Your serene Highness, Lords, ladies and gentlemen good afternoon and I am delighted on behalf of the Community Foundation for Surrey to welcome you here today to celebrate their 20th anniversary. Those of you who have seen me speak before during my Shrieval year will no doubt recognise my daughter’s oboe stand, a vital prop when having to hold a microphone, notes and a glass of wine whilst carrying a hat, and protocol states that I have to carry my hat, it is never to be worn, but I am, at least metaphorically speaking, wearing three hats today:-

Firstly, as High Sheriff, I am, together with the Lord Lieutenant, the King’s representative in Surrey and one of my functions is to support and acclaim charitable organisations across the County for the work they do, and no one is across the County more than the Community Foundation for Surrey, or CF Surrey as I will say from now on to significantly shorten my speech.

And wearing my second hat as the longest serving current Trustee of CFSurrey, I would most definitely like to declare my support and acclaim for this wonderful organisation and the extraordinary work it undertakes on behalf of our local community. As a little segway, the reason I became involved with CFSurrey was due to my late mother-in-law, Judy, who happened to meet Wendy Varcoe, our founding CEO, who I am delighted to say is here today; and Judy told Wendy that her son-in-law had recently sold his business and her daughter needed to get him out from under her feet. So I met Wendy, who was a very strong persuader, and she co-opted me on the spot and here I am nearly 9 years later, for which my wife, Suzanne, is profoundly grateful.

And for my third hat, I have for the past 8 1/2 years been a Panel Member (serving as Chair for 8 of those years) of Guildford Philanthropy, one of the Area Funds administered by CFSurrey.

It is in this latter role that I first came across Robert and Tanya, and more recently their son Zack, our wonderful hosts today. I set up a Corporate Ambassador initiative in 2019 to encourage local enterprises to join with Guildford Philanthropy and give back to their local community, and their charitable trust is one of 46 local organisations which have since come on board, for which I am extremely grateful, as I am for their wonderful generosity in hosting us today.

CFs are amazing things. There are 47 across the UK, and collectively, since the first Community Foundation was set up 50 years ago they have distributed an astonishing £2.1bn in grants, connecting those that are able to give with those in need, being a stable and reliable charitable partner in each of their respective local areas. Our Community Foundation is one of the younger ones, set up in 2005, and I am delighted to say that not only is the founding CEO, Wendy, here, but so is one of our founding trustees, and our first vice-president, Sir Stephen Lamport, and I am sure both Wendy and Stephen would testify as to how far CFSurrey has come in its first 20 years.

You can obviously measure growth by the number of grants that have been awarded and how much the endowment has grown (and I will indeed relay those metrics shortly); but equally as important is the research undertaken, the knowledge gained, the trust engendered and the leadership role assumed which only comes from being a staunch dependable partner to all parts of our local community as we have been now for two decades.

CFSurrey encourages and champions three collaborative super powers:-

The Power of Working Together

By combining our limited resources and sharing knowledge, data, experience and ideas we can collectively make a more impactful difference. CFSurrey itself has been a beneficiary of this approach, with SCC providing a contribution towards core costs for the first 12 years of our existence, and just as importantly we have been given free office space by a succession of businesses and local authorities; and free payroll services for the past 20 years from Azets who I am delighted to say are also here today. Without this collective endeavour we would not be able to support our community to the level that we currently do.

Power of giving well

It is one thing wanting to give, but to know how to give well requires an understanding of the various areas of need. Dr Helen Bowcock produced a research paper for us called Hidden Surrey in 2008, which shone a light on the hidden corners of our county and helped both residents and those from outside of Surrey, realise that despite overall being an affluent part of the country, pockets of deprivation existed. Even today there are areas where child poverty stands at some 40% and life expectancy can vary by as much as 10 years within a half mile radius with the people living in both absolute and relative poverty being masked by the overall per-capita wealth in the county. The Impact Report 2025, being launched today continues that legacy of demonstrating a profound understanding of the needs in Surrey, a recognition of the strengths of the voluntary sector to respond to those needs and an acknowledgement of our ability to bring donors together to help remedy those needs.

The Power of Collective Giving

CFSurrey understands that philanthropy can be encouraged by the provision of match-funding by local authorities, companies, individual donors and central government initiatives like the Community First programme. People can see their donation going further and the impact being greater and are therefore encouraged to dig deeper to help.

CFSurrey acknowledges there is a need to fund organisations in a supportive way, covering reasonable overheads and core costs and not just new initiatives. We understand that funding for multiple years can help a charity plan and not live hand to mouth. We will consider repeat funding if a project is working well or look to help organisations undergo a step change in their operations if their model is successful; and we will also consider measures that will help improve their financial stability.

But not all giving is necessarily financial. CFSurrey also provides a Funder Plus service supporting organisations in need of business or financial skills, which is administered through our own volunteer network sharing their accumulated personal knowledge and experience. Giving that knowledge, contacts, ideas and time can be as valuable as a grant award.

So how does all that giving add up:- In the last financial year CFSurrey awarded over £2.8m of grants and has overall in our first 20 years awarded some £26.7m. Over the same time period it has amassed £17m in endowments across over 80 funds. These are so called forever funds as the capital is invested and the income generated used to make grants in perpetuity. And how many individual beneficiary contacts do you think CFSurrey has made in 20 years, bearing in mind many individuals have benefitted numerous times, it is a quite astonishing 571,613,912 approximately!

Key themes of impact over these first 20 years include- mental health & well-being, children & young people, older people and isolation, poverty & hardship, and community cohesion and equality; and we are always looking for other areas of need which may have been neglected and require vital support.

And so now having negotiated our teenage years and with huge thanks to our incredible staff, trustees, vice presidents, Ambassadors, panel members and volunteers, past and present, we have reached the maturity of being 20 years old.

With the continued support of our generous fund owners, local authorities, businesses and individual donors, together with hopefully a number of new benefactors, we can look forward to having even greater impact in the years ahead. And our wonderful, dedicated staff, spurred on by Beccy’s indefatigable inspiring leadership, will continue to showcase CFSurrey as a shining example of thought leadership, collective philanthropy and purposeful-giving.

May I therefore ask you raise your glasses as I propose a toast to the Community Foundation for Surrey.