

Member Forum

8th December 2020

Questions and replies



Procedural note:

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS:

- Councillors are entitled to submit up to 2 written questions each.
- The questions submitted and written replies are enclosed.
- Councillors are also entitled to ask a maximum of 2 supplementary questions at the forum.
- If a councillor has submitted 2 questions on 2 separate topics, they may ask both of their supplementary questions on just one of the topics if they so wish, or may ask one question on each of the 2 separate topics. All supplementary questions must arise directly out of the original question or the reply.
- Via the group leaders / whips, questions have been submitted in priority order.
- At the forum, the asking of supplementary questions will be rotated between the political groups that have submitted questions, taken in priority order.



LABOUR QUESTION 1

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Kirk

Subject: Local Lettings Policy

We are pleased that Lockleaze will benefit from delivery of new affordable housing across several sites, helping to replace lost housing stock and address the housing crisis across the city (which is likely to worsen as a result of the economic impact of Covid). The first large site, Bonnington Walk, was given planning permission last week and we are very encouraged that this development will create 50% affordable housing - that is, 93 units.

We have long made the case for a local lettings policy in Lockleaze, to ensure that a certain proportion of the new housing will be offered to local people in housing need. A consultation is underway, organised by Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust, to survey residents' views on how a local lettings policy could be developed in a fair and equitable way.

1. Would the Mayor consider looking at the results of this consultation as a possible template for starting the process of setting up a local lettings policy for Lockleaze?
2. Does the Mayor agree that local lettings should be looked at across the city to ensure local people feel the benefit of new housing development in their communities?"

REPLY:

1. The approach to local lettings across the city, will be included in the lettings review. The review was paused due to COVID and officers in Housing & Landlord Services will be re-starting it in the new year.
2. There are clear benefits to local people accessing local lettings in developments in their area but this has to be balanced with the City Wide need for housing

Officers have recently met with councillors from Lockleaze to discuss a local lettings policy.

The feedback from the consultation will be a useful starting point in developing a policy. We will be able to consider this in forming the new policy.



CONSERVATIVE QUESTION 1

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Geoff Gollop (Westbury on Trym & Henleaze)

Subject: MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Q.1 Can the Mayor confirm the effect on the Authority's finances arising from the Chancellor's Spending Review (SR20)?

Q.2 As part of this announcement, specifically in relation to COVID-related spending, what impact will a promised additional one-off Government grant have on the General Fund which previously had a substantial revenue gap?

REPLY:

Q1. The government's spending review was very welcome and has certainly removed the gap in our budget for 2021/22. However, it's a one year solution and will still leave the Council with a budget gap to be addressed in order to achieve a legally balanced budget. We'll use 2021/22 to start looking at a new savings programme.

Indicative allocations will be announced in the local government financial settlement which we hope to receive later this month.

Q2. A further tranche (£1.5bn) of COVID response spend has been allocated to support LAs in 21/22 - the detailed mechanism for how this will be apportioned is yet to be determined and whilst we welcome the recognition that the pandemic will impact over the medium term, the economic condition remains uncertain in 2021/22.

It is not guaranteed that the one-off COVID funding announced will be sufficient to meet any additional costs associated within the 21/22 financial year. The position continues to be closely monitored.

Indicative allocations will be announced in the local government financial settlement which we hope to receive later this month.



GREEN QUESTION 1

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Clive Stevens

Subject: Residents emergencies over Christmas

Dear Marvin - I have been a Councillor for four Christmas periods now. And two of them had residents with personal emergencies I needed to deal with. One, in 2016, was due to a Council Bailiff coming round on 28th Dec and apparently trying to take the children's new toys in order to pay off Council Tax debts. The second was Boxing Day 2019 with a sofa sleeping homeless person completely distraught with Homechoice. I had to deal with both without normal Council support. It's about a 50% chance therefore of it happening again...

Q) Could the Mayor set up an email helpline for the Christmas Period so that any Councillor facing a local "emergency" can at least notify the helpline. The helpline should confirm receipt and pass on the issue to the appropriate officer.

REPLY:

I am concerned you found it so difficult to get support. There is already an emergency out of hours phoneline staffed by the emergency duty team which provides out of hours social care advice and support for:

- Difficulties with children and young people
- Concerns about a child outside your family
- Acute mental health problems
- Older people at risk
- Concerns about a person with a disability
- Emergency housing advice

All members are welcome to use this telephone number to get advice if they need to support or signpost constituents. The call will be answered by an experienced social worker who's confident in dealing with crisis situations. You can **call 01454 615 165 or text phone 01454 618 966** and more details are available here: <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/social-care-health/emergency-duty-team>



LIBERAL DEMOCRAT QUESTION 1

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Gary Hopkins (Knowle Ward)

Subject: Covid-19

1. Can the Mayor please explain why, although there was a general upward trend around the country, Bristol moved so rapidly up the league table in terms of infections prior to the national lockdown?
2. Is the Mayor confident of a reclassification of Bristol as Tier 2, at the first review date, and if not, what are the criteria that present the biggest challenge to getting out of Tier 3?

REPLY:

1. There is no definitive answer to this question.

There are a number of factors which may have contributed: Bristol's rates were rising steadily from September, impacted by summer travel and general social mixing. Having had a low incidence in the first wave, the population may have therefore been more susceptible. What's important is that cases have reduced rapidly in recent weeks.

2. The criteria for moving between Tiers is set nationally, but we believe it will refer to the five point framework which defined the Tiers. We do not have the information as to how the framework is calculated to determine the final outcome.

We continue to focus on reducing rates of infection through our Enhanced Outbreak Management Plan which includes back to basics and targeted communication; greater enforcement and local contact tracing. The very rapid decline in new infections following lockdown will also have been impacted by these additional measures which have been in place for a number of weeks.



LABOUR QUESTION 2

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Pickersgill

Subject: Covid-19 interventions

It is clearly a relief that the effective leadership and management of the pandemic locally, and the sound advice and strategic action from our Public Health Team is starting to be reflected in a decline in the number of new infections (despite still being above the national rate).

As local councillors in Easton and Lawrence Hill, we have obviously been particularly worried about the high infection rates of Covid-19 in Upper Easton and Barton Hill. We very much welcomed the emergency meetings of officers and councillors facilitated by the Neighbourhoods and Communities Service Manager which allowed us to all share specific local intelligence and agree very specific targeted interventions.

We were therefore really pleased to see in recent figures that progress is being made, as Upper Easton had 64 cases (down from 76) and Barton Hill had 44 cases (down from 57) - although we are concerned to see a slight rise in adjacent Ashley, Lower Easton and Eastville.

Q: From your experience to date, what does the Mayor think have been the most successful interventions for tackling the infection rate at a local level?"

REPLY:

Lockdown has been the most effective tool in terms of getting infection rates under control nationally.

We appear to be seeing positive results from our Enhanced Outbreak Management Plan which includes back to basics and targeted communication; greater enforcement and local contact tracing.

We have seen a tremendous community response to the pandemic. We have made the most difference where the City Council has been able to work alongside communities in a respectful and trusting collaboration - encouraging community leadership and getting support and resources where it is most needed.

Crucially, as a council we are rooted in communities and we are building on existing relationships. We are seeing the impact of self-organised citizen action, sustained investment in and partnership with the community and voluntary sector and in the city councils community development team.



CONSERVATIVE QUESTION 2

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Matt Melias (Avonmouth)

Subject: KINGS WESTON IRON BRIDGE

Q1. You recently advised that a revised Formal Planning and Listed Consent application is currently being prepared. Can the Mayor state when this is likely to be completed and considered by Planning and/or Development Control Committee?

Q2. One of the five repair or replace options proposed by the consultants CH2M suggested the carriageway which had an estimated cost of £310k - £350k to achieve a 1.0m drop (2019). Irrespective of any other factors such as avoiding Heritage England concerns, this clearly represents a considerable saving from the latest estimates given for the preferred option of raising the footbridge by 1.076m which are in the region of £1.5m.

Can the Mayor just explain why the idea of lowering a stretch of the roadway was rejected or not revisited in the light of these comparative facts and figures?

REPLY:

1. As this is a Grade 2 Listed Footbridge, the Council's Structures team have worked closely with the Council's City Design team, who are overseeing the preparation of the revised new Planning Application, to discuss new revised ramp options for the proposed east and west approach ramps.

Alternative concepts were proposed and considered in Summer this year and some aspects of detail are still to be clarified.

The next step is for the preparation of CAD (computer aided design) drawings to inform discussions of the detail, in order to arrive at an acceptable design which is suitable for submission for planning early in 2021.

2. The lowering of the carriageway cannot be considered further for cost and environmental reasons, namely:

Structural capacity and the stability of existing rock face abutments would be undermined if the road was lowered by in excess of 1.0m, exposing the lower rock face which would no longer be supported by the road.

There are existing utility services in the carriageway which would need to be lowered and diverted, which would be prohibitive in terms of costs and not included in the CH2M bill estimate.



LIBERAL DEMOCRAT QUESTION 2

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Cllr Anthony Negus (Cotham Ward)

Subject: Enforcement and Fines

Funding vital enforcement

Enforcement of policies adopted by this council is generally under-resourced and attempts at promised consolidation, coordination and smart working have not delivered the heralded ability to hold the line on responding to anti-social behaviour.

Fines do not get paid into local authorities' Enforcement services but for some aspects of fly-tipping, private rented sector housing licensing and highways infringements officers are paid for out of licence and application fees. This is limited even within these sectors but does not apply in planning that also has a spin-off in some related 'working on highways' aspects.

1. I support the principle of the offender paying and enforcement being supported through fines. What is the mayor doing to achieve this, including working with other agencies such as Core Cities and the LGA for example, to alleviate this financial problem and so perpetuating failure to resolve these offences?

Residents' Parking Fines

A number of my Cotham residents - and no doubt this issue is more widespread - have been fined since late 2019 when their cars were not showing current permits because they were not notified - as in every one of the preceding 7 years - that their permit was due for renewal. This is because the system was changed without consultation or indeed notification (not to anyone, including their elected representatives) and no longer prompts renewal. I am aware of some residents who have belatedly renewed from the correct expiry date, paid the charge to avoid it being doubled but who have had their appeal against the fine dismissed. These are people not trying to flout the rules who have been the unwitting victims of under-information by this council whom I believe are due a refund and an apology. I have tried to help some of whom I am aware who are also struggling with the council's refusal to grant them continued use of paper permits when they find it difficult to get through the on-line renewal process and ordering digital visitors permits.

2. Will the mayor agree with me, and many others, that these innocent private citizens are being treated unfairly by not having any leeway granted by one department when another is granting 'proportionality' to large numbers of private landlords who have not applied for licences despite the new rules being made clear in their case?

REPLY:

There is a contradiction in your questions: you are asking for tougher treatment of offenders in one, and the then asking for leeway for people who haven't paid fines in the next.

1. Fines generated by the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team from fixed penalty notices (FPN) for a range of environmental and highways offences are retained by the council. In 2019-20 this amounted to approximately £33,000.



The contracted enforcement service (3GS) is fully funded by income generated by FPNs. Any surplus generated by this contract will be ploughed back into tackling environmental issues in the city.

The council does not receive any fines issued by the courts resulting from prosecutions including the enforcement of byelaws, although costs can be recovered.

The cost of Licensing enforcement is recovered from application fees. In some functional areas these fees are set by Central Government however in other areas e.g. taxi licensing they are set locally on the basis of cost recovery.

2. It is the resident's responsibility to ensure they have a valid parking permit, as it is to ensure they are legally parked at all times.

The Council has endeavoured to provide a reminder service historically, but has never guaranteed to do so. One of the benefits of the new digital permit system is that reminders can now be issued automatically by email, where the customer has supplied a valid email address. Where no email address is held the team are attempting to contact the resident by phone, where possible. Parking Services are not aware of any problems where renewal of permit has been a particular concern.

One of the major benefits of moving to virtual permits is that the resident is able to self-service the majority of the processes. i.e: change of vehicle, renewals, activate visitor permits etc. By doing this, permits can be approved in real time or as near to which provides the Council with improved control of the permits issued and improves the customer experience. A further knock on benefit to this change is the removal of the need to print and distribute 10,000s of paper permits and scratch cards, thereby reducing further the Council's Carbon Footprint.

There is a formal appeal process for Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) governed by the Traffic Management Act 2004 and anyone who feels they have been issued a PCN incorrectly is encouraged to submit an appeal (the details of how to do this are on the back of the PCN and on-line at <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/parking/appeal-a-parking-or-bus-lane-fine> where further information is available on the appeals process). All appeals are considered on their own merits.

If further information could be provided to Parking Services, on the cases mentioned above, a review of any appeals received can be undertaken.

Income generated issuing PCNs for the above is ring fenced and is used, in the first incidence, to cover the cost of this type of enforcement with any surplus used to support Transport related initiatives.

Digital permits have now been in place for just over 12 months and we currently have over 18,500 Resident and Visitor digital permits on issue.



LABOUR QUESTION 3

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Phipps

Subject: Traffic in Bedminster

We are grateful for the recent feedback from officers and the opportunity to discuss increasing traffic and parking challenges in Bedminster.

Parking and the environmental damage caused by vehicles continues to be a significant problem in Greater Bedminster. As you are aware, many local residents have approached Cllr Bradshaw and I with regard to creating Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and have shared their proposals with the BCC Traffic Engagement Team.

We have seen clear national government guidance on enacting Covid-related traffic measures and there is also a longer term health context for our residents of poor air quality, traffic noise, excessive speeds and risk from collision.

Q: Please could we have an update on the progress of local BS3 suggestions and a plan of action about what steps the Council will be taking in our ward?

REPLY:

1. We agree – RPZs are a 20th century solution to a 21st century problem – Councillor Dudd is leading this work to move towards low traffic neighbourhoods.

The pandemic has had huge impacts on our travel habits and as a result we recognise that there is much more work to do to better cater for and encourage shorter and more local trips.

That is why we are developing a Liveable Neighbourhoods Strategy for the city that we will be presenting to Cabinet next year. The strategy will set out how we will engage with residents to bring forward community-led proposals as well as how we prioritise investment across the city as a whole. The Greater Bedminster area will of course be a part of these plans.

In the meantime we are actively seeking further funding to bolster our existing Streetspace programme which would allow us to accelerate our plans in areas such as Bedminster.



CONSERVATIVE QUESTION 3

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Liz Radford (Westbury on Trym & Henleaze)

Subject: AVON MUTUAL REGIONAL COMMUNITY BANK

Q.1 Most Members will appreciate and understand the motivations behind this initiative. The Mayor may recall that we have previously aired some misgivings around the potential financial risks which accompany involvement in this market (questions to Cabinet, 2nd July 2019). At that time, your Deputy, Cllr Cheney emphasised that the Authority was simply providing funding to allow the business case to be prepared and further sought to assuage concerns by reference to the existence of strong regulatory oversight.

Is the Mayor confident that there will be sufficient safeguards in place to protect local taxpayers' exposure, particularly after completion of the third phase of investment being requested (£20.5m)? This is an important consideration given that even if this project is successful, it is reasonable to expect retail banks to react and compete for custom?

Q2. The latest Cabinet report makes clear that: - *“community banks would still have to offer an attractive commercial proposition to lenders and borrowers if they are to be viable and remain sustainable in the long term.”* Of course, the USP of this business will be its inclusive ethos to cater for those who unfortunately also represent something of a higher commercial risk.

Can the Mayor state in what ways this mutual will be exempt or protected from being subject to the kinds of economic forces which have so far driven changes in the delivery of financial services which it is seeking to reverse?

REPLY:

1. There are no ongoing liabilities. We have invested £300,000 and this is the level of our risk.
2. I know that many members will agree with the aims of this initiative, which will look to support some of the most financially excluded people in Bristol, as well as supporting SME and Micro businesses. It is on this basis that Cabinet approved the funding.

Access to financial services and financial inclusion are of fundamental importance to achieving an inclusive economy where no one is left behind.



LIBERAL DEMOCRAT QUESTION 3

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Tim Kent (Hengrove and Whitchurch Park)

Subject: Bristol Energy

Bristol City Council reported on 10th August that Yu Energy purchased the business customers for £1.34M and on 8th September that the domestic customers were purchased by Together Energy for £34M.

1. Can the Mayor confirm when this money was transferred to Bristol City Council and what proportion of the money have we received?
2. To date how much has Bristol Energy cost tax payers?

REPLY:

1. Bristol Energy was sold for £14m, not £34m as in your question.

Final details will be in the Bristol Energy accounts published shortly.

2. In an exempt Cabinet report in 2010, it was approved in principle that the Council would establish a wholly owned energy company. Bristol Energy Company was created in Feb 2015 by the cross party cabinet at the time.

We inherited a company with a business plan that committed us to a spend of £15.7m

We invested with a revised business plan up to an envelope agreed at Cabinet of £37.7m.

We have not exceeded the agreed envelope and this will be partially recouped through the sale of the customer books.



LABOUR QUESTION 4

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Hickman

Subject: Universal Credit

700,000 more people would have fallen into poverty if it Universal Credit wasn't increased by £20 a week last March. Now, the Government is saying that it wants to take this extra £20 away, before we have seen the back of Covid. I know the Mayor will agree with me that this decision is callous, and typical of the Conservative Party, but I think it is worth stating that now for the public to hear.

Q: Will the Mayor reiterate his opposition to the Government's cruel plan to cut Universal Credit by £20 per week during a pandemic?

REPLY:

Government plans to scrap the £20 Universal Credit bonus would take £1,000 a year away from Britain's poorest 500,000 families, pushing over one million more people below the poverty line – and rising to three million depending on further unemployment numbers, according to the Fabian Society.

The same Government refused to feed hungry children during half-term, plans to cut some five million keyworkers' pay, and issued a public sector pay freeze.

Former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, together with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and food charity Feeding Britain, has called on the Government to abandon plans to cut Universal Credit by £20 a week.

The Labour Government introduced and uprated child benefits and tax credits and helped lift around one million children out of poverty.

I am proud to be a founding member of Gordon Brown's Alliance for Full Employment. Child poverty has been increasing since 2012 under the Conservative / Lib Dem coalition and is now rising to record levels, with the rise primarily among families with children under five – with all the impacts we know that early year inequalities bring.

One million families with children will rely on charity food parcels this Christmas, with three-quarters of that number also relying on donated gifts (Save the Children).

Since 2016, our administration has helped bring Bristol together to feed our children, safeguarded early intervention like children's centres, and continues to work with unions and employers to create more jobs and extend the real Living Wage to more workers.



CONSERVATIVE QUESTION 4

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Graham Morris (Stockwood)

Subject: LOCAL HIGHWAYS ISSUES

[SCOTLAND LANE]

Firstly, thank you to Highways for their work in ensuring this route remains open. We now have a much increased confidence that the lane is open and accessible.

In the past 3 weeks we have had two crashes where speeding was a contributory factor.

There have also been several occurrences in the last 8 weeks of significant fly-tipping including 4 mattresses, a variety of clothing, domestic waste and, most horrifically, a load of asbestos dumped in the middle of the road. The installation of cameras would be of great help to deter and to catch the perpetrators.

Q.1 Will the Mayor support such additional measures to help reduce the occurrences of fly-tipping in Scotland Lane and to whom should I direct this request in order to progress this matter?

[WELLS ROAD]

The pavement and gutters along the Wells Road, between Mowbray Road and Counterslip Church are badly impacted by ponding of water, to the extent that to walk along the road is both dangerous and the pedestrians are likely to get wet. The cycle path is also out of bounds, due to the large amount of water which pooling in the gutter by the junction with Davids Road.

This busy thoroughfare provides a route to school for parents and pupils at St Bernadette Secondary and Primary schools as well as access to the local shops and churches.

Q.1 Can the Mayor please advise if there are any plans to deal with the issues of standing water on this stretch of pavement and road?

REPLY:

1. We're pleased you appreciate the work we carried out on Scotland Lane.

Consideration is being given to a range of measures to deter fly tipping on Scotland Road including the use of CCTV. Because Scotland Lane is a long stretch of road and fly tip happens at various points at infrequent times this presents challenges in terms where to position cameras and when to monitor them.

However further data is being gathered to determine whether CCTV could be effective in capturing offences.

2. We are currently undertaking our main arterial route cleanse of gullies across the city and the Wells Road over the length identified above was cleansed week commencing 30th November 2020.



Thank you for making us aware of the ponding issues. The site has been investigated by an officer and added to our small works program. Works to undertake repairs are expected to progress in the new financial year.



LIBERAL DEMOCRAT QUESTION 4

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Mark Wright (Hotwells and Harbourside Ward)

Subject: Proposed plans for "Waterfront Place"

In his response to my previous questions trying to pierce the secrecy around this deal, Mayor Rees claimed that the tender was "a public competition". I cannot think of another public competition where every entrant except the winner remained secret.

1. The standard tendering process invites confidential bids from interested parties for a project, with only the winner guaranteed to be public. If the Mayor will not release the other 21 proposals to the public, in what way does he consider that this "public competition" was different to any other confidential contract tender by the Council?
2. I asked this last time, but unfortunately the Mayor refused to answer it; so I ask again: Will the Mayor release the other 21 entrants so that the Bristol public can see if any are better than the current "winner"?

REPLY:

All proposals were evaluated objectively through a two stage process. The evaluation was carried out by BCC officers from Property, City Design and the Bristol Events team, External support was provided by Savills Property Consultants and Design West.

Following the selection of the preferred bidder conditional contracts were signed

The contract with the preferred bidder is conditional on planning and the public will have a right to comment on the planning application.



CONSERVATIVE QUESTION 5

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Mark Weston (Henbury & Brentry)

Subject: ROAD SAFETY INTERVENTIONS AT HENBURY ROAD/HALLEN ROAD

1. At a previous forum (8th September) the Mayor alluded to a number of additional road safety features being planned for this accident hotspot:-

'We are also planning to install a Vehicle Activated Sign on the approach to the junction, undertaking a more detailed review of the road surface, reviewing existing parking restrictions, the feasibility of vehicle restraint measures, a potential crossing on Kingsweston Road, near Blaise and wider safety measures in the general area.'

Can the Mayor update me on the progress which has been made by officers to expedite these urgently needed measures and the current estimated timescales for commencement/completion?

2. Please can the Mayor confirm what steps have been taken to keep local residents informed of this work as, sadly, to date I have been unable to secure a meeting with Highways Officers to discuss the issues in detail?

REPLY:

1. We have installed a new chevron sign and vegetation blocking the existing signs has been cut back.

Unfortunately the road markings have been delayed due to wet weather so won't now be installed until the new year but these works will be prioritised. The road surface condition has been checked and meets current standards so doesn't require any further action.

2. We continue to look at the wider options, including a crossing and vehicle activated sign and a speed survey has been commissioned. Due to the ongoing restrictions regarding Covid, a site meeting with residents has not been possible. I understand an online meeting was previously proposed and that offer remains on the table.



LIBERAL DEMOCRAT QUESTION 5

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Tony Carey (Brislington East)

Subject: Public Safety - Bristol to Bath Cycle Route

1. Is the Mayor aware of the violence and intimidation being carried out by gangs of youths on the Bristol to Bath Cycle route?
2. Can he assure me that he will do all with our sister agencies to ensure commuters and residents safety on this vital active transport link?

REPLY:

1. The Mayor and Cabinet Members are regularly briefed by Officers and this matter has been recently flagged at a Portfolio Holder briefing.
2. The Parks and Green Spaces Service is working with internal services such as Community Safety and external agencies; including the Police to address the current issues along the Bristol and Bath Cycle Route.

We support any action the Police deem necessary.



CONSERVATIVE QUESTION 6

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Richard Eddy (Bishopsworth)

Subject: COUNCIL-RUN PUBLIC LAVATORIES IN BRISTOL

1. On 4th December 2017- three years ago- the Cabinet approved the strategy paper 'Changing the Way We Deliver the Public Toilet Service in Bristol', which heralded the closure and potential disposal of most of the Council's non-Parks based public conveniences. Can the Mayor inform me of the current status by site of each closed public lavatory?
2. Obviously, the primary purpose of the closure programme was to cut revenue expenditure. Can the Major inform me of any other advantages which have accrued to Bristolians from the programme?

REPLY:

1. Of the 15 public toilets that were closed:

- 7 toilets have been or are about to be transferred under the community asset scheme
- 1 toilet is now being used as a parks depot
- 2 toilets have been sold
- 1 toilet is being run by a private enterprise as a toilet
- In addition a thriving Community Toilets Scheme (CTS) has been established with nearly 200 participants
- The CTS has vastly extended facilities available to the public in terms of opening hours and locations across the city. It is nationally acknowledged as a successful scheme.
- Toilets in parks remain open – covid measures allowing.

2. As well as the increase in numbers of toilets for the public to use, the award winning community toilet scheme has led to toilets that are open for longer, are better quality, and are safer.



LIBERAL DEMOCRAT QUESTION 6

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Chris Davies (Knowle Ward)

Subject: Transport

1. Will the Mayor now work with others in the West of England to move away from the present bus operating system and replace it with franchising?
2. Does the Mayor recognise that both the Greater Bristol Bus Network and MetroBus, worked on and delivered by the four former Avon Authorities, have until Covid-19, been successful in terms of increasing use of public transport against the national trend, and helping our local economy; can he point to any major transport scheme that he has been involved in that is actually being delivered?

REPLY:

1. During a period when nobody is using the public transport system, this is not the time to consider franchising. The money used to bail them out should have been used to purchase equity.

This is a matter for WECA to consider as part of its strategic transport powers devolved to the region.

2. We are working to make Metrobus a success. Its success is limited as it hasn't opened all planned routes and is under capacity at peak times. We are working with FirstBus to try and make it a success as part of an integrated transport system that includes mass transit.

We have continued to work in partnership with bus operators to improve services and delivered continuous growth in passenger numbers pre Covid-19. This has been achieved through a combination of different measures including; contactless payments on bus, simplified fares and fare capping, investment in new infrastructure and bus priority interventions on Bristol Bridge, Baldwin Street and Anchor Road. Clean bus investment, including brand new bio-methane powered buses and the retrofitting of over 150 buses to Euro 6 emissions standards. Frequency enhancements for bus route 2 were delayed by Covid restrictions but have now been delivered with the introduction of service 2a.

Other successful transport schemes include: better taxi ranks, e-scooters, new train stations, electrification of mainline, freight consolidation, improved road services and asset management, new bio-gas buses and bio-methane filling stations, Prince Street bridge refurbishment, Scotland Lane drainage works, fixing the pedestrian and road bridges that have been neglected, new cycle paths, subsidy of 36, 91 and 96 bus routes, pedestrianisation of the old city, Temple Gate upgrade, electric car charging hubs, new Bus lanes, Bridge Valley road repairs and £2.5m project on Airport Road/A4174.



CONSERVATIVE QUESTION 7

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor John Goulandris (Stoke Bishop)

Subject: DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT

Q.1 The P06 budget monitoring report reveals that there is a (non Covid related) substantial £8.1m overspend in the dedicated schools grant (DSG). Can the Mayor confirm when the mandatory deficit management plan to covering future spending will be shared with Members?

Q.2 Is the Mayor confident that sufficient mitigation measures to deal with these cost pressures are being taken so that we will not see DfE inspectors arrive in Bristol in the New Year?

REPLY:

1. The DSG deficit management plan will be completed and shared with members and Schools Forum prior the end of the financial year.

There is an overspend in the DSG and special needs block across the country as government funding is not keeping pace with increased demand.

2. The Local Area Inspection for Special Educational Needs took place in September 2019 and identified 5 key areas of significant weakness. In order to respond and improve each of these areas, Bristol has been required to produce and deliver a formal Written Statement of Action, which outlines what actions will be taken in order to improve Bristol's SEND system and provision. Progress against this action plan is formally monitored by the Department for Education and NHS England.

SEND is underfunded across the country and any intervention by you or your group to central government would be appreciated.

The recent and significant increase in High Needs Block spend, is a direct result of the positive actions taken to improve performance along with the increased focus on statutory compliance, particularly in relation to Education, health and Care Plans. Wider transformation programmes, which commenced this year, will also ensure the Bristol's SEND system becomes more financially sustainable. However, it is important to emphasise that this is a long term and complex system-wide reform across education, health and care.



CONSERVATIVE QUESTION 8

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Lesley Alexander (Frome Vale)

Subject: PROTECTION OF PARKS AND GREEN SPACES

Q.1 Covid and lockdown have shown just how much people value parks and green spaces, including the Downs. Does the Mayor agree that our parks and green spaces are vital for wellbeing and, if so, deserves much better protection in terms of prioritising for funding?

Q.2 Whilst acknowledging budget pressures, will he commit to ensuring that these crucial public amenities have sufficient resources allocated to preserve them and/or has he considered exploring other potential fundraising methods such as 'go fund me' social media platforms and business sponsorship?

REPLY:

1. During the Covid Pandemic the relevance and importance of parks and green spaces was recognised at a national level. It is accepted that the city's parks and green spaces provided a lifeline for local communities in supporting their health and wellbeing during these very testing times.

The Council is currently developing a new Parks and Green Spaces Strategy for the city which will help shape and protect green spaces for the future.

2. Local authorities have significant financial challenges ahead which we need to address.

To ensure that we can sustain and provide sufficient resources to maintain and manage these public amenities going forward the Council's Parks Service is looking at ways in which we can secure funding and generate income through private, public partnerships and the use of its assets so these funds can be reinvested into public spaces across the city.



CONSERVATIVE QUESTION 9

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Peter Abraham (Stoke Bishop)

Subject: IMPACT OF CV-19 ON STOKE BISHOP

Q.1 At one stage, Stoke Bishop ward had the highest number of recorded Covid cases in Bristol, attributed by local residents to the large student population. Can the Mayor state whether or not the Council's analysis of the data confirms this view?

Q.2 Does the Mayor believe that Bristol University has done a good job in containing Covid in our city?

REPLY:

1. Yes Stoke Bishop's once high case rate was due to student cases (student halls by the downs). Incidentally, Stoke Bishop now has one of the lowest rates in Bristol.

University outbreaks were identified, managed and contained through joint working between the university, public health England and our local Public Health teams.

Daily incident Management meetings provided oversight of the process and undertook a daily risk assessment which was used to inform the University Executive.

The universities both established direct reporting systems, which meant that positive cases were identified immediately, and ahead of test and trace and the University Outbreak Management Plan provided the framework for managing both the outbreak response and welfare support. Data was published daily on the University Website.

What's important about Covid is that it's controlled. It's not just the numbers. Bristol University did a good job at controlling the situation. 100 controlled cases has less risk than 10 uncontrolled case in terms of spread.

2. Yes, as you can see by the fact that Stoke Bishop has one of the lowest rates in the city. And don't underestimate the scale of the challenge, not only for the University, but for students too. We are grateful for their efforts and the work to manage their staff and students during a difficult period.



CONSERVATIVE QUESTION 10

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Chris Windows (Henbury & Brentry)

Subject: BRISTOL'S STRUGGLING BUSINESSES

Q.1 The city centre is very quiet with much reduced footfall. It appears to have been more badly impacted than 'out of town' shopping centres like Cribbs Causeway. Why does the Mayor think this has happened?

Q.2 Of the money given by WECA to improve our high streets, the Authority chose to spend the money on East Street, Bedminster. Can the Mayor confirm:- how much funding was provided to regenerate this area; whether or not this has all been spent; and what assessment (if any) has been made as to its success?

REPLY:

1. Do you have any evidence to support this statement? Our evidence suggests they're both struggling.

Obviously people living in the north of the city, including Henbury and Brentry, are attracted to Cribbs rather than the city centre.

2. Bedminster was also just a pilot and we have spent £275,000. An assessment of success has been difficult due to the impact of Covid, which we know has had a huge effect on our highstreets.

Bristol has 47 high streets, South Glos has 11 and B&NES have 35 and yet the WECA pot was split equally 3 ways. This is another example of the governance issues we find working through WECA which I have raised recently.

We will bid for more money as it becomes available.



CONSERVATIVE QUESTION 11

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Steve Smith (Westbury on Trym & Henleaze)

Subject: ROUTE OUT OF TIER 3 RESTRICTIONS

Q.1 A Liverpool pilot involving voluntary mass testing has proved very effective in controlling the spread of coronavirus infections. I understand that it is planned to extend this model extended across other local authority tier 3 areas. What discussions has the Mayor initiated or been engaged in to see this approach applied in Bristol?

Q.2 Can the Mayor elaborate on what steps he is taking to ensure Bristol will move into Tier 2 at the first review point scheduled for 16th December?

REPLY:

1. To maximise the impact of our testing, we will be undertaking more targeted testing, using rapid lateral flow technologies. We will be using these tests to reduce risk by identifying and breaking chains of transmission focussing on high risk occupational groups and settings. This will be a managed programme. We were not offered mass population testing, which is extremely resource intensive and is of limited value.

2. Our numbers have fallen rapidly and we would expect to exit tier 3.

Last Friday we reported 176 cases per 100,000, compared to 300 per 100,000 just a week earlier. We are now almost down to the national average.

We still don't know what criteria government will be using to move areas between tiers. They haven't shared this information with us and perhaps you and your group could intervene with the conservative government to interact more with cities.

We continue to focus on reducing rates of infection through our Enhanced Outbreak Management Plan which includes back to basics and targeted communication; greater enforcement and local contact tracing, as well as increased and targeted testing.



CONSERVATIVE QUESTION 12

Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Steve Jones (Stockwood)

Subject: STOCKWOOD STREET FURNITURE

Q.1 On the corner of West Town Lane and Wells Road is a very splendid road sign. It is many decades old and in a poor state of repair. Can the Mayor please confirm what responsibility the council and Highways have to maintain historic road signs and whether there are plans to restore this local feature?

Q.2 Some of the historic streetlights in Stockwood Ward are getting old and are being replaced. They are being exchanged with a different design to the original installations. Can the Mayor explain what is happening to the old street lights once they are removed, and why the replacements are of a different design?

REPLY:

1. We have a responsibility to maintain signage, but we do not have a specific responsibility to retain 'historic' signs. However we do try to maintain the historic signs where possible even if they're not listed

Highway maintenance will action a job and repair the sign as appropriate. Consideration will be given to whether this might be a suitable project for community payback depending on current restrictions and the work required.

2. We changed the policy on cast iron lighting column to ensure they were retained in their original position, where possible.

I can confirm the only cast iron lighting column removed from the area was due to vehicle damage and has been replaced with a refurbished cast lighting column, which matches the original design as far as reasonably practicable.

The only lighting columns replaced have been non-galvanised lighting columns, which are rusting and reached end of life. These are then scrapped.

We have carried out Salix upgrades, but this involves new LED lantern, a bracket if required and maybe some electrical upgrades. No lighting columns have been removed and relocated elsewhere in the City, in line with our policy.

The replacement columns are all galvanised lighting columns, conforming to the latest British and EU standards, replacing the original non-galvanised columns that are no longer used.

