
HOUSING & COMMUNITIES STATEMENT

Assistance with Increased Costs of Living

With the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, rising fuel prices and an increase in the cost of living, many households in the city are sadly facing financial hardship. Funding has been provided for a number of support schemes, which is being administered by the Council's Advice, Assessment and Housing Options Teams. This funding, alongside expert support from our officers, will help to ease the immediate financial pressures being faced by many in the city. Some examples of the schemes available are set out below:

- **Winter Fuel Support Scheme**

The Council welcomes the £51.7m support package to help low-income households meet pressures on living costs this winter, which was announced by the Welsh Government in November 2021. This aims to reduce the impact of the cut to Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit and the rising cost of energy, and includes £38 million for a winter fuel support scheme. Eligible households can claim a one-off payment of £100 to provide support towards paying their winter fuel bills. To date, the Assessment Team has received 16,317 applications for assistance. The team has made it as easy as possible to make a claim. More information on the scheme, including how to make a claim, can be obtained by phoning the Advice Line on (029) 2087 1071 or by emailing: winterfuelhelp@cardiff.gov.uk

- **Self-Isolation Payments**

The self-isolation support scheme is aimed at those who cannot work from home and must self-isolate due to Covid-19, and who have seen a reduction in their income because of this. It is also for parents and carers on low incomes with children who are self-isolating. Those eligible and who make a claim will receive a one-off payment of £750. The Assessment Team is currently receiving approximately 1,200 applications per week for the scheme, compared to approximately 200 a week back in September 2021. Again, further information on this scheme can be obtained by phoning the Advice Line or by emailing: SISP@cardiff.gov.uk

- **Rent Arrears Pathway**

The rent arrears pathway has been introduced to ensure that anyone experiencing rent arrears and the threat of homelessness is able to get help using one front door. Practical support, as well as financial help, is provided to help reduce or remove the threat of eviction. There are a number of financial support schemes available to those in rent arrears, all with differing eligibility criteria. A wide-ranging publicity campaign has been conducted, including adverts on radio, bus stops, waste lorries and via social media, to promote the

help available, with a further campaign planned in the near future. So far, 593 households have been prevented from becoming homeless via this pathway. Further information is available by phoning the Advice Line or by emailing: renthelp@cardiff.gov.uk

Housing Support Programme Strategy

The Council has developed a new Housing Support Programme Strategy, which sets out the strategic direction for homelessness prevention and housing support services in Cardiff for the next four years. The strategy recognises the significant work that is already being done by the Council and partner organisations to prevent homelessness and to support those who become homeless; however, it also acknowledges that there is still more to do. It sets out a new vision for addressing homelessness in the city, aiming to prevent homelessness wherever possible and, where prevention is not possible, seeks to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and not repeated.

First Homes Cardiff

The Council's assisted home ownership scheme, helping first time buyers in the city get onto the property ladder, has been relaunched as 'First Homes Cardiff'. The scheme aims to help first time buyers living or working in the city who find themselves unable to afford their first home, by offering new-build properties for sale on a shared equity basis within developments across the city. As well as a new name for the scheme, the eligibility criteria for First Homes Cardiff have also been expanded to allow more people to potentially benefit. Applicants who may not work or live in Cardiff currently, but who are moving back to Cardiff for personal or professional reasons and have a strong local connection to the city are now also eligible. To qualify for the scheme, applicants must be aged over 18 and be a first-time buyer or a first-time buyer in their own right. More information about the scheme can be found on the Council's website at: www.cardiff.gov.uk/firsthomescardiff

Homelessness Update – Preventing Youth Homelessness

During the Covid-19 pandemic, although overall numbers of those presenting to the Homeless Service has not increased, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of clients presenting as homeless due to family breakdown. The Homeless Service has a dedicated Prevention Officer who works directly with young people and their families to prevent homelessness where possible. So far this year, 80% of young people at risk of losing family accommodation have been prevented from becoming homeless; however, there is still more that can be done to help. We want to help reach people at an earlier stage to help prevent homelessness – this includes enhancing and improving our advice and meditation services for young people.

I am also very pleased to say that our partners Llamau, with our support, have recently been successful in a bid for lottery funding to carry out further work to prevent youth homelessness. This will bring an additional £3million to Cardiff over the next five years. The funding will help Llamau and other partners, including the Salvation Army, Welsh Refugee Council and Cadwyn Housing Association, to focus on early intervention and prevention for young people at risk of becoming homeless, with specialist support for those who need it most.

Struggles 2 Smiles

'Struggles 2 Smiles' train young offenders to cook and prepare meals, which are then provided to the homeless community in the city. Over 600 Christmas lunches were prepared and distributed to those living in hostels across the city over the festive period.

Regional Safeguarding Boards Recognition Awards

The Change Development & Implementation Team within Housing Services was successful at the recent Cardiff and Vale Regional Safeguarding Boards' Recognition Awards. The team won a 'Highly Commended Award' for the work that they carried out in creating a new safeguarding policy and procedure within Housing Services. The new streamlined procedure ensures that staff have a clear understanding of what harm indicators they should be aware of, when and how to report their concerns, and the support they should receive if affected by a safeguarding concern. The team has already trained 100 members of staff in Housing Services on the new procedure.

Community Safety Update

Problem Solving Group

- **New Area Based Cases:**
 - Deliberate Fire Setting and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in St Mellons – alongside target hardening, actions include improved communications (e.g. residents' forums).
 - Lydstep Flats in Gabalfa – actions include building on youth offer, community litter picks and links with local football clubs.
 - Off Road Bikes – this continues to be addressed via regular operations, the results of which are posted via social media to reassure the communities who are impacted and encourage reporting.
- **Safer Streets Fund** – following Ask Cardiff survey responses and community forums where residents said they would feel safer if lighting and CCTV were improved, 20 CCTV cameras have been ordered. Lighting has also been upgraded in two underpasses, alongside the upgrading of street lighting to 'smart' lighting in a number of streets.
- **Crimestoppers** – following a promotional tour in Quarter 2 of 2021/22, Crimestoppers rolled out a 3-week online campaign encouraging residents to report crime and/or pass on intelligence safely and anonymously. Early data suggests that there has been a 9% increase in reporting via Crimestoppers in Cardiff over the campaign period, set against a 29% fall in reporting across the rest of South Wales.

Violence Prevention Group

- The Violence Prevention Group has established three subgroups, which have developed clear priorities and are currently building their understanding and knowledge of the complexities of serious violence in Cardiff.
- The Community Safety Partnership has taken steps to develop an Intelligence Dashboard using predominately police reported information, which provides us with geographical hotspots of emerging issues.

- Immediate Response Groups have met following recent incidents of serious violence. This has led to partners working together to address critical and immediate issues, as well as establishing a Community Impact Assessment, which looks to address any emerging community tension issues.

Night Time Economy Group

- An approach to reports of drink and needle spiking has been agreed and communicated via the various members including FOR Cardiff, South Wales Police, Gender Specific Services and SRS/Licensing.
- Promotion and support of campaigns through the members' networks (e.g. FOR Cardiff's Women's Network and Safe Places), as well as aligning of applications and actions for accreditation (e.g. White Ribbon and Purple Flag).
- Safeguarding audit is progressing, taking account of the training provided by all members to analyse gaps and the most effective methods for further rollout, including businesses that are not traditionally considered as being within the night time economy (e.g. cinemas).
- Members identified an issue with taxis not completing bookings and leaving vulnerable customers stranded, especially those with wheelchairs or guide dogs, people travelling short distances and those with low mobile phone batteries. Local actions have been identified alongside issues for escalation.

Street Based Lifestyles & Complex Needs Group

- **Drug Litter Reporting** – work has been completed to adapt existing reporting streams, such as the CardiffGov App, to differentiate incidents of drug litter reporting into needles and other forms of paraphernalia in order to provide more accurate and valuable intelligence. This has already resulted in new observations regarding emerging hotspot areas for drug taking.
- **Task & Finish Groups** – partners agreed to initiate four task & finish groups in order to take forward group objectives. These groups include:
 - *Operational* – this group is now meeting fortnightly to address ASB complaints and drug litter hotspots associated or linked to street-based lifestyles. Partner reports to date indicate a marked improvement and/or reduction of issues in four of the first eight locations under review by the group.
 - *Resident Engagement & Volunteer Engagement* – these two groups both aim to highlight available services and encourage good practice in the form of donations and volunteering.
 - *Data & Intelligence* – this group has begun to map out the required and available data sets that will be most useful for the Street Based Lifestyles group going forward.

Councillor Lynda Thorne
Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
20 January 2022