
HOUSING & COMMUNITIES STATEMENT

Meeting with the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

On 31 August 2021, along with members of our Homeless Multi-Disciplinary Team and colleagues from Health, I met with the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, Lynne Neagle MS. The purpose of the meeting was to talk to the Deputy Minister about the roll-out of Buvidal in Cardiff and the great work of our Homeless Multi-disciplinary Team during the pandemic. During the visit, the Deputy Minister met a woman who had struggled with homelessness, mental health issues and addiction throughout her life, but through treatment with Buvidal had now made significant progress, both mentally and physically, including returning to work and re-engaging with her family.

Buvidal is a ground-breaking new treatment for heroin addiction and was rolled out at scale for the first time during the pandemic. It has been a game changer for many living with drug dependence and I am proud that our Multi-disciplinary Team, alongside partners in Health, have played a significant part in leading the way in the roll-out of Buvidal during the pandemic. For many clients in Homelessness Services, substance misuse is as a result of significant trauma, not just a lifestyle choice. We are already seeing the positive impact that Buvidal has had on individuals, with life-changing results being achieved.

Homelessness

Homelessness Prevention Services are currently under immense pressure due in part to a lack of suitable private rented accommodation in the city. Many private landlords are selling their properties as property prices have increased and private rents have risen to a level that many people cannot afford. The Housing Options Service currently has greater demand from clients at risk of homelessness and the Prevention Team is finding it more difficult to find accommodation in the private sector due to a lack of availability. Whilst officers try to source alternative accommodation, they have experienced instances where properties are being secured by other prospective tenants before they have even been viewed, with some even offering to pay higher than the rent asked in order to secure the properties.

A lack of private rented accommodation means that less people are prevented from becoming homeless and the Council is also unable to move people on from temporary accommodation as quickly as we would like. These two factors have led to an increase in the demand for temporary accommodation in the city, particularly by families.

In the last six months, the number of people requiring temporary accommodation has increased by over 150, although with mediation and negotiation, not all have needed to be placed in temporary accommodation at the present time. Homelessness

Prevention Services are looking at innovative ways to address these pressures, which are likely to increase as many Welsh and UK Government financial support schemes come to an end.

Housing Applications and Enquiries

There has been an increase of over 50% in the number of housing applications being made, with urgent applications increasing by 119%. Around 4,000 calls per month are being made to our Housing Enquiries phone line, which is an increase of 75% compared to this time in 2019. There has also been an increase of 126% in demand for housing waiting list appointments and the number of emails received by the Housing Solutions Team has increased by 256%.

Responsive Repairs

There has been a 10% increase in the number of responsive repairs requested compared to the same period in 2019, with around 6,000 requests now being made each month. Officers are also continuing to deal with the backlog created during lockdown.

Advice Services

Last month was the busiest month of the year for all advice services. Contacts to the Money Advice Team increased by 385% on the previous month and the team has supported the highest number of clients since the pandemic started. Both the Adviceline and Housing Helpline assisted with 9,000 calls in August 2021, the highest number ever recorded and an increase of 72% on the previous month.

The demand for financial assistance has also continued to increase. The numbers receiving Free School Meals have increased from 12,005 to 15,476. Changes to eligibility criteria now mean that more families can also apply for school uniform assistance. 6,389 applications have been made since July 2021 – the caseload was only 700 in 2019.

Community Hubs

I know that a lot of people have been feeling isolated during the pandemic and, although our Hubs and Libraries have made sure that they offered a digital programme of events to support vulnerable people in Cardiff, it is really pleasing that a comprehensive and varied face-to-face events programme has returned to the Hubs within the city. Events have included monthly coffee mornings, reading groups, Meet Up Mondays, Knit and Natter, Friends and Neighbourhood Groups, and craft and sporting activities. Face-to-face Storytime and Rhyme Times have also returned. I was particularly moved to hear about the impact of the first Rhyme Time at Grangetown Hub where several of the babies had never attended an 'in person' Rhyme Time or been in a group session of any type. Staff have said that the babies were mesmerised and the parents said that they were really happy to be doing something so simple yet so special with their little ones for the first time.

The outside spaces at our Hubs have also been fully utilised. Staff were really pleased to welcome BBC Wales personalities Derek Brockway and Sue Charles to Llandaff North and Gabalfa Hub to launch the opening of the gardening area and outside gym

equipment. Community members came along and tried out the exercise machines, exchanged plants and were shown around the community garden by Fork 'n' Trowels – the on-site community gardening group.

Hubs have also been supporting events taking place within the wider community. A great example of this were the preparations for the Butetown Carnival, which took place at Butetown Pavilion Hub throughout August 2021. Parents and children from the local area took part in creative sessions at the Hub creating head-dresses and costumes for the Carnival parade. The Hub staff even attended the parade during the Bank Holiday weekend to cheer on the children.

The Hubs and Libraries will continue to develop and build upon a community events programme designed to help communities re-engage and recover.

Councillor Lynda Thorne
Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
23 September 2021