

COUNCIL: 22 OCTOBER 2020

STATEMENT OF THE LEADER

Covid-19 Update

In response to the significant increase in new Covid-19 cases in September, the Welsh Government imposed a local lockdown for the Cardiff local authority area, which came into effect on 27 September 2020. The rate of transmission has since continued to rise, with the rate of new cases in Cardiff having reached 223.5 per 100,000 over the last seven days, with the number of positive tests at 14.4% as of 15 October 2020, which means that our incidence per 100,000 is now the highest in Wales. This persistent increase in case numbers, despite the additional lockdown measures in place in the city, is a cause for genuine concern.

The Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) programme in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan is being expanded rapidly and Cardiff Council, Shared Regulatory Services, Cardiff & Vale University Health Board, Public Health Wales and Vale of Glamorgan Council are all working effectively in partnership to respond to the latest surge in Cardiff's case figures. These figures indicate that the city is entering a new phase of the crisis, which will require a renewed focus on managing the pandemic, delivering essential services and keeping both staff and local residents safe. After the Welsh Government's announcement of the local lockdown to be imposed in Cardiff from 27 September, the Chief Executive and I sent a letter to those previously shielding explaining the new restrictions, emphasising that the Council's vital advice and support services remain available and encouraging them to contact the Council should they find themselves in need of additional help.

Council staff are continuing to deliver positive outcomes in the most difficult of circumstances. Those staff who can work from home are continuing to do so, however, the delivery of essential services means that, for many Council staff, this is not an option. Staff across the Procurement and Health & Safety teams have worked hard to ensure a ready supply of all necessary PPE equipment for staff, and we have invested in additional testing capacity for our key workers to keep them safe. Our key workers are working tirelessly on the frontline to ensure that essential council services continue to be delivered in Cardiff, and I am sure that you will join me in recognising the tremendous efforts of Council staff over recent months.

Brexit

Brexit uncertainty continues to affect business planning and investment decisions, and Cardiff is particularly vulnerable to a disruptive Brexit, as it is amongst the top five British cities most reliant on European Union (EU) markets, with 46% of its exports

going to EU countries. Should the UK Government and the EU fail to agree a free trade deal before November 2020, the UK would once again face a 'no-deal' scenario, in which trade with the EU would be based on World Trade Organisation rules, with most UK goods subject to tariffs. There would also be a range of other implications of the UK leaving the EU without a deal, which the Council has already taken steps to prepare for, as set out in the Brexit Issues Register. On 23 July 2020, the Council's Resilience Unit co-ordinated a Council-wide exercise to update the Register, taking into consideration the impacts of Covid-19. The relevant directorates have identified actions to address each issue, with a continued focus on protecting communities, especially the most vulnerable.

Potential disruption to supply chains and the local economy, the registration of EU nationals on the EU Settlement Scheme and Council finances are amongst the key Brexit risks facing the Council. Moving forward, should 'no-deal' become a definitive position, nominated officers will be asked to undertake a review of their directorate's Business Continuity Plans in the face of the challenges ahead, and to regularly monitor and update the relevant issues and mitigation actions in the Brexit Issues Register. Should a deal be confirmed, work will be undertaken to understand its implications, before putting in place appropriate preparations.

Cardiff Music Board

Cardiff Music Board has been focused on addressing the serious threats currently facing the city's live music sector. The Board has recently warned that if central Government fails to make additional funds available, this sector will face devastating consequences. The funding support already provided by Welsh Government has been crucial and very welcome, however the scale of the impact on the live music sector exceeds this support. The prolonged prohibition of live music events, in combination with the new rules limiting opening hours and the forthcoming end to the UK Government furlough scheme, has created a situation in which certain music venues, as well as the jobs they support, are at significant risk of being lost.

We must remember that live music was a viable industry before the lockdown, that it had been making a substantial contribution to the local and UK economy and – most importantly – that it will become viable again once the pandemic ends. Prior to lockdown, live music created 70% of the jobs and £45.6 million of the income in Cardiff's music sector. Cardiff Music Board is therefore calling on the UK Government to provide the urgent financial support the live music sector needs to survive in this challenging interim period. As chair of the Board, I can say that I believe if we get the appropriate support from government, we will eventually be able to build an even stronger live music sector in Cardiff, and the Board will be working relentlessly to realise this ambition.

I would also like to send the same call for support to protect and sustain our wider cultural community, arts organisations, creative sector and cultural venues, which play such an important role in creating economic and social value for our nation. Culture is a utility for the soul of our nation, and it will be crucial that the Government recognises this reality and invests accordingly if we are to save our vibrant creative industries, which were the fastest growing area of the economy before the pandemic.

Western Gateway

The Western Gateway is a cross-border strategic partnership between South Wales and the West of England aimed at developing a dynamic, green and inclusive regional economy by attracting high levels of investment in transport and digital infrastructure, innovation and foreign direct investment. On 14 October, I attended the Westminster Social Policy Forum keynote seminar, which provided an opportunity for partnership members and MPs to come together to discuss the next steps for the Western Gateway initiative, its key challenges and opportunities, and the priorities for the partnership's full vision document, which will be released following the completion of an Independent Economic Review later this year. The event was chaired by Ruth Jones, MP for Newport West, and included addresses from Leaders of Councils which are members of the partnership.

In my address, I focused on the importance of the South Wales/West of England region seizing the current opportunity to attract high levels of UK government investment in much-needed infrastructure projects. Our regions have long faced under-investment, with infrastructure spending per head 26% higher in the North than in South Wales and the West of England, and more than double in London, so now is the time to address this problem and deliver the economic and environmental benefits that improved regional connectivity and co-operation will bring. Major transport infrastructure projects will play a key role in lifting Cardiff out of the post-Covid economic crisis, but funding for projects in renewable energy, digital connectivity and innovation will also be critically important in unlocking the region's economic potential and leading the green revolution in the UK.

'One Team - One Race': Honouring the Cardiff Bay Rugby Codebreakers

The launch event for the 'One Team - One Race, Honouring the Cardiff Bay Rugby Codebreakers' project was held virtually on 30 September 2020 – Sporting Heritage Day – with the Rugby Football League family and family members of the honoured players in attendance. This project will raise money to create three statues chosen from 13 rugby stars who made a significant contribution to Rugby League over the past 120 years, with members of the community asked to vote for their top three players. All 13 nominees grew up within a three-mile radius of Cardiff Bay, and many battled prejudice and racism before leaving Wales to find fame as Rugby League superstars in the North of England. It is hoped that the artwork, which could use QR codes to tell the story of Cardiff Bay and the role its residents have played in positive race relations since the docks were built, could go on permanent display in Cardiff Bay within the next two years. Committee meetings are taking place on a monthly basis to oversee the delivery of the project.

The exceptional achievements of rugby players from Cardiff Bay's Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities have long been overlooked, and it is time for Cardiff to finally celebrate their contribution to Welsh history. These men not only brought honour to themselves, their city and their nation, but also helped to break down the barriers of racism and social injustice. Their achievements and character remain an inspiration to our city, and this project will ensure that their legacy continues to inspire future generations.

Real Living Wage

On 30 September 2020, I attended Citizen Cymru's virtual 'Building Back Better' event, where I discussed the important role that the real Living Wage has to play in making Wales a more economically, racially and socially just nation. I set out what we and our partners have achieved thus far in Cardiff, most notably in getting Cardiff recognised by the Living Wage Foundation as the UK's second Living Wage City in November 2019. The event recognised and celebrated Cardiff as a Living Wage City, with recently accredited Living Wage employers setting out why they had joined the initiative. We also heard powerful messages from employees across Wales who had benefited from a pay rise to the real Living Wage.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank our Public Services Board partner, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (UHB), for making the decision to become Wales's first real Living Wage-accredited Health Board, particularly during such a challenging time. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the vital contribution that essential workers in the health and social care sectors make to our society, and such action shows real leadership and commitment to ensuring that our 'essential' workers earn a wage that meets their everyday needs.

The recent accreditation of Cardiff & Vale UHB means that the partnership driving the Living Wage in Cardiff has achieved two of its three ambitious targets for 2022. There are now 48,700 workers employed by accredited Living Wage employers in Cardiff, an increase of over 20,000 from our 2019 baseline, which exceeds our target of 48,000. Furthermore, our target for workers receiving a pay rise to at least the real Living Wage was 6,500 and the latest figures show that over 7,100 workers have had a pay rise as a result of their employer accrediting. This is an increase of over 2,600 since 2019. There are now 117 accredited Living Wage employers in Cardiff and we are on track to hit our target of 150 accredited Living Wage employers by 2022.

At this month's meeting of the Welsh Living Wage Leadership Team, which I attended, we also continued to develop options to ensure that the payment of the real Living Wage on all adult social care contracts in Wales remains under consideration by the Welsh Government, which will require the provision of funding at the national level.

During the upcoming Living Wage Week, which will take place from 9-15 November 2020, we will be celebrating and championing the real Living Wage movement, which has never been more vital given the emerging economic crisis that is disproportionately impacting people working in low-paid sectors. On 9 November, I will be attending the Living Wage Week Wales Launch 2020, where I will speak about Cardiff's experience as a Living Wage City and how this has impacted the foundational economy in the region. The Living Wage flags will also be flying from Cardiff Castle again and I hope that Members will help to publicise the benefits of the real Living Wage, the Council's Living Wage Accreditation Support Scheme for SMEs and help Cardiff to 'Build Back Better'.

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill – Corporate Joint Committees

The establishment of Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) is an integral feature of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill, which is currently going through the legislative process in the Senedd (currently at Stage 3). It is anticipated that the Bill will complete its passage through the Senedd and receive Royal Assent by the end of

2020. The Welsh Government published draft regulations for the establishment of four CJsCs in Wales on 12 October 2020, which will cover the existing regions for City/Growth Deals – i.e. South East Wales, South West Wales, North Wales and Mid Wales. The CJsCs will be separate corporate bodies, which can employ staff and hold assets and budgets. They will also exercise functions relating to Strategic Development Planning and Regional Transport Planning, as well as being given a power to do things to promote or improve the economic well-being of their regions. The deadline for submission of responses to the consultation is 4 January 2021.

Councillor Huw Thomas
Leader of the Council
15 October 2020