

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 APRIL 2023

Present: Councillor Molik(Chairperson)
Councillors Ahmed, Ahmed, Ash-Edwards, Boes, Lewis,
Littlechild and McGarry

55 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Cllr Lent and Jenny Rogers.

56 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Littlechild declared a personal interest in Item 4 as he is a community worker in the third sector and works with homeless people.

57 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

58 : ADDRESSING AND PREVENTING STREET HOMELESSNESS IN CARDIFF

The Chairperson extended a warm welcome to everyone present and explained that the purpose of the meeting, was to explore the council's arrangements for those with complex needs and to have candid discussions, on what is going well, but also areas where the council could improve its offerings.

Cllr Thorne was invited to make a statement, in which she said:

'It is good to see so many partners represented here today and I would like to start by thanking all those who work in the homeless sector – they are doing an amazing job in these very challenging times

Much progress has been done over recent years in developing both our services and our accommodation offer, including:

The development of the Homeless MDT - and more recently the young persons MDT, bringing services directly to the individuals who need them most.

We now have a number of Housing First schemes in place in the city, and while still limited in the numbers, these schemes are helping some of the most complex individuals into accommodation.

The development of the Single Assessment Centre, Ty Ephraim, Adams Court and permanent accommodation in our new managed blocks – have provided an additional 360 units of good quality accommodation for single homeless people.

Improvements have also been made to the low needs pathway by the YMCA and extended services are now offered by the Huggard, ensuring we have a wide range of provision in place.

I have to say I do not recognise our services from the comments of the people interviewed – our Outreach Team, working together with the Wallich and The Salvation Army, brought 92 rough sleepers into accommodation last year, and the number of people sleeping rough are still well below pre-pandemic levels

Despite all this good work however - due to the current housing crisis which is being experienced across Wales - services remain under great pressure.

In just one night more than 90 people sought help with emergency accommodation. To ensure we could meet this demand we have unfortunately had to resume the use of shared sleeping spaces.

This has also meant that placements are often being made based on the accommodation available rather the needs of the individual.

So, there is clearly still more work to be done and I am pleased to say we have plans to open more move on schemes later this year, providing settled good quality accommodation for single homeless people.'

The Chairperson thanked Cllr Thorne for her statement and advised all those present that to help ensure the meeting remains focused, the Committee's lines of inquiry had been split into three parts. The first part is pathway of support, The second is services on offer, and the third is addressing challenges.

The Chairperson invited questions, comments and observations from Members.

Members noted that the council follows the eligibility criteria outlined in the Housing (Wales) Act and goes beyond its statutory duty to ensure a compassionate approach. However, Members were concerned that legislative parameters may still hinder individuals' access to support. Members considered it is crucial for local authorities to collaborate in managing demand and capacity pressures.

Members also acknowledged the unintended consequences of the Renting Homes Wales Act, which can affect property availability. Members considered that a national review of the eligibility process and the repercussions of the Renting Homes Wales Act was needed and encouraged engagement with relevant sectors and Welsh Government.

Members recognised the value and effectiveness of MDT & Outreach Services, and the importance of their growth and investment. Additionally, Members encouraged efforts to enhance the pathways connecting these services to mainstream community services, with a particular focus on mental health.

Members noted that Diversionary Activities (DA) play a crucial role in engaging individuals, safeguarding their well-being, and providing a positive alternative to street-based lifestyles. Members were encouraged to hear the positive impact of these activities from partners like the police and health services.

Regarding access to emergency provision, Members appreciated the recognition that queuing systems are not ideal, and welcomed the efforts being made to address this issue.

Members understood the reasons for time-limiting emergency provisions in extreme circumstances, but expressed concerns that such limitations may not offer individuals

a long-term, secure solution. Members acknowledged the pressures on services and the need for more trauma-informed spaces.

Members noted that due to the significant increase in demand and the council's commitment to supporting all individuals, there has been a temporary reliance on shared spaces. Members shared the concerns expressed by the Cabinet Member and partners regarding shared spaces, and noted the confirmation that future accommodation provision being developed by the council will focus on self-contained flats or rooms.

Members commended the efforts made to provide an additional 360 self-contained accommodation options since the pandemic.

Regarding the safety of provisions, Members understand that individuals seeking support may have genuine concerns about their safety. These concerns can be complex and interconnected with the trauma they have experienced, as well as the complexities of their needs.

A discussion took place around defining 'home' for many service users, which brought to light a concept that may not be immediately apparent to those outside the sector. Members agreed with and supported the view presented at the meeting that there are numerous intricate aspects involved in helping individuals feel safe and secure, which are prioritised in the approach. Members agreed that it is important to recognise individual dynamics, as some individuals may choose not to access provisions due to concerns about encountering unwanted individuals or being drawn back into street-based lifestyles and that a shift away from shared space accommodation could help address this concern.

Members acknowledged the need to change the perception that accommodation provisions are unsafe, noting that significant efforts are being made by council services and providers to build relationships and offer tailored support to address this.

Regarding the use of SIA trained safety officers, Members agreed that it is crucial that their deployment is done sensitively and in a trauma-informed manner, with support workers working alongside them.

Members agreed with the comments about reducing or preventing instances of anti-social behaviour (ASB) within provisions and noted that steps are being taken to foster a sense of community, identify risks early, implement effective risk management plans through supportive and restorative practices, and provide high-quality accommodation. Members encouraged the council to continue these efforts and offer support to external providers as needed. Members also considered that it may be beneficial for the council, in partnership with providers, to review their eviction policy.

Members noted that the council's homeless services are experiencing improved staff recruitment and the emphasis placed on providing effective training for staff. Members encouraged the commitment to offer trauma-informed training to staff and suggested considering extending trauma-informed training to council staff who may not directly work in the sector but have roles closely linked to supporting individuals with complex needs.

Regarding the location of provisions, Members acknowledged the council's plans to distribute future accommodation across the city. Members welcomed this approach

as it can contribute to safeguarding individuals, supporting their well-being, and fostering positive community connections.

Discussing Housing First, Members noted that the committee's performance monitoring work highlights its effectiveness in addressing the issue of recurrent homelessness but were unaware of specific criteria that may limit an individual's access to such schemes. Members urged that this issue is raised with Welsh Government.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

59 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

None received.

60 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

15 May 2023 at 2.00pm.

The meeting terminated at 4.40 pm