

**Statement to Cabinet 13<sup>th</sup> February 2013****Cllr Patrick Anketell-Jones**

## Victoria Art Gallery

Bath and North East Somerset residents, rate payers and Discovery Card holders, must be exempted from all visitor charges to the exhibition gallery in the Victoria Art Gallery.

The cost of running the Victoria Art Gallery has always been paid out of the general rate and every visitor has enjoyed free access. This Spring, the Council is going to impose entry charges and those charges will fall\* on BANES residents. It is a charge too far because residents have already paid through their rates an entry charge amounts to double taxation. It is unfair and defeats the purpose of having a public gallery. Please, do not say the Gallery will remain free just because the upstairs permanent collection will not be charged. That is a disingenuous position. We all know\* it is the Lower Gallery that attracts the greatest number of visitors, that excites the public imagination, that makes the greatest contribution to contemporary culture.

We fully understand the Council's requirement, in response to the harsh economic climate, to reduce public expenditure. The Council is expected to absorb a 3 year 10% reduction to its budget and that cut is being spread as evenly as possible throughout the administration so why is the Victoria Art Gallery being hit with a 3 year, 60% cut?

The Conservative Group has an alternative proposal. We do not object to charging non resident visitors even though this will diminish footfall. Many people I spoke to on the steps of the Gallery confirmed that an entry charge will stop them from going in and they could not understand why the Council is pursuing this course when so many other cities have dropped gallery charges. \*\*\*Now, here is a proposal is worth considering. A combined ticket for the Roman Baths and the Fashion Museum could also include the Victoria Art Gallery with the price of the ticket increased appropriately. If the price was put up by as little as one pound the gallery would receive around £50,000. per annum.

This gallery is a local and unique cultural asset. It has a thoughtful curator and attracts widespread support. It is there to educate, illuminate, inspire, challenge and sometimes infuriate. The quality, variety and integrity of its exhibitions maintain the gallery in high public esteem. It stands on its own strengths and it must not, as the MTSRP recommends, be turned into a crowd pulling visitor attraction that brings in money to serve the Treasury before it serves the people.