

Cabinet Member Strategic Priority Area Update: Tackling Health Inequalities
Mrs. Sinead Mooney

At the heart of our ambitious vision for Surrey is an earnest desire and guiding principle, that no one is left behind, to ensure that regardless of age, gender, race or location - everyone is able to enjoy and live out a fulfilling and healthy life, in this most unique of places. Tackling an inequality of health is not only a central step to realising this goal, but also a necessary one, which will require the optimum input of every Council resource to ensure gaps in living standards, life expectancy and life-affirming opportunities across the county are minimal or nil.

While our vaccination efforts remind us that the end of the COVID-19 pandemic is in sight, health inequalities have sadly been heightened during this time, largely across several social settings. This will require much of our focus and attention in the weeks and months ahead - if we are to best recover in a way that works for all of Surrey's residents.

I am pleased that we are working at pace to commence this important work.

We know that the pandemic and necessary lockdown restrictions have adversely impacted on the mental health and wellbeing of our residents. This has caused more people to experience more pronounced problems, which are known to worsen or heighten health inequality; something we will hear about further - later in this meeting. In an effort to mitigate against some of these challenges, we have overseen the creation of the new Surrey Mental Health Partnership Board, chaired by Alan Downey, which will work diligently to bring partner organisations together, in order to oversee and drive necessary improvements - as part of our whole system transformation. I am glad Alan has joined us today and look forward to hearing his reflections on mental health and the work of this board. The board's work will be critical, as good mental health outcomes rely heavily on 'in the round' accountability of all partners in delivering our services. Through the support of this Partnership Board, I believe that we will better realise positive and meaningful changes in our services and in the mental health outcomes of those who live with mental ill health.

In addition to this, the County Council is well-plugged into work by our colleagues at Surrey and Borders Partnership (SABP), whose Emergency Response team regularly advises on pressures faced by the service and devises effective plans to avoid bottlenecks in service delivery. I am also pleased that we are working pro-actively with the alliance partners behind our new CAMHS offer on early intervention, ahead of the offer's April launch. When we get early intervention support right for both young people and their families, we know that we can work to reduce the impact of the problems they face, preventing escalation to more severe difficulties and the need for further clinical support. I look forward to working with my colleague, the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families, in overseeing this important work.

This council is also leading on a rapid needs assessment of key population groups identified as most vulnerable to be impacted by COVID inequalities. The findings of this exercise shall continue to inform our actions within our Local Outbreak Control plan, to ensure that appropriate health protection actions continue to remain in place for high-risk groups. We will continue to mobilise partnership working with various community-based services and VCFS organisations, to ensure that these actions have a real impact in the lives of the communities targeted.

Earlier last year, in response to our desire to tackle health inequalities, we set up an Equality and Health Inequities group as part of Surrey Heartlands' Recovery Board, led by our Director of Public Health, Ruth Hutchinson. With representation from across health, the third sector and local government – this group is actively engaged in strategising and delivering solutions

which address health inequalities - in the short, medium and long-term. At present, the group is leading on the development of a clear and coherent strategy to tackle urgent COVID health inequities, which is grounded in research and findings from our most recent Community Impact Assessment. In addition to this, the group has established a clear set of monitoring guidelines, which will allow us to track our progress in real-time, as we look to reduce inequities and deepen our knowledge base on the wider determinants of health for communities in Surrey. At the appropriate time, this work will require rigorous and robust evaluation, and I am glad that the group is now working on a plan, which will ensure that this work will contribute greatly to future service improvement.

Too often, health inequality persists due to issues of access, with variations in offer causing for groups and communities to receive less care relative to their needs. As a County, we are resolute in our determination to meaningfully deal with these disparities, to ensure that from Camberley to Caterham – equitable access is the norm across Surrey. For example, later in this meeting we will hear about plans to deliver a further 415 units of affordable Extra Care Housing across several locations in Surrey. One area, in which we are already making strides in achieving better access is in domestic abuse. Following the successful launch of the ‘Ask for Ani’ scheme, we are working with Surrey’s network of community and independent pharmacies, NHS colleagues and others on ensuring that our package of support and assistance is well understood and shared at various key outlets, to ensure that regardless of location – everyone who needs DA assistance gets the very best support.

Finally, I wanted to place on record my thanks to our outstanding healthcare workers and health professionals, who have worked relentlessly over the last eleven months. In a previous statement, I stated that they were the ‘pride of our county’, in their ability to keep our county moving and to keep us all safe. In recent weeks, I know we have seen these individuals go above and beyond yet again, leading our vaccination efforts at pace – as we look to return to normal. Their selflessness and dedication truly know no bounds and while we will soon run out of apt descriptions and words to express our gratitude and thanks, I hope they know how grateful we all are for their daily service in this extraordinary time.

If we are to ensure that Surrey is a unique place for all people, this strategic priority must be the golden thread in everything that we do. Inequality should find no haven within our county’s boundaries. To achieve this will require the collective effort of all of us and I am encouraged by both the work detailed and work in the pipeline, that we are well on the way to making this a reality in Surrey.

So, let’s continue onwards on this good path and make sure that all people can realise the dream and vision of a unique Surrey - where all can live healthy and fulfilling lives.