

Mr Chairman, we come together for the first Council meeting of 2020 having laid out the most sensible, sustainable and ambitious budget proposals in Surrey for years.

Our work as an organisation over the past two years has been tireless, and that hard work, leadership and innovative thinking from both council officers and members throughout Surrey County Council must be acknowledged and praised.

Around half a million pounds every working day has been saved through greater efficiency and financial management, over the last two years.

Thanks to that work, we are able to present this balanced, forward-thinking budget, that will deliver real progress and benefits for the people of Surrey – both now and in the future.

Our finances are now on a stable footing and our transformation programme well underway. Not only will we continue to deliver efficiencies for our budget, but as importantly we will be improving outcomes for residents.

Quite simply, we are doing things better.

Ofsted and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire and Rescue Services have recognised this progress recently in our Childrens Services and Fire service, and we're determined to keep raising the bar across all our services.

Our net revenue budget this year has slightly increased to a total £968.4m, which includes over £20m relating to inflation and £55m of service pressures, with £38m of efficiencies identified, largely through transformation.

There is still uncertainty in future funding settlements from government and still growing pressures on many of our services.

We are not complacent. We are looking to the future to identify challenges as well as opportunities, as we move forward as a leading authority.

We are proposing to increase Council Tax by 1.99% this year, to support our sustainable funding base for future years and mitigate against the current uncertainty in medium- and long-term local government funding.

We will also use this increase in Council Tax revenue to deliver real tangible benefits for the Council Tax payer in Surrey.

Our capital investment programme will now enable us to start delivering our ambitious projects, making journeys around the county smoother, protecting homes and businesses, increasing education and care capacity and supporting our local economy.

I will speak about this in greater detail shortly.

We will also be taking up the 2% increase in the Adult Social Care precept, proposed by central government, to help manage the pressures on the Adult Social Care budget.

This is an area that needs a national solution and now with a more stable government in place, I hope we will see a long-term plan evolve to deal with these pressures in a more sustainable way.

We want to play a part in developing those plans as we feel that local government holds the key to many of the potential solutions.

This will form a key part of our engagement with central government, as well as seeking long term funding settlements for local government to enable us to plan our future vision with greater certainty.

Our greatest area of day-to-day spending by far is on supporting our most vulnerable residents – the elderly, those with special educational needs or disabilities, and children in care.

We spend over £1m every single day on Adult Social Care.

And around half a million pounds every day on looking after children.

These are services that many Surrey residents may never have any direct experience of, and whilst it is our statutory responsibility it is also our moral and civic duty to support those people with greatest need.

Through greater integration with our health services and an approach that prioritises independence where possible, we are hopeful that the outcomes for

these residents will improve considerably and provide a more sustainable future for the whole County.

Mr Chairman, Surrey is always considered to be an affluent County, with many of our residents enjoying a comfortable quality of life. However, there are also many pockets of deprivation – many people struggling with poor health, lack of opportunity and without the advantages in life of others.

It is our mission to reduce the inequality in Surrey, particularly in life expectancy, by targeting services and improving access to the many opportunities in this great County.

We must deliver on our Health and Wellbeing strategy whether that's through supporting lifestyle changes, a focus on preventing people falling in to a chronic condition whether that's a physical or mental illness, by much earlier intervention and by delivering new models of care, including easier GP access and earlier screening.

This mission cuts across all our departments and services and is a key pillar of our Organisation Strategy and partnership working that came to the previous Council meeting in December.

Our Environment, Transport and Infrastructure portfolio is perhaps the more 'universal' area of our revenue spend – the things that nearly all our residents see and experience pretty much every day.

It is this area that will focus on our Greener Future ambitions, rethinking the way we provide and use transport in the County and improve the way we maintain and enhance our countryside. That means a thorough review of our existing infrastructure and more particularly our public transport system. If we are to persuade our residents to get out of their vehicles we must provide an alternative means of transport. That requires us to use public money to strengthen and enhance our bus and train services and that is exactly what we shall do.

Transformation funding will be used to support the development and delivery of much of this important work. We will identify and use the best technology, invest in renewable energy, and work to change behaviour, to ensure that Surrey is fit for the future.

It is essential that we have the right level of capacity and resource in place within the organisation to deliver our ambitions set out in the medium-term financial strategy. As members will have seen the main areas of capital investment being around place-based projects such as highways improvement, flood alleviation and renewable energy sources.

The ambitious capital programme outlined, sets this budget apart from previous years.

We are looking to invest hundreds of millions of pounds in a series of projects that will deliver real benefits for the people of Surrey but also deliver year-on-year efficiencies and resilience long into the future.

An extra £92 million on improving our 3000 miles of roads and pavements.

£84 million on projects to protect the environment and help tackle the Climate Emergency, including a Solar Farm, Ultra Low Emission vehicles and electrification of transport services including buses and school transport.

£270m to protect over 30,000 homes and businesses from the risk of flooding – enhancing the environment, attracting investment and keeping residents safe.

£100m to regenerate high streets and invest in local communities. Funding that needs to support projects that our communities actually want and not projects that we think they need. We will genuinely engage with them in partnership to ensure that we collectively deliver real local initiatives.

£31m to provide 883 additional places for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, including a new SEND school.

A further £70m to provide additional school places and improve school facilities across the county.

£7m in the first phase of a programme to deliver 725 specially adapted homes for elderly residents, to increase independence and hopefully reduce hospital admittance.

This, alongside already identified capital investment, takes the total capital spend over the next five years to £1.4bn, and signals our absolute intent to deliver a better place for all Surrey residents.

As already mentioned, a huge amount of work has gone into these budget proposals to ensure they are designed to help us deliver the key priorities of our organisation strategy for the next five years.

This budget focuses on tackling Surrey's inequality, supporting independence, working in partnership, embracing Surrey's diversity, creating a greener future, supporting our local economy, delivering a more joined up health and social care system and leading a digital revolution in the County.

We are very clear in our purpose and we now have the tools to deliver it.

Mr Chairman, let me finish by again paying tribute to the tireless work that has gone into getting this Council in a stable place financially. It is no mean feat and it has provided a solid platform for us to improve lives and create a better place for everyone.

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