

Cabinet Lead Reports – Full Council 23 September 2020

Councillor Michael Wilson

Leader of the Council

Corporate Strategy

It goes without saying that the Covid 19 Pandemic has placed considerable pressure on the authority. As I write, we are facing the imposition of further restrictions.

In conjunction with our public sector colleagues, we have made preparations for a second wave. As part of the preparation, I was keen for our response to date to be considered by scrutiny to identify important lessons learnt and take on board any member recommendations and the scrutiny process is ongoing.

I am proud of the work of the authority in the face of those pressures and would particularly wish to highlight the following:

- The Council has played an essential role in supporting the area through the Covid-19 pandemic. Our staff made over 5,000 calls to vulnerable people in the borough to offer support.
- We distributed over £14m of Government grants to assist more than 1,000 local businesses. Teams provided advice on available business support, new public health regulations, reopening high streets and more
- The Housing Team worked with 130 households facing homelessness, offering accommodation regardless of whether a legal duty was owed to them. We set up the Local Resource Centre which delivered food parcels to those in need and took calls from the vulnerable.
- A rapid transition to remote working for more than 90% of staff occurred following Government instructions to work from home where possible with the deployment of spare IT kit and tools such as Skype for Business. Virtual Cabinet and Committee meetings were facilitated from May onwards.
- A staff welfare survey found that 73% of staff were comfortable with the new working arrangements.
- The HR admin, payroll and finance services were brought back inhouse with minimal disruption at the start of April, despite being in the midst of a global pandemic with unprecedented pressure on local authorities.
- We approved our new Digital Strategy to assist with becoming a digital by default Council.

As we look to recovery, our response is informed by these key themes:

- An environmentally aware and cleaner borough
- A safe environment, healthier and more active residents
- A thriving local economy

- A revitalised borough with infrastructure that meets our ambitions
- A sustainable Council
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External Relations

BBC South Today interview – 27th February re West Beach

Remedial works were carried out at West Beach to remove failing revetments as part of the strategy re-endorsed in 2012. I was interviewed on BBC South Today to discuss residents' concerns with regard to beach erosion and realignment and the reasoning behind the Council's approach.

I take part in weekly District Council Network (DCN) Conference calls which have inevitably concentrated on aspects of the pandemic including updated public information. Latterly the calls have focused on issues such as Government financial support to replace lost income over the period, expenses due to the pandemic and recovery. Also the district view of the Government's White Paper with regard to devolution and uniterisation.

Solent Leaders Forum on 9th April

There was concern from all that the current grants, although very welcomed, left out numerous businesses. The guidance for Councils as currently written, specifically excludes many businesses, including hereditaments that are being used for the provision of the following services.

It was agreed that a letter should be sent to the relevant Secretaries of State identifying where there were gaps in the level of financial support. It was further agreed that the letter should be short, with a specific ask. It was also agreed that the letter should be shared with the local MPs. The Solent LEP wanted to also support this letter. A request was also made to share with Enterprise M3 and their local authorities.

8th July - BBC South Today interview

I met with Radio Solent on Hayling Seafront to discuss the potential for banning horse riding on Hayling sea front. This has been prompted by public concern regarding inconsiderate use of the beach by horse riders at times of high public use for other forms of recreation. This has prompted a review. The Council's approach the by-laws having last been updated in 1990. The growth of "staycations" and the good weather meant increasing numbers using the facilities for swimming and sunbathing, often at odds with the requirements of riders. We are currently in contact with the British Horse Society to work on possible solutions of the issue and whether there is any need to make amendments to those by-laws.

1) Safety is the paramount concern. Due to the irresponsible actions of a few horse-riders we think beach visitors are being put at risk of an accident. (Incidents include riding without safety equipment, hard hats or saddles, outside the permitted times, riding near families/children)

2) We are appealing for horse-riders to behave responsibly when riding on Hayling beach. We do not want to make amendments to by-laws, we want people to behave reasonably.

3) The unfortunate scenes on Hayling beach over recent weeks has led to us looking into the situation with the by-laws and we are discussing what action can and should be taken to keep everyone at the beach safe.

4) We are already in touch with the British Horse Society and we are working on possible solutions to this issue together.

2050 Partnership meeting – 21st July

A number of regeneration projects are underway across the region: the Hampshire Initiative is one such project of which we are supportive, the main focus is:

- Rebuilding a more sustainable economy.
- Cutting air pollution and promoting active travel.
- Creating greener, digitally connected homes.
- Supporting the vulnerable.
- Promoting the natural environment

As will be apparent the aspirations fit with our own corporate strategy and plans for our own authority responsibility.

Corporate Performance

Regeneration

While Covid has caused inevitable delays due to nervousness in the property and investment market, the Regeneration South team continues to work on bringing forward the objectives of the adopted Regeneration Strategy.

In the short term the team is working closely with Economic Development to support businesses through the immediate economic impact of Covid, including the distribution of government grants and liaising with businesses to understand the pressures.

We are now undergoing a process of revisiting the priorities of the Regeneration Programme to ensure that the outcomes will meet the changes social and economic needs.

An example of this is the continued monitoring of the Meridian Centre management now that the Council is the owner. The management will be focussed on stimulating safe activity that both protects the Council's asset and benefits the economy of the Town Centre.

The Regeneration team has been closely engaged with the Local Enterprise Partnership and Hampshire County Council on the production of the Local Infrastructure Investment Plan to ensure that the foundations of the economy are in place for a sustainable future

In July I attended a visit to Waterlooville Town Centre with Flick Drummond MP where we discussed a future architectural vision for the Town Centre. Flick is raising the funds to produce a detailed masterplan. The regeneration team will be working closely with Flick to ensure that the plan is both ambitious but realistic and deliverable.

Planning Awards 2020

It was a great honour for the Havant Regeneration team to be shortlisted at this year's National Planning Awards in the category of Award for Use of New Technology in Planning, in respect of the innovative and exciting video we launched earlier this year to show our ambitions for Havant Town Centre. The awards were held 'virtually' for the first time and while the team wasn't a winner this year, it is a huge accolade to be a finalist and to receive recognition from both their peers and the industry.

Economy

Coronavirus Business grants

The coronavirus-related business grants schemes that have been run by the council (Small Business grants; Retail, Hospitality and Leisure grants; and Local Authority Discretionary Fund grants) have now closed. We have now issued more than £16.4 million in grants to 1,372 businesses in the borough (25 August 2020) through the Small Business and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure schemes. Responding to the needs of business, the fourth and final round of coronavirus-related discretionary grants, to include home-based business, closed on Thursday 27 August and the council is now working to issue grants to eligible businesses.

Inward Investment – Dunsbury Park

Portsmouth City Council have recently announced a major new tenant for Dunsbury Park. Bio Pure Technologies Ltd, part of global award-winning engineering company Watson-Marlow Fluid Technology Group will create 120 new jobs initially with further expansion potential in later phases of the project. Work will commence shortly on the construction of a new 120,000 sq ft manufacturing facility with the aim that the building will be ready for production in 2022. Supported by Havant BC, this new inward investment represents very positive news which represents clear confidence in the Havant industrial market and will make a key contribution to the Borough's economic recovery. Bio Pure will join FatFace, DPD and VW Breeze who are already located at Dunsbury Park.

Havant Business Partnership – virtual event

The next Havant Business Partnership takes place as a virtual event on 30 Sept 2020. Hosted by Gill Kneller and myself, the meeting will provide an opportunity for leading businesses in the Borough to share their experiences of the impact the Covid-19 outbreak has had on their business and the wider economy and support requirements moving forward. This represents a key opportunity to gain valuable intelligence from the business community to help shape our wider economic recovery plans.

You're a star – first ever virtual awards – these took place on 22nd June to thank and celebrate the work of our colleagues including innovative approaches during this period. I am looking forward to presenting further awards on Wednesday 16th September which will be the second virtual awards.

Councillor Michael Wilson