

# Local Housing Strategy 2018 - 2023

## Key achievements

April 2023



**Sir Conwy, yr amgylchedd iawn i fod yn ddiogel,  
yn iach ac yn annibynnol**

**Conwy County, the right environment to be safe,  
healthy and independent**

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## 1 Introduction

This report sets out the key achievements of the 2018 – 2023 local housing strategy and includes data up to 31 March 2023.

The information within this document is correct at the time of publication.

## 2 Context analysis

Conwy's 2018 Local Housing Strategy vision is for *'People in Conwy have access to affordable, appropriate and good quality accommodation that enhances their quality of life'*, to achieve this there are 4 key objectives:

- Increase the supply of affordable housing
- Ensure housing support is available to those in need
- Improve the quality of the private sector
- Ensure people understand their housing options to enable them to make an informed decision

The social rented sector in Conwy (11.6%) is relatively small in comparison to the rest of Wales (16.4%), and offers one of the lowest social housing stocks per head of population. This lack of stock has resulted in many low income households relying on the private rented sector for accommodation in Conwy. Figures published in Conwy's 2018 Local Housing Strategy show 18% of households in Conwy rent privately, this figure is high in comparison to 14% across Wales.

During the first three years of the strategy there was on average 1110 applicants on the housing register, however following the Covid Pandemic the demand for affordable housing soared and on 01 April 2022 the number of applicants on the housing register increased to 1726. This figure on 01 April 2023 was 1967.

On average, 405 units of affordable housing are available to let as a result of property turnover and/or new build delivery. These figures demonstrate how demand far outstrips supply. As the gap between the supply and demand of affordable housing widens the need for temporary accommodation increases. The number of households living in (all forms) of temporary accommodation on 31 March 2023 was 319 including 113 children, of which 191 households were in bed and breakfast accommodation including 58 children.

An annual social housing grant (SHG) budget is available to support Registered Social Landlords (RSL) to develop and increase the supply of affordable housing in Conwy, in the first three years of the strategy this figure has varied from £6.6 million in 2018/19 to £2.8 million in 2020/21.

In June 2021, Julie James MS, Minister for Climate change, announced a new Welsh Government target to deliver 20,000 new low carbon social homes for rent, intermediate homes for rent and shared ownership homes during this Government. To support this, the Welsh Government allocated an additional £50 million to social housing budget in Wales, bringing the total allocation to £250 million. In Conwy this resulted in an allocation of £8.5 million SHG in 2021/22 and £11.5 m allocation in 2022/23. This level of funding is expected to continue. In addition, other grant funding has become available such as Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) Grant.

It is recognised however, that new social housing development is not enough to meet current and future demand. The private sector plays an important role in the housing market, enabling people and families to find a home that is right for them. During the last five years Welsh Government funding has been secured in Conwy to support private initiatives, led by the housing team, to improve the quality of the private sector and increase the supply of affordable housing, this includes unlocking the potential of empty properties.

In addition to increasing the supply of affordable housing, work has been ongoing to ensure the right support is available to those who need it. An annual Housing Support Grant (HSG) is allocated to each Local Authority in Wales by Welsh Government to commission support services that meets local need. In Conwy this figure has varied from £6.4 million in 2018/19 to £8.5 million in 2022/23. This level of funding is expected to continue.

The HSG is an early intervention grant programme to support activity, which prevents people from becoming homeless, stabilises their housing situation, or helps potentially homeless people to find and keep accommodation. The North Wales Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group was set up in September 2020, to provide a forum for collaborative working and oversight of HSG activities. The grant is a valuable resource in helping to achieve the Local Housing Strategy and Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) vision.

Conwy's RRTP was approved by Cabinet and Welsh Government in February 2023. The Plan sets out how Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC) will work towards achieving the Welsh Government's vision to making homelessness 'rare, brief and unrepeatable'.

Prevention of homelessness is the primary focus of the Plan and this includes working with key stakeholders to ensure people understand their housing options to enable them to make an informed decision. This work will build on what has been achieved during the last five years of the Local Housing Strategy.

### 3 Summary of key outputs 2018/19 – 2022/23

- Developed Conwy's interim Local Housing Market Assessment 2022 – 2023
- Developed Conwy's first Local Authority Prospectus 2021 – 2022
- Claimed £41,968,293 social housing grant (and other capital grants) to develop affordable housing
- Delivered 456 units of affordable housing via the RSL new build and Social Housing Grant programme
- Established the Council Owned Sites project group to accelerate the delivery of affordable housing using Council owned land
  - Brought forward 5 council owned land and/or assets to deliver 61 affordable housing units (*this figure is included in the total delivered units noted above*).
  - Developed an affordable housing development framework to support the work of the group
- Established the Housing Quality, Acquisition and Adaptation (HQAA) project group to accelerate the delivery of affordable housing by using existing Council buildings which are no longer in use, and/or open market acquisitions
- Established a regional rightsizing strategic group and developed a consistent approach to rightsizing activities and communication across north Wales
- Worked in partnership with key stakeholders to implement the recommendations set out in the Wales Audit Office (WAO) adaptation report, to improve the adaptation service in Conwy
- Closely monitored the supply and demand for specialist accommodation.
- Allocated 203 properties via the Specialist Housing Panel
- Developed an Empty Homes Strategy in 2018 and set up an Empty Homes Working Group to support the implementation of the annual action plan
- Secured £671,200 grant funding to develop empty homes initiatives to bring empty properties back into use as affordable housing
- Bought 162 empty properties back into use, 31 of which were brought back into use as affordable housing
- Took part in the Welsh Government Private Sector Leasing Scheme pathfinder pilot and as a result secured 7 affordable housing units in Conwy
- Following on from the pathfinder pilot set up the Leasing Scheme Wales initiative and secured an additional 8 affordable housing units
- Developed Conwy's Rapid Rehousing Plan
- Established the Housing and Homelessness Programme Board to support and monitor the implementation of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2023
- Published Conwy's Needs Assessment in February 2022
- Developed Conwy's Housing Support Programme Strategy 2022
- Claimed £36,766,718 Welsh Government Housing Support Grant to commission housing related support services that meet local needs
- Provided housing support to 3542 households
- Took part in the North Wales Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group, set up in September 2020, to provide a forum for collaborative working and oversight of Housing Support Grant activities
- Published Conwy's Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment in February 2022
- Improved the availability and accessibility of information for landlords, private sector tenants, empty home owners and people at risk of homelessness
- Issued the following loans:
  - 14 Home Improvement Loan (total allocation £237,722)
  - 2 Town Centre Loans (total allocation £88,000)
  - 24 Houses Into Homes Loan (total allocation £857,668)
- Increased the capacity within the empty homes team by 1.5 officers and implemented service improvements
- Developed an Empty Homes Enforcement Action Plan
- Used private sector tenant engagement to support service improvements

### 4 Increasing the supply of affordable housing

This section of the report sets out what has been done to increase the supply of affordable housing in Conwy.

To achieve the Local Housing Strategy (LHS) vision, it is important the right homes are delivered in the right places and at the right time. To understand what type of affordable housing is needed and where, it is important to have an up-to-date Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) in place. In February 2022, Conwy's interim LHMA was approved. The interim assessment was prepared in line with the Welsh Government guidance 'Local Housing Market Assessment Guide (2006)' and supplementary guidance 'Getting started with your Local Housing Market Assessment (2014)'.

The Welsh Government issued new guidance in April 2022 and a consistent timetable for all local authorities in Wales to complete their LHMA, in line with the recommendation set out in the independent review of affordable housing supply in Wales 2019. Conwy's LHMA will be updated accordingly.

In addition to the LHMA, Conwy published the first Local Authority Prospectus, in line with Welsh Government guidance, in August 2021. The Prospectus provides housing associations and other stakeholders with the information they need to make informed decisions about where to search for land and property to deliver new affordable housing. The Prospectus is updated and published bi-annually.

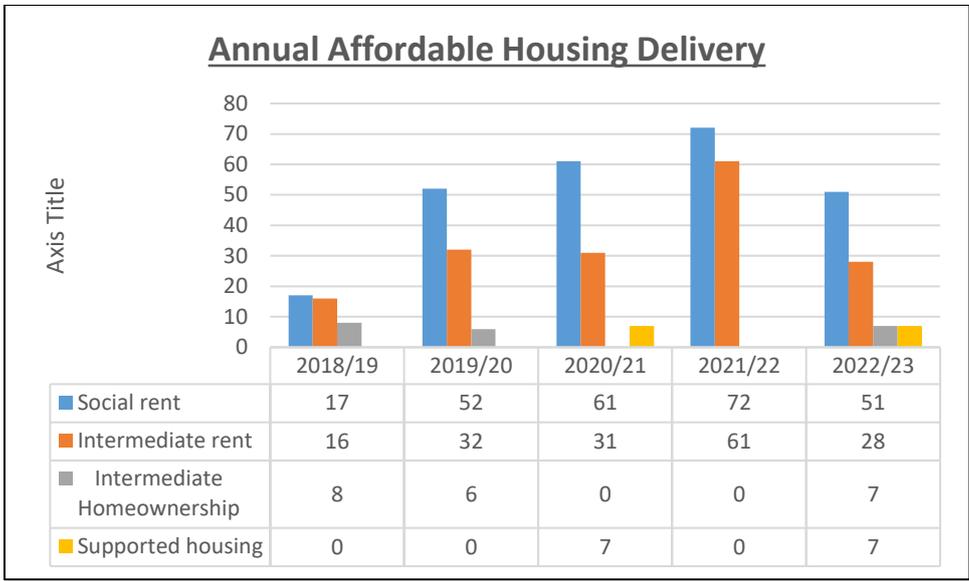
#### 4.1 Social Housing Grant Programme

Welsh Government sets an annual social housing grant (SHG) budget for each local authority in Wales, the table below shows Conwy's allocation during 2018/19 – 2022/23, and other grants used during the period to develop affordable housing.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
<b>Social Housing Grant (SHG)</b>	£5,490,261	£4,618,847	£2,897,964	£8,595,462	£11,302,103
<b>Housing Finance Grant II</b>	£1,202,746	£1,199,008	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Recycled Capital Grant</b>	£246,970	£306,627	£0	£82,430	£312,085
<b>Innovative Housing Programme</b>	£632,271	£621,244	£1,895,591	n/a	n/a
<b>Commuted sum</b>	£0	£0	£80,000	£0	£0
<b>Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP)</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	£2,484,684

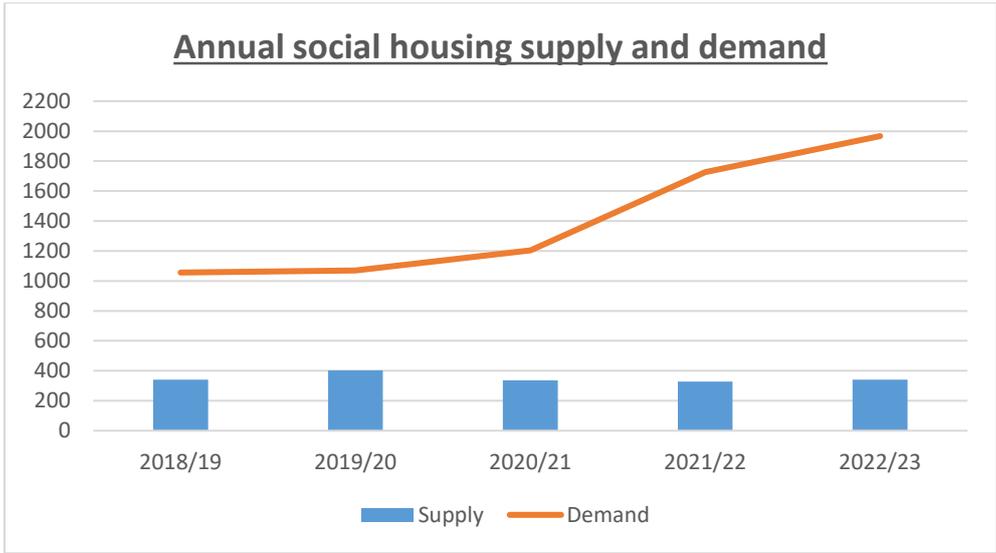
*\*note TACP includes the total grant awarded however, was not fully drawn down in 2022/23*

The affordable housing delivered via the RSL new build and social housing grant programme during 2018/19 – 2022/23 is set out in the graph below:



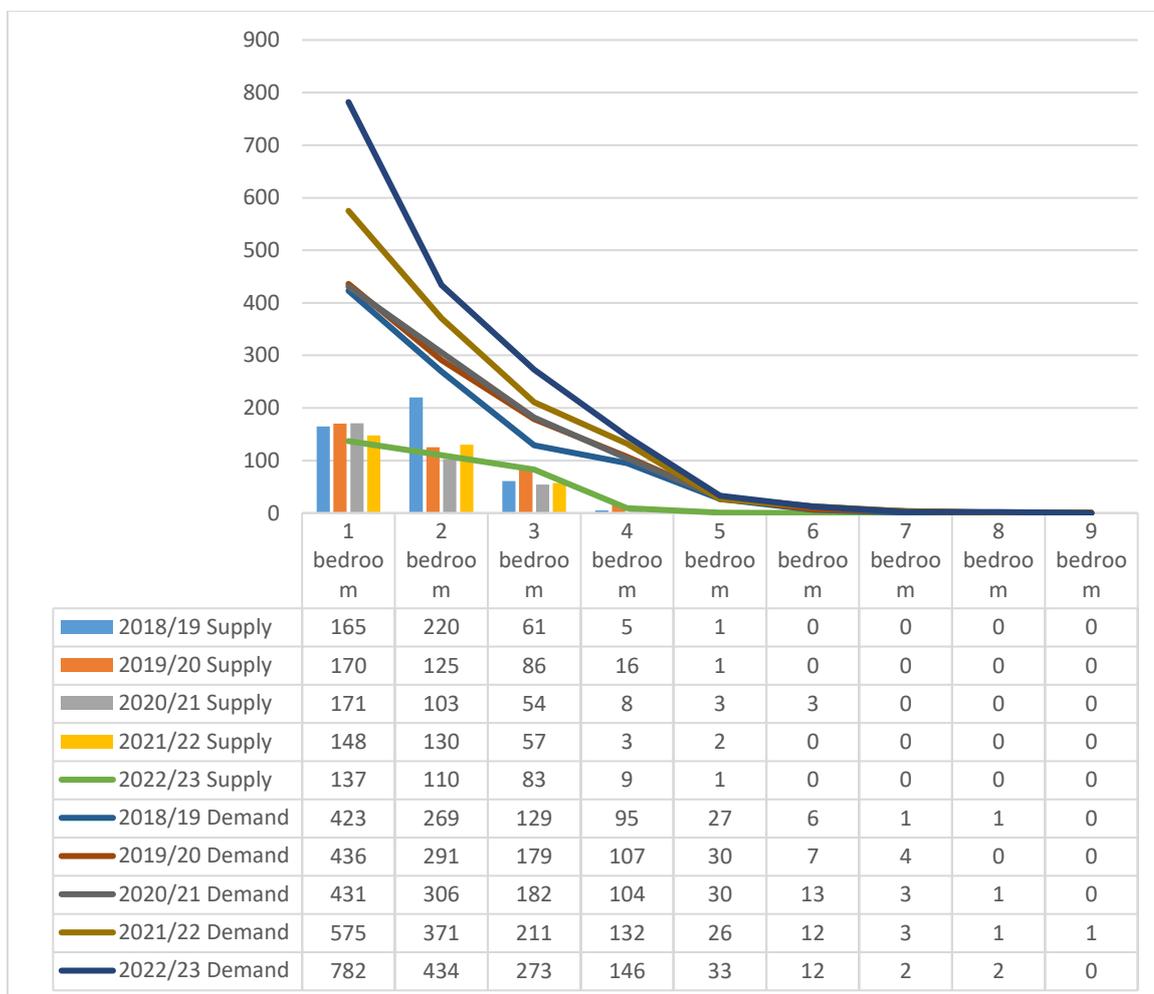
The graph shows the delivery of affordable housing increased significantly in year 4 (133 units) compared to year 1 (41 units), despite the drop in SHG in 2020/21.

The graph below shows the annual supply (*new build delivery via the social housing grant programme and turnover of existing stock*) and demand (*social housing register date at 01 April each year*):



Although the new housing delivery has increased, the demand for affordable housing has soared. As a result the gap between supply and demand is widening.

The graph below shows the annual supply (*new build delivery via the SHG programme and turnover of existing stock*) and demand (*social housing register at 01 April each year*) broken down into bedroom sizes:



The graph shows the greatest shortage of accommodation is one bedroom and larger (4+ bedroom) properties. It is a strategic priority to increase the supply of this type of accommodation, and has been included within the local authority housing prospectus.

#### 4.2 Council assets

To build on the work of the social housing development programme and increase the supply of affordable housing at pace, two projects groups have been set up, these include the 'Council Owned Sites' project and 'Housing Quality, Acquisition and Adaptation' project. Both groups sit under the Housing and Homelessness Programme Board (more detail about this programme is provided in section 5).

The aim of the Council Owned Sites project is to identify and bring forward opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing by using Council owned land. To support this work an affordable housing framework has been established, which allows CCBC to work with an RSL development partner by 'direct award' or by holding mini competitions for sites.

The aim of the Housing Quality, Acquisition and Adaptation (HQAA) project is to identify and bring forward opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing by using existing Council buildings which are no longer in use, and/or open market acquisitions. This group is also looking for temporary accommodation opportunities, to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

Each group is made up of officers who play a key role in bringing forward Council owned assets, which will help to streamline the process, avoid duplication of work and minimise delays. The groups were established in April 2023 and are currently working on a list of Council owned assets which have been identified as potential opportunities for affordable housing.

#### 4.3 Making best use of existing social housing stock

This section describes initiatives that have been developed to make best use of existing social housing stock to meet housing need.

## **Rightsizing**

Rightsizing is the term used when a tenant moves to a property that meets their current housing needs.

In 2021 a regional rightsizing strategic group was set up to develop a consistent approach to rightsizing activities and communication across north Wales. The role of the group is to implement the recommendations set out in the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) Tyfi Tai report 'Right place, right home, right size?', a report commissioned by the group in late 2020, to understand tenant and officer's perceptions on rightsizing and what work was currently being done to encourage and promote rightsizing.

The following has been achieved to date:

- Agreed rightsizing principles
- Developed a 12 month action plan
- Set-up a tenant group to support the implementation of the action plan
- Quarterly monitoring of rightsizing data and rightsizing activities

## **Housing adaptations**

### **- Strategic Adaptations Group**

A Strategic Adaptations Group was set up in 2020 to implement the recommendations set out in the Wales Audit Office (WAO) adaptation report, to improve the adaptation service in Conwy. There were 4 key areas:

1. Streamline application and referrals process
2. Improve communication
3. Make best use of existing stock
4. Improved customer satisfaction and delivery

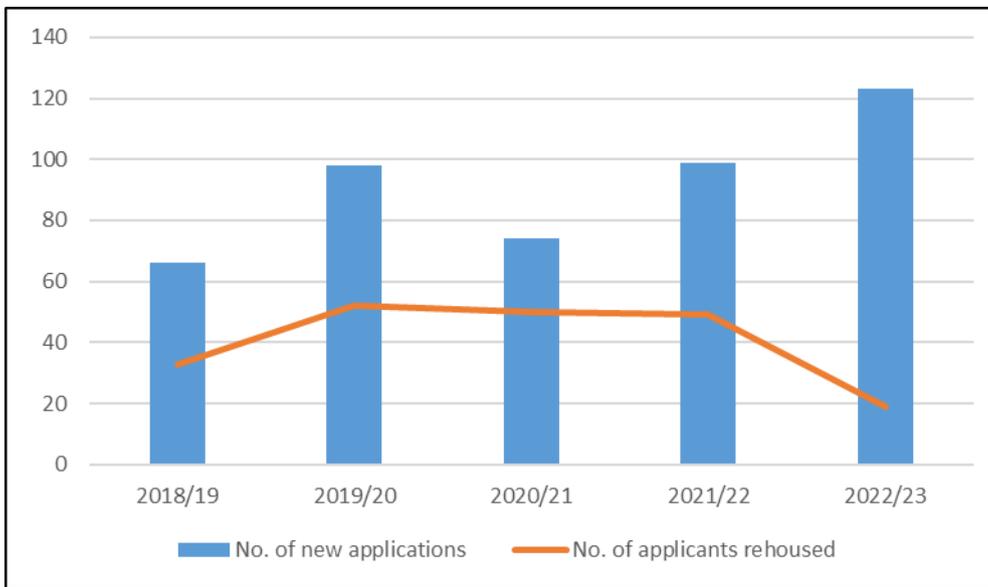
The following has been achieved:

- Developed a single comprehensive application form covering all organisations
- Developed Conwy Adaptations service standards  
[Customer service standards \(conwy.gov.uk\)](https://www.conwy.gov.uk/customer-service-standards)
- Reviewed the existing customer questionnaire
- Monitor the supply and demand for adapted social housing

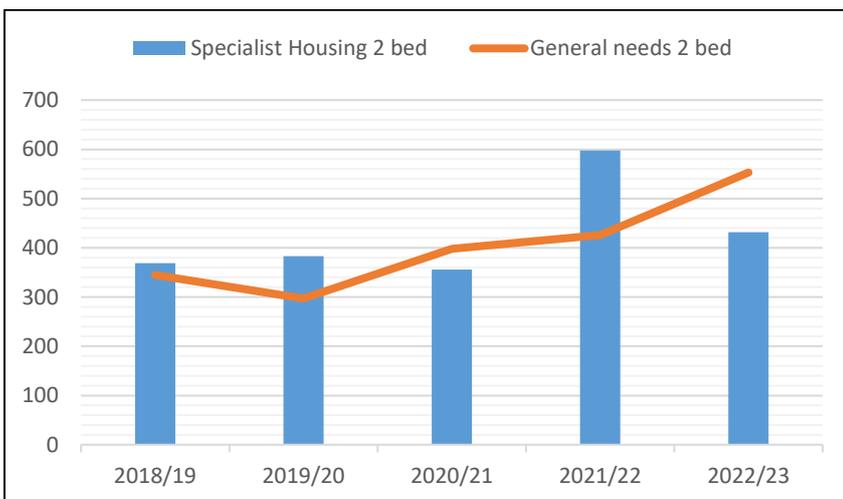
### **- Specialist Housing Panel**

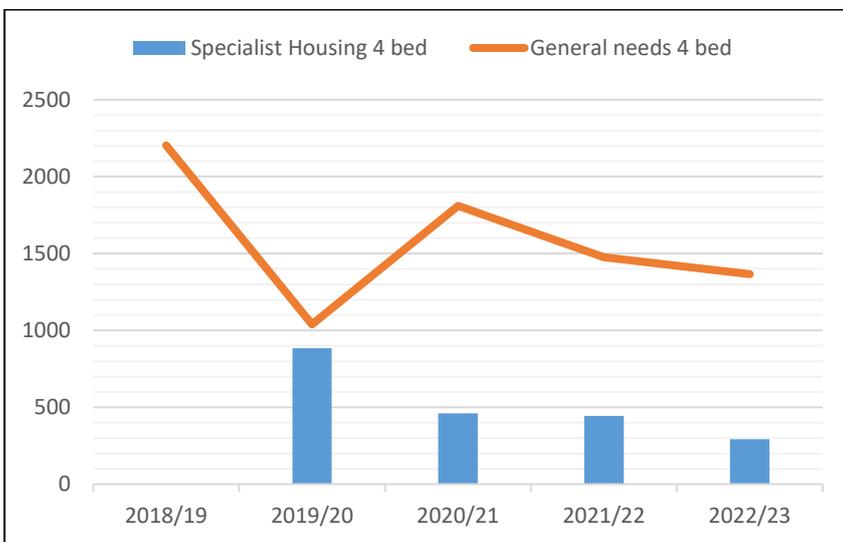
The Specialist Housing Panel consider social housing applicants in band one whose needs cannot be met from the available stock. The role of the panel is to explore options to increase the supply of adapted properties to meet the needs of applicants on the housing waiting list. This includes keeping an up-to-date record of the supply and demand.

The graph below shows the supply and demand for social housing adapted properties during 2018/19 – 2022/23:



The graphs below show the average wait time for social housing adapted properties compared to a general needs property during 2018/19 – 2022/23:





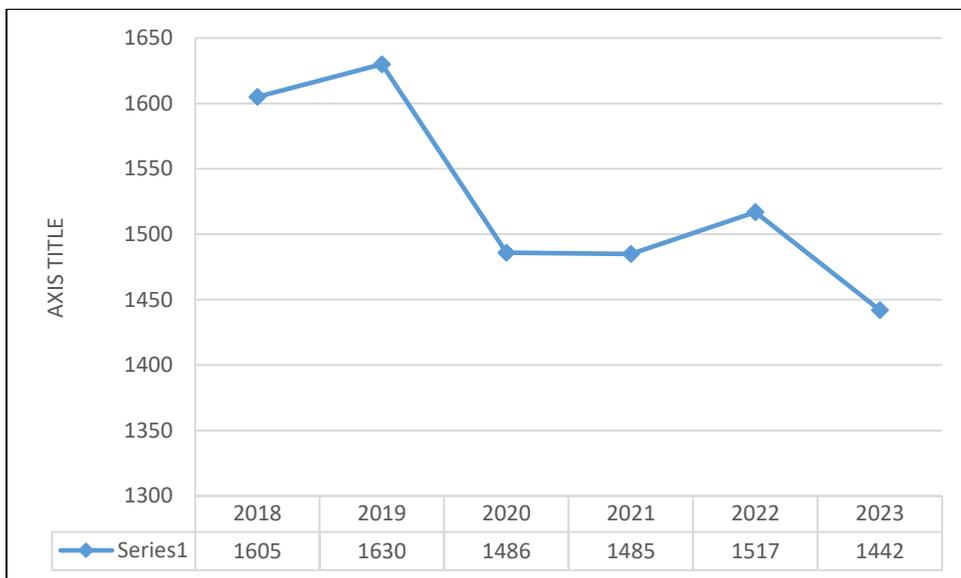
The graphs show that in the last 2 years applicants in need of 1, 2 and 3 bed ground floor/ bungalow accommodation are waiting longer than those in need of general needs accommodation. It is a strategic priority for CCBC to increase the supply of this type of accommodation and has been included within local authority housing prospectus.

#### 4.5 Empty properties

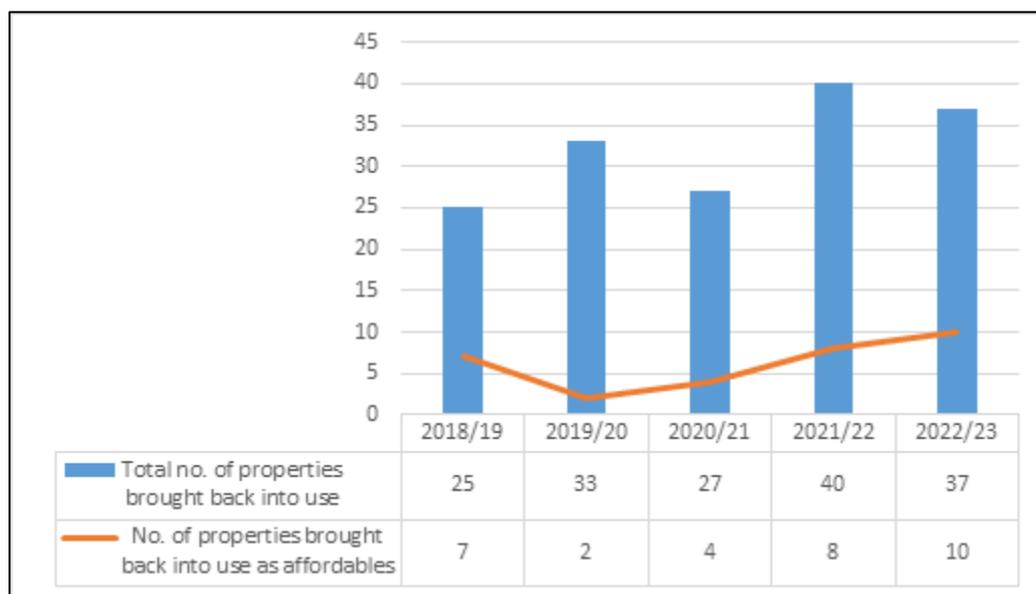
CCBC provide an empty homes service, this service offers advice and support to empty home owners to bring their property back into use. There are currently 1442 properties in Conwy that have been empty for 6 months or more and on average 32 empty properties are brought back into use each year as a result of intervention by the local authority, this equates to 2.2%.

National Assembly for Wales Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee published a report in October 2019 detailing how Welsh Government and Local Authorities can improve the empty homes service in Wales. One of the recommendation was to have a local empty homes strategy and action plan in place. CCBC developed an empty homes strategy and action plan in 2018 and set up a working group made up of key stakeholders to support the implementation.

This section describes how the empty property service has helped to increase the supply of affordable housing, more information on the empty homes service can be found in section 6.2. The graph below shows the number of empty properties at 01 April each year from 2018 to 2023:



The graph below shows the number of empty properties brought back into use during 2018/19 and 2022/23 as a result of intervention by the local authority:



The chart below describes the relevant interventions:

Intervention	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Leased to Local Authority	1	0	0	3	7
Houses into Homes Loan	3	0	8	6	4
Issued VAT letter	1	5	0	6	6
First time buyer grant	0	0	3	2	2
Purchased via Homebuy scheme	1	0	0	0	0
Purchased by RSL	5	6	5	2	1
Home Improvement Loan	4	1	0	0	1
Landlord Grant	0	0	0	1	0
Information/advice given	10	21	10	17	16
Town Centre Loan	0	0	0	2	0
Enforcement Action	0	0	1	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>37</b>

The funding secured to bring empty properties back into use as affordable housing during 2018/19 – 2022/23 includes the following:

Funding	Budget	Limitations	Committed funding
National Park commuted sum	£100,000	This funded was time limited and was available between 2020/21 and 2022/23 only	Budget fully allocated within the time frame
Welsh Government Homeless Phase 2	£392,740	This funded was time limited and was available between 2020/21 and 2022/23 only	£72,700.50 allocated within the time frame
Empty Homes budget (defaulted Houses into Home loan interest)	£50,000	This funding was flexible and not time limited	Budget fully allocated
Place Making	£248,500	This funded was time limited and is available between 2020/21 and 2023/24 only	£20,000 allocated to date. £80,000 committed
Committed sums	£200,000	This funding was flexible and not time limited	Funding not allocated

There have been a number of barriers to spending the above funding, which include the following:

- The availability and willingness of contractors to provide a quote for the work to support the empty property owner to complete a grant application
- The availability of contractors to complete the work
- The price of materials
- Welsh Government timeframe – some properties were being purchased and needed to go through a sale before the grant could be committed, other properties required planning permission to change the use of the building (especially in town centres)
- The Empty Homes team capacity

#### 4.6 Private sector

##### New build

To ensure affordable housing is delivered as part of all new residential private developments Conwy's Affordable Housing Officer is consulted on all planning applications. The Officer will share housing need information to ensure developments meet local housing needs and create mixed, sustainable communities.

##### Existing stock

Rent Smart Wales reports that Conwy County has approximately 9,750 registered private rented sector (PRS) properties. This accounts for 16.9% of dwellings and accommodates 18.2% of households. The private rented sector houses a diverse range of households, with a wide range of needs. The PRS can provide flexibility for people with changing accommodation needs or who need to move house frequently for work reasons etc. However, the sector has a lower level of statutory security of tenure in comparison to social housing, and there can be significant up-front costs such as deposits and rent in advance and landlord imposed eligibility criteria, which can be problematic for low income or vulnerable households.

This section describes initiatives that have been developed to make best use of existing private sector housing stock to meet housing need.

- **Conwy leasing scheme**

Conwy Leasing Scheme offers property owners wishing to rent their properties a guaranteed monthly rent, a housing management and day to day maintenance service, in return for a 3 year lease of their property at Local Housing Allowance rent levels to accommodate households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

There are currently 126 properties registered with the Conwy Leasing Scheme.

#### - **Leasing Scheme Wales**

Leasing Scheme Wales (LSW) is a new initiative set-up by the Welsh Government in April 2022 and builds on the success of the Wales Government '*Private Sector Leasing Scheme Pathfinder*' pilot launched in August 2020. The scheme offers property owners access to a grant in order to undertake works to meet the scheme's property standards, a guaranteed monthly rent and a housing management and day to day maintenance service. In return the property is leased by the Council for between 5 and 20 years and is let at Local Housing Allowance rent levels to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness

Conwy, was one of three authorities that took part in the pathfinder pilot, having successfully bid for the opportunity. Conwy's participation in the scheme was in partnership with Denbighshire Council, however Conwy was the lead authority and held the head lease for each property. Property acquisitions to the scheme ended in March 2022, with a total of 16 properties being leased by Conwy for a 5 year period; 9 in Conwy and 7 in Denbighshire. These properties are all occupied by households who were owed homelessness duties, with support being available to them as required throughout the period of their tenancy. As the pilot ended and all local authorities were encouraged to individually take part in LSW, on 1 April 2023 the head leases for the 7 properties in Denbighshire taken on as part of the pathfinder pilot, were transferred to Denbighshire Council.

Since the launch of LSW in April 2022 Conwy has taken on 8 properties; 3 are leased for a 5 year period and 5 for 15 years. All 8 properties joining the scheme in 2022/23 were long term empty properties. For 23/24 the acquisitions target is 9 properties, and the scheme will continue to target long term empty properties in order to bring them back in to use as affordable accommodation. The target is to acquire 92 properties within 5 years.

All properties leased under both schemes (pathfinder pilot and LSW) are managed by Cartrefi Conwy on behalf of CCBC.

## **5 Ensure housing support is available to those in need.**

Conwy Housing Solutions is CCBC's shared service for housing options and homelessness service, which is delivered in partnership with Cartrefi Conwy. The partnership was formed in July 2014 and delivers key services to meet homelessness statutory duties.

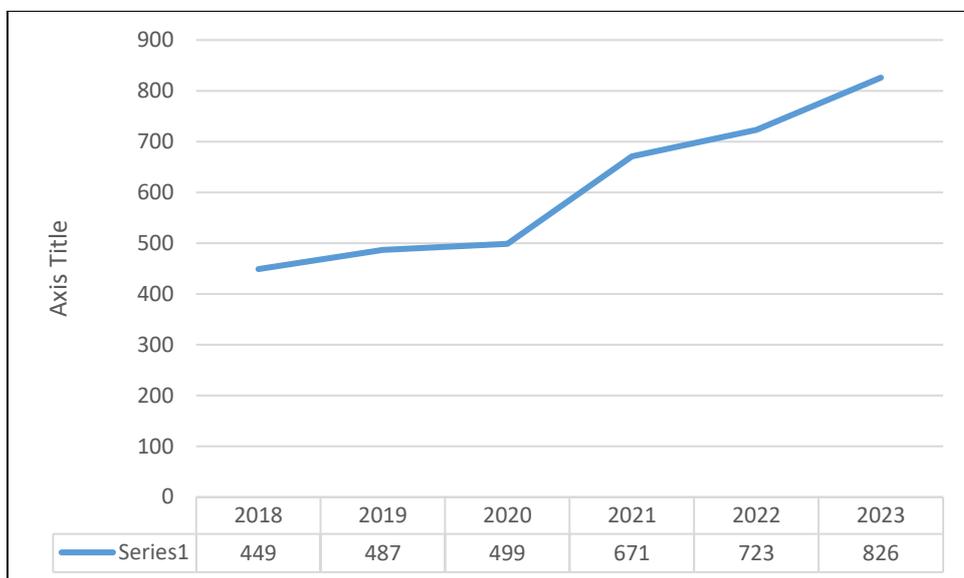
The following statistics provide a picture of what homelessness looks like for Conwy County Borough Council for the period 2018/19 – 2022/23:

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
<b>Number of service requests (i.e. initial contact – possibly threatened with or homeless)</b>	1169	1350	1272	1233	1470
<b>Number of Section 62 homelessness assessments</b>	868	997	1018	932	1033
<b>Total number of outcomes</b>	1089 (615)	1149 (657)	1002 (624)	1061 (679)	1089 (685)
<b>Section 66 – threatened with homelessness</b>	312 (114)	327 (126)	240 (111)	237 (109)	224 (128)
<b>Section 73 – homeless, help to secure accommodation</b>	534 (354)	549 (381)	525 (381)	503 (366)	497 (330)
<b>Section 75 – full housing duty</b>	114 (54)	138 (48)	132 (78)	198 (131)	240 (139)

*\*Note, the figures in brackets are single person households*

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about fundamental change to homelessness services in Wales. On the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Minister for Local Government and Housing Julie James issued a statement setting out expectations in terms of the homelessness and rough sleeping response to the Covid 19 pandemic. The Code of Guidance was amended to ensure that those who were, or are at risk of, sleeping rough had the support and accommodation available to protect themselves. In October 2022 the Homelessness (Priority Need and Intentionality) (Wales) Regulations 2022 came into force. The legislation has amended section 70 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to add an 11<sup>th</sup> category of a person to be found in Priority Need for assistance and eligible for the provision of temporary accommodation to include “a person who is street homeless”.

This has placed unprecedented pressures on our statutory services with 826 cases still open at 31 March 2023. For comparison, the chart below shows the number cases open at 31 March each year between 2018 and 2022:



The figures below show the number of households placed in emergency accommodation on 31 March each year during 2018/19 – 2022/23:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>All forms of temporary accommodation on 31 March each year</b>	144, of which 78 were children	144, of which 75 were children	258, of which 72 were children	279, of which 89 were children	319, of which 113 were children
<b>Emergency bed and breakfast accommodation on 31 March each year</b>	39, of which 9 were children	36, of which 9 were children	135, of which 12 were children	128, of which 19 were children	191, of which 58 were children

On the 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022, Conwy's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) was approved. The Plan sets out how CCBC will work towards achieving the Welsh Government's vision to making homelessness 'rare, brief and unrepeatable'.

Prevention of homelessness is the primary focus of the Plan. Where prevention has not worked the aim is to provide settled accommodation as quickly as possible and ensure the correct support is in place (where necessary) to ensure homelessness is unrepeatable.

A Housing and Homelessness Board was established in April 2023, the aim of the Board is to support and monitor the implementation of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan. It provides the framework to strengthen partnership working arrangements and ensure there is a corporate approach to homelessness prevention activities, as homelessness cannot be resolved by housing services alone.

Each year Conwy receives Welsh Government Housing Support Grant to commission housing related support services that meet local needs. This allocation has varied in Conwy from £6.4 million in 2018/19 to £8.5 million in 2022/23. CCBC also supplements this budget in the region of £1.1million of core funding each year.

Housing Support Grant is an early intervention grant programme to support activity, which prevents people from becoming homeless, stabilises their housing situation, or helps potentially homeless people to find and keep accommodation. The North Wales Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group was set up in September 2020, to provide a forum for collaborative working and oversight of HSG activities. The grant is

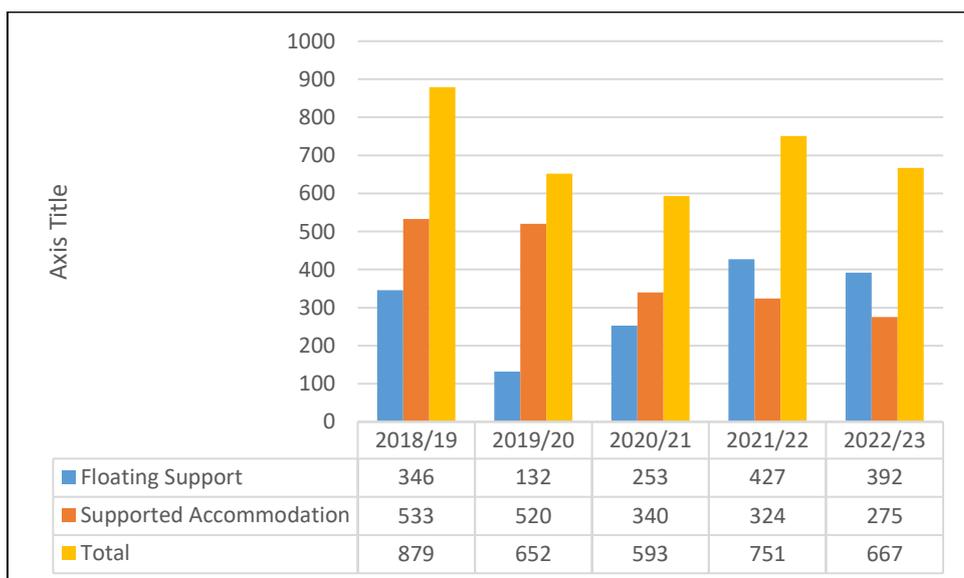
a valuable resource in helping to achieve the Local Housing Strategy, Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and Housing Support Programme Strategy vision.

The Housing Support Programme Strategy was approved in April 2023. The aim of the Strategy is to ensure housing support is available to those in need and sets out the strategic direction for housing related support and homeless prevention services. A comprehensive Needs Assessment was undertaken to inform the strategic priorities set out in the Strategy, the following priorities have been identified over the next 5 years:

- Move towards a Rapid Rehousing approach in the delivery of homeless prevention services
- Strengthen our partnership working to ensure that people’s support needs are met, and that complex/higher level needs are addressed via the provision of multi-agency support
- Provide additional services for people fleeing domestic abuse
- End Youth Homelessness

Each of the strategic priorities is accompanied with a number of objectives which will be reviewed at the Strategy’s mid-point, in line with the HSG Guidance. The Housing Support Programme Strategy vision and priorities are aligned with the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.

Anyone accessing the service in need of housing related support services are referred to Conwy’s Single Pathway. The purpose of this referral system is to make it easier for service users and providers to refer to projects or services and also to ensure that supported accommodation voids are kept to a minimum. The figures below show how many people were referred for support for the period 2018/19 – 2022/23:



## 5.1 Gypsy and Traveller

Opinion Research Services (ORS) were appointed by CCBC as independent consultants in January 2020 to complete a robust and up-to-date assessment of accommodation need for Gypsies and Travellers residing and resorting in Conwy County Borough for the new Replacement Local Development Plan (RLDP) period to 2033. However, due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 and subsequent lockdown and other restrictions that were put in place, work to complete the new Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) did not start until 2021.

The study provides an evidence base to enable the Council to comply with their requirements towards Gypsies and Travellers under Part 3 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, and to support the Conwy County Borough Replacement Local Development Plan (2018-33). The Act requires Local Authorities to undertake a GTAA at least every 5 years, although Local Authorities have flexibility to undertake GTAAs more frequently if a material change in the level of need in the area has been identified. The Council published a GTAA in 2017. Welsh Government wrote to all Local Planning Authorities in September 2019 to confirm

those undertaking an LDP Review must ensure the GTAA establishes an evidence base for Gypsy and Traveller needs across the entire plan period.

The February 2022 GTAA provides an assessment of need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in Conwy County Borough to fulfil these requirements, updating the previous GTAA published in 2017.

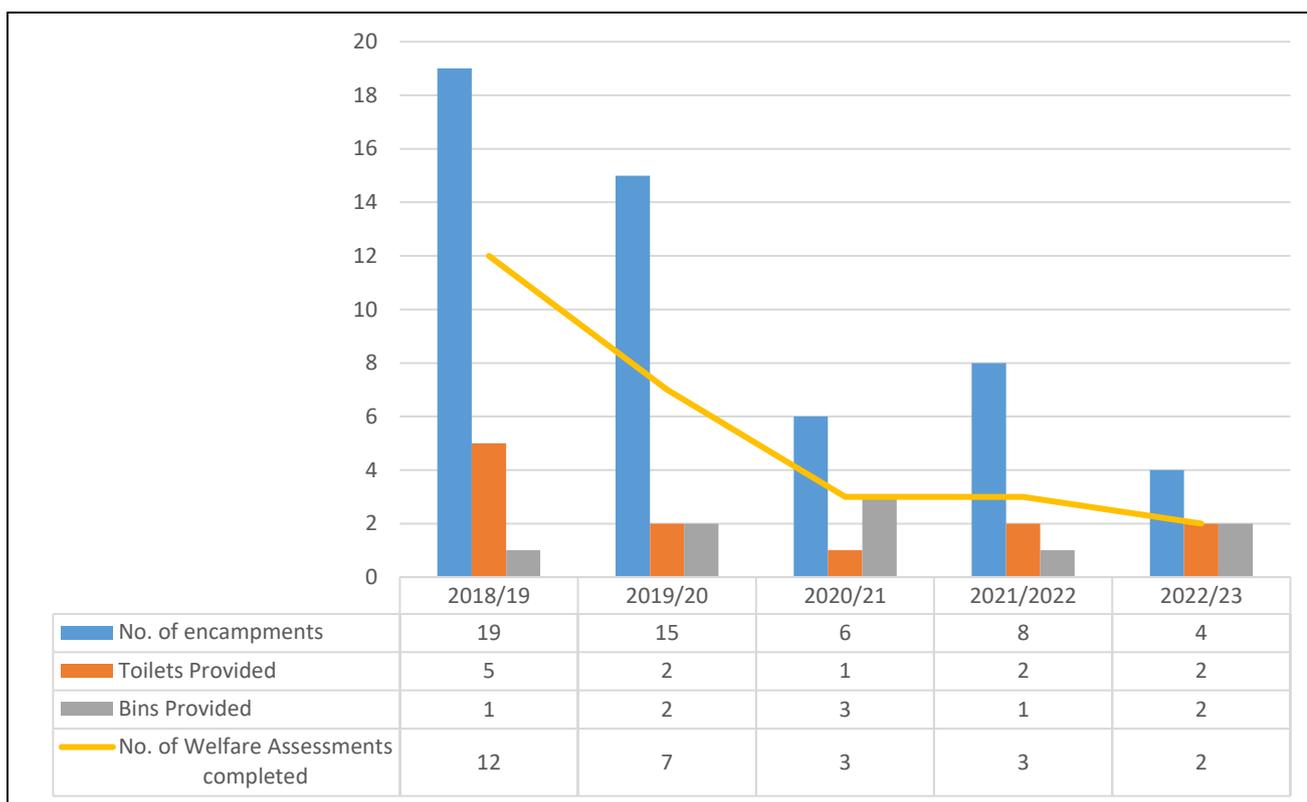
The outcome of the study shows the following need:

- The overall estimated provision that is needed for Gypsy and Travellers up to 2033 is for 1 residential pitch.
- The overall estimated provision that is needed for travelling show people up to 2033 is for 8 plots.

Despite the previous GTAA identifying a need for transit pitches in Conwy County Borough, more recent evidence suggests that this is no longer the case and that alternative approaches should be considered. As such it is recommended that there is not a need at this time for the Council to provide a transit site in Conwy County Borough due to the low numbers of unauthorised encampments, and the short-term transient nature of these encampments.

It is recommended that the Council should continue to monitor the number of unauthorised encampments and consider the use of short-term toleration (including negotiated stopping arrangements) to deal with short-term transient stops. This management-based approach should also include consideration about whether to provide toilets, water and refuse facilities.

The Housing Strategy team are the single point of access for unauthorised encampments, the graph below shows the number of encampments and welfare assessments carried out for period 2018/19 – 2022/23:



*\*Note, the Housing Strategy team will only complete a welfare assessment for encampments on Council owned sites.*

## 6 Improve the quality of the private sector

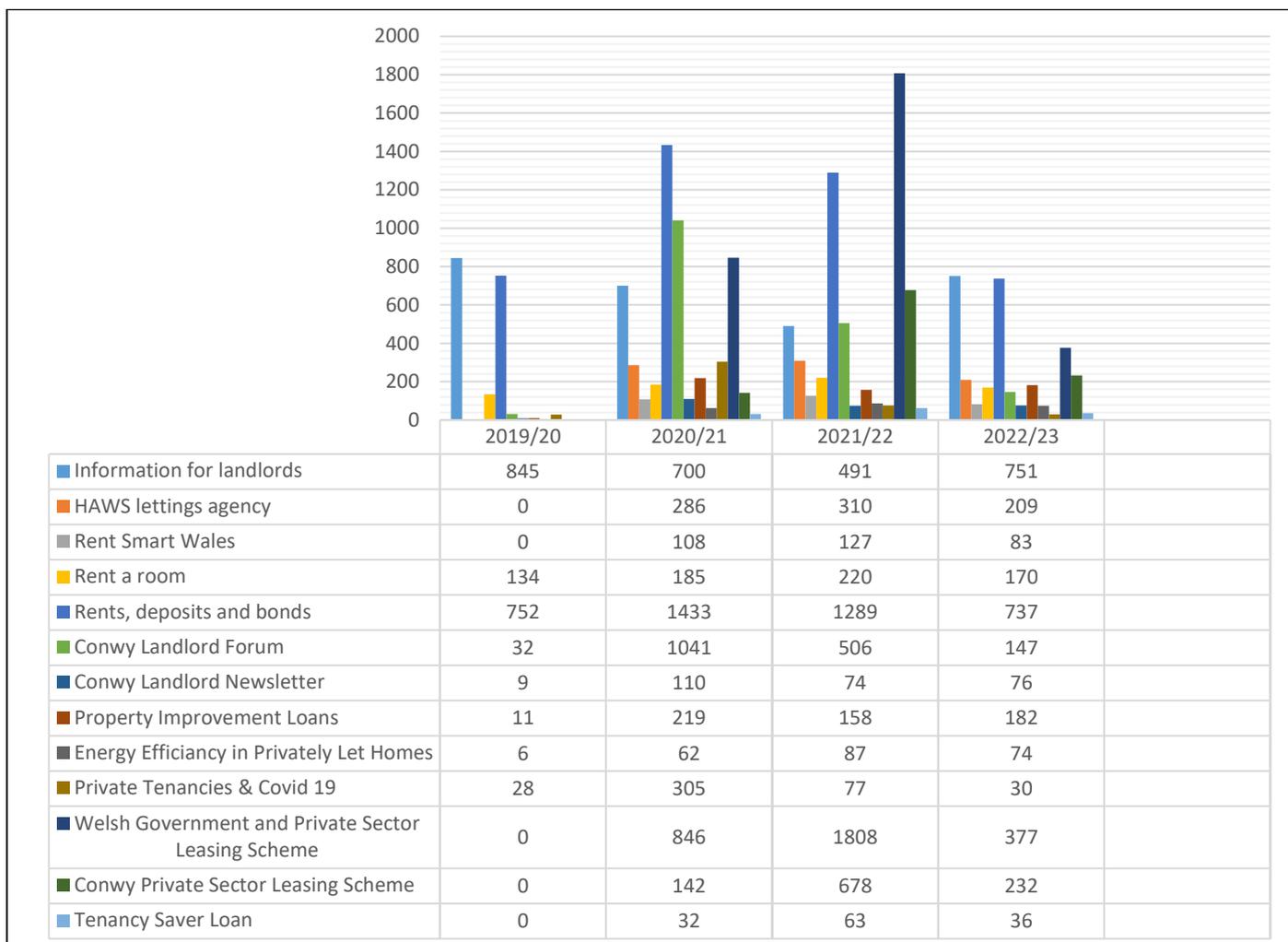
Since 2015 private rented sector property landlords must be registered with Rent Smart Wales, and the person responsible for day to day management of tenancies must have undertaken training in basic tenancy management. Property standards are enforced through Local Authority Housing Enforcement teams and accommodation types that have historically presented the greatest challenges to manage

standards, larger and converted Houses in Multiple Occupation, are subject to mandatory and additional licensing regimes.

## 6.1 Sharing information

The availability and accessibility of information for landlords has been reviewed. The landlord webpages on the Council website have been updated and there are regular social media posts directing customers to the website.

The chart below shows the number of hits the landlord page has had during 2019/20 and 2022/23:



**Note: the website hits were not recorded in 2018/19**

In addition, a landlord forum is held 3 times a year in partnership with the National Residential Landlord Association. During 2020 and 2021, these forums were held online. On average 50 landlords attend each quarter, feedback from the forum show high levels of satisfaction from attendees.

Unfortunately, due to staff capacity the landlord forum was not held during 2022/23.

## 6.2 Funding opportunities

This section describes funding opportunities available to improve the quality of private sector housing stock.

- **Home Improvement Loan**

A Home Improvement Loan is an interest free loan offered by the Council, for home owners, private landlords, charities or developers who wish to make improvements to their property to make it warm, safe and secure.

A total of 14 Home Improvement loans were issued during 2018/19 – 2022/23, the value of these loans was £237,722.

**- Town Centre loans.**

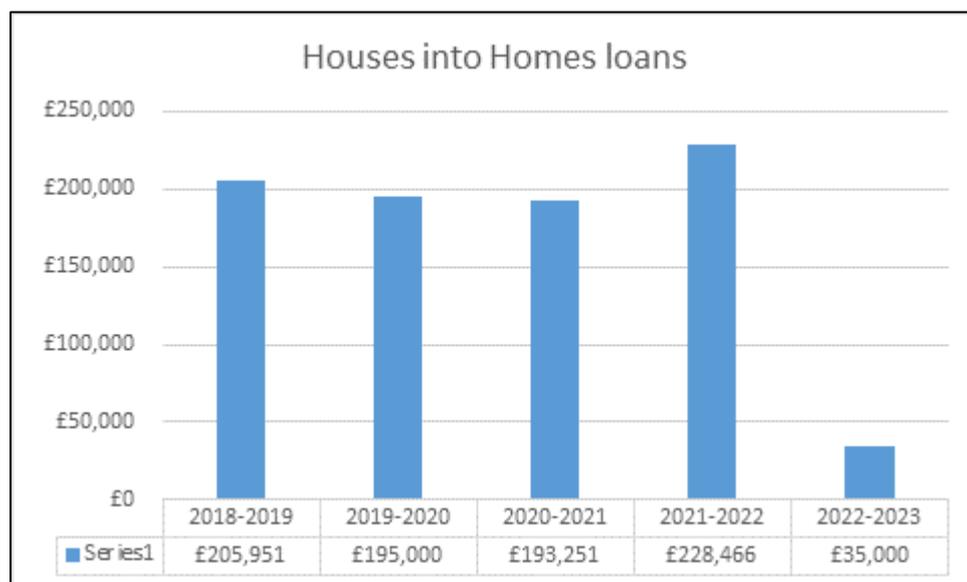
A Town Centre loan is an interest free loan which aims to reduce the number of long-term vacant, underutilised and/or redundant commercial sites and premises in town centres and support the economic recovery of town centres. The loan can be used to improve and repurpose properties for continued ownership, to sell, to rent or bring a vacant site back into use. Under the scheme, a maximum loan of £100,000 per applicant will be considered, and is repayable within 3-5 years.

A total of 2 Town Centre loans were issued during 2018/19 – 2022/23, the total value of these loans was £88,000.

**- Houses into Homes**

A Houses into Homes loan is available to all empty home owners, it is an interest free loan to support owners to bring long term empty dwellings which require upgrading back into use, or to fund the conversion of non-residential properties into residential accommodation. Under the scheme, a maximum of £35,000 per unit of accommodation to be improved or created can be considered (up to a maximum of £150,000 per applicant). Owners have a choice either to sell the property on completion of the works (and repay the loan within 2 years or on sale of the property, whichever happens sooner) or to rent the property (and repay the loan within 5 years).

A total of 24 Houses into Homes loans were issued during 2018/19 – 2022/23, on average this was 5 per year.

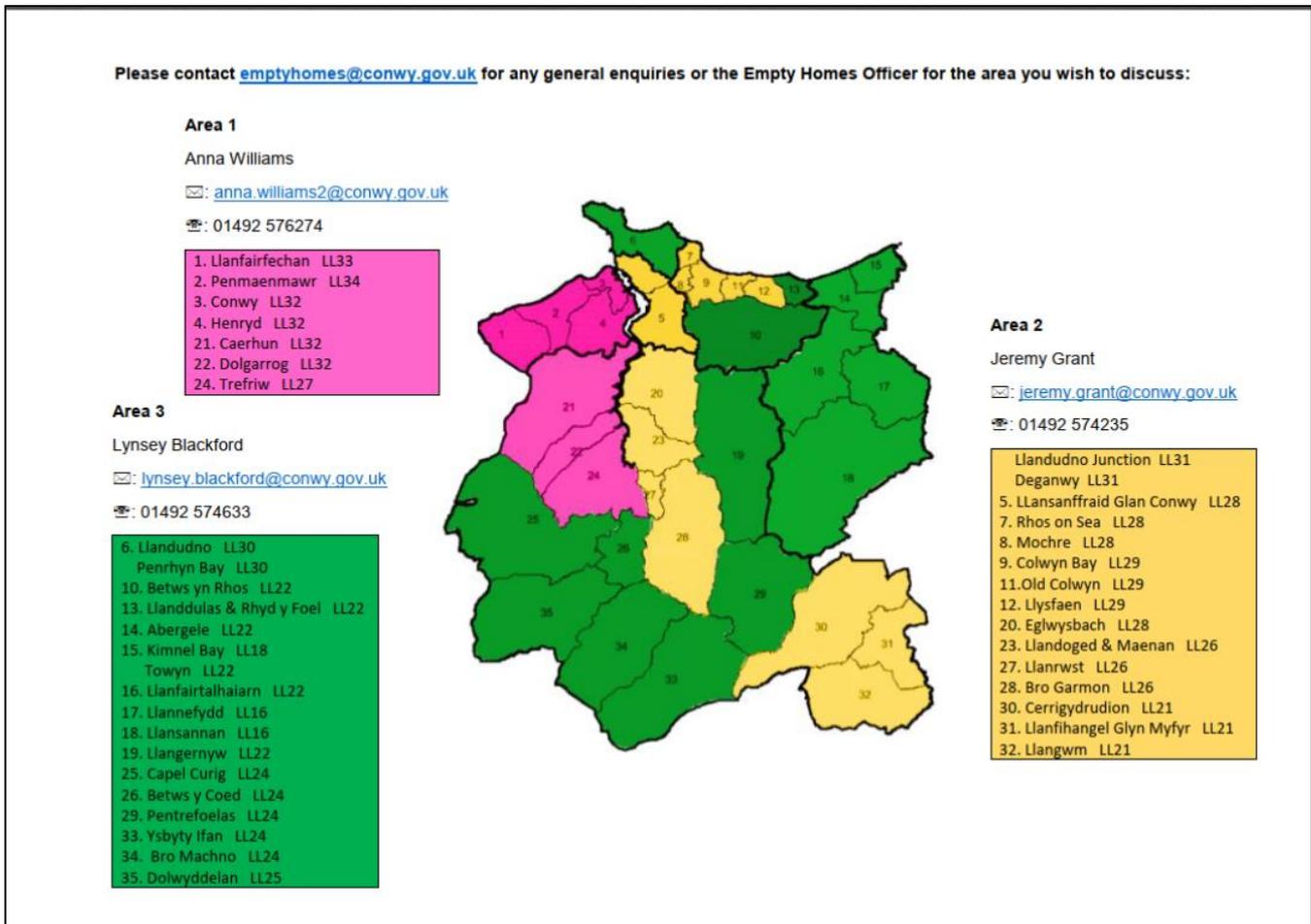


**6.3 Empty properties**

A background to the empty homes service is provided in section 3.5, this section looks at service improvements achieved during 2018 to date, and how properties are brought back into use as improved private sector accommodation.

**Service improvements**

In 2021/22, the capacity within the Empty Homes service increased by 1.5 Officers. The additional capacity has allowed for a new targeted approach to bringing empty properties back into use, including tackling long term empty problematic properties. Each Officer has been allocated an 'area', the map below illustrates the area split.



Each Officer will analyse communities within their area, to understand the extent of empty homes problem, the housing need and how empty homes can be part of the solution to increasing the supply of (affordable) housing.

A marketing communication plan was developed in 2021 setting out how the newly established Empty Homes team will use customer engagement to shape the empty homes service to meet the needs of customers and reduce the number of empty properties in Conwy.

The plan identifies 5 market segments;

- **Market 1: The community**  
**Objective:** To support a community led approach to bringing empty properties back into use and meet local housing need.
- **Market 2: First time buyers**  
**Objective:** To provide flexible funding options to support first time buyers who purchase empty properties, to bring them up to an acceptable standard.  
**Objective:** To provide opportunities to support first time buyers to purchase low cost RSL long term empty (VOID and difficult to let) properties.
- **Market 3: Landlords**

**Objective:** To provide flexible funding options to support (new and/or existing) landlords who purchase empty properties, to bring them up to an acceptable standard and rent at Local Housing Allowance rate, to low income households from the social housing register.

- **Market 4: Empty home owners**

**Objective:** To provide advice and support to empty home owners and bring the empty property back into use as a result.

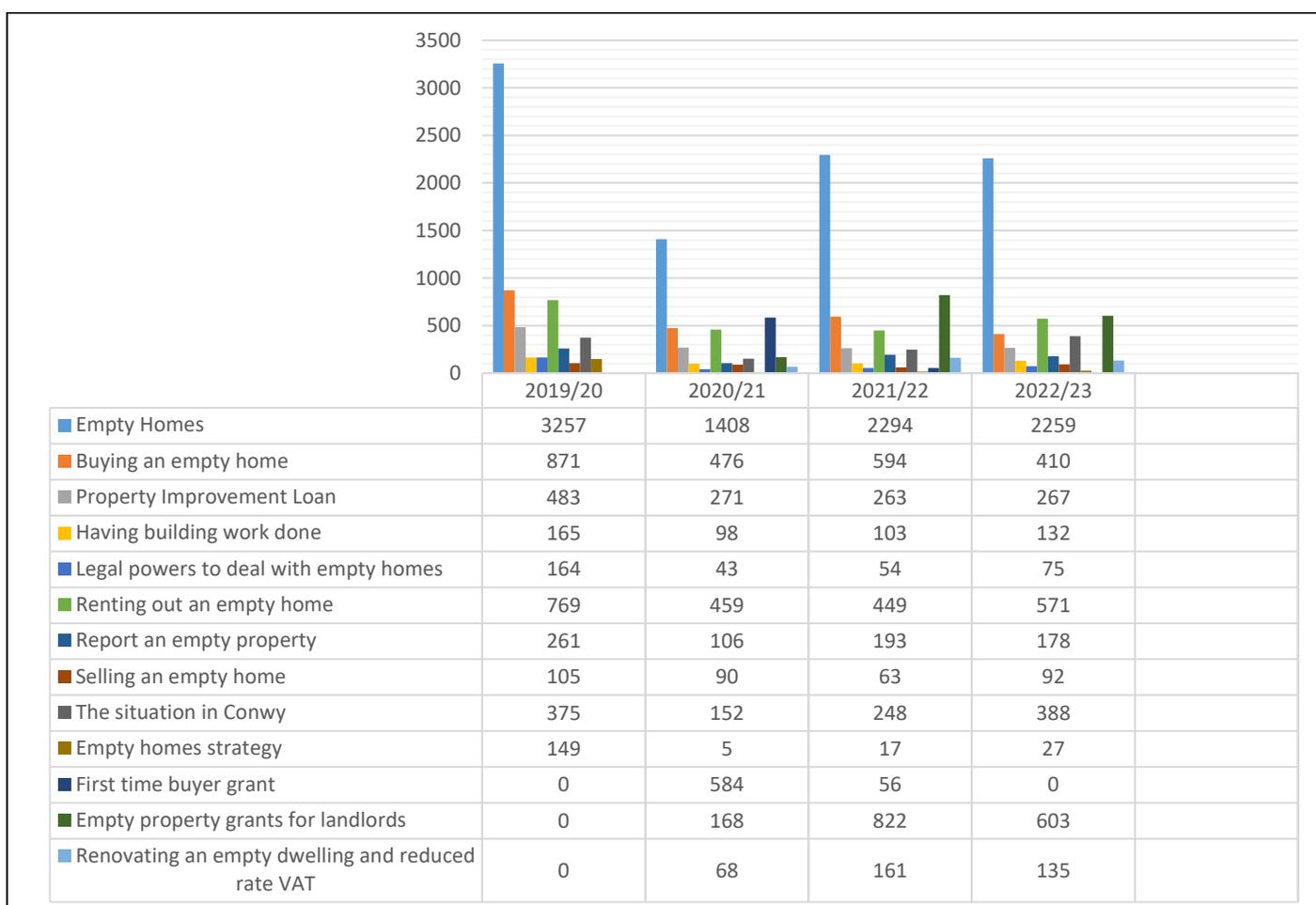
- **Market 5: Town Centres**

**Objective:** To work with key stakeholders to use a housing led approach to regenerate town centres.

## Empty Home owners

To encourage engagement, the availability and accessibility of information has been reviewed. The empty homes webpages on the Council website have been updated and there are regular social media posts directing customers to the website.

The chart below shows the number of hits the empty home page has had during 2019/20 and 2022/23:



**Note: the website hits were not recorded in 2018/19**

In addition, it was important for the team to create new communication channels, the following has been achieved:

- Set-up a generic empty homes email address (this is included on all promotional material)
- Created a new web form for customers to submit enquiries and/or report an empty property

In 2022/23 the first Empty Homes bulletin was published. The aim of the bulletin is share information about the empty homes service such as support that is available to empty home owners to bring their property

back into use and to promote successful outcomes that the team have achieved. The bulletin is published twice a year and to date has been hugely successful, below are some quotes from key stakeholder.

*'Engaging and well designed', 'Really informative'.*

*'Good to highlight the work that is being done and increase awareness',*

*'Great piece of communication, informative and attractively put together'*

*'Excellent piece of work'.*

## **Enforcement**

An empty property enforcement action plan was developed and approved by Welsh Government in 2021/22. The plan consists of a number of long term, problematic empty properties for which an obvious solution has not been identified. Andrew Lavendar, an Empty Property Management consultant commissioned by Welsh Government, is providing support and guidance to implement the plan, with a view to agreeing a course of action for the properties in question.

Welsh Government approval of the plan means that CCBC is eligible to access the £15.2m WG Transforming Towns: Empty Property Management Fund. Originally funding could only be accessed to tackle town centre properties, however this funding has now been opened up for all properties.

To date the following has been achieved:

- i) Agreement has been reached with Housing and Pollution will prioritise one property from the action plan per month where statutory nuisance or overgrown gardens exist. The team is following up on notices already served but not complied with
- ii) Two properties are no longer long term empty and have therefore been removed from the action plan (but another has since been added)
- iii) A long term empty property which was the subject of frequent complaints has been repossessed by the main lender. Although the new owners have not commenced work to date, the change of ownership is likely to result in physical improvements to the property
- iv) Following the service of a statutory notice, a long term empty has been relisted for sale
- v) A property on which significant works in default have been undertaken will be listed for auction imminently as a result of action taken under Law of Property Act 1925. A second property has been identified which may be suitable for similar action
- vi) An application to the WG Enforcement Fund is being discussed in relation to a property on which works in default are proposed following the owner's non-compliance with a notice under s215 of the Town and Country Planning Act
- vii) A Housing Association is currently working on an options appraisal for a large town centre property which is considered an eye-sore site and which has been the subject of historic action under Town and Country Planning Act

## **6.4 Renewal schemes**

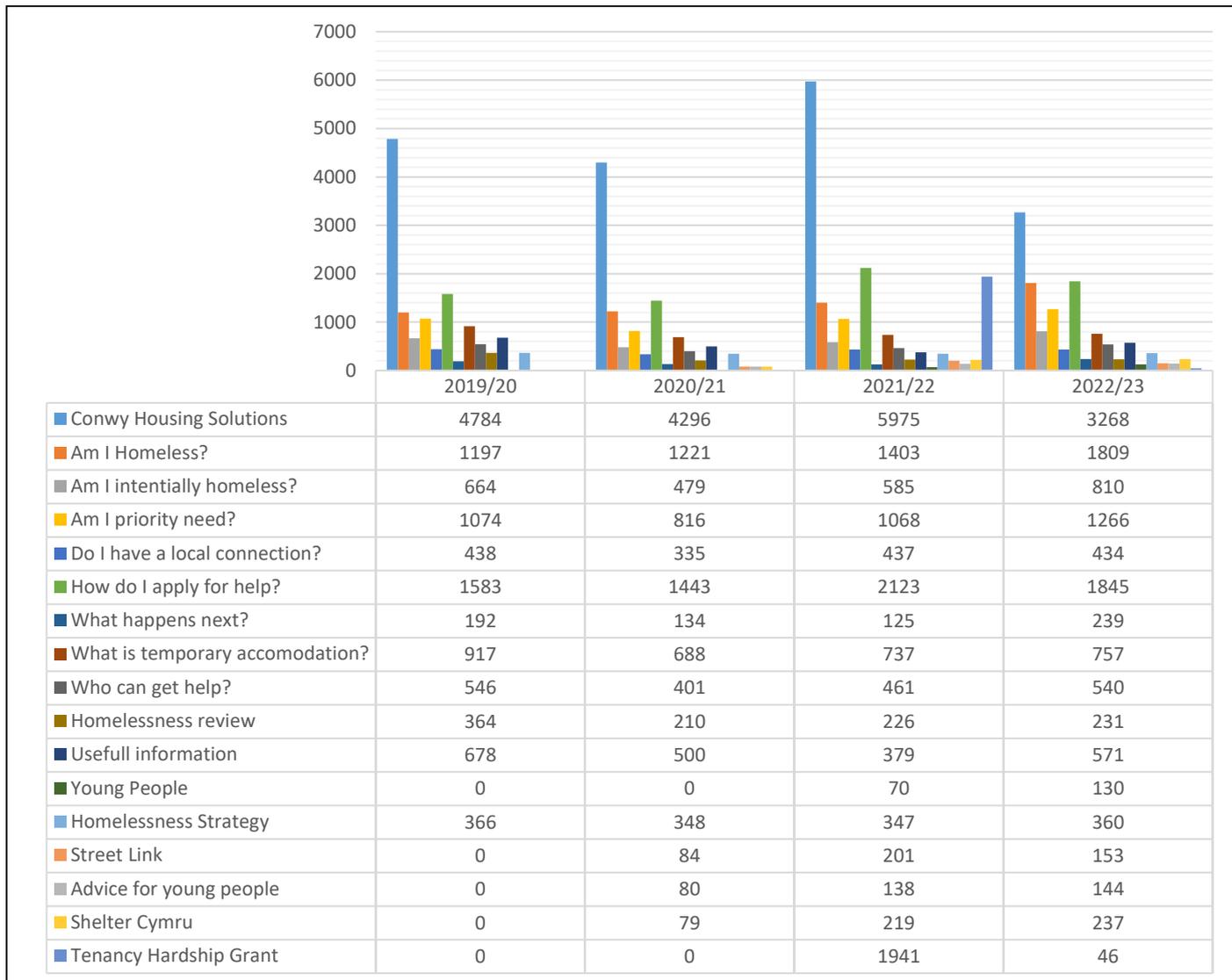
[Information not currently available]

## **7 Ensure people understand their housing options to enable them to make an informed decision**

### **7.1 Availability and accessibility of information**

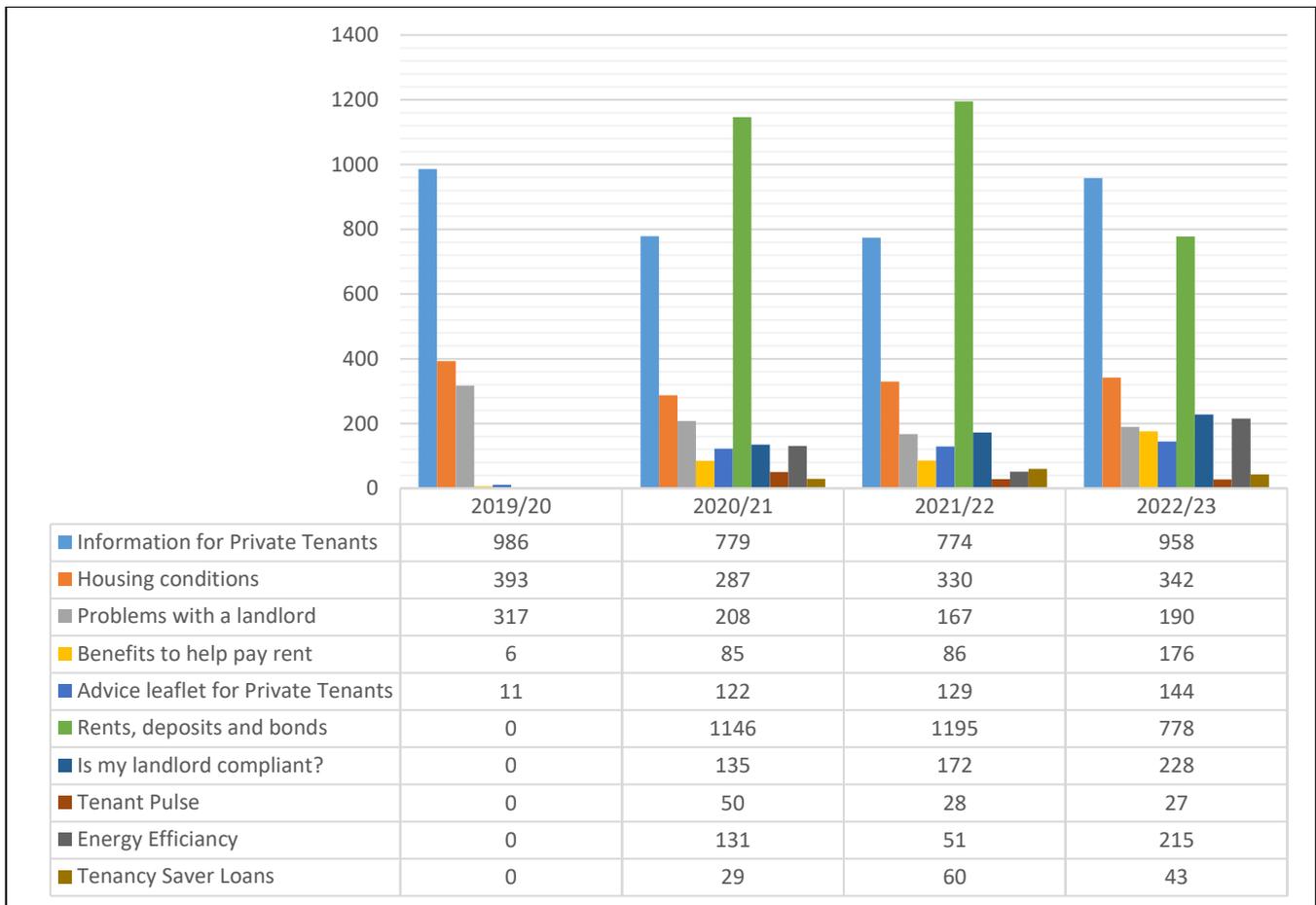
The availability and accessibility of information for Conwy residents has been reviewed. Conwy Housing Solutions webpages and private sector tenants' webpage on the Council website have been updated and there are regular social media posts directing customers to the website.

The chart below shows the number of hits the Housing Solutions page has had during 2019/20 and 2022/23:



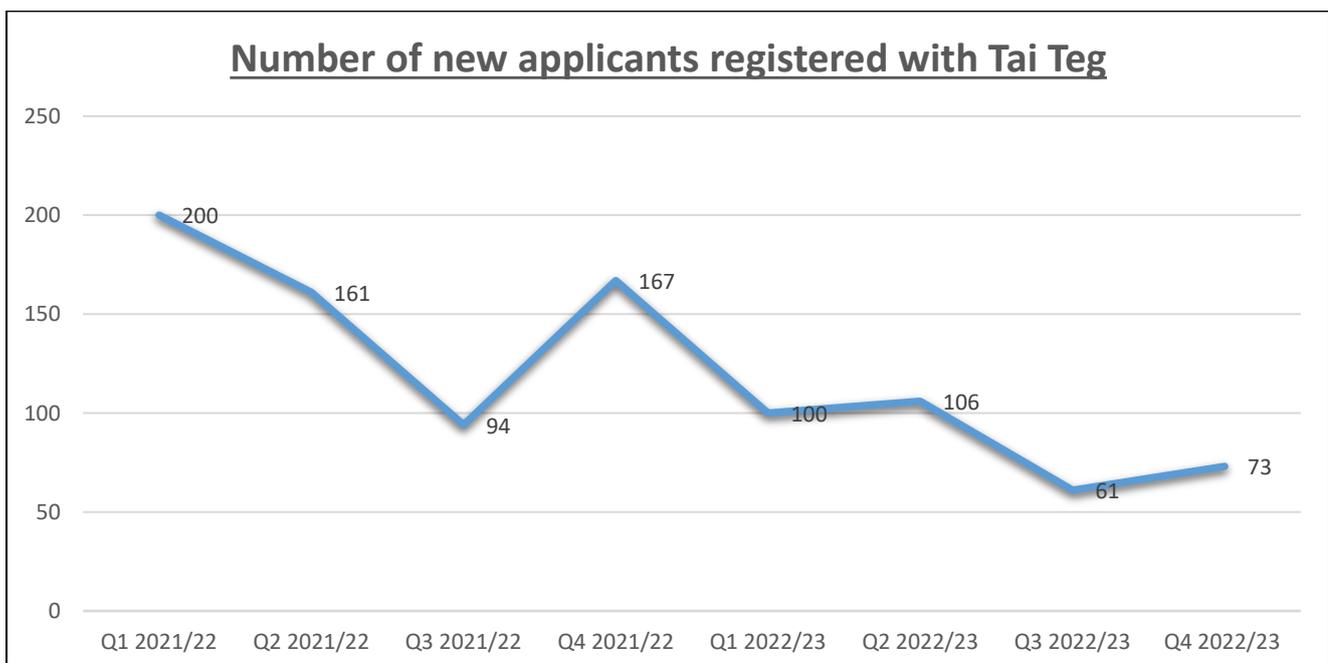
**Note: the website hits were not recorded in 2018/19**

The chart below shows the number of hits the private sector tenant page has had during 2019/20 and 2022/23:



**Note: the website hits were not recorded in 2018/19**

In addition, a marketing communication plan was developed in 2021 to promote the Tai Teg register and intermediate housing opportunities. As a result, the register has increased by 962 applicants.



## 7.2 Tenant engagement

In partnership with the 6 north Wales local authorities, CCBC commissioned TPAS Cymru to carry out a private sector tenant consultation in 2020/21; over 600 tenants participated. The aim of the consultation

was to gain a better understanding of how private sector tenants have been affected by the Covid Pandemic. The consultation showed that local authorities could improve the accessibility and availability of information for private sector tenants.

TPAS Cymru have been commissioned to work with the North Wales local authorities in 2022/23, with CCBC taking the lead, to improve communication with private sector tenants, this includes setting up a Tenant Advisory Group.

To date the following has been achieved:

- Held two tenant forums (1 held in October 2022 and 1 held in March 2023)
- Developed a Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 factsheet for private tenants in February 2023
- Created a platform for tenants to provide feedback on activities held to date, 20 positive responses have been received

In addition to the above, in partnership with Shelter Cymru and Supported Housing Providers, the Housing team has used tenant engagement to support the development of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and Housing Support Programme Strategy. Over 60 people took part in the consultants.

It has been identified that tenant engagement is needed to support the work of the Homelessness Service Improvement Group, which is the third and final group that sits under the Housing and Homelessness Board mentioned in section 5. This group will focus on making improvements within the Housing Service by reviewing and implementing changes around IT, Policies and Procedures, referral pathways and review internal and external partnership arrangements.

## **8 Monitoring the strategy**

The Strategic Housing Partnership is responsible for supporting and monitoring the implementation of the Local Housing Strategy.

Each year a detailed action plan is developed setting out the key priorities and actions. Delivery against the plan is reported to quarterly to the Strategic Housing Partnership and an annual update is prepared for Economy and Place Scrutiny Committee.

The following working groups sit under the Strategic Housing Partnership:

- Affordable Housing Delivery Group
  - Empty Homes Working Group
  - Conwy Owned Sites
- Private Sector Delivery Group
- Strategic Adaptions Group
- Social Housing Management Delivery Group
- Homeless Strategy Delivery Group
- Gypsy and Traveller Delivery Group

The working groups were set up in 2018 to create the framework to deliver the strategy. Each group is made up of the relevant partners needed to complete the tasks within the action plan.

This framework will need to be reviewed to ensure it is still relevant, some groups have already been replaced and/or disbanded.