



Committee	FULL COUNCIL
Date	18 NOVEMBER 2020
Title:	LEADER'S UPDATE
Report of	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Introduction

1. In this month's report I want to take the opportunity to advise members of the range of activities which we as a council have been leading with our community, not just in terms of Covid 19 (which has clearly been the focus of much of the council's activity) but also other important activities and decisions which have enabled council business to continue.

Covid 19

2. Members will be fully aware that the whole of England, including the Isle of Wight is now subject to the latest lockdown restrictions made by National Government in response to the rising level of cases of Covid 19 across the country.
3. However, the second national lockdown introduced to prevent the spread of coronavirus gives our Island community an opportunity to take stock of how successful we have been in slowing the transmission of the disease to date. It also enables us to focus on how we might continue to keep the level of infections low in the future, for the benefit of everyone.
4. With the introduction of Covid Support Officers, effective support for local business using additional funds from government and prioritising our communications with the community through a range of mediums we are reinforcing the expectation that the Island will comply with national requirements. In so doing this council is showing strong leadership, keeping our community safe and working towards achieving our economic recovery plan.
5. Although I am hugely aware of the social, economic and emotional costs of the lockdown we must all follow the government's guidance to prevent these costs being even more severe were there not to be a lockdown in place. We need to remember that this lockdown is not the same as the first one.
6. Many more activities are permitted to continue than was previously the case. Schools, universities and colleges remain open and programmed health care will

still be delivered. I would encourage anyone that has a long-standing appointment with a health care provider to still go to that appointment - protecting ourselves from all other manner of ailments is as important as protecting ourselves from coronavirus.

7. Despite the best efforts of everyone 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 virus and is something that will need to be a regular part of our daily lives for a long time to come.

Member Conduct

8. Getting to grips with meetings in a virtual world is a challenge that we have all had to face since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. But it can create problems around our conduct with each other. There is no better example of this than during the September meeting of Full Council when muttered comments by some members were picked up by sensitive microphones that were not properly muted.
9. I am sure that all members will have learned some important lessons from these events and the need to limit comments to the matters in hand in the future. I am a firm believer that everyone has the right to be heard without fear of unwarranted interruptions or inappropriate remarks and I will work with all group leaders to avoid a repeat of what happened back in September. The run up to the next local election is no excuse for a lack of civility or professionalism and I would ask all member to keep this in mind at all times.

Community Safety

10. I wish to thank all the council staff and those members of our community who, in no time at all, have stood up again with support structures to help our whole community remain safe throughout this lockdown period and beyond. Once again everyone has been magnificent and totally committed to keeping our Island community safe. I cannot say enough great things about everyone who is involved in this effort, but I do know that there is nowhere I would rather be right now than living on the Isle of Wight.
11. I know that some people have suggested the Island should be exempted from the national lockdown because of its relatively low rates of new cases when compared to the rest of the England. I do understand that view, but we cannot be complacent. The weekly numbers of new cases continued to rise during September and October. So we must act to protect ourselves and the health and care system here on the Island as we cannot quickly call on mutual aid from surrounding areas should we come under significant strain.

Business Support

12. I recognise that the national lockdown is also going to bring more pressure to many businesses that are already in a fragile position as a result of the trading challenges they have already faced this year. I have asked officers to distribute the additional funding provided by government to support businesses as quickly as possible so the damage to our economy is kept to a minimum.

13. This includes providing grants of up to £3,000 for businesses who must close by law during the lockdown and a discretionary grant scheme of some £2.8 million for businesses that have had their trade significantly reduced because of the lockdown.
14. The council's regulatory services teams are fully occupied offering advice and reassurance to businesses, ensuring they are Covid secure with the appropriate mitigation in place. To date they have had 964 enquiries/complaints over this period and have undertaken 377 Covid secure compliance checks.
15. The introduction of Covid Support Officers is expected to bring greater resilience to the team and allow it to provide a greater level of information, advice and guidance to the whole community.

Ferries

16. Officers continue to work closely with the Island ferry companies and the Department for Transport to ensure that a lifeline service is maintained with the mainland during the lockdown. We know these connections are hugely important to the Island's resilience at this time. Deliveries of food, fuel, medical supplies and materials all need to be maintained, as does access to mainland healthcare and provision for keyworkers traveling to support our community.

Finance

17. Despite receiving a further £1.1m from government towards the costs of coping with the coronavirus, the council still faces an overspend of close to £7m in the current year.
18. The deficit reduction strategy I reported to a previous meeting of Full Council will help to offset the overspend in the current year, but it remains too early to say what the implications may be for next year. The Chancellor's cancellation of the autumn budget makes it more likely that we will receive funding from government next year of the same order as this year, but this is by no means certain.

Island Deal

19. I wish to inform Full Council that in October I personally wrote to the Prime Minister to remind him of his commitment to an Island Deal and requesting this be considered in the funding arrangements yet to be announced for Local Authorities. I also ensured copies of my correspondence were sent to the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, and to the Secretary of State Robert Jenrick. I await a response and appreciate government priorities are focussed towards Covid-19 at this time.
20. Officers have also been in communication with officials at the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) setting out the Council's fragile financial position and asking for clarity about the 'Island deal'.
21. As Leader I think it is important the Island community are kept informed of the efforts this administration continues to make to secure our financial future at a time when we have prioritised ensuring we do all we can to keep our community safe and that

businesses are supported wherever possible.

Parking

22. I am pleased to say the council has now launched the new All Island Parking Permits which can either be purchased for a single upfront payment of £540 or by twelve monthly payments of £50.00 each. Following the successful introduction of new parking management system the permits can be purchased instantly online.

Awards

23. Members will wish to join me in congratulating three young volunteers from Brading Youth Club who have completed their Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award. These young people have been learning new skills, expanding their physical activities and provided vital volunteering hours to support their local community
24. Members may also wish to know that the council was a finalist in the categories for digital transformation and senior leadership team at the delayed Municipal Journal Awards 2020. Although it is disappointing not to have won these awards, it is a measure of the progress we are making as a council that we were shortlisted for them. My congratulations and thanks to everyone involved in making it possible.

Waste

25. The council's household waste recycling centres at Lynnbottom and Afton Marsh continue to operate through lockdown using our booking system. The booking system has proved extremely popular with residents and makes a visit to the tip easy, quick and safe. The system has recently been upgraded and now features the option to amend and cancel bookings, making managing a visit even easier. I am sure this approach has helped contribute to the current 90 per cent diversion of all household waste from landfill we are now achieving.

Adult Social Care

26. In Adult Social Care the focus of work has shifted back to responding to the second national lockdown with an emphasis on helping the Island's vulnerable residents remain supported and have access to the care and help that they need. We are fortunate to have valued partners in the independent and voluntary sectors who are integral to our ability to respond to the new challenges that lockdown presents quickly and decisively
27. Members will be keen to know that in the last month adult social services were apply to meet the national requirements to identify a designated premises to support hospital discharges for people who have Covid-19, submit a plan for dealing with winter pressures and undertake and submit to government a service continuity & care market review self-assessment. The service continues to work closely with local NHS partners in supporting people's swift and safe discharge from hospital. The integrated discharge arrangements that are in place continue to work well.

Homeless

28. Unfortunately, our housing needs service continues to experience an increase in the number of households presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness and we continue to manage these pressures within the limited number of available options.
29. This situation has been assisted by the introduction of the new single homelessness pathway which went live on the 1st November 2020 as planned, modernising and expanding the service offer for those individuals without a place to call home.
30. I would also draw members' attention to the work of the benefits team which developed and launched at short notice a support payments scheme for those individuals who have been advised to self-isolate by the NHS either because they have tested positive for Covid-19 or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive. The scheme went live at the beginning of October.

Children's Services

31. Since the last Full Council meeting, I can report that a high percentage of children have been attending school as normal, with attendance rates reported as being well above the national average, consistently above 90%. Schools report that pupils are happy to be back at school and keen to learn.
32. Our children's social care services also continue to protect children, albeit that are we are 'doing it differently' through a variety of methods. The government has also shown interest in our model of family centres as a means of reaching vulnerable children of all ages. I am particularly pleased that the council has been able to progress its plans for a new school for the West Wight and planning permission has now been granted.

Fire Service

33. Both Hampshire and the Isle of Wight's Fire and Rescue Services have recently undergone an inspection from the Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services; focusing specifically upon the combined response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The inspectors were keen to understand how Hampshire and the Isle of Wight have worked together within the Local Resilience Forum to deliver all critical services under unprecedented levels of additional pressure. Initial feedback is expected by the end of November.

Recovery Plan

34. The council's Covid-19 Recovery Plan for the Island was endorsed for implementation by the Health and Well Being board in October and all agencies continue to work closely in balancing the need to respond to the continuing effects of the pandemic and recover from its worst effects. The launch of the Island Card this month enabling Island residents to support local businesses in the run up to Christmas, and beyond, is a great initiative and I hope will encourage as many as people as possible to devote some if not all of any festive spending they might be planning to this initiative. As part of the recovery strategy a virtual pop – up business school in October provided support for over 130 people seeking to start their own

business on the island.

Investments

35. I am pleased to report that our bold investment decision in relation to the acquisition of land and buildings in East Cowes has already proved to be a sound economic venture. The global digital Company Teemill (encompassing textile company Rapanui) is one new investor - rapidly growing and offering new jobs to Islanders. We have provided facilities for them on part of our newly acquired East Cowes site.
36. This is in addition to the jobs and other marine provision available at the site. We are also engaged in discussions regarding the provision of affordable housing with another interested party – all of which reflects the positive outcomes we can now expect achieve from the East Cowes Investment, meeting our commitments to Homes England.

Future Leadership Strategy

37. Under my leadership the Cabinet continues to provide strong decision making and direction for our officers in all areas of council business. Working within the financial constraints we have at this time we are now looking ahead to our budget requirements for next year.
38. The need to deliver a lawful and balanced budget remain at the forefront of our minds and in due course proposals will be presented to achieve this objective.
39. Meanwhile, in the coming weeks and months, keeping our community safe, supporting our economy by protecting existing jobs and creating new jobs in the face of a tide of increasing unemployment will remain a priority for this Council's Conservative led Administration.

COUNCILLOR DAVE STEWART

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships

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APPENDIX 1

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 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 consider 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 production 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

Item	Comment	Amount to be deferred (£)
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 business case.	300,000
14. Corporate contingency	Part of the overall revenue budget used for managing in year fluctuations in expenditure and income – represents about of total budget	2,000,000
15. Transformation reserve	Part of the fund created to initiate changes in services to make them more affective and efficient 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.