



Committee: **FULL COUNCIL**

Date: **17 MAY 2023**

Title: **LEADER'S ANNUAL REPORT**

Report of: **LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

Chairman, I submit the following leader's report as a summary of the achievements of last year by the Alliance Administration. The achievements were as a result of the efforts of many people across all sectors, working together with common purpose, including, for example, the voluntary sector, town, parish and community councils and other stakeholders as well as our staff at the Isle of Wight Council.

It has without doubt been a difficult year for everyone; the post pandemic period has brought with it many challenges, the most significant being the cost-of-living crisis which has touched all our lives. We have focused our efforts on doing whatever we can to alleviate the pressures for Islanders. We remain committed to tackling these issues alongside our communities who have done so much to provide local support.

Against the backdrop of economic decline, February Full Council saw the approval of the budget for the 2022/23 financial year. This period of budget setting was one of the gravest situations this council has faced. With inflationary pressures, rising service demand and legacy impact of the pandemic, we have strived to deliver the savings required to secure a balanced budget whilst minimising the impact on services. We will continue to focus our attention on economic recovery. Despite these challenges, we have remained as a committed administration and one which remains determined to work together with our communities to address the needs of our island and the people who live, work and visit.

Delivering services for our local community is not only about focusing on large scale projects but is also about those small differences that we can make daily. The summary of activity below reports on the wide range of activity that has been delivered by this council in the last year:

People and Communities

- Trailblazer for Family Hubs - in 2022 Children's Services were successful in their application to the "Start for Life and Family Hubs" Government led programme. This project will better enhance the current Family Centre offer, providing families with improved access points to integrated family support services for

early help with social, emotional, physical and financial needs. Family hubs provide support to families from conception until the age of 19 (or 25 for young people with SEND).

- This year Children's Services were announced as 1 of 14 Local Authorities across the UK to achieve Trailblazer status. This work has already commenced and will cease at the end of the programme in March 2025.
- Safety Valve - we have also launched the Department for Education's Safety Valve programme with schools, an ambitious programme that includes:
 - building capacity in mainstream schools to support more children and young people with SEN support.
 - the establishment of a new special school, which will enable more children with complex needs to be educated within the local community.

The Safety Valve programme provides the opportunity for the high needs deficit to be paid off by 2027.

- The past year has continued to be challenging for Adult Social Care and Housing Needs. The impact of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis continues to shape demand for support and this in turn has impacted on capacity to deliver the care and support required. Our staff team continues to shine and to work harder than ever to ensure that Island residents are able to access the help that they need. Against a backdrop of increase demand and reduced budget the Isle of Wight has continued to lead the way in a number of areas.
- The recommissioned Living Well and Early Help Service has been nationally recognised, winning the Gold award in the Public Sector Transformation Awards in the Health and Care Category. Delivered in partnership with Aspire Ryde, who are supported by their own community partners – West Wight Sports and Community Centre, Pan Together and Ventnor Town Council, the service has gone from strength to strength. The new Living Well and Early Help Service, which is accessible to all IOW residents through four key geographic locations and to rural localities through a mobile support hub, went live on 1 April 2022. Since the service was implemented less than one per cent of the people who have been supported by it have been referred for statutory service intervention. Help is including anything from social contact and building people's support circles, to referrals into community groups nearby or linking local people with the job centre, Carers Isle of Wight, housing support, health and social care assistance or cost of living help, the wide range of support and the way in which it is being delivered has hugely benefited local people.
- In addition, Following the 2022 independent 5 year review of care provision quality undertaken by TrustedCare (and published in January 2023) the Isle of Wight has ranked first place in the UK with 97% of homes on the Island achieving a CQC Good or Outstanding rating. This is a huge triumph for the county as back in 2017 we were only 2 spots above the bottom of the table with just 70% of services on the Island having been awarded a Good or Outstanding rating. Since 2017 the council has worked in partnership with Mountbatten to develop and provide the Island Better Care Programme which has been made

available at no charge to all CQC registered care services. The sole purpose of the programme has been to equip care providers with the knowledge and skills to bring about sustainable quality improvements. The significant shift in the quality of care and support for local people is a testament to the Programme and to the dedication, hard work and determination of our local care home and home care providers and their hardworking staff teams.

- The Housing Needs team have over the last year effectively managed the high number of requests received for support against a backdrop of a challenging private rental sector. The team have dealt with around 2,000 approaches in the last 12 months. Every effort is being made to ensure that we continued to ensure no family exceeds 6 weeks in bed and breakfast despite the increasing pressures on the service. In 2023/24 a total of 372 households had their homelessness prevented or relieved by the Housing Solutions Team, compared to 289 in 2022/23. This means we are preventing 25% more households from experiencing homelessness than in the previous year. In addition to the day to day activity the team have also successfully lead a programme to provide new accommodation to support homeless people and five flats have been purchased for single homeless individuals or couples to rent here on the Island. The programme was delivered through grant from DLUHC via the Rough Sleepers Accommodation Grant and our own Section 106 monies for “affordable homes” via the planning system. These flats have given homeless people a place to call home and somewhere they can build a new life from.
- This month has seen the closure of the Gouldings for the essential refurbishment. The works have now commenced on site. The programme of work will see the service re-opening in late Autumn 2023 and able to provide a higher quality of care and support for local people.
- In addition, the council’s graduate programme for care and support workers has launched with the team attending sessions with 3 on Island further education providers. We have already started to receive interest and applications for the 20 new apprenticeship style roles which are due to start in July 2023. The programme is a rolling 2-year opportunity to increase the social care workforce here on the Island and to ensure future stability in caring roles. Working with local provider partners, including the NHS Trust, the programme is aimed at ensuring that people who are new to roles in the care sector are fully supported and able to maximise the opportunities related to a caring role. It is anticipated that the new programme will improve the retention and development of our local workforce.
- The business centre team have continued to support local residents during the cost-of-living crisis. Over the past year they have paid 2856 new housing benefit claims within an average 13 days and processed 61899 changes to claims within an average of 3.5 days to ensure that residents receive the financial support they are entitled to. Some 444 exceptional hardship applications have been assessed awarding 272 payments to the value of £54,745. This is in addition to council tax discretionary relief payments of £67,277 awarded to 51 residents to aid households experiencing exceptional circumstances. In November the 21/22 benefits subsidy claim was audited and signed off by the Department for Work and Pensions. The auditors found only four errors on the claim totalling £40 which given that the claim is for £33 million is testament to the great work the team are undertaking in protecting the finances of the council by maintaining a high level of accuracy, thereby avoiding penalties being applied

by the Department for Work and Pensions.

- The revenues team have administered the energy rebate grants and made a total of 56,231 payments to households living in properties banded A-D banded equating to £8,434,650. Another £326,260.00 was paid to households under the discretionary scheme to assist with household bills.
- In November the Adult Community awards ceremony was held as part of the National Festival of Learning. The occasion was an opportunity to share and showcase inspiring stories of Islanders going the extra mile for their community and for the winners to highlight how learning not only supports the gaining of qualifications, but the impact on people's lives.
- The annual review of the council's apprenticeship programmes identified we have 130 members of staff engaged on this type of training, maximising the use of the apprenticeship levy. Learners are a mix of new start apprentices and existing staff go upskill or change skills, with an age range of 16 - 63 years. We are working with 31 apprenticeship providers from all over the country delivering 70 different apprenticeship programmes. We have delivered year one of the Government's 3 year 'Multiply' programme to support adults with numeracy skills. As part of this programme we are also supporting people at work, people seeking work and also parents with finding out how best to support their children's maths at home.
- Our community wealth building work continues. We are now an associate member of Shaping Portsmouth and are planning to have an Island presence at the Portsmouth and South Coast Business week next year. We have also engaged with Greenwich Council who launched their community wealth building strategy last year, to understand how they built and developed their network with local organisations to create a strong anchor network.
- The council's new website is complete with all content from the old site having been transferred by the 31 March deadline and the BETA site operating in parallel during its development switched off, affording access to all the council's webpages on one site. This new platform offers improved features and functionality and works on all devices and is responsive to user needs. Further development of the website will continue as part of normal service.
- Our new digital strategy has set the scene to make the most of the opportunities that digital transformation presents, and which also keep the council's data and information secure. Cyber security is a key consideration for councils across the country with ever increasing threats and attacks being apparent. The Deputy Leader of the council, in his capacity as portfolio holder for digital transformation, has arranged for the council to take part in the Local Government Association Cyber 360 exercise that focuses on cyber security culture within local government. This free support provided by the Local Government Association aims to help councils improve their understanding of cyber risk; prevent and resist cyber-attacks more effectively and develop cyber security skills at every level of the organisation. The review will be conducted over three days in June by a team of external council officers and industry experts.

- **The Council's public health work has gone from strength to strength with a focus on**
 - **Mental Health with the network** growing to over 40 organisations working on mental health and wellbeing and the adoption by partners of a joint Mental Wellbeing Plan with the key priorities of community resilience and information; reducing stigma and discrimination; suicide prevention (self-harm support and bereavement support are key highlights); reducing inequalities and wider determinants. The mental wellbeing small grants fund that our administration insisted upon has funded projects to meet the above objectives.
 - **Substance misuse** – the setting up of the Island Strategic Drug and Alcohol Partnership and collaboratively developed the local delivery plan which demonstrates how key stakeholders will work together to deliver the ambitions of the national 'from harm to hope' strategy has built on previous work. We have secured additional government monies from various sources (Supplementary grant, rough sleepers initiative and probation funding) bringing these together into one plan to better support our most vulnerable residents.
 - **Healthy Lifestyles -the development of a Healthy Lifestyle Plan.** This focuses on the key areas of healthy weight, tobacco control, physical activity and alcohol consumption with a golden thread of NHS Health Checks. Smoking in pregnancy has been a key area of focus and our rates have shown a consistent decrease such that our smoking at time of delivery rate is now statistically similar to the England value.
 - Supported the management of **health protection incidents** and outbreaks in education, care settings and hospitals. This included focused activity in relation to the peak in Group A Streptococcus activity at the end of 2022, helping education and early years settings. Also, jointly supported efforts to monitor and manage the monkeypox outbreak across our local authority area, together with our sexual health commissioners and commissioned services.
 - Supported the roll out of the **COVID-19 autumn and spring vaccination campaigns**, as well as the Influenza vaccination programme. This included various communication activities for the general public and social care staff.
 - Development of numerous communication activities to support uptake of **immunisation and screening programmes**, to help address the impact of the pandemic on uptake of these programmes across our local population
 - Relaunch to the **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment** to enable service planning to meet the needs of the island population
 - We established the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board in line with the new Act and have completed a domestic abuse needs assessment, appointed a survivor voice representative organisation and continue to work towards Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation

Environment

- **Waste** – Residents across the Island should receive their annual waste services booklet and calendar in the first two weeks of May. The booklet contains really useful information to help you to recycle the right materials! This year residents will receive stickers in the booklets for the wheeled bins. Following the change in ownership of the waste partner we need your help in de-branding your bins. This activity is paid for by the new company and not the council. The stickers used to do this will also use icons to help residents remember what you can recycle and what waste goes in which bin.
- **Coastal** – Urgent repair works are continuing along Ventnor eastern esplanade to repair the damaged seawall. I would like to thank the community in Ventnor for their patience while this work is proceeding. Similarly in Seaview, damage to the Pier Road slipway over the winter has meant a temporary closure, which we know is a concern for users. A structural survey has been ordered and repairs will be made as soon as possible. In the Bay area, we are continuing to clear remaining cliff fall debris from behind the catch fencing on the promenade between Shanklin and Sandown. Beach users in Bonchurch will soon see beach reprofiling to move shingles back to the beach areas which has been moved in storms.
- **Dinosaur Isle** – We are currently reviewing the operations at our Dinosaur Isle Museum which currently attracts around 40,000 visitors a year. We want to safeguard the valuable dinosaur collection which is second in importance to the Natural History Museum in London, as well as enhance the visitor experience to the museum.
- **Highways and Transport Improvement Schemes** – the works to improve the Ryde Esplanade and pier are coming to completion. This project of a combined value of over £50 million is a DfT funded partnership involving Network Rail, Southwestern Trains and Wightlink ferries. The improvements and enhancements make a real difference to the appearance of one of our key gateways to the Island. This year also saw the completion of a number of other highway improvement schemes including the Smallbrook roundabout with the aim of creating a safer junction for road users. We have also been successful in attracting funding for cycle schemes including around £700k for improvements in Ryde. We have also obtained further funding from DfT to make safety improvements to the main A3057 route.

Economy

- The last 12 months has seen the delivery of key regeneration projects supporting the Island's recovery from the worst effects of the pandemic. The opening of the Island's first modern co-working space at Building 41 based on the BAE campus will be built on the opportunity of the Island becoming full fibre connected by the end of this year. New businesses starting, existing ones growing and people dropping in while visiting relatives are all using this fantastic facility. Our Biosphere vision has also been brought to life by the development at Branstone Farm, working in partnership with Vectis Housing new homes for 54 island families, a new business centre and a new brewery have all opened to great acclaim. Living and working together while protecting our natural environment the Branstone scheme is an example of the right kind of development which suits the Island.

- The East Cowes Marine hub, Levelling Up fund project has delivered more marine jobs through a new boat hoist and more manufacturing space, the development of the barracks and a new public area, designed in conjunction with the local community, are next to be done this year.
- Investment in the heritage action zones in Ryde and Newport, shopfronts improvements, new public friendly space are one example of our area regeneration approach, working with town and parish councils across the Island to prioritise local improvements. A new programme for helping those struggling to get work and extended support for businesses are key features of the shared prosperity funding we are deploying on the Island.
- Next month Cabinet will consider a new cultural strategy for the Isle of Wight which will seek to shine a light on the fantastic businesses and organisations that improve our economic and social wellbeing through use of their creative skills. Nurturing this sector and working with them Arts council on projects such as The Department in Ryde will be an important element of the next phase of our regeneration programme, capped off by the development of the new film studio at Kingston and the development of a business case for a new cultural centre for the Island based at Newport harbour
- The Event season is due to start in June and the Islands Safety Advisory Group are working hard to ensure the safety of events to those attending or living in the vicinity.

Housing Renewal

- The Eco flex scheme is now live on the Island which will enable eligible Island residents to access free energy efficiency measures for their property. The scheme is an extension of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) to improve domestic property energy efficiency focusing on low income and vulnerable households. There are 3 authorised suppliers on the Island and to find out further information look on the council's website under energy initiatives. This helps to meet the Government and councils fuel poverty and net zero commitments.
- In 2022/23 demand was the highest ever seen on the Island for Disabled Facilities Grants. Following some excellent joint working, prioritisation and hard work the team have managed to reduce the waiting list substantially.

Draft Island Planning Strategy

- The local authority has been working towards further progressing its draft planning strategy against the background of ever changing events at national level.
- Councillors were formally updated on the Draft Island Planning Strategy on 18 January 2023 and Full Council resolved at that meeting that no later than the end of June 2023 that I should inform Full Council again.
- On 11 May 2023 the Cabinet will be considering a report on the Draft Island Planning Strategy.

- I shall accordingly update councillors orally at the Annual Council meeting as to what Cabinet resolved to recommend to Full Council.

Community Safety

- The Community Safety Partnership has recently published its annual strategic assessment and partnership plan. Whilst there has been some increase in overall crime rates the Isle of Wight crime rate continues to be lower than the national average. The council is a key partner in this delivery and works jointly with the other partners, highlights for the last year include the Joint Action Group to tackle antisocial behaviour issues, delivery of the Violent Crime Unit with the OPCC and safer street 3 which improved the safety of our night time economy areas.

Draft Island Planning Strategy

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- Councillors were formally updated on the Draft Island Planning Strategy on 18 January 2023 and Full Council resolved at that meeting that no later than the end of June 2023 that I should inform Full Council again.
- On 11 May 2023 the Cabinet will be considering a report on the Draft Island Planning Strategy, which outlines the issues we face and the potential benefits of extending the time before establishing the most appropriate route to taking our local plan forward.

I shall accordingly update councillors orally at the Annual Council meeting as to what Cabinet resolved to recommend to Full Council

I would like to thank everyone for these outstanding achievements. It would be remiss of me not to also make reference to the many other successes and great work that has been delivered right across the council. There are too many to mention here but suffice it to say it is through the dedication of staff that we make such progress against our priorities for the island and the commitment of cabinet members in delivering our ambitions, for which I am extremely grateful. A final thank you to all those councillors throughout the chamber who have helped, supported and worked with us.

Lora Peacey-Wilcox