

**Minutes of the Council Meeting of Spelthorne Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Knowle Green, Staines-upon-Thames on Thursday 27 February 2014**

**Present:**

**Councillors:**

Ayers F.	Forbes-Forsyth P.C. (Deputy Leader)	Pinkerton J.M.
Ayub A.	Forsbrey G.E.	Rough Mrs M.W.
Bannister C.A.	Friday A.E.	Saliagopoulos D.
Beardsmore I.J.	Gething N.	Sexton J.
Broom P.A.	Grant D.L.	Sider R.W.
Bushnell M.	Harman A.C.	Smith-Ainsley R.A.
Dale J.A.	Harvey I.T.E	Spencer C.
Davis C.A.	Madams M.J.	Spoor B.B.
Dunn R.D.	Mitchell A.J.	Watts R.L. (Leader)
Dunn S.A.	Patel Ms D.	Webb S. (Deputy Mayor)
Evans T.M.	Patterson A.C.	

Murray Litvak, Chairman of Members' Code of Conduct Committee

Miss Sue Faulkner, Vice-Chairman of Members' Code of Conduct Committee

Councillor A.C. Harman, The Mayor, in the Chair

**Apologies:**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S.E.W. Budd, C.M. Frazer, D. Gohil, V.J. Leighton, C.V. Strong and S.D. Taylor.

**30/14 Minutes**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 19 December 2013 and the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 16 January 2014 were approved as a correct record.

**31/14 Disclosures of Interest**

Councillor D. Grant declared a conflict of interest in relation to item 10, report from the Chairman of the Licensing Committee, as she is acquainted with the Soiree Restaurant owners.

**32/14 Announcements from the Mayor**

The Mayor expressed his heartfelt sympathy to all those residents in the Borough who had been the victims of the recent severe flooding.

He also announced that there had been a very successful boxing event held recently that was attended by over 500 people, including the former world light-heavyweight boxing champion, John Conteh, who contributed to the great success of the evening.

### **33/14 Announcements from the Leader**

The Leader of the Council made the following announcement:

“Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Further to the announcements I made at December’s Council about successful enforcements by the Planning and Legal departments, I want to let Council know that in January we successfully prosecuted David Green from the Isle of Wight for illegal mooring at Manor Park on 5 separate dates between May and October 2013. He was fined £50 for each of the five charges and ordered to pay another £250 in legal costs to the Council. He was also required to pay a £20 victim surcharge. I would like to express my appreciation for the diligence of the legal department in securing this prosecution and trust this will act as a deterrent to other illegal boat owners.

Thank you Mr Mayor.”

### **34/14 Announcements from the Chief Executive**

There were none.

### **35/14 Questions from members of the public**

There were none.

### **36/14 Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy 2014-2015 – Key Decision**

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the current Treasury position, the Treasury Management Statement and the Annual Investment Strategy for 2014-15, and Prudential Indicators for 2014-2015 to 2016-2017.

**Resolved** that:

- (1) The proposed Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy for 2014/15 as set out in the report of the Chief Finance Officer be approved.
- (2) The Prudential Indicators for 2014-15 to 2016-17 as set out in the report of the Chief Finance Officer be approved.

### **37/14 Annual Pay Policy Statement 2014-15**

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the Annual Pay Policy Statement 2014-15.

**Resolved** that the Annual Pay Policy Statement for 2014-15 be approved.

### **38/14 Draft Capital Programmer 2014-15 to 2017-18 – Key Decision**

The Council considered the recommendations of the Cabinet on the Draft Capital Programme for 2014-15 to 2017-18.

**Resolved** that:

- (1) The Capital Programme for 2014-15 to 2017-18 be approved.
- (2) The Prudential Indicators for 2014-16 to 2017-18 be approved.

**39/14 Detailed Revenue Budget 2014-2015 – Key Decision**

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the Detailed Revenue Budget 2014-2015 and the proposed Council Tax for 2014-15.

The Mayor referred Members to the Budget Book (green cover) reflecting the decisions and recommendations made by the Cabinet on 25 February 2014.

At the invitation of the Mayor, the Council gave consent under Standing Order 19.4 for the Budget speech of each of the Group Leaders to exceed 10 minutes.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor R.L. Watts, made a statement on the Budget and Council Tax and moved the recommendations on the detailed Budget for 2014/2015 as set out in the Budget Book (green cover). This was seconded by Councillor T.J.M. Evans. The Leader of the Spelthorne Independent Party, Councillor F. Ayers and the Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Councillor I.J. Beardsmore, also made statements.

Copies of the Council Leader's, the Spelthorne Independent Party Leader's and the Liberal Democrat Leader's statements are attached to these minutes at **Appendices A, B and C** respectively.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor R.L. Watts requested, under Standing Order 21.4, that the vote be recorded.

The voting was as follows:

<b>FOR (21 )</b>	Councillors R.L. Watts (Leader), P.C. Forbes-Forsyth (Deputy Leader), A. Ayub, P.A. Broom, J.A. Dale, C.A. Davis, T. Evans, A.E. Friday, N. Gething, A.C. Harman (Mayor), I.T.E. Harvey, M.J. Madams, A.J. Mitchell, D. Patel, J.M. Pinkerton, M.W. Rough, D. Saliagopoulos, J.R. Sexton, R.W. Sider, R.A. Smith-Ainsley, S. Webb (Deputy Mayor).
<b>AGAINST (11)</b>	Councillors F. Ayers, C.A. Bannister, I.J. Beardsmore, M. Bushnell, R. Dunn, S.A. Dunn, G.E. Forsbrey, D.L. Grant, A.C. Patterson, C. Spencer and B. Spoor.
<b>ABSTAIN (0)</b>	<b>None</b>

**Resolved:**

- (1) To approve the growth and savings items as set out in the appendices to the report of the Chief Finance Officer;
- (2) That the Council Tax Base for the whole council area for 2014-2015. [Item T in the formula in Section 31B(3) of the local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the "Act")] should be 36,550.50 band D equivalent dwellings and,  
Calculate that the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purpose for 2014-2015 is £178.97 per Band D equivalent dwelling.
- (3) To approve a 1.94% increase in the Spelthorne Borough Council element of the council tax for 2014-15. Moreover:
- a) The Revenue Estimates as set out in Appendix 1 be approved.
  - b) No money, as set out in this report, is appropriated from General Reserves in support of Spelthorne's local Council Tax for 2014-15.
  - c) To agree that the council tax base for the year 2014/15 is 36,555.50 Band D equivalent dwellings calculated in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as amended, made under Section 35(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- (4) That the following sums be now calculated by the Council for the year 2014-15 in accordance with Section 31 to 36 of the Local Government Act 1992.

A	67,404,718	Being the aggregate of the amount which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils
B	60,863,275	Being the aggregate of the amount which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act
C	6,541,443	Being the amount at 3(c)above (Item R), all divided by Item T (2 above) calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31B(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts)
D	£178.97	Being the amount at 3(c)above (Item R), all divided by Item T (2 above) calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31B(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts)
E	£0	Being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act
F	£178.97	Being the amount at 3(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 3 ( e ) above by Item T(2 above), calculated by the Council, in

		accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings on those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates.
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- (5) All newly built commercial property completed between 1 October 2013 and 30 September 2016 will be exempted from empty property rates for the first 18 months, up to the state aids limits.

A discount of £1000 for shops, pubs and restaurants (excluding banks, building societies and betting shops) with a rateable value below £50,000 for two years up to the state aid limits, from 1 April 2014.

A 50 per cent business rates relief for 18 months - between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2016 - for businesses that move into retail premises (excluding banks, building societies and betting shops) that have been empty for a year or more.

- (6) That Council delegates to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Leader and Finance Portfolio holder, to agree the details of a local Council Tax discount scheme for flood affected properties under Section 13a of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- (7) That, with respect to business rates for business premises which have been flooded, the Council delegates to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Leader and Finance Portfolio holder to agree the details of a local discount scheme for flood affected properties under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2014-2015 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by the Localism Act 2011

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
119.31	139.20	159.08	178.97	218.74	258.51	298.28	357.94

- (8) Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at (e) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the sum which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band 'D', calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different band.
- (9) That it be noted that for the year 2013-14 Surrey County Council and Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to Spelthorne Borough Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

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Precepts issued to the Council

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
i) Surrey County Council	797.22	930.09	1062.96	1195.83	1461.57	1727.31	1993.05	2391.66
ii) Surrey Police	141.12	164.64	188.16	211.68	258.72	305.76	352.80	423.36

**(10)** That, having calculated the aggregate in each case above the Council in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by the Localism Act 2011, hereby sets the amounts set out in Appendix 6 as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2014-15.

**(11)** The Council has determined that its relevant basic amount of Council Tax for 2014-15 is not excessive in accordance with the principles approved under Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992.

**(12)** As the billing authority, the Council has not been notified by a major precepting authority that its relevant basic amount of Council Tax for 2014-15 is excessive and therefore the billing authority is not required to hold a referendum in accordance with Section 52ZK Local Government Finance Act 1992.

#### **40/14 Members' Allowances Scheme 2014-15**

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the report by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) on the review of the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2014-15.

**Resolved** that:

- (1)** Members' allowances for the year 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 remain unchanged.
- (2)** A thorough review of the scheme for 2015-16 will commence in October 2014.
- (3)** The Council will engage positively with the panel in their consultation with councillors.
- (4)** The removal, from Appendix A of the current scheme, of the paragraph entitled 'Suspension of Allowances' be approved.

#### **41/14 Calendar of Meetings for 2014-15**

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the proposed Calendar of Meetings for the Municipal year June 2014 to May 2015.

**Resolved** that the Calendar of Meetings for the Municipal year June 2014 to May 2015 be approved.

#### **42/14 Reports from the Leader of the Council**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor R. L. Watts, presented the reports of the Cabinet meetings held on 28 January 2014 and 25 February 2014, which

outlined the various matters the Cabinet had decided since the last Council meeting.

**43/14 Report from the Chairman of the Licensing Committee**

The Chairman of the Licensing Committee, Councillor R.W. Sider, presented his report which outlined the matters the Committee had decided since the last Council meeting.

**44/14 Report from the Chairman of the Members' Code of Conduct Committee**

The Chairman of the Members' Code of Conduct Committee, Murray Litvak, presented his report which outlined the matters the Committee had decided since the last Council meeting.

**45/14 Report from the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor P.A. Broom, presented her report which outlined the matters the Committee had decided since the last Council meeting. She thanked the officers for their support for the Committee and the members for their work.

**46/14 Report from the Chairman of the Planning Committee**

The Chairman of the Planning Committee, Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley, presented his report which outlined the matters the Committee had decided since the last Council meeting.

**47/14 Motions**

There were none.

**48/14 Questions on Ward Issues**

There were none.

**49/14 General Questions**

**Under Standing Order 14, Councillor R.W. Sider, asked the following general question:**

“Will the Leader and members of the Council join me in congratulating all Council staff and their associated contractors for the magnificent way in which they readily responded to the needs of the residents of our Borough during the recent flooding crisis in January and February 2014; and will they endorse my request that this congratulatory note and thanks be suitably recorded in the annals of the Council’s history.”

**Response by the Leader of the Council, Councillor R.L. Watts:**

“Thank you for your question, Councillor Sider. I agree with you that we should congratulate staff and their contractors for their response to the recent flooding crisis and the needs of residents, both in terms of those who directly helped and others that kept services going so that staff could be released to assist. We will record our thanks as appropriate in the Council minutes.

The portfolio holder for emergency planning, Councillor Patel, will now address you further on this matter.”

Councillor D. Patel, portfolio Holder for Emergency Planning, addressed the Council and gave her thanks and appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the staff and the management team during a very difficult six weeks for Spelthorne. She thanked the Police, fire and rescue teams and other partner agencies who worked tirelessly to ensure the safety of residents. She also thanked the residents for their understanding, support and patience at a time which had been very difficult and praised the community spirit during this period.

**Under Standing Order 14, Councillor F. Ayers, asked the following general question:**

“Can Councillor Robert Watts confirm whether the Council will be offering help to those Spelthorne residents who have had their homes flooded these past few weeks, and if the answer is yes, what help is being offered?”

**Response by the Leader of the Council, Councillor R.L. Watts:**

“Thank you for your question, Councillor Ayers.

The Council is assisting residents who have been flooded in various ways. We have set up Flood Recovery Centres to provide information on a range of issues such as cleaning up your home, health and utility issues, which is also available on our website. Also the Flood Recovery Centres allow residents to obtain cleaning products, food and clothes donated to the Council. We are also looking at how those that had to leave their homes can be given a temporary relief from paying Council tax.

We are ensuring we pick up on central government funds for householders affected by the floods including the Repair and Renew Grant (up to £5k grant (to include cost of survey) for businesses and households). This is intended for measures to improve a property’s resilience over and above repairs which would normally be covered by insurance.

We will be administering a business rates relief scheme for businesses which have been flooded. We are still seeking to obtain the full detail from Government to enable us to implement the scheme but we anticipate we will be issuing 3 months business rates relief for those businesses which has been flooded. This will be funded by central government.

We will also be administering the Business Support grant scheme which is intended to help provide assistance to small and medium size businesses to recover from the indirect impacts of flooding such as loss of trade arising from customers not being able to get to the business for example. The Council has been given an initial allocation of £35k which we have challenged and we have been reassured by the Government that this is an initial allocation which will be revised once they have gained a better understanding from the affected councils of the impacts. We are therefore looking to achieve an increased allocation.

We are also looking to take forward certain key issues raised during the flooding, such as sewage and groundwater ingress with relevant bodies to try and improve the situation in the future.

As a professional, competent Chartered Civil Engineer, I am fully experienced in dealing with river flooding and urban drainage capacity problems. With my experience in both the UK and overseas, I will be directing our officers in liaising with the relevant parties for solutions.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that we have been very impressed and appreciative of the donations made and volunteers who have come forward in the spirit of community cohesion to assist those affected.”

#### **50/14 Urgent Business**

There were no urgent items.

## Appendix A

### **The Budget Speech of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Robert Watts**

Mr Mayor – I have great pleasure in presenting the Budget Report for the Municipal Year 2014-15.

Like most of the UK public sector and particularly local government, this Council is facing a challenging financial future. We have had a further £600,000 reduction in revenue support grant funding for 2014-15. Indeed we believe over the next 5 years our revenue support grant funding will reduce by over 80% and possibly by 2020 we will cease to receive any general revenue support grant.

In this context and following on from over a decade of this Council making budget savings year on year, we cannot simply make “salami slicing” efficiencies but need to invest in order to generate new sustainable ongoing streams. It is for this reason I will be setting out in detail a greater use of reserves than has been the case in recent years. The Leader of the main opposition party will not be able to claim this year that the budget speech is too similar to previous ones!

Whilst we welcome the fact that the Government has now built in council tax freeze grant funding into ongoing funding streams, with council tax freeze grant at only 1% and given the pressures we are under, after careful consideration, we are protecting our tax base by proposing an increase of 1.94% for 2014-15.

We are very mindful of the financial pressures on our residents. The proposed increase on an average band D household is equivalent to an increase of £3.41 per annum or just 7 pence extra per week. This is below the current rate of inflation.

The Council's new priorities of Economic Development, Planning and Housing and Council Assets have informed the construction of the budget. Some small growth of £16,500 has been found for the economic development budget; £450,000 of reserves are being used to resource key Staines-upon-Thames development projects which support both the economic development and asset priorities and will deliver ongoing revenue income; pressures on temporary housing have been accommodated within the budget. In the medium term we are looking at how we can use our existing assets to provide additional temporary accommodation which will ease financial pressures on the Council. The recent Peer Review endorsed the importance of ensuring that we adequately resource the delivery of our asset income generation projects and that's what we plan to do.

As is always the case, Cabinet, Management Team and Heads of Service have worked closely together to identify efficiencies and to balance the budget.

By protecting our income base we are ensuring that the Council can continue to maintain the support it provides to the voluntary sector which by value totals nearly £400,000 per annum.

Interest rates remain at historically low levels and are likely to continue at that level for a while longer. The UK Base rate remains at just half of one percent. Additionally the Government's Funding for Lending scheme had the impact of pushing down the rates banks were prepared to pay councils. This has reduced the Council's ability to continue to deliver the high levels of investment income which it had been achieving in the past and which has previously helped fund the provision of many of the general services for the public. We have responded to this by diversifying our investment strategy to invest in equity backed and property backed funds and corporate bond funds which has helped mitigate the impact of high earning investments maturing. We have been careful to balance risk and return. Currently our core portfolio is achieving an average rate of interest of 4% which in the current climate is an excellent performance, and means we have achieved our objective of offsetting the impact of maturing European Investment Bond investments which had been earning an average of 4% per annum. Whilst we are looking carefully at how we can further broaden our range of investments to improve our investment returns, whilst balancing against risk, it is likely that for some while to come our investment income derived from cash instruments will continue to be constrained.

Additionally we have been using reserves to support the capital programme. We are restraining the scale of the capital programme for 2014-15 to £1million, conscious of our limited capital resources.

Like households and businesses, facing the impact of the recession, the Council has had to tighten its belt and seek out even more savings than the savings it has already delivered over the last few years. From last summer onwards members of the Cabinet have been working closely with the Council's Management Team and heads of service to scrutinise all services' budgets and to identify savings and additional sources of income. This has been a very thorough process. All service teams from Management Team down were asked to identify and deliver savings for the budget. There will continue to be regular quarterly monitoring throughout the coming year to ensure that we successfully deliver these savings.

It might have been tempting for us to have increased our largest fee income source by raising parking fees. However, we have listened to the concerns of our retailers and local businesses and we are not proposing any parking charge increases as part of this budget.

We will seek to build upon our existing partnerships and are putting in place more focused arrangements for driving forward partnership working with other councils and other partners both private and public sector.

The Council has continued to progress in freeing up office space at Knowle Green which can be let out to partners to generate revenue income for the council. We are looking at options with respect to the Council's future

accommodation in order to minimise costs and maximise income and we are speaking to our friends at Surrey County Council.

The Council has now reverted fully to the national local government employers' pay award annual settlement process. We anticipate that the national award is likely to be 1% again, as was the case for 2013-14. This will be accommodated within any net increase in cost to the council tax payer. If the national award proved to be higher we would find additional offsetting efficiencies in year. In addition we are recommending again (for the sixth year) that councillors forgo any annual increase in allowances.

However we continue to be disappointed that local government is not being allowed to retain a larger proportion of business rates. For this Council potentially we retain 6.5% of the total business rates income we collect. Whilst we retain 20% of any additional business rates collected, we are also exposed to additional risks with respect to bad debts and valuation appeals. We will carefully monitor our collection performance and seek to continue the excellent collection rates achieved in recent years.

Whilst we have achieved a balanced budget for 2014-15 we know the future is looking extremely uncertain and challenging. We know the austerity period is likely to continue until at least 2020 which means we face several more years of reducing funding of probably at least 6 or 7 per cent per annum in terms of support from central government. Indeed by 2020 we may cease to be receiving any Government Revenue Support Grant. The welfare reforms, including creation of universal credit are likely to adversely impact financially on the Council. We are carefully monitoring these impacts.

As a Conservative administration we recognise the need for sound housekeeping and ensuring that our expenditure does not exceed income. With that in mind we fully support the recent motion passed by the Surrey County Council urging Central government to allow us to keep the income we do earn rather than redistributing it to other parts of the country. In the meantime in order to meet this future financial challenge we focus ever more closely on:

- maximising income from assets,
- shared working opportunities
- procurement savings
- flexible use of technology
- looking at how we deliver and prioritise services

A key priority for the Council is actively encouraging economic development. We are actively working to have a strong voice in this region's economic development through working in partnership with the Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Through the LEP we are bidding for funds to improve highways infrastructure in the Borough. For example we are supporting a package of infrastructure improvements including widening Staines-upon-Thames bridge in which there is a horrible bottle-neck there every morning and we are also looking at "Runnymede roundabout" at

Egham. We are also supporting a developing skills bid by Brooklands College, which we think is very, very important.

We undertook a rigorous and extensive economic assessment and consultation with stakeholders which we fed into the Council's first ever Economic Strategy which was approved by Council in December. This strategy has received positive feedback from external experts for its clarity and conciseness. The Economic Development Task Group, which I set up, will monitor the delivery of the Economic Strategy.

We have an action plan in place to deliver the objectives set out in the Economic Strategy. This has been well received by our business partners and demonstrates the serious ambitions Spelthorne has regarding economic prosperity.

I am delighted to say that this year the Spelthorne local economy has been making good progress. Last month we received the news that Spelthorne rose from 61st to 13th in the latest UK Competitiveness index.

However the DCLG funded project for difficult to reach properties remains on schedule with over 800 properties already receiving an enhanced service. The project officer is currently working with A2D to move a large number of properties on to weekly rubbish & recycling collections in Stanwell which is due to take place in the next couple of months, once bin areas have been built. This is in addition to other smaller scale changes in other parts of the borough.

Spelthorne councillors and staff, working in partnership with multiple other agencies, have worked extremely hard responding to the flooding situation. Whilst we are now moving into the recovery phase there is still a lot of work to be done to help affected residents put their lives back together. There are four schemes the Government suggested:

- funding measures to help householders and businesses to improve the resilience of the properties against future flooding
- business rates relief;
- council tax discount;
- a Business Support grant scheme for small and medium size enterprises to help them recover from indirect impacts of flooding.

We will be administering these schemes, which will require sensitive administration and we are still seeking full details from government. In order to give the Council the flexibility to implement an appropriate council tax discount scheme and appropriate business rates scheme we have added in additional recommendations six and seven to the budget report to give delegated authority to the Chief Financial Officer in consultation with myself and the Finance Portfolio holder.

A major issue facing the Council, the residents and businesses of the borough is the process leading up to the national decision on the future provision of additional runway capacity. Heathrow airport provides nearly 9% of the jobs for our employed residents. The future prosperity of Heathrow is vital for our local economy. At the same time we need to represent the interests of our residents to seek to mitigate adverse impacts on particular communities. This

Council has been more pro-active in providing its residents the opportunity to understand the issues and to engage with the proposers of the different runway schemes. We ran a very well organised meeting in September at Stanwell Moor Village hall for residents and then followed up with a good debate in this chamber last month. The Davies Commission has narrowed the options and is now in a more detailed consultative process. This Council will continue to pro-actively ensure that it represents the interests of its residents and businesses.

The Council has achieved a number of projects for the benefits of the community in these particularly financially challenging times. These include:

- Well-being centre at the Greeno Centre Shepperton to support our residents with mental health issues (net budget cost £158,200).
- Supporting Families – we are held as a beacon of best practice by the Government for our new supporting families in partnership with two other boroughs (total cost in 2014-15 £351,000 all funded by Surrey County Council)
- We have recently acquired ownership from Surrey County Council of three of our parks: Sunbury Park, Manor Park and Laleham Park including Dumsey Meadow, which safeguards a significant number of open spaces or green lungs for our future generations.

We are looking to ensure that we pro-actively maintain the standards of our assets, as we know a planned approach is more cost effective than a reactive one. I am therefore pleased to say that within the Capital Programme for 2014-15 we have restored the £55,600 planned maintenance provision for works on a number of our building assets which was previously in the programme two years ago.

The Council recently undertook a Local Government Association Peer Review which was a useful exercise providing a lot of positive feedback but also highlighting some areas of potential improvement for the Cabinet and Management Team to work on in partnership. The Peer Review concluded that we had sound financial resources and recognised that we had identified the future funding threats.

I would now like to return to the detail of our budget and Council Tax proposals for 2014/15.

After excluding the £31m of housing benefits fully funded from government grant, our gross service revenue expenditure will be £22.6m. Deducting £8.9m of specific grants and fees and charges results in a net service expenditure figure of £13.7m. Our net expenditure next year, taking into account use of specific reserves and investment income is projected to be £12.2 million. Grants of approximately £3.2m and net retained business rates of approximately £2.4m produces external funding of around £5.5 million. This leaves £6.7 million to be met from the Council Tax, which, after taking account of a collection fund surplus of £188k and a tax base of 36,551 properties at Band D, will require a Band D Council Tax of £178.97 to be levied.

As well as our own part of the Band D Council Tax there will be added the precept from Surrey County Council and the Surrey Police. Like the Council both these organisations have faced a similar decision on council tax freeze and like us they have decided they had no choice but to slightly increase their part of the council tax bill this year. These are: Surrey County Council £1,195.83 (a 1.99% increase) and Police a £211.68 (a 1.99% increase) which gives a total Band D Council tax of £1,586.48, resulting in a 1.98% increase overall.

In conclusion, I would like to place on record my thanks to Councillor Tim Evans for his valued support as the Cabinet Finance Portfolio holder and all other Cabinet Members as well as the Chief Executive and his management team especially Terry Collier and his team and all the staff for their support and assistance in preparing this budget.

I now formally move the recommendations of the Cabinet of 25 February 2014, as shown on page 1 and 2 of the Budget Book, detailing the precepts by the County Council and Surrey Police and the Band D Council Tax levy for the year 2014-15.

Thank you Mr Mayor

**The Budget Speech of the Leader of Spelthorne Independent Party,  
Councillor Frank Ayers**

Thank you Mr Mayor and I would also like to thank Councillor Watts for making available the budget book yesterday afternoon, although if he thinks that just over 24 hours is sufficient to take into account all the contents, well that quite surprises me.

Anyway Mr Mayor before I respond to the budget I wish to have it recorded in the minutes that as the Leader of the main opposition party I requested from Councillor Watts prior sight of the budget statement presented this evening so I had sufficient time to give due consideration to the contents and comment fully. Regrettably Council Watts declined my request on personal grounds, stating and I quote 'As you have clearly commented on your latest web announcement that you feel I am incompetent I have no intention of sharing my budget with you.'

My apologies Mr Mayor, I just wanted to get that on the record.

I will now move on to the budget statement. I would like to say what a good sensible budget we have before us this evening. That is what I would like to say. Unfortunately I cannot. This is the second budget presented by Councillor Watts. Many will recall that last year there were a number of errors and omissions within the budget and when Councillor Watts was asked to explain the reasons he had no answers. One such example was the £100,000 previously identified as savings that disappeared completely, without on the night any explanation why that had happened. Of course we now know why that happened, the appointment of an assistant to the Cabinet to the cost of almost £20,000 per annum and the engagement of consultants to deliver improvement plans for Laleham Park at a substantial cost to the Council. That expenditure together equates to almost all the £100,000, previously identified savings and there was no mention of that expenditure in last year's budget.

Now this year we again have a budget which like a string vest is full of holes. We all know it's not what the budget says but it's what it doesn't say. Where the detailed reasons for the proposed use of £450,000 spend from general reserves as outlined in appendix 1 in the green book to fund a number of projects relating to the regeneration of Staines-upon-Thames town centre? What are those projects? What is being proposed? Who and how will it be taken forward? Will most of the £450,000 be paid to consultants? I suspect that the lack of information is one of two reasons. Either they do not know what, how or where exactly projects will be in Staines or like a number of items in the budget, the devil will be in the detail. Why agree to put funding of £100,000 towards the cost of a pilot enforcement scheme in partnership with the Surrey Police and the crime commissioner? I understand there is one other authority taking part in this pilot scheme. Surely it would have been much more sensible to see if that pilot scheme worked before committing any funding, therefore saving £100,000.

I am however pleased to note that in 2.4 of the green book, so I did manage to read some of it in the short time I had it, the Council recognises the impact that the flooding has had on a considerable number of homes and businesses in the Borough and some provision is being made to give some form of financial support all be it within the parameters and funding set out by the government.

If businesses whose premises experienced at least one day flooding can expect at least 3 months business rate relief, I would like to have seen the Council take this a stage further and give those residents whose homes have been flooded 6 months Council tax rate relief. For a great many it will take at least that amount of time to get their homes back to where they were before the flooding. How will we pay for it some people will say? Well we can review and put on hold the £450,000 proposed spend on the Staines regeneration projects. I'm sure our residents would appreciate such action, which if you really wanted to have a sensible regeneration programme, then £450,000 would hardly be sufficient especially when you take into account or even into consideration the revenue budget provision figure of £287,000 just for resurfacing work for the Elmsleigh car park. That really highlights that the £450,000 for regeneration will be woefully inadequate to achieve any satisfactory results. I believe our residents whose homes were flooded would have appreciated such a positive decision being taken giving them 6 months rate relief on their council tax.

Mr Mayor, this recommendation this evening is to approve a 1.94 percent Council tax increase. I suggest this increase would not be necessary if the Council tax grant of 1 percent on offer from central government had been accepted. Some will argue that if the Council tax grant of 1 percent had been accepted there would be a budget shortfall of approximately £64,000. I believe that by dispensing with the unnecessary Cabinet assistant post and tighter control of spending we could have made up that shortfall. Therefore no Council tax increase would have been needed for 2014-15. I am sure our residents, many whose incomes have not been keeping up with inflation, would have appreciated Spelthorne Borough Council freezing their element of the Council tax for 2014-15 however small that amount may be.

Mr Mayor, the Spelthorne Independent Party cannot support a budget, driven by a party that is losing the trust of its residents and cannot be trusted with the public purse. The budget has left us with more questions than answers and does not offer those residents and businesses who have been subject to flooding, the support that they deserve. Therefore we will be opposing the recommendation put before us this evening.

Thank you Mr Mayor.

## Appendix C

### **The Budget Speech of the Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Councillor Ian Beardsmore**

Thank you very much Mr Mayor.

It is not possible to do a budget report when the figures have only been available for 24 hours. To attempt to do that would produce something careless and slipshod, no doubt adequate for the ruling group, but not me.

It was not as though there was any real reason for it. We all know about the flooding and the wait for government money. That should not hold up the budget book. Any vaguely competent authority would have produced a budget book on time and the lay around would have been the amendments rising from the government figures where needed. Still, that is what a vaguely competent authority would have done and if anyone accuses Spelthorne of being competent however vague is not one of them.

We have lot about the austere drivers that are forcing our hand. Well sorry, when you have been as long around as I have, and no one in this chamber has been around longer, you would actually recognise what this is. This is cheap posturing. A conservative government at the end of its term talking tough on the run up to the next election and lashing out mindlessly at soft targets, in that case local government. The only reason this budget is legal tonight is because the sensible half of the coalition refused to let the ceiling drop below 2 percent and given that something like half of the local authorities in the Country are thought to come in at over 1.5 percent it shows which part of the government actually understands the needs of local government and a great many Councils actually owe a debt of thanks for reigning in Eric Pickles on this issue.

So I am certainly not convinced that future funding is as bad as predicted, but of course it is a good way and good fears for scaring foolish people into doing foolish things. The problem Spelthorne finds itself in is that it's already squandered huge amounts of money. When we sold out our residents and gave birth to that monster that became A2D. We were one of the richest boroughs in the Country 15 years ago. Where is all that money now?

More recently we have squandered many more millions by letting developers off planning infrastructure contributions, which for those who understand are over and above S106 monies. Well it's no wonder then that we're strapped for cash and now we hear from the budget speech from the leader we are going to dig into the reserves, so we can no doubt squander more money. Are we seriously looking into new opportunities to getting more income? Well now we are in the world of SIL and that has ground to a halt allegedly because the government changes. The government produced SIL amendments in 2012, 2013, and 2014 and I'm probably the only person in this Council who is sad enough to look at them.

Other Councils have been able to implement SIL and get money from developers. And again we come down to the budget issue. The difference between the competent can achieve and what the incompetent fail to achieve.

One thing looking at the budget book, and I have had a brief look at it. I didn't get it until yesterday afternoon. It hit me, and I think Councillor Ayers has kind of stolen my thunder on this, the £287,000 for surfacing the top deck of the Elmsleigh car park and I really would like someone to clarify for me whether the top surface is going to be 14 carat gold or 18 carat gold. It is an outrageous amount of money. Not surprising then, that the long term financial picture is bleak. Not bleak because of future government restrictors in funding. Not bleak because of our capacity to squeeze more money from our hapless residents, but bleak because the people running the Council can't do the job.

We know what will happen. Like foolish people panicked into doing foolish things. The Conservatives will fiddle our housing need and use this to create an artificial demand which will be met by selling a huge chunk of our greenbelt, which this Council just so happens to have a very useful stake in, to the effect of getting one third of the net profit.

Thus they will sell out our environment, they will sell out Sunbury just the same way they sold up and stitched up our tenants 15 years ago. Well I have a far better and far more radical idea than that. Just for once, why don't the Conservatives try and manage our finances competently.