

Cabinet Lead Reports – Full Council 16 June 2021

Councillor Alex Rennie

Leader of the Council

During Annual Council I was able to set out some of my plans and ambitions as Leader for the coming months.

Key to this is driving forward the regeneration agenda. Work is underway to submit a bid to the Levelling Up Fund to provide funds so we can attempt to turn our masterplan vision for Havant Town Centre into reality.

To support this bid, I made a delegated decision in relation to allowing the Council to allocate match-funding from our reserves. This would only be used in the circumstances of a successful bid and would still need Cabinet approval before being spent.

Meanwhile, we are also working on a separate vision for Hayling Seafront, alongside Cllr Satchwell and Cllr Pike, safeguarding it as a tourist destination and as a wonderful location enjoyed all year round by residents. I look forward to sharing those exciting plans with residents in the months ahead.

I was also pleased to meet with Flick Drummond MP last week, to hear about her ideas for regeneration in Waterlooville, which I hope we can explore in more detail to bring to fruition. This includes the potential for a second Levelling Up Fund bid, in a later round, for the Meon Valley constituency being used for Waterlooville.

Boundary Commission Review

I have held several meetings with Brian Wood and Members regarding the Boundary Commission Review into Havant. We have agreed to work on a cross party submission on the first part of the review, which decides Councillor numbers, with opposition Members. This is data driven and therefore work is being undertaken to establish whether we have the correct number of Councillors for our current committee structure.

External Relations

Solent Freeport

Cllr Wilson has kindly agreed to continue his work as Chairman of the Governance Task and Finish Group for the Solent Freeport. I have also appointed Cllr Bains to be the HBC Director of the Freeport Consortium Board.

Corporate Strategy & Corporate Performance

Our key corporate projects are progressing as per the approved strategies at Full Council.

Some of our key performance indicators (KPIs) have, though, been affected by further national lockdowns and the ongoing economic impact of Covid-19 during Q4. This particularly impacted on those relating to car parking income, council tax collection rates, business rates collections, and number of affordable homes delivered, which all came in under target. In addition, spikes in call numbers relating to garden waste renewals and annual billing had an adverse effect on call response times in the contact centre. However, targets were achieved for homelessness prevention, processing of planning applications, and benefits processing times, while the majority of teams continued to work from home.

Sickness rates have increased in Q4 to 2.3 days per FTE, which is equivalent to the public sector average. Our staff turnover rate remains low.

Digital Strategy – Portfolio Holder Report

We are now preparing to make more use of Microsoft365 tools, starting with the launch of a new Sharepoint Intranet (Skoop+) which is accessible from any device. This offers greater flexibility when accessing corporate information and forms and fits with our way of working. In the coming months more work will be taken forward to prepare for the corporate-wide use of Sharepoint.

Other plans underway are the use of MS Power Platform to improve how we use data and how to join up systems to improve the customer experience. All these tools combine to create more efficient and innovative ways of working.

An important IT Services project to unlock this potential is also now underway, which will see our Microsoft network redesigned, providing Havant with more control over digital design.

Additional plans surrounding digital also include a review of options for Councillors' IT, as part of a project focusing on digital democracy, which I will update on in the coming months.

Communications – Portfolio Holder Report

Planning Award

The team was instrumental in developing and submitting a bid to the prestigious Planning Awards, based around the council's nutrient mitigation scheme and the Warblington Farm nature reserve. Submitted under the *Award for Planning for the Natural Environment*, the council was successfully shortlisted. The award will be announced over a two-day event held on 9th and 10th June.

The visibility achieved through the awards highlights not only our environmental credentials, but also that the borough is open for business and for investment from developers.

Resident and business updates

We have successfully supported grant delivery for the Restart grant and additional restriction grant schemes through an email bulletin campaign to businesses that had previously been awarded grants during the pandemic. Alongside the continuing 'stay safe, shop local' campaign, which is live across the borough, the communications team is developing a campaign for the Welcome Back Fund which will begin in June.

We have continued to provide residents with council updates and information with our regular magazine-style bulletins.

Record numbers use council website

Over the last few years, the Havant Borough Council website has excelled as the main form of communication for the council.

Six years ago, when we started recording numbers, the website averaged 350,000 visits a year. In the most recent year, the website was visited over 1 million times. This means that users are visiting the website more frequently to access services and information online.

Website information

Following the coronavirus, the website has been in huge demand as residents and businesses look for key information such as service updates, business support and help for vulnerable people.

The website was mainly viewed from Havant and Portsmouth.

The most visited service areas were bin collections, coronavirus support information (including grants) and planning applications.

Accessibility update

New accessibility regulations came into force in September 2020 which ensures the website can be used by as many people as possible.

The last accessibility test was on Tuesday 11 May 2021. The test was carried out by [Site Improve](#) who gave this website an accessibility score of 98.1/100.

Website improvements

- A new cookie compliance tool has been added to the website to give users more control over the information they share when using our

website. The tool can be found in the bottom left hand corner of the website.

- We have improved the search function on the website so it delivers better results to the user. This has been done by inserting new tags on page content to deliver better results.
- A new website popup has been created on the homepage to encourage users to sign up to our newsletters and service updates. The user can add their email address to the popup and be instantly signed up.

Social media

At the end of 2020-21, we saw growth in following and engagement across all of our social media channels, especially due to the pandemic and more people heading online to receive updates from the council. We have shared a range of messages, including public health information, lockdown guidance, as well as business as usual content such as service updates and bin collections.

The council Facebook page gained 1,400 new followers (averaging 116 each month) giving us a total of 5,513 followers.

The council Instagram account which was set up last year has gained 475 new followers, giving us a total of 1,040 followers.

There were also similar trends with Twitter and LinkedIn.