

COUNCIL BUDGET COUNCIL TAX MEETING  
6 MARCH 2013

(19:15 – 21:50)

PRESENT:

The Mayor, Councillor David Williams

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor John Bowcott

Councillors Agatha Akyigyina, Stephen Alambritis, Mark Allison, Stan Anderson, Laxmi Attawar, Mark Betteridge, Margaret Brierly, Richard Chellew, David Chung, David Dean, John Dehaney, Nick Draper, Iain Dysart, Chris Edge, Suzanne Evans, Karin Forbes, Brenda Fraser, Samantha George, Suzanne Grocott, Maurice Groves, Gam Gurung, Jeff Hanna, Richard Hilton, James Holmes, Janice Howard, Mary-Jane Jeanes, Philip Jones, Andrew Judge, Linda Kirby, Gilli Lewis-Lavender, Logie Lohendran, Edith Macauley, Russell Makin, Maxi Martin, Peter McCabe, Krystal Miller, Ian Munn, Diane Neil Mills, Oonagh Moulton, Henry Nelles, Dennis Pearce, John Sargeant, Judy Saunders, Linda Scott, Rod Scott, Debbie Shears, David Simpson, Peter Southgate, Geraldine Stanford, Linda Taylor, Sam Thomas, Ray Tindle, Gregory Udeh, Peter Walker, Martin Whelton, Richard Williams, Miles Windsor and Simon Withey.

- 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda item 1)  
None advised.
- 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda item 2)  
None advised.
- 3 MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2012 – CORRECTION (Agenda Item 3)

The Mayor put the following correction to the meeting:

**Agenda Item 7 - Motion 1 (Conservative)**

That part of the Labour amendment as carried i.e.

“In the final paragraph, after “resolves to request Cabinet agree”, insert “to consult local schools and the School Sports Partnership on the following proposals.”

Therefore, that part of the Council resolution comprising recommendations to Cabinet is amended to read:

“Council resolves to request Cabinet agree to consult local schools and the School Sports Partnership on the following proposals:”

RESOLVED: That the amendment in the terms detailed above is agreed.

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4 MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 6 FEBRUARY 2013  
(Agenda Item 4)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the council meeting held on 6 February 2013 are agreed as a correct record.

5 BUSINESS PLAN 2012-17 (Agenda Item 5)

At the invitation of the Mayor the Director of Corporate Services presented the report and responded to questions from members.

The Executive Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Alambritis moved the recommendations detailed in the submitted report (reproduced below) and concurrently moved an amendment to the recommendations (attached as an appendix to these minutes):

That the Council agrees the Business Plan 2013-17 including:-

- the General Fund Budget;
- the Council Tax Strategy for 2013/14 equating to a Band D Council Tax of £1,102.55, which means that Merton qualifies for Council Tax Freeze Grant;
- the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2013-2017;
- the Capital Investment Programme (as detailed in Annex 1 to the Capital Strategy);
- the Capital Strategy (Section 1: Part A of the Business Plan);
- the Treasury Management Strategy (Section 1: Part A of the Business Plan), 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 submitted report.

The Executive Leader's budget speech is appended to these minutes.

Councillor Mark Betteridge formally seconded the recommendations and the amendment.

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The Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Debbie Shears addressed the meeting and her speech is appended to these minutes.

The Leader of the Merton Park Ward Independent Residents Group, Councillor Peter Southgate, addressed the meeting and his speech is appended to these minutes. He additionally confirmed his support for the Labour amendment.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor Iain Dysart, addressed the meeting and his speech is appended to these minutes.

**Amendment (Liberal Democrat) - Walksheets**

It was moved by Councillor Iain Dysart moved and Councillor Mary-Jane Jeanes seconded that:

This Council rejects proposal EN24 to reduce by £ 50k the Walksheets Budget for

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2014/5 and accordingly calls for a one-off allocation of £ 50k from the contingency fund.

The outcome of the vote on this amendment is recorded below.

The Mayor invited the following Cabinet members to address the meeting:

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Mark Allison

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Maxi Martin

Additional amendments were put as detailed below with general debate invited by the Mayor prior to these being put to the meeting.

**Amendment (Liberal Democrat) – Worksheets (detailed above)**

The Mayor put the amendment to the meeting and there voted 28 for the amendment, 31 voting against the amendment and 1 not voting.

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

**Amendment (Conservative) – Council Tax**

It was moved by Councillor Suzanne Grocott and seconded by Councillor Henry Nelles:

This Council understands the financial constraints facing many families and pensioners in Merton and welcomes the £9.1million that the borough has received from the Government in Council Tax Freeze Grant since 2011 to ensure that there is no increase in the council tax paid by Merton's residents.

This Council notes that between 1998 and 2006 the Labour-run council increased the Merton element of council tax by 55.7%, more than two and a half times the rate of inflation. Under the Conservative administration from 2006 to 2010, council tax increased by less than the rate of inflation each year and was cut in the final year.

Despite the current administration's claims that cuts to front line services are necessary, this Council further notes that there has been a year on year increase in total spend by Merton council since 2011 with total expenditure set to rise from £510.878million in 2012/13 to £524.194million in 2013/14, a further 3% increase on top of the 3% increase in the previous year, whilst the Council's total reserves are forecast to have risen to £90.1million by 31 March 2013.

This Council clearly recognises that there is scope for further efficiency savings to be delivered through a range of measures including:

- a) Focusing on areas of Council waste that haven't so far been subject to in depth scrutiny, such as the bureaucratic and ineffective performance management system and the low occupancy rates of council buildings such as the Civic Centre;

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- b) Further detailed work in those parts of the Council's business where the potential for savings has already been identified but not yet fulfilled, such as procurement, the use of technology e.g. in rubbish collection and translation services, and increased joint working with other local authorities and sharing of back office functions; and
- c) Implementing efficiency savings which have already been considered and agreed by Scrutiny as soon as possible such as the introduction of mobile phone payments for parking and the Council's new sickness policy.

This Council believes that councillors have a responsibility to Merton's electors to ensure maximum value for money and therefore regrets that, as part of this year's budget scrutiny process, the current administration did not take the opportunity to present new ongoing efficiency savings which would have enabled it to fund a 5% reduction in council tax for Merton's hard pressed residents, whilst maintaining the quality of services currently provided.

The Mayor put the amendment to the meeting and there voted 26 for the amendment, 31 voting against the amendment and 3 not voting.

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

**Amendment (Conservative) – Scrutiny of Savings**

It was moved by Councillor Samantha George and seconded by Councillor Diane Neil Mills:

This Council notes that the balanced budget for the year 2012/13 included a reserve of £5.7million for balancing the budget in future years and that such reserves now total £7.8million.

This Council welcomes efficiency savings which can be taken over and above those purely necessary to produce a balanced budget for the current year.

The Council was therefore disappointed to see that the only efficiency savings initially being considered for 2013-14 were those already approved at the Council Budget meeting in March 2012. Whilst the reprofiling of £215,000 of Environment and Regeneration savings following a request by Conservative members of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 10 January 2013 is welcomed, it is nonetheless regrettable that no similar reprofiling also took place in other council departments to bring efficiency savings forward sooner, particularly when there are service reductions already agreed by Council in March 2012 which are due to come into force in 2013-14.

This Council also recognises the valid concerns raised during the 2013-14 Budget scrutiny process about a number of the administration's savings proposals for 2014-15 and beyond, which constitute either service reductions or increases in charges for Merton's residents and businesses. As such, in order to avoid the same situation recurring next year and in light of the Public Value Reviews due to be undertaken in

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2013-14, this Council resolves that:

- a) Cabinet is requested to instruct officers in all of the council's other departments to conduct a review to see if any efficiency savings could be brought forward for implementation sooner and request that regular progress reports on this are presented to the relevant scrutiny panels for consideration; and
- b) As a very minimum, at least the following savings come back for consideration by Scrutiny again as part of the 2014-15 Budget setting process and in the context of the authority's financial situation at that time:

EN38 - Reductions in grant to Polka Theatre  
CSF07 - Delete 7FTEs in children's social care and youth inclusion  
ASC49 - Day care workers to act as drivers/escorts  
EN11 – 1 FTE reduction in Building and Development Control in 2016/17  
EN23 – Reduction in Grounds Maintenance budget  
EN24 – Reduction in Walksheets budget and urgent repairs only  
EN 25 – Reduction in the Surface Water budget to repair damaged gullies  
EN26 – Reduction in the Ditching budget to clear drainage watercourses  
EN35 – Increased charges for halls and watersports centre  
EN37 – Increased charges for Merton Active Plus  
EN45 – Increased charges for sports grounds and parks

- c) Recognising the temporary withdrawal of EN44 (Public value review savings in Greenspaces) and EN46 (Introduce parking charges in five parks), these two savings and any new savings proposals arising from the work due to be undertaken by officers on their implementation are considered afresh by Scrutiny and also considered again at a future Council meeting.

The Mayor put the amendment to the meeting and there voted 28 for the amendment, 31 voting against the amendment and 1 not voting.

The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

**Amendment (Liberal Democrat) – Freedom Passes**

It was moved by Councillor Iain Dysart moved and Councillor Mary-Jane Jeanes seconded that:

This Council calls for the saving of £ 70K generated by the withdrawal of discretionary Freedom Passes from some mental health clients to be withdrawn. This reversal to be funded by a one-off sum from the contingency fund.

The Mayor put the amendment to the meeting and there voted 28 for the amendment, 31 voting against the amendment and 1 not voting.

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The Mayor declared the amendment to be lost.

The Mayor thereupon put the recommendations detailed in the submitted report and as amended by the Labour amendment, to the meeting.

There voted for the recommendations as amended 31 and 29 not voting

It was, therefore

RESOLVED: That the Business Plan 2013-17, together with the agreed amendments detailed in the Labour amendment detailed in the appendix to these minutes, are agreed including:-

- the General Fund Budget;
- the Council Tax Strategy for 2013/14 equating to a Band D Council Tax of £1,102.55, which means that Merton qualifies for Council Tax Freeze Grant;
- the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2013-2017;
- the Capital Investment Programme (as detailed in Annex 1 to the Capital Strategy);
- the Capital Strategy (Section 1: Part A of the Business Plan);
- the Treasury Management Strategy (Section 1: Part A of the Business Plan), including the detailed recommendations in that Section, incorporating the Prudential Indicators as set out in the submitted report and the formal resolutions as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report and as detailed in the appendix to these minutes.

## Labour Amendment

Under Recommendation 1 of the report, after “the General Fund Budget” add:

“as amended by the following recommendations set out in Appendix A”

And after “the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2013-2017” add:

“as amended by the appropriate corresponding increase in the revenue budget gap (Appendix A) as set out in Appendix 7, pg. 316 for the revenue impacts of the recommendations”

## Appendix A

The following savings were reviewed again by O&S on 28 February 2013 and are recommended for rejection

	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	2016/17 £'000	Total £'000
CS47 (part) – potential Saving from the London Councils Grants scheme in years 2 and 3.		26	28	54
EN38 (part) – reductions in grants to Attic Theatre.		1	1	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>27</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>56</b>

The following savings reviewed again by O&S on 28 February 2013 and are recommended for rejection but with altered use of the funds

	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	2016/17 £'000	Total £'000
CS47 – Saving from the London Councils Grants scheme in 2014/15 to be transferred to the Corporate Service Grants budget	87			87
CSF06 – DoE, retain funding but officers to pilot work to refocus use	25			25
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>			<b>112</b>

The following savings were reviewed again by O&S of 28 February 2013 and are recommended that they are not included at this stage until further work undertaken on implementation but not rejected

	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	2016/17 £'000	Total £'000
EN44 – public value review savings in Green spaces	78	119	79	276
EN46 – parking charges in five parks.	44			44
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>320</b>

These proposals would have the following impact on the MTFS position as reported to Council in Appendix 7

	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	2016/17 £'000	Total £'000
<b>Increase in Budget Gap</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>488</b>
<b>Cumulative increase in Gap</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>488</b>	

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## **Speech by Councillor Stephen Alambritis, the Leader of Merton Council , to the Budget/Council Tax Full Council Meeting on Wednesday 06 March 2013**

Mr Mayor,

Many people were surprised to see my name appear in 2010 as the Labour leader of this council

I am proud of my business background and proud of my Labour roots

Those Labour roots go back to the youngest and only boy of four siblings born in colonial Cyprus in the late 50's and emigrating to England at the tender age of seven in the mid 60's

Living in poverty and in cramped conditions was what life was like in Fulham in those days

Father worked nights in the kitchens at the Dorchester hotel and mother worked in the rag trade at the Angel in North London

They eventually scraped enough money to buy a house just by Craven Cottage for £6,000

A lot of money in 1967!

My parents gave me the ability to get on in life, to get a business

But they taught me never to forget how hard it can be

And how the cost of living hurts hard working ambitious families the most

They taught me to care for others, to share with others and to listen to others

I am therefore pleased to be able to present this caring, sharing and listening budget

Mr Mayor,

Last year's Budget was about putting the council's finances on a surer footing

Tonight's Budget is about taking strong steps towards affordability

I therefore move the budget proposals as set out in Recommendation 1, with particular reference to the formal resolution as set out in Appendix 1 to the Report and as amended by the further Recommendations set out in Appendix A

Mr Mayor,

This time last year, I named three people for all their hard work on the budget

These colleagues were:

Cllr Mark Allison

Cllr Peter Southgate

And

Caroline Holland the Director of Corporate Services

I wish to repeat those thanks

I also wish to thank Cllr Debbie Shears and all her councillors

I would also like to thank Cllrs Iain Dysart and Mary-Jane Jeanes

Thanks must also go to Cllrs John Sargeant and Karin Forbes

My deputy leader, Cllr Mark Betteridge, my Cabinet and all Labour Councillors also deserve my heartfelt thanks

Mr Mayor,

Each year we have a duty to balance the budget

Given the cuts in government funding this is becoming increasingly difficult

But we must all recall that this Council agreed to a set of key principles

Dedicating us

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To continuing to provide the services residents need most

To keeping the council tax at an affordable price without being reckless or indulgent over its level

To keeping Merton's streets clean

To doing the best we can for the local environment

Those principles also committed us to ensuring Merton continues to be a good place for young people to go to school

Just in case any one needs reminding these are called our July principles passed by this very council in this very chamber

Mr Mayor,

We are here tonight after a long journey in our budget process that has seen the council punch well above its weight

We are one of the most effective councils in London

We are in the top quartile when it comes to performance

We have had to save £70 million—approximately a third of our budget

While sadly, we have received the lowest funding for our housing needs team, we are nevertheless still maintaining exceedingly low numbers in temporary accommodation

Over 90% of our 16 and 17 year olds are not NEETS because they ARE in education, employment or training

We have achieved the highest improvement rates in exam results in London

Our town centres continue to prosper with Raynes Park heralded as the best performing high street in London by the Evening Standard

Our achievements have been recognised with the borough winning over 40 industry awards across a range of sectors since we came to power in 2010

Mr Mayor,

All this could not be done without our excellent budget strategy

As well as restructuring our corporate centre we have worked hard to drive out waste and inefficiencies in every process

Working together we have been able to develop a number of innovative models in local government

The first of these is our partnership approach

Our South London Waste Partnership is the first of its kind

We have teamed up with three other London boroughs to operate an energy-from-waste-plant

This will save us £60 million over the next 25 years

Mr Mayor,

The second of our three innovative models in local government is to do with volunteering

In our great library service we have introduced a volunteering model for our libraries that is being replicated across the country

Hundreds of volunteers help us to maintain our libraries which were at risk of closing due to cuts in our government funding

Many residents are also now involved in the management of small green areas

Another voluntary programme is our recently launched street champions scheme

Mr Mayor,

The last of our innovative modes in local government relates to sharing services with neighbouring boroughs

Our HR team was one of the first shared services in the local government sector

This shared service with Sutton has already saved well in excess of £500,000

We have also teamed up with Richmond to establish the first legal service in local government with savings of between 16-20%

Following this huge success we are now extending this model to Sutton and Kingston

This will create the first ever four borough legal service, saving a further £100,000

Mr Mayor,

Some in this chamber may not believe me and that is their wont

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But of more importance to me is what our residents say

That is why each year we ask them what they think of our services

Over the last two years we have received record satisfaction levels, often way above the rest of London.

Let us look at just three of those satisfaction levels

One: 79% of residents think we are doing a good job

Two: 69% say we are efficient and well run

Three: 72% say we are a good place to live

A AAA rating for this council if ever I saw one!

Mr Mayor

As late as last week, more feedback was received from the final round of scrutiny meetings

Given the proximity of this to tonight, I was more than happy to delegate authority to Cllrs Betteridge and Allison to give the Cabinet response

I am pleased to announce tonight that appendix A to the amendment I am moving shows us in listening mode on all of the recommendations from scrutiny

And I am delighted that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission has agreed to second the amendment

Mr Mayor,

At the end of the day,

When all is said and done

And we have all left this chamber

What Merton's residents will want to know is how will this budget affect them?

I have some very good news for our residents especially those on low incomes

I also have very good news for our businesses, especially those that are small firms

I know many of us will have seen stories in the news that council tax benefit for people on low incomes is being cut

But, unlike other authorities, Merton Council will not be going along with this

We have decided to pay the extra money ourselves out of the council budget to make sure the overall income of our people on low incomes is protected

This has only been possible as a result of good financial management in this budget

Mr Mayor,

As we all know, the council does not set business rates

However we will do what we can to support businesses in Merton

We will continue to give the small business rate relief

And we will continue to spruce up our town centres in Colliers Wood

Mitcham

Morden

Wimbledon

And Raynes Park

Mr Mayor,

We have had significant reductions in our funding from central government

A 28% cut over three years with more to come

To deliver value for money we have had to cut spending on some services

But we have managed to keep our council tax low

While at the same time protecting the services that matter most to our residents

And unlike many other boroughs

We have not closed any of our libraries

Any of our children's centres

Any of our leisure centres

By offering more of our services on line,

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Getting a better deal from our suppliers and sharing services with other boroughs

We have become a more efficient borough

This has helped us to keep the council tax low

To contain the cost of resident parking and to reduce visitor parking charges

Mr Mayor

Our residents continue to inform us about a range of worrying issues close to their hearts

They are concerned with the lack of growth in the economy

They are also concerned about the rising cost of living

And I remember how hard it was for my parents, hard working people striving to get on when times were hard

Given these very genuine concerns we want our residents to pay no more in their council tax this year than they did three years ago

Therefore

For the third year in a row we are freezing the council tax

This is the first time this has happened in Merton

Tonight we are not only setting a caring, sharing, listening budget

We are also setting a record breaking budget

Of that we can all be proud

Mr Mayor

I commend this budget to the Chamber

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**BUDGET SPEECH BY**  
**COUNCILLOR DEBBIE SHEARS**  
**LEADER OF THE CONSERVATIVE GROUP**  
**WEDNESDAY 6 MARCH 2013**

Thank you Mr Mayor,

“This Administration has not taken every step and looked at every measure to see how they can save money without cutting front line services.”

These are not my words but those of the current Leader of the Council who was in opposition in 2010 at the Budget Council meeting. Oh, how he must be regretting those words now!

For today, Mr Mayor, we are faced with a lazy budget that is totally lacking in imagination.

Labour has fallen back on its previous formula of building up reserves whilst hiking charges for residents, cutting services to the most vulnerable and reducing funding to arts and community groups.

Labour have also snubbed residents by failing to take the opportunity to use the council's budget wisely. Next year they are proposing to spend £524 million of taxpayers' money – that's a whopping £28million increase since 2011. And yet in a gross misjudgement they refuse to pass onto residents the 5% cut in council tax that the Conservatives called for last year.

Building a war chest of £90 million to bribe residents at the next election is a cynical ploy, but one our residents will see through. The country and Merton residents know all too well that Labour cannot be trusted with the public's money. We only have to remember the mess Labour made of the British economy - a mess the country is paying for today.

And just as Labour nationally seem to have no solution to tackling the deficit other than borrowing more, so Labour in Merton seem to be completely devoid of a plan for managing the council's resources other than persisting in building up their war chest of reserves.

Labour in Merton are now sitting on reserves higher than many councils in London, oblivious to the needs of the residents whose money it is they've got stashed away. Labour try to present themselves as the caring party; in fact Cllr Martin takes every opportunity to tell this Chamber about her care for the Borough's children. Maybe that is why over 3 years she has taken £5.7 million out of children's care services and £1.2 million out of youth services.

If Labour and the other two parties truly cared about Merton's hard pressed residents they would have looked seriously at a council tax reduction this year. Conservative councillors know that this is affordable and we even set out in our council tax amendment how they could go about it. If colleagues in Hammersmith and Fulham can do it then so can we, particularly considering the council is again projecting a £4 million surplus on its budget this year and again proposing a 3% increase in total expenditure.

Council Tax remains the second highest concern of residents, even despite the two previous years of council tax freezes funded by the Coalition Government. Yet when asked to consider a sustainable council tax cut, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and Merton Park Independents all flatly refused. I'm afraid that's typical of the 'Can't do, won't do' approach of this Labour run council.

You may have all scoffed at our call for a 5% council tax reduction but that's what residents want. They want a council that is bold and imaginative and which most of all listens to their views. But of course Labour isn't interested in listening to residents. In fact they have such a low regard for residents' opinions that there has not been one consultation meeting between the Leader or Cabinet and the public on the budget, not through the community forums, through My Merton or even online.

They will consult on bus lanes when they think they're going to generate extra revenue but then when they get the wrong answer back they just ignore the majority view anyway, as seen with Hartfield Road and in Mitcham Town Centre.

We saw this also with the recent consultation on the Budget with business ratepayers. Out of all the businesses in the borough just three turned up. Why? Because once again there was a lack of notice and advertising and the timing of the meeting was inconvenient for many businesses since many are still open at 6.00pm on a Thursday.

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Fortunately for residents in Merton all is not lost as they do have a 'Can Do' Conservative-led government who have given Merton nearly £10 million in Council Tax Freeze Grant so that Council Tax can be kept low or reduced. We also have a 'Can Do' Conservative Mayor of London who does actually listen and cares about helping residents which is why he is cutting his precept by 1.2% giving Merton residents a cut in Council Tax. Were it not for Conservatives in power nationally and in London, we would undoubtedly see Labour Merton returning to its natural inclinations - the last time they were in power they increased council tax by 55% in just 8 years.

What this Labour council will do of course is persist in its apparent hatred of the motorist and the motor car. This year alone you have claimed in income and fines from the motorist in excess of £11 million, a whopping £1.6 million more than last year. You've increased beyond the suggested number of mobile enforcement vans and now in this budget you are proposing to not only increase the number of camera vans further but to employ seven more traffic wardens too. What rather gives the game away though is your claim

that this is not a growth item because they will more than pay for themselves through the increase in income from fines. So yet more indirect taxation levied by this council on the motorists of Merton.

The same is true of proposals to charge people to park and use our parks. What a kick in the teeth when the Leader has stood in this Chamber and talked about Olympic spirit and legacy. Councillor Draper has already admitted he has not progressed the Sophie Hosking Challenge Cup for school children, despite the wish of council and the endorsement of the Olympic Champion herself. Now you want to charge our sportsmen and women who use the parks and recreation grounds for weekend sport, running clubs and competitions for young people in our borough.

So much for increasing sport and active lifestyles - this proposal would have the opposite effect in Merton, because sports clubs who are already dissatisfied with the sporting facilities Labour provide will just move out of borough.

Will we ever actually see another Merton Olympic champion?

And all this for what? So that the council can build up its reserves further and presumably enable the administration to have a pre-election spending splurge in 2014. Or Are they thinking of ignoring the vote of this Chamber and resurrecting their gimmick of giving every household a £100 council tax rebate?

It has to be to the credit of Scrutiny that the Commission has at least managed to make some headway in forcing the administration to reconsider some of your proposals for future years. I am only disappointed that it's taken until just 6 days before this meeting for you finally to listen to the views of councillors from all sides of this Chamber.

Mr Mayor, we are here today to consider a budget from a Labour administration with no respect for democracy. The residents we all represent rightly expect all 60 of us to consider this decision carefully, as for many the level of council tax represents one of the highest monthly expenditures they have to pay. Yet Cllr Alambritis has shown a total disregard for this Chamber and for democracy in Merton, because since January he has been writing to residents telling them that council tax will be frozen this year, before a single one of us Councillors has even voted.

This is symptomatic of a lacklustre minority Labour administration. In their total disregard for democracy, they deal with minority parties behind closed doors and both show complete contempt for the residents they represent.

Mr Mayor, Labour have refused to cut council tax; all they are interested in is ripping off residents to build a war chest for electioneering. Labour's mantra is to rip off residents to build huge reserves and they have shown a total lack of respect for democracy, which is why on this side of the Chamber we cannot vote for their budget.

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**Agenda Item 5. Budget Council**  
Councillor Peter Southgate - MPWIR

**6 March 2013**

Thank you for calling me to speak on behalf of MPWIR, and thank you too for setting out your principles governing the allocation of time between political groups for budget council meetings. As these ensure a fair deal for minority political groups against the big battalions, I hope they will be adapted by your successors for future budget councils.

On the assumption that few people will still be listening by the time I finish this speech (particularly if I use the full six minutes I've been allowed), I'm going to break with convention and thank officers for their input to the budget process of the beginning rather than the end of my speech. In particular I want to thank Caroline Holland and Paul Dale for their support through two or three cycles of budget scrutiny meetings going back to last November plus their support to the Financial Management Task Group. That has helped members to analyse future budget proposals in the context of current financial performance.

I hope members will agree that we are now getting better quality information and better researched proposals than we were getting a few years ago. I realize there are still differences of opinion over the presentation of information and how it may best be integrated, but we are closer to this with the service plan format than we have been in the past.

I mentioned improvements to the capital budget last year, but I make no apology for referring to this again because of the benefits from challenging the programme and cancelling projects that have little likelihood of materializing. That has been combined with a much more realistic approach to slippage. So if you look at the cost of servicing our borrowings (on page 83) you will see they are 10.14% of revenue for 2013/14 rising to 12.14% in 2016/17. That's still a lot of money in absolute terms (around £17m next year) but it's less than we were looking at three years ago. Then, we were forecasting borrowings of £204m in 2013/14, now we are looking at £125m.

Still with the historical perspective, we can see the benefits of freezing council tax for the third year running in the reactions of our residents. If I combine this with the policy of the previous administration of pegging the increase in council tax at or below RPI, the number citing the level of council tax as their main personal concern drops from 45% in 2005 to 27% in 2012. Over the same period (2005 to 2012) the number believing the council provides good value for money has gone from 33% to 54%, the numbers who say the council is efficient and well run is up from 53% to 69% and “doing a good job” is up from 62% to 79%. These are fundamentally important measures of performance in the eyes of our residents, and they demonstrate that a minority administration is no bar to improvement.

Going from the macro to the micro, I'd like to turn now to the savings considered in the final round of scrutiny by the Commission last week, and why they mattered. The first is funding for the voluntary sector. I accept that monies we were previously paying into the London Councils Grants Scheme were not necessarily benefitting Merton residents, but now that they have been repatriated to Merton, the best possible use for them is surely to insist they do start benefitting our residents, rather than being swallowed up elsewhere. As a point of principle, we should strive to maintain funding to the voluntary sector. Elsewhere in this budget we are inviting the voluntary sector to find savings of £98K through their own efficiencies. That's not undoable (for example the merger of MVSC and Volunteer Centre Merton will allow economies of scale), but we can't continue to rely on the voluntary sector if we don't fund it adequately.

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As a result of the review of volunteering I have been undertaking with colleagues (particularly Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender), I have become convinced that the voluntary sector is our best hope and ally for coping with a prolonged period of austerity, likely to extend through the life of the next council (2014-18) as well as this one. We have a good record for volunteer activity here in Merton, the Annual Residents Survey shows that 1 in 5 people volunteer on a regular basis, and we are

pursuing a number of initiatives to encourage more people to volunteer. So the contribution of volunteers could be what differentiates Merton from other local authorities that have turned out the lights and locked up the libraries and the children's centres. But to get there we have to make sure we treat our volunteers right, we need to keep faith with them by maintaining funding, not cutting it. And we need to do more to help them to adapt if they are to be eligible for grant funding, because we don't want to lose the experience and talents we have in our midst (and let me declare an interest at this point as a trustee of Merton and Morden Guild, which has seen its funding cut by more than half). So I'm pleased we've put in place the offer of interim funding to carry those organizations through the next six months, and not shut them down prematurely.

The other item I'd like to highlight is the proposed saving from the public value review of Green spaces. It seems to me the logical sequence is to carry out the review and then decide where the scope for savings lies – horse in front of cart. To book savings from a review yet to be carried out is not something scrutiny can approve because we need evidence to gauge whether the proposed saving is sound or not. Please note that we're not saying the saving can't be taken, just that we need to see the business case first.

So I was very pleased that Cllrs Mark Betteridge and Mark Allison accepted all of the recommendations from the Commission at its meeting last Thursday, and have incorporated these into the amendment to the main report. Members of the Commission can reflect that they have made a difference to the budget we will approve this evening. I would like to thank the two Marks for their willingness to listen to scrutiny and their openness to making changes to the Business Plan.

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Merton Council Budget Meeting 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013

Speech by Councillor Iain Dysart, Liberal Democrat Group Leader

“Thank you, Mr Mayor. It never gets any easier. We now find that Government do not expect the national deficit to be resolved until at least 2018. More pain, less relief. So much for Gordon Brown’s economic miracle. But we will continue to stand up for our beliefs in economic strength and a fairer society. Having 75% of the Liberal Democrat manifesto in the Coalition Agreement matters, but continued delivery matters more. Making difficult decisions, which national Labour duck, is a long, hard slog. But we know the importance of local community action to make our communities better places. And so do the voters of Eastleigh! Go forth, they say. Well, Labour did! But we see from Eastleigh that being in Government and making unpopular choices when inheriting a mess from your predecessors doesn’t necessarily preclude you from winning. And the Lib Dems continue to deliver on our pledge to take low earners out of income tax, Since May 2010, 7,710 people removed from liability. From April 2013, a further £ 92, 600 saved, making a total of £ 55, 560, 000 since April 2010. The pupil premium, which in 2013/4 is worth £ 5.3 million to Merton schools; that’s £900 per pupil on free school meals. Real help. And that’s what we want for our hard-pressed residents. Our values have been and remain to working to protect and support future generations, increased transparency, and better decision-making, protecting front-line services, particularly for the vulnerable. Locally and nationally, a strong economy in a fairer society.

So what of this year’s Budget box of delights? Well, firstly, I’m not delighted. Some savings previously agreed are scheduled to take effect this year and we have placed an amendment on one of these; namely the withdrawal of some discretionary Freedom passes. Additionally, several voluntary groups supplying services to hundreds of elderly and vulnerable residents are being stripped of funding due to changing criteria, such as Merton Mind and the Friends of St Helier, due to work already carried out. But as for tonight’s proposals? The Council has had to find over £ 11million of savings this year. We’re pleased that some efficiencies were found though disappointed that not all were taken when identified in preference to awaiting a Budget meeting. We’re pleased that the Council proposes to freeze council tax again, taking advantage of the Coalition Government’s grant incentive. But the voluntary sector will see cuts of £ 141,000 over four years. We forget at our peril the valuable work they do; and that other Council departments might have to intervene later if this work cannot be continued due to insufficient funding. I’m pleased that the scrutiny process has led to some proposals being re-thought, like the £ 25,000 saving generated by handing over the administration of the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme benefiting a range of children from many of our schools to the schools themselves, who couldn’t or wouldn’t necessarily continue the funding. Again, due to scrutiny pressure, enforcement team cuts have been withdrawn, and the further cut to the Attic Theatre won’t proceed. But the administration remains intent on pursuing false economies, like the reduction to the Walksheets Budget on which we’ve also tabled an amendment given the serious financial and reputational costs, which could

arise. And with 1 year to go before the 2014 elections, we should, on a cross-party basis, do whatever we can to lobby for better settlements and an end to the iniquitous position with the Lee Valley Regional Park, for which Merton is now faced with a higher levy.

Mr Mayor, I'm concerned too for the staff of our authority. I believe they give of their best in difficult circumstances. They need and deserve our support and our thanks. They have to control and work within diminishing budgets. And we know that over the past three years, basic pay has not increased, never mind risen with inflation. We will lose more staff, increasing the pressure on those left. I was reassured to be advised that the figure on page 165 of our report was wrong; the target for sickness absence is decreasing from 8 to 7 days, not rising from 8 to 9. But this in itself presents challenges.

Mr Mayor, we could have had a Budget to protect front-line services, defend our children and young people, and the elderly and vulnerable. We needed to see an end to the month on month colossal underspends on waste services, along with children and adult social care services. A resolution to the inability of some staff departments who wanted them to have electronic payslips, thereby saving this Council money. A sign of how much and by when any legal action against us by the former Connexions providers would cost. We needed recognition that whilst Government funding levels do matter, how those monies are spent is a local decision. No point, of course, in seeking advice on any of this from Mr Miliband; his only idea is; deal with a debt by increasing that debt. Brilliant! And the Shadow Chancellor's surname says everything. We needed a Budget with practical answers to practical answers. Instead, we have a lack of vision and direction. Merton deserves better"

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

28 FEBRUARY 2013

(7.15pm – 10.40pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Stan Anderson (substitute for Judy Saunders) John Dehaney (substitute for Peter McCabe), Iain Dysart, Suzanne Evans, Suzanne Grocott, Richard Hilton, Russell Makin  
Co-opted member – Dr Jo Sullivan Lyons, Parent Governor Representative – Secondary Schools

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Mark Allison, Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Mark Betteridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation  
Caroline Holland , Director of Corporate Services, Paul Dale, Interim Assistant Director of Resources, Darren Williams Borough Commander Merton, Sophie Ellis Assistant Director of Business Improvement, Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda item 1)

None.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors; Peter McCabe and Judy Saunders.

3 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 31 JANUARY

RESOLVED: Minutes were agreed, Councillor Neil Mills requested further information on de-aggregated commercial waste and pest control, also head count numbers in parking proposal for back office and the frontline.

Councillor Makin asked that page eight resolution on Duke of Edinburgh Award CSF06 should be amended to read “to recommend that cabinet should reject this saving until further work is done on an alternative proposal”

Councillors were disappointed not to have received the additional information from the last meeting earlier although do not wish to apportion any blame to scrutiny officers.

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Councillor Hilton sought confirmation on who signed off the business case for the Energy ReFit savings circulated by email to the Commission on the 28<sup>th</sup> February. The Director of Corporate Services agreed to provide more information.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
28 FEBRUARY 2013

5 FUTURE OF POLICING IN MERTON

The Borough Commander, Darren Williams reported that Merton is one of the lowest crime boroughs across London.

Over the last few days local officers had police knocked on over 2,500 homes (1 in 35 houses across Merton) to offer home security and crime prevention advice.

The Commission were shown a four minute video on policing achievements in Merton.

The Borough Commander said the video will be used to highlight to officers the fantastic work they have done in 2012 and how it can be continued through the period of austerity. The local priority is to staff the neighbourhood teams. There are a number of short term vacancies but the Metropolitan police are training five thousand recruits over the next three years. Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are being trained to become full police officers. All PCSOs in Merton are being trained in crime prevention. All special constables are attached to a ward in Merton. The Borough Commander further reported that Merton Police have set themselves challenging targets for the recruitment of special constables and volunteers.

Merton Police are facing a number of challenges including; improving response to victims. The police need to reduce the number of buildings, Wimbledon and Mitcham police stations will be retained. Safer neighbourhoods bases cost approx £270,000 a year to maintain and are not all accessible to the public.

Merton will not be losing any police officers to neighbouring boroughs. In Mitcham, the majority of crime relates to anti-social behaviour. In the Wimbledon area it is mainly retail crime. Wimbledon is also the centre of night time economy crime.

The Borough Commander is intending to circulate a map of crime hot spots with the aim of encouraging large retailers to do more to prevent crime as well as increasing the number of neighbourhood watches. A future initiative will include the Borough Commander and some police officers cycling around the borough with local residents. as a way of engaging with local communities.

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Commission members asked a number of questions including if neighbourhood policing will continue in Cricket Green and if there will be an increased visible presence in Wimbledon because of the high crime rate?

The Borough Commander reported that every neighbourhood team will have one officer and one Police Community Support Officer. Although wards will be policed differently based upon their crime patterns. The allocation of resources will be discussed with senior officers next week.

Commission members expressed gratitude to the Borough Commander for all the work that he and his officers had done. However some concern was expressed about the use of maps to identify crime hotspots as potential burglars could make

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
28 FEBRUARY 2013

use of this information. Another Commission member shared this concern and asked if there is any evidence that it works?

The Borough Commander has said that the map will not identify individual streets. He went on to say that the use of daily information on crimes across the Borough did seem to be working as Merton were seeing reduction in every crime type except motor vehicle crime. He also said that going forward we do need to develop innovative new solutions to tackle issues together as a community and not just rely on the police.

A Commission member asked how satisfaction with the police service will be measured.

The Borough Commander reported that satisfaction is measured by a survey conducted by an independent company. It is hoped that this survey can be improved as it does not reach all sections of the community.

6 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2013-17

A Commission member asked if the meeting stated in paragraph 1.1 on page 11 took place.

The Chair reported that the situation had since changed and the cabinet member would respond to this meeting by email.

Councillor Richard Hilton circulated advice from the monitoring officer, regarding the legality of the meeting proposed. Councillor Hilton asked the Chair if he had agreed to attend the meeting?

The Chair reported that he never intended it to be a private meeting, the scrutiny officer was asked to minute the discussion, though there was a recognition that it was less than transparent.

Councillor Hilton asked for the minute to show that he was unhappy that the Chair engaged in such a conversation to represent this body having no authority to do so. He was disappointed that the Chair would go down that route, especially as a champion of scrutiny.

The Chair asked Commission members if they had any further consideration of the capital programme budget proposals.

A Commission member asked if the chairs of the scrutiny panels would give an overview of their discussions on the capital programme

The Chair of the Children and Young People Panel reported that they had discussed schools expansion. The Chair of the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel reported that they did not have any major reservations about the capital programme.

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A Commission member queried the highways and regeneration budgets asking if they are standard, as there seems to be a significant reduction every year, are these unspent monies re-profiled or do we start with the same figure?

The Interim Assistant Director of Resources reported that they are standard amounts there is a backlog in highways, we will review future year's allocations. There has been an improvement in the condition of the roads so not carrying forward. The Director for Corporate Resources also reported that when we do the outturn we will look at slippage, re-profiling and report to the cabinet.

Duke of Edinburgh Award

Commission members expressed a range of views about if the Duke of Edinburgh award should be targeted. A Commission member felt that it was valid to target funds at groups most in need especially in a time of austerity. Another Commission member wanted to see funding targeted to those who wouldn't otherwise benefit from this scheme. A Commission member pointed out that the local authority had taken a strong lead on this scheme we could not assume that this would continue for any pupil irrespective of their background. Another Commission member felt that the scheme had been successful and some schools could mentor others. Another Commission member felt that the scheme is benefitting a wide range of pupils and we should encourage it for all and not only target specific groups.

The Chair asked the Commission to vote on the funding being retained but targeted to those pupils who wouldn't otherwise benefit from this kind of activity.

Six members voted in favour and four voted against. The vote was carried. Councillor Hilton asked the minute to show that he voted in favour of the funding being retained.

Councillor Southgate moved a motion to: Accept officers offer to look again at pilot programme developed to extend scope of Duke of Edinburgh Award. This was seconded by Councillor Makin

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An amendment was put forward: Officers to look at how best to target funding to those most in need of this kind of programme in the event that the saving is not taken. Councillor Hanna seconded the amendment. Five members voted in favour of this motion. Four members voted against and one member abstained, in which case the motion was passed.

The Commission discussed the funding for the Polka and Attic Theatres. A vote was held on taking the savings for the Polka Theatre five members voted in favour and five voted against, the motion was carried with the Chair's casting vote.

A vote was held on taking the savings for the Attic Theatre

Four members voted in favour, six members voted against this motion, it was not

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carried.

In relation to savings EN44&EN46 The Chair asked Commission members to vote on officers carrying out a review to look at potential for taking savings and not to take savings until review has been completed. Six members voted in favour and four voted against. This vote was carried.

EN46

Some Commission members felt that there needed to be more evidence on usage, it was pointed out that the Sustainable Communities Panel had not seen any evidence.

Councillor Diane Neil Mills moved a motion to ask the Commission to vote against the principle of charging residents to use parks. This was seconded by Councillor Evans. A Commission member pointed out that only the parks in Wimbledon had been targeted. Four members voted in favour, five voted against and the motion was not carried.

In conclusion the Chair said that the Commission do not accept savings EN44&46 as further work needed to be done.

The Commission agreed the following in relation to other savings:

CSF07 – Saving to be taken and further information provided to the Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Panel

ASC49 – Further information to go to the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel in due course.

The Commission asked the Cabinet Member to exercise caution in relation to the savings set out in table 20; Councillor Mark Allison said that he would report back to the Commission on implementation.

## 7. CUSTOMER CONTACT STRATEGY

A Commission member pointed to the list setting out why change is needed and felt that 'the need to reduce financial expenditure' should not be included in the list as this Strategy was needed irrespective of the financial Climate.

A Commission member pointed out that the Director should be the accountable officer for the strategy rather than the Assistant Director for Business Improvement as set out on Page 49.

The Director for Corporate Resources said that she was ultimately responsible and

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is the sponsor and will ensure that this is made clear in the strategy.

Commission members asked a number of questions including how this document will be used to drive performance and customer experience, is the Strategy based on best practice or existing work, the importance of extending internet access and if the bidders day will take place in March?

The Assistant Director for Business Improvement said the strategy is based on existing work and good practice from elsewhere, The Bidders day is likely to take place in April now, the purpose of the event is to stimulate the market and ensure that the approach is right.

A Commission member asked if the council would still proceed with the strategy if we did not have budget pressures, the annual residents' survey highlighted the need to improve customer contact.

Councillor Mark Betteridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation reported that the Strategy would continue irrespective of the financial situation, the annual residents' survey highlighted the need to improve customer contact.

At 10.15pm the Commission agreed to suspend standing orders and extend the meeting for ten minutes.

8. NOTES OF THE FINANCIAL MONITORING TASK GROUP MEETING 7  
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Councillor Iain Dysart said he has submitted questions some of which have not yet been answered

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9. UPDATE ON PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW  
AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION ON THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

This item was noted

10. WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

The Commission agreed that the next time borough commander is invited he should be asked to provide information on:

1. Details of officer deployment given the target on 'officers undertaking other duties'
2. Proposed increase in neighbourhood teams



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Also customer contact programme update to be added to the work programme for 2013/14

THE MEETING ENDED AT 10.25pm.

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
31 JANUARY 2013

(7.15pm – 10.05pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Peter McCabe (Vice Chair), Iain Dysart, Suzanne Evans, Suzanne Grocott, Jeff Hanna, Richard Hilton, Russell Makin, Diane Neil-Mills and Judy Saunders.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Mark Allison, Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Mark Betteridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation  
Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services),  
Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration),  
Paul Dale (Interim Assistant Director of Resources)  
Mark Humphries (Asst Director Infrastructure & Transactions),  
Gerald Porter (Interim Head of Facilities),  
David Keppler (Head of Revenues and Benefits),  
Sophie Ellis (Assistant Director of Business Improvement),  
Sean Cunniffe (Head of Customer Contact),  
Annalise Elliott (Head of Safer Merton),  
Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services).

1 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda item 1)

None.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from co-opted members Dr Jo Sullivan-Lyons and Colin Powell.

3 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 8 JANUARY 2013 (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED : That the minutes be agreed, with the following amendments:

- Item 5 – Control of Noise Nuisance – fourth resolution, insert “as soon as possible” so that revised resolution reads – “to recommend to Cabinet that it explores options for providing a 24/7 service as soon as possible through an ‘invest to save’ approach that would deal with complaints promptly and further reduce the need for court action as well as sending a message to residents that anti-social noisy behaviour will not be tolerated”.
- Item 6 – Customer Contact programme Update – second paragraph on page 6 amended to read – “In response to concerns expressed by Councillor Richard Hilton and a request for clarification from Councillor Peter McCabe, Caroline Holland gave assurances that the Council had not employed staff unnecessarily nor wasted money on this programme”

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (Agenda item 4)

None.

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- 5 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2013-2017 (Agenda item 5)
- 6 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE: supplementary information (Agenda item 6)
- 7 SCRUTINY OF THE BUSINESS PLAN: comments and recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Panels (Agenda item 7)

The Commission agreed to take these three items together.

**Scrutiny of proposals relating to Corporate Services**

The Commission discussed the savings proposals for Corporate Services and agreed a number of comments and recommendations to Cabinet.

Members commented on the number of savings that comprised underspend or redundant budgets.

RESOLVED: to recommend to Cabinet that:

- 1) underspend and redundant budgets should be continually reviewed and deleted as appropriate.
- 2) the terminology in savings proposals should be reviewed to accurately reflect the source of the saving
- 3) savings proposals be presented consistently across all departments so that the base budget clearly relates to the proposed saving.
- 4) service implications and staffing implications be completed for all savings proposals.
- 5) the above changes should be made and included in the agenda papers for the budget Council meeting on 6 March.

The Commission welcomed the move to consolidate utilities and phone accounts in order to drive efficiency savings but requested more information about the context, including the base budget for total spend on these items. The Commission also asked to see the business case for the Energy ReFit savings (items CS19 and CS20). ACTION: Assistant Director Infrastructure & Transactions.

~~Comments, questions and recommendations on specific savings proposals are set out below.~~

Business improvement – rationalisation of management costs (CS1)

In response to questions, the Director of Corporate Services clarified that the £230,000 base budget related to the staffing costs of the Business Improvement Division, that some managers currently manage very small teams and that the ideal “span of control” would vary depending on the type of service that was provided. She added that the very nature of business improvement work meant that the total number of staff would reduce over time.

Business improvement – systems and projects (CS2)

The Commission noted that this savings proposal had been withdrawn.

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IT Service Delivery (CS5) and IT Service Development Revenue Budgets (CS6)

Members commented that the size of the saving seemed small in relation to the base budget. The Assistant Director Infrastructure & Transactions explained that it was a composite budget and that the savings on CS5 would be achieved through re-negotiation with suppliers, supported by a pan-London group. The savings on CS6 would be achieved by review and subsequent deletion of parts of the budget that were no longer needed.

Mobile phone contract (CS7) and Cancellation of T mobile contract (CS14)

In response to a question, the Director of Corporate Services confirmed that the replacement of the PABX system was in the capital programme and that there would be a reduction in the costs of calls over time.

The Assistant Director Infrastructure & Transactions said that the Council has a contract with T T mobile (not T mobile) that will reduce costs of staff mobile phones. Staff will make a contribution to cover personal calls.

The Assistant Director Infrastructure & Transactions undertook to provide information on how many mobile phones the Council has and the total cost of these.

ACTION: Assistant Director Infrastructure & Transactions

Infrastructure & Transactions – outsourcing service desk (CS10)

Members discussed a written representation received from Keir Greenaway, GMB Branch Secretary (tabled at the meeting and published with the minutes). The representation set out concerns about the impact of outsourcing. The Assistant Director Infrastructure & Transactions explained that the intention of the proposal was to improve service delivery.

Members discussed the impact that outsourcing would have on staff morale and consequently on service delivery.

RESOLVED: to recommend to Cabinet that the reputational risk of this savings proposal be changed to “high” in order to reflect the impact of a possible adverse effect on staff morale.

The Commission requested the names of local authorities that had successfully outsourced this service. ACTION: Assistant Director Infrastructure & Transactions

Infrastructure & Transactions – information governance vacant post (CS12)

The Assistant Director Infrastructure & Transactions clarified that the post had been vacant for about two months and that the previous postholder (now on secondment elsewhere in the Council) has been covering some of the duties. In the longer term, it is planned to address through bringing teams together.

Infrastructure & Transactions - asset & change analyst vacant part post (CS15)

The Assistant Director Infrastructure & Transactions clarified that the total number of staff on IT service delivery is 40.

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Surrender of remainder of ITSD overtime budget (CS16)

Members expressed concern that the impact of the saving might lead to the loss of IT systems during normal working hours. The Director of Corporate Services and the Assistant Director Infrastructure & Transactions explained that work to increase planned maintenance and to upgrade systems would mitigate this risk.

RESOLVED: to recommend to Cabinet that the description of the risk should be amended.

In response to a question, the Director of Corporate Services undertook to find out whether PCN payments can be made on-line between 5pm and 5.30pm on a Friday.

ACTION: Director of Corporate Services

Outsourcing building services and security service (CS23)

The Commission discussed a written representation received from Keir Greenaway, GMB Branch Secretary (tabled at the meeting and published with the minutes). The Assistant Director Infrastructure & Transactions explained that the proposal would lead to a more robust and flexible service. Members expressed concern about the impact on staff. Members received assurances that staff would be supported with getting Security Industry Accreditation qualifications in order to improve their prospects and the services provided.

RESOLVED: to recommend to Cabinet that the reputational risk be changed from "low" to "medium" to reflect the concerns discussed.

Consolidation of utilities budgets (CS27)

In response to questions, the Assistant Director Infrastructure & Transactions clarified that the overall gas and electricity bill for the Council's corporate building is £2m and that the proposed saving relates to monies no longer needed due to consolidation of buildings and changes to the procurement of electricity.

Corporate Governance – Investigations Service (CS30)

The Director of Corporate Services said that four staff would remain in the team and that a shared service would be explored as a means of providing resilience. She added that as the saving wouldn't be taken till 2015/16 there would be time to increase fraud detection rates through "data mining" and other tools as well as to consider the impact that new benefit arrangements will have on fraud investigations.

Customer Services - close cash office (CS35)

The Commission noted that this was one of the recommendations of the scrutiny review on customer contact.

Members requested information on the cost per transaction of third party payments.

ACTION: Head of Customer Contact

Customer Services – impact of customer service review (CS39)

In response to a comment about the modest level of anticipated savings, the Director of Corporate Services clarified that estimated savings would be £30k in 2014/15,

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£60k in 2015/16 and £90k in 2016/17 and that these may increase.

The Assistant Director of Business Improvement confirmed that there were no vacant posts at present.

Customer Services – rationalisation of divisional budgets (CS40)

The Head of Revenues and Benefits described the budgets that were no longer needed and said that some had already been deleted.

Resources – change in audit arrangements (CS41)

The Commission noted the savings made in audit fees.

Resources – improved cash management (CS45)

In response to a request for more detail, the Interim Assistant Director of Resources explained that these were still estimates and that the improved cash flow forecasts would enable the figures to be further refined.

Resources – Voluntary Sector (CS47)

Members expressed concern at the impact on the voluntary sector and sought clarification of the proposals. The Director of Corporate Services said that the savings were reductions in the Council's payment to the London Council Grants Scheme and would not have an impact on local voluntary sector organisations. Members requested clarification of the consultation on this proposal. It was explained that this did not currently relate to any Merton funded groups and that the consultation would be undertaken when it was felt that there would be such an impact.

It was moved and seconded that the repatriated funds should be ringfenced to support local voluntary sector organisations. A vote was taken, 8 members agreed and 2 abstained.

RESOLVED: to recommend to Cabinet that the repatriated funds from the London Council Grants Scheme should be ringfenced to support local voluntary sector organisations.

**References from the Overview and Scrutiny Panels**

The Commission agreed to forward to Cabinet the comments and recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels, as set out in the report.

Councillor Evans confirmed that she was satisfied with the responses received in relation to questions that she had raised with officers regarding some of the savings in the remit of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Members discussed a number of the items in the Panels' references and agreed to make additional comments and recommendations on these:

Resources - Voluntary Sector – saving from the London Councils Grant Scheme (CS47)

It was moved and seconded that the saving should be rejected. A vote was taken, 9

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members agreed and 1 abstained.

RESOLVED: to recommend that Cabinet should reject this saving.

Children Social Care and Youth Inclusion – Duke of Edinburgh Award (CSF06)

Members discussed the proposal to re-provide the Duke of Edinburgh Award through funding by schools instead of by the Council. There was general support for the Duke of Edinburgh Award and varying views on how it should be funded in future. It was noted that officer advice to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel was that schools would pick up the funding. Some members expressed concerns that not all schools would be in a position to do this.

It was moved and seconded that this saving should be rejected. A vote was taken, 6 members agreed, 5 of whom asked for their names to be recorded (Councillors Dysart, Evans, Grocott, Hilton and Neil-Mills)

RESOLVED: to recommend that Cabinet should reject this saving.

Building and Development Control (EN07 and EN10)

Members expressed concerns about these savings, in the context of discussion at the Sustainable and Communities Panel and at the Commission's discussion of the enforcement of noise nuisance at its meeting on 8 January 2012.

RESOLVED: to recommend that Cabinet should reject these savings

Reduction of grants to Polka and Attic Theatres (EN38)

It was moved and seconded that this saving should be rejected. A vote was taken, 6 members agreed, 5 of whom asked for their names to be recorded (Councillors Dysart, Evans, Grocott, Hilton and Neil-Mills). Councillor Makin disagreed and asked for his name to be recorded.

RESOLVED: to recommend that Cabinet should reject this saving.

Savings from public value review of parks and green spaces (EN44)

RESOLVED: to recommend that Cabinet withdraw this saving until further work has been done on the detail of the proposal.

Introduction of parking fees in five parks (EN46)

It was moved and seconded that this saving should be rejected. A vote was taken, 4 members agreed and asked for their names to be recorded (Councillors Evans, Grocott, Hilton and Neil-Mills), 5 disagreed and 1 abstained (Councillor Dysart asked for his name to be recorded as abstaining). The motion fell.

RESOLVED: to recommend that Cabinet withdraw this saving until further work has been done on the detail of the proposal.

Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion – deletion of 7 posts (CSF07)

RESOLVED: to recommend that Cabinet withdraw this saving until further work has been done on the detail of the proposal.



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Transport efficiencies (ASC49)

RESOLVED: to recommend that Cabinet should postpone this proposal until the pilots, with day care workers acting as drivers/escorts, have been evaluated.

Traffic and Highways - Walksheets budget (EN24), surface water budget (EN25) and ditching budget (EN26)

RESOLVED: to recommend that Cabinet note the Commission's concerns about the deliverability of these savings proposals due to their dependence on the weather.

Direct provision – reduce day care costs (ASC50):

Voluntary sector grants – reduction in infrastructure costs (ASC51); and

Adult Social Care Brokerage Efficiencies (ASC34)

RESOLVED: to recommend that Cabinet proceed with caution in relation to these savings.

Introduction of mobile phone payments for parking (EN05)

RESOLVED: to recommend that Cabinet bring this saving proposal forward and introduce it as soon as possible.

Traffic and Highways – reduction in grounds maintenance budget (EN23)

It was moved and seconded that this saving should be rejected. A vote was taken, 4 members agreed, 5 disagreed and 1 abstained. The motion fell.

RESOLVED: to recommend that Cabinet note its concerns about the capital budget being spent on items that are not subsequently maintained by the Council (for example planting of trees).

**Service plans relating to remit of the Commission**

The Commission discussed the Customer Services and Safer Merton service plans and asked the financial monitoring task group to scrutinise and report back on the other service plans to the Commission's meeting on 28 February.

On the Customer Services service plan, members commented that they would expect to see the number of telephone callers reduce over time as the number of on-line transactions increases. The Director of Corporate Services said that this would be kept under review and that the number of face-to-face transactions is reducing, thus reducing costs.

The Director of Corporate Services undertook to provide information about the Council's new responsibility in relation to the appointment of a medical examiner.  
ACTION: Director of Corporate Services

The Commission noted the updated Safer Merton service plan (laid round at the meeting and published with the minutes) that now contains data on anticipated demand and supply as well as updated performance indicators. The Director of Environment and Regeneration said that the main reason for the anticipated rise in cases of anti-social behaviour is the broader definition of this following new

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legislation. In response to a question, he confirmed that the increase in drug treatment numbers is year-on-year.

The Director of Environment and Regeneration undertook to provide additional information on:

- 1) the Mayor of London's proposals on school based police officers, and
- 2) the income assumptions behind the Safer Merton budget data for 2015/16 onwards.

**ACTION:** Director of Environment and Regeneration

**Capital budget 2013/17**

**RESOLVED:** that the Commission would defer consideration of the capital budget to its meeting on 28 February and make any recommendations to Council on 6 March.

**Business Plan 2013-17: overview**

In response to a question about future movements and use of the reserves budget, the Director of Corporate Services said that £7.8m had been allocated for use in future years (as set out on p84 of the business plan update report) and that £2m had been "recycled" and is now in the Community and Housing budget.

The Director of Corporate Services undertook to provide information to explain the increases in staffing figures for Street Scene and Waste (p69) and Public Protection and Development (p70). **ACTION:** Director of Corporate Services

The Director of Corporate Services undertook to provide an explanation for the basis of the staff numbers (p57) for the Children Schools and Families Department and the reason for the increases. **ACTION:** Director of Corporate Services.

8 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13 (Agenda item 8)

**RESOLVED:** that the Commission approve the work programme for 2012/13 as set out in the report.

## Doug Napier

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**From:** Deirdre Costigan  
**Sent:** 21 September 2017 11:37  
**To:** Doug Napier  
**Subject:** RE: car park charges

Found it! But it doesn't say who it was.... It's on page 5 of this -  
<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/Data/Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Commission/20130228/Agenda/3949.pdf#search=en46>

### EN46

Some Commission members felt that there needed to be more evidence on usage, it was pointed out that the Sustainable Communities Panel had not seen any evidence. Councillor Diane Neil Mills moved a motion to ask the Commission to vote against the principle of charging residents to use parks. This was seconded by Councillor Evans. A Commission member pointed out that only the parks in Wimbledon had been targeted. Four members voted in favour, five voted against and the motion was not carried.

In conclusion the Chair said that the Commission do not accept savings EN44&46 as further work needed to be done.

Deirdre Costigan  
Policy Officer (Labour Group)  
Leader's Office  
London Borough of Merton  
Civic Centre, London Road, Morden, SM4 5DX

Tel: 020 8545 3989 Fax: 020 8545 4690  
[www.merton.gov.uk](http://www.merton.gov.uk)

---

**From:** Deirdre Costigan  
**Sent:** 21 September 2017 11:30  
**To:** Doug Napier  
**Subject:** car park charges

I can't find a quote. But this is the history.

- This proposal was first put forward in October 2011 as part of the 2012/13 budget round – see page 65 and the equality impact assessment on 318 of budget pack – <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/Data/Cabinet/20111017/Agenda/9488.pdf> At that time it was for Wimbledon Park, Haydon's Road and Joseph Hood. Sustainable Communities agreed "not to cut this budget until further work is completed and brought back to Panel in the next municipal year." It was therefore not included in the final budget proposals for 2012/13.
- The proposal was put forward again the following year (2013-14 – saving EN46) where it was proposed to introduce charging in five parks (Wimbledon, Sir Joseph Hood, Abbey, Haydons Rd & Joseph Hood) and Sustainable Communities said "EN46 – Concerns expressed regarding generating income through the use of parks for parking and highlighted the need to undertake an impact assessment." (see - <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/Data/Sustainable%20Communities%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Panel/20130110/Agenda/3966.pdf>) There was a further discussion at the January Sustainable Communities meeting where a motion to reject the proposal was

defeated. Overview and Scrutiny then met in January (<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/Data/Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Commission/20130131/Agenda/3948.pdf>) and voted against the saving. However Cabinet decided that this saving would not be rejected but would be temporarily held back – the budget papers agreed state that EN46 was “not included at this stage until further work undertaken on implementation but not rejected” - see page 7 -

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s2049/minutes.pdf>

- This saving then appeared in the Greenspaces Business Plan which was agreed as part of the 2014 budget proposals – see page 199 of

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s3382/Business%20Plan%202014-2018.pdf>

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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL  
15 JANUARY 2013

7.15PM – 10:00PM

PRESENT: Councillor Russell Makin (in the chair), Councillors Stan Anderson, Ray Tindle, Richard Hilton, Samantha George, Judy Saunders, John Sargeant, Dennis Pearce

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Nick Draper, Cabinet Member for Community and Culture, Councillor Andrew Judge, Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration, Councillor Mark Allison, Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Mark Betteridge, Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation, Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services, Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration, Cormac Stokes, Head of Street Scene and Waste, James McGinlay, Head of Sustainable Communities, John Hill, Head of Public Protection and Development, Rebecca Redman, Scrutiny Officer

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 27 NOVEMBER 2012

Cllr Richard Hilton requested a correction to the minutes in relation to his questions on page 4 and that the exact question asked was whether the council required the officer post if there were so few cases and if this represented value for money.

Cllr Samantha George requested a correction to the minutes in relation to her question on page 4 and clarified that her question was in relation to proposed alternative savings.

RESOLVED: Panel agreed the Minutes, as amended, as a true record of the meeting.

4 MATTERS ARISING

Members enquired about the information on street lights that was requested at the last meeting of the Panel in November 2012. Cormac Stokes apologised for not having forwarded this information sooner and endeavoured to send the information to Members asap.

5 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2013-2017

Caroline Holland gave an introduction to the report informing the Panel that there were shortfalls in all departments against the original targets. The Autumn statement had yet to be received in terms of the Local Government

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL  
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Financial statement. The grant position update would be given to Cabinet at their meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2013. Members heard that there was a £42,000 difference in the assumptions made for 2013/14 and an £800,000 difference in assumptions for 2014/15. In addition, that public health funding was announced on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2013 and therefore not captured in the report. The Panel also heard that a statutory consultation was due to be undertaken with businesses on 14<sup>th</sup> February to discuss business rates and setting the base for the NNDR. Caroline Holland asked Members for their views on the risk ratings, deliverability and impact and if they felt these levels were right.

Members discussed and made comments on the following budget proposals:

pg17 – What was the response to the request from the NJC Trade Union Side for a pay increase for its members in 2013/14? Caroline Holland informed the Panel that a 1% pay increase and changes to national Terms & Conditions was proposed but rejected by the Trade Unions and that this saving was built into the MTFS.

pg17 – Why is there no update to the price inflation figures?

Caroline Holland explained that the RPI minus 1.5% is assumed but this is being reviewed to determine if it needs to be rebased. If so the council would be required to find further savings.

pg19 – Collection Fund contributions.

Caroline Holland outlined that additional monies had been put into this fund to offset the budget gap and that adjustments have been made.

pg19 – Concessionary fares budget query

pg20 – Pension funds – should we enrol staff sooner?

Chris Lee responded by stating that the council had chosen to defer auto enrolment, not due to the cost, but to ensure staff have all of the information they need.

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pg21 – Empty Homes Officer – when will we have a view on the officer post?

Caroline Holland explained that the officer post would not be impacted.

ER18 – What is the impact of the saving and how has this been communicated to residents?

Cormac Stokes explained that there would be no impact on residents and that waste collection would stay the same. It was agreed that a Saturday service was not convenient for residents.

CH13 – Why are additional savings being identified when the MAE service has already made significant savings?

Caroline Holland explained that the savings were across community and



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housing as a department, not just to be found in MAE.

EN01 – Has the cut already made to the budget for seeking legal advice resulted in a decrease in enforcement notices issued despite the increase in complaints in this area?

Councillor Andrew Judge explained that the use of enforcement notices is not the only valid way to address noise issues and that mediation is cited as good practice which means the council is able to spend less on legal fees but does not mean that the issue is not being tackled or ignored. John Hill explained that a separate budget was retained for enforcement action and that this budget was a more general advice budget. A Member advised that this distinction be made explicit in the document.

EN02 – Why are the savings that could be made not being taken sooner?

John Hill explained that the council would need to undertake a procurement process and market testing. This could be brought forward but some exploratory work would need to be done.

EN05 – Have we explored mobile technology?

John Hill explained that mobile phone pay options for parking will be introduced which would reduce the need for pay and display machines and cash collection and maintenance. Chris Lee added that mobile technology would be considered as part of the PVR for street cleaning.

EN06 - Kier Greenway – Staffside Secretary for GMB, was invited to speak on the proposed saving to represent the officers the saving, should it be agreed, would impact upon.

John Hill explained in response that the Enquiry Research Officer post was created 15 years ago when there was a boom in planning. This post is now in decline and one of the lower risk posts as work of officer could be subsumed into wider team.

EN07 – What are the pre application planning fees and what % increase has there been to date?

John Hill explained that charges varied, with the highest at £3000 for initial meeting and follow up to £960 for follow up meetings. The smallest scale flat rate fee being £90.00.

EN10 – Request for figures on number of enforcement cases to avoid cutting service where possible and be clear on impact. Are we looking creatively at how we might work differently?

John Hill explained that a risk analysis had been undertaken on the impact this would have.

EN11 – Will this impact on our ability to meet application targets?

Chris Lee explained that the department recognised the turbulence in terms of planning policy at national level and the changes in the planning framework

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but that responsibilities and fees are in a state of flux at present but that the council has time to plan for and manage potential risks.

EN15 – Need to engage with Trade Unions on this to get support for the proposals.

EN17 – What are the anticipated benefits related to improvements in data collection?

EN18 – How are the figures derived?

Chris Lee explained that benefits are included in the final negotiation on the contract for Phase B which comes into effect in 2014/15. In addition there are shared benefits for the boroughs involved in selling energy above a certain level. The council, however, are taking a cautious approach as the energy market is speculative.

EN23 – How can we ensure that areas are maintained?

Chris Lee explained that Veolia hold the contract but have stated that they intend to withdraw from April 2013, when a contract extension is possible, and therefore the council were now in the position of seeking to maintain the service they previously provided whilst determining how this might be provided in the future, looking at the role residents and community groups could play.

EN24 – Has an impact assessment been made of the cost of potential insurance claims should saving go ahead?

Cormac Stokes explained that the council would need tighter control over the inspection routine.

EN25 – Will this service realistically be able to operate with this reduction?

Chris Lee explained that the council could make the saving and still meet its statutory duty. In addition, the figures outlined were not the total funds available for this area. There were additional funds available in the capital budgets.

EN29 – Amend wording to reflect reality of saving.

EN30 – Can this saving be made earlier?

Chris Lee endeavoured to review this suggestion.

EN31 – How will we recoup the £400,000 investment in this area? The ROI should be made clearer on this and the expected benefits.

Cormac Stokes explained that the saving on maintenance would be built in and also the efficiencies on energy efficiency measures could be calculated and included in due course. Chris Lee explained that these would be annual savings.

EN33 – How will workload of officer be managed if reducing to 4 days?

James McGinlay explained that technological advancements in the work of the

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL  
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team meant that this officer post could be compressed into 4 days. The saving would be clear by the next financial year once technological developments had been embedded.

EN35 – An equalities impact assessment should be undertaken and the figures on how many will be affected need to be presented.

James McGinlay confirmed that he was happy to undertake a comparison with other boroughs and present these figures.

EN38 – Concerns expressed about the impact of the reduction in the Core Arts Grants to the Polka and Attic Theatres.

EN43 – Why is entire budget for grants to voluntary organisations being cut?

James McGinlay explained that the budget for this area had been inherited and that this transition would be funded from elsewhere. The funding would fund a post over the next 2 years developing capacity of community groups to become sustainable.

EN44 – Which core in house services may be reduced and posts deleted?

Chris Lee explained that whilst there was a significant staffing reduction in this proposed saving any decisions taken would be determined through the Public Value Review Process looking at parks and green spaces. Early findings that will inform this PVR have indicated that community groups would like to get involved in delivering some of these services.

EN46 – Concerns expressed regarding generating income through the use of parks for parking and highlighted the need to undertake an impact assessment.

RESOLVED: The Panel agreed to forward their comments to Cabinet via the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

The Panel agreed to hold a special meeting prior to the Commission meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013 to consider the service plans as Members did not feel that there was not sufficient time at the meeting to cover the business plan and budget in detail and fully scrutinise the proposals.

## 6 ACTION PLAN ON SCRUTINY REVIEW OF TREES

Members received the Executive Response and Action Plan for their Task Group Review of Trees undertaken as part of the Panels 2011/12 work programme.

A Member commented on the good work that was being undertaken by volunteers and community groups and that this should be encouraged and further volunteers recruited.

RESOLVED: The Panel agreed to performance manage delivery of the Action

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Plan every 6-9 months as part of the work programme.

7 LOCALISM ACT – BACKGROUND PAPERS ON THE COMMUNITY RIGHT  
TO BID AND THE COMMUNITY RIGHT TO CHALLENGE

RESOLVED: Not considered. The Panel agreed to postpone consideration of this item until their April 2013 meeting.

8 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

RESOLVED: The Panel requested a briefing at their February meeting from the newly appointed Director of Merton Priory Homes and the Housing Needs Manager on the financial performance of the contract and progress to date