

**REPORT FROM THE LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER
FOR RESOURCES, ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE AND CHILDREN'S
SERVICES TO THE MEETING OF FULL COUNCIL
ON WEDNESDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 2016**

Combined Authority

The first thing I must do in this report is to give apologies for not being able to attend Full Council this month. In the last few days the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has offered a meeting with myself and the leaders of Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils in order to discuss the future of the Solent Combined Authority and Devolution Deal. The meeting has been fixed for late afternoon on 16th November.

At last week's Scrutiny Meeting I suggested that a regular Leaders update meeting take place in order to feed back any information gathered as the potential Solent Deal progresses. I will seek to set up the first of these meetings to communicate any information or indications that arise out of the meeting with the Secretary of State.

With the medium term financial strategy in place we must now look at how we can best take forward securing and growing the Island's economy. We know that the Island cannot be self sustaining and so we continue to argue the case for proper financial recognition of our status as an Island. We have had indications that the Island's 'unique' nature will be recognised in the Fair Funding Review but this must be brought to fruition.

The Fair Funding Review, whatever it brings forward, will not take effect until 2019/2020 at the earliest. We know that aside from this, Government intends to continue to cut back on funding to local authorities so we are compelled to do what we can to support ourselves. Further to our discussions with the then Secretary of State in the summer, we have been given a very clear steer that the routes to achieve this are via assistance from the Solent LEP and through the Solent Deal / Combined Authority proposal.

These opportunities will not directly improve our financial position but will offer funding streams that can be used to pump prime regeneration activities that in turn will increase the key sources of income for the Council, namely Business Rates and Council Tax, thereby improving our position. The other potential that a Combined Authority brings is to share in a pot of pooled business rates. The distribution of this pot would be on the basis of ensuring that no member of such an Authority is worse off than would have been the case in the current Local Government financial settlement. Growing the pot through regeneration activity therefore means the Council can improve its revenue position and maintain valued public services.

If any of these potential routes to improve our financial position is undermined or fails it will cause us grave difficulty. We know at this moment that nothing else is on the table and that the Government's stance is against 'handouts,' so we must look to those options that are 'live' and which have some potential substance.

There has been some confusion about the purpose of the £30million investment fund, still, 'on the table', as part of the proposed Solent Devolution Deal. This

funding is for the creation of economic wealth and prosperity and is not intended to fund the additional powers/activities being devolved from Government. This funding will also be devolved from Government, the exact amounts will be determined as part of the negotiations to 'close' the deal.

Fight for the Wight Petition

At the time of writing it has been arranged to present the petition at Number 10 Downing Street at midday on Tuesday (15 November). I will be attending together with representatives of groups who are suffering at the hands of the Government's austerity regime on the Island. I hope the presentation will attract further publicity for the Island's cause. In addition to the signatures obtained for the petition a large number of individual testimonies of the effects of Government cutbacks have been submitted and will be presented which add great weight to the petition. As indicated above, securing recognition of the unique 'Island Factor', whether independently or through the Fair Funding Review, is key to our future. The petition and the individual testimonies form a major part of the case to secure such recognition.

Contacting the council

We have all received many complaints about the difficulty residents have in contacting the council on the telephone on the main 821000 number. Members will recall Full Council agreed to reduce the level of staffing in the call centre as part of balancing the 2016/17 budget. As many of you may have noticed by now, a new system has been introduced to try to funnel callers to the department they wish to speak to and thereby cut down call waiting times. It has been noted that there is a significant difference in waiting times for callers who enter an extension number as opposed to those who hang on waiting on the main number. The new system thereby gives a list of departments for callers to select thereby hopefully achieving a similar effect as if they had an extension number to use. The system is still in its early days but will hopefully make telephone contact with the council easier.

Careers Fair

On 27th October the annual careers fair was held at the Isle of Wight College. The event was well attended and showed the breadth of opportunities that are available to our young people. Through discussion with the Chamber of Commerce I am hoping that similar events and/or provision of information for younger children will be able to come into being to help those young people to develop aspirations and motivation for their future lives at an earlier stage, assisting them particularly in their GCSE choices and studies.

Future of Youth Provision on the Isle of Wight

I attended a meeting organised by IWALC on 21st October looking at the future of Youth Provision on the Isle of Wight. The current Youth Offer ends next March but I am hopeful that a new long term programme for organising and guiding youth activities will be able to come into being with council support. I have met with Tony McCarthy, the coordinator of the new collective organisation that will hopefully steer this process, as well as with Community Action Isle of Wight who are assisting the process. Details of how these ideas will be able to go forward will hopefully be circulated soon.

Children in Care Awards

Lastly, I am able to report that the annual STAR awards for Children in Care, which were due to take place in October but had to be postponed due the closure of the Ryde Ice Rink where they were due to take place, will now take place on 19th December at Cowes Yacht Haven. Members, as Corporate Parents, are all welcome to join in the celebration of the achievements of our children in care.

Councillor Jonathan Bacon

Leader and Executive Member for Resources, Organisational Change and Children's Services