

COUNCIL: 21 SEPTEMBER 2023

LEADER STATEMENT

Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Annual Conference 2023

I was pleased to join Cabinet colleagues and councillors from across Wales at the WLGA Annual Conference in Llandudno on 14 September 2023, which was being held for first time in five years. Speakers at the conference included the First Minister and Minister for Finance and Local Government. Both emphasised that Wales is facing the most challenging financial circumstances since devolution, citing the £900m in-year budget challenge facing the Welsh Government due to the impact of inflation and the erosion of the funding allocated to Wales by the UK Government. This means that the Welsh Government's 3-year funding plan is now significantly devalued.

The First Minister acknowledged that he had real concerns about the resilience of local government given decades of pressure and cuts. He made clear that the mood music from Westminster was not positive and he did not anticipate HM Treasury acting to restore the real term value of the Local Government Settlement any time soon. The Welsh Government does not anticipate a more favourable financial settlement for at least two years, even under any incoming Labour Government at Westminster following a General Election which is due to be held within the next 12 months or so.

The UK Government Chancellor of the Exchequer is due to give his Autumn Statement on 22 November 2023, which will mean that Welsh Government will need to defer the publication of its draft budget until 19 December 2023.

Both Welsh Ministers acknowledged the critical role of Local Government and commended in particular the role played in supporting refugee and asylum seekers from Ukraine and Afghanistan, an area where Cardiff has taken the lead in responding. What was evident was the critically important role that Local Government has played, and will continue to play, in responding to a range of challenges. Across Wales, Local Government plays an instrumental role in supporting communities, supporting the most vulnerable and delivering on behalf of local areas.

Official Opening of Llanishen and Lisvane Reservoirs

I was pleased to attend the official opening of Llanishen and Lisvane Reservoirs, including the new visitor centre, by Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water on 7 September 2023. The visitor centre is really impressive and includes a café, three meeting rooms, a grab & go service, as well as shower and changing facilities for watersports. It is great to see both the Llanishen and Lisvane Reservoirs being re-opened to the public again and the reservoirs being brought back into operational use for watersports, alongside work to protect and enhance the ecology of the site.

Cardiff City Football Club Academy and Sports Complex

On 19 September 2023, I was pleased to attend and speak at the official opening of the new Cardiff City Football Club Academy and sports complex in Llanrumney, alongside Cardiff City Board members Steve Borley and Ken Choo; Academy Manager, Gavin Chesterfield; First Team Manager, Erol Bulut and Llanrumney ward members. The £8 million project provides state-of-the-art training facilities, which will help attract new footballing talent to Cardiff and will benefit the football club, community and city.

I want to thank Cardiff City Football Club, Cardiff University and House of Sport for their investment in Llanrumney and what must be the best sports pitch complex in Wales. Cardiff City Football Club's Academy will occupy the site alongside the University pitches, which now includes 5 floodlit 3G pitches accommodating football, rugby, hockey and American football.

It's also great to see the reuse of an old Council building – the former Dr Who building that used to be located in Cardiff Bay – which has been repurposed to create a learning environment with classrooms for the youngsters who attend the Academy. The two-storey building includes offices, a lecture theatre, canteen, changing rooms and a gym. The building also houses an indoor academy-standard 3G training pitch.

Local clubs and local people will benefit too. We have ensured through the Council's investment that local teams will get regular access to the 3G pitches at affordable rates, including at peak times. There are also dedicated grass pitches for the community and a new community hub building with changing rooms, facilities for match officials and a new community room. As part of our partnership, Cardiff University has also committed to working alongside local clubs to maintain and improve the quality of the grass pitches.

This investment in Llanrumney forms a big part of the Council's regeneration plans for the east of the city – an area that has long been overlooked for investment.

Councillor Huw Thomas
Leader of the Council
21 September 2023