

## **Leader's Statement – County Council, 12 July 2022**

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Madam Chair, Members, I doubt any of us here in this chamber have been oblivious to the unprecedented times in our national political landscape.

The events of last week, and beyond, have demonstrated the importance of good, clear leadership in being able to deliver your ambitions, whether that's in public service or private enterprise.

There are many fine examples within this council, from Joanna Killian down through the organisation, and indeed within our elected Members – committed to public service and making the lives of our residents better.

Politically, we also stand by these principles.

We have reviewed and revised our Select Committee system and put a renewed emphasis on scrutiny – to give Members across this chamber the chance to properly engage, question, understand the work that is going on and the policies we aim to put in place.

As a Cabinet we welcome scrutiny, from Members, from residents, from the local media – as we know it's an essential part of leadership.

Without that confidence and trust, we would not have been able to make the progress we have.

We have set out our ambition and we are steadfast in our determination and our effort in delivering it.

Enabling a greener future for Surrey, tackling health inequality, empowering our communities, growing a sustainable economy, and ultimately ensuring no one is left behind.

Whilst chaos and uncertainty have spread through our national politics, here in Surrey we carry on, united in our mission and delivering day in day out for the people who call our county home.

Madam Chair, as well as our great teams here within the council, we couldn't truly deliver a better quality of life for our residents without working with our partners across the county.

We are one part of a Surrey-wide ecosystem, all interdependent on each other, and when working together what we can achieve is limitless.

County Council, Surrey Police, Surrey Fire & Rescue Service, the local NHS, Districts & Boroughs, the voluntary and community sector, transport providers, utility companies and many more.

COVID showed in the clearest, quickest terms the impact of that partnership, coordinated through Surrey's Local Resilience Forum.

That Forum remains in place day-to-day, assessing and understanding risks, mitigating those risks, and ready to stand up quickly to respond to any incident. Forty-four organisations across Surrey working together – our residents should rest easy that the systems are in place to keep us safe – and I'm pleased to see the new Independent Secretariat now in place to coordinate that work going forward.

Another really positive recent development in our partnership working has been the formal introduction this month of the new Integrated Care System – an evolution of our

relationship as a council with our local health services, ensuring that people's health and care needs are met more effectively and efficiently.

It will help make sure people are not passed around the system, that acute health providers and the social care system is more joined up, with joint working and joint appointments already in place to take that integration forward.

It will also help us take that next step together in reducing health inequalities – tackling the wider determinants of health more effectively – things like education, housing, pollution - to relieve pressure on our health and care system in the long term and ultimately to improve life outcomes for our residents. In essence to deliver our prevention and early intervention agenda.

This partnership will also be evident through our work together 'on the ground' in our communities – listening, understanding, and better targeting tailored support.

That local engagement is so key in delivering our No One Left Behind ambition, and everything that strengthens that community understanding and partnership should be celebrated.

We are determined to use every tool at our disposal to improve that work – whether it's co-designing the future of town centres with the community like in Horley; using our library spaces to bring more support together in one place and opening access for communities to use more flexibly; creating new, modern community hubs like the plans in Sunbury; or ensuring we support local community events - getting under the skin of what local areas need and want to make them better places. And of course, we are rolling out community link officers to be our eyes and ears, so we truly understand what issues we need to address in those communities.

We'll be there – the council and its partners – for all residents.

Members, at the last council meeting I announced that the member allocation for highways improvements in your divisions would double, and since then there has been a workshop to demonstrate how the council is putting the tools in place to support us to engage with residents effectively around this type of local decision making.

The old, tired, and bureaucratic local and joint committee system does not properly engage residents in the things that matter to them – we must show more imagination, more energy, and have more meaningful conversations with more residents and partners, in order to really help our communities thrive.

For every one of us, that is our passion, that's why we're here – talking and understanding the people who elect us.

Let's embrace new ways of doing that more effectively.

Let's make it happen.

Madam Chair, I am incredibly proud of Surrey as a place.

I'm proud of our communities, our people, our businesses big and small.

I'm proud of our schools and our young people.

I'm proud of our villages, our towns, our universities.

And I'm proud of our environment, our beautiful countryside that offers so much benefit to everyone here and beyond.

It is one of our most treasured assets, and I'm proud of the role Surrey County Council has in managing, protecting, and enhancing that rich biodiversity and nature.

Last week I had the honour of attending the Queens Baton Relay for the Commonwealth Games that start in Birmingham later this month.

The baton had travelled to over 70 countries around the world before coming to the UK, and Surrey was chosen from a competitive list of entries across the country to host a leg of the relay.

The setting, at Newlands Corner, was superb – with the added bonus of our magnificent new Visitor Centre being open.

There have been many inspirational Surrey residents chosen to be baton bearers and our wonderful county was chosen to host it.

Thanks to the efforts of some brilliant council officers and colleagues from Active Surrey, the event was a great success, with local school children sharing in the moment, along with our partners at Surrey Police, Surrey Fire & Rescue Service, Surrey Hills, and Guildford Borough Council.

It really encapsulated what a great place this county is.

But it also demonstrated what a responsibility we have, together with residents and partners, to protect our county.

We have acted over the last few weeks to restore and put protections in place for some hugely important rural sites in Surrey, including working to restore the chalk grassland at the Downs near Caterham.

We're working with Surrey Wildlife Trust – another important partner – to develop a nature reserve in East Ewell, and we recently worked with five other councils to purchase Tice's Meadow in Farnham to protect the long-term future of its natural habitat.

We also stand ready to react quickly – with no better example of this than the excellent response of Surrey Fire & Rescue Service last week to contain the wildfire at Bisley Ranges.

The cause of that fire is not yet known, but I should take this opportunity, ahead of the summer, to remind everyone to be careful and considerate when out in our wonderful countryside – please do not take barbeques out with you, pack a picnic instead and dispose of cigarettes and litter correctly.

As you all know, we have a comprehensive Climate Change Delivery Plan in action, with good progress already underway but plenty more to do.

Our transport plan is a huge part of that – aimed at cutting the 41% of Surrey's carbon emissions that is caused by transport with practical measures to help people to get around Surrey easily and sustainably.

More walking and cycling routes, more electric vehicle charging points, more bus services, as well as improving internet connections for home-working and redesigning neighbourhoods to enable easier access to local services, lessening the need to travel by car.

We also saw the on-demand bus service go live in Mole Valley last week. Two electric minibuses offering a shared door to door bus service for residents which can be used

to take them to a doctors or hospital appointment, to access further education and training, or to go shopping.

With the ability to book trips to and from outside the area and running alongside the existing bus service this will help people who may be isolated due to their rural location or have had little choice but to use their car.

We will roll this service out across the whole county over time, and it will be a really important part of not only hitting our carbon neutral targets but also opening up our communities.

Travelling more actively – walking, cycling, scooting, running, whichever you prefer – also has huge health benefits for our residents and can save money. It's win-win, but we recognise it's not always easy in Surrey – this plan helps to tackle that.

We're committed to this agenda, and there is yet more to come. We will not falter.

It's our collective responsibility to protect this wonderful place of ours.

Madam Chair, last time we assembled as full council, I spoke at length about the measures we have put in place to support our residents with the cost-of-living crisis.

Our dedicated welfare support webpages and helpline, Surrey Crisis Fund, our work with the Community Foundation for Surrey and other voluntary sector groups, our lobbying of government and use of the hardship fund.

That work continues in earnest, with targeted support reaching the most vulnerable.

One achievement since that meeting in May that I'm particularly proud of is our pay agreement for Surrey County Council staff, through positive and productive discussions with the unions.

We are implementing a phased salary increase, meaning those paid the least get the most – our lowest paid workers seeing an increase of 7.85%.

The percentage increase drops further up the scales, with those in the top pay bands receiving no increase.

We think this is fair, responsible and, in very real terms, enables us to help those who need it most.

We will continue to work collaboratively with our partners, always striving to improve people's quality of life and life chances.

To protect our wonderful county and make it the best place it can possibly be – for everyone.

On that note I will update our next council meeting on where we are with our county deal ambitions, but I have had some productive conversations with our District and Borough colleagues over the past few weeks and I am confident that we will put together a compelling bid for the benefit of the residents of Surrey.

Madam Chair, while other areas of our political landscape grab the attention, we crack on and stay true to our ambitions and principles.

We won't falter, we'll adapt to work with the new government that is formed, tackle any challenge that is put in our way, be open to new ideas and opportunities.

Always working hard on behalf of Surrey's residents and businesses.

Thank you.