

My Ref: Scrutiny/Correspondence/Cllr McGarry

06 December 2018

Councillor Lynda Thorne  
Cabinet Member Housing & Communities  
County Hall  
Cardiff  
CF10 4UW



Dear Lynda,

**COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 DECEMBER 2018  
– HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2018-22; THE IMPACT OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT  
ON RENT ARREARS**

As Chair of the Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee, I wish to thank you and officers for attending Committee and providing Members with an opportunity to consider the draft Homelessness Strategy 2018-22, prior to its consideration by Cabinet on the 13 December, as well as a briefing on issues relating to the impact of Universal Credit on rent arrears. Members of the Committee have requested that I feed back the following comments and observations to you.

**Homelessness Strategy and Review 2018-22**

The Committee considered the Cabinet Proposal and Strategy document and concluded that it supports the proposals and commends the report to Cabinet.

The Committee noted the positive steps made during the current year regarding the provision of a range of services for people who are threatened with homelessness and regarding services for those who are rough sleepers in terms of the numbers of spaces available to them. The Committee noted that a review of services on offer, and their location, was going to take place as part of work going forward.

Members commended the commitment to the prevention agenda and the approach adopted in terms of putting the individual or family at the centre of decisions going forward and, for those with very complex needs, not giving up on them and continuing to look at ways in which they can engage with the Council and its partners.

However, Members stated that there needed to be a real drive to improve joint working across partners and the third sector to address the very complex issues presented in the review and Strategy. Members noted the steps taken to link with PSB partners, but felt that the delivery rested on a collaborative approach, and should therefore be a priority to enable the delivery and achievement of the commitments and actions set out in the Strategy.

Members concluded that, in relation to the Strategy, key to its success was the development and implementation of a detailed **Action Plan**, setting out how the commitments and actions contained in the Strategy are to be achieved. Members would strongly recommend that this be implemented by the deadline reported at the meeting – that is, by the 31 March 2019. Members appreciated that coordinating this with partners would be challenging, but concluded that the issue warranted priority, and should be treated as such.

The Committee would urge that the Action Plan contain Governance Arrangements/Structures across partners on delivering the Plan; and that each Action contains Performance measures, which partners will deliver, timescales and budgets.

Members seek assurances that the Action Plan will be developed within the current financial year and will I will continue to monitor this with you and officers in the coming months.

Members stated that the **supply of suitable accommodation** was their main concern arising from the consideration of this Item. They were extremely worried about a range of issues in relation to the private rented sector, echoing the concerns already raised by yourselves in terms of the stability of this sector; and the major obstacle of persuading private landlords to let their properties to individuals and families in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. Members noted the increased efforts to engage with landlords to try to overcome their perceptions in relation to potential tenants and to encourage them to remain in the market long-term. However, Members wish to be assured that this critical commitment in the Strategy is working, and would therefore recommend that further information on how this will be achieved be supplied to the Committee and that regular updates on the success of this commitment be reported.

As you will be aware through the Q&A session, Members raised a number of issues in relation to the **Huggard** and other hostels in Cardiff. Members wish to reiterate the need to publicise and communicate the services on offer at the hostels, deliver the message that the hostels are safe and secure for anyone who needs to use them, and publicise more widely

more positive messages about the hostels, in order to overcome negative perceptions and encourage more people to use the services.

### **The Impact of Universal Credit on Rent Arrears**

Whilst this was a separate Item on the Agenda, Members agreed that the major issues reported and crossover of issues raised under the Homelessness Strategy warranted the need for them to be considered together in this letter.

A strong message that Members wanted to convey was their empathy and acknowledgement of the devastation that the transfer to Universal Credit, and the consequent increasing debts (including rent arrears), is causing to the lives of many individuals and families, particularly at this time of the year. Members noted the measures that the Council has put in place to date in assisting people who find themselves in this predicament, and would recommend that the Council continue to maintain and further improve (where possible) these services as a further 7000 people are transferred onto UC early in 2019.

More widely, Members were particularly concerned about the impact that arrears would have on the HRA and the commitments to deliver on the number of new builds, which, in turn, exacerbates the supply and demand for housing across Cardiff. The Committee will be scrutinising the HRA Business Plan in March 2019, and would request that an update on this issue be reported at this meeting.

Members are committed to monitoring this issue closely and will request updates from yourself and officers in due course.

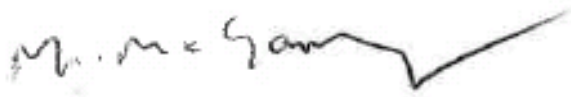
### **Additional CASSC Meeting**

On considering the Committee's work programme at the 5<sup>th</sup> December meeting, Members agreed that they wished to hold an additional meeting, dedicated to homelessness, which they agreed would take place late January/early February 2019. The CASSC Scrutiny Officer will be in touch with you and officer's PA to arrange. The aim of the meeting will be to obtain views from yourself, officers and a range of providers and will be looking at issues in relation to people coming through the single person's gateway and will be exploring views around the following:

- Update on winter provision (particularly over the Christmas period).
- Are services fit for purpose?
- How the hostels work together – is it effective?
- Supported accommodation – how effective is it? What kinds of support is on offer?
- Do people coming through the gateway get the support they need?
- For members to understand the complexities of the service and the people that use it.

Thank you again to you and officers for attending. I hope you find the Committee's comments useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. McGarry', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**COUNTY COUNCILLOR MARY M<sup>C</sup>GARRY**

**Chairperson - Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee**

Cc: Sarah McGill, Corporate Director  
Jane Thomas, Assistant Director, Housing & Communities