

**WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**BUDGET STATEMENT**

**2012/13**

COUNCILLOR JOHN KINGSBURY  
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL  
16 FEBRUARY 2012

## **WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **BUDGET STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

Mr Mayor, fellow Councillors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

In February 2011 when I presented the Budget for 2011/12 I was able to announce a Nil increase in the Borough Council's share of Council Tax. I am pleased to say that I can make the same announcement this year; a further year of No increase in Council Tax for Borough Council services. This means that for residents of Woking they will enjoy: - a third year with the Borough Council Tax at the same level; a third year with our charges for services kept substantially at the same level; and a third year of service improvement. This is a remarkable achievement given the difficult economic times in which we live.

This achievement has not happened by accident. It has resulted from the positive action taken by the Conservative administration of this Council to secure improvements in operational efficiency and investment in economic growth. But we could not achieve this through leadership alone and I am sure the Council will support me in thanking Council staff for their strenuous efforts on behalf of the residents of Woking.

It may come as a surprise to those opposite that I am grateful to them for the occasions when they have supported our initiatives over the past year; hopefully they will continue to do so next year.

The Coalition Government has found resolving the structural Budget Deficit within the term of a Parliament to be more challenging than expected. The Council knows that as far as Local Government is concerned a 28% reduction was imposed over two years. Whilst this has placed a great strain on our finances we have achieved these savings and improved our reserves; we are financially stronger now than we have been for some time. I would like to think that this is all we needed to do but it is not. The Chancellor's Autumn Statement made clear that the need for austerity would continue beyond this Parliament and that the level of our grant reduction will amount to

around 40%; our plans for the future take this into account but it means three more tough years ahead.

The Conservative Administration of the Borough Council has provided a coordinated and managed response to the economic climate and created a positive environment within which Woking can continue to thrive. We have maintained our commitment to ensure that appropriate capital investment is made whilst achieving the savings in running costs necessary to deliver a balanced revenue budget. As a direct result of this, we do not need to cut any services for the residents of Woking in 2012/13; indeed we are able to include some modest growth including improvement of Westfield Common, support for Football in the Community and a programme to support young people not in education, training or employment. I hope, with continued proactive Conservative leadership, we can both invest in the long term and secure operational efficiencies to meet the needs of Woking residents in 2012/13 and beyond.

That is why it is clear to me that it will be important that the voters of Woking in the May Borough Elections return a Conservative Administration to continue leading the Council forward. We have the vision and the commitment to protect and improve services for Borough residents.

The Budget and Council Tax proposals for 2012/13 demonstrate another year of positive Conservative leadership and management, which enables the presentation of a balanced and measured approach to maintain and improve services; improve cost effectiveness and take pro-active intervention to support our local community in these difficult times. Over the last year we have had much success in delivering our priorities, despite the economic downturn. Let me mention some of them.

### **Waste and Recycling**

We said we would “Increase recycling to 60% by 2012.”

**Achieved!** We have met our target with the help of very successful food waste and green waste services. I am delighted to report that over 60% of the Borough’s waste was recycled in October, November and December 2011, with the figure for one of those months reaching 65%.

### **Affordable Housing**

We said we would “Continue to use Woking Borough Homes to deliver affordable homes and the pursuit of PFI funding, being always sensitive to the concerns of existing local residents and the ability of the infrastructure and local services to bear additional development.”

**Achieved!** At last we have taken forward the PFI Non HRA housing scheme through the submission of the legal and financial documents necessary to secure Government approval to call for final tenders. We have also addressed concerns about the role of Woking Borough Homes and continued our investment in the delivery of affordable homes through the approval of its Business Plan and hopefully the approval of the Council’s Investment Programme tonight.

In addition we have, with cross party support, undertaken a market test of our Housing Revenue Account (HRA) activity which, when taken together with the localisation of the HRA, will enable us to increase investment in our housing stock over the coming years.

We have also submitted the Local Development Framework to the Government and hopefully after an Examination in Public in March we will have the sound basis upon which to deliver homes for those in need in the Borough.

### **Economic Vitality of the Borough**

We said we would “Focus on economic regeneration in terms of employment, leisure, recreation, retail environment and climate change initiatives and seek to improve the quality and extent of the retail offer in the town.”

**Achieved!** We have created new shops and more are currently being built in the Town Square. I look forward to eating in the Café Rouge and visiting the new Library which will be the best in Surrey. We have stimulated activity as evidenced by lower unemployment and greater use of our car parks. We are nearing completion of the Hoe Valley project and have opened a state-of-the-art community building next to the Leisure Centre, home to seven active community groups, and also built a new headquarters for the Sea Cadets at Goldsworth Park. In addition, we have continued to maintain our extensive support of some £2m for the voluntary and community sector. Most importantly we have achieved this without cutting any services, either in 2010/11, 2011/12 or in our proposals for 2012/13.

## **Pride of Place**

We said we would “Work with the Police to combat anti-social behaviour”.

### **Achieved!**

We have continued our extensive work with the Police and our Neighbourhood Officers. Public confidence in how effectively we work together continues to grow. We supported the Police and the People of Faith in Woking with “Woking Street Angels” and have allocated continued funding for future years to ensure this valuable service operated by volunteers continues to make our streets and young people safer.

## **Children’s Play Facilities**

We said we would “Invest in more children’s play facilities”.

### **Achieved!**

We have continued to invest in new and enhanced facilities for children and young people across the Borough. This year has seen the completion of a new sports pavilion and junior pitches on the former Astra site at Byfleet, funded through a grant from the Football Foundation and section 106 contributions. Section 106 funding and a grant from Play England have also enabled us to improve and extend the existing play area and to provide a new multi use games area at West Byfleet. The health and well being of the younger members of our community will also be enhanced through a partnership arrangement with Goldsworth Park Primary School. Using funding from Sport England and our Climate Change offset fund we have constructed a new enclosure over an outdoor swimming pool together with photovoltaic electricity at the school, giving pupils and local children the opportunity to swim all year round.

## **Finance**

We said we would “Prepare the Business Plan for 2012/13 on the basis that the target for any increase in Council Tax would be the CPI target set by the Bank of England.”

**Achieved!** There is no Council Tax increase before the Council tonight. By keeping to our target we have been able to claim the Coalition Government grant to enable the Council Tax increase to be set at NIL; that's right No Increase in Woking's share of council tax yet again whilst protecting and enhancing services for all residents. Another clear demonstration of Conservative leadership and management at its best. I regret that Surrey County Council and Surrey Police have not felt able to follow our lead and declare nil increases in their shares of Council Tax.

We also said we would "Drive improved cost efficiency in the provision of Council services."

**Achieved!** We have maintained and improved Council services and kept the Council's finances sound despite the ravages of the economic downturn. The outsourcing of Leisure Services, with cross-party support, was a major success and contributed to our savings target and, with the investment we have planned, will result in improved services for residents. With the Budget and Financial Strategy before the Council tonight, we will build upon this success.

We also set out to restore the Council's reserves.

**Achieved!** We set out a path to restore the reserve fund to £3m within three years; we have restored it in two. The Budget before the Council tonight demonstrates we have achieved this target ahead of time.

Now for next year; the Budget that we, the Conservative administration of the Council, have recommended tonight ensures continuity of services and necessitates a continuing need to improve cost efficiency and invest in the future. We are able to recommend this Budget through improved operational efficiency, the success of our investment in both the Thamesway Group and Wolsey Place, and continued investment in new retail and industrial units. The Budget before the Council has over £1m of net income from the Thamesway Group and £2.0m from Wolsey Place; neither would have been possible without strong Conservative leadership and cross party support.

This Conservative Administration will continue to do all it can to ensure the community of Woking receives the services and support it needs in the most cost effective way possible. It is clear, given the state of the national finances, that we must be more self-reliant and less dependent on Central Government. It is therefore essential that we continue to

stimulate the economic vitality of the Borough if we are to ensure that the services the community needs are sustainable.

The interventions we have undertaken, those before us tonight and those we may consider over the next twelve months, are directly related to this need to ensure continued and enhanced service provision. Woking Town Centre is the major source of our revenue income, a major employment centre and a well connected location for business. We continue to believe we can significantly improve and develop our existing land holdings and provide further improvements in partnership with others if we continue to act in 2012/13 as we have over the last three years. We hope to achieve an urban renaissance in our Town Centre so that in future years our residents can all be proud to be part of our community. Like many residents I find the congestion caused by Victoria Arch and the unpleasant experience encountered by cyclists and pedestrians using the arch unacceptable. I have therefore asked officers to bring a report to the next meeting of the Executive with proposals to secure the delivery of tunnels to improve the pedestrian and cycle experience and to help reduce congestion.

Finally, I am sure the Council can agree that we have achieved a great deal in difficult times and that Woking residents have been well served by this Council. However we still have much to do to secure the economic vitality that is essential to underpin service levels in 2013/14 and future years. I am also sure that we can do so under continuing strong Conservative leadership and hopefully in a collaborative way during 2012/13.

Mr Mayor, I have pleasure in commending this Budget and Council Tax proposal to the Council.

Councillor John Kingsbury  
Leader of the Council  
16 February 2012.