



Committee: **FULL COUNCIL**

Date: **5 OCTOBER 2022**

Title: **LEADER'S UPDATE**

Report of: **LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

We have spoken this evening of our Queens passing. For me, having known no other, HM Queen Elizabeth will be forever my Queen. I send strength, love and prayers to the royal family at this time of deep sadness. I wish a long and healthy life to Our King, Charles III.

Work continues on the improvements to the transport hub at Ryde. The initial phase of work has diverted the pedestrian route and the segregated cycle route is now largely complete. Progress has been slower than anticipated but routes are now open and final surfacing is scheduled toward the end of the project.

Most of the works fronting the Rose Garden and La bowl together with the works in Western Gardens were completed prior to the world renowned scooter rally at the end of August.

We know that there has been issues with vandalism of the temporary toilets and we remain committed to ensuring that these facilities remain available.

Within Regulatory Services our covid support officers have completed their contracts. In their time with the council, they dealt with over 1800 requests for assistance; 2000 visits to business, schools, and public areas; manned 92 pop up locations to distribute test kits; updated the website and delivered webinars and supported the regulatory teams with surveillance and intelligence visits. I wish to extend my personal thanks and thanks from the council and all islanders for their work in keeping our communities safe.

The regenerations projects at East Cowes, Branstone, and the new innovation wight business centre will see new jobs and homes being created following their completion in the coming weeks and months. I attended the first community open day at Branstone at the end of August and look forward to meeting the new residents and businesses that will call this new development home. The project has been shortlisted for a regional construction project of the year award. I sincerely thank all of those who we have worked across multiple organisations to make these projects successful.

Our focus remains provision of housing for those islanders in need of affordable accommodation. While it really was a relief to see over 200 affordable homes completed and commenced during our time in administration; demand continues to outstrip supply so we will continue to do all we can to help to continue to support new housing.

The proportion of schools judged good or better by Ofsted during the 21/22 academic year continues to rise from 74% to 79%. That's three more judged good - well done to Broadlea Primary, St Frances Primary Academy and Chillerton and Rookley Primary.

The summer has seen the holiday activities and food programme. There have been nine providers operating on the Island this summer, delivery holiday activity and food schemes across 14 sites. 7,956 HAF - scheme places were awarded for summer provision, and attendance data provided to date suggests attendance of at least 81% against bookings, therefore projecting a take up of 6,444 places. This equates to between 1,100 and - 1,400 unique children.

Council officers undertook monitoring of all provision over the summer to ensure quality services were being delivered and identified pockets of excellent practices across the eight HAF standards. For example, West Wight Nursery discovered that a significant number of children attended in their scheme could not swim, and therefore they have organised swimming lessons for them. Massive Well done West Wight!!

There is an excellent breadth of formal and informal activities being delivered across the island that take advantage of the natural assets of the area., e.g. arts and crafts, cooking, animal husbandry, music, and trips to beach, sport centres etc. I am really pleased that we have been able to work with so many different partners across the Island. The HAF programme has helped established new partnerships and good practise, such as a new relationship between two HAF providers whereby one provides hot food to the other, YMCA to Scallywags.

Preparations are now underway for the new Christmas HAF schemes! My sincere thanks to all staff and volunteers who continue to help and support our Island families.

At the end of August the council tax team have processed 50,093 energy rebate payments to council taxpayers who reside in properties banded A-D. Again, well done to those staff that have worked tirelessly to achieve this.

The Government has announced the roll out of a further household support fund (HSF) to commence from 1st October which will provide a wider range of support for households including energy bills, housing costs, and food vouchers. This will replace the current HSF grant which is being utilised to administer food vouchers to those residents in receipt of Local Council Tax Support. As at 31st August the benefits team have processed 2609 applications resulting in 1391 vouchers being issued to resident. Against, further work is now being undertaken to target those eligible pensioners who have not applied to ensure the funding spend is maximised. It is important to stress, this funding is now included for pensioners to apply.

We are all aware of what will be the most difficult winter; the council will continue to work with all agencies and our town, community and parish councils to ensure people have access to the advice and support they need to cope with the impact of the increasing cost of living by ensuring the best possible signposting and support for the help they might need.

A difficult time for many of our residents, please lets all work together to support our island people.