Item 4

21st September 2023

Glasgow City Council

Wellbeing, Equalities, Communities, Culture and Engagement City Policy Committee

Report by Head of Transformation and Financial Inclusion, Glasgow City Council, Director of Libraries Sport and Communities, Glasgow Life

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Welcome Places

Purpose of Report:

To provide Members with an overview of the Welcome Places initiative in operation within the city and its impact to date, and to outline proposals for the continuation of these.

Recommendations:

Members are requested to:

- Note the detail of the Welcome Places initiative along with impact secured to date; and
- Note the proposals for libraries to act as Welcome Places going forward.

Ward No(s): Citywide: ✓

Local member(s) advised: Yes ☐ No ☐ consulted: Yes ☐ No ☐

***PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING**:*

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1 Introduction

1.1 This paper provides Members with an overview of the Welcome Places initiative in the city. This initiative was established by Glasgow City Council and Glasgow Life to provide citizens with support to ensure access to further holistic assistance, where appropriate, and was one of a number of programmes designed by Glasgow City Council and partners to support residents with the Cost-of-Living crisis. The paper details the impact of the offer and sets out proposals for the continuation of funding.

2 Background and context

2.1 In April 2022, the average household energy bill rose by 54%, with inflation hitting a 40 year high. Many citizens were facing unthinkable decisions such as choosing between purchasing food or paying for energy. The Cost of Living Crisis has been, and continues to be, felt by all of our citizens, but more deeply by those who already find themselves living in low-income households. In turn, these challenging circumstances will deepen existing inequalities further. GCC and ALEO partners are committed to supporting individuals, households and communities most vulnerable to the effects of the Cost-of-Living Crisis as articulated in our Strategic Plan.

2.2 Welcome Places is a partnership project hosted by Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Life, GCVS and Third Sector organisations which launched on 17 October 2022. This service was established directly in response to a Council motion on 8 September 2022 seeking a stigma-free solution to the increases in fuel costs which would lead to many suffering from fuel poverty and poor health. The Welcome Places initiative established free ‘warm hubs’ throughout the city which could be accessed by citizens struggling with fuel costs or faced with a choice between fuel or food, for respite and support during the colder winter months.

2.3 Welcome Places in Glasgow are free, established community spaces accessible to any member of the public without any conditions of entry. A total of 23 Welcome Place venues were confirmed across the city, 18 of which were libraries or community centres managed by Glasgow Life. The remaining five venues were managed by Third and Voluntary Sector partners. An integrated programme of activities and support available through Welcome Places was jointly developed by the partners. This was informed by a shared awareness of the ongoing impact of the Cost-of-Living crisis and its impacts on citizens and local communities. Furthermore, Welcome Places also provided locations for person-centred holistic support services, such as Glasgow Helps, to engage with citizens in need of assistance.

2.4 Each Welcome Place venue was provided with funding to supplement their current provision. This could be used to ensure a staff presence at venues over and above existing provision, to provide community members with hospitality (warm beverages and/or food), as well as to offer additional practical support such as increased service provision and activities. These funds could be used as a contribution to the overheads and running costs of the venues or for

furnishing and equipment required to provide a relaxed and dignified environment for citizens.

2.5 Initially Welcome Places were funded to run through to the end of December 2022. Based on citizen engagement, positive feedback and the persistent cold weather, it was agreed to extend this. GCC secured additional funding to extend the service until the end of March 2023.

3 Evaluation

3.1 In April 2023, an independent evaluation was conducted by the University of Glasgow on the Welcome Places model to understand the impact achieved for citizens and to articulate lessons for the future. The evaluation can be accessed in the Members' Library. This research reports that Welcome Places;

- Had a positive impact on community members;
- Established effective partnership working;
- Highlighted that small investments can make a big difference within communities;
- Bolstered relationship-building.

3.2 The findings of the evaluation highlight that this model of support was well received by those that made use of it. For many service users, the value of the offer was multi-faceted and included not only the provision of a warm, safe place but also access to the additional services and activities on offer in these venues. Others spoke of the positive impact on their mental health as a result of having a place to go. Alongside this, there was valuable feedback on the contribution that Welcome Places had on reigniting a sense of social connectedness after the difficult and isolating experience of the pandemic. This was highlighted particularly across venues with a strong community connection, that already had an identifiable role within an area and where the Welcome Places service was provided in addition to that.

3.3 The research conclusions reiterate this, describing the value of identifying and harnessing points of established trust and engagement in communities to maximise impact. Alongside this, the evaluation referenced the need, in future iterations, to take time to understand the services already available across the wider community. This will maximize the use of resources as well as impact for citizens. Overall, however, the programme was a success in relationship-building across, as well as between, organisations as well as between organisations and community members and within communities.

3.4 Furthermore, there are also lessons for the project planning and implementation of this offer. The joint approach to designing and delivering this initiative was cited as an example of excellent partnership working. There was a collective awareness across sectors and partners of the key driver for the programme. The substantial pressures citizens were experiencing as the colder months approached, and a desire to maximise resources, resulted in partners adopting multi-agency collaboration to tackle a mutually recognised challenge. The programme of activity was subsequently developed and implemented very

swiftly and became a valuable aspect of the process. As one interviewee put it, *"We would not have been able to do this alone."*

3.5 Additionally, the importance of ensuring equity in the delivery and design of initiatives like Welcome Places are considered and that adequate coverage and reach is a priority when designing future initiatives. Starting and stopping programmes that seek to create safe, welcoming spaces for citizens may have adverse implications for trust and engagement over time, and was highlighted as a risk to the project's success. As such, the research recommends that in the planning of future iterations of Welcome Places and similar initiatives, the value and strategic potential of continuity is factored in.

3.6 Feedback from service users clearly articulates the continued provision of welcoming community spaces that facilitate access to services and activities along with a little hospitality, as a priority. It is clear that this is as much, if not more, about a place to connect with others as it is somewhere to keep warm. The evaluation articulates the significant difference a small investment can contribute to securing this.

4. Welcome Places 2023/24

4.1 The value of the Welcome Places initiative has been documented in the external evaluations undertaken. On this basis, Glasgow Life has committed to expanding the involvement of its libraries in the programme, in recognition of their role as key community spaces. From 1 October 2023, all 32 community libraries along with the Mitchell Library will operate as a Welcome Place. Library opening hours can be found at: http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/libraries

4.2 Glasgow Life's free, programmed offer of activities and services for children, families and adults of all ages will continue to be delivered across the library estate. This will be complemented by access to further support for citizens that need it most, available through co-located services based within libraries, including Universal Credit support officers, Family Finances team, CAB, Jobs and Business Glasgow and Glasgow Helps.

4.3 This expansion will further test evaluation findings that the use of existing 'welcome places', such as libraries and community spaces where there are existing relationships and service offers, provides the greatest impact. Whilst this will not therefore include community centres these will of course remain a valued part of the community infrastructure in the city.

4.4 The continued provision of small additions to the existing service offers has been secured through the allocation of £34,000. These funds will meet the costs of hot beverages across the Welcome Places network. This will encourage citizens to maximise the use of the library space.

4.5 The initial Welcome Places initiative also operated over a small number of third sector venues. Whilst these venues are not included in this proposal, again, the value of building on the relationships and trust that anchor organisations have

within communities is recognized. On that basis, we will continue to engage with citizens to shape the wider network of Welcome Places including within third sector operated spaces. Furthermore, it is proposed that an updated progress report on the impact of this next phase of Welcome Places is provided to Committee shortly after the end of this financial year.

5 Policy and Resource Implications

Resource Implications:

Financial:	Funding for the continuation of these services have been secured within existing GCC and GL budgets.
Legal:	None
Personnel:	The ongoing delivery of these initiatives will be overseen by existing staff.
Procurement:	There are no new procurement implications arising from the report.

Council Strategic Plan:

Grand Challenge 1: Reduce poverty and inequality in our communities.

- Mission 1: End child poverty in our city using early intervention to support families.

Grand Challenge 2: Increase opportunity and prosperity for all our citizens

- Mission 1: Support Glasgow residents into sustainable and fair work.

Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:

Does the proposal support the Council's Equality Outcomes	Yes. The proposal supports Outcome 3 – Service users are provided with information accessible to them on services provided by the Council Family particularly, those who face barriers through disability, language and digital exclusion.

2021-25? Please specify.	
What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report?	No significant impact, positive impact or negative impacts identified at this stage
Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socio-economic disadvantage.	These projects will have a positive impact on addressing socio-economic disadvantage. Funded organisations will provide appropriate advice and support to citizens that will assist to improve their financial position.

Climate Impacts:

Does the proposal support any Climate Plan actions? Please specify:	Yes. Climate Theme 1 Communication and Community Engagement and Climate Theme 2 Just and Inclusive Place
What are the potential climate impacts as a result of this proposal?	Glasgow Citizens are more informed on energy saving measures.
Will the proposal contribute to Glasgow's net zero carbon target?	Yes

Privacy and Data Protection Impacts:

Are there any potential data protection impacts as a result of this report?	None

If Yes, please confirm that a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) has been carried out	

6 Recommendations

6.1 Members are requested to;

- Note the detail of the Welcome Places initiative along with impact secured to date; and
- Note the proposals for libraries to act as Welcome Places going forward.