

COUNCIL
4 MARCH 2020

(7.15 pm - 10.05 pm)

PRESENT The Mayor, Councillor Janice Howard
 The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Edward Foley

Councillor 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, Mary Curtin, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Anthony Fairclough, Jenifer Gould, Edward Gretton, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Natasha Irons, 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, Peter Southgate, Geraldine Stanford, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward, Martin Whelton, Dickie Wilkinson and David Williams MBE JP

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Dean, Brenda Fraser, Joan Henry and Marsie Skeete.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2020 are agreed as an accurate record.

4 BUSINESS PLAN 2020-24 (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 2020-2024. The Director then responded to questions from

Councillors David Chung, Adam Bush, Mike Brunt, Jenifer Gould, Stan Anderson, Oonagh Moulton, Paul Kohler, Edith Macauley, Najeeb Latif and Ben Butler.

The Leader of the Council presented the Business Plan 2020-24 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 Eleanor Stringer formally seconded the recommendations, and reserved her 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 2020-24.

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 2020-24

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 and Laxmi Attawar.

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 Edward Gretton.

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.

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 Owen Pritchard, Daniel Holden, Agatha Akyigyina, Hayley Ormrod, Hina Bokhari, Aidan Mundy, David Simpson, Nick Draper, Nigel Benbow, Carl Quilliam, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, James Holmes, David Ward, Peter Southgate, John Dehaney, Andrew Howard, Rebecca Lanning, Thomas Barlow, Martin Whelton, Simon McGrath, Dennis Pearce, Stephen Crowe, Mary Curtin, David Williams, Paul Kohler, Tobin Byers, Peter McCabe, Natasha Irons, Billy Christie and Eleanor Stringer.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Mayor called for a roll-call vote on the Conservative amendment to the Business Plan 2020-2024. Voting was as follows:

Votes in favour: Councillors Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Adam Bush, Omar Bush, Stephen Crowe, Edward Gretton, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Najeeb Latif, Nick McLean, Oonagh Moulton, Hayley Ormrod, David Simpson, David Williams and the Mayor, Councillor Janice Howard (16)

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, Mary Curtin, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Natasha Irons, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Rebecca Lanning, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Russell Makin, Dennis Pearce, Owen Pritchard, Geraldine Stanford, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward and Martin Whelton (30)

Not voting: Councillors Eloise Bailey, Hina Bokhari, Anthony Fairclough, Jenifer Gould, Paul Kohler, Simon McGrath, Carl Quilliam, Peter Southgate, Dickie Wilkinson and the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Ed Foley (10)

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 2020-2024. Voting was as follows:

Votes in favour: Councillors Eloise Bailey, Hina Bokhari, Anthony Fairclough, Jenifer Gould, Paul Kohler, Simon McGrath, Carl Quilliam, Peter Southgate, Dickie Wilkinson and the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Ed Foley (10)

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, Mary Curtin, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Natasha Irons, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Rebecca Lanning,

Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Russell Makin, Dennis Pearce, Owen Pritchard, Geraldine Stanford, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward and Martin Whelton (30)

Not voting: *Councillors Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Adam Bush, Omar Bush, Stephen Crowe, Edward Gretton, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Najeeb Latif, Nick McLean, Oonagh Moulton, Hayley Ormrod, David Simpson, David Williams and the Mayor, Councillor Janice Howard (16)*

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 2020-2024. Voting was as follows:

Votes in favour: *Councillors Eloise Bailey, Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Hina Bokhari, Adam Bush, Omar Bush, Stephen Crowe, Anthony Fairclough, Edward Gretton, Jenifer Gould, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Paul Kohler, Najeeb Latif, Simon McGrath, Nick McLean, Oonagh Moulton, Hayley Ormrod, Carl Quilliam, David Simpson, David Williams and the Mayor, Councillor Janice Howard (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, Mary Curtin, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Natasha Irons, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Rebecca Lanning, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Russell Makin, Dennis Pearce, Owen Pritchard, Geraldine Stanford, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward and Martin Whelton (30)*

Not voting: *Councillors Peter Southgate, Dickie Wilkinson and the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Ed Foley (3)*

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

The Mayor then called for a roll-call vote on the Liberal Democrat amendment 3 to the Business Plan 2020-2024. Voting was as follows:

Votes in favour: *Councillors Eloise Bailey, Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Hina Bokhari, Adam Bush, Omar Bush, Stephen Crowe, Anthony Fairclough, Edward Gretton, Jenifer Gould, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Paul Kohler, Najeeb Latif, Simon McGrath, Nick McLean, Oonagh Moulton, Hayley Ormrod, Carl Quilliam, David Simpson, Peter Southgate, David Wilkinson, David Williams, the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Ed Foley and the Mayor, Councillor Janice Howard (26)*

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, Mary Curtin, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Natasha Irons, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Rebecca Lanning, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Russell Makin, Dennis Pearce, Owen Pritchard, Geraldine Stanford, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward and Martin Whelton (30)

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 2020-24. 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, Mary Curtin, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Natasha Irons, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Rebecca Lanning, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Russell Makin, Dennis Pearce, Owen Pritchard, Peter Southgate, Geraldine Stanford, Eleanor Stringer, Dave Ward, Dickie Wilkinson, Martin Whelton and the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Ed Foley (33)

Votes against: Councillors Eloise Bailey, Hina Bokhari, Anthony Fairclough, Jenifer Gould, Paul Kohler, Simon McGrath and Carl Quilliam (7)

Not voting: Councillors Thomas Barlow, Nigel Benbow, Adam Bush, Omar Bush, Stephen Crowe, Edward Gretton, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Andrew Howard, Najeeb Latif, Nick McLean, Oonagh Moulton, Hayley Ormrod, David Simpson, David Williams and the Mayor, Councillor Janice Howard (16)

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council agrees the Business Plan 2020-24 including:-
 - A) the General Fund Budget;
 - B) the Council Tax Strategy for 2020/21 equating to a Band D Council Tax of £1,276.92, which is an increase of below 4%, inclusive of 2% Adult Social Care flexibility;
 - C) the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2020-24;
 - 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 the Council report;and agrees the formal resolutions as set out in Appendix 1 to the Council report.

This page is intentionally left blank

Speech by Cllr Stephen Alambritis the Leader of Merton to the Council Budget Meeting on Wednesday 04 March 2020 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 our sound financial management during a period of continued government austerity

Tonight, I present a budget that means money will be made available to invest in services for Merton's Families

Tonight, I confirm Labour in Merton is avoiding damaging cuts and able to spend more on priority services

Tonight, I want to say a big thank to our staff

Madam Mayor,

Labour Merton is stronger because we do not seek short term fixes but pursue a medium term financial strategy

This budget also illustrates that however strong the austerity pressures, we have held to our **July Principles** set out in our 2010 administration

Madam Mayor,

You may have noticed that I have just gone back a decade

And that reminds me of our late dear colleague, Cllr Danny Connellan

Danny had this ability to provide history lessons to the chagrine of the opposition benches during budget meetings

So here goes, a history lesson from me

In 2010 we started our term of office with a £70m budget gap
Since then we have faced further government cuts every year
But we have consistently maintained our top objectives since 2010 namely:

Making Merton a great place for families and bridging the gap between the East and the West of the borough

So, to the History Exam Question: Describe the achievements of the London Borough of Merton since 2010

The model answer would include the following:

Since 2010 Merton council has:

Maintained council tax rebates for low income households

Opened a new library in Colliers Wood

Opened a new leisure centre in Morden

Exempted care leavers from paying council tax

Provided an extra 4,500 school places

Achieved record school results

Has lowest number of households in temporary accommodation in London

Frozen the council tax for 6 consecutive years

There endeth the history lesson

Madam Mayor,

In addition to speaking about the past one must needs talk about the present

And the Budget presented before us today will mean:

Nearly £4m a year extra for Children's services

Almost £1m extra a year for the borough's refuse service

More money to tackle the national and growing scourge of fly-tipping

Around £150K a year for emergency planning, ahead of Grenfell

A saving of £2.4m on the cost of council pensions

Madam Mayor,

The budget before us tonight must be balanced

However, the effect of the Tory Government's austerity and funding cuts, aided and abetted by their one time Liberal friends

Means, that we need:

An increase of 1.99% on the council tax

Plus 2% for the Adult Social Care precept

We also need to find £16m a year in savings by 2023

With a further gap of £9m a year after that

It does not end there Madam Mayor

I have to report to this meeting tonight

A shortfall in government funding for the most deserving in our community

Our children with special needs look to us for support

We have set aside a further £37m for them but the cost could rise to £65m

Madam Mayor,

I can assure you that we will, despite all the difficulties imposed on us, continue to look to the future for our residents

For our EU residents seeking settled status

For our Windrush residents seeking justice from a dysfunctional Home Office

For our residents wanting the council to support St Helier Hospital with now 95% of residents on side with our position

For our residents wanting us to enforce against fly tippers, bad landlords, rogue traders and those engaged in anti-social behaviour

For our residents looking forward to a new town centre in Morden, a new masterplan in Wimbledon and investment in Colliers Wood and in Mitcham

For our residents needing their small corner shop that is helped by Merton Council with automatic rate relief

For our residents and all AFC Wimbledon fans looking forward to football at Plough Lane this coming August

For our residents in the voluntary sector where funding has increased for the second year in a row – now over £10 million

For our residents seeking action from us on climate change following our Climate Emergency Motion passed unanimously

Friends of the Earth say we are joint second in London for being Climate Friendly

Residents also want action to tackle air pollution and to improve air quality

On that score Madam Mayor,

I am pleased to report that:

The Local Government Chronicle, has shortlisted Merton for our ground breaking work on construction site pollution

And we have been approached by the MET office to work with them to develop new approaches to modelling and forecasting air pollution

We are also tackling air pollution around schools with our anti-idling campaign

Madam Mayor,

We must also look to the future that lies with Merton's children
And for them,

Our School Improvement Team continues to work miracles

We have good and outstanding Schools

We have the opening of a brand new building for our new
secondary school in South Wimbledon this September

We have record numbers of parents getting their first
preference in their choice of school

And we are 3rd in the country for the progress our school
children make...not 3rd in London or the South of England but I
repeat...3rd in the country!!

But there also needs to be a future for all in education

Therefore we do not forget the good marks we have got for
adult education from Ofsted

As we provide opportunities for everyone to experience the joy
of life-long learning

Let us not forget Merton's Children Services as it continues to
look after some of our most vulnerable in our society

And we have Kept all children's centres open

Madam Mayor

I now move to formally present Labour's 10th budget in a row

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

Cllr Mark Allison my deputy leader

All councillors who chair and who sit on our scrutiny panels

Thanks also go to **Cllr Peter Southgate** the chair of scrutiny

To all my cabinet members and to all my councillors

To the leader of the Opposition, **Cllr Nick McLean** and to all his councillors

And can I also thank **Cllr Anthony Fairclough** and his Liberal colleagues

Finally a really big thank you to our Director of Corporate Services **Caroline Holland**

Madam Mayor,

We always take action for those residents facing difficult times in every budget we have given

But action for our residents will not happen without our excellent hard working staff and it is to them that I turn

I want to thank staff in our Libraries for their work in installing seven stunning sensory places for children

We need to thank staff in our Elections Department for carrying out three unscheduled elections

We need to thank staff for Car Free Day, for the Rainbow Crossing, for Film Merton and for the record recycling rates we are achieving

We need to thank Dr Dagmar Zeuner, our Director of Public Health, for her guidance on the Coronavirus outbreak

Guidance has gone to us, to local MPs, to residents, to businesses and to council staff

Our staff, led by our Chief Executive Ged Curran and his Directors, are showing great resilience in very challenging times with increasing demand for our services

And they are still producing great results and providing a great service to residents and this is reflected in our independent resident surveys

But let me share with you some individual cases and the thoughts from residents themselves about our staff

From Adult Social Care: **“The Occupational Therapy department at Merton have never failed to give exceptional support. The service to date has enabled me to care for my mother in law in her own home.”**

From Libraries: **“My son loves the new circus-themed West Barnes Library, he asks to visit every day after school. We are planning on doing a tour of all the Merton libraries to see the different themes, equipment and books they all have.”**

From Children, Schools and Families: **“I am writing to say a big thank you to you as a social worker who has really helped so much in our journey raising our son who is very very special. You are always there when we need support...instead of judging me you have put many things in place to help me through this very difficult time”.**

I want to express my pride in the entire workforce for the work they do for our residents and for our community

In conclusion Madam Mayor,

A rare first edition copy of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone was found by an 11-year-old reader in Wimbledon Library during this financial year

The book is of high value and is being safely kept somewhere in this building

I have however Madam Mayor,

Been making inquiries as to the books actual worth but sadly the value of the book is not so high as to wipe out the cuts we are facing from the Government

Perhaps Harry Potters Magic Wand may come in useful but as we know such magic, including Magic Money Trees, are the preserve of Tory Prime Ministers

And so to reality and to the real world, Madam Mayor

Our Budget this year is:

A Budget for families

A business-like Budget

A budget that bridges the gap

A budget for Safety

And a budget for Equalities

I commend to this Budget from London's Best Council

ENDS

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

This page is intentionally left blank

Introduction

Madam Mayor,

May I begin by thanking the Officers for their hard work in preparing this budget report.

12 months go - I delivered my first budget speech – then I said that I disliked the administrations lazy approach to policy making:

- if it's working - tax it;
- if you don't like it – ban it.

Well - I still do!

But tonight, Madam Mayor, I want to speak about what the Conservatives are determined to champion in Merton:

- ambition; technology; and success.

Clear blue thinking in how we approach the challenges that confront our communities.

The lazy left like to vilify Conservatives and say that we value individualism over family & community – actually over everything.

Well, they're wrong - we simply acknowledge the contest that life is.

And in doing so we encourage the inner energy that sets free the ambition that burns so deeply within – **why not it's part of human nature!**

Leadership

Madam Mayor, to govern is to lead, set clear priorities and objectives, with detailed planning and appropriate resources aligned.

This Labour-led administration is failing to follow these most simple of practices.

And the recent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge report supports this view

that the Council's financial strategy is not explicit about how it supports strategic priorities vs balancing the council's budget.

There is not a clear narrative that describes where the borough has come from and where it is going.

Resulting in a lack of clarity for staff and planning across the departments and it isn't clear how resources are aligned behind a common goal.

To Merton Labour "being business like" is just a slogan – to us it is an ethos.

A word of advice to the Labour front bench – just saying it, doesn't mean it's done – you have to get it done.

Commercialisation

Madam Mayor, The commercialisation of the Borough's assets must always form a central thread in our strategic thinking.

And yes - that means taking risks – how else we will become a truly transformative Council.

Of course, we should look to mitigate risk

But to de-risk to the point that there is no risk simply removes all financial benefit – is in itself an excuse to do nothing.

Reviewing risk appetite to ensure opportunities that can deliver a wider range of benefits are not missed.

Let's take the fate of Morden Park House as an example - in last year's budget this administration proposed closing it – an now it is turning over a profit.

Liberal Democrats

Now Madam Mayor, officers produced a report on the Liberal Democrats voluntary mansion tax as required, it was then rejected by Cabinet as the policy was deemed unworkable.

If they had researched their policy properly they would have known the limitation of the original motion.

At OSC they tried to widen its scope - ignoring the democratic decision already laid down by this Council.

CLlr Pritchard was right when he commented that their Leaders performance at the Commission lacked integrity.

Well its back – and yet again they are not providing the full information.

In the narrative they omit to say that Westminster Council has the lowest Council tax in the country.

Unable to rebrand properties from H to H, I, & J they looked to a voluntary scheme – it was a levelling up measure.

To explain Madam Mayor – the average amount received by Westminster was £2384 – this figure includes the £963 voluntary contribution.

The band H charge for Merton residents in 2019/20 is £3,096.

But tonight we are not voting on the policy, but a consultation and we would have appreciated the courtesy of including that cost in their amendment.

So when Cllr Fairclough stands shortly perhaps he could confirm:

- How much the consultation will cost?
- Where will it be funded from?
- And have they been signed off by Officers?

What are actually voting on?

Austerity

Over the last 10 years difficult decisions have needed to be made by successive Conservative led Governments to restore the public finances.

Conservative Chancellors have undertaken their historic duty of fixing the public finances after their Labour counterparts have run out of other peoples money to spend.

They took the difficult decisions that have enabled this One Nation Conservative Government to fund an increase in the core spending power of local government by 6.3% nationally and 6.5% in London.

The members across the aisle are going to have rethink their strategy – no longer will they be able to follow the redundant mantra of anti-austerity rhetoric laid down by Cllr Allison.

Their performance at the last Council meeting verged on the ridiculous.

Member after member standing to speak as if nothing had changed – as if there had been no election.

Well there was – the people voted – and they voted Conservative.

Technology

Technology is our great hope – so often drowned out by the redundant politics of class warfare, virtue signalling and the frenzy of climate change.

It is technology that will enable us to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Utilising the new education technology, such as digital interactive whiteboards, giving the opportunity for all pupils to be challenged by innovative learning techniques.

Technology & Opportunity – that's Conservative Thinking

But like two sides of a coin, with opportunity comes challenges,

and none more so than artificial intelligence in the work place.

This is a genuine contest – designed to be an evolution to greater productivity.

And like all advancements through-out-the ages– it will mean change.

**Change we must embrace and master,
because it is technology that will expand our economy and enrich our lives
not the politics of tax and ban.**

Veolia

Madam Mayor, much to the concern of members opposite, we have been campaigning extensively in Mitcham and Morden – meeting residents and discussing their concerns.

We are witnessing first-hand the disgraceful conditions of their streets.

It infuriates me and my Conservative colleagues when we see the residents in these wards being failed by the very people, they have elected to represent them on this Council.

The management of the Veolia contract has been a disgrace – which has now led to its renegotiation and further costs for Merton residents.

Where is the political determination to sort this mess out?

And that includes fly tipping too.

I acknowledge the challenge - but we simply must be more pro-active in our approach – and that is why we are proposing to double the Councils enforcement capabilities – and in doing so giving hope to Merton’s residents.

Because this is what is required – politicians taking the lead, setting high-standards and demanding results.

St Helier Hospital

Madam Mayor - how we deliver our health provision has changed – it is 2020, not 1920.

Clinical outcome must be the overriding consideration – and that means the right care - at the right place - at the right time.

For 20 years the Merton Labour party have impeded investment in St Helier Hospital. And now - the building are no longer fit for purpose.

To those in this chamber that who are already talking judicial review – I say - that if we do not seize this opportunity there may not be another.

The very thing you are trying to stop - you may well end up causing.

You are not part of the solution.

I urge you to look to the Nelson Hospital and Raynes Park Medical Centre to see what can be achieved when you remove the politics.

Because it is the party of the NHS - The Conservative Party - that will provide the funding for a sustainable long-term future for St Helier Hospital.

Summary

Madam Mayor, there are great challenges ahead and to compete we need vision, courage and energy.

But just 4 weeks ago in this Chamber I gave the Leader of the Council the opportunity to look to the future.

Instead, egged on by Cllr Allison, he chose to reheat the redundant arguments of the past - now settled.

In doing so they confirmed, what most members on this this council already know, and indeed, I suspect they do too.

That they represent the past – and not the future.

So Madam Mayor, I urge members to vote for our amendment and in doing so demanding change.

Thank you.

Thank you, Madame Mayor

And I'd also like to thank officers for their work on the budget.

Now we all know that the Government is to blame for the continuing cuts to local government services.

So far it has failed to do anything like reverse the spending cuts of the last decade.

Despite talking of vision, courage and energy – and not really displaying any – there's not really any mention of that, Madame Mayor, from the Conservative group.

Their amendment at least aims to reflect some priorities, albeit not ones often associated with our Conservative colleagues.

But it just simply drains down the reserves – what about the longer-term?

It's funny that he should speak about 'lack of integrity' and 'virtue signalling' – because that's what their amendment displays. No thought has been given to how these priorities could really be sustained by the administration over time.

In 2018, the Conservative group ran on a manifesto to "make things a little bit better". And their amendment fails to meet even this limited threshold.

But this is a politician's amendment: written to look good on a leaflet written to be voted down.

Like I said last year, we demand more and better from the official opposition.

Nonetheless, the administration still bears responsibility for the choices it makes in this budget.

We know that Merton's weakness is: lack of follow-through – taking measured risks, setting targets measuring performance, and telling a story about the Council and what it is trying to achieve.

During last year's LGA peer review, councillors and officers from other authorities highlighted to these gaps.

It echoes that this administration didn't put forward a manifesto at the last local elections.

It's about political leadership.

Merton needs to listen, be bold, creative, take responsibility for its actions.

Instead we get the scrutiny process, hundreds of pages to wade through to understand what's being done.

But this gives us no sense of what the point of the administration is and what they stand for,

And we get told from both the administration and the opposition is that Merton should be "business-like".

Madame Mayor – whether we believe it's true or not, does that inspire anyone?

Is it what we came into politics for?

Does "business-like" explain what you're trying to do, which services you want to protect, and what you want to transform?

Many of the challenges we face – the climate emergency, the funding crisis, racism and intolerance in our communities – need people to come together to take action.

And as a Council we must do what we can to create the best environment to help our communities come together.

But if you're not paid enough, or don't get enough hours;

If your housing is insecure, or badly maintained;

If you don't get the support you need as a carer or parent,

Then some days, things just take way too much energy.

You have fewer choices. No peace. You are not free to live how you choose.

So we're challenging the administration to look at ways to help give people more support; give them more room to breathe.

More control in their lives,

And more opportunities to increase and develop their stake in the area,

Madame Mayor, tonight we're bringing forward 3 amendments that we think would help bring a fresh start.

We're not going to fall into the same trap as the Conservatives, we recognise the need for evidence before big changes can be made, but we also know that change needs to be sustainable.

On our amendment 1 – which Cllr McLean spent so much time talking about – primary school breakfast clubs bring many advantages. The evidence shows extra opportunities for socialising, varied food, less hunger and so better concentration, plus some safe and reliable childcare for working parents.

So this amendment establishes a limited pilot scheme to properly understand how we might develop a sustainable scheme for the children from the lowest income families.

We know that the overall financial position doesn't offer much room for unpicking the cuts.

But with our amendment 2, we're hoping the administration will think again about some of the cuts proposed.

Charging applicants for blue badges, not replacing youth worker vacancies and cutting safeguarding training. Expecting the procurement team to negotiate contracts better to make millions of savings, at the same time as cutting staff. These are not things we should be quick to do.

And yes to help pay for this we've had to make some difficult choices – cutting *My Merton* and reducing the number of full time trade union staff, and using available reserves to help balance the budget until the position becomes clearer. As a former trade union rep in the private sector I completely understand the positive role of a trade union, but as the number of Merton's staff has fallen in the last five years, reducing paid for facilities time is not unreasonable.

Lastly, amendment 3 is about setting a new course for the Council. Giving people that peace and space to feel more involved in their community.

But we recognise that change doesn't come quickly or easily, so this amendment presents series of actions that help to build the evidence base for change. To help us understand how best to do it.

That's about looking at: how paying the London Living Wage will impact contracts and workers, how to make things better for those on zero hours, and helping renters by applying for a full landlord licensing scheme.

And if we take climate change seriously, we need to identify money to help make the borough net carbon neutral.

Madame Mayor we urge colleagues to give these ideas a fair hearing – Merton's officers have worked with us to ensure they are financially and legally sound: don't hide behind partisanship.

Thank you, Madam Mayor, for allocating me 3 minutes to cover a subject as complex as Merton's budget for 2020/21. I'm going to do this from the perspective of the budget scrutiny process, which this year was more about the big picture than the detailed savings – all of which were accepted.

In some respects, we got a better settlement than we might have expected from central government, including over £5m from the Revenue Support Grant, which we haven't seen for several years. The Improved Better Care Fund increased to nearly £5m.

But these grants are for one year only, and we have no certainty they will continue. So as far as our Medium-Term Financial Strategy through to 2022/23 is concerned there are several "known unknowns", but the biggest of these by far is the deficit on the Direct Schools Grant, and how it may eventually be resolved by the DfE. Adding last year's overspend of £2.9m to this year's forecast overspend of £10.5m gives a cumulative deficit of £13.4m and it is set to go on rising. So, it is prudent to make provision for this and £16m has been set aside, even if the DfE expressly forbids us from funding the deficit directly.

If the deficit can be resolved (and there are grounds for cautious optimism), the effects on our finances could be transformative – no exaggeration. I know you shouldn't count your chickens before they're hatched, but if this happens, I would urge Cabinet to revisit some of the most difficult savings we have scrutinised, those classed as "High Risk" and with the most impact on vulnerable users.

As an example, a reduction of £100K in the £700K budget for children's social care comes with the "risk of less effective or reduced resource available to respond to Serious Youth Violence and exploitation of Merton children". Look a bit further into the Equalities Impact Assessment and the language is even more stark: **"This may result in increased numbers of young people being seriously injured or killed,** and an increase in the number of young people who need to become looked after to increase their safety"

So, it's reassuring to read that this saving is to be reviewed before it is taken; I for one, hope that it is never taken. We all know that youth violence is on the increase in Merton as elsewhere in London, and this is not the time to be cutting back on activities designed to counter it.

Cllr Peter Southgate – Leader, MPWIR

This page is intentionally left blank