

One of my responsibilities as Leader of the Council is chairing the St Helens People's Board, which meets regularly and brings together representatives from the council and local private, public and voluntary sectors including Merseyside Police, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, the local NHS, social care, GPs, Torus and others.

At last week's meeting we heard an update on our integrated care system St Helens Cares, had a presentation from the NHS providers of our 0-19 Healthy Child Programme, and received the Safer St Helens and Healthwatch annual reports. There's a huge amount of collaborative work taking place in St Helens day in, day out, and I encourage any residents interested in finding out more to have a look at the council website or get in touch for more information.

Also on last week's agenda, and perhaps most importantly right now, was a discussion about the cost of living crisis and what we can do to help residents, businesses and our communities through the coming months.

#StHelensTogether was the name we gave to our efforts at the start of the pandemic to coordinate support and volunteers, and that collaborative approach has remained. As we face another crisis we'll be stepping up efforts with our partners to help our borough.

But we do so in very difficult circumstances. This week the Chancellor confirmed that public service spending cuts of £18billion are coming. Meanwhile a poll of metropolitan councils has found that two-thirds say they either face a 'threat' to or 'extreme pressure' on key service delivery over the next year, and St Helens is among them.

I wish local opposition councillors, who take every chance to bash the council but too often fail to point the finger at government, would acknowledge the existential threat facing essential services.

It's easy but wrong to blame councils for service cuts, just like it's wrong to blame GPs for lack of appointments, schools for lack of resources, or the NHS for lack of beds. Point the finger where it belongs – Tory HQ.

Through #StHelensTogether we'll do our best to help people through these difficult times, and there is lots of advice available online at www.sthelens.gov.uk/sthelenstogether including information about energy bills, council tax and more. This will continue to be updated with further information from partners in the weeks ahead.

Best wishes to all Star readers.