

Leader Statement to the Executive 6 June 2019

Members. Please accept my apologies for not attending this evening. This week is my 36th Wedding Anniversary and I am on holiday with Elly.

I did want to make this statement to explain how I intend to run the business of the Council.

Members will be aware of the convention I introduced two years ago for the Executive which enables any Member to give me notice, by 5pm on the Tuesday before the meeting on Thursday, and attend, ask questions or make representations about any business before the Executive. I have done this to ensure that all Members of the Council, from all parties have an opportunity to contribute to the business of the Executive; this arrangement will continue.

The change to “no overall control’ means I need to do more to ensure the business of the Council continues to be done efficiently and that the views of the four political parties are taken into account in consideration of business and the drafting of reports. I have therefore set up a “Leaders Meeting” to which I have invited all Group Leaders and the Deputies of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Groups to reasonably reflect the political balance of the Council; the first meeting will take place on 12 June. The Leaders Meeting will not have any Executive power but will be a forum within which future business, issues of concern and priorities can be discussed. This will enable Officers to prepare reports appropriately and hopefully enable the Council to continue to act in the interests of local residents and to avoid us all consuming too much time on “party politics’ solely for the sake of it. I am grateful that Group Leaders have accepted the invitation. In order that all Councillors have direct access to me as Leader I will be continuing the practice of offering all Members the chance to come and have a private meeting with me

I have also reminded Officers and fellow Portfolio Holders that the Shadow Portfolio Holders must be formally briefed on the business of the Council. I know this has worked well in the past for many areas of our business, such as Recreation, Environment and Economic Development; I want to ensure that it works fully across all areas. I have the full support of Portfolio Holders and I am hopeful that the shadow will also support this.

I set out at the Council the agreed Council priorities upon which we will concentrate. To help progress the Environmental issues I have asked that the Climate Change Working Group review the Council’s approved

Woking 2050 and Natural Woking strategies and advise the Executive of the actions it may be possible to undertake to accelerate the delivery of the strategies. I will also review with Officers how we ensure that Members and the public are more aware of the extensive work we have been doing and are planning to do as part of the 2019/20 Business Plan approved by the Council.

The approach we have taken to the awarding of grants has highlighted that whilst the system works well for the majority of the £1 million we give to good causes each year, there are two significant grants we award which need more scrutiny. These are Woking Community Transport and Citizens Advice Woking. In order that there is more time for debate I intend to invite the Shadow Portfolio Holder for grants to the initial meeting that I have with the Portfolio Holder and Officers in October. I would also welcome suggestions from Councillors about how we can better scrutinise these two bodies to ensure we get good value for money for our residents.

The Council commitment to deliver more affordable homes and to provide help to residents in need is most positive but perhaps not recognised by all because we've just got on with doing it, such as Moor Lane, but we need to communicate more widely on what the Council is doing. This was highlighted to me when the Local Government Association visited Woking and was astounded by the depth and breadth of what we are doing and said "why aren't you telling everyone about it".

I hope tonight, and later at Council, that Members will support the proposal for Children Centres. This is accompanied by the innovative proposal we are developing with the NHS and Surrey County Council to incorporate a Mid Wife and Family centre in the town centre Library which I hope will be completed this Municipal Year.

Finally I would like to lend my support to the Motion from Cllr Barker about the review of Executive arrangements. The current arrangements have been in place since 2000 so a review of them is well overdue. I think we can recommend to Council that the Motion is supported and a Working Group formed, (2 Conservatives, 2 Liberal Democrat's, 1 Labour and 1 Independent Member) to consider the issues. To avoid delay I suggest we put forward names at the July Council.