

**COUNCIL: 30 JUNE 2022**

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**FINANCE, MODERNISATION & PERFORMANCE STATEMENT**

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**Cost of Living Support Scheme**

On 23 June 2022, the Cabinet approved a report on the Cost of Living Support Scheme setting out how we would implement a Discretionary Cost of Living Scheme, funded by Welsh Government, totalling £2.193million in Cardiff. This is part of the £177million Welsh Government support programme, trying to help families most in need during this time of rapidly rising cost of living.

We have already begun distributing the non-discretionary Cost of Living Scheme grant, which provided a £150 payment to all households living in properties in council tax bands A-D, those in band E who get a disability band reduction, and any property receiving Council Tax Reduction irrespective of their band. In Cardiff, these payments will total more than £13.3m. So far, we have made payments to 86% of eligible households in Cardiff – around 76,000 – with around £11.5 million having been distributed. We have contacted all eligible households and will be doing so again to maximise take-up.

The additional Discretionary Scheme will make payments to certain groups eligible for various Council Tax discounts, including care leavers, and also payments to people in the most financial need, on means-tested basis through various routes and schemes:

- Discretionary Housing Payments – intended to help tenants struggling to pay their rents (proposed allocation = £700k)
- Applications via the Money Advice Team – supports residents who struggle with their finances, often recommending one-off payments to resolve issues (£700k)
- Fuel Voucher Scheme – gas and/or electricity vouchers for residents on prepayment meters struggling to pay their bills (£50k)
- Families affected by the Benefit Cap – a direct payment of £150 to help families with three or more children who are affected by the Cap (£205k)
- Free School Meals (FSM) – there are a maximum of 2,000 families in Cardiff in receipt of FSM who have not received the £150 payment, and this will ensure they do (£300k)
- Adult Services – some clients are struggling with essential care costs. Payments are not to pay for care, but to help with the rising cost of living (£50k)

The Council will be contacting those we know are eligible, and is planning a publicity campaign, which will see information made available at our Hubs, through our Advice Line on 029 2087 1071, and from the Money Advice Team on social media and its website. Letters will also be sent to households receiving benefits. I would urge any member who speaks to residents struggling financially to contact the Council's Money Advice Team to see whether they are eligible for this or any other support.

## **Real Living Wage**

One of the key pledges in the Welsh Government's Programme for Government is to pay social care workers in Wales the real Living Wage and Cardiff Council is fully supportive of this ambition. The Council has recently taken action to ensure that eligible workers within the care sector are paid the real Living Wage by issuing commissioned providers with an annual uplift, which also includes an additional amount that covers implementation of the real Living Wage. This uplift applies to registered workers in care homes, domiciliary and supported living settings. It is also to be received by all personal assistants funded through the local authority Direct Payment. Providers are required to confirm that they have paid their eligible staff at least the real Living Wage from 1 April 2022 (backdated to this date if passed on after 1 April 2022). This will enable the Council to assure itself that the uplift is reaching these vital workers within the social care sector.

## **Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards 2022**

Cardiff Council's entry, on behalf of the Cardiff Living Wage City Partnership, is one of nine that have been shortlisted in the Public/Private Partnership category of this year's LGC Awards. I participated in a judging panel session on 10 June 2022 to present details of our entry and explain how the Council has collaborated successfully with partners such as Cynnal Cymru, Citizens Cymru and Cardiff University Business School to promote the payment of the real Living Wage by employers in Cardiff. The awards event is due to take place in London on 20 July 2022.

## **Cardiff Gov Mobile App**

At the end of May 2022, the total number of downloads for the CardiffGov mobile app had reached 59,797 since its launch in 2018. The most recent update in March 2022 delivered functionality for residents to report graffiti within the city, as well as providing guidance on how to manage notifications, accessibility improvements and several technical changes in the background to improve existing services. Last month, over 80% of graffiti reports were made using the new web and app service. The next release for the app is planned next month and will include a new service for reporting problem parking cases across the city, which will enable residents to upload photos as part of the reporting function. Further planned changes and additions include the development of a new service for reporting street lighting issues.

## **BOBi Chatbot**

Since its launch, the Council's chatbot, BOBi, has had over 123,000 conversations with residents, including 6,000 which took place last month. The main topics of conversation in the last few months have focused on Council Tax following the annual billing process, dealing with customer queries regarding garden waste changes and booking appointments at our Recycling Centres. Current development work is focusing on allowing customers to make graffiti reports within the chatbot itself and extending parking-related services, allowing users to report problem parkers, check permits and inquire about fines. Feedback scores remain high, with around 89% of feedback being Very Good, Good or OK. Continuous learning assists in improving BOBi's response accuracy and conversational standard from month to month.

## **Website**

[www.cardiff.gov.uk](http://www.cardiff.gov.uk) had 226,000 visitors in May 2022 who viewed 785,000 pages of information. Last month, 68% of website visitors used a mobile device and 22,000 online payments were made via the website totalling £2.9million. In addition, over 350 pdf files were removed from the website and either replaced with accessible content or removed as they were no longer required.

**Councillor Chris Weaver**

**Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation & Performance**

**23 June 2022**