COUNCIL
2 MARCH 2016

(7.15 pm - 10.20 pm)

PRESENT The Mayor of Merton, Councillor, David Chung
The Deputy Mayor of Merton, Councillor Pauline Cowper

Councillors: Agatha Mary Akyigyina Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Hamish Badenoch, John Bowcott, Michael Bull, Adam Bush, Tobin Byers, Charlie Chirico, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Stephen Crowe, Mary Curtin, David Dean, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Fidelis Gadzama, Ross Garrod, Suzanne Grocott, Jeff Hanna, Joan Henry, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Janice Howard, Mary-Jane Jeanes, Abigail Jones, Philip Jones, Andrew Judge, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Abdul Latif, Najeeb Latif, Brian Lewis-Lavender, Gilli Lewis-Lavender, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Oonagh Moulton, Ian Munn, Katy Neep, Dennis Pearce, John Sargeant, Judy Saunders, David Simpson, Marsie Skeete, Peter Southgate, Geraldine Stanford, Linda Taylor, Imran Uddin, Gregory Udeh, Peter Walker, Jill West, Martin Whelton and David Williams.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

An apology was received from Councillor Maxi Martin.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

No declarations were received

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED

The minutes of the Council Meeting held on 3 February 2016, were approved as a correct record, subject to an amendment of item 18 Petitions, that Councillor David Dean's name be replaced with Councillor Brenda Fraser.

4 BUSINESS PLAN 2016-20 (Agenda Item 4)

The Mayor briefly explained procedure for this Budget Council meeting. He 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' would be used for each of the votes relating to the substantive budget motion or any amendments to it.

The Mayor invited the Director of Corporate Services to present the Business Plan 2016-20 to the Council. The Director of Corporate Services then responded to questions on the report from Councillors Fidelis Gadzama, David Simpson, Greg Udeh, Stephen Crowe, Peter Southgate, Katy Neep, Charlie Chirico, Stan Anderson, Daniel Holden, Joan Henry, Jill West, Peter Walker, Suzanne Grocott and Laxmi Attawar respectively.

The Leader of the Council then addressed the Business Plan 2016-20. Councillor Stephen Alambritis moved the recommendations as detailed 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.
The Mayor then invited the oppositions Group Leaders in turn to respond to the Budget proposal and the Business Plan.

The Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Oonagh Moulton addressed the meeting and her speech is attached to the minutes, as Appendix B.

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 C.

Members of the Cabinet were then invited to address the meeting. The following took that opportunity:

- The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Mark Allison
- The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities, Councillor Edith Macauley
- The Cabinet Member for Community and Culture, Councillor Nick Draper.
- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah

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

Councillor Oonagh Moulton moved the Combined Opposition Budget Amendment, (which can be found as Agenda Item 5), which was seconded by Councillor Peter Southgate

Councillor Suzanne Grocott moved the Conservative Amendment 1, (which can be found as Agenda Item 6), which was seconded by Councillor David Williams

Councillor James Holmes moved the Conservative Amendment 2, (which can be found as Agenda Item 7), which was seconded by Councillor David Dean.

The Mayor then opened up the general debate on the three proposed amendments and on the proposed substantive Business Plan. Councillors Jeff Hanna, Suzanne Grocott, Peter Walker, David Williams, Ross Garrod, James Holmes, Abigail Jones, David Dean, John Dehaney, John Sargeant, Mary Curtin, Mary-Jane Jeanes, Sally Kenny, Gilli Lewis-Lavender, Martin Whelton, Judy Saunders, Adam Bush, Imran Uddin, Agatha Akyigyina, John Bowcott, Marsie Skeete, Ed Foley, Brenda Fraser, Najeeb Latif, Dennis Pearce, Hamish Badenoch and Tobin Byers, all spoke in the general debate. Following the conclusion of the general debate, the Mayor called for the Council to vote on each of the amendments in turn via a roll-call

- **Combined Opposition Budget Amendment (Agenda Item 5)** that had been moved by Councillor Oonagh Moulton and seconded by Councillor Peter Southgate

Voting in Favour: Councillors: Hamish Badenoch, John Bowcott, Michael Bull, Adam Bush, Charlie Chirico, Stephen Crowe, David Dean, Edward Foley, Suzanne Grocott, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Janice Howard, Mary-Jane Jeanes, Abdul Latif, Najeeb Latif, Brian Lewis-Lavender, Gilli Lewis-Lavender, Oonagh Moulton, John Sargeant, David Simpson, Peter Southgate, Linda Taylor, Peter Walker, Jill West, and David Williams. (25)

Voting Against: Councillors: Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Tobin Byers, David Chung, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Pauline Cowper, Mary Curtin, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Brenda Fraser, Fidelis Gadzama, Ross Garrod, Joan Henry, Abigail Jones, Philip Jones, Andrew Judge, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Ian Munn, Katy Neep, Dennis Pearce, Judy Saunders, Marsie Skeete, Geraldine Stanford, Imran Uddin, Gregory Patrick Udeh, and Martin Whelton. (33)

Not Voting: Jeff Hanna (1)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

- **Conservative Amendment 1 (Agenda Item 6)** that had been moved by Councillor Suzanne Grocott and seconded by Councillor David Williams.

Voting in Favour: Councillors: Hamish Badenoch, John Bowcott, Michael Bull, Adam Bush, Charlie Chirico, Stephen Crowe, David Dean, Edward Foley, Suzanne Grocott, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Janice Howard, Mary-Jane Jeanes, Abdul Latif, Najeeb Latif, Brian Lewis-Lavender, Gilli Lewis-Lavender, Oonagh Moulton, John Sargeant, David Simpson, Peter Southgate, Linda Taylor, Jill West, and David Williams. (24)

Voting Against: Councillors: Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Tobin Byers, David Chung, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Pauline Cowper, Mary Curtin, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Brenda Fraser, Fidelis Gadzama, Ross Garrod, Jeff Hanna, Joan Henry, Abigail Jones, Philip Jones,

Andrew Judge, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Ian Munn, Katy Neep, Dennis Pearce, Judy Saunders, Marsie Skeete, Geraldine Stanford, Imran Uddin, Gregory Patrick Udeh, and Martin Whelton. (34)

Not Voting: None (0)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

- **Conservative Amendment 2 (Agenda Item 7)** that had been moved by Councillor James Holmes and seconded by Councillor David Dean

Voting in Favour: Councillors: Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Hamish Badenoch, John Bowcott, Michael Bull, Adam Bush, Tobin Byers, Charlie Chirico, David Chung Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Pauline Cowper Stephen Crowe, Mary Curtin, David Dean, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Fidelis Gadzama, Ross Garrod, Suzanne Grocott, Jeff Hanna, Joan Henry, Daniel Holden, James Holmes, Janice Howard, Mary-Jane Jeanes, Abigail Jones, Philip Jones, Andrew Judge, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Abdul Latif, Najeeb Latif, Brian Lewis-Lavender, Gilli Lewis-Lavender, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Oonagh Moulton, Ian Munn, Katy Neep, Dennis Pearce, John Sargeant, Judy Saunders, David Simpson, Marsie Skeete, Peter Southgate, Geraldine Stanford, Linda Taylor, Imran Uddin, Gregory Udeh, Jill West, Martin Whelton and David Williams. (58)

Voting Against: None (0)

Not Voting: None (0)

The Mayor declared the amendment to be carried.

Following the end of the voting on the amendments, the Mayor invited the Leader to formally move the Business Plan 2016-20 report.

- Councillor Stephen Alambritis moved the **Substantive Motion** as amended which was seconded by Councillor Tobin Byers.

A roll-call was called on the **Substantive Motion** as amended.

Voting in Favour: Councillors Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Tobin Byers, David Chung, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Pauline Cowper, Mary Curtin, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Edward Foley, Brenda Fraser, Fidelis Gadzama, Ross Garrod, , Joan Henry, Abigail Jones, Philip Jones, Andrew Judge, Sally Kenny, Linda Kirby, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Peter McCabe, Ian Munn, Katy Neep, Dennis Pearce, John Sargeant, Judy Saunders, Marsie Skeete, Peter Southgate, Geraldine Stanford, Imran Uddin, Gregory Patrick Udeh, and Martin Whelton (36)

Voting Against: Councillors: Hamish Badenoch, John Bowcott, Michael Bull, Adam Bush, Charlie Chirico, Stephen Crowe, David Dean, Suzanne Grocott, Daniel Holden,

James Holmes, Janice Howard, Abdul Latif, Najeeb Latif, Brian Lewis-Lavender, Gilli Lewis-Lavender, Oonagh Moulton, David Simpson, Linda Taylor, Jill West and David Williams (20)

Not Voting: Jeff Hanna and Mary-Jane Jeanes (2)

RESOLVED

That the Council agrees the Business Plan 2016-20 including:-

1) the General Fund Budget;

2) the Council Tax Strategy for 2016/17 equating to a Band D Council Tax of £1,102.25, which means no change in Merton's Council Tax.

3) the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2016-2020;

4) the Capital Investment Programme (as detailed in Annex 1 to the Capital Strategy);

5) the Capital Strategy (Section 4 of the report)

6) the Treasury Management Strategy (Section 5 of the report), 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 this report.(Also detailed as Annex 1 to these minutes)

7) that officers be asked to actively to explore and report back to Council on the Government's offer of a 4 year financial settlement, and in particular how this could provide certainty on future funding for both Merton residents and staff, assist with forward planning and help avoid short term decision making.

Revenue Report:

1. Members approve the proposed budget for 2016/17 set out in Section 2 of the revenue report, together with the proposed Council Tax levy in 2016/17.

2. That it be noted that at its meeting on 18 January 2016 the Council calculated its ***Council Tax Base for the year as 71,327.0*** 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 11,127.2*** 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	**512.373**
Corporate Provisions	**6.895**
Amounts Payable to the Levying Bodies	**0.928**
Contribution to/(from) Financial Reserves	**1.693**
Gross Expenditure	**521.889**

   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	**442.969**

   NB: The final analysis of gross expenditure and income may vary from the figures shown above as a result of some minor changes in allocations e.g. overheads

   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 2016/17 (including special expenses re WPCC)	**78.920**

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 formula grant

	£m
Revenue Support Grant including Transition Grant Baseline funding NNDR & Section 31 Grant	**(23.156)** **(35.052)**
Formula Grant	**(58.208)**

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)	**1,106.45**

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

	£
Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators Special Levy	**300,042**

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)	**1,102.25**

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	**1,129.22**

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.

	Valuation Bands							
	A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
Part of the Councils Area	734.83	857.31	979.78	1,102.25	1,347.19	1,592.14	1,837.08	2,204.50
Parts inc. WPCC	752.81	878.28	1,003.75	1,129.22	1,380.16	1,631.10	1,882.03	2,258.44

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 2016/17 by taking the aggregate of 4(i) above and the Greater London Authority precept.

	Valuation Bands							
Precepting Authority	A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
G L A	184.00	214.67	245.33	276.00	337.33	398.67	460.00	552.00

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

	Valuation Bands							
	A £	B £	C £	D £	E £	F £	G £	H £
Part of the Council's Area	918.83	1,071.98	1,225.11	1,378.25	1,684.52	1,990.81	2,297.08	2,756.50
Parts inc. WPCC	936.81	1,092.95	1,249.08	1,405.22	1,717.49	2,029.77	2,342.03	2,810.44

Appendix A

Speech by Councillor Stephen Alambritis, the Leader of Merton Council, to the Budget/Council Tax Full Council Meeting on Wednesday 02 March 2016 at 7:15pm and in the Council Chamber at the London Borough of Merton, Civic Centre, London Road, Morden, Surrey, SM4 5DX

Mr Mayor

Last year's budget was about providing hope while taking tough decisions

This year's budget is about protecting vulnerable residents while keeping the promise made to all our residents that we would freeze their council tax

Protecting vulnerable people be they our senior citizens or our newly born

They both need a Labour council that is true to its values on looking after those in need of our services

And a Labour council that keeps its promises to those on low pay

Mr 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 thanks

Thank you to Cllr Mark Allison my deputy and to my cabinet

Thank you to my councillors and to Councillor Peter Southgate chair of scrutiny

To Councillor Oonagh Moulton and to her small band of earnest councillors

And to our very one and only Liberal, Cllr Mary-Jane Jeanes

We are also deeply indebted to Caroline Holland the director of corporate services

Mr Mayor

Each year we have a duty to balance the budget

We have done so in the past and will continue to do so in the future

Because we are a best achieving council

Because we are a business friendly council

Because we are a caring, listening, innovative council

Mr Mayor

We councils get most of our funding from central government and the nasty Tories have cut funding to local authorities by as much as 50 per cent since 2010!

But Mr Mayor

Because we are well run and businesslike we can still report tonight on good things coming to our residents

A brand new family leisure centre is on course

Two new libraries are also on the way

And we are on target to create 4,000 extra places in our best primary schools by 2018

This budget will make us even more attractive to the business community bringing more business start up's

Mr Mayor

It is a truth universally acknowledged that residents expect politicians to keep their promises

And on that score Mr Mayor I can say tonight that we are on course to keep our tax promise with our sixth year in a row council tax freeze

Mr Mayor

People wonder why no one trusts politicians

It is because they don't keep to their word

But in Merton that is not the kind of politics we do

In Labour we believe in straight talking, honest politics

Some people think we should try and weasel our way out of it but that is not the new politics we practice here

We made a promise and we are sticking to it

Mr Mayor

In sticking to our promises we also have to deal with the impact of a Tory government every day

With our funding slashed again, we need to strike a balance so we do our best to look after all our residents whether they need a school place , adult social care, their street swept or just do not want to pay more council tax

So we are staying true to our “July Principles”

These Principles make sure adult social care and children’s services have less of a share of the cuts than other areas

We have also used our good financial management to add an extra £12m to the adult social care budget over the last few years.

That is how we have been able to keep the adult social care budget constant since 2010, despite the pressures

Given these pressures and the reference back from scrutiny I am pleased to say Cabinet have listened

And at the 15 February cabinet meeting two new additional recommendations were agreed as a result in this budget

The first of these is a new £1.3m fund for vulnerable people

This funding will be used to reduce the impact of the government’s cuts on vulnerable people, covering all social care including children

And officers have been asked to seek to identify similar significant funding for future years

We are committed to ensuring that the particular demands faced by well-run adult social services are met

We are also committed to ensuring we cover the costs where demand exceeds this

Indeed in the current year adult social care spent more than its allocated budget

But we ensured that we used some of the underspend from previous years that we kept to one side to make sure we could continue to deliver important social care services

Mr Mayor

Our new fund is at least equal to the sums that would be generated by a 1.7% increase in council tax but, crucially, because we are a buinesslike council we are

able to do this without breaking our solemn promise to local residents to freeze Merton's council tax

Mr Mayor

The second of these recommendations is an additional £164K for Crossroads

So the total additional funding following scrutiny input comes to £1.464m for local care services

And so we in Labour Merton are doing all we can given our limited resources to fund local care services

But Mr Mayor

There is a national crisis in Adult social care

And George Osborne is refusing to both tackle the scandal of bed blocking and inadequate funding for local care services

Instead he wants local residents to pay more in council tax and he bounces a change in government policy with little if any notice triggering increases in council tax

A tax that is a grossly unfair tax and a cruelly regressive one at that

Mr Mayor

This is typical of a Tory party that cares more about millionaires than hard working families

So we are not going to let George Osborne force us to break our promise because he refuses to fund adult social care properly

Funding that care, resolving the issue of 8,500 patients trapped in expensive bed blocking hospital stays, is a national problem and will take billions to sort out

It will not be fixed by forcing Merton's pensioners and hard working families on fixed incomes to pay more in council tax

That is why Merton Labour intends to work with other local authorities such as Hammersmith and Fulham who are also freezing their council tax

And with the Leaders and Chairs of the South West London boroughs and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's)

And with the NHS and care providers

To unlock this funding so that we can ensure a long term sustainable future for adult social care that does not let George Osborne off the hook!

Now, if residents tell us they want to pay more council tax I am happy to go along with that. For me it is what the residents want that counts.

I will be fully consulting residents on next year's budget and if they tell me they want to pay more, in the light of demographic changes, then I will follow their lead

I was elected to serve local residents and that is what I will do

But oh what irony we have with conservative councillors and their protestations tonight!

Conservative councillors who promised to cut council tax by 10% are now intent on increasing council tax so Merton residents have to pay for their own government's catastrophic mismanagement of our NHS

Would it not have been better to go to their own darling George to sort out the crisis in adult social care?

Instead they are colluding with him about his own leadership aspirations

Mr Mayor

Making people pay more and covering up the mess in the NHS the Tories have created is all about Osborne taking over from Cameron and nothing at all to do with helping elderly people in need of social care

Conservative councillors should be lobbying the Chancellor to use his Budget next month to bring forward the £700m of new funding earmarked for social care through the Better Care Fund. That is what I am doing

They should not be lobbying for a council tax increase for Merton's hard pressed working families on low pay struggling with tax credit changes and cuts

Confused Conservatives Councillors in Merton should also be listening to the Local Government Association (LGA)

This influential body is Chaired by one of their own in Lord Porter. It says that council tax rises will not fix the social care crisis

Mr Mayor

Now everyone knows that I used to be a football referee

My sporting question to Conservative Councillors tonight is are you sure you know which way you are playing?

Are you for cutting the council tax by 10% or for increasing the council tax-which is it to be?

Well we on this side in the red kit we know which way we are playing

We are on the side of Merton's residents

This is a budget for them. Help for the vulnerable and low taxes for the hard pressed. More libraries and a new leisure centre.

AFC Wimbledon coming home

We are on your side

I move!

Appendix B

BUDGET SPEECH BY COUNCILLOR OONAGH MOULTON

LEADER OF MERTON CONSERVATIVE GROUP

WEDNESDAY 2 MARCH 2016

Thank you, Mister Mayor

If only this council had received a pound for every time the administration shirked their responsibilities and blamed the government for their own dire straits. They'd have enough money to make up the shortfall in the council's finances….and we wouldn't need to be here until 10 o'clock tonight!

There are many things that Cllr Alambritis and his Cabinet are not good at but clearly they excel in self promotion. The Leader has already regaled us with how business-like he thinks this council is and I'm sure there's more to come from Cllr Allison.

Reality however paints a different picture. A picture of an uncaring, financially illiterate administration that's out of touch with local residents. Cllr Cooper-Marbiah's recent press comments about sticking plasters and elephants showed this all too clearly.

She may regard the opportunity for sustainable funding as a mere sticking plaster but for the thousands of Merton residents who rely on Adult Social Care services the precept is much more than that.

Perhaps the sticking plaster was in fact meant for her own Leader? He is certainly in dire need given the gaping, self-inflicted political wound he has suffered in recent weeks!

It's hard to be sympathetic to Cllr Alambritis and Cllr Cooper-Marbiah though when we consider who are the real victims of the cuts they are proposing to Adult Social Care:

- The vulnerable residents no longer able to attend the local day care centre because of a lack of volunteers to cover posts deleted last year.
- The older people who won't be able to rely on meals on wheels to provide them with a hot meal every day
- Grandma or grandpa stuck in hospital simply because there is such a backlog of day care assessment requests

- And not to forget the families and carers of all of the above who just need the odd break from looking after their loved one. As a former carer myself, I know how crucial it is to be able to recharge ones batteries now and then. Yet under this Labour administration, that is for the chop too.

I fully accept Cllr Alambritis is unlikely to heed warnings about all this if it was just from the Leader of the Opposition.

I would hope that he would listen to the concerns of some of his own Labour councillors and to colleagues on Scrutiny.

And I would certainly expect that he would pay attention to the outcry from all those vulnerable residents, their families and the community groups who are bearing the brunt of these unnecessary cuts.

Whatever the July principles may say on paper, he and Cllr Allison need to realise those words are meaningless if they don't translate into protecting services for the most vulnerable.

This council is developing a real problem with how it is viewed by the very people we were all elected to protect. I spoke this time last year about the extremely worrying trend in Merton of falling levels of satisfaction with the Council among disabled residents.

It seems unlikely that this important group views the council any more highly today…although of course we can't possibly know for sure because there has been no Annual Residents Survey this year. And most conveniently for the administration, webcasting was scrapped by Labour last month too so now these residents can't even watch their fate online. They and the various community organisations working hard on their behalf – are denied the opportunity to see their elected representatives taking crucial decisions here tonight that will fundamentally change their everyday lives.

Cllr Alambritis cannot simply blame the Government for his current woes because just as with webcasting, there are clear and fully costed alternatives available to Labour. He and his Cabinet are just choosing not to take them. **This is a situation of their own making!**

This administration has been given the power to fix their own financial mess but they are refusing to do so. Instead of ensuring adequate funding for the most vulnerable, they just congratulate themselves for being 'business-like', when in reality Labour's financial incompetence is harming those residents in Merton who are most in need.

In recent times, they have:

- Continually made the wrong choices for the people of Merton;
- Demonstrated a lack of innovation, leadership and vision for our borough;
- And consistently failed to deliver on the savings and past efficiencies that would now be delivering financial benefits.

This year alone the council is predicted to overspend by £2.6million whilst simultaneously stashing away £1.7million in reserves.

If this is how Labour run Merton, just imagine what would happen if they were in charge at City Hall….let alone Downing Street:

- A £1.9billion black hole in the finances under Sadiq Khan
- And borrowing more not less in order to fund a £55 billion spending splurge under Jeremy Corbyn.

And yet still Cllrs Alambritis and Allison claim to run a 'business-like' council.

Surely a business-like council would focus on ensuring that all possible efficiencies and savings are driven out of the back office in order to protect budgets for the frontline services that residents rely on?

Yet this council has failed to deliver over £5million of savings that they themselves have agreed in previous years.

A business-like council would get on and use the millions of pounds put aside for Morden Park Pool to deliver the new leisure centre promised to residents.

Yet this council dithered and delayed for 4 whole years whilst the build costs escalated and thousands of pounds of additional potential revenue were lost in the process.

And a business-like council would sweat the council's property assets and maximise long term returns for the taxpayer by investing the proceeds of any sales in future property.

Yet this council just can't wait to flog off the family silver in the form of the P4 site without considering more innovative options.

But sometimes the solution can come from the most unlikely of places!

Yes, Mister Mayor, this administration has been thrown two lifelines to help them out of the financial hole they've dug: one from George Osborne and one from Boris Johnson.

Late last year the Chancellor announced that the Government would give councils the power to raise a precept of up to 2% to help fund Adult Social Care where there is local need and demographic pressures.

And then, as a result of his careful management of the City Hall finances, the Mayor of London has been able to reduce his share of council tax once again this year.

So whilst we most certainly do not have a business-like council, we do at least have both a business-like government and a business-like Mayor.

After all that's why the country elected a Conservative government in May last year. Economic competence under the Tories compared to Labour's record of financial mismanagement.

Of course reducing the deficit, building a stronger economy and providing security for working people all require some tough choices for local government. Yet, that's no excuse for bad decisions.

Tonight we are presented with a unique opportunity. A combination of new powers from the Government and the London Mayor's prudence means £1.355million of crucial extra funding to protect the vulnerable can be raised at no additional cost to the Merton taxpayer. That's right, residents won't see a single penny extra on their council tax bills with this Opposition amendment.

One might have expected the Leader to jump at this get out. After all it's what Scrutiny recommended.

It's what many of his own councillors wanted.

And it's what 9 out of 10 councils nationwide are doing. Plus it would still allow him to plaster the whole borough with his favourite council tax freeze posters at public expense!

Yet this heavy handed Labour Cabinet flatly refuses to levy the precept. Instead it is choosing to persist with cuts to vital services such as meals on wheels, day care centres and care support packages.

Let me be clear: my group and I are entirely committed to low taxes in Merton. Needless to say, we would have made some very different choices had we been running the Council in the last 2 years. I am pleased that my colleagues will be outlining some of these in our second amendment.

However, Merton is where it is. As an opposition, we recognise the real demographic pressures facing Adult Social Care and the need for a sustainable funding solution. After all, by 2020 demand for the borough's services is due to increase by 23% for older people aged over 90, by 13% for people with dementia and by 6% for adults with learning disabilities.

What is needed is security for the vital services on which vulnerable residents rely .The Cabinet's conjuring trick of £1.3million from a Government housing fund is no more than a short term fix.

A sticking plaster solution that leaves holes elsewhere in the budget and is for one year only.

Merton residents deserve better and here this evening all councillors will get to make their **own** choice. Members opposite may differ on the reasons for raising the precept. However, I hope that tonight people will put aside any differing views on each other's motivation and instead come together to deliver a better outcome for all those older and disabled residents we represent.

I am moving this amendment tonight because it is the right thing to do for the people of Merton. The most vulnerable in our community shouldn't have to suffer as a result of financial mismanagement and poor choices. We on this side know it and I suspect many Labour colleagues do too.

I therefore call on councillors from all parties to support the amendment.

Appendix C

BUDGET SPEECH BY COUNCILLOR PETER SOUTHGATE

LEADER OF MERTON PARK WARD INDEPENDENT RESIDENTS

WEDNESDAY 2 MARCH 2016

Budget Council – MPWIR speech

In the ten years I've been commenting on the budget as Leader of the Merton Park Independents, I don't think there's ever been a year when we haven't been looking to save money somewhere. But that process has become progressively harder over the years, kicking in with a vengeance with the introduction of austerity in 2010.

In my opinion, Labour made a decent fist of managing the finances during that first administration from 2010 to 2014. It would have been easy to respond to the cuts in central government funding by slashing services, all the while passing the blame back to the Chancellor. But Labour in Merton didn't do that, instead they took a pragmatic, businesslike approach, and played the hand they had been dealt to the best of their ability. We can see the results in the steady upward trend in satisfaction from the Annual Residents' Survey, on measures such as value for money.

So for example when the DCLG under Eric Pickles imposed an effective freeze on increasing council tax, Labour didn't challenge that, instead they took advantage of the council tax freeze grant, initially worth £2m a year to us, and managed within those limitations.

But now we have a new government, and a new minister, Greg Clark at the DCLG – and a complete 180° turn in policy. Anyone who heard Tony Travers speaking at the recent Merton Partnership conference will understand the full significance of this shift. So the council tax freeze grant ends, and instead local authorities are encouraged to increase council tax – "encouragement" taking the form of assuming we will increase council tax and cutting central government funding accordingly. In particular the looming crisis in Adult Social Care is acknowledged with the introduction of a dedicated precept of up to 2% on council tax.

Now I realise it is galling to be told by the Chancellor that adult care is in a mess, and he is graciously allowing you to tax your own residents to pay for it. But let me turn to the Bible for a word of warning against fighting this policy. "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 26.14) – tempting as it may be to do so. In other words, railing against the government for its heartless cuts gets us nowhere, and will achieve nothing for those who depend upon us most – the elderly and vulnerable.

For their sake I urge the administration to rediscover its former pragmatism, its ability to make the best of the hand it has been dealt, and to raise the revenues we need

within the new rules now before us. We have to bring in new money – there is no alternative

At this point I will segue (I hope seamlessly) into the Combined Opposition amendment you have before you. But can I preface this by thanking Cabinet for their willingness to listen to scrutiny's concerns about the impact of the proposed cuts to adult care, and for doing something about it in the form of the Savings Mitigation Fund? It does prove that the effort that goes into scrutiny in Merton is worthwhile, and that backbench members can make a real difference to the lives of our residents. I wouldn't want us to lose sight of that.

But the basis for funding the proposed Savings Mitigation Fund does depend on a one-off injection from reserves already allocated to meet budget shortfalls, and there is no guarantee of continuity for future years.

Levying the precept at even the lower rate of 1.7% will bring in £5.4m for adult care over the next four years, and moreover will put that funding on a sustainable footing. It would be a tragedy if this opportunity were to be lost.

The amendment sets the precept at 1.7% rather than the maximum 2% allowed because that exactly equates to the reduction in the GLA precept, resulting in no net change in the tax paid to the council. In so doing it acknowledges the administration's manifesto commitment not to increase council tax. Let me spell it out – residents will pay the same amount in tax to the council next year (2016/17) as they have paid this year (2015/16). And yet we bring in £1.35m of new funding for adult care – what's not to like?

And yet in a fundamental sense this misses the point. If we listen to our conscience, it's telling us we should do this because it's the right thing to do – we don't really need any other justification. So let's show some moral leadership on behalf of the elderly and the vulnerable, and vote for the precept.

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