
HOUSING & COMMUNITIES STATEMENT

Housing Solutions & Prevention Team

The Housing Solutions & Prevention Team, which was brought together in September 2022, has commenced face-to-face appointments in Community Hubs across the city, supporting people who are facing potential eviction from their homes. The Prevention Team is now providing support from 12 Community Hubs, including Central, Ely, St Mellons, Powerhouse, Butetown, Llandaff North and Llanishen; and has reduced the waiting time for an appointment down from over a month to just six days. Work is ongoing to reduce this further. The team continues to support unprecedented numbers of people presenting to the service each month, with 555 people being supported by officers at the end of February 2023. Of these, 68% were seeking support after being given a Notice to Quit by their private landlord. Last month, the team prevented 83% of cases from being passed on to temporary accommodation by saving tenancies and finding other suitable, affordable accommodation.

Increased Demand for Homelessness Services

There are still significant demand challenges in Housing and Homelessness Services, which has now necessitated the use of hotels for families in order to provide interim accommodation for those at risk of homelessness. Waiting lists for temporary accommodation remain incredibly high and this continues to have a significant impact on the service.

The out-of-hours service for single people is under immense strain with as many as 93 people using this provision in a single night during the recent cold weather. Due to the substantial increase in out-of-hours presentations, the service is currently conducting a full review to fully understand why people are presenting and how we can work to reduce this by improving prevention pathways. Staffing is being increased temporarily to respond to the new levels of demand and additional interim accommodation is being sought to place those in need. The recently implemented Severe Weather Emergency Protocol ensured that every person who needed accommodation and was at risk of rough sleeping during the recent cold weather was successfully accommodated.

In addition to the increase in demand from single people and families, there is also increased demand from young people. In response to this, we are developing our services for young people in three areas – improving homeless prevention for young people; expanding the amount of temporary accommodation available; and strengthening the support available for young people with complex needs by piloting new approaches such as Housing First.

Good work continues to be undertaken to address rough sleeping; as of 17 March, 23 people were reported as sleeping rough on the city's street. Council teams continue to engage with them and are there to provide help and support whenever the person is ready to accept it.

The Council will continue mitigating the worst impacts of homelessness, whilst keeping a core focus on preventing it from occurring in the first instance. Significant resources are being invested in increasing the availability of settled accommodation and the new Landlord Enquiry Tenant Support (LETS) Team is working tirelessly to secure additional accommodation in the private rented sector.

Sheltered Accommodation Services

I want to congratulate everyone working in the Community Living Service for achieving an excellent result in successfully meeting the Erosh Code of Practice standards at the first attempt. Erosh is a national consortium for older people's housing and support, which has its own quality standards framework and Code of Practice for housing providers. Assessments were carried out last month and involved meetings with residents, staff and stakeholders. These meetings highlighted the impressive work being done by staff in partnership with local agencies to provide a range of schemes to maintain the mental and physical wellbeing, independence, and quality of life of residents. The assessors noted that the free activities provided by the schemes, such as Get Cooking courses with Public Health Wales, exercise classes like Tai Chi and sessions with the Welfare Liaison Team, not only helped residents return to socialising after the pandemic, but also supported them with any cost-of-living difficulties they may be facing. The assessor was also impressed with the extensive refurbishment works that have taken place at nine of the ten Community Living schemes across the city.

World Book Day

World Book Day was created by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1995 to promote the importance of reading by celebrating the world of books. Over 100 countries take part in celebrating World Book Day on an annual basis and I am very pleased to say that Cardiff Hubs & Libraries are active participants in this focus on literacy, fun and learning. Events took place in Hubs and Libraries across the city during the first week of March, including at Llandaff North and Gabalfa Hub where families took part in treasure hunts, arts and crafts and activities. Menter Caerdydd also joined in their weekly Ti a Fi session with singing, stories and stickers. The children really enjoyed the celebrations, and it was a great opportunity to encourage reading in the community.

Warm Welcome Spaces

The Warm Welcome Spaces available in all our Hubs have supported 8,834 people and helped them get through the winter months by providing access to a warm and safe environment. Hub staff have distributed approximately 1,000 free warm packs, donated by Wales & West Utilities and containing items such as hot water bottles, blankets and hot drinks flasks, to visitors so that they would be better equipped to keep warm in their own home during the current cost-of-living crisis and period of high domestic energy prices.

Our Food and Fuel Champions are also providing essential advice to those who are struggling with the cost of living. Support has been provided with fuel vouchers, foodbank vouchers and income maximisation, including benefit checks and assistance with applications for grants and discounts, as well as referrals to the Money Advice Team for in-depth advice on money management and budgeting.

Cardiff and Vale College Apprenticeship Awards 2023

Hamza Zahid, a plumbing and heating apprentice from the Responsive Repairs Service within Housing & Communities, won the Plumbing Apprentice of the Year Award at this year's Cardiff and Vale College Apprentice Awards. The Cardiff and Vale College Apprenticeship Awards celebrate the success of standout apprentices who have studied at the College over the academic year. Hamza joined the Council as an apprentice three years ago and has worked alongside our qualified operatives and managers gaining practical skills, whilst also studying for his gas qualification at Cardiff and Vale College. Hamza has gained a vast amount of knowledge and experience over the last three years and has progressed to a high standard. He has proved this with his knowledge of the trade and his ability to work on his own and alongside his mentor. He has recently achieved his Accredited Certification Scheme (ACS) Gas certification and will now be applying for a permanent role as a Gas Engineer within the Responsive Repairs Service. I'm sure that members would want to join me in congratulating Hamza on winning this award.

Energy Efficiency Retrofitting

The Council's One Planet Cardiff strategy recognises that housing is a significant contributor to the city's carbon emissions and includes a commitment to help improve the energy performance of all housing tenures in the city. I am therefore pleased to announce that the Council has been successful in securing Welsh Government funding to support a much-needed energy efficiency retrofit of British Iron and Steel Federation (BISF) properties in Llandaff North and Rumney. BISF properties are a steel framed, non-traditional build type that are considered both 'hard to treat' and 'hard to heat'. They are thermally inefficient and costly for residents in terms of fuel bills. The scheme will be managed by the Council's Building Improvement Planned Maintenance Team, with dedicated officers overseeing the work. The scheme will not only improve the BISF properties, but will also help lift residents out of fuel poverty by increasing the energy performance of their properties.

Opening of New Wellbeing Hubs

After months of planning and works involving Cardiff Council, Cardiff & Vale University Health Board and Llanedeyrn Health Centre, the new Wellbeing Hub @ Maelfa was officially opened by the Welsh Government Minister for Health and Social Services, Eluned Morgan MS, on 2nd February 2023. This was the first of our joint Health and Wellbeing hubs to open in Cardiff and has since been followed by the official opening of a new Wellbeing Hub in Rhiwbina on 24th March 2023. Funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund and the Welsh Government's Integrated Care Fund has enabled the Neighbourhood Regeneration Team to fully refurbish the library and transform it into a new Wellbeing Hub.

These new Wellbeing Hubs enhance the existing advice and support services already provided in our Hubs by integrating a range of specialist health clinics and providing a 'one-stop approach' to the health and wellbeing of our citizens. I am pleased to say that feedback from residents so far has been really positive, and I look forward to seeing more of these integrated, community-focused facilities being rolled out across Cardiff in the future.

Splott Park 3G Facility

On 16th March 2023, I was pleased to officially open a new 3G football pitch in Splott Park, which was proposed by local ward members and funded through our Neighbourhood Renewal Schemes Programme. The new synthetic all-weather pitch includes 5-metre-high perimeter fencing, floodlighting and secure access and it was great to see young players from Splott Albion FC having a lot of fun using the pitch for the first time. The 3G pitch will be managed and maintained by Splott Albion FC and will be available for hire at no cost to local junior clubs, as well as private hire by other sports teams.

Cowbridge Road East Neighbourhood Regeneration Scheme

Following the successful work on Tudor Street, Cowbridge Road East is the next priority area for regeneration. The Neighbourhood Regeneration Team is currently holding a series of six engagement sessions with residents and traders to help discuss issues and ideas raised by shoppers, residents and businesses in the shopping area. The information gathered will be used to shape future improvements and funding bids.

Community Building Grants Programme

In April 2023, the Neighbourhood Regeneration Team will be launching a new capital grant for community groups to upgrade facilities such as community centres and church halls. Information will be circulated to all Members and via social media to encourage groups to apply.

Graffiti Prevention Art Project

The Caretaking Supervisor, responsible for managing the Graffiti Team, has been working with local artists, schools and youth groups to try to prevent graffiti by commissioning local artists to paint on walls on Council estates which have previously been targeted. Following on from this, the Graffiti Team would like to work with more artists to enhance local estates, targeting additional areas on Council estates such as subways and garages which are public facing.

Student Housing and Community Awareness Campaigns

With three world-leading universities in the region, Cardiff attracts students from across the UK and internationally. While higher education opens up a world of opportunities for students, it also brings new responsibilities and challenges and for many students, this involves living independently for the first time, navigating new relationships and experiences and, of course, finding suitable accommodation.

The Council works closely with the city's universities, South Wales Police and Cardiff & Vale University Health Board through the Cardiff Student Community Partnership and employs a dedicated Student Liaison Officer. One of the key areas of work relates to student housing. Throughout the year, officers participate in information campaigns and engagement and training events aimed at students and other stakeholders who play a role in supporting students in Cardiff. Officers provide information, tools and resources at events and seek to:

- Provide advice and resources on finding safe, secure and quality housing;
- Encourage students to take an active role in their communities by participating in local services, activities and volunteering;
- Promote community-focused behaviour and sustainable practices;
- Equip students with recycling bags, food waste bags and food waste caddies, and explain how to use them and where they can get more;
- Link students with services such as University Accommodation Teams and Shared Regulatory Services Enforcement Teams when specialist support is required, and;
- Engage with students and local residents to understand their needs and concerns.

This joint approach also includes working closely with the universities and student unions to tie in with their annual housing and community information campaigns, promote community-related content through their communication channels and develop closer links to support research and training opportunities between the universities and council services.

Community Safety Update

Community Safety Initiatives in Cardiff Parks

A number of community safety initiatives have recently started in Cardiff's parks, which will complement and align with the work of the Parks Service's new Community Safety Manager. This includes the installation of Safer Street Round 2 funded lighting in Grange Gardens in Grangetown following concerns raised by young people using the Grange Pavilion building. This collaboration has also enabled new lighting, CCTV and amendments to youth infrastructure at St Mellons Skatepark and Hub, following concerns about anti-social behaviour (ASB). A task & finish partnership group has also been formed to develop an action plan for improving safety across Bute Park, which experiences a range of issues related to its location adjacent to the city centre. This group will also align with a range of Safer Street Round 4 funded initiatives, which will resource target hardening projects and improved community spaces.

Safeguarding Supported Accommodation

The Community Safety Partnership has noted a general rise in drug-related and exploitation issues targeting vulnerable residents in supported accommodation. As well as presenting safeguarding concerns, this can lead to a range of ASB and criminal issues that affect the whole community. Partner agencies are providing support via the governance of the Street Based Lifestyles & Complex Needs priority work, with an initial focus on Litchfield Court in Riverside. This approach will look to rapidly improve security and strengthen alignment with the work of South Wales Police. Partners are looking at expanding this approach across the city and prioritising areas as part of an evidence-based approach.

Problem Solving Group

ASB levels have reduced dramatically in all areas of focus through effective partnership working. With two community projects closing at the end of this month (St Mellons Skatepark & Hub and Lydstep Flats & Park), other areas of focus have been scoped across the city, whilst retaining links to the closed project areas to ensure reduced levels of ASB are sustained.

City-wide Safety Initiatives

Several city-wide safety initiatives are currently being supported by the Council's Community Safety Team, including:

- Crimestoppers social media campaign in areas of suspected under-reporting;
- Reparative works to lighting in areas of open-use youth diversionary activities;
- Safer Wales Inclusive Service (SWIS) – a project for young females aged 12-16 years, which provides one-to-one and group work focused on encouraging positive lifestyle choices; and
- Community engagement events such as Gabalfest.

Councillor Lynda Thorne
Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
24 March 2023