

Homes and Housing Delivery Policy Committee 13 December 2024 Public Forum – Questions



Public forum questions have been received as listed below (full details are set out on the subsequent pages):

1. Hilary Rydon and Jan Wren, Brislington Meadows Housing Development
2. Hilary Rydon and Jan Wren, Brislington Meadows Housing Development
3. Shaban Ali, Barton House
4. Shaban Ali, Barton House
5. 12-year old resident, Barton House residents
6. 12-year old resident, Barton House residents
7. 12-year old resident, Barton House residents' protesting
8. Joanna Booth, HRA Stock Condition Surveys
9. Joanna Booth, Housing Revenue Account Budget 2024/25 – void properties
10. Joanna Booth, Q2 Corporate Risk Report
11. Dan Ackroyd, resident engagement strategy
12. Dan Ackroyd, Housing Management Board
13. Dan Ackroyd, delegated approval
14. Mike Oldreive, Q2 Corporate Risk report
15. Mike Oldreive, Housing & Consumer Standards Programme
16. Mike Oldreive, publication of Fire Risk Assessments



1. Hilary Rydon & Jan Wren - Brislington Meadows Housing Development

On behalf of the "Save Brislington Meadows" group, please can you confirm what stance the Green Party will be taking on this development?

Response (from Councillor Parsons, Bristol Green Party):

The Green group submitted an amendment to a council motion in 2021 instructing officers to consider designating Brislington Meadows as Local Green Space, which led to its subsequent adoption as such in the draft Local Plan.

Since outline planning consent has already been granted, this overrides the emerging local plan. As such the whole of the site can be developed to the extent that the outline permission allows this and with all reserved matters still to be consented first. We have not received any further details than those published on the website for the site: Brislington Meadows. A reserved matters application is therefore expected sometime in the first half of 2025.

As a matter of principle, the Green Party is committed to protecting Bristol's SNClS and green spaces. Green councillors will work within the existing policy framework to protect well-loved green space within Brislington Meadows to the extent that is possible. We will always prioritise preserving and where possible enhancing biodiverse

2. Hilary Rydon & Jan Wren - Brislington Meadows Housing Development

Furthermore when any reserved matters application is received from the appointed developer that buys the meadows for housing, can the local and wider community be assured that the green party will give all areas of the application very close attention and scrutiny in line with their policies and values?

Response (from Councillor Parsons, Bristol Green Party):

When any reserved matters application is received these will be notified to neighbours and publicly consulted on as required for all planning applications. At that point anyone interested can submit their representations on the application to the Council.

Eight Green councillors serve on development control committees where planning applications are heard, and those councillors are duty-bound to judge all applications independently by balancing material considerations, their values, representations from the public and local and national policy.

3. Shaban Ali, Barton House

Is the council fully aware of its duty of care and legal obligations under the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018, particularly concerning unsafe and unfit living conditions, not only in Barton House but across the city?

Response:

The council is aware of landlord statutory obligations and continue to better understand and improve the condition of the council's homes.

4. Shaban Ali, Barton House residents

Why are support letters from professional organisations like the NHS and schools, as well as tenants' concerns, disproportionately ignored, especially for residents from certain backgrounds, perpetuating harmful and unjust conditions?

Response:

The council are sorry to hear that residents feel this way and want to reassure all residents that this is not council policy, or the case in practice.

When applications for rehousing are being assessed, all relevant information provided by professionals and the applicant are considered and are assessed fairly and consistently regardless of an applicant's background.

All HomeChoice Bristol applicants have the statutory right to request a review of their band award. These reviews are completed by officers not involved in any previous decision making. The review also allows for new information to be submitted and to be assessed as part of the formal review process.

5. 12-year old resident, Barton House residents

As a 12-year-old child, is it acceptable for me to live in constant fear, sleeping fully clothed at night because I am terrified of alarms and forced evacuations? This fear is destroying my education, my mental health, and my future aspirations of becoming a lawyer. What immediate actions will you take to ensure children like me are given safe and dignified living conditions?

Response:

Applications for the Housing Register are assessed based on an individual's needs and updated as household circumstances change for any reason. All applications can be updated and new or previously unknown information from the household or key professionals can be submitted, this is fully assessed. This includes information on the impacts of trauma on any household member, that is linked to their housing or home's location.

6. 12-year old resident, Barton House residents

Despite submitting a doctor's report detailing the severe impact living in Barton House is having on my wellbeing, my mum has been told it's 'not enough.' What exactly is 'enough' for the council to act and provide us with the help we desperately need? Why is our suffering being ignored?

Response:

When applications for rehousing are being assessed, all relevant information provided by professionals and the applicant are considered and are assessed fairly and consistently regardless of an applicant's background.

The Council has a specialist Health and Housing Team which consists of trained medical professionals with expertise in assessing people's health-related housing needs. The Health and Housing Team considers cases where a significant amount of health-related information has been provided to ensure consistency in decision-making.

Information from professionals and concerns expressed by tenants submitted as part of an application and is fully assessed. All documents and information submitted in support of an application are held digitally and linked to the HomeChoice Bristol application. It is not possible to state what information is 'enough' to secure an award of a high level of banding priority, as this will vary on a case-by-case basis, but we can assure all applicants that any information will be assessed fairly and in line with our published Allocations Policy.

7. 12-year old resident, Barton House residents' protesting

Residents, like my mum, who peacefully protest against the appalling treatment in Barton House are being met with intimidation and the threat of arrest. What measures will the council put in place to ensure those who raise their voices for justice and basic human rights are treated with respect and not silenced by force?

Response:

The right to peaceful protest is fully respected and upheld by Bristol City Council. Peaceful protests are a legitimate form of expression.

We are aware of the protest and the action taken by the police at the Customer Service Point, 100 Temple Street on Monday 2 December 2024. The police were called to help facilitate a peaceful protest and left within an hour.

Accusations that residents are being silenced or threatened are unfounded. We are committed to fostering an environment where diverse viewpoints can be shared openly and respectfully. If specific concerns arise, we encourage open dialogue to address them constructively and transparently. Should any resident experience or witness anything illegal, we advise them to report this directly with the police.

8. Joanna Booth, HRA Stock Condition Surveys

At the cabinet meeting on 06 June 2023, the following decision was taken:

"Purpose of Report: 1. To seek approval to procure services to carry out an enhanced stock condition survey programme on Housing Revenue (HRA) housing stock.

2. 1+1 year contract (one year with option to extend the contract for a second year) for a value of up to £1m per year to complete surveys on 40% of stock per year. Spend to be split across three financial years (2023 – 2026)."

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s84139/Stock%20Condition%20Surveys%20Cab%20Report%20V2.pdf>

According to an answer given to a public forum question at the Strategy and Resources committee, no stock condition surveys were done until July 2024.

Please explain what happened to the decision to commission external stock surveys and the money allocated for it?

Response:

Following the approval of the stock condition survey programme, a tender exercise was undertaken to select a suitable consultant to undertake the surveys. Some key staff changes within Housing and Landlord Services meant that the procurement took longer than originally planned. We have a target to complete a stock condition survey to 30% of our homes (c.8,000 surveys) by the end of March 2025. We have currently completed approximately 4,000 surveys and anticipate to complete the planned 8,000 surveys by the end of March 2025. We also expect to spend the allocated budget by the end of March 2025.

9. Joanna Booth, Housing Revenue Account Budget 2024/25 – void properties

In the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2024/25 there are multiple references to reducing the level of 'void' properties.

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/b34172/Housing%20Revenue%20Account%20HRA%20Budget%20Proposals%20202425%2023rd-Jan-2024%2016.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=9>

"Void rates have been reduced within the plan to reflect the need to reduce void turnaround times to 50 days in 2024/25 and 30 days in 2025/26."

"An ambitious reduction in void turn around times has been built into the business plan and an improvement plan has been developed that will remain under regular review"

Please can you provide the details of this "improvement plan"?

Response:

The voids improvement plan includes key initiatives including:

- Reviewed relet standard including increased use of decorations vouchers where appropriate
- Pre exit tenancy inspections
- Review of standards in hard to let properties
- Implementation of closer collaboration across departments
- Escorted viewings and Digital sign ups whilst still being refurbished
- Issuing promise certificates where applicable for minor repairs to incoming tenants to move in safely but more quickly.
- The council recognises that the targets in the business plan 2024/25 plan were very ambitious and are being reviewed as part of the new business planning cycle.

10. Joanna Booth, Q2 Corporate Risk Report

For Agenda item 14, the Q2 Corporate Risk report was written in August 2024. It is meant to be a 'forward looking' document that enables the councillors to see the risks that are coming.

Why is this report being presented in December and not at either of the two previous meetings where it could have been presented?

Response:

The Q2 Corporate Risk report has gone through the decision pathway. The report was presented to the Audit Committee in September 24 and the Strategy & Resources Committee in October 24. Due the reporting time timeline, other committees will receive the report a bit later.

11. Dan Ackroyd, resident engagement strategy

The response to a question I asked at the 19th July meeting included:

"Finalise and implement overarching resident engagement strategy: o The overarching resident engagement strategy has been drafted and considered by the Housing & Landlord Services Senior Leadership team on 10 July ...The strategy will be approved in late September early October 2024".

Where is this overarching resident engagement strategy please?

Response:

During the summer discussions have taken place with officers and other stakeholders. Whilst the strategy had been drafted and considered in July, it was in draft form and changes were made. The resident engagement strategy is now being progressed through the decision pathway and will be shared at Policy Committee Chairs Briefing on Monday 16 December 2024. The strategy will be presented to the H&HDC for approval in early 2025.

12. Dan Ackroyd, Housing Management Board

The response to a question from Mr Banks at the last meeting included: " We have taken a decision to pause our current Housing Management Board – In light of the new consumer standards and our Regulatory Judgement."

This is a confusing answer.

At the last Housing Management Board held on the 28th February, the suggestion was "To maintain continuity, it is recommended that current tenant / leaseholder board members be asked to remain in post until at least the end of the current financial year and/ or until new recruitment undertaken."

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s94716/09%20-%20Housing%20Management%20Board%20Review%20Next%20Steps.pdf> - last page.

Exactly where was the decision taken to stop meetings of the Housing Management Board, and by who?

Response:

The decision to pause the Housing Management Board was taken due to a change in political administration and the vacant post of Homes & Housing Delivery Director.

13. Dan Ackroyd, delegated approval

My understanding is that the decision to set up the 'Housing and Consumer Standards Programme' was a decision taken by an officer.

Under what power, authority or delegation of authority was that decision taken?

Response:

The establishment and resourcing of the programme was not taken as a key decision because it was accounted for in the HRA Budget 2024/25. The finance team confirmed that the HRA Business Plan, approved by Full Council, has revenue provision of £0.5m in 2024/25 and 2025/26 for the formation of the Programme team. This was reported in the report to the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee in July 2024. This report confirmed that the Housing and Consumer Standards Programme (HCSP) is a strategic corporate programme.

The HCSP reports into a programme board chaired by the Executive Director of Growth & Regeneration with regular updates taken to the Corporate Leadership Board chaired by the Chief Executive and the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee.

Where key decisions are required to be taken in relation to the programme, a report will be brought to the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee to seek approval.

The programme is and has been in the public domain with update reports being taken to the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee in July, September, and November 2024 and on the council's website.

14. Mike Oldreive, Q2 Corporate Risk report

For Agenda item 14, in Appendix A1 - Corporate Threat Risks for CRR60 there is a 'mitigating action' of: "Housing & Consumer Standards Programme - Training and support to senior leaders and the governing body (H&HDC Cllrs) to understand and discharge their oversight responsibilities under the Consumer Standards & other landlord related statutory requirements" which has a due date of 31st March 2025.

What will that entail?

Because it sounds like the councillors might be currently unaware of the extent to which Bristol City Council is failing to discharge their oversight obligations.

Response:

The training is currently being arranged and is likely to take place in January or February 2025. The training will:

- Provide an overview of the social housing sector
- Outline the regulatory environment
- Outline the responsibilities of key officer and Cllr Groups
- Give an external view on BCC's Housing & Consumer Standards Programme

Following the regulatory judgment, Councillors were given a briefing on the consumer standards, wider regulatory environment, regulatory judgement, and the Housing and Consumer Standards Programme. A briefing paper was also provided to the 19 July 2024 Homes and Housing Delivery Committee (H&HDC).

Updates have subsequently been brought to each H&HDC meeting. The Councillor training proposal was endorsed at the 20 September 2024 H&HDC meeting.

15. Mike Oldreive, Housing & Consumer Standards Programme

My understanding is that the decision to set up the "Housing & Consumer Standards Programme" was taken as an Officer delegated decision, approved by the Corporate Leadership Team on 9th April 2024.

Where and when was this decision published?

Response:

This was reported in the report presented at the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee in July 2024. This report confirmed that the Housing and Consumer Standards Programme is a strategic corporate programme.

The programme is and has been in the public domain with update reports being taken to the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee in July, September, and November 2024 and is available on the council's website.

16. Mike Oldreive, publication of Fire Risk Assessments

When are the the Fire Risk Assessments going to be published online?

The page where I expect them to be (<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/residents/housing/council-tenants/home-safety-improvements/fire-safety/fire-risk-assessments>) has said "The fire risk assessments are temporarily unavailable." since 2023.

Response:

Clicking on the link will take you to a webpage providing information on Fire Risk Assessments. The page states "If you live in a block of flats owned by the council and want to see your Fire Risk Assessment, email buildingsafety@bristol.gov.uk".

The council is in the process of developing a Property Safety Strategy which will include plans to improve the accessibility of health and safety related information related to resident's homes.

Homes and Housing Delivery Policy Committee 13 December 2024 Public Forum – Statements



Public forum statements have been received as listed below (full details are set out on the subsequent pages):

1. Shaban Ali, Barton House
2. Amina Yusuf, Barton House
3. Dan Ackroyd, Transparency in Decision-Making
4. Hilary Rydon and Jan Wren, Brislington Meadows Housing Development

Please note: The views and information contained within these public statements are those of the individuals concerned and not of the Council.



Statement 1 – Shaban Ali, Barton House

The living conditions in many flats at Barton House and other similar council-owned properties are disgraceful—unfit for animals, let alone human beings.

Residents endure persistent damp, mould, overcrowding, and unsafe structures, causing significant physical and mental health harm. These conditions, on the surface, seem to disproportionately affect specific demographics, compounding social and economic barriers.

In individual cases professional organisations, including the NHS and schools, have raised serious concerns about the impact on residents' health and education. Despite repeated pleas for help from both residents and professionals, these warnings have been ignored.

Statement 2 – Amina Yusuf, Barton House

As a mother of two children with autism, it is heartbreaking to watch them panic and fight in fear whenever the alarm goes off, especially when we've already lost one of their headphones. Barton House no longer feels like a home for us; it has become a source of distress and anxiety for my family. I am pleading with Bristol City Council to listen to our situation and take immediate action to rehouse us, so my children can finally feel safe and we can begin to rebuild a sense of peace and stability in our lives.

Statement 3 – Dan Ackroyd – Transparency in Decision-Making

Too many decisions are being taken in private and are not being published.

At the time of writing, I still do not understand why an Officer, rather than a politician, made the decision to set up the 'Housing and Consumer Standards Programme.'

Regardless of how the decision was taken, it should have been published.

That it was not published appears to be a breach of both "The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012" and the "The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014"

It seems clear why the decision was taken when it was though. Part of the score given to BCC by the Regulator of Social housing depended on: "Bristol CC has informed us that a robust governance framework has been put in place to deliver this improvement plan, including senior level oversight of delivery, through a new programme board."

Without having a 'transformation programme' in place, Bristol could have received a worse score.

By putting the programme in place but not telling anyone about it, the party of the previous administration was saved embarrassment a few weeks before the election.

Another decision that was taken in private and not published was the decision to stop holding meetings of the 'Housing Management Board'.

These are major changes on matters of housing management.

Under Section 105 of the Housing Act 1985, the council has a legal obligation to consult secure tenants before deciding these changes.

No consultation appears to have been done.

Although the "root cause" analysis session (in Agenda item 12, Appendix "Aiv") sounds like a good idea, the list of people being consulted would be laughable, if it wasn't such a serious matter.

The 'root cause' analysis session also appears to omit any examination of why Bristol City Council was unprepared for changes in Fire Safety legislation.

Chair, at the first meeting of this committee in July, I asked when there would be an investigation into why BCC was so unprepared for the changes in Fire Safety law, which led to the evacuation of Barton House being so traumatic for residents and cost Bristol tax payers so much money.

At the time, you said 'starting to fix the problems' was a high priority. I accepted your answer, but I expected this committee to initiate an investigation shortly afterwards.

It's half a year later, there's no investigation, nor any sign of one.

This is a breach of an electoral pledge made by the Green party to the residents of Barton House.

Another pledge made was to prioritise the rehousing of Barton House residents, particularly those families with children, who had been traumatised by the mismanaged evacuation.

This Council must recognise that people who traumatised in a building are suffering an ongoing harm by living there.

It is disgraceful that BCC is continuing the harm. And the Green party looks ridiculous for making electoral pledges it apparently cannot keep.

The Strategic Housing Review presented at the last meeting suggested that BCC should restructure the Housing Department. At that meeting, I asked how it was concluded that the 'Strategic Housing Review' has no equality impact.

The answer given was that the paper was just for discussion.

But now the decision has been made, and recruitment for the executive director role is underway. Again, this appears to be a key decision that has been taken in private, and does not appear to have been published.

I am disturbed by the lack of publishing of the Fire Risk Assessments, or mention of them in the future work of this committee.

At the event held at Barton House to mark one year since the evacuation, I asked a Green councillor why the Fire Risk Assessments had not been published. The Cllr responded very confidently that they had been published. But they haven't been.

The web page setup to hold them (<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/residents/housing/council-tenants/home-safety-improvements/fire-safety/fire-risk-assessments>) has said "The fire risk assessments are temporarily unavailable." since 2023.

Finally, it is regrettable that the corporate risk report in Agenda item 14 is being presented so late. The risk reports are meant to be forward looking papers that help this council avoid risks through mitigating actions. The risk report before the committee in December was written in August.

Chair, I am not confident that this committee is exercising proper control over the officers and their handling of decision-making and operational processes.

I sincerely hope to see clear evidence of improvement in the near future.

Statement 4 – Hilary Rydon and Jan Wren, Brislington Meadows Housing Development

Brislington Meadows is an identified SSSI wildlife haven of 9.1 hectares, made up of ancient meadowland, hedgerows, trees and brownfield. This site was put on the 2014 Local Plan as a suitable site for housing. It has now been taken off the new emerging local plan, because of its ecological importance and in support of Bristol’s Ecological Emergency declared in 2020.

Despite its importance the land was sold to Homes England who instigated a public planning appeal and subsequently the planning inspector undervalued the ecological importance of the site and outline planning has been granted for 260 homes.

The area of brownfield (former Police Station) which adjoins the meadows could be developed and the local community would be very pleased to see much needed homes on this area.

The Green Party ethos of a “fairer, greener country” and the policy of a brownfield site approach first typify the makeup of the meadows area. Brownfield for development, whilst retaining the meadow land as a valuable community resource to support physical and mental health alongside the diverse wildlife and ecology.

An invitation from local residents to visit this site is extended to cabinet members to appreciate the uniqueness of this site and its invaluable contribution and ecological importance to the local community.