

COUNCIL: 28 JANUARY 2021

HOUSING & COMMUNITIES STATEMENT

Homelessness

I am pleased to say that rough sleeping in the city remains low with only seven individuals recorded sleeping out on 8 January 2021. The Multi-disciplinary Outreach Team works constantly to bring new rough sleepers into accommodation and to work with more entrenched individuals to encourage them into accommodation. Can I remind Members to report any possible rough sleepers by completing our online form or by texting 'REALCHANGE' to 80800, giving details of the person's location?

Money Advice

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, more people in Cardiff are experiencing an increase in debt, including rent arrears and less income to make repayments. The Council's Money Advice Team has therefore launched a large public awareness campaign, working in conjunction with the Council's Communications Team, to publicise its work and the assistance that is available to residents. The campaign includes bus stop and waste truck advertising, advertising through Wales Online and via social media/website campaigns. We want to reach as many people as possible through this campaign as the pandemic has caused debt problems and the loss of jobs for many residents who wouldn't previously have needed such advice and support.

Self-Isolation Support Scheme

The Self-Isolation Support Scheme (SISP) went live on 16 November 2020 and is designed to help working people on a low income who cannot work from home and will lose earnings when told to self-isolate by the NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) service. The eligibility criteria for the scheme were increased from 14 December 2020 to include parents/carers of young children in Year 8 and below who have been told to self-isolate and stay home from school/childcare settings.

SISP claims can be made online and the Council's Advice and Hub Teams are on hand to support people to claim if they cannot do this themselves. Additional help is also offered and referrals made to other council services if any additional need is identified. Since the scheme started, the teams have received over 1,028 telephone calls and helped 101 people to make an application over the phone.

The Council's Benefit Assessment Team is responsible for carrying out the relevant checks and making the fixed £500 payment to those eligible and living in Cardiff. To date, 3,229 applications have been received and 617 payments of £500 have been made.

As well as a national publicity campaign by the Welsh Government, the Council's Communications Team is also working to publicise the scheme locally. For example, emails have been sent to all internal partners and external stakeholders to further promote the scheme to ensure that anyone in Cardiff who is eligible for the payment makes a claim.

Help for Tenants Struggling to Pay Rent

Evictions due to rent arrears have been on hold in Wales during the Covid-19 pandemic and no enforcement action can be taken currently; however, this is due to end in Spring 2021.

Many tenants who are falling into arrears now may not be seeking the help they need as they do not see their tenancy being 'at risk' in the immediate future. Citizens Advice estimate that 11% of private renters are in rent arrears and this would equate to over 4,000 households in Cardiff. There is a very real risk that evictions will escalate when the enforcement ban comes to an end and, by then, it may be too late to prevent homelessness.

To help address this, we are targeting our Discretionary Housing Payments at tenants who have fallen into arrears during the pandemic. Our Homeless and Advice Services are working to ensure that landlords are aware of the help available and can assist their tenants in addressing their rent arrears. A letter has been sent to more than 600 private landlords advertising the help available and this has also been advertised through the Landlord Forums.

The Discretionary Housing Payment form is now available online, with Adviceline support available for those tenants who are not able to claim digitally. A publicity campaign has also been launched to promote the support that can be provided by the Council's Money Advice Team, including posters and e-flyers, and the teams will continue to work with partners to promote the help available.

Estate Management

A new Local Team of 16 staff is being established to clean up neighbourhoods in the city, in partnership with our residents, which will cover the following areas:

- Butetown & Tremorfa
- Ely & Caerau
- Fairwater & Gabalfa
- Llanrumney & Trowbridge

We are currently recruiting members of the team, which will work to identify local priorities, carry out clean-ups and respond promptly to any reported issues. We want to encourage pride in our neighbourhoods and to work in the community with our residents.

Community Hubs

We are continuing to invest in our local communities by delivering regeneration projects in the heart of communities. Our most recent Community Hub projects have transformed Whitchurch and Rhydypennau Libraries into modern, fit for purpose wellbeing hubs and were completed in Autumn 2020. Funding has been secured for these projects from the Integrated Care Fund (ICF) and the Welsh Government's Museum, Archives and Libraries Division.

Building on the success of these most recent projects and the wider Hubs programme, the next transformation is being planned for Rhiwbina Library. The draft proposals aim to transform the current building to:

- Improve the use of internal space to enable the Council to operate a modern and sustainable library service, and the ability to deliver (together with partner organisations) health & well-being activities and advice & training services that are appropriate to the needs of the community.
- Improve and increase the space within the building that is available for community uses.
- Improve the look of the building, which is located within a conservation area.
- Improve external areas to enable the creation of useable outdoor space for the benefit of users of the Hub and the wider community.

Future services will be shaped in partnership with the local community and will include a variety of health & well-being focussed activities. This may include activities such as:

- Low level mental health support and confidence building, and interventions such as stress control and mindfulness.
- Setting up and maintaining befriending, self-help and peer support groups linked to improving health & well-being.
- Delivery and partner sessions for low-level therapeutic activities such as arts/crafts, music, drama, cookery sessions, gardening, photography, sewing or knit and natter groups.
- Delivery and partner sessions for inter-generational learning and social activities that especially target older people to help avoid social isolation and loneliness.

Community engagement on draft proposals for Rhiwbina Library will go live in February 2021.

Community Hub Digital Services

With the current Covid-19 pandemic meaning that people need to stay at home to stay safe, our Libraries and Community Hubs have had to find a different way to reach and engage with the residents of Cardiff. This need has resulted in the creation of a digital programme of events for adults and children catering to people's hobbies and wellbeing.

The Hubs are currently offering online sessions that cover a broad range of interests, such as mindfulness, keep fit, The Social Hour, Sporting Memories and Friends and Neighbours' groups. These run alongside regular events such as children's story and rhyme times. These sessions are advertised on our new Hubs website, which has been developed in recent months to be a focal point for this new programme of online activities, as well as events from Independent Living Services, Into Work Advice Service and Adult Learning Cardiff. The site also includes general updates and information about our open Hubs, library services and partner organisations. The full digital programme is available at: www.cardiffhubs.co.uk

The Hubs have provided a Click and Collect library service, as well as providing a delivery service to those who are isolated or vulnerable. This has been facilitated by a Library Adviceline that was set up for this purpose in March 2020, which has, to date, received 9,000 calls.

The Ely and Caerau Hub also has a food distribution centre, which has provided food to vulnerable people throughout the pandemic. Staff at the centre work closely with Adviceline staff who receive the referrals. The parcels are delivered all over the city, six days a week, by dedicated volunteers. Since October 2020, 560 parcels have been delivered to those who are unwell or isolating.

Councillor Lynda Thorne
Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
21 January 2021