

## County Council speech – March 2019

Mr Chairman and Members, for those of you that have been counting the days you will know that today marks my 99<sup>th</sup> day as Leader of this county council. That leaves me a clear day to achieve my first set of priorities. What can possibly go wrong ?

As you might imagine there have been plenty of challenges during those 99 days, some frustrations but equally a great deal of progress.

I am truly appreciative of the hard work and dedication of officers and members who work tirelessly for our residents as we move towards achieving our 2030 vision for Surrey.

An essential part of that vision is that children and young people are safe and feel safe and confident, and there can be no greater priority for any of us in this chamber than turning around our children's services.

Mr Chairman, I believe that during our recent monitoring visit the first green shoots of recovery were evident.

The report touched upon our comprehensive improvement plan, improved culture for learning and thorough and analytical assessments, all of which were sadly lacking in previous inspections.

But let's be clear; we still have a long way to go, and in fact we have already reached the next key milestone as the SEND local area re-inspection in its second day today of a three day visit. I hope this process demonstrates how better partnership working, a passion of mine, is also starting to make a difference for children and their families.

There will never be a time for complacency but I am encouraged by the progress made so far and am confident that we have the right member and officer team in place to continue our road to recovery.

Our original budget for the year 2018/19 assumed we would need to draw down £21m from our already depleted reserves but I am pleased to say that as a result of our programme of modernisation and improved efficiency, any use of reserves is unlikely to exceed £1.5m and more likely than not we will actually achieve a balanced budget for the first time in some years. That is also the expectation in the budget for 2019/20 passed by this council last month and whilst that will put us on a much firmer footing we also need to see any necessary council tax rises in future years be limited and below any government cap. An ambitious plan perhaps from where we have come from, but the right ambition and I believe a deliverable one.

As I announced on day one, Mr Chairman, another of my priorities as Leader is to move this Council back within the county boundary and closer to our residents, and those plans are progressing.

A number of potential locations have been identified to house a smaller civic heart for the county, and by the time of our May Council meeting I would expect to be able to update Members on our relocation from County Hall. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our district and borough colleagues for their help and support to ensure the move goes as smoothly as possible.

Work is progressing on the restructuring of our Select committees and democratic services area to deliver on my promise that all members will have the opportunity to make a real contribution to the essential work of this council. These new arrangements will be in place for the start of the new municipal year in May.

Mr Chairman, I was delighted that last month's Cabinet meeting agreed to the community charity NewSPAL taking over the running of the Performing Arts Library.

There will always be a place for music, drama and culture in our society, and this deal will see the library reinvigorated for the benefit of existing users and I hope a new generation.

There was further good news last month with the announcement of a joint 999 mobilising system with West Sussex Fire & Rescue, which will benefit residents of both counties with more effective deployment to emergencies.

This is a good example of partnership working and harnessing our collective expertise, which is absolutely essential if this county council is to thrive.

As you know, Mr Chairman, the vision for Surrey in 2030 is a shared vision, and we cannot and should not try to deliver it alone.

You might recall that on day one I said that one of my aims was to harness the collective power of Surrey's people and organisations so the county could have a bright future.

I sincerely hope that part of that future will be about Surrey agreements, which would be a single unifying philosophy that unites everything we and our partners do to make residents and businesses more self-reliant.

Of course this could never be a one size fits all approach and would differ within each district or borough, even from town to town, but in all cases would cut across all services and improve outcomes for residents.

Every single one of us has a role to play whether you are a voluntary, community or faith organisation, volunteer, business, philanthropist or resident. We all bring skills, expertise and ideas for how Surrey needs to be a better place. This is about strong communities where everyone takes some responsibility for making life better.

Our district and borough colleagues as well as our wider partners will be key to the successful delivery of those outcomes, which is why I have written to all district and borough leaders proposing the creation of joint forums.

These local partnership boards would not only significantly reduce the level of bureaucracy, but also broaden the remit of local and joint committees by encompassing a wider representation of key partners in a locality.

They would be the primary forum for communication with local communities around local issues, along with wider consultations and discussion. A true place based approach.

I very much look forward to progressing this over the coming weeks and months, and we will be seeing a paper coming to Cabinet next month with more of the detail.

So what else will the next 99 days hold?

- There is the launch of the 25 year countryside strategy, which will ensure that we protect and enhance Surrey's wonderful countryside, leaving it in a better condition for future generations whilst at the same time supporting the local economy.
- I look forward to hearing about progress on Cllr Povey's review of Community Recycling Centres, and what alternative operating and funding mechanisms are available to us as part of the wider strategy on waste management.
- We will look carefully at the feedback from the Fire and Rescue consultation, which we sincerely hope will shift the emphasis more towards working with our communities and businesses to prevent emergencies from occurring, whilst ensuring that when they do, we respond as efficiently as we possibly can.
- There will also be the launch of the Surrey Health and Wellbeing strategy, supporting the delivery of local health care plans and ensuring residents are supported to look after themselves and have access to the services that they need.
- We will be bringing a detailed strategy and delivery plan on how we manage our extensive property estate to Cabinet in April. This will pull together a number of strands of work and will see us reduce the size of our operational estate, include a plan to ensure no building we own remains empty and most importantly a plan to generate revenue wherever possible from that estate to be used to support our frontline services.
- A real example of part of that strategy is the opening next month of the new Horley library which will deliver our vision of libraries being a space for everyone to learn, access information, acquire new skills whilst also being a focal point for community engagement.

The cabinet updates to council reflect the breadth of activity across all of the service areas as we move forward with our transformation plans with increasing pace. With a drive towards getting the right people in the right place, a culture that delivers continuing improvement and a transparency in our key priorities, I think we can allow ourselves a degree of optimism, as we move along that journey.

Thank you.