



Cardiff Council's Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee – Rough Sleeping

Written Evidence from The Wallich

Are services fit for purpose?

1. There are a number of services, accommodation projects and partnerships which are working well across the city to address the needs of people experiencing rough sleeping. However, there are also significant gaps in service provision, and some major changes are needed to meet the growing demand for services, and the changing landscape of rough sleeping post-pandemic.
2. The single assessment centre (SAC) offers a bespoke presentation pathway for single people. It includes accommodation units as well as in-house support services. This has been of benefit and was needed due to the high number of presentations.
3. There is women's only accommodation as part of Adam's Court, but this is not currently sufficient and more accommodation, preferably a stand-alone, specialist service is required to ensure women experiencing street homelessness are safe and supported in a way that recognizes their unique experiences and needs.
4. With regards to specialist accommodation projects – The Wallich's Riverside project, Community Housing Team, our Nightshelter and Shoreline services have all been decommissioned in the past 4 years. This was specialised accommodation for people experiencing homelessness with specific needs such as substance misuse, or dual diagnosis of cooccurring mental health and substance use. We are concerned that the current accommodation available is too generic and 'one size fits all' and that people with specific needs are not having their needs met. The Wallich continues to self-fund the Shoreline project, but this is unlikely to be sustainable long-term.
5. Bedspace (formally called floorspace) is still being used across Cardiff Council managed accommodation, which contravenes the mandate from Welsh Government that this type of accommodation was no longer to be used.

6. The accommodation at Cargo House is operating almost like a nightshelter, with placements made nightly, residents accommodated from 8pm until 8am. The Wallich used to run a nightshelter in the city, but this was decommissioned during the pandemic, in part, and in agreement with us, because it no longer met the requirements of modern homelessness accommodation. We are surprised to see a return to this type of accommodation, where no support or shelter is available during the day and people cannot settle or work towards a successful move-on.
7. The Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) is a valuable service. It offers good working practices and partnerships with providers offering a wide spectrum of specialist skills. With regards to mental health, the MDT provides instant access to a psychiatric nurse and referrals for counselling are quick. However, these services don't have the power/legal authority to section people when in crisis, so have to wait for those who do, by which point the client may have left or no longer wish to engage. We have found the relationships we have built up with clients in this situation has then been damaged due to a lack of trust.
8. The issue of security vs support is, in our opinion, a threat to the success and safety of accommodation for people experiencing street homelessness in Cardiff. Many of the hostels and accommodation services run by Cardiff Council have been, or are currently, staffed overnight by security guards from specialist security companies rather than homelessness support staff.
9. This means that these services are not being run in a way which is psychologically informed, and also that the unique training, skills and experience of support workers is not always available for clients when they may need it. We have heard reports of inappropriate behaviour by security guards, and also of incidents which have not been handled correctly such as overdoses and needle stick injuries.
10. The very nature of security work is also usually limited to patrols, surveillance and monitoring, which is not conducive to offering people support and making them feel safe. We would like to see all homelessness accommodation across the city being staffed by skilled and trained support staff, so that someone can present for help and advice at the time which is right for them, and also that critical incidents are dealt with correctly and in a timely way. We note that support staff are sometimes being used alongside security staff, but this still creates an environment which is not trauma informed, or psychologically informed.

How does The Wallich and the council work together? What are the areas of strength and what requires further development?

11. There are some really good examples of positive partnership working between The Wallich and Cardiff Council services, including delivering frontline outreach services and sharing back-office space. There is typically good communication across all partner agencies, particularly where we are able to use modern tools like WhatsApp to get instant responses to urgent questions.
12. We would however like to see more consistency in the partnership working arrangements for outreach services, as whilst some council officers are engaged and proactive with us, others are seemingly more reluctant to collaborate. Some individual members of staff are willing to visit our Solutions centre to engage with clients and staff there, but others will not, impacting upon the continuity of support services for people sleeping rough and living street-based lifestyles.
13. Because effective partnership working can vary significantly depending upon the individuals involved, it can be difficult to maintain consistent, up-to-date client records, including risk information and interactions with different agencies. Our staff are not able to access the council's Comino case management system directly, meaning that work may be inadvertently duplicated or missed altogether.
14. There have been further good examples of collaboration in Gateway services for accommodation, including effective arrangements with all accommodation providers for managing placements, transfers, evictions and abandonments. We also believe that all partners have worked well together recently to manage the implementation of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016, necessitating considerable work amending contracts and license agreements.

How effective is the support on offer?

15. We feel that there are significant shortcomings in the current housing support offer, primarily due to the ever-increasing demand for emergency accommodation without the corresponding options for positive move-on to permanent housing. Whilst there are only 42 emergency bed spaces available, there are currently around 88 people presenting for overnight shelter, and this number has recently been approaching 100.
16. We believe that the majority of clients in temporary accommodation would ideally be able to move into long-term rented accommodation, however there is a real shortage of social housing,

and private rental properties are both highly in demand and increasingly unaffordable for those on low incomes or receiving housing benefit, due to the frozen Local Housing Allowance (LHA).

17. We believe that there is also significant levels of demand for long-term supported accommodation, for example for those with chronic substance use needs. However our Cardiff Shoreline project, providing long-term supported accommodation for people with alcohol dependency, has been decommissioned by the Council and we are having to seek alternative funding following the withdrawal of Housing Support Grant (HSG) funds.
18. In order to end homelessness in Cardiff for good, we need a diverse range of service provision, including dispersed supported accommodation options in the community, tenancy support services to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place, assertive outreach, and Housing First for those with the most complex needs.

The complex needs of those requiring support.

19. At The Wallich we support a wide range of clients with considerable complex and overlapping needs. As well as their experiences of homelessness or housing instability, our clients often have significant mental and physical health needs, substance use, and/or history of contact with police and the criminal justice system.
20. Access to appropriate mental health support is a particular challenge, due to the complexity of referral pathways and high barriers to entry. Because of high demand for talking therapies through mainstream NHS services, clients are typically prescribed medication to manage their mental health, but can find themselves languishing on long waiting lists for other specialist interventions. This in turn can exacerbate other issues around substance use or anti-social behaviour.
21. There are also significant gaps in provision for people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) as part of their immigration status. These clients were typically able to access homelessness services during the pandemic as part of the wider public health response, however they are now facing a complete lack of support as they are not eligible for mainstream housing support services.
22. Finally, we are noticing an increase in presentations of people who are in work, but facing homelessness due to eviction or some other breakdown of tenancy. These individuals are typically unable to access support due to their work status and income levels, however they are also unable to afford suitable housing in the private rented sector. To stay in temporary

accommodation without receiving housing benefits can mean an individual is liable to pay up to £200 per week. Faced with no other alternative, we have heard examples clients living in their cars whilst working.