

**COUNCIL: 28 MARCH 2024**

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## **LEADER STATEMENT**

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### **European Professional Club Rugby Finals Weekend 2025**

On 31 January 2024, I attended the official announcement at the Principality Stadium, which confirmed that Cardiff will be the host city of the European Rugby Champions Cup and Challenge Cup Finals in May 2025. This followed a successful collaborative bid involving Cardiff Council, the Welsh Government and Welsh Rugby Union.

The two finals were last held in Cardiff in 2014 and were estimated to have generated an economic impact of £24m. As a more recent example, in 2022, the two finals were held in Marseille, France and generated an economic impact of c.£36m. The matches were also broadcast to 115 countries globally and watched by a cumulative audience of 5.7 million people. The economic impact for Cardiff and Wales in 2025 is expected to exceed this, particularly given the larger crowd capacity at the Principality Stadium.

Securing the hosting of the European Professional Club Rugby Finals Weekend in 2025 supports both our 'Stronger, Fairer, Greener' commitment to develop a new pipeline of major events in Cardiff, as well as the Corporate Plan 2023-26 commitment to work with event promoters and the city's cultural venues to rebuild the capital's event and cultural offer by working in partnership with the Welsh and UK Governments to attract new major international sporting events.

### **Severn Estuary Commission**

As I outlined in my previous Council Statement in January 2024, the Western Gateway Partnership has established 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 the UK and Welsh Governments, on the feasibility of options for using the Severn Estuary to create sustainable energy as part of a UK-wide effort to achieve Net Zero.

The Commission was launched formally at an event held at the Pierhead Building in Cardiff Bay on 12 March 2024 and marked the first official meeting of the Commission and other key stakeholders. As Chair of the Western Gateway's Severn Estuary Steering Committee, I was pleased to attend and set out our expectations for the work of the Commission, which will be chaired by Dr Andrew Garrad CBE and brings together a range of experts, including Sue Barr, Peter Davies CBE, Chris Mills, Dr Nigel Costley and Dr Madeleine Havard.

The Commission will have an open remit to explore a range of options, including energy systems, financing options, socio-economic issues and how the environment can be protected, to determine their final recommendation. The Commission is expected to finalise its findings and make recommendations to the Western Gateway Board and the UK and Welsh Governments early next year.

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

As I outlined previously in my Council Statement in January 2024, the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) City Deal Joint Committee (the Regional Cabinet) and the South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) have agreed to novate the City Deal funding agreement and project portfolio to the South East Wales CJC and, subject to final legal agreements, for the South East Wales CJC to take on responsibility for decision-making and implementation of the City Deal. The transfer of the CCR City Deal to the South East Wales CJC was finalised by both the CCR Regional Cabinet and CJC on 18 March 2024, which means that Cardiff Council will cease to be the Accountable Body for the CCR City Deal from 1 April 2024.

In advance of an update report to Cabinet this month on the South East Wales CJC, I was pleased to welcome CCR/CJC officers to a briefing for councillors in Cardiff on the transition process, which was held on 29 February 2024. A further report on the termination of the Joint Working Agreement and the implementation of any new arrangements will be considered by both Cabinet and Council in due course.

### **Nation of Sanctuary**

I currently represent Cardiff Council on the Welsh Government's Nation of Sanctuary All Wales Strategic Oversight Board and was pleased to receive a letter this month from the Minister for Social Justice, Jane Hutt MS, which thanked the Council for its support and the outstanding work of council officers involved in delivering the Homes for Ukraine programme in Wales.

In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Ukrainian guests sponsored by the Welsh Government were initially accommodated in nine venues across the city, whilst long-term homes were found across Wales. In February 2024, we closed the last of these accommodation settings, with Cardiff supporting over 400 Ukrainian guests under the Welsh Government's Ukraine Super Sponsor programme to secure move-on accommodation in the city, more than any other local authority in Wales. Across all schemes combined, we have welcomed and provided initial reception support to over 1,200 Ukrainian nationals.

The Council is proud to have worked effectively to mobilise accommodation and support services, in collaboration with partners, to help our Ukrainian guests to settle in a new country and to find employment, many of whom have found work in sectors facing labour shortages, contributing to the Welsh economy and donating their skills to our city. Others have enrolled onto adult learning courses. Ukrainian children have also been welcomed into local schools and developed new friendships.

I am pleased that the Capital City of Wales, in its role as an important international gateway to Wales, has played a critical role in supporting the Welsh Government's ambition for Wales to be not only a Nation of Sanctuary, but a globally responsible and compassionate nation.

### **The Big Conversation at Cardiff University**

I was invited by the Vice Chancellor of Cardiff University, Professor Wendy Lerner, to speak at one of the University's 'Y Sgwrs Fawr / The Big Conversation' events that was held on 20 February 2024. I was pleased to engage with University staff and academics as part of a discussion about the challenges and opportunities that the city faces, as well as the role that Cardiff University can play in shaping the city and improving the experiences of current and future citizens.

### **International Mother Language Day**

I was pleased to join other councillors in attending and speaking last month at the annual event held in Cardiff to mark International Mother Language Day, which is held at the International Mother Language Monument at Grangemoor Park in Grangetown. International Mother Language Day provides an opportunity to celebrate the diversity that exists within Cardiff's communities, where over 100 different languages and dialects are spoken.

### **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association**

I was pleased to welcome delegates who visited Cardiff this month as part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK office's Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments, which engages parliamentarians and clerks from across the Commonwealth in peer-to-peer learning. The seminar programme included a visit to Cardiff, which incorporated a day at the Senedd on 14 March 2024 to learn about the Welsh Parliament and Welsh Government's devolved responsibilities, as well as its relationship with Westminster. On 15 March, I was pleased to speak with one group of delegates at the Powerhouse Hub in Llanedeyrn at the invitation of the Member of the Senedd for Cardiff Central, Jenny Rathbone MS. I then met later with another group of delegates who had enjoyed a tour of Cardiff Castle and I was pleased to speak to them and answer questions about local government in Cardiff and the Council's relationship with the Welsh and UK Governments.

**Councillor Huw Thomas**  
**Leader of the Council**  
**22 March 2024**