
HOUSING & COMMUNITIES STATEMENT

Warm Welcome Spaces

Cardiff's Hubs and libraries began providing warm welcome spaces from 10 October and already 350 individuals have taken advantage of the scheme; 93 people received information on support available to help with food and fuel costs. This scheme is a national initiative which has been supported by Welsh Government and is aimed at keeping people warm this winter. The warm welcome spaces are part of the Council's response to supporting city residents through the cost-of-living crisis by providing heated spaces in community buildings where people can pop in for a free hot drink, have a chat with staff and others, and if they wish, find out about services available in the Hub that could support them.

The warm welcome spaces provide the opportunity to read a newspaper, pick up a book from the library or to take part in some of the many varied activities that the Hubs and libraries host regularly throughout the week. Our Hubs and libraries are thriving community spaces and we want to encourage anyone struggling to heat their home to come in and enjoy the warm welcome. Additional locations in the community that can offer warm welcome spaces are actively being sought by officers.

The Council is also offering grants to groups, who want to deliver their own warm spaces or improve their services, through two new funds. The Loneliness and Isolation Fund, delivered jointly with Cardiff Third Sector Council (C3SC), will give up to £1,500 to groups to cover venue hire, promotion and marketing, or work to improve the availability of either the digital or face-to-face side of their services. The Warm Spaces Fund will give up to £500 to groups providing venues well known to local communities including community centres and places of worship to provide their own warm spaces. Groups funded under these schemes will be included on the Warm Welcome Campaign's website <https://www.warmwelcome.uk/>, providing the locations of warm spaces in Cardiff. The application deadline for both schemes is 5pm on Monday 24 October.

Summer Reading Challenge and Project Gadgeteers

Every year, Cardiff's Hubs and Libraries Service holds the Summer Reading Challenge which this year was themed "Gadgeteers" encouraging children to enjoy books, take part in fun free activities and discover the amazing science and innovation behind the world around them. Additional funding was provided by Welsh Government for Welsh libraries to provide a programme of Gadgeteer-themed activities as part of the Summer of Fun. I am pleased to report that 652 children joined the library during the summer. Over 3,900 children in Cardiff were rewarded with prizes and medals for taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge and, almost 6,000 children enjoyed the hundreds of free events which took place in Hubs across Cardiff.

Reading Well for Teens

Reading Well for teens launched in public libraries in England and Wales on 10 October, World Mental Health Day 2022. A free event was held at Central Library Hub on 15 October to promote the initiative with guests from mental health charity, Platform. A special selection of books has been compiled to support the mental health and wellbeing of teenagers aged 13-18, providing information and advice to help them better understand their feelings, handle difficult experiences and boost confidence. The books have been chosen and endorsed by leading health professionals with the final selection co-produced with teenagers. In Cardiff, full book collections have been purchased for every Hub and library across the city, which will be of enormous benefit to younger people following the Covid-19 pandemic. Alongside the books are a selection of digital resources to further support teenagers.

Tenants Conference 2022

I was pleased to attend and welcome our tenants and leaseholders to the Annual Tenants Conference on 30 September at City Hall. This was the first conference to be held in person since 2019 and appropriately enough, the theme of this year's conference was 'New Beginnings'. The conference was attended by more than 80 tenants who were able to visit stalls from many different council teams and external partners such as Dogs Trust, Specsavers and Age Cymru. The conference was a great success and provided a fantastic opportunity for tenants and residents of Cardiff to come together and discuss their experiences.

The conference included presentations on topics such as health and wellbeing in the community, legislative changes such as the introduction of the new Renting Homes (Wales) Act and the construction of new community living schemes across the city on sites, including Channel View and Canton Community Centre. Workshops including healthy cooking on a budget, money advice and Welfare Reform were also provided.

Modular Home Extensions

The Disabled Facilities Service has embraced innovations in the building sector with their new approach to providing home extensions. Modular extensions allow people to remain in their own homes while the work is undertaken and for the work to be completed much faster than previously.

Traditionally, a fully on-site built extension would take long periods of time and required several tradespeople to complete. This year, the service has been installing pre-built modular extensions rather than an extension built on-site where appropriate. The modular extensions are manufactured off-site to specification and then moved into place using cranes. The units are manufactured locally with 85% of the materials used to construct the units sourced in Wales, providing the additional benefit of a much greener solution than a traditional build.

To date, five new modular extensions have been installed, with a sixth under construction. As well as reducing significant disruption to residents, the average delivery time of a disabled facilities adaptation has reduced from 214 days to 119 – a 45% reduction over six months, which is an excellent result.

Homelessness Prevention

I am saddened to announce that the number of people in temporary accommodation has risen significantly since 2021 and is continuing to increase. There are currently 516 families living in temporary accommodation in the city. This represents a 27% increase in occupancy since April 2021 and 8% since the start of this financial year alone. Numbers presenting to Homelessness Services are also increasing, projecting a 10% increase in demand this year. Whilst these figures are of concern, this does not represent the full story of demand on services. With accommodation now at near capacity, waiting lists to enter temporary accommodation have increased dramatically and are up a staggering 426% since July 2021. This demand is felt equally for family accommodation which has a waiting list increase of 378% over the same time period.

To try to mitigate these significant demand pressures on the service, a number of steps have been taken to provide additional support to those who are either already homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. These include expanding the number of Prevention Officers and providing assistance to those in financial hardship. Alongside this financial assistance, mediation is also offered between landlord and tenant, providing advice and support to tenants in order to help keep their homes. Where an individual's current accommodation cannot be sustained, practical assistance is provided to individuals to help them find alternative accommodation. This assistance combines financial support in the form of a bond and rent in advance payments, with practical guidance through our city-wide Home Finder Workshops, Money Advice and Into Work Advice Services.

The Council is acutely aware that prevention is better than cure and is in the process of reviewing preventative measures in the city. The Community Safety Partnership has also noted the increasing pressures faced by Homelessness Services and has agreed to discuss and evaluate the potential impact on the community at the next Community Safety Partnership Board meeting in early December.

Since the end of last month, the Housing Solutions Team and the Homelessness Prevention Team have joined together to provide a comprehensive service to those threatened with or facing homelessness. Bringing the two teams together has reduced duplication of work, providing a more seamless journey for customers. Work is ongoing to implement new procedures to ensure customers have easy access to prevention funding, to help keep them in their own homes, with the creation of two new prevention officers supporting those with rent arrears.

Historically, homelessness prevention services have only been provided face-to-face in the city centre. However, the newly formed team is working towards rolling out this face-to-face prevention service across all Hubs in the city to ensure that residents do not have to visit the city centre to access vital support; this will also ensure excellent links with the Money Advice Team, Adviceline, Housing Helpline and Into Work Advice Services. This personalised, city-wide approach will be instrumental to our success by providing uncompromising access to the services on offer.

Of course, homeless prevention takes time and this does not resolve the immediate issue of capacity concerns within family accommodation. The Homelessness Service is constantly reviewing the needs of the accommodation and calculating future demand and is already seeking to acquire further accommodation wherever possible to help ease this demand.

New Modular Temporary Accommodation at Gasworks Site

In order to help alleviate the housing pressures the city is currently facing, I have tasked the Housing Development Team to bring forward a rapid installation of new modular homes on one of the larger brownfield sites. An innovative approach has been put together with the partner developer, Wates, for around 190 new demountable modular homes to be built on the former gasworks site in Grangetown. This scheme is an example of how the Council can collaborate with private sector partners to provide solutions to some of the problems the city faces. The new modular homes will be installed on the site within months and will provide warm, safe and secure accommodation for homeless families in the short term. Once the long-term development scheme for the site has been through the design and planning process, the homes can be relocated to other sites elsewhere meaning that the Council can make a short term use of what would otherwise be an empty site.

Increasing GP Outreach Provision

In some positive news, funding has been received that will enable the Homelessness Service to increase the provision of GP Outreach Services at our supported accommodation for single people. The funding will cover an additional four sessions meaning there will be a GP available every morning at one of the sites working alongside the nurses. Their focus will be on seeing and treating conditions that, if not treated, would otherwise lead to the use of unscheduled care or attendance at A&E.

Welsh Government Visit To Homelessness Services

Welsh Government officials recently visited some of our Homelessness Teams and worked side by side with them, witnessing the realities that the service is currently experiencing. They joined the Outreach Team and NHS colleagues on one of their walkabouts to see the excellent work that the service is doing to support the most vulnerable people in the city. They were visibly emotional from their experience and could not praise staff in the Homelessness Service enough.

I would like to express my thanks to all staff working across Housing & Communities. Their hard work and dedication are incredibly admirable at a very demanding and challenging time.

Councillor Lynda Thorne
Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
21 October 2022