

Bristol City Council Minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Commission

17 November 2022 at 6.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Barry Parsons (Chair), Henry Michallat (Vice-Chair), Amirah Cole, Martin Fodor, James Scott and Gary Hopkins

1 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed the attendees.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Bailes, Cllr Ali, and Cllr Edwards who was represented by Cllr Fitzjohn.

3 Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received.

4 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

As a point of Matters Arising a Member suggested that, in light of the decision to re-introduce a consultation process, that the Parks and Green Space Strategy be brought back to the Communities Scrutiny Commission for consideration. It was agreed to note this as part of future Scrutiny work programming.

RESOLVED; That the Minutes of the previous meeting be approved, and; that the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy be noted for consideration as part of future Scrutiny work programming.



5 Action Tracker

The Action Tracker was received. One item regarding EQIA Housing Allocation remained outstanding as this information would be shared with Members once available.

6 Chair's Business

No Chair's Business was raised. The Chair reminded attendees to use plain language without jargon or acronyms for accessibility purposes.

7 Public Forum

Public Forum questions and statements were published prior to the meeting and can be viewed [here](#).

Mary Stevens submitted a Public Forum question regarding item 10 (Ecological Emergency Action Plan update) and received a written response.

Suzanne Audrey submitted a Public Forum question regarding item 11 (Trees Strategy update) and received a written response. A supplementary question was asked to clarify how it would be possible to receive an answer to the question of how many trees are being felled due to new developments. Officers clarified that while there was no single source of this information, the data would be held by the council in different areas. The Director for Management of Place emphasised that Trees were strongly considered as part of Highways work, and draft policies regarding this would feature as part of the planned consultation. Further specific enquiries were welcomed.

The Bristol Tree Forum submitted a Public Forum question regarding item 11 (Trees Strategy update) and received a written response. Chris Wallace asked a supplementary question to clarify that a number of the questions submitted that were around establishing the cost and scope of the proposed surveys had been asked with the intention of assessing the cost of Bluesky commercial surveys, and access to the resulting data. An alternative method would be using open data at a lower cost. Officers welcomed the clarification, and elaborated that Bluesky was the data provider which conducted mapping work and sold data across the UK, and that Bristol City Council paid for the licence to access data. An agreed methodology for monitoring tree canopy remained under consideration, and cost would be one of the factors in this. Officers agreed that a conversation could be had around the best way to access the data. Chris Wallace emphasised the public interest in the data.

Chris Wallace asked an additional supplementary question regarding the figure used to establish the baseline of tree canopy as this would affect the figure that would need to be achieved to 'double' this (as a stated aim). The original baseline was suggested to be 12% leading to a target of 24%, but may have been closer to 18%. Officers agreed that this required consideration and that recommendations would be



made on establishing the ultimate target. The Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities added that the 12% figure was accurate at the time the target was agreed, and had been amended following further research. It was noted that discussions on this topic had been held elsewhere.

Len Wyatt presented the Public Forum statement regarding item 10 (Ecological Emergency Action Plan) on behalf of the Bristol Parks Forum.

RESOLVED; That the Public Forum be noted.

8 Tenant Participation Review

The Business Innovation Manager and Business Improvement Manager delivered the presentation on the Tenant Participation Review which invited Scrutiny to provide a steer on the scope for inclusive co-design of tenant participation and comment on the options for tackling resource challenges. Key points raised included:

- A summary of the progress of Moving Forward Together, including the identification of a number of resident priorities
- The intentions around co-designing tenant participation with residents
- A summary of the delivery challenges, significantly the resource capacity of staff
- A request for input on some of the proposals and options provided (see below for details).

A representative of the Housing Scrutiny Panel noted that recruitment to the Panel had proved difficult, particularly in ensuring diverse representation. The Chair recognised both the importance and challenges in engaging communities. It was also felt that progress over recent years had been slow, and hoped this could be improved upon.

A Member enquired about the progress of fire safety work following two recent fires in council properties. The Business Innovation Manager stated that the approach to fire safety had changed following the fires and a subsequent inspection, with the decision made to remove EPS cladding, remove 'stay put' directives, and hold 'waking watches'. Residents were contacted where changes had taken place. A productive event with residents in attendance had taken place on the day of the meeting, with the Fire Service present.

A Member noted that the budget consultations had been examining a reduced capacity in community development, and queried whether officers had capacity for necessary work. The Business Innovation Manager agreed with the challenges of this, and stated that this would be considered as work progressed. Key considerations included which methods of engagement should be prioritised as the best use of time, ie. formal tenant participation meetings, co-designing with residents. Asset-based community development work was expected to be a focus. Changing contact methods to allow more time to focus on more complex cases had been considered.



A Member recognised the will to make improvements but had concerns over the acknowledged obstacles. It was considered that formal meetings were unlikely to be the best way to engage people 'on the ground', but that residents would attend meetings about specific concerns, as demonstrated by the fire safety events. The need to reach people where they were based was emphasised. The Business Innovation Manager agreed that building flexibility into engagement methods to capture different preferences for input required consideration.

A Member noted the need to manage expectations around what would be possible in light of budget considerations and the additional funds for fire safety work. Officers supported this.

A Member asked if the resident satisfaction survey was broken down by area to see if feedback varied. It was confirmed this was the case.

A Member outlined previous experience with a model in which artists were provided with studios in residence in a tower block, helping to support a cohesive community within the building to mutual benefit. Officers noted the suggestions and welcomed further materials.

As part of the presentation Officers suggested a number of areas where it would be useful for Scrutiny Members to provide a steer or comment, including;

1. Offer views on resident engagement priorities.

One Member noted the high level of response around ASB as a priority (although the responses were gathered prior to the fire incidents). Another Member confirmed this matched their experience with case work, where residents felt little action around ASB was being taken, and Members emphasised the need to take clear actions quickly. The Business Innovation Manager recognised the concerns raised and highlighted that a new policy around ASB had been shared with Councillors with the intention of revisiting procedures and an action plan of improvements. Resourcing also impacted this issue.

2. Provide a steer in response to the options submitted for tenant participation co-design and proposals to begin the first phase of co-design (by March 2023).

A request was made for the advantages and disadvantages of the options (paragraph 2.7.6 of the report), which were summarised as follows:

Option 1: "The housing engagement team facilitates a single task and finish group". The advantage of this option would be the opportunity to work as a single group, providing continuity and faster progress towards development. The drawback would be the potential risk of excluding some voices.

Option 2: "Housing commissions an external organisation to co-produce, with residents, a revised involvement structure with improved engagement activities". The advantages of this option involve utilising community grassroots resources, but is dependent on what is possible/available across the city.

Option 3: "Housing commission an external organisation to co-produce a local involvement model / offer. The formal structure remains in place with recommended changes made". It was noted that limited resources would affect this option.



Members considered that the most appropriate approach may vary by Ward. For example, in Easton where there were a number of community groups the second option would be considered appealing, but that may not be the case in areas with fewer community groups and differing capacities. It was hoped there would be scope to tailor the approach to the needs and abilities of different areas, but it was recognised that this touched on part of a wider conversation around building communities through innovation.

3. Comment on the options for the co-design and make clear how they would like members to be involved with co-design activities.

Officers stated a preference to involve Councillors and communities at the same time in order to work on solutions in tandem. This was supported. It was suggested that the knowledge and networks built through the work between Councillors and the community resilience fund could be applied.

4. Comment on the proposed joint working with community development and where relevant commission engagement to local groups.

Members acknowledged the benefits of harnessing outside capacity through commissioning and the opportunities that come with community development. It was agreed that further consideration was needed, and Members would send any further comments directly to Officers due to the limited time for discussion.

Officers stated their interest in hearing from Councillors around influencing governance and decision making. Members noted that based on the report the main way for Ward Councillors to connect would be through the local Housing Forum. The difficulty in Ward Councillors engaging directly with residents of tower blocks was highlighted, as they are frequently inaccessible without a fob; Officers noted this.

5. Comment on the need to identify a named person for consumer standards

It was clarified that the regulations suggest that the named person for consumer standards should be senior enough to influence all areas of the business, so consideration was needed around where that responsibility should be held and what could be delivered within that while ensuring regular contact with the political level. Members suggested that more information was needed around the hierarchy of decision making in order to form a view on this issue. It was agreed that Officers could provide this information.

RESOLVED; That i) Members direct any further comments to Officers, particularly around joint working, ii) Officers note the comments of the Communities Scrutiny Commission for consideration, and iii) further information around the hierarchy of decision making for the 'named person' is provided.

9 Tree Strategy: Bristol City Council and Scrutiny Working Group update

The Parks Development Manager delivered the presentation on the Tree Strategy update. This included responses to the recommendations of the Scrutiny 'Trees' Working Group report produced in 2021-22 as well as an overview of the public engagement work undertaken in relation to the development of the



strategy and the expected timeline for progress. Further information about the Tree Canopy targets and planting plan was also provided.

Commission Members commented and raised questions regarding the report.

Cllr Fodor, as the previous Chair of the Scrutiny 'Trees' Working Group, welcomed the response to the recommendations made. The issue of street trees was raised, noting the inequality of access and higher cost of planting. Officers commented that Highways officers had been closely involved with planning, and provided guidelines around where street trees could be planted. Members emphasised the importance of street trees for communities.

The protection of trees, as raised through Public Forum questions, was raised. Members recommended clearer communication around the threshold for Protection Orders. Members were also concerned about the limited consequences to a breach in Protection Orders. Officers commented that new legislation from changes to the Environmental Act specifically referenced trees and that this would be reflected in policy development. The regulations stated that where urban trees were removed it was necessary to replace 'like for like'.

The planning and mapping processes underway as part of the Strategy development was expected to identify the priority areas for tree planting.

The public engagement plan was discussed. The public questionnaire was to be circulated through existing networks, platforms and partners and expected to last 6 weeks. It was framed in order to obtain results to go into workshops for further development.

A concern was raised over the limited response to the Public Forum question around how many mature trees were lost to development. It was clarified that while there was no overarching mechanism or single source of data to provide this, but figures would be known through individual planning applications where tree loss would be agreed within the application.

A Member noted the approach of another local authority where developers removed trees without permission they were charged the equivalent of profit from improvement to the house. Officers stated that where trees had been felled in advance Bristol City Council had retrospectively applied the policy to protect trees, using the policy as a tool to prevent opportunism where it was not appropriate to apply a Protection Order. Bristol was progressive in this regard.

Members stated they would welcome further information about progress as it became available.

RESOLVED; That Officers note the comments of the Communities Scrutiny Commission for consideration.

1 Ecological Emergency Action Plan

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The Project Manager – Pesticides Reduction and Grassland Management delivered the presentation updating the Commission against the progress of the Ecological Emergency Action Plan with particular focus on the Managing More Green Space for Nature project. A series of maps of Bristol were displayed, displaying areas of 'Habitat distinctiveness', a map of West of England Strategic Habitat Networks, and potential tree planting sites.

Commission Members commented and raised questions regarding the report.

The Chair welcomed the identification of urban Bristol as potential wildlife and planting areas.

Clarification of the meaning of the terms 'woodland' or 'wetland network' was requested. This was in relation to the West of England Nature Strategic Habitat Networks which were developed around understanding core habitation sites for species population, then looked at 'corridors' between habitats for wildlife with the aim of strengthening the network.

A Member expressed concern over the perceived lack of progress since the issue was considered at Scrutiny in 2019-20. The Project Manager stated the modelling work that was taking place would help to identify the resource implication and what could be delivered across the city and at scale.

Officers provided reassurance that while the recruitment freeze did have an impact on a specific post, the MMGSN project and action plan was being delivered by officers already in post.

Officers noted that work around establishing the sequencing of the delivery of actions was essential, for example, the changes of regime to 'cut and collect' grass cutting work. Once the mapping and sequencing work was complete these would support long term change to future management.

A Member queried any upcoming relevant contracts for land management, and how changes would be implemented. Officers stated that it would first be necessary to know the resource capacity (expected February 2023). The land management would need to be negotiated, and this work would feed in to the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy land use function. It was noted that not everything on the map could be delivered due to competing uses.

A Member asked how communication around the networks was planned for private land owners, Officers stated this would be best pursued through existing platforms and networks. The One City strategic working group included partners such as the Wildlife Trust and was well placed to communicate with the public.

Officers noted that the Ecological Emergency Action Plan was specifically scheduled alongside the Tree Strategy in order to be considered in tandem.

Members noted that it would be beneficial to continue to monitor progress, while also considering the wider impact of the climate emergency for a future work programme.

RESOLVED; That Officers note the comments of the Communities Scrutiny Commission for consideration.



1 Performance Report Q1 2022-23

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The Performance Report was noted for information. The Chair reiterated that Members were requested to submit questions regarding the Performance Report in advance of the Commission meeting in order to ensure that relevant officers could provide a response and/or attend the meeting. Any subsequent questions were requested to be directed to Scrutiny in order to obtain responses.

It was agreed that future meetings would hold the Performance and Risk items at the start of Commission meetings to ensure these were allocated sufficient time for discussion.

RESOLVED; That any questions raised by Members regarding the Performance Report be sent to Scrutiny in order to obtain written responses from relevant Officers.

1 Work Programme

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The Work Programme was noted. It was noted that due to the proposals regarding libraries as part of the budget consultation it had been agreed to delay the start of the Libraries working group until more information was known.

RESOLVED; That the Work Programme be noted.

Meeting ended at 9pm

