Public Forum
Committee Model Working Group
27th October 2023

Questions	
Number	**Name**
PQ01	Dan Ackroyd
PQ02	
PQ03	
PQ04	
PQ05	Suzanne Audrey

Statements	
Number	**Name**
PS01	Clive Stevens
PS02	Roger Gimson

Questions

Qs 01-04 – Dan Ackroyd

Q1 – Currently there seems to be some confusion about the procedures for a councillor not being allowed to vote on a certain agenda item. For example, there was a matter before Full Council where there was a surprise announcement that any Councillor who rents a property wouldn't be allowed to vote, which was slightly controversial. At another committee, the chair proposed during the meeting that a Councillor who had only watched the video of a previous meeting, but hadn't attended that previous meeting wouldn't be allowed to vote on accepting the minutes, but the member objected quite strongly to that.

It does not seem a good process that members are presented with these surprise announcements during meetings. Members may need time to take legal advice which is not possible to do on the fly during a meeting.

Wouldn't it make much more sense that the discussion of any proposed changes in who can take part in votes must happen before the meeting?

A1 – Councillors receive legal/constitutional advice as and when appropriate regarding decisions and voting arrangements, this includes the requirement to be present and voting for formal decisions. This is provided as soon as reasonably practicable.

Q2 – For a lot of meetings, it's really frustrating how little time there is between publication of the agenda and documents of a meeting, and the deadline for when questions need to be submitted by.

For example, at the Extra-ordinary Full Council on the 31st, the first two documents have 250 pages each. That's quite a bit of information to be digested in the three working days between those documents being published in the agenda and the deadline for questions.

I realise it might not be trivial to achieve this, but please can agendas of meetings be published further ahead of the meeting?

A2 – The statutory requirement for publication of formal committee papers is 5 clear working days. For Full Council meetings, we usually try to send these with 6 clear working days' notice. The nature of business and the volume of reports mean it's already challenging to meet the existing deadlines.

Q3 – Regarding the agenda item "Should public forum questions for all committees (regulatory and policy) be limited to 2 questions (with 1 supplementary question per public forum question)?"

Although there are some committee meetings that have far more questions from many members of the public than could possibly be answered in a meeting, there are other committees where there is very
little public engagement, and a two question limit seems unnecessary.

Recently, a member of the public definitely asked more than two questions in a sub-committee, but those questions resulted in the discovery that BCC hasn't been exactly following UK law, which seems like quite a useful outcome of a meeting, that might not have happened if that committee had a two question limit.

I think there could be some changes to procedure that distributes the time more fairly in a meeting, including a rule against members give long bloviating answers that one could interpret as aiming to try to 'run out the clock' to avoid a particular public forum question being asked in a meeting.

Do other councils, particularly those that already operate under a committee model, have rules this council could copy that more fairly divide up the time allocated for public forum?

A3 – Public forum arrangements vary between local authorities and some have little or no provision for questions. The option to limit the number of questions to two per person per meeting would assist with management of time at the meetings and enable more people to contribute. This matter will be considered by the Committee Model Working Group in more detail at the meeting.

Q4 - For some meeting, 30 minutes for public forum is really not enough time.

Is it possible that more time could be allocated to public forum under certain circumstances, e.g. when there are a large number of topics that different people want to ask about?

A4 – The Chair has the option to increase the amount of time allocated to public forum.

Suzanne Audrey

Q5 – In my opinion, one of the reasons why Bristol voted to reject the elected mayor system of governance is because power and decision-making has been increasingly concentrated in the hands of the mayor and a small number of people who are chosen by the mayor. This has side-lined local councillors and l the communities they represent.

Please will you summarise the key points in the local decision-making paper presented today that will enable local communities to be more involved in local decision-making?

A5 – The key points are set out in the paper, which includes the ways in which local communities can become more involved in decision making. This is separated into the activities that are recommended for introduction in Phase 1 (from May 24) as well as a longer list of potential suggestions should Members opt to proceed to Phase 2.

Statements

PS01 – Clive Stevens

Dear Committee - I couldn't help but notice the words, "equitable distribution" on page 2 of your report (part 3, in the table):

"Community Investment Funds - Preparatory work can be done to understand how to ensure an equitable distribution of funding across the city."

The term "equitable distribution" sits slap bang within the subject of fairness which is my chosen study area at the University of Bristol. You might be interested to know that there are at least three widely used interpretations of the term "equitable":

1) Firstly the legal term, I doubt that applies here.
2) There is the concept of giving a helping hand to the disadvantaged. This version of equitable was acknowledged as the most commonly used in a 2021 systematic study of usage within public administration and the social sciences (education, social work, healthcare etc).
3) A third conception of equitable is to give just reward, merit or deserts. The benefit a person gains is proportionate to the effort or money they put in. This meaning is still used in business, much of psychology and education as well.

So an equitable distribution of community investment funding could for example be focused in deprived areas and appropriate demographics (based on meaning #2) or it could be focused to those groups that deserve it on merit (meaning #3) perhaps for example those with enough resource to find matched funding. Or maybe you can, with the help of officers, and with your diversity of backgrounds and experience, seek a middle ground where both apply (like in education).

My studies show that differences in conceptions of moral values like fairness, equity and the like can lead to a lot of disagreement amongst a diverse group. So, I leave you with my best wishes!

Clive Stevens

(ex-councillor and now PhD student, topic: conceptions of fairness in local government)

PS02 – Roger Gimson

I am former chair of the Bishopston, Cotham and Redland (BCR) Neighbourhood Partnership, and currently chair of the BCR Community Partnership which holds public forum meetings on issues such as engagement with the CIL process. However, this statement is a personal one.

In my previous statement to the Committee Model Working Group meeting in May, I set out three suggested principles for local decision making. The latest update from the Local Decision Making sub-group proposes to base the future approach to this on the Area Committee structure. I welcome this because it meets my suggested first principle that **local councillors should drive local engagement**.

The responsibilities that are proposed to be devolved to Area Committees in Phase 1, in addition to their current role in allocating local CIL/S106 funds, are largely advisory. This will be a small step towards better local engagement, but only if the Area Committees can respond in a timely manner to prioritisation requests on matters such as road safety schemes, asset disposals, street cleaning etc. This suggests they will need to meet more frequently - the Area Committee responsible for our area has not met for a year because no CIL funds were available to allocate this year.

In the next phase of work for the Local Decision Making sub-group, concerning the structure and governance of Area Committees, my third principle, that **decision making should be truly local**, becomes important. I would suggest that:
- Current Area Committees are too large to engage directly with the people in their areas.
- Area Committees must meet on a regular well-publicised schedule, at least four times a year, to address local concerns in a timely manner.
- Either Area Committees must allow more time for public forum at their meetings, or Councillors should be obliged to hold local public meetings beforehand to allow local opinion to be heard prior to decisions being taken or priorities being set.

I would also hope that consideration will be given in future options to my second principle – that **funding should be better allocated**. Every Area Committee should have the ability to address local matters that are not necessarily related to development sites or deprivation. This is to ensure that all council tax payers feel that the Council is prepared to engage with them and address their local concerns.