

# Overview & Scrutiny Management Board 2 November 2020 Public Forum



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## **Public Forum Questions**

### **Question 1: Cllr. Anthony Negus**

This, one of the few public meetings of our key scrutiny committee, has a thin agenda with just one substantive item.

This is not through any failing of members or support officers.

For some time, due to a dysfunctional Forward Plan process that has been the subject of previous complaints, the Overview & Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) has been obliged to meet the day before Cabinet in order to work within the time available after the issuing of the relevant reports, for assessing and discussing them and making comments to Cabinet. Recently it has not even been possible to produce a meaningful public agenda for OSMB meetings because of the apparent inability to fix the Cabinet agenda in time for OSMB to plan ahead. Instead OSMB has had to adopt the cover-all standing item of 'Mayors Forward Plan' (MFP) with the increased difficulty of arranging officers to attend. Despite special probing this month this is still the case after the LGA visiting panel identified failings in this process. Although the effectiveness of the Democratic Services team has improved, this fundamental problem is worsening.

This is dysfunctional and insults the accepted protocols that underpin the democratic process. It is therefore unacceptable to me and no doubt fellow councillors for this council to continue in this way. In a reply to a similar previous complaint, partly repeated at an OSMB Leads meeting it was said that, in effect, the administration was not breaking any rules but would endeavour to improve the situation, particularly regarding timely inclusion of items on the MFP.

Despite that, again the MFP contains new items, undated items and some items being taken off the meeting scheduled in the MFP with no consideration of other processes apart from getting items through Cabinet.

Whilst the Administration's business is being done, however disjointedly, the democratic and value-adding process of scrutiny cannot be delivered by councillors who are being shackled and silenced. Much more importantly decisions cannot be seen to be questioned, challenged or enhanced by our tax-paying citizens, whom we all represent and serve.

Question:

I believe that the Chair and OSMB members, at least, are entitled to a clear and binding statement of how the administration will reconsider its responsibilities and reset its procedures to ensure that scrutiny in this council is allowed to function properly. May I have the assurance of the mayor or the Chief Executive that this statement will be available in time to be considered at the next public meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Management Board?

Answer:

The Chair will reply verbally at the meeting.

**Question 2: Councillor Anthony Negus**

The city's 70 councillors are elected to represent their constituents in the area where they live and across the city. Yet councillors are not adequately kept informed and are denied access not only to documents and to meetings of which they are aware but also, as I learn, to other ongoing pieces of work of which there is no public or accountable record.

Will the Chief Executive please make available, for information, a list of the restricted and unrestricted substantive areas of work that are being developed, away from the beneficial contribution of Council overview, by selected groups through the One-City process and elsewhere?

**Answer:**

The Chair will reply verbally at the meeting.

**Question 3: Councillor Clive Stevens**

Dear OSMB - at your last meeting you were concerned about the lack of 'forwardness' in the Forward Plan. I believe you put in an urgent statement to Cabinet.

I see this plan seems to give more advanced warning and perhaps more detail than before. Does it?

**Answer:**

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board has advised that in his personal view the answer is no.

**Question 4: Councillor Clive Stevens**

What would be the ideal notice period and level of information required for you to carry out effective, quality scrutiny of Council decisions (before Cabinet)?

**Answer:**

The personal opinion of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board is that a month's notice of items on the Forward Plan is sufficient, providing that Members have adequate disclosure about information relating to the nature of each report, and the potential risks/impact.

## **Public Forum Statements**

### **Statement 1: Jenny Howard Coles, Adblock Bristol**

Bristol City Council has many policies around issues like health inequalities, mental health, air quality, active travel and carbon emissions, congestion etc, which most Adblock Bristol members actively support. Given Adblock Bristol's focus on outdoor corporate advertising we can't help notice the huge amount of such advertising which directly contradicts all of the above, much of the One City Plan, and many of the city's aspirations. Many of the outdoor adverts we see, from billboards and bus stops, phone kiosks and digital screens are for high polluting vehicles such as SUVs, long-distance flights and processed food, and these almost entirely from large corporations with little or no direct interest in Bristol or the people who live here.

The purpose of adverts is to induce citizens to buy something that they otherwise wouldn't<sup>1</sup>. Research from the University of Bath shows that we do not even need to pay conscious attention to an advertisement in order to be influenced by it<sup>2</sup>.

The work of Adblock Bristol, and the massive response to the Local Plan has shown an appetite for action on corporate advertisers, and there are several specific areas of advertising that are very much within the council's control.

We have seen other councils in the UK use existing powers to bring in restrictions on some advertising, like the [London Mayor's ban on junk food advertising on TFL](#), and similar policies by [Southwark](#), [Haringey](#) and [Merton](#) Borough Councils. We propose that Bristol City Council and the Mayor bring in similar or bolder regulations, to support healthy, low carbon living for Bristolians, and help achieve the council's own goals in these areas.

This would be in line with the recently adopted [One City Climate Strategy](#) which contains a proposal to "[create] advertising standards and restrictions to support responsible consumption."

The three specific policies we propose are:

1. A planning policy on advertising, either as part of the Local Plan or as a standalone document, to assist the council in responding to new billboard applications anywhere in the city. (This was requested by members of Development Control A after a recent application.)
2. Amending the council's Advertising Concession Agreement (the contract for advertising on bus stops; [up for renewal soon](#)) to include an outright ban on advertising of products which cause high levels of CO2 and microparticulate pollution, and adverts for processed food with high fat, salt or sugar content, on infrastructure owned by the council;
3. The Council's public health team to lodge complaints with the Advertising Standards Agency where adverts breach existing ASA rules against junk food adverts being placed in settings with

<sup>1</sup> Dyer G. Advertising as Communication (Studies in Culture and Communication). Routledge. 1982.

<sup>2</sup> Heath R, Nairn A. Measuring affective advertising: implications of low attention processing on recall. Journal of Advertising Research. 2005; 45(2): 269-281.

a high footfall of children and young people (e.g. near schools). Despite this rule having been in existence for some time, it is frequently breached by advertisers.

The Council may wish to consider an overarching 'Advertising Policy' that feeds into all of the above and also contains aspirations for further measures in the future.

For more information about existing powers that councils have to control the negative effects of advertising, see:

[Taking down junk food ads](#) - report by Sustain

[Take action — Badvertising](#) - resources from the 'Badvertising' campaign

To read more about how corporate outdoor advertising works against the council's priorities, see the Resources page of our website: [What's Wrong With Advertising](#)

We can offer support to the committee should you need more evidence, case studies, or contacts with professionals within the field who have helped with similar Local Authority actions.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this proposal.

Jenny Howard Coles on behalf of Adblock Bristol

<https://adfreecities.org.uk/bristol>

## **Statement 2: Anna Mears**

My statement refers to my own personal view on the matter, though it may be noted that I am also a member of Adblock Bristol.

Bristol City council has passed motions relating to the climate and ecological emergency, the health and wellbeing of its residents and concern for the recovery of local Bristol businesses in the aftermath of the pandemic. However, when you look around at the messages strewn across the city, it would seem that we are a city with no regard for these motions. Much of the outdoor advertising across Bristol promotes the use of SUVs which emit irreverent greenhouse gases, contributing significantly to global heating, as well as the degradation of our local air quality. You will also see adverts for unhealthy fast food chains, often located dangerously near to our schools and playing areas. During a time of particular difficulty for our home-grown businesses, the overwhelming messaging from national corporations suggests a total lack of regard for the economic growth of our city.

In line with our declaration of a climate and ecological emergency, with our One City Plan, and with our Covid-19 economic recovery plans, Bristol City Council must take a serious look at its outdoor advertising policy. This is an opportunity to be a leading local authority and take this a step further by introducing a stance against all corporate billboard advertising, or at least to take into account the content of the messages that the council has so far blindly approved, regardless of how harmful they have been for our communities and our local environment.

It is clear that the residents of Bristol have consistently taken a standpoint against corporate billboard advertising. It's time for the council to align its policy with the voices of its residents and introduce an Advertising Policy that works for the people of Bristol.

### Statement 3: Councillor Carla Denyer

Dear OSMB,

Thank you for considering this proposal to create an Advertising and Sponsorship policy.

I think it is an excellent step for the council to take, because currently a lot of the advertising in our city undermines our council's objectives – on climate change, air pollution, healthy food, mental health and inequality.

Advertising is a really pernicious medium. Long gone are the days of Victorian adverts extolling the virtues of one bar of soap over another. For decades advertising has used psychological techniques to make us feel inadequate – we are not cool enough, sexy enough, professional enough, satiated enough – unless we buy this product. Even if we previously didn't know we wanted it. And it clearly works, or the companies would not be spending so much on ads.

I know some of you will be thinking 'I just ignore them' – but the thing is, the research clearly shows [1] that doesn't work. Even if you think you're ignoring them, the message still goes in.

So I welcome this draft policy but would like to see it go further. In your session today please consider:

1. **Could this overarching policy be made *more* overarching by applying to the Council's planning and property strategy and as well?**
  - a. **Planning:** Or could a similar policy be brought in through the planning system? This was explicitly requested by members of Development Control A, championed by the chair (Don Alexander) a couple of months ago, and I understand that since then it has been under consideration by Cllr Nicola Beech. So there is an opportunity for the council to be more joined up by combining these efforts.
  - b. **Commercial property strategy:** The Council's commercial property strategy seeks income from walls, assets and plots and leads to the BCC-led planning applications such as the proposed billboard on the office wall facing the Temple Meads approach. These then cause the issues for DC. Therefore it would make sense to have a tweak to the commercial property strategy to ensure that council officers are not bringing forward proposals that are at odds with our own planning policies.
2. **Should the policy be more explicit about what it means** for advertising to '*support the council's strategic vision set out in its Corporate Strategy*', be '*compatible with its wider strategy and policy framework, including the Constitution and Equality and Inclusion Policy*' or '*support its values, strategic goals, corporate objectives and/or helps drive forward the council's*

*aspirations'*? I am very concerned that without clear definitions, these will just be vague and nebulous aspirations, and it will be impossible to prove or disprove that they have been met.

### 3. Adding to the list of categories of advertising that are not permitted:

- a. **Advertising for high carbon products or services** (with a definition of what constitutes high carbon). These ads are directly at odds with the city's 2030 carbon neutral target. Work already done as part of the [One City Climate Strategy](#) has shown that a large proportion of the city's emissions are 'Scope 3' (indirect) and therefore tackling excess consumption is essential. **The Climate Strategy contains a requirement to "[create] advertising standards and restrictions to support responsible consumption."**
- b. **Advertising for products that worsen air pollution.** This would have substantial overlap with the above.
- c. **Advertising of junk food**, not just near schools (which is already disallowed under rules from the Advertising Standards Agency) but on billboards across the city. (Advertising for a restaurant near its premises could be exempt.)

With both the Bristol Local Plan and the council's Advertising Concession Agreement (for advertising on bus stops) up for renewal and being drafted *right now*, and with the urgent 2030 carbon neutral target pressing down on us, now is the time to bring in more ambitious policies that will reduce the harm caused by advertising. **If our advertising policy fails to consider these points we risk baking in a harmful status quo for the next decade.**

[London has already done it with junk food](#), and while I recognise Bristol doesn't have the exact same powers as London, we *do have enough powers to do much more than we are currently doing*.

I am happy to answer any questions or send you further reading material.

Thank you for considering my statement.

#### References:

1. Heath R, Nairn A. *Measuring affective advertising: implications of low attention processing on recall*. Journal of Advertising Research. 2005; 45(2): 269-281.

#### Other reading:

- Coverage of a policy I co-proposed on banning advertising for high carbon goods and services: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/green-party-advertising-ban-high-carbon-cars-suv-flights-b963789.html>

I am happy to provide the background paper for this policy upon request.

- Case studies section of the Badvertising website – including a brief summary of the successful campaign to ban tobacco advertising, and the strong parallels between this and advertising of climate damaging products today: <https://www.badverts.org/case-studies>

**Statement 4: David Redgewell, South West Transport Network and Railfuture Severnside**

We welcome the investment in the city region by this fund especially the works in the old city, Baldwin Street and Victoria Street and especially the bus gate on Bristol Bridge which allows important improvements to the cross city bus network service 1 and 2 plus 2a Stockwood to Bristol Temple Meads, City Centre, Clifton Down Station and Southmead Hospital, Southmead we believe this bus service should operate via the Southmead hospital bus station.

We would hope that the Bristol Bridge scheme will lead to much needed regeneration of the eyesore derelict bank buildings in Castle Park and a New High Street.

On other schemes we are still concerned about the delay to the city region bus network from North Somerset and South Bristol when buses join the traffic flow on City Centre Lewins Mead Stokes Croft cycle lanes scheme with conflicting movements of buses terminating at Lewins Mead and Bristol Bus Station and metro bus routes to East and North Bristol and to Cribbs Causeway Bus Station.

The other schemes are most welcomed.

The cycle lanes outside the Bristol Royal Infirmary Marlborough Street may again need looking at for bus services operating to Southmead Hospital service 13 and those terminating in the city centre - bus services from Yate Bus Station Y1 and T1 Bus service from Thornbury and Aztec West.

We are disappointed that at present no way forward has been found for the St Mark's Road area with the local shop owners and, as there are access points to Stapleton road station, we are concerned that no consultation has taken place with Rail user groups like the Severn Side Railway Partnership, Friends of Bristol suburban railway and Railfuture Severnside. We still hope a way forward can be found on this scheme with community leaders.

The Bedminster scheme again should have looked further into public transport needs of bus passengers and safe walking routes to Bedminster Railway station.

We welcome the scheme in Clifton village and the other social distance schemes.

The Cumberland road scheme needs to address access to Harbourside and SS Great Britain and coach parking plus art centre facilities, metro bus routes and the harbour railway.

When the scheme are consulted on as permanent schemes, the role of the public transport needs to be addressed and the role of access to bus stops and Railway stations addressed also along with disabled access arrangements.



We would as ask for consultation with the Mayor One City Transport Board.as the schemes become permanent.

We very welcome the improvements to walking, cycling and public transport in the Bristol Bath city region that this department for transport and WECA mayoral transport authority funding is achieving.

We are also very pleased that both Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire Council now have Covid 19 marshals and hope that these officers will also look out for lack of social distancing at public transport network bus stops and interchanges.

Along with journeys makers and Avon and Somerset police British transport police and Bristol port police.

We would also welcome enforcement on the city region bus and rail services of the wearing of face coverings unless you are exempt.