

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

13th March 2016



Report of: Zoe Willcox, Service Director Planning

Title: Review of European Green Capital 2015

Ward: Citywide

Officer Presenting Report: Alex Minshull, City Innovation, Sustainability and Civil Protection Service Manager

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Recommendation

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board are asked to note two Reviews of Bristol's year as European Green Capital:

1. "The Story of Bristol's Green Capital Year" produced by Bristol 2015 Ltd – Document 1
2. "Review of Bristol 2015 European Green Capital Year" an independent report to Bristol City Council – Document 2

Summary

Bristol's aspiration to be a green capital was first set out in 2003 in the Bristol Community Strategy: "Bristol; a green capital in Europe – creating sustainable communities and improving the quality of life".



Bristol was awarded the title of European Green Capital 2015, in recognition of the successful improvements to the environment of the city. As part of this a programme of events and activities was run throughout 2015. Document 1 presents the activities of the year. It was produced by Bristol 2015 Ltd and published spring 2016.

In May 2016, Bristol's incoming Mayor, Marvin Rees, promised an independent review of the city's year as European Green Capital to learn from its experience. This report was published in December 2016. This is Document 2.

Links to the documents are provided and the summary from the independent report (document 2) is included in the body of this report.

Bristol is well placed to continue to improve quality of life in the city and realising the City Council's aspirations, such as the goal for the city to be entirely run on clean energy by 2050.

Bristol 2015 Story of the Year

1. Bristol 2015 Ltd produced a review of report of the activities of the year. This was part of their contract with Bristol City Council and in turn met the Council's obligations to the European Commission for reporting on the year.
2. The report is available on-line at:
<https://www.bristol2015.co.uk/citywide-review/> or
<http://bristol-review.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/#p=1>
3. Much of the data included in that report was reported to Overview and Scrutiny Board on 2nd March 2016.
https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/Data/Overview%20&%20Scrutiny%20Management%20Board/201603021800/Agenda/0302_9.pdf

Independent Review of Bristol 2015 European Green Capital Year

4. The independent review was undertaken by Steve Bundred, of the Local Government Association. It was published on 21st December 2016.
5. The full report with appendices is available on line at:
<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/bristol-green-capital>.
6. The following text is the summary of that report, written in the first person by Mr Bundred.

Summary

i. On 14 June 2013 the European Commission (EC) awarded Bristol the status of European Green Capital 2015. This status did not come with a grant from the Commission but there was an undertaking by the City Council to contribute £1m towards the cost of developing a programme of specific projects to mark the award and to assist in raising funds from other sources, including the private sector. In the event, a cash total of £10.3m was raised, including the council contribution, albeit £8.5m of this total came from publicly funded bodies. A number of private sector partners also entered into contractual commitments to deliver £2.3m of contributions in kind, bringing the total to £12.6m. There was in addition considerable voluntary effort in support of the core programme.

ii. I was appointed in October 2016 by Bristol City Council (BCC) to undertake a review of aspects of the delivery of Bristol's European Green Capital 2015 programme. I have been assisted throughout by officers of the Local Government Association and have received full co-operation from past and present officers and members of Bristol City Council, the Board of Bristol 2015 Ltd and its private and voluntary sector partners engaged in the delivery of the programme. I am grateful to all concerned for their support. The evidence base on which I have reached my conclusions, including the names of those I have interviewed, is set out in Appendix A. However, this is my report and others bear no responsibility for its conclusions.

iii. The terms of reference for my review are set out in Appendix B. They did not require me to examine any financial transactions of Bristol 2015 Ltd (the Company) which was chosen as the delivery vehicle for the programme, or of the City Council. It is important to emphasise that my review was not prompted by any concern about such transactions. All relevant questions in this regard were resolved by the Council prior to my appointment. Instead the focus of my review has been on learning from successes.

iv. I have nevertheless felt it necessary to comment on a few aspects of the year which did not go as well as they might have done. Some elements of both the governance and specifics of the programme gave rise to adverse public comment and political controversy both during the year and afterwards, provoking hurt and disappointment among those feeling unjustly criticised and leaving others to feel their legitimate concerns were not properly dealt with. I believe that the best interests of the city now require a clear line to be drawn under these issues.

v. In summary, I have concluded as follows:

a. Against any measures, and especially by reference to its original objectives, the programme was an undoubted success. Complex and often creative events were delivered as planned. Many people participated. The management of individual projects and of the programme as a

whole was well organised. Funders were satisfied. The European Commission was pleased with the outcome. And the profile and reputation of the city were greatly enhanced.

b. The original objectives of the Green Capital programme, as evidenced in the bid approved by the European Commission, were not specific. The Commission's emphasis was on knowledge transfer across the European Union (EU), while the Council's focus was on promoting inward investment in the City for economic development purposes. I acknowledge the obvious suitability of the bid for European Green Capital status, as evidenced by its success, but consider that it would have been preferable for the City Council, in whose name the bid was submitted, to be clearer about its objectives at the outset and to have thought about these in broader terms.

c. Reflecting the experience of previous winners of the award, the programme was originally conceived as being modest. But, for very laudable reasons, it became more ambitious at a late stage. This had significant consequences. Most notably it meant that the contents of the programme were mainly driven by the willingness of others to fund specific projects rather than an objective assessment of the needs of the city.

d. It also meant that insufficient thought had been given to the resources and skill mix that would be needed within BCC to support the programme. For future initiatives of this kind there should be early consideration of the pressures they will impose on Council staff and the additional support that will be required.

e. Partnership working with the private sector is not straightforward. Before embarking on other projects of this kind, BCC needs to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the benefits its partners expect to gain from their involvement and the requirements or conflicts this may create.

f. In future, there also needs to be more thought given to the engagement of partners on an on-going basis and the wider implications of diverting existing resources to provide support for major new projects.

g. Although there were existing partnerships in place at the time Bristol was awarded the title of European Green Capital 2015, once the planned programme had become more ambitious the decision to create Bristol 2015 Ltd as an arms-length company tasked with delivering it was right. It reflected good practice and experience drawn from elsewhere. It also had a Board that was representative of key public, private and voluntary sector partners.

h. The Company did an excellent job in plugging gaps created by the initial lack of specific objectives and insufficient consideration by the Council of planned legacy deliverables or the way in which they would be assessed. However, in future the Council should take greater responsibility for these matters so that the brief to the delivery vehicle is less open to interpretation.

i. Bristol 2015 Ltd fully accepted and complied with its responsibility to account for the use of public funds, but considered it unnecessary to go beyond this when faced with requests for additional information to be made public.

j. The nature of the additional accountability demands that Bristol 2015 Ltd would be subject to, despite its arms-length status, was foreseeable and should have been made clearer to all concerned at an earlier stage. For future arrangements of this kind the letter of appointment of company directors should specify their responsibilities in this respect.

k. The mechanisms put in place by BCC to ensure proper oversight and accountability of Bristol 2015 Ltd were proportionate and robust. They were in line with what I would have expected to see and have been endorsed by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG).

l. The elected Mayor was a director of the Company, but not a Council appointee. In my view, few people would be able to distinguish between the Mayor's public and private roles in serving on the Board of a company created by the Council, to which he had originally been appointed by the Council as Chair, receiving most of its income from the Council and contracting with it to fulfill a public purpose. In future, if the Mayor is to serve on the Board of a similar body there must be greater clarity about his role.

m. The Mayor's membership of the Board had both advantages and disadvantages. In my view, the former outweigh the latter but this is a finely balanced judgement. For the future more careful consideration should be given to these issues.

n. The same careful consideration should be given to the role of the Council's chief executive to avoid any perceived or actual conflict of interest, although in agreeing to the appointment of the then City Director as chief executive of the Company, the Council did take legal advice and acted upon it.

o. There was, and often still is, some confusion about the extent to which private companies in receipt of public funds may be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI). In future, arms-length company directors should be made aware of guidance from the Office of the Information Commissioner (OIC) on this matter, issued in July 2015, and should be encouraged to draw it to the attention of partners and suppliers. Where there is legitimate room for doubt about the applicability of FOI, the Council and its arms-length bodies should adopt a presumption in favour of transparency. I believe the avoidance of FOI responsibilities can never be a legitimate objective of a public body.

p. The stance taken by both the Council and the Company in responding to FOI and similar requests for greater transparency unwittingly created suspicions that there was something to hide. In truth, these suspicions were wholly unfounded, as the Council has subsequently established.

q. Earlier and more detailed planning by the Council might have enabled elements of the programme to be more representative of Bristol's diversity and more inclusive of disadvantaged groups, but as the programme was largely driven by funders this is far from certain.

r. Moreover, initial planning was driven by the EC's focus on knowledge transfer and the Council's emphasis on economic development. Inclusivity became an objective of the programme but was initially confused with empowerment and was an underlying consideration rather than a principal driver.

s. Despite this, both the Council and the Company acknowledged the need to promote inclusivity. This was reflected in the composition of the Board and the approach taken to delivery of the programme, especially in relation to matters such as the education programme and the award of grants to small businesses and community groups.

t. The factors that give rise to exclusion are complex and inter-linked. The Council should give thought and devote more resources on an ongoing basis to, for example, addressing the barriers that prevent members of excluded groups from attending meetings or engaging with civic life in other ways. This requires a paradigm shift within BCC.

u. Some opportunities were missed to engage minority communities and disadvantaged groups to a greater extent. This has also been accepted by both BCC and the Company Board. But the programme was nevertheless far more inclusive than some of its critics have acknowledged. Many elements of it were uniquely imaginative and long-lasting.

v. The task of assessing the legacy of such programmes is inherently difficult, but was made more so by insufficient thought having been given to this at a very early stage within BCC. For

similar future initiatives an attempt should be made by the Council to produce a formal assessment of the baseline from which progress might be measured and a plan prepared on how legacy impacts will be captured and reported.

w. Nevertheless, there will be a formal assessment of the legacy at a later stage as there is a contractual commitment to produce a five year assessment report.

x. This will show that in practice considerable thought was given to ensuring that supported projects would have continuing benefits. There is therefore much evidence of a positive legacy for the Council and the city from what was in general a very successful, popular and rewarding European Green Capital year.

vi. In conclusion, I would like to thank Mayor Marvin Rees and Bristol City Council for inviting me to undertake this review. I would also like to offer my own congratulations to Bristol City Council, Bristol 2015 Ltd and all those directly concerned in its delivery for the success of Bristol's European Green Capital 2015 programme. Bristol has made a huge contribution over many years to advancing understanding and concern about environmental matters within the UK and beyond. I hope this continues to be the case for many years to come.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers: None.