



Committee	FULL COUNCIL
Date	15 July 2020
Title	LEADER'S UPDATE
Report of	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Introduction

Can I begin by thanking all members of the council for their work with the local community in supporting it through the initial response to the coronavirus pandemic. I fear there remains a great deal for us to do to contain the virus and prevent it spreading on the Island. I think all of your hard work over the last few months has left us in a strong position to do this but we cannot afford to let our guards down for a moment.

1. An awful lot has happened over the last five months, much more than I can ever do justice to in this report. I would refer members to reports submitted to meetings of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet for a more detailed summary of the work undertaken to respond to the challenges of the coronavirus and the work currently being undertaken to recover the Island's economic, social and environmental wellbeing.
2. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of the council's staff who have been at the forefront of the council's response to the coronavirus. Everything I have seen points to a dedicated and committed team focused on doing their best for our Island community, to keep it safe and contain the spread of the virus. People have stepped up to the challenge, whether it is in their usual day to day roles or being redeployed into new and unfamiliar settings or simply embracing the need to work from home and all the changes that brings.
3. Our Island's NHS staff, and indeed all key workers, have also exhibited an unparalleled commitment and togetherness to work flexibly and take all steps necessary to better protect and care for our community. The Thursday night clap for carers has been an important way of recognising and thanking them for the wonderful work they, and our own staff, have been doing since the start of the pandemic.
4. I must also thank and pay tribute to every member of our community that has provided support for a vulnerable person or organised local community support

groups for people in a local area. The strength of our community is one of the most special things about the Isle of Wight and this has been demonstrated once more through the response to the coronavirus to date. There is no doubt their efforts provided much needed support to the council and allowed us to concentrate resources in some of the harder to reach areas.

5. The outstanding work of the council's community cell to support our Island community through the pandemic, in partnership with many local and voluntary groups, is told in some key indicators:
 - Over 8,600 calls to the council's helpline requiring over 6,600 actions in response.
 - Over 5,000 shielding residents contacted by the council in 21,260 outbound calls (1400 residents receiving regular support calls).
 - Over 650 welfare visits made and 540 emergency food parcels delivered.
6. In addition, the council has provided funding of c£250,000 to community support hubs and help sustain third sector organisations through the pandemic.
7. However, despite the best efforts of everyone, we know that the virus has not gone away. Anyone can catch it and anyone can spread it. Good hygiene and social distancing are still the best defence we have against the coronavirus and is something that will need to be a regular part of our daily lives for many months to come.
8. Keeping the virus under control while developing an ambitious recovery plan will be the main focus for us in the coming months and building on the positives arising from our recent experiences, such as communities coming together to support our most vulnerable and adopting new ways of working will help us maintain the gains we have made during this difficult period.

Financial Management

9. The council's financial position has been a major concern for me as Leader and for the Cabinet as a whole, since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Our current projection is for a deficit of £9.8m in the current year's (2020/21) budget before the latest announcements by the Secretary of State of further support for local authorities are taken into account.
10. This administration has taken a robust and prudent approach to the management of the council's financial resources over the last three years and built a stronger and more stable financial base, although still fragile, than has been the case for many years. We have increased the council's overall financial resilience to be able to better deal with financial shocks of this nature. Therefore, I can confirm that the council will not have to resort to any immediate reductions in services to meet the financial deficit and we will avoid the possibility of section 114 notices, the so called 'bankruptcy' position, which some other local authorities are predicting.
11. Working with my Cabinet colleagues we have agreed a deficit reduction strategy (see appendix 1) in which we will defer some planned items of expenditure to a later date. This will allow the council to contain its net revenue expenditure in 2020/21

within the financial envelope agreed by Full Council in February. Should the council's financial position improve then these items of expenditure will be reconsidered, so they are not abandoned altogether, but that may be the case if no new funding is secured for their delivery.

12. Our deficit reduction strategy provides 'headroom' of almost £1.7m to deal with any further unfunded costs associated with coronavirus or to help support new and urgent council priorities in supporting the Isle of Wight's recovery from the impacts of the virus. This strategy also leaves the council's operating balance in the general reserves intact at c£10m, some £3m in excess of the minimum level necessary to avoid a section 114 notice. This excess is likely to be necessary in helping the council to 'smooth' its savings requirements over the next three years once there is greater clarity about the funding likely to be available over the period.

Care Home Support

13. Covid-19 has had a significant impact on our Island care homes, both residents and staff. Government required every council to submit a Care Homes Support Plan, which we did on 29 May. I am delighted to inform you that we were recognised as having submitted one of the strongest plans in the South East region.
14. As of 1 July, there had been no outbreaks of Covid-19 in any of our care homes since 25 May. That statistic is testament to the skill, professionalism and sheer hard work of every single member of staff involved. I salute them all.
15. Throughout the pandemic, our housing needs service has arranged emergency accommodation for large numbers of people presenting as homeless. As of 1 July, we have ensured no child is living in bed and breakfast, and when you think about the level of housing demand we face, this is also marvellous achievement to celebrate.
16. At the start of the pandemic the government's emergency legislation "eased" the rules underpinning defining a homeless person. As a result, at one stage during the pandemic the council's housing needs service was providing emergency accommodation and support for 80 homeless people.
17. Our housing needs service provided a first-class response to the government's requirement to move homeless people out of dormitory style emergency accommodation within 48 hours. In so doing it had to commission emergency accommodation and support services for the people concerned.
18. The new emergency accommodation services will need to continue into the winter; we have submitted a bid for additional funding from government in terms of realising our ambition that no-one returns to the streets and to move everyone currently in this accommodation into some suitable 'move on' accommodation. Government has allocated c£100m to this aim which will be allocated through a competitive process.

Public Health

19. Our public health team have been central to the council's response to the coronavirus pandemic throughout. It has provided, liaised with Public Health

England (PHE) and local health protection control teams, working to close down and investigate outbreaks of Covid-19 across the Island and in many settings. It continues to consider the data from government on a daily basis about the virus and the actions the council may need to take in response. This process has now been formally set out in the Covid-19 Local Prevention and Outbreak Control Plan considered by the Cabinet on Thursday 11 July.

20. It is of great merit to the team that, notwithstanding all of the work it has been doing in response to Covid-19, it was still able to finalise the public health strategy approved by the Cabinet in June. This is a comprehensive strategic document that will guide our approach to Public Health going forward.

Children's Service

21. Children's social care continues to deliver all of its statutory duties throughout the Covid-19 crisis, it is business as usual but doing it differently. Over 90% of child protection conferences and other statutory reviews continue to occur on time, and where there is any delay, these are for understandable and unavoidable reasons.
22. Across March and April 2102 visits were undertaken either virtually or and face to face. Multi agency work remains strong with robust frontline links between children's social care, police, schools and health in particular. Since the start of Covid-19 we have seen an increase in the numbers of children subject to child protection planning and children coming into care. This is impacting on placement availability and increasing costs to the authority.
23. All schools offered emergency childcare provision for the children of critical workers during lockdown. School staff, social workers and school improvement colleagues worked together to identify the most vulnerable children open to social care and to ensure they were safely attending school. School improvement staff have remained in frequent contact with all school leaders to offer support and guidance throughout.
24. There were 9.5% of children of school age back in school (3,500 students with the number continuing to grow weekly) compared with 6.9% nationally. The Island has had better school attendance than that seen nationally throughout lockdown.
25. Throughout the pandemic schools have responded magnificently on the Island and have been well supported by the council's staff. I would say thank you to everyone involved with the provision of services to children for all of their efforts in supporting our young people through a most difficult period.

Economic Recovery

26. In the context of considering the Island's recovery from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic our regeneration plans take on an even greater significance. The increasing importance of our digital connectivity has been highlighted during recent months and the ability of our businesses to remain in contact with each other, the mainland and the wider world has been brought into even sharper focus. Our Digital Island ambitions, including the recently announced accelerated roll out of full fibre broadband across the Island, has gained even more significance.

27. Given the challenging financial circumstances we face we have had to undertake a careful review of our regeneration plans to ensure the projects we support deliver measurable benefits and generate much needed revenue.
28. Key projects such as the acquisition of the Venture Quays properties and the housing and jobs units development at the former Branstone farm represent our strategic contribution to the recovery of the Island and the wider Solent economy, supporting the growth of marine employment in the Medina Valley and providing a template for the right scale of development in our Biosphere rated rural areas.
29. Despite the clear challenges presented by the pandemic, I am pleased we have continued to move our plans forward towards delivery of these schemes. Our ambitious plans for Newport Harbour have been well received and the Heritage High Street projects in Ryde and Newport are underway demonstrating our strong commitment to “Building Back Better”.

Waste Management

30. I must commend the work of the council’s waste and recycling service, delivered in partnership with Amey, throughout the pandemic period. The service has gone to great lengths to ensure that our kerbside services have had no disruption, unlike much of the country, over the last 12 weeks. I know that good plans are in place to ensure this remains the case.
31. Members will also be aware that the Household Waste Reception Centres (HWRC) also reopened without incident using a new booking system to help manage social distancing and traffic flow in and outside both Lyn bottom and Afton Marsh. The waste and recycling team have, with Amey, slowly doubled the number of spaces bookable over the last few weeks and they are now in 15 minute slots. The separation of materials coming to the sites is excellent to see and will really support the Island’s environmental aspirations. Most recycling and waste types can now be taken to both sites now, a full list is available on www.iwight.com/recyclingcentres .
32. I was pleased to hear that the waste and recycling team has been shortlisted as finalists for two national recycling awards, one for the partnership work that went into delivering the Island’s new recycling plant at Forest Road, and the other for the excellent “Holiday Lets” campaign run last summer. This is also a good time to remind accommodation providers, as they look to reopen, to make sure they make contact with their waste and recycling collection providers to restart their collection services when their guests arrive.
33. Works on St Mary’s Roundabout continued during the Covid-19 period. They were hampered by stopping of larger resurfacing works because of lockdown delays in the supply chain but this has now resumed. This is scheduled to be completed early to mid-Dec 2020.

Regulatory Services

34. Responding to the impact of the coronavirus has been at the heart of the work of Regulatory Services teams over the last 12 weeks and I am sure it will continue to be so for many weeks to come. Much of this work has been in the provision of

information, advice and guidance to businesses as they reopen or prepare to reopen following lockdown. Over 419 businesses have been surveyed in the retail sector, advice given to 112 hairdressing businesses and nearly 400 enquiries/complaints related to Covid-19 have received a response.

35. The council continues to support the Isle of Wight Against Scams Partnership (IWASP) to publish scam warning messages quickly out into the community. Over the next month we have an advert running with Isle of Wight Radio on scams and doorstep crime prevention which will also feature on their website and the Beacon magazine at the end of the summer.
36. Sadly, Covid-19 has seen almost every event planned for the summer season cancelled on the Island, and officers have been working with the event organisers regarding dates and plans for the summer of 2021. There are some events which are hoping to go ahead, but these will be dependent on future government guidance.
37. It is worth mentioning to members that government guidance has introduced a new regime for street furniture and now gives the ability for all licenced premises to be able to sell alcohol for consumption off site. Where this was possible during the lockdown period, it did create some situations where there were gatherings of more than 6 persons and steps had to be taken to deal with these under licensing and anti-social behaviour powers.
38. The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) are meeting on a regular basis to consider the impact of Covid-19 in relation to community safety themes along with recovery. Task and finish groups have been established to look at areas such as the return of the night-time economy and anti-social behaviour.

Support Services

39. Our support services have very much been the unsung heroes of the council's response to the coronavirus. The business centre teams have completed a herculean effort of distributing government grant funding to local businesses as quickly and in a timely a manner as needed; the contact centre team continue to help support the delivery and on-going management of the community helpline for our vulnerable Island residents working alongside the many staff who were redeployed to this project to make it a successful and responsive service to identified community needs; the democratic services team have been undertaking all the necessary preparations to enable council meetings to be operated virtually in line with the changes in legislation as a response to the pandemic situation;
40. Perhaps the most notable area of business support is that of the work of the ICT teams who have provided technical and practical support to enable staff to transition to working from home in a very short space of time and with minimal disruption to normal business; as a result of the capital investments made by this administration to build a more resilient and modern ICT platform from which this council can operate.
41. Not only that, they have been heavily involved in enabling crematorium services to be live-streamed and delivering enabling equipment to services so that they could keep in touch with our customers and help those in care to maintain contact with

loved ones. Through the introduction of the Microsoft Office 365 suite of software, it has been possible to secure an easy transition to remote working and the use of the virtual meeting environment.

42. Notably, in the 90 days prior to lockdown as a result of Covid-19 the Microsoft 'Teams' facility saw approximately 800 conference meetings taking place by this means. In the 90 days since lockdown there have been some 15,200 conference meetings held using this facility.
43. During this frenetic time for services, it was also pleasing to learn that the council has met the government target set for apprenticeships for the third consecutive year. For the period April 2019 to March 2020, a total of 53 apprentices signed onto programmes with the Isle of Wight Council.

Conclusion

44. I appreciate this is a full and detailed report covering a range of services provided by the Isle of Wight Council. It is by no means fully comprehensive and there will be areas of activity I have not covered. But as a whole I can report that our council has 'stepped up to the plate' when it came to responding to this unprecedented pandemic and we can all be proud of the work of our staff.
45. I conclude by specifically recognising the response of our Media and Communications Team. Without engaging with our community, keeping them informed of what is happening and how people can get support then we would not have achieved the success we have achieved.
46. This virus has not gone away and we must all remain alert, stay safe, follow guidance and save lives. I particularly liked the reminder of the behaviours we all still need to adopt if we are to continue containing and preventing the spread of the virus, recently published by University Hospital Southampton:
 - Wash – your hands as often as possible
 - Walk – 2m apart when you can
 - Wear – a face covering where you cannot walk apart
47. I am pleased to report that we are now on a pathway to recovery although there will continue to be a fine line between the time we are allocating to activities directed at recovery and response. However, if we continue to follow all of the guidance I am sure that the coming weeks and months, working with our partners and government we can come through in good shape.

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COUNCILLOR DAVE STEWART

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships

Isle of Wight Council: Deficit Reduction Strategy 2020/21

Item	Comment	Amount to be deferred (£)
1. Works to further increase the flexible use of office accommodation including provision of digital information for visitors to buildings	It is possible to review this approach in the light of lessons being learned from the current working arrangements established in response to the coronavirus.	50,000
2. Refurbishment of Ryde Help Centre	Plans to upgrade similar to County Hall	55,000
3. Refurbishment of Sandown Civic Centre	It is possible to review this approach in the light of lessons being learned from the current working arrangements established in response to the coronavirus.	820,000
4. Repurposing of the first floor at Westminster House	The original intended outcomes have already been achieved through other means.	993,446
5. Additions to the fire fleet	Planned additions already achieved, essential and urgent equipment needs will continue to be met.	300,000
6. Nicholson Road enabling works	Planning permission will be secured but further enabling works will be postponed.	260,000
7. Sandham Middle School – pump priming investment	Delays in securing a development partner allow the scheme to be deferred	860,879
8. Regeneration schemes - opportunistic investments	Part of a sum set aside for the council to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities for economic growth	400,000
9. Guildhall – pump priming investment	Part of a sum set aside for supporting potential bids for external funds should a financially viable use of the building be identified.	30,000
10. Unspent from completed schemes	Various unused funds where the actual spend has been less than the budgeted amount.	190,000
11. Development of a Local Transport Plan (LTP)	Estimated cost of producing the plan is less than the budgeted amount.	30,000
12. Feasibility study for the repair of Undercliff Drive	To inform the total funds needed to reinstate the road following public support for the works last year.	195,568
13. Production of the outline business case for the acquisition and development of Camp Hill	Requires assurances from the Ministry of Justice to give sufficient confidence to invest in the development of a business case for Council's approval.	300,000

Item	Comment	Amount to be deferred (£)
14. Corporate contingency	Part of the overall revenue budget used for managing in year fluctuations in expenditure and income – represents c60% of total budget	2,000,000
15. Transformation reserve	Part of the fund created to initiate changes in services to make them more effective and efficient, saving money and without having to create one off calls on the revenue budget	2,000,000
16. Reserves earmarked for known short term risks	Specific budget for known risks – in this case the potential for losing a court action taken against the council over the sixth form buildings at Christ the King. Following the council's successful defence of its position the budget is no longer needed	3,000,000
	TOTAL	11,484,893

Note: Items 1 to 10 inclusive are from the capital programme but funded through the revenue budget in accordance with the council's treasury management strategy.