
FINANCE, MODERNISATION & PERFORMANCE STATEMENT

Budget Update and Autumn Statement

Members will be aware that local authorities across the UK are expecting a shortfall in funding for the next financial year. Whilst the Council will not receive the provisional settlement from Welsh Government until 20 December this year, at present, finance officers are anticipating a budget gap of upwards of £40 million. This presents a significant challenge, and work is ongoing to identify the potential savings that will be necessary to deliver a balanced budget proposal in March 2024. Public consultation on any proposals will take place from early January, with the Budget Council meeting due to take place on 7 March 2024.

At the time of writing, the full implications of the Autumn Statement are still being assessed, though the initial indications are of a deepening period of further austerity for many public services. There was no indication of any significant funding for public services to help address the rising prices and increasing demand that all services are experiencing.

At a WLGA event last week to discuss the financial position of Welsh local authorities, the Leader of the WLGA described the outlook as “grim” for Welsh public services if there is no further funding from the UK Government. Across Wales, local authorities collectively face an estimated £411 million shortfall in funding.

Living Wage Week 2023

The Council played an active role in Living Wage Week earlier this month at events hosted by Cardiff University and by the Institute of Government & Public Policy in London. The Cardiff events celebrated the successes of the Cardiff Living Wage City Partnership and highlighted the key findings of research undertaken by Cardiff University, which included a survey of UK Living Wage employers.

As mentioned in my Council Statement last month, I joined colleagues from across the UK to discuss the topic of *“From The Living Wage And Local Collaboration To Digital Innovation And Inclusion: Creating The Right Conditions For People To Thrive”* at the conference in London. During the discussion, I was able to highlight the impact that the Cardiff Living Wage Partnership has had on the Cardiff economy. Cardiff University’s latest analysis shows the impact that uplifts to the real Living Wage have had on the local economy. An additional £75 million has gone into the Cardiff economy as a result of these uplifts since 2012. This is out of a total Welsh uplifts figure of around £109 million.

The new real Living Wage rate of £12.00 per hour was announced on 24 October and needs to be implemented by Cardiff's 215 accredited Living Wage employers by 1 May 2024.

The Council's Living Wage Accreditation Support Scheme continues to pay the first three years of accreditation fees for Cardiff-based small and medium-sized enterprises who are interested in becoming accredited Living Wage employers. Further information about the real Living Wage is available at: www.livingwage.wales

White Ribbon Campaign

Members will have received an email from me on 14 November advertising a number of public events taking place between 20 November and 8 December in support of 'White Ribbon Day', otherwise known as the United Nations 'International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls', which is held on 25 November. This date also marks the start of the annual 16 Days of Activism campaign, which starts on 25 November and ends on 10 December, which is Human Rights Day.

White Ribbon UK is part of a worldwide movement started by men committed to ending male violence against women. Cardiff Council is an accredited White Ribbon organisation and we are committed to not only raising awareness of violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence, but also to addressing the attitudes and behaviours that enable it to flourish. While women and girls are disproportionately affected by violence and abuse, we recognise that anyone can be affected by these issues. The Council has commissioned local specialist services to support women, men and children, and to promote the national Live Fear Free helpline: 0808 802 0800.

I was very pleased to open the series of events by attending a session with council staff and the CEO of White Ribbon UK on 20 November, which focused on actions we can take as an employer to support staff who are experiencing violence against women, domestic abuse or sexual violence.

Digital Services

CardiffGov Mobile App

At the end of October, the CardiffGov mobile app hit 84,689 downloads since its launch. The number of downloads continued to be higher than average, with 1,893 downloads last month. More users are using the app to check waste collection details due to the recent industrial action, with the number of checks nearly tripling from August to September (up by 183%) and then up by a further 9% from September to October.

Development work has been completed on improvements to waste bag stockists' information, with appropriate testing having been completed on the CardiffGov mobile app. Further testing is also due to take place in relation to other channels such as the website and chatbot.

Website

During October, 328,000 people visited www.cardiff.gov.uk, viewing 658,000 pages with 77% of visitors using a mobile device. Over 28,000 online payments were received totalling £3.3million and 334,000 residents checked their waste collection details online, which was an increase of 29,000 on the previous month. In addition, 92% (19,800) of recycling centre bookings and 95.2% (3,100) of bulky item collections were made online – both of these figures are the highest online percentages to date.

Chatbot (BOBi)

The Council's chatbot, BOBi, handled a total of 7,465 conversations in October, with 840 resulting in handoff to Connect to Cardiff (C2C) agents. This figure is down from the previous month, although significantly higher than the average of 5,000 conversations per month. Of the 578 users who left feedback, 74% rated their experience as ok, good or very good, with 40% rating it as very good. Chatbot users mostly engaged with the scenarios provided for waste options, Council Tax and parking enquiries.

The team has completed changes to the chatbot content relating to Senedd elections, which explains how to vote and provides details of local polling stations. Additional changes have been made to multiple waste scenarios due to the industrial action, including waste calendars, bulky item collections, garden waste, bins and bags, and recycling centres.

The development of the 'Where is my nearest...?' function to locate closest services to a customer's given address has been finalised. The team has also completed work on major events and road closures, which can now be checked using the chatbot to help users plan their journey through Cardiff.

Connect to Cardiff (C2C)

The top four reasons for contacting the Council last month via Connect to Cardiff (C2C) related to the impact of industrial action on waste collections; events (e.g. the visit of Their Royal Highnesses The Prince and Princess of Wales, and the announcement that some Euro 2028 matches would be held in Cardiff); the Traffic Regulation Order banning cycling on Queen Street; and the announcement of Cardiff becoming the UK's first UNICEF Child Friendly City.

Councillor Chris Weaver
Cabinet Member for Finance, Modernisation & Performance
24 November 2023