Communities Scrutiny Commission: Chairs Statement and Comments on Agenda Item 9: Growing the Power of Communities.

I think it's this only right to declare at the outset that I have a particular interest in this issue. Not only does it go to the heart of the beliefs of myself and my party but I formed a team with Alderman Bev Knott to design and implement the introduction of Neighbourhood Partnerships into the fabric of decision-making in the city which was arrested by the first mayor and destroyed by the current mayor. I agree with many of the ambitions of this report and so have simply made amendments which seek to remedy inconsistencies omissions and falsifications which are either due to an attempt to rewrite history or from lack of knowledge of the previous arrangements due to not having any involvement with them at the time.

As a footnote, and this was what really frightened the following administrations and the officers who were tasked to deliver their wishes, the local decision making process that formed the first two years of the roll-out of the Neighbourhood Partnerships were clearly stated as only the beginning of a process which would, year-on-year, take more levels of decisions away from the centre and put them more firmly in the hands of the citizenry. It's not surprising therefore that any top-down mayoral system would seek to falsely represent the aims and intentions of the Neighbourhood Partnerships process where the minority group of local councillors had the same vote as elected local members and their only power was to sign off agreed decisions because, under the Local Government Act this was the only way such local decisions could then be ratified, and linked back to a formal council decisdsion. Once again Bristol was at the forefront of this liberal, bottom-up, revolution that has since become so tragically and steeply inverted.

Please note my amendments as follows:

1. **Summary**
   Investing in community development and empowering communities is a key priority in the Corporate Strategy. This report gives an overview of community development since 1st April 2019 and the direction of travel for the council as a whole.

Context

1. 'Neighbourhoods & Communities' service was formed in 2018 as part of the change in the way the council works with neighbourhood communities and the need to make savings. There was a move ~~away from~~ **towards** council-led neighbourhood partnerships and neighbourhood management arrangements ~~to~~ **and away from** an approach which seeks to foster citizen action, community-led initiative, capacity building and collaboration.

2. The approach **should** recognise~~s~~ that innovation, ambition, citizen-action and neighbourliness are ~~part~~ **the essence** of city life. Much of the innovation and vitality of Bristol is powered by the diversity of the people, the unique history and cultural heritage of neighbourhoods and a wealth of small and large businesses and community and voluntary organisations. The different communities and life

experiences are a tremendous asset. A community development approach **should** seeks to nurture and maximise these kinds of assets towards inclusive, connected and resilient communities.

3. It is well-document**ed** that whilst Bristol thrives in so many ways there is also stark inequality. Some neighbourhood communities and citizen networks have the social and economic power to build the thriving communities they want to live in. Other communities find it more difficult to achieve their potential because of inequality and **rightly wish to reverse** the way top-down decisions can undermine community building efforts. Inequality has a debilitating, corrosive impact on people's lives, undermines self-determination and social action. It can cause people to distrust the authorities they are so often dependent on. **When this patronage dries up through lack of funding and at the same time the opportunity for local people to take part in shaping alternative solutions is summarily withdrawn without consultation there is a perfect failure, derived from a fundamental lack of trust and belief that people, all people, want to and can play a part in shaping their own communities, and likely much more than that. Some may, at least temporarily, benefit from some additional support (recognised and provided within the previous approach) but leadership and decisions sjouyld flow from the people.**This applies to neighbourhood communities and to city wide communities which come together because of shared experience, for example, black and minority ethnic communities, LGBT, women and disabled people. Community Development therefore prioritises communities which experience the greatest exclusion and inequality.

4. The Community Development Team works in 10 priority neighbourhoods and has built a national and international reputation for asset based community development (ABCD). The Bristol approach is rooted in 5 community development principles:

   - Equity & inclusion
   - Place based
   - Asset based (building on what's strong and already exists)
   - Human connection
   - Citizen-led

   [The report does not cite achievements, either tangible or in terms of community resilience].

5. Encouraging social action is key to achieving the ~~cities~~ **city's** aspirations at a city level e.g. [Great Bristol Spring Clean](), [Bristol Reading in Schools](). [Can Do Bristol]() is a web platform where organisations of all sizes can ask and offer help and support and share volunteering opportunities. Bristol is part of the UK and international ['Cities of Service']() which aims to drive a culture of citizenship and social action for stronger communities. **This is best achieved from within, where communities seek to achieve agreed aspirations and then call in agencies tasked to support their requirements.**
   To encourage social action and raise the profile of the platform BCC is working with over 20 partners to make 2020 a ['Year of Can Do'](). There will be a series of events

through the year.

6. Information about the work ~~of the work~~ of the Community Development Team can be found [here](#).

7. To support the leadership role of ward councillors and community involvement in local decision-making there is a meeting allowance of £200 per Cllr. per year. Councillors are invited to nominate a local organisation to receive the funds and help organise community conversations. There are different arrangements in place across the city according to local circumstances. In some areas there are two or three ward collaborations. In 19/20, 30 of the 34 wards have arrangements in place to receive the funding. In some areas Cllrs. make their own arrangements and do not draw on the funds. In 18/19**,** over 2335 residents participated in over 70 meetings, hosted by over 18 organisations. These community spaces/networks influenced a range of decisions including priorities for devolved Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106 (details of CIL/s106 decisions are covered in a separate report). **The quantum of engagement from local people has diminished as has their ability to take part in open discussions about smaller sums of money and having their considered local improvements delivered rather than being needed to support the central administration's preferences which should be delivered through the strategiuc CIL fund.**

8. At the heart of the corporate strategy there is the understanding that the city council needs to reinvent the way BCC works with citizens and city partners towards a culture of collaboration. Change is underway through the One City approach, **(although it is collaborative reach is very narrow)**, Libraries Strategy and national pathfinder 'Bristol Future Parks'. Service departments are considering new ways of working with citizens and communities.

9. 'Growing the Power of Communities' is about embedding a community development approach in the way we work as a council. For communities to realise their potential we need to find ways for stretched BCC resources to ~~get behind them~~**be available for them**. This is about making practical changes to simplify systems and procedures; get out of the way; build on what's already happening; listening; getting behind community-led initiative; engaging in early conversations which value the experience and knowledge of communities as part of a team effort.

2. Policy
Corporate plan – Empower Communities, well connected, inclusive communities
Equality and Inclusion Strategy
Health & Wellbeing Strategy

4. Consultation

a)Internal
Not applicable
b)External

Not applicable

5. Public Sector Equality Duties

5a)   Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following "protected characteristics": age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:

   i)   Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.

   ii)   Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --

   -    remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;

   -    take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' impairment);

   -    encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

   iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
       - tackle prejudice; and
       - promote understanding.

Fostering good relations is integral to community development. Positive action is taken to facilitate connections and networks to promote understanding and facilitate connections. The work of the service aims to be proactive in addressing the barriers to full participation by using premises which meet a good standard of access, ensuring individual access requirements are met and building in an approach which recognises historic and systemic inequality.