

Resources

Scrutiny Commission

1st December 2022

Public Forum



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Q1 – Q2	Suzanna Audrey	13. Performance Report Quarter 1



Public Forum Statements

Statement 1: Suzanne Audrey

I would like to submit the statement to the Resources Scrutiny Commission, 1 December 2022.

Quarterly Performance Report (Quarter 1 2022/23)

BPPM516 Increase the percentage of Corporate FOI requests responded to within 20 working days

I note the following update in the Quarterly Performance Report (Q1 2022.23): “Due to the previous target of 70% being regularly achieved the target has been increased from 70% to 75% this will allow for us to continue to track improvement and monitor in future quarters. It is noted that this is currently below the new target and work is continuing across the council to improve performance.”

In response to a question about Freedom of Information requests that I submitted to Cabinet member Cllr Craig Cheney at Full Council 8 November 2022, I received the following reply:

“We recently increased the KPI target from 70% to its current of 75% as we were routinely hitting it. We’ve had a fall in performance this quarter, likely due to challenges around resources and the complex nature of the cases we receive. The challenges around resources and financial pressures are forcing us to look at other ways to improve our FOI performance. The Head of Information Assurance and Disclosures Team Manager meet with the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) regularly to discuss topics and challenges, discuss workloads and complex cases/trends. One of our proposals is to reduce the amount of FOI requests - the cost to the council of managing FOI requests is wildly out of step to the value of the request. Most FOIs come from the same small group of people and have minimal wider public interest. The council needs to be open and transparent in its operations so as to reduce the number of requests. The inefficiency of responses is due to the sheer number of requests which takes resource out of other services.”

I was surprised by the suggestion that “most FOIs come from the same small group of people and have minimal wider public interest” and decided to investigate the WhatDoTheyKnow website as this is open to the public ([Bristol City Council - view and make Freedom of Information requests - WhatDoTheyKnow](#)). I looked at the first 3 ‘pages’ of FOI requests made to Bristol City Council which date back to August 2022 (Appendix 1). I found the following:

- 124 request/follow-up contacts were made by 83 different people
- The topics are wide-ranging and include: local democracy, parks and green spaces, trees, transport, mayoral activities and expenditure, adult and children’s services, special educational needs and disabilities, planning, enforcement, housing, clean air zone, city governance, city finance, litter and fly-tipping, parking

I find it difficult to understand why these requests were described as coming from “the same small group of people” or why they are considered to be of “minimal wider public interest”.

I have sympathy with the officers who are attempting to deal with freedom of information requests if they are unable to easily access the information required.

I agree with the suggestion that the council needs to be open and transparent in its operations so as to reduce the number of requests.

Appendix 1 – Please see attached document:

FOI requests, coded and sorted. [Bristol City Council - view and make Freedom of Information requests - WhatDoTheyKnow](#) accessed 23 November 2022.

Statement 2: David Redgewell

Budget 2023 /2024.

Firstly, we welcome the major proposals for Public transport, Network Division and the City Transport including bus and railway officers to move to WECA.

Especially bus stop maintenance design and delivery to the West of England Mayoral Combined Transport Authority.

6 years ago before covid 19 the City Council, South Gloucestershire Council and Banes were looking to transfer all major transport functions to West of England Mayoral Combined Transport Authority.

As per the statutory order in Parliament

The metro mayor Dan Norris has the control of a large number Transport Projects all in Partnership with North Somerset council.

With the West of England committee.

These are Bristol Temple Meads station and quarter. £92 MILLION.

Bus service improvements plan. £105 MILLION.

£520 MILLION City Region transport plan.

£152 million pounds for the metro west railway route.

Bristol Temple Meads station Bedminster, Parson Street, Pill and Portishead.

But all the Mayoral Combined Transport Authority have staff.

To carry out Main Highway functions.

Railway Executive functions.

Bus service information and infrastructure services.

Bus and rail interchanges.

Walking and cycling.

All the other Mayoral Combined Transport Authority have precepting powers.

We very much and fully support the transfer of Transport functions and Public transport Network officers to the west of England mayoral combined transport Authority.

As we have this should of happen years ago.

The public transport campaign organisations have been asking Mayor Rees to help set up an integrated transport Authority. With the appropriate office to run the Authority.

There are concerns about the west of England Mayoral Combined Transport Authority.

But this because it needs officer and staff to run still quite new Authority.

Bristol City Council is doing the right thing by transferring offers and functions.

We want to see a stronger West of England mayoral combined Transport Authority committee and Transport executive. With Transport councillors from Bristol City Council, Don Alexander

Sarah Warren, BANES, Stephen Reade Transport Executive, South Gloucestershire North Somerset Council Steve Hogg.

We must set up an integration Transport Authority.

Especially to deliver Metro West railway projects Bus service improvements plan. Joint local transport plans and mass transit system.

All Transport campaign groups.

Transport for Great Bristol.

Railfuture Severnside.

Friends of Bristol Suburban Railways.

South West Transport Network.

Somerset Bus Partnership.

Somerset catch the bus campaign.

Gloucester catch the bus campaign

Bath and Greater Bristol tram group

Bristol Disability Equities Forum.

All support the setting up of an Integrated Transport Authority.

And North Somerset Council join the West of England Mayoral Combined Transport Authority and the LEP in the Levelling Up Bill.

On other budget issue we are very concerned about the city estate. As a major proposal.

The leasing of the lord mayor chapel to Bristol Cathedral. The terms are not laid out in budget.

On Bristol central library we are very concerned that such an ironic grade 1 listed library building should be sold off.

The central library was built by Charles Holden and Anthony Stocker and built in 1906.

£30,000 taken from £50,000 left for construction.

We do not understand the reference to poor disabled access when we have a fully accessible public library. We are not marginalised from the building.

The migrant community, vulnerable people and the deprived communities have bus services to College Green and the city centre a few minutes walk or wheelchair roll from College Green.

We have a great network of libraries across the city region with Bristol City Council and libraries west.

Including St Paul's, Easton, Bedminster, Fishponds, Knowle, Lockleaze.

Kingswood, Staple Hill, Patchway and Filton in South Gloucestershire.

Where regional book services can be ordered, computers are available.

Both the Lord Mayor's Chapel and the central library should be commercialised.

With wedding and events, better catering facilities and menu reorganisation of the library to create a public space and meeting room.

We do not support relocation of the central library for the city and the city region is in the interest of the communities of the city and county of Bristol to Debenhams in Broadmead or Marks and Spencer building.

Broadmead shopping centre facilities and Tourist area need a lot of investment but not the central library.

As a Trustee of Bristol Disability Equities Forum I would like to see full equalities impact assessments. Not a few lines about disabled and migrant communities and vulnerable people and deprived people.

If the central library is sold off to the school, money should be returned to Vincent Stuckey and Lean family members via the Merchant Ventures.

We support investment in city parks and gardens but would like to see more investment in cafes and public toilets to generate income.

We also need a budget for public toilets. Especially within the new transport interchanges in the west of England Mayoral Combined Transport Authority building and hubs in Bristol.

We need to maintain a budget for the night-time economy and tourism within the city. As both are big economic development for the city region with Visit West.

A new tourist information centre could be in the central library or the bus and coach station

We also need to see the Transport Levy for bus and public transport Network services transfer to the West of England Mayoral Combined Transport Authority and Metro Mayor Dan Norris.

For bus services and metro west railway.

Coaches ferry and bus services.

We like to add to our statement we would like clarification of the lord mayor chapel being used for gay marriage by law as this still not allowed in the church of England in the Diocese of Bristol and Malmesbury. We would not oppose transfer to the cathedral if gay rights were protected.

On the Central library we are interested in any plans to move the library to city hall.

David Redgewell South west transport Network and Railfuture Severnside

Bristol Disability Equalities Forum.

Ian Beckey Gloucestershire catch the bus service campaign.

Public Forum Questions

Question 1 & 2: Suzanne Audrey

I would like to submit the following questions.

Question 1:

Are most Freedom of Information requests to Bristol City Council from the same small group of people with minimal wider public interest?

Question1 Officer Reply:

This year the Council has received approximately 1700 information requests and we do receive a number of requests from the same small group of citizens.

Question 2:

In what ways could be council be more open and transparent to reduce the number of Freedom of Information requests?

Question2 Officer Reply:

As this question relates to comments made by Cllr Cheney in a public meeting, it would not be appropriate for officers to respond and this question should be referred to the Mayor's Office for a response.