

Good Evening, Cabinet.

Looking at a page of budget figures, or even the more modest sums in my Group's proposals, it is easy to lose sight of how these proposals will impact on vulnerable individuals. This is especially the case when so called 'front line services' are involved. However, there is a sense in which we, ordinary councillors, are the front line, and I make no apology for talking about Radstock again, and an old barn by the church just below my house. It seems that 4 school children - perhaps 14/15 years old are regularly having 'sleep overs' there, smoking among the hay bales. I have not yet managed to find out why they are there, whether they are just disaffected teenagers from broken homes or whether I am right to suspect they are ketamine users, and on track to join the 100 or so young people in the Norton Radstock area whose behaviour has cost them their homes. We have to find out whether they are symptomatic of a wider problem in the B&NES area or are atypical, like the phenomenally high number of teenage mothers in my ward living in the front rooms of their own mother's (housing association) houses. This is why I am appealing to you tonight to accept the Labour proposal to fund a research officer for one year, and I believe from what was said at the Overview and Scrutiny panel by the Cabinet member for Children and Young people that there are plans to approach the PCT for joint funding. This morning I had a long conversation with the council officer responsible, Graham Seeborn and obtained his support for the proposal for a research officer. Unless we have proper research into the nature and causes of homelessness among young people, and whether the Council's plans going forward will meet those needs, we cannot say whether we are directing council resources to the right ends. We are all agreed that prevention is better than cure, but while I whole heartedly support the appeal from my Group for more detached youth workers, we also need to provide facilities for 'normal' non- problematic teenagers. It has been said that homelessness in the present economic climate is only one failed mortgage payment away. Our young people may only be one divorce, one bereavement, one incident of sexual abuse or one bout of depression away from the barn or the public bench. We certainly support plans for a 3 million allocation for a hostel in central Bath, but we also need to be aware of the hidden problems, swept under the carpet as if we lived in the Victorian era. Who knows, in supporting the proposals re internet charges, we may enable some young person to find their own solution in terms of a college course, a job, or more appropriate housing. In short, in asking you to prioritise the needs of our young people, especially in semi-rural, deprived areas, please listen to Cllr Inker and accommodate our proposals in the draft budget.

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