

County Council speech – May 2019

Mr Chairman and Members, let me begin by congratulating Nick Darby on his election as group leader of the Residents Association. I have worked with Nick over the past couple of years on the Elmbridge Local Committee and as a member of the investment board and know him to be someone who is diligent and hard-working, always putting his residents first - despite being a lawyer.

Equally, having seen Nick Harrison in his first two and last two years as Leader, I have witnessed at first hand his honest, open and appropriate challenges during that time, and I have no doubt he will continue to keep us on our toes as Chairman of the Resources Select Committee.

And welcome to Nikki Barton, who returns to the chamber following the Haslemere by-election earlier this month.

Also I would like to welcome both new and returning leaders across districts and boroughs, and I look forward to visiting each of them over the coming weeks.

As you know it is a key strategic commitment to work better with our partners across the county, coordinating and collaborating to secure better outcomes for the people we jointly serve. Therefore, while the recent elections may have resulted in changes to some of the administrations I don't believe that this will or should delay the implementation of local partnership boards across the county, something I mentioned in my last council speech, and indeed which we will be piloting in two boroughs later this year. These boards, with membership drawn from key stakeholder groups, are intended to transcend political control as they genuinely focus on good local place shaping.

Mr Chairman, it is imperative that we ensure our message is properly conveyed so that residents understand that this is about modernisation and a better way of delivering services and not about cutting cost. We are dealing urgently with the finances of the council so it moves on from surviving to thriving. But I want this county council to be an authority that really cares about its residents, listens to its residents, and explains to its residents what it can and cannot do and where we can assist them to help themselves and others.

I recognise that we all want our children to be safe, our vulnerable adults to be well cared for, our roads to be well maintained, our schools to be outstanding, our countryside to be protected, the air to be clean and ultimately to ensure that our generation passes on a legacy to the next that they can be proud of. I also know that our residents recognise that there is a cost, a financial cost as well as a human cost, to achieving those aspirations.

As an administration we are working hard to address the historic shortcomings in our children services area and we are making some really positive progress. We are tackling the pressures from the increasing demand for adult social care which is

largely a reflection of the demographics across the county. We will be investing more in our highways infrastructure as we try to cope with the volume of traffic that uses the 3000 miles of roads that we are responsible for on a daily basis.

Everything that we are now doing is about striving to be the most efficient council, delivering value for money for our residents and modernising the way in which services are delivered.

We are improving how we work and reorganising our workforce to reflect modern day working practices.

It is of course absolutely essential that we explain our plans clearly to our residents whether that be around increasing the resource we put into the community to look after our vulnerable family members or redeploying resource within the Fire service to enable them to focus on a real prevention agenda. The senior leadership team at Surrey Fire and Rescue are transforming the service to one that is fit for the future with a determination to stop fires from happening in the first place rather than having to deal with the often very sad consequences.

We are also custodians of the outstanding areas of natural beauty we all enjoy across the County; countryside that is owned by our residents and for the use of our residents. That is why we have developed a 25 year strategy which we will shortly be publishing. This puts the protection of the countryside at the very heart of how it will be managed going forward.

However, I completely understand the frustration when people believe we are restricting access by seeking a contribution towards the cost of maintaining the countryside through car park charges.

I have already made a commitment – indeed I made this clear as soon as I became Leader - to review those charges through a working group in the Autumn when we have a full year's figures.

And if we cannot **clearly demonstrate** to our residents that those parking charges are directly contributing towards the upkeep of the countryside, **and I mean clearly demonstrate**, then we will review the policy.

Dr Povey continues the good work with his group to review the CRCs and I very much hope they will find a workable solution that ensures the recycling centres remain open as part of the wider proposals we will be considering following the recently published government waste and resources strategy.

We are absolutely committed to supporting recycling and we must make that as easy as possible whether that's through increased curb side recycling or the use of a local community recycling centre, whilst recognising that a minority dispose of large amounts of waste at the CRC rather than pay to have it removed commercially. It was to stop this sort of behaviour that the charges were introduced.

As a county council we are clear about our responsibility to the environment and that is why I will be asking the Chairs of the Select Committees to consider setting up a working group alongside Cabinet to develop an Environmental Charter.

This would include a review of the causes of traffic congestion, which we know has a significant impact on air quality.

Let's see what we can achieve together to make a positive impact in this area

Mr Chairman our committee process is a vital component of our structure and I am therefore grateful to the cross party working group that have carried out a review of our scrutiny function. The new structure gives every member of this council the opportunity to make a full and meaningful contribution to the policies and strategies that we pursue and I very much hope that it will be embraced across the chamber as a transparent and effective critical friend. Let's use the talent within this organisation to find better, more effective and more efficient ways of doing things.

As we move forward with increasing confidence around the future financial stability of this organisation, we will have choices. Choices on what we invest in and choices on what we expect our residents to pay for. Over the coming weeks we will carry out a comprehensive review of the charges and services that we provide to all council tax payers and will listen to feedback from local people.

Mr Chairman, I propose to make one change to the Cabinet at this stage.

Joining the Cabinet will be Dr Zully Grant-Duff, who replaces Charlotte Morley. Dr Grant-Duff will be particularly focussing on the rollout of the IT, Digital and Agile working transformation programmes. We must and will invest in our staff and give them the tools they need to do an excellent job.

Charlotte has made a significant contribution to the cabinet over the past 12 months and I am grateful to her for her support

There will also be some changes to the roles of the deputy cabinet members.

Alison Griffiths will now be working with me in delivering our Surrey wide Health Strategy and progressing the integration of this council with Surrey Heartlands.

Cameron McIntosh will work alongside Julie Iles in delivering the hugely important transformation of the way we support those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Wyatt Ramsdale will assist in embedding the restructure of Orbis and working with our partners East Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove.

Natalie Bramhall will ensure we progress the implementation of our asset and place strategy which was approved at last month's Cabinet meeting. This will centre on significantly reducing our operational estate to reduce costs as well as generate income through capital receipts.

In relation to the County Hall project and our commitment to be closer to our residents, planning work is ongoing to relocate around one thousand staff members to existing buildings within the county, whilst maintaining 300 or so people in a small civic heart in either Guildford or Woking. There will be a detailed analysis and options report to Cabinet in July, setting out both the financial benefits and total costs.

Finally Mr Chairman, I would like to thank the Council for re-electing me as Leader. It is without doubt a demanding role but also a great privilege. I will continue to drive forward our agenda of improving the delivery of our services, improving outcomes for residents and delivering our ambition to make Surrey County Council an organisation that its elected members, its workforce and our residents can be justifiably proud of.