

**MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 19<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2004**

**BOROUGH OF SPELTHORNE**

**AT THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF SPELTHORNE, HELD IN  
THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNCIL OFFICES, KNOWLE GREEN, STAINES ON  
THURSDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2004 AT 7.30PM**

Amos Mrs P C	Fullbrook J M	Pinkerton Mrs J M
Ayers F	Grant Mrs D L	Pinkerton J D
Bain Ms M	Hirst A P	Ponton Mrs J E
Beardsmore I J	Hyams Mrs M	Royer M R
Bhadye S	Jaffer H R	Searancke E J
Bouquet M L	James P R	Sider R W
Ceaser G S (Mayor)	Leighton Mrs V J	Spencer Mrs C L
Colison-Crawford R B	Napper Mrs I	Trussler G F (Deputy Mayor)
Davies F (Leader)	O'Hara E	Turner Mrs D
D'Sa R V	Packman J D (Deputy Leader)	Weston Mrs P
Forsbrey G E	Paton J M	Wood-Dow Mrs J M

Co-Opted Member: Mr M. Litvak

G S Ceaser, Mayor, in the Chair

**Minute Silence**

The Mayor invited the Council to hold a minute's silence in remembrance of the recent loss of two prominent members of the Borough. Louise Mellet who had been a councillor for 4 years, a member of the Executive and represented the Ashford Town Ward. Bob Schaffer who had been the Chairman of the Sunbury Urban Council in 1968 and the Mayor of Spelthorne in 1976/1977 as well as holding numerous chairmanships during his time as a councillor. He reminded members of his love of cricket including his involvement with the Sunbury Cricket Club.

**25/04 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K. Chouhan, E K Culnane, Mrs J B Langridge-John, S B S Lorch, Mrs M J Madams and C V Strong.

**26/04 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2003 be approved as a correct record.

**27/04 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

All members present declared that they had a personal interest in minute number 30/04 - Members' Allowances – Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel under Section 4.1 of the Code of Conduct.

**28/04 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE MAYOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE MAYOR**

The Mayor reminded members that they already had details of the numerous Mayoral events arranged.

The Mayor presented Alan Jones the Councils' Environmental Health Manager (Domestic & Pollution) with a long service award for 25 years service to the Council.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

The Chief Executive announced that the Council had been successful in obtaining Liveability funding to the value of £2.1million for parks and open spaces. The funding would be used to introduce six youth zones within the Council's parks. A Green Space Forum would be established consisting of representatives from the local community, Police and young people as well as other agencies to oversee the projects.

The Leader asked that the Chief Executive forward details of the Liveability Grant and projected programme to all members.

The Chief Executive reported on the continued success of gaining national awards for the regeneration of Staines Town Centre. The latest award came from the Royal Town Planning Institute for planning for urban areas and communities.

The Mayor presented the award to the Leader of the Council.

## **29/04 QUESTIONS FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

Under Standing Order 12, Mr Michael Rigby, on behalf of the Lower Sunbury Residents' Association asked the following question of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Davies:

"Given the unequivocal decision on the TP26 land made by the Inspector in his report on the Public Inquiry into the Local Plan in 1989 in favour of Proposal R5 to designate the land as public open space, could the Leader give his assurance that, after 15 years of delay and contrary to the headline in the Surrey Herald of Jan 28th stating: 'Council turn down opportunity to buy green area', the Council will adhere to its commitment to acquire the land from Surrey County Council and devote adequate resources to the land's subsequent maintenance as public open space, and that action to expedite this process will be taken immediately in order to effect a conclusion within the next three months."

Councillor Davies invited the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Planning, Councillor G.E. Forsbrey to respond:

Councillor Forsbrey responded as follows:

"Spelthorne Borough Council continues to be committed to the acquisition of the TP26 land in Sunbury, in order to establish an improved public amenity for the local community. However, it would not be in Spelthorne's best interests to purchase the land under the current terms proposed by Surrey County Council in relation to the initial purchase price, improvement costs and ongoing maintenance costs. We are continuing to negotiate with Surrey County Council for a sale at peppercorn levels with future maintenance sums incorporated, which, we believe is the norm for this type of transaction.

Furthermore, it is pleasing to note the eagerness of the Lower Sunbury Residents Association to establish this land as public open space and we are keen to work with them to perhaps set up a 'friends' group or trust that could help to oversee the land when it is finally in Spelthorne's possession."

The Mayor agreed that the information requested by Councillor I J Beardsmore on the current price being asked for TP26 land would be sent to him.

## **30/04 MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES**

The Council considered the recommendation of the Executive to support the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel appointed to consider Members' Allowances. The report from the Independent Panel had been circulated to all members of the Council.

### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That with effect from 1st April 2004 the following allowances be paid:

Basic Allowance ( <i>All Councillors</i> )	£3511
Leader	£8054
Deputy Leader	£5349
Executive Members ( <i>4 excluding Leader/Deputy Leader</i> )	£2685
Chairmen Of Overview and Scrutiny Committees (2)	£2685
Chairmen of Planning and Licensing Committees (2)	£2685
Principal Opposition Group Leader	£2685

- (b) That the allowances should be reviewed again in Autumn 2004 at which time it was noted the Independent Remuneration Panel would wish to interview a representative sample of members.

### **31/04 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2003 – COUNCIL TAX CHANGES AND SETTING OF THE COUNCIL TAX BASE**

The Council considered the recommendations of the Executive on the discretionary Council Tax powers introduced by the Local Government Act 2003.

In accordance with Standing Order 18.4 a request was made that voting on part (a) of the motion be recorded. The vote was as follows:

For (30)	Councillors Mrs P.C. Amos, F. Ayers, Ms M. Bain, S. Bhadye, M. L. Bouquet, G.S. Ceaser, F. Davies, R.V. D'Sa, G.E. Forsbrey, J.M. Fullbrook, Mrs D.L. Grant, A.P. Hirst, Mrs M. Hyams, J.R. Jaffer, P.R. James, Mrs V.J. Leighton, Mrs I. Napper, E. O'Hara, J.D. Packman, J.M. Paton, Mrs J.M. Pinkerton, J.D. Pinkerton, M.R. Royer, E.J. Searancke, R.W. Sider, Mrs C.L. Spencer, G.F. Trussler, Mrs D. Turner, Mrs P. Weston and Mrs J.M. Wood-Dow.
Against (0)	-
Abstained. (3)	Councillors I.J. Beardsmore, R.B. Colison-Crawford and Mrs J.E. Ponton

### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That there be no change to the second home discount for the 2004/2005 financial year. That during 2004 discussions take place with Surrey County Council to seek their agreement to set up a county-wide scheme and to determine whether they were prepared to agree a compromise that ensures that a proportion of the County gain be received by the Borough of Spelthorne residents. A joint approach on this by the Surrey Districts would also be sought via the SLGA. The outcome of these discussions and approaches would then be reported to the Executive later in 2004
- (b) That there be no change to the long-term empty home discount for the 2004/2005 financial year. That the matter of long term empty home discount be raised with the ODPM to determine whether they were prepared to agree a compromise that ensures that a proportion of the monies received could be retained by the Borough of Spelthorne residents. That a review be undertaken in conjunction with the new Empty Homes Officer during the 2004 year to identify if the reducing or removing the

discount would encourage owners to reoccupy /let or sell the empty properties. A report would then be submitted to the Executive on the findings during the summer. If it was agreed by Members that the discount should be reduced then all properties would be contacted by Council mail shot in the early Autumn 2004 to allow time for them to sell or let before the effective date of 1st April 2005.

- (c) That local discounts would only be given in very exceptional cases that could include flooding, and cases where committal action through the courts was not deemed appropriate. Such cases would need to be supported by third party reports generally from a social worker or doctor.
- (d) That the responsibility for dealing with applications for local discounts in very exceptional cases, as per (c) above, be delegated to the Strategic Director (Support); and
- (e) That in future any local discounts / exemptions would be funded entirely locally and there would be a requirement for the billing authority to transfer from its general fund to its collection fund the amount by which the council tax had been reduced. A budget allocation for this would need to be considered by the Executive in due course.

### **32/04 REVENUE BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX**

The Council considered a report on the Council's detailed Revenue Budget for 2004/2005 for consideration in the context of overall spending and the Council Tax to be levied for the financial year ending on 31st March 2005.

The Mayor, Councillor G.S. Ceaser, reminded members that the Budget Book [green cover] reflecting the decisions and recommendations made by the Executive on 10th February 2004 and the precepts being levied by Surrey County Council and the Surrey Police had been circulated to all members on 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2004.

The Mayor gave his consent under Standing Order 16.4 for the budget speech of each of the Group Leaders to exceed five minutes but not to exceed 10 minutes.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor F. Davies, made a statement on the Budget and Council Tax and moved the recommendations set out in the Budget Book (green cover). This was seconded by the Deputy Leader. The Leader of the opposition Group, Councillor I.J. Beardsmore also made a statement.

A copy of the Leader's statement was made available for other Members, the press and public at the meeting and is **attached at Appendix A**.

An amendment was moved by Councillor I.J. Beardsmore and seconded by Councillor Mrs J. E. Ponton and copies of the amendment were circulated at the meeting. The meeting was adjourned to enable clarification to be obtained. On reconvening the meeting and with the agreement of the Council the amendment was withdrawn.

Councillor J. D. Packman paid tribute to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Davies for his excellent Leadership skills and the drive and enthusiasm he brought to the work of the Council.

#### **RESOLVED: -**

1. That based on the decisions of the Executive on 10 February 2004 and updated information on Government Revenue Grants, the 2004/05 revenue budget should show a reduction in Revenue Grants receivable of £5,275 and a reduction in General Grants awarded by the Council of £7,410.
2. That the Prudential Indicators as set out in the Budget Book at Appendix A be agreed.
3. That the Capital Programme as set out in the Budget Book at Appendix B be approved

4. That in support of an increase of 30p. per week (13.1%) in the Spelthorne element of the Council Tax for 2004/05 the following proposals be agreed:
  - a. The Revenue Estimates as set out be approved.
  - b. An amount not exceeding £1,790,000 as set out in the report of the Strategic Director (Support) be appropriated from General Reserves in aid of Spelthorne's local Council Tax for 2004/05.
  - c. To note that the Council Tax base for the year 2004/05 is £38,948.30 calculated in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as amended, made under Section 33(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
5. That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2004/05 in accordance with Sections 32 and 33 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

(a)	£37,553,685	Being the aggregate of the amount which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 32 (2)(a) to (e) of the Act
(b)	£27,574,370	Being the aggregate for the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32 (3)(a) to (c) of the Act.
(c)	£9,979,315	Being the amount by which the aggregate at (a) above exceeds the aggregate at (b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 32(4) of the Act, as its budget requirement for the year.
(d)	£4,752,065	Being the aggregate sums which the Council estimates will be payable for the year into its general fund in respect of redistributed non-domestic rates, revenue support grant or additional grant, increased by the sum which the Council estimates will be transferred in the year from its Collection Fund to its General Fund in accordance with Section 97(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (Council Tax surplus) and increased by the sum which the council estimates will be transferred from its collection Fund to its General Fund pursuant to the collection Fund (Community Charges) Directions under Section 98(4) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 made on 7 <sup>th</sup> February 1994 (Community Charge surplus).
(e)	£134.21	Being the sum (c) above less the amount at (d) above, all divided by the amount at 4c above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 33(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year.

6. That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2004/05 in accordance with Section 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

#### Valuation Bands

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
89.47	104.39	119.30	134.21	164.03	193.86	223.68	268.42

Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at 5(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.

7. That it be noted that for the year 2004/2005 that the Surrey County Council and Surrey Police Authority have stated the following amounts in precepts issued to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 as amended of the local Government Finance Act 1992, for each of the categories of the dwellings shown below.

Precepting Authority	Valuation Bands							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Surrey CC	592.92	691.74	790.56	889.38	1,087.02	1,284.66	1,482.30	1,778.76
Surrey Police	98.04	114.38	130.72	147.06	179.74	212.42	245.10	294.12

That having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 6 and 7 above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2004/2005 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Valuation Bands							
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
£780.43	£910.51	£1,040.58	£1,170.65	£1,430.79	£1,690.94	£1,951.08	£2,341.30

### **33/04 LOCAL LIST OF BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES OF ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORIC INTEREST**

The Council considered the recommendations of the Executive on the outcome of the public consultation on the Draft Local List of Buildings and Structures of Architectural or Historic Interest for adoption by the Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

**RESOLVED** that the local list of buildings and structures of architectural or historic interest be formally adopted by the Council as supplementary Planning Guidance subject to:

The responses to representations as set out in Appendices A and B to the report to the Executive on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2004 being agreed, with the following additional wording, including that relevant to the text on Sir John Gibson's grave:- "The Draft Local List has been subject to extensive public consultation and received widespread support. All of the comments received and suggested additions to the list have been carefully assessed against the fairly strict criteria, which we have set. Overall it is proposed that 5 items be removed from the draft list and 12 items added - making a total now of 160 buildings and structures. We have had one further letter from the relatives of Sir John Gibson - received after the report was completed. This has provided further information of which the following is relevant for inclusion in the description - date he was knighted, the fact the grave also contains the remains of 3 other members of the family and the fact the

stone for the grave was sourced from the site in Sudan where he built what was at the time the largest dam in the world."

#### **34/04 LOCAL PLAN – ALTERATIONS TO POLICIES H5 AND H6**

The Council considered the recommendations of the Executive on the outcome of public consultation on the Revised Deposit alterations to Policies H5 (dwelling sizes) and H6 (affordable housing) together with recommended formal responses to those representatives received.

##### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the recommended responses to representations on Revised Deposit changes to Policies H5 and H6 and the supporting text, as reported to the Executive at its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2004 by the Strategic Director (Community) be agreed and
- (b) That the likely timetable for the adoption of the altered Policies H5 AND H6 be noted.

#### **35/04 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS FOR 2004/2005**

**RESOLVED** that the calendar of meetings covering the period from 1st May 2004 to 31st December 2005 and as recommended by the Executive be approved.

#### **36/04 TREASURY MANAGEMENT – PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS FOR 2004/2005 AND ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

The Council considered the recommendations of the Executive on the Prudential Indicators for 2004/2005 which were outlined in the report of the Strategic Director (Support) to the Executive on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2004 for capital finance purposes. Consideration was also given to the annual investment strategy which had been based on the outlined approved by the Executive at its meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2004. A copy of the annual investment strategy based on the outline approved by the Executive had been circulated to all members on 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2004.

##### **RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Prudential Indicators for 2004/2005 as outlined in the report of the Strategic Director (Support) to the Executive on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2004 be approved; and
- (b) The annual Investment Strategy as submitted be approved.

#### **37/04 REPORT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor F. Davies, presented his report which outlined the various matters the Executive had dealt with since the last Council meeting. In moving the report the Leader invited questions from members, which were answered by the relevant Portfolio Holder as indicated below:

Councillor J.D. Packman, the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Community Liaison, responded to questions relating to the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003.

#### **38/04 IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

The Chairman of the Improvement and Development Committee, Councillor A.P. Hirst, presented his report which outlined the matters the Committee had dealt with since the last Council meeting and in doing so reminded members of the Special Improvement and Development Committee meeting being held on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2004 to consider the delivery of IT services.

#### **39/04 PLANNING COMMITTEE**

The Chairman of the Planning Committee, Councillor E. O'Hara, presented his report which outlined the matters the Committee had dealt with since the last Council meeting. He went on to remind members of the committees' request to the Executive for funding to be made available for a traffic study to be undertaken in the Green Street area of Sunbury.

#### **40/04 STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

The Chairman of the Standards Committee, Mr. M. Litvak, presented his report, which outlined the matters the Committee had dealt with since the last Council meeting and responded to a question raised.

#### **41/04 GENERAL QUESTIONS**

Under Standing Order 13 Councillor R.W. Sider asked Councillor J.D. Packman, the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Community Liaison the following question:

"Can the Leader assure me that this Council will press the Surrey Police Authority to man the front desk at Staines Police Station 24 hrs a day, as opposed to the current opening times of 8.00am to 10.00pm."

Councillor J.D. Packman, the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Community Liaison, responded as follows:

"I can confirm that Staines Police Station is open from 8am to 10pm, 7 days a week. These opening times apply to all 4 custody centres in Spelthorne.

A telephone is located outside of these stations that provides a direct line to the Police Call Centre in Guildford, but not for emergency calls.

Surrey Police Authority reviewed the opening hours for their custody centres over the past 6 months and recently reaffirmed their current policy.

Outside of Staines, Sunbury Police Station is open from 9am – 5pm on weekdays and Ashford from 10am – 6pm on weekdays. Shepperton Police Office has now been refurbished and the Police Neighbourhood Specialist Officer will be opening and running a surgery from the office within the next few weeks.

The local Police Superintendent advises that the current arrangements represent a balance between public demand and police resources outside peak hours and the recent review indicated no significant public discontent with them.

I can inform Council that the Chief Executive and myself have a meeting arranged next month with the Divisional Commander, Superintendent Lynne Owens at which time the matter of Staines Police Station opening times will be raised with her."

#### **42/04 APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

##### **Staines Parochial Charity – Appointment Of Three Representative Trustees**

**RESOLVED** that Mr K. Hartley of 36 The Doultons, Octavia Way, Staines, Councillor E. O'Hara and Mr A.C. Collins of West Lodge, Ridgemoor Road, Englefield Green be re appointed to serve as representative Trustees on the Staines Parochial Charity for a further 4 year term of office until 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2008.



## BUDGET REPORT 2004-2005

Mr Mayor, I have pleasure in presenting the Budget Report for the municipal year 2004/2005.

As usual, before dealing with the budget proposal, I would like to summarise some of the issues that we dealt with last year and to look at some matters that will undoubtedly challenge us in the year ahead.

Last year we decided that in order to use our resources more effectively, we should focus on fewer priorities. We consulted widely with local residents and their comments coupled with members' views produced four key priorities which were, as we all know, Making Spelthorne Safer, Making Spelthorne a Better Place, Engaging Younger People and Improving Quality of Service. All of our plans for next year embrace the principles contained in the four priorities.

We continue to give great attention to community safety and, during the last year, we have extended the CCTV coverage in Staines Town Centre. We have introduced permanent cameras in Ashford and we have a total of 19 mobile cameras in use throughout the Borough. Working with the Surrey Police we have introduced Police Community Support Officers at a cost of some £140,000 per annum. This is a clear demonstration of support to our local community. We are determined to work with the Surrey Police to combat the rising tide of anti social behaviour that a small minority of young people seem determined to pursue. It is to be hoped that when people are brought to prosecution that the judiciary impose robust and suitable sentences on offenders.

Last summer we introduced a temporary skate park in the Elmsleigh Surface Car Park. The obvious enjoyment of youngsters showing off their skills, coupled with the very positive feedback that we received means that we are now intending to develop a permanent skate park at The Lammas. Youth shelters have been placed in some of our parks and, whilst there has been a mixed reaction to these shelters in some areas, the reaction to them is generally positive.

Housing has once again been a key issue. Having undertaken a very expensive housing needs survey that confirmed our belief that there was a significant level of need, we set ambitious plans in place. We planned to provide funding to support the provision of an additional 165 units of affordable accommodation each year. With the abolition of Social Housing Grant from 1<sup>st</sup> April this year, our plans were completely thwarted. We have reduced the number of units to 115 per year but even this reduced target appears to be unachievable.

Last year I mentioned the role of the Regional Housing Boards and predicted that very little funding will come into our area. I hate to say "I told you so" but "I told you so". Over the next two years there will be support funding for 55 units in the Spelthorne area. It is clear that neither the Government nor the Regional Housing Boards recognise the problems that we encounter in an area where there is precious little land available and land costs are astronomical. To make matters worse we have been instructed that Bed and Breakfast accommodation, cannot be used for families in future, except in an emergency. All this comes from a government that talks incessantly about partnership, key workers, joined-up thinking and joined-up planning. The real losers, as always, will be the local community, particularly young people, who cannot afford the cost of a decent permanent home and the council tax payers who will have to foot the bill for more temporary accommodation.

In September 2003, I was delighted to see Clerical Medical starting their ambitious refurbishment programme for the Elmsleigh Centre. This is the first of a number of phases that will turn the Elmsleigh into a centre that will "round off" the Staines regeneration project and, perhaps as importantly, will see the eventual return of the Five Swimmers Statue to its rightful home. We have also embarked on a car parks improvement plan costing £1.5m which will ensure that they are of a standard that the users expect, and will also make a financial return to the Council.

During the past year we have implemented a new officer structure in order to accommodate changing circumstances. In particular, we have increased resources in performance management, external funding, communication, marketing and our priority areas of Community Safety and Young People, and all at no additional cost to the local tax payers. I am particularly keen to ensure that the council should maximise the amount of external funding it receives and I look forward to fruitful results in the year ahead.

**In December we had our Comprehensive Performance Assessment inspection which is the first time that the Council, as a whole, has been subjected to a review of its performance. It is fair to say that officers and members worked together to put together a strong case which I believe shows the Council to be an excellent authority. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members and staff who made such an outstanding commitment in ensuring that the process was as painless as possible. The Peer Review which took place earlier in the year commented that the 'Councils passion for improvement is as strong as ever' which is validation of our objective to provide services in a cost effective and efficient manner. We look forward to receiving the CPA results in early April, 2004**

Turning now to this years Budget. In November we reviewed our financial strategy and at that stage agreed a number of key principles that would underpin future budgets.

The council's policy of using reserves and interest earnings was of particular concern because these two sources represent 26% of the budget funding. Using reserves to such an extent means that all our uncommitted reserves would be spent by 2008, clearly a situation which is neither desirable nor sustainable. We agreed last July that we would reduce the amounts taken from reserves by £500k, cumulatively each year.

**It is also the case that using reserves and interest to underpin the budget has meant that additional costs have not been passed on to the council tax payers. This is shown by the fact that our council tax is below the Surrey average and well below what the government assumes we are going to collect via Council tax – assume £182 at Band D compared to £118 currently collected. We need to recognise this situation and take steps to recover the position so that our reserves can be used for projects other than supporting the council tax.**

In preparing the budget we also face continuing pressure in the form of central government diktats and initiatives. This next year, for example, we have additional costs of £67,000 to meet new recycling targets, £108,000 to satisfy the requirements of the Disabled Discrimination Act, additional costs for new licensing regulations; the list goes on and on. It almost goes without saying that the government contributes little or nothing to support the financial demands on local taxpayers. Coupled with these spending pressures, there is also the need to ensure resources are available for new priorities – particularly for young people and environmental services.

Whilst younger people are one of our key priorities we cannot overlook the needs of our older people. Next year we will be spending £496k on transport schemes for older people. In addition to this we will be spending a further £1,163k on day centres and associated services. These services are regarded by government as a County function and it is County that gets the grant support for elderly services. We are looking to work with other partners to reconfigure these services to provide more comprehensive and inclusive facilities for the local community.

Next year our financial help to the voluntary sector will total approximately £500k. This is our way of supporting and valuing the work of these voluntary organisations who play such a key part in our community. Indeed, without the active support of so many local people who willingly give their time to help others, the cost to this council could run into really serious amounts.

As I said earlier, housing will remain a key issue next year. Over the last year we began the transformation of our housing service and we now pay for a support team of officers to help people in temporary accommodation. We have also introduced our private sector leasing scheme which will allow us to stop using bed & breakfast accommodation as required by legislation. All of these measures mean that we will be spending £1.1m on housing services each year – an increase of 136% since 2000/01. Our challenge for the future will be to maintain or reduce these levels of costs against a backdrop of the difficulties of developing affordable homes.

Taking account of all these factors and others that have not been mentioned, preparing a balanced budget for 2004/05 was never going to be easy. Last year I explained how there had been a change to the way that grants were allocated and demonstrated that government money was being diverted from the South East to the North and Midlands. This year, we were assured by government that there would be no changes to last year's formula and that there would be a substantial injection of new money into the Revenue Support Grant.

For the first time in seven years of this government I had confidence that we would receive, at least, an equitable settlement. The government set the minimum increase, or floor, at 3% which indicated a minimum increase to Spelthorne of £169,000 over last year's grant. In reality, the government told us that they were adjusting last year's actual settlement and calculating this year's settlement on the adjusted figure. Because of this adjustment our actual increase was some £92,000 less than the 3% minimum that we were promised. The actual settlement calculates at 1.3% but the government still maintains that we are getting a 3.6% increase.

I said in my budget speech three years ago that the two Labour governments that we have had since 1997 were the most cowardly and corrupt governments that I have ever encountered. Given the way that they deal with Conservative local government I still hold those same views. They are treating our local residents with cowardly contempt.

I turn now, Mister Mayor to my proposal for the setting of next year's council tax.

As Members are aware, we have had an excellent record of keeping the council tax down. Our current Band D council tax is the second lowest in Surrey, on average, £13 below other Surrey districts. In recent years the %age increase has consistently been less than the governments assumed increase, hence our council tax is significantly less than the governments assumption of £182. With all the pressures being placed on us a realistic increase is essential if we are to maintain services and have a sustainable financial future.

I am, therefore, proposing a Spelthorne council tax next year of £134.21 Band D, an increase of 30p per week (13.1%). To our own part of the tax we have to add the precepts from Surrey County Council and the Surrey Police. The County increase in precept is 4.45% and the Surrey Police is higher at 8.9%. Between them the County and Police are responsible for almost 90% of the council tax levied. In total the overall increase at Band D will be 5.9%.

**Our spending next year is to be £12,897m. Grant and Business Rate produces £4.760k and we plan to use £2,918 from interest earnings and reserves. This leaves £5.227m to be met from the council tax which, after taking account of a deficit of £7,830 in this year's collection fund and a tax base of 38,948 properties at Band D, will require a Band D council tax of £134.21 to be levied. To this is added the amounts from the two precepting authorities, £889.38 from Surrey County Council and £147.06 from the Surrey Police, giving a total Band D figure of £1,170.65.**

In conclusion, I would like to place on record my thanks to my Vice Chairman, Councillor Packman and all other Members and Officers for their support and assistance in preparing this budget.

I now formally move the adoption of Minute No: 524 of the Executive of the 10<sup>th</sup> February 2004 as amended by the Budget Book and the separate paper detailing the precepts by the County Council and Surrey Police circulated to all Members on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2004.