

# Public Forum

Committee Model Working Group

29<sup>th</sup> September 2023



Questions	
Number	Name
PQ01/02	Dan Ackroyd

Statements	
Number	Name
PS01	Councillor Tim Kent

## Questions

**Q1** – Currently press releases are available through <https://news.bristol.gov.uk/> and presumably sent out to members of the press. Currently some of the items are quite 'opinionated' and there seems under the committee model there is going to be quite a large risk of disagreement about which items are newsworthy and the exact wording. If it's worth the time of this committee to discuss it, what is going to be the process for writing the press releases under the committee model?

**A1** – Media relations and the preparation of press releases is not part of the Work Programme for the CMWG, however officers have advised that this is one of the things that will be picked up with Party Group Leaders as part of the implementation of the new arrangements.

**Q2** – I told you I was going to ask a difficult question. We, as a city, just haven't thoroughly thought through would be the effect of politicians being in office, when they can't be 'punished' by being voted out. I do think politicians who are not running for re-election have a really important role to play in this committee and more generally in the council and political scene in Bristol. The mayor has told the story of his unhappy childhood quite a few times, and I believe him. His life story genuinely seems to be on an upward swing since he joined a boxing club. Unfortunately, the lesson the mayor seems to have learnt is to fight, fight, fight until the bell rings.

The mayor is still in 'fighting' mode and this is affecting how the council is being run and how politicians who are running for re-election are conducting themselves. There is a huge amount of politicisation of council activities that are meant to be apolitical, including the planning process. Planning decisions taken really affects people's lives, and have impacts on the city for decades or even longer to come. My understanding is that the politicisation of the planning process has resulted in the need to protect the identity of residents when making comments on the planning portal and that of planning officers attending committees. There is an unacceptable level of name calling coming from councillors, which somewhat amusingly, I probably am not allowed to repeat here, as they are too



offensive for members of the public to repeat. But I am most concerned about the politicisation of the proposed East Bristol Liveable neighbourhood scheme.

I do not know exactly where comity has broken down, but the 'heat' in the discourse is deeply alarming to me. Councillors should not be trying to force people in another party to back their scheme via twitter. It should not be acceptable for the mayor to trying to force the leader of a party to 'order' one of their councillors to ignore the opinion of the people who elected them. There are a lot of people on the internet who have started to believe really quite odd ideas about the motivation behind schemes to limit car traffic in residential streets. Some of them believe they are justified in taking quite extreme actions to prevent what they see as nefarious schemes. I am very concerned that if the current level of 'heat' in the conversation around the EBLN would provide enough 'causus belli' for them to instigate violence against citizen or officers, or politicians.

Moving from a mayoral model to a committee system would be difficult under the best of circumstances. It's going to be much more difficult if the outgoing mayor continues his encouragement of fighting until his term ends. I would hope members of this committee would use their influence to calm the waters and speak out against behaviour that is going to make introducing the committee model more difficult than it needs to be.

**My question is, when are committee members (and hopefully other councillors who are not running again) going to speak up, against the behaviour that is threatening the success of the transition to a committee model?**

**A2** – We are satisfied that the preparations for the Committee model are progressing well.

## Statements

### **PS01 – Councillor Tim Kent**

#### **Title: Area Committees Working Group**

The working group has been meeting weekly since the last meeting of this Committee to ensure it can report back to the committee next month.

The working group issued a form to departments suggesting 25 areas that local decision making maybe developed, or a consultation role taken on. This was based on the content of the previous public statement by Cllr Poultney and myself to this committee. The working group has met with several executive and service directors to discuss opportunities for greater local decision making. In the main these conversations have been really constructive with a positive indication from officers although financial constraints remain a common concern. That work is now complete and over the next week or two we will be working through the list to bring forward a paper to suggest what areas could be considered for Area Committee local decision making and what would not be appropriate to proceed with at this point. We are seeing this as a two (or even three) stage process to ensure anything we suggest is deliverable.

