

Thank-you Mr Mayor

First I must start by thanking John Turnbull, his team and all the other officers for the time they have given members of my group over the last year. They have had to work especially hard this year and been quizzed more extensively as we look for revenue generating ideas and their efforts are much appreciated.

The recent changes to the Formula grant see us facing greater challenges both this year and next. Whilst savings seem to have been found by the ruling group this year I am still concerned that we are not moving towards greater commercialisation. How are we going to manage in 2012 if we do not investigate new ways of doing business without further squeezing the salary budget? It has taken 12 months to consider and incorporate a charge for planning services.

As last year I would like to stress that we are asset rich and cash poor we need to make those assets pay and maybe we need outside help.

The Rainbow centre is planned to generate £3000 to council funding and yet in comparison the Playhouse needs £223K to keep it going. Like leisure centres there are organisation's that will support and run local Theatre's. Now is the time to explore these options. Evidence from research suggests that local theatres are doing well. This implies that people are looking for entertainment close to home and we need to take advantage of this. Success in this area could almost remove the need to use the working balance.

We have 3 other assets that require similar levels of support, they are Bourne Hall, the Ebbisham centre and Ewell Court house. As I mentioned at S&R in September these buildings have rooms for hire but Google doesn't suggest them on page one in a search for wedding venues but I am pleased to report

that Horton Park Golf Club was close behind the Racecourse, an advantage of new management I presume.

Horton Park moves me nicely on to mention that it costs us nearly 1.3 million to keep the countryside open. Our most valuable assets are the open spaces and residents place huge importance on them. We need to go beyond ice-cream vans and a BMX track if we are to generate a useable income. Hook road arena appears to be in an ideal location to be offered for greater public use. It is close to the 2 new housing developments with excellent cycle routes. Now is the time to open up the area to community sports, green fairs and other community based events. Could we offer bike hire and have we explored green gyms to help with keeping the country open, could we work more closely with the Lower Mole team? Just some food for thought here.

I have been advised that the needs and interests of the users of the community centres are also changing and that there is greater potential for additional income. Despite this the challenge of an increased income seems to have been pegged at the 2009/10 level. Without a stretch target focus and efforts will be moved to other areas. So I'd like to see at least an extra £20K added to the fees income.

Waste Management is one of the few mandatory elements for the councils and it is pleasing to see a modest target of 16% trade recycling but that only gives a modest saving of 30K. I hope that the new Tariffs, I was pushing for last year, for trade bins and collections will prove an incentive so that we can increase the recycling rate. In the mean time I would like us to investigate the possibility of extending the household waste collection to increase the number of types of plastic that can be collected. Maybe if our current partners can't help then we should search out alternative suppliers, for some specific products. I gather that even the humble crisp packet can be recycled if necessary.

The council has signed up to the 10:10 agenda and so we are doing well at reducing energy usage. There are some interesting projects presented to the capital members group and the officers in this area should be congratulated, particularly as this is a role shared with Elmbridge. However there may be a case for extending the payback period to 7 years, if it sets a good example, when evaluating the projects.

Projects in the IT area have been approved as part of the capital programme. This will lead us to systems which are modern and flexible. Virtualisation means we are free to explore options that can reduce our costs.

We would therefore recommend that we explore the options for platform sharing many of our IT systems in partnership with other Councils or possibly alone via outsourcing. I anticipate that many other councils will be looking to save costs and IT is a back office service that is ready for consolidation and partnership.

And on partnership, last year the Liberal Democrats talked a great deal about partnership working. Some has begun but there is clearly scope for more.

We need to build bridges between the council and the business community to ensure we have a vibrant borough. We need a Town Centre Manager. We need to address a growing trend toward night time noise and antisocial behaviour in our town centre - and this is a town centre which will become more and more densely populated as we fight to keep our open space and our Green Belt. We need to build up our market so that it becomes the most prestigious in the county and has a waiting list and it's excellent news that we are taking back responsibility for the market ourselves.

We need to get to grips with our parking problems and not wait to be dictated to by the county council. Car park income is down and the streets are overcrowded. We have a multi-storey

car park which is half empty and parking permits so expensive that no-one wants to buy them. We have scores of roads crying out for a residents' parking scheme and our growth as a university town will put even more pressure on our parking capacity both onstreet and offstreet.

In summary, we too would take advantage of the government's proposals concerning council tax. We would build on partnership working and seize opportunities which help reduce our costs. But the emphasis must change to focus on income generation. All discretionary services must be reviewed and we must challenge ourselves as to their benefit to our community as a whole. We should make it clear to our residents which services are discretionary - in other words which we don't HAVE to provide. We should make it clear what the mandatory services cost us and how those costs affect council tax. Carrying the community with us during these difficult times will be fundamental to being able to provide successful local government

Thank- you very much for your attention.