

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 NOVEMBER 2023

Present: Councillor Taylor(Chairperson)
Councillors Ahmed, Ahmed, Ash-Edwards, Boes, Lent, Lewis,
Littlechild and McGarry

17 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

18 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

19 : MINUTES

The minutes of the 18th September 2023 meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

20 : HOMELESSNESS CRISIS - BRIEFING

Members were advised that this item sought to explore the current situation and possible solutions to ease the pressures and support people in Cardiff.

For this item, the Chair welcomed:

- Cllr Lynda Thorne – Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
- Jane Thomas – Director for Adults, Housing and Communities
- Helen Evans – Assistant Director, Housing and Communities
- Dave Jaques – Assistant Director for Development and Regeneration
- Matt Evans – Operational Manager for Supported Accommodation and Assessment
- Gareth Jones – Strategic Operational Lead for South East Wales at the Wallich
- Richard Edwards – Chief Executive of the Huggard

Before the statement from the Cabinet Member and presentation, the Chair thanked officers for organising the Committee's recent visit to view homeless accommodation.

The Cabinet Member was invited to make an opening statement, in which she noted the scale of the task at hand and the difficulty in finding solutions. She thanked the officers for their work to bring forward these proposals to alleviate the issue, and advocated thinking outside the box. Officers provided a presentation, before Members were asked for their questions, comments and observations.

During the presentation, officers highlighted the increase in good quality temporary and supported accommodation before and during the pandemic, as well as the improvement of support services, resulting in very low levels of rough sleeping. The

'No-one Left Out' approach, an important part of the pandemic response, had built an expectation that services would continue to provide everyone with temporary accommodation even when there was no legal duty to do so.

However, Members heard that Cardiff was now experiencing a housing crisis which was placing exceptional pressure on homelessness services. While the city had a good supply of temporary accommodation units (1,699 in total), all of them were full, and 28 more families were entering accommodation than exiting it to permanent homes every month. Combined waiting lists were up 150% since 2021 and the number of single people presenting for emergency accommodation had increased to 88 per night. The number of people sleeping rough had increased to 43, and with 8,000 people on the housing waiting list, demand for affordable housing was far exceeding supply.

The Committee was told that emergency accommodation had been established due to this demand, with the council making exclusive use of 4 hotels to offer 326 units of accommodation as well as support from staff and other services on all sites. Key causes of this increase in demand included a lack of affordable accommodation in the private rented sector, with the average rent in Cardiff costing £200 more than the Welsh average, and the average rent for a two-bed property exceeding the Local Housing Allowance by more than £100 a week. Officers noted that an increase in the number of Airbnb lets was contributing to this, as well as landlords leaving the market due to taxation changes, mortgage interest rate rises and changes in legislation. Cardiff was heavily reliant on the private rented sector, with 24.3% of households renting privately and the lowest home ownership in Wales at 58%.

In order to address this, prevention support was available in all Community Hubs and in other locations, along with improved mediation services like the Young Persons Gateway. Prevention of homelessness was consequently up to 83% in September 2023 compared to 71% last year. The Committee heard that the service had seen examples of individuals giving up their private rented accommodation to access homeless services with the goal of securing social housing, and it was being proposed that intentionality be considered where there was clear evidence of an applicant deliberately making themselves homeless – exempting those with complex needs.

Officers were also considering how to increase 'move-on' from temporary accommodation, and had a dedicated team working with clients to find private rented accommodation and advice services. The council was purchasing properties on the open market, with 120 acquired since April 2022. They were working with the YMCA to increase capacity within the low-needs pathway for single people, and with Llamau on new supported accommodation schemes. The Tai Ffres project was also expected to deliver 130 units for young people by 2027. Where appropriate, it was proposed that offers be made of private rented accommodation outside the Cardiff area, and that permanent offers of social housing be made anywhere in the city, whereas currently 4 higher availability areas had to be chosen. The Committee asked that more information be provided on these proposals in case they risked taking people outside of their support networks.

Members heard that the main solution was simply to build more homes, but this did not happen overnight. More than 60 sites had been identified with capacity to deliver

over 4,000 new homes in the long term, 1,000 new council homes would be delivered by December 2023 and strategic support was provided to housing associations to deliver 2,000 additional affordable homes by 2027. Officers also highlighted the importance of cold weather provision as the winter months approached. Additional accommodation had been sourced for single people, and a full review of how people presented to services was underway in order to reduce the pressure on key sites.

The representative of the Wallich noted that nobody had foreseen the sheer number of people in need of support services. In the past they had been able to turn to the private rented sector, but at the moment there was something of a perfect storm and it was difficult to find sustainable long-term accommodation. The representative of the Huggard agreed that these were unprecedented times, and that the housing crisis and homelessness crisis were synonymous in many respects. Mental health was another key factor, as a lot of homeless people experienced trauma. Building more units would help to alleviate the crisis but would not solve it entirely, and the root causes needed to be addressed too.

The Committee explored the implications of the intentionality proposal, noting that this could be a subjective judgement that differed from assessor to assessor, and might just move the problem to a different part of the service. Officers suggested that there were specific and clear examples of people intentionally giving up accommodation, and stressed that the council needed to get the messaging right when the waiting list was continually growing. Members suggested making use of social media to do this, and advocated caution when determining whether someone was intentionally homeless as they would lose access to the related support services.

Members noted the difficulties in addressing the root causes of the crisis when the immediate need was so overwhelming, and heard that officers were not anticipating an increase in Welsh government funding or housing support grants, which would equate to around a 10% cut in real terms due to inflation. Organisations within the sector had to compete against each other for contracts, so it was difficult for support providers to take on additional financial commitments. It was clear that central funding on its own would not suffice, so innovative solutions like partnership arrangements between local authorities and the third sector to lever additional funding were important. Local authorities had little power besides lobbying to tackle the many national factors in this crisis, such as the Housing Support Grant, Local Housing Allowance, Airbnb and interest rates.

Members queried a number of issues relating to people with complex needs, and were reassured that these individuals were not being put in temporary accommodation, and there were always support staff on site. Members asked whether the council's approach would be deemed acceptable under the Rapid Rehousing framework, and were assured that everything they were building met those standards, although some of the properties they had purchased and temporary accommodation acquired for the winter did not.

Members advocated spreading the available accommodation around Cardiff rather than having it concentrated in the city centre, as a way of relieving pressure on busy sites. Officers noted that they were already pursuing this via new schemes in Grangetown, Llanishen and Penylan, although it was generally easier to get accommodation in the city centre, and for specialist support to be delivered at

centralised hubs. Providing professional intensive support around the clock was particularly difficult when people were spread around the city, and the related costs were higher.

Members highlighted the statistic that 14% of those currently sleeping rough had no recourse to public funds, and were in agreement that even when there was no statutory duty to support people, as a city there was a moral duty. Members raised the importance of addressing wider needs and not just relying on accommodation as a solution. On the issue of immediate need, the Committee supported the proposal of buybacks to offer immediate relief, and continuing lobbying of national government on the Local Housing Allowance.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

21 : ADULT SERVICES AND HOUSING & COMMUNITIES Q2 PERFORMANCE 2023/24

Members were advised that this item concerned the Adult Social Services and Housing & Communities Performance Report for the Quarter 2 period, July to September 2023.

For this item, the Chair welcomed:

- Cllr Lynda Thorne – Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
- Cllr Peter Bradbury – Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty, Equality and Public Health
- Cllr Julie Sangani – Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty, Equality and Public Health
- Cllr Norma Mackie – Cabinet Member for Social Services (Adults)
- Jane Thomas – Director for Adults, Housing and Communities
- Helen Evans – Assistant Director, Housing and Communities

The Cabinet Members were invited to make opening statements, after which Members were asked for their questions, comments and observations.

Members noted the number of outstanding care plan reviews in adult services, and heard this backlog was being carefully managed. Cases where people were secure and supported had not been prioritised due to a high level of work over this period but they were now under review.

Regarding the spike in staff vacancies, Members sought to ascertain how reliant the service was on agency workers. Officers responded that they were trying to recruit to all posts, although in some short-term cases agency cover was necessary. The Principal Scrutiny Officer suggested adding this to the committee's workplan to look at it in greater detail.

Members asked about the progress of the service users' review of quality of care, and heard that this was being trialled with a small number of users first. It was a

complex written survey and sought to reach people just after they had left care to get the most accurate results.

Members asked for an update on the development of the equality action plan, which the Cabinet Member agreed to provide via email. The Committee noted the issue of council housing repairs and were pleased to hear that the number of outstanding cases had gone down in Q2, almost to pre-pandemic levels. The damp and mould team aimed to get out and assess cases as soon as possible.

The Committee explored the targets and KPIs on which performance was assessed, and heard that officers were gathering a lot of data about topics like hospital discharge which they needed to translate into more usable performance indicators. It was difficult to set suitable targets on new KPIs when there was no previous benchmark to compare against. Members suggested that it would be helpful to see a list of all the KPIs gathered so they could highlight the ones they were most interested in hearing about.

Members heard why it was difficult to set precise targets in such a complex and difficult national economic situation. The Cabinet Member noted that the money advice service was significantly overperforming because a lot more people were seeking help due to inflation, the cost of living and mortgage rises. It was also difficult to measure the complexity of interventions, such as whether they prevented something happening further down the line. Despite this complex situation, they were committed to the constructive relationship they had with scrutiny and continuing to give the Committee the fullest possible picture.

AGREED: that the Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, writes to the Cabinet Member conveying the observations of the Committee when discussing the way forward.

22 : CABINET RESPONSE TO CASSC'S COST OF LIVING INQUIRY

Members were advised that this item sought to consider the Cabinet's response to the recommendations made by this Committee's Task & Finish inquiry report titled, 'Cardiff Council's Support to Residents with the Cost-of-Living'. Of the report's ten recommendations, eight had been fully accepted and two partially accepted.

For this item, the Chair welcomed:

- Cllr Lynda Thorne – Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities
- Cllr Peter Bradbury – Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty, Equality and Public Health
- Jane Thomas – Director of Adults, Housing and Communities
- Helen Evans – Assistant Director, Housing and Communities
- Hayley Benyon – Operational Manager for Housing and Communities

The Cabinet Members were invited to make opening statements, after which Members were asked for their questions, comments and observations.

Members queried the progress of the partially accepted recommendation which said finance colleagues would look into making temporary staff permanent. The Cabinet

Member responded that while there were naturally some budgetary constraints, they aimed to give staff as much security as possible. Some temporary members of staff had been in post for more than four years, and around ten of these had been made permanent. They felt this was a common-sense approach which would continue going forward.

Members heard how the rolling out of outreach services to particular areas worked. Officers explained that all the advice services (money, housing, into work etc.) sat within one team, since the kinds of support people needed were generally interlinked. School outreach had been particularly effective, especially during the cost of living crisis. Provision could be shifted around to particular areas if needed, and they were constantly monitoring and responding to demand. The Committee was in agreement that this was a real success story which the council ought to be highlighting more.

The Committee discussed how best to follow up on the recommendations in the future. It was suggested that an annual review would be appropriate due to the in-depth nature of the study, starting next summer with the ability to look back on the winter period. Members noted that the inquiry had been relatively narrow and suggested widening its scope to include issues like insulation, retrofitting and warm banks.

The Chair added that the Committee was grateful for the Cabinet's positive response.

AGREED: that the recommendations be reviewed annually, starting in six months' time.

23 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were none.

24 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The meeting terminated at 6.45 pm.