

Leader's Report to Full Council – January 2019

Introduction

1. For the Isle of Wight Council 2019 has started well with some excellent news about the quality of services we are now delivering for our Island residents.
2. We have been recognised for having some of the best children's services in the country, protecting our vulnerable children and providing strong leadership. We have a 'good' fire service keeping our residents safe. We have achieved double the national average of care leavers going to university. We have provided early sight of budget options for 2019 / 20 to enable people to have time to respond and help us to set a lawful and balanced budget in February. Residents are now waiting an average of just a minute to speak to the council in the contact centre. We are exceeding national targets for recycling to the extent that the Government wants to know just how we have achieved this exceptional success. Most importantly after consistently making our 'unique case' to Government the Island has at last had its status formally recognised in the most recent funding report which is a positive step towards the local funding review due to be published later in the year..
3. My report provides specific information to help members and the public better understand the achievements now being realised by this council.

Children's Services

4. I am delighted to advise you that the Isle of Wight Council's children's services have been rated good by Ofsted with the authority praised for its leadership, child protection work and innovative social work practice. The rating, which grades all aspects of social care services as 'good', puts the service in the top 25% percent of councils in the country and is a significant turnaround from the 2013 position when we were then rated as inadequate.
5. Ofsted visited for three weeks at the end of November / beginning of December and looked at all aspects of the council's children's social care work in great detail. They found that, "children in need of help and protection receive a good service" and multi-disciplinary teams were a strength adding "value, capacity and expertise" in supporting families and children.
6. Ofsted said the partnership with Hampshire County Council since 2013 had "brought stable and consistent leadership, increased resilience and a firm focus on continual improvement". It also discovered "highly skilled, ambitious senior leaders have a clear, shared vision and an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement of the service".
7. Ofsted also commented that, "Political leaders are engaged with, and visible to, children and staff. They have a good understanding of the service and have secured significant financial investment. This increased understanding has ensured more vigorous scrutiny and challenge and a greater focus across the council on meeting the needs of vulnerable children"

8. I would like to thank all of our staff on the frontline who have delivered day in and day out to make this service good, to protect and care for our Island children and young people when they are in need and to do so compassionately, professionally and sensitively.

Fire Service – Inspection Report

9. I am also delighted to report a ‘good ’outcome from the inspection of the Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service, published by Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) just before Christmas.
10. I would like to commend all of the members of the Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service for their contribution to an excellent outcome of the inspection. I know this supports Members’ own experience of the professionalism and dedication of both the whole time and retained fire fighters who work to keep our community safe and well protected. I would also like to acknowledge the strategic leadership and support of the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service which will have made a significant contribution to this achievement.
11. There is clearly still some work to do improving how we look after our staff and I know that the Cabinet Member, Councillor Tig Outlaw, is already in discussions with the senior managers about how we can address this issue.

Protection of our Environment

12. Increasing household recycling is one of the Government’s priorities for waste Management and I am pleased to report that the Isle of Wight has now exceeded Government Targets in this area. We have been recognised as a source of best practice and I have been in contact with the office of the Under Secretary of State regarding a visit to DEFRA to share our good practice. An invitation will also be extended for them to the formal opening of our new multi-million pound recycling facility at Forest Road later in the year led by Cabinet Member Michael Murwill.

Budget

13. Finalising proposals for the 2019/20 budget process continues to be a key piece of work for the Administration. Publishing options in November last year provided an early opportunity for council members and the general public to comment on them and suggest alternative approaches to closing the savings gap of £5.5m in the next financial year.
14. I would like to take this opportunity to remind people that comments can be made by email to budget@iow.gov.uk and that the usual, more generic consultation questionnaire is available on the council’s website at: <https://www.iow.gov.uk/Council/OtherServices/Financial-Management/Budget-Consultation/>.

15. A public meeting will also be held on Thursday 30 January at Medina Theatre, Newport, when members of the public will be able to ask questions of the cabinet and senior officers about the draft proposals.
16. The council has also successfully re-applied to be in the Business Rate Retention Pilot with its current partners of Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils, for 2019/20 (now offered on a 75% Retention basis as opposed to the 100% basis) prior to the launch of the national scheme in 2020/21. This was a very competitive process which was oversubscribed and applications were assessed on their merits with no priority given to existing pilots.
17. Based on current estimates, this could provide the benefit of a direct allocation of £1m to the Council and a further share of a "growth and productivity pot" of circa £3m for capital investment.

Brexit

18. In recent weeks I have been discussing the potential impacts of a 'no deal' Brexit, with other Leaders from across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Members will be interested to know that the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum (LRF) has already undertaken a significant amount of work in this area and continues to advise all local authorities across the two counties.

One Public Service – Community Hub

19. A brand-new help centre designed to give people easy access to information, advice and guidance has now opened at County Hall and has combined the council's reception with Citizens Advice and Age UK to create a single streamlined 'community hub' known as Isle Help. The charity Hearing Loss will also use the centre from February when it starts a monthly clinic.
20. The council has invested £214,000 in the project, which is the start of its ambition to offer a 'One Island – One Public Service' of integrated service covering health, council, emergency services and the voluntary sectors. The centre in the council's ground floor reception area includes new seating, a confidential meeting pod, self-service computer, terminals for access to a range of council services, meetings rooms and pre-programmed phones with numbers for government agencies and Island companies were used throughout the refurbishment.

E-Newsletter: 'The Island'

21. Island residents can now sign up to receive a new community e-newsletter. The newsletter provides exclusive information from the council, signposting to all our services and highlighting our key partner organisations – as we all work to make the Island a better place. As the newsletter develops it will also provide more targeted information about those services and areas that especially interest the community.

22. The newsletter is available by subscription which can be accessed at:

<https://www.iow.gov.uk/Council/Council-News/News/Subscribe-to-our-digital-newsletter>

Regeneration

23. A new regeneration vision document for the Eastern Bay area has been produced which sets out an ambitious programme of economic, social and environment improvements in this key part of the island. It includes major projects, such as partnership investment proposals for Dinosaur Isle, the development of a new extra care plus housing complex at the former Sandham middle school site and complementary activities proposed by the private sector. Above all the vision, which has been developed through extensive consultation, is a call to action to all parties to work with local communities to realise deliverable, visible improvements all will be able to see in the next few years.

24. Whilst on the subject of parcels of land central to our regeneration aspirations, I can confirm the council is currently completing a due diligence exercise on the acquisition of the Camp Hill site from the Ministry of Justice. This approach has been fully supported by our Island MP Bob Seely and I will report further on this in initiative in due course.

Digitalisation

25. The second Isle of Wight council led 'digital conference' took place in November. It hosted a wide range of Island, national and international businesses to identify and grow the digital opportunities for the Island. The key priorities for our Island Digital strategy were considered and agreed around skills, premises and promoting the island as one the best connected, work/life balance places to do business in the UK. Central to this year's event was a digital frenzy hosted by Barclays Eagle Labs; over 100 Island Digital businesses also held a new networking session "Digital Disrupt" on the evening of the conference. This council will continue to enable as many as businesses as possible to locate, grown and prosper on the island

The Island Plan

26. There has been a good level of interest in the draft Island Planning Strategy that was published for consultation on 3 December, which seeks to balance the economic and environmental aspirations we have for our Island. We are already aware of examples of landowners and agents looking at our draft planning blueprint and now having the confidence to invest in all the background work that is required to bring sites forward and have started engaging with officers about how to do this. This is a positive move towards achieving the aspirations of the Corporate Plan and the emerging Regeneration Strategy.

Corporate Resources

27. Following the recent senior management restructure I can confirm that the new Director of Neighbourhoods, Colin Rowlands, begins work with the council on 14 January and Olly Boulter commenced his new role as Strategic Manager for Planning and infrastructure in December. Two new graduate recruits also started work in December and are already providing good work for the council
28. The council was highly commended at the Chamber of Commerce's Business Awards for the work it has done in the recruitment of apprentices which has seen it meet and exceed its required numbers under the apprenticeship levy scheme

Strategic Partnerships

29. I hope that members will join with me in welcoming an acknowledgement of the Isle of Wight's unique circumstances in the Government's, "Review of local authorities' relative needs and resources consultation", published just before Christmas. This is the latest document published as part of a fair funding review of local authorities spending needs and includes a specific reference to the Isle of Wight as follows:

"The Isle of Wight is a uniquely isolated and remote authority as it is only possible to reach a major town or city from households on the island via a ferry journey. The Government therefore considers it necessary to take account of the additional time taken by ferry transport in any measure of remoteness, including the time taken on board the ferry and at embarkation and disembarkation".

Cabinet on the Road

30. This initiative for cabinet meetings to take place around the island has been well received by the local community. It also provides Town & Parish Councils with the chance to engage with the cabinet directly to share and discuss matters relevant to their particular areas and feedback on council performance and policy. By April all areas of the Island will have been able to access such a meeting – which I believe represents true evidence of community engagement at a local level.

Concluding Remarks

31. Once again, I am able to report a full and active level of progress being overseen by the conservative led administration. As council leader, I am reassured that this council remains on track to deliver against its Corporate Plan objectives and to provide the level of inspiration reflected in our strategic vision for the future.
32. Overall I believe we are doing a good job delivering our corporate plan and against this backdrop of tangible results that this report is presented to full council

Dave Stewart

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships