

Bristol City Council
Minutes of the Call In Sub-Committee
(of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board)



27 March 2024 at 5.00 pm

Attendance:

Call-In Sub-Committee members present:

Cllr Amal Ali, Chair
Cllr Katja Hornchen
Cllr Tessa Fitzjohn
Cllr Paula O'Rourke
Cllr John Goulandris
Cllr Jos Clark
Cllr Gary Hopkins

Members who called-in the Cabinet decision:

Cllr Martin Fodor
Cllr Lorraine Francis
Cllr Tom Hathway
Cllr Christine Townsend
Cllr Tim Wye

Cabinet member in attendance:

Councillor Ellie King, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities

Officers present:

Patsy Mellor, Director: Management of Place
Richard Fletcher, Parks Services Manager
Sinead Willis, Solicitor
Ian Hird, Scrutiny Advisor

1 Call-in of 5 March Cabinet decision on allotment rent and water charges

1. At the outset of the meeting, the Legal Advisor informed the meeting that members of the sub-committee had received a letter from the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities. The text of that letter is included at Appendix 1 to these minutes.



2. It was noted that in light of the letter from the Cabinet member, the Call-In Sub-Committee members had indicated that they were minded to agree to take no further action on the issues raised in the Call-In, on the understanding that:

- the 5 March Cabinet decision would not be implemented;
- the decision would be referred after the election to the new Public Health and Communities policy committee and that the committee should first make a decision about allotment rents and water charges, and subsequently consider allotment regulations.

3. Following initial discussion, the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities explained the background and context relating to this issue from her perspective and outlined her reasons for sending the letter to the Call-In Sub-Committee.

4. 10 public questions and 15 public statements had been submitted to this meeting. The questions (together with written responses) and the statements were published on the Council's web site alongside the agenda papers for this meeting. Individuals in attendance in the public gallery were given the opportunity to present their statements.

5. Following further discussion, the Call-In Sub-Committee

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That (with reference to the letter included at Appendix 1), no further action should be taken in relation to the issues identified in the Call-In, on the understanding that the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities and the Director: Management of Place undertake not to act on the Cabinet decision that had been called-in, and that the decision will be referred to the future Public Health and Communities policy committee, who will consider whether any further information is required and take into account the issues raised in the call-in and in the public forum questions and statements submitted to this meeting. The Call-In Sub-Committee recommends that the Public Health and Communities policy committee makes a decision first in relation to allotment rents and water charges and then subsequently considers the allotment regulations.

APPENDIX 1

Text of letter dated 27 March 2024 to Call-In Sub-Committee members from Cllr Ellie King, Cabinet member for Public Health and Communities

Dear Call-In Committee member

As you'll know, later today we are meeting to discuss the Call-in from a group of councillors of a decision taken by Cabinet in March regarding Allotment rents and water charges, alongside a Parks and Green Spaces and Allotments and Food Growing Strategy.

You will have seen from the published Appendix E- 'Executive/ Officer response to the Call-In' document prepared by Bristol City Council officers that we have a robust defence against the points raised by the call in. Expert officers from our



parks, consultation, equality and inclusion and legal teams have all advised that this decision was made legitimately. The consultation complied with the council's duty to consult fairly and lawfully and was consistent with the Gunning Principles.

I still believe this was the right decision in the challenging circumstances. However, in the spirit of cross-party collaboration as we move into a committee system of governance, I propose to defer the decision until after the election for consideration by the future Public Health and Communities policy committee.

If the call-in committee vote to take "no further action" in this evening's session, myself and the Director of Management of Place will agree not to act on the decision as delegated in March's Cabinet meeting. I will confirm this in the upcoming April Cabinet meeting.

Councillors, or party groups, will have their own opportunity to propose a plan for an improved, financially sustainable allotment service to the Public Health and Communities policy committee.

The two guiding principles that have steered this work to date has been firstly to halt the decline of the allotment service and deliver necessary service improvement; and secondly to protect and invest in a struggling parks service so all of Bristol's residents can enjoy the benefits, as detailed in the Parks and Green Spaces and Allotments and Food Growing Strategy. I still believe these are the right principles and the decision taken in March reflected these. As I'm sure we can agree on these principles, this is an opportunity to embrace the collaborative potential of the committee system and enable cross-party members to work together and take ownership of the policy.

I hope you agree with this proposal as a way forward.

Kind regards,

Cllr Ellie King, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities

CHAIR _____

