
HOUSING & COMMUNITIES STATEMENT

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan

The Cabinet approved the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan for 2022-23 on 10 March 2022, which sets out the Council's purpose and vision as a social housing landlord. It includes a 30-year financial model and details seven key objectives for the coming financial year. The business plan set out an ambitious housing development programme of more than 4,000 new homes (of which 2,800 will be council homes) that will be of the highest quality and in a wide range of locations across the city. This programme is currently the largest council housing programme build in Wales and represents an investment of over £850 million.

This development programme is investing heavily in building new accessible, adaptable and affordable homes for older tenants, which will help promote independent living in Cardiff. We are currently delivering 10 new community living buildings and, in doing so, investing in excess of £100 million and delivering around 500 new homes specifically for older tenants to ensure that our population ages well. To ensure that we contribute to our One Planet Cardiff agenda, these new development projects are also leading the way in low-carbon building.

We are also investing over £19 million to make improvements to our existing council housing stock. This will include over-cladding our high-rise blocks and planned upgrades of kitchens, bathrooms and windows. To improve energy efficiency and make our homes warmer, we will also be improving insulation and installing new renewable technology such as solar panels. In addition, to further improve our estates and communities, the Estate Regeneration and Local Action Teams have both been allocated additional funds to expand the work they currently do. This will create better and safer places, where people are proud to live.

The HRA Business Plan is an impressive read, with bold and ambitious targets, and I am looking forward to seeing these objectives being delivered over the coming year.

Cardiff Living Development at Crofts Street

I was very pleased to welcome the new tenants of nine highly energy-efficient, sustainable modular council houses at Crofts Street in the Plasnewydd ward into their new homes last month. These homes are on the cutting edge of modular technology and it has been amazing to witness first-hand just how quickly this scheme has been delivered. I was on-site to watch the first units being craned into position just before Christmas, with a small plot of derelict land being transformed into a row of nine modern houses in a matter of months. The tenants received their keys to the new homes at the end of last month.

The two-bedroom, terraced properties have been developed as part of the Cardiff Living house building partnership between Cardiff Council and Wates Residential. The new homes were built off-site using Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) and were lowered onto their final position on-site at the end of last year, with all the groundworks and external hard and soft landscaping having been completed.

This is the first time that this method of off-site construction has been used by the Council to deliver permanent homes for families living in the city. This approach to using modular building and MMC is one that we must repeat on constrained sites elsewhere within our programme. The method not only enables the units to be built and installed in record time, but also uses the latest technology and construction materials to create net zero carbon buildings that are 90% more energy efficient than standard homes built to current building regulations. The homes have been certified as 'climate positive' and are extremely airtight, which means that they are well insulated and residents will also see huge savings on their energy bills.

Building in this way is also much less disruptive for the residents living around the site, with a smaller workforce on-site and a lot of the building work being undertaken off-site in a factory. It was very pleasing to see the interest in this development from local residents, many of whom came out to watch the new homes being craned into position. We have now come full circle at Crofts Street as, back in the 1940s, there used to be a terrace of nine houses at this location before they were bombed in World War II and had to be demolished.

Homelessness Update

There are currently around 18 people sleeping rough in the city. We are doing everything we can to ensure this number remains low. Our Outreach Team has been working really hard, engaging with rough sleepers and supporting them to access a range of accommodation and the support they need to maintain it.

Sadly, we are seeing a rise in the number of young people with complex support needs requiring assistance. Joint working is currently underway between Children Services, and Adults, Housing & Communities to create a targeted Young Persons Multi-Disciplinary Team, which will help the most vulnerable young people who find themselves homeless and in need of vital support. It is hoped that the service will launch early in the new financial year.

Our new supported accommodation schemes continue to deliver at pace. A new project at Malvern Drive, which will support single homeless people who are ready for permanent independent living is going well. Handover of the project is due in early May, with the first clients moving in in June 2022. In addition, the first phase of Adams Court, another new supported housing scheme for single people, has been completed this month with clients moving into the newly renovated building. Phase two is due to be completed in August 2022.

Our new family homelessness centre at the Gasworks site in Grangetown is progressing well, with the first families due to move in next month. The new centre will provide not only temporary accommodation, but access to a wide range of support services for families.

Developing a Rapid Rehousing Approach to Homelessness

Part of the Welsh Government's vision – one that the Council shares – is that we aim to prevent homelessness in Wales, but where it cannot be prevented, it is rare, brief and unrepeatable. To reduce the impact and time spent in temporary accommodation, we are working with our partners to develop a rapid rehousing approach to support individuals and families into settled accommodation. A rapid rehousing pilot has commenced and will inform the wider roll-out of this new approach in summer 2022.

Housing Advice and Support for Veterans

I was really pleased to join the Cabinet Member for Social Care, Health & Well-being on 7 March 2022 on a visit to the Leckwith Drovers allotments site in Grangetown. In addition to discussing the Green Headspace project being delivered at the allotments in partnership with the Welsh Veterans Partnership, we also spoke to veterans and their families about the sustainable and affordable homes that are being delivered for Armed Forces leavers, veterans and their families in Cardiff through successful partnership working between the Council, Welsh Veterans Partnership and Housing Associations. The Mill housing development in Canton is the latest new-build site where veterans and their families have recently moved into and they were incredibly complimentary about the difference that this new housing provision has made to their lives, as well as the amazing advice and support that they have received from the Council, especially from our Veterans Team. They were also very pleased and excited about our housing development programme and particularly welcomed the fact that we have secured the Gas Works site in Grangetown. They were looking forward to working with us in drawing up the plans for this site and throughout the development.

Responsive Repairs Unit Update

Our Responsive Repairs Unit is responsible for the repairs and maintenance of the 13,776 properties in our council housing stock. On average, 4,532 repairs are raised monthly and over 93% of our emergency works continue to be completed on time.

Due to the lockdowns and firebreaks during the Covid-19 pandemic, our operatives could not enter tenants' properties for 29 weeks. This, coupled with staff sickness, tenants shielding or not wanting workmen in their property, has created an outstanding backlog of 3,900 routine repairs resulting in delays to works being completed.

To address this, we have ringfenced the backlog, allocated 1,600 overdue repairs to our external contractors and introduced new additional maintenance persons to carry out general repairs. The outcomes of these interventions are then monitored in new Responsive Repairs Taskforce meetings that are held on a weekly basis.

In addition to this, a full service review is underway to improve customer satisfaction. This includes a review of all processes and procedures to streamline and increase the number of first-time fixes. We are also procuring a pool of small contractors to help support us to deal with peaks in demand and will seek to expand the use of maintenance persons if the current scheme is successful. In addition to this, in order to ensure a pipeline of skilled trade persons within the Council over future years, we will be launching a new Repairs Academy. Finally, we will be introducing 'My Repairs' where our tenants will be able to report, view and book repairs online.

The Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee was provided a full update on the service on 9 March 2022 and was also advised that, even with the issues identified, the total number of complaints received from tenants equate to less than 1% of all the repairs that are completed.

I am confident that with the above measures in place, the backlog will be removed as quickly as possible.

Overcladding Works at Lydstep Flats

I am pleased – as I know all the residents affected are – that work has now started on the scheme to overclad the three high-rise housing blocks at Lydstep Flats in Llandaff North. Cladding was removed in the aftermath of the Grenfell tragedy as it did not meet current fire safety standards; however, progress to date has been affected by significant cost rises due to Brexit and inflationary pressures in the building industry, as well as the impact of the extensive testing and regulation framework for cladding solutions.

The works are being carried out by ISG Ltd and will see new A1-rated cladding fitted to the three blocks of flats, which will provide the highest level of fire safety. The works will also include the provision of new windows, balcony upgrades including balustrading, surfacing and new balcony doors for the 126 households. In addition, each property will benefit from a new extract ventilation system for the kitchen and bathroom, as well as the fitting of a new flue to the boiler. The works to all three blocks are expected to take around 70 weeks to be completed.

We are working closely with residents and the contractors have employed a dedicated resident liaison officer to ensure that the transition goes as smoothly as possible. As with previous years, we are assisting residents with energy costs until the new insulation has been added. These much-needed improvements will not only bring practical upgrades for residents, but will also improve community unity and pride.

We also intend to replace cladding at Loudoun and Nelson House in Butetown and proposals for these schemes are currently being considered.

'Together for Cardiff' Legacy Funding

To help those affected the most from the rising cost of living, I am pleased to confirm that the Council's Money Advice Team has partnered with Action in Caerau and Ely (ACE) and Alan Peterson OBE to inject £60,000 into a fund to allocate fuel vouchers to those in need across Cardiff. Residents can access these vouchers by contacting the Adviceline or visiting any local Hub.

Rent Rescue Pathway

The Rent Rescue Pathway was launched in April 2021 to offer 'one front door' to residents who were struggling to pay their rent. Clients who contact the Council are provided with rapid help, advice and practical support by Money Advice Team and Housing Options Centre staff working seamlessly together to support tenants to reduce or remove their rent arrears. This scheme recently reached a milestone, with more than 1,000 tenancies saved through the Rent Rescue Pathway allowing these clients to remain within their own homes and preventing them from becoming homelessness.

Refurbishment of Central Hub Children's Library

As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, we are all too aware of the negative impact this has had on our children and young people. We want to encourage more young people into our hubs and libraries. I am therefore pleased to announce that the Children's Library in Central Hub is now open after receiving a complete refurbishment.

The area is now bright, welcoming and includes a state-of-the-art sensory area. To complement our sensory feature, mood lighting has been installed, allowing staff to tailor the lighting according to the needs of children and to enhance event experiences. The makeover includes brand new flexible furniture enabling space to be customised to allow for more interactive children's events and larger group story times. Designer family fun pods also allow for quiet parent/guardian and children time so enhancing reading experiences. This is a truly wonderful refurbishment and will be of great benefit to our young library members.

Winter of Wellbeing in Hubs and Libraries

The Winter of Wellbeing is a multi-strand campaign funded by the Welsh Government that aims to help young people recover from the pandemic and boost their physical, social and emotional wellbeing. Hubs and libraries across Wales have been allocated £500,000 as part of the campaign, targeting families and those aged under 25 with events and activities, both online and in person, helping them connect with their local library and with each other.

Cardiff is leading on the national co-ordination of the project, working with literacy charity and principal partner, The Reading Agency. The campaign aims to rebuild confidence and raise awareness of how reading can promote wellness. Young people from across Wales have been encouraged to nominate books that have helped them during the pandemic and a shortlist of titles has been published to encourage other young people to enjoy them too.

As well as co-ordinating the efforts of staff in local authorities throughout Wales, Cardiff Hubs and Libraries staff have worked hard to create a programme of free local events that draw young people in and show them the variety of activities taking place in their community. These have included working with schools to provide creative writing workshops and visits from inspiring authors and illustrators, as well as family fitness sessions and a mindfulness course aimed at teens. There have also been special 'rhyme time' events for little ones and reading-based outreach to young users of the Huggard Centre experiencing homelessness.

It has been a pleasure to have been able to deliver these events and work alongside other local authorities who are mirroring these efforts across Wales. The campaign runs until the end of March 2022, but hopefully its positive impact on the awareness of our services and on the wellbeing of children and young people in Cardiff will continue.

Councillor Lynda Thorne
Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
11 March 2022