



Committee	FULL COUNCIL
Date	20 JANUARY 2021
Title:	LEADER'S UPDATE
Report of	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

1. In my report today I wish to take the opportunity to inform members of a range of activities which we, as a council, have been leading on within our community, not just in terms of Covid 19 (which has clearly been the focus of much of the council's work) but also other important activities and decisions which have enabled normal council business to continue.
2. However, I would like to start my report by congratulating Laura Gaudion, our Interim Director of Adult Social Services, on her award of the British Empire Medal (BEM) for her services to adult social care during the covid-19.
3. This is well deserved recognition for all of Laura's hard work, and I know that she considers it to be recognition for the work of all her team which she values most highly. It is especially pleasing because Laura is 'home grown' talent - having worked for the council for many years. I hope that this recognition of achievement means we can encourage and develop many more staff in the same way in the future.
4. I hope the whole of Council will join with me in thanking all of our staff for the wonderful job they continue to do in response to the pandemic. Balancing the delivery of our much needed and essential services with the need to react to the ever changing demands of the virus is not an easy task but is one which they have all fronted up to and undertake with great professionalism, fortitude and skill. Thank you all.

COVID 19

5. I am sure the most pressing matter on all of our minds at this moment is the rising rate of cases of Covid-19 on the Island and how we can best help our community to stay safe during what is a third national lockdown.

6. Sadly, it is clear the Isle of Wight has not been able to escape the impact of the new variant of the virus which is estimated to be up to 70% more infectious than the original version. It is also estimated that the one in three people with the virus show no symptoms at all so are likely to be unknowingly spreading it to anyone they come into contact with.
7. This is why it is more important than ever that everyone in our community acts as if they have the virus and could pass it on to the person they are next to and that we treat anyone we come into contact with as if they have the virus. The guidelines of **HANDS-FACE-SPACE** need to be followed rigorously so that we can protect ourselves and protect each other. The big message is **STAY AT HOME** unless you absolutely need to go out.

PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT

8. The council continues to work alongside all of its partners to provide support to the challenges they are facing, especially at St Mary's Hospital, where the numbers presenting are high and growing. They are expected to remain high throughout January, until we can start to see the impact of the national lockdown. Of course, the greatest impact will be achieved if everyone in our community behaves responsibly, follows the guidelines and protects our Carers and NHS workers. So, follow the message and **STAY AT HOME**.
9. In response to the rising number of cases the Island was able to secure a mobile testing facility from Friday 8 January which will be located at the Medina Leisure Centre for at least three weeks. Everyone who has any symptoms, no matter how slight, is encouraged to self-isolate and get a test as soon as possible. Self-isolation is really important and does not include visiting a supermarket on the way for a test, to get supplies in, just in case it is positive. Self-isolation means staying at home and only going out for a test and for no other reason. I would also encourage everyone to make a self-isolation plan in case you need to self-isolate, before you get symptoms, and to read the useful self-isolation toolkit information which is available on the council's website.

VACCINATIONS

10. It was great to see the start of the roll out of the covid-19 vaccination programme on the Island before Christmas and I look forward to it gaining pace as the new year develops. Organised by the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group covering Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, the programme is already been delivered at four locations by the three Primary Care Networks (of GP's). The delivery hub at the hospital also opened just after Christmas and it will focus on vaccinating NHS and adult social care staff with a view to vaccinating everyone as quickly as possible. Finally, a new vaccination centre is planned to open at the Riverside Centre in Newport at the end of January, further adding to the speed of delivery.
11. Vaccinations are being delivered in accordance with the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), based on those at most risk of mortality from the virus. Phase 1 of the vaccine roll out is targeted at the following four cohorts of individuals:
 - Residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
 - All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers

- All those 75 years of age and over
 - All those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
12. Unfortunately, I am not able to update Members on the progress of the vaccination programme against target at this time as this data is held by the NHS at a national level and is not yet available to us.

COUNCIL SUSTAINABILITY

13. As Members might expect, with the increase in the number of covid-19 cases on the Island some members of the council's staff have already been affected by the virus and have had to self-isolate as a result of contracting it or being in contact with someone that has it. This is something that is likely to increase in the coming weeks and officers continue to update and implement service and corporate business continuity plans in response.
14. It is likely that the council will need to prioritise its resources to supporting the key services which protect our most vulnerable people which could lead to the suspension of some other services as staff are redeployed to the areas where they are most needed. Please do bear with us during this difficult time, the Chief Executive will update members as any of these changes are made and as Leader I will be kept fully informed.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

15. 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 all our staff involved in this great effort. We have an internal BIG agenda – Believe in Great – which is truly being fulfilled.
16. Our Helpline has remained in place since the start of the pandemic and is now providing help, advice and guidance for the extremely clinically vulnerable individuals within our community who have been advised to shield, as well as more general advice and guidance for the community.
17. Regulatory Services, bolstered by our new team of Covid Support Officers, continue to provide a huge amount of information, support and guidance to businesses wishing to trade in a Covid -secure way and in accordance with the rules relating to tiers or the national lockdown. I am pleased to say that in general terms we have seen high levels of compliance with the regulations since my last report to Council. However, many more businesses are looking to continue trading in the current lockdown, which was not the experience during the first lockdown, therefore the teams are increasingly busy offering guidance on and interpreting the law as it applies this time around.
18. Our fire service continues to provide 'Safe and Well' checks and fire safety inspections are offered at home/business premises supported with telephone appointments. Fire service volunteers have also been trained to support IW Ambulance response, movement of the deceased and logistical support to health colleague with movement of equipment, personnel and vaccinators.

BUSINESS SUPPORT

19. Once again the national lockdown is 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 again 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. I can confirm that extra resources have already been deployed to support the council teams leading this work and we keep a keen eye on its progress.
20. I very much welcome the Chancellor's new scheme for the provision of top up grants for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses. These are worth up to £9,000 per property to help businesses through to the Spring and should help to protect this vital sector to the Island's economy so that it can stand back up quickly as soon as it is able.
21. Applications for all forms of grant funding went live on the council's website on Monday 11 January 2021 and we will be doing all that we can to make payments to businesses as soon as possible.
22. I am grateful to all those who supported the Island Gift Card project enabling islanders to support local businesses in the run up to Christmas, and beyond. The successful Christmas Pop up shop in Newport High St demonstrated what can be done to help respond to the changes our High Streets will face in the future if we all work together
23. Our Branstone Farm rural business project in partnership with Vectis housing begins on site this month creating new jobs and much needed affordable housing for islanders, having secured planning approval and UK government funding from the LEP and Homes England.

FERRIES

22. Officers continue to work with the Island ferry companies and the Department for Transport to maintain food, fuel, medical supplies and materials, access to mainland healthcare and provision for keyworkers traveling to support our community is as important in this national lockdown as it has been in the first two.
23. As the question has been asked many times, I will again state that the council has no power to prevent people from travelling on the ferries either to or from the Island. In general webinars with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, we have asked the government to consider widening the local authorities' powers to enforcing travel restrictions but have not yet has a positive reply. However, it should be noted that there are in the order of 34 exemptions from the current restrictions on travel

FINANCE

25. The Conservative administration continues to make to securing our financial future a key priority, doing all we can to keep our community safe and ensure businesses are supported wherever possible.

24. I can report that, prior to the introduction of the new national lockdown, the council's overall financial position had improved by £1m to a projected overspend of £6m in the current year. This may worsen, but the previous robust financial position of the council, has enabled the developed of a deficit reduction strategy will help us to see out the current financial year.
25. However, the challenges for 2021/22 remain and are heightened by the uncertainty about the medium to long term effects of the pandemic on the council's overall financial position.
26. The provisional local government financial settlement announced just before Christmas has made no significant difference to the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy which will require savings of £3.5m next year for the council to contain planned expenditure within its expected income.

ISLAND DEAL

27. As members know I have continued to press the case for an Island Deal and this is even more important following the recent announcements that the review of local authority funding has (the Fair Funding Review) has been further slipped to 2022/23 at the earliest.
28. I am pleased to inform council that, with the support of the Island's MP Bob Seely, a meeting has now been offered with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick MP, to discuss the case for an Island Deal. I will of course update members on the outcome of any meeting held as soon as I am able to do so.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

29. I am pleased to report that the workforce development service passed with flying colours its re-accreditation assessment against the national 'Matrix Standard' accreditation for information, advice and guidance services. This is a professional standard required for the delivery of the adult and community learning, but which has been adopted as a model of good practice by the whole learning and development team.
30. Impressive feedback from the assessor identified that he had heard "inspirational stories from learners about their experiences", that the "staff live and breathe the standard in their work".
31. The council received notification that it is one of only 12 councils who have met the cumulative public sector target for the number of new apprenticeships since 2017. This is an achievement that we are immensely proud to have met and will have long term benefits for our workforce development.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HOUSING NEEDS

32. I hope that Members will join with me in saying a huge thank you and well done to everyone that worked in our social care services over the Christmas period. It was I understand a very challenging period with a fast-changing number of people with covid-19, or self-isolating either as a colleague or someone we care for.

33. The adaptability, professionalism and all-round standards of care provided have been reported to me as of the very best. I must also include all of our partners in the independent and voluntary sectors who I know have all done sterling work to keep our communities safe at these most difficult of times.
34. Resources across both housing needs and adult social care continue to be targeted at addressing the surge in covid-19 cases across the island. The recent rise in numbers of people testing positive in our community has led to significant staffing pressures across the whole health and social care system with approximately one quarter of the workforce impacted and isolating.
35. In addition to the impact of the virus directly on services we are also seeing an upturn in care and support requirements as a result of the duration of the covid-19 response. Families and informal carers in our communities who have previously chosen not to access support are now approaching us seeking out our help. We have seen an increase in contacts across all service areas. As demand continues to increase staff are working harder than ever to ensure that people are safe and receive the care and support that they need. I thank them all for what they are doing in these difficult times.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

36. In the run up to Christmas our staff in Children's Services worked particularly hard to set up the new winter grants scheme, known as 'connect4communities' to ensure that children who are eligible for free school meals continue to receive help during holiday periods.
37. The scheme has already distributed £222,480 of funding to schools, colleges and early years settings for them to provide an estimated 5,590 children with vouchers. A range of other grants have also been processed for voluntary and community groups. I understand from Councillor Brading that some £145k was allocated into a grant pot to help smaller organisations that support Families and Young People at this difficult time. To date 10 grants totalling £56,600 have already been made and further bids are encouraged from community and charity organisations to use in helping people, especially families with children, to access necessities like food and fuel.
38. I also have to say a massive thank you to everyone involved with planning for and delivering the reopening of schools from Monday 4 January. It was a truly amazing effort from everyone involved and is a great testimony to their professionalism and dedication to doing the best for the Island's young people. They should all be rightly proud of their achievements.
39. Our teams also helped schools prepare to put in place the lateral flow testing scheme for secondary schools. The government's announcement of 4 January now means that schools will be open only to vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers. All other pupils will receive online teaching. The local authority has assisted schools in setting this arrangement up and are pleased children will continue to interact and learn. To support this the government in the summer term provided 800 Laptops, and subsidised data usage as required, and now in the new lockdown is supplying a further 780 laptops.

PAVEMENT PARKING

40. Following the motion passed at the last meeting of Full Council the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure has written to the Department for Transport on the subject of pavement parking. I have set out below the key element in the response to his letter:

“As you are aware the Department carried out a public consultation on possible solutions to the complex pavement parking problem. The consultation was launched on 31 August and ran until the 22 November. We have received over 15,000 responses. We are very appreciative and thankful for the number of responses we received to this consultation. This is an issue on which we are keen to hear a wide range of views. The Department is now carefully analysing the responses and the results will inform future policy decisions. Whichever solution is arrived at must allow for the needs of all road users in differing situations, while considering any environmental implications”.

41. We now await the impact of the consultation, including our contribution, to government policy.

Newport Junctions:

42. I am pleased to be able to report to Members the receipt of many positive comments following the completion of works to replace the roundabout at St Marys with a new ‘signal controlled’ junction. Works were delivered on time and within budget and have created new possibilities for future economic regeneration at the former Camp Hill prison site.
43. Following discussions with Newport and Carisbrooke Community Council and local ward councillors I am also pleased we have secured their support for the next phase of planned improvement works for Newport. This will see the addition of a third lane on the carriageway between Coppins Bridge and the roundabout adjacent to Matalan – referred to as St Georges Way. These works are expected to begin by the end of February and are programme to last for 20 weeks and we expect the outcome to further improve Road Infrastructure in Newport.

FUTURE LEADERSHIP STRATEGY

44. Under my leadership the Council’s Cabinet continues to provide strong and clear 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 budget requirements for next year. The need to deliver a lawful and balanced budget remain at the forefront of our minds and in due course proposals will be presented that will achieve this objective.

45. Meanwhile, keeping our community safe, taking steps to support the recovery of our economy by protecting existing jobs and creating new jobs in the face of a tide of increasing unemployment. In summary: strong leadership, keeping our community safe and regeneration of our economy underpinned by a sustainable financial strategy – these priorities remain the focus for this Council's Conservative led Administration.

COUNCILLOR DAVE STEWART

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships

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