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## **HOUSING & COMMUNITIES STATEMENT**

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### **First Homes Cardiff**

I am pleased to confirm that the Council will soon be relaunching the scheme assisting first-time buyers into affordable homeownership. The Council has been running a scheme for a number of years, but has recently been working to refresh the policy and improve the process to ensure that it is responding to the current housing market conditions and assists those people who most need our help to buy their own home. The 'First Homes Cardiff' scheme will be relaunched later this summer and will ensure that the Council is able to provide support to potential first-time buyers who find themselves priced out of homeownership and stuck in private rentals or living with parents. There are some really exciting new-build projects being delivered over the next five years, which will include new homes to be sold through the First Homes Cardiff scheme.

### **Help for tenants in arrears due to Covid-19**

In addition to the wide range of housing and money advice already available from the Council, the authority is now delivering a new Welsh Government scheme: the Tenancy Hardship Grant.

This grant is for private or housing association tenants who have been unable to pay their rent due to financial hardship caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and have accrued rent arrears of at least eight weeks between March 2020 and 30 June 2021. Tenants must also not have received Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit when the arrears were accrued.

Households will be able to apply for practical support to alleviate their arrears, as well as receiving advice about Council services that can help tackle their financial pressures, such as money management and debt advice, information on benefits, grants and discounts they may be eligible for, signposting to employment and training support and more. Tenants in need of support should contact the Adviceline on (029) 2087 1071.

The Council is also keen to hear from landlords with tenants in rent arrears. Council services work with owners of private rented properties to provide interventions to save tenancies.

Council tenants experiencing money worries and difficulties paying rent should contact the Welfare Liaison Team for support on (029) 2023 4200. While the new Welsh Government grant scheme is not available to council tenants, the Council already

offers a great deal of support to their tenants, who may be eligible to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments.

### **Community Safety Partnership**

The Violence Prevention Group, which acts as the strategic oversight group, held its first meeting on 17 June 2021. This was a very positive meeting and the group is taking steps to look at the current partnership landscape of meetings that are held to address serious violence issues and is also looking at what data and intelligence already exists in this space. There are also three sub-groups proposed under this strategic oversight group:

- **Violence Against Women and Girls** – this sub-group is already in place and reconvened on 30 June 2021 with regional representation covering Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan.
- **Serious Violence and Organised Crime** – the Community Safety Partnership is currently scoping out the remit of this sub-group due to the existing concerns that surrounds youth violence.
- **Night Time Economy** – the sub-group is looking to join with FOR Cardiff's Night Time Economy group to reduce duplication and maximise opportunities.

In addition, the Community Safety Partnership's Problem Solving Group continues to work on local issues, as well as monitoring and evaluating progress. Sub-group meetings have been held recently to update Councillors on the problem solving methodologies (OSARA – objective, scanning, analysis, response and assessment) that have been put in place in relation to emerging issues. These meetings have provided Councillors with the opportunity to reflect on the progress made by the Community Safety Partnership and have been received very positively.

### **Increase in Demand for Services**

Services within my portfolio are seeing a significant increase in demand as Covid-19 restrictions have been relaxed within Wales over recent months. For example, requests for repairs to council housing have increased by 20% and the workload for Tenancy Management was 40% higher than normal in June 2021. The number of homelessness assessments completed also increased by 22% between April and June 2021 and there has been a sharp increase in families seeking help since 1 April 2021, with an additional 99 households now residing in temporary accommodation.

Demands for financial assistance have also increased and new schemes created by the Welsh Government to assist with this, while welcome, are causing pressure on services. The numbers receiving Free School Meals have increased from 12,005 to 14,631, while 10,000 applications have been made for the new Pupil Deprivation Grant (help with school uniforms). To put this in context, the caseload was only 700 in 2019. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme caseload has also increased from 30,200 in 2019 to 31,379 in June 2021.

As in many other sectors of the economy, recruitment of new staff is proving to be problematic and, whilst additional posts have been created to meet the increased demand, it has not yet been possible to fill them all. Members' enquiries have also increased by 40% and I would ask colleagues to be patient as services deal with this peak in demand.

## **New Wellbeing Support Service**

The new Cardiff Wellbeing Support Service was launched this week, which will provide support to adults who feel socially isolated and help people to manage their own personal health and wellbeing. The service will be embedded with the Council's Community Hubs team and will complement the work of the team's Community Inclusion Officers who organise and encourage participation in the wide range of Hub and partner activities & events. The new team will ensure that there is a wide range of provision to help as many people as possible by working with different partners. The service will provide short term, one-to-one mentoring to those who need it and help individuals to access the right advice and support. Further information about the service is available by contacting the Adviceline on (029) 2087 1071 (option 1) or by emailing: [WellbeingTeam@cardiff.gov.uk](mailto:WellbeingTeam@cardiff.gov.uk)

## **Veterans Support**

The Veterans Advice team has worked with the Council's Adult Learning team to support 13 veterans and their families to improve their IT skills. All participants engaging in the programme received a tablet prior to enrolling onto a seven-week training programme, which includes a number of accredited courses including creative writing, IT skills and photography. In addition to this, the veterans will be supported to produce a short documentary detailing their experiences of serving in the Armed Forces. Following the completion of the course, an event will be held at Llanover Hall to highlight and showcase the short films.

## **Rough Sleepers**

The good work to bring rough sleepers in Cardiff into accommodation continues; however, with the recent good weather, more individuals are choosing to sleep out. We have accommodation available and there is no need for anyone to sleep on the city's streets. I would ask colleagues to report any rough sleepers by completing the online form on our website or by texting 'REALCHANGE' to 80800, giving details of the person's location.

**Councillor Lynda Thorne**  
**Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities**  
**15 July 2021**