

REPORT FROM THE LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND LEAD MEMBER FOR RESOURCES TO THE MEETING OF FULL COUNCIL ON WEDNESDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2015

Leader

As leader my time has largely been taken up with work in relation to ongoing consideration of the budget and chairing the Budget and Policy Liaison Group as well as continuing involvement in consideration of a potential combined authority. The current position will have been reported to members in a further briefing session by the time of Full Council. I have also been involved in a number of meetings, including a meeting with the Department for Transport in London, to consider how best to take forward the new franchise for Island Line.

Report from Children's Services:

GCSE results

Last month I hoped to be able to relay congratulations to all those who sat GCSE and vocational examinations this year for their achievements, but time prevented this. Their results are a true testament to all the hard work and dedication of pupils, parents, teachers and school staff this year.

Some schools are celebrating really good results this year, although for some there is still some way to go, but these early results help us and academy sponsors, to plan for how we can help those schools that need it to seek further improvements Island-wide next year.

Visits

Since the last Full Council I have had the opportunity to visit the Island Learning Centre at its new site on its opening day on 4 September. The new centre has been relocated to Newport and a large primary school has had a new lease of life after being closed for several years. The centre will provide support for the 51 primary and secondary schools within the local authority, with specialised education alternative provision.

Social work Innovation Fund

The new family intervention teams will be in place this month. These teams are part of a £4 million investment in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight from the Department for Education. These teams will each have an adult mental health worker, a substance misuse worker and a domestic abuse worker. Each team will work alongside one of our children in need teams. Their focus is to work with the adults in the family to bring about rapid change to support the social worker for the child. Each team member will be linked to local specialist services (Adult Mental Health Services, Island Recovery Integrated Services and the Women's Refuge) bringing

together a partnership approach to prevent children coming into the care of the council.

The programme also provides for working in partnership with Home-Start locally to train up a group of volunteers with the specialist skills to work with us to support families open to children's social care.

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB)

The annual LSCB Conference is on 23 October 9.30am to 4.30pm at Cowes Yacht Haven, with the theme of 'Toxic Trio re-visited'. Bookings for a place are via the board's website and I would encourage you to attend.

Corporate parents

An apprenticeship programme for children in care and care leavers has been developed. We are creating opportunities with support from across all our council services. We are offering apprenticeships for them to work for the 'family firm' as other parents might do for their own children. The second care leaver apprenticeship has now been recruited to and has started work with the Isle of Wight Council.

Report from Exchequer Services:

Help centres

The Customer Interface Project has now progressed following the closure of the face to face service at both Freshwater and the Sandown office. Self-serve computers are now located in Sandown and Freshwater libraries and residents are being assisted by library staff to carry out on line transactions. The computers have been designed as an easy to use facility to assist residents with a variety of topics and links to many other service providers.

Both Ryde and Newport Help Centres have changed the way they operate with advisors meeting visitors and arranging appointments for vulnerable customers and those residents with more complex enquiries. The help centres are also working to establish a referral system for any residents identified as needing additional help and support, thereby signposting them to the most appropriate provider who can assist in resolving their enquiry.

Revenues

The project with Capacity Grid to increase the new homes bonus grant is progressing well and to date it is estimated to deliver an extra £1 million of income over the next six years. A number of empty properties have been returned to occupation and to date 50 mobile caravans have been brought into valuation. This alone will increase the valuation list and hence increase council tax revenue by some £296,000. The project closed at the end of September. The full financial impact of this work can be reported when available. A review of farms and outlying buildings has identified a number of additional properties which have increased the rateable value by 271,085, equating to an increase in revenue of £173,000.

Payments

From 1 September all sundry debt collection has fallen under the remit of the payments manager. This will enable the end to end process of invoicing to collection to be managed more efficiently within one team. An officer based in property services who undertook the code of practice work has resigned so this role has now transferred to the payments team enabling further centralisation of the billing and ordering function.

Operational support

The team have been reviewing their processes to ensure they are efficient. They are working with their printers to improve the layout of property addresses used to issue council tax bills and notification letters in order to maximise the discount for post available through clean mail and also reviewing the scanning process for blue badges.

Report from Financial Management

External audit of the council's accounts for 2014-15 has been completed with an unqualified audit opinion. Further to this, the Audit Committee on 29 September approved the council's Statement of Accounts for 2014-15 following the presentation of the external auditor's audit results report. The Statement of Accounts was published on the council's website on 30 September, in line with statutory requirements.

External audit of the Isle of Wight Council Pension Fund accounts for 2014-15 has also been completed with an unqualified audit opinion. In addition to the Pension Fund accounts being published on the website as part of the council's Statement of Accounts, a separate annual report and accounts has also been produced and published online.

The external auditor's economy, efficiency and effectiveness (VFM) opinion was that the council has arrangements in place to maintain its financial resilience and that an unqualified conclusion was appropriate. However, the auditor highlighted the continuing significant scale of the challenge facing the council.

Councillor Jonathan Bacon

Leader and Executive Member for Children's Services and Lead Member for Resources