

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL HELD AT
WOODHATCH PLACE, 11 COCKSHOT HILL, REIGATE, SURREY, RH2 8EF, ON
13 DECEMBER 2022 COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM, THE COUNCIL BEING
CONSTITUTED AS FOLLOWS:**

Helyn Clack (Chair)
Saj Hussain (Vice-Chair)

Maureen Attewell	Eber Kington
Ayesha Azad	* Rachael Lake
Catherine Baart	Victor Lewanski
Steve Bax	David Lewis (Cobham)
* John Beckett	* David Lewis (Camberley West)
Jordan Beech	Scott Lewis
Luke Bennett	r Andy Lynch
Amanda Boote	Andy MacLeod
Harry Boparai	Ernest Mallett MBE
Liz Bowes	r Michaela Martin
Natalie Bramhall	* Jan Mason
Stephen Cooksey	* Steven McCormick
Colin Cross	Cameron McIntosh
Clare Curran	* Julia McShane
Nick Darby	Sinead Mooney
Fiona Davidson	Carla Morson
Paul Deach	Bernie Muir
Kevin Deanus	Mark Nuti
Jonathan Essex	John O'Reilly
Robert Evans	Tim Oliver
r Chris Farr	Rebecca Paul
Paul Follows	* George Potter
Will Forster	Catherine Powell
r John Furey	Penny Rivers
* Matt Furniss	John Robini
* Angela Goodwin	* Becky Rush
Jeffrey Gray	Tony Samuels
Tim Hall	Joanne Sexton
David Harmer	Lance Spencer
Nick Harrison	r Lesley Steeds
Edward Hawkins	Mark Sugden
Marisa Heath	Richard Tear
Trefor Hogg	Chris Townsend
Robert Hughes	Liz Townsend
Jonathan Hulley	Denise Turner-Stewart
r Rebecca Jennings-Evans	Hazel Watson
Frank Kelly	Jeremy Webster
Riasat Khan	Buddhi Weerasinghe
Robert King	Fiona White
	Keith Witham

*absent

r = Remote Attendance

75/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

Apologies for absence were received from John Beckett, Matt Furniss, Angela Goodwin, Jan Mason, Steven McCormick, Julia McShane, George Potter, Becky Rush.

Members who attended remotely and had no voting rights were Chris Farr, John Furey, Rebecca Jennings-Evans, Andy Lynch, Michaela Martin, Lesley Steeds.

76/22 MINUTES [Item 2]

The minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 11 October 2022 were submitted, confirmed and signed.

77/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

There were none.

78/22 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS [Item 4]

The Chair:

- Led the Council in a moment of silence for the families affected by the terrible events that occurred in the last few days in Solihull.
- Congratulated the Chief Executive of the Council and her amazing staff on the recent Stars in Surrey award ceremony, she congratulated the winners and nominees of the Awards and hoped that they would carry on in the future.
- Noted that her full announcements could be found in the Council agenda front sheet.

79/22 LEADER'S STATEMENT [Item 5]

Colin Cross arrived at 10.10 am.

Buddhi Weerasinghe arrived at 10.15 am.

The Leader of the Council made a detailed statement.

A copy of the statement is attached as Appendix A. Members raised the following topics:

- Agreed that Members should be proud of the Council's staff.
- Highlighted the continuing issues in Home to School Transport; the number of appeals had increased and parents should not have to deal with the stress of unnecessary appeals.
- Hoped that Members on the Appeals Panels would now be listened to and the fifty recommendations from the internal review would be actioned; noted that a new board had been set up to oversee the progress however it lacked cross-party membership.
- Noted that the budget to be debated at February's Council meeting should cover an increased mileage allowance for staff who drive as part of their duties and saw no evidence of the Cabinet applying pressure on Surrey's MPs to achieve that.

- Noted that once in receipt of the final settlement figures for Surrey from the Government, the Council must decide how to close the current £14 million budget gap ensuring that services are preserved particularly for the most vulnerable; noting perhaps a total 4% Council tax increase, the balance was between making efficiencies and being efficient.
- Noted that the latest version of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) scheme was controversial for many Surrey residents and strongly encouraged cross-party working across the Council and the borough and district councils most affected, and close liaison with the Mayor of London.
- Wished all a Merry Christmas and best wishes for 2023 for all in the county; and collaboration between Members to face the challenges ahead.
- Welcomed a new Member of the Council, Harry Boparai who was elected at the recent by-election and noted that the Liberal Democrat Group was at its largest since 1997.
- Thanked the administration for listening to the concerns raised about the affordability of the Your Fund Surrey project, with the budget now reduced from £100 million to £60 million.
- Noted that the Council was spending £500,000 on Community Link Officers (CLOs) to engage with local communities and Members as a replacement of the Local and Joint Committees; asked how the Leader could justify that level of spending.
- Noted disappointment that the relationship between the borough and district councils and the Council appeared to have soured; welcomed that in the new year the Leader would listen to and work with the borough and district councils further.
- Asked the Leader to commit to expand the Council's use of community hubs that were warm and free so that there was one within walking distance of all neighbourhoods in Surrey; and for the Leader to commit to the Council to undertake an energy makeover of the community spaces before next winter.
- Noted thanks for the recent excellent sustainable transport learning event and examples provided of areas doubling their bus patronage due to the introduction of bus priority lanes at a bigger scale than being proposed in Surrey.
- Welcomed the current bus consultation as a chance to expand bus routes to meet Surrey's far less ambitious plan for a 15% increase but was shocked that the consultation proposed cuts to three local bus routes.
- Welcomed that the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture (CFLLC) Select Committee had secured an internal review of Home to School Transport; noted surprise that the internal review sought to improve internal processes, as opposed to addressing the causes of the increased appeals.
- Noted that the Council's review heard the views of three parent carers compared to the number of recommendations and views of 290 residents heard by Family Voice Surrey; asked the Leader to commit to listen to what comes back to the CFLLC Select Committee and the suggestions from both reviews.
- Noted that there were people in the county being left behind, noting the increasing number of people reliant on food banks and people concerned about their heating bills, their mortgages and the general cost of living crisis.
- Highlighted the recent floods in their division, there were many people who spent three days unable to get out of their houses because of flood water outside; they felt left behind.
- Noted serious reservations about the money for Your Fund Surrey which was being distributed disproportionately to wealthier areas in the county, there were many who felt left behind.

- Applauded the contribution that the Council along with the borough and district councils and charities, had made to support the Ukrainian crisis; but asked what the Council was doing to support Afghan and other refugees.
- Asked whether the Leader could provide hope and optimism when looking forward to the new year, so that far fewer people feel left behind.
- Asked whether the Leader agreed that far from offering support to local government or providing empowerment, the financial settlement to local government provided one year at a time was to the detriment of all political parties and a long-term solution to local government funding was required.
- Referred to the Leader talking about working in partnership, however noted outrage at the lack of democracy concerning an email sent to local Members from Surrey Heartlands which requested a decision to be made in the absence of data or an impact statement; a follow up letter was sent noting that the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council agreed to the proposal; asked the Leader what data and impact statement the decision was based on.
- Asked the Leader whether he would agree that the £500,000 to £750,000 cost of the CLOs might had been better spent on recruiting more people to help Surrey's young people that needed support.

80/22 ELECTION OF COUNTY COUNCILLOR [Item 6]

The Chief Executive formally reported that Harry Boparai was duly elected as the new County Councillor for the Sunbury Common and Ashford Common division following the by-election held on 30 November 2022.

The Chair welcomed the new Member and looked forward to working with him, she invited him to meet with her to discuss how the Council operates.

81/22 CHANGES TO CABINET PORTFOLIOS AND APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES [Item 7]

The Leader introduced the report and noted that it reflected the appointment of David Lewis (Cobham) as the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and the changes resulting from this.

RESOLVED:

1. Noted the changes to Cabinet appointments and portfolios set out in Annex 1 and 2 to this report.
2. Appointed Victor Lewanski as Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee for the remainder of the 2022/23 Council Year.
3. Appointed Richard Tear as Vice-Chairman of the Audit & Governance Committee for the remainder of the 2022/23 Council Year.
4. Noted the following committee appointments:
 - Saj Hussain to the Audit & Governance Committee
 - Edward Hawkins to the Planning & Regulatory Committee
 - Robert Hughes to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee

82/22 REVIEW OF POLITICAL PROPORTIONALITY [Item 8]

The Leader introduced the report and noted that it was brought about due to the by-election result on 30 November 2022 referred to in item 6 on the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That Council adopted the revised scheme of proportionality as set out in Annex 1 to the report.

83/22 MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME [Item 9]

Questions:

Notice of twenty-three questions had been received. The questions and replies were published in the second supplementary agenda (item 9) on 12 December 2022.

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

(Q1) Joanne Sexton asked whether the Cabinet Member would agree that it was disappointing that the Council had chosen not to engage with the borough and district councils. She hoped that the questions would initiate a change of approach, ensuring that those Cabinet Members who are twin-hatters will communicate any changes in advance, a more inclusive process was needed which would benefit all residents.

In response, the Leader in the Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth's absence would follow that up with the Member, he acknowledged that the more such matters can be discussed and agreed the better.

(Q2) Catherine Powell noted that at a recent select committee meeting the statement was made that using Surrey Deciles improved granularity; she asked the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member to explain how it improved granularity at the lower end of the deciles.

In response, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety explained that the Surrey Deciles were a useful tool that had been developed by the Public Health Intelligence and Insight team with a particular focus on the deprivation in Surrey to understand its granular nature, alongside other considerations such as public value and deprivation of isolation and transport. She noted that it was difficult to identify pockets of deprivation using a national measurement. She highlighted the large amount of analysis undertaken to inform processes such as Your Fund Surrey, providing a fuller understanding of where those deprived communities existed.

(Q4) Eber Kington noted that the response from the Leader continued to justify intervention in the functions reserved for the borough and district councils and ignored the concerns expressed to him by Surrey's leaders. Due to the Government's imminent change to the law on the matter and given the Leader's position as the Chairman of the County Councils Network, he asked that if the change in the law did not apply to the Council, which county councils it was aimed at.

In response, the Leader noted that he set out why it was important that the Council had a county-wide view of housing issues and noted a recent positive conversation with the leaders of the borough and district councils; the focus and lobbying of the Government would be on issues that affected the whole county.

(Q5) Robert Evans asked whether the Leader would agree that Surrey's food banks provided an invaluable service to many needy families in the county and asked whether he would join him in thanking all those staff and volunteers at the food banks.

He asked whether he would agree that the need for food banks in Surrey - a wealthy county - was a sad indictment for twelve years of Conservative Party Government.

In response, the Leader noted the fantastic work carried out by the staff and volunteers at food banks and that he had witnessed the generosity of residents first hand at the East Surrey Food Bank in terms of donations. He commended the generosity, both in terms of money and time that people give to food banks enabling support to those families that need it, particularly around the current time of the year.

(Q6) Will Forster had no supplementary question.

Jonathan Essex noted that the response said that the Covid-19 impact on face-to-face frontline services had been successfully addressed, he asked whether the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member could confirm whether or when the Reigate Registration Office had or would be reopened and whether it would be relocated to Woodhatch Place.

In response, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety confirmed that the Reigate Registration Office would reopen in February 2023 at its existing location.

(Q7) Liz Townsend welcomed the remuneration review for Surrey's foster carers, however regarding the second part of her question about a plan B she asked whether there was an emergency plan in place if foster carer numbers continued to fall. If the Council's recruitment measures were not successful, she asked whether there were clear thresholds in place to ensure that the Council did not end up in a crisis position.

Catherine Powell noted that she had raised some time ago the change that the Council made in terms of transport to family time affecting foster carers and their desire to stay with the Council, she asked whether the Cabinet Member would agree that the matter would be reviewed.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families noted that it was a priority area for the directorate and for the Council, foster carers were invaluable to the work the Council did to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of its children and young people. She provided her assurance that the areas highlighted in the questions would be reviewed and followed up. She noted that the Council would continue to invest resources into the development of care leaver accommodation within the county and the fostering strategy; staff had also been trained to undertake Merton Compliant Assessments. She acknowledged that working with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children required specific knowledge and skills and so a specialist team had been developed; that team had won an award at the Stars in Surrey Awards. Due to the increasing demand children could not always be allocated with the specialist team and arrangements were in place to support the quadrant teams.

(Q8) Hazel Watson noted that on the basis that the County Deal for Surrey included the provision for the Council to run adult education, she asked how the Leader intended to do that if he has no control over the east of the county; if the matter had been resolved, she asked why it could not be brought forward so that the issues raised in her question could be implemented now.

In response, the Leader noted that he received comments from the leaders of the borough and district councils yesterday on what they would like to see in a potential County Deal for Surrey; those comments would be included in the Council's submission to the Government. He noted that the question was speculative as there

was no guarantee that Surrey would get a Level 2 county deal, however he too had asked why the Council delivered the services for the west of the county whilst the services to the east of the county were delivered through East Surrey College. He noted that there were historical reasons for the current structure but hoped to combine the delivery of the services across the county as part of the skills agenda; negotiations were currently underway between the Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth, and East Surrey College.

(Q9) Lance Spencer noted that there were 1,000 families waiting for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) across Surrey - equivalent to twelve for each of the Council's divisional Members - and a third of those had been waiting over the legal limit of twenty weeks. He asked what steps the was Council taking to reduce these excessive delays, which were the result of efficiencies made in previous budgets.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning acknowledged that there were delays in the system, particularly around the completion of EHCPs for 998 young people. She noted that nationwide only 60% of all young people being assessed for an EHCP were being assessed within the twenty-week period; that was inadequate. She noted that the delays happened due to a workforce shortage in Surrey's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system, including caseworkers and staff in the Educational Psychology Service; there was a mandatory input on every assessment in the statutory process by an educational psychologist. To address the shortages, recruitment was underway, and staff were being trained as caseworkers; one quadrant was fully staffed and across the county staffing was at 80%. Also, by doing a more risk-based assessment of work with young people, the aim was to increase the timeliness in the completion of EHCPs by the end of 2022.

(Q10) Fiona White welcomed the bid made for additional SEND places within the county. She noted that the response stated that the schools would not be provided by the Council and asked the Cabinet Member whether she would use her influence to ensure that the schools would be as close to good transport access as possible to help parents and children get to school and to avoid further difficulties with the Home to School Transport scheme.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning noted that she would use her influence and explained that one of the reasons why the Council wanted to have maintained schools built within the county was to ensure that children could go to school closer to home, closer to their families, communities and social networks.

(Q11) Jonathan Essex asked whether the Cabinet Member would agree that whilst the Surrey Developer's Forum was hosted by a group of private developers that as public bodies including the Council, it would be appropriate to at least publish what was presented at these meetings and who was in attendance.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families noted that she was happy to follow up the matter with the Member and whilst it would not be her decision to make, she agreed that it would be useful for the minutes to be made public.

Robert King asked the Cabinet Member whether the Council had a policy offering land to the borough and district councils.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Property and Waste confirmed that the borough and district councils in their local plans had allocated many sites for residential, office and retail use following joint work between the Council's and the borough and district councils' officers. She noted that in many cases the purpose of the land had been

decided and the public were consulted through the local planning process. She noted the regular liaison between the Council and the borough and district councils; whilst much was done to bring forward developments, under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council must obtain best value for money for its land and assets.

(Q13) Mark Sugden asked that if the Mayor of London and Transport for London (TfL) did pursue the expansion of the ULEZ and did not introduce any measures to mitigate the potential adverse impacts on the county, whether the Council would consider what it could do to help mitigate those impacts on Surrey's residents, communities and businesses.

In response, the Chair in the Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth's absence asked for officers to ensure that the Cabinet Member would provide a written response.

(Q14) Catherine Powell noted that in his statement the Leader said that the root causes of inequality needed to be addressed. She asked the Cabinet Member therefore to advise how all sixteen of the Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Surrey that were in the bottom 10% nationally in terms of attainment and skills for young people that were not included in the Key Neighbourhoods, would be supported to address that source of inequality.

In response, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety referred to the response to Part A of the question which looked at Income Deprivation Affecting Children and Education, Skills and Training Deprivation, noting that those measures sat alongside universal statutory services which were delivering for children and young people daily; therefore every measure listed in part A would not be included within the Key Neighbourhoods which had been agreed by the Health and Wellbeing Board. She explained that the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) was made-up of seven sub-domains and took many elements into account. She noted that the Key Neighbourhoods had the most deprivation across the IMD and the Public Health Intelligence and Insight team advised their use as a single best way of predicting health outcomes and to provide targeted support to reduce health inequalities and improve health outcomes. Beneath the IMD, insights on the ground from health colleagues and from Members were also relied upon.

(Q15) Eber Kington thanked the Cabinet Member for offering a review of the policy, albeit when LED conversion was complete; he asked when that would be the case and whether he would commit to start the review before that date so that any change could be implemented immediately. He asked whether he would consult residents on the policy as part of the review, including women's groups campaigning for safer streets.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Community Resilience anticipated that the review would take place early next year around February, the LED rollout was nearly complete. He noted that there had been delays due to the Ukrainian crisis, for example. He noted that the criteria for the current streetlight night-time switch-off policy were areas where Surrey Police advised switching the lights off may have an adverse impact on crime, and roads with a significant road traffic collision record during the proposed switching off period.

(Q16) Robert Evans thanked the Cabinet Member for his help during the recent local flooding crisis in his division. He asked whether he was aware how deeply distressing the whole situation was for many residents to be knee deep in water and raw sewage

outside their homes for several days, whilst the various authorities concerned failed to understand who was responsible for or was able to address the situation. He asked whether he would agree that the Council must do more to increase the cooperation between all the various agencies and Members, to ensure that in future there would be a quicker response, ensuring that residents are supported.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Community Resilience agreed that the Council should, and it would continue to work closely together with the other agencies, however he noted that each agency had different statutory powers. He noted a positive example of collaborative working during the recent bad weather in Haslemere where the divisional Member went out several times and whilst it was not the Council's role, the Highways team used its equipment to pump out the water.

(Q18) Lance Spencer noted that 2,850 people were waiting to have a diagnosis of Autism and currently the Surrey and Borders Partnership (SABP) was dealing with cases from November 2019 and the volume was 1,200 whilst the capacity was 400. He asked whether the Council would put pressure on SABP to resolve the matter.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Adults and Health noted that the Council was in constant contact with SABP about what they provide and what the Council provides. He noted that there was a meeting next week to discuss the matter and he would update the Member in due course about what would happen going forward.

(Q19) Jonathan Essex welcomed the response confirming that low cost, affordable housing was a key issue. He asked the Cabinet Member whether the Council on its owned land might have a restrictive covenant or similar to ensure that all housing builds regardless of whether the land was sold off or continues to be owned by the Council, would be for social housing with at least 50% for social rent.

Robert King asked whether the Cabinet Member was aware that the Local Government Act 1972 referred to by the Cabinet Member for Property and Waste in a previous response, included the criteria of social value within affordability and that would be a key indicator; he suggested that Members should go on a training course to understand what the legislation sets down.

In response to Robert King, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families noted that she would be happy to go on a training course alongside him. Responding to Jonathan Essex, she agreed that the need for low-cost housing was incredibly important and that was highlighted at the recent Surrey Housing Summit. She noted that it was difficult to commit to a percentage as it would be subject to individual developments and funding circumstances and was largely a matter for local determination by the borough and district councils. It was a complex issue and she noted that the Council needed to do all it could with its partners to ensure that low-cost key worker and affordable social housing were a priority.

(Q20) Catherine Baart asked the Cabinet Member what the target was - as a percentage - of EHCPs to be reviewed on time for next year and beyond.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning noted that she did not know what the service target was for next year and she would look to find that out and would update the Member; she hoped that it would be closer to 100% of EHCPs reviewed within the time scale. She noted that many of the points that she raised in answer to an earlier question about the completion of EHCPs were pertinent here, for example that the recruitment of new caseworkers was key. She added that the service did prioritise the review of cases for children who were in a vulnerable

category who are Looked After Children or on child protection plans, those children who were missing education and those who were coming up to a key stage transfer.

(Q21) Catherine Powell thanked the Leader for highlighting the importance of the Local Area Co-ordinators (LACs) during his statement. She asked the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member whether partnership funding from SABP and Frimley had yet been secured to expand beyond the four current LACs, and if not what the timing of that was envisaged to be.

In response, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety noted that the Council had a successful bid for funding from Surrey Heartlands: £175,000 for 2023/24 and 2024/25; the figures from the other agencies were unconfirmed. She noted that the next areas to implement LACs were yet to be agreed so she welcomed the Member's contribution to that conversation. She noted that there was a focus on the communities with the poorest health outcomes, and the approach was implemented in partnership with local communities, the borough and district councils, and health; a cross-system leadership group supported that implementation. She noted the exciting prospect of potentially funding three further LACs in partnership with the Council's health colleagues.

(Q22) Will Forster asked the Cabinet Member to confirm that the Surrey Schools Forum was happy with the approach.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning noted that the Surrey Schools Forum met last week, and she would seek an update from officers as to the outcome of that meeting. She reiterated that the Cabinet agreed to the transfer of the 1% at its November meeting and it was waiting for the Secretary of State's approval.

(Q23) Jonathan Essex asked in terms of grant payments, how much were still being withheld by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), how much the Council currently anticipated receiving back from the Government and when that might be.

Nick Harrison noted that the Eco Park had been working for a while and that was the reason for the suspension of grant payments. He noted that the agreements setting out the reason for suspension had finished, therefore he asked whether there was any valid reason why the Council should not be receiving the extra grant payments.

In response to Jonathan Essex, the Cabinet Member for Property and Waste noted that the payments were subject to commercial confidentiality, and she would report that information to the Council as soon as she was able to. Responding to Nick Harrison, she noted that he was correct that the digester and gasifier were working, she noted that the strategic director was having ongoing discussions with Defra to come to a solution and once obtained she would report that back to the Member.

Cabinet Member Briefings:

These were also published in the second supplementary agenda (item 9) on 12 December 2022.

Members made the following comments:

Deputy Cabinet Member for Levelling Up: on the Council's levelling up bid of transport for Sheerwater, **Will Forster** asked whether she had heard back from the

Government or whether she was aware when that decision would be made and for Members to be informed.

In response, the Deputy Cabinet Member explained that the Council was delighted to have put in a transport bid for levelling up Woking, and it was awaiting a response from the Government. She noted that she would speak to officers to understand whether they had heard anything in recent weeks and would update the Member.

Cabinet Member for Highways and Community Resilience: on the Ravenscote Junior School crossing, **Edward Hawkins** asked whether the Cabinet Member was aware of how well received it was by the residents in that area and the feedback was that there had been more children walking to school. He noted that through his Members' Allowance he was assisting the school in the Feet First: Walking Training programme. He noted that it had been a success and provided his thanks.

On the 30% factor added on as a contingency when a divisional Member was asked to commit to a budget for a highways scheme, **Nick Harrison** asked the Cabinet Member whether Members could be informed on whether that contingency was used or not and if not, could it be available for further schemes in the Member's division. He noted that it would be useful to have a report on contingency levels and whether they were used. A difficulty faced by Members in selecting schemes for the coming years was that there was a long list of items in the Horizon budget, of which dates had not been fixed. He noted that it would be useful to have guidance on whether by committing to a scheme in a Member's own £100,000 budget, that would otherwise be factored into the Horizon budget.

On the work of Surrey's local Flood Forums, **Keith Witham** asked the Cabinet Member to thank them for their work and the parish councils that hosted them, he noted the work done by the three Flood Forums in his division looking at over 100 locations where there were persistent flooding problems affecting either the highways or people's homes. He noted two advantages of the forums, that they brought together all of the statutory agencies and the forums were chaired by the respective local MP.

In response to Edward Hawkins, the Cabinet Member noted that he was aware of the positive feedback, he knew the area well and welcomed the thanks. Responding to Nick Harrison, the Cabinet Member explained that if a contingency was not used, then that money was still available, and Members could ask about their contingency money. He noted that additional guidance could be circulated, however he noted the issue of guidance overload and he suggested to the Member to have a discussion after the meeting on what specific guidance he would like issued. Responding to Keith Witham, the Cabinet Member recognised the tremendous commitment from the staff; highlighting that engagement and partnership working was key.

Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources: on the impact assessments regarding efficiencies which came out very late last year, **Catherine Powell** noted that there were several issues raised subsequently regarding the changes around Home to School Transport and their impact on vulnerable groups. She asked the Cabinet Member when the impact assessments were likely to be released this year.

On the accounts for 2021/22, **Nick Harrison** asked the Cabinet Member when he expected those to be signed off, he noted that one of the issues causing the delay might be due to the valuation of investments for which the auditors were awaiting guidance and he asked whether that could be confirmed with a date and whether it was the reason for the delay.

In response to Catherine Powell, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources noted that the topic had been thoroughly covered in the recent select committee hearings which he had attended, and he noted that the impact assessments would be made available when the budget was finalised. A commitment had been made for next year that the impact assessments would be available with the draft budget when issued. Responding to Nick Harrison, the Cabinet Member noted that he was unable to give an answer at present but would respond to the Member after the meeting.

Cabinet Member for Education and Learning: on SEND support, **Chris Townsend** noted that he spoke to a head teacher a few days ago about that support in their school, noting that she had no reply to her email to officers on the matter and she said that the SEND support she was receiving was rubbish. He was concerned that if the Council was trying to ensure such inclusion within the schools, those schools needed the support staff to deliver and that was not currently the case.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning noted that she was happy to speak to the Member on the matter as it was not nice to hear that feedback, she would ensure that the issue would be brought to the attention of officers and would ask the quadrant lead to contact the school in question as soon as possible.

84/22 STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS [Item 10]

Tim Hall (Leatherhead and Fetcham East) made a statement on the Tree Giveaway at the Leatherhead Library. He thanked several people involved including the librarians, the library service, the Fetcham Tree Wardens and the team in the Environment, Transport and Infrastructure directorate. It was a successful community event with 150 trees given away to residents. He commended the giveaway to others.

Mark Sugden (Hinchley Wood, Claygate and Oxshott) made a statement noting that on 27 November 2022 the iron lantern connected to street lighting on Claygate Green had fallen off the monument exposing live electric cables. He thanked the Council's emergency lighting team who had someone on site within twenty minutes to make the lantern safe. He also thanked the manager of the Hare and Hounds pub who stored the lantern safely so that it could be then collected and repaired by Elmbridge Borough Council.

Fiona Davidson (Guildford South-East) made a statement querying what the Council meant by resident engagement, which on the one hand was so important that the Council committed to over £500,000 a year for CLOs and on the other hand it was not important when it came to the London Road, Burpham - Active Travel Scheme in Guildford phase one; which she was not consulted on. The closure of the northbound section of the A3100 for five months would lead to gridlock, economic damage and it would increase pollution. Residents were angry with the scheme; the only consultation process was a general market research study in 2020 involving less than 200 people - one third did not live or work in Guildford - and the questions were not specific.

85/22 ORIGINAL MOTIONS [Item 11]

Item 11 (i)

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

Under Standing Order 12.1 Robert Evans moved:

This Council notes that:

- The number of pupils entitled to free school meals in Surrey is rising steadily and that more families than ever are becoming reliant on food banks.
- The cost-of-living crisis will lead to a general deepening of health inequalities among children and 'being hungry' in the school day will have a detrimental impact on their education.
- Research by the Child Poverty Action Group has shown that the cohort most vulnerable to food poverty is families who are on very low incomes, but who do not qualify for free school meals because their annual household earnings (excluding benefits) exceed £7,400.
- The Government previously rejected the recommendation of its own independently commissioned National Food Strategy, published in 2021 that it should increase the threshold for free school meals up to £20,000, this being the minimum income required for people to afford to feed a family.
- The Government's Food Strategy (June 2022) states it "will continue to keep free school meal eligibility under review, to ensure that these meals are supporting those who most need them."

The Council further notes that:

- The Council has used £2.27m of its Household Support Grant to continue providing food vouchers to eligible children over October, December and February school holidays, as well as other measures to help the most vulnerable families.

This Council believes that:

- Free school meals should be a basic right for all children who need them and therefore supports the expansion of free school meals provision to every child whose family is in receipt of Universal Credit or equivalent, or with a low-income.
- Provision be made for food vouchers to cover school holidays for all families in receipt of Universal Credit or with low-income.

This Council resolves to call upon the Cabinet to:

- I. Look at every possible way in which the Council can do more to assist children in need and to extend the provision of free school meals.
- II. Write to the Chancellor the Exchequer, Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Surrey's ten other MPs and the Secretary of State for Education Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, seeking their support for this aim.

Robert Evans made the following points:

- Stressed that it was a timely and important motion at the stage in the year which often highlighted the differences in our unequal society.

- Noted that the motion recognised that many children and families in Surrey were seriously affected by the current cost of living crisis, the price of some essential food products had doubled and consequently, more children were now claiming free school meals in Surrey, one of the country's wealthiest counties.
- Explained that each of the four different devolved nations of the UK had the responsibility for their own free school meals policies, meaning that there were anomalies about geographic location and entitlement.
- Noted the example of Northern Ireland where any child of a family on household earnings of less than £14,000 a year was entitled to free school meals, but in England that figure was as low as £7,400.
- Noted that in Surrey's schools the cost of a school meal is £2.60 a day or £13 a week which was costly when totalled and for families with several children.
- Noted that for many children the school meal might be their only substantial meal of the day.
- Noted feedback from residents and schools in his division and across Surrey that many children miss out because of the overly restrictive eligibility criteria for free school meals, which in turn affected additional school funding and support which accompanied the free school meals eligibility.
- Noted that recent research by the Child Poverty Action Group found that one third of children in poverty across the country - 800,000 - did not qualify for free school meals; there would be many in Surrey that fell into that category.
- Noted that Members should be pleased that the county had allocated over £2 million worth of food vouchers to help children over the school holidays.
- Noted that there was substantial evidence to show that children who were hungry were less able to learn and to thrive at school.
- Noted that there were many breakfast clubs in Surrey and more families were going to food banks.
- Noted that the motion asked the Council to accept that free school meals should be a basic right for children who need them and that the criteria should be those on low incomes, in receipt of Universal Credit, and that the current arbitrary loophole needed to be eliminated.
- Noted that by agreeing the motion, the Council could set a good example for other authorities around the country.
- Highlighted that the Leader and other Members had a hotline to the Chancellor and leading cabinet members in Government, so was sure that they would put pressure on senior figures to ensure that there would be a fairer, better and more equal distribution of free school meals in the future.

The motion was formally seconded by Will Forster, who made the following comments:

- Reflected that the motion was personal as he was on free school meals as a child at a time when there were not many in receipt of those, compared to now where sadly there were far too many children on free school meals.
- Noted that the Council had done a good job on free school meals, using the £2 million Household Support Grant to make sure food vouchers were given out over the school holidays.
- Emphasised that children were still going hungry, Surrey did not have a fair deal for its children from the Government and it needed one. Surrey's children were penalised compared to elsewhere in the country.
- Stressed that it was vital to agree to the motion for the Council to work with the Government to expand and roll out free school meals so that hopefully next year no child goes without food and that they could enjoy their education.

Two Members made the following comments:

- The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning thanked the motion's proposer for tabling the motion, which was in support of the national campaign called Feed the Future and she noted that there was a Ten Minute Rule Bill being introduced in the House of Commons pressing for universal free school meals for all children at primary school.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning noted that unprompted by the motion she had already written to the Government's Children's Minister expressing concern about the issue and asked for the extension of free school meals provisions; she had also raised the issue last week at a meeting with six of Surrey's MPs to ask for the provision to be extended.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning noted her personal ambition that no children are left behind and noted that last November she introduced the Council's Child Poverty Action Plan for Surrey, which underpinned the work being done on levelling up across the Council's directorates, in partnership with the borough and district councils.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning noted that eligibility for free school meals was a passport to other benefits such as holiday school vouchers and schools could receive the pupil premium for those children to try to close the attainment gap which was disproportionate in Surrey.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning noted that there was a gap between children's eligibility for those free school meals and the actual take up of the of those meals by the families concerned, she had asked the service to work with schools in the new year to address that.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning noted that she would gladly write to the Chancellor, the Secretary of State and the other Surrey MPs again and noted that the Conservative Group supported the motion.
- Noted their role as a founder of a charity that runs a food bank and cooked each week to provide a hot meal for those in the queue, along with providing food education and was often assisted by local young people.
- Noted that the focus for the aforementioned food bank was to support the local free school meals families, of which there were many and all was done to ensure that the children did not go hungry; that support was there weekly regardless of holidays and without any assessments.
- Noted that every family in the UK had felt the impact of recent world events, but for those with low incomes the policy was devastating to children whose development and education then suffered as a direct result; and knew that first-hand having grown up in a low-income family.
- Stressed that it was vital that children were supported, to keep them healthy, able to learn, and to not go hungry because they were Surrey's future.

The Chair asked Robert Evans, as proposer of the motion to conclude the debate, he made the following comments:

- Stressed that the motion made it clear that the current criteria were flawed and confusing, there were many needy families and children who fell outside the current eligibility criteria and the system was so confusing that children entitled to free school meals did not receive those.
- Hoped that not just the Cabinet but all Members would write to all those listed in the second resolution, putting their words of support into deeds, and writing twelve letters each equating to 972 letters; ensuring that progress would be made.

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

Therefore, it was **RESOLVED** that:

This Council notes that:

- The number of pupils entitled to free school meals in Surrey is rising steadily and that more families than ever are becoming reliant on food banks.
- The cost-of-living crisis will lead to a general deepening of health inequalities among children and 'being hungry' in the school day will have a detrimental impact on their education.
- Research by the Child Poverty Action Group has shown that the cohort most vulnerable to food poverty is families who are on very low incomes, but who do not qualify for free school meals because their annual household earnings (excluding benefits) exceed £7,400.
- The Government previously rejected the recommendation of its own independently commissioned National Food Strategy, published in 2021 that it should increase the threshold for free school meals up to £20,000, this being the minimum income required for people to afford to feed a family.
- The Government's Food Strategy (June 2022) states it "will continue to keep free school meal eligibility under review, to ensure that these meals are supporting those who most need them."

The Council further notes that:

- The Council has used £2.27m of its Household Support Grant to continue providing food vouchers to eligible children over October, December and February school holidays, as well as other measures to help the most vulnerable families.

This Council believes that:

- Free school meals should be a basic right for all children who need them and therefore supports the expansion of free school meals provision to every child whose family is in receipt of Universal Credit or equivalent, or with a low-income.
- Provision be made for food vouchers to cover school holidays for all families in receipt of Universal Credit or with low-income.

This Council resolves to call upon the Cabinet to:

- I. Look at every possible way in which the Council can do more to assist children in need and to extend the provision of free school meals.
- II. Write to the Chancellor the Exchequer, Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Surrey's ten other MPs and the Secretary of State for Education Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, seeking their support for this aim.

86/22 SELECT COMMITTEES' REPORT TO COUNCIL [Item 12]

The Chairman of the Select Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs' Group introduced the report and noted that scrutiny within the Council had come a long way. He noted that the select committees were working cross-party to hold the Cabinet to account and to question officers; the robust committee system was a tribute to the select committee chairmen, Task Group Leads, Members and officers. He noted that scrutiny was on a journey of improvement and highlighted three things to continue to improve on: firstly, earlier scrutiny on the budget however inflation and the uncertainty in Government had not helped the budget setting process; secondly, more recommendations from the select committees were needed, particularly targeted recommendations and that varied between the select committees and support was being provided; lastly, more public engagement in the select committees was needed, there was something remote about the building and the select committees that needed to be overcome.

A Member noted feedback from other Members of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture (CFLLC) Select Committee who visited a quadrant speaking to the social workers in that area, that there was one social worker team missing out of the four teams which was a deep concern and was something the CFLLC Select Committee would investigate. Referring back to his previous comment to the Leader about the CLOs costing between £500,000 to £750,000, he noted that the money could be better spent on that missing team for example.

RESOLVED:

1. That Council reviewed the work summarised in this report providing feedback to Scrutiny Chairs as appropriate.
2. That the Select Committees would report to Council three times again next calendar year.

87/22 SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL - ELECTORAL REVIEW COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION [Item 13]

The Leader introduced the report and reminded Members that the Council was required to have a review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), since its last in 2010. He noted that since 2010 there had been a small increase in the overall population of the county and that would be considered. He noted that the submission needed to be sent to the LGBCE shortly and that needed to indicate whether the current number of 81 Members should increase, decrease or be maintained; and the second phase would look at the detailed implications of that in terms of the boundaries of the existing divisions. He thanked the chair and Members of the cross-party Member Task Group - SCC Electoral Review.

Three Members made the following comments:

- The Chair of the cross-party Member Task Group - SCC Electoral Review explained that the proposals set out in the report were unanimously adopted by the Task Group and a lot of work from officers had gone into the report.
- The Chair of the cross-party Member Task Group - SCC Electoral Review noted that the recommendation was that the Council size remains at 81 Members; in the next phase it was possible that it could increase or decrease by one or two as had happened at the last review.
- The Chair of the cross-party Member Task Group - SCC Electoral Review noted that there would be a Member seminar in January on the Electoral Review, he

commended Members to attend that as in early March phase two would be underway looking at the detail of each of the suggested divisional boundaries, Members would be invited to attend a workshop.

- Queried why population size was used as a measure as opposed to the electorate size as the relationship between population and electorate varied depending on the demographic pattern of counties.
- Thought that the geographic pattern or relative geographic size of counties might be relevant when determining a sensible size of divisions, for example Surrey had a large amount of woodland.
- Noted that Members served all their residents in their division and not only the electorate, and therefore population size was the correct measure.

The Chair noted that the queries raised could be addressed at the Member seminar and workshops.

RESOLVED:

That the Council approved the Electoral Review Council Size Submission, ahead of it being sent to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).

88/22 FEEDBACK FROM THE RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE SELECT COMMITTEE ON A REFERRAL FROM COUNCIL - 'MOTION ON PROCUREMENT POLICY, TAX AVOIDANCE AND THE FAIR TAX MARK' [Item 14]

The Chairman of the Resources and Performance Select Committee introduced the report noting that the original motion had been tabled at July's Council meeting by Jonathan Essex and was referred to the Resources and Performance Select Committee for consideration due to its technical and complex nature. He thanked the motion's proposer for his invaluable input and the select committee's Task Group Lead; and he thanked the Head of Policy and Improvement for her work in compiling the report and recommendations.

The motion's proposer thanked the Chairman of the Resources and Performance Select Committee and the expertise provided by the officers in reviewing the original motion and identifying best practice and looking at how the Council could strengthen its existing position in that area. He looked forward to the Council being recognised as a Fair Tax council.

RESOLVED:

That Council supported Jonathan Essex's motion to accept the Fair Tax Declaration with the following exceptions:

1. Alternative wording to be agreed with the Fair Tax Foundation regarding the following items:
 - a. Undertake due diligence to ensure that not-for-profit structures are not being used inappropriately by suppliers to reduce the payment of tax and business rates.
 - b. Demand clarity on the ultimate beneficial ownership of suppliers and their consolidated profit & loss position.
2. The following item be removed:
 - a. Include tax conduct in social value scoring for assessing contracts.

89/22 APPOINTMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL [Item 15]

The Leader introduced the report and noted that there was a requirement to have an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP), two of the current Members did not wish to continue for a further term so there was a requirement to advertise for replacements.

RESOLVED:

1. Approved the proposed timetable for the appointment of an IRP and the completion of its subsequent review of Allowances Scheme as set out in paragraph 4.
2. Approved an Appointments Panel consisting of the membership set out in paragraph 5.

90/22 AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION [Item 16]

The Leader introduced the report and noted that there were two suggested amendments to the Constitution. The first amendment to Standing Orders related to the transfer of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) applications, endorsed by the Planning and Regulatory Committee. The second amendment was a revised Officer Code of Conduct which updated the previous 2017 edition and it had been through several parts of the Council for consideration including the People, Performance and Development Committee in November; he thanked Eber Kington for his input.

A Member raised concerns regarding the advice on recorded voting provided in the Chair's housekeeping note sent to Members prior to this Council meeting; these were noted and the Chair suggested that these be considered by the Member Development Steering Group.

RESOLVED:

1. Approved the amendments to Standing Orders set out in Annex 1.
2. Approved the revised Officer Code of Conduct set out in Annex 3.

91/22 REPORT OF THE CABINET [Item 17]

The Leader presented the report of the Cabinet meetings held on 25 October 2022 and 29 November 2022.

Recommendations on Policy Framework Documents:

- A. Coordinated Admissions Scheme for September 2024 (*as set out in the Cabinet paper from 29 November 2022*)

A Member asked the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning whether she planned to take a more proactive approach next year so that the coordinated school admissions process could play its part in addressing climate change. She could do so by working with local schools to move to more children attending their local school, and that being higher in the admissions criteria in all areas of Surrey as part of tackling climate change, reducing the carbon footprint of travel associated with school travel, and increasing opportunities for active travel and public transport.

In response, the Cabinet Member explained that school admissions were regulated by admissions legislation including the Department for Education's School Admissions Code; that set out how local authorities must determine admissions criteria and the

process by which school places must be offered. Whereas the item under consideration was the procedures manual for the way in which individual school admissions criteria were coordinated, and admissions applications were then judged and allocated. The Member's question was around changing school admissions criteria, however out of approximately 400 maintained schools the Council was the admissions authority for only 85 schools across the county. Other types of school were their own admissions authorities and so determine their admissions criteria. A judgement by the Schools Adjudicator earlier in the year meant that the criterion of nearest school had been removed as an admissible admissions criterion and the Council was adhering to that. She noted that the admissions legislation was founded on the premise of parental preference; the Council could not influence that. She concluded that whilst the Council could not do what the Member was suggesting, the Council published guidance for school admissions on its website; and she encouraged Members to attend the quadrant Member development seminars.

RESOLVED:

Approved the coordinated admissions scheme that will apply to all schools for 2024.

Reports for Information/Discussion:

25 October 2022:

- B. A County Deal for Surrey
- C. A Skills Plan for Surrey
- D. Healthy Streets for Surrey Design Guide

29 November 2022:

- E. Responding to the Rising Cost of Living in Surrey
- F. Adult Social Care Strategy for People with Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment 2022 - 2027
- G. Traffic Regulation Order Policy

- H. Quarterly Report on Decisions Taken Under Special Urgency Arrangements: 1 October 2022 – 2 December 2022

RESOLVED:

1. Noted that there had been no urgent decisions in the last three months.
2. Adopted the report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 25 October 2022 and 29 November 2022.

92/22 MINUTES OF CABINET MEETINGS [Item 18]

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.

The Chair noted that the draft Cabinet minutes concerning the meeting on 29 November 2022 had been re-published since the first Council supplementary agenda (items 8 and 18) was published on 9 December 2022, to include David Lewis (Cobham) in the attendance list and present at the meeting.

The Chair wished all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

[Meeting ended at: 12.31 pm]

Chair

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Leader's Statement – County Council, 13 December 2022

Good morning Madam Chair, Members.

We come together for the final time of 2022, with the weather colder, Christmas just around the corner and many people looking forward to a festive break with friends and family.

It is an important time of year to take stock, reflect on the past year and look forward with a sense of renewed energy and fresh perspective to what 2023 can bring.

However, for some this can be an emotional time of year, reflecting on those who they can't be with, or feeling an increased sense of isolation and loneliness.

This year those feelings may well be exacerbated by the very real struggles we are facing as a society, and indeed as a global population.

We know that for many, Christmas brings pressure to spend money they don't have, and those financial pressures will be even more acute this year as inflation has eaten away at the money in people's pockets.

For some, this has pushed them into real financial hardship with serious implications for their mental and physical health and wellbeing.

It is that group of people that our efforts as a council has been directed towards this year.

By now you are all well aware of our ambition in Surrey – that no one is left behind – and that ambition has never been more relevant or important as it has been over the last few months.

We have really focused all our resource, all our skill and determination, all our power locally in making sure that those in real difficulty are supported in every way possible.

While I wish that it were not needed, I am very proud of the work we have undertaken to provide financial support, a listening ear, essential advice, warm places to be, companionship, and reassurance.

Much of that is offered by our dedicated staff, by you as local Members, and by our partners who we bring together and work closely with as part of the Surrey system.

We know that we can't offer a silver bullet and fix things in an instant, and that the support on offer is often a crutch to help people through a difficult time rather than a long-term solution. But we have worked tirelessly to step up and step in when really needed and I thank all our staff and partners for those efforts.

A proper solution must be achieved though. Our society is unequal, and it is not right that some people here don't see the benefits of all that Surrey has to offer.

We recognise this and are determined to address the root causes of that inequality.

That is what our No One Left Behind ambition is all about – getting the right structures and support in place to fundamentally tackle inequality, so that in the longer-term crisis support is not needed and everyone in Surrey can access the advantages and opportunities to give them a better quality of life.

We are not there yet – we don't pretend to be – but we have made some good progress over the last year.

Our Children's Service are out of intervention and recognised as making progress by Ofsted, in order to give children and young people the best start in life, whatever their background. But that progress remains fragile in some areas as we saw with the recent issues surrounding the Home to School Travel Assistance Programme, which reinforces the need to continually review our processes in terms of effectiveness, consistency, and fairness.

We have launched Surrey's Skills Plan, bringing together businesses and education providers to make sure Surrey people have the skills to get good jobs and power a strong local economy.

Surrey's Health and Wellbeing strategy is in place, and our public service reform agenda is making progress, already beginning to tackle the root causes of ill-health, with closer integration between the NHS, Public Health, and Social Care to achieve more joined up solutions.

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service has also improved and judged by HM Inspectorate to be 'much more effective and efficient at keeping people safe'.

We have progressed our green agenda, with Surrey County Council recognised as a leader in the sector in delivering our net-zero ambitions.

We are protecting and enhancing our natural environment – carrying out important conservation and restoration work, increasing biodiversity, planting trees, educating the next generation, working with farmers, other councils, and partners like the Surrey Wildlife Trust to make sure more people can access Surrey's wonderful countryside and the benefits that go with it.

We've invested £13m in Active Travel Schemes – more cycle lanes and safer walking routes – with much more to come next year.

We've built two new, modern Children's Homes.

We've delivered 280 additional school places for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

We've approved plans and will soon be building 368 modern homes for elderly people, enabling them to live independently for longer.

We're the first council in the UK to tackle period poverty, in partnership with Binti.

40,000 free places at holiday camps for young people in need.

Millions in grants to local charities.

Nearly £3m invested to directly help people suffering multiple disadvantages through our Changing Futures programme.

Madam Chair, Members, there is much more to do, but we **are** changing futures – changing the future life chances and opportunities of people across Surrey, all through that driving ambition that no one here should be left behind.

Just last week I had the opportunity to hear some incredibly uplifting stories about the work of the wonderful people we have here at Surrey County Council, sharing that ambition, and dedicating their working lives to public service.

Surrey's workforce is fundamental in making the county such a great place to live and work.

The services we deliver as an organisation are relied upon by very many people, from all walks of life, at all ages and in every corner of Surrey.

I'm incredibly proud of our staff, who work every day to serve the public and make people's lives better. We are bonded by that idea of public service, and however challenging our roles can be we are united in that mission.

That commitment to help those in need is shared across our communities in Surrey.

We are without doubt one of the most welcoming and compassionate places in the country and nothing demonstrates that more than the many stories of Ukrainians hosted here by generous residents. It is good that we have been able to top up the payments to those host families and indeed I must also pay tribute to the Surrey Fire and Rescue Team who have made a number of trips to Ukraine to provide equipment, training, and support. Real practical things that are making a genuine difference.

We have welcomed nearly 3,000 Ukrainian nationals fleeing Putin's horrific war, across 1,500 Surrey homes, the second highest in the 152 areas of the UK.

Whether it's the Covid pandemic, a war in Europe, or helping each other keep warm – our communities step up to the plate time after time.

And we are proud of being an active partner with them.

When we come together across Surrey, and within our towns and villages, we really can make things happen.

You see Members, that is one of our most important roles as an organisation – bringing people, groups, and organisations together, bringing the right skills and influence to the table, to learn from each other, to react quickly and to drive positive change.

As an upper tier local authority, we are in a position of privilege and great responsibility in Surrey, and we are clear in our determination to use that for the benefit of all.

That is never more important than in the face of severe systemic and societal challenges, as we have faced over recent years, and we continue to face as we go into a new year.

Inflation and the cost of living will undoubtedly continue to be a very real issue for us and our residents and business throughout 2023, with potentially longer-term impacts.

There remains global uncertainty around the war in Ukraine, supply chains, inflation, and wider geo-politics.

While our influence on those issues is limited to say the least, our influence at home is great, and we must continue to face these challenges head on, on behalf of Surrey.

We have local challenges too – ones that we have discussed in depth as a full council and through our robust Select Committee system.

As I have said many times, we do not shirk these challenges. We do not stick our head in the sand.

We redouble our efforts, we learn lessons and we grow stronger.

We will continue to work proactively and collaboratively with our District and Borough partners, on everything from waste management to community engagement, from refugees to warm hubs. I recognise that we need to do more together as local government and I will make every effort in 2023 to work even more closely with the Leaders of the District and Boroughs for the benefit of our residents.

We will continue to play a strong role within the Local Resilience Forum, keeping Surrey resilient and ready to step up in any emergency, like the recent water outages, with our teams out on the ground supporting vulnerable people.

We will continue to work hand in hand with our voluntary sector partners, with financial support to fantastic organisations like Community Foundation for Surrey and Citizens Advice Bureau, and valuable insight and collaboration with groups like Surrey Ethnic Minority Forum and Surrey Coalition of Disabled People. We can not deliver our ambitions without the help and support of the VCSE, and we must recognise the enormous contribution they make to the lives of our residents.

We will continue the progress we're making with health integration with our NHS partners, tackling health inequality, and joining up health and social care as best we can to relieve pressures on hospital beds and ensure people can be cared for at home.

On this issue in particular, the government is listening.

I have spoken with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and am working closely with Patricia Hewitt in her review of the Health and Social Care system, ensuring that not just Surrey's voice is heard, but also that of the whole of local government.

The Chancellor's Autumn Statement also demonstrated the government's understanding of local government issues, pausing the Adult Social Care reforms and offering additional funding that undoubtedly will at least help councils short term financial position.

Moving into the new year, it's essential that influence of local government is strengthened further and here in Surrey we will continue to work with government, and other councils, in finding solutions for those longer-term challenges we face as a sector.

I remain confident in the government's devolution agenda and continue to discuss with partners our collective ambition for a county deal for Surrey – giving local government more powers and autonomy to benefit the whole of Surrey.

As I said earlier, we have a huge responsibility as the County Council and it's something we take very seriously. With further devolution – that I expect would be welcomed by all Members here – we can really deliver faster on those ambitions of a stronger local economy, a greener future, thriving communities and reduced health inequality.

Madam Chair, yes, we have huge challenges to face, and a great responsibility to our people, but Surrey has so much going for it.

We must harness that and ensure everyone can benefit.

There is a great Surrey Story waiting to be unleashed and I'm confident that we can keep momentum in 2023 in making our county an even better place for everyone.

Members as we enter the Christmas break, and in the festive spirit, I want to thank you all for your constructive and productive dialogue over the last year.

We will continue to seek to work collaboratively, across the political spectrum as much as possible, and although there have been many challenges in 2022, your input and dedication to your local communities has been invaluable.

Addressing the cost of living, showing our support for Ukraine, dealing with the pandemic – we are strong when we work together towards those common goals.

I know we share a desire to serve the people of Surrey and work for what we genuinely think is best for the County.

Armed with the right funding, the right powers and genuine local flexibility, our great county of Surrey will continue to rise to the challenge and continue to deliver for our communities.

Merry Christmas.

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