

## **Statement: CS08.01**

**Cabinet – 24<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

**Re: Agenda item 8**

**Statement submitted by: Councillor Andrew Brown**

First, we recognise that the Council is facing a number of challenges, whether that be Central Government funding, inflation and rising costs, or service pressures. However it is the Mayor's job to bring the solutions to the table, and his to take responsibility for those things that are in his power to control: the budget is a reflection of his choices and priorities over the past 7 years as much as anything else.

Proposals to make further savings from the Parks budget, to close Central Library and to further rationalise the library service across the city may have been dropped – thanks to the Bristol Parks Forum and the need to shore up his candidate in the local by-election – but there are changes that speak to his priorities: further cuts to the cultural budget and £200,000 into provision for legal fees to defend the Council in SEND appeals – the vast majority of which are lost. Surely that is money that could be better spent getting decisions right first time.

Aside from the budget, the Mayor will today drop a further £25m on the Bristol Beacon project – taking the Council's contribute from £10m and 20% of the original budget to £83.9m and 64% of the total cost. Eye watering figures that our residents across the city rightly question when they see their Council Taxes go up, or our SEND services failing. And unlike with Bristol Energy debacle, he can't even blame the previous administration – this one is all on him.

Now, he will argue that this is capital that couldn't be spent on all the revenue services that represent the day-to-day business of the Council. But there are links; the additional borrowing costs impact on revenue that could be otherwise deployed, and there are also costs to the Council reputational damage, making it harder to justify measures required to balance the books.

Whilst he's splurging the cash on Bristol Beacon, he's scrabbling around raising costs on residents across the city. Bizarrely, some of the proposals deliberately target those who are doing the right thing, particular new charges for waste services - whether it be charging for Christmas Tree disposal, introducing charges for disposing of DIY materials at our recycling centres, charges for new/replacement recycling containers, or raising garden waste charges (including by a whopping 71% for benefit claimants). Surely we should not be penalising residents who are positively engaging with responsible disposals of wastes.

Also on the agenda today is a whole suite of charges that could have a huge impact on one of Bristol's key assets: it's Floating Harbour. We are concerned that residents of boats – that contribute positively to the city – are being hit by charges with no consultation whilst operators of commercial craft are seeing their licences double. Perhaps most egregiously, passengers on ferries in the city will be hit by a levy that operators will have little choice but to pass on. We wouldn't apply such a fee for any other form of transport. These changes should be paused so that a full consultation and review can be conducted with all those affected.

There are many, many constraints on Bristol's budget – but where the Mayor does have control, many of the measures appear to be counter-productive, if not positively damaging.

## **Statement: CS08.02**

**Cabinet – 24<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

**Re: Agenda item 8 - : Budget report & Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24**

**Statement submitted by: Councillor Barry Parsons**

I would like to offer my support to the administration on two schemes that affect my ward. Having been involved in consultation and co-design work for improvements to Rosemary Lane and St Mark's Road, I am pleased to see these schemes progressing. I believe that both will lead to a better environment for walking and cycling, and go some way towards changing people's travel choices away from cars and towards healthier and more sustainable modes of travel.

The changes to St Mark's Road offer a welcome improvement to this street and meet some of the key needs that businesses and advocates of cycling and walking have expressed to me. These include repairing the degraded street surfaces, improving accessibility for disabled people, extending pavement space and increasing the amount of cycle parking so that people can make better transport choices when visiting this distinctive shopping street. I have been pleased to work with the community on designing these changes. St Mark's Road has been neglected for years, and this is an opportunity to make some much-needed improvements.

I would also like to lend my support to families with children at May Park Primary School who have asked me to help bring about a school street as part of the changes to Rosemary Lane. Evidence from other local authorities and our own emerging good practice for Liveable Neighbourhoods tells us that these changes are likely to provide more benefits when designed as area-wide schemes. Combining a new traffic-free route along Rosemary Lane with a school street for May Park would provide enormous benefits for children and families at the school by dealing with both the volume and speed of through traffic, and reducing congestion during the school run. By doing so it would enable safe walking, scooting and cycling to school, as well as enhancing the green space and play area at Rosemary Green. I know there is a lot of local support for this, and I would like to request that the administration considers it.

As ward councillor, I stand ready to facilitate maintenance of any street furniture such as planters to enhance these schemes. I look forward to taking part in further engagement to ensure that both projects are successfully concluded.

**Statement: CS08.03**

**Cabinet – 24<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

**Re: Agenda item 8 - : Budget report & Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24**

**Statement submitted by: Councillor David Wilcox**

In February 2022, it was my pleasure to raise a budget amendment to increase the number of Civil Enforcement Officers by 18 so that the roads of Bristol would be safer for pedestrians, cyclists & drivers and congestion for all vehicles would be reduced.

At the time, I tried to engage officers from the Highways Department in discourse about creating my first budget amendment. I received minimal traction from the Highways Department. With the timescales needed to match the Budget process, I had to design my amendment based on publicly available information: information from LinkedIn and actually applying for a job as a CEO to gain salary information. However, my amendment was signed off by the S151 officer and endorsed unanimously by the full council; even Mayor Rees voted for it.

Later on in the year, I did ask the S151 officer if there were any means of tracking the progress of budget amendments. There is no process in place for members to ascertain this information.

On enquiring with the head of Highways in May, I was told that they had recruited five more CEOs and were looking to recruit more.

On Friday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, 2023, I received an email from the acting head of Highways telling me that the budget amendment was unfeasible. The main reason given was that I had not correctly consulted with the Highways Department before raising the amendment and it would not be revenue neutral.

The budget-setting process for this council is currently broken; its members are not adequately supported or informed of the council's financial status to create valid budget amendments.

The current administration does not act on the will of the full council in a suitable time frame or keep its members informed of the status of its budget amendments.

The Green Group of councillors and I look forward to a collaborative approach to setting the council budget in 2024.

## **Statement: CS08.04**

**Cabinet – 24<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

**Re: Agenda item 8 - : Budget report & Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24**

**Statement submitted by: Councillor Heather Mack**

Although not as bad as expected following the government's updated budget settlement, this is still a budget with some devastating cuts. Cuts to council departments and staffing don't exist in a vacuum – they will have a wider impact on Bristol and those who rely on our services. As often happens those in poverty will be hardest hit, particularly if the proposed cut to the lifeline Council Tax Reduction Scheme goes ahead. The Labour administration's mismanagement of key projects like Bristol Beacon and Bristol Energy have blown holes in our budgets and the city will bear the cost for decades to come – servicing the Bristol Beacon debt will hit our revenue budgets for 50 years.

For years Greens have called for a more strategic and holistic approach to the budget that takes long-term costs into account as well as short term savings. Only 2% of our capital budget is in investments to save – we need more long term strategic focus in investments that will reduce our service costs in the longer term. If we had prioritised investments to save and specialist school placements in previous years we could have reduced our bills by now.

The environment has been treated as an afterthought in this budget - but climate action doesn't have to be sacrificed on the altar of austerity. Green proposals such as minimum energy efficiency standards and a workplace parking levy would raise valuable funds and help the city meet our carbon neutral target.

If we had improved sustainable travel, cleaned up our air and made our city fit for cycling and walking this could improve the health and wellbeing of our population and the pressures on social care may be less now.

We recognise however that Central government is ultimately to blame for refusing to fund local authorities properly, compounding over ten years of cuts to local authorities from the Conservatives in Westminster. Tory austerity has led to a lost decade and an alarming number of councils now face bankruptcy as a result – this must be the nail in the coffin of this discredited ideology.