

County Council speech

5 February 2019

Mr Chairman and members, let me begin by thanking the great many residents and partners who took the time to respond to the Council's consultation and engagement exercise.

Over twenty eight thousand responses were received on the five service areas that were consulted on and whilst of course there was a mixture of views, we have listened very carefully to the feedback.

That's why Cabinet last week removed the proposal to close four community recycling centres pending a thorough review of our waste and recycling service.

This will allow us to pick up the details in the Government's recent waste strategy – which was only released after we had begun the consultations. I am grateful to Dr Povey who has agreed to chair a cross party working group to look at all of the options.

However, there can be no doubt that these remain extremely challenging times. The impact of austerity has meant that local government has lost 60% of its funding since 2010 and this Council has had to use over £80m of its reserves since 2014 to supplement its revenue budget.

Mr Chairman, in truth we have not done enough in the past to ensure our finances are sustainable and this is now a major piece of work – but I am determined that we will put the council's finances on a solid footing as quickly as possible. This financial year we will have delivered £106m of savings as our transformation programmes start to take shape, and we will not have had to rely on our very limited reserves to achieve a balanced budget.

But given the pressures the county faces and the financial challenges that need addressing we are left with no choice but to recommend an increase in council tax by 2.99% for the municipal year 2019/20.

It gives neither me nor indeed any of us any pleasure in making this recommendation, particularly as Surrey residents pay some of the

highest Council tax in the country, but it is my genuine hope that we will get to a position in the future where we can limit further increases.

Mr Chairman, I read the funding settlement with interest.

Having worked so closely and productively with our District and Borough partners over the past 12 months to make a success of the Business Rates Retention pilot and promote economic growth, we were disappointed that Surrey was not chosen as one of the authorities to pilot the scheme in year 2.

However, I was pleased that common sense prevailed in relation to the elimination of negative revenue support grant, which on any view would have been unfair and inequitable.

Mr Chairman, none of us in this chamber want to see a reduction in services, but there can be no doubt that we need to radically re-design the way in which we deliver them.

Whilst we now have a strategy in place that will ensure the council has a sustainable financial plan, the main catalyst for the consultations was **not** financial, but to provide better outcomes, particularly within Children's Services, where we are behind the curve compared to neighbouring authorities.

I know there has been widespread concern about the closure of Children's Centres but the truth is that the proposals approved by Cabinet last week will help us to better target support to the most vulnerable and most in need.

Research has told us that many of the most vulnerable in our communities do not currently use Children's Centres so our proposals will allow us to take the service to them and visit people in their homes. There are many other authorities who have implemented a very similar structure to their children's services with extremely positive results for children and families. To that extent we are following an established path and will need to work closely with our partners to make sure no one is left behind.

Looking forward, Mr Chairman, there will be a second round of consultations later in the year, which will focus on how we can improve the way in which we deliver our library and bus services.

It is vital that we look at and understand what alternative proposals in each place would look like on a case by case basis. That is why we have already started to engage with our District and Borough Partners as there cannot and should never be a one size fits all approach to how our services are delivered.

And it is also vital that as many services as possible are delivered in partnership. This will not only ensure we provide residents with value for money but also that we provide more efficient and seamless services to the people of Surrey.

There are already a number of examples such as:

- The ten year plan for health and wellbeing in Surrey which we shall shortly publish, setting out how we can work together with our local communities to transform outcomes across Surrey. This is largely thanks to unprecedented levels of collaboration.
- The integrated approach to delivering a youth strategy with Woking Borough Council, as agreed through the Woking Joint Committee, which aims to improve young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health whilst supporting the transition from adolescence to adulthood.
- And the SHAPE board, which has come together with a number of public authorities to think more creatively about publicly-owned assets across the county.

Mr Chairman, in my eight weeks as Leader I have been humbled by numerous messages of support and encouragement.

I have enjoyed getting out and meeting residents, staff, partners, MPs – and even opposition groups!

And one thing is absolutely clear: we all have the welfare of Surrey residents at heart.

I strongly encourage all of us as elected members to make residents aware of the outcome of the first phase of consultations, and promote

the second phase when it begins. Each of us has a unique place at the heart of our communities and your voice will be vital as we go through a period of significant change. But with that voice comes a responsibility to represent the authority within those communities.

Some double-hatters amongst us face district and borough elections in May and many more of us will be out on the doorstep supporting colleagues over the next 90 days.

This provides an excellent opportunity to listen to residents' concerns and their ideas for how services can be delivered. It also provides an opportunity for us to inform them about the work we have already started to improve services for those most in need of our support and to look for solutions that will enhance services for everyone.

Mr Chairman, we all signed up to the 2030 Vision that Surrey will be a uniquely special place where everyone has a great start to life, people live healthy and fulfilling lives, contribute to their community, and no one is left behind.

I am confident that this budget, and more particularly the transformation programmes that sit beneath it, will take us one step closer to achieving that vision and I therefore commend this budget to members.

Thank you.