

BUDGET COUNCIL
6 MARCH 2019

(7.15 pm - 10.11 pm)

PRESENT The Mayor, Councillor Mary Curtin
 The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Geraldine Stanford

Councillors Agatha Mary Akyigyina OBE, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Eloise Bailey, Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Hina Bokhari, Kelly Braund, Mike Brunt, Adam Bush, Omar Bush, Ben Butler, Tobin Byers, Billy Christie, David Chung, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Pauline Cowper, Stephen Crowe, David Dean, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Anthony Fairclough, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Edward Gretton, Joan Henry, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Janice Howard, Natasha Irons, Mark Kenny, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Paul Kohler, Rebecca Lanning, Najeeb Latif, Edith Macauley MBE, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Simon McGrath, Nick McLean, Oonagh Moulton, Aidan Mundy, Hayley Ormrod, Dennis Pearce, Owen Pritchard, Carl Quilliam, David Simpson CBE, Marsie Skeete, Peter Southgate, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward, Martin Whelton, Dickie Wilkinson and David Williams

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest made.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS TWO MEETINGS HELD ON 6 FEBRUARY
 2019 (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the ordinary and extraordinary meetings held on 6 February 2019 are agreed as an accurate record.

The Leader of the Council then led a tribute to Councillor Oonagh Moulton, who had stepped down as Leader of the Opposition at the last meeting of the Council. Councillor Nick McLean, Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Anthony Fairclough, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group and Councillor Peter Southgate, Leader of the Merton Park Ward Independent Residents all spoke, paying tribute to Councillor Moulton's time as Opposition Group Leader. Councillor Edith Macauley also spoke, giving her thanks.

4 BUSINESS PLAN 2019-23 (Agenda Item 4)

The Mayor outlined the procedure for this Budget Council meeting. She also reminded the Council that all budget related decisions, including proposed amendments, were required to be recorded within the minutes with a list of the names of those who voted for or against the decision or who abstained from voting. To accommodate that, a roll call vote would be taken for the substantive budget motion and any amendments to it.

At the invitation of the Mayor, the Director of Corporate Services presented the Business Plan 2019-2023. The Director then responded to questions from Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Oonagh Moulton, Simon McGrath, Owen Pritchard, David Simpson, Paul Kohler, Pauling Cowper, Janice Howard, Russell Makin, Brenda Fraser, James Holmes, Abdul Latif and Nigel Benbow.

The Leader of the Council presented the Business Plan 2019-23 and formally moved the recommendations in the report whilst making his budget speech to Council, a copy of which is appended to the minutes as Appendix A.

Councillor Tobin Byers formally seconded the recommendations, and reserved his right to speak.

The Mayor then invited the opposition Group Leaders in turn to respond to the Budget proposal and the Business Plan.

The Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Nick McLean addressed the meeting and his speech is attached to the minutes, as Appendix B. As part of his speech, he presented the proposed amendment to the Business Plan 2019-23.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor Anthony Fairclough, addressed the meeting, and his speech is attached to the minutes, as Appendix C. As part of his speech, he presented the proposed amendments to the Business Plan 2019-23.

The Leader of the Merton Park Ward Independent Residents Group, Councillor Peter Southgate, addressed the meeting and his speech is attached to the minutes, as Appendix D.

The following members of the Cabinet addressed the meeting: Councillors Mark Allison, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah and Kelly Braund.

The Mayor then invited members to move proposed amendments to the Business Plan.

Councillor Nick McLean moved the Conservative amendment which was seconded by Councillor David Williams.

Councillor Anthony Fairclough moved the Liberal Democrat amendment 1 which was seconded by Councillor Eloise Bailey.

Councillor Anthony Fairclough moved the Liberal Democrat amendment 2 which was seconded by Councillor Eloise Bailey.

Councillor Anthony Fairclough moved the Liberal Democrat amendment 3 which was seconded by Councillor Eloise Bailey.

Councillor Anthony Fairclough moved the Liberal Democrat amendment 4 which was seconded by Councillor Eloise Bailey.

The Mayor then opened up the general debate on the proposed amendments and on the proposed substantive Business Plan. The following members spoke in the debate: Councillors Billy Christie, Hayley Ormrod, Marsie Skeete, Daniel Holden, Carl Quilliam, Nick Draper, David Dean, Eleanor Stringer, Stephen Crowe, John Dehaney, Edward Gretton, Joan Henry, Adam Bush, Dave Ward, Omar Bush, Hina Bokhari, Rebecca Lanning, Andrew Howard, Sally Kenny, Paul Kohler, Dennis Pearce, Mark Kenny, Natasha Irons, Aidan Mundy, Ben Butler, Laxmi Attawar, Martin Whelton, David Williams and, finally, Tobin Byers.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Mayor called for a roll-call vote on the Conservative amendment to the Business Plan 2019-2023. Voting was as follows:

Votes in favour: Councillors Eloise Bailey, Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Hina Bokhari, Adam Bush, Omar Bush, Stephen Crowe, David Dean, Anthony Fairclough, Edward Gretton, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Janice Howard, Paul Kohler, Najeeb Latif, Simon McGrath, Nick McLean, Oonagh Moulton, Hayley Ormrod, Carl Quilliam, David Simpson and David Williams (23)

Votes against: Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Kelly Braund, Mike Brunt, Ben Butler, Tobin Byers, Billy Christie, David Chung, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Pauline Cowper, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Joan Henry, Natasha Irons, Mark Kenny, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Rebecca Lanning, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Aidan Mundy, Dennis Pearce, Owen Pritchard, Marsie Skeete, Peter Southgate, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward, Martin Whelton, Dickie Wilkinson, the Deputy Mayor Councillor Geraldine Stanford and the Mayor, Councillor Mary Curtin (37)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

The Mayor then called for a roll-call vote on the Liberal Democrat amendment 1 to the Business Plan 2019-2023. Voting was as follows:

Votes in favour: Councillors Eloise Bailey, Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Hina Bokhari, Adam Bush, Omar Bush, Stephen Crowe, David Dean, Anthony Fairclough, Edward Gretton, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Janice Howard, Paul Kohler, Najeeb Latif, Simon McGrath, Nick McLean, Oonagh Moulton, Hayley Ormrod, Carl Quilliam, David Simpson and David Williams (23)

Votes against: Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Kelly Braund, Mike Brunt, Ben Butler, Tobin Byers, Billy Christie, David Chung, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Pauline Cowper, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Joan Henry, Natasha Irons, Mark Kenny, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Rebecca Lanning, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Aidan Mundy, Dennis Pearce, Owen Pritchard, Marsie Skeete, Peter Southgate, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward, Martin Whelton, Dickie Wilkinson, the Deputy Mayor Councillor Geraldine Stanford and the Mayor, Councillor Mary Curtin (37)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

The Mayor then called for a roll-call vote on the Liberal Democrat amendment 2 to the Business Plan 2019-2023. Voting was as follows:

Votes in favour: Councillors Eloise Bailey, Hina Bokhari, Anthony Fairclough, Paul Kohler, Simon McGrath and Carl Quilliam (6)

Votes against: Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Kelly Braund, Mike Brunt, Ben Butler, Tobin Byers, Billy Christie, David Chung, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Pauline Cowper, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Joan Henry, Natasha Irons, Mark Kenny, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Rebecca Lanning, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Aidan Mundy, Dennis Pearce, Owen Pritchard, Marsie Skeete, Peter Southgate, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward, Martin Whelton, Dickie Wilkinson, the Deputy Mayor Councillor Geraldine Stanford and the Mayor, Councillor Mary Curtin (37)

Not voting: Councillors Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Adam Bush, Omar Bush, Stephen Crowe, David Dean, Edward Gretton, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Janice Howard, Najeeb Latif, Nick McLean, Oonagh Moulton, Hayley Ormrod, David Simpson and David Williams (17)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

Councillor David Williams advised that, due to the next amendment relating to the establishment of a Landlord Licensing scheme, he would be declaring an interest and leaving the chamber as he was a landlord of a property in the borough.

The Monitoring Officer advised that in his view Councillor Williams had no interest to declare. As with voting on council tax, it was likely there would be a significant number of people affected and he could therefore remain in the chamber and vote.

Councillor James Holmes sought clarification that the same advice applied to him, as a landlord in the borough. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that his view was that there was no interest to declare.

The Mayor then called for a roll-call vote on the Liberal Democrat amendment 3 to the Business Plan 2019-2023. Voting was as follows:

Votes in favour: Councillors Eloise Bailey, Hina Bokhari, Anthony Fairclough, Paul Kohler, Simon McGrath and Carl Quilliam (6)

Votes against: Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Kelly Braund, Mike Brunt, Ben Butler, Tobin Byers, Billy Christie, David Chung, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Pauline Cowper, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Joan Henry, Natasha Irons, Mark Kenny, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Rebecca Lanning, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Aidan Mundy, Dennis Pearce, Owen Pritchard, Marsie Skeete, Peter Southgate, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward, Martin Whelton, Dickie Wilkinson, the Deputy Mayor Councillor Geraldine Stanford and the Mayor, Councillor Mary Curtin (37)

Not voting: Councillors Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Adam Bush, Omar Bush, Stephen Crowe, David Dean, Edward Gretton, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Janice Howard, Najeeb Latif, Nick McLean, Oonagh Moulton, Hayley Ormrod, David Simpson and David Williams (17)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

The Mayor then called for a roll-call vote on the Liberal Democrat amendment 4 to the Business Plan 2019-2023. Voting was as follows:

Votes in favour: Councillors Eloise Bailey, Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Hina Bokhari, Adam Bush, Omar Bush, Stephen Crowe, David Dean, Anthony Fairclough, Edward Gretton, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Janice Howard,

Paul Kohler, Najeeb Latif, Simon McGrath, Nick McLean, Oonagh Moulton, Hayley Ormrod, Carl Quilliam, David Simpson and David Williams (23)

Votes against: Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Kelly Braund, Mike Brunt, Ben Butler, Tobin Byers, Billy Christie, David Chung, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Pauline Cowper, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Joan Henry, Natasha Irons, Mark Kenny, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Rebecca Lanning, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Aidan Mundy, Dennis Pearce, Owen Pritchard, Marsie Skeete, Peter Southgate, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward, Martin Whelton, Dickie Wilkinson, the Deputy Mayor Councillor Geraldine Stanford and the Mayor, Councillor Mary Curtin (37)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

The Mayor then called for a roll-call vote on the substantive motion for the Business Plan 2019-23. Voting was as follows:

Votes in favour: Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Kelly Braund, Mike Brunt, Ben Butler, Tobin Byers, Billy Christie, David Chung, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Pauline Cowper, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Joan Henry, Natasha Irons, Mark Kenny, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Rebecca Lanning, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Aidan Mundy, Dennis Pearce, Owen Pritchard, Marsie Skeete, Peter Southgate, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward, Martin Whelton, Dickie Wilkinson, the Deputy Mayor Councillor Geraldine Stanford and the Mayor, Councillor Mary Curtin (37)

Votes against: Councillors Eloise Bailey, Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Hina Bokhari, Adam Bush, Omar Bush, Stephen Crowe, David Dean, Anthony Fairclough, Edward Gretton, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Janice Howard, Paul Kohler, Najeeb Latif, Simon McGrath, Nick McLean, Oonagh Moulton, Hayley Ormrod, Carl Quilliam, David Simpson and David Williams (23)

RESOLVED:

That the Council agrees the Business Plan 2019-23 including:

- A) the General Fund Budget;
- B) the Council Tax Strategy for 2019/20 equating to a Band D Council Tax of £1,227.82, which is an increase of below 5%, inclusive of 2% Adult Social Care flexibility;
- C) the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2019-2023;

- D) the Capital Investment Programme (as detailed in Annex 1 to the Capital Strategy);
- E) the Capital Strategy (Section 1, A)
- F) the Treasury Management Strategy (Section 1, A), including the detailed recommendations in that Section, incorporating the Prudential Indicators as set out in this report;
and agrees the formal resolutions as set out in Appendix 1 to the report as follows:

Revenue Report:

1. Members consider the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission set out in a separate report on the agenda (Item 6), and approve the proposed budget for 2019/20 set out in Section 2 of the revenue report, together with the proposed Council Tax levy in 2019/20.
2. That it be noted that at its meeting on 10 December 2018 the Council calculated its **Council Tax Base for the year as 74,951.7** in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012(SI 2012: 2914).
3. That it be noted that the Council calculated the **Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC) Tax Base for the year as 11,464.4** in accordance with regulation 6 of the Regulations, as the amounts of its Council Tax base for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.
4. That the Council agrees 4(a) - 4(i) below, which are calculated in accordance with Section 31A to 49B of the Localism Act 2011, amending Section 32 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
 - a) being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) (a) to (f) of the Act

	£m
Gross Revenue Expenditure of Service Committees Corporate Provisions	546.797
Amounts Payable to the Levying Bodies	(3.777)
Contribution to/(from) Financial Reserves	0.949
Gross Expenditure	(4.186)
	539.783

- b) being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) (a) to (d) of the Act

	£m
Gross Income	(447.413)

c) being the amount by which the aggregate at 4(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 4(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax Requirement for the year

	£m
Council Tax Requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2017/18 (including special expenses re WPCC)	92.370

d) being the aggregate of the sums which the Council estimates will be payable for the year into its General Fund in respect of revenue support grant, and baseline funding (NNDR) to constitute the Council's Settlement Funding Assessment

	£m
Revenue Support Grant including Transition Grant	0
Baseline funding NNDR inc. top-up & Section 31 Grant	(44.026)
Settlement Funding Assessment	(44.026)

e) being the amount at 4(c) above, divided by the amount for Council Tax Base at 2 above, calculated by the Council above, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including special items (WPCC)).

	£
Merton's General Band D Council Tax Levy (including properties within Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators area)	1,232.39

f) being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act

	£
Wimbledon and Putney Commons Special Levy	342,822

g) being the amount at 4(e) above, less the result given by dividing the amount at 4(f) above by the amount of the Council Tax Base at 2 above in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special items (WPCC special levy) relates.

	£
Merton's General Band D Council Tax Levy (excluding WPCC)	1,227.82

h) being the amounts given by adding to the amount at 4(g) above, the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in the area of Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators (WPCC) mentioned above at

4(f) divided by the amount at 3 above, calculated in accordance with Section 34(1) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in the area of WPCC.

	£
Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators Band D	1,257.72

i) being the amounts given by multiplying the amounts at 4(g) and 4(h) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

Part of the Council's Area	Valuation Bands							
	A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
	818.55	954.97	1091.40	1227.82	1500.67	1773.52	2046.37	2455.64
Parts inc. WPCC	838.48	978.23	1117.97	1,257.72	1,537.21	1,816.71	2,096.20	2,515.44

5. To note that the Greater London Authority have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each category of dwellings in the Council's area as indicated in the table below, and that the Council agrees the Council Tax levy for 2019/20 by taking the aggregate of 4(i) above and the Greater London Authority precept.

Precepting authority	Valuation Bands							
	A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
GLA	213.67	249.29	284.90	320.51	391.73	462.96	534.18	641.02

For information purposes this would result in the following Council Tax Levy for Merton residents:

Part of the Council's Area	Valuation Bands							
	A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
	1,032.22	1,204.26	1,376.30	1,548.33	1,892.40	2,236.48	2,580.55	3,096.66
Parts inc. WPCC	1,052.15	1,227.52	1,402.87	1578.23	1,928.94	2,279.67	2,630.38	3,156.46

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Appendix 1

Speech by Cllr Stephen Alambritis the Leader of Merton to the Council Budget Meeting on Wednesday 06 March 2019 at 7:15pm and in the Council Chamber at the London Borough of Merton being situate at the Civic Centre on the London Road in Morden Surrey SM4 5DX

Madam Mayor,

Tonight I report on an administration on course to be London's best council
I report on our 1,800 employees working across four departments delivering services to 200,000 residents

Tonight I present a budget for Merton's Families

And I confirm Labour in Merton delivering on its manifesto pledges

Madam Mayor,

Merton is stronger because we did not seek short term fixes but pursued a medium term financial strategy

The people of Merton are satisfied because whatever the challenge, however strong the pushback, we have held to our July Principles set out in 2011

Madam Mayor,

I must now tell the Chamber that we face a new challenge

The Tory Government is in free fall over Brexit

Merton is not immune to the Brexit shock and slowdown

But we are not weak

We have a choice

We can choose to buckle under the Brexit uncertainty or we can be a force for local stability

In this Budget we choose to be a force for local stability by putting Merton's families first

Madam Mayor,

Our School Improvement Team continues to work miracles

Good and outstanding Schools

The opening of a new secondary school, with a new building in South Wimbledon on the way

Record numbers of parents getting their first preference in their choice of school

Our Leisure Department

Albeit small in number it delivers big on impact

Like a brand new Morden Leisure Centre in Morden Park nicely nestled between St Helier and Cannon Hill Wards

Merton's children's Services

Rated Good with Outstanding features on Safeguarding on Adoption and crucially in leadership

Keeping all children's centres open

Madam Mayor,

Let me turn to our care for the most vulnerable in Merton

Council tax rebates for low paid families now in their 7th continuous year

Adult Social Care services that are the envy of other boroughs

Opening a new centre for adults with disabilities at Leyton Road in Abbey Ward
A Strategic Partner Programme that has allocated £4m to health and wellbeing groups

A review of the lunch club provision to modernise the offering to residents
Labour in Merton Looking after our young people and looking after our senior citizens

But Madam Mayor,

We need savings to continue to look after young and old alike

We are doing just that with our new waste collection service

The new service is saving us much needed money

While leading to an increase in recycling to over 40% and rising

While leading to a decrease of 330 tonnes per month sent to landfill

Madam Mayor,

We continue to tackle the scourge of fly tipping that is a national crisis with one million fly tips in the UK last year according to DEFRA's own figures

And Merton will be taking part in the biggest mass-action environmental campaign called the Great British Spring Clean promoted by the Keep Britain Tidy group

Madam Mayor,

This Chamber is aware of my pro-development approach

That is why we have a Future Merton Team delivering on housing, on regeneration and on exciting plans for Morden Town Centre

Working on the Wimbledon Masterplan and Rediscovering Mitcham with

improvement plans for Colliers Wood and South Wimbledon

Madam Mayor,

The Local Government Association tell us of the 60% cut in local government funding since 2010

And yes, Local authorities are at breaking point and some have gone over like Conservative Northampton

Madam Mayor

I now move to present Labour's 9th budget since we took back the administration in 2010, held it in 2014 held it again in 2018 and in football parlance Madam Mayor that's a hat trick of election victories!

We are tonight presenting an increase in the council tax of below 5% inclusive of 2% to provide for Adult Social Care flexibility.

Madam Mayor,

I therefore move the business plan and the budget proposals as set out in Recommendation 1 with particular reference to the formal Resolutions as set out in Appendix 1 to the Report before us tonight

In doing so I want to single out a few people for special thanks

Mark Allison my deputy leader and cabinet member for finance

All councillors who chair and who sit on our scrutiny panels

Thanks also go to Cllr Peter Southgate the chair of scrutiny

To my cabinet members and to all my councillors on this side of the chamber

To the former leader of the Opposition, Cllr Oonagh Moulton and to the current leader Cllr Nick McLean for stepping up to the plate and congratulations from me on your new position and to all their councillors on that side of the chamber
And can I also thank Cllr Anthony Fairclough and his Liberal colleagues for their contributions
Finally a really big thank you to our Director of Corporate Services Caroline Holland
Madam Mayor,

We always take action for those facing difficulties in every budget we have given

And this Budget is no different

We are exempting care leavers in the borough from paying council tax until age 25
This follows an excellent campaign by the Children's Society
And this is what that Charity says about Merton's Labour policy for our care leavers

*"The Children's Society is pleased to learn that Merton will beexempting care leavers from paying council tax.
This change will make a huge difference to the lives of vulnerable young people....."*

Caring Merton. Labour Merton, Madam Mayor.

Our young people, indeed all people, do not deserve a Tory government wreaking havoc by its appalling handling of Brexit

Let me explain to the Chamber what Brexit means to a Local Authority like Merton
Madam Mayor

Low business confidence especially in the High Street will hurt our business rate potential at a time when we are increasingly reliant on that income stream
Leaving the EU will impact on our ability to deliver care services because of a future lack of care workers due to Brexit
This council is not standing still on Brexit
We have set up a corporate task group with Director and Cabinet Member involvement
We will be on hand to help our EU citizens gain Settled Status Madam Mayor
And we will continue to lobby the Government in defence of our 20,000 EU nationals living in the borough

Madam Mayor,
Whilst this Tory Government is imploding over Brexit its own Ministers are congratulating us
For example, the Conservative Education Secretary Damian Hinds MP has recently written to our schools congratulating them on the very high level of progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
Another Minister is also praiseworthy of our Library service
Conservative Culture Minister, Michael Ellis applauded Merton's award winning libraries during his recent visit, noted the great work being done in Merton and how this should be the blueprint, the blueprint, for libraries across the country

Madam Mayor,
Of equal importance are the views of our residents
The last Annual Residents' Survey revealed record high levels of satisfaction with council services and several "best evers"

Madam Mayor,
Residents also rightly look to the administration to deliver on its manifesto pledges
And we are:
On rolling out a borough wide 20mph speed limit
On air quality by working with the Mayor of London on introducing air quality measures
On bringing home AFC Wimbledon
On completing the new leisure centre
On defending our residents against a Tory hard Brexit
On continuing to offer council tax support
On fighting Tory cuts to schools and care services
On driving up recycling rates
On fighting to save our schools
And on fighting for more bobbies on our streets

Madam Mayor,
Nine years ago we set out a long term business-like plan
Because we wanted to make sure Merton never again was powerless in the face of Tory austerity
Nine years later our borough is safe for residents with strong community cohesion
with people feeling proud and not discriminated against
But the Tory Brexit storm clouds are gathering
Our response to this challenge must and can be quick
We act now so our residents don't have to lose out later

And so this is our Budget Madam Mayor
One that leads to an ever safe borough
One that cares for our children
One that looks after the vulnerable
One that gets investors investing in Merton
I commend to the Chamber a Budget that puts Merton's families first
Madam Mayor, thank you.

ENDS

Councillor Nick McLean, Leader of the Conservative Group

Thank you Madam Mayor – I may have been born in New Zealand but Merton is my home – and I care passionately about the community I live in and represent in Cannon Hill.

I am a new Leader, elected in 2018 and the past is behind. Indeed, I make the Leader of the Liberal Democrats look practically establishment.

I am grateful for the courtesies extended to me by Officers and Members from across the Chamber as I embark on this challenge.

Madam Mayor – I did not enter politics to manage lives – I want to make lives better. I do not believe in excessive managerialism and top down bureaucracy – I am resentful of the words tax and ban.

I believe politicians must strive to create an environment where an individual is able to take decisions for themselves and their families,

where family, friends and the community are the support network;

- and the state the safety net.

I am a democrat – it does not matter how you vote, but that your vote matters. I have strong values – Conservative values.

- Opportunity for all;
- In life you should be rewarded for the endeavour you put in;
- And you never pull one person up by pulling another one down.

I reject the politics of envy and class warfare...I believe in aspiration and helping people get on in life – and what's more I am proud of it.

Madam Mayor, Local Government authorities across the UK are facing budgetary restraints. But let us be reminded why those difficult decisions have been necessary – in 2008 the then Labour Government crashed the economy.

Once again a Labour Government had run out of other people's money to spend. Contrast that with the jobs miracle under this Conservative Government

- 32.6 million people in work
- And soon, for each and every one of those people in work, one of the highest minimum wages in the world.

We understand that a dynamic business environment is essential to the vibrancy and growth of the borough – creating the opportunity for the new start-up or budding entrepreneur to succeed – championing business hubs so that residents can work

and live close by – removing the need to travel, reducing air pollution and creating a better work life balance – a sustainable future for Merton.

Conservatives creating jobs for residents of Merton.

For the many – not the few.

Madam Mayor, there is a common theme when it comes to Labour and money – that is mismanagement – and Merton Labour are no different.

This administration has now tottered into its ninth year

- nine years of failing adequately to prepare for grant reductions;
- nine years of failing to maximise innovation and efficiency;
- nine years of failing to make the right decisions for Merton.

And Madam Mayor – it has become quite apparent that without the high quality guidance from the Senior Officer team then things could be so much worse.

Rather than step-up to the challenges this Administration showed a lack of political courage. That is why the Council now faces budgetary headwinds in the years ahead.

For too long Merton Labour have hidden behind and misrepresented the Conservative's deficit reduction programme – refusing to take responsibility for their own budget decisions.

On this side of the Chamber we are all instinctively drawn to living within our means.

Low tax and low spend.

Merton Labour on the other hand are low tax and over spend.

And not only do they run down our finances, they also seem determined to run down our borough.

Madam Mayor, after the Merton hall disgrace you would think that Merton Labour would cease the cultural vandalism – but no they were at it again.

Fortunately, a Conservative led scrutiny revolt stopped the mothballing of Morden Park House – an historic building and the only registry office in the borough.

And when they were asked at Cabinet why it was removed, Cllr Allison mumbled that 'the business case has not been made,' well if it hadn't been made then why did they include it on the first place?

I am a small businessman – not a past spokesman for small business – and I know what 'business-like' really means – and that is not the actions of a business like council.

And Madam Mayor whilst we will support some of the Liberal Democrat amendments in particular tonight we will not support their second amendment the Merton Wellbeing Innovation Fund as the business case has simply not been made – have they been taking advice from Cllr Allison?

The contempt with which Merton Labour seem to hold the Borough's much-loved historic buildings is only matched by the contempt they seem to have for its residents.

This Labour Administration constantly seeks to abdicate responsibility and attempt to shift the blame – well it will not go unchallenged in this chamber anymore.

The deficit we have today has been caused by this administration's financial mismanagement.

Yes Local Government is being asked to do more, with less.

But as countless other local authorities take steps to manage this, this hard-hearted Labour administration tries to balance the books on the back of our children – what a disgrace.

Madam Mayor – our amendment puts the children of Merton first,

It commits £20,000 to improve our air quality around local schools;

Ensures Little Leagues are free at the point of use;

Allows Merton Music Foundation to continue to operate.

Takes genuine steps to improve the air that we breathe – instead of using air quality as an excuse for a stealth tax on those in our borough who don't vote Labour.

Last week I visited Cricket Green School in Mitcham – a fantastic school and rightly held in high esteem by this Council.

The children had recently finished planting new trees – trees which are desperately needed in this area of high pollution.

Today, I visited, with Nigel Benbow, Merton Abbey School – another excellent school – and again located in an area of high pollution.

Now think of the good we could do for Merton's future and the wellbeing of our children if we have this £20,000 to allow local schools to plant trees – it is a ground-breaking policy that should not be kept in the shade. It puts our children first and helps us all.

Last Saturday, along with Cllr David Dean, I met with Little League volunteers and organisers at the Prince Georges Fields to discuss the challenges that they now face because of Cllr Alambritis' indefensible decision to start charging for pitch use – a policy he said he would not do.

Now I appreciate that it is a difficult time for him to talk football.

But just because his beloved Fulham seem destined for the drop.

There is no need to relegate the sporting chances of our Borough.

Which is why we are determined to reverse this policy.

But Merton Labour's desire to end things that local children benefit from and enjoy does not stop there.

Madam Mayor – Merton Music Foundation provide high quality musical education for children throughout the London Borough of Merton.

By cutting their budget, this Labour administration is depriving children of all socio-economic backgrounds the opportunity of an enriched musical experience.

I ask colleagues opposite to think of this, and change their tune.

Madam Mayor – we are also seeking to remove Labour's misguided tax on parked cars – a discriminatory tax that will not improve air quality in this Borough.

Under this Labour Administration there exists an unacceptable and shameful 9 years of healthy living gap between people living in the most and least deprived areas of Merton.

To reduce this gap smarter policies are needed – like Low Emission bus zones as introduced on Putney High Street which has led to a reduction in Nitrogen Dioxide of 87%.

Madam Mayor – if this Council does not pass this amendment, they will be endorsing worse air quality and shutting out children from the pleasure of music and the opportunity to play football with their friends.

It is in the Borough's best interest to have happy, healthy children, with a rounded education who are not learning in schools surrounded by pollution. Conservatives are passionate about equality, protecting the less well off and on the side of young people in Merton

Our amendment puts our children first – we are giving this Council the chance to do the right thing – to change the Administration's mind, so; Councillors – vote with your conscience – and for this amendment, which I so move.

-END-

Cllr Anthony Fairclough, Liberal Democrat group leader, budget speech 6 Mar 2019

Madame Mayor, we were told that austerity was over.

But on all sides of the chamber, we must realise that's not true.

The current and future cuts that Merton needs to make go way beyond what can be delivered through efficiency savings.

So we on the Liberal Democrat benches join others in calling on the Government to reverse its continued underfunding of local government.

And whilst we do not agree with a significant number of the planned cuts in this budget, the constraints of the budget don't offer much in the way of opportunities.

Nonetheless, Madame Mayor, while difficult choices need to be made, the administration can set its priorities within that framework

And so we will propose amendments that reflect clear priorities.

But first I want to turn to the plans of the administration and of the opposition, as Councillor McLean has just so eloquently outlined.

It is regrettable, we think, that some of the situation we find ourselves in has been exacerbated by the administration, sometimes with 'short term fixes'.

The Conservative majority Government didn't continue Coalition policy of giving Merton extra cash to "freeze" the Council Tax, so there are now bigger and faster jumps in Council Tax rises to make up that gap and worse cuts to services.

A lesson for us all there.

There is quite a lot of vagueness in the savings pack. Many of the longer-term savings are "reviews" – meaning future cuts to services that we are being asked take it on trust that the detail can be sorted out later.

Madame Mayor, I think we should ask ourselves whether that's good enough, for us and for our constituents. And then whether there might be a better way?

Looking now to the opposition benches, I have sometimes wondered whether the Conservative group wants its plans implemented.

Their 2018 manifesto would have cost local taxpayers millions extra: often expecting residents to pick up the tab where the Conservative Government rolled back the state.

For example, whatever the Opposition's position on the waste contract and weekly bin collections, breaking the Veolia contract – whether now or in six years – will cost residents dearly.

But they have been really clear about one thing – continuously trying to push cuts onto the most financially vulnerable in the borough, most recently last November in the debate on the Council Tax support scheme when they tried to take away essential Council tax benefits for those on the lowest incomes.

With respect, we demand more and better from the official opposition.

Although we are pleased to see several of our campaign themes reflected in the Conservative budget amendment, looking at the detail they're just kicking the can down the road until next year by draining the reserves. It's quite ironic to hear that our amendment didn't make a business case, when your entire business case is draining down the reserves. As we've already heard, the *Balancing the Budget reserve* will be fully utilised already by 2021, and your plans simply drain that more quickly.

This is not the budget amendment of a Conservative group looking to become the administration.

As we favour open debate, last night I sent all the Group leaders copies of the Liberal Democrat amendments, so hopefully all have had a chance to think about our proposals.

And I welcome that the Conservative group, also shared the text of their proposals this morning.

Cllrs Quilliam, Bokhari and Kohler will talk to our amendments in more detail, but I will outline them briefly here.

Amendments 1 and 2 seek to mitigate some of the worst aspects of cuts to social care.

We would keep two vital support workers for children and their families at the Bond Road Centre.

We believe that the charges for blue badges are both unnecessary and unfair.

Our new Wellbeing Innovation Fund will help establish new ways to continue vital services and promote independence.

Amendment 3 looks at developing some new and interesting ideas around revenue growth, and pushing the Council to rethink previous short-term decisions.

We can learn from other Councils.

Like Stockport, we could create a Strategic Roads Fund to invest in improving our roads now, to save in the long run.

It might not come as any surprise that a Lib Dems group is proposing fixing potholes!

We could look to Westminster or Kensington & Chelsea to set up a voluntary Council Tax donation scheme. Here in Merton we want an Education Innovation Fund from that.

Continuing to let Merton's Little League football charities use local parks for free maintains the fantastic work open to all.

Amendment four is about stepping in to protect community policing. And despite what a former Merton councillor – currently, I think, the Prime Minister, may say about there being no link between police cuts and knife crime, we prefer to stick with evidence.

Together, our four amendments help residents during uncertain times, whilst recognising the difficult financial environment for the Council.

Surely by working together across the chamber, things can only get better ...

Thank you, Madame Mayor

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MPWIR – BUDGET 2019/20

Thank you Madam Mayor. Tonight marks the culmination of a long process of budget scrutiny starting back last November, so in the short time available to me I want to reflect on that process, and to consider whether we can improve on it in future years.

The challenge facing us tonight is that a significant proportion of the savings we are about to approve will fail. In the event we will be unable to implement or deliver them. If you doubt me, take a look at the projected out turn for the current year. Against a target for savings of £6.6m we are on course to deliver £5.4m, a shortfall of £1.2m or 18%. And in the previous year 2017/18 against a target of £10.3m we fell short by £2.4m or 23%.

Could we do more to identify the savings that are going to turn out to be undeliverable? We all understand that savings have to be made, unpalatable as that may be. But are we making the right savings? Have a look at some of the savings that have already been replaced between the first and second rounds of budget scrutiny, consider what we might learn from them. Was it ever realistic to think we could reduce staffing in our assessment and commissioning teams for Adult Social Care?

I know we have faced unprecedented cuts in funding from central government over the last decade. We receive our last direct grant of £5m for next year, after that we're on our own. So I fear there's a tendency to react with resignation, fatalism even, to feel there's nothing we can do but accept the proposed cuts to services. But that would be wrong, indeed it would be an abnegation of our responsibility to our residents to scrutinise the budget in their best interests.

Remember – some of these savings will prove undeliverable, and when that happens users will suffer if less palatable savings have to be substituted. It's incumbent upon us to make sure we fully understand how proposed savings will work out in practice, what the risks are and how they can be mitigated. We know we have to set a balanced budget for the year ahead, we accept that, but the MTFS does allow some flexibility for the years from 2020/21 and beyond.

And in case you think it's all doom and gloom, perhaps we can hope for some relief from the Chancellor's spending review next week. The only benefit from the growing income inequality in our society is that tax receipts from the top quintile of taxpayers

in January this year were much higher than anticipated. Is it too much to hope perhaps that a little of the surplus might be redistributed to the public sector, and to local government in particular?

Cllr Peter Southgate
Leader, MPWIR