



OFFICER REPORT TO COUNCIL

ORGANISATION STRATEGY 2021 - 2026

KEY ISSUE/DECISION:

This report outlines how the council will contribute to achieving the aims and ambitions set out in the Community Vision 2030 (the 2030 Vision) over the medium term. The Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally shifted the strategic context in which the council is operating, and in September 2020 a strategic reset was agreed, with four priority objectives that have emerged through the response forming a new focus for our work.

The refresh of the Organisation Strategy builds on the hard work and dedication of Surrey County Council over the last two years to put the organisation on a firm financial footing and which has enabled us to cope with the unforeseen challenges that have arisen this year. We have continued to deliver services and protect our most vulnerable residents while transforming the organisation to enable us to provide a better future for the county.

The refreshed strategy uses the lessons learned from our response to the Covid-19 crisis, to reflect how our priorities and strategic approach as an organisation needs to change to ensure we can deliver the 2030 Vision. Focussing on a smaller set of priorities based on a robust evidence base and what residents say are the key challenges and opportunities, will mean we can better align our resources and activity to delivering the outcomes that will make the most difference to the lives of those who live and work in Surrey.

By approving the refreshed Organisation Strategy, the County Council is recognising the emphasis on our priority objectives, enabling the organisation to continue to adapt to the current context, while reaffirming its commitment to improving outcomes for residents; creating better lives, a better place and a county where no-one is left behind. Our commitment to making sure we leave no-one behind is not new; it is a central part of the 2030 Vision and a key feature of the Organisation Strategy from previous years. The refreshed Strategy reaffirms our commitment to tackling inequality as the guiding principle for everything we do, as well as setting new equality objectives that include reducing health and economic inequalities.

As part of the council's Policy Framework (as set out in the Constitution) the Organisation Strategy must be approved by Council.

BACKGROUND:

1. The Community Vision for Surrey in 2030 (the 2030 Vision) sets out a shared set of outcomes for the county council, district and borough councils, other public services, the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS), businesses

and residents to work together towards in order to improve the lives of people who live, work and study in Surrey.

2. The 2030 Vision states that by 2030 we want Surrey to be a uniquely special place where everyone has a great start to life, people live healthy and fulfilling lives, are enabled to achieve their full potential and contribute to their community, and no one is left behind. We want our county's economy to be strong, vibrant and successful and Surrey to be a great place to live, work and learn. A place that capitalises on its location and natural assets, and where communities feel supported and people can support each other. Despite the significant impact of Covid-19, the broad ambitions outlined in the 2030 Vision remain valid and should continue to guide our work and that of our partners.
3. Originally approved by Council in 2018, and refreshed in December 2019, this latest refresh of the organisation's strategy reflects the changes in the context and environment that the organisation is operating in and focusses on a smaller set of priority objectives. However a number of the core elements remain consistent with the version approved by Council in 2019 - it continues to outline how our activity will contribute to the 2030 Vision for Surrey, and remains focused on creating better lives, a better place and a county where no-one is left behind.
4. The Strategy sets out a clear strategic direction for the council and brings together a number of interrelated workstreams including response and recovery to the Covid-19 pandemic, transformation and our Medium-Term Financial Strategy alongside day to day activity of our services.

Organisation Strategy 2021-2026

5. The refreshed Organisation Strategy builds on the work and successes of the past two years that have enabled us to continue to provide high quality services and make efficiencies while at the same time responding to, and leading recovery from, the Covid-19 pandemic.
6. We continue to face financial challenges alongside rising demand for services, a situation that has worsened as a result of Covid-19. Although we have received additional funding from Government, this falls short of what we require to meet the lost income and increased demand that has been brought about by the pandemic.
7. The priority objectives in the Strategy are based on extensive research and engagement that has taken place over the summer. This has enabled us to work from a robust evidence base to understand the impact of Covid-19, what residents see as the challenges and opportunities, and how the future priorities for the council align with this. This engagement includes a survey carried out with approximately 2,200 Surrey residents looking at behaviours, attitudes and opinions during the period of the pandemic and a comprehensive Community Impact Assessment (CIA).
8. The results highlight the importance that residents feel in terms of being connected to their local community, emphasised by those that have had to

isolate and shield themselves, and of their support networks, including family, friends and neighbours in addition to services they have received during the crisis from both the public sector and VCFS. It is this emerging community spirit that we are looking to build on through our priority to reinvigorate our relationship with residents, and empowering communities to tackle local issues and support one another.

9. The findings show a significant impact on mental health & wellbeing, notably amongst residents aged 16-34 and those in lower income households. Support for priority groups or more vulnerable residents was recognised as a priority which has influenced the refreshing of the Organisation Strategy around the principle of 'no-one left behind'.
10. Lockdown has highlighted health inequalities where certain groups, such as those that are vulnerable or from BAME communities are likely to have been disproportionately impacted in a negative way. The reported impact on access to healthcare services is also significant with the result that there have been low levels of use for out of hours GPs, mental health services and services for carers, despite those concerned having a relevant health issue. The priority to tackle health inequality reinforces the importance of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy as a critical tool to driving work across the system to reduce these widening inequalities, including increasing our focus on addressing mental health issues.
11. Resident engagement has highlighted a strong desire to support local businesses and looking at how local recovery can be encouraged through innovation, support and funding. Growing a sustainable economy so everyone can benefit is a key priority, and how we can support people and businesses across Surrey to grow during the economic recovery.
12. To help us to continue to deliver on the long-term aims for the county, the refreshed strategy emphasises four priority objectives as our clear focus, based on the evidence and findings outlined above. These will help us to meet the more immediate challenges and take advantage of opportunities that have emerged through the response to Covid-19. The four priorities for the refreshed Organisation Strategy are:
 - i. **Growing a sustainable economy so everyone can benefit**
Support people and businesses across Surrey to grow during the economic recovery and re-prioritise infrastructure plans to adapt to the changing needs and demands of residents at a time of financial challenges.
 - ii. **Tackling health inequality**
Drive work across the system to reduce widening health inequalities, increasing our focus on addressing mental health and accelerating health and social care integration to reduce demand on services while improving health outcomes for residents.
 - iii. **Enabling a greener future**
Build on behaviour changes and lessons learnt during lockdown to

further progress work to tackle environmental challenges, improve air quality and focus on green energy to make sure we achieve our 2030 net zero target.

iv. Empowering communities

Reinvigorate our relationship with residents, empowering communities to tackle local issues and support one another, while making it easier for everyone to play an active role in the decisions that will shape Surrey's future.

13. Underpinning the refreshed priorities are key enablers through which we will continue to transform the council:

a. Customer experience

We will get better at seeing things from a resident's perspective, giving customers a simpler and more consistent experience.

b. Stronger partnerships

We will focus on building stronger and more effective partnerships with residents, other public services and businesses to collectively meet challenges and take opportunities.

c. Transformation and reform

We will continue our comprehensive transformation programme to improve outcomes for residents, deliver efficiencies and make sure financial sustainability underpins our approach.

d. Financial management

We will spend our money in the most efficient and effective ways, so we can have the greatest impact on improving people's quality of life and ensure we provide the best value for money to our residents.

e. Agile, diverse and motivated workforce

We will embed new agile ways of working and provide staff with the tools and support to be high performing and outcomes focussed. We will put equality, diversity and inclusivity at the heart of everything we do, valuing the strength of a diverse workforce.

f. Digital and Data

We will embrace digital solutions and take a data-driven approach to transforming our organisation and services we deliver for residents.

14. Our focus on a smaller set of priorities will mean we can better align our resources and activity to delivering the outcomes that will make the most difference to the lives of residents, and ensure we are doing this in the most financially sustainable way. Success for the council should be on the impact that we have and making a positive difference for residents through our activity to deliver on our priority objectives.

Our guiding principle - tackle inequality in Surrey by focussing on no-one left behind

15. Running through all four of the priority outcomes in the strategy is a theme of addressing inequality; inequality between places, such as the economic disparity between the east and west of the county, and inequality between and amongst communities, with people's life chances and quality of life affected by a number of factors that drive these disparities. We know through the extensive work that the council has undertaken over the past several months that the impacts of Covid-19 and lockdown measures have widened these existing social, economic and health inequalities. We must act on these inequalities, so that we can stimulate economic recovery and jobs growth and provide support early for some of Surrey's most vulnerable residents.
16. Our commitment to making sure we leave no-one behind is not new; it is a central part of the Community Vision for Surrey in 2030 which residents and partners helped to shape and develop two years ago. Tackling inequality and ensuring no one is left behind has also been a feature of the Organisation Strategy from previous years. The refreshed Strategy reaffirms our commitment to tackling inequality as the guiding principle for everything we do, as well as setting new equality objectives that include reducing health and economic inequalities.
17. For residents, our more clearly emphasised commitments around equality, diversity and inclusion means engaging with them in different ways to ensure all voices are heard, which will help us better understand the drivers of inequality so we can take more effective action. We will take an evidence led approach to identify inequality and discrimination, so all residents will find it easy to access our services and feel included. For example, Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) will not just look at health and economic inequalities on protected groups but will also consider impacts on residents on lower incomes or living in deprived areas.
18. In addition to making EIAs as robust as possible, we will be doing more to ensure we have the best possible evidence and insight so we can make better decisions on addressing health and economic inequalities, in line with how the Community Impact Assessment has influenced the refresh of our Organisation Strategy.
19. We will also build stronger relationships with communities and partner organisations to foster better community relations and work together to make Surrey a fair and welcoming place to live, work or study.
20. For staff this means creating an environment where people feel comfortable to bring their whole self to work and a place that values difference by embracing people's different perspectives to help tackle the challenges we face. We will act to remove any barriers to this to strengthen the diversity of the council's workforce, and support all colleagues, no matter their background, feel welcome and have the same opportunities to succeed. Focusing on this will improve the council's performance and lead to better services for Surrey's residents so they get better outcomes and value for money.

21. To enhance the prominence of this agenda in our work and demonstrate our compliance with the public sector equality duty, we have identified core actions in the strategy which will form our equality objectives and support us to achieve our ambitions.

Consultation and engagement

22. The refresh of the Organisation Strategy has been informed by recent engagement and research that has been carried out with residents and partners over the past several months to understand the impact of Covid-19 and focus our strategy on the areas that are important to residents.
23. This includes a Covid-19 temperature check postal survey carried out in the summer with approximately 2,200 Surrey residents looking at behaviours, attitudes and opinions during the period of the pandemic. This has given us a statistically representative set of results to help us understand what has happened to our population and how we might plan for future impacts from similar events.
24. We have also undertaken a comprehensive Community Impact Assessment to fully understand the initial impact of Covid-19 on Surrey's communities, particularly for vulnerable populations and places.
25. The refresh of the strategy was shaped by the work of the Select Committee Chairmen & Vice-Chairmen's Group with representatives from each of the Select Committees plus the Audit & Governance Committee forming a Task and Finish Group to oversee development of the strategic reset. A report of the findings of this task group went to Cabinet as part of the Strategic Reset item on 29 September 2020.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

26. The council's Equality, Fairness and Respect Strategy 2015 – 2020 was our previous commitment to deliver fair and inclusive services to meet the needs of all Surrey's residents. The strategy focused on supporting independence among vulnerable adults and children; helping all young people to succeed in education, employment and training; reducing health inequalities; and being a local employer of first choice for people from all our diverse communities.
27. As the context we are working in has changed, and issues like the Covid-19 crisis are worsening existing health inequalities and economic insecurity, we need to ensure tackling inequality and leaving no-one behind are at the forefront of everything we do.
28. The refreshed Organisation Strategy strengthens the council's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion by making this our central guiding principle and setting four new equality objectives around the economy, health, communities and our organisational culture. A council-wide action plan to strengthen the council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion is under development and will be presented to Cabinet in February. This will be key in driving culture change, so it sits at the forefront of everything we do.

29. Agreeing these objectives will enable us to prioritise activity to tackle inequality as well as ensuring the council remains compliant with its legal obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The Act requires the council to publish objectives it thinks it needs to achieve to further the aims of the general equality duty, namely, to have due regard to the need to:

- “eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.”

30. Progress against these objectives will be tracked and reported annually through the outcomes-based performance framework the council will use to assess and manage its performance.

Next steps

31. If the recommendation is agreed, the Organisation Strategy will be published on the council’s website.

32. Ensuring delivery of the Organisation Strategy and that resources are aligned to the Budget will be highlighted in the 2021/22 Budget Report and Medium-Term Financial Strategy presented to Cabinet in January 2021 and Full Council in February 2021 for approval.

33. Adoption of the Organisation Strategy will drive work programmes to enable us to achieve the aims and objectives of the Strategy including the development of an outcomes-based performance framework that will measure our progress towards our priorities and reducing inequalities across Surrey.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Council is asked to approve the Surrey County Council Organisation Strategy 2021–2026 (Annex A), which sets out how the council will work with residents and partners to contribute to the achievement of the Community Vision for Surrey in 2030. It sets out priority areas the council will focus on over the next five years.

Lead Officer:

Rachel Crossley, Executive Director for Strategy and Commissioning
Rachel.crossley@surreycc.gov.uk

Annexes:

Annex A - Surrey County Council Organisation Strategy 2021 – 2026

Annex B - Surrey County Council Organisation Strategy 2021 – 2026 one-page summary

Sources/background papers:

[A Community Vision for Surrey in 2030](#), Report to Council 9 October 2018

[Surrey Community Vision 2030](#)

[Covid-19 Community Impact Assessment](#), Report to Cabinet 24 November 2020
