

COUNCIL: 24 JUNE 2021

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER

AGENDA ITEM:

Covid-19 Update

As a result of the successful mass vaccination programme and the low Covid-19 infection rates seen last month, Wales moved to Alert Level 2, effective from 17 May 2021. This phase of lockdown easing allowed for pubs, cafes, restaurants, visitor attractions and entertainment venues to re-open indoors, as well as a greater level of indoor activity. Since taking this major step towards normality, the Council has continued to work alongside public service partners to make sure that the city, and public services, are restarted safely and successfully.

While the number of Covid-19 cases had fallen significantly from the winter peak, we have begun to see an increase over the past two weeks, driven largely by the Delta variant, which is now the dominant strain in Wales. The rate of new cases in Cardiff currently stands at 18.5 per 100,000 population over the seven-day period to 12 June 2021, which, while still relatively low, is likely to increase further in the coming weeks. Incredible progress has been made in managing the pandemic over the last few months; however, as the recent uptick in cases has reminded everyone, this progress is fragile and it is essential to continue following all public health measures. Furthermore, due to ongoing uncertainty around the potential impact of the Delta variant, the Welsh Government has opted for a phased transition into Alert Level 1, prolonging the state of social distancing-restricted trading for businesses in the hospitality, culture, leisure and events sectors.

Mass Vaccination Programme Update

The rollout of the Mass Vaccination Programme has continued to progress at pace, supported by the opening of the Bayside Mass Vaccination Centre in the former Toys R Us building, which has been holding first dose walk-in clinics for adults every weekend in June. Up to 17 June 2021, Cardiff & Vale University Health Board has administered 551,211 vaccination doses (348,240 first doses and 202,913 second doses), and all residents above the age of 18 have been offered a first dose. The local vaccination effort has been nothing short of phenomenal, and it will continue to be the best way of combatting the Delta variant and recovering from the public health crisis.

Recovery and Renewal Programme

Given the significantly improved public health situation relative to the winter peak, my Administration is now looking beyond the immediate restart of services towards the recovery and renewal of our city. On 20 May 2021, the Cabinet considered a series of four reports addressing the future of local public service delivery, the future of Cardiff's economy, a Child Friendly Recovery and our One Planet Cardiff response to the Climate Emergency. These reports comprise our Capital Ambition Recovery and Renewal Programme, which will guide our work to build back Cardiff as a fairer, greener and stronger city in the post-Covid era.

While we have one dedicated report for a Child Friendly Recovery, consideration of our children and young people's rights and needs will inform our work in all areas and very much act as the golden thread running through our Recovery and Renewal Programme. Over the summer months, we will run a programme of engagement with the public and city stakeholders on the proposals in these reports to ensure that they align with their needs and aspirations, with the outcome of this process to be presented to Cabinet in the autumn.

Cardiff Public Services Board (PSB)

On 9 June 2021, I attended a meeting of the Cardiff Public Services Board (PSB), where PSB members considered the Council's *Child Friendly Recovery* report, the second of four 'Recovery' reports to be considered by the PSB. At the April 2021 meeting, the PSB reviewed the city centre recovery strategy, and looking ahead, the *Greener, Fairer, Stronger* strategy will be considered next month, followed by the *One Planet Cardiff* strategy in September 2021. The PSB's support of the Council's ambitious plans for the city offers a strong example of the enhanced partnership working put in place during the pandemic, which we intend to build on moving forward.

Accordingly, the PSB also considered work to explore how the levels of volunteering and community action in response to the Covid-19 pandemic can be transferred to a sustainable, long-term footing. An active third sector is a real asset for the city, as it has the agility needed to respond quickly in times of crisis, therefore partners across Cardiff's public sector will continue to work with Cardiff Third Sector Council to build upon the work done over the last 18 months.

Beyond issues related to pandemic recovery, the PSB received an annual update on the work undertaken through the Youth Justice Strategy, 'All Our Futures,' developed in response to the HM Inspectorate of Probation-led inspection in January 2020. In reviewing the first year of the strategy, there has been significant and acknowledged improvements in practice, partnership working, and staff involvement and development; however, the PSB recognises that much remains to be done over the coming year to fully realise our ambitions for our young people in contact with the youth justice system.

Cardiff Music Board

The Cardiff Music Board has continued to meet throughout the pandemic, with our primary focus on supporting the Cardiff music sector throughout the pandemic. The Council's Economic Development team has led on the work with the Cardiff Music Board to deliver the Cardiff Music Strategy and has also processed over 1,500 Creative Freelancer grants, totalling £3,842,500, with a significant amount having been music sector related.

The Board also wants to deliver activity that can support the city's grassroots music venues in recovering from the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, so we are keenly positioned to programme activity when the Welsh Government guidelines permit the go-ahead for outdoor live music events in the city.

The Cardiff Music Board is also engaging in the current consultation on the replacement Local Development Plan in order to contribute ideas about how the review can best support the music ecology in Cardiff. I am pleased to say that the Music Board is also now monitoring planning applications that might have an impact on live music venues in the city and is playing a significant role in sharing expertise to best integrate music as part of the city's recovery and regeneration plans.

Levelling Up and Community Renewal Funds

In March 2021, the UK Government announced details of new UK-wide investment programmes in parallel with the Budget, namely the Levelling Up Fund, worth £4.8bn; and the Community Renewal Fund, worth £220m. These new regional funds will be crucial for raising economic productivity and delivering inclusive growth in Cardiff as the city transitions into the uncertain post-Brexit landscape, considering that funding from the EU has been a significant financial contributor to regional and local economic development in Wales.

Through the Community Renewal Fund – the one-year precursor to the new UK Shared Prosperity Fund replacing European structural funds from 2022 – the Council will create opportunity across Cardiff's most deprived communities by investing in skills, local businesses and employment. A shortlist of projects will be submitted to the UK Government by 18 June 2021.

Through the Levelling Up Fund, the Council will work with the UK Government to boost investment in local infrastructure, town centre and high street regeneration, local transport projects, and cultural and heritage assets. Cardiff has been placed into category 1 of the Levelling Up Fund, meaning that it is one of the places with the highest levels of identified need. Submissions for the initial funding round will focus on those projects that are able to deliver substantial spend in the current financial year, however, further funding rounds will be open for longer-term projects.

The UK Government will announce successful projects for the Community Renewal Fund from late July 2021 onwards, while investment decisions for the first funding round of the Levelling Up Fund will be made by autumn 2021.

Councillor Huw Thomas
Leader of the Council
17 June 2021