

County Council Meeting – 8 May 2012

Statement / Updates by Cabinet Members

Reaffirming our Commitment to Volunteering

Introduction

I would like to take this opportunity to draw all Members' attention to two recently published documents that together set out how we will ensure Surrey residents are at the centre of our One County, One Team approach. The county council's new Corporate Strategy and its Commitment to Public Involvement both contain strong statements about supporting citizens to take the lead in improving our communities. I believe one of the most important ways we can make this compelling vision a reality is by encouraging residents to get more involved in their local community through volunteering.

I am immensely proud of our culture of volunteering in Surrey. Hundreds of thousands of residents give up their time each week to support local people and causes. An excellent recent example of how we can work together as One Team is the three 'Citizen's Hubs' run by and for disabled people in Surrey. These are run in partnership by the Council, the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People and user and carer-led organisations. The Hubs in Redhill, Epsom and a recently opened one in Woking are staffed entirely by disabled volunteers, with the support of a coordinator. These are the first centres of their kind in the country and help promote disabled people's independence by supporting them to make more informed choices. The Hubs are one of many examples where volunteering underpins the Council's work by creating stronger, more self-reliant communities. Whether we were living in times of abundance or austerity, we would want to encourage all our residents to take responsibility for improving their community by giving back in some way.

Why is this important now?

There are over 5,700 voluntary, community and faith sector organisations in Surrey. For obvious reasons, efforts to quantify the financial value of volunteering to Surrey's economy are fraught with difficulty. However, we know that the figure is substantial; even more so when we take account of the wider social value of volunteering, including developing skills and building social capital. The Council is committed to ensuring it is looking at all ways it can nurture this crucial resource. There are three areas of work we will focus on over the next year to help achieve this.

1. Reviewing the way we support Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) infrastructure services

We are currently reviewing how we commission infrastructure services to ensure the best possible support for voluntary organisations. By working closely with voluntary sector partners, encouraging innovative approaches and rigorously focusing on the best outcomes for voluntary organisations, we will drive the maximum possible value for Surrey residents.

2. Embedding a culture of volunteering amongst Council staff

As the largest employer in Surrey we are committed to supporting our staff to get involved in Surrey community life outside of their professional roles. Therefore, in February the Council launched a staff volunteering scheme. This enables employees to spend the equivalent of two days paid leave a year volunteering in Surrey. As well as directly benefiting Surrey residents, similar schemes in the public and private sector have been proven to improve the skills, knowledge and performance of those volunteering. We will update Council as the scheme develops on how staff are using their volunteering hours to help worthy causes in Surrey.

3. Continuing to promote new volunteering opportunities

Finally, we will use the unique opportunity presented by the Olympics and Jubilee coming to Surrey to help people who haven't previously volunteered to get involved. A fantastic example of the huge contribution volunteers can make to life in Surrey is the Surrey Olympic Ambassadors scheme for the 2012 Olympics. 450 Surrey residents are volunteering as Ambassadors and will play a crucial role ensuring the anticipated million spectators who are expected to visit Surrey during the cycle races will receive a warm welcome and helpful information.

Conclusion

One of my key objectives over the next year is strengthening resident engagement – both with the Council and in our communities. I see volunteering as fundamental to this and I look forward to working with Cabinet colleagues, the Chairman, the Communities Select Committee and all Members to ensuring volunteering is central in delivering our One County One Team Corporate Strategy.

Helyn Clack

Cabinet Member for Community Services and 2012 Games

8 May 2012