

STATEMENT BY COUNCILLOR JOHN BULL ON BEHALF OF THE LABOUR GROUP

On behalf of the Labour Group I'd like to propose the amendment to the budget as printed.

The Group is pleased that the Cabinet have now discovered that there is £18 million in reserves, £8 million more than the minimum level that the Auditor requires.

We are also pleased that in the last week it has emerged that there are additional sums available from the Collection Fund Surplus and the so-called Headroom. Frankly we cannot understand why that information was not given to Overview and Scrutiny Panels when they scrutinised the Service Plans which in some cases still showed large deficits. In the case of Children's Services, for example, the Cabinet Member gave no indication at the Panel meeting that he knew that there was an opportunity to fund the £850,000 deficit from one of those sources.

Now once again we hear the rumble of goalposts being moved with the news yesterday that the deficit in Adult Social Services is not £307,000 as announced at the Budget Fair on Friday but £150,000

Welcome as some of these developments are our Group wish to make further proposals to alleviate the effect of this budget of cuts on BANES residents, particularly the most vulnerable.

Firstly from the £96,000 still unallocated in the Collection Fund Surplus we wish to spend:

- £40,000 on preserving the Home to School Transport budget for post 16 young people with Special Needs , together with a request that this budget should be protected in future years. This is one cut that officers described as a 'tough decision'
- £19,000 to preserve the budget for democracy and participation in schools so that DAFBY and UKYP functions can run as planned
- remove the £100,000 donation to the Theatre Royal, which we believe is inappropriate in a time of financial cutbacks

Secondly from the £372,000 still unallocated in Headroom and the £100,000 from the Theatre Royal donation :

- restore £300,000 of the cut of £400,000 in the Supporting People budget for the coming year so that the effect on these residents will be less abrupt and we can monitor over a longer period the change to support in their own homes

- provide £117,000 in order to reduce by half the increase in charges under the Fairer Charging policy

Finally one disgraceful aspect of this year's budget process has been that the loss of 76 jobs, many in the form of compulsory redundancies, has scarcely been mentioned nor have members had a chance to comment on the priorities involved.

We are therefore proposing that half of these job losses should be postponed and we would ask the Director concerned to look particularly hard at posts in Planning where the Council has after a long difficult period now begun to reach the standards and targets required, all of which could be jeopardised.

We would fund half the **£600,000** required by reducing by £300,000 the sum allocated to the new Medium Term Financial Challenge Reserve (which is purely a notional figure at this stage) and £300,000 from the Restructuring Reserve the size of which is similarly speculative. Although this would only postpone these cuts for one year at this stage it will give a breathing space in which to monitor the effects of the economic upturn on the planning environment particularly and allow more informed choices to be made in future.