

**Public Questions to Resident Experience Board
Thursday 13 October 2016, Surrey History Centre**

Question 1 from Sue Johnson

Having heard about the Resident Experience Board in Surrey Matters, I am pleased to see that in the latest edition, unlike the last time, a reference was given for the Board's website. What measures are being taken to ensure the Council/Board get their promotion right first time? As the majority of all Board and Committee meetings are held in the daytime at County Hall this disadvantages those residents who work and are unable to travel to Kingston. What measures are being taken to ensure this Board is made more accessible and is effectively promoted to residents across Surrey so that others can contribute their experiences in the future?

Reply:

The Resident Experience Board has received a mention in two recent editions of Surrey Matters and would like to thank the Surrey Matters team for the inclusion within this countywide magazine. The Board aims to engage with Surrey's residents to learn from their experiences of living and working in and around the County; and by working with Surrey Matters we hoped to raise awareness of the Board, what it does and what it is about. We have learnt from both our appearances in Surrey Matters that there is room for improvement, and will continue to work closely with our colleagues to promote the Board better across the County.

The majority of Surrey County Council's Boards and Committees meeting during the daytime within the working week, although seven of our eleven Local Committees and the Corporate Parenting Board meet in the evening or late afternoon. As many County Councillors are also Members of their local Borough or District Councils, Surrey's meetings are scheduled during the working day to avoid clashes with other local committee meetings throughout the county. Surrey's Board and Committee meeting dates are also published online for each Board and Committee, often over a year in advance, and notification of meetings are published in public Council buildings, such as libraries.

Our website, also offers residents to sign up to notifications for Boards and Committees that are of interest to them on an opt-in subscription arrangement.

In a bid to make meetings more accessible to residents that cannot attend during the day, the Resident Experience Board, along with Council, Cabinet, Planning and Regulatory Committee, Surrey Police & Crime Panel and Woking Joint Committee all have their meetings webcast live and are also archived for catch-up for six months. However on occasions such as today's meeting of the Resident Experience Board at the Surrey History Centre, webcasting facilities are not available.

Democratic Services has begun using social media this year and direct engagement with Surrey's Boards and Committees is welcomed on their Twitter account, [@SCCDemocracy](#). Over the summer, Democratic Services officers have been looking into making it easier for residents to get involved with the Board; such as by suggesting topics for scrutiny, and providing information on attending meetings and giving evidence. Though this is still in development it is hoped that new tools will be available by the end of the year. The Board also publishes a newsletter relating to news and stories from Council services within its remit available at: <https://surreyreb.interests.me/>

Despite all of this, very little can beat direct input and involvement with Surrey's residents such as yourself. I would like to thank you for your questions to the Board and hope that other residents may be encouraged to get involved in the near future too.

**Colin Kemp
Chairman of the Resident Experience Board**

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Question 2 from Sue Johnson

Some residents may wish to report local problems or issues to their Local or County council; however, due to a lack of clarity around where responsibility or ownership lies, some people may be put off as there is no single point of contact to refer to. Has Surrey County Council considered a joint contact approach with District and Borough Councils and otherwise, what plans are in place to communicate the different roles and responsibilities of Surrey County Council and the eleven District and Borough Councils to residents in a clear and simple manner?

Reply:

All District and Borough Councils have a local committee which is always a good point of contact for local residents to ask questions, report problems and find out what is going on in their area. Details of your local committee can be found [here](#).

The joint Borough and County approach is one that the county have been promoting over the last couple of years. Woking Borough Council was the first to have a Joint Committee, which has been operating for two years now. Woking Joint Committee is made up of both County and Borough councils with officers from both authorities. These meetings are held during the evening and public engagement is encouraged on all agenda items. I am pleased to say Spelthorne will also be using this joint model from later this year and I know many other authorities are looking at adopting the joint model too.

As to communicating roles and responsibilities, although each authority has some clear duties the delivery of these can often be a partnership role between Parish, Borough, District and County councils working together to deliver the best service for our residents. I would suggest a good point of contact is your local committee and they can obtain a reply from either authority to any question you may have.

Colin Kemp
Chairman of the Resident Experience Board
13 October 2016

Question 3 from Sue Johnson

My local library, Ash Library, is the heart of the community and a lovely place to visit, relax and meet people. Recently I have noticed that some changes to the library has caused it to lose its 'community feel'. Library staff are no longer able to personally issue or return books; communication with customers seems to be discouraged at the main counter by a physical barrier; book reservation collections is now self-service, resulting in a loss of privacy on what customers choose to read; changes to the way book club members can collect their books which leads to customer inconvenience, and losing the personal welcome from staff as a result of constant personnel changes. I would like to know why these changes have been made to Ash Library and what can now be done to get back that 'community feel' that has been taken away?

Reply:

Thank you for your kind comments about Ash library and its importance to the community. Against a background of declining local government funding in Surrey we have sought to keep all our libraries open. You will be aware that across the UK many public libraries have closed or are closing. This has meant however to achieve savings while maintaining the service we have had to look at everything we do and often change the way we do things.

We have been introducing self service across all libraries in Surrey since 2005. Having self service helps us deal with declining staff numbers in a positive way in that staff are released to interact with and help borrowers with things like homework queries or computer help. Staff still aim to provide good customer care and will always be available at and around the self service machines to support borrowers.

The self service has proved popular with many of our users as it reduces queues at the counter and many customers report that they feel an increased sense of privacy when issuing their own books- particularly important in a community library like Ash where staff may know their customers and their families.

The reserved books have been moved to a trolley near the self service machines for those who want to pick up their books quickly. The service appreciates that people may not always want their choice of requested books to be visible. If customers do not want their books kept on the reserve shelf then we are able to store them behind the counter for collection if you put a note on the request.

The library service agrees that the counter at Ash is rather higher than we would like nowadays. Unfortunately there is a high cost in changing this which we cannot meet at present but we do encourage staff to move away from behind the desk and proactively interact with library users looking for help.

Book clubs are encouraged to issue their books at the self service again to reduce pressure on staffing. If anyone needs help from the staff then they would be more than willing to assist.

The library service has gone through some staffing changes in the last few years and the staff are sometimes working at other libraries to gain experience or training which helps them provide a better service when they return to Ash but the main personnel at Ash are the same staff as have always been there.

With the introduction of these new procedures the staff now have more time to interact with the wider community and encourage a broader audience. Earlier in the summer all the classes from the local infant school came for visits. The staff had time to show them how the library works, why they can find in the library and how to use it, and encourage the children to bring their families to the library. Ash library has also had a very successful Reading Challenge in the summer for the children and the staff have other ideas for projects in the future.

With all this now happening after a period of change we hope that Ash will be in a position to become even more involved with the local area and enhance the community feel that it has had.

Thank you for your continuing support to the library service.

Colin Kemp
Chairman of the Resident Experience Board
13 October 2016