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Ymgynghoriad ar ddigartrefedd – Hydref 2022

Consultation on homelessness – Autumn 2022

Ymateb gan: Di-enw

Response from: Anonymous

I am writing to you in your capacity as the Senydd Local Government and Housing Committee . I write to you to report a shameful turn of events in which a young couple with three children, one of whom is disabled, have been issued with an eviction notice and there is no housing available for them to move in to.

I have known x his whole life and his wife x from before they were. x herself is disabled as defined by the Equality Act 2010 as she has limited hearing and has been prescribed a specialist hearing aid.

x and x have three children – dob 2011, dob 2012 and dob 2018. They have lived at x Cardiff since the start of their marriage. x works and they have always paid their rent on time.

x and x were notified that the owner of their home had sold the property in December 2021. They immediately contacted Housing Options in the hope of securing alternative accommodation. They were told that they should stay put until they were formally requested to leave the property.

x and x have been in constant touch with Housing Options, Cardiff Council and recently homeless support organisations such as Shelter Cymru. Both x and I have spent hours searching for affordable rental properties in and neighbouring areas where their children can continue to attend their Welsh Medium School. There are no suitable properties for a family of 5 within their price range.

In April 2022, the family were informed they were at the top of the waiting list for housing. Their landlord has been persistently asking them to leave and on 17 October 2022, they were granted an eviction order by Cardiff County Court. This stipulates that the family must move out of their home on or before 31 October 2022.

Despite having been top of the waiting list since April 2022, they have not been offered any housing or accommodation. Even now, just ONE WORKING DAY before eviction, they are still being told nothing is available.

As stated at the start of this email, the couple's youngest child is disabled. They became unwell very soon after they were born and following surgery was diagnosed with Laryngomalacia and Tracheobronchomalaci. These conditions give X a weakened windpipe which affects both breathing and ability to eat and drink.

X has been admitted to hospital on multiple occasions. One parent needs to stay with them whilst the other parent looked after their siblings. They were unable to eat and their parents had to learn how to feed them using gastric nasal tubing. As a side effect X suffered developmental delay. They continue to require frequent medical attention due to their ongoing condition and the resulting poor immune system.

X recently started the school their siblings attend where they are given additional support.

X propensity to catch infections mean that it is not practical for the family to live in shared accommodation. They need space and security to set up X's respiratory and feeding equipment.

The family already live a stressful life. X's mother passed away when she was young so parental support is limited. X works as many hours as he can. However, his wages are deducted from the couple's Universal Credit. The current average rental cost of a 3 – 4 bedroomed house in is circa £1200 per calendar month. Their rent until now has been £730 pcm. We have asked Housing Options to explain how the family are expected to source the additional £500 per month to privately rent, but neither of us have received an answer. Universal Credit will cover no more than £718 per month for a family of 5. The latest email from Housing Options received today continues to tell the couple to find private accommodation, with no guidance as to how to pay for it.

X and X asked for these additional geographical areas to be considered some weeks ago and it appears this has only just been actioned by the officer. This officer has been extremely hard to work with, often not responding to requests for information or advice, in a timely way, if at all.

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Dear Sir / Madam,

I've written to most of you in the lead up to current events. I am now expanding the list of people and asking, nay pleading, for just ONE of you to stand up and say THIS IS NOT RIGHT or HOW CAN WE HELP?!

X and X have lived in Cardiff for nearly 12 years. In fact X has lived in all his life. They have been served with an eviction notice which stated they must leave their home by 31 October 2022. Housing Options have been unable to provide any accommodation. They have advised the couple to WAIT UNTIL THE BAILIFFS ATTEND TO CHANGE THE LOCKS. Only when they cannot get access will they be classed as homeless and provided with any type of accommodation.

I have been reading through some of the Council Strategies and guidance and have to say, the council are not adhering to their own processes, aims or objectives.

Let's start with Cardiff Housing Support Programme Strategy 2022 to 2026:

“Strategic Priority 1 - Encourage take up of advice and prevention services by:

- Developing a communications plan to widely promote the help available to prevent homelessness
- Increasing the accessibility of specialist housing advice, mediation, and prevention services, by providing these through the Community Hubs.

“In 2020/21, 76% of households who approached the Housing Options Service at an early stage were prevented from becoming homeless, and so far in 2021/22 there have been further improvements”.

“We need to promote prevention services more widely, using various means to ensure we prevent homelessness wherever possible, including promotion of the financial support available to help households such as the new Tenancy Hardship Grant”.

Real Life:

X and X Housing Options that their landlord had sold their home in December 2021. They were told that they should stay put until they were formally requested to leave the property.

“Strategic Priority 2 - Prevent family breakdown wherever possible by:

- Reviewing and enhancing our advice and mediation services, with particular regard to young people
- Considering targeted interventions and support for school-aged children and their families.

“A dedicated Prevention Officer works directly with young people and their families to prevent homelessness where possible”.

Real Life:

X and X's three children are school aged and attend the local Welsh Medium school. Even though the youngest is disabled they have not received “targeted intervention” – indeed their school has been horrified by this turn of events. The “dedicated Prevention Officer” has not offered any alternatives except to rent privately. Both X and I have spent hours searching for affordable rental properties in and neighbouring areas where their children can continue to attend their school. There are no suitable properties for a family of 5 within their price range. Universal Credit gives an allowance of £718 towards rental of a three bedroomed house. There are currently no three bedroomed houses to rent in or other areas under £1200 per month. The Prevention Officer has not provided them with any information about how to make up the £500 + per month deficit.

X continues to require frequent medical attention due to their ongoing condition and the resulting poor immune system. X has some development delay and receives additional support at the school they attend with their siblings.

“Strategic Priority 5: Embed an assessment / triage approach for all those presenting as homeless by:

- Ensuring need is properly identified for both individuals and families, and that housing and support plans are tailored to individual need
- Ensure our family homeless centres offer appropriate support by working with Early Help and other partners
- Reviewing the success of the Single Homeless Assessment Centre and consider future development of the scheme.”

Real Life:

X and X’s landlord has been persistently asking them to leave and on 17 October 2022, they were granted an eviction order by Cardiff County Court. This stipulated that the family must move out of their home on or before 31 October 2022. Despite having been top of the waiting list since April 2022, they have not been offered any housing or accommodation. In fact their Prevention Officer told them by email that they were not being evicted on 31 October 2022 and that “you still have occupation rights beyond this date and work will continue to help you secure PRS accommodation or Social Housing whilst this remains the situation”. The eviction notice clearly stipulates that the family should not be in the property.

A further email from the same Prevention Officer states:

“Your case has now been passed by management for Temporary Accommodation placement as soon as possible I have requested that the extra areas you have provided be added to your Band A waiting list application, however it is now seemingly unlikely that you will be offered social housing before the eviction is escalated by your landlord”.

X and X asked for these additional geographical areas to be considered some weeks ago and it appears this has only just been actioned by the officer.

“Strategic Priority 7 – Adopt a Rapid Rehousing approach through the development of a detailed Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, including:

- Increasing the supply of socially rented accommodation by building 1,500 social housing units over the next 5 years (council only) and continue to seek ways to increase the supply of social and affordable housing

- Increasing Housing First provision and the access to intensive support in the community • Promote mutual exchanges to address housing need among social tenants”.

Real Life:

So where is this additional social housing?

It would be too much upheaval for the family, and especially X [disabled child], to move into temporary accommodation before permanent accommodation is sourced. X has identified several council houses in that have been empty for a number of months. She has asked if there a reason these houses are not being offered to them, but again no response is forthcoming.

Cardiff City Council’s Well-Being Plan 2018 – 2023 states:

“Housing, a central component of quality of life, remains relatively unaffordable compared to other major British cities with the average house costing around eight times the average salary. Furthermore, there is a close correlation between wards containing high levels of deprivation and high levels of social housing. Along with the rise in the number of people living in poverty, the rise in those facing destitution and homelessness is one of the most pressing issues in Cardiff.

So what is the Local Authority doing about this? Is it really being given top priority?

And finally the Council’s How we let our Homes A Guide to the Cardiff Housing Allocation Scheme 2016

We also need to rehouse some exceptional cases. These are applicants who have an immediate housing need and don’t happen very often. They are authorised by a Senior Officer in the Council or Housing Association.

Final Thoughts

X’s father lives nearby but is severely disabled. X was brought up by her Mum who sadly passed away when X was a teenager. This means that they have limited family support systems around them, no opportunities to stay with anyone or to “sofa surf”. I don’t live near Cardiff so staying with me would make it impossible for X to attend work or the children to attend their school. X and X are loving, family oriented parents who do not want their children to witness their personal possessions being removed from the house and the family, to all intents and purposes, left on the street. The toll on X and X’s mental health has been, and continues to be immense.

Please, I implore you, help

Regards

X (Godmother to X)

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By way of an update – The family received a letter from court stating that bailiffs are coming to change the locks on 7 December 2022. Cardiff City Council continue to say there is no alternative housing available and, even if there were, there are other people in front of them to be allocated. It's looking more and more like this family of five will be put in one "hotel" room for an unknown period of time. Not that the council has even suggested this – they have been fully silent on every request for information.

The family have moved most of their belongings to various places across Cardiff and are making plans for their two cats to be looked after. There is only now the large pieces of furniture – wardrobes, three piece suite, kitchen appliances – that still require removal and storage.

It looks as if this will cost hundreds of pounds. Cardiff City Council has advised them that they can claim financial help towards this. However, this is only in the form of a loan, which will need to be paid back promptly. Yet another slap in the face for the family.

I hope their contribution sets the narrative for the inquiry. It's ironic that, as we approach Christmas, there is nowhere for this family to live in the city of X's birth.