

COUNCIL 14 NOVEMBER 2011

Agenda item 6a refers

LEADERS REPORT

I would like to take this opportunity of reminding everyone why we are in the position we are today, as a Council, moving forward with the preparation of our new budget for 2012/13.

I recall a well-known local MP saying to me before the last General Election. *“Be assured Michael, six months down the line if we win this election, it will be us that is to blame for all the problems with the finances, and the decisions necessary to put things right!”*

Labour left us - The Coalition Government that is, and you as local councillors - with a massive economic mess. National government is still spending £120 million a day on Labour's debt interest alone!

Let's not forget that Ed Balls and Ed Miliband were at the heart of creating this mess and haven't learned the lessons of their mistakes or changed their minds. Their message has been simple: vote for us and we'd do it all again.

Running up Government debt is like running up massive credit card bills - the longer you leave it, the worse it gets, burdening our children and grandchildren with even more debt. You only need to look at countries like Greece and, now, Italy, to see that if we don't take steps to live within our means we'll end up facing deeper cuts, less growth and higher unemployment.

I have no idea where we will be on November 14th with the crisis in the euro (as I write this to go to print, long before that date), but what one can say with confidence is; “that a week is a long time in Euro Policy these days”. It is very worrying indeed.

Those Councillors amongst us with a few years' service will remember, when at budget time we asked officers for their “bids” - favoured projects to spend the funds on - flowing into our coffers. Indeed one was heavily criticised by central government departments if you did NOT spend on pet projects.

Why is this so important now to us in Harborough District Council? Well I raise it as the background to the reasons some of our number, and many of our residents may have conveniently forgotten, with regard to the cuts in our grants and income over the two years to March 2013, (Some £1.46 million of income deleted by reduction in government grant over this period) and the reasons we need to be frugal and commit to living within our means at a time of rising inflation.

Hence the Council's moves towards a Future Options Review, asset resolution, and major contract review.

However, memories can be short when it comes to seeking to apportion blame for the reasons why Council must now face some very difficult decisions, and we will be taking some vital steps in that process again on November 14th.

In the light of the much improved working relationships emerging from the Future Options process, I pay tribute to all those opposition members who had the courage to support the recommendations on October 31st. This comes I know with reservations, but I hope no longer the deep distrust that may have littered some previous debates. As an Administration we will be happy to ensure progress is maintained, outcomes are delivered, and that the voices on our colleague's benches are heard in debate.

Mike Rook (Leader HDC)