
HOUSING & COMMUNITIES STATEMENT

Homelessness Demand

The Homelessness Service remain under immense pressure, which is anticipated to increase further. As well as the increase in demand, we are also experiencing a reduction in move on, creating longer stays in temporary accommodation.

This picture is reflected across the UK and is a combination of different factors, which include rising private rent levels and landlords leaving the market. In Cardiff, the number of landlords selling their properties is up by 122% compared to pre-pandemic levels. We are also seeing many clients presenting to the Homelessness Service that would have previously accessed private rented accommodation, including people in full-time work. Legislative changes such as the introduction of the Renting Homes Act, an increase in homeless duties to single people and changes to intentionality legislation has also led to an increasing demand on the service.

We are also seeing a sustained increase in demand on our emergency out-of-hours service for single people, with upwards of 80 presentations per night. Efforts are ongoing to locate suitable grounds for new emergency accommodation provision. Work is also ongoing daily to ensure that assessments are carried out on all individuals so that we can provide the most suitable long-term accommodation for applicants. We continue to scope proposals to increase our emergency accommodation further.

Waiting lists for temporary accommodation have increased by 537% in two years and the number of families accommodated in hotels continues to increase. To help with this increased demand and end our reliance on ad-hoc hotel bookings, we have secured more than 150 additional units of family accommodation through exclusive use of a hotel.

Working with our Registered Social Landlord partners, further plans are underway to continue increasing our temporary accommodation, with an expansion of new units across the city.

The ongoing development of the Gasworks site by the Council, known as Yr Hafan, is continuing with seven additional modular units currently on site. The modular units – an innovative solution to the pressures we are facing – enables us to boost our supply of accommodation quickly, in considerably less time than via traditional building methods. Once completed, the site will provide 155 homes, with a mixture of one, two, three and four bedrooms. The units are bright, spacious and highly energy-efficient, incorporating renewable technologies in line with our One Planet Cardiff Strategy. We hope that residents will be moving in early next month.

In addition to increasing our temporary accommodation, we are also implementing new arrangements to make the best use of the private rented sector. This includes a new Move On team and a new scheme to support clients to afford private rents by creating bespoke packages, which will include into work and money advice.

Even with all this additional activity, I am concerned that the homelessness situation in the city remains enormously challenging. It is becoming increasingly difficult to support everyone who needs our help, and I am concerned that difficult decisions will soon have to be made to ensure that we are supporting the most vulnerable in the city and those with the greatest need. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Homelessness teams for their continued work and dedication in finding new ways to decrease the current pressures on the Homelessness Service.

Private Sector Housing Enforcement

During Quarter 2 of 2023/24, the Cardiff Housing Enforcement Team within Shared Regulatory Services undertook a prosecution of a company and its sole director for failure to licence or maintain two houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) in the Roath area of the city. The owner and his company were fined a total of £68,000 for failing to obtain HMO licences or carry out works of repair. With costs and victim surcharge, the total financial penalty was in excess of £72,000.

The Housing Enforcement Team was also successful in securing a conviction for obstruction where an owner of a filthy and verminous premises prevented access by council officers and contractors who were there to clear up the premises. There are several important cases in the Court schedule for a variety of offences, most notably where an owner has wilfully contravened 11 Emergency Prohibition Orders served on a large building in Roath. This is a most serious case, and the Cardiff team is being supported by South Wales Fire & Rescue Service to secure both a conviction and the safety of more than 25 residents living in seriously unsafe conditions.

Annual Tenants Conference

The Annual Tenants Conference was held on 6 September at City Hall and was attended by over 90 tenants who had a wonderful day. The conference provides an opportunity for tenants and leaseholders to engage with the Tenant Participation Team and senior housing managers. Throughout the day, presentations were delivered relating to the cost-of-living crisis, the Community Living Project, Cardiff Wellbeing Support Service and on-line repairs. The information provided was invaluable for our tenants as these council services will make a real difference to the quality of their lives. Workshops were also held advising tenants on topical issues such as Credit Union, welfare reform, digital inclusion and Age-friendly Cardiff.

It was lovely that so many partners were in attendance on the day, including Age Cymru, Specsavers, Action for Warm Homes and many others, as well as representatives from other council services, such as waste management and the Local Action Team, who were on hand to provide information and guidance on a wide range of issues that can help improve the lives of our tenants.

The most anticipated moment of the conference is always the hotly contested Blooming Marvellous competition, where prizes are given to the schemes with the best community garden. Once again, the standard was exceptionally high, with the Community Living Scheme in Wheatley Road in Ely coming out as winners for 2023. I want to say 'well done' to everyone who competed.

Summer Reading Challenge 2023

I am pleased to report that the Libraries and Hubs team had a very successful Summer Reading Challenge. This year's theme was 'Ready, Set, Read!', which was all about sports and games, and it continued to promote the importance of reading during the school summer holiday period. This year 8,537 children joined the Summer Reading Challenge, which is almost double that of last year, which is fantastic. Alongside this, over 1,300 children signed up to be new library members. It's clear from the number of books read and children taking part in the events, as well as feedback from parents, that the Summer Reading Challenge remains an effective way of maintaining literacy levels, providing free activities and lots of fun throughout the summer holiday period.

Sanctuary Seekers Space at Cardiff Central Library Hub

A new group has been set up in Cardiff Central Library Hub, with the aim of providing a welcoming space for people who are new to the city. The Sanctuary Seekers Space is a weekly creative wellbeing session for sanctuary seekers in Cardiff, in partnership with Creative Lives. The group meets every Thursday in the fourth-floor meeting room and gives people the chance to meet other new people and make friends, explore hobbies with Creative Lives and get involved in their new local library service. Whether people are interested in finding books in different languages, a place to study, finding out about the events and activity programme, browsing the internet, seeking information and advice from the Hub Service or just have a cuppa and a chat, the Sanctuary Seekers Space provides information to help people find their feet in a safe environment. The group and refreshments are free, and no booking is required.

Ely & Caerau Health and Wellbeing Hub

I am pleased to say that funding has been secured with Cardiff and Vale University Health Board to move the proposed Health and Wellbeing Hub in Ely to the next stage of design and the completion of a full business case. This project will build on the recent successful partnership projects at Cardiff Royal Infirmary and the Maelfa in Llanedeyrn, and demonstrates the Council's commitment to partnership working and jointly delivering vital services for the residents of Cardiff. The principles of the project also align strongly with the ethos of the Council's Community Hubs programme, which has embedded joined-up service provision and partnership working in priority neighbourhoods at its heart.

Cowbridge Road East Shopping Area

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Team has carried out community engagement with residents, shoppers and visitors to gather their views on the improvement of Cowbridge Road East district centre shopping area, which is located within the Riverside Ward. Over 150 people attended the sessions and a full evaluation report

on the findings has been produced, which will be used to help shape future regeneration plans for the area. Further engagement on proposals is being planned for the end of the year.

Councillor Lynda Thorne
Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
21 September 2023