

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER

Covid-19 Update

Covid-19 cases in Cardiff have remained high in recent weeks; however, these infections have not led to the significant levels of hospitalisations seen in previous waves due to the widespread protection provided by the mass vaccination programme. As of 22 September 2021, Public Health Wales data showed that the case rate in Cardiff was 433.9 per 100,000 population over the 7-day period to 18 September 2021 – which, although significant, is below the Welsh average of 559.9 per 100,000 population – and test positivity was 13.5%, also below the Welsh average.

Cardiff & Vale University Health Board (UHB) has seen an increase in average daily Covid-19 hospital admissions; however, despite the rise in the number of cases, the rate remains relatively low and the UHB will continue to monitor this rate carefully as we await further conclusive data. Consequently, we are not yet out of this crisis, and as councillors and community leaders, we must continue to emphasise the need for citizens to behave responsibly and help prevent the spread of the virus.

Whilst the Welsh Government relaxed the majority of remaining public health restrictions on 7 August 2021, as Wales moved to alert level zero, it has been confirmed that a 'NHS Covid Pass' showing an individual's vaccine status will be required by those aged over 18 for entry to nightclubs, indoor non-seated events (over 500 people), outdoor non-seated events (over 4,000 people) and other large events (over 10,000 people) from 11 October 2021 to help curb the spread of the virus. Despite the high levels of the virus and increasing pressures on the Health Service in Wales, the First Minister confirmed earlier this month that the alert level will stay at zero for the time being.

Mass Vaccination Programme

The roll-out of the mass vaccination programme has continued to progress at pace. As of 21 September 2021, Cardiff & Vale University Health Board (UHB) has administered 711,750 vaccination doses – 370,513 first doses and 341,237 second doses. Crucially, over 85% of all people aged over 50 or in a vulnerable group have received their second dose, with general vaccination rates high. Good progress has also been made in vaccinating young people, with nearly 70% of people aged 18-29 now fully vaccinated and just over 70% of 16- to 17-year-olds having received their first dose. Vaccinations have also commenced for 12-15 year olds who are immunosuppressed or have underlying health conditions and will be rolled out more widely to this age group next month.

A booster vaccination programme for those aged over 50 in priority groups 1-9 commenced earlier this week in the Cardiff & Vale area, starting in care homes. As has happened throughout the pandemic, we are working in close partnership with our UHB colleagues to support this work.

Cardiff Public Services Board (PSB)

On 22 September 2021, I attended a meeting of the Cardiff Public Services Board (PSB) where the PSB Climate Emergency Board (CEB) provided an update outlining initial collaboration outcomes and a proposed action plan. Engagement for behavioural and cultural change, low emission fleets and infrastructure, low-carbon public procurement and tree planting have been agreed by the CEB as the most impactful areas for joint work and collaboration. The Board also discussed the Age Friendly City initiative, outlining Cardiff's draft submission to join the World Health Organisation's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities in advance of its consideration by the Council's Cabinet in October 2021; as well as the Child Friendly City initiative, setting out the roadmap to accreditation to be provided including the expectations of UNICEF over the coming months.

It was apparent from discussion at the PSB meeting that the additional and significant demand pressures being felt by many council services in the wake of the pandemic, particularly those relating to providing care and supporting our most vulnerable people, are being felt across the city's public services. Despite the improved public health position, it was clear that the indirect impacts of the pandemic on our public services and communities are severe and will continue to be so for some time to come. The long tail of the pandemic, combined with major and UK-wide workforce challenges, will continue to affect adversely council services for the foreseeable future, with managers and staff working incredibly hard and creatively to ensure the delivery of vital public services in the face of difficult and growing pressures.

South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC)

I attended a meeting of the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) City Deal Cabinet on 20 September 2021, which considered a report relating to the South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) that was established on 1 April 2021 by Regulations (the Establishment Regulations) issued by the Welsh Government earlier this year. The functions to be exercised by the South East Wales CJC, which are to prepare, review and revise a Strategic Development Plan; develop a Regional Transport Plan; and undertake the economic well-being function, do not come into effect until 28 February 2022.

The CCR Regional Cabinet agreed to 'lift and shift' the current City Deal arrangements to the statutory CJC, which is a corporate body and would act as the decision-making body in place of the existing CCR Regional Cabinet. The CJC would also act as the conduit for project delivery in place of the Accountable Body, a role which is currently undertaken by Cardiff Council. A Transition Plan was also approved, together with the establishment and terms of reference of a Transition Board that will oversee this process. A report on various matters relating to the South East Wales CJC will be brought forward for consideration by Cabinet and Council later this year.

Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme

Earlier this month, 40 Afghan families fleeing their home country in the wake of the Taliban seizing control began arriving in Wales, where they joined 10 other Afghan families who have already been welcomed to Wales. All of these families have connections to Welsh elements of the Armed Forces, having worked with or alongside our troops in Afghanistan, and now it is our turn to support them in their time of need. So, for me, it is a privilege to be able to welcome them to Wales and to Cardiff. These families will be housed in Home Office-funded temporary accommodation until they are found new homes across Wales. Some of them will be resettled in Cardiff, and the Council has been working with our partners to ensure their smooth transition into their new communities, of which they will soon become important and valued members. Our city has a long and proud history of welcoming people of all races and creeds, and we have been doing everything in our power to ensure that we continue this tradition in our work to welcome and integrate the Afghan families.

Race Equality Taskforce

On 8 September 2021, I attended a meeting of the Race Equality Taskforce, where I heard presentations with the latest updates on the Taskforce's work and spoke in praise of the fantastic city-wide effort that the Taskforce is leading to deliver race equality in Cardiff. There is already an ambitious and comprehensive programme of work emerging from the Taskforce for the Council and its partners to progress, encompassing workstreams of employment, education, citizen engagement and criminal justice. Members of the Taskforce have brought forward strong draft proposals across these areas of work, including to increase employment in ethnic minority communities, engage with local communities around the Atlantic Wharf and Indoor Arena development, deliver anti-racism training in schools, divert ethnic minority groups away from the criminal justice system and help the Council formulate appropriate goals in their action plan for the 'Diverse Council Declaration'.

This work has been progressed at pace during a challenging year and I extend my thanks to all Taskforce members, Council officers and our partners, who have got us this far and delivered on a high-quality road map for a more equal city. I am particularly pleased that the Taskforce has been given the opportunity to shape Cardiff's recovery plan from Covid-19, as well as our economic development plans for Atlantic Wharf, a flagship initiative for this administration that must deliver on meaningful social, community and employment benefits for the residents of our city's most diverse neighbourhoods. I look forward to receiving further updates from the Taskforce and this administration will continue to support this critical initiative.

Betty Campbell Monument

On 29 September 2021, I will attend the unveiling of a permanent bronze monument in Central Square to honour the late Betty Campbell MBE (1934-2017), following a campaign by the Monumental Welsh Women group. Betty Campbell was Wales' first Black head teacher, a champion of equality and diversity and was an elected member of this Council from 1999 to 2004. Significantly, this will be the first ever statue of a named, non-fictionalised woman to be erected in an outdoor public space in Wales.

Betty Campbell was born in Butetown and dedicated her life to improving and promoting education, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic history, equality of opportunity, representation of women, community support and development. Her work as an educator and community leader was recognised internationally. Our city and nation owe her a great debt of gratitude, and it is my hope that this new monument will become a symbol of ambition and hope that will inspire future generations to continue our city's journey towards true equality for all of our communities. It will be my honour to speak at this event and pay tribute to her life.

Housing 2021 Conference

On 7 September 2021, I attended the Chartered Institute of Housing Annual Conference, 'Housing 2021', in Manchester, which was the first major conference that I have attended in-person since the start of the pandemic. I was pleased to speak and participate in a panel discussion session, entitled "Wales: A comprehensive path to achieve Net Zero". I was proud to highlight the incredible work that we are doing in Cardiff around low and near-zero carbon housing, including our mixed-tenure scheme on the former Eastern High site and our Passivhaus schemes. Beyond housing, I also discussed the Council's broader One Planet Cardiff agenda, including our plans to transform public transport and active travel in Cardiff, and our low carbon and renewable energy schemes.

Councillor Huw Thomas
Leader of the Council
23 September 2021