

Housing for Vulnerable People – Written Evidence from Cardiff Council

How effectively the Welsh Government is planning for the future of HSG in light of rapid rehousing transition and the forthcoming Homelessness Bill.

Welsh Government is planning effectively in some areas for the future, however there are some improvements in long term planning that will need to be made to effectively deliver both rapid rehousing and the proposals set out in the forthcoming Homelessness Bill.

Recognition that one size doesn't not fit all for people with complex need is crucial, the right support at the right time is integral as is offering a range of good quality housing and support options to meet those needs.

Rapid Rehousing

In late 2022, Cardiff Council developed a detailed Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) which outlined the strategic direction of Cardiff Council in making the transition to a rapid rehousing model. Some short and medium-term actions from the plan are currently being implemented within existing resources. However, to achieve the long-term goal, a significant increase in funding and staffing is required.

It is estimated that £3.7m in revenue funding and £706m in capital investment to address the shortage of affordable housing would be required to implement a rapid rehousing approach in Cardiff. Until this funding becomes available, Cardiff will continue to work towards this aim within existing resources.

White Paper –“Ending Homelessness in Wales”

While Cardiff agrees with many of the principles and ambitions contained within the White Paper, it is clear that over the short to medium term the changes would have a negative impact on the prevention and relief of homelessness in Cardiff. While many of the proposals are supported in principle, a significant increase in capital and revenue funding would be required to deliver these changes and implementation could only take place in the longer term when the current housing emergency has stabilised. Some other proposals, particularly regarding what is considered “suitable accommodation” are not considered achievable at all even with considerable investment. Unfortunately, these proposals show little understanding of the

reality of the housing options available in the city or of the volatility and unpredictability of demand for homeless services.

Some of the proposals will lead to unintended consequences as they will increase dependency, remove personal responsibility and lead to expectations from applicants that cannot be met by the Local Authority. In this, the proposals move away from an approach that empowers and supports individuals to find their own solutions which was a key element of the Housing Wales Act and the ethos of the Housing Support Grant. Many of the proposed changes within the White Paper will only add more pressure and demand on services that are already significantly overstretched, while not addressing the fundamental issue of the lack of affordable housing.

The proposals do not consider the differences between local authority areas including demographics, communities and housing need and supply. These are issues that require local solutions, and local authorities are best placed to understand local need and how best to address this. The risk is that homelessness becomes the only route into securing social housing.

Estimated Cost Implications

It is estimated that approximately £418.9 million capital funding would be required to meet the existing demand for social housing.

The Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) provided by the Welsh Government includes costings for some but not all of the proposals. These costings have been reviewed and alternative estimated costs calculated. When comparing the costings in the RIA to Cardiff's calculations, it is clear that the Welsh Government have significantly underestimated the cost implications of implementing the changes.

To increase staff within the homeless service and to provide additional support services for more complex clients, in Cardiff, an increase in revenue would be required. It is estimated that these costs could range between approximately £22.8 million to £30.7 million. If the ambitions set out in the proposals were to be achieved, it is also estimated that approximately £510 million extra in capital would be required to increase temporary and permanent housing. Not all of the proposals were able to be costed in the RIA and no calculations have been carried out for those additional proposals, so costs are likely to be even higher than those stated above.

Current HSG Funding

Housing Support Grant (HSG) funding is currently complicated, with much more certainty required on long term funding. Annual allocations continue to be an issue to develop services longer term. The uncertainty in allocation levels restricts the authority's ability to forward plan. Staff in the sector are usually on temporary contracts to match funding cycles; this affects both staff morale, recruitment and retention.

Prior to 2023/24 the housing support grant had not received an inflationary increase for several years. The uplifts to the Housing Support Grant for the last 2 years have been very welcomed and has contributed to helping partners delivering services work towards achieving the Real Living Wage. It has contributed to help local authorities manage significant increases in demand. However, the annual basis of the HSG grant award and with no guarantee of an inflationary uplift year on year makes the long-term commissioning of services difficult.

Most Local Authorities have a mix of internal and commissioned services. Commissioned services are a mix of not-for-profit Housing Associations, Third Sectors organisations and Charities.

Year-on-year inflationary uplifts in the Housing Support grant is needed to help grow and sustain for our third sector partners.

Current and anticipated pressures in the delivery of HSG-funded support services, including pressures on the workforce.

Pressures on the delivery of HSG-funded support services are impacted by the lack of long-term funding cycles of more than a year and no guaranteed inflationary increases. managing significant need often whilst navigating equally overwhelmed health and social care services.

Frontline housing workers are support vulnerable individuals with increasingly complex needs. They often work with people with significant

safeguarding issues, often there are complex health issues, trauma, mental health issues, and chaotic substance use.

People with learning difficulties or disabilities, neurodivergent people with issues such as autism and ADHA are also increasingly presenting to housing for assistance. Staff on the frontline are managing significant safeguarding concerns on a daily basis across a spectrum of ages and need.

As well as single people staff are often working with families that have significant or complex issues that require children services intervention due to risk or behaviours. The prevalence of neurodiversity has seen significant increased demand

There is a danger that support staff will leave the sector due to the current demand on services. This demand is due to the consecutive ongoing pressures of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and the current housing emergency – all needing crisis management and placing additional pressures on services and staff, with little chance to reflect.

Recently the workforce development subgroup worked closely with Welsh Government to provide CIH Level 3 Certificate in Providing Homelessness Services accredited qualification for Housing Support workers. As this is new it is yet to be built into commissioned services and with the current crisis management and high turnover of staff as a result, its challenging to release staff from under resources services to attend training. If you use agency to cover so staff can train makes services unviable.

There is a perceived lack of career progression for support workers. This can lead to a high turnover of staff due to members of staff leaving the service to advance their careers. Cardiff Council would welcome a commitment from Welsh Government to professionalise the role of support worker to reflect the demands on the position.

Funding has been reduced over a wide range of public services in recent years – all of this is feeds into a challenging environment for other statutory partners such as Health and social care.

It should also be noted that the challenges faced within Cardiff cannot be compared to other authorities in Wales as there are a different set of

pressures faced. The number and scale of people presenting in Cardiff is similar to other major

The national insurance (Excluding the RLW Increase) changes will result in a deficit of over £1m in Cardiff. Local authorities have to set out our Housing Support Grant spend plans for 2025-2026 how our allocation of funding meets all relevant increases in staffing costs to ensure the continuation of services. In the absence of indications of how we meet the deficit of the NI changes.

The Housing Support Grant funds support staffing levels. We have a split of approx. around 50% via commissioned services tendered to Housing Associations, Third Sector organisations and charities which often have no reserve or ability to absorb these costs, which could result in contracts being handed back and could have further implications to an already unstable market. Cardiff values its partnership working arrangements and encourages a vibrant and empowered third sector to work alongside. Whilst many of the factors affecting the sector currently are out of Welsh Governments and Local Authority control some of the legislation proposed is having direct consequences on the housing support market

How much is known about service performance, including data on outcomes?

The New Housing Support Grant framework of reporting that was implemented in April 2023 which evolved from the High-level performance framework has improved reporting, but it is our opinion that there are still some issues. There is very little feedback on the outcome and use of data submissions.

Local Authorities compile annual data for demographics of service users, this local data is used to understand service users and to make improvements to services locally. The data captured for the purposes of the grant doesn't often show the full picture of how a person's journey through the service has developed. It provides a snapshot of a 6-month period.

It is felt that our own internal data is more useful to demonstrate the success of the support offered and the services delivered.

An IT system to record the information sent to Welsh Government would be helpful – the use of excel can be onerous and places a considerable burden on officer's time, there is also room for errors. A system which allows

authorities to disaggregate data to be used for multiple purposes has been a welcomed suggestion by providers and local authorities across Wales.

It is also felt that to measure the success of approaches such as rapid rehousing and the policy changes in the White Paper, further KPI's/outcomes will need to be developed in partnership with Welsh Government.

How effective is joint working between housing support services and public services such as health and social care?

Partnership work between housing support services and public services is very effective in Cardiff with a range of projects demonstrating successful outcomes.

Health and Social Care

Homeless Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT)

Over recent years the Homeless MDT has grown in strength and in the numbers of multi-agency professionals involved. The MDT is targeted at people who experience repeated instances of homelessness. This includes those who often move transiently between homeless services, hospital care, the prison system and periods of sleeping on the streets. Complex Needs Co-ordinators are now based within temporary accommodation, with key working now provided on sites.

This approach started as a housing led initiative in partnership with C&V UHB as a proof-of-concept approach. Good progress has been made and there is now clear leadership from the health board to take this approach further and embed it into mainstream delivery. Housing is working closely with the Cardiff and Vale Health Inclusion Service to deliver an integrated housing, health and social care model. Work is focussed on delivering health and social care to all individuals considered to be on the 'cliff edge' of health inclusion who experience some of the poorest health outcomes.

A new proposal aims to provide coordinated, integrated health and social care services to Health inclusion groups, focusing on proactive, preventative, and personalised primary care. This new model will co-locate services, offering a 'one stop shop' and 'no wrong door' approach to increase engagement and prevent individuals from falling through gaps. It will also operate outreach and in reach approaches. The key objectives include in

reach into the emergency unit/hospitals, GP sessions in supported accommodation sites and outreach work. This allows for comprehensive assessments and screening in health, housing, and social care needs, facilitating communication, and encouraging multi-professional care planning across the system.

Supported Housing

There is also significant work underway working with the Mental Health teams at Hafan Y Coed and CMHT's to pilot new approaches to moving people on after long spells in hospital, rehabilitation or residential placements. One of these schemes is in partnership with Mind, the pilot has been very successful and achieved good outcomes. There are opportunities to further build on this work to inform future joint commissioning

Joint Internal Working

The location of housing and homeless services in Cardiff, within the Adults, Housing & Communities directorate, ensures there is close partnership working across housing and social care. There are good governance structures in place to support these working relationships.

Project work is ongoing to improve the support available to help people move from hospital to more appropriate housing. This includes delivering new models of housing with flexible support and care options. A new Older Person and Specialist Housing Gateway is in development and will provide older people and those with specialist housing needs such as learning or physical disabilities access to a wider arrange of housing options.

Children and Young People Services

There is strong partnership working between Housing and Children's Services, demonstrated by the development of a Council-run specialist housing project for young people with complex needs transitioning from local authority care. Collaboration between the two services has significantly improved planning and transition processes, ensuring smoother support for young people. Additionally, the Young Person's Multi-Disciplinary Team, established two years ago, has delivered successful outcomes and is now being refocused to take a more health-led approach.

Managed Schemes

It has been recognised that some single people will always require some level of support to maintain a tenancy. A new concept of a managed scheme was

introduced in Cardiff in June 2022. Tenants in these schemes are given permanent contracts, but support is on site for those who need it. The aim of rapid rehousing is that homelessness should be brief and not repeated, and the secure nature of the tenancies and support given in managed schemes helps to achieve this goal.

This model has shown excellent results. There are 156 residents in the current schemes, with no evictions recorded since implementation. There have been examples of tenants re-engaging with employment and also with estranged family members through the support they have received.

Officers with the Managed Accommodation schemes work directly with adult services to increase access to housing for those with a care and support need. Managed schemes have also been developed in partnership with Adult Social Care.

Prison Leavers

Weekly meetings take place between the Council's Homelessness Service and Parc Prison, and fortnightly meetings take place with HMP Eastwood Park helping the team to develop a more structured plan for releases, however there are improvements to be made within this pathway so that it works more effectively.

A prison link worker is now based in Cardiff Prison. As part of the Community Accommodation Service established by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), the Council and HMPPS has set up CAS-3 Grant Funding Agreement to provide prison leavers with temporary accommodation for a minimum of 90 days post-release to improve resettlement outcomes. A new young person's prisoner resettlement pathway has also been developed with a dedicated Young Person's Officer managing all such cases.

Domestic Abuse Services

In April 2018, Cardiff Council implemented the specialist female-only VAWDASV Service, RISE Cardiff. The Service has been delivered by a consortium of providers. This comprehensive service replaced the previous arrangements of 11 separate grants relating to 16 services, delivered by four providers on annual rolling contracts with six reporting mechanisms.

This new 24/7 service sought to deliver a range of refuge options alongside preventative, supportive, and therapeutic services to victims and their

children (aged 0 – 18) across the city that was more aligned to the work of housing, health police and social care. The service was commissioned using budget from six sources, allowing a more joined up and innovative approach to service delivery. This contract has now entered its last year, and the service will be recommissioned in 2025/26.

A separate service for men experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence was established with the provision of a directly funded male refuge in Cardiff in 2015. Since that time, efforts to develop a more comprehensive regional service for male victims has been explored, with services being piloted and reviewed. Learning from the pilots and reviews will now inform commissioning of a regional male service in 2025/26.

White Paper's duty to identify, refer and co-operate

In relation to the duty to refer, we have in partnership with Cardiff and the Vale Health Board (CAVHIS) developed a list of housing statuses. These statuses will hopefully if agreed be embedded into local hospital admission paperwork. We are in the process of developing a local pathway to test the approach, the proposal is that EU/hospital staff will refer anyone with complex need who is homeless or at risk of homelessness to the CAVHIS team and if appropriate, CAVHIS will complete the 'duty to refer' to housing solutions.

We understand that the Welsh Government can only place a duty on those organisations in their control, for example, social services, local health boards & RSL's, however we believe that representation to UK Government here is crucial if we really want to see a meaningful impact. If for example the Home Office, DWP, Probation Service and Prison Service had a duty to effectively identify, refer and cooperate this would prove invaluable for planning services, making a real difference to the current system which is often reactive rather than preventative. With a duty on these organisations too this would help to support the prevention agenda.

We also believe that referrals from GP's and Primary Care are also crucial as they are at the frontline of services.

We are aware that educational establishments have not been listed due to commitment to reducing workload for schools, however, Cardiff believes that to be most effective these establishments should be subject to this duty as

well and perhaps consideration should be given to removing other workloads to allow for this.

Cardiff also believes that any third sector organisations that are funded by the Housing Support Grant should also have a similar duty.

The list should also, where possible, evolve to include bodies that connects with groups that are recognised as harder to engage with including the WAST.

Training should also be provided to other organisations to help them to identify and refer, although not necessarily place a duty on them to do, but to create more awareness of the issues. These organisations could include Third Sector organisations and charities that have specific links to those who are less likely to seek assistance from the Local Authority e.g. Barnardos, Princes Trust, MIND

The need for closer linkage with health cannot be overestimated. Health colleagues should have a duty to refer to local authorities when there is a risk of actual homelessness. Local authority homeless teams have a duty to refer to health when service users are not registered with a GP or have health problems that need treating. The commissioning of specialist health inclusion services is linked here, if there are no specialist health inclusion services the above is unlikely to work.

What services should be commissioned in future to effectively support people with complex needs to find and keep a home?

Early intervention has been identified as key to successfully tackling homelessness and it is therefore vital that people are aware of the prevention services and help available. It is much more cost effective to keep people in their homes, rather than providing them with new accommodation. Further investment in prevention services is therefore vital.

Tenancy sustainment is crucial. A quick-response service with skilled officers to support those with complex needs would greatly help individuals maintain their tenancy.

Education is important. Many of those who present are young people who have experienced a breakdown in relationship with their parents. Often family life has become difficult, and in some cases, it may not be safe for the young person to remain at home. Effective advice and mediation services are key to supporting young people alongside targeted interventions and support for school-aged children and their families.

Whilst Housing First is not suitable for everyone further investment in Housing First would be beneficial for a particular cohort. The principle of Housing First underpins managed schemes.

The standalone Housing First delivered in Cardiff offers direct placement into Council, Housing Association and private rented sector tenancies with intensive wraparound support. Housing First is successful for specific cohorts of people when there are no other options, but it does have its limitations around managing independence, not creating dependence. As at November 2024, 84 of the 91 people (92%) in Cardiff who have been accommodated via the scheme have maintained their tenancies and have therefore broken the cycle of homelessness.

Overall, it is felt that there needs to be a range of options to support those experiencing or threatened with homelessness - not one size fits all, there will always be a need for the 24/7 supported hostel model as this is the most effective solution for some groups. The aim for Cardiff in reaching an approach to rapid rehousing is to move away from the staircase models of homelessness traditionally used and focus on getting people into the right housing and support solutions for them at the right time.