

COUNCIL: 25 NOVEMBER 2021

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER

Covid-19 Update

Covid-19 cases in Cardiff have stabilised and begun to decrease moderately over recent weeks; however, transmission remains high. As of 17 November 2021, the rate of new cases in Cardiff currently stands at 567.7 per 100,000 population over the 7-day period to 13 November 2021, which is above the Welsh average of 504.9 per 100,000. While life in the city has taken major steps towards normality in recent months, ongoing high case rates remind us that we must continue to act responsibly and follow the remaining public health guidance.

As of 15 November 2021, the Welsh Government has introduced a new requirement to present an NHS Covid Pass – proving either fully vaccinated status or a recent negative lateral flow test – to gain entry to cinemas, theatres and concert halls, in effect expanding the measure that was introduced last month for entry to nightclubs and large events. On 17 November 2021, the First Minister confirmed that there will be no changes to the current Covid regulations following the latest 21-day review period and Wales will remain at Alert Level Zero for the time being. The outcome of the next review of the regulations is expected to be announced on 10 December 2021.

Mass Vaccination Programme

The rollout of the mass vaccination programme has continued to progress at pace. As of 18 November 2021, Cardiff & Vale University Health Board (UHB) has administered 841,898 vaccination doses – 386,503 first doses, 348,187 second doses, 101,436 boosters and 5,731 third doses. First dose vaccinations have been extended to those aged 12 to 15 years old, with nearly 50% having now received one dose, which has been deemed sufficient for granting fully vaccinated status to those in this age group.

As we approach the challenging winter months, the roll-out of the booster vaccination programme for over 50s and those in priority groups, aligned to the flu vaccination, will be critical in protecting our residents and health services. The vaccination programme is making good progress, with the Welsh Government's commitments to offer a first vaccine dose to all 12-15 year olds and a booster vaccine to all eligible care home residents achieved by 1 November 2021. Those eligible for a booster vaccination will receive an invitation from Cardiff & Vale UHB and I would strongly encourage everyone to attend their allocated appointment. Over the coming weeks, we will continue working in close partnership with our UHB colleagues to ensure that all those who require it will receive their vaccinations in a safe and timely manner.

Cardiff Public Services Board

On 10 November 2021, the Cardiff Public Services Board (PSB) received a presentation on the Director of Public Health's Annual Report 2020, entitled '*Let's leave no one behind*'. The presentation outlined the report's recommendations, which included specific recommendations for the PSB, and these were approved. The report highlights the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on different communities, with poorer health outcomes associated with levels of deprivation, housing conditions and being from an ethnic minority group.

As Cardiff recovers from the pandemic, we must prioritise creating a healthier, more active and more resilient city, which will involve working together to address widening health inequities. As set out in the Annual Report, we must double our efforts in four priority areas: childhood immunisation, screening, tackling obesity and improving air quality. Working with our communities will be crucial, particularly around health literacy, building trust around immunisation and addressing barriers to behavioural change. Furthermore, the Council's work across housing, safeguarding, mental health and substance misuse will ensure that we are taking the necessary steps to deliver improved health outcomes for future generations.

Living Wage Week 2021

On 15 November 2021, I was pleased to attend the launch event for this year's Living Wage Week, which promotes and celebrates the 'real' Living Wage movement. The real Living Wage is the independently set hourly pay rate, which is updated annually and calculated according to the basic cost of living in the UK. The rate aims to ensure that no one should have to work for less than they can live on. At the event, I spoke about Cardiff's approach to supporting the Living Wage movement locally and the real impact that we have delivered in recent years. The First Minister also announced the new real Living Wage rate in Wales, which has been increased to £9.90 per hour, up from £9.50 per hour last year.

The Council started paying all its staff the Living Wage in 2012, before becoming an accredited Living Wage employer in 2015. Ever since, we have been at the forefront of the movement in Cardiff and Wales, championing the Living Wage and providing support to other organisations, big and small, in the city to become accredited employers.

More recently, the Council has played an active role in lobbying Welsh Government Ministers and officials to expand the real Living Wage into the social care sector in Wales, participating in a number of events with the First Minister and officials. The Welsh Government has set out its commitment to paying social care workers the real Living Wage as part of its five-year Programme for Government and this is a key priority that is expected to be implemented early in the current Senedd term.

COP26 and Wales Climate Week 2021

In the run up to COP26 in Glasgow, which took place earlier this month, the Council signed up to both the UK100 Net Zero Pledge and the Edinburgh Declaration following the decision of Cabinet on 14 October 2021.

UK100 is a network that brings together local authorities to share knowledge, collaborate and petition the UK Government on climate, clean energy and clean air policy matters. It also provides support to decision-makers in UK towns, cities and counties in their transition to Net Zero. In advance of COP26, UK100 called on local authorities to sign and adopt its Net Zero Pledge, which includes commitments to set ambitious Net Zero targets for greenhouse emissions for council operations by 2030 and for area-wide emissions by 2045 at the latest; to report carbon emissions annually, and to limit the use of offsets and, if used, for them to be as local as possible. As has been made clear in our One Planet Cardiff strategy, the Council is committed to achieving Net Zero by 2030 and is already positioned to meet these commitments.

The Edinburgh Declaration is a statement of intent on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, which has been agreed between subnational, regional and local governments across the world calling on the UN Convention on Biological Diversity to take bold action to halt global biodiversity loss. It also calls for greater prominence to be given to the role that subnational governments, cities and local authorities can play as key enablers in delivering a new global framework of targets. By signing the Edinburgh Declaration, the Council has not only signalled its commitment to delivering transformative actions in order to achieve the aims and ambitions set out in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, but has also taken a positive step towards achieving our One Planet Cardiff vision by recognising the importance of our natural environment and the contribution of green infrastructure to mitigating and minimising the potential impacts of climate change.

On 24 November 2021, as part of Wales Climate Week, I will be participating in a panel discussion at an online climate change conference organised by Cardiff University, which is entitled '*From declarations to action: partnership working on the climate emergency*'. The Welsh Government Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS, is also scheduled to be a panel member and speak as part of this event, which will explore the progress made by the Welsh Government, Cardiff Council and Cardiff University since our respective declarations of a Climate Emergency in 2019. I look forward to highlighting the work that the Council is doing in response to the Climate Emergency and, in particular, our projects in collaboration with the other organisations and sectors. As such, I will set out our ambitions from the One Planet Cardiff strategy and the key projects that we will deliver on the journey towards carbon neutrality.

Councillor Huw Thomas
Leader of the Council
18 November 2021