

BUDGET 2003: AMENDMENT

**Lodged au Greffe on 12th November 2002
by Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier**



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In the estimate of revenue expenditure of the Agriculture and Fisheries Committee, add -

£184,000 to enable the dairy industry to provide free school milk.

DEPUTY G.P. SOUTHERN OF ST. HELIER

Report

The provision of free school milk used to be funded by the Education Committee. When that Committee decided that such provision was not part of its core services, following a States debate, responsibility for the funding was passed to the Health and Social Services Committee. That Committee has experienced budgetary difficulties in recent years and has had to reassess its priorities. The expert advice provided to the Committee by the Medical Officer of Health is that significantly greater health and social gains could be achieved if the budget of £184,000 was spent in other ways. This advice and the budget-cutting exercise requested by the Finance and Economics Committee at the beginning of this year, led the Committee to suggest to the decision conferencing process that the £184,000 no longer be provided for school milk. This suggestion was accepted by the decision conference. As things stand, unless the Health and Social Services Committee diverts funds from areas they are advised are a higher priority, the supply of school milk will cease in January 2003.

I have no argument with the expertise of the Medical Officer of Health as to health spending and maximizing benefit but I, and many others in the community, would be sad to see this service end. Having said that, I do not believe for one moment that we can ask the Health and Social Services Committee to override the advice it receives and take the £184,000 from areas of higher priority.

The issue of free school milk does not, however, stand in isolation. It is closely linked to another of our concerns - the plight of farming in the Island and the dairy industry in particular. The recent agriculture debate left us with a policy for agriculture, but no funding. The fact remains the dairy industry is facing possibly the worst crisis in its history. Do we want to deliver another body blow to it now? A fundamental independent review of the dairy industry is now taking place. I believe we must give this support to the industry, at least for the next year, until the review has reported and a way forward for the industry is identified. This approach would have the double advantage of maintaining the free milk service to children and supporting the dairy industry and the continuation on the Island of the Jersey cow. I appreciate that the prospect of finding this sum of money will not appeal to the Finance and Economics Committee, but in the light of the professional advice given to the Health and Social Services Committee concerning spending priorities, and the unprecedented crisis facing the dairy industry, for the next year at least, I believe the States must agree to make this amendment to the Budget 2003.

There are no additional manpower implications for the States if the free school milk service is continued.