

Strategy and Resources Policy Committee

17 March 2025

Public Forum – Questions



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

- Q1. Melissa Topping: Council complaints procedure
- Q2. Melissa Topping: Council complaints procedure
- Q3. Jen Smith: Period 10 Finance report - Safety Valve programme/Dedicated Schools Grant
- Q4. Jen Smith: Period 10 Finance report - Forecast Overspend on Home To School Transport
- Q5. Jen Smith: Women's safety
- Q6. Suzanne Audrey: Public engagement
- Q7. Suzanne Audrey: Public engagement
- Q8. Suzanne Audrey: Public engagement
- Q9. Rachel Fagan: Bottle Yard studios
- Q10. Rachel Fagan: Bottle Yard studios
- Q11. Naomi Richards: Bottle Yard studios

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

- 1. Grant Sheldon: South Bristol strategy
- 2. Dan Ackroyd: Council tax and Bristol Waste

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



PUBLIC QUESTIONS

1. QUESTION FROM MELISSA TOPPING

Why are all BCC complaints/feedback not being dealt with by an independent body but instead passed to the team being complained about to investigate themselves?

Response:

The Council operates an internal two-stage complaints process. The first stage is dealt with by a person of responsibility, often a Team Leader or Manager from the service complained about. Complaints can be escalated to Stage Two, and these are handled independently by a Case Manager from the Corporate Customer Relations Team.

If a resident is not happy with the response to a Stage 2 complaint, they are able to refer the matter externally to the Local Government Ombudsman (which is independent from the Council) for review. More details about our complaints process can be found [here](#) which sets out each stage of the process.

Both Local Government and Housing Ombudsmen recommend this model of complaint handling, which brings over 90% of Stage One complaints to resolution without the need for escalation, as public sector best practice and in line with other local, unitary and metropolitan authorities in England.

2. QUESTION FROM MELISSA TOPPING

Why at stage 2 is complaint then followed up by asking said team if they did these things or not, as this results in the same answers from the same people being complained about. Meaning complaints just go round in a circle never investigated properly? Independent investigation is needed.

Response:

Complaints, when escalated to Stage 2, are handled independently by a Case Manager from the Corporate Customer Relations Team to review the original decision. This may involve asking questions of the officer who took the original decision. If a resident is not happy with the response to a Stage 2 complaint, they are able to refer the matter externally to the Local Government Ombudsman for review.

3. QUESTION FROM JEN SMITH

Period 10 Finance outturn report – Safety Valve programme/Dedicated Schools Grant:

This paper says: 'Bristol City Council formally joined the Safety Valve programme at the end of 2023/24, and the DSG ended the year with an £18.5 million in-year overspend. Whilst the forecast overspend in the DSG is continuing to grow, the Safety Valve programme is developing mitigations to meet demand for SEND support within available funding.'

Updated financial modelling by the council is predicting a £41.5m deficit in the DSG by March 2030 instead of the 0 it has stated in public.

As the council has said it has consulted on services prior to signing up to Safety Valve and that Safety Valve is merely a “bail out”, how does the council plan to bring this deficit back down without further cuts to educational services which cannot be made without consultation? The 'mitigations' cannot be new ones if they were made after the historic consultation.

Response:

The conditions set out in the Safety Valve Agreement between the Department for Education and Bristol City Council are consistent with the six key priorities contained within the Bristol SEND & Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028 Strategy. The largest contribution to the reduction of the deficit will be achieved through delivery of local specialist provision which specifically aligns to Priority 4: develop more high-quality and inclusive education provision.

The council is continuing to implement the existing mitigations and has no plans to adopt new ones at this time. It is expected that, despite the further overspend, the existing mitigations will place Bristol City Council's high needs services on a sustainable footing in the future.

4. QUESTION FROM JEN SMITH

Period 10 Finance report - Forecast Overspend on Home To School Transport

Papers say: 'The Educational Improvement Division is currently forecasting an adverse variance of £1.3 million against a budget of £26.2 million, representing a forecast overspend of 5.1%. This is due to pressures of Home to School transport volumes.'

And

'The forecast overspend is due to the increasing numbers of children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) being placed in high-cost Independent Non-Maintained Schools resulting from both a current lack of sufficiency of local maintained provision and delays in the development of new local provision so that some of this new provision may not now become available for use until 2025/26.'

As what has been described as 'the bulge' in terms of numbers of pupil have moved or are starting to move into post-16, what is Bristol City Council doing to support those pupils who need to travel hours through to other LAs due to a lack of suitable post-16 places in Bristol?

The local authority is responsible for implementing EHCP provision, but has left Send pupils in a position where they are unable to reach named settings. Expecting pupils with complex disabilities to get themselves across more than one LA alone on public transport is both a safeguarding issue and a costly mistake.

Response:

The Local Authority is changing its offer for post-16 children so that it will not offer to commission and arrange their travel from September 2025 for those starting their post-16 course. Post-16 children are still eligible for support to get to their named provision through travel warrants, through an Independent Travel Trainer, or through a personal travel budget. Where children have complex disabilities, these will be taken into account when agreeing a safe travel support offer, ensuring that their provision is accessible.

Work is ongoing to develop local post-16 places to meet more complex needs, reducing the number of hours that children with SEND have to spend travelling.

5. QUESTION FROM JEN SMITH

Women's safety

Amongst other things, Strategy and Resources Committee is responsible for:

Legal and statutory services

External relations

Equalities

Equality Commissions and Women's Safe City

How is Bristol protecting women in the city from members of its own workforce from being spied on? The results of an independent investigation would have been useful for this wouldn't it?

Response:

The Council does not engage in 'spying' activity.

Bristol City Council's Equity and Inclusion Strategic Framework demonstrates our commitments to creating a fairer, safer, accessible and inclusive city where everyone feels they belong. We recognise that to properly address inequality, we need to focus on the needs of people in specific ways, and so include a commitment to improving safety, challenging sexism and misogyny, and ensuring our services and workplace requirements consider women's needs and circumstances.

We hold ourselves accountable through the collection and reporting of data to ensure we are able to monitor changes. Our Quality of Life data includes a range of indicators related to crime and safety which we are able to disaggregate by demographics. All decisions within the council, including any H.R. decisions or policies, have a supporting equality impact assessment that allows us to identify potential impacts to women and commit to mitigations to reducing any negative impacts. We publish our Gender pay gap every 12 months, which shows improvement made through our commitment to ensuring equity for women.

BCC remains active in the work of the Women's commission which has included workstreams such as securing women's safety. In 2022 BCC launched the Women's Safety Charter: a call to action for all organisations to join us in tackling gender inequality, promote a zero-tolerance policy towards harassment for those engaging in the night-time economy, which we remain committed to. BCC remains

committed too proactively tackling discrimination, harassment and victimisation against women and to removing societal barriers so that they can thrive in the city.

6. QUESTION FROM SUZANNE AUDREY

Public engagement

BACKGROUND. You will be aware that I have asked repeated question about the definitions and criteria used to refuse questions from the public. I have not received clear definitions. In addition, on more than one occasion, I have raised concerns about questions being refused and subsequently been allowed to ask them. This strikes me as unfair to those who may be less persistent, but who have been unfairly or incorrectly told that a question is not permitted.

QUESTION: What measures are in place to ensure fairness and consistency across the various committees in the assessment of whether questions from the public are permitted? (Please don't reiterate the general policy, but please focus on measures to ensure it is fairly implemented.)

Response:

Committee Procedure Rule CMR9.5 (Scope of questions, statements and petitions) states: The Chair in consultation with the proper officer may reject a question, statement or petition if it: (i) is not about a matter for which the committee has a responsibility; (ii) is defamatory, frivolous or offensive, or (iii) requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.

Democratic Services staff routinely carry out an assessment of each question received to ensure compliance with CMR9.5

If Democratic Services staff have a concern about a question in this regard, they will refer the issue in the first instance to the Proper Officer. If the Proper Officer is of the view that a question should be refused, the matter will be discussed with the Chair. Ultimately, the decision to reject a question is taken by the Chair in accordance with the constitutional requirements.

7. QUESTION FROM SUZANNE AUDREY

Public engagement

BACKGROUND: At the last Values and Ethics sub-committee, I was told I could not ask questions about the number of complaints against councillors, and that I should submit a Freedom of Information question instead. The questions were subsequently allowed, but only after I had emailed all councillors on the sub-committee as well as the Head of Legal Services. I am very grateful to the councillor who chaired the meeting in the absence of the usual chair. However, it seemed unlikely that the councillors on the committee would have known about this if I had not informed them.

QUESTION: What measures are in place to ensure that councillors on a committee are aware when a member of the public has been refused permission to ask a question or make a statement?

Response:

Committee members will be informed of all questions submitted to a meeting that meet the Council's constitutional requirements. If a question is refused by the Chair, the questioner will be informed of the reasons for this. Committee Chairs are authorised to reject public forum statements or questions under the Committee Procedure Rules. No arrangements are currently in place to inform all councillors on a committee about questions that have been refused.

8. QUESTION FROM SUZANNE AUDREY

Public engagement

BACKGROUND: In response to a recent freedom of information request, Bristol City Council indicated that "neither a tally nor a list of rejected public questions, statements and petitions are held, neither is a record of instances where items marked in council papers as 'withdrawn'".

https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/blocked_questionsstatements

I can understand that the content of some rejected questions or statements may need to be withheld, but the absence of any record could mean that a pattern of potentially unfair rejections would not become evident.

QUESTION: What measures are, or could be, in place to enable councillors to assess whether there is a pattern of potentially unfair treatment in terms of public forum questions or statements being rejected?

Response:

The Council's constitution sets out the grounds on which public forum questions or statements can be rejected. The constitution is approved by Full Council and delegates authority to the Chairs of the relevant Policy Committees and the Lord Mayor to take the final decision in relation to this and to take decisions fairly and appropriately. These measures are considered sufficient.

9. QUESTION FROM RACHEL FAGAN

Bottle Yard studios - Council's failure to consult Equity trade union on the sale of Bottle Yard Studios

Why has the Council failed to engage Equity UK in a meaningful consultation about the sale of Bottle Yard Studios, despite the Chair of the Committee (and Council Leader) promising to do so during the 14 October Committee meeting when Equity raised our concerns?* -- * See minutes of 14 October Council meeting item 61 <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=37753> accessed 16.31 on 11/3/25

Response:

The council has engaged with trade unions and directly employed staff. The wider impact of the sale has been considered in the Equality Impact Assessment. Relevant and appropriate updates will be shared with stakeholders, with particular focus on ensuring those working at or from the site are kept updated

on progress at appropriate points. The Director of Economy of Place met with Equity on 11.10.24 and Bectu on 15.11.24.

10. QUESTION FROM RACHEL FAGAN

Bottle Yard studios - Attacks on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion in TV & Film production make US streamers unsuitable candidates for Bottle Yard Studios

Many streaming services in the industry are changing their EDI policies to appease the current US administration, this puts Bristol City of Film's commitment to "diversity within our film and TV industry"* at risk, and makes many streamers unsuitable buyers for the Bottle Yard Studios. Will the Council prioritise the public interest over supposed commercial sensitivity, and disclose who they are considering selling Bottle Yard to? ---- * taken from <https://bristolcityoffilm.co.uk/diversity-and-employment-standard/> accessed 16.28 on 11/3/25

Response:

The identity of bidders is commercially sensitive and publication at this stage would prejudice discussions with potential investors. No decision on the sale of the Studios will be made until a full and robust analysis of the offers made.

The Bottle Yard Studios is committed to the Bristol city standards relating to Equality Diversity and Inclusion.

11. QUESTION FROM NAOMI RICHARDS

Bottle Yard studios – Sale of Bottle Yard Studios

Why does the Committee agenda refer to the decision to "the decision to sell Bottle Yard Studios" (p. 191 public document pack) when no final decision on the sale has been taken, as agreed during the 14 October Extraordinary Committee meeting (item 61)?

Response:

It is confirmed that no decision has yet been taken to sell Bottle Yard Studios, this will be noted when this report is considered.

PUBLIC STATEMENTS

STATEMENT 1 – Grant Sheldon

South Bristol strategy

We want a South Bristol Strategy -a plan for the development, regeneration, and growth of the South Bristol area. This strategy must focus on improving infrastructure, local economy, and community services, with a particular emphasis on addressing existing challenges such as social inequality, health and job opportunities in the area.

There has never been a strategy for South Bristol. The deprivation profile of Hartcliffe and Withywood, Filwood, Hengrove and Whitchurch Park and Stockwood has existed for over 40 years and exacerbated significantly by the closure of the largest Cigarette factory in Europe in 1990. Paul Smith former Councillor quotes in Hartcliffe Betrayed of the downward slide from “ideal neighbourhood” to dormitory estate. You are proposing an even greater dormitory for the whole of South Bristol.

This administration has inherited plans driven single mindedly for housing without considering the consequences of dumping large numbers of homes at low density (wasting land) into existing deprived areas. Where is the creation of balanced and sustainable communities? The future generations of this area deserve better. Your budgets will also suffer the consequences of rising ill health and deprivation.

An example of this short sightedness and lack of a cohesive strategy is the removal of the athletics facility on Hengrove Park. We do not need to dig up existing resources and build at very low density less than 70 dph; we need to build on our strengths, not just build houses at the expense of future social and economic wellbeing of the whole community. Here is the opportunity to create a unique, innovative facility combining Hospital, Skills Academy, family cycling centre and athletics programme. Athletics is a social, community programme which brings in children of primary age right through teenagers to adults in their seventies. It engages parents and carers, provides a focal point for interventions in nutrition and physiotherapy. It will include rehabilitation and sport for college students. It will integrate the family cycling centre which involves those with disabilities.

This administration has the power to step back and create truly thriving neighbourhoods. Do not be pressurised by well-meaning officers or perceived pressure from Central Government. The population of South Bristol, deserve more than the dumping of over 2500 homes at very low densities without creating balanced and sustainable communities.

The area needs a bigger vision. According to your annual ward reports, our area has more obesity, less weekly activity, poorer education, more special educational needs, more youth offenders, less confidence in going out in the dark, less satisfaction in living there, more obesity and generally poorer health. This is unacceptable in 2025. Children deserve a better future and the implications for your budgets are immense despite your transformation programmes. You are proposing to spend £14m of taxpayers’ money on relocating the cycling centre! Scandalous waste of limited resources.

You have an opportunity to bring hope and prosperity for the residents of Hartcliffe and Withywood, Filwood and Hengrove and Whitchurch park. Start now with a rethink on the future of the athletics facility alongside a cohesive South Bristol Strategy. We have over 5000 signatures on a petition agreeing with us.

The Green Party policy on health and wellbeing is “prevention over cure” and the policy on neighbourhoods is to enhance local communities and promote sustainable neighbourhoods. The 2024 manifesto proposes “green spaces and developing sustainable urban planning strategies to enhance community well-being and environmental sustainability. According to the Green Party manifesto, your policies reflect commitment to “fostering vibrant, sustainable and inclusive neighbourhoods. The current plans very much go against these policies.

STATEMENT 2 – Dan Ackroyd

Council tax and Bristol Waste

First, I note that Council Tax collection is proving problematic "Increased work volumes have led to delays in processing changes and in issuing accurate bills." I have heard multiple anecdotes about people finding it difficult for the Council to actually take their payment, as well as errors in the amount owed being difficult to rectify.

It sounds like it might be time to upgrade to a better piece of software for collecting and managing Council Tax and allowing people to pay it.

Second, the Bristol Waste documents while voluminous, are "weak tea".

I had hoped to see a dramatic improvement planned in the service. In particular the introduction of underground garbage bins, like they have in Amsterdam. Apologies if I missed that in the documents.

I expected to see a discussion of why the redrawn route maps for the refuse collection caused so many problems with the pick up up of refuse, and why the predicted "savings" from those changed routes didn't materialise.

And I was hoped to see some explanation of why multiple directors of Bristol Waste had resigned at short notice, and why there are pending decisions to be made by the Crown Prosecution Service.

Without acknowledgement and understanding of the problems that Bristol Waste has endured, it is hard to be confident that the plan will correct those problems.

It is regrettable seeing political parties try to "score points" off the problems that Bristol Waste has had, when there hasn't (and can't be) a full discussion of those problems.