

**COUNCIL: 22 JULY 2021**

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## **STATEMENT OF THE LEADER**

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### **Covid-19 Update**

As I outlined previously in an update that was sent by email to all Members last week, after beginning to see a worrying rise last month, Covid-19 cases have risen significantly in the first two weeks of July 2021, driven by the highly-transmissible Delta variant. As of 15 July 2021, the rate of new cases in Cardiff was 173.1 per 100,000 over the 7-day period to 10 July 2021 – which is well above the Welsh average – and test positivity was 9%. Currently, the overwhelming majority of positive cases are in unvaccinated groups and in both young adults aged 20-29 and older teenagers, who we know are at far less risk from Covid-19. Nevertheless, this steep rise in cases represents a real cause for concern.

Due to the success of the local Mass Vaccination Programme, the latest rise in cases is not yet translating into a significant increase in hospitalisations and deaths. Cardiff & Vale University Health Board (UHB) has seen a small increase in average daily Covid-19 hospital admissions; however, in absolute terms, the rate remains low and the UHB will continue to monitor this rate carefully as we await further conclusive data.

On 14 July 2021, the Welsh Government provided an update on the further easing of Covid-19 restrictions in Wales, following the earlier publication of guidance for schools and colleges on 9 July 2021. Wales is completing the transition to Alert Level One from 17 July 2021, which means that up to six people will be allowed to meet in private homes and holiday accommodation. Organised indoor events for up to 1,000 seated or 200 standing will also be able to take place following a risk assessment, with the limits on the number of people who can gather outdoors being removed. Furthermore, the First Minister confirmed that, from 19 July 2021, those aged under 18 and adults who have been fully vaccinated will no longer need to self-isolate upon their return from a country on the amber list. However, they will need to continue to take a pre-departure and PCR test on day two following their arrival in the UK, and it will also be very important for them to take care about physical contact with others on their return.

Looking to next month, if case rates allow, the First Minister has confirmed that Wales will move to Alert Level Zero from 7 August 2021, which would remove most of the remaining restrictions. From this date, all legal limits on the number of people who can meet would end, nightclubs could resume trading and indoor social distancing laws would be replaced with a requirement for venues to conduct risk assessments. However, face masks will still be required in most indoor public places – including in shops and on public transport – with an exemption for hospitality businesses.

## **Mass Vaccination Programme**

The rollout of the Mass Vaccination Programme has continued to progress at pace. As of 15 July 2021, Cardiff & Vale UHB has administered 653,263 vaccination doses (354,279 first doses and 298,984 second doses). Crucially, over 90% of all people aged over 60 or in a vulnerable group have received their second dose, with general vaccination rates high. This is vital, as the evidence suggests that the vaccine has significantly weakened the link between infections, hospitalisations and deaths, particularly after two doses. Furthermore, 96.6% of care home residents are now fully vaccinated and there have been no recorded Covid-related care home deaths in Cardiff since March 2021. Looking ahead, a booster vaccination programme for over 50s and those in the nine 'priority groups', aligned to the flu vaccination, will likely be rolled out later in the year. As has happened throughout the pandemic, we are working in close partnership with our UHB colleagues to prepare this work, and we will provide an update in due course.

## **Cardiff Public Services Board (PSB)**

The Council's *Greener, Fairer, Stronger* strategy received the collective support of public service partners when it was discussed at a meeting of the Cardiff Public Services Board (PSB) on 7 July 2021. As the city adapts to a new and different environment, a partnership approach will be essential in taking forward initiatives and projects that will lead recovery and renewal in the city, so I was encouraged to hear the positive response to this strategy from our public service partners. For example, colleagues in health highlighted that the City of Villages approach will provide real opportunity to address loneliness and social isolation, creating places where people can come together in their local community. In addition, Natural Resources Wales' work with the Council to develop a blue and green infrastructure plan will help identify the strengths and opportunities in the city that will feed through a number of the key missions of the strategy. As focused areas of work from this strategy are developed, we will continue to engage with partners through the PSB and associated delivery boards to collectively build Cardiff back as a greener, fairer and stronger city.

## **Living Wage Buildings**

On 5 July 2021, Cardiff University's sbarc|spark building was announced as Wales' first Living Wage Building. This pledge means that all tenants in Cardiff's future 'Home of Innovation' will be obliged to pay at least the real Living Wage to employees and on-site contractors. As Chair of Cardiff's Living Wage City Steering Group, I was delighted to speak at the event alongside Sarah Hopkins, Director of Cynnal Cymru; Professor Rachel Ashworth, Dean of Cardiff Business School and Living Wage Commissioner; and Professor Chris Taylor, Academic Director, sbarc|spark.

Living Wage Buildings are part of the Living Wage Places initiative and sbarc|spark is the UK's third such building, following International House in Brixton, South London and The Workbox in Penzance, Cornwall. As part of the Living Wage Places initiative, Cardiff was recognised as a Living Wage City in 2019, the only UK capital city to receive this distinction.

As of 31 March 2021, there were 126 accredited employers in Cardiff, representing an increase of 19 from the previous year. Furthermore, there are now 58,886 people

working for an accredited Living Wage employer and 7,929 workers have received a pay rise as a result of their employers becoming Living Wage-accredited. Whilst I am proud of this success, our ambitions for this initiative are far from being met, and we are continuing our work to increase the number of accredited Living Wage employers in the city as part of a three-year action plan.

**Councillor Huw Thomas**  
**Leader of the Council**  
**15 July 2021**