

BROMLEY LABOUR GROUP NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE LABOUR MEMBERS OF BROMLEY COUNCIL

CRAY VALLEY WEST WARD:

SUE GIBBENS, JOHN HOLBROOK & COLIN WILLETTS

PENGE & CATOR WARD:

PETER FOOKES, JOHN GETGOOD & KAREN ROBERTS

MARCH - APRIL 2005 EDITION – BUDGET SPECIAL

TORY LEADER DISTORTS BUDGET SETTLEMENT

This is a report on the budget setting meeting held on Monday 21st February. New Tory Leader Stephen Carr plans to send out an amazing distortion of the true facts in a message that will go out with all council tax bills at the beginning of April. Even though Bromley received an increase in its Revenue Support Grant (RSG) from Central Government of 4.2%, double the rate of inflation, he still plans to talk about the loss of grant just because the average increase was 6.2% across all authorities. The money Bromley received was very much comparable with other London boroughs. Bromley are also set to receive an extra £5 Million as a result of various targets in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment agreed with the government. Labour Leader, John Holbrook also highlighted the fact that Bromley receives many other specific grants not included in the RSG such as £1.6 million for social services and housing, £612,000 for community safety; £240,000 for environmental and leisure services and a £2.5 Million increase in Education standards funding. Councillor Carr does not realise how lucky he is as in the bad old days of Tory government, the then Tory council was actually forced to make real cuts in services rather than worry about where the extra money could be spent. It remains to be seen whether this generally muted speech from Carr manages to keep him in post come the annual Tory group elections in May where we know there is bitter infighting going on. Carr is the third leader in as many years following on from Michael Tickner and Russell Mellor. The Council tax will increase by 5%, we asked for an extra £1 Million to go into Social Services and Housing as this budget regularly overspends and it is clear that the Tories kept the budget artificially low in order to keep council tax as low as possible. Nobody wants to pay extra tax but the reality is that voluntary organisations who do excellent work in the borough are suffering, e.g. Community Links. This is very much a false economy as many of these organisations actually save money in the long run. Citizens Advice Bureaux, BATH and Bromley Refugee Network are other organisations to have suffered at the hands of Bromley Tories this year. The Tories declined our amendment which would have been paid for by use of reserves. As it is, the Tories have taken out £3.5 Million already from that source.

BROMLEY COUNCIL TAX FIGURES 2005/06

Band A = £728.64	Band E = £1335.84
Band B = £850.08	Band F = £1578.72
Band C = £971.52	Band G = £1821.60
Band D = £1092.96	Band H = £2185.92

TORY COUNCILLORS DESELECTED

The Tories in Bromley have deselected two councillors. Chris Phillips, the current Portfolio Holder for Social Care, Health and Housing and member for Kelsey and Eden Park has paid the price for being the fall guy for closing the Rachel Notley Day Centre for the elderly in Beckenham. This was deeply unpopular amongst many Tory members. He has also found it difficult to work with maverick co-Councillor, Rod Reed. Tony Wilkinson, member for Copers Cope and very experienced member and Chair of the Development Control Committee has also suffered a similar indignity. Petty squabbling often takes place when you have too many councillors in your group!!!

BROMLEY'S DRAFT PERFORMANCE PLAN

The Council is currently putting forward its draft performance plan for 2005/06 which will go out to residents with the council tax. We were pleased to see that Social Services and Housing finally gained a star in its review report just before Christmas. Bromley is a nice borough to live in but residents should be receiving a first class service not the take it or leave it approach that we get from Bromley Tories. Standards of street cleaning are variable at times and the amount of graffiti in the area, particularly on the NTL boxes is not acceptable. We know for a fact in Penge that the CCTV cameras have been used to hit "soft targets" but how come they never catch anybody spraying graffiti on the shop fronts in the area? Bromley Tories talk about using mobile cameras to catch those that regularly dump at given spots but it never seems to happen. In the long term, this would actually reduce the levels of council tax as often money is having to be spent clearing up the same grot spot. There were 5,000 incidents of graffiti in the borough last year as opposed to 2850 in 2003.

Recycling rates are rising but there is still much to do in that area. Whilst Bromley is one of the few authorities to take action against developers who flout the rules, there is still a large backlog of cases of enforcement outstanding. We need to do that job properly or not at all. A recent minor case in Penge took over a year to resolve. Vacancies in Social Services and Housing are down slightly but still at 20% which is no great improvement, even though this remains a problem throughout London. The Local Economy Portfolio area is another one where the Tories talk tough but deliver very little. Colin Bloom has presided over the collapse of Maple Rd market in Penge and the loss of Town Centre Management there which has led to more rubbish being dumped and businesses left feeling isolated. Many of the new units at the Anerley Business Centre at the former Town Hall site remain empty.

TORY ATTACK ON GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

Bromley Tories love to blame everybody else for their problems. This has continued with attacks on Ken Livingstone and the GLA. They have been attacking Transport for London, conveniently forgetting the many extra buses that are now running in the borough. TFL is also the only body funding traffic management schemes in the borough as Bromley Tories and in particular, robust Portfolio Holder, George Taylor refuses to spend any money on accident reduction schemes. He and his colleagues have regularly ignored the advice of professional officers to install speed humps as and when required. He is also very reluctant to allow speed cameras. There are now also 47 Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) in the borough who have helped in the fight against crime and anti-social behaviour which is slowly on the wain. How many of these would be lost if Michael Howard was ever to get his hands on the levers of power? More wards will get these safer neighbourhood teams which have already led to significant crime reductions in Penge, the Crays and Hayes. The aim is that all wards in London will have them by 2008 which will mean a minimum of one sergeant, two constables and 4 PCSO's.

CONTACTING BROMLEY LABOUR GROUP/SCHOOL GOVERNORS

We are always happy to take up issues that you raise with us. One of the best ways of doing that is on e mail or through the council website – www.Bromley.gov.uk You can contact councillors by using the same format eg, Peter.Fookes@Bromley.gov.uk This is the same for members and officers of the authority as well. You can also use the old snail mail and write to us c/o Bromley Civic Centre, Stockwell Close, Bromley BR1 3UH.

We also need to have more school governors. If you are interested, please contact one of us or Janet Heathcote at Bromley.