

Leader's Statement – County Council, 13 July 2021

Madam Chair, Members,

As we meet this morning we can look forward to a return to normality with the imminent removal of legal restrictions on the way we go about our lives, the way we socialise, work, and interact with each other, following 16 months of living through a global pandemic.

However, we must remember that July 19th will not signal the end to public health interventions in dealing with COVID-19; it is legislation being replaced by guidance.

The pandemic is not over, we must remain vigilant and we must remain considerate and responsible in keeping the virus at bay.

Our Public Health team will continue to work tirelessly, monitoring data, on test and trace, guiding schools and businesses and giving expert advice as we move into the next phase of dealing with COVID.

We will continue to be transparent with residents and give the best advice possible to keep Surrey safe.

Madam Chair, it seems an age ago since we gathered in County Hall in Kingston for the final time, in February 2020 - the last time I delivered a Leader's speech in person.

These past 16 months have been the most challenging many of us have faced, both personally and professionally, yet we can reflect with great pride on what we have collectively achieved.

The staff of this organisation have, without question, gone above and beyond to support the people of Surrey, to provide guidance, information, food, equipment, a friendly chat, or words of advice to our residents, many who have needed us more than ever before.

We have worked incredibly well with partners throughout COVID too, something that we are determined to build on and take forward.

Looking ahead, we have a great responsibility to lead Surrey through the immediate COVID recovery towards a buoyant, positive, and successful future.

Let us be in no doubt however Madam Chair, that we have huge challenges ahead.

The impact of the pandemic, the UK's economy, and the political agenda nationally will undoubtedly have a substantial impact on local government.

But we have worked tirelessly to get ourselves in the best possible position as an organisation to tackle those challenges, and indeed take opportunities that may be on the horizon too.

While COVID has been at the forefront of our minds, we have not stopped in our core mission and in delivering our strategic objectives for the council:

- Delivering a Greener Future
- Growing a strong and sustainable Local Economy
- Enabling Communities

- and Tackling Health Inequalities

Our transformation programme has continued at pace, always striving to be better.

Ofsted have paid us another visit and again have commended the progress being made in Children's Services.

Our Chief Executive and her team have delivered safe County-wide elections.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services have also just completed a full inspection of Surrey Fire & Rescue Service and initial feedback noted the progress made and raised no issues of concern. We wait patiently and indeed optimistically for their full report as we take forward our Making Surrey Safer Plan.

We again set a balanced budget without drawing on reserves and reiterated our ambitious capital investment plan to make Surrey fit for the future.

Your Fund Surrey has been launched, with hundreds of ideas and comments submitted. We're already seeing some fantastic community projects reach the final stages to access funding, making a huge difference to communities across Surrey.

We've moved forward with the building of hundreds more Supported Living and Extra Care homes, to keep people living independently for longer and modernising Adult Social Care.

Just last week we launched a Surrey-wide, long-running consultation on our Surrey Transport Plan that aims to revolutionise the way we travel in Surrey. It is, rightly, a bold and transformative plan:

- increasing walking and cycling routes to encourage people out of their cars

- providing more charging points and parking for electric vehicles
- more bus services
- charging for transport use
- introducing car clubs

And addressing fundamental issues that contribute to people travelling around and through the county. Things like improving internet connections for home-working, reducing the need to travel, or redesigning neighbourhoods for better access to local services within walking and cycling distance.

We know this is going to be hard, we will undoubtedly face some opposition, but we all have a responsibility to change our behaviour in order to reduce the 46% of carbon emissions currently generated by transport in Surrey.

We know we have a huge role to play, to make this behaviour change as easy as possible. But this is on all of us.

Let's create better places, together.

This is all part of our Climate Change Strategy, to deliver a Greener Future for Surrey and tackle the Climate Emergency.

Madam Chair, we are absolutely serious about this.

It is one of our four overriding Strategic Objectives, and fundamental to everything we do to make Surrey a place where people can live happy and healthy lives long into the future.

We have set out how we can deliver this Greener Future and are consulting with partners over the summer on a Delivery Plan. We cannot do this alone. All of our

partners in local government and beyond must play their part in delivering that plan which I very much hope will be a delivery plan we can all get behind.

We should acknowledge however that work to deliver this mission – to reduce our carbon emissions to net zero, as a council by 2030 and as a county by 2050 – is already well underway.

It is already embedded in all that we do.

- Our Tree planting strategy
- The move to a more eco-friendly HQ here at Woodhatch
- The aforementioned Surrey Transport Plan
- Our Local Cycling and Walking plans
- Education of our young people
- Council vehicles turning electric, and our EV infrastructure roll out
- Replacement of our streetlights with LEDs
- The Surrey Solar scheme, with over 7,000 residents already signed up
- The River Thames Scheme approval
- Our work in Farnham around traffic and air quality
- Our investment in electric buses

But these things are just the start.

Our plan is comprehensive, ambitious, and achievable. It needs to be.

But to be able to achieve it, we must all play our part.

Residents and communities must stand up too, and together we must take collective responsibility for the future of the world we live in.

As a County Council we are committed to working closer with residents, as a partner in communities to help them thrive, and to collectively deliver a brighter, stronger future for Surrey.

Thriving communities is what we should all be aiming to be part of, and support.

They are essential to meeting future challenges, whether that's delivering a Greener Future, or tackling health inequalities.

Strong communities help drive a sustainable local economy and a strong local economy improves health outcomes.

Compassionate and connected communities help people live independently for longer.

Ultimately, local networks of support help to improve quality of life and life expectancy.

For too long the County Council has been accused of being remote from our residents, not only because we were based out of county in Kingston, but because we're responsible for a substantial and diverse geographic area and 1.2m residents.

As we all know as Members, our communities and residents are not all affluent and middle class – across the county our local communities have very different demographics, different challenges, and different requirements that they need to thrive.

We are shifting our culture, as an organisation, to understand these different local places better, and to be an active partner.

We are working alongside communities, who are invested in their localities, who know the challenges and see the opportunities.

We want to help build on the strong community action that is already happening, and actively encourage more residents to join up and join in.

In the coming weeks you may see and hear more about the 'Make It Happen' campaign, which aims to engage our residents.

It is designed to boost participation from residents – to demonstrate, perhaps to people who might not usually get involved, that they have a say, a stake in their local area, and that they can 'Make It Happen'.

Members – we already play a huge role in connecting people in our communities, in building those networks. But I know our communities will welcome hearing that this council continues to be committed to engaging and playing an active part, committed to Making It Happen, together.

This ambition is fundamental to Surrey's post-pandemic recovery.

Surrey Local Resilience Forum's *Building Forward Better* report will outline how we, and partner organisations should build on, and adapt to, the long-term changes brought about by COVID and that be crucial to guiding us as an organisation.

But this is a challenge for everyone in this county, together.

Our entire County Council workforce, our partners, our residents, our businesses, and crucially Members, all of us as elected representatives, must work collaboratively to shape a new Surrey. We owe that to our residents.

I remain determined that no one is left behind in Surrey, and that is even more important as we deal with the long-lasting impact of COVID.

A place that builds on all our natural assets, our dynamic people, and our innovative spirit, to provide more opportunities and a brighter future for everyone. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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