



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

COVID-19

Cardiff Council

Homelessness

Cardiff Council took over two large hotels and re-purposed two new shipping container schemes to provide safe and self-contained accommodation for rough sleepers, homeless clients and people living in unsuitable emergency accommodation

Context

The Council had to rapidly address homelessness in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, protecting rough sleepers, allowing people who were in emergency accommodation to effectively self-isolate and ensuring the safety of frontline staff. As the virus began to spread throughout the community, it became crucial to secure a significant number of additional self-contained accommodation units - to ensure that nobody remained on the street, and that individuals were capable of self-isolating if they started showing symptoms. The Council has an in-house hostel team that already managed three hostels in the city and was able to expand very quickly to provide support in the form of additional accommodation in the hotels and shipping containers. Cardiff had also developed a strong multidisciplinary homeless team with social services, health and third sector membership. However, the radically different challenges presented by Covid-19 demanded a fundamental re-evaluation of the partnership's approach to service provision.

Development

During the pandemic, a new partnership group was established, including a very wide range of organisations, that played a crucial role in developing the services within the facilities. This included Cardiff Council in-house hostel team and partners including Public Health Wales, South Wales Police, Probation, Area Planning Board, Cardiff & Vale University Health Board and third sector service providers. Co-operative values and principles were put into action by the Council, working with housing associations, hotel owners, third sector charities and accommodation and support providers to rapidly devise an innovative solution to a complex problem.

Implementation

Over 140 clients were provided with appropriate accommodation where they could shield or self-isolate, and over 180 additional units of supported accommodation were established. This consisted of 20 isolation units in re-purposed shipping containers from existing developments, two large hotels and re-purposed accommodation. The accommodation was created by the Council's hostel team; however the services provided within the facilities were delivered by a wide range of organisations all contributing to the safety and support for high-need individuals. Staff were redeployed from other areas of the council to ensure that the facilities could be fully staffed. 24-hour support and security staff were provided at all sites. Three meals a day and snacks were provided by the Council's Meals on Wheels Service in partnership with the Council's Youth Foods, a joint initiative between the Council and the GMB union. The third sector provided advice on substance misuse and harm reduction services. Stakeholders involved in the process set up a Covid-19 Homeless Task Group consisting of Cardiff Council staff, service providers and statutory partners. This continues to meet fortnightly via teleconference.



Shipping containers used for emergency accommodation

Review

Rough sleeping was reduced in the city, from approximately 30 people in March 2020 to five individuals. Since the end of lockdown, this figure has increased to 12. During lockdown, the use of emergency accommodation decreased and the use of shared sleeping spaces reduced from more than 100 units to seven. Support services such as nurse-led clinics and therapeutic counselling were provided at the hotels and existing hostels with positive results and increased engagement from clients. A new long-lasting Class A drug substitute, Buprenorphine, was made available with the support of the Welsh Government and the results have been exceptionally positive. Co-operative values and principles were reflected through a collaborative effort working with accommodation providers such as The Wallich, Huggard, YMCA and Salvation Army and its statutory partners. The successes seen by homelessness services during the pandemic culminated in the launch of the 'Real Change Campaign'

towards the end of June 2020, which asks people not to give their spare change to those begging on the street, but instead to signpost vulnerable people to the services that can deliver real change in their lives. The campaign aims to embed the achievements made during lockdown into a long-term approach, to lock in the benefits realised and lessons learned from the crisis. This campaign was supported by all partners. The Council is currently developing permanent schemes to replace the hotels; the first – based in former student accommodation – was opened in September. The learning from the pandemic in terms of offering the full range of health and therapeutic services on site will be taken forward and all partners are committed to making the schemes a success. Shipping containers used for emergency

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