

**REPORT FROM THE LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR
CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND LEAD MEMBER FOR RESOURCES
TO THE MEETING OF FULL COUNCIL ON
WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2015**

Hello Boys and Girls.

That's just to prove that this report is written by me as will now be the practice for myself and all other members producing reports for Full Council.

Leader and Resources

My time has been largely taken up since Full Council last convened in dealing with the ongoing meetings, conversations and negotiations concerning devolution and the establishment of a combined authority.

I have already updated members by email, but given the significance of this issue I feel it appropriate to also set out where we are in this report. A 'challenge session' with Greg Clarke, the Minister for Communities and Local Government, took place in Westminster on Tuesday 17 November. Together with the leaders of Hampshire, Basingstoke, Southampton and Fareham I presented the 'bid', following which we answered questions from the minister. The presentation went well and work is proceeding, particularly in relation to responding to some of the challenges from the minister. The timescale is unclear but it is hoped to have a further detailed members' briefing in early December when we can be more precise. As things stand things are shaping up well for the Island. At the root of the bid is a proposal to remove the local authority services from the current system of local government finance and give it an independent income based on retention of business rates which would be free from the current system of annual spending reviews by central government, which has consistently damaged us year after year. A base line would be created for all the authorities so that by equitable distribution of those funds none are worse off and all stand to benefit from the remainder of the pot, which will be distributed according to a series of principles including need related provision.

A huge amount of work has been done in relation to this process by John Metcalfe, to whom I would like to record my thanks for the sheer amount of time and effort he has put in to help ensure that the Isle of Wight is to the fore in this process - which could provide both a lifeline as well as strong chances of growth and development for the Island.

I would also note that I have met, as have many others, with Christopher Garnett as part of his work to ensure a sustainable future for Island Line. The meeting also involved representatives from the Department for Transport who were on the Island as part of the work to create the new franchise arrangement. A members' briefing is taking place this Friday at 4.30pm and I would strongly urge all members to attend to hear about his progress and his thoughts at this stage.

Lastly, in this section of my report, I would record that I have met with representatives of most town and parish councils to discuss how best to pursue

devolution of services which those bodies still wish to see provided in their communities, but which the Isle of Wight Council is unable to continue providing. The meetings were frank but productive and a further session will take place next month to take this work forward. As part of this process representations were received concerning a draft proposal to not pay over Council Tax Support Grant to these authorities. In light of representations made and the desire to facilitate working with the town and parish councils this proposal was withdrawn last week as the benefits and savings to be gained from the sort of working together that was discussed will outweigh the saving to be made from non-payment of the grant.

Children's Services

I have continued my programme of visits to schools on the Island including visits to Chillerton and Rookley and Godshill Primary Schools, as well as a visit to Queensgate Primary School, to promote School Meals Week. I have also visited the Isle of Wight College to view and support the Careers Fair that was held on 29 October.

The most recent meeting of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) took place on 6 November. Following the stepping down of the Improvement Board Professor Ray Jones now attends the LCSB to oversee and contribute to the work of the Board. I also met separately with Professor Jones on 22 October as part of his ongoing review of the process of improving Children's Services on the Island. We had a useful discussion highlighting areas still to be worked on but during which Professor Jones commented favourably on the continuing improvement of the system on the Island.

Lastly, I should formally report that following John Coughlan's appointment as the new chief executive of Hampshire County Council, Steve Crocker is now in the role of interim director of Children's Services thereby taking on the role and responsibilities previously held by John in relation to Children's Services. I am sure that Steve will perform these extremely capably and I would also like to record my thanks to John Coughlan for his work over the past months helping and guiding Children's Services on the Isle of Wight through an intensive period of improvement and development from the position which existed when he arrived on the Island in 2013.

Councillor Jonathan Bacon

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