

COUNCIL: 25 JANUARY 2024

CULTURE, PARKS & EVENTS STATEMENT

Cardiff @ Christmas

I would like to wish all members a very happy and healthy 2024 and to take a moment to reflect on the collaborative work of our partners and officers in delivering a truly magic Christmas offer for residents and visitors.

The Cardiff Christmas Festival, presented in the breathtaking Spiegel tent and relocated from Cardiff Castle to Sophia Gardens this year, attracted just over 13,000 visitors. Sponsored by Admiral Money, the Festival also worked with the Holiday Inn and Hotel Indigo to offer both overnight stays in the city and pre-/post-event catering. Among other events, a comedy fundraiser was held for the official charity partner, Shelter Cymru, on 2 December 2023.

The opening night of Santa's Wish was attended by 80 families from the Dreams and Wishes Charity, which provides support for children with life-shortening illnesses. NSPCC Cymru also hosted and invited 100 supporters and volunteers to a performance. In addition, 120 discounted tickets were provided to enable families from deprived parts of the city to enjoy the show. There were also three dedicated performances of Santa's Wish for pupils from schools from across the city. The event organisers employed 106 freelance creative and event staff, and it is estimated that the event contributed at least £1m in additional monies to the local economy, mirroring the success of the inaugural event in Cardiff Castle.

Despite some changes to the layout, Cardiff's Christmas market was again extremely popular this year, including more than 150 different stall holders and specialist food outlets. It worked very well alongside the German bar and food outlets, and further complemented the new addition of Christmas lights within the trees in The Hayes this year. Footfall remained strong for all the areas associated with the Christmas market and, whilst it is difficult to provide an exact year-on-year comparison because of factors such as the autumn rugby internationals and weather conditions, footfall was reported as very good by the many outlets that the Council engaged with.

The combined offer of the Christmas market, Winter Wonderland and German bar remain a compelling reason to visit the city centre at Christmas and, of course, Santa was also in residence at Cardiff Castle. Tickets sold out within days and a lot of positive feedback was received. The bad weather failed to deter visitors who were very appreciative of the beautiful way in which the Castle had been dressed for Christmas. The children enjoyed sharing their wish lists with Santa and then choosing their gift, with the refreshments also being welcomed by the grown-ups.

Now in its third year, the Christmas at Bute Park light trail has evolved from a Christmas event to a rich celebration of arts and culture. Listed as one of The Guardian's Top Ten trails in the UK, the event generated £1.5 million of economic impact and attracted over 100,000 paying visitors. The event's organisers also increased the number of principal charities they worked with this year, which included City Hospice, Cardiff Women's Aid, Welsh Refugee Council, AP Cymru (a charity which supports families with neurodivergent children), Guide Dogs and Crisis. They also provided complimentary tickets to over 40 schools, foodbanks and other charitable groups, including the donation of 800 tickets to the Child Friendly Cardiff Team for wider distribution.

There was also an increased commitment by the event's organisers to working with home-grown creatives via the Welsh Government-supported Ignite Cymru scheme. More than 50 students from the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama produced a specially composed audio for the trail, whilst 35 set design & lighting students produced key installations, including Wal Y Castell. In addition, 50 young people from Pontypridd charity, Citrus Arts, were involved in the creation of Hiraeth, and Molara Adesigbin and Grace Priest, two emerging Welsh visual artists, were chosen to design and create one of the new installations. The event also contributed £2,488 to the Bute Park Improvement Scheme.

Overall, it was a successful Winter Wonderland, with attendance close to pre-Covid levels, but for a period of bad weather after Christmas which affected numbers. Highlights included a new covered entertainment and seating area on City Hall Lawn, which allowed visitors to sit in comfort out of the weather and enjoy the daily free entertainment schedule, which included many local artists and entertainers performing live and even pop-up movie nights on Mondays. This year, the Ice Bar featured a 'Wales' theme, which celebrated famous Welsh landmarks and personalities that were all carved from real ice, including the Wales Millennium Centre and Gareth Bale. The extended Ice Walk within Cardiff Castle also proved very popular, as did the attractive Christmas-themed lantern installation at the Castle. This year, Winter Wonderland supported NSPCC Cymru and Passport to the City through the provision of free rides for children and young people.

I hope members had the opportunity to visit the city centre over the Christmas period and enjoy the attractions on offer.

Museum of Cardiff

2023 was a busy year for the Museum of Cardiff and it is encouraging that visitor numbers are now exceeding pre-Covid figures. As a result of the team securing funding from the Welsh Government for a new Fusion Project Assistant, the Museum has been able to deliver several projects to help people access arts and heritage. These included creating 100 children's craft packs and working with FareShare Cymru to distribute them to families over the festive period. The Museum also supported Kitsch'n'sync and Innovate Trust to deliver doorstep theatre performances, as well as assisting the Wales Puja Committee to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Durga Puja Festival in Cardiff. I am delighted that the Museum has been successful in securing further funding for January to March 2024 to continue this excellent project work.

Over the past 12 months, the Museum has held 46 free events for families and visitors, supporting local communities in the cost-of-living crisis. These events and activities were supported by, and delivered in partnership with, Kids in Museums, Passport to the City, FOR Cardiff and the Federation of Welsh Museums. Some of the highlights were as follows:

- 659 babies and toddlers sang and played at Dinky Dragons, the Museum's monthly free event.
- Five different themed gallery trails were developed for the school holidays for families to explore the Museum.
- 1,717 visitors came to the Museum during Welsh Museums Festival Week.
- The Museum welcomed artists and performers Jack Skivens, Mymuna Soleman, Cath Little and Taking Flight Theatre to run free workshops and performances for visitors.
- Visitors were taken behind the scenes on tours of the Old Library for the Cadw OpenDoors event and with the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama for City of Arcades Day.
- Cardiff People First took over the Museum for a day, giving tours and talks to visitors.
- 38 people chatted over tea and biscuits at Reminiscence Monthly.
- The Museum also hosted three training tours for the Wallich Invisible Cities tour guide trainees, showing the group the wonders of the Old Library building to inspire them in creating their own tours.

In 2023, 16 volunteers gave over 270 hours of their time to welcome visitors to the Museum, help with events, and assist with caring for the Museum's collections. The Museum hosted two students from the University of Leicester and Cardiff University for their module placements. The Museum also continued to welcome schools on self-led visits around the exhibits.

In addition, 62 new objects and stories were taken into the Museum's collection, including panels from the iconic Cardiff-created cartoon Superted, adding the history of Cardiff's creative industries to the Museum's story. The Museum also added 20 objects to the @house_memories Cymru app, designed for and with people living with dementia and their carers, to explore objects from the past and share memories together.

Within the last year, the team has also collected oral histories from people who had worked at the iconic Howells/House of Fraser department store in the city in order to preserve the memories of the much-loved store, which closed in March 2023. This work to remember Howells has also included working in partnership with Cardiff University to conserve the maquette of the javelin thrower statue, the full-scale version of which was positioned on top of the store during the 1958 British Empire and Commonwealth Games that were held in Cardiff.

Cardiff International White Water

I'm pleased to report that Cardiff International White Water, which is managed by the Council, has been recognised by Tripadvisor as a Travellers Choice destination with a current rating of 5.0 based on over 1,200 reviews. The detail of the reviews evidences the high levels of customer service being provided by our staff. The venue also hosts water rescue training events for emergency service authorities/agencies from across the UK, with 30 such events having been accommodated in the current financial year to date. I am very encouraged by the number of repeat events that have been booked through until 2027 and the hosting of these events support the critically important delivery of services provided by these authorities/agencies.

Wheelchair Fencing World Cup

I was delighted to be invited to the launch of the Wheelchair Fencing World Cup, which came to Cardiff for the first time earlier this month. Held at the Sport Wales National Centre in Sophia Gardens from 11-14 January, this inclusive and accessible event saw athletes from across the world compete in the final European-based Wheelchair Fencing event before the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. I would like to congratulate the event organisers and those athletes who took part, and wish all those who have qualified every success in Paris later this year.

Drovers Way Play Area

Prior to Christmas, along with the local ward members for Radyr and Morganstown, I attended the opening of the Drovers Way play area following completion of the refurbishment project and site drainage scheme. I was delighted with the quality of provision, which I'm sure will be enjoyed by current and future generations of children in the locality. Officers have also been preparing tender documentation for play schemes at Clare Gardens in the Riverside ward and on open space at Sanatorium Road in the Canton ward.

Coed Caerdydd

Despite the unfavourable ground conditions that we have been experiencing during the planting season to date, I can confirm that excellent progress is being made with the 2023/24 tree planting programme. Over 11,000 trees have already been planted towards our target of 30,000 and I'm encouraged by the levels of participation from corporate bodies, schools, local communities and, in particular, from volunteer networks, which has seen an increase in volunteer hours of 15% when compared with this time last year. This year's programme will see activity across all wards throughout the city, with an increased focus on planting within streets and on highway land.

Local Nature Partnership

There has been a positive response to the public consultation taking place with Cardiff residents feeding into the development of the Cardiff Nature Recovery Action Plan. The consultation commenced in November 2023 and ten workshops have been held across Cardiff attended by over 200 individuals. A final workshop specifically for schools is due to be held next week; this interactive event will enable schoolchildren to express their views on nature which will feed into the action plan. An online survey has been run alongside the face-to-face workshops and, to date, 242 responses have been received. The engagement with Cardiff residents will be critical in enabling the Council, along with partners, to shape the detail of future plans.

Cardiff Music Development

Following Cardiff's successful delivery of the BBC Radio 6 Music Festival in 2022, I am delighted that Huw Stephens' new show will be BBC Radio 6 Music's first regular programme broadcast from Wales, reflecting the BBC's Across the UK plans to better reflect, represent and serve all audiences. The show commenced on 9 January and airs from Tuesday to Friday between 4pm and 7pm.

To celebrate the launch of the new show, the Cardiff Music Board supported a free concert at Clwb Ifor Bach on 11 January. A full house enjoyed the concert, headlined by CVC, one of the most celebrated Welsh bands of this time, and there was much appreciation for the Council's music development work.

A Cardiff Music Officer has been successfully recruited and starts work this month to support the progression and development of the Cardiff Music Strategy. The team looks forward to delivering an exciting programme of music activity throughout this year.

I am also happy to report that the Council has helped the successful move of Porters live music and arts venue to a new premises in Barrack Lane/Charles Street. Officers have been working with the venue for some time and this work highlights how positive engagement and collaboration can lead to successful outcomes.

Councillor Jennifer Burke
Cabinet Member for Culture, Parks & Events
19 January 2024