

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL HELD REMOTELY ON MICROSOFT TEAMS ON 16 MARCH 2021 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
Jonathan Essex	Marsha Moseley
Robert Evans	Tina Mountain
Tim Evans	Bernie Muir
Mel Few	Mark Nuti
Will Forster	John O'Reilly
John Furey	Tim Oliver
Matt Furniss	Andrew Povey
Bob Gardner	Wyatt Ramsdale
Mike Goodman	Penny Rivers
Angela Goodwin	Becky Rush
David Goodwin	Stephen Spence
Zully Grant-Duff	Lesley Steeds
Alison Griffiths	Peter Szanto
Ken Gulati	Keith Taylor
Tim Hall	Barbara Thomson
Kay Hammond	Rose Thorn
David Harmer	Chris Townsend
Jeffrey Harris	Denise Turner-Stewart
Nick Harrison	Richard Walsh
Edward Hawkins	Hazel Watson
Marisa Heath	Fiona White
Saj Hussain	Keith Witham
Julie Iles OBE	Victoria Young

\*absent

### **13/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [ITEM 1]**

Apologies were received from Mr Kemp.

The Chairman wished Mr Kemp well.

### **14/21 MINUTES [ITEM 2]**

The minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 9 February 2021 were submitted and confirmed.

### **15/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [ITEM 3]**

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

### **16/21 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS [ITEM 4]**

The Chairman:

- Highlighted to Members that the Chairman's Announcements were located in the agenda front sheet.
- On behalf of the Council, thanked those Members who would not be standing in the forthcoming local elections, for their service and hard work.

### **17/21 LEADER'S STATEMENT [ITEM 5]**

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

*Mrs Mountain left the meeting at 10.09 am*

*Rachael I Lake joined the meeting at 10.11 am*

Members raised the following topics:

- Looked forward to the future and the focus on Covid-19 recovery.
- Highlighted the continued focus and scrutiny needed on Children's Services, for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), the commissioning of the Children's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Contract (EWMH) ensuring the right transition arrangements from children's to adult services, on mental health noting the Task Group and the Summit, the continued rollout of the mental health practitioners through the GPiMHS (General Practise integrated Mental Health Service) and the trial of Woking's Safe Haven.
- That the focus for Land and Property Services must be on using the Council's assets more productively by looking towards affordable housing, delivering care homes, growing in-house expertise, working with the District and Borough Councils to ensure Surrey-wide strategic planning, and learning lessons from the joint venture with Places for People.
- Noted the need to address the funding challenges in Adult Social Care.
- Welcomed a Member's suggestion of a cabinet of all the talents, noting the importance of taking advantage of all Members' skills and experience, and paid tribute to Mr Spence.

- Noted the need to address the issues of climate change including issues around Heathrow and Gatwick; and diversity both of which were easy to ignore.
- Thanked the Chairman for his service, the Leader of the Council for the undoubted improvements to the Council's overview and scrutiny function, senior officers and all staff for their immense hard work noting the assistance from Democratic Services, and all Members whether stepping down or seeking re-election.
- Paid tribute to the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families who would be stepping down, noting her outstanding leadership and improvements made within Children's Services.
- Praised the Chief Executive who had been outstanding in her management of Covid-19 alongside the continued improvements made to the Council.
- Regretted that the discourse which had been focussed on scrutiny, challenge and a carefully observed journey of improvement; was overshadowed by self-congratulation.
- That whilst significant progress had been made, good governance relied upon effective challenge by the opposition and offering a choice to residents.
- That there was much to improve on the funding of SEND noting the overspend in the High Needs block and recruitment of an Assistant Director - SEND Transformation.
- Suggested that regarding the Safer Streets Campaign, the Council apply for Government funding to reverse the policy on part-night street lighting.
- Wished retiring Members the very best for the future, paying tribute to Mrs Hammond who had demonstrated an outstanding contribution to public life over many years and thanked the Chairman for his service.
- That by working co-operatively with Members on a range of issues concerning Farnham, the political leadership developed a joint plan including the creation of the Farnham Board, the Infrastructure Programme and £139m for Farnham infrastructure projects in the 2021/22 Budget.
- Thanked colleagues on the Farnham Board including its Programme Director for the Farnham Infrastructure Programme as well as the Leader of the Council and hoped that the work would continue.
- Thanked the Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee, the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families, his Residents Association and Independent colleagues including its Group Leader, the Council's Chief Executive, officers, the trade unions and the Chairman.
- Regarding the local elections, hoped that there would be a wider cross-party spectrum of Members with a continued commitment to work cooperatively for all residents.

## 18/21 MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME [ITEM 6]

### Questions:

Notice of twenty questions had been received. The questions and replies were published in the supplementary agenda on 15 March 2021.

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

**(Q3) Mr Paul Deach** asked for further detail on the exact breakdown of spend of the additional £739,000 that was not finalised at the time of writing the response.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Resources and Corporate Support explained that the Winter Support Grant totalled £2.1 million had to be spent by 31 March, however officers had engaged with the Department for Work and Pensions who confirmed that the money could be used to fund the food vouchers for free school meals for the Easter holidays and the additional £739,000 funding received in March had an extended deadline of 16 April. The Council was looking to use that additional money to provide extra vouchers equating to an additional £20 above the original £30 for children entitled to free school meals during the Easter holidays which could be used either for breakfast, a hot meal or it could be held over for a few weeks into May. The Council was also looking at a £50 voucher for Care Leavers to support them over Easter. The deadline for finalising the spend was today and would be discussed at March's Cabinet meeting.

The Cabinet Member for All Age Learning provided reassurance that the Council was looking further ahead than the Easter holidays, noting the Holiday Activities and Food programme in 2021 in which the Council reported back to the Department of Education enabling it to work with Active Surrey as a provider for activity packs for primary age children who were eligible for free school meals. There was also a programme website including physical activity and arts and craft resources as well as two free healthy lifestyle parenting workshops about practical advice and tips on nutrition. There were pilot cohorts mapped to the areas of deprivation for both primary and secondary ages and it was estimated that the Council would be offering in excess of five hundred places to those in receipt of free school meals throughout Easter. Applications were open for the summer programme and so the Council continued to deliver for its most vulnerable residents.

**(Q4) Ms Ayesha Azad** thanked the Leader of the Council for his commitment to eradicating inequality from across the county.

In response, the Leader of the Council provided the latest figures on the gender pay gap which in 2019 was 16.8% and had dropped to 12.75% as at March 2020, so noted good progress on that but that there was more work to be done.

**(Q8) Dr Peter Szanto** had no supplementary question.

Dr Zully Grant-Duff asked whether the Leader of the Council agreed that digital inclusion was key to access to health provision, education, and employment opportunities and whether he would confirm his commitment to developing a digital infrastructure strategy to support the Council's ambition that no one would be left behind and Surrey would be prosperous for all.

In response, the Leader of the Council gave that commitment and confirmation noting that the matter was in the remit of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure. That in terms of digital inclusion, he noted that 200,000 of Surrey's approximately 1.2 million residents were digitally excluded so a digital inclusion plan was vital, as the Council must ensure that it could effectively communicate with its residents.

*Mrs Morley left the meeting at 10.45 am*

*Mrs Mountain rejoined the meeting at 10.46 am*

**(Q9) Mr John O'Reilly** noted that by 2025 the Council was planning for a 46% reduction in carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions, he asked whether the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change agreed that in order to achieve that reduction,

bold and exciting initiatives were required to reach the Council's ultimate goal of zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050.

Mr Jonathan Essex highlighted the challenge of the Council needing to invest over £13 billion by 2030 as well as the challenge of meeting the 2025 target, he asked what the Council would do to ensure that the Government provided Surrey with the leverage to bring forward that money both from the public and the private sector.

The Cabinet Member for Highways noted that yesterday the Council was awarded £660,000 for rural mobility funding and that would be used for a planned pilot project in Mole Valley for on-demand rural transport improvements which would revolutionise connectivity across the county, including electric vehicle provision through small minibuses and would be rolled out further if successful.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change noted that the Surrey Climate Change Delivery Plan would go to June's Cabinet meeting where plans would be finalised.

She stated that more Government funding was needed, noting that the Council received £6 million for Green Jump Surrey with a further £3 million received, there was some funding coming through for schools concerning the decarbonisation of their buildings. Officers were working continually to deliver more funding from Government to help the Council deliver its projects going forward.

**(Q12) Mrs Penny Rivers** asked when the matter would be corrected regarding on-call firefighters who worked between 1 July 2000 and 5 April 2006 who were eligible for, but who had not been included in the Local Government Association Firefighters Pension Scheme Special Members of the 2006 Scheme by the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).

In response, the Cabinet Member for Community Protection noted that following the discovery that an options exercise for retained firefighters to join the Modified Scheme (2006) had not taken place, an internal audit was undertaken. As a result, two hundred and one cases were identified and ninety-eight forms were returned, with twenty-six registering interest and two declining and there had been further subsequent enquiries. SFRS was awaiting external guidance and she was considering arranging a second options exercise.

**(Q13) Mr Robert Evans** noted that the response provided regarding the ratio of firefighters to Surrey's population compared to other fire and rescue services was evasive. He sought clarification as to why his invitation to the SFRS Working Group had been withdrawn and who had made that decision.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Community Protection noted that the membership of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee's SFRS Working Group on the 'Making Surrey Safer Plan' was the responsibility of the Chairman of that Select Committee and Working Group.

Regarding the ratio of firefighters, the Cabinet Member for Community Protection explained that it was important to understand that SFRS' response model was based exclusively on Surrey's needs, which determined the number of firefighters needed to man appliances and the ways of working; there was no value in comparing the figures to other fire and rescue services. She noted that SFRS' Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) was tailored to Surrey and over the past ten years new technology had been introduced and information was shared with Members on a regular basis

regarding changes, transformation successes including the dynamic cover tool, degradation procedures and the joint fire control in which East Sussex was due to join soon, and that SFRS was ahead in many areas nationally. She noted the upcoming Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services' (HMICFRS) inspection and thanked the Member for his continued interest in SFRS.

**(Q14) Mr Stephen Cooksey** noted that residents in his division were keen to know why the Council spent £246,000 on a PWC report that the Leader of the Council was not prepared to share with residents. He asked the Leader of the Council to comment on his statement made about not receiving a formal request to disclose the report, as the Chairman of the Surrey Leaders' Group - Leader of Runnymede Borough Council - had asked the Leader of the Council to provide that report and he had declined to accept that request.

In response, the Leader of the Council explained that he had spoken with the Chairman of the Surrey Leaders' Group who noted that the matter would be raised at a Group meeting. He explained that he had never received a formal letter requesting the disclosure of the PWC report and had asked the Member to forward that. He noted that the PWC report was prepared for the Council's internal use to assist with the preparation of a business plan and information from that was fed into the Council's transformation work. He noted that the point was out of date, highlighting the current work on the Community Impact Assessment (CIA) which provided a good understanding of Surrey's communities and informed the work on empowering communities. He noted that Surrey's District and Borough Councils had spent in excess of £300,000 commissioning a report by KPMG which made various proposals on ways to improve efficiency and collaboration.

**(Q15) Mr Jonathan Essex** asked the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change to confirm whether as noted in the written response, that the development proposals for the site would take into consideration local planning policy and guidance. Regarding February's Cabinet report on the Woodhatch Masterplan, he asked whether it would be in line with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council's (RBBC) commitment that affordable housing should be at 'social' rent and in line with the RBBC Local Plan which did not promote building on urban open land.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change said that the Council would adhere to all of the current plans with RBBC and as twin-hatted Members any RBBC planning applications in respect of the Council would be scrutinised.

**(Q17) Mr Robert Evans** noted that he was sure that all Members were experiencing additional queries from residents regarding potholes and damaged roads due to the recent rain and snow. Referring to the written response in which the Government was not giving any indication of additional money to address the situation, he queried that as Surrey had eleven Conservative Members of Parliament (MPs), whether the Cabinet Member for Highways or the Council had or would engage with the Government to provide such additional funding to repair the roads.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Highways explained that the Council had been engaging with Surrey's eleven MPs and with the Department for Transport about a fairer funding formula on roads as the current one did not take into account usage and included a set payment per structure irrelevant of its size. The response back was in line with the Government's belief that there would be no changes to the current formula as a majority of local councils were supportive of it. Locally however, the Council's increased funding was producing good results, for example highways

complaints had decreased considerably as had the number of reports from residents. The Council was also trialling Artificial Intelligence cameras which could identify potholes proactively, noting the continued innovation on Surrey's highways.

**(Q18) Mr Stephen Cooksey** noted that the written response indicated that the Leader of the Council was struggling to find any justification for his misrepresentation of the conclusions of the KPMG report. He asked the Leader of the Council whether he believed that it was helpful to the Council's relationship with Surrey's District and Borough Councils to promote implications that might suit his political agenda but were not factual.

In response, the Leader of the Council explained that Surrey's District and Borough Councils commissioned the KPMG report to counter the Council's position in relation to potential unitary structure which was pursued with the encouragement of the Government. He added that the Council would pursue its transformation agenda and would focus on delivering better quality services to its residents that it was responsible for and suggested that Surrey's District and Borough Councils should do the same.

**(Q19) Mr Jonathan Essex** asked that in addition to the work done by the teams across the Council in ensuring value for money, whether there was a plan to include value for money in the work carried out by internal and external auditors going forward. He noted the importance of using lessons learnt from current and recent contracts to make sure that value for money was maximised before finalising contracts.

In response, the Leader of the Council recognised that the contracts were significant and needed to be well scrutinised both during the procurement process and subsequently. He noted that he was happy if the audit function could add to that as it was vital to get contracts right, to get value for money and to ensure that the Council had independent evidence to substantiate that. He added that robust contract management was equally important, and the Council was focussing on that stringent process to ensure that contracts were well procured and managed.

**(Q20) Mr Jonathan Essex** referred to the staff travel survey noting that it was the case that many of those staff who would be travelling to work post Covid-19 would be travelling further and longer to Woodhatch Place. He asked whether some of the savings in officer's travel expenses over the last year could be used to incentivise staff to choose public transport over private transport. He was concerned that in the absence of that financial incentive the proposed new local bus service may benefit the residents of Redhill and Reigate, but not those travelling from further away.

In response, the Leader of the Council agreed that it was vital to increase the uptake of public transport by both residents and staff. He noted the need to invest in good quality public transport, starting with the £50 million for low emission buses and the Government's £3 billion in funding for a new bus strategy, which the Council could bid for next year. He reiterated the point made by the Cabinet Member for Highways on the planned pilot project in Mole Valley for on-demand rural transport improvements. He emphasised that it was vital to increase the use of public transport through measures including incentives and investing in the public transport network across the county.

#### **Cabinet Member Briefings:**

These were also published in the supplementary agenda on 15 March 2021.

Members made the following comments:

**Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change:** on the Eco Park, a Member noted that the legal proceedings were to be expected when the Council removed the £42 million asset of the Eco Park from its accounts. The Member asked for assurance that the legal proceedings with Suez would not impact the Council's Waste Infrastructure Grants that it received from the Government as it was still expecting £63 million from that.

In response, the Cabinet Member noted that owing to legal privilege a full reply could not be given.

**Cabinet Member for Communities:** on libraries, a Member noted the positive comments on the situation and changes during lockdown. The Member made reference to the challenging budget situation in relation to re-establishing the revenue lost in cultural services and asked the Cabinet Member to provide reassurance that his plans to realise those savings would not include the closure of any community libraries.

In response, the Cabinet Member said that as previously stated, he confirmed that the fifty-two current library services would remain, the buildings and positions may change, but every area with a current library service would continue to have one. The Council was doing its best to ensure that the provision was fit for purpose and flexible for future use whilst working within financial constraints. He noted that he was confident in the progress towards transforming library services into something that Surrey residents would be proud of.

## **19/21 STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS [ITEM 7]**

Mrs Tina Mountain made a statement on Epsom's response to Covid-19 which had become an amazing hub for administering the vaccine and paid tribute to all the doctors, nurses, administrators and volunteers.

## **20/21 ORIGINAL MOTIONS [ITEM 8]**

### **Item 8 (i)**

Under Standing Order 12.3 the Council agreed to debate this motion.

Under Standing Order 12.1 Dr Andrew Povey moved:

#### **This Council notes that:**

Given the number of residents volunteering during the current pandemic, Surrey County Council will build on this and the previous Government's work on the Big Society.

It further recognises the importance of encouraging the ongoing volunteering by residents in a range of activities of benefit to our communities.

#### **The Council resolves to:**

- I. Work with other public sector bodies to promote volunteering and its benefits.
- II. Work with the voluntary, community and faith organisations and employers as an element of our 'no-one left behind strategy' to encourage volunteering.

III. Publicise the benefits of volunteering to the individual, society and our local communities.

Dr Povey made the following points:

- That throughout the last challenging year people had come together, noting the volunteers that helped to deliver food, visited the isolated and helped the vulnerable as well as providing assistance to the vaccination programme.
- It was a good opportunity to build upon the one million plus people who had signed up for more formal volunteering roles with the NHS and other public bodies.
- The motion sought to recognise and thank Surrey's residents for their efforts as volunteers and hard work over the last year.
- That it was vital to retain the community spirit generated through the pandemic for the future. The Government could not do everything in terms of looking after its citizens so volunteers played a crucial role.
- There had been previous attempts nationally to encourage volunteering such as the Big Society. In November 2010 the Surrey Strategic Partnership hosted a Big Society conference and the conclusion was that Surrey already had its own Big Society through the significant amount of volunteering and community activity that already took place.
- That looking to the future it would be good for the Council to build on the momentum gained through the pandemic by continuing to encourage residents to volunteer, which brought benefits to communities as well to the individual as it was character-building and helped those less fortunate.

The motion was formally seconded by Mrs Bernie Muir, who made the following comments:

- That over the past year people had discovered the joys and fulfilment of volunteering with many first time volunteers learning a lot about their local community and themselves, whether working alone, in a team, part-time or full-time.
- That in helping others, volunteers benefitted themselves, their health wellbeing and happiness. Volunteers could make new friends to combat isolation, acquire new skills, develop and advance employment opportunities, build their confidence and a sense of purpose, strengthen ties with the community which would improve neighbourhoods, broaden their support network by working with others with common interests and gain a new outlook on life and enhance causes important to them.
- In addition to supporting people as seen through the pandemic, there were an array of volunteering opportunities such as supporting theatres and museums, in heritage conservation, sports, faith groups and across neighbourhoods teaching skills to others.
- That children learnt from their parents the benefits of volunteering.
- That research had shown that adults with disabilities, health conditions, learning disabilities and conditions such as autism had shown improvement after volunteering.
- Highlighted the Old Moat Garden Centre in Epsom run by the Richmond Fellowship Charity, which offered bespoke support to those with mental health issues through work-based therapies.

- That more employers needed to see the benefits of volunteering, highlighting Surrey Choices' EmployAbility programme, in which individuals were carefully matched to an employer.
- That with the increase in agile working, volunteering would be a good way to increase engagement and tackle the isolation of working from home.
- The Council must assist in every possible way to help people to help others and in so doing to help themselves.

Nine Members made the following points:

- Thanked all those volunteers across the county that had offered their help and services and would do so after hearing the motion. Volunteering was rewarding both for the individual's mental wellbeing and to the benefit of communities.
- Noted that in Guildford and Waverley in the first fifty-two minutes of the vaccination programme roll out being announced, eight hundred and fifty volunteers stepped forward and there was a waiting list of volunteers in Runnymede.
- Hoped that the surge in volunteering would continue, noting that the work in customer services for communities in libraries was about empowering communities. The Council was working to solidify its partnerships to strengthen the community spirit and resident's empowerment.
- Noted that the promotion of volunteering was not consistent with the recent history as it was not long ago that approximately eighty volunteers in total from Elmbridge, and Epsom and Ewell were dismissed by the Council from running a previous contract for carers which they had been running successfully and were trained to do so, the contract was awarded to a company with little previous carers experience.
- Supported the motion, noting a life of voluntary service and in the first lockdown along with two other residents a cross-party initiative was established to encourage voluntary work and that generated over three thousand volunteers.
- That the lockdowns had changed the demographics of volunteers as many elderly residents had to shield and that befriending services were invaluable.
- Regarding a previous Member comment on volunteers having to queue due to the high demand to help with the vaccination programme, noted that more work needed to be done behind the scenes through customer relationship management software to coordinate the effort.
- That although there was no shortage of volunteers in Britain, welcomed the motion as it encouraged more volunteers and praised the effort of the local Knaphill St Johns Brookwood Volunteers Group stood up in response to the pandemic and thanked the Council's leadership and support of volunteers.
- Thanked all the volunteers across the county and it was important to recognise their service and to support them.
- Noted the huge volunteering effort throughout the pandemic, but that going forward there were many that did not appreciate what places there were for volunteering.
- Highlighted Voluntary Action Elmbridge and Voluntary Action services across Surrey and the country which registered organisations looking for volunteers, so it was vital to signpost residents to available services.
- Highlighted the contribution made by the governing bodies at Surrey's schools; 94% of schools in Surrey were rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted and Surrey in a recent survey was rated as the second-best place to live in the UK. The role of school governors was voluntary, they had a responsibility for making sure

that schools were performing, early interventions and education were vital for children particularly vulnerable learners and so commended the work of school governors.

- Noted the deprivation in their local division with many residents who did not feel that they could engage, however the challenge of the pandemic had driven an increase in the local voluntary sector which had been a positive experience as it helped with wellbeing, education and employment opportunities.
- Noted a personal experience of volunteering which had been life-changing, encouraged residents to volunteer and thanked the Council for welcoming her over the past four years.
- Welcomed those organisations which had a well-organised use of volunteers, noted however some organisations which needed to have more of an open mind regarding volunteering such as the police. Regarding Surrey Police he noted the use of volunteers including Special Constables - however they needed to be relatively fit alongside regular Police Constables - and Community Speed Watch - however the work was not followed through; and so called on Surrey Police to make better use of volunteers.
- Echoed a previous Member comment on the greater use of software by the Council and support in terms of communications and advertising around the opportunities available.
- Noted a personal volunteering experience over the past five years as an independent visitor with Croydon Council with a young person in care and had utilised social media to attract younger people to those roles.
- That in order to keep the level of volunteers up, the Council needed a different approach, through utilising social media to attract younger people and more that could be done through the Surrey Youth Cabinet.

The Chairman asked Dr Povey, as proposer of the original motion, to conclude the debate:

- Thanked all Members who had commented, noting the interesting suggestions and experiences of Members in terms of volunteering.
- Welcomed the summary by the seconder on the benefits of volunteering.
- Would look into the ideas raised in the discussion such as on the Surrey Youth Cabinet, on software and on Community Speed Watch - which he would take back to the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner as the Council's representative on the Surrey Police and Crime Panel.
- That there was always a role for volunteers, noting plenty of opportunities.
- Hoped that the Council seized the opportunity with the momentum gained take the matter forward.

The motion was put to a vote and received unanimous support.

Therefore, it was **RESOLVED** that:

**This Council notes that:**

Given the number of residents volunteering during the current pandemic, Surrey County Council will build on this and the previous Government's work on the Big Society.

It further recognises the importance of encouraging the ongoing volunteering by residents in a range of activities of benefit to our communities.

**The Council resolves to:**

- I. Work with other public sector bodies to promote volunteering and its benefits.
- II. Work with the voluntary, community and faith organisations and employers as an element of our 'no-one left behind strategy' to encourage volunteering.
- III. Publicise the benefits of volunteering to the individual, society and our local communities.

**Item 8 (ii)**

Under Standing Order 12.3 the Council agreed to debate this motion.

Under Standing Order 12.1 Mr Robert Evans moved:

**This Council notes that:**

It formally places on record its sincere thanks to all those workers, directly and indirectly employed by Surrey for their extraordinary efforts during the current COVID-19 crisis.

From the Council's own dedicated employees to the hard-working teachers and other staff in schools, Surrey recognises that many people have worked very long hours, not just to continue their existing role but to diversify and innovate.

Health service staff are at the forefront of saving lives, but care home workers, the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service and countless other people, including many community volunteers, are displaying remarkable courage in the face of great adversity and unforeseen challenges.

**The Council resolves that:**

- I. It hereby applauds and thanks each one for their remarkable contribution in this year of crisis.

Mr R Evans made the following points:

- That the motion echoed the words of the Leader in his statement and built on the previous motion and Members' comments.
- That the motion was a formal statement from the Council that it sincerely appreciated and thanked all workers and public services in Surrey, including volunteers, for their extraordinary efforts during the Covid-19 crisis who kept the county and country going.
- That the NHS had been saving lives daily so the 1% pay rise was disappointing.
- Praised the community spirit witnessed in his division, noting the Local Conversation initiative which provided activities and support, faith and community groups, and Stanwell Events, the Stanwell Food Bank which had provided hundreds of meals with support from local companies.
- That the motion thanked the scientists and the NHS which had excelled themselves with the vaccination programme.

- That the motion thanked parents who had been home schooling and others who had simply looked in on their neighbours.
- Hoped that the Council would be able to thank all workers in Surrey in some formal way once normality returned, in the meantime, that as a mark of the Council's appreciation that the motion be passed.

The motion was formally seconded by Mr Jonathan Essex, who made the following comments:

- Was astounded from the start of the first lockdown by the increase in volunteering in Surrey's communities, noting the surge in volunteers for a local volunteer centre with street support teams and food bank collection points set up, as well as the demand to crew vaccination centres and litter picking had become fashionable.
- That just like the Big Society should not be a cover for austerity, those workers who put themselves at risk should be thanked highlighting a personal example. Staying local had highlighted those who we relied on the most such as teachers, recycling collectors, delivery drivers and the NHS.
- That as local politicians, more than just declaring thanks was needed as Members were held accountable for their actions not just their words.
- In supporting the motion, let the Council signal its desire for more than the 1% pay rise to NHS workers and signal its frustration in the repeated delays in putting social care on the stable footing that it deserved. To commit to change how the Council valued those whose jobs it was to care for Surrey's most vulnerable in society going forward.

Ten Members made the following points:

- Highlighted that Surrey Police and its officers were missed out so would like to add that group to the list, noting their continuous hard work.
- Welcomed the proposer's remarks particularly in relation to teachers, noting that the response of Surrey's schools to the pandemic had been phenomenal and thanked Council officers for their support. Schools had stayed open to support the most vulnerable pupils, teachers and support staff had adapted to remote learning and had set up testing facilities to enable all pupils to return to their studies.
- Thanked the proposer for highlighting the significant contribution made to Surrey's response to the pandemic by Surrey Fire and Rescue Service. Which as a key public protection service within the Community Protection Group it had been on the frontline ensuring that the impacts of the pandemic were lessened particularly for the most vulnerable.
- Noted sincere thanks to SFRS for its outstanding work over the last year, its willingness to go above and beyond, and its unfailing commitment to protect and safeguard Surrey's residents.
- Added the Council's thanks to the Surrey Local Resilience Forum (SLRF) chaired by SFRS' Chief Fire Officer and led by the Chief Executive. The Forum brought together Council staff, the NHS, the Surrey Police, Surrey's District and Borough Councils, SFRS, schools, volunteers, and the military who had collectively done a remarkable job in helping to protect residents.
- That after sixteen years as a Member, paid tribute to the work of all the county's officers during the last year and past years noted that enjoyment over the years as a Member had been made possible by the terrific effort of all officers.

- Highlighted that it was World Social Work Day 2021 and so thanked all Surrey's social workers who had continued to visit families face to face and provide personal care for older adults during the pandemic.
- Noted that as Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families she and the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Domestic Abuse had recorded a message for social workers online on Surrey Matters and that it would be good if Members could share that through social media channels as it would indicate the Council's support.
- Echoed the previous Member's comments regarding World Social Work Day 2021, asking Members to join in celebrating the courage and resilience that many of Surrey's frontline social workers had shown during the challenging time; thanking all frontline social workers and staff within Adult Social Care.
- The Leader endorsed the motion noting that there was an endless list of people that deserved thanks and praise for their remarkable contributions.
- That the motion as drafted should not be confused with the Member comments made in relation to the sensitive pay negotiations in relation to the 1% pay rise to NHS workers.
- Highlighted that it was also Young Carers Action Day 2021, thanking the over 14,000 young carers in Surrey.
- Urged all to visit the Action for Carers website: <https://www.actionforcarers.org.uk>, to see how Surrey's young carers could be supported and how Members could get involved.
- Noted no hesitation in supporting the motion, Members' comments in support and thanked the proposer for the motion.
- Welcomed the motion's sentiment of paying tribute to the remarkable contribution made during the last year of crisis.
- Noted the honour of being a Member for the last twelve years, and of being a Cabinet Member. Paid tribute to the actions of Chief Executive as well as the team of officers working behind her who were professional, had acted with alacrity and integrity, and worked in partnership with key services across the Council and the Surrey LRF to protect the most vulnerable in the county.

The Chairman asked Mr R Evans, as proposer of the original motion, to conclude the debate:

- Thanked all the Members that had responded and welcomed the cross-party support and the Leader's endorsement.
- That although not explicitly mentioned in the motion he thanked Surrey Police and the Police Community Support Officers.
- That as a school governor he recognised how all teachers had gone beyond the call of duty.
- That he recognised the work of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service whose firefighters put themselves on the frontline.
- Shared his thanks to the military and the SLRF.
- Thanked the Cabinet Members for highlighting World Social Work Day and for the work done across Adult Social Care and Children's Services.
- Hoped that at some stage the Council could recognise the efforts undertaken in the last year during the pandemic.
- That whether explicitly mentioned or not in the motion the thanks expressed encompassed all workers and volunteers at whatever level who helped during the last year and would continue to do so.

The motion was put to a vote and received unanimous support.

Therefore, it was **RESOLVED** that:

**This Council notes that:**

It formally places on record its sincere thanks to all those workers, directly and indirectly employed by Surrey for their extraordinary efforts during the current COVID-19 crisis.

From the Council's own dedicated employees to the hard-working teachers and other staff in schools, Surrey recognises that many people have worked very long hours, not just to continue their existing role but to diversify and innovate.

Health service staff are at the forefront of saving lives, but care home workers, the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service and countless other people, including many community volunteers, are displaying remarkable courage in the face of great adversity and unforeseen challenges.

**The Council resolves that:**

- I. It hereby applauds and thanks each one for their remarkable contribution in this year of crisis.

**Item 8 (iii)**

Under Standing Order 12.3 the Council agreed to debate this motion.

Under Standing Order 12.1 Mr Matt Furniss moved:

**This Council notes that:**

Following the last Council meeting, I wrote to the Mayor of London on behalf of this Council to express our strong feelings against the proposed new Greater London Boundary Charge that would penalise Surrey and other counties' residents bordering London.

London is not an island and must take into consideration the impact on its neighbours. Surrey County Council and the Mayor of London need to work together to tackle congestion, to move toward net zero carbon and to enhance the prosperity of the region by working together.

However, it is clear from the response that Transport for London (TfL) is initially looking at a £3.50 daily charge, with a possible higher charge (£5.50) for the most polluting vehicles.

This charge would impact between 57,000 and 61,000 residents on a typical working day based on 2011 and 2019 data. Whilst this levy, as the Mayor's Office says, could be earmarked to support sustainable travel in boundary borough, there is no mention that this money would be invested in cross-border improvements.

Surrey residents and taxpayers have already bailed out London's TfL for the second time through the Government's generous settlements in 2020. Surrey and other bordering counties' residents should not have to bear extra financial penalties for the London Mayor's mismanagement of TfL's finances.

**The Council resolves to:**

- I. Oppose any Greater London Boundary Charge or charge on entering London to work that targets non-London residents.

Mr Furniss made the following points:

- Following February's Council meeting, he wrote to the Mayor of London for confirmation on whether he was considering a Greater London Boundary Charge, following suggestions from several media reports.
- That the correspondences with the Mayor's office were less than positive, highlighting the lack of cross-border working and the London-centric attitude.
- That he had sought the Mayor's reassurance to the Council that Surrey's businesses and our residents that the boundary charge was not a serious or active proposition which would impact potentially more than 61,000 Surrey residents on the typical working day travelling across the border.
- Called for greater cooperation by the Mayor of London and Transport for London (TfL) to improve sustainable transport in and out of London, Surrey remained committed to working with TfL as a key partner to tackle congestion in the move forward to net zero carbon.
- Opposed any Greater London Boundary Charge or any charge to enter London to work that targeted non-London residents as Surrey and other bordering counties' residents should not have to bear extra financial penalties for the London Mayor's mismanagement of TfL's finances.

The motion was formally seconded by Mrs Bernie Muir, who made the following comments:

- Noted concern about the proposal for the Greater London Boundary Charge particularly for those Surrey boroughs that bordered London as a considerable portion of the working population and residents were reliant on services crossing into London.
- That the proposed charge showed no cooperation between London and the counties impacted, there was no suggestion of any of potential funds being distributed to mitigate the negative impact faced by Surrey's residents.
- That business owners, professions and services that depended on road vehicles crossing the border would be adversely affected.
- Noted that taxpayers had already bailed out TfL twice, to the tune of at least £3.4 billion, and the proposed Greater London Boundary Charge was an ill-conceived quick fix in the absence of a clear and workable strategy would never be justified.
- That in the midst of the pandemic the Mayor of London was asking the residents of Surrey and the bordering counties for funding to mitigate the Mayor's failed policies and mismanagement of TfL.

Mr Jonathan Essex moved an amendment which had been published in the supplementary agenda (15 March 2021), which was formally seconded by Mr Robert Evans.

The amendment was as follows (with additional words in bold/underlined and deletions crossed through):

**This Council notes that:**

Following the last Council meeting, I wrote to the Mayor of London on behalf of this Council to express our strong feelings against the proposed new Greater London Boundary Charge that would penalise Surrey and other counties' residents bordering London.

**There are many TfL bus routes serving parts of Surrey and the Government this week announced funding for bus lanes and measures to encourage the increased use of public transport.**

**Surrey County Council's Climate Change Strategy commits that greenhouse gas emissions from Surrey should be reduced by two thirds by 2030 and to zero by 2050.**

London is not an island and must take into consideration the impact on its neighbours. Surrey County Council and the Mayor of London need to work together to tackle congestion, to move toward net zero carbon and to enhance the prosperity of the region by working together.

However, it is clear from the response that Transport for London (TfL) is initially looking at a £3.50 daily charge, with a possible higher charge (£5.50) for the most polluting vehicles.

This charge would impact between 57,000 and 61,000 residents on a typical working day based on 2011 and 2019 data. Whilst this levy, as the Mayor's Office says, could be earmarked to support sustainable travel in boundary borough, there is no mention that this money would be invested in cross-border improvements.

~~Surrey residents and taxpayers have already bailed out London's TfL for the second time through the Government's generous settlements in 2020. Surrey and other bordering counties' residents should not have to bear extra financial penalties for the London Mayor's mismanagement of TfL's finances.~~

**The Council resolves to:**

- ~~I. Oppose any Greater London Boundary Charge or charge on entering London to work that targets non-London residents.~~
- I. **Urge the Government to provide long-term sustainable financial support to TfL and encourage whoever is elected Mayor in 2021 to work closely with Surrey County Council to make public transport a more economically viable option in Surrey, just as it is in London, and additionally, to ensure any new charges are mutually beneficial to London and Surrey.**

Mr Essex spoke to his amendment, making the following points:

- That the amendment ensured that the motion reflected the challenge of improving public transport between London and Surrey.
- That the motion encouraged private car journeys, whilst the amendment ensured that the motion matched the Council's commitment to addressing climate change in-keeping with Surrey's Climate Change Strategy which was committed to a 67% reduction in transport emissions by 2030.
- That the amendment included reference to TfL's bus routes travelling into and out of Surrey, and such proposals by the Mayor of London would fund bus lanes and public transport in the absence of money during the pandemic or from Government.
- That the amendment clarified that a new direction of travel was needed, including policies and incentives that reduced the need to travel and encouraged staying locally as well as electrifying public transport.
- Emphasised that investment was needed to deliver such changes regarding reducing congestion, improving road safety and air quality, noting that air quality action areas still existed in many parts of Surrey.
- That the amendment was intended to be constructive, calling on the future leadership of Surrey and London to work together.

The amendment was formally seconded by Mr R Evans, who made the following comments:

- That the amendment both strengthened and updated the motion by removing inaccuracies and ambiguities in order to ensure honesty with Surrey's residents.
- Contrary to the wording of the motion, the Council had not taken a position on the Greater London Boundary Charge and asked whether the Cabinet Member for Highways could publish his correspondence with TfL and the Mayor of London's office.
- That TfL bus routes cross-border between Surrey and London benefitted passengers.
- That Surrey taxpayers had not bailed out London, Surrey benefitted from London services and the subsidies were financed from the whole country via the Government as fare revenue made up 70% of TfL funding.
- Questioned whether the Cabinet Member for Highways or Members had read the Mayor of London and TfL's Financial Sustainability Plan - 11 January 2021, which stated that passenger numbers were down 95% in the first lockdown, costs had risen as buses had to be adapted with more staff needed and Personal Protective Equipment. The Government had contributed over £3 billion in emergency funding for TfL, noting certain conditions such as the suspension of concessionary fares for schoolchildren and over 60s.
- That the Leader noted earlier that no one should be left behind, but it was not the Mayor of London nor TfL who would make that decision, noting that a future motion on the issue be directed towards the Secretary of State for Transport and that all political parties write to the Government regarding fair funding.
- That there were hundreds of stations in Surrey and many rail lines leading into London, the Prime Minister yesterday encouraged more people to use buses.
- That the motion ignored the fact that there was an election for Mayor of London on 6 May 2021, it gave the impression that the result was a foregone conclusion, which the amendment rectified.

Mr Furniss did not accept the amendment and he made the following comments:

- Noted that the London-centric attitude had been clear throughout the correspondence with the Mayor of London's office which was also asking the Secretary of State for Transport to devolve vehicle Excise Duty to London.
- That there should be cross-border working for the benefit of all, rather than putting up a wall around London and penalising anyone who crossed over whether it was for personal, business, or medical reasons; particularly during the pandemic.
- That more sustainable transport should be prioritised rather than introducing the Greater London Boundary Charge.

Seven Members spoke on the amendment and made the following comments:

- Was in favour of reducing emissions and greater cooperation between all interested parties but noted the unintended consequences of the amendment.
- Challenged the practicalities of calling for an increased use of public transport such as buses; noting the difficulties in distance travelling.
- That the Greater London Boundary Charge was a threat to businesses which relied on cross-border travel, would redirect residents on the London border to further local recycling centres which may increase carbon emissions, and would penalise those residents attending Kingston Hospital.
- Opposed the amendment so as not to support Surrey's residents funding the Greater London strategy, whilst in relation to the original motion noted that their division bordered Greater London so many residents travelled into London daily for work, school pick-ups, shopping and going to the doctors and the Council must continue to put pressure on the Mayor of London's office to object to the selfish proposition and to push for clarity for residents.
- That it diluted the original motion by focussing on divergent issues around public transport and utilising bus lanes.
- Supported the principle of the amendment which was about requesting long-term financial support for more sustainable transport.
- Noted concern that in order for Surrey to reach its target of a 46% drop in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2025, innovative thinking was vital, it was a good opportunity during Covid-19 recovery to assess how travel had changed.
- Supported the amendment as stressed that the business as usual concept was not possible if the Council was ever going to address the declared climate emergency.
- Opposed the amendment as the Mayor of London and TfL did not understand the amount of cross-border traffic into London, noting divisional examples of travel into London for medical, education, work purposes.
- That TfL may run buses in Surrey but they have had a policy in recent years of demanding money from Surrey to fund them, TfL was in financial difficulty but some of its troubles were down to its mismanagement.
- The proposed charge needed to be opposed and a pan-regional approach was needed rather than a London-first approach.
- Noted a divisional example of a borough bordering Greater London and that local residents were opposed to the Mayor of London's proposal. Whilst sharing the objectives to reduce emissions, that must be done in a planned manner, rather than a knee jerk reaction which would potentially impact those who could least afford it.

The Chairman asked Mr Essex, as proposer of the amendment to conclude the debate:

- Noted that he had no further comments to add.

The amendment was put to the vote with 10 Members voting For, 61 voting Against and 2 Abstentions.

Therefore the amendment was lost.

Returning to the substantive motion, nine Members made the following comments:

- Noted that TfL had many years to work more closely with Surrey but repeatedly had acted in an isolationist way, noting no consideration by TfL of the charge in relation to cross-border travel and discussions over the new Epsom and St Helier Hospital serving the residents of north Surrey and south London.
- That a robust partnership was needed as well as the Council ensuring that it set out what was needed for Surrey's residents.
- Noted a divisional example highlighting the use of Kingston Hospital by Epsom and Ewell residents as well as the shopping facilities in Kingston. Suggested that the charge worked both ways, from London into Surrey noting the cross-border travel and use of Chessington Road.
- That the charge was the wrong way to plug the gap in TfL's budget, noting divisional examples in which there was not an adequate supply of buses going into and out of it from London and that the new Epsom and St Helier Hospital at Sutton would be costly to Surrey's residents if the charge would be brought in.
- Noted that the proposed charge was absurd, due to the extensive cross-border travel and that the charge would impose a hard border.
- That cross-border travel was a daily occurrence, highlighting the importance of opposing the charge which was potentially a forerunner of sweeping a large part of north Surrey into Greater London area by extending the London boroughs right out to the M25.
- That the proposed charge was an idea stemming from the London Congestion Charge but was misleading to compare it as the Congestion Charge was intended to reduce the amount of traffic into London and was successful as it was served well by public transport links.
- Whilst the proposed charge was a revenue raising exercise which would affect many thousands if not millions of people bordering or travelling into London for work, shopping and leisure facilities; and would backfire on London creating enormous chaos and inconvenience.
- Noted surprise regarding contributions from Members who had not read the Mayor of London and TfL's Financial Sustainability Plan - 11 January 2021 nor understood the amendment, reiterating the earlier point that if Surrey wanted to have an impact on what was decided by whoever would be Mayor of London following the elections, Surrey had to work with them.
- That the proposed charge was not a decision for the Mayor of London but for the Secretary of State for Transport, noting pages 99-100 of the Mayor of London and TfL's Financial Sustainability Plan - 11 January 2021 which detailed the exemptions and proposed charge.

- Noted opposition to the proposed charge, which referred to daily cross-border traffic as opposed to occasional travel.
- That the vehicle Excise Duty as an alternative system of funding was opposed by the proposer of the motion, but that was a proposal from the previous Mayor of London, now Prime Minister and was supported by all of Surrey's political parties.
- That the motion highlighted the ineptitude of the current Mayor of London, lack of collaborative working and financial mismanagement; opposed the proposed charge in order to protect Surrey's residents and businesses.
- That having written to the Cabinet Member for Highways in January highlighting the issues that would affect his local division noting several busy roads travelling between Surrey and London; the response was to wait and see, and his offer to work with the Cabinet Member on the issue had been ignored.
- Welcomed the motion but noted that it did not go far enough, noting that in his correspondence to the Cabinet Member he indicated that if TfL was to introduce the proposed charge, then Surrey should do the same in order to compensate for the lack of funding for its highways.
- Noted a divisional example in which Surrey residents down the road from Sutton in Greater London would face the proposed charge, which was sabre-rattling between the Mayor of London and Government with Surrey's residents being caught in the middle.
- Sought assurance from the Cabinet Member for Highways that in the absence of countermeasures to the proposed charge, that the Council was prepared to do whatever was necessary to protect Surrey residents and would call upon the eleven Surrey MP's to support their constituents.

The Chairman asked Mr Furniss, as proposer of the original motion, to conclude the debate:

- Thanked Members for their contributions to the debate noting that it was vital to protect Surrey's residents from unfair charges.
- That irrespective of the future Mayor of London and upcoming elections, the Council needed to make a firm stance that it did not support a charge that targeted non-London residents in order to bailout TfL's failing finances and compensate for the lack of Government funding.
- That Surrey's MPs had been written to since February's Council, he was happy to share the initial correspondence with the Mayor of London, response and subsequent letter with all Members.

The motion was put to the vote with 66 Members voting For, 2 voting Against and 4 Abstentions.

Therefore it was **RESOLVED** that:

**This Council notes that:**

Following the last Council meeting, I wrote to the Mayor of London on behalf of this Council to express our strong feelings against the proposed new Greater London Boundary Charge that would penalise Surrey and other counties' residents bordering London.

London is not an island and must take into consideration the impact on its neighbours. Surrey County Council and the Mayor of London need to work together to tackle congestion, to move toward net zero carbon and to enhance the prosperity of the region by working together.

However, it is clear from the response that Transport for London (TfL) is initially looking at a £3.50 daily charge, with a possible higher charge (£5.50) for the most polluting vehicles.

This charge would impact between 57,000 and 61,000 residents on a typical working day based on 2011 and 2019 data. Whilst this levy, as the Mayor's Office says, could be earmarked to support sustainable travel in boundary borough, there is no mention that this money would be invested in cross-border improvements.

Surrey residents and taxpayers have already bailed out London's TfL for the second time through the Government's generous settlements in 2020. Surrey and other bordering counties' residents should not have to bear extra financial penalties for the London Mayor's mismanagement of TfL's finances.

**The Council resolves to:**

- I. Oppose any Greater London Boundary Charge or charge on entering London to work that targets non-London residents.

**Item 8 (iv)**

Under Standing Order 12.3 the Council agreed to debate this motion.

Under Standing Order 12.1 Mr Will Forster moved:

**This Council notes that:**

The shift to Microsoft Teams meetings has enabled Council business to continue during the pandemic and that Members and staff have adapted admirably to this change in practice.

There are some definite advantages to holding remote meetings such as increased participation from the public and members and reduced road congestion and carbon emissions. It also saves the council money and enables those with caring responsibilities to attend when travelling a distance would have been an obstacle. It would therefore be beneficial to have the choice to continue to hold these remote meetings where appropriate, after the current temporary measures have lapsed.

Some Members may prefer meeting in person whilst acknowledging that remote meetings do have their place.

It is essential for Members to understand their obligations with regard to meeting attendance be it in person or online.

**The Council resolves to:**

- I. Write to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) urging that the temporary change to the meeting rules set out in the Local Government Act 1972 be made permanent so that after May we have the flexibility to hold meetings remotely or in person or by using a combination of the two.
- II. Write to Surrey's Members of Parliament, as well as Surrey's Borough, District, Town and Parish Councils asking for support for this flexible approach to council meetings.
- III. Request that the members of the Audit and Governance Committee assess the pros and cons of holding remote/hybrid/in person meetings and make recommendations as appropriate to which Council/committee meetings must be held in person and which could continue to be held remotely.
- IV. Once our request is successful, to explore the use of technology to develop remote meetings in order to attract an even wider audience.

Mr Forster made the following points:

- That the motion called on the Council to lobby the Government to extend local authorities' powers to hold remote meetings both in the short-term post 7 May and also into the long-term after the pandemic.
- That it was frustrating that the Government seemed reluctant to extend remote meetings often citing the lack of parliamentary and ministerial time; hoped that the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government would review the matter urgently.
- That the flexibility to hold remote meetings brought advantages such as the £2 million reduction in Member expenses over the last year, reducing travel also reduced congestion on Surrey's roads and carbon emissions, Member and public engagement in meetings had increased.
- That should there be an extension to the powers granted under legislation, the Audit and Governance Committee would lead on agreeing which meetings should be remote, in person, or hybrid.

The motion was formally seconded by Mrs Angela Goodwin, who reserved the right to speak.

Eight Members made the following points:

- Noted that there was a huge loss in terms of getting a feel for a committee and for interactions with colleagues as well as officers; remote meetings were useful for smaller meetings such as working groups.
- Noted the difficulties of remote meetings including technical limitations, that 200,000 residents in Surrey were digitally excluded and cost of IT equipment.
- Supported the motion because it included a resolution for the Audit and Governance Committee making recommendations as to which Council or committee meetings could be held in person or remotely.
- The Leader reassured the proposer noting that he along with many other council leaders across the country had raised the issue with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government through the Local Government Association and the County Councils Network.

- Highlighted support for resolution point I in that the Council would urge the Government to continue with the temporary change to the meeting rules, in order to have the flexibility to hold meetings remotely, in person, or using a combination of the two.
- Urged that the Audit and Governance Committee take into account the work the Chief Executive and officers were doing in relation to the Remote Meetings Protocol as further guidance around virtual meetings would be useful - such as not setting up back to back meetings - and recognising concerns expressed by staff around hybrid meetings which potentially disadvantaged those attending a meeting remotely.
- That although the motion called for greater flexibility, noted unease against the blanket use of remote meetings going forward.
- That although remote meetings saved time and travel, the key disadvantage regarded the difficulty in interacting with Members and officers.
- Noted actions already underway by the Council for example regarding flexibility, that was reflected in the Council's agile working principles.
- That emerging from lockdown, it was a good opportunity for the Council's refinement of the Remote Meetings Protocol and that it was important that Council refer future considerations directly to Members via the Audit and Governance Committee.
- That in a short space of time over the course of the pandemic, the Council had progressed for the better, noting the ease of public participation and increase as well as Member participation.
- That it was vital to have the flexibility of hybrid meetings, noting the importance of inclusivity for both Members and residents. Adding that it would enable more prospective councillors to step forward who were previously prevented from being Members.
- Supported greater flexibility through remote and hybrid meetings as it allowed the continued participation for those Members elsewhere in the country or abroad, or with health problems noting the increased attendance at remote meetings.
- Welcomed the flexibility to hold meetings remotely, in person or a hybrid between the two and that a downside of remote meetings was the lengthy voting system compared to voting in person.
- Echoed the importance of inclusivity as hybrid meetings enabled a whole new portfolio of prospective councillors to become Members including those working or who were parents.

Mrs Goodwin, the seconder of the motion, made the following comments:

- Noted the variety of Member comments most of which had been in favour of the motion and commended the motion.

The Chairman asked Mr Forster, as proposer of the original motion, to conclude the debate:

- Thanked Members for the broadly supportive comments and experiences shared.
- Concerning meetings with perspective councillors, noted that remote meetings enabled greater inclusivity as Members could engage fully whilst undertaking caring responsibilities, looking after children and working.

- That following agreement and continued flexibility granted by the Government, the Audit and Governance Committee's monitoring of the Remote Meetings Protocol would be useful.

The motion was put to a vote and received unanimous support.

Therefore, it was **RESOLVED** that:

**This Council notes that:**

The shift to Microsoft Teams meetings has enabled Council business to continue during the pandemic and that Members and staff have adapted admirably to this change in practice.

There are some definite advantages to holding remote meetings such as increased participation from the public and members and reduced road congestion and carbon emissions. It also saves the council money and enables those with caring responsibilities to attend when travelling a distance would have been an obstacle. It would therefore be beneficial to have the choice to continue to hold these remote meetings where appropriate, after the current temporary measures have lapsed.

Some Members may prefer meeting in person whilst acknowledging that remote meetings do have their place.

It is essential for Members to understand their obligations with regard to meeting attendance be it in person or online.

**The Council resolves to:**

- I. Write to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) urging that the temporary change to the meeting rules set out in the Local Government Act 1972 be made permanent so that after May we have the flexibility to hold meetings remotely or in person or by using a combination of the two.
- II. Write to Surrey's Members of Parliament, as well as Surrey's Borough, District, Town and Parish Councils asking for support for this flexible approach to council meetings.
- III. Request that the members of the Audit and Governance Committee assess the pros and cons of holding remote/hybrid/in person meetings and make recommendations as appropriate to which Council/committee meetings must be held in person and which could continue to be held remotely.
- IV. Once our request is successful, to explore the use of technology to develop remote meetings in order to attract an even wider audience.

**Item 8 (v)**

Under Standing Order 12.3 the Leader of the Council, Mr Tim Oliver, moved a proposal. The proposal was as follows:

That the motion below by Mr Chris Botten be referred to the Cabinet for more detailed consideration.

**This Council notes that:**

The economy of Surrey relies significantly on workers from the European Union (EU) in the care and health sectors, in construction and hospitality and other areas vital to our communities.

EU nationals from the 27 EU member states are part of our shared communities alongside United Kingdom (UK) citizens. They are our husbands, wives, partners, parents, friends, neighbours and colleagues.

**This Council further notes that:**

Since 2016 EU nationals have been promised again and again that "there will be no change for EU citizens already lawfully resident in the UK and [they...] will be treated no less favourably than they are at present".

Home Office figures (as of Dec 2020) reveal that 4,800 people in Surrey are still waiting for a decision on their Settled Status application.

27,320 people in Surrey have only been granted temporary 'Pre-Settled Status'. That means a total of 32,120 applicants in Surrey have still not been given the permanent right to stay.

**The Council resolves to:**

- I. Recognise the valuable contribution EU citizens make to Surrey, acknowledging that they are an integral part of our community and without them the Council would struggle to deliver its services.
- II. Write to the Home Office and Surrey's Members of Parliament urging them to grant EU citizens living locally the automatic right to stay in the UK.

In speaking to his proposal the Leader of the Council:

- Noted that the Council recognised the valuable contribution that European Union (EU) citizens made to the United Kingdom and Surrey.
- Noted that there were approximately 4.6 million people who had been granted the right to remain in the UK post Brexit under the EU Settlement Scheme and those applications were being progressed.
- Noted that of those 4.6 million people, 2.5 million people had been being granted permanent leave to remain, 2 million had been granted pre-settled status and only 3% were refused, withdrawn, voided or invalid.
- Noted that it would be helpful for Members to have more detail on the matter to understand whether there were difficulties for Surrey residents on their settled status applications.
- That the Minister for Future Borders and Immigration recently urged people to apply to receive the status they deserved in UK law; the Government was supportive of EU citizens seeking settled status with support available seven days a week on the phone and by email, as well as seventy-two grant funded organisations across the UK to help EU citizens with their applications.
- Noted that applications for settled status must be submitted by 30 June 2021.

Mr Chris Botten agreed to the referral of the motion.

The proposal to refer the motion was put to the vote and received unanimous support.

Therefore it was:

**RESOLVED:**

That the motion be referred to the Cabinet.

**21/21 REVIEW OF SELECT COMMITTEE TASK GROUP LEAD ROLE - REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL [ITEM 9]**

The Leader of the Council introduced the report. He noted that he was pleased to see that the Independent Remuneration Panel recognised the considerable improvements that the Council had made to the scrutiny function. He thanked the chairmen of the select committees and Members for their input, he welcomed the earlier engagement on policy matters and the contribution of the task groups which gave a smaller group of Members the opportunity to deep dive into areas of focus.

**RESOLVED:**

That the SRA for the Task Group Lead is retained at its current level and subject to annual inflationary adjustment in line with other Members' Allowances.

**22/21 ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL - MEMBER DEVELOPMENT [ITEM 10]**

The Vice-Chairman introduced the report and noted that:

- She had been chairing the Member Development Steering Group (MDSG) on behalf of the Deputy Leader.
- The MDSG was responsible for overseeing Member training and support, it was cross-party and she thanked its members for their constructive challenges and input.
- Despite the challenges of Covid-19 and it being the last year of the current Council election term, she noted that attendance at Member seminars and training events had been higher than ever. That was partly due to the mixture of online and in person learning which would reduce time and travel commitments for Members, alongside a reduction of costs for the Council.
- One of the key tasks of the MDSG over the last year had been to feed into the plans for democratic and Member spaces at the Council's new civic heart, Woodhatch Place, which would facilitate the Council's democratic requirements whilst providing a modern agile working space.
- She hoped that Members would support the report and the amendment, noting the importance of the current approach to Member development as being 'sufficient, equitable, and effective'.

Mrs Mary Lewis moved an amendment to the recommendations which had been published in the supplementary agenda (15 March 2021), which was formally seconded by Mrs Clare Curran.

The amendment was as follows (with additional words in bold/underlined and deletions crossed through):

That Council endorses notes: ~~the current approach to Member development and agrees that it is sufficient, equitable and effective.~~

- I. the Annual Report on Member Development;
- II. the Decision of the Audit and Governance Committee Member Code of Conduct Task Group not to make Corporate Parenting Training Mandatory in the Code of Conduct; it is listed as 'Essential' training as part of member induction;
- III. the 'Corporate Parenting Principles' introduced in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and the 'Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities on Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked After Children and Care Leavers' 2018.

That Council resolves: to work with Officers through the Member Development Steering Group to develop an enhanced Corporate Parenting training offer which is included in ALL Member training, including training sessions of all Scrutiny and Regulatory and Local/Joint Committees of the Council, so that they are assured that Statutory Corporate Parenting principles are being embedded in all aspects of the Council's and Members' work.

That Council agrees: to reconsider the Member Training offer on Corporate Parenting after six months of the new Council, to monitor uptake of the 'Essential' induction training and the introduction of 'Applying Corporate Parenting Principles' training in every part of Members' work as Councillors.

Mrs Lewis spoke to her amendment, making the following points:

- Thanked the officer for the report and the MDSG for its work.
- That although Members would generally agree that the current approach to Member development was 'sufficient, equitable and effective', she noted that the Corporate Parenting Board supported mandatory training on Corporate Parenting.
- That local authorities had a duty to apply the seven Corporate Parenting Principles introduced in the Children, and Social Work Act 2017, further clarified in the Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities on Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2018.
- Highlighted Principles (a) - (g) in the Children, and Social Work Act 2017 which local authorities had regard to, noting that over the last few years the Corporate Parenting Board had not seen evidence that such Principles permeated the Council's work.
- Highlighted point 2.2 in the Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities on Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2018, in which 'the corporate parenting principles do not exist in a vacuum. They should shape the mind-set and culture of every part of a local authority in how it carries out all of its functions in relation to looked-after children and care leavers.'
- That in January 2020 the Corporate Parenting Board and the Executive Director of Children, Families and Lifelong Learning wrote to the five hundred plus elected councillors in Surrey challenging them on how they were applying their Corporate Parenting Principles - there had been little change from the Council following that.

- That without the assurance that Members had understood fully and had signed up to their statutory duties, that as Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families, and Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Board it was difficult to ask that of external partners.
- That only 38% of Members took up Corporate Parenting training after the 2017 election, noting the reluctance by some to support initiatives that had been started by the Corporate Parenting Board.
- That the Member Services Manager made strong representations for mandatory training on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Board at the Audit and Governance Committee Member Code of Conduct Task Group, which the Committee decided against.
- The amended recommendations were a compromise in that it was proposed that training on Corporate Parenting principles would be essential.
- Hoped that Members would support the amendment towards an enhanced Corporate Parenting ethos across the new Council.

The motion was formally seconded by Mrs Clare Curran, who made the following comments:

- Paid tribute to Mrs Lewis for the outstanding work that she had done on behalf of the Council as Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families.
- That she found it reasonable to expect Members to be fully up to speed on the statutory guidance which applied to Members, following their duties by attending appropriate and tailored training opportunities which would be presented to all in the new Council following the elections.
- Noted that just as there was a shared aspiration for excellence through the Council's improvement work going forward, there should be a shared aspiration about the way in which the Council thought about its children and young people.
- That it was vital to ensure that all Members of the new Council irrespective of division or political party, had access to a full training offer to embed in the Council's strong ethos of Corporate Parenting.
- That it was vital that Members shared a sense of vision and responsibility for its children and young people ensuring that they were at the forefront of its actions, the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibility must not stand apart from the Council's regular duties and nor could the responsibility be delegated solely to the Corporate Parenting Board.
- Asked Members to support the amendment, appealing to Members to model the behaviour and attitude of any good parent by welcoming the training and opportunities to support, to encourage and to guide children and young people.

Twelve Members made the following points:

- As Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee a Member sought clarification from the proposer of the amendment on the wording, whether the training was proposed as mandatory, or essential. He noted concern if the training was to be mandatory as it was a matter of judgement by each elected Member and did not breach the Member Code of Conduct.
- In response the proposer of the amendment confirmed that as published in the supplementary agenda the compromise by the Corporate Parenting Board was for an essential training on Corporate Parenting Principles.
- Noted that the amendment summed up the Council's Conservative Party administration, which had been using its majority to impose conditions on all Members over and above that which the law and local political consensus required.

- That the proposal for Council to monitor the uptake in training after six months was unacceptable as it treated Members as incapable of making their own rational decisions as to how they fulfilled their role, independence was fundamental.
- That the proposals were an attempt to highlight to Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) that the Council was taking action, when in fact the administration had failed to protect its children and its leadership did not take responsibility regarding the 2018 Ofsted report.
- Made a plea for the Council to support the amendment in reflecting that passion that all Members had for their own children, noting the importance as Members to understand the needs and to support all those children and young people that the Council cared for.
- That over the last twenty-four years as a Member, it was clear from the 'Every Child Matters' agenda in which education and social care services were merged, that Members' responsibility and role was in caring for its children and young people so having that training was important.
- Noted that there was no full programme of formal Member training twenty-four years ago and was proud as chairman of a working group which looked at cross services performance, to bring in staff development and Member training.
- That it took enthusiasm, passion and real commitment to be a Member to carry out the work needed so supported the enhanced training offer and noted the importance of refresher training.
- Applauded the Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Board and its members who were passionate about Surrey's Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
- Noted disappointment that the matter had been turned into a political issue, stressed that the training needed to be essential because all Members had a responsibility as Corporate Parents.
- Noted that the amendment was an emotional plea, it was another example of regulation and bureaucracy. Although granted the title of Corporate Parents, most Members were not involved in the work around Looked After Children or Care Leavers on a day-to-day basis.
- Although not explicitly stated, the implication was that the training was mandatory and noted caution against creeping towards that.
- Noted anger in response to some comments which demonstrated why such training needed to be essential. Looked After Children and Care Leavers were important to the Council and should be to all Members irrespective of day-to-day input.
- That the amendment would help to emphasise to Members their responsibilities around their role as Corporate Parents.
- Pointed out that the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee was a scrutiny body unlike the Corporate Parenting Board, so stressed that it needed to have up-to-date information.
- Echoed previous comments in which residents were the judge of whether Members were doing a good job, that in addition to Member attendance, the completion of critical training modules should be made public so residents could decide whether Members were fulfilling their responsibilities.
- That the amendment was proposed on behalf of the Corporate Parenting Board which was cross-party and not by Cabinet. As essential training, it would highlight the Corporate Parenting responsibility held by all Members.
- The Vice-Chairman noted that it was an emotional topic as emotion was vital to understanding the experiences of Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
- The MDSG had developed a training guide for post the May local elections, which included a wide range of essential training such as: Corporate Parenting, the Member Code of Conduct, local government finance, an introduction to

equalities, diversity and inclusion. Such principles were necessary to be a modern Member.

The amendment was put to the vote with 69 Members voting For, 1 voting Against and 1 Abstention.

Therefore the amendment was carried and became the substantive motion.

The motion was put to the vote with Members voting unanimously.

Therefore it was **RESOLVED**:

That Council noted:

- I. the Annual Report on Member Development;
- II. the Decision of the Audit and Governance Committee Member Code of Conduct Task Group not to make Corporate Parenting Training Mandatory in the Code of Conduct; it is listed as 'Essential' training as part of member induction;
- III. the 'Corporate Parenting Principles' introduced in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and the 'Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities on Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked After Children and Care Leavers' 2018.

That Council resolved: to work with Officers through the Member Development Steering Group to develop an enhanced Corporate Parenting training offer which is included in ALL Member training, including training sessions of all Scrutiny and Regulatory and Local/Joint Committees of the Council, so that they are assured that Statutory Corporate Parenting principles are being embedded in all aspects of the Council's and Members' work.

That Council agreed: to reconsider the Member Training offer on Corporate Parenting after six months of the new Council, to monitor uptake of the 'Essential' induction training and the introduction of 'Applying Corporate Parenting Principles' training in every part of Members' work as Councillors.

## **23/21 CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES - REMOTE MEETINGS [ITEM 11]**

The Leader of the Council introduced the report, which followed on from item 8 original motion (iv). He hoped that the Government would put in arrangements to allow local authorities to carry on with remote formal committee meetings. In the event that the Regulations were not extended or new legislation did not come into force post 7 May, the recommendations sought to reinstate the arrangements previously in place regarding executive (Cabinet) and non-executive decision-making. If still in force by 31 July 2021 or as soon as practicable thereafter, the measures were to be reviewed. He added that unless there was a change in the Regulations, the Council's Annual General Meeting (AGM) in May would have to be held in person and quorum adhered to.

A Member suggested that regarding the Council's AGM a hybrid meeting would be beneficial if feasible.

## **RESOLVED:**

That, in the absence of the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 being extended beyond 7 May 2021, or other regulations being in force, Council agreed:

1. To amend the definition within the Council's Constitution (as far as the law allows) to define Cabinet as a formal meeting of Cabinet or the Leader or nominated Cabinet Member making a decision in consultation with at least two other Cabinet Members.
2. To delegate all non-executive decisions (as far as the law allows) to the relevant proper officer in consultation with the relevant chairman or member nominated by the chairman.
3. To agree that all members unable to attend a council meeting for a period greater than six months receives a dispensation further to section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to 31 October 2021.
4. To resolve that, in the absence of legislation to allow remote meetings to take place, that all decision making will take place in line with the Surrey County Council Remote Meetings Protocol (Annex A).
5. To agree that the Audit and Governance Committee will monitor the use of the delegations in line with the Remote Meetings Protocol (Annex A) and as required, make recommendations on any required amendments to the protocol to ensure that Members remain informed in relation to council decision making.
6. To authorise the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chairman of the Council and group leaders to incorporate any legislative changes issued by Government into council business processes.
7. To agree that all the above measures will automatically terminate on the coming into force of any regulations which permit remote attendance at Council meetings.
8. To review these measures (if still in force) by 31 July 2021 or as soon as practicable thereafter as determined by the Audit and Governance Committee.

## **24/21 REVISED COUNCILLOR CODE OF CONDUCT - AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE: REPORT OF THE MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT TASK GROUP [ITEM 12]**

The Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee introduced the report. He noted that it was a further revised iteration from what the Council received at its past two meetings, as the Local Government Association (LGA) had made small amendments to the Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020.

## **RESOLVED:**

That Council approved the revised Councillor Code of Conduct.

## **25/21 REPORT OF THE CABINET [ITEM 13]**

The Leader of the Council presented the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 23 February 2021.

### **Recommendations on Policy Framework Documents:**

- A. School Organisation Plan
- B. Strategic Investment Board Annual Report - Financial Year 2019/20

A Member noted that regarding Halsey Garton Property Limited delivering income and efficiencies, the Council invested £327 million and the value of that investment was £267 million which was a book loss of £60 million - although not a realised loss, it was disappointing. The Council and other councils swept up available assets across the market and 40% of Surrey's investments were in the retail sector which although was diversification it had not worked for Surrey. Regarding the recommendation to endorse the Strategic Investment Board's Annual Report, he noted that Council should express its concern in relation to the returns and activities of Halsey Garton Property Limited.

In response, the Leader reiterated that the book valuations were not crystallised losses and expected that following the pandemic those valuations would recover over time as the Council is a long-term property investor. The Council was running at 85% for rent collections which was good under the current circumstances. The Council did not sweep up all that was available on the market, it was a balanced portfolio of investments. There was a detailed matrix for deciding whether or not a property was suitable to be invested in and the portfolio would continue to be managed with advice from external providers.

### **Reports for Information/Discussion:**

- C. Setting a Radical Agenda for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Surrey and Surrey County Council
- D. Improving Mental Health Outcomes, Experiences and Services in Surrey
- E. Surrey Infrastructure Prioritisation
  
- F. Quarterly Report on Decisions Taken Under Special Urgency Arrangements: 10 February 2021 - 16 March 2021

### **RESOLVED:**

1. That Council approved the School Organisation Plan 2020-2030.
2. That Council endorsed the Annual Report of the Strategic Investment Board.
3. That Council noted that there had been no urgent decision in the last month.
4. That the report of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 23 February 2021 be adopted.

**26/21 MINUTES OF CABINET MEETINGS [ITEM 14]**

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.

Miss Heath paid tribute to the Chairman for his service and thanked Members for their service including those who would not be seeking re-election.

[Meeting ended at: 14.18 pm]

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**Chairman**

## Leader's Statement – County Council, 16 March 2021

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Mr Chairman, this is the final council meeting and final council speech of this electoral cycle.

As all Members are only too aware, we have an election in May, which gives our residents the opportunity to reflect on the work carried out by this administration, the progress we have made together, and the direction of travel in which we are heading.

And ultimately, decide whether we continue that journey.

I, for one, welcome that chance to take stock and assess, because I'm immensely proud of this organisation that I – and we as elected Members – lead, and the progress we have made and continue to make together.

Mr Chairman, I will take some time to reflect on that in a moment, but first I wanted to focus on the significance of this next week in the calendar.

A week from today – 23 March – signifies exactly one year since the UK first went into lockdown in response to COVID-19 although in Surrey we were responding earlier than March, with the first UK-contracted case in Haslemere.

This week also marks a year since our Chief Executive Joanna Killian declared a major incident and immediately put into place the structures of the Local Resilience Forum to formally coordinate the response across Surrey.

We have not stepped back from that major incident in the whole 12 months.

Next Tuesday will be a poignant day, reflecting on the many people who have very sadly died as a result of this pandemic – the emotional impact on families right across Surrey, loved ones lost, families unable to see each other, businesses lost, individuals scarred by isolation, our fundamental freedoms and way of life disrupted like never before.

We will be marking this date as an organisation, with an event of reflection for staff to come together – still virtually – to share memories of the year that has passed and pay tributes to those that we have lost.

It is an important moment for us to take stock.

It is also important to again recognise the incredible work that has been undertaken by us as a council, alongside other partners of the Local Resilience Forum, to keep people safe, to support our vulnerable residents and to help our communities through this challenging time.

I couldn't be more proud of the work that the people of this organisation have carried out over the last year.

Whether it has been staff manning our community helpline, sourcing and delivering PPE, sorting food boxes, helping provide extra refuge space for families fleeing a violent lockdown, advising schools how to open safely, delivering various COVID testing streams, warning and informing our residents, keeping services running, moving some services to virtual, helping to manage increased deaths sensitively, or providing more support to care homes.

Our people have been adaptable, willing, skilled, and dedicated.

It has been harrowing at times, tiring, difficult, and certainly out of our comfort zone, but we should be so proud of every single person who has contributed to this effort.

Mr Chairman, Members – I'm sure you will want to join me in saying a huge 'Thank You'.

Last week we celebrated International Women's Day – an incredibly important occasion not only to celebrate women and gender equality but to take a step back and ensure we are doing everything possible to pursue further equality – embracing diversity of all forms, in everything we do.

At Cabinet in February, we reported on our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan and Policy Statement.

It confirms that we, as a council, will take a zero-tolerance approach to bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

We must also recognise that other forms of bias are more covert. To tackle these, myself and my Cabinet colleagues have attended unconscious bias and race discrimination training – useful in demonstrating how unconscious biases can affect the daily experiences of all of us across the council.

We will take this forward in all our future decision making and structures.

I am serious about this issue, which is fundamental to our guiding principle in Surrey that no-one is left behind.

While we recognise International Women's Day, I want to pay particular tribute to two incredibly strong, inspiring women that have helped drive Surrey forward over recent years.

The first is Mary Lewis – our Cabinet Member for Children's Services who is – to my great sadness – standing down at this forthcoming election.

Mary is both compassionate and incredibly strong willed – which has made her the perfect person to lead this county's Children's Services during huge challenge and transformation.

It is very easy to try and make cheap political shots about historical failures of this service – some Members present may want to catch up a little bit on the very real progress we have made - but it is much more difficult to grab hold of that challenge and tackle it head on.

But Mary has done just that, working tirelessly alongside the late Dave Hill and now Rachael Wardell and the service, to deliver what Ofsted has described as 'substantial and sustainable improvements'.

It is a shame she won't be in post when the full inspection team return later this year and deliver their official verdict and what we are confident will be an improved rating.

The improvement in that service is there for all to see – there is some way to go, it has been difficult at times but we are confident we know what we need to do and indeed will do over the coming months.

But Mary has helped get us into a much better place than we were a couple of years ago.

She has been an incredible servant to this County, particularly our young people, and she leaves a hugely positive legacy.

Mary, you will be missed – not least for your sharp wit and never being shy in keeping me in check.

The second woman who I want to pay tribute to is Joanna Killian, who has been our Chief Executive now for three years and has driven forward the most remarkable transformation at Surrey County Council.

As I've said previously, if COVID had hit three or four years ago, it may well have pushed Surrey County Council to the brink. Indeed, we only need to look around to see other local authorities who are struggling financially.

But not here. Not now.

From 2014/15 to 2017/18 every budget used reserves to plug the gaps – for the last three years we have set a balanced budget and begun to start building those reserves back up.

Tough choices have been made – they have had to be - but overwhelmingly that stable financial picture has come about through clear vision, innovation, and bravery to do things differently which has made our services better, not just more efficient.

We have also become a forward-thinking organisation – fiercely ambitious to make Surrey a place fit for the future.

The financial stability that we have overseen over the last few years – led by Joanna and the team she has put in place – and supported by this Council, has been the bedrock to enable us to start delivering this vision.

This is not just rhetoric. This is making a real difference to the lives of our residents:

- More school places
- More in-County places for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- Substantial and sustainable improvement in Children's Services
- On track for a net-zero-carbon council by 2030
- Council offices finally back in the County for the first time in 50 years
- Hundreds more supported living homes so older people can keep their independence for longer
- The biggest investment in flood defence and alleviation this County has ever seen
- £100m Fund for Surrey's local communities to deliver projects they want and need
- A modern, agile fire service working to prevent fires happening in the first place
- Vulnerable children supported with Free School Meals, technology and activities through lockdown and school holidays
- Surrey's Growth Board laying the foundations for a buoyant local economy
- New electric busses
- Planting trees
- Replacing streetlights with LEDs
- Teaching more children to ride a bike
- Massive investment in big infrastructure projects that will revolutionise our town centres and our highways
- New training to frontline care staff

- More social workers recruited
- A top-class library service
- 94% of schools rated good or outstanding
- A new foster caring model giving greater support to carers
- Greater long-term investment in our roads and pavements
- More power to local communities and residents

These are not just empty promises – this is real action, real progress, real achievement.

I have been Leader of this council now for two and half years. I take responsibility for the direction of travel – you can agree with it or not - but I'm glad our residents can now have their say.

I will always stand up and be counted – when things go wrong, and when things go well - I will always be honest with our residents.

I will not stand here and say one thing, and then say another when the situation suits.

Whether we're in an election campaign or not, I'd encourage the other political Leaders present to stay true to what they know and be straight with residents about the progress this organisation has unquestionably made over the last three years.

It is progress that all of us should be proud of.

Mr Chairman, I'd like to say thank you to you too, for the important role you have played over the last couple of years – representing this council and this county during the most difficult of times

So Members, as we set off on the election trail lets be honest with our residents; lets recognise the areas where we have seen improvements and progress, lets acknowledge the areas where there is more to do and lets reassure our residents that we are an authority that does care about them and are making genuine attempts to make their lives better. Above all lets not distance ourselves from acknowledging our individual role on that journey as all 81 Members of this council have played their part in transforming the council for the benefit of our residents.

No one can pretend that this is an easy challenge but equally no one can or should pretend that we aren't meeting that challenge. It will be for the new council to set the tone for the next 4 years but for my own part I hope it stays true to the principles that have been guiding us; to have a county of equal opportunity, of equal access to healthcare systems, where we address the issues that affect life expectancy but above all that we genuinely mean it when we say that we must ensure no one in this county is left behind.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.