

**COUNCIL: 25 JANUARY 2024**

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## **LEADER STATEMENT**

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### **European Commission Report on the Quality of Life in European Cities 2023**

Cardiff has scored highly in a major new EU survey assessing the quality of life in major European cities, with the city being declared the best city for families with young children. The [report by the European Commission](#) follows an extensive survey of at least 839 residents in each of 83 cities in 36 countries in Europe, totalling 71,153 interviews, on a range of issues, including safety, jobs, transport infrastructure, culture, health, and quality of local administration. The survey showed that between 91% and 93% of people in Cardiff agreed that they were satisfied living in the city, which was on a par with people in the Tyneside conurbation and higher than the other UK cities in the survey – Glasgow, London, Manchester and Belfast – and far higher than major European capitals like Rome, Athens and Belgrade. Cardiff scored highly in several areas of the report, with Cardiff outperforming all 83 cities, including all of Europe's principal capitals, in the following two categories:

- A good place for families with young children to live; and
- A good place for immigrants to live.

Cardiff was also placed in the top 10 in the following other categories:

- A good place for LGBTIQ people to live (5<sup>th</sup>);
- Satisfaction with green spaces (9<sup>th</sup>); and
- Satisfaction with noise level (10<sup>th</sup>).

In other categories, Cardiff outscored the other UK cities, including the main category, satisfaction with cultural facilities (more than 90% of respondents), satisfaction with public spaces (85%), air quality, cleanliness and the time it takes to get a request solved by the Council. It also had the lowest percentage of people in the UK cities surveyed who agreed there is corruption in the Council (c.36%). The city performed less well in perception of its transport infrastructure, compared with other cities, with one of the highest levels of car use in Europe (58%, behind Tyneside and Manchester) and the lowest level of public transport use and walking in the UK. The Council recognises that high levels of car use cause air pollution and congestion in the city, which is why we are building cycle lanes, improving walking routes and looking at new ways of funding improved public transport options. We recognise that public transport options across the city need to improve if we are to encourage people out of their cars; however, we need to find a way of funding the required public transport improvements and this will require us to have open and honest conversations with residents and neighbouring local authorities within the Cardiff Capital Region about how we do that.

## **South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC)**

Members will be aware that the South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) has been established in accordance with the provisions of The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and The South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee Regulations 2021 (the Establishment Regulations), which came into force on 1 April 2021. The South East Wales CJC is comprised of the leaders of each of the 10 principal councils within the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR). Corporate Joint Committees are distinct corporate bodies and legal entities, which will be able to directly employ staff, hold assets and budgets, and be directly responsible for exercising specific functions. This differs from the existing City Deal joint working arrangements within the CCR where the Accountable Body (i.e. Cardiff Council) is required to hold responsibility for directly employing staff and holding assets and budgets.

In December 2023, the CCR Regional Cabinet and South East Wales CJC agreed to novate the City Deal funding agreement and project portfolio to the South East Wales CJC and, subject to final agreements, for the South East Wales CJC to take on responsibility for decision making and implementation of the City Deal. This will have related implications for the Council as the Accountable Body for the Cardiff Capital Region, which are currently being addressed by relevant legal and financial officers from both the Council and South East Wales CJC. I can confirm that a briefing on the transition to the South East Wales CJC is currently being arranged and is expected to be provided to councillors in Cardiff within the next month or so. I will ask officers to circulate details to members as soon as a date has been agreed.

## **Severn Estuary Commission**

The Western Gateway Partnership's Severn Estuary Steering Committee, which I chair, forms part of Western Gateway's 'Decarbonisation of Energy' workstream that seeks to position South Wales and the South West of England as a global leader in green renewable energy systems. The Steering Committee has led the process of establishing an independent Severn Estuary Commission, which will consider the most appropriate use of the Severn Estuary's renewable energy potential and provide impartial and expert advice and recommendations to the Western Gateway Partnership Board, and in turn to Government, on the feasibility of options for developing sustainable energy solutions in the Severn Estuary. I'm pleased to report that the Commission has secured a chair who is a pre-eminent figure in the renewable energy sector, whose name will be announced later this month. The first meeting and public launch of the new Severn Estuary Commission is then expected to take in Cardiff in February.

## **Core Cities**

I attended a meeting of the Core Cities UK Cabinet in Bristol on 5 January 2024. One of the main items was a discussion with Darren Jones MP, Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury. This focused on the potential solutions that the UK's major cities offer to the challenges facing an incoming UK government and what actions would be needed to enable this. Contributions highlighted the inadequacy of current levels of investment in infrastructure, which disadvantages UK cities relative to their competitors in Europe and elsewhere, and stifles growth and productivity.

Core Cities made a clear offer around the opportunity for an incoming UK Government to work in partnership and stress test ideas with the Leaders of the UK's major cities and use the wealth of experience and networks that exist across the Core Cities network.

### **World AIDS Day**

I was pleased to join with colleagues and speak at a community event to mark World AIDS Day on 1 December 2023 in my role as both the Leader of Cardiff Council and Chair of Fast Track Cardiff & Vale Leadership Group, which was held at the National Museum in Cardiff. The event focused on three important themes – commemorate, celebrate and educate – and provided an opportunity to extend support to those living with HIV, as well as remembering those that have died as a result of the virus through the decoration of a memorial tree with ribbons and 'leaves' bearing the names of those who were being commemorated. The event provided an important opportunity to reflect on how far we have come in the fight against HIV and related stigma.

Whilst councils in Wales have no direct responsibility for sexual health, it has not stopped both Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils from playing a full and active role in the Fast Track Cardiff & Vale partnership. As Chair of the Leadership Group, I am proud of the work that the partnership has done to date in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. This includes working with communities to tackle stigma by normalising conversations about HIV; the setting up of a HIV community support group; promoting HIV prevention work and treatment through council services, particularly in our Housing & Communities and Education directorates; and supporting our colleagues in Health to increase the uptake of HIV testing. What is clear is that this kind of collaboration and innovation is essential if we are to achieve the UNAIDS 2030 goal of ending new transmissions of HIV and tackling stigma by the end of this decade.

### **Festival of Light and Friendship**

I was pleased to attend and speak at the Festival of Light and Friendship at the Norwegian Church Arts Centre in Cardiff Bay, which was held on 10 December 2023 and organised by the Norwegian Church Arts Centre in collaboration with the Welsh Norwegian Society. The event was attended by guests from Vestland County Council and Knarvik High School in Norway and included a religious service in both Norwegian and English led by Reverend Ingrid Ims from the Norwegian Seamen's Church in London. In addition to music provided by the Salvation Army Band and the lighting of the indoor and outdoor Christmas trees, a memorial plaque for former Welsh Norwegian Society member and manager of the Norwegian Church, Karen Allen, was also unveiled in the gallery. The annual Christmas event celebrates the twinning links between Cardiff and Vestland in Norway and helps to strengthen the historic ties between our two countries.

**Councillor Huw Thomas**  
**Leader of the Council**  
**19 January 2024**