

Appendix 1

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

Madam Mayor,

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

Tonight I present a budget for Merton's Families

And I confirm Labour in Merton delivering on its manifesto pledges

Madam Mayor,

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

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

Madam Mayor,

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

The Tory Government is in free fall over Brexit

Merton is not immune to the Brexit shock and slowdown

But we are not weak

We have a choice

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

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

Madam Mayor,

Our School Improvement Team continues to work miracles

Good and outstanding Schools

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

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

Our Leisure Department

Albeit small in number it delivers big on impact

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

Merton's children's Services

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

Keeping all children's centres open

Madam Mayor,

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

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

Adult Social Care services that are the envy of other boroughs

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

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

But Madam Mayor,

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

We are doing just that with our new waste collection service

The new service is saving us much needed money

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

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

Madam Mayor,

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

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

Madam Mayor,

This Chamber is aware of my pro-development approach

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

Working on the Wimbledon Masterplan and Rediscovering Mitcham with

improvement plans for Colliers Wood and South Wimbledon

Madam Mayor,

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

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

Madam Mayor

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

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

Madam Mayor,

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

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

Mark Allison my deputy leader and cabinet member for finance

All councillors who chair and who sit on our scrutiny panels

Thanks also go to Cllr Peter Southgate the chair of scrutiny

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

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

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

And this Budget is no different

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

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

Caring Merton. Labour Merton, Madam Mayor.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ENDS