

CABINET – 29 JUNE 2021**PROCEDURAL MATTERS****Public Questions****Question (1): John Oliver**

The Council's website gives access to the document 'Tell us what you think about our services. Complaints, Compliments, Comments' which sets out the Council's policy for dealing with complaints. This was published in October 2019. Has the Council's policy for dealing with complaints changed since October 2019 and, if so, could you please state what the changes are?

Reply:

Surrey County Council operates three complaints procedures. Two of our complaint's procedures; those for Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care, are statutory and set out in law. The third procedure, our corporate complaints procedure, covers all other Council services and is based on best practice. The fundamental complaints procedure i.e. the number of stages and timescales has not changed since 2019 because it remains in line with current best practice.

The final stage of all our complaints procedures is the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, an independent body with a legal remit to investigate complaints against councils in England and to provide advice and guidance on good administrative practice, which Surrey County Council complies with.

We want to make it as easy as possible for people to raise complaints and concerns with us when things go wrong, so we can use the learning to improve our services and take action where needed to put things right for our customers. We have information about all our complaints procedures publicly available on our website, along with an online complaint form so people can contact us at times and places that suit them.

The document 'Tell us what you think about our services. Complaints, Compliments, Comments' is a public information leaflet explaining our corporate complaints procedure and how people can contact us with their feedback . This is currently in the process of being reviewed to make sure it is still fit for purpose.

Alongside our public facing information, we also have accompanying internal staff guidance setting out how the complaints procedure should operate in practice. This is reviewed regularly to make sure all staff are aware of their responsibilities in dealing with customer complaints and have access to appropriate information and advice. This guidance was last updated in July 2020 to provide additional advice on financial redress and goodwill gestures.

Mark Nuti
Cabinet Member for Communities
29 June 2021

Question (2): Andrew Matthews

The Mole Valley Local Committee is a vital forum for Mole Valley residents and both county and district councillors to scrutinise the way Surrey County Council's services are delivered locally, and the way that 77% of our Council tax is utilised. However, Surrey County Council

is reducing the number of annual meetings from four to three, and Mole Valley residents are facing a 7 month gap between the last meeting in February, and the next meeting in September.

Surrey County Council says it wants to improve its engagement with communities, but the only initiatives so far have been to reduce community engagement and accountability, and sideline the borough and district councils with which it should be cooperating over issues such as climate change, active travel, and road safety. Why is Surrey County Council so determined to sideline local communities and reduced community engagement?

Reply:

Thank you for your question. Local and Joint Committees (LC/JCs) have been operating in a similar fashion for over 20 years, but digital technology and opportunities for engagement have changed considerably in that time and the last year has shown us how we can engage with a much wider cohort of people on their terms. This is leading us to think about how we engage, enable and empower our communities, working with them to deliver solutions and change.

Local Committees are formally constituted to operate as decision-making meetings. The LC/JC must operate in a particular way in order to take the decisions that are required, if there are no decisions then the meeting may not be held.

Alongside these formal meetings we want to engage with our residents as informally and inclusively as possible and use a variety of digital tools to gain the greatest reach and value through these engagements. We are encouraging all councillors to engage with their residents through digital means, as well as face to face. We have ever evolving digital tools to engage and seek views in a different manner and we are developing these further alongside our commitment to empowering communities.

If residents wish to discuss particular issues, we can arrange bespoke engagement sessions to do this and look for ways to resolve concerns alongside them and partners. These can be digital to allow the greatest access for communities to join us in ways and at times that are convenient for them and focussed on the issue or a particular area. Since summer 2020, SCC has expanded its reach into local communities, hosting 8 digital engagement events reaching over 40,000 people, with over 20,000 views and over 2500 engagements for these events. This level of engagement is far higher than has been the case for local and joint committees and also allows us to be much more conversational in our approach.

We have held two specific engagement sessions on issues within Mole Valley in the last year with residents and we are happy to support future engagement sessions if there are topics in the area that are important to the local communities.

Surrey County Council (SCC) has also identified new ways of sharing information with its councillors, so the need for informal or information sharing at local or joint committees is reduced, and this information, in most cases, can be shared with District and Borough Colleagues. We are currently working closely with District/Borough Members and SCC Members to provide guidance and information on this approach as part of Local Decision Making – Local/Joint Committee Induction sessions.

We have also been improving our customer service channels as a council and using our online reporting channels or customer services to log requests/issues which is the speediest and most transparent way for residents to receive a response to their concerns. We are signposting to these channels and have asked all councillors to do the same. One consistent way of raising issues and requests allows us to track these for both response and trends and also avoids costly duplication of requests.

We are also developing a range of tools that will allow residents to regularly tell us what they think, so we can plan future engagements or use their insight to review our policies and processes and allow residents to do more for themselves.

If you have a subject you would like to hold an engagement session on please do contact your Surrey County Council divisional Councillor and the Community Partnership and Engagement team.

Mark Nuti
Cabinet Member for Communities
29 June 2021

Question (3): Sally Blake

Freedom of Information questions have ascertained, in the 12 months to 31 March 2021, Surrey County Council's Countryside team felled 87 trees, Highways felled 951, and Land & Property (Property Services) Landholdings felled 3,750. That is a total of 4,788 trees, in addition to an unspecified number of trees felled by Surrey Countryside Partnership for habitat management.

What is the Council's policy on felling trees, taking account of current environmental concerns, in particular:

- before the decision to fell was taken, did the Council calculate the consequent reduction of air pollution/CO2 absorption, and balance this against the small risk to safety posed by falling trees?
- how were the CO2 emissions from burning the wood taken into account by the Council when no record was kept of the approximate tonnage of trees felled or the amount sent for burning?
- was the adverse effect on biodiversity assessed and taken into account in the decision to fell the trees and, if so, how?
- how many trees were planted by the Council in the 12 months to 31 March 2021 and, allowing for average survival and growth rates, how long will these take to replace the 4,788 mature trees that were felled, in carbon sequestration?
- how many trees were planted under the Council's New Tree Strategy in the 12 months to 31 March 2021, including trees planted by other councils and third parties?
- will the Council reconsider its felling strategy in future years to keep felling of trees to a minimum based on all risks and environmental concerns?

Reply:

Surrey County Council (SCC) principally applies a risk –based approach to the management of trees in its control as set out in its tree risk policy ([Surrey County Council Tree Management Policy as part of Health and Safety Manual v1.0.-2019](#)).

Currently, the policy does not consider carbon emissions or biodiversity, neither are carbon emissions data related to arboricultural work currently captured.

However, as part of the Council's approach to implementation of the Greener Future Strategy, all significant SCC policies will be reviewed and amended to ensure they reflect our Greener Futures ambitions, and I can confirm that this will include arboricultural and tree planting operations.

To this end, the Tree Management Policy is currently being reviewed and an updated policy will be in place in September 2021, taking into account the implications of the Greener Future Strategy. The revised policy will have greater emphasis on the need and value of retaining existing trees wherever it is practical and cost effective to do so.

In light of the 1.2 million Tree Strategy ([Surrey's new tree strategy 2020 \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#)), SCC and its partners planted 229,739 trees in 2020/21. Annual planting targets are currently being set as part of a Delivery Plan which will be released in October 2021 in readiness of the new planting season. This Plan is based on research identifying all potential areas for tree and hedgerow planting on public sector land in Surrey and the carbon value of that planting, as well as feedback from local authority partners, parish councils and community groups as to suitable areas for planting.

Finally, it is worth noting that SCC has recently concluded research which identified the optimum locations for planting trees and hedgerows on public sector land across Surrey. This research also includes areas for other types of habitat improvement and creation and the potential for carbon sequestration and nature recovery. SCC welcomes suggestions from residents and communities as to possible areas for tree planting or habitat creation.

Marisa Heath
Cabinet Member for Environment
29 June 2021