

17 SEPTEMBER 2021



## **CABINET MEMBER UPDATE: COMMUNICATIONS AND EQUALITIES, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (TIM OLIVER)**

### **Introduction:**

1. I am pleased to update the Resources and Performance Select Committee on the progress of work in two of my portfolio areas: internal and external communications, and equalities, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and outline what I hope to achieve in these areas in the next year.

### **Proposed achievements for 2021/22**

#### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

2. We have already made great progress with the council's equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) programme, but there is more to be done. The [corporate EDI Action Plan 2021-22](#), passed by Cabinet in February, outlines our radical ambitions for EDI. The plan covers five themes:
  - a) Employee Experience
  - b) Leadership
  - c) Knowing and engaging our communities
  - d) Communication and engagement
  - e) Delivering inclusive services.
3. In terms of employee experience, there are a number of goals we are working towards for the next year:
  - 3.1 We are working to join the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme to support our LGBTQ+ colleagues to feel free to be themselves in the workplace and make SCC a more attractive prospective employer for a wider talent pool.
  - 3.2 We are developing a 'trans at work' policy for colleagues who are transgender or are in the process of transitioning. This will include information

on trans equality in recruitment, support for employees at work who are transitioning and the process for any trans colleague who has witnessed or experienced discrimination at work.

3.3 An action plan to strengthen our approach to reasonable adjustments and accessibility for colleagues with disabilities is in development. Options being considered include a central reasonable adjustments budget and a strengthened process for how reasonable adjustments are coordinated.

4. In terms of the leadership theme, we will start to scope the resources and time required to secure accreditation under the LGA's Equality Framework. This follows a recommendation made by the Resources and Performance Select Committee in January.
5. For the knowing and engaging our communities theme, we are working towards a number of goals for the next year:
  - 5.1 We have supported the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey to select representatives for a new Surrey Inter-Faith Forum. The first meeting is scheduled for September.
  - 5.2 We have received positive coverage of the launch of the Period Dignity initiative across Surrey and are in discussions with district and borough councils in Guildford, Reigate and Banstead and Surrey Heath to expand the rollout to other community facilities.
  - 5.3 The new BAME Reference Group that will be set up in the Autumn and will continue to work with Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum (SMEF). SMEF has been involved in a broad spectrum of work supporting the county council and wider system partners to ensure BAME organisations are aware of, shaping and engaged in key priorities for the county as well as identifying barriers to this. For example, they have been integral in supporting with the uptake of vaccinations in BAME communities by utilising appropriate communication channels, dispelling myths and engaging community leaders to lead by example. The BAME Reference Group will be set up in the Autumn, made up of volunteers from key community groups and will support with a wider range of work programmes.
6. In terms of communications and engagement on EDI, SCC's website is currently being reviewed by the Council's Web and Digital Services team to ensure it is accessible for residents whose first language is not English and residents with disabilities. Additionally, we are piloting British Sign Language (BSL) video interpretation to increase accessibility for residents and staff whose main language is BSL.

7. To meet the plan's ambitions on delivering inclusive services, we have two key aims:

7.1 Continue work to develop a digital accessibility policy and governance to ensure EDI is streamlined into our activities to strengthen our digital capability, such as procurement of new software.

7.2 Continue work in the Procurement and Commissioning service to strengthen EDI in our approach to the purchase of goods and services, including the appointment of a specialist to focus on tackling modern slavery in supply chains, and strengthening guidance and tools for officers to support them to consider EDI throughout the procurement process. The current plan is to launch further work around our policy through procurement framework in time for the next financial year.

8. Finally, I am pleased that the Member task group on councillor diversity is due to start later this year, with the first meeting planned for November. The Member Development Steering Group are due to consider the scope of the Councillor Inclusion and Diversity Review at their meeting in November 2021. The members of the review task group have not yet been appointed. New Member EDI training is planned for October.
9. To date, much of the work undertaken has been done by prioritising existing budgets to enable us to drive forward the action plan. To date, the only additional spend has been to support the staff networks: training for staff and members; and funding for a programme (a post in the process of being recruited). This resource currently totals approximately £135,000 per annum. In addition to this, we have allocated funding for an EDI Programme Manager, who will be responsible for driving and coordinating action across the Council, supporting the CLT Corporate Lead for EDI and the Change Group, as well as staff networks.
10. Whilst there has been real progress in this agenda, we still have much work to do. Although the organisation now has a clear action plan, and leadership established across our directorates and our staff networks, there remain real challenges within our workforce with a number of staff highlighting over recent months that there remain pocked of bias and discrimination. Fortunately, we are hearing more about these issues, and the staff networks – very much staff led and driven – have enabled staff to start talking much more openly about their experiences. These experiences are helping us to identify where we have issues. One example of an area that has been highlighted that we are resolving is the way that we approach reasonable adjustments for staff that are disabled. To date, these adjustments are identified and funded by services in a way that means that there is no standard and no guarantee that a team can fund the appropriate adjustments needed for an individual.

11. In respect of our community, whilst we have a number of excellent initiatives happening with specific communities, we know that we have more to do in coordinating with our partners to tackle inequality more generally in our community. We are opening up the dialogue with communities about diversity and inclusion through our empowering communities agenda. We know that we need to work much more closely with partners, including the ICS, police, and districts and boroughs, to understand and better support our diverse communities.

## **Communications**

12. The council's Communications Narrative and Strategy is built on responding to major challenges faced by the council: not having a strong enough voice in the sector and with government, being seen as too remote from communities and residents, an out-of-date county reputation, and a lack of understanding of what the council does and the value residents get for their council tax. These challenges, and the narrative, are borne out of working closely with council directorates and the leadership on a day-to-day basis.
13. The council's comms narrative for 2021, attached as **Annex 1**, sets out our communication and engagement plans for the next year. The communications narrative and strategy is adopted by the whole Communications Team, and the strategy and wider ways of working are presented clearly and prominently on internal communications channels to ensure the wider organisation understand the organisation strategy, key messages and priorities and our Internal Communications officers are experts in drawing that out in creative ways across various internal communications channels.
14. The communications narrative for 2021 focuses on four key themes:
  - a) An Unstoppable Force
  - b) Make it Happen
  - c) One Surrey Story
  - d) What does SCC do for you?
15. The 'Unstoppable Force' theme aims to make sure that Surrey County Council is a leading voice for local government in being part of the solution when it comes to national policymaking. The pandemic has demonstrated that local government can deliver – that often the quickest, most effective and appropriate services and support are delivered locally. For too long, local government has not had a strong voice at the table but we are determined to change that. We will be proactive and provocative, often going where local government is not invited but is integral in shaping a better future.

16. Our 'Make it Happen' campaign is all about our mission to deliver greater community engagement and empowerment across Surrey. The campaign ties all our community focussed projects together – including Your Fund Surrey, infrastructure projects, library transformation, active travel and tree planting - under a message that encapsulates our mission and inspires others to adopt it. We will guide residents to a recognisable one-stop-shop to get involved, have their say and influence what happens in their community. We will also take the campaign offline, out into communities to creatively engage a more diverse range of residents.
17. The One Surrey Story is all about making sure Surrey is a place that is fit for the future, ready to tackle upcoming challenges and take opportunities. The work of Thinking Place in creating a shared brand for Surrey will build on this and demonstrate a collective goal of partners across Surrey to give the county a strong and positive identity. This will drive our work on strengthening Surrey's local economy, getting a growth deal, improving relationships with business and attracting new ones, and making sure Surrey County Council is seen as a leader in its field. It also works to strengthen Surrey's long-term recovery from Covid-19, reducing health inequalities, increasing opportunity, strengthening financial resilience and helping to tackle the climate emergency.
18. 'What does SCC do for you?' is all about demonstrating to residents what the council does for them. Many of our services are unseen by most residents, yet that is where the majority of council tax is spent – Adult Social Care and Children's Services. We must be accountable to our residents and demonstrate what we deliver on a day-to-day basis in their area, and how we have a positive impact on their lives and the place in which they live. This work will demonstrate to the public what each directorate of the council does – outputs, outcomes, transformation, value for money and delivering better – and transparency about how decisions are made.
19. The comms narrative will focus on five tactical areas:
  - a) Geo-targeted digital communications – targeting our communications to specific communities with content that is directly relevant to them (e.g. through social media advertising)
  - b) Leadership of Surrey's multi-agency communications – SCC Comms team have chaired the Multi-Agency Information Group (MIG) for the Local Resilience Forum throughout COVID, and are positioned to take that leadership forward post-COVID through the Surrey Communications Group and the Surrey Prepared partnership.

- c) Insight and intelligence-led communications – using research, data and resident insights work (through these teams within the council) to help us plan and execute communications campaigns, to deliver better outcomes.
  - d) Digital engagement and user experience – making sure our digital channels (including social media) are as user friendly as possible, and working with customer services to ensure residents get the best experience possible when interacting with the council online.
  - e) Cutting edge new media platforms and artificial intelligence – always looking for what communications channels our residents are using, and how we can use new channels (for example new types of outdoor advertising and new social media platforms) to help us deliver more effective communications.
20. Key milestones including the local travel plan consultation and active travel campaign in September, and community roadshows in October, will help to showcase this narrative.
  21. There is a challenge with finding a consistent and coordinated approach to communicating all the work and different projects and priorities of the council. We are addressing this by establishing a more joined up approach to planning, pulling in the Leadership Office to our comms planning and agreeing a consistent approach to updates for members and other stakeholders around cabinet portfolios directorates. We have also just completed a piece of work on the council's branding, to ensure more consistency
  22. Our Communications Managers have regular meetings with Cabinet members around campaigns, reactive comms, specific issues and priorities. These are also attended by the Head of External Communications and Public Affairs Manager, in order to get a holistic understanding of political sensitivities and competing priorities. The Communications Team are also represented (usually by the Director of Communications and the Head of External Communications) at Cabinet meetings, Cabinet Agenda Planning, Full Council and relevant select committees, to ensure a broader understanding of political sensitivities. The team also work closely with Democratic Services and the Head of Governance. Members receive a useful daily email about current affairs. The summary is compiled by the council's Press Officer, and is done so through local media knowledge and scanning, as well as drawing on the LGA daily news bulletin (we are unable to share much paywall content to the whole organisation due to NLA licensing agreements). We look to brief Members on other current affairs issues through our Weekly Top Lines briefing email that is issued to all members every Monday.

23. We have worked hard over the last year to define and grow key public affairs channels and will continue to strengthen these over the next year, enabling us to make the most of opportunities to engage, influence and give Surrey a voice.
24. Public affairs activity will take place in the form of:
- a) Strong engagement with the Surrey MPs
  - b) A robust plan of parliamentary engagement (committee responses, inquiries and submissions)
  - c) Events (e.g. Spotlight on Surrey, upcoming conferences and panels)
  - d) Media opportunities (building on recent success in the *MJ*, *LGC* and *New Civil Engineer*)
  - e) Influential and impactful relationships between senior officers and members and Whitehall counterparts
  - f) Media and stakeholder monitoring.
25. In terms of media opportunities, a few examples include:
- Surrey County Council Chief Executive Joanna Killian speaks with the LGC about coronavirus's impact on both adults' and children's services - [LGC](#)
  - Tim Oliver, chairman-elect of the County Councils Network and leader of SCC, writes in *The Times* to say that levelling up must be for everyone, including the shire counties - [The Times](#)
  - The incoming chair of the County Councils Network Tim Oliver has shared his concerns over "new layers of governance or administration" being put into the local government system as a result of reforms the prime minister has advocated as part of his levelling up drive - [LGC](#)

One example of the use of these tools is our public affairs activity on local government finance, ensuring that local government has the right funding to deliver the services residents rely on.19.1 We are working towards several key milestones, including the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) which is expected in November 2021, the winter and spring Budgets, and the Local Government Finance Settlement, the final decisions of which are expected in December 2021.

19.2 We are working to a comprehensive engagement plan including MPs briefings, targeted ministerial engagement, parliamentary questions, and

conference fringe appearances alongside submitting responses to the CSR and budget.

### **Conclusions:**

26. The above demonstrates an ambitious and far-reaching programme of work that I am keen to lead for 2021/22 across my portfolio areas of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and communications.
27. I am enthusiastic to work with the Resources and Performance Select Committee to shape this work, particularly in the EDI space where the input and engagement of the committee has been so valuable thus far.

### **Recommendations:**

28. It is recommended that the Resources and Performance Select Committee:
  - a) a) Review the Cabinet Member update and offer feedback and thoughts as appropriate.
  - b) Express whether it is satisfied with the Cabinet Member plans and ambitions for 2021/22.

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### **Contact details**

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