

Leader's Statement – 7 July 2020

Mr Chairman

As you have already touched upon, it was with the greatest of sadness that just two weeks ago, we suddenly and tragically lost Dave Hill, our Executive Director for Children, Lifelong Learning and Culture.

Dave was a key member of the senior leadership team, a team that has worked so hard to raise the bar in the delivery of our services. Words really cannot express our sense of loss, both personally and professionally, but all our thoughts continue to be with Dave's wife Jo and his two daughters Laurel and Lydia.

Dave was a tower of a man who was held both in respect and affection by those who worked with him not just at Surrey but across the whole of children's services. He was thoughtful, inspirational, committed and self-deprecating. He will be irreplaceable.

We will work tirelessly to ensure his legacy lives on in delivering the very best support for Surrey's young people.

One of Dave's final acts here was to play a critical role in securing more emergency refuge accommodation for families escaping domestic abuse.

It is a fitting tribute to him, that this safe space is now available that will ultimately provide sanctuary and safety for some of Surrey's most vulnerable families. It is a symbol of everything he stood for.

As Joanna Killian, our Chief Executive, stated, Dave's passion for justice and fairness also made him the natural choice to sponsor our renewed efforts towards equality, diversity and inclusion at the council.

He would not tolerate discrimination of any kind and was determined we would be a better council.

Dave was in tune with our staff very recently, as the Black Lives Matter movement gathered momentum and brought into focus the experiences and discrimination black people are subjected to - even now, even here in the UK.

It is abundantly clear that the anger and frustration expressed by the black community across the world is not just about the single incident in America some weeks ago, with the killing of George Floyd.

We have made great strides in the equality agenda in this country, transformative progress has unquestionably been made over the last two decades.

However, it is important that we recognise racial bias in our country still exists. We undoubtedly still have some way to go.

Mr Chairman, members, we must **listen** to the experiences of black and other ethnic minority members of our communities.

Without giving these communities a voice - without listening - we cannot pretend to know how the lives of BAME people are affected day in day out by racial prejudice, bias and discrimination.

We recognise that more must be done to break down the barriers facing the BAME community, tackle conscious and unconscious bias and empower those who may feel restricted or unheard.

Please speak up, we **will** listen.

We are challenging ourselves to put equality of opportunity at the forefront of our policy and decision making.

We will test this, we will listen to our minority communities and we will work together to ensure that Surrey is a place where everybody can flourish, and that not one single person is discriminated against.

Mr Chairman, we convene again as full council, still in uncertain times.

But we are re-emerging, albeit cautiously, from a lockdown that has been hugely challenging for many in our communities.

Surrey County Council and its partners across the county have done a phenomenal job over the last four months in responding to the COVID crisis.

Our response with our partners has shown the power of working together - coordinated, aligned and striving for a shared purpose. Delivering food parcels, supporting our shielded residents and visiting our 4000 extremely vulnerable residents.

Much of that response work is ongoing; we are not out of the woods yet.

Moving into the next phase, Surrey is also leading the way in delivering our Local Outbreak Control Plan.

We have been one of 11 authorities in England chosen as part of a Good Practice Network of councils, sharing best practice in how we manage local cases and outbreaks and restrict the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

We are proving that we are a trusted authority, who is there for its residents and who can be relied upon to deliver.

I must pay tribute to our Public Health Team here at Surrey County Council, led by Ruth Hutchinson, who have been working non-stop on developing this plan alongside other colleagues within the council, as well as our NHS partners, district and boroughs and military planners.

It is a comprehensive document which will evolve as we continue to learn, and it will stand us in good stead to do everything we can to keep the situation under control here in Surrey.

Everything we have done, and everything we are doing, is aimed at keeping the people of Surrey safe, allowing them to get back to work, giving them back their freedoms and seeing loved ones again. In order to do so, we need everyone to **play their part** and **Keep Surrey Safe**.

We cannot emphasize these messages enough, and I urge all members to carry that message out to your communities:

Everybody must keep following the basic public health guidance to restrict the spread – we are back to the mantra of ‘wash your hands’, keep social distancing and be alert to symptoms.

People must get tested and isolate if they have any of the symptoms, and comply with NHS contact tracers.

If you are contacted by those tracers, please do as instructed and isolate.

If we all play our part, we can Keep Surrey Safe, and keep Surrey open.

Mr Chairman, as I’ve already mentioned, we are seeing our communities, our high streets and our businesses opening up again.

But this restart is not without trepidation, and challenges that must be overcome.

We are engaging with communities about the best ways to open up high streets safely and get people moving around, increasing active travel and boosting footfall for retail businesses as they reopen.

We are working with our colleagues from Surrey Heartlands to ensure people have access to the health services they need, and supporting our care sector.

It is vital that we continue to support, and listen to, Surrey’s Community, Voluntary and Faith sector who have stepped up, as always, during the response with an overwhelming number of volunteers in action, helping those people most in need.

Indeed, it is important, as you have already done Mr Chairman, to thank all those who have played their part and recognise their contribution, that has not only brought comfort and relief, but also undoubtedly saved lives.

But that sector is struggling – their income has been hit with the lack of fundraising, while demand for their support has increased.

They have never been more needed.

It is here, in supporting our voluntary sector, connecting our communities, boosting our local economy, enhancing our place, where our recovery work will really pay dividends.

Mr Chairman, we continue to push forward as an organisation, striving to make Surrey the best place it can be.

We recently held the first meeting of our ‘One Surrey Growth Board’ – a strategic partnership to ensure improvements in Surrey’s economy, homes, infrastructure and quality of life. We will work closely with all partners to deliver those ambitions.

Over the coming months we will go live with our Community Projects Fund - £100m for groundbreaking projects sparked by engagement with our communities, delivering real benefits for our residents and turbo charging Surrey’s recovery.

Our library transformation programme is gathering pace, again with important input from our communities.

The delivery of our Climate Change Strategy and our Tree Strategy, finalised in May, is underway.

We are still delivering major projects like the Surrey Flood Alleviation Scheme, a masterplan for Farnham Town Centre, and multi-million-pound road, cycle and pedestrian improvements on the A320 between Chertsey and Ottershaw.

Surrey Fire & Rescue Service continues to modernise with the next phase of the Making Surrey Safer Plan put into action.

Our transformation of services for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is already making a positive difference to families.

As part of this progress, Mr Chairman, and in line with the government agenda, we must now take a fundamental look at the future of local government.

Those of you who attended – virtually – the LGA conference last week will know that the government are pressing ahead with the planned Devolution White Paper in the autumn.

We must explore the potential for Surrey.

We must build on our track record here at Surrey County Council.

We have transformed this council, from financial instability and failing services into one of the leading authorities in the country, with a positive economic outlook and services that are fit for the future. Over the last four months we have led a robust, coordinated and effective response to COVID-19.

But we can do even more.

By working with government ahead of this White Paper, I believe we can secure greater powers and responsibility, and we can examine what the right structure of government is for Surrey's future - to tackle the challenges we face and take the opportunities that are coming our way.

With the right combination of devolved powers and structural reform, alongside our strategic vision and leadership, we can not only recover from COVID-19, but unleash growth and fulfil this county's potential.

We can reduce inequality. We can deliver new models of health and social care. We can support the high street. We can plan a sustainable, greener future. We can ensure the skills needed for our local economy are met through opportunities for our young people. We can better empower and connect our communities. We can lead a digital future.

There are huge financial savings to be made and a more productive and resilient economy to be harnessed.

This is a huge opportunity for Surrey, and one we must get right.

We will continue our work in exploring the options, and engage our partners across Surrey, with a view to coming back to Council in early autumn.

Mr Chairman. Our ambition has not dimmed. Our transformation has not stopped.

We continue to raise the bar for public service.

We remain innovative in our thinking, determined in our attitude and bold in our actions.

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