

Mr Chairman and Members, I would like to begin by welcoming the new Leader of the Lib Dem Group, Chris Botten to this meeting, which is the first in his capacity as Group Leader of the Surrey Opposition Forum.

I have known Chris for many years through working on Tandridge District Council, and always found him to be decent, genuine and hard-working, putting his residents first in everything he does.

I would also like to pay tribute to Hazel Watson, the longest serving member in this chamber, who is stepping down after 14 years as Leader.

Moving on, Mr Chairman and Members, I was pleased to see so many of you at yesterday's important seminar that focussed on our recent Ofsted inspection.

There is no doubt that the report made for very difficult reading.

Clare Curran, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services will be providing a statement in a few minutes, however she has made it very clear in recent days that we all take this judgement extremely seriously. We fully accept there is a great deal for us to do to make sure we look after the children of Surrey.

Mr Chairman and Members, as I have spoken about previously in this chamber, I was brought up in care and the wellbeing of our children is something I feel passionately about. And it is something I am absolutely determined to get right.

It is something that every one of us in this chamber must get right as corporate parents. We all have roles to play.

And we have firm plans in place.

I am delighted that Dave Hill – one of the country’s most highly regarded children’s strategic directors – has joined us to lead this crucial work.

And I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Dave on receiving a CBE from Prince Charles last Friday for his services to children’s social care and his work as a children’s commissioner.

Mr Chairman, our ability to ensure that Surrey’s children and young people are safe and secure will go a long way towards determining their future.

We have continually risen to the challenges of doing more for less - but any big organisation requires almost constant improvement. We have seen many large businesses that have

been part of our commercial landscape disappear, whilst others are struggling to adapt and survive in our ever-changing world. We are also operating in an environment where change is not only desirable but essential. We have to meet the growing needs of our residents with significantly reduced funding.

You will all have seen in your papers the item on Surrey's vision for the future. Developed in order to achieve better outcomes for everyone in Surrey.

I couldn't help but be reminded of the story of Sir Christopher Wren walking unrecognised amongst the workers building St. Paul's Cathedral some 350 years ago.

When he asked them what they were doing most replied "cutting some stone".

But one man replied "helping Sir Christopher Wren build a beautiful cathedral".

That man understood the vision, its purpose, and the part he played in it. For great projects to be successful everyone involved should recognise their part is just as crucial as anyone else's.

With that in mind Mr Chairman we are putting together plans for a programme of transformation that will allow us to enhance the

services we provide to residents whilst also ensuring we respond to rising demand.

It is therefore vital that we must look at radical solutions to make our services as efficient and effective as they can possibly be.

To achieve this we will need to deliver services in a more imaginative and innovative way. And it will mean working much more closely with our partners, such as borough and district councils, the health service and the voluntary sector.

It is a vision that must be shared by everyone in Surrey.

That is why I am calling on everyone to help us shape it – residents, members, staff and partners. We are beginning a period of intense engagement so that all those with a stake in the future of our beautiful county can have their say.

We want our children to be safe.

We want our elderly to be cared for.

We want our families to have a home they can call their own.

We want our businesses to be even more successful.

And we want no one to be left behind.

Key to our transformation programme will be shaping services around the places in which our residents live. We must be responsive to the modern needs of our residents and we cannot assume that what is right for Farnham will automatically be right for Merstham.

That is why it will be vital for us to develop this programme with others. And this will not just be about what services we provide, but also where and how we provide them.

Only by shaping these plans with residents and partners will we get this right.

Of course, we are only at the beginning of this work and we will spend the coming months engaging with stakeholders before Council considers the vision formally in October, followed by the Budget and Organisation Strategy in November.

As part of this, I look forward to us engaging with our residents, who pay one of the highest council tax rates in the country. It is vital that they have a say on how this work is shaped.

Surrey's businesses are the life-blood of the county and make a significant contribution to the success of the country as a whole. I would like to hear from as many of them as possible.

Furthermore, Mr Chairman, I have said all along that we are **not** the dominant council in Surrey. We are simply one of twelve councils that work as one team to deliver outcomes to our residents.

So, of course, we will be consulting our district and borough colleagues to hear their visions, ideas and solutions.

In addition, I look forward to consulting with our hard-working staff and I am currently visiting our various offices around the county with the Chief Executive to hear their views on the county council.

And of course our other partners such as the NHS, the voluntary sector and the faith communities.

All have a role to help set the vision.

Only by pulling together the thoughts and ambitions of these different groups will we be able to develop a programme of work worthy of success and worthy of the people of Surrey.

Mr Chairman, the people of Surrey understand.

They understand the pressures of demand.

They understand the lack of funding from government.

They understand that we must be realistic and live within our means.

And they understand that will most certainly involve having to continue to make some really tough decisions. There will be things that we will simply not be able to do - no matter how much we might want to.

And Members... I have challenged you in this chamber in the past to be game changers. I know that many of you have already seized that opportunity, but this gives you the chance to **be** that community leader... **work** together as one team... and sow the seeds of change to make a difference to your residents' lives.

I urge you to speak to your local residents, your businesses, your community groups. ANYONE you have the chance to speak to. Make sure they are given a voice and their thoughts and ideas are heard.

Mr Chairman, over the past eight years Members and staff have worked tirelessly to achieve a balanced budget or manage a small surplus but the challenge will not get any easier – in fact it will get harder. Much harder.

However, I firmly believe that this process will help us make choices and set priorities, for the benefit of Surrey residents.

Some will no doubt say this is about us avoiding having to make those important decisions.

They are wrong.

This process will provide us with the evidence and insight to make the best decisions to make effective use of our resources and generate the income we need to provide quality services to our residents.

In order to make this happen Mr Chairman, I have refreshed the Cabinet portfolios to reflect the changes in the senior leadership team and our new approach.

And central to this work will be a focus on people and place. The focus on People will be responsible for ensuring services are joined up, easy to access and efficient. The focus on Place will be responsible for harnessing the work we do alongside our partners to make the best use of our combined resources, knowledge and assets.

As a result I am delighted to announce Tim Oliver as the Cabinet Lead for People, Colin Kemp as the Cabinet Lead for Place and Helyn Clack as the Cabinet Lead for Corporate Support Services.

In addition, to ensure we have the capacity to make it a success, I am very pleased to announce the appointment of Alison Griffiths, Charlotte Morley, Cameron McIntosh and Jeff Harris as Deputy Cabinet Members.

As well as providing extra capacity and knowhow, this will also ensure they have the necessary knowledge and experience of Cabinet to continue its work in years to come.

Furthermore, Mr Chairman, much of our transformation work will be led and driven by a refreshed senior officer team.

In addition to Dave Hill we also welcome Michael Coughlin as Interim Director of Customers, Digital and Transformation.

Both have made a positive start in their roles and my Cabinet and I are greatly looking forward to working with them.

As you know Mr Chairman, we have delivered over £540m of savings over the past eight years in the face of £200m being cut from our government funding.

We have worked hard, and achieved a lot.

But there is still a great deal more to do.

Nonetheless I have complete confidence in our Leadership Team, our staff, our partners and the Members in this chamber to transform outcomes for our residents.

Finally, Mr Chairman, I want to talk about something so many of our residents ask us about on the doorstep. Something that fills our postbags and email inboxes on a daily basis.

The frustration for all of us with potholes on our roads. I share this frustration. And I know Members share it too.

Earlier this year I announced that we would invest an extra £5m in tackling the damage to our roads following the recent severe winter weather. Members already know we received a huge increase in reported potholes during February and March. I can tell you now that the figure for April is even worse – an increase of one hundred and thirty seven per cent on the same month last year.

That is why we are determined to do even more to tackle this problem for our residents.

Over the next two years we will invest a further £15m in improving our roads. That's a total of £20m of new money. We will look again at the roads identified by Members and make extensive repairs to extend their life.

Mr Chairman, despite repeated efforts to get Government ministers to recognise that they severely underfund our roads they have refused to act. Ministers will not recognise that the sheer volume of traffic on our roads is causing them to deteriorate more quickly.

So that is why we will act.

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