

Public Forum

Committee Model Working Group

28th July 2023



Statements	
Number	Name
PS01	Clive Stevens
PS02	Dr Ann Kennard, Secretary, Bristol International Twinning Association
PS03	Dianne Francombe, CEO, Bristol & West of England China Bureau
PS04	Mary Page
PS05	Dan Ackroyd

Statements

PS01 – Clive Stevens

Dear Chair and Committee Members.

It is good to read that last month you gave further thought to the future operation of the Escalation Panel. This is a necessary improvement to local democracy and if used well could ensure controversial aspects within a decision or scheme can be researched and deliberated on more thoroughly. There were times in my day when a short delay to get further or missing information or deeper consideration of more effective mitigation would have helped make a better, less expensive, decision.

Additionally, because scrutiny is built in to the committees themselves, it will add an extra incentive to get things right.

I assume escalation won't apply to the Planning Committees. They have their "cooling off" period (since 2019 I think) which enables officers and councillors to seek further information and reflect on the balance of issues and mitigations. That is a similar purpose, just triggered by a different mechanism, to the Escalation Panel.

Hopefully the Panel will be open and people can submit statements, like Call-In. All in the interests of a fairer and more democratic Bristol, which is what people voted for in the referendum.

Kind regards – Clive Stevens



PS02 – Dr Ann Kennard, Secretary, Bristol International Twinnings Association

STATEMENT FROM THE BRISTOL INTERNATIONAL TWINNINGS ASSOCIATION

Having received the information about the Public Meeting to discuss the upcoming Committee system, when the mayoral system ceases in 2024, with only 2 hours to the deadline and an appointment to keep, I can only make a small contribution to the discussion.

BITA has been an active member of the International Strategy Board from its inception, and has made a consistent contribution to its work of publicising Bristol's international role. Bristol has seven partner cities which cover a large part of the world, where we also have excellent links and personal connections. It is important to have an official forum where representatives of Bristol's international community can meet and exchange business, cultural and other activities, as well as ideas and views with each other. The link between all these bodies and the BCC International Office is vital to ensure that all necessary synergies are possible – without that link, Bristol's international work will become scattered and lose its heart and its momentum. It is essential to retain this body, and to ensure that the International Office is at the centre of the City Council's work in contact with the rest of the world.

Dr Ann Kennard

Secretary, Bristol International Twinnings Association

Chair, Bristol-Hannover Council

PS03 - Dianne Francombe, CEO, Bristol & West of England China Bureau

Morning

I am confirming that as CEO of the Bristol & West of England China bureau a member of BITA how important the international strategy board is to developing the international activities on behalf of the City.

A coordinated and strategic response is essential to keep Bristol focussed on international matters and ensure that the city has a voice in the wider international community as well as national policy.

The China bureau can only operate to continue to develop a harmonious relationship with its sister city Guangzhou if the City is behind it and as this relationship is a civic one (like other twinings) it is essential to have support from the City Council and for us to have committee where matters can be discussed.



I hope that within the new committee structure you continue to keep the International strategy board because if not it will be very detrimental to our activities and all the excellent work that has been undertaken over the last 10 years will quickly be lost leaving Bristol and its communities devoid of a voice across the City.

Thank you for taking my message into account.

Best wishes

Dianne

Dianne Francombe
CEO
Bristol & West of England China Bureau

PS04 – Mary Page

To the Committee,

Having looked through the information supplied on External Partnerships, I believe two columns have been missed from the data. For the council and the public to understand the relationships with the External Partners I believe it is essential to understand how the council representative works with that partner, i.e. whether the role is as part of the usual duties of the council representative, or whether there is an additional payment made for their services to that organisation. It also matters where any payment for services to that external partner comes from, i.e. is it a special responsibility allowance from the council or additional payment from external funds.

This financial interests information is critical to know who the representative is serving and representing when sitting at the table of any External Partnership meeting.

Organisations such as the Bristol Port where the councillor becomes part of the Board might well expect the councillor to look after and put the Port's interests first, doubly so if there is a financial payment for being part of the Board. This is exacerbated if the councillor is the local one for Avonmouth and Lawrence Weston like Councillor Alexander, as it means there's a potential conflict between the role on the board looking after the interests of the Port operations in that area and the role of the councillor looking after their residents in Avonmouth and Lawrence Weston. So as well as a column for financial recompense for the role, there needs to be a column stating 'Whose side the representative is on'.

I also note that the Avon Fire Authority is missing from the list as an External Partner but it is chaired by Councillor Massey. It would be useful to understand why, or how that body is defined and what other similar bodies might have been left out. As to the public this might look like an External Partnership.

Additionally, I believe that the financial (pecuniary interests) of these relationships would be appropriate to publish under the Dept of Local Government Transparency Code 2014/2015, especially point 5.



5. Three principles have guided the development of this Code:

- demand led – there are growing expectations that new technologies and publication of data should support transparency and accountability. It is vital that public bodies recognise the value to the public of the data they hold, understand what they hold, what their communities want and then release it in a way that allows the public, developers and the media to use it
- open – provision of public data should become integral to local authority engagement with local people so that it drives accountability to them. Its availability should be promoted and publicised so that residents know how to access it and how it can be used. Presentation should be helpful and accessible to local people and other interested persons, and
- timely – the timeliness of making public data available is often of vital importance. It should be made public as soon as possible following production even if it is not accompanied with detailed analysis.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-transparency-code-2015/local-government-transparency-code-2015>

Kind regards,
Mary Page

PS05 – Dan Ackroyd

1. The setup of the One City groups is an abomination that seems deliberately chosen to boost the voice of the privileged and to exclude people.

2. Chair, I think you failed to do a good job at the last meeting to enforce the rules. There was disruption from a Councillor attending as a member of the public, and you did nothing to stop it, and so it fell to another member of the public to confront the councillor.

That is a shame for a couple of reasons.

It is not pleasant for members of the public to be forced to follow one set of rules for attending, to see an elected member feel free to break those rules.

Less obviously, not enforcing the rules prevents some useful conversations being had. Judging by their demeanour as they left the room, the Councillor clearly felt that they have useful information that should be written down and considered about urgent decision making. I hope the committee figures out a way to preserve and use that info.

3. There is a problem in Bristol with the Council keeping too much information secret by default, and apparently there just aren't great ways of finding out some information other than 'contacting a councillor'.

Councillors are already stretched for time. They shouldn't have to help Bristolians tracking down information that should have already been published.



There is also a discriminatory aspect to this lack of information, as some Councillors represent much poorer wards, where there are naturally going to be more urgent case work to be done by the councillor.

But also, that way of getting information depends on the Councillor being willing to talk to the public, which just isn't always the case.

This is going to be a problem as there seems likely to be many disagreements and confrontations over whether a particular piece of information should be published or not, particularly when the information is partially held by outside group (e.g. WECA). Some clear rules about being more open might help.

4. My understanding is that the conversation about the East Bristol Liveable Neighbourhood became a bit heated. I am sorry to hear that. As an Open Source developer I know how distressing working in public can be.

Some of the members of Cabinet who are implementing the scheme have been repeatedly trying to 'encourage' members of another party into engaging with the public more, to at least relieve the burden of that community engagement.

But they're doing that after being really quite unpleasant, for a very long period of time, to the people they are asking for help,

It's unrealistic to expect people who have been on the receiving end of unpleasantness to come to the aid of those who have been abusive of them.

If any group of Councillors wants to expect that another group would aid them in communicating with the public, they need to have a period of time where they have spoken only with respect with the fellow Councillors, have been open with information instead of hoarding it, and aren't playing silly games with the levers of power.

I hope the Councillors who aren't currently behaving adequately do not wait until the Committee system actually arrives, before attempting to change their behaviour.

cheers

Dan Ackroyd

