

Question: PQ23.01

Cabinet – 9th March 2021

Re: Agenda item 23 – Bristol Holding Group Business Plans

Question submitted by: Suzanne Audrey

It was worrying to read the following extracts from Grant Thornton's Review of Governance Arrangements for Bristol City Council's Subsidiaries 2019/20, which suggest members of Cabinet were not fully informed when decisions were being taken and seemed to accept a process described as inadequate by the external auditor.

- *Arrangements for communicating key inputs to Cabinet... as well as the outcomes of scrutiny from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB), were inadequate.*
- *the information and papers provided... did not clearly state the risks faced... or provide sufficient robust information to enable Cabinet to make an informed decision.*
- *papers provided to Cabinet included within the appendices and, as such, messages were more difficult for Cabinet to consider*
- *some information and decisions... are not routinely published. In our opinion and based on practice elsewhere, we consider that these decisions could be published by the Council. This approach, which restricts access to information, some of which does not need to be confidential, is creating concerns that the Council is not as open and transparent as it could be and should now be addressed within its governance arrangements.*
- *Cabinet papers did not record that OSMB were consulted and the outcome of that discussion.*
- *The approval of BE's business plan by Cabinet was agenda item 18 of 22, of which there were 14 key decisions including the Council's 2020/21 budget. Our review of the webcast identified that there were no questions or comments made and the business plan was approved without any challenge.*
- *....the Council did not have effective risk management arrangements in place.*

Given these concerns, it is worrying to note (at the time of drafting this question) that there are well over 100 papers for today's agenda. There are 19 key decisions to be made, of which the 23rd item on the agenda (16th key decision) relates to Bristol Holdings business plans (18 papers) and the 24th item on the agenda (17th key decision) relates to the enormous increase in costs for refurbishment of the troubled Bristol Beacon (13 papers).

Question

With regard to the Bristol Holdings business plans, please can you explain what measures have been undertaken to ensure that all Cabinet members have been able to read, question, comment on, and/or challenge the information provided before this item is approved at today's Cabinet meeting?