

**Statement: CS09.01**

**Cabinet – 18 January 2022**

**Re: Agenda item 9 - 2022/23 Budget Report and Treasury Management Strategy (Including Public Health)**

**Statement submitted by: Councillor Heather Mack**

This is an incredibly difficult time for local authority budgeting, and any constructive criticism or amendments we have for this budget does not negate the fact that the real issue here is a lack of funding from the Conservative government. COVID has reduced our income from business rates and council tax, whilst increased demands for many services. Inflation will cost us £21m whilst service pressures in adult and children social services increases year on year. The changes to adult social care funding nationally will not help local authorities like Bristol to provide the care that everyone deserves, it only looks after wealthy homeowners. So we must first and foremost point the finger of blame for any cuts at the national government.

However, I also have concerns about the decisions made by this administration (Mayor) with this budget. £19m in savings are needed yet £33m of savings are proposed over the next few years. I recognise the need to be cautious when many of these planned cuts/savings are being scoped out, but even when the % certainty stated is applied, and with the £3m contingency reserves – these cuts are more than is needed. At a time when we have £10m more in reserves than our policy states is necessary, these cuts seem unnecessarily harsh. I have said this before but I will say it again: We need to consider the human and environmental capital of the city, not just our financial capital and reserves.

It is not right to pretend that after years of cuts there is still more room for the council to scale back departmental budgets without affecting real services and impacting on real people. Each of these cuts reduces our resilience as a city and weakens our community. Cutting social care for adults trying to live independently with mental or physical care needs will cost us much more in the future, whilst being cruel. Greens have previously proposed Invest to Save projects – such as buying property for residential care to reduce our adult social care costs. If we do not spend and invest in our social care services now, we will fail all those needing care in the coming years. This budget may be called financially prudent, but I don't want to see money in the bank whilst people are suffering.

This administration would prefer to take away vital services like Concorde House, which delivers amazing work to the most vulnerable, and pray that the private sector will still deliver an honourable facility, like they always do! They would prefer to make the council workforce multi-skill, without upskilling and training or any consideration for the work people are already doing, pushing the most brightest and creative thinkers out, because when you make cuts like this, you stifle growth, you remove the space to grow onto and this will perpetuate because you will never find that space again, or the talent.

The Greens are now the largest councillor group in Bristol, we hold the votes to pass this budget. It is therefore disappointing that we were not included or consulted with when considering the cuts in this budget.

We will use the next few weeks to work with officers to explore which of these are sensible savings, and which will result in service cuts. We plan to propose legal amendments to reduce these and prioritise both social and environmental justice in this budget.