



Committee: **FULL COUNCIL**

Date: **17 NOVEMBER 2021**

Title: **LEADER'S UPDATE**

Report of: **LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

1. The Alliance Administration has come together to produce its corporate plan for the consideration of the council at its meeting today. The Alliance's aim is for the council to work together with our communities to support and sustain our economy, environment and people. We will do this by being community focused, effective, efficient and fair. We know that the Island has many challenges, but we are determined to tackle these and make a real difference to the lives of everyone in the community.
2. The Plan is about and for the Island, of which we are all a part. My Cabinet colleagues have worked closely with directors and the community to identify the fifty aspirations that we hope will make the difference to Island life. I look forward to your support for the Plan when we consider it later on the agenda at today's meeting.
3. The government's autumn budget and spending review was announced on 27 October but we will not hear what that means for the council in detail until December when the provisional local government finance settlement is announced. Whilst we do not yet know what the budget will mean for funding to the council, given the known and expected cost increases set out in the budget, we fully expect the next 3 years to remain financially challenging.
4. The budget confirmed an overall real terms increase in funding to local government of 3.7% on average over the next 3 years. The whole of the increase in funding will be front loaded and allocated in next financial year, meaning that in future years the only increase in funding to local government will come through council tax increases. For next year the government have also announced that the maximum council tax increase for general council services is 2.0% but with the ability to add a further 1% for a social care precept.
5. It should also be noted that the government has also set aside £5.4bn over the next 3 years to meet the impact of social care reforms due to be implemented in October 2023 relating to the cap on personal care costs and changes to the means test.
6. There has been an awful lot of commentary and discussion about the government's proposals for County Deals as a method for devolving powers and responsibility from

central to local government. This is intended to be covered in the government's levelling up bill, which was due for publication in the autumn but is now delayed following the change in Secretary of State.

7. We have taken the view that this council should wait and see what the new bill says before investing time and effort in developing proposals which may then be out of line with the government's thinking. I am keen that our limited staff resources are focused on delivering the aspirations in the corporate plan. We will continue to liaise with other local authorities across the region to understand their thoughts about the art of the possible. Always remembering that the government expects a 'deal' so if we get something from government, we would be expected to give something in return.
8. We were pleased to receive confirmation of £5.8m funding from the governments levelling up fund for the East Cowes Marine Hub project. The combination of public sector, private sector and the charitable third sector partners developed the proposal with the support of the Island's MP and the local community were clearly important ingredients in getting the funding. The project is expected to support 106 new jobs through renovated employment floorspace, 32 new sailing academy jobs and 10 apprenticeships.
9. The project is one of just over 100 successful bids supported in the first round of levelling up funding, with no indication of when a second round may happen. It was led by our Regeneration directorate and I want to thank all those who worked hard in scoping and preparing it. We will ensure that the project has good oversight to ensure everyone's hopes and expectations are achieved and the proposed outputs are delivered.
10. I recently wrote to the then Secretary of State of for Housing Communities and Local Government in early September when I raised issues about the number of homes the government required in the new Island Planning Strategy and the negative impacts of the presumption in favour of development on securing the right mix and tenure of homes built on the Island. I have just received a response from the new Minister of State for Housing which in summary suggests that that:
 - "It will be for the Inspector appointed to examine the Local Plan to assess the evidence provided by the council and to decide whether these [exceptional] factors could amount to constraints which would prevent the Isle of Wight from meeting its full housing needs"
 - "Having an effective, up to date plan is the best way to protect an area from unplanned development [on the basis of a presumption in favour of sustainable development]"

I will share this correspondence with councillors following the meeting.

11. I am pleased to record that Broadlea Primary School was inspected by Ofsted earlier this term and has improved from requiring improvement to good in all areas. I would like to place on record my thanks to the governors, the headteacher, all the school staff and our school improvement team for this achievement. We want to see a higher proportion of schools judged good or better by Ofsted and this outcome will be much welcomed by children, parents and the local community.

12. At the time of writing the Leaders of the world are gathered in Glasgow for COP26, working to an ambition of the world to be net carbon zero by 2050. As councillors will be aware we have recently adopted a climate strategy with an aspiration for the Isle of Wight to be net carbon zero by 2040. We will work to help our community meet the challenges of climate change and in so also aim to improve the overall health and wellbeing of our community by taking actions to provide warmer well insulated homes to reduce fuel poverty, cleaner air through lower transport emissions, and improved mental health from connecting with the outdoors.
13. However, we also understand that it helps to know what small changes everyone can make now to help reduce carbon emissions at home and increase our community wellbeing. Small changes we can all make now include, switch off tv's, monitors and game stations at the mains rather than leave on standby, reduce you water by use taking showers and not leaving the tap running, where possible walk or use public transport, reduce your waste by thinking about packaging when you go shopping pick card or loose items over plastic and make a change to buy recycled and recyclable cards, wrapping paper and presents. We should also look to only buy the food we need, I understand that forty percent of all food purchases is wasted, so this small change could make a significant impact on our individual carbon footprints.
14. We aim to set out these practical tips and much more in the Mission Zero Hub to be launched in the spring. It will be a resource of information, guidance, help and actions to enable and support the whole community to grow stronger together in adapting to a changing climate.
15. As part of our climate change strategy we are reviewing all of the council's investments with a view to ceasing any investment in carbon producing activities. This includes the pension fund and its investments which the council manages on behalf of its members in a responsible fashion and in which it has a duty to maintain the viability and sustainability of the fund at times. The council is already progressing work to evaluate the current carbon footprint of the pension fund and once this has been established the Pension Fund Committee will consider all the options available on how best to reduce the fund's carbon footprint. The aim is to cease such investments as soon as practically possible.
16. With winter and frosty mornings approaching we will soon be reminding our community how we can all help reduce waste and have a sustainable Christmas. We will be encouraging people to shop locally and support businesses to remain on our high streets and grow. Also to support local farmers this winter and reduce the carbon impact of Christmas meals by buying locally grown and reared food this winter – less miles, less plastic, lovely food and reduced waste. We will be providing out usual level of support to small business Saturday which takes places on 4 December.
17. Recycling our food waste has great environmental benefits as it is used in an anaerobic digester to create electricity and compost for agricultural land. Over the summer the waste teams have been reminding residents to make use of the weekly food waste service, if you know of anyone that does not have a food caddy, they can order one for free either online or via the council's call centre.

18. Between July and October this year the council was able to employ additional staff under the banner of the government's Welcome Back Fund. The staff were tasked with ensuring the standards of the public realm were maintained to the highest of standards, especially in our resort areas. In addition, the frequency of bin emptying in our major resort towns was increased as was the frequency of litter picks on some of our beaches. This level of activity would not have been possible without this funding stream. Whilst the overall impact of the programme is still to be evaluated, I hope it has been well received and made a positive impact during a very busy tourist season. It would be beneficial if the government could continue to see its way to making similar funding in future years, but probably very unlikely!
19. Since the last meeting of Full Council, the rate of covid-19 cases on the Isle of Wight reached a very disappointing but significant high of 562 per 100,00 population, primarily driven by a large number of cases amongst those 10 to 14 years of age. As I write the overall figure has reduced to 365 per 100,000 population (as at 3 November) and is now below the UK average of 391 per 100,000. As we heard at the recent meeting of the Local Outbreak Engagement Board, the still relatively high case rate is generally thought to be due to community spread, mostly within households.
20. The fact that we are out of lockdown and able to live our lives more freely is in no small part down to the impact of the vaccination programme, but we should remember that even being double jabbed does not guarantee a person will not catch the virus. In many cases their symptoms will be less severe than if they were not vaccinated, but it is still something to be avoided and it is quite possible to pass the virus on if you do not follow the rules on self-isolation. So, I would again urge everyone in our community to make good choices when you are out and about this autumn, all the good behaviours that helped us through the lockdowns are as relevant now as they ever were. So please continue to think hands, face, space, get a vaccination (or booster) if offered and protect others as well as yourself. The government's plan B would see a return to mandatory face coverings in public places and the introduction of covid passports in some venues.
21. Please remember that all the updated advice and guidance on COVID can be found at www.keeptheislandsafe.org
22. Helping to improve people's mental health and resilience as we come out of the pandemic is an important aspiration for the Alliance Administration. I am grateful for the work that Councillor Michael Lilley is leading in this regard as the Mental Health Champion. I was also pleased to hear that the results of a recent multi-agency workshop held by the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Partnership have been shared amongst partners and are being used alongside work on children and adult's mental health needs assessments to inform the adults Mental Health strategy due next year.
23. Following a presentation to the Health and Wellbeing Board Energise Me held a multi-agency workshop to identify gaps and priorities in work to increase physical activity, active travel and actively moving when engaging in arts and culture activities as a route to improving a person's overall wellbeing. The results of the workshop are informing children's and adults' physical activity and health lifestyles strategies that are in development.

24. Despite significant pressures across the health and care system our internal care homes, home care services and Wightcare continue to perform well focusing on meeting the needs of our local residents. The Gouldings has recently received its report and rating following the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) Inspection and now being rated as 'good'. Thanks and well done to all of the staff working there for achieving this rating during the most difficult of times.
25. Adult Social Care continues to work closely with local NHS partners in supporting people's swift and safe discharge from hospital but the continued workforce challenges for local independent sector provider partners is creating pressure. We are doing much joint work to encourage people to come and work in the sector including some introductory training courses in association with Isle of Wight College.
26. Our Housing Needs service continues to provide a considered response in highly challenging circumstances. We have and continue to experience an increase in numbers of households and single people approaching the service as homeless or at risk of homelessness and this is being managed within existing resources.
27. The adult and community learning awards evening took place on 6 October which as always provided many inspirational stories from those who had participated in the programmes of learning and gained new skills that they did not expect to possess at the start and often overcoming significant barriers as a result. The evening was attended by Councillor Debbie Andre as the portfolio lead for skills and learning and who was delighted to be part of the event and gave her congratulations to all those who received awards.
28. The council has, each year, to undertake a significant and stringent exercise to demonstrate to central government that its ICT infrastructure is secure and is being managed robustly to maintain the security of the data and information it holds whilst using the public services network (PSN). This work has resulted in the achievement of the full compliance certificate for the next twelve months.
29. The partnership work of the council's hospital discharge team was recently recognised when it was highly commended at the Municipal Journal Awards. The introduction of the discharge facilitation service and an integrated discharge team has enabled a system wide response to a wicked problem. The integration is not limited to statutory partners and includes support from our local voluntary sector and our independent sector. This is welcome recognition for the work of the whole system and I would add my congratulations and to all involved.
30. As this will be our last Full Council meeting before Christmas can I take this opportunity to wish you all much laughter and rest over Christmas and good health and prosperity for 2022

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