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**HOUSING & COMMUNITIES STATEMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM:**

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**Reopening of Hubs and Libraries**

I am pleased to say that all Hubs and libraries in the city are now open for appointment based Advice and Into Work services, library browsing and PC appointments. Visitors to our Hubs and libraries are increasing week-on-week, with customer feedback highlighting how much they have missed face-to-face interaction and how much they are looking forward to our increasing event programme. While the Hub and Library Service adapted well during the pandemic, with more than two million virtual visits made to the services in the past year, there is no substitute for the face-to-face interaction that the Hubs offer.

Click & Collect was introduced as a brand new service during the pandemic, including a home delivery option, and has proved to be very popular. Following feedback from customers, this service will continue to remain available to broaden choice for Cardiff's citizens moving forward. In addition, almost one million loans of e-resources were downloaded over the 12 months and the Council invested in more e-books and e-magazines during the pandemic to ensure the choice available was wider than ever. While the Click & Collect Library Services and e-books have proved popular, for some people there is no substitute to browsing the shelves at their local library or Hub and choosing the titles they want to borrow that way. From April, Hubs and libraries were able to offer library members the opportunity to browse their bookshelves for the first time in over a year.

Access to public PCs is essential for some customers to ensure that they are digitally included and offering the use of PCs marked another step forward in the Hubs & Library recovery plan. PC use and library browsing slots can be booked via the Library Line.

**Restart of Community Groups in Hubs**

Opportunities for social interaction using technology have been made available and currently there are a wide range of digital activities that are available to Cardiff's residents – these include Social Hour, low-impact training sessions, Community Cooking, Gardening Hour, and Knit and Natter. The sessions have proved very popular with seven thousand people participating in sessions since the beginning of the year. Moving forward, the digital programme will continue to be offered alongside face-to-face activities as the service recognises that a dual programme will offer a blended approach to event delivery.

The development of a programme of face-to-face activities has, however, been prioritised over the last month in response to a clear need to help communities re-engage and help vulnerable groups who may have experienced greater levels of social isolation. This has included the return of activities to help people get active again including dance sessions, yoga, gymnastics, judo, walking for health and litter picking. There are Age Friendly activities as well – including a return to coffee mornings to bring people together, meet up Mondays, over 50's dance, sporting memories, and Elderfit. Storytimes and Rhymetimes in person have also returned – utilising both outside and inside spaces at our Hubs. The recent fantastic weather has enabled both parents and children to enjoy stories in the sun. Book groups have also made a return alongside Lego for Adults, Friends and Neighbourhood Groups and Ancestry groups for our customers to learn more about the family history resources that they can access.

### **Specialist Disability Benefit Service**

Now in its third year of delivery, the specialist disability benefit service is having better outcomes than ever before. The service, which is part of the Money Advice Team, helps families with children or young people, who have disabilities, claim the benefits they are entitled to. Support is not only given to help apply for disability benefits, but also to help appeal against negative benefit decisions. Assistance is also provided at court tribunals.

Referrals have doubled in the past year with the service supporting nearly 100 families with a 93% success rate with new awards being successful or negative decision being overturned. The often discretionary nature of disability benefit awards can make claiming and appealing negative decisions very confusing. The officer helps families to navigate through the complex system with fantastic results, with one family receiving a backdated award of nearly £6,000 and ongoing entitlement of over £200 a week.

### **Healthy Cooking Challenge**

In partnership with and funded by Public Health Wales, the Advice team delivered a Healthy Cooking Challenge competition that aimed to promote healthy eating and to encourage and support the community to learn to cook healthy, nutritious meals on a budget. The project also served to share tips on shopping and eating healthily on a budget. This also promoted the various council services available to provide tailored support and advice during these challenging times.

The Adviceline received over 100 calls from people wanting to take part. Fifty households from across the city were selected and each received a free box that included easy-to-follow recipe cards, the necessary ingredients and basic cooking utensils. Engaging video tutorials were also created to further support them get creative in the kitchen and cook up inexpensive and nutritious meals. Participants emailed photos of themselves and their families cooking (and eating) the meals created. Every participant who submitted photos was also entered into a competition to win a £150 supermarket voucher. The project was hugely successful in terms of positive community engagement and promoting healthy eating on a budget.

## **Financial Assistance with Buying School Uniforms**

The Pupil Deprivation Grant (help to buy school uniforms) was expanded this academic year to include eligible pupils from most school years. To support this, from 17 May 2021, the grant can now be claimed online via the Council's website. This new online service was promoted via the Council's social media channels and through schools, resulting in a considerable increase in applications. The number of applications has been high with 1,383 received in one week. Applications for the current academic year will close on 30 June 2021, with the new scheme reopening from 15 July 2021. The Council will continue to promote the availability of this help to ensure that everyone eligible for the grant makes a claim.

## **Homelessness**

Rough sleeper numbers in the city remain historically low with a weekly average of just 10 recorded in May 2021. This is a considerable achievement when, at its peak, rough sleeping reached 120 individuals, with the average regularly topping 80.

The new Single Person Assessment Centre at Hayes Place has started to open on a phased basis. The centre provides good-quality emergency accommodation for short-term use, but also allows clients to stay longer if needed for them to stabilise and for their needs to be fully assessed. Nine people are currently accommodated, all of whom are undergoing wellbeing assessments and are open to the Homeless Multi-Disciplinary Team.

The Diversionary Activities initiative is dedicated to tackling the rise of negative street cultures, moving people away from the lucrative nature of street begging activity and building people's skills and ability to move into independent living. This is achieved through engagement via education, training and employment, and creative and therapeutic outlets.

Activities organised by the team in recent months include an accredited food hygiene and cookery course "Get Cooking" in partnership with Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, a gender-specific wellbeing group helping to tackle issues such as domestic abuse and low mental health in partnership with Safer Wales, mindfulness classes and volunteer bee keeping and conservation opportunities at Bute Park.

## **High-quality Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Families**

The new family homeless centre at Briardene on North Road in Gabalfa is now open. 11 families have already moved into this brand new accommodation and the full site is expected to be in use by the end of June 2021. Support will be available on site to ensure the families can address any issues and quickly move on to permanent accommodation and once fully operational, the scheme will offer a broad range of support including Flying Start sessions.

## **Overcrowding Project Update**

Addressing overcrowding in the city has been identified as a key priority during the pandemic and research has been undertaken into best practice in addressing both overcrowding and the encouragement of downsizing. This has informed a new targeted approach to overcrowding. A pilot focused on council tenants commenced in December 2020. 57 tenants living in Cardiff Council properties with an urgent or high

need for rehousing were identified and work is now proactively taking place on a range of options to assist them. To date, 19 have successfully been rehoused and four are currently under offer.

Other solutions to address overcrowding are also being explored such as undertaking structural alterations to a tenant's property such as extensions and attic conversions, and enlarging incoming void properties to make them suitable for larger families. Officers will shortly be consulting with tenants individually to find bespoke solutions to their overcrowding circumstances by issuing a questionnaire to all those affected seeking their views on other solutions such as moving non-dependants to alternative accommodation.

### **Innovative Housing Development**

The Council purchased the former Gasworks site in Grangetown last year to ensure that a suitable housing development of around 500 affordable homes is delivered for the local community. Whilst the long-term development of the site is taken forward, the Council is delivering a 'meanwhile use' on a small area of the site consisting of 48 flats for families who find themselves homeless and in need of support.

In partnership with Beattie Passive, 48 two and three bed flats achieving a Passivhaus and zero carbon standard will be built. These modular homes are being built in a factory and delivered to site. This means that the project will be completed much quicker than traditional build with completed homes, including kitchens and bathrooms fitted in the factory and reducing the amount of work required on site. This is a fully demountable system that can be removed and rebuilt elsewhere when the long-term redevelopment of the Gasworks site occurs. The modular homes are above the Welsh Government standards and are extremely efficient to run for the tenants, helping to reduce fuel poverty.

So far, over 20 completed flats have been delivered to site and the first block will be ready for handover at the end of July 2021. The scheme has received over £4.5 million in homelessness grant funding from Welsh Government. This is another example of the development programme delivering at pace and scale and moving towards achieving the Zero Carbon standard.

### **Maelfa Regeneration**

The final phase of the Maelfa Regeneration Scheme has recently been completed. It has revitalised the local area and delivered a modern, new shopping centre, affordable new homes, better road infrastructure and parking and public realm improvements. The comprehensive transformation of the area has been delivered by the Council and its development partners, Cardiff Community Housing Association, with the original 1970s shopping centre having been replaced with nine new shops, 40 flats and 16 townhouses. All nine shops are now occupied and businesses are very pleased with the scheme.

Regeneration work in Llanedeyrn is still taking place with a new partnership Health and Well-being Hub being built, connected to the Council's Powerhouse Community Hub. The first phase of this is complete, with the opening of a new Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) for young people taking place this week. Future schemes, including a new older persons' living block on the site behind the Maelfa flats, are also in the pipeline.

## **Tudor Street Regeneration**

A large scale regeneration project for Tudor Street in Riverside has taken another step forward as the contractor for the public realm and transport improvements has started on site. Large scale excavations and roadworks will form the first element of the project, which will enable sustainable drainage features to be created. Wider pavements, safer routes for pedestrians and cyclists are also key features of the scheme, which will complement a commercial business improvement scheme that is now entering its third phase. Both schemes have secured over £4m in regeneration investment for this area.

## **Safer Streets**

A joint bid to secure funding for measures that will help make Cardiff streets safer places has been successful. The Cardiff Community Safety Partnership, which comprises of organisations including Cardiff Council, South Wales Police, South Wales Police & Crime Commissioner and other key statutory partners, has been awarded £432,000 from the Home Office's Safer Streets fund for schemes that seek to crack down on neighbourhood crimes like burglary, vehicle theft and robbery. The money will be spent in Cardiff to deliver a number of new measures including additional CCTV, better lighting and physical safety improvements in the Grangetown and Butetown areas, mobile CCTV to respond to incidents and issues across the city when needed and an enhanced crime prevention service for repeat victims, such as provision of doorbell monitoring, security improvements, property marking and educational workshops, new approaches to identifying anti-social behaviour hotspots and a new Crimestoppers initiative.

**Councillor Lynda Thorne**  
**Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities**  
**17 June 2021**