

Once again there is no increase in Council Tax to fund general services.

However, following consultation, we will apply a 3 per cent social care precept to bills this year, which will be spent exclusively on helping to provide support and take care of our elderly and vulnerable adult residents.

Barnet has the largest population of any London borough and is home to a high number of older people, many of whom require care. The precept will generate an additional £4.6million per year, adding £2.80 per month to Council Tax bills for a band D property in 2017/18. This is not a decision we have taken lightly, and I am proud to say there has been no overall increase in residents' Council Tax bills for each of the past six years, equating to a 16 per cent real terms reduction in Council Tax since 2010/11.

We have plans in place to fill our total budget gap of £53.8million until 2020 as pressure on our services continues and our income from central Government decreases. I want to ensure funding allocated to us considers the unique challenges we face as a borough; in particular getting a fair deal on funding the number of police officers on the beat and extended GP opening hours. I will continue to raise these issues with the Mayor of London and central Government.

Despite sustained budget pressures, we have successfully saved £112million between 2011 and 2016, and maintained high levels of resident satisfaction.

We continue to focus on delivering good value universal services and taking care of Barnet, while ensuring tough action against those who litter and fly-tip. We're also investing in new street cleaning machinery and highway repair crews so we can keep our streets as clean and safe as possible.

Redevelopment and investment is providing significant opportunities for Barnet and the people who live here.

By 2020, £834million will be invested in infrastructure including community facilities, drawing on the proceeds from growth and development. New schools, an additional Thameslink station, two community hubs – which will provide shared space for local residents and community groups, business hubs providing space and services for local businesses, a new children's home and 320 new council homes will be built. We are investing up to £35million in two new leisure centres, and £4.2million in a Youth Zone. Roads and pavements are a priority, and we are now three years into a £50million improvement programme.

Plans are in place to provide 27,000 new and replacement homes and up to 30,000 new jobs in the borough. We're approaching this growth responsibly: enhancing what needs improving while protecting what people value, such as our parks.

Last July we signed a £4.5billion deal with development partners to transform Brent Cross. The new scheme will see the shopping centre double in size, creating a new town centre and community facilities as well as 7,500 new homes.

Barnet continues to have some of the best schools in the country. More than 8,000 new school places have been created with 94 per cent of our schools rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

We are supporting our residents and families to live independent, healthy lives, as part of our work to become the most family-friendly borough in London. I'm proud our employment programmes have helped more than 1,300 residents to find work and learn new skills.

Further challenges will undoubtedly come our way, but I am confident we are well placed to respond to them, while delivering the services we know matter to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yong Pw'.

Richard Cornelius

Leader of Barnet Council