Leader’s report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

November 2016

The first 6 months of the new Administration has provided continuity of service but also a renewed focus on our 3 key priorities:

- Increased affordable housing
- A car park review
- Pro-active planning enforcement

In all three areas, work is underway to improve our current performance and meet the increasing pressures we face as a Council.

We have pursued and initiated work on major service areas such as the Joint Waste Contract, CCTV maintenance and monitoring and we have addressed service failings evident in the Green Spaces contract. All of the details for these issues follow or are dealt with by my Cabinet colleagues in their reports.

We have also driven renewal through the launch of a new website in July, replenished Churchfields Recreation Ground and opened Cowey Sale toilets and café (at last!)

In the last 6 months, we have been supportive of Councillor Elmer’s efforts and the work of the Heathrow Task and Finish Group to put more pressure on Heathrow and this support will continue irrespective of the whether the Government finally approve development.

We have also been working closely with our local businesses, many of which are international, in addressing their concerns on underinvestment and infrastructure around our key industrial areas within the Borough.

Our budget position remains challenging and the Portfolio Holder for Resources covers this in his report. However, we are compiling the 2017/18 revenue budget in the context of the MTFS, developing a Capital Programme that will renew the Borough’s infrastructure and we have brought forward property investment opportunities that will underpin our future financial position and, in one case, provide additional affordable housing. Looking to the future we have also responded to the Government’s consultation on Business Rates Retention.

However, by far, our biggest challenge for us as Members and to our communities remains the need for more housing – certainly more affordable housing and the dilemma of where we can put it while at the same time preserving the character and environment of our Borough. This will challenge us all in the months to come.
Current key projects

**Devolution**
The timetable for negotiating a Devolution deal across the 3SC area has been extended following the changes in Government following the EU Referendum. There has been a slight loss of momentum as the new Government clarifies its commitment to devolution deals. However, the preparation of a 3SC devolution deal continues with regular Leader’s meetings and separate Chief Executive meetings. The current timetable still shows a likely draft deal for sign off by partners in March 2017. I have yet to remain convinced that devolution in its current form, is the most cost effective and most efficient way to deliver infrastructure and give accountability to our residents.

**Waterside Drive Sports Hub & Stompond Lane**
Works commenced on site in March 2016. We continue to remediate the land via a complex groundwork package. Subject to inclement weather conditions or any unforeseen objects being found in the landfill site it is envisaged that we will have completed the remediation work by January 2017. The Sports Hub is scheduled to open in September 2017. Meanwhile, the purchasers of Stompond Lane are developing their site development proposals prior to the submission of a planning application. A legal challenge to the planning permission granted for Waterside Drive has been made to the High Court. Although the court set down a December date for hearing the case, the receipt of a new planning application for the site has caused the Council to apply to the court to adjourn the hearing.

Key achievements

**Leisure Live**
Leisure Live took place on Saturday 9 July 2016 in Hersham, with an estimated 3,000 people in attendance. The event was vibrant, engaging and successful with over 40 local clubs, groups and businesses all showcasing their leisure and wellbeing related activities and services to our residents throughout the day.

**Support for businesses**
So far this year we have supported 18 Elmbridge Civic Improvement Fund applications, and 5 start-up applications. In addition, our promotion of the Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership Local Growth Hub business advice service has resulted in the highest number of enquiries across the LEP from Elmbridge businesses. We arranged the Enjoy Elmbridge Day on 2 July 2016, which included co-ordination amongst out town centres, increased footfall and awareness of our independent retailers. In addition to all this work, we have also held the annual Elmbridge Retailer of the Year awards to help promote and celebrate our local retailers and town centres.

Key challenges

**Evidence review of Planning policies**
The Government has imposed new legislation which means we must rethink our local plan. An evidence base review was completed and 43 out of 48 members attended briefings in July and August. LDS approved by Cabinet in September. Strategic Options consultation is being prepared with oversight.
from the Local Plan Working Group. Consultation paper scheduled to be considered by Cabinet in November with consultation starting in December.

**Affordable homes delivery**
Due to delays in construction of two of the developments due to deliver the majority of new affordable homes in 2016/17, it will not be possible to achieve the target of 40 additional affordable homes this year.

The likely number of additional affordable homes to be delivered this year is around five, although the other 35 homes being delivered next year, rather than this. An empty homes review has resulted in the number of recorded long-term empty homes falling by 112 from 608 at start of July to 496 at start of October. Further work will be undertaken to understand why these properties are empty and to help reduce the number further. The Affordable Housing Member Panel is being relaunched and work is underway to increase the supply pipeline and deal with increasing levels of homelessness.

**Green Spaces Contract**
From mid-August TLG grounds maintenance contract showed improved quality and service delivery following the meeting of the EBC & MVDC Chief Executives with the CEO of TLG. The Green Spaces Team have continued with the micro-monitoring of the contract which includes with daily updates and joint site inspections with TLG. The Cabinet are considering alternative options for 2017/18.

**Areas for action/ Forward planning and next projects etc.**

**CCTV monitoring arrangements**
The Overview and Scrutiny Community Safety Working Group has recommended that we procure a combined monitoring and maintenance contract for 3 years starting in April 2017 that includes 24/7 active monitoring. We are looking for a Council decision in December 2016.

**Universal credit**
Working in partnership with Citizens Advice, Paragon Housing, Job Centre Plus and Surrey County Council, we are helping to get residents prepared for the introduction of Universal credit. We are pleased that two of our staff members have become Universal Credit champions, and look forward to working with those affected by the changes.

**New Council Vision**
We will soon look to update our Council Vision, to ensure that our goals are in line with our resident’s needs and to ensure good value for money for them. This will be a big work area, and will impact on the future development of the Council for years to come.