

Council Speech 13 November 2018

Mr Chairman and members,

Last week I advised my Conservative Colleagues that I will stand down as Leader of this County Council on 11 December 2018 and pass the baton on to someone new.

Over the last decade, Local Government has gone through some of the most extraordinary and challenging times. We have achieved a great deal over the past ten years despite these difficulties and I feel – with the county firmly fixed on an exciting new vision for the future – now is the right time for me to stand aside.

Mr Chairman, I want to reflect this morning on the many benefits we have delivered for Surrey.

When I became Deputy Leader in 2009 the country had just experienced the crash of financial markets across the World and the consequences of that crash quickly hit local government.

Since then, a staggering 16 billion pounds has been cut from local government funding nationally, with over two hundred and thirty million pounds of that funding taken from services for Surrey's residents.

On top of that, this Surrey Conservative administration has reduced costs by over £540m over the last 8 years and we are on target to save a further £106m this year. This is an extraordinary achievement.

But we kept going – thanks to the tough decisions we have made. Always having residents at the centre of our thinking.

It was clear to me back then that we needed to transform our services and reduce our costs. I launched a Public Value Review of every single department and service with terrific support from officers across the council. We found £287m of savings by doing things differently.

The lesson of the last ten years in local government is that while we have been focused on improving efficiency – preserving services, despite the increasing demands – our task has been made continuously more difficult for us by circumstances beyond our control.

In 2011 the Government decreed that the NHS should hand over responsibilities for severe learning disability services to local government. Surrey County Council received over 860 individual cases and NHS passed over the £65m of annual funding with promises of inflation funding to follow.

It is extremely disappointing that Government has not only failed to do that but has also completely eroded that funding so we no longer receive a single penny. It means the Surrey council tax payers have now been left to fund this vital service.

Similarly, the Government in 2013 decided to hand responsibility for public health back to councils, but the annual funding was immediately cut by more than fourteen million pounds.

It is difficult for anyone involved in local government to accept that despite:-

- Continually finding efficiencies and savings,
- Continually weathering cuts in funding,
- And continually facing increasing demands for children and adult services

That Councils are expected to carry on regardless while the health service is handed more and more funding.

In many ways we have been a victim of our own success!

Nonetheless, we have worked hard with the health service to bring health and social care closer together. We have seen the emergence of Surrey Heartlands, as a devolution partnership, but I remain concerned at the level of work and time commitment required to make a reality of a truly integrated system. I still have reservations about the tangible outcomes and whether this initiative really does support or reduce costs for Surrey Adult Social Care.

I totally support the principal of the Government's ten year funding plan for the NHS but there needs to be a concurrent ten year plan for Adult Social Care. Without it, the Health and Social Care system will be brought to a standstill.

The challenges we have faced since 2009 have not always been financial.

During December 2013 and January 2014 we witnessed some of the heaviest rainfall in Surrey which resulted in the flooding of many homes in the county. The devastation caused to homes in Surrey was the highest recorded in UK.

I must pay tribute to our previous Chief Executive David McNulty for his professionalism in handling this crisis and since then we have worked tirelessly with the Environment Agency to draw up a plan for much improved flood protection along the Thames. We now know that the scheme is nearly ready for sign off by HM Treasury but there is still a funding gap of £257m to resolve.

Despite these challenges there have been moments of great celebration.

In 2010, I was delighted to put Surrey forward as the site for the 2012 London Olympic Cycling events. They were a remarkable success thanks to all the hard work and commitment of so many at the county council. That Olympic legacy continues today with the annual London Surrey Cycling events which have raised considerable funds for national and local charities.

On 22 July 2013 the new Walton Bridge was opened between Walton and Shepperton. I must pay tribute to our previous Leader Nick Skellett, who was hugely instrumental in its delivery.

And then, Mr Chairman, there was the event in 2015 to commemorate the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta. Once again the county delivered an outstanding event in partnership with Runnymede Borough Council. The world's eyes were on Surrey that day and our Officers along with Surrey Police and Royal Holloway University delivered events we could all be rightly proud of. The Jurors Chairs will be a lasting legacy of this historic event.

In addition we will see the Eco Park open in the new year - providing the next generation of waste treatment facilities for Surrey households.

And we have rebuilt fire stations in Guildford, Woking, Salfords and a new one will soon open in Fordbridge.

Woking Fire Station was re-built with 31 flats above, I believe this is the future for all of our fire stations.

These flats can provide much-needed accommodation to key public servants and young people in order for them to have a place they can call home.

Over the last 10 years I have worked with Leaders and Chief Executives of our 11 Boroughs and District. I am grateful for their personal support. As we develop our Vision for Surrey 2030 I strongly believe they will play an important role in changing local government services for all our residents.

In addition, we have supported the work of two Local Enterprises Partnerships, Enterprise M3 and Coast to Capital. This work has seen investment of over £50m for the benefit of Surrey residents, including significant improvements to the Runnymede Roundabout, Meadows Gyratory and A22 network resilience scheme.

And meanwhile, our work to improve roads for our residents has continued. We launched Operation Horizon and today we can see the improvement it has made to many Surrey roads.

We have also lobbied hard for fairer funding of Surrey roads. This work will continue but I am pleased the Government has begun to listen to us and that the Chancellor announced extra money in the Budget for roads. We must continue to push for Surrey to get its fair share of Vehicle Excise Duty raised in Surrey to be spent on our county roads. That's what I call fairness.

To meet the financial challenges we have had to be resourceful and courageous. In 2012 this council made a brave and historic decision in not accepting the Government's offer of a Council Tax Freeze Grant – we went against the majority view in National and local government at that time – but that decision has led to an extra £250m since 2012 for us to support public services for Surrey's residents.

Mr Chairman, I have long felt that the solution to our financial pressures will **not** be found with government.

Yes, fair funding by government ministers can help us.

Yes, proper retention of business rates will make a difference.

But, at the end of the day, we must determine our own future.

That was the reason why in 2013, I launched the long-term investment strategy to create an income stream of up to £10m per year by 2020. And the Asset and Property Strategy agreed by Cabinet last month has the potential to raise an extra £25m a year by 2030.

These initiatives are vital when we have to resolve the financial implications of the huge rise in the number of children with special educational needs.

We, as Corporate Parents, cannot fail these “children in need” so we have set up plans to reform the services we offer to them and their families. We will be working with schools and the health service to deal with issues earlier on and closer to home. And Mr Chairman I look to all members of this council to be Champions for our “Children in need”.

But there is of course still more to do.

It was with deep regret that Surrey failed its Children Services Ofsted inspection in 2015. I can honestly say that I am now confident that with the appointment of Dave Hill, Surrey is now in the hands of a Children Services specialist and the changes he is making will bring better services for Surrey children.

But we will only be successful if we members and officers work more effectively with our partners and they with us. We cannot change the world on our own. Change will not happen overnight and we are still perhaps 2 to 3 years away from being where we should be.

Outside of Surrey, I was privileged to be elected to the chairmanship of the County Councils Network and then Leadership of the Conservative Group at the LGA. In those roles I was able to stand up and fight for change. Change which has benefitted people in Surrey and nationally.

I was able to persuade the government to:

- Implement the fair funding process before enacting the Business Rates reform, and
- Allow local authorities to raise the precept locally for Adult Social Care.

But first and foremost it has been my role at Surrey that has been my priority.

I am deeply thankful to everyone who has contributed and taken a role in my Cabinet over the years. We have faced difficult times and have made difficult decisions, but it has been a hugely enjoyable and satisfying role, working to make Surrey a better place.

In particular I am very grateful to my deputies. Peter Martin who was always ready with a quiet piece of advice and support, often we would debate issues before we aired them. He was a loyal and hardworking Deputy, and under his stewardship as military champion the County Council is one of the national leaders in its support and commitment to the military. In the last 18 months John has stepped into the role of Deputy Leader. I am grateful to you both.

I have no doubt that the new leader and their Cabinet will go from strength to strength with the support of a great senior management team and professional officers across Surrey. And I thank them all Officers for the support they have given me over the years.

Mr Chairman, I have been privileged to serve with so many hard working Conservative members of our Group since 2009 and win three elections. I thank them for their loyalty and dedication.

And of course thanks to the opposition leaders and members I have traded exchanges with over the years. The very cornerstone of democracy is the importance of different voices and challenge but in a respectful manner. Our political views may differ but the one thing that unites us all is our desire to do the very best for our residents.

And when a member assumes the role of Leader it is critical never to lose sight of your own division. I would like to say a genuine and sincere thank you to my District Councillors in the Warlingham Division for their loyal support over the years. And I am also indebted to the Parish Councillors and Parish Clerks who together do so much to improve the lives of local residents.

I must thank those we have worked in partnership with to bring services to our residents, particularly the wonderful voluntary, community and faith sector who have been integral during my time as Leader and are key to this council's future.

Ultimately it has been an honour to serve the residents of Surrey as Leader of the Council and I cannot think of any role that has brought me so much satisfaction – despite the hard work and challenges.

I firmly believe we have achieved great things in the face of adversity and I am delighted that we have secured the best possible senior management team led by a truly outstanding Chief Executive – Joanna Killian.

Together we have put the county on course to a brighter vision in 2030 and a transformation plan that will bring lasting benefit for our residents.

There is of course a positive side to standing down as Leader. I will genuinely be able to spend more time with my wife Anne – although she may not see this as positive!

Anne has been a real inspiration to me in this role. I have no doubt that without her support, her voice of wisdom, her reasoning and understanding this job would have been far more difficult. She is my rock and has always been there no matter what the issues or challenges.

As we move into the next chapter in the history of the County Council, I wanted to leave you with a simple proverb, which I believe is relevant to us all.

If you want to go fast, go alone... if you want to go far, go together.

I would like members, officers, and partners, all of us, to hold that proverb dear as we work towards a vision for Surrey in 2030.

Finally Mr Chairman and members, thank you for allowing me the privilege and honour of serving as Leader of Surrey County Council.

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