



Rhoda Grant

Scottish Labour MSP for the Highlands and Islands

Save our Services

13 February 2008

Rhoda Grant, Highlands and Islands Labour MSP, is urging Highland Councillors not to bend to political pressure and to vote against cuts to services for the young and vulnerable in today's highly controversial budget debate (Thursday).

"The Council is leaving itself open to accusations of closing the door to 'independent scrutiny' by cutting funding to the voluntary sector, " said Mrs Grant. " And, £5.123 million of cuts in the Education, Culture and Sport budget, including cutting teachers and services in our schools is difficult to justify as an 'efficiency'."

"None of the SNP government's proposals in terms of nursery provision, class sizes or free school meals gets new funding. The SNP costed this set of commitments at £832m in their manifesto.

"Whilst the report refers to £12.753m of efficiencies and savings, most of these are actually service reductions, involving job loss in Highland Council, grant cuts to external organisations, big increases in charges to consumers, and across the board cuts in support staff costs – which will have a knock-on effect in service quality.

"According to our analysis, only around 13% of savings are being made through genuine efficiency gains. This is less than £2m of the £12.7m total.

"We are threatening our most vulnerable members of the community with this budget. Highland Councillors are being bombarded with letters from individuals, groups and organisations, who will all be affected by the loss of funding to the Highland Community Care Forum and Age Concern.

"There is a growing concern that cutting voluntary organisations and managing the work inhouse smacks of a desire to remove independent scrutiny over services," said Mrs Grant.

"It is unbelievable that the council has not looked at the spiral effect of cutting funds to these key organisations.

"As well as the loss of additional funding which HCCF receives as a charity, there are many more bodies which it supports and which will struggle to continue.

"Letters to councillors use the words "betrayal" and "self interest" and if reports of a rift in the coalition are correct then I would urge Councillors not to hide behind the coat tails of the SNP but to look to the views of the people they represent and find a way to protect our most vulnerable in the Highlands and Islands.

"Stop the cuts to Education and Social Work."

Ends

Websites

Rhoda Grant MSP : www.rhodagrants.org.uk

Education Cuts Watch : www.educationcutswatch.org.uk

Highland CutsWatch : www.highlandcutswatch.org.uk