

FINANCE, MODERNISATION & PERFORMANCE STATEMENT

Real Living Wage

I attended the Cardiff Living Wage Steering Group meeting recently with our partners who have so successfully delivered significant progress in the city in new accreditations and wage uplifts over the last three years. I'm delighted the partnership is completing its next ambitious 3-year plan and will be seeking approval from the Living Wage Foundation to continue as a Living Wage City.

The success of the Council's work and the Cardiff Living Wage City Partnership was recognised in July 2022, when we won the Public/Private Partnership category of this year's Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards. This is a superb recognition of the strong partnership that has been built in Cardiff to promote the real Living Wage.

Committing to paying the Real Living Wage is an important way in which employers can help support their staff, particularly at this challenging time. The rate for the Real Living Wage next year was announced on 22 September 2022 and will rise by a record 10.1% to £10.90 an hour (£11.95 in London), recognising the significant recent cost-of-living increases.

Financial Update

Councillors will know that the Month 4 report went to Cabinet this month and shows the significant in-year financial pressures that the Council is facing. In this year's budget, we put aside £10 million for issues that we expected to face emerging from the pandemic, recognising that the Welsh Government's Covid Hardship Fund was closed at the end of the last financial year. This is proving vital in providing in-year financial resilience.

Over recent weeks, calculations of future rising prices and pressures have made the expected budget position for next year look increasingly challenging. This is a situation that is faced by Local Authorities across Wales and the UK – energy prices, pressure on pay budgets, and rising supplier costs due to inflation in particular will increase costs significantly in the public sector. As ever, I will continue to keep Members updated on the Council's financial position throughout the budget setting process for 2023/24.

Website

www.cardiff.gov.uk had 201,000 visitors in August 2022 who viewed 681,000 pages of information. Last month, 68% of website visitors used a mobile device and 19,700 online payments were made via the website totalling £2.4million. 84% of Penalty Charge Notice appeals and 84.4% of street cleansing reports were completed online. The website has also achieved 94% AA level accessibility compliance and is now in the top three council websites in Wales as rated by SOCITM's accessibility partner, SilkTide.

CardiffGov Mobile App

At the end of last month, the total number of downloads of the CardiffGov mobile app had reached 63,847 since it was launched. An update enabling the reporting of problem parking was released in July 2022 and a further technical update is also due to be provided this month, which will improve useability and performance of the app. The function enabling appointment bookings at recycling centres is currently being updated and development work is due to commence at the end of next month that will also enable allow users to report street lighting problems via the app in future.

BOBi Chatbot

The Council's chatbot, BOBi, had 6,089 conversations last month, with chatbot users engaging mostly in conversations about Council Tax, appointment bookings for our recycling centres and queries about waste and recycling. There was also a big increase in the number of users looking for information regarding fines. The chatbot also includes a new feature, which allows users to report graffiti without having to leave the chat. Following analysis of customer interactions with BOBi, the service is currently focusing on an expansion of the existing parking scenario, which will provide more information for users, as well as allowing them check if they are part of a digital parking permit scheme and to report problem parkers in the city.

Wales Interpretation and Translation Service (WITS)

The Wales Interpretation and Translation Service (WITS) has seen a month-on-month increase in demand, as demonstrated by a 50% increase in August 2022 compared to August 2021, with 3,148 requests for an interpreter. The top five interpretation languages requested were Arabic; Polish; Ukrainian; BSL; and Bengali. The top six translation languages requested were Polish; Ukrainian; Arabic; Bengali; Russian and Romanian. Ukrainian continues to be in the top five, with high demand throughout Wales.

Councillor Chris Weaver

Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation & Performance

23 September 2022