

Introduction

Madam Mayor,

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

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

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

Well - I still do!

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

- ambition; technology; and success.

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

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

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

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

Leadership

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

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

And the recent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge report supports this view

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

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

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

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

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

Commercialisation

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

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

Of course, we should look to mitigate risk

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

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

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

Liberal Democrats

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So when Cllr Fairclough stands shortly perhaps he could confirm:

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

What are actually voting on?

Austerity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technology

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

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

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

Technology & Opportunity – that's Conservative Thinking

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

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

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

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

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

Veolia

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

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

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

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

Where is the political determination to sort this mess out?

And that includes fly tipping too.

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

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

St Helier Hospital

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

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

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

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

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

You are not part of the solution.

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

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

Summary

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

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

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

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

That they represent the past – and not the future.

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

Thank you.