

Resources Scrutiny Commission Public Forum



Date: Tuesday, 25 January 2022

Time: 5.00 pm

Venue: The Council Chamber - City Hall, College Green, Bristol, BS1 5TR

Issued by: Johanna Holmes, Scrutiny Coordinator

City Hall, Bristol, BS1 5TR

Tel: 0117 90 36898

E-mail: scrutiny@bristol.gov.uk

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Public Forum

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Public Forum Questions:

Ref	Name	Agenda Item	Attending
Q1 – Q2	Joanna Booth	Budget Proposals - SEND capital budget	No

Public Forum Statements:

Ref	Name	Topic	Attending
PFS 1	Joanna Booth	Contracts & Procurement	No
PFS 2	Emma Harvey (CEO), Trinity Community Arts Ltd, The Trinity Centre	Budget Proposals – Capital Programme	TBC



Public Forum Questions

Questions 1 – 2: Joanna Booth

Q1. How does the collapse of Together Energy affect Bristol City Council's finances? Did Bristol Energy owe any money to Bristol City Council, for example? or vice versa?

Q1 Officer Reply:

The announcement that Together Energy will be ceasing to trade will have no impact on the Council or its subsidiaries. There are no outstanding transactions between Together Energy and BE2020 or outstanding debts between BE2020 and the Council.

Q2. At Cabinet on 1 September 2020, £28.7m was allocated to SEND capital spend, for a list of projects. <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s51731/SEND%20Sufficiency%20-%20Decision%20pathway%20Report.pdf>

At Cabinet (18/01/22), the Education Capital – Budget Allocation report stated: Full capital funding was not available for all SEND projects in 2020. The Council has secured new capital grant funding in the sum of £5.04m for the SEND projects; adding additional capital to projects that were not previously funded but had been approved subject to funding being secured (Appendix

A1) and which together now comprise the current Special Educational Needs and Disability Capital Programme.

Appendix A1 in that document purports to be a list of projects that fall under the Special Education Needs and Disability Capital Programme.

My question is, why are year 7 bulge classes in this list at a cost of £6m, which presumably comes from the SEND capital budget?

If the £6m does not come from the SEND capital budget, where does it come from?

Q2 Officer Reply:

The 2020 Cabinet report outlined a range of SEND Capital proposals that would be implemented subject to funding being secured. The recent Cabinet report outlined our proposals to meet our statutory obligation to ensure sufficient mainstream and SEND school places in the city and utilises £6m from the Basic Need Capital Grant for 2022/23, provided directly by the Department for Education for the creation of school places. This fund is not ringfenced or committed to SEND schemes.

Public Forum Statements

Statement 1: Joanna Booth.

Dear Resource Scrutiny,

A contract has been awarded by Bristol City Council (BCC) to the Bristol City Centre BID for £45,000 for sexual harassment training. The BID informed me that the council had reached out to them to provide this service, and in turn they knew someone who would be able to do it.

They said: "we've been asked by Bristol City Council to work with them to provide a specialist trainer to deliver sexual harassment training to staff in Bristol's venues, not the council itself. She is highly regarded and our team will support to coordinate this complex rollout".

The tender states this was a 'direct award'.

The money seems to come from the £282,000 from the Home Office in relation to the 'spiking drinks' campaign.

According to BCC's procurement rules, for a contract of £45,000, three quotes should be obtained where possible.

I am worried that money is being distributed without the council following appropriate rules, however, I do not know all the rules of procurement. I cannot know whether there is anything wrong with the procedure that has been followed at all.

I wanted to make sure the members of the scrutiny committee were aware of the situation.

All the best,

Joanna

Statement 2: Emma Harvey CEO, Trinity Community Arts Ltd.

Statement relating to 2022/23 - 2031/32 Capital Programme

Findings of the recent [100 Beacons report, 2021](#) - produced in partnership with concessionary lettings and the Council - has evidenced the contribution of Bristol's community assets make to the city. This includes the critical role they played in providing local services as part of the COVID19 response. As we continue to navigate the isolating impact of a period of successive restrictions, it's the spaces that reduce the distance between us that help us to level-up, culturally, socially and economically.

Since sharing the report we produced with Bristol City Council (BCC) representatives, including the Mayor and Cllr Craig Cheney, we have received a positive response from the and a commitment in principle to investing in community assets owned by the city. However, as the budget is still in draft form, it's still not clear how this will translate into money for buildings; the [Capital Programme Summary](#) doesn't specifically stipulate this commitment as a distinct budget line, so we're concerned

that this makes it easier to move away from this commitment if not specifically defined for investment in community assets.

The 2022/23 - 2031/32 Capital Programme Summary shows a [£26m commitment to Bristol Beacon for 22/23](#). We would like to make sure that a comparable, clearly defined commitment to community asset investment, is clearly made within the coming financial year and that the Cabinet overall understand the importance investing in this area. Investing millions in central transformative projects should not be at the expense of community centres and civic spaces. Many of these are outdated and dilapidated, requiring urgent investment for a range of measures to make them accessible, energy efficient, COVID-Secure and financially viable.

As we know, Bristol faces rapid regeneration from external market forces who have the ability to drastically change a locality, with very little power held by local communities and we are all too aware of chronic under-investment in public services, making the sale of publicly owned assets a difficult temptation to avoid. But, if we leave our growing communities to be serviced by a shrinking public asset pool, this leaves us with less space to grow social and economic prosperity from the bottom up.

As part of the One City Plan, we would like to see **clear financial and strategic commitment to a long-term strategy for investment and development of community infrastructure** that can respond to Bristol's growing and changing neighbourhoods across the city. Investment in assets at local level will help to create a diverse, accessible and prosperous city made up of vibrant, cohesive, balanced and sustainable communities where everyone is valued and can thrive economically, culturally and socially.

I hope that the Council will consider their approach to community assets and take on board the findings of our 100 Beacons report and the recommendations listed, below.

Emma Harvey, CEO

Recommendation 1

1. Establish a £50m capital grant fund for concessionary lettings, providing grants between £100,000 to £500,000 for repair, renovation and sustainability measures

BCC grant around 120 lettings at less than market value to voluntary, community and social enterprises (register of all concessionary tenancies (pdf, 101 KB)). This invaluable in-kind support provided annually to Bristol's third sector means local organisations can deliver facilities where they are most needed and focus financial resources on service provision and staffing, creating vital paid jobs and contributing to neighbourhoods as local economic multipliers. This scheme has proved even more important during the pandemic, with many community spaces helping to underpin localised responses such as food distribution.

BCC carefully balances the granting of concessionary tenancies with the potential capital receipt they could generate, by considering the social, economic and environmental benefits they produce for Bristol.

However, this portfolio consists of outdated, dilapidated and complex assets that offer little lettable or sale value. Given their condition, the estimated value of £1.5m rental subsidy would be largely

unachievable across the portfolio, were BCC to choose to rent these assets at their estimated 'market value'.

While they offer a valuable outlet for services to be developed and managed by local people, bringing greater independence and financial sustainability to local communities, these buildings can be problematic with limited technical and physical capabilities, limiting the tenant's ability to make the asset viable as a social enterprise. This creates additional dependants of these tenants on the local authority in the form of grants in order to fund and sustain the teams managing them.

Energies of boards and management become largely consumed with management of a problematic asset, limiting their ability to focus resources on the development and delivery of programmes and services.

Through the creation of a specific fund, targeted largely at Bristol's own asset portfolio, we will be able to target investment to where it is needed most, with mid-level investment designed to improve the accessibility, physical and technical capabilities of hubs across the city. Match funding will be encouraged as part of the process, but as these are some of our smallest, least resourced spaces, match funding will not be a prerequisite for the fund.

Recommendation 2

2. Develop a clear strategic plan for the long-term development and investment in Bristol's neighbourhood infrastructure to meet the city's growing needs

Suggestions for strategic scoping:

1· Survey investment needs and use of the 117 est concessionary lettings (in progress, Trinity Community Arts April 2021)

· Explore options to improve the viability of the concessionary lettings portfolio e.g:

- consolidate groups within assets to allow for rationalisation of the portfolio
- freehold asset transfer of specific assets
- strategic leverage of Community Ownership Fund for asset improvement
- transfer multiple assets to a specially constituted community buildings trust
- create a match-fund pot for asset repair
- disposal/sale of assets
- acquisition of identified community buildings not publicly owned

2· Identify key premises managed by BCC as part of the wider asset portfolio such as libraries (250 assets) that are suitable for Community Asset Transfer/disposal that could improve the viability of the concessionary lettings portfolio

3· Review and update Community Asset Transfer Policy; supporting communities to set up new models for asset management/transfer incl Community Development Trusts to manage and acquire assets and to take advantage of devolved regional and national funds (e.g. Community Ownership Fund)

4· Develop mechanisms/work with national partners e.g. Locality to support the formalisation of groups responsible for management of assets

5· Introduce a new 'Community Asset Class' for Local Authority owned assets to prevent unilateral disposal/demolition of identified assets of community value and support the introduction of local planning policy that will allocate a portion of strategic sites for community-led development

Perhaps in part due to COVID19 as well as with the clarity afforded to us by the One City approach, Bristol has a unique once in a millennia opportunity to achieve meaningful change together through taking a more strategic approach to protecting and strengthening the assets we own.

If we value communities by taking them seriously and resourcing them to effectively manage the assets we already own, the payback will be tenfold in terms of jobs, community cohesion and economic and social recovery.