

COUNCIL MEETING
3 APRIL 2013
LEADER'S STATEMENT

Madam Mayor, Members and Officers of the Council, before I report on the work of the Executive since the last Council meeting, I would like to briefly reflect on a couple of major achievements of this Labour Administration during this municipal year.

My starting point is to speak about the budget setting and then Plan for Change. Once again, despite the savage and unfair cuts in Government grant that Bury has faced we have kept our spending within budget thanks to this administration's commitment to sound financial management and to take difficult decisions which are unpopular but as I have said previously with power comes responsibility.

The achievement is all the more striking when you consider over the first 2 years of this Labour Administration £22m has been removed from Departmental budgets. Inevitably any budget reductions mean less employees and some 224 jobs have been lost over the same period.

However, what we are not seeing is any reduction in the demand for our services especially in Childrens and Adult Care services.

To achieve all of this we developed and used our Plan for Change, as they say I am a man with a plan.

Through our Plan for Change we also identified the need for a balanced longer-term budget programme which not only addresses the immediate financial pressures but also sets us up to successfully meet unforeseen risks and takes us some way towards meeting the further Government cuts that we know are coming. Bury for all the grief and pain that is heaped upon us from the ongoing financial turbulence is in good shape going into the next 12 months and beyond.

Madam Mayor, I will now take this opportunity to report to Council on the work of the Cabinet since the last Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 30 January.

The Cabinet signed up to support a Greater Manchester £17m Green Deal where all Districts provide up front capital on a loan basis to fund energy efficiency works to private domestic consumer's properties. Bury's contribution will be £1.2m, from which over 2,000 properties will be upgraded. The monies will be paid back over an agreed period.

Members agreed a revised working model on Destination Management which reflects a great deal of consultation and discussions which aims to strike a balance between retaining what works and developing new and more innovative options to better promote the Borough and support tourism and local businesses.

A Poverty Strategy for Bury covering 2013-16 has been agreed. This is a statutory document originating from the Child Poverty Act 2010, which requires all local authorities to produce child poverty strategies and work with local partners to reduce and prevent child poverty.

The strategy covers key issues and provides advice and support, including:

- **Managing the money** – Many residents find it difficult to manage their finances and in need of advice to deal with debt issues.
 - **Claiming what is due** – Residents requiring advice to ensure they claim the benefits they are entitled to.
 - **Work works** – Assisting those people who are able to work back into employment.
 - **Breaking the cycle** – Preventing the intergenerational cycle of poverty that people are born into.
 - **Strategic issues** – Ensuring that Team Bury implement, monitor and evaluate the action plan by keeping poverty high on the agenda.
- And finally • **Every contact counts** – Ensuring residents are able to access all Team Bury services and confidently sign post when required.

Allocations Policy

A revised and updated Allocation Policy was agreed and adheres to the Council's values of supporting people in severe need and empowering communities by:

- Dropping Band 6 to make the Housing waiting list more representative by giving preference to people in housing need
- All serving Armed Forces personnel to be placed in Band 1
- Prioritising households that are homeless, in life threatening situations or have urgent medical/social needs (Band 1)
- Maintaining Choice Based Lettings for the majority of properties (whilst allowing direct lets where appropriate to support elderly and disabled residents)
- Utilising local lettings policies to build and strengthen communities
- Encouraging a more proactive approach to housing options and homelessness prevention to help more people find (or remain) in settled accommodation

Social Fund

Many Members may not be aware that the Social Fund Has now been localised by Government with, of course, the usual sting in the tail.

Yes we have heard this story before, and where this time the fund has been cut by 50% by DWP. From the 1st April the level of awards will have to be maintained within this reduced amount, which in effect we will simply have to be rationed.

There are two areas covered by the fund:

- Community Care Grants, which are payments to enable vulnerable people to live in the community and are, in the current system, conditional upon receipt of a means tested benefit.
- Crisis Loans, which are to meet immediate needs such as general living expenses or items needed after a disaster and entitlement is not dependant upon receipt of a benefit.

The proposed scheme has been developed in conjunction with the local Citizens' Advice Bureau and is based on feedback from Bury's Welfare Reform Board.

The new scheme will be run as a grant rather than a loan scheme. However if customers do wish to repay the amount this will benefit them in terms of making future applications to the fund.

Madam Mayor it was my privilege to join you to sign, on behalf of the Council, the Military Covenant. In a few weeks we will be attending the 98th commemoration the Gallipoli landing on 'W' beach.

So it is timely for the Council to make this pledge to support our armed forces and do what we can to work with service men and women and their families to help reintegrate them back into our communities. This is particularly important when we all know the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers is still under threat of being disbanded.

Finally Madam Mayor, it gives me great pleasure to announce a new initiative called 'Made in Bury' – which is the Council's new Community Awards scheme which I hope will become a major part of our Civic Calendar and a way of recognising the great work that goes on day in day out by thousands of unsung heroes right across our Borough.

There will be three categories including:

- **Outstanding Contribution to a Township (single award)**
- **Young Person and/or Young Person's Group – outstanding community contribution (25 and under)**
- **Volunteer of the Year Award.**

The winners will be announced at Annual Council and they will also be there to receive their certificates

Madam Mayor, that concludes my statement.

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