

County Council Meeting – 16 October 2012

LEADER'S STATEMENT

Madam Chairman

Almost a year ago today I stood before this Chamber having been elected Leader of the Council. In the speech I made to full Council that day, I outlined my plans for my first year as Leader.

I gave my commitment to listen and learn. As well as my strong belief in working as ONE TEAM because by forging stronger teams and stronger partnerships, we can do more for the people of Surrey.

Over the first six months of my leadership, my Cabinet and I, supported by the Corporate Leadership Team and my Conservative colleagues, focussed on 'steadying the ship'.

We have put in place a Corporate Strategy which is simple, clear and concise and in that we set out our purpose and vision for the next 5 years.

We have begun to deliver our apprenticeships programme, as part of our commitment to ensuring young people have the best opportunities to succeed. We want to give young people the opportunity to aspire to a better future for themselves and their families and it is my intention that we will continue on this important work in the years ahead.

In difficult financial times, we want to make sure that we are supporting our businesses, by providing opportunities for them to grow, which is why we have delivered a deal to provide Superfast Broadband coverage for almost the whole of Surrey, making us the most well connected county in the country and giving a real boost to our residents and businesses over the coming years.

This is part of our wider commitment to investment in IT, including recent migration to a new state of the art data centre and the creation of a public sector network called UNICORN. All of which involved close working with our partners but which will ultimately benefit our residents and businesses by providing more efficient and better services.

And, as a further part of our promise to work in partnership with Surrey businesses, we have pledged to keep more of our spending on contracts local, as well as making it easier for our small and medium sized businesses to bid for Surrey contracts, by simplifying our procurement processes. Alongside this, both the Deputy Leader and I have been meeting with businesses and related organisations across the county to hear directly the needs and concerns of business leaders and doing all we can to make sure that we as a County Council are doing our part to make businesses in Surrey successful.

In December last year, I was really pleased to announce the launch of the Community Improvement Fund, creating a pot of £750k for local community groups to make a real difference in their areas. I am delighted to say that we've received plenty of great applications (currently 112 applications being considered) for projects that improve local areas, making a real difference to people's lives and helping

residents independently enhance where they live. All the projects that have won money are fantastic examples of the county council and residents joining together to make Surrey an even better place to live. I think it is really important that we as a County Council, continue to put power – and indeed money – into the hands of local people to spend on their local priorities.

Having good roads is absolutely vital if Surrey is to continue to have a strong economy and I want the residents and businesses of this county to know, that we, Conservatives are serious about our roads. Our roads are improving all of the time because we continue to invest in them in an efficient manner. In fact through the innovative work of the SE7 Councils, led by Surrey County Council, we are improving our highway network, while at the same time cutting costs. We are also creating the next generation of Highway engineers through the SE7 MSc degree programme, ensuring that we have necessary talent to keep our roads functioning in the future.

We have planned our winter maintenance programme early, in order to ensure we are ready for any adverse weather:

- We are combining new technology with more traditional methods;
- We have 16,000 tonnes of salt stored at depots across Surrey, which will be replenished throughout the winter;
- We are working with our partners including farmers across the county, to make sure that all measures are in place to keep levels of disruption to a minimum, if heavy snow arrives.

All of this shows that we are well placed to keep Surrey moving, over the coming months and as prepared for winter as we have ever been.

Protecting the vulnerable is one of the cornerstones of this Administration and while I am Leader of this Council, I will do everything in my power to make sure that we are supporting those in our communities who need our help, because in these difficult times, supporting vulnerable people is vitally important. This is why we have committed to invest £10m towards preventative care until 2017 and this work is being taken forward alongside our partners in the Districts and Boroughs and in the Voluntary sector - another excellent example of working together to make Surrey stronger. This substantial investment provides real benefits to our most vulnerable residents and will enable many more people to live with independence and with dignity.

Of course, it is important that in these straitened times, that any investment gives value for money to the taxpayers of Surrey and that is why it is important that the focus of this work is on prevention, thereby avoiding greater costs in the future. This thread runs through what we do on a day to day basis. We have continued to embed financial responsibility into every aspect of the work of the Council, ensuring that every penny of tax-payers money is used wisely, whilst continuing to deliver the best quality services. I am very pleased to be able to say that the Audit Commission has praised Surrey County Council for its continued efforts to provide residents with value for money;

We continue to see a rise in demand for adult social care, a rise in the number of child protection cases in the county and of course the need to spend more money on maintaining our road network.

The District Auditor has confirmed that despite these increasing pressures, we have reduced the amount of taxpayers' money we spend each year. In fact, in 2010/11, we spent £22 less per head of population than we did in the previous 12 months, whilst improving the quality of services to Surrey residents.

This brilliant result has made us one of the top performing county councils in the country when it comes to delivering value for money. This is due in large part to the excellent work we did in the last 2 financial years to find savings of £128 million and the work we are doing this year to find savings up to £70 million. But we won't rest on our laurels, we will continue to do all we can to be smarter with our finances, investing where it is sensible to do so, while ensuring efficient use of taxpayers' money.

These examples – and of course there are many more - demonstrate that this Administration actually delivers on its promises.

I am sure those on all sides of the Chamber will agree with me when I say that Surrey delivered a series of BRILLIANT Olympic events. All of those involved – volunteers, our officers, our Members and all of our partners in the public sector – particularly the Districts and Boroughs and the Police came together to make sure that everything ran smoothly and of course our residents and businesses were patient, supportive and understanding, while these events were ongoing.

As all Councillors will be aware, 2015 will mark the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the Magna Carta – a significant event for the county, but also an event of worldwide significance. There will be a range of celebrations taking place all over the country and as Surrey is the county where the Magna Carta was sealed, I believe it is important that we mark this historic moment accordingly, which is why we are working with Runnymede Borough Council to provide a new Magna Carta visitor centre. This is another great example of strong partnership working between the County Council and one of our Borough partners. It will ensure that for generations to come, Runnymede and Surrey's place in the establishment of democracy in this country and beyond is rightfully recognised.

This year we have delivered 1,440 new school places for our children and young people and credit must go to all involved in this difficult and challenging process. Of course, we must not rest on our laurels and we have to start planning now to deliver the required school places for September 2013. But I think it is really important that we recognise these successes – particularly in such difficult times. Those difficult times are continuing, with local government facing some of the hardest choices it has ever had to face.

At this point I want to say a very personal thank you to every member of staff for their commitment, resilience, determination and the support they provide to this council and their service to the residents of Surrey. We will continue to be strong, if we continue to pull together to face the challenges ahead. So again – thank you.

And believe me, there is more to come, because we have plans for the county, which will span the next 10 years. I believe we are continually on a journey – to improve services and create better opportunities for our residents and businesses. As part of that journey, the Chief Executive and I recently began examining what it will take to guarantee our county has a prosperous future. Today is not a moment for detailed blueprints – they will be developed over the next 6-9 months. But I thought it was important to make Members aware that we are working to make Surrey stronger. A part of this will be a plan to get a better deal for energy exclusively for Surrey residents and businesses, an exciting scheme which I am looking forward to giving Members more detail on in the very near future

It is my strong belief that the future of Surrey County Council is as a more commercially minded organisation, combining the very best of public service, with the very best of business approaches. The Deputy Leader and I, alongside the Cabinet and Corporate Leadership Team, are turning our minds to new approaches, new and more innovative thinking and new ways to deliver excellent services to our residents

We want to be as imaginative as possible in our policies, because difficult times demand innovative solutions. We want to set our officers free, to do things in a different way and to be able to bring their ideas to the table.

We need to continue in maximising every asset we have and looking at different ways of delivering what the people of Surrey require. We will be prudent and pragmatic in our approach, always endeavouring to secure the best value for the residents of Surrey. I will discuss this more innovation-focussed approach in more detail when I address Council in March next year but I can say today that our vision for the future will ensure that Surrey County Council is fit for purpose, fully maximising value for money and fighting for our residents and businesses.

This vision will show how we will navigate the biggest storm that local government has ever had to face and we will be able to deliver this vision, because we now have strong relationships with our partners, which will enable us to continue on our journey to secure the future of Surrey.

We Conservatives are on the side of people who work hard and want to get on in life, we Conservatives are creating an aspirational county, a county that rewards effort and where work pays. Something for something, not something for nothing.

When we deliver the innovation agenda which we are currently working on, it will leave a legacy we can all be proud of, but this can only be achieved by continuing to work together as one team.

While I am Leader, we will continue to deliver our plans, ensuring that Surrey remains the place to live, the place to do business and the place to innovative and flourish.

And finally Madam Chairman, Surrey's residents and businesses can have confidence in this Conservative administration in safeguarding the future of Surrey;

David Hodge
Leader of the Council