

# CARTREF YW POPETH HOME IS EVERYTHING



## Appendix 2

### **Shelter Cymru written response to**

### **Cardiff Council Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee**

### **Meeting 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023 – Item: Rough Sleeping in Cardiff**

#### **Background**

Shelter Cymru welcomes this opportunity to inform the considerations of the committee in relation to addressing and preventing rough sleeping in Cardiff.

Shelter Cymru is Wales's national homelessness charity. We help thousands of people each year across the country who are affected by the housing emergency by offering free, confidential and independent advice. We also campaign to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society.

We exist to defend the right to a safe home and fight the devastating impact the housing emergency has on people and society. We do this with campaigns, advice and support – and we never give up. We believe that home is everything.

Naturally, the pandemic and lockdown periods changed the nature of our work in line with Welsh Government's 'No-one Left Out' approach. Whilst street homelessness was drastically reduced during this time, numbers are now increasing, as is the use of temporary accommodation which is at an all-time high across Wales.

It is difficult to talk about street homelessness without referring to temporary accommodation as many who are street homeless will have yo-yoed in and out of temporary accommodation situations.

To provide a note on terminology, Shelter Cymru prefer the use of the terms 'street homeless' or 'people experiencing street homelessness' rather than 'rough sleeper', placing emphasis on the circumstances rather than the individual. Homelessness should not form part of a person's identity. This mirrors the language used in the Homelessness (Priority Need and Intentionality) (Wales) Regulations 2022 which added people in this situation to those who should be found to be in priority need. **We would suggest that Cardiff Council also looks to adopt this terminology.**

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This response has been prepared by the policy and research team in consultation with caseworkers in our Cardiff-based housing advice service who hear the stories of people experiencing homelessness in the city on a daily basis. We have also talked to officers who were involved in Shelter Cymru's own street homelessness outreach service which has now come to an end. We have focused on the questions provided by Chair of the Committee and provide a number of key observations.

### **Are services (such as emotional and accommodation) fit for purpose?**

Shelter Cymru specialises in legal advice and assistance and is not an accommodation or support provider. Our observations here are based upon our casework.

**Emotional support** - We welcome Cardiff Council's therapeutic offer through the Multi-Disciplinary Team and the recognition that mental health services are a key partner in homeless prevention. We have cited the work of the team as an example of good practice in our research on preventing social housing evictions for anti-social behaviour which will be launched at our [People and Homes Conference](#) in June. This research suggests that **all front line services should be delivered in a trauma informed way and staff appropriately trained.**

**Accessing an emergency bed** - The system of queueing at Tŷ Tresilian for an emergency bed space is problematic, far from trauma informed and a barrier to accessing overnight accommodation. People experiencing street homelessness have reported feeling exposed while queueing for emergency beds, especially when substances are being used in the area.

Violence in the public areas around the emergency accommodation centre is off-putting for some. We are aware of a serious incident in the area of Hansen Street and understand that this is well known to the homeless community. There is a genuine fear amongst the most vulnerable people of being in this area.

The queueing system itself is logistically fraught as those who commit their time, sometimes up to a couple of hours, only to then find that there is nothing available, will have been unable to access other services which will have closed while they were committed to queueing. **We**

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would recommend an evaluation of the process for accessing an emergency bed and consideration of digital allocation systems through mobile phones to those who are able and want to receive them. These could be beneficial and efficient for both the client and council staff.

**Hotels and B&Bs** - The use of hotels and B&Bs as temporary accommodation solutions is commonplace across in the city and the rest of Wales as the number of people needing to be accommodated has increased dramatically. Supply is a particular issue during periods of high tourism demand such as sports fixtures such as the [six nations](#) and concerts when homeless people are moved out of the city.

There is much uncertainty for people living in hotels & B&Bs, they often will not know where they will be staying the next day and will be expected to 'check-out' in the morning like all other guests leaving them and their belongings in a state of street homelessness until that night's accommodation is confirmed and accessible. **We wonder if any consideration has been made to a system of block booking hotels or formally procuring more temporary accommodation spaces for sole use by the Council so that people have more certainty where they will be sleeping on a nightly basis.**

A [new report](#) released on 8 March 2023 from the Senedd Local Government and Housing Committee looks at the challenges facing homelessness services in Wales. Evidence provided by Shelter Cymru included our observations on the supply, suitability and quality of temporary accommodation currently being used to house people experiencing homelessness and the support services made available to them.

The people we see living in temporary accommodation talk about their life being on hold and a feeling of being in limbo. Employment opportunities, education, relationships, and health and wellbeing are adversely affected.

Many are living without the usual freedom of being an adult citizen, are not allowed to have visits from friends and family, have been separated from beloved pets and may even have to abide by an evening curfew as early as 6pm (in a north Wales local authority) with any incursion on these rules potentially carrying the threat of eviction. People have told us about

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their feelings of loneliness and isolation and the limits it places on their ability to socialise, find or keep work, and access services.

Shelter Cymru staff report that some street homeless people refuse the offer of a bed, pod or other emergency space at public facilities as they do not feel that they are safe in that accommodation.

**Housing First** – We believe that there is a shortage of Housing First opportunities in Cardiff, and that people who would benefit from this model instead rely on the other temporary and emergency solutions that are on offer. **We would advocate for the introduction of more Housing First opportunities in Cardiff to help alleviate the issue of street homelessness in the city.**

The Housing First opportunities that are available are too restrictive as the person must fit the criteria of being street homeless (not sleeping in a hostel or sofa surfing) to access them. We recognise that these are Welsh Government criteria rather than the policy of Cardiff Council.

## **How your organisation and the council work together – what are the areas of strength / development?**

Shelter Cymru staff report a good and ever improving working relationship with the Housing & Homelessness Team at Cardiff Council. The Council are said to be in general, good communicators that maintain regular contact with Shelter Cymru staff despite the challenging service circumstances that they find themselves in.

Regular bi-monthly meetings with the Assessments Team will resume this month. We understand that these will further develop to include the Prevention, Temporary Accommodation and Allocations teams. Shelter Cymru feel that this is an appropriate frequency for meetings.

We value the relationship we have with Cardiff Council and feel that our work is valued and respected by the local authority. Our staff have reported that they do sometimes feel that some Council officers can at times be defensive. This is understandable given the service pressure

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which they are under, however a more open and transparent dialogue would help all involved to address homelessness in the city.

Pre-pandemic, front line network meetings were regularly held but they never re-commenced following the pandemic. **Shelter Cymru feel that the reintroduction of the multi-agency meeting would be helpful as a tool in a joined up and partnership approach to delivering solutions.**

## **Support on offer – how effective is it?**

We appreciate how much pressure local authority services are under at the moment and are sure that everyone is working hard to provide the best service possible. We do have to report however that some of our clients have described a culture of gate-keeping both when they contact the Council over the telephone and at the Hub (formally the housing options centre). Some have told us that felt discouraged from seeking assistance, being told there was nothing available. Others have said that they'd been advised they'd be accommodated in a B&B in Weston Super Mare.

Our staff have also expressed concern that vulnerable homeless clients aren't always assigned support workers, this seemingly being the case in particular for those being placed in hotels or B&Bs. Ensuring support referrals and packages are in place are an important part of effective homelessness solutions.

In terms of Shelter Cymru's services, we know there is still unmet need for housing rights advice to prevent people sleeping on the streets. Our caseworkers see many cases of people slipping through the net or the accommodation and/or support offered not being suitable for people with complex needs.

Our Street Advice Cymru project has run from 2019 to 2023 in Cardiff, Wrexham and Swansea with the aim of reducing numbers of people sleeping on the streets by providing housing advice and advocacy 'on the go'. The intention was to break down the barriers to conventional housing advice and improving rates of rehousing. The Cardiff Street Advice post has been vacant for

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some months. The Cardiff Service was located within the Job Centre and we know that partners are missing the close referral pathways which had been created.

The Comic Relief funding which supported the project is due to come to an end this year. We are therefore beginning a process of evaluation across the three locations to assess the impact of the service, what a future service model should look like and how it could be funded. **We would be grateful for the support of the Council in conducting this service evaluation and will be in contact over the next few months to discuss this further.**

## **Understanding the complexities of those requiring support**

Shelter Cymru staff report that they believe most street homeless people in Cardiff have been offered a bed space at some point, some having been through the homelessness system many, many times.

Many will have complex circumstances and needs. There are some who are 'entrenched' in their behaviours and will not accept the offer of emergency accommodation. The reality is that the choice between the offer available and sleeping on the street is a very poor one for those who can't cope with the environment of the emergency accommodation because of mental health illness and/or recovering from addiction.

Shared spaces can be especially frightening for people with mental health issues. Some simply cannot cope with such close proximity to others. Shared bathroom/washing spaces in particular can be frightening spaces for people who have experienced sexual abuse and are unsuitable for some with medical conditions.

We reiterate our call here for **all frontline services from the point of access to the configuration of accommodation to be designed in a trauma informed way.** Without this thoughtful and mindful approach to service delivery, the ongoing cycle of disengagement and life on the streets is unfortunately inevitable for many.

## **Our observations**

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To conclude, the key observations which we would like Cardiff Council's elected members to consider in relation to street homelessness are:

- **Cardiff Council should use of the term” street homeless” or ‘people who are experiencing street homelessness’ rather than “rough sleeper”.**
- **All frontline accommodation and support services should be designed and delivered in a trauma informed way and staff appropriately trained.**
- **The process for accessing an emergency bed needs to be evaluated and redesigned to be more sensitive to the needs of the most vulnerable people.**
- **Consideration should be given to a system of block booking hotel accommodation or formally procuring more temporary accommodation spaces for sole use by the Council.**
- **There needs to be more Housing First opportunities.**
- **The multi-agency homelessness meeting should be reintroduced to provide an opportunity for partnership working.**
- **Shelter Cymru would be grateful for the support of the Council in conducting an evaluation of our Street Advice Cymru Project.**