



Committee: **FULL COUNCIL**

Date: **15 SEPTEMBER 2021**

Title: **LEADER'S UPDATE**

Report of: **LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

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1. Cabinet colleagues are continuing to get on top of their portfolios and are working hard with staff to identify how we can reshape some of the council's activities to meet the aspirations of the Alliance Administrations. As set out in the forward plan I expect this work to be summarised and published for discussion in a revised corporate plan in October.
2. I and my Cabinet remain committed to making decisions openly and explaining honestly to the public the immense challenges the council is facing. Councillors will note from the recent published forward plan that we have identified a significant amount of work to do.
3. We are still working under the covid-19 pandemic which brings an added dimension to how we must think about, and plan for, everything we want to do. The visitor economy is central to the Island's overall economic wellbeing so it is important that we have been able to welcome as many visitors as possible. I hope has provided enough trade to help our businesses recover and plan for the future.
4. As I write Almost 81 percent of Island residents over 18 years of age have now received both doses of vaccine (86% a single dose) but we still need to encourage those in the younger age groups (18 – 34 years) to have the vaccination; in the main this is the group of people most likely to be infected by the virus at this time. I hope that we will soon have some greater clarity from government about the booster vaccine and vaccines for those over 12 years of age.
5. It is clear that we are going to have to live with the threat of covid-19 for some time to come and in doing so everybody will need to think carefully about the personal activities they will undertake to keep themselves and those closest to them safe. The guidance is all there; vaccinations, testing, face coverings, social distancing, ventilation, good hand hygiene; the choice for us all is how we use it.
6. The Public Health team continues to lead the overall response to the covid-19 pandemic, monitoring the case numbers, checking for and managing outbreaks, providing information advice and guidance through, for example, a number of webinars for education settings in preparation for the start of term. It continues to

input to the shaping of the vaccination programme to encourage those least likely to take up the vaccine to do so.

7. Our 0-19 children's public health service is now bedding in after a year of the new service model and partnership with NHS Solent. We are improving the outcomes for children and families and supporting those impacted by covid measures. It is likely this service will be central to the roll out of covid-19 vaccinations to those of 12 years of age and older should the government choose to take this approach.
8. Much has been written in recent weeks about the national pressures on the health and social care system, but especially in adult social care. I recognise these challenges on the Isle of Wight and hope that the government may soon address them, although the response to my letter following the motion at the last meeting of the Full Council was less than helpful.
9. I am extremely grateful to everyone who has contributed to resolving some of the challenges faced by the Island at the end of August. This was only possible because of the good and strong partnerships between the council, local providers and health services which meant the Island was able to stay 'just ahead' of the pressures and keep people safe, but the situation remains exceptionally challenging.
10. Councillor Love continues to maintain a close involvement in monitoring the pressures experienced in the system and the council's response to them. Our care and support services, both internal and commissioned from the independent sector, continue to be stretched as a result of the same workforce pressures which are being seen nationally and an increased demand for support as we 'come out of' the pandemic. We have seen an increase in contacts across all service areas within adult social care and housing needs and as demand continues I am grateful to all our staff who continue to work around the clock to ensure that people are safe and receive the care and support that they need.
11. Our children and young people are now back at school and teachers and support staff are working hard to ensure that they will hopefully enjoy a less disrupted year in education. However, we remain watchful and our staff continue to advise and support schools whenever there is an issue. That support and advice happens around the clock and is not always visible but is vital in ensuring the smooth running of our education system on the Isle of Wight.
12. Since the last Full Council meeting our Children's Services social work teams received a focused visit from Ofsted looking at child protection arrangements. This was a routine but intensive check from Ofsted which does not result in a graded judgement but comments on a specific area of our work. I am pleased to say that Ofsted noted continued good progress from our previous inspection in late 2018 when our services were judged to be 'good' in all regards. This is an area of the council's activity that requires constant attention and I am grateful for the diligence of Councillor Andre in this regard. There is and always will be more to do but it is good to have external validation that we are continuing to do well in this vital area.
13. The council in partnership with Amey has recently run a very successful food waste road show and online campaign highlighting the importance of composting your food waste through weekly food waste collections. The events have been so popular

that additional days in Cowes, Yarmouth, Ventnor and Ryde have been added to the schedule. Our waste and recycling services are continuing to exceed their targets for recycling thanks to the excellent work of our community making sure the right things go in the right bins.

14. In the coming month many council facilities will be upgraded with low carbon heating systems and solar panels to help bring our estate closer to net-carbon zero and in support supporting our Mission Zero - Climate and Environment Strategy that will be coming to the Cabinet in October. This work is being funded by a £2.6m grant achieved by a collaboration of our climate change and property services teams who are now working hard to deliver these exciting projects.
15. As part of our sustainable transport aspirations works are shortly to begin to create a new, all-weather, shared-used path of approximately 1.2 kilometres long upgrading what is currently a largely gravel track between The Riverside Centre on Newport Harbour and Mews Lane on the Newport to Cowes cycleway. The project is funded through the government's Active Travel 2 and Local Transport Plan programmes and is supported by 84 percent of over 600 responses to a consultation exercise.
16. A further grant from the Department for Transport has been secured to increase local cycling and walking infrastructure plans in other locations across the Island in order to secure external funds and discussions with Town and Parish Councils will be starting shortly.
17. It was a relief to see the roadworks to widen St George's Way in Newport completed during August. I understand that, along with the works at the former St Mary's roundabout, these works should make an impact on the flow of traffic around the County Town. I am very much looking forward to seeing the impact of these works and know that Councillor Jordan will be monitoring their impact very closely.
18. The Alliance Administration is keen to address the lack of provision of affordable housing for Island residents, especially in making use of brownfield sites. Therefore, I am pleased that we have been able to make a bid for almost £1m to the government's brownfield land release fund. This will help in cleaning up and clearing council owned brownfield sites readying them for housing development. I am looking forward to a positive outcome of his bid very shortly.
19. I requested a visit to the Branstone Farm development site recently. Here forty two new affordable homes are coming out of the ground, new business units are being built alongside a new home for Goddards brewery. This project brings to life the Biosphere principles informing the Island regeneration programme with the work-live development being set in rewilded, biodiverse landscape. I hope that this model can be replaced in other schemes across the Island and I know Councillor Bacon will continue to champion the Biosphere Reserve as a catalyst for positive sustainable change.
20. It's been great to see our town centres and tourist areas recovering during the summer with many businesses reporting record turnover in recent weeks. The council's support for High Street recovery encouraging diverse uses such as arts and culture and themed markets through Heritage Action Zone funding has helped provide a glimpse of what the future role of our town centres might be as well as being

continued hubs for retail and commerce.

21. Councillor Julie Jones-Evans recommends the council's continued support for the tourism Business Improvement District (BID) as a vital means of securing the much needed funds to promote the Island to potential visitors. The Visit Isle of Wight BID ballot renewal process is underway for a further five year term for this valuable tourism promotion initiative. A successful BID will helping the Island compete for the "staycation pound" and I would encourage all those businesses who have a vote to use it.
  
22. The efforts of Councillor Ian Stephens has got our website redevelopment project back on track following its challenges during the pandemic. A new content management system will be ready to load with new content by the end of November 2021 which will allow for user review and content refinement in anticipation of a go live of a new website at the end of March 2022. Having a much better and easier to navigate website is important we must work harder to make it easier for the public to communicate with us so that the council can respond better to its wants and needs than ever before.

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