

Cardiff Council – response to the request for information from the Welsh Affairs Committee

This document is being written following an invitation to give evidence at the Welsh Affairs Committee regarding the work of Cardiff Council in its provision of housing and homelessness services to prison leavers. It will highlight successes and areas of development under the following:

- Prison Pathway
- Temporary / Emergency Accommodation
- Multi-Disciplinary Team
- Housing First
- Private Rented Sector
- Managed Accommodation
- Social Housing

Prison Pathway

Under the current Prison Pathway, there are a number of services involved at various stages of the individual prisoner's incarceration and subsequent release. Cardiff Council has a Prison Link Officer whose role is vital in allowing Cardiff's Homeless Services to establish a clear and suitable Housing Plan for individuals leaving prison. The Council has had a base within HMP Cardiff for the last 12 months which allows a more joined up approach between services and crucially a better understanding of the individual's needs through face-to-face assessment. There continues to be development work around the work of the Prison Link post and how it integrates with all the services involved and ensures that the right services are involved at every stage. Various levels of duplication have been identified currently which is not time effective for any of the services involved and can also cause confusion for the individual.

Cardiff's Homeless Services are seeing a lack of consistency in the Prison Link Applications (PLA) being received from Forward Trust who complete the PLAs on behalf of HMPPS. This includes some being received on the day of release which simply does not allow adequate time to be able to process the application and secure suitable accommodation in all cases. Alongside the timing of the PLA, we experience receipt of applications which are not fully completed and therefore

cause delays in a full housing assessment being able to be carried out. As part of ongoing work to improve the communication between Cardiff Council, Forward Trust and the Probation Service, regular monthly meetings have commenced to look at the outstanding documents, understanding why and participating in shared learning where we have seen insufficient PLAs. Part of the homeless assessment requires receipt of the Housing Risk Assessment (HRA) from the Probation Officer; however, we are often having to chase for this information. Whilst the delay in receiving the HRA does not mean we cannot consider a homeless duty towards the individual. It does mean that we are unable to provide accommodation providers with a person's complete risk and support information for the most suitable placement to be considered. In these cases, this can lead to placement in an emergency provision pending the required information. We fully understand the pressures that are impacting on all parts of the system and that these pressures can result in such problems occurring, however there is an opportunity to considerably improve the prison release process through greater collaboration and better lines of communication.

We continue to see individuals present to Homeless Services on the day of release where no information is known about them due to them advising prison resettlement teams that friends or family will be accommodating them on release. We appreciate that plans can change last minute due to a number of factors, however, we feel that individuals may benefit from some more robust conversations around their accommodation plans and the options available under Homeless Services. This would hopefully avoid "on the day" presentations and ensure positive prevention of homelessness where safe and suitable.

The introduction of Community Accommodation Service – Tier 3 (CAS3) in Cardiff whilst in the first instance has been positive, due to the increasing pressure on the gateway, we have been unable to commit to the number we hoped to. We are constantly looking at ways of ensuring the success of this pathway and are currently in discussions with Housing Associations to consider use of HMO accommodation for this cohort with support being given on site. Given the smaller numbers accessing homeless services via this route, we have seen better communication and information sharing for these individuals and a clearer pathway for each prison leaver. CAS3 aims to enable prison leavers who would otherwise be homeless to escape the cycle of crime by providing temporary accommodation for up to 84 days on release from prison.

Temporary / Emergency Accommodation

In Cardiff we have worked tirelessly to respond to the increased demand on services. The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a need to rapidly increase our stock of temporary and emergency accommodation and in December 2023 Cardiff declared a housing emergency due to the continuing pressure on services and the large number of individuals requiring housing and homeless assistance.

Any increase in demand on our services can have an impact on the pathway into accommodation for Prison Leavers due to limited availability. Cardiff Council is fully aware and appreciative of the pressures faced by the Prison Services which have led to the introduction of End of Custody Supervised Licence to try to ease the capacity pressure in prisons. The decision, whilst understood, does cause some concern around any opportunity we have to engage with individuals who may be released under ECSL and reduces potential for positive prevention of homelessness outcomes due to the time constraints. This process is putting additional strain on services which are already dealing with other pressures including the increased number of refugees through the Streamlined Asylum Process, combined with a lack of affordable housing in the city.

Cardiff has a diverse range of accommodation available to Homeless Services which ranges from smaller supported settings to much larger hostel accommodation. Whilst accommodation is more commonly close to the City Centre, we have developed sites away from the Centre giving individuals an element of choice in their accommodation, having consideration for their needs and circumstances. Our separate low needs pathway within Homeless Services allows us to ensure that our housing projects that offer higher levels of support are used for those with the highest needs.

Unfortunately, due to demand pressures, despite this range of accommodation, we have had to continue to rely on emergency accommodation models which can often include shared spaces. Whilst we agree that shared space is far from ideal, current demand means that this option is essential in order to place those in urgent need of temporary accommodation. Through the opening of such accommodation in response to the demand, we have been able to engage with client groups who may not have previously accessed our services for their own

personal reasons and keeping rough sleeping in the city to around 20 individuals, a much lower level than before the pandemic.

Multi-Disciplinary Team

Alongside our temporary accommodation service, since 2019 we have introduced and developed our Homeless Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT). The MDT comprises of a range of partners which includes Mental Health Services, Substance Misuse Workers, Psychologists, Counsellors, Police and Probation. The MDT has a focus on supporting people with complex and multiple needs, including co-occurring mental health and substance misuse issues and who repeatedly present to homeless services. The teamwork in a person-centred way ensuring that interventions are made to support individuals to address their needs and secure long term positive outcomes. The bringing together of services allows professionals to share resources and address gaps and barriers within provision. The MDT works to support people to access mainstream services which are often not set up to support complex individuals, without additional support this client group can often be excluded from services.

We aim to further develop the MDT Service to be involved at the Homeless Assessment stage to allow staff and individuals the opportunity to build a relationship pre-release and for the MDT to feed into the overall pathway plan for that individual, with the aim of preventing repeat homelessness. We feel this could be particularly useful for those individuals with substance misuse or mental health vulnerabilities.

Housing First

Our Housing First for Prison Leaver Scheme (funded via Welsh Government Homeless Prevention Grant) continues to provide successful outcomes. The project works with private sector landlords in Cardiff to provide access to safe and suitable accommodation to those leaving prison who would otherwise re-enter Homeless Services. The project positively contributes to the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders back into the Community with the aim of reducing reoffending and the revolving door cycle. The success of the scheme is only possible with focused partnership working and collaboration with both internal

and external partners which include Prison Resettlement Teams, NPS and CRC Probation Services, Police, St Giles's Trust, Health and Homelessness.

The project is currently supporting 13 individuals, of which 10 are accommodated via the project and a further 3 are receiving support whilst in prison to secure accommodation on release. To date the project has a 75% tenancy sustainment rate, 1 client who was previously identified as a prolific offender has not reoffended in the 5 years working with the scheme and the team won the Housing Team of the Year at the CIH Welsh Housing Awards in 2021 demonstrating the excellent work and outcomes achieved.

As the scheme predominantly relies on the private market to secure accommodation there have been great funding shortfalls, due to the sharp rise in private rented housing costs over the last few years, a rental top up system has been needed to ensure affordability of accommodation. This and the intensive support required limits the ability of the Council to expand this scheme.

Private Rented Sector

Apart from the Housing First model, which is heavily subsidised, the reduction in availability of affordable privately rented accommodation across the city has meant that this pathway option has almost become impossible. Data gathered from October this year showed the average rent for a 1 bed rented property in Cardiff was £860.38 giving a shortfall when compared to Local Housing Allowance rates of just over £210 per calendar month, making the private sector unaffordable to those in receipt of benefits. We continue to monitor the market and work to ensure that the private rented sector remains a viable move on option.

Regrettably we are faced with many landlords reluctant to consider offering a Contract (tenancy) to anyone known to be a prison leaver. As sponsors of the Cardiff Landlord Forum, we work with our landlords to try to give them a better understanding of our homeless clients and their support needs and risk levels, which are often low, along with the support available through our services to ensure longevity in housing options.

Managed Accommodation

Cardiff has introduced Managed Accommodation which is a key component of the housing led approach to homelessness in Cardiff. The approach recognises that stable and high-quality housing is essential in addressing the root causes of homelessness and supporting individuals to pursue opportunities based on their needs, wants and aspirations. Cardiff has opened two managed accommodation sites, with a third ready for occupation this month. These are large new housing association apartment blocks with low level support provided on site by the Council, to allow single people to move on from homeless accommodation into permanent homes, in a managed way.

Social Housing

Social Housing continues to be a housing outcome for many leaving prison or as move on from Homeless Services, however Cardiff currently has over 8500 on the Common Housing Waiting List, which is shared by all social landlords in the city. So, for those ready for independent living, move on into settled accommodation can take some time which unfortunately can result in a regression in a person's progress while they are waiting. We remain committed and focused to the development of our temporary and permanent housing solutions with an ambitious council housing development programme to deliver 2,800 new council homes of which 1,032 have been delivered to date. Opportunities to deliver new homes at scale and pace are under continual consideration.