

LEADER'S REPORT

November has been an important month of Remembrance especially as we marked the centenary of the end of World War I. On behalf of the County Council on Remembrance Sunday, I laid a wreath at the War Memorial at Winchester Cathedral. I am aware most members were present at parades and events in their own Divisions.

On Friday 9th November there was a memorial event in the Great Hall with the Winchester Military Wives Choir and Chamber Choir of Peter Symonds College.

The Remembrance season included special concerts at Royal Victoria Country Park Netley and at Romsey Abbey the latter attended by the Lord Lieutenant. At both events there were French and German guests in attendance. I know many councillors attended those concerts.

The County Youth Orchestra of which we can be justly proud repeated their performance of Mozart's Requiem last Saturday in Winchester's twin town of Giessen. I was privileged to be invited to hear our Hampshire orchestra joined by a German choir.

I pay tribute to the Hampshire Music Service and the work they do across the County.

The week before last I attended the NCAS conference in Manchester and last week I was at the CCN conference in Guildford. At both conferences the point was made very clear that upper tier councils are facing huge funding pressures with escalating social care costs. Children's Care costs increasing at the fastest rate. Hampshire suffers from these pressures as much as other councils but because we have faced up to these pressures earlier than most as well as having the scale and capacity to handle pressures it is clear we are faring better than most.

Members will know I have alerted the PM to these problems. I have also corresponded with Treasury ministers and had face to face meetings with MHCLG ministers including the secretary of state. I am sure they get the message although they may be somewhat distracted by other pressures and also the competing demands on public funds for other important services such as health, police, pensions and social security not to mention defence. It is also clear the best thing the Chancellor can do to help the quality of life of all residents is to run a sound economy. We want no more letters from ex Ministers saying "there is no money left".

The week before last there was a meeting of the Hampshire Partnership where we updated partners on the work of the Hampshire Commission 2050. I encourage all councillors to follow the work of the Commission and make representations if you wish. It is important that we try to future gaze as well as deal with immediate problems. A report was made to P&R Committee and its work is available on the County website and meetings are open to attend.

I am aware of the motion that has been tabled for today's meeting re Brexit which looks at national aspects of Britain's impending departure from the EU. I can advise Council there will be a detailed report to Cabinet to assess implications of Brexit for Hampshire and what measures we should take locally to deal with potential eventualities rather than debate the more philosophical issues of EU membership.

I reported to Cabinet earlier this month that the Minister of State at MHCLG Mr Jake Berry has confirmed to the 3 unitary Councils of Southampton, Portsmouth and IOW that there will be no moves on progressing their bid for a Combined Authority. Members will know that could have created a great risk to the integrity of the county of Hampshire and

the quality of services for Hampshire residents. That risk is now removed, I am pleased to say.

I am however in dialogue with the Leaders of the 3 unitaries as I believe close cooperation and partnership with the unitary neighbours is important. We are setting up regular meetings including with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Related to co-operation with the unitaries the County Council in its response to the Government consultation on LEPs has proposed that either the Solent and EM3 LEP should merge or if that is not achieved they work more closely together.

I want to take the opportunity today to make some comments about access to information for County Councillors. I have been advised this has been a matter for some discussion recently with senior council officers. This is clearly not a party political matter. It is an issue for all members whatever their role or party. It particularly concerns the use of and access to exempt reports.

My first assurance to Council is that I am personally wholly committed to ensuring that all elected members should have the fullest access to information that we can achieve, within the constraints of the law and our need to run a good business. Democracy must be as transparent as possible and I would never interfere with officers judgement in such matters other than to urge on the side of transparency

Members will be aware that Council responsibilities can concern highly sensitive and confidential information about vulnerable service users, as well as various forms of commercial confidentiality. I do not intend to hide behind GDPR, but there is no question that the new regulatory framework has changed and accentuated our shared responsibilities. For example, it is simply not the case that any member has an automatic right of access to any information simply by dint of being a councillor.

I also want to keep this matter in perspective. This council's formal use of exempted reports is actually very rare indeed and the evidence of concerns being raised about those reports over years is rarer still. We also know from endless external inspection, from the Information Commissioner, Ofsted and CQC, that our management and sharing of confidential information is actually rated very highly indeed according to their critical standards.

We can always improve, especially with the advent of new technology which is helping us transform administrative processes. I can report I am due to consider a report at my P&R Decision Day in early December which will include options for development and clarity. That report will be published in advance of my decision as usual and I would be more than happy to take comments in advance of my decision. I will of course have to be guided by professional legal advice which I hope all members would agree is one of the great strengths of this council.

In conclusion I wish to pay tribute to Karen Murray who is retiring from the County Council today as Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services after more than 40 years' service with HCC.

It says much for Karen that she has served the county for such a long period and has risen from being a Management Trainee to a Director of Service and member of the CMT. Karen, I wish to place on record our sincere thanks to you for your excellent service performed with style elegance and charm and a smile. The people of Hampshire have been well served and we wish you and your family the long and healthy retirement you so richly deserve.