

**CABINET MEMBER OF THE MONTH:** Tim Oliver**Strategic Direction**

- Officers across the Council have been working over many months to create a robust budget which was discussed at Full Council on the 8<sup>th</sup> February. Now that we are moving into a recovery phase following the past two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council will continue to deliver efficiencies whilst improving services for residents, to lobby the Government over funding, and work in partnership towards sustainability and thriving and empowered communities. A balanced budget will be the key to ensuring the Council is able to deliver the wide range of strategic functions and services for 1.2 million residents it is responsible for, especially as the cost of living continues to rise.
- We have recently invested £560,000 in our local Citizen's Advice charities to provide welfare support for residents around budgeting and to ensure people are accessing help they are entitled to and able to manage difficult financial situations. This is alongside investment in the Surrey Crisis Fund and establishing a grants programme with the Community Foundation Surrey using match funding to turn £200,000 into £400,000 of benefit to address urgent issues around the economic impact on our communities over the coming months.
- While we have been working closely with our District and Borough colleagues, foodbanks, and countywide charities to ensure help is available for residents to alleviate the impact of these pressures and ensure that no one is left behind, it isn't just domestic households that are affected. They are also creating additional demand for the critical services we provide. An increasing number of the most vulnerable residents are relying on our services to meet their needs, and these services are often the most expensive public services to deliver.
- The decision to raise council tax at a time of increased cost pressures on households is not one the Cabinet has taken lightly. Council tax is our primary funding resource and provides around 75% of revenue, with every penny being invested in the people and place of Surrey. The proposed 4.99% increase in council tax will enable us to continue delivering high quality services for all residents who need them while investing in mental health services to tackle the impending crisis. 4% of the increase will be directed to social care and mental health. The remainder will provide funding to meet the increased cost of delivering vital services across the Council. Because many of our services provide support to the most vulnerable, forgoing an increase in funding at a time when pressures on those services are increasing significantly may well have the opposite effect and be to the detriment of those who need our services most.
- The Government published the Health and Social Care Integration White Paper last week which sets out their ambitions to accelerate the delivery of joined-up health and social care at place level. In the paper there were proposals for a single accountable person, shared outcomes, and increasingly pooled NHS and social care budgets at place level. By working with our partners in health, including through our involvement in Surrey Heartlands and Frimley Integrated Care Systems, we will deliver integrated services, address wider health determinants, and improve outcomes for Surrey's residents.
- We have been on a determined journey to improve our children's social care services in recent years and I am hopeful that the positive changes we have undertaken will be reflected in an Ofsted inspection report due in March 2022. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our hardworking staff in children's services for their efforts in delivering a better social care provision for the children of Surrey.

## No one Left Behind

- Our ultimate ambition in Surrey is that no one is left behind. This means helping those who needs us most and improving quality of life for everyone. We recognise all the benefits that living and working in Surrey has, but know that life is really difficult for some people here, which is why we're determined to do everything we can to make life easier for those who need us.
- Work towards our 'no one left behind' objective encompasses a wide range of projects and programmes underway at the council, including our support for the voluntary, community and faith sector; our work to tackle child poverty in Surrey; our equality, diversity and inclusion work; partnerships with business through the One Surrey Growth Board and Skills Leadership Forum; our ambitious programme of work to tackle the mental health crisis in Surrey.
- We are also using our ambition of no one left behind to guide our actions towards, and in response to, the government's Levelling Up agenda at the core of which is a commitment to tackle inequalities and ensure that no one is left behind, which aligns well with our own ambitions for Surrey.
- Having anticipated much of the White Paper and initiated the work set out above, we are now more formally responding to it and the opportunities it presents for us to enhance and accelerate our priority outcomes by enthusiastically progressing devolution for the county through an ambitious County Deal, negotiated with Government. We will be briefing members on the Levelling Up White Paper and our response to it next month.

8

## Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

- The Council takes its commitment to EDI very seriously and has agreed additional investment that enables the recruitment of a new Head of EDI and an EDI Programme Manager. We are working with our Employee Reference Groups to ensure we have the best chance of securing the best people for these new posts, that will play an important part in making a difference for our residents and staff.
- Officers have started work to refresh the EDI Action Plan 2021-22, which was agreed by Cabinet in February 2021. While recognising that there is no 'quick fix' and that we still have some way to go, we have made progress in key areas, such as facilitating the establishment of, and providing support for, Employee Reference Groups (ERGs), partnering with Binti on the Period Dignity Project to be the first county to start eradicating period stigma, and narrowing the Council's Gender Pay Gap from 16.8% to 12.8%
- We will continue to build on this progress to continue our journey to become a fairer, more compassionate and more inclusive organisation. Work is underway to gather evidence from stakeholders in our communities and workforce to inform priority setting for 2022-23. This has included focus groups to get the views of almost 100 front-line workers and developing a community survey to capture the views of residents and partners working with us on EDI.

## Working in Partnership

- The Council continues to work closely with our partners to ensure we are delivering the best services and outcomes we can for residents. Our work with partners is driven by our commitment to deliver on the ambitions for people and place in Surrey set out in the Community Vision 2030. A key mechanism to improve partnership working and

collaboration within the county has been through our three existing strategic partnership boards (Health and Wellbeing board; Greener Futures board; and One Surrey Growth Board) that have been established to oversee and respond to issues of major significance in Surrey.

- Beyond the formal boards that have been established, along with the extensive day-to-day interaction that many of our staff (and in some instances Members) have with external bodies and service providers, there are many other important partnerships across the county that bring key stakeholders together, each having their own unique focuses, for example the Surrey Charities Forum or the Surrey Interfaith Forum.
- To strengthen these existing partnerships, we have formalised arrangements to convene partners through a newly established Surrey Forum, which was outlined to Cabinet in December. As a reminder, the Surrey Forum has been established to better align and co-ordinate the work of the strategic partnership boards, strengthen collaboration between partners, and embed new ways of working to empower communities. This brings together a range of leaders from the public, private and voluntary, community and faith sectors.
- Members of the Surrey Forum have already shown a real willingness and appetite to enhance how we come together as strategic partners. They have reaffirmed a clear commitment to a shared vision of ensuring that no one is left behind but have agreed that in light of the pandemic and the new challenges and opportunities we face, it is the right time to jointly refresh the ambitions of the Community Vision 2030 and extend its horizon to 2050. The Forum will also play an important role in getting behind the Surrey Story campaign and the ambition to embed within partner organisations the unique place narrative and brand for Surrey which articulates Surrey's distinctiveness and character, and highlights what makes it special and attractive as a place to live, work, play and do business. Members of the Forum have shown an interest in how we utilise data and insight at a strategic level, and the ongoing development of a Surrey-wide Data Strategy is an important piece of work that the Forum will look to support. The next meeting in March will focus on the group collectively agreeing a set of priorities, and the recent publication of the Levelling Up White Paper will play an important part in helping to shape the focus of the Forum to ensure that partners across Surrey continue to ensure that no one is left behind.
- The Levelling Up White Paper clearly sets out that upper tier authorities will be the main vehicle for devolution and local leadership, to give areas greater control and influence locally. Therefore, it is important that as the lead authority we work collaboratively with partners in Surrey to secure the best deal for the county to help accelerate the work we are already doing to tackle inequality. We have already engaged with partners to develop our initial County Deal proposal, and we will continue to do this as we update our proposals in light of the functions outlined by government in the new devolution framework.

This page is intentionally left blank