

SPEECH TO FULL MEETING OF BURY COUNCIL  
30/6/10

MR MAYOR,

THE COUNTRY FACES A FINANCIAL CRISIS THE LIKES OF WHICH WE HAVE NOT FACED SINCE THE 1930'S.

IN THE FACE OF A RECORD LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT BORROWING AND A MASSIVE BUDGET SPENDING DEFICIT THE NEW GOVERNMENT HAS WISELY TAKEN IMMEDIATE ACTION TO START DEALING WITH A FINANCIAL PROBLEM THAT IN ITSELF THREATENS PUBLIC SERVICES PROVISION.

THE RECENT EMERGENCY BUDGET CONFIRMED THAT AS PART OF THE MEASURES TO REDUCE THE BUDGET DEFICIT LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE BEING ASKED TO FIND THEIR SHARE OF THE CUTS.

IT IS NOT UNDERSTATING THE CASE TO SAY THAT ASKING LOCAL COUNCILS TO FIND THEIR ALLOCATED SHARE OF THE £1.6 BILLION OF CUTS WILL BE CHALLENGING.

IN BURY OF COURSE ONE COULD BE FORGIVEN FOR WONDERING HOW WE MAKE FURTHER CUTS. I FOR ONE CAN HARDLY REMEMBER A COUNCIL BUDGET THAT DIDN'T INVOLVE CUTS – ALBEIT THE PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION PREFERRED TO CALL THEM EFFICIENCY SAVINGS.

IN FACT IT COULD BE ARGUED THAT OUR OFFICERS SHOULD NOW BE PAST MASTERS AT MAKING SO CALLED EFFICIENCY SAVINGS. BUT THIS ISN'T A TIME FOR FLIPPANCY, BECAUSE THIS TIME WE FACE REAL

CUTS – AND NO OTHER WORD CAN DRESS UP THE LIKELY IMPACT ON OUR PUBLIC SERVICES.

NOW WE COULD SIT HERE AND HURL ROCKS AT EACH OTHER ABOUT THE MERITS OF MAKING THESE CUTS NOW OR LATER. OR EVEN THE LEVEL OF CUTS REQUIRED.

AND MEMBERS MAY GET SOME SHORT TERM SATISFACTION FROM THAT. BUT AS BURY COUNCILLORS AT A TIME OF CRISIS I BELIEVE WE HAVE A DUTY THAT TRANSCENDS PARTY POLITICAL DIVIDE.

WHEN THIS AUTHORITY IS FACING REAL CUTS TO SERVICES BOTH IN YEAR AND UNDOUBTEDLY OVER THE COMING YEARS WE HAVE A DUTY TO LOCAL CITIZENS TO FOCUS ON HOW WE CAN SECURE THE FUTURE OF PRECIOUS SERVICES, HOW WE CAN PROTECT AS FAR AS POSSIBLE THE VULNERABLE AND WEAK IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND ENSURE IMPORTANT SERVICES DO NOT FRACTURE UNDER CUTS AND CHANGES.

WE HAVE TO WORK WITH GUILE AND INITIATIVE TO ENSURE WE CAN DO WHAT WE CAN FOR LOCAL PEOPLE AND THE SERVICES THEY CHERISH AND OUR OFFICERS WILL BE CHARGED LIKE NEVER BEFORE WITH THE TASK OF MAINTAINING QUALITY SERVICES WITH LESS FUNDS.

THAT IS WHY WE IN THE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT GROUP DECIDED TO PUT THIS MOTION BEFORE COUNCIL TONIGHT. WE NEED TO START LOOKING AT SERVICE PROVISION NOW, WE NEED TO START EXAMINING OPTIONS NOW AND YES, WE NEED TO BE TALKING TO STAFF, UNIONS, SERVICE USERS AND PARTNERS NOW.

AND THROUGHOUT THAT PROCESS WE NEED TO BE OPEN AND HONEST WITH PEOPLE ABOUT THE DIFFICULT CHOICES WE FACE AND ULTIMATELY WHY CERTAIN DECISIONS HAVE TO BE TAKEN. WE CANNOT EXPECT PEOPLE TO LIKE SEEING SERVICES CUT, NO ONE IN THIS CHAMBER WANTS TO CUT SERVICES – WE WOULD MUCH RATHER BE PROVIDING BETTER SERVICES. BUT WE HAVE A DUTY TO GO THE DISTANCE – THE EXTRA MILE – TO DO WHAT WE CAN TO MAKE ANY CUTS AS PAINLESS AS POSSIBLE, TO ENSURE NO STONE REMAINS UNTURNED IN THE ATTEMPT TO PROTECT THE NEEDY AND VULNERABLE.

THAT IS WHY THIS MOTION IN ESSENCE CHALLENGES THE WHOLE COUNCIL TO WORK CONSTRUCTIVELY TO GET THIS RIGHT FOR STAFF AND SERVICE USERS ALIKE.

IT IS MY EXPERIENCE AND I KNOW OF OTHERS IN THIS CHAMBER ALSO, THAT SOME OF THE WORST DECISIONS THIS COUNCIL HAS TAKEN HAVE BEEN WHEN THE PUBLIC AND STAFF HAVE NOT BEEN PROPERLY ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS.

I COULD DRAG UP PAST EXAMPLES – WE COULD ALL COME UP WITH OUR OWN EXAMPLES, JUST AS WE CAN FOR OCCASIONS WHEN THE COUNCIL HAS GOT IT RIGHT. ENGAGED THE PUBLIC FROM THE START – GENUINE CONSULTATION, GENUINELY LISTENING TO THE VIEWS OF THE BURY PUBLIC – AND A REAL DESIRE TO ACT ON THOSE VIEWS, CONCERNS AND SO ON.

THIS MOTION FLAGS UP THE NEED, THE SURELY WIDELY HELD VIEW IN THIS CHAMBER THAT WE, AS A COUNCIL, WISH TO PROTECT KEY

FRONTLINE SERVICES WITH THE ADDED COMPLEXITY OF PROTECTING AS MANY JOBS AS POSSIBLE.

WHILST IT COULD BE TAKEN AS READ, FOR THE AVOIDANCE OF DOUBT IT MAKES CLEAR THIS COUNCILS BASELINE POSITION.

THE SECOND PART OF THE MOTION THEN CALLS ON THE CURRENT MINORITY ADMINISTRATION TO ENSURE THE COUNCILS SCRUTINY AND REVIEW STRUCTURE IS FULLY UTILISED IN EXAMINING PROPOSALS AND THAT MEASURES ARE DEVELOPED FOR ENGAGING IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE BURY PUBLIC ABOUT THIS ISSUE.

WHILST I DON'T PROPOSE MAKING ANY SUGGESTIONS THIS EVENING, I WOULD HOPE THAT THIS ADMINISTRATION , AT THIS TIME WOULD BE RECEPTIVE TO ANY SENSIBLE SUGGESTIONS ON THIS ISSUE FROM COUNCIL MEMBERS, GROUPS, STAFF, UNIONS, VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS, LOCAL BUSINESSES AND ANYONE ELSE I MAY HAVE OMMITTED.

LETS GET THE ISSUES OUT IN THE OPEN AND LETS PRIORITISE THEM LETS FIND WAYS TO TACKLE THEM, WHEREVER POSSIBLE BRING PEOPLE ALONG WITH US.

I WOULD MAKE TWO PLEAS TO THE OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES IN THIS CHAMBER.

TO THE CONSERVATIVE ADMINISTRATION I WOULD SAY THIS.

YOU COULD OF COURSE IGNORE THIS MOTION, YOU COULD SAY WELL ITS HARMLESS ENOUGH -PAY LIP SERVICE TO IT AND VOTE IT THROUGH. BUT IF YOU FAIL TO GRASP THE OPPORTUNITY TO TACKLE THESE ISSUES HEAD ON WITH CROSS PARTY SUPPORT AND WORKING AND FAIL TO ENGAGE STAFF AND THE PUBLIC THEN I BELIEVE YOU

MAY WELL FACE CONSEQUENCES THAT WOULD PUT THE PAY AND RE-GRADING WELL IN THE SHADE.

AND TO THE LABOUR GROUP. A SIMILAR OPPORTUNITY BECKONS. AS I SAID EARLIER YOU CAN START HURLING ROCKS IF YOU PREFER, I MUST CONFESS I AM PICKING UP A FEW VIBES OF ANIMOSITY TOWARDS THE LIB DEMS AT PRESENT.

YOU CAN TAKE TRY AND UNDERMINE THIS PROCESS OR YOU CAN WORK TO ENSURE THE COMMUNITIES YOU REPRESENT AND THEIR SERVICES ARE PROTECTED.

WOULDN'T IT BE PREFERABLE FOR US ALL TO SET ASIDE OUR POLITICAL GRIEVANCES AND WORK TOGETHER TO FIND WAYS OF PROTECTING SERVICES WE ALL CHERISH?

IN THIS ADDRESS I HAVE DELIBERATELY SOUGHT NOT TO ATTACH BLAME TO THE SITUATION FACING THIS AND EVERY OTHER COUNCIL. AFTERALL – MAYBE THAT IT'S A CASE OF GOOD COP BAD COP – I'M NOT SURE WHAT CLLR BAUM HAS IN STORE.

IT'S AN ACKNOWLEDGED FACT THAT THERE IS A MASSIVE BUDGET DEFICIT,

THE GOVERNMENT IS SEEKING TO REDUCE IT – THEY HAVE CHALLENGED US TO DO OUR BIT.

THERE ARE THREE PARTIES IN THIS COUNCIL AND A MINORITY ADMINISTRATION.

THIS ISN'T A CASE OF SACRIFICING PRINCIPLES OR PROPPING UP AN ADMINISTRATION IT'S ABOUT PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST, ABOVE ALL ELSE. PURE AND SIMPLE.

THE CHALLENGE WE FACE AS POLITICAL PARTIES IN THIS CHAMBER IS  
ARE WE PREPARED TO DO THAT, ARE WE ABLE TO PUT ASIDE  
NARROW POLITICAL SELF INTEREST FOR THE SAKE OF LOCAL  
PEOPLE?

AS A LIBERAL DEMOCRAT ON A MINORITY CONSERVATIVE  
ADMINISTRATION COUNCIL I FOR ONE SINCERELY HOPE WE CAN.  
SO CAN YOU?

MR MAYOR I COMMEND THIS MOTION.

CLLR VIC D'ALBERT  
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT, HOLYROOD WARD