

CHAIR/CHAIRMEN'S STATEMENTS TO COUNCIL

Councillor Barry Nash

Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee

During this last year COVID has impacted significantly on the work of Community & Wellbeing. The implications and impact of COVID goes to the heart of what Community & Wellbeing does; supporting our communities.

This disruption resulted in cancelling the June 2020 Committee, as the Council focused on rising to the critical challenge of supporting our residents, particularly those who were shielding and most vulnerable during what were possibly the darkest days of the pandemic. It is important to recognise the significant role of all council staff and Members during these challenging times in supporting our most vulnerable residents.

Local hospitals and local voluntary organisations

Following NHS public consultation at the October 2020 meeting, the Committee had the opportunity to consider the eventual decision made by the NHS Trust to build a new multi-million pound acute hospital close to this borough in Sutton, to serve our residents. The Committee also noted that 85% of existing services would continue to be provided locally at Epsom Hospital and that Epsom Hospital would also benefit from a major investment, ensuring the hospital continued to serve our residents for many years to come.

At the recent meeting of the Health Liaison Panel it became clear that other services will continue on top of the 85% discussed in October 2020.

In March 2021 the Committee recognised the fantastic work done by local voluntary organisations in supporting our vulnerable residents during the pandemic. The Committee agreed the continued support to these voluntary organisations and recognised their invaluable work for our residents through ongoing financial grants for another year.

COVID impacts

In November 2020 the committee also had to make difficult decisions about keeping Council commercial venues closed due to the pandemic restrictions. These included The Playhouse, Ewell Court House and Bourne Hall. In addition, it was agreed that due to the circumstances, the Surrey Youth Games in 2021 were unviable and that we, along with the other Surrey District & Borough Councils, would have to defer our participation until 2022.

Parks and Open Spaces

The borough parks and open spaces have provided a crucial outlet for our residents supporting both physical and mental wellbeing during the pandemic, which has highlighted the importance of our green spaces.

As a result of the increased usage of our open spaces during COVID, we have seen an increase in anti-social behaviour. We have endeavoured to work quickly with our partners to address these issues as quickly as possible. One example of this is the recent installation of kissing gates at the Hook Road Arena entrance points, to prevent further ASB incidents from quad bikers.

Also, there has been additional emptying of litter bins and increased litter picking, as well as an awareness campaign around the dangers of Nitrous Oxide canisters. Not only do they cause a serious harm to health, they also require an extensive clean-up operation.

Lastly, the High Street Task Force has been redirected to support our parks and open spaces, helping to keep them safe places to visit which has been a valuable resource during these challenging times.

Homelessness

During COVID there has been a concerted effort to reduce rough sleeping across the country including the Government's "Everyone In" programme. Whilst this has been successful and has saved lives, it has also increased the already high numbers of homeless households within the borough. As the pandemic continues the ongoing threats from COVID remain, including the risk of significant increases in unemployment, particularly amongst our young residents across the borough.

Given that many new people presenting as homeless are single, the Council has successfully applied for government funding to create a new specialist role in our Housing Services Team, focussed exclusively on helping our single homeless residents out of temporary accommodation and into suitable "move-on" accommodation.

The Council has also responded to this increase in homelessness by acquiring 24 units of new temporary accommodation from Sanctuary Housing at Defoe Court in East Street Epsom. This new accommodation will be used flexibly to accommodate households of differing sizes within the borough, so that they are close to support networks, transport and able to access employment.

Skills Hub

Building on the success of the recently launched Skills Hub, the Council has also submitted an application to the Department of Work and Pensions for funding to set up a Youth Hub to address rising numbers of young Universal Credit claimants within the borough and to actively prevent even higher levels of unemployment and homelessness.

Councillor Neil Dallen
Chair of the Environment and Safe Communities Committee

Climate Change

We are now in the second year of the Climate Change Action Plan and despite Covid we are progressing largely to plan and I would like to record my congratulations and thanks to the officers concerned.

In the first year of the plan we achieved completion of 22 out of 35 actions and partially achieved another 8. The remaining 5 actions along with the partially completed ones have been moved to this year's actions.

An updated report is due to come to Environment and Safe Communities committee next month.

Waste and Recycling

The government has published a long awaited second consultation on DRS (Deposit Return Scheme) and "Extended Producer Responsibility" proposals. The DRS consultation states that it is unlikely to be enacted until late 2024 at the earliest.

Safe Communities

The Epsom and Ewell Community Safety Partnership is now set up and picking up its responsibilities including reviewing JAGs (Joint Action Groups) and Community Triggers.

It brings together a number of agencies including the Police, Fire Service, Rosebery Housing, Business Improvement District (BID), Surrey Heartlands, relevant voluntary group representatives along with Borough and County Council officers.

The Joint Enforcement Team (JET) approach has considerably improved the level and co-ordination of enforcement among partners. It has helped get results from JAGs as well as assisting in the Covid challenges with Covid marshals in the High Street and visits to various businesses to advise and/or enforce.

Mobile CCTV

The new mobile CCTV units are now operational and have already had some success with capturing images of suspected drug activity. These have been passed on to Surrey Police.

Councillor Eber Kington
Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee

Covid 19 Response

Once again I must begin my Statement with thanks to all our staff for their continued work for the community during these extraordinary times. Although the Government's recent announcements in regard to its Road Map point to a continually improving situation, as a Council we still have an important role in supporting vulnerable residents, encouraging compliance with the Covid-19 regulations and supporting local businesses as they recover from the financial challenges of the lockdowns.

Most members of staff are now undertaking their normal duties, but many are still working from home whilst others are working in the community, observing covid safe practices to ensure they, and our residents, stay safe. In addition, some members of staff continue to have important roles in support of the local and national work being undertaken to get us all through the pandemic.

Going forward, members of staff will have key roles in supporting our Build Back Better plans for the Council and the Borough. My thanks to you all, for your work over the past 12 months and for your on-going support for what needs to be done in the future.

I would also like to thank our residents, many of whom have taken on volunteering roles to support local voluntary groups, or have been part of the community effort to ensure that we all stay safe and that our environment is protected. There are many examples of individuals checking on neighbours, supporting the work of Age Concern and the Food Bank for example, setting up local support networks, undertaking individual and regular litter picking, and supporting the local vaccination programme. Collectively those selfless acts of support and action have made a real difference to our community's response to the pandemic. Again, my thanks to you all.

Town Centre Celebratory Art Work

Over the next few months the Epsom Market Place will be enhanced by two new art works celebrating Epsom's history.

Emily Davison is a key figure in the campaign for women's right to vote and the statue by sculptor Christine Charlesworth commemorates, not just her tragic death at the 1913 Derby, but also her intelligence, courage and dedication in serving the cause of women's rights. The Borough Council has contributed to the installation of the statue with both funding and Officer support for the legal and installation negotiations and paperwork. A covid-secure unveiling of the statue is planned for the summer.

The Horse Racing industry is a key part of Epsom's History, and a Derby Hall of Fame will also be installed in the Market Place this summer. Starting from the Evocation of Speed, it will consist of two lines of brass roundels celebrating some of the key horses, jockeys and trainers associated with the Epsom Derby since its beginning. The list has been compiled with the support of the local racing community and starts, of course, with Lord Derby.

Welcome Back Fund

The Government has announced a new Welcome Back Fund to help councils boost tourism, improve green spaces and provide more outdoor seating areas, markets and food stall pop-ups, giving people more, safer options to reunite with friends and relatives. The Borough Council has been awarded £71,063 which will be used in some of the following ways.

- Investing in street planting, parks, green spaces and seating areas to make high streets as beautiful and welcoming as possible.
- Publicity campaigns and holding street markets and festivals to support local businesses.
- Installing signage and floor markings to encourage social distancing and safety.
- Environmental clean-ups and removing graffiti.