

COUNCIL: 17 MARCH 2022

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER

Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

On 8 March 2022, the Welsh Government Ministers for Social Justice and Finance and Local Government met with Council Leaders, including myself, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) representatives – including Councillor Elsmore in her role and capacity as a WLGA Spokesperson – and third sector representatives to discuss preparedness in Wales to accept people escaping the Russian invasion and military conflict in Ukraine. Everyone across Welsh local government has been horrified to see the devastation unfolding in Ukraine and there was a unanimous determination to offer all support possible.

The Leader of the WLGA has also written to the Prime Minister about the conflict and has reiterated the call for the UK Government to provide more clarity and act with greater urgency in responding to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The letter also called for the current restrictive and bureaucratic visa scheme to be scrapped to enable those people trying to escape the war in Ukraine to come to Wales and find a safe place as easily and as quickly as possible.

Welsh local government is ready to do whatever it can to help those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine and is making preparations to ensure that appropriate support can be provided when Ukrainian citizens begin to arrive in Wales. Cardiff also stands ready to receive Ukrainian refugees, but we are waiting on further clarity and, above all, urgent action by the UK Government in this matter. More detail on the routes to the UK and visa process is urgently required so that councils in Wales can make progress on putting in place the necessary arrangements to support Ukrainian refugees arriving in the UK, the majority of whom are women, children and other vulnerable people.

Covid-19 Update

After a record-breaking wave driven by the highly transmissible Omicron variant, Covid-19 cases in Cardiff have decreased significantly since the start of 2022, with the rate of new cases as of 9 March 2022 currently standing at 212.9 per 100,000 over the 7-day period to 5 March 2022. The latest data indicates that the Omicron wave is in recession and that the link between the virus and serious illness, hospitalisation and death has been weakened significantly, due in large part to the success of the mass vaccination programme. Essentially, this means that Cardiff is progressively moving from the pandemic to the endemic phase, in which we will learn to live with the virus.

As such, the Welsh Government has set out a gradual path to normality. Since 28 February 2022, face coverings have been legally required only in retail, public transport and health & social care settings, and the self-isolation requirement has remained in place only for those with symptoms or a positive Covid-19 test. Furthermore, if the current situation remains stable, all remaining public health restrictions in Wales will be removed from 28 March 2022. While the pandemic is not yet over and adherence to all remaining restrictions remains crucially important, the efforts of our staff and public health services and the sacrifices that we have all made over the past two years have brought us to a position where we can look forward to recovery.

Mass Vaccination Programme

The local rollout of the Mass Vaccination Programme has been a tremendous success, saving many lives and protecting over one million people. As of 1 March 2022, Cardiff & Vale University Health Board has administered 1,084,098 vaccination doses, and the pace and scale at which the booster programme has been delivered over the winter months has protected our vulnerable residents and health services during the highly infectious Omicron wave. Health boards in Wales are currently working on the arrangements for offering two doses of the vaccine to all 5 to 11 year olds.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to our public health partners for their efforts during what has been an exceptionally challenging year, as well as all those across the city who have supported the mass vaccination effort. As always, we will continue working together to deliver the vaccination programme for as long as it is necessary.

Race Equality Taskforce

The final meeting of the Race Equality Taskforce was held on 24 February 2022 and a report outlining the work of the Taskforce, including the approved proposals from its five sub-groups, was received by the Cabinet on 10 March 2022 and is also being presented to Council on 17 March 2022. The report sets out a comprehensive and practical set of recommendations, which have been developed collaboratively by the Taskforce and I want to express my gratitude to the members of the Taskforce and the many residents and organisations across Cardiff who have been involved in and supported this work. The work of the Taskforce will deliver meaningful opportunities for change in our city, and I hope that the report's recommendations will be supported by councillors. The work of the Taskforce over the past 18 months has positioned Cardiff at the forefront of race equality in local government both in Wales and in the UK. It has created a strong foundation and, whilst progress has already been made to date, our work in response is just beginning. Over the coming months, the Council will focus on progressing actions in response to the Taskforce's recommendations and scoping possible avenues for future work on race equality and anti-racist practice in Cardiff.

Community Jobs Compact

In an important first step following on from the recommendations that have been put forward by the Race Equality Taskforce, I was pleased to sign the Community Jobs Compact on 7 March 2022 on behalf of Cardiff Council, which will help promote job opportunities in the community and support local people in their applications.

The Council is an employer that is committed to building relationships and support for local residents to access job opportunities within the Council. This includes using a fully anonymised job application process as part of recruitment and addressing unconscious bias by requiring appropriate training to be undertaken by interviewers. The Council is also an accredited Living Wage Employer that has committed to paying the real Living Wage since September 2012.

The Compact aims to bring local people and employers together to tackle poverty, unemployment, and under-representation in the workforce. This forms a key part of our commitment to tackle race equality in Cardiff in response to the proposals made by the Race Equality Taskforce and involves the organisation committing to a series of inclusive and fair work practices that will make a real difference in the lives of Cardiff residents. As part of this commitment, the Council will also encourage local businesses across the city to join the Compact and provide more employment opportunities to local people, ensuring that we fully leverage our size and scale to advance racial equality and social justice in Cardiff.

Cardiff Public Services Board

Serving as Chair of the Cardiff Public Services Board (PSB) over the past five years has been a great honour, and I have had the privilege of seeing first-hand the contribution of public service workers in the city. They have worked tirelessly to deliver the services that we all rely on, particularly services for the most vulnerable within our communities, and have helped to change Cardiff for the better. I am particularly proud of our response to the Covid-19 pandemic over the past two years, which exemplifies how far strategic partnership working has come in Cardiff. This level of collaboration has not only enabled the city to continue meeting the challenges of Covid-19, but to start on the road to recovery and renewal.

Over the past five years, the PSB has played a crucial role in making progress in areas which fundamentally require collaboration between major public service providers in the city. I have already mentioned how the PSB mobilised an effective local response to the pandemic, but its impact has been far broader. The PSB has led the development of a city-wide approach to tackling the climate emergency and delivering the actions that will help make Cardiff a carbon neutral city by 2030. It has worked to promote healthy eating and living through the “Move More, Eat Well” strategy and pledged Cardiff’s biggest employers to promote active travel measures. It has also worked to support the Child Friendly Cardiff Strategy, helping place children and young people at the centre of the city’s response to, and recovery from, the pandemic.

Taken together, the PSB has supported a whole system approach to tackling inequalities in the city, encouraging a healthier and more active population, and creating a more resilient city. With a duty to review our priorities every five years, the Cardiff PSB will now take stock, and begin work to develop a new Well-being Plan, which will set out the city’s priorities for the next five years.

Councillor Huw Thomas
Leader of the Council
11 March 2022