Nikki Barton, County Councillor for Haslemere (Independent) said:

Surrey is at breaking point. The impact of the government’s austerity squeeze on Surrey has meant that the Conservative Council cannot balance its budget.  We have been forced to cut our cloth, but now the shirt is being taken off our backs.

In Haslemere we have felt the discomfort of cutting our local youth worker, our Saturday dust cart, our library opening hours, our bus services, with a night-time street light switch off about to start and cuts in local highway budgets to come. But as Surreys financial crisis deepens,  further swingeing cuts to front line services, support for our most vulnerable residents – those with learning disabilities, the elderly and those needing adult social care will be unavoidable.

In spite of the pleas of Surrey’s Conservative leadership, Number 10 continues to treat Surrey unfairly.  The weak and vulnerable are paying the price for being Surrey residents, while Theresa May’s government seems to think Surrey residents are content to pay higher council taxes and receive fewer services.  Last year the Council had to increase Council Tax by an extra 2% to help fund adult social care, raising £12million.  This was a drop in the ocean, given annual costs for that care are more than £360million.  Next year, an increase of 18% will be needed to keep these essential services.

I support Surrey Leader David Hodge in his demand that central government stop tightening the vice on Surrey and that it ensures we have sufficient means to meet the increasing demands of our naturally aging population and of the new social care duties placed on the local authority by central government itself.  There is unacceptable conflict between the basic needs of Surrey, on the one hand, and the position and policies of our 11 local Surrey Conservative MPs (including the current Chancellor Philip Hammond and Secretary of State for Health Jeremy Hunt), on the other hand.  This gives me grave concerns about Hammond’s or Hunt’s political commitment to fight for Surrey’s needs in Westminster.  And, what is more, Hunt’s alignment with Number 10 leads me to question whether his local associates will be prepared truly to fight for Haslemere’s social needs at the county level.