

HO(2) 9

Ymgynghoriad ar ddiartrefedd – Hydref 2022

Consultation on homelessness – Autumn 2022

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Caerdydd

Response from: Cardiff Council

The supply, suitability and quality of temporary accommodation currently being used to house people experiencing homelessness and the support services made available to them;

Cardiff Council has over 1,500 units of temporary and supported accommodation available to those experiencing homelessness. As part of Cardiff's long-term strategic goals and in-line with our Housing Support Strategy 2022-2026, excellent progress has already been in improving the quality of accommodation. Reliance on low quality 'floor-space' for emergency accommodation has been removed and replaced with units of high quality, self-contained accommodation for single people and families. Cardiff will build further on this success, with renovations planned for the large complex needs provision for single people and continuing the development of high-quality accommodation for families. Reduction in rough sleeping and tents on the street

Cardiff is acutely aware that everyone presenting to homeless services does so with individual and specific support needs, which is why we have ensured that we have developed specialised pathways to meet the needs of everyone in our community. We also complete a bespoke Housing Support Needs Assessments with all applicants at the time of their assessment which provides us with the framework needed in providing accommodation which is suitable to the individual's needs. When considering placement options, Cardiff's three bespoke Gateways are designated for young people, single people, and families. By offering these distinct pathways, it is ensured that tailored support is available for everyone facing homelessness and mitigate our own recognition that in some instances, inappropriate accommodation can in fact hinder someone's progression to independent living, rather than enhance it.

Within the accommodation supply, there is a wide range of provision available. For single people, we have over 800 units available, comprising 12 staffed hostels of differing support needs, 219 units of specialised supported accommodation in the form of shared houses across the community, and a triage centre dedicated to the assessment and support of single people with complex needs.

For families, there are approximately 150 spaces in hostel provisions, across medium to high support needs. Within these spaces, also operate accommodation dedicated for young families who might need additional support to live

independently. For families with low support needs, or who are ready to live independently, we offer more than 350 units of accommodation which are independent and self-contained.

For young people, a mix of 102 hostel spaces, 64 spaces within shared houses, and 7 self-contained accommodation spaces is offered. The shared houses and the hostel spaces are staffed 24 hours a day and offer higher levels of support, with the shared houses offering a diverse arrangement of accommodation for those that might find residing in larger hostel accommodation more difficult.

The accommodation consists of a very diverse range of pathways and support needs. Within each of these pathways, support remains tailored in a manner appropriate for the individuals residing in them. In the low support pathways for example, assistance might be in tenancy preparedness, practical assistance in searching for accommodation, financial assistance in the form of bond and rent in advance, or income maximisation. For the higher support accommodation, support can become much more specific to the individual. There are dedicated units for substance misuse, alcohol dependency, mental health, offending behaviour, and Mixed Disciplinary Teams that can be deployed to intervene in cases where significant concerns are raised around an individual's welfare.

To ensure accommodation supports households to independence, Cardiff is committed to the ongoing assessment of the suitability of the support pathways available to all applicants and is seeking to phase out all low-quality accommodation over the next few years. Alongside this, we are implementing real, practical support in our community by rolling out homeless assistance city-wide.

Despite all this work, Cardiff still finds itself with substantial concerns over its future ability in managing the sustained increase in demand for its services which it currently faces. There is already significant capacity for temporary accommodation provision and 300 units of accommodation have been opened since the Covid-19 Pandemic, but the problems faced are vast. As well as the accommodation provisions now operating at full capacity, residents are facing increasing journey lengths whilst in temporary accommodation due to the reduced move on options available to them. Comparing this to pre-pandemic, households under a full housing duty now spend on average 26% longer in temporary accommodation. A combination of factors, such as the overwhelming increases in Section 21 notices being served in the private rented market (up 206% compared to pre-pandemic 2018), the cost-of-living crisis, high property rental prices, are all contributing to unequal flows of people moving into temporary accommodation with fewer moving out.

This unequal flow has now resulted in 117 planned placements for families moving into temporary accommodation, up 154% in this financial year and 500% since last July. Planned placements comprise of upcoming possession orders, warrants and family notices that will require accommodation over coming months. Simply, demand now equates to approximately 53 families being referred for temporary accommodation each month when move on is approximately 42. This means that families are only being placed at the final warrant stage of the homelessness cycle.

This creates considerable strain on families who are already under extreme stress over the thought of becoming homeless.

The impact living in temporary accommodation has on individuals and families

Cardiff Council is aware that living in temporary accommodation can have a significant impact on both individuals and families, and this is something which is exacerbated by the increased temporary accommodation demand. Temporary accommodation has been well documented as having a negative and destabilising impact on the lives of those that need it, removing the independence of some individuals and often taking people away from their supporting networks such as friends, family, health services or education. Whilst Cardiff has always strived to work with households to maintain these networks, this is not always feasible, and sadly these de-stabilising factors are seen in resident's lives.

This negative impact is being felt particularly at present as the available accommodation supply is shrinking due to the higher numbers of people accessing it. In real terms, this lower availability of accommodation means having less accommodation available in areas of Cardiff which might help to mitigate the loss of an individual's support networks. Due to increased demand and subsequent supply constraints, we are now using hotels to accommodate families facing homelessness. This is not a position we are comfortable with. Cardiff has always been able to provide emergency accommodation for its residents when required, and it is recognised that the negative impact felt by those living in temporary accommodation is always going to be more heavily burdened by households living in hotels. Hotel accommodation fails to offer the security and stability that families need to return to independent living, conferring only isolation and a significant source of additional stress unto them. This is particularly impactful for families with young children who will undoubtedly struggle to adapt to such a change in environment and the more limited access to facilities.

Cardiff is doing all we can to mitigate this impact and endeavour to move all households back into more suitable accommodation as swiftly as possible. Moving forward, we are actively working on proposals for increasing the availability of our future accommodation supply to ensure we can continue to avoid the more negative impacts of homelessness and use of hotel type accommodation. Family temporary accommodation increased throughout the pandemic, but now future plans are needed to address new increased demand. To do this the council is reviewing existing spaces within the city and utilising modular buildings whilst longer term developments are processed. Examples here include additional spaces within the south of the city that would see an addition 172 units. Further accommodation with the former Lansdown hospital site is also being developed and the council has multiple developments across the city which will provide more homes to communities in the coming years.

Cardiff is also working hard on mitigating the impact of living in temporary accommodation for all households generally by improving the quality and offering of its accommodation stock. Since the start of the pandemic, Cardiff has opened a significant number of units of accommodation and all of these have had the ethos of

harm reduction in mind, offering high-quality, self-contained accommodation with full access to facilities wherever possible. We ensure that the appropriate support services are available to all individuals accessing our accommodation, making sure that everyone is given access to the support needed to help them to live independently in the future. In one example of this, we can highlight the positive success in our dedicated move-on pathways such as our Tenancy Training for young people which has achieved an incredibly successful tenancy sustainment rate of 99%.

Providing these dedicated pathways for move-on is crucial in our ability to help families into independent living and to compliment this, Cardiff ensures that we remain flexible in our allocations priorities, increasing the percentage of lets that go to homeless households and ensuring that no household resides in temporary accommodation longer than they have to.

The impact of the ongoing demand for temporary accommodation and support services on local authorities, their partners and communities

The ongoing demand for accommodation and support services is being felt by all stakeholders involved in our service delivery. Following on from the initial demand shock seen by the Pandemic, many staff and providers believed this impact would be temporary and would soon see a return to a 'normal' for their service. Despite these beliefs, demand for accommodation services did not quell in the aftermath of the Pandemic and on the contrary, we are now seeing many areas within the service with increased demand. This impact is particularly felt in the increase to frontline homelessness presentations which are currently projected to rise more than 10% on last year and have now risen consecutively since 2020/21. Due to this demand increase, the number of families in temporary accommodation has risen by 27% since April 2021 and our list of planned placements across all household types during this time has increased from 63 to 332 (426%).

All of this has a significant impact on Cardiff's budgets, which are already under immense pressures.

It is also of particular concern that this sustained demand on our staff and partners will result in 'burnout' for the individuals involved. Due to the significant uplift in homeless presentations coming through and limited housing, staff are needing to make very difficult decisions around placements, often needing to pick *the most* suitable placement or deciding on which family out of many needs placing the most imminently. This decision-making can be emotionally very difficult for staff who are operating in tough circumstances. These factors are now leading to an increase in complaints and member enquiries as we are not able to place people in accommodation as early as we would like.

Long-term, the fear is that this could impact on staff retention in the Housing sector and lead to a lower quality of service overall. It is possible we are already seeing the impact of this staff retention, with recruitment in the sector very difficult since coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The effect of this sustained increase in demand feels widespread. As an authority, we are seeing higher caseloads for frontline housing officers, a temporary accommodation team dealing with increased numbers for placement, and an allocations team trying to balance the constant difficulties of a waiting list of over 8000 applicants. We are also noticing that this impact is not just isolated to our traditional frontline homeless services, with the knock-on effect of the increased demand filtering through to many other services who are helping to shoulder an increased burden of workload in order to continue delivering the service fitting of Cardiff's ambitions.

Options to increase the supply of affordable and appropriate housing in the short to medium term to reduce the use of temporary accommodation;

In the short-term, finding ways to increase access in the private rented sector is paramount to reducing the use of temporary accommodation in Cardiff. As part of this endeavour, Cardiff has re-branded and launched its new Private Rented Sector team, LETS which we hope will encourage landlords into working more closely with the Authority to fill their vacant homes. As part of this initiative, Cardiff is also actively seeking to secure landlords via the Welsh Government Leasing scheme, having secured 22 properties already and hoping to secure 10 more by the end of this financial year. Despite this, the barriers we face in the private rented sector are substantial. Whilst Cardiff has a large private rented market, it faces significant shortfalls between property prices and local housing allowances, with our latest assessment showing an average shortfall of more than £400 across all property types. Alongside this issue, Cardiff is facing an unprecedented number of landlords issuing non-fault notice to clients in the sector, with Section 21 Notices up by 206% and landlords citing property sale as the reason for this notice up 316%. This information coincides with a survey we completed at a recent landlord forum whereby 40% of landlords advised that they had sold a property in the last two years and 63% advised they were thinking of selling a property. Some of the primary reasons cited around the reasons for landlords leaving the market were increased legislation, Renting Homes Act implementation and a decline in profitability.

We know that prevention is better than the cure, so we are actively working on our rollout of our Prevention services city-wide to help ensure that those with a housing need can get the assistance so urgently required at an early intervention stage. Our hope is that the increased focus on prevention, alongside our dedicated private rented team can help to shore up our housing needs in the short-term. The homeless prevention fund has been crucial to support the work of the prevention team. Its flexibility of use has been exactly what has been required and this is what will be required in the future if we are going to, at scale, prevent many more citizens from becoming homeless. On top of this the Cost of Living Discretionary Scheme has also been vital to support residents in the most need with other financial issues, which alongside DHP has made a significant impact to supporting those in financial difficulties, and therefore preventing them from becoming homeless. Finally, to further mitigate our short-term housing pressures, we have substantially increased our allocation of social housing lets to homeless applicants and piloted new ways in

which we can further prioritise homeless applications to ease the demand on homeless services

It is important to recognise that even with these actions in place, Cardiff still faces unprecedented demand on temporary accommodation and at present, is aware of 332 households that will require emergency accommodation in the coming months. To resolve our medium-term needs, the Authority is actively trying to secure accommodation in the form of buy backs and has so far secured 25 properties in 2022. We are also aware that empty homes cannot be justified in a time when accommodation is in such short supply, and Cardiff has around 1233 empty homes in the city. We have already developed an Empty Homes Policy 2021- 2024, to tackle the issue of empty homes and working to return these properties back into use. Alongside this policy, additional incentives are being offered landlords willing to offer their homes to the Welsh Government leasing scheme if they have previously been recognised as an empty property.

Finally, Cardiff has a focus on long-term solutions and is currently engaged with an ambitious build programme which hopes to provide almost 4000 homes in the city (of which 2800 would be affordable), alongside our proposals for “managed blocks” which will help to provide permanent move on accommodation for individuals who’s support needs may have been considered too high to have lived independently before.

Whilst this will provide our services with a great deal of relief, it is crucial to reinforce the difficulties we face in the short and medium term as addressed above.

Progress implementing Ending Homelessness in Wales: A high level action plan 2021-2026, and in particular the move towards a rapid rehousing approach.

Cardiff is fully committed in moving towards the actions laid out in the high-level action plan 2021-2026 and implementing a rapid rehousing approach, but we recognise that the barriers in taking some of these actions forward feel insurmountable at present. Of particular concern is our ability to stem the number of people coming into accommodation whilst increasing the flow of individuals out in such a challenging privately rented market. Without this relief, we cannot see a way in which we can reduce our reliance on temporary accommodation in the city in the short-term whilst also ensuring the safety of our residents who face homelessness.

Good work has already been completed however in making homelessness a rarer event and we are already in the process of strengthening our housing support services and rolling these out city-wide in order to prevent homelessness wherever possible. Since the end of September 2022, the Housing Solutions and Prevention Team have joined together to provide a comprehensive service to those threatened with or facing homelessness. The joining of the two teams has reduced duplication of work and provides a more seamless journey for customers. Work is ongoing to implement new procedures to ensure customers have easy access to the prevention funding, to help keep them in their own homes, with the creation of two new

prevention officers supporting those just with rent arrears. This decision also ensures excellent link up with wider support such as Money Advice, the Advice Line, Housing Helpline and Into Work Advice teams. This personalised, city-wide approach will be instrumental to our success by providing uncompromising access to the services we have to offer to prevent homelessness.

Whilst we keep a primary focus on homeless prevention, we still face increased demand and due to a lack of move on options, our temporary accommodation supply is facing extreme difficulty, particularly in the short-term. Without finding ways to overcome the barriers in the private rented sector, it is difficult to see how we can make current instances of homelessness and the subsequent accessing of temporary accommodation for individuals significantly rarer or briefer. The Authority continues to engage private landlords and constantly seeks new ways to improve our offer to incentivise their dependence on us to help to fill their homes, but without overcoming the causes for the number of landlords leaving the market, or the substantial gap between housing allowances and rent, this seems difficult to achieve.

We are currently in the process of reviewing how our accommodation best fits the targets as laid out in the rapid rehousing guidance. As such, we are constantly seeking to improve the quality of our accommodation stock and ensuring that any new unit of accommodation is more closely aligned to the self-contained standards as desired under the plan. We are also committed to phasing out any low-quality form of accommodation and reducing the number of 'stages' in the rehousing cycle, removing all non-essential steps in this process and moving individuals into settled accommodation at the earliest possible time. Alongside these improvements, we have reviewed our existing allocations policies to try and increase the speed in which someone can be offered permanent accommodation independently of the private rented sector. In some examples of this, we have increased our allocations policy to homelessness, piloted new ways we can speed up our allocations offer to homelessness, and opened a new style of "managed blocks" which have provided additional settled move-on options to individuals facing homelessness who might have higher needs than those ordinarily moving into settled accommodation.

Finally, in recognition of the aims of the high-level action plan, we have had good success in our adoption of assertive outreach services. Since the start of the pandemic and the "everyone in" campaign, Cardiff's rough sleeping numbers have decreased significantly, from around 80 to an average of 12 by April 2021. We are exceptionally proud of this achievement and continue to invest resources in our Outreach practices to engage all those that are rough sleeping and encourage them into accommodation at the earliest opportunity.