

Leader's Address to Council

My Lord Mayor – Arglwydd Faer.

Could I begin by offering my thanks to all members of the Chamber for their hard work representing, supporting and championing their communities over the past year.

My particular thanks go to the Council's Cabinet and indeed to all members who sit on the Council's scrutiny committees. I know I speak on behalf of all Cabinet Members in commending your diligence and commitment.

In my statement yesterday, I informed members that Councillor Julia Magill has decided to step down as Cabinet Member for Education and Skills.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay personal tribute to Councillor Magill's hard work over the past three years and to the very real difference she has made to education in Cardiff and to the lives of countless children and young people in our city.

Julia will continue to give all the very best for the future as she continues to serve as Ward Councillor for Llanishen and Thornhill.

I am sure you will all want to join me in wishing her the very best in the future.

As a result I am pleased to welcome Councillor Sarah Merry as the new Cabinet Member for Education.

Sarah has worked with Councillor Magill over the past 12 months on reshaping youth services in the city in her role as Assistant Cabinet Member for Young People and Learning.

I have every confidence that Sarah has the ability, the commitment and drive to build on the sound foundations put in place by Cllr Magill.

Of course there is much work still left to do.

Education remains one of our top priorities for the year ahead.

A great education is vital in giving people the opportunity to realise their potential and succeed in life. A great education system is also a critical factor in supporting our city's economy.

Cardiff has more people with degrees and fewer people without qualifications than any of the 10 'Core Cities'.

But for too long this has been the case despite, not because of, the performance of our schools.

We are tackling this underperformance head-on – and the latest results show that we're already having an impact.

And over the next few years:

- We will invest £182m to modernise our schools
- We will continue to drive up our GCSE performance and increase attendance rates in both primary and secondary schools
- And we will intervene to make sure that no school in Cardiff is failing

Our commitment is that every school in Cardiff – without exception – will be a good school.

And we will continue to work to create more and better paid jobs in our capital city.

More new jobs have been created in Cardiff than many of the major British cities.

Unemployment is now at its lowest level for 6 years – and is lower in Cardiff than all the 10 Core Cities.

We're committed to working with the private sector to make sure this continues:

- We will transform Central Square, creating a new business district and bus station
- We will secure a City Deal for the Cardiff Capital Region
- We will adopt a Local Development Plan
- And we will launch an energy prospectus and develop a Cycle Strategy benchmarked against the best cities in Europe

Mark my words, the coming years will be exciting ones for Cardiff.

But they will also be challenging.

The communities that we represent are living the reality of austerity.

Members will know that the Council has already had to make over £85m in savings during the last three years.

And over the next 3 years that figure will be around £120m, not including the £41m removed from the 2015-16 budget.

This will have profound impacts on our public services, which are already under tremendous pressure.

We all depend on the public services that this Council delivers.

But this is even more the case for some of our most vulnerable residents.

No matter what July's emergency budget brings, we will remain committed to supporting these people in the face of austerity.

- We will make sure vulnerable children are protected and that our older people are looked after
- We will help the homeless, and support those suffering domestic abuse.
- We will tackle human trafficking and prevent people from being radicalised and drawn in to terrorism

It will not be easy.

The cuts will hit our city's poorest and most vulnerable communities and families the hardest.

But we will not abandon those who need our support the most.

Protecting some services will mean changing the way we deliver others.

In some cases, it will – and already has - meant stopping some services all together.

Making these changes will always be hard.

But we have been left with little choice.

Given the scale of the cuts, setting a balanced budget will be challenging.

But the real challenge – our challenge - will be to reform our public services in a way which is consistent with our values.

I am convinced that we will do it.

I am convinced that we will meet these challenge, and that in doing so we will do the best for the people of our communities and of our city.

Our public expect that we work together in a constructive way, and I will be seeking to do just that with members across this chamber over the year ahead.

Thank you / Diolch yn fawr.