

**Budget speech of the Leader of Staines and Ashford Residents' Group –
Councillor Denise Saliagopoulos**

Madam Mayor, thank you very much.

I believe as the opposition that it is very easy for us to criticise and slam your budget proposal this evening.

I would like to thank our Chief Executive, officers and members of staff involved with the work on the budget; thank you also to the Deputy Chief Executive for the time he took last week, presenting the proposed budget to the Opposition Groups here at this Council. Certainly we would recognise the work of your Portfolio Holder for Finance (again we have said this publicly in the Council before).

Madam Mayor, something the Council has not however allowed for: a risk down the line, a very significant risk, which should be marked as red; perhaps not within the next couple of years but certainly it must be considered a long term risk – I talk about the Women in this borough who expected to retire at 60 – when suddenly the Government announced they were to work until the age of 67. (Some of the advice was to “get an Apprenticeship) where am I going with this: Many of these women will be pushed in poverty, will need help with council tax rent etc, and call on a plethora of help from the local authority; This Council will have to foot the bill. Madam Mayor, I did try to put before the Council a question on the matter of womens pension but it was turned down as irrelevant. Is it irrelevant? Not to the women it isn't and certainly not to this Council.

We constantly hear that Surrey County Council is to blame. Yes they are for the Services they provide that have failed; is this why at the Presentation I mentioned above, we were told that it is “and I quote Madam Mayor, “unknown as to the extent of impacts and whether SC is sustainable long term”. What does that mean to this Council and the people of this Borough?

I would like to mention the billion pound or so the Council has spent on acquisitions of properties in and out of the borough. It is a matter of record that we did not disagree with the principles of this; however, the debt is becoming a bit uncomfortable; Property seems to be a bit of a risk business when we think about the uncertainty of Brexit – we certainly hope not. Lets remind ourselves again that the debts the Council amasses is a debt which belongs to every resident in this borough.

We cannot expect the local taxpayers and the residents of this borough to keep paying out and paying out – for what they perceive as cuts to services (many of which are beyond our control).

The budget you propose, through you Madam Chairman is one which is sound in many areas, but full of uncertainties in others. Will the Government or wont the Government short change us over the New Homes Bonus; will the

Government or wont the Government reduce the Grant by £3m? As I said above we major so much on what Surrey will do or what Surrey will cut next – but these are uncertainties. We know that they are potentially running out of reserves? That is also an uncertainty.

We understand that the uncertainty of Brexit is not in our control as a Council; however we do believe that the Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee should have looked at this in more depth. You may recall that Cllr Quentin Edgington raised this very point recently. Although we do not believe we will be impacted to bad locally relating to the services this Council provides; we are not looking at the impact to Health and Social Care and possible issues – in addition to the dire straits they find themselves in now. We must not work in silos and need to work more closely with our Health and Social Care professionals in this borough. We should be having regular dialogue with our GP's – this is how a difference could be made in this borough in any event.

There has been confirmation I believe that Surrey Police has proposed an increase of 10.14%? The Borough crime statistics have been published and it was interesting that some parts of the borough have very high crime; we do hope that the proposal by the Surrey Police Crime Commissioner to put 100 officers back on the beat – takes this borough into consideration and puts officers where we need them in this borough.

You talk about the proposals to increase the Council Tax and the fact that they are minimal. That gives you an extra income of some £30 odd K? and according to the briefing I received on the budget, (All to get an extra income of £31k) so (in your words) “will generate income with a marginal impact!!!! So why even take it from residents? To do what with exactly?

It would have been a gesture to our residents to have kept Spelthorne's Council Tax to zero this financial year. We should have looked at this; the residents of this borough are sick of paying out and paying out - you have missed a huge opportunity! We can do better than this for our residents. I am sorry but we cannot support the Council Tax rise the Conservative Group propose, for the reasons I have highlighted this evening.

Thank you very much Madam Mayor.