

STATEMENT FROM CLLR VIC PRITCHARD

Thank you for publishing your budget proposals for the coming financial year. I recognise the tough position the council is in financially, and I wish to commend the hard work of officers over recent weeks and months. The main problem the council faces, however, is not an absence of cash but its misuse, and this administration's misguided political priorities.

For example, £128,000 of revenue funding is to be spent on operating the Ring of Steel – that is, the inner ring that, as we now know, was suggested by the council, not the police. Imagine using council taxpayers' cash to block those very taxpayers from entering their own city centre. That money should be spent on more pressing revenue items – cutting grass verges or filling potholes, for example.

Also in the budget are savings of £126,000 in library services in Keynsham and Midsomer Norton, and a restructuring of the waste service that adds up to hundreds of thousands of pounds. These are key services for residents, and I urge Cabinet to ensure the savings do not come at the detriment of the service.

Also, with much recent focus placed on ensuring vulnerable people are able to walk the streets safely at night, I do hope the £14,000 cut to the council's CCTV operations does not put people at risk of harm. The budget documents for this item state, and I quote: *“As this proposal is implemented, we will need to ensure that public safety concerns are not compromised by any changes that are made”*. I would echo that and urge Cabinet to recognise its duty of care to residents.

I am also concerned about the proposal to reduce the council's corporate communications budget by £34,000. This administration has already done enough to tarnish the council's reputation for poor public engagement, and I worry that this saving is yet another example of Cabinet failing to put residents at the heart of everything it does.