

Leader's Speech to full Council – 10 December 2019

INTRO

Mr Chairman no one would dispute that on a national level this has been a year of uncertainty, political earthquakes and division that, in the final weeks of December, will hopefully find some resolution in Thursdays General Election. Let's hope the outcome brings greater stability and unity to our fractured country.

However, despite the national uncertainty, Surrey County Council has continued, steadfastly, delivering for the people of Surrey.

We have progressed and delivered a large part of our transformation programme across the piece, becoming an organisation that is financially stable, forward looking and innovative.

We are ready, not just for 2020 and whatever that may throw at us, but also prepared for the longer term, committed to delivering the Vision for Surrey 2030 and beyond.

But we have to raise the bar, to deliver for the people of Surrey.

We have set out our organisation strategy, refreshed for the next five years, that identifies key areas of focus and which will provide a robust framework for all that we do in the years ahead. Mr Chairman I will highlight a few of those areas now but I would encourage all members to look closely at Item 9 of today's agenda and in particular Annexe A and C, which set out the 8 key areas and impact statement.

TACKLING INEQUALITY

We are working with residents in every area of Surrey to identify and address causes of inequality, especially in life expectancy.

Surrey is widely seen as an affluent county, but here at Surrey County Council we know only too well that there are many people who do not have the same opportunities, quality of life or advantages.

We are determined that no one in Surrey is left behind.

We are working to tackle the root cause of inequality, to increase access to opportunity - especially in the area of health and wellbeing – to narrow that gap and give people the chance to benefit from all that our wonderful county has to offer.

Just last month we agreed to scrap the car parking charges across the countryside to encourage everybody to get out there and feel the health and wellbeing benefits of enjoying our commons.

This will be followed, in the coming months, by an investment plan for our rights of way and our cycle paths so we can make it easy for people to reach their local countryside without just relying on the car, and give Surrey a fitter future.

SUPPORTING INDEPENDENCE

Part of addressing inequality issues, is about supporting independence – helping residents help themselves and each other within their community.

It's essential - if Surrey is to be a place that continues to thrive in the future - that communities across the county remain strong, that people continue to feel that sense of

belonging and support and that people can remain living in their home, within their support network, for as long as possible.

We are committed to providing the tools and support to ensure that happens.

Part of this is our project to build 725 new specially adapted homes, that will enable elderly residents stay independent, with a better quality of life, for longer, and prevent admission to hospital.

MORE JOINED UP HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

We are also well on the way to proper, meaningful integration of Surrey Heartlands health services with Surrey County Council services so they're more effective, efficient and seamless for residents.

We're all too aware of the confusion and complexity many residents face when having to deal with a myriad of health and social care services, often at quite difficult times in their lives, when the last thing they need is further obstacles to overcome.

By bringing services together, to deliver a more holistic service, we will not only simplify the process for residents, we are certain we will provide better outcomes for people's health.

CREATING A GREENER FUTURE

This year we have joined with many other local authorities across the country in declaring a climate emergency.

Now, it's all very well making that statement and recognising the fundamental global threat of climate change. But it's another thing to take meaningful action, and we are serious about doing that.

The Greener Futures work has been a Surrey County Council-led initiative, not party political.

We recognise that we must also work with Government, partners (including districts and boroughs), businesses and residents.

A lot of work has been undertaken since July when we also committed to becoming a zero-carbon county by 2050, and this is reflected in the recent Scrutiny Task Group report.

We will continue to develop this work and launch a firm action plan in April 2020. This will be a strategy that everyone in Surrey can take ownership of and it is this collective responsibility that we must harness to make real change.

This work may seem abstract to some, but as we all learn more about the consequences of climate change, we realise that it directly affects our quality of life, particularly that of our older residents, those with existing health issues and those on lower incomes.

So, in delivering real change, we are addressing many factors of inequality, which I mentioned earlier.

EMBRACING SURREY'S DIVERSITY

Another key driver to tackle inequality is to understand and remove the barriers that hold some people back.

Embracing Surrey's diversity and recognising the benefits of a diverse workforce and population will make a real difference in making Surrey a place full of opportunity.

This is a mission I'm going to take personal ownership of, bringing the diversity issue into my portfolio as leader and holding the whole council to account in addressing this aspect of inequality.

The council's Diversity workshops are proving invaluable in helping us understand the issues and barriers facing staff from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups.

That work will continue in earnest, informing our actions internally and helping us ensure Surrey can be a place where everyone can succeed and thrive.

PARTNERSHIP

As we become a more outward looking organisation, working with residents, businesses, partners and communities I am confident that we will collectively meet challenges and grasp opportunities.

There is an unbelievable amount of good work going on in the county of Surrey – from businesses leading the way across the world in terms of tech and innovation, to voluntary organisations delivering lifechanging opportunities for people every day in communities across the county.

We are determined to harness all that good work, support those delivering it, learn from it, and facilitate more of it, to make sure everyone benefits and things continuously improve.

Just last month in Cabinet, we agreed papers delivering strategies for improving our universal youth offer and for modernising our library services.

Central to both strategies is partnership working.

In the case of our youth offer we will work with voluntary, community and faith sector partners to increase and improve the many excellent services they can provide in each area, offering the buildings we manage across the county, many of which are currently under used, at little or no cost.

SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

A huge part of our forward-looking agenda is, of course, investment.

Investing in the infrastructure Surrey needs to build a strong and resilient economy.

We will be publishing our budget for the next financial year in January. It will be a budget that is forward looking, sustainable and ambitious.

Thanks to our tireless work in getting our financial position in order over the last two years, we are in a position to make real choices. To invest in our residents now, and the next generation.

We will set out that investment in detail, but it will include hundreds of millions of pounds to protect residents and businesses from flooding, improvements in our roads and highways to keep Surrey moving smoothly, new special educational needs school places, upgrading broadband capability across the county and investment in public transport and greener technology.

We will also set up a Community Investment fund to support our high streets and to invest in projects that will make a real and lasting difference to our communities.

I am also pleased to announce that in the New Year we will be convening a Future Economy Surrey Commission.

This will bring some of the most experienced and insightful minds in the county together, to help plan the best way forward for Surrey to deal with future challenges to our local economy and position the county as THE place to come to work, to start a business or to grow a business.

DIGITAL REVOLUTION

No doubt part of this work will revolve around a digital revolution in the county – harnessing things like the 5G Innovation Centre at Surrey University.

We are already exploring how to make the most of new and emerging technologies to innovate and improve services, and the way we work.

This involves the development of a digital strategy for Surrey that will come to fruition in the new year and will set out our ambition for how we will use digital to help Surrey, and its residents, thrive.

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A big test of that move to a digital future and our own use of technological advancement will come when we move the organisation's Civic Heart to Woking next year.

I am pleased that we have managed to finalise our move back into the county we serve, within my first year in office.

It is a collective achievement, and something that should give the whole organisation optimism as we head in to 2020.

Mr Chairman, I really do believe we are making good progress in delivering the transformation this Council needs to ensure that our children are safe, our elderly and vulnerable residents are supported, that our residents feel part of this fantastic county and that we genuinely do all we can to improve their quality of life and address the inequality of life expectancy.

I would call on all of us to be good neighbours this Christmas, and look out for those who need support and companionship.

Finally, on a personal note can I thank you all for your support this past year and pay tribute to our dedicated staff who will be working with the most vulnerable residents and delivering vital services over the Christmas break – this work doesn't stop.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas, and a happy New Year.