

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL HELD AT THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, KINGSTON UPON THAMES, KT1 2DN ON 10 DECEMBER 2019 COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM, THE COUNCIL BEING CONSTITUTED AS FOLLOWS:

Tony Samuels (Chairman)
Helyn Clack (Vice-Chairman)

	Mary Angell		Naz Islam
	Ayesha Azad		Colin Kemp
*	Nikki Barton		Eber Kington
	John Beckett		Graham Knight
	Mike Bennison		Rachael I Lake
	Amanda Boote		Yvonna Lay
	Chris Botten		David Lee
	Liz Bowes		Mary Lewis
	Natalie Bramhall		Andy MacLeod
*	Mark Brett-Warburton		Ernest Mallett MBE
*	Ben Carasco		David Mansfield
*	Bill Chapman		Peter Martin
	Stephen Cooksey	*	Jan Mason
	Clare Curran	*	Cameron McIntosh
	Nick Darby		Sinead Mooney
	Paul Deach		Charlotte Morley
*	Graham Ellwood		Marsha Moseley
	Jonathan Essex		Tina Mountain
	Robert Evans		Bernie Muir
	Tim Evans		Mark Nuti
	Mel Few		John O'Reilly
	Will Forster		Tim Oliver
	John Furey		Andrew Povey
	Matt Furniss		Wyatt Ramsdale
	Bob Gardner		Penny Rivers
	Mike Goodman		Becky Rush
	Angela Goodwin		Stephen Spence
	David Goodwin	*	Lesley Steeds
	Zully Grant-Duff		Peter Szanto
	Alison Griffiths		Keith Taylor
	Ken Gulati		Barbara Thomson
	Tim Hall		Rose Thorn
	Kay Hammond		Chris Townsend
	David Harmer		Denise Turner-Stewart
	Jeffrey Harris		Richard Walsh
	Nick Harrison		Hazel Watson
	Edward Hawkins		Fiona White
	Marisa Heath		Keith Witham
	Saj Hussain		Victoria Young
	Julie Iles		

*absent

73/19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

The Chairman opened the meeting by informing Members that due to conduct issues and upon advice from the Police, he had taken the decision as Chairman, not to allow members of the public into the building to watch the meeting. He reminded Members that the meeting would be webcast and therefore the public would be able to watch the proceedings via the Council's website.

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Barton, Mr Brett-Warburton, Mr Carasco, Dr Chapman, Mr Ellwood, Mrs Mason, Mr McIntosh and Mrs Steeds.

74/19 MINUTES [Item 2]

The minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 8 October 2019 were submitted, confirmed and signed.

75/19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

Dr Andrew Povey declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a trustee for the Surrey Hills Society.

Mr Nick Harrison declared a personal interest as the chair of governors to a maintained primary school in Surrey.

Mr Will Forster declared a personal interest in Woking Borough Council as a borough councillor and Chairman of the County Council's Moving Closer to Residents Task Group.

76/19 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS [Item 4]

The Chairman:

- Highlighted to Members that the Chairman's Announcements were located in the agenda front sheet.

77/19 LEADER'S STATEMENT [Item 5]

Mrs White arrived at 10.03am

Mr Islam arrived at 10.04am

Miss Griffiths arrived at 10.05am

Ms Azad arrived at 10.38am

The Leader made a detailed statement. A copy of the statement is attached as Appendix A.

Members raised the following topics:

- Noted that climate change must remain at the top of the Council's agenda and that there had been a positive start by Surrey's Greener Future Task and Finish Group and looked ahead to the report on highway trees due in 2020.
- Stated that the Organisation Strategy 2020-2025 was aspirational as the reality across services was one of austerity. Local government required

continuous funding from the Government rather than one-off grants to adequately address the pressures in key areas such as adult social care, highways, climate change and housing.

- Supported the Council's move to Woking as County Hall was not fit for purpose, but the new building must ensure lower carbon emissions output and be good value for money for residents.
- The move must also consider that staff would be looked after during the transition and there would be functioning IT systems upon arrival.
- Welcomed the reports in the agenda as they ensured a forward-looking County and stressed that the Council must be committed to continuously ensure the competency and sensitivity in the delivery of services to the most vulnerable of Surrey's residents.
- Praised the positive future outlook by the Council, and noted the essential partnership work involved in the Leader's upcoming Future Economy Surrey Commission.
- Supported the use of electric buses, the need to address youth and public services, to tackle county lines, continue to seek social care reform and alleviate school funding cost pressures from the Government.
- Commended the Council's decision to retain the Community Recycling Centres (CRCs), the move back into Surrey, the reversal of the decision on car parking charges in the countryside and the Leader chairing the 'Cut the Pollution' campaign in Farnham which identified traffic changes in the area.
- Sought clarification if the Future Economy Surrey Commission would take on the declared 'Climate Emergency' by confirming whether the Council will oppose Gatwick Airport's expansion and would deal with inequality in Surrey.
- Acknowledged Extinction Rebellion's call for divestment in the Council's Pension Fund away from fossil fuels and halting planning permissions for oil drilling companies but noted that this was a matter for the trustees of the Pension Fund.
- Welcomed the Council's commitment to keep its libraries open but asked for confirmation on how it would address the financial pressures in funding the high needs block of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).

78/19 MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME [Item 6]

Questions:

Notice of ten questions had been received. The questions and replies were published in a supplementary agenda on 9 December 2019.

A number of supplementary questions were asked and a summary of the main points is set out below:

(Q1) Mr Robert Evans asked the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience if she felt that the current reciprocated use of Surrey's fire services in the county with neighbouring forces was the most efficient way to run Surrey's Fire and Rescue Service. That in recent discussions with firefighters they expressed concern on the differing approaches and training between fire services and noted the lack of contingency for the water rescue service.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience stated that Surrey Fire and Rescue Service reciprocated more incidents in neighbouring forces than it received. Water rescue facilities were based in Walton and Fordbridge and were adequately equipped to deal with evolving risks such as flooding. Those practices had been in place since 1947 in the Fire Services Act and Surrey had the most advanced system in the United Kingdom to identify the nearest suitable appliances to deploy.

(Q3) Mr Chris Botten asked that in subsequent papers, the Organisation Strategy 2020-2025 and the Next Phase of Transformation be amended to reflect the written question response by the Leader of the Council.

Mr Essex noted that as the Council had £100 million available in the Community Investment Fund, whether it could be used to address the 'Climate Emergency'.

The Leader of the Council responded to Member queries by stating that the purpose of the Community Investment Fund was to support meaningful projects in local communities - not solely restricted to addressing climate change or highways improvements. The Fund would be spent appropriately through regulation by Member and officer boards and the Leader suggested that there would be a future all-member workshop on the issue in early 2020.

(Q4) Mrs Hazel Watson stated that she would be happy to champion the Cabinet Member for Highway's recommendations - as the relevant cabinet member in her district council - as detailed in his written response and sought clarification on the responsible officer for parking enforcement within the County Council.

The Cabinet Member for Highways responded by thanking the Member for her support on the matter and that he would notify her of the appropriate contact.

(Q5) Mr Jonathan Essex asked the Leader of the Council to confirm why food banks were part of the Council's future vision of 'looking forward' within the Impact Statement. That the conversion of the Council's surplus land should not be restricted to public allotments where food would be grown voluntarily but should include community initiatives that employed people on the land.

The Leader of the Council responded by stating that he would look to change the wording from 'looking forward' and would support community initiatives to address the issues. He had recently spoken to the Chief Executive of the Trussell Trust and would look to extend to the initiatives that the Member proposed. He noted that other organisations on homelessness for example, would welcome the use of surplus land for providing food. He stressed that it was ultimately for residents to have the freedom to decide what they wanted to do with surplus land in their community.

(Q6) Mr Robert Evans asked the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience if she shared his concern that there should be continual fire safety checks to identify buildings with hazardous cladding and that all Members had a role in identifying buildings with vulnerable inhabitants.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience stated that the written response outlined the hard work of officers in that area and Surrey Fire and Rescue Service used Experian data to accurately identify who inhabits

certain buildings and the nature of buildings. Following the Grenfell inquiry, Members were assured that no buildings in Surrey were at risk from hazardous cladding due to subsequent remediation.

(Q7) Mrs Hazel Watson asked the Cabinet Member for Highways if he agreed that the pilot schemes concerning the Rethinking Transport programme were not sufficiently ambitious and did not reflect the need to provide more bus services in rural areas.

Mr Hall asked if one of the pilot schemes would include access to Woking and the Council's new building Midas House, to help those travelling from the east of the county.

Mr O'Reilly noted that the three pilot schemes were ambitious and asked if there was a budget associated with the schemes.

The Cabinet Member for Highways explained that he did agree with the importance of rural bus services and added that improving air quality was also a focus. He was looking at ways to ease Member's travel to Woking and commented that the pilot schemes had been budgeted and would be reported to Members through the appropriate committee processes.

Cabinet Member Briefings:

These were also published in the supplementary agenda on 9 December 2019.

Members made the following comments:

Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families: on the development of the Council's Integrated Care System (ICS) through the commissioning of children's services for Surrey Heartlands, a Member asked whether the Council were moving at pace to improve integration within health and social care for all children in the county.

The Cabinet Member responded that the delivery of children's services was moving at pace as evidenced by yesterday's member briefing on the service, noting the range of questions asked on the presentation by the Executive Director for Children, Families and Learning. It was exciting that the Council would take over the commissioning of children's health provisions for Surrey Heartlands, as two priorities of the Council to improve children's social care and SEND provision were heavily linked with health. The Council's children with disabilities team would be her focus in 2020 and she noted the culture change needed within health to be more residents focused.

Cabinet Member for Highways: on the Epsom Market Improvement Project, asked when the legal agreement between the County Council and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council on management of the Marketplace would be signed - in place of the current partnership agreement with Kier.

The Deputy Leader of the Council informed the Member that it was being signed and would shortly be finalised, as legal officers between both Councils had agreed amendments.

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Prosperity and Infrastructure: on the recent member briefing concerning the Local Enterprise

Partnerships (LEP) and what thoughts he had to ensure progression with the Coast to Capital LEP in the east of Surrey.

The Deputy Leader explained that he was working with both LEPs, Enterprise M3 in the west and Coast to Capital in the east - in particular - but noted that there was no new funding for any of the LEPs, there were changes to the grading of funding and that current funding must be spent by 2021. A recent bidding round redistributed funding from projects that were not delivered to Coast to Capital, within Leatherhead and Tandridge in the east of Surrey.

Mr Nick Harrison declared a personal interest as the chair of governors to a maintained primary school in Surrey

Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning: urged caution on appealing the decision by Surrey Schools Forum to reject the transfer of £3.3 million of funding to the high needs block of SEND to the Secretary of State; until Surrey County Council reviewed its funding on SEND in relation to its education health and care assessments and plans (EHCPs).

In response the Cabinet Member explained that the Council were in the process of reviewing that funding and noted that not all schools responded to the proposal by Surrey Schools Forum, some schools rejected the proposals as they thought the Government's funding was inadequate. The Council were addressing EHCP response times by working in consultation with parents, but noted the challenge of funding.

Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste: on the consultation on the Tree Strategy concerning the planting of trees and if the consultees included residents, local voluntary groups and Members and if they would be consulted before the draft was signed-off - in late November the Cabinet Member for Highways noted that he could not offer any more information until the draft was signed-off.

A Member asked the Cabinet Member if there were any other options available for tree planting, as he noted that a local group who wanted to plant ten trees were quoted over £3,000 by a company that the Council suggested.

A Member commented that there were tree wardens in Spelthorne and it cost them £35 to plant trees there, he asked the Cabinet Member to address the cost disparity across Surrey.

In response, the Cabinet Member stated that the Council were working collaboratively with a number of companies on tree planting and noted the maturity of trees over the next 30 years was important. He informed the Member that he did not recognise the figures quoted and asked him to send the details over to be looked at. He noted that residents and tree wardens were important contributors on tree planting. The Cabinet Member explained that there were two consultations, the overarching Tree Strategy - delayed launch due to the general election - to which all borough and district councils, residents and organisations would be given copies of to give their feedback by mid-February and the other consultation concerned urban tree planting in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Highways.

Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Fire and Resilience: on the maintenance and planned improvements for the County's Public Rights of Way

network, a Member asked if the Cabinet Member would agree to have a dedicated cycle planner to ensure the improvement works happened and if there was sufficient capital to address bridges which were out of action.

In response, the Cabinet Member commented that there was a significant capital investment plan and she was happy to share that with the Member and noted that the Cabinet Member for Highways was working on merging cycle routes with footways.

Cabinet Member for Adults and Public Health: a Member asked for confirmation that priority was given to achieve parity on funding for both mental and physical health by lobbying all involved.

In response, the Leader of the Council could not give an absolute guarantee on parity but commented that there was significant investment in addressing mental health which included the work done through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) - out for re-tender next year. He also noted that the Council were working on the provisioning of mental health in conjunction with Surrey Heartlands and he would provide the Member with a specific answer to the funding parity in due course.

Mr Will Forster arrived at 11.10am

79/19 STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS [Item 7]

There were none.

80/19 ORIGINAL MOTIONS [Item 8]

None received.

81/19 ORGANISATION STRATEGY 2020-2025 AND THE NEXT PHASE OF TRANSFORMATION [Item 9]

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and noted that a significant amount of work was done last year concerning the Council's Community Vision for Surrey in 2030, which served as a roadmap for service improvement with key stakeholders and partners. The Organisation Strategy 2020-2025 was a living document which updated the Vision 2030 and set out eight key areas to be addressed over the next five years. The Strategy would ensure the effective delivery of services in collaboration with the Council's Transformation Programme. In response to the Member's earlier query on the wording of 'looking forward' with regards to food banks, the Leader stated that the Impact Statement highlighted pledges to residents on what the Council had delivered and where it was looking ahead to address - he welcomed Members' comments and would answer any queries.

A Member drew the Council's attention to a local project on the use of ground source heat pumps on four public buildings in a local village to fuel 50-75% of energy in place of conventional combustion heating. That project echoed the Council's commitment to a greener future, through its initiatives to increase biodiversity, the planting of more trees and recycling waste to which the Member praised as important steps to ensure a sustainable Surrey.

A Member commended the Strategy and in particular its reference to 'ensuring value for money' through the use of performance measures. He recommended that mental health should be more prominent in the Strategy rather than its passing reference. He welcomed the Council's promotion of libraries, use of land to build truly affordable housing, the rollout of 5G - especially in rural areas - the development of existing infrastructure such as community facilities and schools, and the work on Surrey's 2050 Place Ambition.

In response, the Leader of the Council informed Members that the Strategy's success was based on the genuine improvement of outcomes rather than figures alone. Mental health was key to the Council's overall Health and Wellbeing Strategy as driven by Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership. The Council would continue to work with districts and borough councils on affordable housing.

RESOLVED:

Council approved the Surrey County Council Organisation Strategy 2020 – 2025, which set out how the council would work with residents and partners to contribute to the achievement of the Community Vision for Surrey in 2030. It set out priority areas the council would focus on over the next five years.

82/19 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY [Item 10]

As Chairman of the Member Development Steering Group, the Deputy Leader introduced the report and stated that the Council was committed to supporting Member development and training. Last year the Council was awarded the Charter Plus status for Member development and was committed to reviewing its Member Development Strategy every two years, track changes were included in the report to show the amendments from the current review by the Steering Group. Included in the Strategy were commitments to increasing engagement in Member development through greater online access to training, a new module for induction training on community leadership which included a course on social media skills and handling resident enquiries. Members would have 1-1s on an annual basis - with the first of these being within the first six months of being elected - and the Steering Group would meet regularly in 2020 to develop its commitments.

A Member praised and welcomed the commitment and positive approach by the Deputy Leader as the chairman of the Steering Group and suggested that Members sincerely backed the Strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the revised Member Development Strategy was approved by County Council.

83/19 SURREY'S GREENER FUTURE TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT [Item 11]

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste noted that it was disappointing that conduct issues had resulted in Extinction Rebellion, who were protesting outside, were not allowed in the public gallery.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste thanked Surrey's Greener Future Task and Finish Group and officers for formulating the Call for Action - since the Council announced its 'Climate Emergency' in July - in conjunction with eighteen witnesses.

- He stated that the commitments within it were ambitious and challenging but necessary to address climate change and were driven by firm support from the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive. Significant proposals would be put forward to the Council's budget next year to ensure real changes to deal with this.
- The Council began the process of planting 1.2 million trees and will launch the Tree Strategy in March 2020, committed to ultra-low emission buses in Surrey by 2030 and a small fleet of electric buses in the next few years, by March 2020 all electricity used by the Council will be renewable and were developing solar farms to produce all its electricity by 2025.
- He positively noted that Surrey was leading the way in addressing climate change, it had seen the 32% reduction of carbon dioxide between 2007-2017 and was developing a Climate Change Strategy to be launched in April 2020 which would provide a benchmark to measure the Council's performance.
- He welcomed the Task Group's suggestion for a separate Member Reference Group to help shape both the Tree and Climate Change Strategies.
- He praised the crucial partnership work of district and borough councils, health partners, the University of Surrey, Surrey Climate Commission and the Council's consultation with its residents.
- That it was vital that Members were kept informed, a seminar in February 2020 would be arranged.
- The Council would follow up its written letter to the Government concerning the Committee on Climate Change's inadequate letter on 'International aviation and shipping and net zero'.
- He stressed that a culture change was needed and noted that addressing climate change was the responsibility of all.
- He would shortly be writing to Government ministers to highlight that financial help was needed to aid local governments in addressing climate change.
- He reminded Members about the 'Trees for Christmas' campaign where a £3 donation to the Surrey Wildlife Trust would go towards the planting of trees.

The Chairman of the Task Group thanked the Cabinet Member for his positive endorsement of the Task Group's work, noted the hard work of officers throughout the eight witness sessions and praised the varied expertise of the Members within the Task Group. He highlighted the use of mobile agile working through Skype which reduced journeys to County Hall and facilitated discussions with witnesses across the country. He noted the 157 responses from organisations and members of the public which aided the Call for Action and that two of the witnesses, Woking Borough Council and Bristol City Council were leading the way. He emphasised the importance of young people in tackling climate change, particularly Hurst Park Primary School in Elmbridge which was a Green Flag Eco-School and commented that the Council were delivering some of Extinction Rebellion's demands.

The Chairman of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee welcomed the collaboration between Members and officers with external witnesses, which facilitated the Task Group's active involvement in the policy-making process. The Council must deliver substantive action to address climate change - aided by a down payment in next year's budget - by being a vanguard to ensure radical change.

A Member emphasised the need for the Council to lobby the Government to reposition the balance of planning issues towards supporting projects which protected green areas of Surrey, away from the signing-off of detrimental planning applications within parish, borough and district councils.

A Member commented that an ambitious strategy on climate change was important as it recognised the scale of the challenge. It would take time to embed the pledges within the Call for Action, but some could be implemented quickly and he hoped to receive a report at January's Cabinet on what has been achieved - as well as within the Climate Change Strategy in April. Within forums held by Surrey Climate Commission, residents stressed that they were part of the solution and that the Council could make it easier for people to tackle climate change by engaging in a 'climate conversation' with its residents - as held in Leeds. The Council's credibility on addressing climate change was dependent on significant investment, strengthened dialogue with Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Government may prove useful to fund the Council's pro-climate strategies.

A Member reported that he would like to see greater emphasis in future reports - such as January's Cabinet paper - on how the Council dealt with its own estate in terms of carbon neutral energy production, noting the alternative of solar energy and the increased capabilities needed in its storage.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste would take Members' suggestions away, noting that partnership work with borough and district councils was crucial and he would report to Council next year on the progress made on addressing climate change.

RESOLVED:

1. That Council noted the task group report and the Cabinet Member's response to their recommendations;
2. Adopted the Call for Action; and
3. Agreed to the development of a zero carbon strategy and action plan.

84/19 REPORT OF THE CABINET [Item 12]

The Leader presented the report of the Cabinet meetings held on 29 October 2019 and 26 November 2019.

Reports for Decision:

- A. Moving Closer to Residents: Delivering Our Ambition

Mr Will Forster declared a personal interest in Woking Borough Council as a borough councillor and Chairman of the County Council's Moving Closer to Residents Task Group

A Member highlighted value for money (VfM) concerns in relation to the move to Woking and had asked the Task Group and Cabinet to obtain an independent evaluation. He asked the Leader to explain the energy rating of Midas House in Woking and it was a concern that the Council were buying parking spaces as this discouraged the use of public transport.

A Member noted that more information was needed to be able to address residents' queries on the balance of money between County Hall in Kingston and Midas House in Woking.

In response, the Leader of the Council stated that there was no uncertainty on the matter as there was a Part 2 item presented at the last Cabinet with the costings of the move and the independent valuation from Vail Williams supported those costings. He stated that the energy rating for Midas House was an E and County Hall was a C. The lower rating at Midas House was dependent on it having air conditioning, inefficient lighting - which would be replaced with LEDs - and an open atrium to which the Council were proposing to cover in order to create the new council chamber.

In accordance with Standing Order 28.1 Mr Kington requested a recorded vote, this was rejected as there were fewer than ten Members who stood in support.

The recommendation was put to a vote with 56 members voting for, 2 voting against and 8 abstentions.

RESOLVED:

Council approved the acquisition of Midas House, Woking on the terms set out in the attached report as the County Council's new Civic Heart.

B. Organisation Strategy 2020-2025 and the next phase of transformation

RESOLVED:

Council approved the Surrey County Council Organisation Strategy 2020-2025 (as reported at item 9 on Council agenda).

Reports for Information/Discussion:

- C. Review of Charges for Parking in Countryside Estate Car Parks
- D. Libraries: Out Next Phase
- E. Quarterly report on decisions taken under special urgency arrangements

RESOLVED:

1. That the report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 29 October 2019 and 26 November 2019 be adopted.
2. That Council noted that there had been no urgent decisions in that quarter.

85/19 MINUTES OF CABINET MEETINGS [Item 13]

No notification had been received by the deadline from Members wishing to raise a question or make a statement on any matters in the minutes.

[Meeting ended at: 11.49 am]

Chairman

Leader's Speech to full Council – 10 December 2019

INTRO

Mr Chairman no one would dispute that on a national level this has been a year of uncertainty, political earthquakes and division that, in the final weeks of December, will hopefully find some resolution in Thursdays General Election. Let's hope the outcome brings greater stability and unity to our fractured country.

However, despite the national uncertainty, Surrey County Council has continued, steadfastly, delivering for the people of Surrey.

We have progressed and delivered a large part of our transformation programme across the piece, becoming an organisation that is financially stable, forward looking and innovative.

We are ready, not just for 2020 and whatever that may throw at us, but also prepared for the longer term, committed to delivering the Vision for Surrey 2030 and beyond.

But we have to raise the bar, to deliver for the people of Surrey.

We have set out our organisation strategy, refreshed for the next five years, that identifies key areas of focus and which will provide a robust framework for all that we do in the years ahead. Mr Chairman I will highlight a few of those areas now but I would encourage all members to look closely at Item 9 of today's agenda and in particular Annexe A and C, which set out the 8 key areas and impact statement.

TACKLING INEQUALITY

We are working with residents in every area of Surrey to identify and address causes of inequality, especially in life expectancy.

Surrey is widely seen as an affluent county, but here at Surrey County Council we know only too well that there are many people who do not have the same opportunities, quality of life or advantages.

We are determined that no one in Surrey is left behind.

We are working to tackle the root cause of inequality, to increase access to opportunity - especially in the area of health and wellbeing – to narrow that gap and give people the chance to benefit from all that our wonderful county has to offer.

Just last month we agreed to scrap the car parking charges across the countryside to encourage everybody to get out there and feel the health and wellbeing benefits of enjoying our commons.

This will be followed, in the coming months, by an investment plan for our rights of way and our cycle paths so we can make it easy for people to reach their local countryside without just relying on the car, and give Surrey a fitter future.

SUPPORTING INDEPENDENCE

Part of addressing inequality issues, is about supporting independence – helping residents help themselves and each other within their community.

It's essential - if Surrey is to be a place that continues to thrive in the future - that communities across the county remain strong, that people continue to feel that sense of

belonging and support and that people can remain living in their home, within their support network, for as long as possible.

We are committed to providing the tools and support to ensure that happens.

Part of this is our project to build 725 new specially adapted homes, that will enable elderly residents stay independent, with a better quality of life, for longer, and prevent admission to hospital.

MORE JOINED UP HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

We are also well on the way to proper, meaningful integration of Surrey Heartlands health services with Surrey County Council services so they're more effective, efficient and seamless for residents.

We're all too aware of the confusion and complexity many residents face when having to deal with a myriad of health and social care services, often at quite difficult times in their lives, when the last thing they need is further obstacles to overcome.

By bringing services together, to deliver a more holistic service, we will not only simplify the process for residents, we are certain we will provide better outcomes for people's health.

CREATING A GREENER FUTURE

This year we have joined with many other local authorities across the country in declaring a climate emergency.

Now, it's all very well making that statement and recognising the fundamental global threat of climate change. But it's another thing to take meaningful action, and we are serious about doing that.

The Greener Futures work has been a Surrey County Council-led initiative, not party political.

We recognise that we must also work with Government, partners (including districts and boroughs), businesses and residents.

A lot of work has been undertaken since July when we also committed to becoming a zero-carbon county by 2050, and this is reflected in the recent Scrutiny Task Group report.

We will continue to develop this work and launch a firm action plan in April 2020. This will be a strategy that everyone in Surrey can take ownership of and it is this collective responsibility that we must harness to make real change.

This work may seem abstract to some, but as we all learn more about the consequences of climate change, we realise that it directly affects our quality of life, particularly that of our older residents, those with existing health issues and those on lower incomes.

So, in delivering real change, we are addressing many factors of inequality, which I mentioned earlier.

EMBRACING SURREY'S DIVERSITY

Another key driver to tackle inequality is to understand and remove the barriers that hold some people back.

Embracing Surrey's diversity and recognising the benefits of a diverse workforce and population will make a real difference in making Surrey a place full of opportunity.

This is a mission I'm going to take personal ownership of, bringing the diversity issue into my portfolio as leader and holding the whole council to account in addressing this aspect of inequality.

The council's Diversity workshops are proving invaluable in helping us understand the issues and barriers facing staff from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups.

That work will continue in earnest, informing our actions internally and helping us ensure Surrey can be a place where everyone can succeed and thrive.

PARTNERSHIP

As we become a more outward looking organisation, working with residents, businesses, partners and communities I am confident that we will collectively meet challenges and grasp opportunities.

There is an unbelievable amount of good work going on in the county of Surrey – from businesses leading the way across the world in terms of tech and innovation, to voluntary organisations delivering lifechanging opportunities for people every day in communities across the county.

We are determined to harness all that good work, support those delivering it, learn from it, and facilitate more of it, to make sure everyone benefits and things continuously improve.

Just last month in Cabinet, we agreed papers delivering strategies for improving our universal youth offer and for modernising our library services.

Central to both strategies is partnership working.

In the case of our youth offer we will work with voluntary, community and faith sector partners to increase and improve the many excellent services they can provide in each area, offering the buildings we manage across the county, many of which are currently under used, at little or no cost.

SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

A huge part of our forward-looking agenda is, of course, investment.

Investing in the infrastructure Surrey needs to build a strong and resilient economy.

We will be publishing our budget for the next financial year in January. It will be a budget that is forward looking, sustainable and ambitious.

Thanks to our tireless work in getting our financial position in order over the last two years, we are in a position to make real choices. To invest in our residents now, and the next generation.

We will set out that investment in detail, but it will include hundreds of millions of pounds to protect residents and businesses from flooding, improvements in our roads and highways to keep Surrey moving smoothly, new special educational needs school places, upgrading broadband capability across the county and investment in public transport and greener technology.

We will also set up a Community Investment fund to support our high streets and to invest in projects that will make a real and lasting difference to our communities.

I am also pleased to announce that in the New Year we will be convening a Future Economy Surrey Commission.

This will bring some of the most experienced and insightful minds in the county together, to help plan the best way forward for Surrey to deal with future challenges to our local economy and position the county as THE place to come to work, to start a business or to grow a business.

DIGITAL REVOLUTION

No doubt part of this work will revolve around a digital revolution in the county – harnessing things like the 5G Innovation Centre at Surrey University.

We are already exploring how to make the most of new and emerging technologies to innovate and improve services, and the way we work.

This involves the development of a digital strategy for Surrey that will come to fruition in the new year and will set out our ambition for how we will use digital to help Surrey, and its residents, thrive.

MCTR

A big test of that move to a digital future and our own use of technological advancement will come when we move the organisation's Civic Heart to Woking next year.

I am pleased that we have managed to finalise our move back into the county we serve, within my first year in office.

It is a collective achievement, and something that should give the whole organisation optimism as we head in to 2020.

Mr Chairman, I really do believe we are making good progress in delivering the transformation this Council needs to ensure that our children are safe, our elderly and vulnerable residents are supported, that our residents feel part of this fantastic county and that we genuinely do all we can to improve their quality of life and address the inequality of life expectancy.

I would call on all of us to be good neighbours this Christmas, and look out for those who need support and companionship.

Finally, on a personal note can I thank you all for your support this past year and pay tribute to our dedicated staff who will be working with the most vulnerable residents and delivering vital services over the Christmas break – this work doesn't stop.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas, and a happy New Year.