



Committee: **FULL COUNCIL**

Date: **22 FEBRUARY 2023**

Title: **LEADER'S UPDATE**

Report of: **LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

There is no doubt that this winter has been hard for a great many people on our Island and for staff across all our public services who have been managing increases in demand, particularly those in social care and health.

Whilst we must react to this increase in demand we also need to remember that there are other services which, whilst not seeing increases in demand to the same extent, nevertheless provide important support to our residents.

The multi-agency Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Partnership have signed off the Isle of Wight's Mental Wellbeing Plan, which sets out how we can improve our own and others' mental wellbeing across the Island over the next 5 years. This plan focuses on the actions required to support people before they require services or reach crisis point. It identifies priorities to drive forward significant improvements in Islanders' mental wellbeing and prevent death by suicide through a commitment to build community resilience, reduce stigma and discrimination and work in partnership to prevent and support people impacted by suicide.

Also in December 2021 the government launched its 10-year drug strategy, From Harm to Hope, with a clear vision to reduce drug and alcohol related harm. Our Public Health team are working with partners to implement this strategy and reduce harm for residents on the Island through developing a local delivery plan, supported by a substance misuse needs assessment, and overseen by the multi-agency Island Strategic Drug and Alcohol Partnership. This partnership is chaired by Simon Bryant, Director of Public Health for the Island, who is also the Senior Responsible Officer for this local implementation.

I was delighted to officially open Building 41 at Northwood recently. This high-quality co-working and office space, delivered on time and on budget, provides a real step up in business accommodation on the Island. All build and conversion spend on this project was with Island-based contractors and I was delighted to feel the buzz of excitement amongst the businesses who attended the opening event.

While disappointed not to have received support from the Levelling Up fund round 2, good progress is being made with the round 1 project, East Cowes Marine hub, with a new boat hoist now fully in action at Wight shipyard.

The Ryde Transport Hub project is progressing well with most of the work to the West and East of the interchange complete, and the new bus lanes and improved central public realm taking shape. The new pedestrian pier is also well advanced with around two-thirds of the old tramway pier structure restored and the new upper-layer of steel work being put in place. The final piece of the jigsaw, the refurbishment of Ryde Esplanade Station, is now also underway with works started on turning a redundant rail-side building into new offices for station staff which will free-up space for the link to the pier with its new public facilities and cafe.

A civic event took place on 24 January for the 6th Newport, St John's Scout Group. 39 beavers, cubs and scouts came along to County Hall and received a talk from the Chairman of the Council about her role, the council's mace bearer and its historical place in Full Council proceedings, Elections Manager who introduced the elections and voting process to them, together with talks from our Youth MP and the Vice Lord-Lieutenant Brigadier Sheen. A great time was had by all, including the opportunity to wear the Chairman's chain of office and photo shoots with the Vice Lord Lieutenant's sword! This was a great opportunity to introduce young people to the civic and democratic processes, and in preparation for that big day when they become eligible to vote. It is hoped that this is an event that can be repeated and if any councillor knows of any other interested groups please email civic.affairs@iow.gov.uk and the team will seek to arrange a visit.

The Revenues team is preparing for the annual billing exercise whereupon more than 72,000 council tax bills and 7700 business rates bills will be issued by mid-March for the 23/24 financial year charge. The team is managing a number of legislative changes this year as part of the billing exercise which includes a revaluation of business rated properties and a new business rates relief scheme for retail, hospitality and retail properties. The Valuation Office Agency has been working closely with businesses and has reassessed all non-domestic rated properties. Hence from 1 April 2023 all business properties will have a new rateable value assessment on which the business rates account is calculated.

However, the Autumn Statement introduced a new business rates relief scheme for retail and hospitality properties which will provide 75% relief, up to a cash limit of £110,000 per business to assist these businesses financially and help them to evolve and adapt to changing consumer demands.

Finally, National Apprenticeship Week 2023 was 6 to 13 February. This week brought together businesses and apprentices and the theme this year was #Skillsforlife. The week reflected on how apprenticeships can help individuals to develop the skills and knowledge required for a rewarding career and how apprenticeships can help businesses to develop a talented workforce that is equipped with future-ready skills.

We are proud of all our apprentices and are delighted to support and promote the government's campaign. Since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in 2017 we

have supported over 300 people in apprenticeship learning programmes in the council from level 2 (GCSE level) to level 7 (Postgraduate). There are some really great case studies on our website [Apprenticeships at The Isle of Wight Council](#). In addition, the Chairman of the Council was approached by the Oberbürgermeister of Coburg, our twinned city, asking us to consider an exchange programme with their 3rd year apprentices in the Autumn of 2023. The proposal has been discussed at Apprenticeship Board and an initial meeting to scope this exciting opportunity is planned for later this month.