



Committee: **FULL COUNCIL**

Date: **19 JANUARY 2022**

Title: **LEADER'S UPDATE**

Report of: **LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

1. Here's to our good health and prosperity in 2022! Let's hope it is kinder to us all. I hope that you all had an enjoyable festive break and managed to spend quality time with family, over what I know can be a busy period.
2. Congratulations to Ian Lloyd, Strategic Manager for Partnerships and Support Services in Adult Social Care on his award of the British Empire Medal (BEM) for his work with the council's covid-19 helpline and 26-strong community hub response throughout the covid-19 pandemic. This is well deserved recognition for all of Ian's hard work, and I know he considers it to be recognition for the work of everyone involved (and so do I!) with the programme, which he values most highly. Well done Ian and the entire 26 hubs and their volunteers.
3. I hope Council will join with me in recognising and thanking all of our staff for the 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 continue to respond to in a professional and diligent manner and I know they will do so for as long as is necessary. I am really conscious of the pressures across the social care sector and also in schools and have to acknowledge the work being done in these settings to keep people safe and our children educated
4. The emergence of the omicron variant of covid-19 has brought significant new challenges to our community and the continued delivery of our services. With an increase in cases we have supported access to testing and ensured those that needed contact tracing and support are contacted in a very timely way. Covid Support Officers are supporting business and have been active in promoting the use of lateral flow testing in the past few weeks. They made some important deliveries of test kits to local pharmacies in the days before Christmas, following a failure in the national supply chain. Our communications work has promoted personal responsibility and the good behaviours necessary to keep ourselves and each other safe from the virus.
5. As I write, the Island's seven day rate of cases per 100,000 population is amongst the lowest in the UK but is increasing rapidly, and we know from previous waves of the pandemic, that our case rates tend to lag the mainland by about two weeks. So,

our need to be ever vigilant for our wellbeing and that of friends and family remains.

6. Our Adult Social Care and Housing Needs services are under significant pressure both within the council and across the independent and voluntary sectors. Staff shortages linked to levels of vacancies, annual leave and sickness challenge not only our internal services but our care home, home care and housing partners on a regular basis. We continue to be very grateful to our local care and support providers, their staff, health colleagues and the Island's many informal and family carers for their dedication, commitment, and hard work through the pandemic – what they do to support our most vulnerable residents really matters. We remain committed to supporting them and to working with them to ensure that people are safe and well cared for.
7. The NHS roll out of booster vaccines before Christmas looks to be an important response to the variant especially in preventing people becoming seriously ill as a result. I understand that some 84% of eligible Island residents have now received their booster which is good, but I hope that more people will be encouraged to get a booster and indeed get a vaccine shot if they have not already had one. Councillors will be aware that this is a particularly testing time of year for St Mary's Hospital (and indeed all hospitals) so anything we can do to prevent ourselves from having to go to hospital keeps beds free for those that really need them.
8. All the updated advice and guidance on COVID can be found at: www.keeptheislandsafe.org
9. The government published the details of its [Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant](#) (OHLG) scheme (for leisure and accommodation businesses) on 30 December and council staff have been working to introduce systems for applications to be received as quickly as possible, details will be available on the council's website no later than the week commencing 17 January 2022. This is a mandatory grant to businesses in qualifying premises set out in the guidance based on rateable value. As such no "decision" has to be taken to make a payment only that businesses complete an application form and submit the required information. The final date for receipt of an application is 28 February 2022. I am sure that few businesses will need any encouragement to apply but would encourage them to all do so.
10. The government has also announced an extension to its Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) fund to support businesses that cannot access the OHLG grant funding. As with the existing ARG it is for the council to determine eligibility for this funding but it cannot be used for wider business support activities and must go to individual businesses. Funding will be allocated in one off grants and, at the time of writing, the council is still to receive confirmation of the amount of funding it will have to distribute but it is expected to be in the region of £200,000. The amount of individual grant is at the council's discretion. The council expects to be able to receive applications for this grant from 24 January with a closing date of 28 February 2022, to ensure the final allocation of these limited funds is achieved as quickly as possible.
11. Council may also be interested to know that it has also been possible, using Contain Outbreak Management Funding (COMF) for the Regulatory Services team to support businesses required to put in place a covid certification scheme for their patrons. This support is also open to certain businesses /events who wish to put in a voluntary

scheme. Any enquiries should be directed to covidregs@iow.gov.uk.

- 12 Funding of £160,000 has also been secured by Children's Services through the Regional Covid Recovery fund for additional family support workers in Family Centres and is being specifically used to support families impacted by the pandemic. Recognition of the success of the Isle of Wight Family Hub model has come in the secondment of one of the council's service managers to be a regional co-ordinator supporting local authorities across the South east in developing their Family Hubs.
- 13 The latest [consultation](#) on the budget for 2022/23 closes on the 21 January and will be important in finalising the proposals that will be coming to Cabinet and then Full Council in February. Our initial appraisal of the government's provisional local government finance settlement is that the council will be no worse/better off than planned. The additional money the government is providing local government overall, will only just about be sufficient to match the additional expected costs we have to face in the coming year. The settlement is also only for one year again and not multi years as had been expected. This is thought necessary to allow the government time to look again at its 'fair funding' review of local government.
- 14 Conversations are still ongoing with government officials about the need for a specific 'Island deal' in the final funding settlement (due at the beginning of February) and work has been presented at the government's request to:
 - a. Review the evidence for the additional costs facing the Isle of Wight due to physical separation from the mainland
 - b. Identify how these costs could be reflected in the local government funding system
- 15 I mentioned the government's proposals for County Deals as a method for devolving powers and responsibility from central to local government in my previous report. I can confirm that the promised levelling up bill is still to be published by the government although indications are that it may be come out in January. We continue to liaise with other local authorities across the region to understand their thoughts in any levelling up proposals; but for now the focus of the Alliance Administration is in making the best of what is in our control for the benefit of the Island.
- 16 I submitted the application for Newport and Carisbrooke to be awarded city status last month as part of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee year celebrations. The case made for Newport and Carisbrooke as the Island's capital which highlighted its important economic and civic role, its heritage and royal connections, was extremely good. The plans for regeneration of Newport harbour will gain a significant boost should the bid be successful, and the wider confidence and profile a successful bid will bring to the Island should not be underestimated.
- 17 I am sure that the Adult and Community Learning Service's recent initiative, working with partners, to support 10 places on an HGV driver theory course reflects the quality of its work to the Matrix Standard. This project includes employability support, facilitating the required medical and achievement of the theory test. This course enables progression to the practical test to gain the full Driver Certificate of Professional Competence and may lead to apprenticeship opportunities or a Skills Bootcamp with Qube Learning (up to 16 weeks training leading to a job interview).

The 10 places have been recruited through Job Centre Plus and the scheme is now oversubscribed.

18. Council staff continue to monitor the national situation in respect of Avian Bird Flu and following recent confirmed cases on the mainland advice has been provided to domestic and commercial bird keepers through the media and in correspondence.
19. Since May of last year the Alliance Administration has built foundations from which the council can continue to build in the year ahead. The path will not be easy, as we continue to deal with the challenges of covid-19 and the scarcity of resources, but we have the people across the council (and Island!) to make the difference we all so much want to see for us all, on our precious Island.

COUNCILLOR LORA PEACEY WILCOX

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships

821000 | e-mail lora.peacey-wilcox@iow.gov.uk