

## **DC Statement – Cllr Christine Townsend Green Party Group Southville Ward**

The Nolan Principles cannot be served with the current governance set-up of this committee despite the elected members being bound by them as the Society of Merchant Venturers are not. Nor does the Society of Merchant Venturers make any financial contribution. The Committee's secrecy, incompetence and extravagance have, cost the Bristolian tax-payer hundreds of thousands of pounds and must now be dealt with.

The recent Judicial Review illuminated how public funds were used to defend the indefensible. The settlement demonstrated that the Committee's licensing decisions were, as they had been repeatedly warned, contrary to the purpose of the Victorian piece of legislation that this committee is bound by. Society of Merchant Venturer members led on these decisions.

The Society of Merchant Venturers have sought to involve themselves in the democratic process and influence decisions in this and other arenas which has been well publicised in recent years. The time has come for a complete overhaul of how and why public money can be used by private individuals to further their own views, interests and ideological positions. The elected representatives of the people, including the Lord Mayor, must step-up and address these now pressing issues that run contrary to the democratic society in which we are told we live.

Officers administrating this committee do so as servants of the people paid from the public purse. Yet the contortions exercised in relation to the Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations questions from Downs for People do not reflect this.

Your agenda today does not include the minutes from the Governance Task and Finish Group that previous paperwork indicates apparently met on December 13th. Nor could I find a record of a meeting stated as scheduled for September 8th – Why is that? Where are these minutes? This is unacceptable.

Councillors on this committee cannot claim the role of the elected mayor lacks transparency, openness, avoidable loss of public funds and democratic decision making, whilst simultaneously dragging their feet with inaction and inertia in relation to this committee – that would be hypocrisy of the highest order.

The Society of Merchant Venturers need to hand over the Downs and remove themselves from our governance structures, getting out of Bristol's democracy – removed if necessary. Only those of us with a mandate to represent the people can be in position to make decisions over how our public spaces are managed and how much public money is spent on them. It is the people who have been paying for the upkeep and development of public space, not the Society of Merchant Venturers.