

Extraordinary Council Meeting – 26th May 2020

STATEMENT CS01

Subject: Bristol Energy

Submitted by Councillor Mark Weston

I write to express my anger and dismay that all councillors taking part in today's emergency debate will not have been given access to critical information pertinent to it.

The decision to postpone the original meeting (scheduled for 20th March) due to the COVID-19 crisis was understandable and justified in those exceptional circumstances. However, the Opposition Members who requisitioned this EGM offered the postponement with certain provisos which were agreed to by the Mayor, two of which were:-

- *We know that another report will be coming from Ernst and Young around 15th May and that an extraordinary meeting could be reconvened to debate the energy company following the publication of that document.*
- *That an all-member briefing be held to appraise members as to its content.*

These conditions were accepted by the Labour Administration. They were important concessions secured in order to ensure all councillors were better informed about the true position of this 'albatross' of a company and enhance discussion on the best way forward.

Now, the decision has been taken to withhold crucial information apparently on the basis that this need not be disclosed prior to the next Cabinet (Tuesday, 2nd June).

Firstly, I want clarification on (i) *Who, when and at what stage was it decided to renege on our disclosure deal?* And (ii) *Why the Administration feels justified in hiding key developments in this saga from Full Council?*

It seems that backbench members are only ever to be given tantalizing details on what is going on with Bristol Energy. Once again, a shroud of secrecy is descending around it and the promised briefing betrayed.

The back-tracking is a clear breach of good faith and trust. It creates a situation whereby even during our 'exempt' session, most of those taking part will be in the dark over viability options. It cannot be acceptable to have such two-tier levels of knowledge and will only undermine the quality of debate and decisions taken in the chamber.

Moreover, the optics of this does not look good. It has all the hallmarks of an Executive circling the wagons to protect itself from political embarrassment. This in turn will lead onlookers to draw their own 'negative' conclusions about the future direction of travel for this disastrous corporate commercial venture.

I urge the Administration to rethink and reverse this wrecking manoeuvre before any further damage is done.