
HOUSING & COMMUNITIES STATEMENT

Homelessness Demand

Members will be aware of the unprecedented demands on homelessness services. These pressures continue and emerging demands are also yet to be fully realised as an increase in presentations is anticipated by December. This will put additional pressure on an already stretched resource.

All of the Council's temporary accommodation is full. Four hotels are now being used as emergency accommodation and, on average, 88 single people continue to present each night at emergency out-of-hours provision. To help to address this, plans are currently being finalised to create significant additional spaces to support clients as we head into the winter. These will include contingency and emergency accommodation, which will be located across the city.

As an immediate response, the Council continues to work closely with Registered Social Landlords to create additional temporary accommodation units. Last month saw the opening of Bay Chambers, which created 43 new units that are all fully occupied. The Council is also working with the YMCA to create additional units for single people who have low needs and are currently accessing homelessness services.

Tai Ffres, the Young Person's Housing Association launched by United Welsh and Llamau, is now accepting referrals from the Young Persons Gateway, with people moving in this month. This will provide settled accommodation for the most vulnerable young people and will aid the move-on out of temporary accommodation.

To ensure that households can move out of the emergency and contingency accommodation, plans are also underway to increase the Council's temporary accommodation at scale and pace through a variety of methods. I will update Council further on these plans over the coming weeks.

Homeless Prevention Team

Our focus remains on preventing homelessness wherever possible. The Homeless Prevention team has been completely reviewed and face-to-face help & support is now available in more areas across the city than ever. The team has seen a reduction in the number of Notices to Quit served by landlords, which is at the lowest it has been since April 2023. However, the number of people being served a Notice to Quit by family and friends, and the number of people who are sofa-surfing, has sadly increased.

In order to address this, substantial work has been carried out on the Young Persons Homeless Pathway, with the Prevention team taking the lead on young person homelessness assessments and working in partnership with Llamau to provide family mediation to support young people to remain at home.

The Prevention team is also now co-located with the Probation team and undertakes homeless assessments from within HM Prison Cardiff, which has helped to speed up the assessment and referral process for the Prisoner Pathway. This has helped to increase prevention rates from 71% in September 2022 to 83% in September this year.

Young Persons Housing-Led Project

The Young Persons Housing-Led Project aims to prevent vulnerable young people entering adult homeless services. It has now been running for 12 months and, during this time, six young people with complex needs have been supported through the scheme, with four being permanently housed in social housing and two young people being permanently housed in private rented housing. Due to the success of the project, plans are in place for discussions between Housing-led Services and Children's Services about further expansion of the project.

Private Rented Sector

The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015 introduced minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) for domestic private rented properties. The Regulations were designed to increase the energy efficiency of the worst performing dwellings, reduce fuel poverty and increase housing standards. Since 1 April 2020, it has been unlawful to let out a domestic property under all new and existing tenancies if the property has an Energy Performance Certificate rating of F or G (the least energy efficient categories).

Shared Regulatory Services (SRS) has been conducting a programme of contacting the owners, agents and landlords of private rented properties to remind them of their duties under the legislation and to signpost them to potential funding streams that may be available to assist them in improving the rating of their property. To date, F and G rated properties have been targeted, as well as those properties for which there was no clear rating.

Since this work began, property improvements and re-certification have been evidenced, resulting in new property ratings ranging from B to E. By the end of September this year, the estimated reduction in carbon produced from these properties as a result of SRS interventions is approximately 72 tonnes, together with a reduction of 73,116 kilowatt hours in the energy needed for heating these properties. The approach will continue to be one of seeking compliance, working with landlords and letting agents, and remaining sensitive to the financial and capacity pressures on the sector currently.

Welsh Public Library Standards 2022/23

I am pleased to say that Cardiff Hubs and Libraries Service continues to perform strongly, demonstrating a clear commitment to meeting the needs of its customers.

Every year, libraries services across Wales are assessed against the Welsh Public Library Standards and, once again, Cardiff's provision has been commended for the top-quality services provided to residents around the city. The annual assessment report found that Cardiff provided a wide range of activities and services to support the city's diverse communities and, in particular, there is a strong commitment to health and wellbeing, with the city ranking in the top quartile of library authorities for adults who feel the library makes a difference in terms of skills development, and health and wellbeing.

The report highlighted that the Hubs and Libraries Service has developed a number of innovative wellbeing-related initiatives, including the provision of digital screens displaying health and wellbeing information; the translation of Cancer Research UK videos into community languages; the incorporation of physical activity into story times; provision of a sports library that loans equipment; and physical activities for older people.

The city is in the top quartile of library services for the number of visits and virtual visits per capita and, whilst the number of physical visits to the city's libraries has not returned to pre-pandemic levels, virtual visits have increased markedly, with demand for digital reading materials continuing to rise rapidly.

I am very pleased with Cardiff's performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards and the report's recognition of our strong emphasis on delivering a service that seeks to boost people's health and wellbeing. I am also grateful for the hard work of Hubs and Libraries staff who always go the extra mile to help Cardiff's communities.

Warm Welcome Spaces

Cardiff's Hubs and Libraries are providing Warm Welcome Spaces once again this winter in response to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Anyone who is struggling to heat their homes is encouraged to pop-in for a free hot drink and a chat and, if they want to, find out about support and advice services. Last year, the spaces were heavily utilised and, so far this year, over 2,000 people have already enjoyed a warm welcome and been supported with signposting to services. Further information about other locations in Cardiff offering Warm Welcome Spaces this winter can be found at: www.warmwelcome.uk

Prevent

On 14 & 15 November, the Council's Prevent team hosted a visit by the Home Office Director of Prevent, Michael Stewart, who is currently visiting priority areas across the UK. Whilst in Cardiff, he met with a number of people, including myself, the Chief Executive and representatives from our Police, Health and Probation partners, as well as third sector and community groups. He noted that the Council was performing well in its delivery of a local Prevent programme and was particularly impressed with the effectiveness of partnership working and leadership on Prevent by officers and elected members.

Community Safety

Following on from my Council Statement last month, I am pleased to confirm that the partnership bid to the Home Office's Safer Streets Fund was successful. The funding received will be used to deliver a number of projects in Adamsdown, including strengthened CCTV provision, gating in Anderson Fields, a virtual reality programme exploring gang behaviour that allows young people to safely experience the consequences of their decisions, and a motocross educational programme on the safer use of bikes.

The Community Safety Team is trialling a ward action plan approach in response to street-based lifestyle priorities for Adamsdown/Splott, Riverside and Butetown. A partnership tactical delivery plan is also being developed in response to problems caused by off-road bikes and the impact of this plan will be monitored by the Community Safety Partnership.

In addition, the draft Violence Prevention Strategy is due to be discussed by the Council's Community and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee in January 2024. Public consultation on the draft strategy will also take place in the New Year.

Councillor Lynda Thorne
Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
24 November 2023