
HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

AGENDA ITEM: 10

Volunteering Cardiff

I was honoured to attend the “Volunteer Thank You Event” held earlier this week on 22nd January 2018. The event was an opportunity to thank all the volunteers who support the delivery of council services, including ‘friends’ groups who support Parks and Bereavement Services, Into Work Services and St David’s Hall to mention just a few. Invited guests received goodie bags and certificates as part of their thank you. In addition to this, some of the volunteers were able to share their volunteering stories with the rest of the volunteers in attendance. It is only when listening to these individual stories can we begin to understand the profound impact that volunteering has had on them and their lives, but also the huge benefit that volunteering work has on those individuals benefitting from the services provided.

The event also marked the launch of the new Volunteer Cardiff portal (www.volunteercardiff.co.uk). The website has been developed in partnership with Cardiff Third Sector Council, Student Volunteering Cardiff, Keep Cardiff Tidy, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Sport Cardiff, Spice and Volunteering Wales. The new portal allows citizens to choose the type of volunteering that they would like to do and in which area of the city. Opportunities are available on a short or long term basis with local projects and community groups, or with larger organisations such as the Council. Anyone is welcome to get involved, regardless of their age, experience or skills.

Welfare Reform – Universal Credit

Members will be aware that Universal Credit is due to be rolled out in Cardiff on 28th February 2018. The table below shows the future implementation timeline for Cardiff:

28 th February 2018	Full Service – new claims and change of circumstances accepted for households with less than three children
1 st February 2019	New claims and change of circumstances accepted for households with three or more children
February – July 2019	Contingency Period
July 2019 – March 2022	Large scale migration of remaining claims over to Universal Credit

It is therefore timely for me to update Members on the current position and work that has been undertaken to prepare for and, hopefully, alleviate some of the negative impacts. The emerging issues from other local authorities include:

- Front line services receiving very high numbers of queries due to confusion over new benefits and the claim process.
- Increased demand for specialist debt advice.
- Digital support increased dramatically with considerable number of repeat customers.
- No noticeable reduction in workload for Housing Benefit departments.
- Decrease in Council Tax collection rates for Universal Credit (UC) claimants.
- Council Tax Reduction significantly under-claimed by UC claimants.
- Decrease in Private Sector Landlords willing to accommodate UC tenants.
- Rent collection has reduced from 98% to 72% for UC claimants. UC claimants account for 8.92% of tenants, but contribute 38% of the arrears (Croydon – Feb 2017).
- 30% of Local Authority tenants on UC have arrears in excess of £1,000 (Flintshire – Sep 2017).

With this in mind and acknowledging that we cannot completely negate the significant impact on individuals and families in Cardiff, we have taken the following steps to ensure that we are doing all we can to support them:

- Engagement events arranged for 29th January 2018 (stakeholders) and 30th January 2018 (private landlords).
- Further development of the Landlord Liaison Service for Private Landlords.
- Advice Outreach across the city and co-locating in food banks, hostels, community hubs and Jobcentre Plus offices.
- Expansion of employment services and the launch of the new employment gateway service in April.
- Review of IT infrastructure including increased PC and Wi Fi access across the city.
- Expanding role of hub staff to include homeless prevention.
- New self-service section in Central Library Hub – scan stations and increased number of phone lines to promote self-serving customers.
- Introduction of a telephone advice line service.
- Targeting of face-to-face services for those unable to self-serve.
- Robust training package for front line staff & partners – over 800 staff to be trained during January and February 2018.
- Review of Arrears Procedure – early intervention toolbox; increase in welfare liaison officers.

Rough Sleeping

I'm sure colleagues are aware of, and share my concern for, those individuals who are currently sleeping rough on the streets of Cardiff. As mentioned in my previous statement to Council in November 2017, we are pleased to be

supporting a new campaign called Give DIFFerently. This is a campaign that encourages people to donate by text to raise funds to help people to move away from the streets. If people want to help these vulnerable individuals rebuild their lives, there are more beneficial ways to make a difference rather than giving them cash in the street and Give DIFFerently assist with this.

Donations will go into a fund managed by the Community Foundation in Wales, where individuals can access small grants that will bring about positive change at a crucial moment in their lives. From clothing and transport for a job interview to household items for a new tenancy, all the money raised will directly help people move away from homelessness. Alternatively, concerned residents could volunteer with charities that provide support to the homeless or those at risk of homelessness. The initiative is being supported by those organisations delivering frontline services in Cardiff, including Cardiff Council, Big Issue Cymru, Huggard, Salvation Army, South Wales Police and the Wallich.

I would also like to update Members on the winter provision for Rough Sleepers. Numbers remained high during December 2017, with 79 people being recorded as sleeping rough in Cardiff during the week ending 22nd December 2017. In previous years, the drop in winter temperatures had led to more people accessing the cold weather provision, of which there are 54 spaces available and further contingency for an extra 55 spaces. At no point were all of these spaces taken and there remains no need for anybody to sleep outside at night. The challenge for us is encouraging those living on the streets to access the services that are available.

To further update Members on developments, I can also confirm that:

- The Housing First pilot project for up to 10 direct placements with wrap around services became operational in December 2017.
- Improved emergency provision of 3 extra pods are now in place at Tŷ Tresillian, with a further 5 pods due in early 2018.
- An additional 8 pods at the Huggard are due for completion in January 2018.
- Tŷ Tarian (accommodation for women with high support needs and at risk of exploitation) is now in place and early indications have been very positive.
- The provision of Into Work Services in our hostels has been piloted and has provided good initial results which will be reviewed prior to full implementation.

Empty Homes

Performance relating to empty properties in Cardiff has taken a downturn over the last two years for a number of reasons, attracting negative press coverage. However, the situation is now improving and I want to highlight the work that is being done to improve performance in this area.

A new Empty Properties Officer was recruited in June 2017 to bolster the work being carried out in this area and a mailshot was sent to owners of approximately 200 empty properties. There are approximately 1,400 long-term empty homes in Cardiff and the team will contact all owners in February 2018

by way of a mailshot to encourage their return to beneficial use. To date, this work has resulted in an increase in active cases and ongoing dialogue with 115 property owners. Many of these properties are now undergoing works of renovation or are being sold.

Further work is being undertaken to enhance joined up working, in particular to ensure reliable monitoring of empty homes and the effective promotion of the Houses to Homes loans scheme. In addition, officers are actively engaging with partners to develop a more innovative service and a broader package of incentives for owners. Enforcement resources have also been further increased recently to deal with more problematic cases and to provide a more comprehensive service.

Wates Cardiff Living Programme / Into Work Advice Services

Cardiff Living is an exciting development partnership between Cardiff Council and national developer Wates Residential that will deliver 1,500 new homes over a 10-year period. As part of the community benefits that Wates stipulated in their bid, the Council's Into Work Services have acted as a brokerage for Wates Residential and supported them in recruiting for their various job vacancies. This ensures that local people are given the opportunity and access to apply for these vacancies through local Job Clubs and mentoring support being run city-wide through the Hubs and other community locations. Into Work Services support clients to get the qualifications they need, carry out interview technique sessions, support them to create bespoke CV's and to search for the right opportunity for them. The partnership with Wates Residential has proven to be extremely successful and the team has filled a number of Labour/Gateman vacancies for the company and are currently looking to recruit for a range of roles, including Assistant Surveyor; Site Surveyor; Principal Design Manager; Administration Apprentice (will complete NVQ Level 2 Business Administration) and Cleaners. We are hopeful that these opportunities will also be filled with job seekers working with the Into Work Services.

Llanishen Hub

The new Llanishen Hub opened its doors for the first time on 27th November 2017. This new community facility, situated at the heart of Llanishen village on the ground floor of the police station on Station Road, is a partnership project with South Wales Police and the Police & Crime Commissioner. The ground floor has been refurbished and remodelled to accommodate library services as well as a children's corner, housing and benefit services, public access PCs, an IT suite, interview rooms and a community room. Feedback from our partners has also been very positive with footfall for Money Advice, Housing Solutions and Benefit queries being high from the outset.

Blue Monday

Libraries and Hubs across the city had the perfect antidote to the January blues with a packed day full of activities and information. Central Library Hub hosted a Blue Monday event on 15th January 2018 with a number of taster sessions and workshops to encourage people to try something different in the New Year. Activities include crafting for mindfulness, yoga, creative writing, cake

decorating and learning French. A number of organisations attended the Central Library Hub event, including Samaritans, Time to Change and Recovery Cymru. Further events were hosted throughout Hubs in Cardiff, including the Powerhouse, STAR and Llandaff North & Gabalfa Hubs.

Councillor Lynda Thorne
Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
24 January 2018