications of a change in legislation relating to Homelessness that entail significant financial pressures this year. Although an allocation of £1.5m from the Council's post-Covid arrangements fund was provided to assist the situation, a net overspend of £2.7 million is anticipated this year.

IEWS 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."*