



Summary of an Inquiry Report of the:
Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee

Cardiff Council's Support to Residents with the Cost-of- Living

January 2023



Cardiff Council

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CHAIR'S FOREWORD

The UK is in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis. Soaring fuel and food prices, alongside rising interest and inflation rates are leaving people in dire financial situations. The cost of living in the UK has been increasing since early 2021. With a backdrop of growing demand and continued uncertainty, the picture is complex and vast.

In recognition of the wide-ranging nature of the topic, the council's Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee wished to review how we as a council are alleviating pressures and supporting all cohorts of Cardiff communities. Remaining mindful to the nature of the topic, Members concurred on the need for the Inquiry to provide, timely, focused assistance to the council in its review of services.

All recommendations proposed in this Inquiry have been based on the evidence received and valued perspectives of all stakeholders involved. They are presented to Cabinet in a bid to supplement the service area's ethos of providing the best possible support to all of Cardiff residents', regardless of their individual circumstance.

Inquiry Members have remained mindful to the financial pressures placed on local authorities and the current context on which this Inquiry is based, and so, the recommendations we have made centre largely around maximising current resource, strengthening external support and allowing greater flexibility in service provision. Inquiry Members concur that officers and executive personnel involved in this work hold a strong passion and commitment toward providing the best possible support and assistance to Cardiff residents. The work they do is invaluable and, given the likelihood of demand remaining, or even increasing, myself and Inquiry Members would strongly champion the team being protected and grown wherever possible.



On behalf of myself, and the Inquiry Members, our most sincere thanks to all stakeholders who engaged in this work. For so openly sharing their valued perspective and knowledge and offering their time and continued assistance. My deepest thanks also to the Inquiry Members, for their time, dedication, and invaluable contributions. It has been a pleasure working with all stakeholders involved in this Inquiry.

Councillor Margaret Lewis *-Task & Finish Inquiry Chair, Community & Adult Services Scrutiny Committee.*

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The task group reviewed a draft scope for the Inquiry at its first meeting and agreed for the terms of reference to be:

To assist the council in its response to the cost-of-living crisis, this Inquiry will:

- *Review issue-related council services and proposed action on offer to Cardiff residents.*
- *Examine the scope, remit, demand, capacity and join up of services on offer.*
- *Assess, in consultation with key stakeholders, community awareness and accessibility of services and schemes available.*

APPROACH TAKEN

This report uses the evidence gathered by the task group to make key findings and recommendations to the Cabinet in respect of the council's arrangements for supporting residents with the cost-of-living.

To achieve this, the task group received evidence from the following witnesses:

Date of Meeting	Witnesses
<p>Meeting 1 – 7 Nov 2022 <i>‘Setting the Context’</i></p>	<p>Cllr Peter Bradbury (Cabinet Member for Tackling Poverty and Supporting Young People) Cllr Lynda Thorne (Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities) Helen Evans (Cardiff Council’s Assistant Director, Housing & Communities) Hayley Beynon (Operational Manager – Advice) Sam Gane (District Hub Manager) Khalid Osman (Into Work Co-Ordinator) Emma Dennett (Benefit Assessment Manager)</p>
<p>Meeting 2 – 17 Nov 2022 <i>‘Observe services and meet frontline staff and clients – Cardiff Central Library Hub’</i></p>	<p>Frontline staff & members of the public accessing services.</p>
<p>Meeting 3 – 18 Nov 2022 <i>‘Roundtable: Public demand, Awareness & Access’</i></p>	<p>Cardiff & Vale Citizens Advice Cardiff & Vale Credit Union Cardiff Foodbank Community Housing Cymru Welsh Women’s Aid Diverse Cymru</p>

	Gypsy & Traveller Wales Riverside Advice Welsh Government
Meeting 4 – 28 Nov 2022 <i>‘Observe services and meet frontline staff and clients – Butetown Hub, Penylan Library & Community Centre, Fairwater Hub’</i>	Frontline Staff & Members of the public accessing services.
Meeting 5 – 9 Dec 2022 <i>Summing up Meeting</i>	Inquiry Members

The key findings and recommendations are the unanimous view of the task group. Details of all evidence considered by the task group and used in the preparation of this report is available for inspection upon request

KEY FINDINGS

Inquiry Members wish to place on record that all stakeholders who engaged with this inquiry, hold a strong passion and commitment toward providing the best possible support and assistance to Cardiff residents with the current cost of living.

The Inquiry team wish to commend the work of the Council's Advice Services management and staff, who are leading and delivering vital services against a backdrop of continued uncertainty and ever-growing demand. It is for this reason why Inquiry Members wish to voice their view of protecting and growing this service wherever possible.

The below Key Findings have arrived after five meetings which included visits to Council hubs and a roundtable with external representatives.

Context

Cardiff Council's Advice Service is made up of the following teams:

- Money Advice,
- Into Work and
- Adviceline.

Support for help with the cost of living can also be accessed through the Council's Housing Solutions and Prevention Team, and Welfare Liaison Team. All teams offer direct support, information, advice, and guidance regarding cost of living and carry out referrals into other services where appropriate.

KF1

The advice service teams are all based in Cardiff Central Library Hub and operate an outreach service, visiting identified hubs, and some other community locations across Cardiff on a rota basis. Resource constraints do not allow advice services to have a constant presence in all parts of the city. Presence of the team is determined by need and where it is known the demographic may have a higher risk of poverty and low-income.

KF2

The advice team operates a 'tell us once approach'. During the inquiry, Members found Cardiff Central Library Hub benefits from all the advice services being under one roof, including consistent presence from relevant external partners, allowing for a strong 'tell us once approach'. However, in local hubs, which do not benefit from all of the services being under the same room at one time, an individual requiring support may need to be signposted to other teams or support services; depending on the level of support required.

KF3

Inquiry Members were informed by council staff there are many financial support schemes made available by UK & Welsh Government to alleviate cost of living pressures for individuals; however, the challenge is working within the bureaucracy surrounding those schemes to ensure staff can quickly distribute money to an individual.

KF4

Inquiry Members were informed speedy financial assistance or support can sometimes be difficult to achieve due to the regulations set by both the Welsh Government and the council in its decision-making process.

Examples provided to Committee Members, where a simplification of the council's internal process would be welcomed included:

- Lowering the threshold of when a decision must be made by the cost-of-living discretionary schemes panel
- Reallocation of outreach services in the city
- Wording on publication documents

KF5

Senior Managers who engaged with the inquiry identified the following as the key challenges the services currently face:

- Raising awareness of the Councils support to tenants in the private rented sector.

- Uncertainty over what will happen once government led initiatives end. With significant concern this will lead to surge of demand with little support available for the teams to offer.
- Sustainability of resource – many of the advice services are grant funded resulting in the staff delivering services being on temporary, annual based contracts; this lack of employment security provides a high level of anxiety and worry for staff members.
- More resource and funding is required to allow services to be provided in more parts of the city. Inquiry Members recognise due to the council budget deficit, external funding may be required, and the service area has a dedicated bid writer who supports with this.

KF6

Demand

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, the council's advice teams, and externals who engaged with the inquiry, have seen a significant, and continued, increase in demand. There has also been a notable increase of people presenting for help from the older population, and those who have never experienced financial hardship before.

KF7

It is widely anticipated the demand for cost-of-living related support will continue and remain high. For this reason, the council's advice services are an area where sufficient resource, and sustained investment from the council is vital.

KF8

There has been an increase in complexity of the cases presented to staff with frontline staff, and externals, advising the council needs a stronger offer of mental health support for residents.

KF9

As Inquiry Members were informed a gap in the council's offer is around mental health support, it was confirmed all staff delivering services do get training around mental health: however, one staff member in a local hub informed Members they had not yet received any training around mental health.

KF10

The typical answer rate for the Advice Line is 9 seconds. At busy times in Cardiff Central Library Hub, residents can be waiting up to 2-3hours to see an advisor. Reasoning for the lengthy wait time was attributed to the length of time it takes to provide cost-of-living related support (average 1hour).

KF11

During the Inquiry, Members visited a hub which does not receive outreach services. Staff at the hub informed Members:

- Their current offer does not meet demand and they would benefit from outreach services, or third sector organisations being present
- They are unable to provide residents with confidential support due to lack of facilities – they would welcome a private area to provide confidential advice to residents

KF12

Other hubs visited who receive outreach services advised, they would benefit from increased outreach provision due to demand.

KF13

Externals who engaged with Inquiry Members felt their provision is not being fully utilised by the council. Some externals who provide outreach services within council hubs shared this view, and have experienced appointments not being made for their services when present in local hubs. They attributed this to a lack of awareness among council staff of their presence.

KF14

To cope with demand, the service area continually reviews services to determine resource need, with reallocation of resource within teams if required. In addition, managers are continuously and proactively applying for bids for external funding to widen their provision further, with many of the advice services also benefiting from volunteers helping to deliver assistance.

KF15

To manage increased demand, externals advised they have deployed hybrid offers – offering individuals face to face support or virtual sessions on an appointment basis.

KF16

Accessibility

To ensure council services are accessible for all cohorts, inquiry members were informed:

- A leafleting campaign is underway utilising connections in Pensioner Clubs, Council Tenant Forums, Independent Living Services, Community Resource Team, Meals on Wheels, Day Centres, Lunch Clubs, Bingo Halls, Hospitals, Schools and Parent Portals, Carers Network, Unpaid Carers, Care Forum, Telecare and places of worship.
- DigiVans advertising the Council's services will be placed in areas of lower take up.
- Community Inclusion Officers and staff from hubs/day centres are encouraged to spread the word of help available.
- Staff have access to a 'Language Line' resource – frontline staff who engaged with this inquiry confirmed it worked well, however there was lack of awareness of the WITS service.
- At the time of the inquiry, advice services staff can speak over 29 community languages.
- Information on services available has been circulated to Elected Members with the request they spread the message with their residents

KF17

It was recognised by all stakeholders some individuals may not wish to seek assistance due to stigma and personal pride; changing society's perception around accessing help is a key barrier the council is working to address, particularly through the work of its community and engagement officers.

KF18

The council must ensure the language on council publication is correct – for example use the word entitlement instead of benefit and apply instead of claim. This could significantly help to address the barrier created by stigma and perception.

KF19

To improve access within specific cohorts such as the elderly or those with disabilities, the advice team:

- Hold drop-in sessions at local hubs and community centres
- Liaise with local groups
- Ensure staff have continuous training
- Apply for grants to widen service provisions and offers

KF20

For wards in Cardiff that do not have a hub, the service area engages with local community groups and external partners to offer drop-in sessions at community venues. Externals who work with the council on such community events informed Members the events are very successful.

KF21

The majority of stakeholders who engaged in this Inquiry, voiced the benefits of providing services to individuals face to face, as they felt this allowed for stronger interaction and subsequent support.

KF22

Some externals who engaged in this Inquiry stressed although hubs play a significant role in facilitating community engagement; it must be recognised that they are not the only route to gain community engagement. The council must place less

reliance on individuals going to hubs to access services. There must be a flexibility in service provision, with the council offering a range of different means to access services for example through, home visits and greater presence in public buildings and digital offers.

KF23

Relevant external organisations stressed to Members that those from BAME communities tend to be most comfortable engaging with people they trust such as faith leaders, or culturally related organisations. It is therefore crucial the council establish robust relationship with such figure points to ensure that trust is transferred.

KF24

Council senior managers and externals highlighted the importance of providing services away from local communities as many residents may not want to be seen accessing services close to where they live due to embarrassment.

However, when engaging with staff working in local hubs, they stressed the importance of individuals being able to access services locally as residents may be unable to travel due to mobility issues. In addition, externals highlighted some individuals may not be able to afford transport, and that an individual dealing with trauma or mental health may not be able to visit a busy environment such as Central Library Hub or have the confidence to wait for services for a lengthy period.

KF25

Partnership Working

It was acknowledged by all stakeholders' effective partnership working, and a robust referral process between the council and externals is key. In recognition of this, the council has strong relations with a number of external bodies and has also established a Cost-of-Living Task Force with membership comprising of 15 external partners:

- Citizens Advice
- Department for Work and Pensions

- Cardiff 3rd Sector Council
- Age Connect Cardiff
- WLGA
- Public Health Wales
- National Energy Action
- Cardiff Food Bank
- NEST
- Cardiff and Vale Credit Union
- NUS Wales
- Representation from Cardiff Housing Associations
- Llamau
- Cardiff & Vale College
- Welsh Water

KF26

The majority of externals engaged in this Inquiry confirmed they have a strong working relationship with the authority; those that didn't, would welcome a relationship including the ability to offer their services in hubs.

KF27

The Welsh Government initiative, the 'Regional Advice Network' has membership from third sector partner representation and Cardiff Council to enable the sharing of information knowledge and skills. However, some of the externals who engaged in this Inquiry did not have access to the forum or received dissemination of its information.

KF28

To stimulate a strong community context and knowledge of services available, many externals voiced they would welcome the council facilitating a partnership network which enabled information sharing and relationship building locally.

KF29

Public Awareness

The publication campaign surrounding the Council's support for cost-of-living assistance includes:

- Social and digital media
- Wales Online adverts and articles
- Radio advertising on Capital FM and Spotify
- City Centre posters – including a digital screen on Westgate Street.
- Digi vans
- Letters sent to all households across the city on a phased basis detailing the council support available
- Printed and digital leaflets distributed to all hubs across the city, and shared with partner organisations
- Leaflets provided to front-line council workers to offer their clients, with some leaflets translated into community languages such as Arabic, Polish, Bengali, Somali and Ukrainian.
- E-flyers circulated to the advice teams stakeholders lists for circulation, which comprises over 120 organisations.
- In-person promotion of services in St David's 2 on 4th November and 16th January 2023.

KF30

Senior council managers and externals confirmed raising public awareness can not only be done through a digital approach as this is not viable for certain cohorts. For this reason, more traditional routes such as leaflets, and letters to all households in Cardiff advising them of services is being deployed by the council.

KF31

Externals would welcome more partnership events between themselves and the council, such as 'one stop shops' which offers support in public buildings.

KF32

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following a review of the evidence received during this Inquiry, Members have agreed the following recommendations for Cabinet consideration:

Context

R1. To ensure support to residents is not delayed, undertake a review of all relevant internal processes that relate to both strategic and operational matters, identifying where simplification can occur. The review should be done in consultation with relevant managers and frontline staff. In particular, the review should consider the decision-making process in relation to:

- Cost of Living Discretionary Schemes
- Relocation of advice services
- Publication material

KF4, KF5, KF6, KF7

Demand

R2. Due to the current, and highly anticipated continued demand, invest in more long-term employment opportunities for advice staff members. This could be achieved through an increase in permanent positions, or where temporary contracts are deployed, a year-by-year basis is avoided wherever possible.

KF2, KF6, KF7, KF11

R3. To strengthen the council's mental health support, widen the partnership work with primary mental health services and mental health related organisations. In addition, look to enrol 'mental health champions' across the teams who can establish links with local mental health organisations, utilising the externals knowledge and training on offer.

KF7, KF8, KF9, KF10

R4. Introduce a target to monitor residents' waiting times in hubs for cost-of-living related support. The target should set a feasible waiting time and will help monitor levels of demand and evidence if additional resource is required. To ensure the target is achieved and lengthy wait times do not occur, or are reduced, alternative service provisions could be offered such as virtual or in-person appointments at set times.
KF7,8,11,14,16,23,25

Accessibility

R5. To strengthen the local model and its offering undertake a review. In particular, the review should consider:

- Increasing hub facilities, such as more Hubs offering 'free phones' to residents and phones can be used to access any freephone number.
- Ensure all hubs offer confidential areas for residents to receive support.
- Widening the access for grass-root organisations to hold pop-up spaces in local hubs, offering cost-of-living related support, particularly those who specialise in representing population groups where engagement levels are low.
- The internal information sharing within all council departments on the external support on offer; including how information detailing the days externals are present in local hubs is circulated.

KF3, KF7, KF8, KF11, KF12, KF13, KF14, KF18, KF20, KF21, KF25, KF27, KF32

R6. Hold more pop-up events, in partnership with local organisations, both within council owned buildings and those outside of council control where footfall is high, such as local supermarkets. Areas where council hubs are not present must also be at the forefront when determining locations.

KF3, KF7, KF8, KF11, KF12, KF13, KF20, KF 21, KF23, KF25, KF27, KF32

R7. Consider enhancing the flexibility of service delivery by offering home visits or virtual appointments (where appropriate).

KF15, KF16, KF23, KF25

R8. As a way of addressing public perception and stigma, continue to ensure within all cost-of-living related publication, words such as benefits, and claim are avoided – instead using words such as access and entitlement.

KF18, KF19

R9. To stimulate a feeling of trust between the council and individuals from minority backgrounds, and to strengthen the outreach and engagement with all cohorts of Cardiff communities, ensure workforce diversity within Cardiff's Advice Teams.

KF17,18,24,

Partnership Working

R10. To strengthen the city-wide offer to residents, explore the possibility of establishing a Neighbourhood Partnership which allows partners to share information and knowledge of local support. Learning should be applied from the Cost-of-Living Taskforce but wider membership should be applied, including:

- Wide ranging grass root and third sector organisations
- Community leaders

KF26,27,28,29

COMMUNITY & ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP



Councillor Ali Ahmed



Councillor Bablin Molik
(Chair)



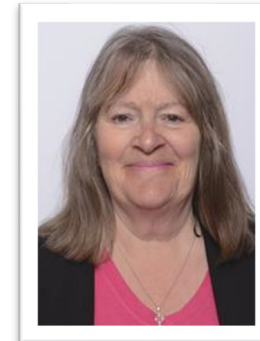
Councillor Saleh Ahmed



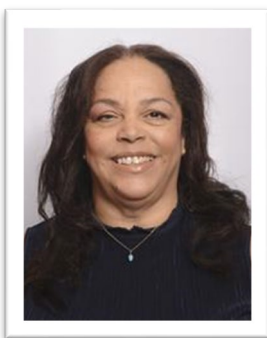
Councillor Mike Ash-Edwards



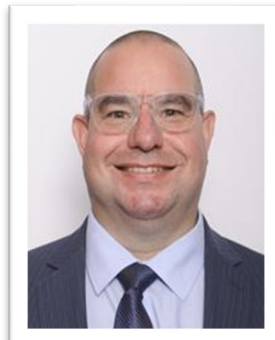
Councillor Claudia Boes



Councillor Sue Lent



Councillor Margaret Lewis



Councillor Peter Littlechild



Councillor Mary McGarry

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