

Cabinet Member Strategic Priority Area Update: Empowering Communities**Mr Mark Nuti**

Empowering communities is key to delivering our vision of a county where no one is left behind; ensuring residents in Surrey can play an active role in tackling local issues, supporting one another and influencing decisions that will shape their future. This means changing the way we work with our communities. The council will need to focus its efforts to make this change, hence we have made Empowering Communities one of our four strategic priorities.

Communities in Surrey have been facing the biggest collective challenge in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic has unquestionably exacerbated existing issues and widened inequalities. A comprehensive Community Impact Assessment (CIA) has highlighted this, as well as the health and social and economic impact on communities. We have used this to understand the priorities for recovery. Although there are many ongoing challenges as a result of the pandemic, we have seen communities coming together, incredible partnership working and a real community spirit growing across Surrey. We must build on this, change the way we work and resist the temptation to revert to, what may have been perceived as, a 'distant, out of touch' authority!

We want to put communities at the centre of everything we do; designing services for residents with input from residents. We will engage in different ways so residents can influence decisions which will impact their lives and habitats enabling people to become more independent.

We have recently launched the 'Make It Happen' campaign which highlights the importance of working together to strengthen our communities and create better places to live. This campaign ties all our community focused projects together with one message explaining our mission which we hope will inspire others to adopt it and get involved.

One of our new initiatives is 'Your Fund Surrey' a unique opportunity for residents to access £100 million of capital funding for 'legacy' projects which will enhance and benefit communities for years to come. Our new 'Common Place' web-based ideas platform has already had nearly 450 schemes posted with over 10,600 people interacting with it. We will be accepting applications from February with the fund expected to last for five years. A fantastic example of empowering communities by enabling them to make a real difference.

We are creating a new, modern library service fit for the world we live in but also one that reflects the needs and wants of the specific area it serves. We are having conversations with residents and groups to make sure we arrive at a service that caters for the needs of its community now and in the future.

We are also working to develop and embed a social value approach enabling us to use our commissioning and market management power to maximise benefits to our communities and better meet local needs. We have relaunched our Social Value Marketplace and piloted the Goodsted platform to bring communities together to realise the impact of social value. There is so much more we can do to harness the strengths in communities across Surrey. We will be working with key partners such as health and the Police to understand more about local issues and enable communities to be able to help themselves.

As part of our joint work with health, we want to work with Primary Care Networks and other local partners to build on current approaches and trial new forms of support in selected localities that can supplement existing community-focused work to improve support for residents, prevent crisis and help tackle place-based health inequalities

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We have many strengths within the county that we will use to drive our ambition forward such as partnership working. This type of collaboration has been used to great effect in developing the Farnham Infrastructure Plan (which you will hear more about later in this meeting).

Partnership working is also at the heart of our relationship with The Community Foundation for Surrey. The Community Foundation for Surrey has helped many residents and groups over the last 15 years, and they continue to raise funds and distribute financial support across numerous good causes in the county. I'm pleased to say they will be using their considerable experience in helping on the advisory board of the new Your Fund Surrey project. I won't say any more about them as we are fortunate to have the Chairman of the Trustees, Mr Jim Glover with us today and I'm sure he will expand on the work they do.

We will build on and connect to new practices that have been developed over the last few years in areas such as children's social care, adult social care and the fire service. These practices will help support independence and aid the philosophy of prevention rather than cure! The initiatives that I have mentioned are just the beginning. The strategic priority to empower communities will touch everything we do across all areas of the council. It will take time but as officers, members and partners start to think and do things differently we will see the county flourish. I'd like to finish by taking this opportunity to formally thank our communities for adhering to the painful restrictions that have been placed on them over the last year. All the volunteers and the volunteer services as well as our charities and faith sector have been fantastic in the support they have given to our residents. When asked, people across the county answered the call to help in so many different ways, showing what a fantastic place Surrey is to live, work and play in. I would also like to recognise the Borough and Districts who did an amazing job mobilising locally in their respective areas. Lastly, I would like to give a huge thank you to Joanna Killian and all the staff at Surrey County Council who went above and beyond what could have been expected of them. All of us, whether we live here or work here, or both, make up the community that is Surrey. Let's empower that!