

CABINET MEMBER OF THE MONTH – 25 APRIL 2023

NAME: Denise Turner Stewart**PORTFOLIO:** Communities and Community Safety

This is a challenging time for our communities. The after-effects of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis are being keenly felt by many residents, and our Communities Services are working hard to support them.

Effective community engagement is key at times like this, and we have introduced both Community Link Officers and Local Area Coordinators to work on the ground, directly with residents. This engagement work is part of the activity that will help us deliver our Empowered and Thriving Communities agenda, connecting with our communities in the areas where they live, asking them about their lives, and listening to their ideas for improvements, what is needed and what they might want to do for themselves.

Community Link Officers (CLOs) are now working in each of the 11 Districts and Boroughs. It's early days, but CLOs have started building strong connections with County Councillors and joining up with community groups and wider partners. Activities include:

- Keeping communities up to date and connected with current SCC initiatives, for example joining up a community project with the Greener Futures team to facilitate tree planting.
- Collaborating with community groups and local charities to make sure cost-of-living advice and support is reaching those most in need.
- Putting residents in touch with the Your Fund Surrey team to get community funding for a new community project and supporting them through the application process.
- Organising 'Let's Talk' events to bring communities together and listen to what they need.
- Meeting with members and sending out monthly activity updates to all Councillors. Updates are also going to District and Borough Leaders to share the activity and collaborations with D&B officers.

This work has been well received; one resident said *"I've been attending community meetings for years. There was always lots of talking but nothing would come out of it. But since this past year or so, I can really notice a shift; I am finally seeing things changing and starting to happen. I am really excited about it."*

Local Area Coordination: Our first four Local Area Coordinators in Surrey have so far received introductions to around 125 residents in local communities who need support to realise their vision of a good life. Introductions to our Local Area Coordinators are coming from a wide range of people and professionals and have been growing steadily. The most common routes are self-introductions, housing providers, family centres / outreach workers and family and friends. In terms of the support people are asking for, common themes include poor mental and / or physical health, social isolation, housing, and support to be more independent. We are also hearing that other professionals value the fact the local area coordinator can work with anyone – providing flexible, ongoing and proactive support rather than waiting for things to get worse. Local Area Coordinators are also able to share first hand testimonies about the hardships and challenges residents are facing through a variety of forums and meetings, including the Empowered & Thriving Communities Board.

In Hurst Green (near Oxted), the Local Area Coordinator has worked with residents to set up a craft club and pop-up café, which is leading to introductions to people who need support but don't know where to turn. For example, a resident recently opened up about issues they had been avoiding dealing with because of their mental health, which included reapplying for housing benefit. With a Local Area Coordinator alongside them, they have managed to pause a summons to Court for non-payment of Council Tax and are now engaging with specialist support to deal with the cause of their poor mental health. By attending the café weekly, they are also enjoying the company and support of other people for the first time in years. Despite living in the area for over four years they knew no one before, and felt socially isolated. They have said the kindness of the people they have met has been overwhelming. Although it will take time, they now feel they can begin to make decisions again and change their life for the better.

Here are some quotes from residents about the impact working with local area coordinators is having on their lives: *"Makes me get out of bed in the morning. I feel as though I have purpose again". "It's made me feel much more confident and helped me believe I can do things and accomplish them. I'm feeling a lot more positive now". "You saved my life. Before I met you, I was lost and now I have met new people and*

have somewhere to go every day". 'I was in an extremely dark place, and the only way out of it was because of the support I had from [their Local Area Coordinator]".

Our ambition is to see Local Area Coordinators in all key neighbourhoods. Following approval of a bid for funding from Surrey Heartlands we are expanding the team to another four locations. These were agreed by the partnership leadership group based on analysis of IMD and local data and insight and will be subject to community validation. We are currently recruiting a local area coordinator for Goldsworth Park (Woking), which will be followed by Stanwell (Spelthorne), Stoke (North Guildford) and Holmwoods (Dorking).

Towns & Villages: Following partnership discussions and [Cabinet approval on 28 March 2023](#) our Towns and Villages approach is now underway. This will accelerate effective ways of working so things are better joined up around residents and families and make sense in the places they live, in their unique town or village. The approach builds on positive examples to date where closer multi-agency and community collaboration at the scale of a town has delivered better outcomes for residents. For example, in Horley, where the development of a community vision for the town helped spark new wellbeing initiatives (e.g., the use of local green spaces), identified priority public realm and regeneration projects, and galvanised ambitions for better future skills provision. Elsewhere there has been positive progress in Farnham (town centre traffic management), Caterham (flood reduction), Staines (public realm) and Weybridge (community services, public realm).

By working more closely and effectively together, in defined local areas that are meaningful to our residents, councils, health, police, community, voluntary and charitable and business partners can work with communities to identify and address what matters to them. Over the spring and summer there will be a key focus on five priority towns identified through an analysis of our 27 strategic towns and 2 village areas (see Cabinet report for details). To move quickly, we are assigning lead officers and key roles from SCC teams to advance work with partners in these areas. In parallel we are planning ahead across all 29 areas with health, Districts and Boroughs, VCFS, and other partners to accelerate closer collaboration and deliver improvements with and for communities.

Your Fund Surrey (YFS): YFS was launched in November 2020. The Normandy Shop, our first funded project, has been built and is due to open in June, and Leatherhead and Dorking gymnastics, who have created a new accessible gym including a sensory room, is also developing at pace. The projects which are up and running are reporting much more in the way of positive benefits than at first envisaged, with, for example, more visitors, connections to GPs and social prescribing and local pubs adding cycle racks.

Applications are picking up and we are funding more and more projects including our largest funded project at 1.9million, creating a new community centre and pavilion in the heart of Oxted in Tandridge. This project really signifies what YFS is all about; a project created by the community, for the community leaving a lasting legacy. The Chair of Master Park Management Committee said *"Your Fund Surrey has saved Master Park. The generous grant you have awarded us will change us from being a "cap-in-hand" charity to a sustainable charity . . . we are very grateful, appreciative for all your hard work and ultimately we are very VERY happy"*. In addition to this, we have recently funded three smaller projects: a new accessible path around a nature reserve in Warlingham, a new 3G pitch at Oakwood school, a project in conjunction with the football association, and a new multi-use games area at a school in Cranleigh. All these projects will enhance the health and wellbeing of residents, encouraging all ages to be active and make new connections.

Members have the opportunity to make a difference in their communities by thinking carefully about how they can distribute the two pots of money that been allocated to them, and are being encouraged to do so. Your Councillor Community Fund (formerly MCA) for £5k is now live for the next financial year and is in addition to the £50k members have been allocated over the next 2 years for YFS small community projects. It is pleasing to see that applications are coming in already for both funds.

Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise: In line with the council's objectives to enable a strong VCFS and support them through the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis and parallel increases in demand for their services, we worked creatively with the Community Foundation for Surrey to set up a Strategic Transformation Fund. Our £100,000 grant was match funded by corporates in Surrey and 21 charities benefitted from this. For example, a grant has been given to support the merger of the Citizen Advice charities in the South West to create a strong and effective charity to support residents. In

addition, all Citizen Advice charities received funding for 2023-24, to increase the welfare offer support, creating more outreach to points where vulnerable people may already be at, to ensure wherever possible, residents are taking up the benefits they are entitled to, and preventing more people from falling in to further financial and wider difficulties.

Our **Customer Services** Welfare line continues to work closely with Citizens Advice and Surrey Crisis Fund colleagues dealing with a range of enquires from benefits advice to emergency support and mental wellbeing issues. We saw an increase in calls relating to higher energy costs during the colder months, alongside a rise in food bank and community fridge queries too. To mitigate additional call volumes, Customer Services worked flexibly and were able to move and train team members on other enquiry lines as required - a benefit of centralised contact centres.

Active Surrey have now distributed all the Together Fund (£175K to community groups) and our Year 1 Opening Schools Facilities Funding (£250k per year for 3 years to schools' opening their facilities for community use) aligned to the H&W Board Priority Places and the Movement for Change strategy.

Libraries: 2023 marks the midway point in the Libraries and Cultural Services Transformation and its strategy to increase impact whilst reducing cost, which runs until 2025. We started by developing a workforce to deliver excellent customer service and improving IT provision to help more residents get on-line. This is part of the work to modernise, and develop library services which are fit for the future. Plans are also in place for the whole library estate. This will be delivered through capital investment, grants and funding awards so every library will benefit from the transformation programme. These changes, allowing us to deliver a modern, first class, county-wide service that meets and respond to local needs, will deliver an improved service offer for the benefit all our residents.

- **As Social hubs:** Libraries will increase and expand their current range of events and activities, signpost to local services by increased partnering with local groups, host drop-in sessions that support health and wellbeing and integrate seamlessly with partners in new co-located spaces in the heart of communities.
- **As Learning hubs:** Libraries will continue to offer a great range of books for all ages to build literacy and a love of reading as well as free access to IT and information all to support lifelong learning. The service will expand that offer by co-designing with local communities to provide greater access to new services, courses and resources to increase skills by working much more in partnership with local and national education providers to provide greater choice and opportunity for residents.
- **As Cultural hubs:** Libraries will utilise increased and improved flexible library spaces to deliver a more diverse range of events, performances and exhibitions, providing a focal point for community cultural life. This will encourage people to stay longer, supported with improved refreshment and toilet facilities.
- **As Economic Enablers:** Libraries will work with local and national partners to support business start-ups, SMEs and inventors to support high street regeneration. This will include the practical discovery of new technology, e.g., 3D printing and scanning, so libraries cement their places as community anchors, accessible to all, supporting wellbeing, ensuring no-one is left behind.

Surrey Arts recently held a gala concert featuring 350 young people, including Up Orchestra (an inclusive orchestra for young people), Together at Home (an online group for young people whose first language is Arabic), and Just So Singers (an inclusive choir for young people with additional needs).

Feedback from parents; *"I just wanted to say a huge thank you for the incredible gala concert you put together. It was honestly the most wonderful thing I have ever seen and a truly humbling experience."*
"You gave them an opportunity to be more than a label and the assumed limitations that come with that."

We are in the process of planning an Arts & Culture Festival, 'Connect to Culture', taking place in July in Redhill and Staines with a focus on skills development and providing an opportunity to undertake some early testing of ideas through co-design with young people, building on feedback gathered from 267 young people in Redhill/Merstham and 650 from Staines/Stamwell on what they would like to see more of in their areas, which indicates in both cases more creative/cultural activity as well as support into careers in the arts.

Surrey Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS): His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service's (HMICFRS) third full inspection of SFRS is currently underway and we look forward to hearing their comments and recommendations. In 2021, SFRS undertook an independent review of its culture and

an action plan to address areas for improvement was put in place. A second review completed in December 2022 showed a positive direction of travel for the service.

Investment in the redevelopment of Reigate fire station is seeking Cabinet approval this month. The project will deliver a new facility which will be able to accommodate the larger advanced technology fire appliances and improve the working environment for staff. Plans to redevelop Chobham and Lingfield fire stations are also well underway with works due to being later this year and options are being developed for new training facilities and the provision of a new firehouse at Wray Park. Bespoke personal protective equipment and specialist 4 x 4 vehicles have been procured to fight wildfires this summer.

In March the Youth Engagement Scheme Team hosted another week-long course at Leatherhead Fire Station for young people at risk of exclusion from school. 723 young people have now graduated from these courses which are early intervention schemes to help young people make better choices when they return to their place of education. Using firefighting activities such as running out a hose, wearing breathing apparatus and using ladders, the course aims to increase the young person's self-esteem and resilience.

7

In addition to ongoing campaigns around fire prevention for residents and businesses, SFRS are actively seeking community volunteers to support the development of the services' new community plan, which will come into effect in 2025. Volunteers will be asked to attend focus groups and take part in surveys. To sign up or to join, residents can visit SFRS's social media accounts and follow the links. People living or working near a Surrey Fire Station can also become On-Call Firefighters to help make their own communities safer. The dates for On-Call training nights are listed on the SFRS website, along with more information on the role and training offered, or residents can visit a local Fire Station and chat to the crew.

Serious Youth Violence - Surrey's Safer Communities Programme: SCC have worked in partnership with Surrey Police, the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner and SFRS to provide Year 6 teachers with updated, trauma-informed resources to deliver community safety messaging to primary school children. The innovative materials are an enhancement of the PSHE curriculum, in line with Surrey Healthy Schools, and will teach pupils how to stay safe and build important life skills in an engaging and informative way. A primary school teacher and SENCO assistant described the materials as "*an amazing set of resources*" that she believes will positively impact a large number of young people.

Ellie Vesey-Thompson, the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner, said: "*I am really excited to support the launch of this brilliant programme, that will directly enhance the support that teachers across the county can access from the whole Community Safety partnership in Surrey. We are really pleased that the new materials ... are focused on the early practical skills and resilience that individuals can take into life to tackle a range of situations. I hope these will help deliver memorable lessons that lead to building healthy relationships, discussions on making healthy choices that reduce the vulnerabilities that criminals exploit, and the simple message that the police and others are there for you when you need them.*"

Anti-Social Behaviour: In response to the launch of the Government's Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Action Plan, the Community Safety team are taking a proactive approach, working alongside Surrey Police, the Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), and district/borough community safety leads. Key partners are meeting this month to consider the plan and Surrey's preparedness for delivering commitments. A forward plan is already in place to provide refresher training exploring ASB in all its guises to ensure we are the best position to tackle ASB through prevention and enforcement using the range of tools and powers available across the partnership.

Trading Standards have been working to protect young people from unsafe vapes; sales have risen rapidly, with marketing targeting younger people and many products uncompliant with safety legislation. The service has dealt with over 70 complaints about illegal sales, carried out 9 under-age sale test purchasing operations and seized over 5,500 non-compliant vapes.

In conclusion: I hope these snapshots have helped give a flavour of just some of the work being undertaken to support our communities as we work with them towards a vision of Surrey we can all be proud of. It is impossible to mention and credit the many dedicated staff working so hard for, and alongside, our residents, but I am grateful to them all. We must never lose sight of the people we serve and the importance of our Empowered and Thriving Communities agenda to ensure that no-one is left behind.