PRESS STATEMENT FROM THE MANIFESTO GROUP OF COUNCILLORS:

We are totally against the introduction of Poll Tax in Camden. It is a tax that will benefit the rich at the expense of the poor and is a means of reducing still further the amount of local control councils can exert on setting their own levels of expenditure. It follows in the wake of taking away from Camden the Rate Support Grant in 1980/81; the Rate Capping legislation of 1984/85; and the cuts in jobs and services that were made by the council from 1987.

Poll Tax will clearly not achieve any of its stated key objectives of efficiency, fairness and accountability. It will be an administrative nightmare to collect and will cost far more than the present collection of the Rates. People will have to pay the same amount, regardless of ability to pay so that millionaires will gain substantially, while the working class will suffer greatly. In particular, black and ethnic minorities will be hit hard, as will women, people with disabilities, young people and pensioners. Joint and several liability will mean that a wife will be liable for her husband's tax if he leaves her and cannot be traced. Exemptions to the tax will affect only the few, but the rest will be paying at least 20% of it. This will include people who are barely able to live at the moment on income support. Students will also be expected to pay the 20% with no adjustments to their grants. Accountability should be about participation by the community as to what it wants from the services being provided by the council. However with Poll Tax, there will be increased pressures on the council to reduce expenditure, as small increases in spending will mean a disproportionate increase in the tax. This will lead to still further cuts taking place.

Poll Tax registration has already deterred people from giving their names to the list of electors and will mean votes against the Government will be lost in forthcoming elections. Questions on registration forms, followed up by visits from Poll Tax canvassers, raise serious issues of civil liberties. In addition, personal details from council departments will be used to compile the register.

In place of the Poll Tax, we would wish to see a locally based income tax that related to ability to pay. This should be coupled with the reintroduction of Government Support Grant that would especially help the poorer boroughs.

As part of the increasing protest against the Poll Tax, we support the stand being taken by the Camden Stop the Poll Tax Campaign concerning the frustration of the Poll Tax Register. Registration forms will be sent from the Town Hall to every household in Camden this month and we agree with the Campaign that one of the most effective ways of protesting against the tax is not to send them back completed but to have them destroyed at the mass burning on 17th June at 4pm at St. Martins Gardens, NW1. At the same time, we support the tactic of denying that the forms were ever received. A campaign of non-registration now, will pave the way for a protest of non-payment and non-collection beginning in April next year.