

**Minutes of the Council Meeting of Spelthorne Borough Council held in
the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Knowle Green, Staines on
Thursday 23 February 2012 at 7.30pm**

Present:

Ayers F. (Leader)	Forsbrey G.E.	Rough Mrs M.W.
Ayub A.	Francis M.P.	Sider R.W. (Deputy Mayor)
Bannister Mrs C.A.	Frazer C.M.	Smith-Ainsley R.A. (Deputy Leader)
Beardsmore I.J.	Friday A.E.	Strong C.V.
Broom Miss P.A.	Gething N.	Taylor S.D.
Budd S.E.W (The Mayor)	Harman A.C.	Watts R.L.
Bushnell Ms M.	Leighton Mrs V.J.	Webb Mrs S.
Colison-Crawford R.B.	Madams Mrs M.	
Dale Mrs J.A.	Mitchell A.J.	
Davis C.A.	Napper Mrs I.	
Dunn R.D.	Patel Miss D.	
Dunn Mrs S.A.	Patterson A.C.	
Evans T.J.M.	Pinkerton Mrs J.M. (Deputy Leader)	

Mr. Murray Litvak, Chairman of the Standards Committee and Ms Sue Faulkner, the Vice Chairman were also in attendance

Councillor S.E.W. Budd, the Mayor, in the Chair

47/12 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Gohil, Ms J.R. Sexton, Mrs C. L. Spencer and P. Forbes-Forsyth.

48/12 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2011 were approved as a correct record.

49/12 Disclosures of Interest

Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley disclosed, on behalf of all members present, their personal interest in Agenda Item 9(5) Members' Allowances, under Section 4 of the Members' Code of Conduct.

50/12 Election of a new Leader

It was moved by Councillor A.C. Patterson and seconded by Councillor Ms M Bushnell and

RESOLVED that Councillor F. Ayers be appointed Leader of the Council until the day of the Annual Council Meeting following the Borough Election in 2015.

51/12 Announcements from the Mayor

Mayoral Events

The Mayor announced the following events:

Charity Spring Ball, Runnymede Hotel, Egham – 31 March 2012

Ladies Luncheon to Celebrate St George's Day – 26 April 2012

52/12 Announcements from the Leader

The Leader made an announcement as follows:

“Thank you Mr Mayor. I do have two announcements. Before I move onto them I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Council for electing me as Leader. It is a great honour and I will work my hardest for the benefit of the Spelthorne community. I would also like to pay tribute to the outgoing Leader, Councillor Mrs Vivienne Leighton for the hard work and dedication she has shown since the elections, in moving the Council forward. I would especially highlight her Leadership in the preparation for the budget which I will deliver later tonight and for the vision she expressed at the last meeting for this Council to be a community leader providing best value services for the residents of the borough.

Mr Mayor, following my election as Leader I would like to inform the Council that I will be making appointments to my Cabinet in due course and in the meantime the current Cabinet will continue to serve.

I would also like to inform Council that as Leader it is my responsibility to make a scheme of delegation for executive functions. I am not in a position to do so today and so I would like to confirm that for the time being I will retain all such functions and make a scheme of delegation in due course.”

53/12 Announcements from the Chief Executive

On behalf of the staff, the Chief Executive thanked Councillor Leighton for her contribution as past Leader and congratulated Councillor F. Ayers on his appointment as new Leader.

54/12 Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy 2012-13 – Key Decision

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the current Treasury position and the Annual Investment Strategy and Prudential Indicators for 2012-2013 to 2014-2015.

RESOLVED that:

1. The proposed Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy for 2012-13 as set out in the report of the Assistant Chief Executive be approved.
2. The Prudential Indicators for 2012-13 as set out in the report of the Assistant Chief Executive be approved.
3. The Council formally adopts the Chartered Institute in Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice for Treasury Management Public Services (2011).

55/12 Calendar of meetings for June 2012 to May 2013

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the Calendar of Meetings covering the period 1 June 2012 to 23 May 2013.

RESOLVED that the Calendar of Meetings for June 2012 to May 2013, attached as Appendix A to the report, be approved.

56/12 Detailed Budget 2012-13 – Key Decision

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the Net Revenue Expenditure Budget for 2012-13 and the proposed Council Tax for 2012-13.

The Mayor referred Members to the Budget Book (green cover) reflecting the decisions and recommendations made by the Cabinet on 21 February 2012.

At the invitation of the Mayor, the Council gave consent under Standing Order 18.4 for the Budget speech of each of the Group Leaders to exceed 10 minutes.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor F. Ayers, made a statement on the Budget and Council Tax and moved the recommendations on the detailed Budget for 2012/2013 as set out in the Budget Book (green cover). This was seconded by Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley. The Leader of the Opposition Group, Councillor I.J. Beardsmore, also made a statement.

A copy of the Council Leader's and the Opposition Leader's statements are attached to these minutes at **Appendix A and B** respectively.

Councillor C.V. Strong moved that, under Standing Order 18.5, the following amendment to the original motion be made. This was seconded by Councillor Mrs. S.A. Dunn.

To add the following words:

“4(d) to insert the revenue budget the sum of £75,000 to cover possible legal costs in respect of the proposed Eco Park in Charlton. To be funded from General Reserves”.

Councillor C.V. Strong requested, under Standing Order 21.4, that the voting on the amendment be recorded.

The voting was as follows:

FOR (7)	Councillors I. J. Beardsmore, S. E. W. Budd, R. B. Colison-Crawford, R. Dunn, Mrs. S. A. Dunn, Mrs. C. E. Nichols, C. V. Strong.
AGAINST (27)	Councillors F. Ayers, R. A. Smith-Ainsley, Mrs. Pinkerton, Mrs. C. A. Bannister, Ms. P. A. Broom, Ms M. Bushnell, Mrs. J .A. Dale, C. A Davis, T. Evans, G. E. Forsbrey, M. P. C. Francis, C. M. Frazer, A. E. Friday, N. Gething, Mrs. D. L. Grant, A. C. Harman,

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	Mrs V. J. Leighton, Mrs M. J. Madams, A. J. Mitchell, Mrs. I. Napper, Ms. D. Patel, A. C. Patterson, Mrs. M. W. Rough, R. W. Sider, S. D. Taylor, R. L. Watts, Mrs S. Webb.
ABSTAIN (0)	There were none.

The amendment was lost.

The Mayor then directed that a vote be taken on the original motion.

RESOLVED:

1. To approve the growth and savings items as set out in the report's Appendices.
2. To approve the Council Tax Base for the whole Council area as 2012-13. [Item T in the formula in Section 31B(3) of the local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the "Act")] and calculates that the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purpose for 2012/2013 is £172.22
3. To approve a 2.9% increase in the Spelthorne Borough Council element of the Council Tax for 2012/13 the following proposals:
 - a) The Revenue Estimates as set out 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 2012/13.
 - c) To agree that the council tax base for the year 2011/12 is 40,667.3 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. To approve that the following sums be now calculated by the Council for the year 2012-13 in accordance with Section 31 to 36 of the Local Government Act 1992.

(a)	£54,616,000	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 Council.
(b)	£47,612,334	Being the aggregate of the amount which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act.
(c)	£7,003,666	Being the amount by which the aggregate at 3(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 3(b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31A (4) of the Act.

(d)	£172.22	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 Section34 (1) of the Act (as per the Attached Appendix).
(f)	£172.22	Being the amount at 3(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 3(e) above by Item T (2above), 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 in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates.

That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2012/2013 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992

VALUATION BAND	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Spelthorne	114.81	133.95	153.08	172.22	210.49	248.76	287.03	344.44

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.

57/12 Capital programme 2011-12 to 2015-16 – Key Decision

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the proposed Capital Programme for 2012/13 to 2015/16 in the light of the available resources and corporate priorities.

RESOLVED that:

1. The Capital Programme for 2012/13 to 2015/16 be approved.
2. The Prudential Indicators for 2012/13 to 2015/16 be approved.

58/12 Fees and Charges 2012-13 – Key Decision

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the schedule of fees and charges to be implemented from April 2012.

RESOLVED that the fees and charges, as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Chief Finance Officer, be approved.

59/12 Pay Policy Statement

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the Pay Policy Statement for 2012-13.

Council noted that the Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities to publish an annual pay policy statement, approved by full Council, to increase transparency regarding the use of public funds to pay council staff.

RESOLVED that the Pay Policy Statement 2012-2013 be approved.

60/12 Members' Allowances Scheme

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the minutes of the Independent Review Panel (IRP) which met on 10 February 2012.

RESOLVED:

1. That the recommendation of the IRP in relation to the freezing of the Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances (para. 4.1(b).) be approved.
2. To refer back to the Panel the recommendation at (para. 4.1(a).) to ask them to review the issue of travel expenses in the light of data to be obtained from other Surrey districts.

61/12 Spelthorne Safer, Stronger Partnership (SSSP) Partnership Plan

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the SSSP Partnership Plan.

The Council noted that the partnership has undertaken a comprehensive Strategic assessment which identifies five key priorities.

RESOLVED that the Partnership Plan in its capacity as a statutory member of the SSSP be approved.

62/12 Report from the Leader of the Council

The Acting Leader of the Council, Councillor R. A. Smith-Ainsley, presented the reports of the Cabinet meetings held on 24 January 2012 and 21 February 2012, which outlined the various matters the Cabinet had decided since the last Council meeting.

63/12 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.

64/12 Report from the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Ms. P. A. Broom, presented her report, which outlined the matters the Committee had decided since the last Council meeting.

65/12 Report from the Chairman of the Planning Committee

The Chairman of the Planning Committee, Councillor G. E. Forsbrey, presented his report, which outlined the matters the Committee had decided since the last Council meeting.

66/12 Questions on Ward Issues

One question on a Ward Issue was submitted under Standing Order 14 by Councillor Mrs. C.E. Nichols. The Mayor, Councillor S.E.W. Budd, had directed at the beginning of the meeting that the question together with the answer would be read aloud at this meeting and circulated to all members. Furthermore under Standing Order 14.5 supplementary questions would be permitted but that in the interest of fairness gave a direction that the answers would be provided in writing in order to ensure that a properly considered response was provided.

Question from Councillor Mrs. C.E. Nichols:

“Residents in my ward have complained that Linden Homes has made misleading statements about the extent of public consultation on the proposed redevelopment of the police college site. When was the Planning department first approached by Linden Homes concerning the site and what advice was Linden Homes given concerning consultation?”

The response from Councillor R. A. Smith-Ainsley circulated to all members and read aloud at the meeting is set out below:

“Thank you for your question. As you know, we strongly encourage all developers to speak to neighbours, residents groups and ward councillors before submitting any major application.

The planning department were first approached by Linden Homes, by email, on 20 June 2011. In a later email sent on 19 July 2011 they referred to their intention of “arranging public meetings, exhibitions and talking to local resident associations”.

At the same time, the Head of Planning and Housing Strategy contacted Linden Homes, strongly advising them to start having early discussions with LOSRA to gauge local opinion.

The first meeting between officers and Linden Homes took place on 5 October 2011. In that meeting Linden Homes informed the Council they had already had face to face meetings with most of the residents immediately adjoining the site. A suitable venue for a public exhibition was discussed, and the developer was reminded to invite local councillors to the exhibition. Officers also discussed the possibility of Linden Homes making a pre application presentation to all Members at the Council offices.

All the pre-application public consultation information provided by Linden Homes was placed on the LOSRA website on 20 October 2011 to enable discussion. This was immediately after the public exhibition had taken place.

The methods used by Linden Homes: a mix of face to face discussions, a public exhibition with an opportunity to speak directly to the developer, along with the information on the LOSRA website is, in my view, an entirely appropriate way of obtaining the views of the local community.”

67/12 General Questions

One general question had been submitted under Standing Order 14. The Mayor, Councillor S. Budd, had directed at the beginning of the meeting that question together with the answer would be read aloud at this meeting and circulated to all members. Furthermore under Standing Order 14.5 supplementary questions would be permitted but that in the interest of fairness gave a direction that the answers would be provided in writing in order to ensure that a properly considered response was provided.

Question from Councillor Mrs. C.E. Nichols:

“Will the Leader confirm that Spelthorne Borough Council is wholly opposed to the building of an ‘Eco Park’ at Charlton Lane and, if SITA’s application is passed by Surrey County Council on 9th March 2012, will Spelthorne Council fund a legal challenge?”

The response from Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley circulated to all members and read aloud at the meeting is set out below:

“Thank you for your question Councillor Nichols. Firstly, I can confirm that on 26 January 2011 this Council raised very strong objections on planning grounds to the Eco Park proposal. Our position is unchanged since that time - we still object to the Eco Park.

In recent months, many residents have written to the Council to ask us to take a judicial review against the County Council.

Whilst I can understand the concern of residents, such legal challenges can only be made where a decision is flawed. Whether or not the decision is flawed is something we cannot determine at this time because the decision is still pending.

The Council has written to the County Council with further representations to take into account. We will be looking very carefully at Surrey’s planning report and background papers when they are published. We will consider very carefully the way in which that Committee makes its final decision. We will look at everything very carefully.

It is premature to come to a view on whether or not legal action would be appropriate in advance of that decision and our own careful assessment of it.”

Under Standing Order 14.2 Councillor Mrs. C.E. Nichols asked the following supplementary question:

“I would like clarification, bearing in mind Councillor Leighton’s earlier comment that the Council had plans based on what may or may not be decided in the future, whether the Council has taken any legal advice on this matter?”

Response from Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley:

“As I have said already, the Council has not taken legal advice at this stage, but we will do what is necessary after the County Council decision has been made on March 9th”

68/12 Appointment of a replacement Trustee to the Laleham Charities

It was moved by Councillor F. Ayers and seconded by Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley and

RESOLVED that Mr. Matthew Calvert be appointed to serve as a Council representative on the Board of Trustees of Laleham Charities for a term of four years.

69/12 Appointment of a replacement Representative to the Ashford Relief in Need Charities

It was moved by Councillor F. Ayers and seconded by Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley and

RESOLVED that Councillor Mrs. M. Bushnell be appointed to serve as a Council representative to the Ashford Relief in Need Charities for a term of four years.

70/12 Urgent Business

Appointment of a replacement representative to the Surrey First Joint Committee and the Surrey Leaders’ Group.

It was moved by Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley and seconded by Councillor Mrs J.M. Pinkerton and

RESOLVED that Councillor F. Ayers be appointed to represent the Council on the Surrey First Joint Committee and the Surrey Leaders’ Group.

COUNCILLOR Frank Ayers
COUNCIL TAX SPEECH 2012

Mr Mayor – I have great pleasure in presenting the Budget Report for the Municipal Year 2012/13.

The Council has been faced with a difficult situation with this year's budget process with respect to the Government's offer of "Council tax freeze" grant. Initially the offer of grant equal to 2.5% of council tax income in return for freezing council tax looks generous. However, if you look more closely you find that the money is only for one year, which means if we accepted the freeze grant our income in a year's time would be around £200k lower than if we had increased council tax for 2012-13 which in turn would force us to make additional cuts in a year's time. The Cabinet has therefore very carefully weighed up its council tax decision and has decided that in order to protect frontline services for the future we will make a small increase of 2.94% in the Spelthorne Borough Council tax.

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 £4.92 per annum or just 10 pence extra per week. This is below the current rate of inflation and follows on from the Council having frozen council tax for the previous two financial years.

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

We are also looking to increase the support we give to the business sector and there will shortly be unveiled an exciting initiative with one of our partners

In the face of continuing significant grant cuts, the 2012-13 budget has been one of the hardest budget this Council has ever had to set. The temptation would have been to dip into reserves. However, we know that a solid and firm financial base must underpin everything the Council does. Put simply, if we don't balance the books we cannot continue to provide the full range of services to our residents both now, and in the future, which is always uppermost in my mind. We are constantly reviewing everything we do, how we do it, and whether anything can be done better, often in partnership with others.

I am proud to say Cabinet, managers and staff have, together, tackled and overcome this challenge in a most professional way.

Local government has proportionately made the greatest contribution to the Government's deficit reduction programme aimed at putting the nation's finances on a sustainable basis following the mess left by the Labour Government. This Council has a general grant cut of 10% for 2012-13 and net underlying reduction of £500,000 in the grant we receive.

It has been said before, but is well worth repeating that the grant funding we will receive will be just £42.34 per head of population for 2012/13; this is 20% below the national average of £53.27. This means we are losing £1 million per annum against the average district council.

As we are all acutely aware interest rates remain at historically low levels. The UK Base rate remains at half of one percent. Just like businesses this has hit the Council's ability to continue to deliver the high levels of investment income which it had been achieving and which has previously helped fund the provision of many of the general services for the public. Currently our portfolio is achieving an average rate of interest of 0.97%, Whilst we are looking carefully at how we can 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 will continue to be constrained. This is why it is justifiable for the Council in the forthcoming year (during a period of low interest rates) to use a small amount of its interest equalisation reserve, to support the revenue budget, which was built up over recent years from above target investment performance, as I am sure you will agree with me a fine example of prudent investment by this Council. At some point interest rates will start to rise and our investment income will recover.

Some have queried why councils appear to have relatively large reserves? Councils such as ourselves need reserves to enable us to fund an ongoing capital programme and, to have contingency monies to cope with unexpected pressures, particularly important in the uncertain times that we are now facing. I would remind Councillors that eight years ago the Council were using more than £2.8million general reserves to support the revenue budget. Four years ago we were using £1m. We could not go on taking funds from the reserves. So we have gradually been reducing the use of reserves. In 2012-13 we will be using only £200k of the interest equalisation reserve. The next step in our future strategy will be to move towards making revenue contributions to the reserves to replenish them.

[Additionally we have been using reserves to support the capital programme

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. I can assure you no stone has been left unturned. This budget being presented to the Council today is underpinned by **additional savings of £1m (approximately 8% of budget)**. Savings have been found across all services and at every level from Management Team downwards. There will continue to be regular quarterly monitoring throughout the coming year to ensure that we successfully deliver these savings.

We are putting in place more focused arrangements for driving forward partnership working with other councils and other partners

both private and public sector. During the year we have entered into several additional partnerships with Runnymede Borough Council for sharing of officers, with us sharing:

- our Head of Communications;
- a benefits fraud officer;
- depot operations manager.
- And agreeing to combine from next January our ICT teams

We are continuing to review our assets to look at those which might be under-used or surplus, and which might have an alternative use.

This will include looking at ways of using our assets to generate ongoing income streams. This Council is actively supporting the Surrey wide project looking at the use of public sector assets across Surrey

The Council has also made great progress in freeing up office space at Knowle Green which can be let out to partners to generate revenue income for the council. To date, we have freed up 30% of space at

Knowle Green. Our target is to increase this to 45% in the fullness of time. With Surrey County Council we have co-located Council independent living staff alongside Surrey County Social Services staff and voluntary sector staff. This has not only assisted the budget position, but has helped provide a more joined up service for our residents. Other opportunities for integrating services are being looked at.

As part of our belt tightening, this Administration is recommending that both Councillors and staff (other than staff earning under £21k per annum) again forgo any annual increase in pay or allowances. It will be the third year for staff and fourth year for councillors. I must

stress this does not in anyway reflect on the value we place on the dedication and commitment of our staff in delivering services to our residents, but it is a strong message to our residents that we appreciate the strain on households at this difficult financial time for the residents of our borough and the country in general...

As part of ensuring that our finances are sustainable, I am pleased to say that despite the grant cuts and pressures on the Council, we have reduced our use of specific reserves by £100,000 and are on track to have nil use of specific reserves in the following year.

Whilst we have achieved a balanced budget for 2012-13 we know the future is looking extremely uncertain and challenging. There are a number of very significant external changes which will impact on local government finances over the next few years. These include a new

funding regime for local government under which we will be funded through being allowed to retain a small proportion of the business rates we collect. We are however fully aware that if there is shortfall in business rates income we will have to bear that risk, The welfare reforms including creation of universal credit are likely to adversely impact financially on the Council. It is in this context that we are seeking to carefully minimise budget pressures in future years.

We have been reviewing management structures and have reduced by 33% the underlying senior management costs of the council between 2009-10 and 2012-13; I should remind councillors that here in Spelthorne we have the lowest ratio of staff to residents compared to all the other districts in Surrey that operate Streetscene services in house.

I would like to briefly touch on the progress we have made on delivering some of our key projects:

In Stanwell a new integrated health centre, pharmacy, library and community café has opened.

Phase 1 of the Stanwell New Start has completed and we are now looking ahead to phases 2, 3 and 4 which undoubtedly will transform Stanwell.

2011-12 saw the successful implementation of food waste collection which has resulted in a 5 percent increase in our recycling rate to around 36 percent , with a 9 percent reduction in refuse collected.

I would like now to return to the detail of our budget and Council Tax proposals for 2012/13.

Our net expenditure next year is projected to be £12.1 million. Grants of approximately £800k and Business rates of approx. £3.7m produces around £4.5 million. We plan to use £0.6 million from interest earnings and reserves, a reduction of £100,000 on previous

budget. This leaves £7.012 million to be met from the Council Tax, which, after taking account of £8k adjustment from this year's collection and a tax base of 40,667 properties at Band D, will require a Band D Council Tax of £172.22 to be levied. It is perhaps interesting to note that if we still kept all of the business rate collected in the borough, we could levy a nil absolute Council Tax and still have lots of money left over!

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 £1,149.66 (a 2.99% increase) and Police a £203.49 (a 2.5% increase) which gives a total Band D Council tax of £1,525.37 , giving a 2.9% increase overall.

In conclusion, I would like to place on record my thanks once again to Councillor Mrs Vivienne Leighton as the outgoing Leader, and to Councillor Tim Evans for his valued support as the Cabinet Finance Portfolio holder for their input 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 21 February 2012, 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 2012/13.

Thank you Mr Mayor

Mr Mayor,

Not sure whether or not to congratulate or comiserate with the new leader having taken on the job. But I hope we can work together on behalf of all our residents in the coming times which I fear are going to be very difficult for all of us

It is certainly a difficult time nationally. We have inherited a mess that was the making of neither of our party's but we have got the job of clearing it up. I suppose I ought to say I have complete faith in central government to achieve this. But bluntly I don't and some of my concerns impact directly on local government.

Changes to the benefit system, apart from being very flawed in themselves, are likely to lose us money as we will no longer receive any cash for doing that job. My real concern however is the risk that the changes will fail and we will get the job back along with all the extra costs involved in re-establishing the system. It will surprise no one that as the details on this and indeed the details on the changes to the business rate emerge, it becomes very clear that the Treasury has indemnified themselves at our expense. It now appears that we will not get a great deal of extra money from the business rate. But on both these items we will get all the risk.

As such I see this as a limbo budget. A necessity stuck between the old system and the new system. A new system which no one really is sure how, or even if, it will work. The only surety is that money is tight.

In Spelthorne this should not be the case - and my party will have great difficulty in supporting the proposed increase in the Council Tax especially on top of the hit residents have just taken from another place.

I will go into the reasons for this. It may come as a surprise to many of you that 16 years ago we were one of the richest Boroughs in the country. We had just banked a whopping £50 million from selling out our council housing. I say selling out because it was blatantly obvious even at the time that the sell out was all about short term asset stripping rather than long term benefit. Sadly, I am not surprised at the poor deal our residents are getting from A2 as it now is - and even more sadly there is very little we can do about it.

Now the immediately obvious question is: Where has that money gone? But before we get to that it needs to be pointed out that it is not just that raw capital. In the years between 1996 and up to the credit crunch in 2008 interest rates were higher and we earned more than £20 million in interest alone. Where has that money gone? To put that in perspective this budget is around £13 million! We could have had this year free on that interest alone.

The fate of this cash is a litany of budget over-runs, poor financial management, and constant raids on the reserves to peg the Council Tax especially on the run up to the elections. There have been some improvements to our parks and services but in the big picture they constitute a poor return on our money.

To compound the problem we have gone to great lengths to ensure that money which should, or could, have come to us in the form of Planning Infrastructure Contributions (PICs) has not come to us. In the last 4 years using this route Elmbridge Council have gained £3.8 million for their residents. For Spelthorne residents - nothing. This is money for schools, roads, parks improving our street scene and so forth. This is not to be confused with Section 106 monies which are quite separate. PIC would have been separate additional money for the benefit of our residents. Even then our S106 record is poor. In the last 4 years we have been the second worst in Surrey for S106 money and even before that our performance was only mediocre.

So that is another whole tranche of additional money we have squandered. Makes the talk of generating additional income seem a bit inadequate really.

In the end we will get some money in the future because of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which is replacing PIC. BUT guess what? We will be one of the last Boroughs in Surrey to get that because of the inadequacies of our Local Development Framework (LDF) which does not have an infra-structure statement, despite repeated attempts by me to get infra-structure included.

This is the same LDF by the way which cost us a mind numbing £1.2million !!!
If you really want to see out of control spending at its worst that is one place to look. And as I said, we now find it unfit for purpose.

Now we are in a new situation and times have got hard and every one has to tighten their belt. This is where all the money Spelthorne has had in the past should come into play in order to protect our residents. Only it is not there when we need it most. So the solution is simple. We have squandered the money so the residents will have to put their hands deeper into their pockets to bail out your failing. Because that is what this budget is about.

I am afraid I have to say your failings because I do not remember just how many motions and amendments we have tabled over the years, either to kick start things or save money or to provide better services. And you have rejected the lot. Plain fact is from the Staines Sea Cadets to the LDF money has been wasted in huge quantities.

I do understand the issue of tax base but I also know the wastage which got us into this mess. We will get a very significant amount of money from the government albeit just for a year if we freeze our tax now. Given our wastage can we morally, reasonably expect residents to bail us out? There is nothing in it for them. It is Eric Pickles who said that Councils had a moral duty to freeze the council tax. Not me. But it is more true in Spelthorne than in many other areas.

As things stand at the moment there is nothing in this budget for residents except pain. We have to listen to what they are asking for, what they are telling us. And having listened provide the clear strong leadership to implement those messages.

Cllr Ian Beardsmore

Lib Dem, Leader of the Opposition.

Insert as recommendation 4 (d)

To insert into the revenue budget the sum of £75,000 to cover possible legal costs in respect of the proposed Eco Park in Charlton. To be funded from General Reserves