

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL HELD AT
WOODHATCH PLACE, 11 COCKSHOT HILL, REIGATE, SURREY, RH2 8EF,
ON 19 MARCH 2024 COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM, THE COUNCIL BEING
CONSTITUTED AS FOLLOWS:**

Saj Hussain (Chair)

* Tim Hall (Vice-Chair)

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

*absent

r = Remote Attendance

13/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

Apologies for absence were received from John Beckett, Jordan Beech, Harry Boparai, Fiona Davidson, Jeffrey Gray, Tim Hall, Frank Kelly (remote), Rachael Lake BEM (remote), Cameron McIntosh, George Potter, Buddhi Weerasinghe (remote).

14/24 MINUTES [Item 2]

The minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 6 February 2024 were submitted, confirmed and signed.

15/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

John O'Reilly declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 9 noting that he is a British Petroleum (BP) pensioner and owns shares in that company.

Liz Bowes declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 9 noting that she is a British Petroleum (BP) pensioner.

David Lewis (Cobham) declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 9 noting that he is a pensioner in Shell and owns shares in that company.

Trefor Hogg declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 10 noting that he is a community representative to NHS Frimley.

Edward Hawkins declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 10 noting that he is a Council appointed foundation governor at Frimley Park Hospital.

Carla Morson declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 10 noting that a close family member works at Frimley Park Hospital.

16/24 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS [Item 4]

The Chair:

- Noted that he had the privilege of visiting the Grange Centre in Great Bookham, which supports people with disabilities; noted that it would be a good place for Members to support using their allocations.
- Highlighted the recent Surrey Armed Forces Covenant Conference at Pirbright, noting that the Council works closely with the military and it was interesting to hear speeches from those in the army and those who provide support.
- Encouraged Members to complete their Related Party Disclosure form.
- Noted that the rest of his announcements could be found in the agenda.

17/24 LEADER'S STATEMENT [Item 5]

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

Members raised the following topics:

- Highlighted that it was World Social Work Day, joined the Leader in thanking all of Surrey's social workers for their hard work despite facing tough conditions.

- Congratulated those officers in being appointed as Interim Chief Executive and Interim Section 151 Officer, noting that they would do a good job despite ongoing financial pressures and increasing demand.
- Noted that at the end of month nine the forecast was for a £3.3 million overspend in the Council's budget this year, that had increased to £4 million even after using the £20 million contingency budget and additional money from reserves for the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Recovery Plan.
- Noted that the demand for children's and adults' statutory services continued to rise, the Council was not intervening early enough; children with special educational needs and mental health issues were being pushed back.
- Noted that the new Mindworks Surrey strategy allowed each school, irrespective of size or number of pupils, to book a one-hour monthly slot to consult on two children and young people who meet specific requirements, there were only 35 slots a week and over 500 schools in Surrey, equating to only four slots a year.
- Asked whether the Schools Forum had been consulted on that new strategy, and whether the Council was giving schools additional funding or support, some families and carers were taking out large loans to fund private assessments.
- Emphasised that support was ineffective and charities could only do so much, there was ongoing frustration at poor communication and record keeping.
- Regarding the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) capital programme, the Budget Task Group raised concerns about its cost yet the delivery of the programme had not been flagged as a risk; costs had increased by 48% with between 920 to 1,180 places delivered against the target of 2,000.
- Hoped that the Council was looking at the demands going forward, more scrutiny was needed and reports must highlight the areas for improvement.
- Noted that there was indication that the Government was willing to address the financial challenges faced by the Council, funding for public health was vital to provide the necessary early intervention and prevention support.
- Made a plea for the Council to visibly create hope for those feeling hopeless.
- Was pleased that the Leader mentioned the excellent visual impairment unit at Woking High School, highlighted that Woking College sought a similar unit.
- Noted that members of Unison had voted over 90% in favour of strike action, Council staff were paid less than the National Joint Council pay award and many neighbouring councils.
- Asked how the Council was engaging with staff and its unions on staff pay and conditions, and how would it mitigate strikes.
- Noted that the County Deal provided Surrey with more control over matters within the county, however noted concern in the extra workload as the Council would have to adequately resource those new responsibilities.
- Asked whether the Leader had assessed the impact of that burden and whether there would be changes to the Cabinet and select committees to be able to scrutinise that; how much would the County Deal cost in money and staff time.
- Asked whether the Leader was aware and agreed with Guildford Borough Council's decision - or possible misinterpretation - to ban all campaigning in Guildford High Street on the basis that it was Surrey County Council land.
- Referring to the elections for the Mayor of London on 2 May and the transport links between Surrey and London, asked whether the Leader would review the Council's approach of non-cooperation with a newly elected Mayor of London.
- Regarding the recent inspection, noted that the Council had let down many families and children over the last few years, asked when the Leader thinks that the recovery would be complete.
- Welcomed the new children's homes, but asked what proportion of children were being placed in homes outside of Surrey; and when the Leader thinks that would be reduced to zero in the future.

- Asked the Leader to list the specific benefits of the County Deal that residents could expect to see in the next few months and years.
- Asked whether the Leader in his recent visit to Downing Street mentioned the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) which had been replaced by Surrey's County Deal.
- Asked whether the Council had no choice but to spend an extra £200 million to extend its twenty-five year waste and incineration contract by five more years despite market engagement indicating no commercial interest in the incinerator.
- Asked whether it was in residents' interest to give Ringway the responsibility for filling potholes and road resurfacing in a contract that could run for twenty-one years and be worth £2.5 billion, how could the Council ensure that it does not lead to money being spent on repairing roads at the expense of funding buses.
- Noted that an independent review in 2018 concluded that Surrey was not delivering high quality Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services; the Mindworks Surrey contract was for ten years and queried why the Council accepted Mindworks Surrey not taking referrals for neurodiverse children.
- Noted that EHCPs were supposed to cut waiting times for additional needs children to twenty weeks, yet the Council did not have the funding to support the increased demand for school places in Surrey and was required to take out £8 million from schools' budget for the Safety Valve Agreement; schools with more SEND children suffered most from the EHCP delays and funding shortfall.
- Queried whether the Council's large waste and road contracts were delivering the best value and whether those could be reviewed to generate savings which could be reinvested to support vulnerable residents and young people.
- Noted a recent visit to the new children's home in Epsom which was homely and had a good atmosphere, and was in the centre of the town, it was a blueprint for future homes; congratulated those involved in making it a reality.
- Regarding the County Deal, welcomed the devolution of the adult education budget from 2026 to 2027 to the Council, it would provide an opportunity to provide adequate adult education in Mole Valley, helping residents in improving their skills leaving no one behind.
- Congratulated the Leader for securing a historic Level 2 County Deal, which would boost economic growth including green jobs and promote house building and urban regeneration; asked whether the Leader was ambitious to broaden and deepen devolution to Surrey and if so, what other responsibilities would he like to see devolved to the Council over time.

18/24 MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME [Item 6]

Questions:

Notice of eighteen questions had been received. The questions and replies were published in the supplementary agenda on 18 March 2024.

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

(Q2) Catherine Powell asked whether the Cabinet Member believed that there was an opportunity for better working with the Council's partners to consider their solutions regarding shared care records and asked how those services could be promoted widely.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care explained that work was underway concerning record sharing and Technology Enabled Care, as well as scrutiny from the

select committee. The programme would become clearer as the transformation plan is rolled out, she was keen to engage with the Member on that as it moves forward.

(Q3) Robert Evans OBE asked whether the Cabinet Member had seen the articles by the press regarding the sale of the former County Hall in Kingston, which was sold by the Council for £25 million. He asked whether she was surprised to see that the forecast value was £250 million, querying whether it had been undersold. In response to the Leader who stated that the figure quoted regarding the forecast value was inaccurate, he asked whether the Cabinet Member would clarify the figures.

Jonathan Essex referred to the penultimate sentence of the response around future development of the site and the Council securing 'any excess of value', he asked whether the Council would receive additional money.

Steven McCormick referred to the last sentence of the response asking whether the 'legal charge against the asset' was time constrained, when would the full amount of the sale be realised; would that information be available to Members and residents.

The Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure confirmed that the Council sold the former County Hall site for in excess of £25 million. Regarding the Gross Development Value, Savills estimated it to be worth £250 million and so far, the purchasers RER (Kingston) Ltd had spent approximately £700,000 annually on empty rates, they had spent on security and planning application costs in excess of £1 million, interest rates had increased dramatically. She estimated that over £32 million had been spent on the site and that the residual land value with planning permission was between £35 and £40 million. She noted that hundreds of millions of pounds would be spent developing the site, the market was at a low point and the purchasers had spent more on the site than they likely expected. Therefore, she believed that the Council secured a good deal.

(Q4) Jonathan Essex praised the response which highlighted the progress being made in reopening one of the largest libraries in east Surrey. He asked whether the Cabinet Member could confirm that Consort House has full disabled access and how for example, would the library be advertised in the town centre.

The Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure was pleased that the Council was able to transfer the library service from the Harlequin Centre to Consort House. Consort House was Disability Discrimination Act compliant so should have disabled access, however she would check that was the case. Regarding signage advertising the reopening of the library, she would leave that to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities to liaise with the service.

(Q6) Andy MacLeod welcomed that on-street parking enforcement was back on track and that there was a focus on informing Members about parking enforcement. He disagreed with the explanation for why it all went wrong a year ago due to only twelve Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) transferred from the boroughs and districts, when sixty CEOs were needed. He noted that it went wrong because the transfer process was badly managed, similarly that was the case in the transfer of grass cutting to the Council. He was concerned that there was not a proper focus on change management and asked the Cabinet Member whether lessons would be learnt regarding all transfers handled by the Council.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth noted that each time a transfer or change happens lessons were learnt. He noted disappointment that more staff did not transfer over, NSL was recruiting throughout and the amount of

CEOs was at the right level and the Council would continue to review their performance. He noted that NSL was only paid when it deployed teams, so it was in their interest to continue the parking enforcement around the county.

(Q7) Lance Spencer noted the immense stress faced by the 125 families with additional needs children who were trying to find a school placement and asked whether the figure would be less in future years as lessons are learnt.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning noted that this year the SEND service dealt with 1,837 children who went through the under 16 Key Stage transfer process, which was the largest number it has ever managed and next year the number was likely to be higher. She recognised the stressful situation for the 125 families who were awaiting a school placement for their child for September, it demonstrated the urgent need to advance the SEND capital programme to build those additional places to meet the needs of children in the future. Noted the hard work by the SEND admissions team across the different settings, particularly in the non-maintained independent sector.

Jonathan Hulley left the meeting at 11.06 am.

(Q8) Angela Goodwin noted that she had received many complaints about the Council's poor communication about the on-street parking and visitor permits in Guildford. She asked whether the Cabinet Member would consider working with the relevant team to improve the communication specifically on the website, and in the run up to the renewal letters in late summer for on-street parking and visitor permits.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth noted that he always looked to improve the team's communications. He noted that most people had signed up online for their parking permits and he had asked the team to send a regular email to residents in permitted areas about any changes. Those who had not signed up by email would be written to.

(Q9) Catherine Powell noted that many people were confused by the situation, therefore it would be helpful if the Cabinet Member could provide a briefing regarding what Mindworks Surrey was and was not doing. She asked whether the Schools Forum knew about and had agreed to the correspondence sent out yesterday.

Jonathan Essex asked whether the Cabinet Member could confirm what the current average waiting time was and what the process was of taking referrals that were not being accepted by Mindworks Surrey. If a child had been waiting half a year, once accepted would that amount of time be factored into the date when Mindworks Surrey starts taking all of the cases it was contracted to take.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning emphasised that the waiting lists and backlogs in the Mindworks Surrey neurodiversity service were unacceptable and the needs of neurodiverse children and young people were not being met. Noted that the situation highlighted the difficulty of partnership working with differing priorities, challenges and budgets; Mindworks Surrey was delivered by Surrey and Borders Partnership (SABP). Noted that high demand was a national problem, and the Council continued to work alongside SABP to address the waiting lists. She would ask the joint integrated commissioning team to prepare an urgent written briefing for Members about what was happening with the Mindworks Surrey neurodiversity service. Noted that it was unlikely that the Schools Forum would have been consulted as the matter was outside its remit, the relevant bodies were the different phase councils. She would check and include in the briefing whether schools were consulted on the interim

arrangements. She would ask SABP officers to provide information on the average waiting times, to be included in the briefing as well as the alternative pathways for children not currently being seen.

(Q10) Robert Evans OBE asked the Cabinet Member what provisions were in place should weather conditions require grass cutting more frequently than scheduled.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth noted that extra crews were on standby if additional cuts were needed. He noted that the number of cuts had increased from four to six in urban areas, with two cuts in rural areas; grass cutting had already started in March.

(Q11) Jonathan Essex asked the Cabinet Member to clarify and consider the number of bus stops needed to cope with the current and future number of buses.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth noted that he would provide a written response.

(Q12) Catherine Baart asked the Cabinet Member to confirm that the Council was happy to take no action to address the gap in the provision of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) from Redhill Station to East Surrey Hospital; and confirm that the Council was pursuing funding from Active Travel England for that. Asked whether the Council was happy to take no action and abandon the bus service to the diabetes and stroke rehabilitation centres in the only borough which has no community transport or Digital Demand Responsive Transport.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth reiterated that as Princes Road was private, it was the landowner's responsibility. Noted that the Council would consider adopting the road should the landowner ensure it meets the adoptable standard and pays the commuted sum; that was currently not being pursued. He noted that the team was looking at alternative routes to address the matter. The Council was maintaining the Town Path part of Princes Road.

(Q14) Robert Evans OBE asked whether the Cabinet Member was disingenuous by not providing the requested figures going back to 2010 as requested, it was for Members to decide whether comparisons were only meaningful for the last few years.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources reiterated that much had changed over the past ten years, those numbers were difficult to obtain and do not provide meaningful comparisons. The response provided meaningful data for the last five years. Looking beyond that, the level of services provided by the Council and the level of grants received were completely different. If desired by the Member, those figures could be provided.

(Q15) Catherine Powell queried the last sentence of the response around recreational verges which were not part of the public highway, she noted that there were such verges that were part of the public highway in estates. She asked the Cabinet Member whether he would reconsider either reallocating the maintenance of those recreational verges currently designated as highway verges or come to another way of managing those, as green spaces were vital to young people's mental health.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth noted that all Members were sent the maps and were asked to review their divisions. Every section of the highways extent would be cut, he encouraged the Member to email him

regarding sections that the Members wants reviewing and he would ask the team to follow up. He clarified that the Council would not cut third party landowners' grass.

(Q18) Catherine Powell sought clarity on how many places had been provided to date under the programme, was it 920 or 1,180; and what was the plan. She asked the Cabinet Member to explain what processes were underway to ensure that the current needs were being met, those needs were increasing.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning noted that she would ask officers to prepare a detailed written briefing covering the completed projects to date, how many new places had been delivered and had been re-provided and in which schools, and what the future programme was and how it was being reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of children with additional needs.

Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Member Briefings:

These were also published in the supplementary agenda on 18 March 2024.

Members made the following comments:

Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth: on the problems with parking enforcement, **Chris Townsend** noted that monthly reports were sent to Members outlining parking enforcement data and that now included schools. Having reviewed the reports, most of the parking enforcement was in Guildford and Woking, and not in his division and he asked why that was. Residents in his division reported that they had never seen one of the 65 CEOs, they had contacted NSL reporting that people were parking on yellow lines and NSL responded that a CEO would be deployed; they had never been seen.

The Cabinet Member asked the Member to contact him with particular roads and he would raise his concerns with the team, the Member could also email NSL. He noted that Guildford and Woking had more controlled parking enforcement in place than the Member's division.

On the transfer of the LEPs' functions to the Council, **Nick Harrison** requested further information on what assets were being transferred and for periodic updates to be provided detailing what budgets, functions and schemes the Council has in mind.

The Cabinet Member explained that the Council was working with Hampshire County Council, and Brighton and Hove City Council to determine the assets and monies to be transferred from 1 April. He noted that there had been a recent Member Development Session on the matter, an update with answers to the questions asked would be provided shortly. As the process develops, updates would continue to be provided to Members around what was available. The most significant asset would be Longcross, Runnymede which was an enterprise zone. The Council would also receive loan repayments, and there was a ring-fenced pot of money to support high growth businesses in Surrey.

Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure: contrary to the Cabinet Member's previous comments in response to question three, **Robert Evans OBE** noted that the former County Hall building in Kingston had been granted planning permission, Kingston Council's decision in September 2023 reference 21/03939/FUL. He asked whether the Cabinet Member would correct her earlier statement.

The Cabinet Member noted that she had been informed that planning permission had not been granted, she noted that the conditions might yet to have been cleared. She noted that the Council had made the correct decision to dispose of the building which was not in the county.

Edward Hawkins asked the Cabinet Member to confirm how many extra care units and other units there were for vulnerable and elderly adults, as well as the number of children's homes in the pipeline.

The Cabinet Member would provide a written response to the Member once she had spoken to the relevant Cabinet Members.

Cabinet Member for Environment: on the Surrey Local Nature Recovery Strategy, **Helyn Clack** noted that Members representing rural areas were becoming more aware of the new strategy and the consultation underway. She asked how the Cabinet Member would be engaging further with Members on the strategy.

The Cabinet Member noted that the Council was working with other local authorities, residents and interested parties on the implementation of the strategy. Work was underway measuring and monitoring the current provision to understand how nature and biodiversity could be improved across Surrey, baseline data was starting to be collected. Other related pieces of work would link into the strategy, covering biodiversity net gain, land management concerning crops, and recreation. She would provide an update in her next Cabinet Member Briefing to the Council.

19/24 **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS [Item 7]**

There were none.

20/24 **ORIGINAL MOTIONS [Item 8]**

Item 8 (i)

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

Under Standing Order 20.3 (a) Robert Evans OBE moved a proposed alteration to the original motion standing in his own name, which had been published in the supplementary agenda on 18 March 2024.

The proposed alteration to the motion was as follows (with additional words in bold/underlined and deletions crossed through):

This Council believes that:

The current system for local government finance is no longer fit for purpose.

This Council resolves to:

Call on the next government to bring in a fairer and more robust system ~~to replace Council Tax.~~

Under Standing Order 20.3, the proposed alteration to the original motion was put to the vote and Council agreed to the proposed alteration and it was therefore open for debate.

Robert Evans OBE made the following points:

- Noted that the current system for local government finance was no longer fit for purpose, it was largely based on Council Tax and a reform of which would be popular and make economic sense.
- Noted that thirty years since the current Council Tax system was introduced, successive governments had not acted to address the long overdue reform.
- Noted that Council Tax was based on 1991 property valuations, since then average house prices in Surrey had increased more than five times.
- Stressed that the Council Tax system was unfair as those in the cheapest properties in Surrey pay disproportionately more than others in multi-million-pound homes.
- Noted that if the motion is carried, Surrey could be at the forefront of change, sending a signal to a new government that reform was needed.
- Suggested that in the short term, some new Council Tax bands could be introduced, meaning that those in larger more expensive properties contribute a fairer percentage of their income to the Council.
- Suggested that in the long term, Council Tax, Stamp Duty Land Tax and the bedroom tax could all be replaced by a proportional property tax based on property values annually, doubled for empty homes; £5 billion potentially could be raised and distributed fairly.
- Suggested that a land tax would be more radical whereby the land would be valued and whilst it would be fairer, it would take longer to develop.
- Emphasised that the motion did not exclude alternative suggestions by Members.
- Believed that the next government must address the inequities, to make the country's economy stronger.
- Noted that there was no reason that a wealthy county like Surrey, should be constantly short of money and cutting services.

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

- Noted that councils' funding nationwide had been cut by a quarter since 2016, the current system was broken and needed fixing.
- Noted that Buckingham Palace was valued at £1 billion, was in Band H and was charged just over £1,800, that was equivalent to a Band B property in Surrey.
- Noted that the Palace was charged less than an average three-bedroom house in Blackpool and 46% of households in England would pay more Council Tax.
- Referred to Parliament's cross-party Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee report released earlier in the year which noted that there was a £4 billion gap in council funding for 2024/25.
- Noted that the County Councils Network (CCN) stated that even well-run and efficient councils would not be able to withstand further funding reductions.
- Noted that demand was not reducing, the CCN called for a cross-party discussion between the political parties nationally as to what councils can be expected to deliver whilst facing a further funding squeeze.
- Noted that the Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies stated that the Government knows that Council Tax was outdated, inequitable, inefficient and anti-levelling up; and it was not brave enough to address that.
- Quoted the Leader that a non-partisan discussion was needed about the future of business rates and Council Tax, which were based on outdated valuations; there needed to be a 'modernised tax system' based on 'the ability to pay'.
- Stressed that the Government was not listening, the Council could help bring about the change needed if the motion is carried.

Eleven Members made the following comments:

- Hoped that the focus would be on the first part of the motion and not about deleted aspects of the motion in the second part.
- Noted that the Community Charge or poll tax was implemented in Scotland first as there had been a call from residents to make changes, it had been reversed due to its unpopularity.
- Noted that the Council Tax system was brought back in which did not differ largely from the previous domestic rates system; it was difficult to produce a system that meets the needs of all residents.
- Noted that over many years the Council had repeatedly stated that it was concerned about the funding formulas and settlements received from the Government.
- Noted that the Council's current in-year budget expenditure position was that the cost of meeting the demands had exceeded the income received.
- Noted that it was difficult for the Council to plan for the medium term due to the Government's reluctance to provide multi-year funding settlements.
- Welcomed the six-month extension of the Household Support Fund, yet that was introduced with little notice in the Spring Budget and would eventually end.
- Noted that the Member for Tadworth, Walton & Kingswood had long campaigned for a change in the way that the highways maintenance grant was calculated, the funding allocation was based on road length and did not account for traffic volumes and usage, which disadvantaged Surrey.
- Noted that when public health responsibilities were transferred to local authorities, the grant allocations were based on the NHS spend rather than the needs assessment; the Council was the fifth lowest funded authority receiving a grant of £34.73 per head compared to £199 per head for the City of London.
- Called for the reform by the next government in the way local authorities are funded, the system of local government finance was no longer fit for purpose.
- Agreed that there needed to be an overhaul of the local government finance system; stressed that for the Council to be able to deliver its services, greater funding was required whether from the Government or locally.
- Urged caution, noting that the Council remained in a negative revenue support grant position whereby it owes the Government around £20 million annually, that had been waived over the last few years.
- Called for a fair funding review, however noted the risk around there being a more heavily weighted deprivation index, which would disadvantage the Council.
- Noted that Surrey had an ageing population, 70% of the Council's budget was spent on the delivery of social care and regarding Home to School Transport, by 2026/27 upper tier authorities would be in difficulties if the current level of inflation and demand continues.
- Disagreed with the suggestions put forward by the proposer but agreed with calling on the next government for a fair and more robust system; recognised that business rates needed to be reviewed.
- Highlighted that the County Deal was an opportunity to look at fiscal devolution, the Council would have greater control over its activities in the county and how it funds the services and raises money, for example through a tourist tax.
- Noted that £1.2 billion was needed to run the Council, 76% of that was generated from Council Tax, if Council Tax was to be abolished then that money would have to be generated some other way.
- Agreed that local government was at crisis point and a different approach was needed.

- Noted that as Chair of the CCN would continue to lobby the current and next governments.
- Noted that the Government must act to ensure that local government can deliver adequate services to support the local population, as it faces a funding reduction and a significant increase in social care costs.
- Noted that in addition to the County Deal, the Government must enable councils to benefit from and expand their ability to raise revenue locally, a new sustainable funding system would enable to Council to meet residents' needs.
- Noted that for example, an airport passenger duty would raise just under £4 billion this year and the Council deserves its fair share being sandwiched between Heathrow and Gatwick Airports, there could be a local levy on fuel duty in Surrey's petrol stations and an increase in the levels of fines for breaches.
- Agreed that an increase in the number of Council Tax bands was needed to relieve the pressure on local government.
- Referred to the call for a voluntary contribution scheme in the budget amendment at the last Council meeting which was not agreed, noting that such a scheme had been implemented at Waverley Borough Council, and other borough and district councils such as Woking Borough Council.
- Noted that reform was necessary regarding all local government funding, that needed to be reviewed cross-party nationally.
- Noted concern that short term financial pressures caused local authorities to make irrational decisions such as selling properties cheap, which they could have developed themselves for more money; in some local authorities, legal issues had built up over time causing bankruptcy.
- Noted that all taxation is unfair, defining fair taxation was difficult and often rewarded some at the expense of others.
- Noted concern around having a mansion tax, the market would be distorted and property price inflation would penalise those who had struggled to buy their family home, often the elderly who were funding their social care through mortgaging their house.
- Noted that proper consideration and planning was needed around the suggestions to reform local government finance.
- Noted that residents' Council Tax bills were not equivalent to the total of what their council was spending, as councils received government grants, a share of business rates, money from fees and charges, and funding from capital programmes.
- Noted that Surrey's businesses paid around £600 million annually to the Government, yet the Council and the borough and district councils received around £130 million a year; called for a campaign to reform business rates so that residents receive a greater share of those.
- Noted that in the past at a different local authority, 70% of its expenditure was on education and it was increasing, the Government took over the running costs from local authorities replacing that responsibility with social care; today 70% of local authorities' expenditure was on social care.
- Noted that the focus must not be solely on how local government generates money from residents, the Council and borough and district councils must consider what services they would like to be responsible for.
- Noting the importance of early intervention, did not understand why if the Council wants something done it has to wait for the General Election; the movers of the motion could discuss the matter with their national political party colleagues committing their party to address the issue via their manifestos, to get the mandate for it and for the electorate to then decide.
- Supported having additional Council Tax bands so wealthier residents with larger homes contribute significantly more than those least able to pay.

- Noted that Council Tax was regressive, yet councils had increased their Council Tax by just under one third above inflation since 2010 and their core spending power had been reduced by 27% in real terms.
- Noted that councils were receiving less money from the Government and from business rates, yet residents were paying more for less services.
- Noted that those most able to pay tax should do so, society is created through the pooling of resources; leaving no one behind.
- Noted that councils must act in fairness to future generations, for example through a mandated government responsibility for action on climate change.
- Noted that the proposer had shown a misunderstanding of the commercial property market, it was wrong to infer that a new government using a new tax system would allow the Council to keep hold of all the money raised.

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

- Noted that he did not have a hotline to any incoming government, less so than the Cabinet Members to the current government.
- Highlighted that overall, there was consensus on supporting the motion.
- Noted that he had put forward some suggestions for change and welcomed the other suggestions made around an airport tax and tourist tax; supported the review of business rates.
- Rejected the comment that all taxation is unfair, had been to countries without a system of taxation where instead there was bribery and brutality.
- Reiterated that the motion stated the current system was not fit for purpose and asks the next government to bring in something fairer and more robust; believed that a good government is bold and should consult on creating a better system.
- Encouraged the Members who were Parliamentary candidates to take the motion forward nationally, to work to improve the system.

The motion was put to the vote and was carried with one abstention.

Therefore, it was **RESOLVED** that:

This Council believes that:

The current system for local government finance is no longer fit for purpose.

This Council resolves to:

Call on the next government to bring in a fairer and more robust system.

21/24 SELECT COMMITTEE FEEDBACK ON A REFERRED MOTION: 'ADVERTISING & SPONSORSHIP POLICY' [Item 9]

The Chair of the Greener Futures Reference Group (GFRG) introduced the report and explained that the motion referred from the Council meeting on 11 October 2022, called for the Council to take the lead in not promoting carbon producing products on advertisements on the Council's highways. He noted that despite the motion being consistent with the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019 and the move towards a global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, it had been referred to the select committee avoiding meaningful debate at the Council meeting; and other motions on climate change had either been amended or referred. He noted that at the GFRG meeting in November 2023, officers were concerned by the

potential loss of £500,000 annually if that advertising was banned and suggested that the money generated from advertising carbon producing products be used to support greener future projects to reduce carbon emissions. He welcomed the review by the Cabinet to weigh up the immediate financial benefits to the Council against the long term damage from the carbon emissions of the promoted products. He hoped that the Cabinet would delay signing the contract in process, to seek a better solution.

The motion's proposer urged Members to support the GFRG's recommendation to challenge the reasons given for not pursuing the motion's resolutions. Noted that the argument that it would decrease income was not proven, and it was absurd that the money generated from advertising such products could be used to reduce carbon emissions elsewhere. Stated that the advertising change would demonstrate the Council's positive leadership on climate change and was in line with its climate strategy. Many national and international bodies had called for the banning of advertising high carbon goods, just under 70% of the public agreed. Referred to a legal opinion that councils could introduce low carbon advertising policies, Somerset Council and Cambridgeshire County Council had committed to such policies.

The motion's seconder suggested that when the Council negotiates contracts for its new electronic billboards and creates new advertising space, it aligns its advertising policy with its ambitions for Surrey's green economy and net zero target. Called for the Council to plan how to use its new devolved powers to promote Surrey's own green companies.

The Leader clarified that purpose of the report was not for the motion to be debated as it would be considered by the Cabinet, he welcomed the Chair of the GFRG and movers of the motion to speak on the matter at a Cabinet meeting.

RESOLVED:

That Council noted that:

- i. the Greener Futures Reference Group (GFRG) did not endorse the recommendation of officers.
- ii. the GFRG recommends that the issue be considered by the Cabinet.

22/24 ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (FRIMLEY PARK HOSPITAL) [Item 10]

The Chair of the Adults and Health Select Committee introduced the report, noting that the national New Hospital Programme aimed to build forty new hospitals by 2030. He noted that Frimley Park Hospital, served residents in Surrey, Hampshire and Bracknell Forest, and was one of the seven hospitals most severely affected by Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). The intention was to rebuild the hospital in a new location, and the regulations required the establishment of a Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) to scrutinise the design plans. He explained that the Council would be the host authority with four members to sit on the JHOSC from Surrey, four from Hampshire and two from Bracknell Forest; politically proportionate and proportionate to the number of residents using the current hospital. Local Members for the divisions closest to the current hospital and new location if different, would be invited to the JHOSC meetings as non-voting observers.

Three Members made the following comments:

- Welcomed the clarification around the local Members as non-voting observers which would include Members with residents who use Frimley Park Hospital such as Farnham residents, asked for those local Members to be included.
- Highlighted that a resident's relevant hospital did not solely depend on where they live, but it also depended on the surgeries they use. An understanding was needed around which surgeries are associated with Frimley Park Hospital, rather than just the towns and villages.
- Asked whether the Council's JHOSC membership was composed of Members that live in the part of Surrey that Frimley Park Hospital serves. The Chair clarified that the membership had been published in the supplementary agenda.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care thanked the Chair of the Adults and Health Select Committee for providing clarity about the next steps. She thanked the select committee for supporting Adult Social Care. She noted that it was Social Work Week and she asked Members to support the service particularly as it goes through the upcoming Care Quality Commission inspection.

RESOLVED:

1. That the County Council agreed to the establishment of the Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Frimley Park Hospital) with effect from 19 March 2024 for the duration of the rebuilding programme (expected to be 10 years).
2. That the County Council be represented by four Members including the chair of its health scrutiny committee; and its membership be confirmed as:
 - Trefor Hogg
 - Richard Tear
 - Michaela Martin
 - Carla Morson
3. Any consequential amendments are made to the Council's Constitution as required.

23/24 SELECT COMMITTEES' REPORT TO COUNCIL [Item 11]

The Chair of the Select Committee Chair and Vice-Chairs' Group introduced the report, noting that scrutiny's role was to help improve services provided to Surrey residents by holding the Cabinet and senior officers to account for their decisions; and to help develop the Council's policies. The report set out the huge amount of work undertaken by the select committees across a range of subjects, including the deep dives by the Task and Finish Groups. She noted that it was vital to continue collecting valuable evidence from external witnesses and for recommendations to be effective.

The Leader thanked the Chairs of the select committee and the Chair of the Select Committee Chair and Vice-Chairs' Group for all their hard work. He noted that he had continued to deliver on his commitment that all policy changes would be scrutinised by the select committees. He was pleased that Task and Finish Groups were up and running, those provided in-depth analysis of areas that could be improved.

A Member called for greater officer support for the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee, to ensure that it is supported adequately.

RESOLVED:

That Council reviewed the work summarised in this report providing feedback to Scrutiny Chairs as appropriate.

24/24 ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL - MEMBER DEVELOPMENT [Item 12]

The Chairman of the Member Development Steering Group (MDSG) introduced the report, providing assurance that it was equitable; it was for Members to decide its effectiveness. He noted that requested changes had been made to ensure that the Member Development Sessions were more interactive, there was also greater interaction through the two in-person Member Development Days. He noted that neither the sessions nor days were well-attended and improving that was a work in progress. He noted that the new Member Reference Library on Microsoft Teams would go live next month and would assist Members to use the facilities available. He encouraged Members to use the training offered by the Local Government Association. He noted that he was stepping down as the Chairman of the MDSG and he thanked officers for their hard work. He emphasised that the MDSG should be representative of all Members, that was why the membership changed annually and he asked Members to put themselves forward to join so they could shape the work. The next MDSG meeting would be in June and he noted that the MDSG's work this year would focus on the Member induction courses post the 2025 county elections.

RESOLVED:

That Council endorsed the current approach to Member development and agreed that it is equitable and effective.

25/24 REPORT OF THE CABINET [Item 13]

The Leader presented the report of the Cabinet meeting held on 27 February 2024.

Recommendations on Policy Framework Documents:

There were no reports with recommendations for Council.

Reports for Information/Discussion

27 February 2024:

- A. Promoting and Supporting Sustainable Economic Growth in Surrey (LEP Integration)
- B. Provision of Primary School Places in the Planning Area of Reigate
- C. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Public Report Regarding Concerns About the Delivery of Education for Children with Additional Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- D. SFRS Fire House and Training Facility

A Member noted a recent visit to the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) headquarters in Reigate, noting the large amount of work that it undertook. Thanked the Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue, and Resilience, and the Cabinet for their support of the redevelopment of the SFRS which once redeveloped could let out facilities and develop the training offer to other Fire and Rescue Services nationally.

- E. Quarterly Report on Decisions Taken Under Special Urgency Arrangements: 3 February 2024 - 11 March 2024

RESOLVED:

1. Noted that there had been no urgent decisions since the last Cabinet report to Council.
2. Adopted the report of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 27 February 2024.

26/24 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.

[Meeting ended at: 12.44 pm]

Chair

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Leader's Statement – County Council, 19 March 2024

Good morning Mr Chairman, Members.

Today's Council Meeting is our first meeting without Joanna Killian leading the organisation as Chief Executive, and the next time we come together will be to ratify the appointment of a new permanent Chief Executive.

It is our final meeting of the financial year 2023/24, with the 2024/25 budget agreed at our last meeting and planning for 2025/26 budget setting already underway, and with the Council AGM to come in May.

We have this week officially entered the pre-election period – not relating to elections here for the County Council, but for many of our District & Borough partners, and the Police & Crime Commissioner in Surrey.

We know there will be a general election at some point in the coming months.

As I will touch on a bit later, we are in the midst of ramping up our improvement programmes within the Council – to build on the heavy lifting work we have done these past years so that our services are fit for what promises to be a challenging future.

However, the change we are operating in today is very different to the change we were operating in six years ago. Surrey was then, where several Councils are today. Financially challenged, struggling to cope with rising demand and no clear long-term post Covid vision.

In that context, the circumstances of this particular organisation today could not be more different.

Surrey County Council is seen as a leading local authority. Our finances are stable. Our services are improving across the board. Our workforce is focused and ambitious for Surrey.

That gives us a solid bedrock to face what is now required – an evolution, to progress even further and faster along the upward trajectory we're on.

While we await the appointment of a new Chief Executive, the Corporate Leadership Team are picking up the baton and offering us further stability, reassurance, and strong leadership.

Our improvement work continues in earnest, our future planning remains on track, our services continue to positively impact residents' lives every single day.

This Council is on track, and while change swirls around us, we know where we want to be, we will not deviate from that course, and we remain guided by our ambition that no one in Surrey should be left behind.

Mr Chairman, since we agreed our budget at our previous Council meeting, our residents have been receiving their council tax bills and information.

For some, this can be one of the only times they interact with us as a Council, and for many it is another burden on already stretched family finances.

We know it's a difficult thing to land with residents – another tax, another bill that they see rising.

And it is this time of year, and the demand for council tax, that brings into sharp focus the importance of making sure that every single public pound is spent appropriately.

Everything we do – every hour of work, every visit made, every contact we have, every project, every job, every service – must be delivered in the most effective and the most efficient way possible.

Our residents must have the confidence that their money is being spent wisely and with the most impact– to make Surrey a better place, and to care for and support those people who need us most.

Alongside those bills issued by District and Borough Councils, our Communications Team, with support from our Finance Team, produced a very clear leaflet, explaining exactly how our residents' council tax is spent, as well as an excellent video showcasing what the County Council does.

I would urge all Members to share those useful resources and take up that collective responsibility to clearly and honestly explain how the Council uses its budget.

Spending public money is a huge responsibility – especially in the current financial climate, and it is a responsibility we must all take extremely seriously.

More than 70% of our entire budget is spent on Adult Social Care and Children's Care – more than £2m every single day spent on what is a relatively small proportion of our population, but it is those people who need us most.

And we will continue to do all that we can to ensure that we do not leave those people behind.

It is the smaller proportion of our budget that is actually spent on our more visible services, like road maintenance, libraries, countryside management, and community recycling centres – the things that are experienced by the most people – as well as

those services that keep us safe like Surrey Fire & Rescue Service, and Trading Standards.

We have to be straight with people. With public finances stretched, there is less money from government, coupled with higher demand for services that are more expensive to deliver.

Local government is expected to do more, with less.

But here in Surrey, we won't shy away from that challenge. We'll tackle it head on.

That involves an honest conversation – with residents, with partners, with ourselves – about the type of organisation we are, and the organisation we want to be in the future.

About our priorities.

About how we organise ourselves – as an organisation, and as a system of partners.

About how we design and deliver services differently – using data more effectively and making the most of new technology and digitisation opportunities.

About the size of our workforce, and ensuring we have the very best people delivering for the very best county in England.

This a challenge we face collectively – everybody involved in delivering public services, in supporting the most vulnerable people in society.

And so, we have a collective responsibility to tackle it, and to ensure that in another six years' time we can again say that we recognised what we needed to do, and we did it successfully.

We have clear priority areas where this improvement is underway – in Children’s Social Care, our service for families with children who have Additional Needs and Disabilities, and Adult Social Care.

Building on progress in delivering better outcomes for residents, and reducing demand through a focus on prevention, early support, and greater independence.

In the case of our Customer Transformation programme - a focus on getting things right first time, responding better and more effectively to the needs of our residents, and really improving that experience when people need us.

We know there is work to do to improve further, and that improvement is the core focus of our transformation work.

Mr Chairman, I just want to focus on some of the progress already being made in services for children with additional needs and disabilities, following the recent findings of the Ofsted and CQC Local Area SEND Inspection published late last year.

Inspectors found that although there is more work to be done, we “have put in place important actions that are starting to make a difference.”

Of particular note, we have made huge and rapid progress on Education, Health, and Care needs assessments, after many families faced long waits and delays due to complex issues within the system.

We have been determined in our action on this matter, recognising the importance to families of having the support they need for young people to thrive.

Our additional investment and work to counteract the national challenges in availability of Educational Psychologists, has allowed us to increase capacity in Surrey, which is

making a big difference to how quickly we can process assessments. Our focus and that of our partners, must now be to deliver those plans in a timely way.

Although there is more to do, this is a significant step in our recovery journey.

To ensure families are kept up to date on progress, we will soon be launching a new termly update for Additional Needs and Disabilities information and events. Anyone can sign up for these updates via the Local Offer website, and I encourage everyone to do so.

Support for these young people and their parents and carers is absolutely central to our ambition that no one is left behind and is reflected in our priorities within our investment programme too.

As part of this, we've recently completed the construction of a new facility specifically for visually impaired pupils at Woking High School.

This is modern, cutting-edge teaching space for 20 visually impaired students, in a net-zero state of the art building and will make a massive impact on the lives of the young people who will use it.

It is the 43rd project under the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Alternative Provision Capital Programme, which has already provided over 1,180 specialist school places since 2019, and there are 40 more projects in the pipeline to 2026/27.

In addition to this Mr Chairman, we recently announced our pride in opening three brand new purpose-built children's homes in the county - one in Epsom and two on a site in Walton-on-Thames – again as part of our capital investment programme.

This investment is vital to increase residential capacity for young people in care in the county.

Currently, around 70% of Surrey children in residential homes are placed out of county, a figure which is largely due to a lack of available homes for them here in Surrey.

These homes will reduce that proportion of Surrey children living out of county and give more young people in care the choice to stay living in Surrey, close to their communities, where it is appropriate for their needs and circumstances.

A great deal of care and consideration has gone into the build, location, and design of these homes, with modern, green technology and efficiency, ensuring they are suitable and sustainable for the long-term.

These are great examples of our ambitious investment programme – also agreed at our last Council meeting – delivering a real impact for residents, helping us reach our no one left behind ambition, and transforming how we deliver services.

Mr Chairman, a positive development for Surrey since our last meeting came in the announcement of Surrey's County Deal by the Chancellor as part of the Spring Budget early this month.

This is an important step in delivering true devolution of powers from Westminster to local communities, recognising the ability of local government, working closer to residents, and knowing how to provide the best conditions for our local areas to thrive.

It also demonstrates the strength of this Council, being one of a select few that have achieved a County Deal.

I had the pleasure of attending Political Cabinet at 10 Downing Street last week, as this government really does want to hear the voice of local authorities.

I spoke on behalf of the sector and had very productive conversations about the key issues and pressures facing local government. I will be having specific follow up meetings with the relevant Secretaries of State in the coming weeks.

I know that, given the right support, in the right way, local government can lead the way in tackling some of this country's biggest challenges.

And that, Members, is something on which I'm sure we can all agree.

Ultimately, this County Deal— albeit with limited additional powers at this stage - is one of those opportunities for the Council to act with greater influence, independence, and flexibility to make a difference in our wonderful county. It also gives us the opportunity to work more closely with the other tiers of local government who face their own challenges, playing to our respective strengths for the benefit of our residents.

One of the crucial changes will mean Surrey County Council will be taking on a leadership role of our vibrant economy - meaning for the first time we will be able to deliver a cogent economic strategy for the whole of the county.

Integration of powers, held previously by LEPs, is already underway - we thank colleagues at Enterprise M3 and Coast to Capital for their support on this.

Integration will be complete by April, bringing a range of benefits for businesses and residents.

Setting a single economic vision for the county, ensuring Surrey-wide solutions are developed to support local economic growth.

A new Surrey business brand and website will make it easier for our 110,000 businesses to know where to access the right information, advice, and guidance.

The creation of a Surrey Growth Hub service will provide better support for business, and targeted interventions for high-growth local businesses.

Our Surrey Careers Hub, launched in September and already engaging with more than 97% of the county's secondary schools, colleges, and educational providers, will continue to grow.

Future government funding to support local growth will now be focused on the whole of Surrey, instead of it being spread across larger regional areas.

We are working with partners across Surrey, public and private sector, education providers, and District and Borough colleagues in developing this exciting new opportunity to strengthen our business community and ultimately a growing, sustainable local economy.

Mr Chairman, before I finish, I must note that this week is Social Work week – an opportunity to recognise the importance of one of our key services and celebrate some of our most important front-line staff.

Social Workers dedicate their time to supporting our most vulnerable residents - young and old, and all ages in between. They are the embodiment of our ambition that no one is left behind, and I want to pay tribute to each and every Surrey Social Worker and thank them for the vital work they do every single day.

Of course, we'd like more of them, and I would ask all of us to share in celebrating that profession – not only this week, but every week – to promote the benefits of that career and encourage people to consider that path.

Mr Chairman, Members, we continue to live through a period of change, but our foundations are strong, and our ambitions are clear.

We signal the end of a financial year that has been full of progress and improvement, and although I am quite sure the coming year will have its challenges, we look forward to the next phase of the development of this Council with renewed energy and vigour.

Thank you.