

**COUNCIL: 26 OCTOBER 2017**

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## **HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES STATEMENT**

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### **Housing Developments / New Council Properties**

Work is well underway to achieve our target of delivering 1,000 new council homes in Cardiff over the next 5 years with a range of delivery routes and innovative solutions being identified.

We have 3 Development schemes actively on site through our Cardiff Living programme at Willowbrook West, Braunton Crescent and on our former depot at Mount Pleasant Lane Llanrumney. These 3 schemes alone will deliver 130 new council homes with the first handovers planned for early 2018. The Cardiff Living programme will deliver approximately 600 new council homes in total, of which 350 will be built over the next 5 years.

Cabinet recently approved our proposal to enter into a package deal arrangement with Cadwyn Housing Association for the delivery of 30 flats at Courtney Road – we anticipate that this development scheme will be on site by January 2018. We are in discussions regarding other package deals and I look forward to further updating on these exciting opportunities when appropriate.

We have completed the remodelling of the former Children's home at Thornhill Road, Llanishen, creating 8 'Independent Living' flats for older people.

We are actively buying homes from the market – targeting larger family homes and former council properties. We have completed 4 buy-backs so far with another 1 due to complete by the end of the month and further viewings arranged. We aim to complete 20 buy-backs each year for the next 5 years.

On top of our Cardiff Living Project we are taking forward a second ambitious build programme. Our first scheme of 16 new homes has been granted planning permission and we will shortly be tendering for a contractor. We have been assembling land for this project and are actively working up schemes on a further 12 sites capable of delivering at least 400 additional council homes.

I am also pleased to announce that we have been successful in our bid via Welsh Government's Innovative Housing Fund to pilot 8 family homes made from recycled shipping containers as short term or 'meanwhile' living solutions for people in the most urgent housing need.

Our target of 1,000 new homes is ambitious but we will explore all opportunities open to us as the demand for housing in our city increasingly grows and in doing

so we will be seeking additional funding capabilities from Welsh Government to help us.

### **Rough Sleeping**

The rising numbers of individuals sleeping rough continues to be a significant challenge across the UK, including Cardiff. At the count week ending 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2017, there were 100 known individuals rough sleeping in Cardiff. Cardiff Council and its Voluntary Sector Partners have developed robust rough sleeping intervention procedures over a number of years to engage with and link people into accommodation and support services. In addition, new initiatives are being rolled out more information is available on [www.cardiff.gov.uk/homeless](http://www.cardiff.gov.uk/homeless). As the number of services continues to increase so does the draw for people who are homeless to come to Cardiff with currently up to 60% of those sleeping rough in Cardiff are from other areas and have no local connection. The service has successfully reconnected 68 people with homelessness services in their local area however this remains a growing challenge.

I recently attended a meeting of a multi-agency taskforce specifically established to form a co-ordinated a response to rough sleeping, drug use, discarded needles and aggressive begging across the city. The taskforce will ensure a strategic and joint approach is taken to tackle the issues associated with drug abuse in public spaces, homelessness and begging in and around city. We will continue to ensure that support services are promoted to take rough sleepers off the streets and ensure that chaotic drug users are supported into services whilst taking the appropriate enforcement action to tackle anti-social behaviour in a responsible and proportionate manner. The taskforce will report into our existing partnership arrangements and I will receive regular updates as the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities.

### **Grant funding for schemes to tackle homelessness**

I am pleased to say that Cardiff has been awarded grant funding of £540,000 by the Welsh Government to take forward initiatives to address homelessness and rough sleeping. While this funding is for this year only, it will allow us to pilot new initiatives and build on some of the projects underway. 14 different schemes were put forward and all were successful in achieving funding. This funding will allow us to enhance our Reconnection Service, this services helps homeless people return to their home area; Expand on our Housing First project for Rough Sleepers and improve prevention services. Some capital funding was also awarded and this will help us to extend and improve our emergency homeless accommodation.

### **Rent Smart Wales**

Rent Smart Wales now has 171,500 properties registered with 15,272 landlords and 2,537 agents now licensed. We continue to process large volumes of licences every month, with 1,462 licences approved in September. Following Cabinet approval of the Rent Smart Wales enforcement policy in July 2017, we are now taking action to ensure compliance. During September 2017, 20 Fixed Penalty

Notices were issued and two successful prosecutions taken – one in Neath and one in Cardiff. Fines and costs for both cases totalled £3,543.

I am continuing to meet with local Landlords to listen to their experiences both good and bad with the aim of encouraging and securing a joint partnership, working relationship between the Council and local Landlords.

### **Welfare Reform**

There are 2,446 tenants currently impacted by the size restrictions (bedroom tax), of those 196 are on the priority downsizing waiting list. Discretionary Housing Payments are currently paid to 384 individuals who are affected by the Benefit Cap and of those 149 are actively working with the Into Work's Back to Work Scheme. From February 2018 Universal Credit will apply to all new claims including those with disabilities and health problems, those who are in work and those with children. The new claims needed to be made online and all UC accounts will need to be managed online. With Universal Credit being paid in arrears, research by Citizens Advice on the pilot areas has shown that a significant number of households have fallen into debt as a result.

### **Libraries**

The performance assessment report for the third year of the fifth framework of the Welsh Public Library Standards has been received from the Welsh Government. The report highlights a positive and improved performance by Cardiff Library service that has been delivered in the Libraries and Hubs across the city, as well as directly within the communities of Cardiff:

- Cardiff continues to meet all of the 18 core entitlements in full
- Improvements have been realised against the 7 targeted quality indicators – achieving 4 in full and 3 in part
- Physical visits have increased year on year ranking Cardiff's Libraries and Hubs as the most visited in Wales
- The Authority also ranks 1<sup>st</sup> in the levels of active borrowers
- The service is the cheapest in Wales with a net cost of £1.50 per visit

### **Summer Reading Challenge**

This year's Summer Reading Challenge was the most successful yet! The event followed an 'Animal Agents' theme and a huge 7,511 children joined the scheme, a 16% increase on the previous year. With a completion rate of 67.7%, 5,085 children finished the challenge, reading 6 books over the school summer holidays. This year saw 17% more children complete the challenge compared to last year.

### **Welsh Housing Award**

One of our Hostel Services Officers has been shortlisted for a Welsh Housing Award in the category of Housing Champion, due to their efforts in identifying the need for better eye health provision for those accessing homeless services. Working with the RNIB and Specsavers, the officer set up surgeries which involved service users (including rough sleepers) having eye tests and subsequent treatments, including glasses and hospital admissions. This work has

brought substantial benefits to those service users who need it. Four people in total have been shortlisted in this category and the winner will be announced at an award ceremony to be held in November 2017.

**Councillor Lynda Thorne**  
**Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities**  
**26 October 2017**