

---

## **HOUSING & COMMUNITIES STATEMENT**

---

### **Homelessness Demand**

The high demand for homelessness and housing services continues, with even more homeless families being placed into temporary accommodation last month. There are currently around 630 families residing in temporary accommodation in the city. Despite taking on the use of a large hotel recently, temporary accommodation remains at capacity and, therefore, we are still having to temporarily house homeless families in other ad hoc hotels. This is clearly something we want to avoid wherever possible. 150 families are currently residing temporarily in hotels of all types, across the city.

Every effort is being made to address this increasing demand and our focus remains on preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place. The Housing Solutions and Prevention Team continues to see record numbers of people presenting to the service each month. 641 people who are at risk of becoming homeless were being supported at the beginning of this month, including 68 young people. The team continues to provide face-to-face support from Community Hubs across the city, with the waiting time for an appointment now down to 4 days.

62% of the current households that the Prevention Team is supporting have been served with a Notice to Quit by their landlord, with almost half of these due to the landlord selling the property. Sadly, the service is also starting to see an increase in the number of people presenting at risk of homelessness due to mortgage arrears as interest rates continue to rise and low-rate deals come to an end.

Encouragingly, last month, 73% of those who presented to the service at risk of homelessness were prevented from becoming homeless. This was achieved by saving tenancies and finding alternative suitable and affordable accommodation.

The team has been looking at ways to improve the journey for those leaving prison, working in partnership with Probation Services. The team will be carrying out homeless assessments at Probation offices and linking up with the Resettlement Team based inside the prison to secure accommodation for those due to be released.

In addition to the focus on prevention work, the Homelessness Service continues to explore long-term solutions to deal with the increased demand it is facing. It is continually looking at new ways in which it can support people to move on from temporary accommodation and into their own permanent homes. This includes increasing the number of social housing lets to homeless clients, working with our housing association partners to identify difficult to let properties, bringing empty properties back into use and buying properties from the open market. The service is also continuing to promote a variety of leasing schemes to private landlords in the city to increase the amount of affordable properties available in the private rented sector.

Despite all of this encouraging work, this remains a very challenging time for the service.

### **Tenant Participation Events**

The Tenant Participation Service continues to provide events for tenants and leaseholders in the city, providing them with advice and assistance alongside an opportunity to spend time with their neighbours. Last month, at the request of, and working with, the Whitchurch Councillors, the team held a picnic that brought together residents from two different estates in the secret garden of Whitworth Square. The event was attended by officers from South Wales Police, the Health and Wellbeing Service, Cardiff Youth Service and Cardiff North Senedd Member, Julie Morgan MS. I was very pleased to hear the positive feedback following the event and look forward to more events taking place in the future.

### **National Residential Landlords Association**

Together with officers from a number of council services, I was pleased to represent Cardiff Council and speak at an all-Wales National Residential Landlords Association 'On Tour' event, which was held on 25 May 2023 at Cardiff City Stadium. I shared my opinions on the many challenges, conflicts and constraints that the Council is currently grappling with, whilst trying to meet the housing need of Cardiff citizens. Being honest and frank about these issues helped to demonstrate that we do value the part that residential landlords play in housing hundreds of vulnerable people across Cardiff and Wales, and that we want to assist them where we can in order to support and sustain tenancies in the private rented sector. The feedback that I received was extremely positive, despite it being a challenging time for the sector, particularly given recent legislative changes.

### **Private Sector Housing Enforcement**

The cost-of-living crisis, along with pressure on the availability of housing in Cardiff, has impacted on the work of the Housing Enforcement Team within Shared Regulatory Services during the last 12 months.

2022/23 saw an upturn in the number of complaints received by the service and that trend has continued beyond the winter months, where complaint levels are usually at their highest. The team dealt with 1,977 service requests where 520 of those related to hazards in houses requiring inspection. There were 104 complaints about potential filthy and verminous premises where, perhaps as a legacy of the pandemic, vulnerable people have become isolated and are struggling to care for themselves. The team has worked with Cardiff's pilot scheme in relation to hoarding and has carried out emergency works in several properties to remove hoarded materials and provide safe living conditions.

The Cathays Additional Licensing Scheme was redeclared by Cabinet in October 2022 and went live on 1 February 2023 for its third designation. The team aims to inspect and licence 900 Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) this year across its additional licensing districts, Cathays and Plasnewydd, and in line with mandatory licensing duties.

Unfortunately, the housing crisis provides rogue landlords with an opportunity to exploit vulnerable private sector tenants. This is seen in the poor quality of some existing houses and HMOs, and in the use of unsuitable accommodation that has not achieved Planning or Building Regulation Standards.

The Housing Enforcement Team closed 11 properties during 2022/23 using Housing Act powers of prohibition. 87 sub-standard properties have been closed in the last five years. In the same period, 906 Improvement Notices have been served, addressing a wide variety of hazards in private rented houses.

16 separate prosecutions have been taken against landlords in the last two years for multiple separate offences, with fines totalling £59,215 and costs of £9,566. There are also nine further prosecutions pending. These offences relate to:

- Non-compliance with Improvement Notices
- HMO Licensing issues
- Contravention of Emergency Prohibition Orders
- Contravention of HMO Management regulations

The team has also had an increased focus on tackling private sector empty homes across the city thanks to the additional resources provided via income generated through the Council Tax premium. This work included writing to all known owners of empty properties listed on the Council Tax register in order to offer advice and assistance on how to bring the property back into use. Those properties identified as empty for more than five years (128 from the April 2022 list) were individually reviewed and categorised. Owners were contacted with more direct advice, and where they failed to respond or engage, notices were served.

An action plan, submitted to and agreed by Welsh Government, identified the most problematic empty properties and prioritised associated actions. Targeted enforcement for these properties has progressed, resulting in works in default being completed at two properties, with the aim of enforcing sale of the property if the debt is not paid. Other targeted enforcement action has resulted in three problematic properties being renovated and either occupied by the owner or rented. In addition, two properties previously subject to a Compulsory Purchase Order have both been fully renovated by the new owners and returned to occupation. In addition, the team has also dealt with 159 complaints or enquiries specifically relating empty properties. The overall work of the team this year has resulted in a further 91 properties or dwellings being brought back into use.

To ensure all sections of the Council are aware and involved with this work, the team organised four meetings of the Empty Homes Working Group. This facilitated improved coordination with Council Tax, Housing Strategy and the Housing Options service, in particular promoting the Houses into Homes loans, LETS Private Leasing Schemes and Buyback options.

Overall, performance in 2022/23 was good, including positive action taken through the Empty Homes Working Group to share information and work collectively in our approach to dealing with empty properties in Cardiff.

## **Welcome Spaces**

Warm Welcome Spaces were set up in Cardiff Hubs in response to the cost-of-living crisis in the winter of 2022/23 for people who were unable to afford to heat their homes. The Warm Welcome Spaces provided comfortable environments where visitors were encouraged to relax with refreshments, have a chat and make new friends. Useful financial information was also available on topics such as Pension Credit and Money Advice. Volunteers were successfully recruited to support the Warm Welcome Spaces, where 11,000 visitors were welcomed.

As summer approaches and the focus on warmth has become less relevant, the scheme has been rebranded as 'Welcome Spaces', with the same dedicated areas within Hubs, volunteer-led activities, and the aim of reducing social isolation. The scheme is reflective of the national drive towards local drop-in community spaces available for all, something that libraries and hubs have offered for many years.

The cost-of-living crisis means that opportunities to get out of the house and relax, with little or no requirement to spend money, are now more valuable than ever. Highlighting these Welcome Spaces brings in more visitors to our Hubs where they can get advice, explore the library – perhaps for the first time in many years – and find out what other free events and services are available to them.

## **Cardiff Wellbeing Support Service**

The Wellbeing Support Service has been focusing on addressing the impact of social isolation on older people. I am pleased to say that the pre-Covid programme of events has been reinstated and expanded, with digital events continuing to promote inclusion. The number of activities being offered in community settings outside the Hubs has increased, including walks around the city and trips further afield. A range of these trips have been made possible using community VEST transport, including visits to the Botanical Gardens in Carmarthenshire, St Fagan's National Museum of History, Barry Island, Museum of Cardiff, Newport Transporter Bridge and Cardiff Bay. The feedback from attendees has been overwhelmingly positive, many of whom would not be able to attend these visits without support.

The Wellbeing Support Service has also broadened the range of activities that they offer to include tai chi, boccia, new gardening groups, local history interest groups and social singing. By providing digital sessions, people who are housebound have been able to participate in cooking groups, online coffee mornings, online exercise and quizzes. Some individuals have been enabled to join sessions in person with support from carers. As well as seeing high numbers of the older community attending groups, support workers from Pinetree Hospital have been taking part in sessions with their service users, as well as schools, refugees and asylum seekers and those with dementia and their carers.

Inclusion Officers are now also supporting older people to engage with volunteering opportunities to ensure that they have further opportunities to take part in their local community.

## **Wellbeing Mentors**

The Health and Wellbeing Mentors continue to work with individuals with low level mental health issues and signpost them to activities to help boost their wellbeing. Exercise-based activities delivered via the Community Hubs are very popular. This includes walking, litter picking, sports (including walking sports), LIFT sessions, dance and tai chi. The Mentor service is person-centred, and each client is given a tailored action plan. Many people have been supported to access community groups of interest and specialist advice, as well as providing toolkits for reducing stress/anxiety and building confidence. A wide range of community groups with varying needs have also been assisted, including groups for those seeking sanctuary, ex-offenders, adults in work, parents, carers and young people not in education, employment or training. Clients have gone on to access training courses, return to work, find employment, or they are volunteering and engaging with their communities. During the first full year of operation, 93% of respondents to evaluation feedback reported that their needs were met. The service can be contacted directly by emailing the Wellbeing Team at: [Wellbeingteam@cardiff.gov.uk](mailto:Wellbeingteam@cardiff.gov.uk) or by phoning 029 2087 1071.

**Councillor Lynda Thorne**  
**Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities**  
**23 June 2023**