

Bristol City Council Minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Commission

7 December 2020 at 5.00 pm



Members Present:-

Councillors: Anthony Negus (Chair), Jo Sergeant (Vice-Chair), Jon Wellington, Donald Alexander, Barry Clark, Graham Morris, Matt Melias, Martin Fodor and Carla Denyer

1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information

The Chair welcomed the attendees. The meeting was conducted via video conference.

2. Apologies for Absence

No apologies were received from the Communities Scrutiny Commission. The Growth and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission were invited for the joint item on Decarbonisation of Residential Properties, and apologies were received from Councillors Breckels, Brain, Brook and Weston.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received.

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the CSC meeting held on 15th October 2020 were approved.

5. Action Tracker

The Action Tracker was noted. The action around consideration of the Bristol Impact Fund remained outstanding.



6. Chair's Business

The Chair noted that the meeting had a full agenda, and that the meeting was to proceed on the assumption that all reports had been read in full.

7. Public Forum

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

Suzanne Audrey asked two supplementary questions directed at representatives of the Jubilee Pool working group, asking for a response to the Mayor's comment on the conclusions made by the group, and requesting an update that could be provided to the community. It was agreed that these questions were best responded to by individuals rather than on behalf of the Communities Scrutiny Commission.

A high number of public forum questions and statements were received in regard to HMOs and Licensing, and these were addressed in the relevant item. The Chair noted the volume of questions and thanked the Officers for the detailed responses provided.

Councillor Clive Stevens thanked officers for the comprehensive answers provided to his public forum questions, and asked to continue discussions outside of the meeting. This was agreed.

Andrew Waller presented his Public Forum statement on the HMO SPD as it related to enforcement.

Councillor Clive Stevens presented his Public Forum statement on the data collection around enforcement.

The additional public forum questions and statements were noted by the Commission.

RESOLVED; That Jubilee Pool working group representatives respond to Public Forum supplementary questions, with the response copied to Chair of Communities Scrutiny Commission; and

That the Public Forum be noted.

8. Decarbonisation of Residential Properties

The Executive Director for Growth and Regeneration and the Sustainable City and Climate Change Service Manager introduced the Decarbonisation of Residential Properties item. The published paper outlined the programme to decarbonise homes to achieve the city goals of carbon neutrality. The paper also highlighted cross cutting opportunities, such as the City Leap Energy Partnership, and the differing workstreams within Social Housing and Private Housing.



The Service Manager for Planned Programmes outlined the work undertaken within the Social Housing stock. Bristol compared well with other Local Authorities, with 70% of the housing stock listed as EPC rating A-C, however existing programmes were not forecast to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, and this had prompted consideration of a number of different initiatives. Pilots for 2021 were planned with learning to be shared across teams and the region. A tenant advisory service was also created to support tenants in increasing efficiency and lowering costs.

The Programme Manager for Energy Service outlined the delivery work undertaken in Private Housing. Bristol was in a relatively good position, having reduced carbon emissions across the city by 23%, which was above the national average. Some supply chain problems were encountered with the Green Homes Grant voucher scheme, and WECA had commissioned a research piece to help stimulate this. A local bid had been submitted to The Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme (LADS) for retrofitting across the city. A support service for fuel poverty was also commissioned, and a Fuel Poverty action plan was developed to sit alongside the decarbonisation strategy.

Members were invited to ask questions.

Members asked about the relationship between tenants and leaseholders, and what measures would be needed to retrofit in those situations. Officers stated that tenants would be consulted on the recharge for any work undertaken; recharges would depend on the terms of leases. It would become more difficult in areas with adjoining owner occupiers where it would be necessary to work with contractors to see if this could be offered to the owner occupiers.

Members welcomed the evaluation of heat pumps. Officers noted that improvements made by heat pumps were variable dependant on the type of property, ie. they were not suitable replacements for gas on their own, but could be appropriate combined with other measures such as insulation. The strategy noted that addressing fuel poverty and reducing tenant's bills was also a key driver, not just improving carbon efficiency.

Members expressed enthusiasm for the initiative with Energiesprong and asked for further details in how pilot properties would be selected. This would initially be in pairs of properties, potentially in larger clusters. The approach would be to develop the supply chain; while the pilots would be more expensive and would require support from grants, the long term intention was for a cost neutral scheme through mass production.

A typo was noted in paragraph 4.2.3. In the sentence 'for low income buildings with a combined income of £30k pa' this should read 'below £30k pa'.

The report noted that some tenants had reported issues with heat pumps, and Members asked for further information around this. Reported issues were around the timing and use of the system, and perception of cost. A study was conducted in response to complaints which led to adjustment and servicing of the pumps. Members welcomed the approach to complaints raised.



A Member invited the team to consider visiting properties in Stockwood.

Members noted that the decarbonisation programme required an initial capital outlay followed by longer term funding, and asked what the long term picture of this would look like. Officers noted that savings produced would be reflected in lower utilities bills for tenants so would not be returned to the same pot. The pilots, particularly around Energiesprong, would help to firm up the long term picture. The City Leap partnership would also provide opportunities for the future. Stimulation of the market and innovations in delivery would both bring costs down and increase capital to meet costs. The Executive Director emphasised that the pilots and initiatives outlined were designed to demonstrate what may be possible, not necessarily what was cost effective at that stage.

Members supported the 'whole house' approach. There was discussion of the two strands of work around reducing carbon and bringing homes up to the energy performance A-C rating as minimum standard, and the benefits of a whole house plan that would address all action required to maximise efficiency and minimise costs.

Members noted the complex nature of the work taking place across multiple sectors, and asked how City Leap as a partner would have an impact across the different work strands. Officers agreed the complex nature of this; the intention would be for City Leap to bring different aspects for different work strands. Where Bristol City Council controlled social housing stock City Leap would be expected to bring access to capital knowledge, technology and innovative working practices. City Leap would also bring commercial opportunities for the private rented sector and identify opportunities for further government funding.

Officers were thanked for the report and the valuable discussion.

9. HMOs and Licensing

The Service Manager for the Private Housing Sector, the Service Manager for Development Management and the Team Leader for Neighbourhood Enforcement attended for the item on Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) and Licensing.

The Service Manager for the Private Housing Sector provided an overview of how teams within Bristol City Council worked to manage Houses of Multiple Occupancy. The provided report contained information on property licensing, enforcement on both licensed and unlicensed HMOs, planning controls, and related issues such as waste and noise. The number of HMOs in Bristol had risen since 2011, with an impact on the private rented sector and local communities. As a result the Council had introduced measures to improve standards in property licensing and new planning controls through Article 4 and the recent SPD. These were not interdependent, which could give the impression that work was not joined up. Officers noted that the impact of these measures may take time to demonstrate. Both Planning and Housing teams were willing to work together in sharing data and improving standards.

Members were invited to ask questions.



Members asked whether core cities and the LGA had been engaged on this as a national issue. Officers confirmed this had been brought to the Core Cities Private Housing Group which recognised this as a common problem but noted some concern over whether there would be unintended consequences in linking Planning and Licensing.

Members queried why enforcement in property appeared to be treated more leniently than other types of fine incurring behaviours. Officers stated that enforcement action within housing resources had to be focused on the worst offenders. However, landlords were frequently taken to court where necessary and a recent example was provided. There was a delay in the court process at the time. Tenants also had their own recourse, and Bristol City Council would support and encourage tenants with rent repayment orders. Unlicensed landlords could not evict tenants.

Members noted the points raised in the Public Forum statements around enforcement and whether the team was sufficiently resourced. Officers provided a breakdown of the resources available and focus; prioritisation was given to statutory obligations. One of the benefits of increasing the number of licensed properties was ensuring that landlords were identifiable and therefore faster action could be taken.

The property licencing scheme was cost neutral and was accounted and paid for through licensing enforcement, but could not be used for other funded activities.

Members asked for clarification of enforcement powers, particularly around identifying responsibility for, for example, waste issues in rented properties. Officers stated that responsibility lies with the actions of the individual; the person who deposited waste is responsible, but once a tenant moves out the landlord is obliged to address the waste where it is necessary to do so.

Members asked for Officers thoughts on what would be welcomed to help empower the teams addressing the issues. Officers suggested that a simplification of the existing legislative framework in order to enable action to be taken at speed would be beneficial.

Members asked how much of the funds generated through fines would be returned to Bristol City Council. These funds would not be returned to Bristol City Council once the case had proceeded through Courts. However, a new power under the Housing and Planning Act 2016 allowed for civil penalties that applied to property licensing and income was ringfenced for enforcement activities.

Members asked how many times the enforcement power listed under paragraphs 22.4-22.7 (enforcement) and 23.10 (EPA) had been utilised. Officers agreed to provide this information.

Members noted the valid points raised through the Public Forum statements. Officers agreed to review these and provide comments.



The Chair suggested that the topic be reconsidered for Scrutiny in a future municipal year. This was noted. It is not confined to a student issue.

The Officers were particularly thanked for a thorough report and comprehensive responses to Public Forum.

RESOLVED; That Officers provide information on how many times the recommendations and powers listed under paragraphs 22.4-22.7 (and 23.10 (EPA) have been utilised; and

That Officers comment on the Public Forum Statements related to the HMO item.

10 Wildlife Management: Discussion with Cabinet Member

The Cabinet Member for Climate, Ecology and Sustainable Growth was invited to a discussion on wildlife management and the wider approach to the Ecological Emergency.

Members had heard positive things about Parks management, but also received reports that the contracts in place may be complex, potentially locking in to a type of approach around, for example, verges.

The Cabinet Member noted that approaches to verges vary, with different mowing times dependent on the area. There was an issue around communications with the public; the change from cut verges to a less managed approach could create the perception of neglect, and there had been instances where staff were abused by members of the public.

The Parks Development Manager added that moving from an amenity cut to something better for wildlife required certain considerations. In terms of contracts most verge cutting took place in-house so there was a degree of flexibility with this, with an exception being an agricultural works contract that cuts meadows rather than verges. Part of the move towards a more wildlife friendly approach required a change to the machinery used in order to remove the risings which would traditionally be left in situ. It was estimated that this would have the necessary impact on soil after around three years. Consideration was needed around the programme to change machinery, the approach, and messaging with the public. The team was looking at potential sites to develop the details.

The Ecological Emergency programme and strategy was discussed. Bristol was the first city in the UK to announce an Ecological Emergency in February 2020, with the Climate and Ecological Emergency programme brought to Cabinet later in the year. This sits within the One City approach. A full action plan was anticipated by March 2021.



Members requested sight of the draft Ecological Emergency paper to be shared with the Commission for comment prior to the finalised document progressing to Cabinet. This was agreed.

Members noted that Bristol City Council conducted a trial on being glyphosate free in some areas across the city. The conclusion was not to end its use, but there is now a One City target to reduce its use. Officers stated that options are being reviewed to meet this target.

Members requested consideration of the use of leaf blowers due to the impact on biodiversity. The noise could also negatively affect people with autism. The Cabinet Member noted these concerns.

A member raised the issue of fly tipping and habitat. The Cabinet Member noted this. Officers added that the appearance of some spaces that were deliberately being left to support biodiversity gave the erroneous impression that the land was 'neglected'.

Members asked if there were opportunities to be more pro-active, particularly in supporting insect life. It was confirmed that insects as pollinators are high on the agenda, and the Cabinet Member noted the point for further consideration. This is a collaborative approach and input had been sought from organisations such as Avon Wildlife Trust and the National History Consortium.

The Cabinet Member and Officers were thanked for their attendance and the discussion.

RESOLVED; That the draft Ecological Emergency action plan paper be shared with the Commission for comment prior to the finalised document progressing to Cabinet; and

That the Cabinet Member note the comments raised by Members for consideration alongside the Ecological Emergency action plan.

11 CSC Performance Report: Q2

The Performance report was noted for information. The Chair noted that the impact of Covid-19 had affected some Key Performance Indicators.

12 Work Programme

The Work Programme was noted for information.

