

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

CABINET - 15 JUNE 2006

REPORT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

THE NEXT FOUR YEARS

Election results

I am delighted that a total of forty five Conservative Councillors were returned at the election on 4 May and naturally pleased that in two wards – Cremorne (one seat) and St Charles (three seats) Conservatives gained seats previously held by other parties.

Turnout at this election was up by 4% on the 2002 figure, to a total of 28.72% of a larger electoral register. In 2002 a total of 78,383 votes were cast in eighteen wards. In 2006 a total of 85,776 votes were cast (an increase of 9.4%) .Of the two electorates, in 2002 some 59% supported Conservative candidates but in 2006 no fewer than 64% supported Conservative candidates.

Across London, there were a number of trends evident:

1. A strong swing away from Labour candidates. Labour lost 181 seats in all and lost control of eight boroughs and gained one.
2. Strong support for Conservative candidates. Conservatives won 132 seats overall and took control of seven councils and moved two others to 'No overall control'. Conservatives lost one Council.
3. Incumbent councils of all parties fared badly with a total of 22 out of 32 incumbent councils losing seats at this election.
4. There was evidence of considerable turbulence with only Westminster having no change in the party balance.
5. Just seven incumbent administrations strengthened their positions by gaining seats.

I draw from this that local electors not only kept faith with existing Conservative councillors and turned to them in St Charles ward, but that they also rewarded this Conservative group of Councillors with a

significantly increased share of the overall vote and more votes overall than ever before.

Given incumbent administrations elsewhere across London – even those favoured by CPA inspectors – were punished by voters, these results can be seen as a ringing endorsement of our hard work over the past four years and our commitment to high quality services and low taxes.

Even in wards where there had been local concerns – over Lots Road, Holland Park School renewal in Campden and Sloane Square, the Conservative share of the vote went up or was solid.

	Share of Vote	
	2002	2006
Cremorne	47.4	61.06
Campden	73.6	72.32
Royal Hospital	78.6	78.8

I am pleased that voters recognised our willingness to both lead but also listen to local people and to take a proper amount of time to consider all alternatives before deciding major changes.

Continuous progress

It is clear that in committing my administration to continuing our good local work over the next four years there are still major challenges to be faced.

But in doing so we can look back on four years of solid achievements that give us confidence we can deliver the plans we make.

My Cabinet has committed itself to deliver *Better City Life* – an acknowledgement that Conservatives can and will be the force that leads a renaissance in Britain's cities – to make them places of which we can be proud, popular with long standing residents and newcomers; with employers and visitors.

To do this we have said we want to work with others and our second Community Strategy published late in 2005 stands as a record of these commitments.

But we have also said the Council wants to make three distinctive contributions by:

- ***Responding to residents***

We will maintain our good record of consulting over both big themes and smaller changes. We will strengthen this work further by finding new ways to ensure the voluntary sector contribution is reliable and important and continuing to work closely with residents and tenants associations.

We want to commit to annual opinion trawling which other councils have been doing but we have not.

Our "Here to Help" initiatives have led to vastly improved email and telephone call handling and our new Service Centre at the Town Hall should open in 2007 and be a radically improved experience for personal visitors.

- ***Really good services***

We know our services are good but we know they can get better still. I want to see a strong spirit of innovation aboard in the organisation, where ideas from the public, Councillors and staff can be heard, considered and the best ones implemented.

I want our work on the environment to become more central to our thinking. The Conservative local government manifesto "Vote blue: go green" clearly resonated with local people and greatly contributed to our success. As David Cameron put it "We're all in this together and together we can lead the way".

In our environmental progress we will avoid token gestures but be prepared to innovate ourselves and support worthwhile changes by local residents and organisations.

But our enthusiasm for improving services further will not mean we lose our financial discipline. We have committed to a continuing freeze on the locally determined element of Council Tax next year in 2007/08 and we are serious about this promise. We have an excellent record on finding economies and efficiency gains and more will be needed. Our sixth year as a Standard & Poor's Triple A rated organisation and the recognition this brought in the Financial Times signifies the importance we place on retaining financial strength.

- ***Renewing the legacy***

I am delighted to launch a new publication that details our bold new plans to renew the legacy of fine streetscapes, important public buildings and our parks and open spaces over the next ten years.

None of these projects are trivial and they all come with complications and choices to make. Some of our residents will have concerns; some may prefer alternatives. But be in no doubt that we recognise that maintaining and enhancing this Royal Borough as one of the world's most important and most popular areas to live and visit cannot be achieved without leadership and boldness.

And we must not forget our own estate. We must ensure the Town Hall and other buildings are fit for 21st century work and that they sit well with improvements we are making elsewhere.

More to do

In a complex urban area there are always likely to be demanding challenges and Kensington and Chelsea is not immune from these.

- *Crime and fear of crime*

The "basket of ten" reported crimes taken as the most useful overview fell by 4.1% last year but still street crime is a major worry, detection rates are too low and fear of crime is still too high.

We have been strong supporters of the local police but no one should mistake our support for complacency.

Where we believe the MPA and local police can do more we will say so whilst maintaining our flagship policy of supporting visible policing by paying for PCSOs to increase cover and impact beyond the MPA minimum.

- *Health and the local NHS*

Whilst there are clearly many dedicated local NHS staff, the local PCT is in a real mess with a cumulative deficit of over £20m and facing massive requirements for reduced spending over the next two years.

Again we will collaborate where this serves local people but also hold the PCT and the Strategic Health Authority to account where this is necessary both locally and within a London context.

- *Local school standards*

Our commitments to a better Holland Park School and a new Chelsea Academy are well understood.

But we also need to ensure we have a strategy for renewing all of our school estate and ensuring that standards in all our schools, all of the time, remain high.

We will want our children's centres to flourish whilst at the same time, want to ensure our efforts reinforce the importance of parents and parenting not undermine family life.

- ***Supporting ambition***

The Council has made good use of external funding over thirty years to ensure North Kensington and other areas are improved and the life chances of residents in those areas are made richer.

In the future it is less likely that such funding can be accessed although we must remain alert to possibilities.

However a reliance on local resources at least means we can settle on a more local agenda for our future work and I want us to keep up our work on ensuring that environmental standards in North Kensington are just as high in other areas of the borough whilst also having a programme of work and investment to support ambition amongst local people and local businesses.

- ***Using all opportunities***

London is changing and I want Kensington and Chelsea to be at the centre of these changes, influential and persuasive. In my new role leading the Association of London Government I will want to be able to apply initiatives developed locally to improving public services across London.

We must be ready to work with other councils who see the world as we do, to hunt out efficiency gains and challenge ourselves to learn from others and assist those who want to learn from us. A number of councils have new administrations with fresh energy and we will take opportunities to work closely with them.

We want to use any new powers the Government allows us that offer us opportunities to serve our public better. We will work within the ALG to make the case for London, to collaborate with the Mayor of London where common cause exists and to ensure London's future is secured.

But the Mayor of London must also understand that the tide of opinion may now be running against his expectations of ever increasing precepts and an ever bigger London and it is our duty to ensure these alternatives views are expressed.

- ***A distinctive borough***

Our borough has a rich heritage of artistic endeavour, architectural wonders and talented individuals. Notting Hill Carnival , the great Museums and Institutions of South Kensington, Opera Holland Park, Linley Sambourne House and Leighton House all contribute hugely to London's arts excellence.

I want to ensure our contribution to this sector and the opportunities it offers to both local people and visitors are better understood and synergies with employment opportunities, training, education and ambition are well understood and exploited.

- ***Civil society***

London's population is more diverse than ever before and Kensington and Chelsea is one of its most diverse parts. Urban management in this context demands creativity and resilience and unlike other councils who face a period of establishing themselves or sorting out governance issues, we can draw strength from our stability whilst reaching out to a wider public and ensuring our future democracy is strengthened and civic engagement prospers.

To aid these I want us to work with local councillors of both parties to strengthen local ownership of local issues. I think we should return to the debate over some form of local initiatives. The West Chelsea Initiative was very successful and proved that local people will come together to strengthen ties and agree local priorities. The determination by the police to run neighbourhood policing deserves our support but we have a strong contribution to make.

I hope we can pilot new local ward initiatives in perhaps four wards in this coming year.

- ***From planning to delivery***

We have well established systems for declaring our ambitions and ensuring our budget allocations follow our plans.

Our 2006/07 and beyond programmes are therefore in place.

With our renewed and strengthened mandate we can ensure our plans are delivered and our partners are supported and challenged to match our bold ambitions.

In our major capital projects we will move from careful planning to purposeful delivery.

I want the next years to be amongst the most successful the Council has ever known so that in four years time local people know that their trust has been well placed.

Councillor Merrick Cockell
Leader of the Council