

Member Forum

12 December 2023

Questions and replies



Procedural note:

There will be a special 20 minute session at the beginning of this meeting for Councillors to ask questions about the Barton House major incident.

Councillors are entitled to submit up to 2 written questions each.

- The questions submitted and written replies are enclosed.
- Councillors are also entitled to ask a maximum of 2 supplementary questions at the forum. A supplementary question must arise out of the original question or answer given.
- Via the group leaders / whips, questions have been submitted in priority order.
- At the forum, the asking of supplementary questions will be rotated between the political groups that have submitted questions, taken in priority order.



Questions to the Mayor from Councillor Amal Ali

I recognise this is a hugely difficult situation for Barton House residents, who have my utmost sympathy. I welcome that the council has organised measures such as taxis to school for affected children. Please can Cllr Dudd outline the steps taken to support Barton House residents since the evacuation?

REPLY:

I'd like to reiterate the thanks to residents expressed at cabinet last week, where we thanked tenants for their cooperation and resilience as we wait for the full results of the structural survey.

Since the temporary decant of Barton House on Tuesday 14 November we have, with the support of community organisations, city partners and local leaders, put in place wrap around support for residents. I am grateful for the support given by all who have been involved and for the tireless efforts of officers and all associated with this response.

This is clearly a uniquely challenging period for residents of Barton House and I recognise the stress they have been under for the past four weeks. I hope that the steps we have taken to support residents has helped ease their stress and discomfort.

The steps taken by the council to support residents includes providing:

- Hotel accommodation on a full board basis.
- Three meals a day with packed lunches available for school age children.
- Taxi journeys to essential locations such as school and work.
- Bus passes.
- Regular cleaning and laundry services.
- Childcare and support.
- Translations of regular email updates.

In addition to the support provided by the council, we have also seen a huge surge in community offers of help. Regular communications have included signposting tenants to other support, which have included activities for children and families including sessions for mothers and babies, translation services and broader group and family support.



Questions to the Mayor from Councillor Mark Weston

1. The situation at Barton House has caused a great deal of concern for many residents across the city living in High Rise blocks of Flats. Can I ask the Mayor if other buildings have been subjected to similar testing so that we can reassure residents that their homes are safe?
2. After any extraordinary event like this there are always lessons that can be learnt. Can the Mayor please spell out how that learning exercise will be conducted and how residents can directly feed into it?

REPLY:

1. High rise blocks in the council estate are subject to several types of surveys as part of the regulatory requirements of the sector. Where surveys identify any actions required to ensure resident safety is maintained, we take steps to carry out that work.

As our oldest buildings Barton House, John Cozens House, and Havilland House were subject to some initial surveys. Barton House raised some questions which were further considered by a peer review. This led to the evacuation, as a result we've carried out considerable, intrusive survey tests as to the safety of the building.

We have no evidence that there are any safety concerns at Havilland or John Cozens or any of the rest of our estate. Barton House remains of a unique construction amongst our housing estate.

2. Of course. We're still in the process now and will outline a review process once we're in the recovery period. The council's Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response team are currently undertaking a review process to consider the approach taken to date.

As with all situations where an emergency response and recovery are required, input will be gathered from across all areas of the council, particularly those services who have been supporting residents directly.

The council's processes for emergency response proved to be effective and we brought together all key leadership inside BCC, as well as the set up of a multi agency board, following the existing processes for the declaration of a major incident.

There always some lessons, and there will also be successes. Our experience shows just how important it is to engage with community leaders to prevent misinformation from exploitative campaign groups. One negative is the suspected leak of information to the press during the confidential all member briefing. We need to consider how we share information in future.

We've been in constant communication with residents regarding the operation and this has been a success.



Questions to the Mayor from Councillor Andrew Brown

Did the Council consider waiving rents for all residents displaced from Barton House? - e.g. those being accommodated in hotels rather than with friends or relatives.

If yes, can you outline the reasons why this was ruled out?

REPLY:

I can understand the attractiveness of the argument, but as with so many issues we deal with there are unintended consequences.

There are two key areas for consideration:

Stopping rent charging would end our contractual relationship with tenants. This is an important relationship that ensures many protections for residents, and places duties on the council that would not exist in the absence of this relationship. While they are paying rent we have a responsibility to residents and it means we are currently funding alternative accommodation and food, as well as daily payments to people staying with family and friend.

Also, the ending of rent charging would result in the recalculation of benefits received by the majority of residents of the block. Such recalculations may negatively impact people's incomes and potentially create a debt that would need to be paid out of future benefit entitlement.

During this temporary evacuation we believe our approach is in the best interests of the majority of residents, but we will keep our policy under review once we know the long term position.



Questions to the Mayor from Councillor Chris Jackson

As a former firefighter, I understand the issues facing Barton House. Putting residents' safety first by evacuating the building to was the right decision. With some of the issues that have arisen with older housing stock that could prove uneconomical to repair and maintain going forward, this makes the case that we need a full-scale approach to modernise our council housing. Rather than extending the life of outdated buildings that may no longer be fit for purpose, we should instead consider building entirely new council housing stock to replace buildings that are no longer fit for purpose.

Does the Mayor agree with this assessment and what government support would be needed to enable this to happen?

REPLY:

Since 2016 the council has invested £2.5 million per year into building safety improvements in our high-rise blocks through our estate regeneration plan. As part of that process a refreshed Housing Investment Plan (HIP) was approved by Cabinet in January 2023 and included approval for expenditure in the first year of the plan.

Following approval at Budget Full Council we are now investing an additional £96 million in putting new building safety measures in place. This investment will see new sprinkler and alarm systems being installed and work being carried out to continue the replacement of cladding. Considerable progress has been made to establish the requirements of the new framework required to deliver fire safety work, particularly fire compartmentation and fire stopping works.

We need to continue to review our current estate and identify long term plans for the older stock within the housing estate. Building new homes, particularly affordable and social housing, has been a central plank of this administration's policies. More than 12,500 new homes have been built in Bristol since 2016, with a further 3,040 underway. Of these 12,534 new homes, 88 percent were built on previously developed land and 2,142 were new affordable homes. Despite this effort, we continue to face an unprecedented housing crisis that can only be tackled by continuing to deliver housing at scale.



Questions to the Mayor from Councillor Tim Rippington

I note it costs £3.5m to evacuate Barton House and support residents through the evacuation. This, of course, is absolutely the right thing to do. However, I am interested to know what impact will these costs could potentially have on the HRA Business Plan, including existing planned programmes and our ability to build new council homes?

REPLY:

We can't be certain at this time as the situation continues, and of course still don't know the final costs.

Will review the HRA business plan as part of the usual process for budget full council next year which will be able to give more details about the consequences for the future plans.

We continue to be committed to building new council homes. The current HRA business plan identifies £1.8 billion of investment over the next 30 years that aims to deliver more social housing across our city. This delivery is already underway as we continue to work with Goram Homes to develop new sites such as Hengrove Park and move closer to completing development in areas such as Lockleaze.





Questions to the Mayor from Councillor Heather Mack**Subject: Budget**

The budget consultation is currently live, with more in proposed savings for next year than is necessary to prepare for a greater budget gap in 25/26.

1. Does the Mayor think that the current level of funding for local government is acceptable?
2. Does the Mayor think that the savings being made now will have a long-term negative impact on the city?

REPLY:

1. No I don't. The funding gap for local authorities across the UK is almost £3 billion over next two years. The LGA has recently warned that one in five councils expect to follow others in issuing a section 114 notice this year or next.

Bristol, like councils all across the country, including Nottingham, continues to face real challenges after thirteen years of national government austerity. The cost of operating crisis is driven by that austerity, combined with rising costs of and demands for local services – not least children's and adult's social care.

The Chancellor's Autumn Statement harmed us too, so we will be waiting until Christmas for the Local Government Finance Settlement, ahead of passing a Budget in February for April.

This lack of certainty, lack of long-term funding, is at the heart of what needs to change in the relationship between local and national government.

2. Yes. Just as one example: last year, we secured £8 million through the Household Support Fund. This supported over 90,000 households in our city last year:

- It goes towards feeding kids who would otherwise go hungry, with 23,000 free school meal vouchers
- Heating homes which would otherwise be cold
- Supporting foster households and care leavers
- Helping out over 10,000 low-income pensioners
- Giving Discretionary Housing Payments to parents who can't pay their rent
- Topping up Local Crisis Prevention Fund payments for 10,000 households
- Adding to the capacity of the Red Cross – who are operating in our city, in our country, in 2023.

National government are, shockingly, cutting that, while the national cost of living crisis continues. There is no question that every reduction from them which foists more demand onto us, is having a negative impact.

There may be no alternative other than for the Council's s.151 officer to issue a s.114 report as the council's expenditure will exceed the resources it has available in the financial year. The reality is that we need to pass a balanced Budget for an eighth year. Otherwise, commissioners appointed by the government will do it for us.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Hornchen, Brislington East Ward**Subject: Mass Transit**

I have just returned from Brussels and Cologne. They both have mass transit systems that go underground when needed near the centre, due to the streets being too narrow. As a cyclist, this is a very appealing solution to me as it means we can have enough space above ground for active travel infrastructure, including mobility scooters.

Is there room for segregated cycle lanes and bus lanes on roads like Church Road and Gloucester Road if they both have above-ground, segregated mass transit routes?

REPLY

Any mass transit system has to be segregated to achieve modal shift.

The rough road width for a segregated mass transit with cycle paths, loading and pavements is around 17.5-18m, or 15-16m without loading. Including a traffic lane in either direction requires 21-22m minimum for segregated mass transit, cycle route, pavements and traffic lane in either direction.

Road widths in St George and Kingswood on Church Road (A420) are 10.5-11m. There are various other points along the route between Kingswood and Lawrence Hill that are similar widths and not many sections that get the 15-16m minimum for just mass transit and a cycle route with pavements but no loading.

It is not a simple case of removing lanes or traffic capacity, these roads have one lane in either direction for most of their length so to provide the segregation which is needed to get mode switch from cars to public transport you would have to remove the general traffic lanes completely and close the roads. Closing these roads would move thousands of vehicles including HGVs onto other unsuitable routes such as Ashley Down Road, Kellaway Avenue and Whitehall Rd. Closing these roads would bring the city to gridlock.

One other option is to knock down half of the buildings along the road and widen it but that is also not realistic and would be hugely damaging to local communities along those corridors.

I am sure you are as surprised as I am that the opposition parties all fail to support the underground option which is the only way of delivering segregated mass transit. I'm sure you're also as surprised as I am that the Tories and Green Party support the closure of Gloucester Road, Church Road, Two Mile Hill, St Luke's Road and Malago Road.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Steve Smith (Westbury on Trym & Henleaze)**Subject: ROAD SURFACE MAINTENANCE**

Members of all parties welcomed the recent news that area committee CIL-funded highway projects would be “topped up” to ensure that they could be completed despite inflationary pressures. It now transpires that other safety-critical road schemes are also being delayed because contractors cannot work for the rates that the Council is paying. An example is the roundabout at the junction of Henleaze Rd, Southmead Rd and Eastfield in my ward, which is in a dangerous condition and in desperate need of resurfacing. A TTRO has been made for the work to take place and we were assured that it would be done before Christmas. However, we are now told that at least two contractors have turned the work down because inflation means that the rates paid under the Council’s framework contract are insufficient. This despite assurances we have been given that the contract was to be renegotiated this September.

1. How many highways schemes (by number, total value, and broken down by Ward) are currently delayed due to contractors turning down work?

2. What is being done to resolve this problem, which will only get worse as prices continue to rise and our roads continue to crumble?

REPLY

1. I share your frustration with this consequence of Conservative mismanagement of the national economy, including Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng’s disastrous Mini-Budget, on top of 13 years of disinvestment in Local Government. It is having real consequences across capital and maintenance projects, as well as in other services such as Adult Social Care.

The framework contract consists of 12 Lots. Two of the Lots are having problems with contractor acceptance due to inflation. Highway schemes delayed are:

- 17 surfacing sites on the Lot 1 framework. We are awaiting a decision from the remaining contractor on the list. These are spread across the authority, and amount to. (Spreadsheet shared directly) value circa £800k (spreadsheet to be shared).
- 13 footway maintenance works in paved areas, totalling (again, spreadsheet of details shared directly) circa £500k (spreadsheet to be shared). This funding has now been moved to other footway repairs on bituminous footways.
- 10 Local Area committee schemes, totalling £200k (document to be shared) (attached document)

2. The contract price was increased in March 2023 by 8% to encourage the suppliers. In September this was changed to 18.8% in line with the inflation indices in the contract. However, construction inflation, especially on bitumen, has risen well above the indexed rise in inflation.



We are in the process of gaining approvals to allow the contractors on the each of the framework Lots not delivering to reprice and then re-rank the contractors. This will allow the contractors to reprice considering all the inflation pressures but still provide competition. We are aiming to have this complete by mid-February 2024.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Gary Hopkins

Subject: JUBILEE POOL

1. jubilee pool is now in its second year of independence and despite difficult circumstances is doing well.

Central government made funds available for pools through sport England. Jubilee pool was excluded from the council bid for funds and only included after jubilee contacted Sport England direct causing sport England to instruct bcc to include jubilee. S.E showed how much they valued the pool by awarding £22,000. Meanwhile the council decided to exclude the jubilee from the even more important capital bid.

Why does the mayor think he knows better than Sport England despite their instructions?

2. jubilee receives no financial support from BCC. Can the mayor please give the total annual cost to this council including PFI, for the pools that this council does support and the capital planned to be spent?

REPLY

1. It was not “excluded”. We engaged productively with Sport England around the criteria for submissions, then successfully made a bid working with FOJP. We were delighted to be awarded the grant, passported to Jubilee Pool.

Sport England have made a capital grant round available for improved energy efficiency projects. We have looked across our entire estate and developed a £1million bid which prioritised projects which we think have the best chance of meeting the competitive criteria, as well as being aligned to our Leisure Strategy which prioritises leisure centres with large footfall and serve areas of deprivation.

Jubilee Pool are invited to continue to collaborate with Bristol City Leap on further developing energy efficiency projects, and potential external financing.

2. Jubilee Pool receives no support for BCC as it was removed from the portfolio for the reasons explained above.

Excluding the PFI there is no cost to the council of our estate, and we’re confident to leverage private investment of £9m by the operators because there is no longer cross subsidy of Jubilee Pool or Kingsdown Sports Centre. The investment proposed with the planning submission at Horfield Leisure Centre shows the potential.

As you state, Jubilee Pool is now run by the local community, and an alternative operator was found for Kingsdown who have also invested in the facility. The net effect of our decision was to ensure a sustainable future for Bristol’s leisure portfolio and we have lost no pool provision.



Questions to the Mayor from Councillor Ed Plowden

Subject: Bus Franchising

All three Unitary Authorities have now passed a resolution to investigate formally the Business Case for Bus Franchising, which is the required first step towards franchising.

The Combined Authority Mayor's response appears to be to produce an internal, informal report at some unspecified moment in the next year, which will fall short of the required formal study.

1. Is the outgoing Bristol Mayor satisfied with this course of action and what attempt has he made to communicate the Full Council decision taken last December, so as to prompt meaningful action?
2. Why did no-one from Bristol City Council attend the Combined Authority meeting on 1/12/23 and will someone now attend now it has been re-arranged specifically to give Bristol a chance to attend?

REPLY:

1. Bus franchising will not make a difference if your party's above ground mass transit scheme closes Gloucester Road, Malago Road, St Lukes Road and Church Road to traffic. Buses, HGVs and other vehicles will be forced onto small and unfit residential roads in these areas.

As the chair of WECA scrutiny you are best placed to raise these questions there, however we are calling for a report to come to January committee. This should set out the position and will be able to comment in more detail then.

2. My actions are always in the best interests of the citizens of Bristol and, as a board member of the combined authority, in the best interests of the citizens of the city region.

In this case, this is a question not of policy, but of WECA's procedures. Any questions you have about WECA's procedure should be raised there.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Hornchen, Brislington East ward

Subject: Rough Sleeping

I am appalled that the Home Secretary is looking to stop charities giving tents to homeless people, some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Not addressing rough sleeping is a political choice, as shown by the 'Everyone In' policy during Covid and the fact that rough sleeping decreased by 75% under the last Labour Government.

What does the council need to end rough sleeping in Bristol?

REPLY:

I agree, and clearly the Prime Minister did too. The now former Home Secretary's statement, calling rough sleeping a 'lifestyle choice' was appalling. Homelessness is clearly not a lifestyle choice and it is an abhorrent way to talk about some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

An end to no-fault evictions, more protections for renters, and a form of rent controls would help tackle rough-sleeping. Likewise, we need more investment into public services that support people at risk of homelessness.

The rise in rough sleeping is symptom of the overall housing crisis, and the only long term solution to this crisis is building more homes. We launched Project 1,000, our plan to see 1,000 affordable homes built each year in Bristol, which will bring down the housing waiting list – playing a part in ensuring everyone can have a roof over their heads.

An important step towards ending homelessness in the UK is electing a Labour Government.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor John Goulandris (Stoke Bishop)

Subject: USING INJUNCTIONS TO END ILLEGAL ENCAMPMENTS

1. Does the Mayor welcome the important Supreme Court ruling on the use of 'newcomer' injunctions to prevent unidentified travellers from setting up camp on public land?
2. Following this determination, will the Mayor commit to using injunctions as a method of protecting the Downs? Such a move would avoid the large legal costs and officer time expended on removing unlawful encampments. In addition, clearly other parts of Bristol which are plagued by or subjected to these problems would benefit from this means of enforcing property rights.

REPLY

1. The Supreme Court decision does confirm the approach we've taken in a number of our Injunction cases, most notably in St Werburghs.

The Council has a range of powers both under statute and at common law to deal with trespasses on its land, which includes newcomer Injunctions. We've used all available powers to address unauthorised encampments, always considering our duties and responsibilities as a public authority, having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights, the Equality Act 2010 and proportionality generally.

2. The decision of the Supreme Court just confirms that newcomers are bound by an injunction which protects the land in question. In an earlier decision it did also make the point that injunctions were not necessarily the appropriate remedy where a number of the occupiers have protected characteristics or other vulnerabilities.

We do not think an injunction is the correct approach here. The encampment on the highway on the Downs is assessed as low impact by the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Chris Davies**Subject: MOVING TRAFFIC OFFENCES**

Last month i highlighted that despite the long campaign by the lga to get the powers and public demand for action this council has not taken 1 single action on enforcement on these available powers.

The answer to my question was factually incorrect. Driving through a no entry sign and the wrong way up a one way street is covered as reference to part 6 of the road traffic act of 2004 schedule 7. You should check this in the commons library.

The last sentence of the response actually admitted that cost effective enforcement by moveable cameras is possible but of course if the police were called upon they would have far more time and cost commitment and would not get a ticket receipt.

1. Will the mayor now list out what offences we have applied to enforce and if key ones are missing explain why.
2. Will the mayor get officers to meet with us so that we can explain what is required for effective enforcement to protect our public.

REPLY

In November 2022 Bristol City Council consulted on six sites in the city that were identified for new Moving Traffic Enforcement (MTE) powers, This consultation formed part of our application to Government for the powers to be granted to us, under Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004.

More recently, in July this year, we were granted the new MTE powers by Government to enable us to enforce moving traffic restrictions in Bristol. Since then we have been working on the delivery of these proposals, with the aim of launching the enforcement powers at the six identified sites in Spring 2024. These sites are:

- Hockeys Lane – Banned turn restriction;
- King Georges Road, Queens Road– Banned turn restrictions;
- Lower Redland Road – No entry restriction onto a one-way road;
- Furber Road – No entry restriction onto a one-way road;
- Bath Bridge roundabout Cattle Market Road – Banned movement restriction;
- Hareclive Road, Anton Bantock Way – Banned turn restrictions;

We are aware that other sites across the city may also be suitable for MTE moving forwards, and so further information on how we triage these new MTE requests will be confirmed in due course, once the powers are launched next Spring at the first tranche of sites listed above.

However, please be aware that it is likely that some element of funding will need to be identified before we can introduce any new MTE sites in the city. In the meantime, and for the avoidance of doubt, these new MTE powers do not cover pavement parking and/or parking restrictions, which are dealt with differently.



Questions to the Mayor from Councillor Christine Townsend**Subject: HMOs**

Regarding 57 Islington Rd BS3 – unlawful tenanting as a mandatory HMO without the legally required correct dwelling class.

In the reply I received on Nov 14th you stated ‘Officers have been in correspondence with the owner to gain access and inspect, which we hope will be within the next two weeks’.

It is now four weeks later and the above has not happened. I am informed that: - ‘applicable legislation does provide provisions whereby entry can be secured.’ Planning Enforcement has known for months about the unlawful practice of this landlord, I have been communicating with the department since July.

1. What evidence, over what timeframe, is needed to enact the provisions that allow for entry?

There is no point in having Article 4 Directions that seek to control the numbers of HMOs in a particular area if the necessary enforcement is not undertaken when landlords stick two fingers up to the council and existing residents to unlawfully tenant a property anyway.

2. As there is a proposal to extend private renting licenses, what, if any, impact will this have on the ability of planning enforcement to actually act when unlawful practice is highlighted and known to be happening?

REPLY:

1. Officers have been communicating directly with the property owners to try and gain access to the building to conduct their investigation.

In cases where there is no response or cooperation from a building owner to allow access, officers do have powers available to them under planning legislation to investigate without the need for a warrant.

Officers will exercise these rights if cooperation is not forthcoming to allow access to carry out their investigation.

2. The recent consultation on extending property licensing closed on 7th November. Officers are currently considering responses and any decision on whether to extend licensing will require a decision to be taken by Cabinet.

Planning and housing legislative powers are not interlinked. The powers available to planning enforcement officers will remain the same regarding HMOs should there be any extension to private housing licensing.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Hulme, Horfield Ward**Subject: Gloucester Road**

Councillors are familiar with the problems that arise from the privatised bus network. Horfield residents and I want a reliable, efficient, sustainable public transport.

There are a lot of unanswered questions about overground only options for mass transit. As a councillor for Horfield, I am aware of the congestion issues we already have on residential streets.

Question 1) If key transport arteries like Gloucester Road are closed to traffic, where do buses, HGVs, and cars go instead?

Question 2) If main roads like Gloucester Road are closed to traffic, is it possible to introduce Liveable Neighbourhoods in surrounding areas to mitigate displaced traffic?

REPLY

1. Thank you for raising your concerns. There are two aspects that are unclear. Firstly, closing streets while building and secondly any long term closure.

Closing while building as you would have to do for a tram type solution would mean diverting all traffic including buses and HGVs onto surrounding roads such as Ashley Down Rd and Kellaway Avenue. This would be hugely damaging to public transport that would be stuck in the congestion caused for the whole length of these diversions.

Closing long term would see benefits to public transport on the Gloucester Road when the scheme is built, but there would be severe congestion on surrounding routes which would have a huge impact on local people on those alternative routes. This would also impact public transport routes along those corridors such as for example the number 70.

2. No, it simply would not be possible to adopt that approach to reduce rat running and make other active travel interventions.

Liveable Neighbourhoods depend on main roads to act as just that, main roads. The removal of through traffic that delivers the benefits of the scheme is reliant on some traffic relocating to main roads that are more suitable for this traffic while local shorter trips can be made via active travel. Without the wider network being available to manage displaced traffic, these sort of schemes cannot work.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Jonathan Hucker (Stockwood)**Subject: STOCKWOOD SHOPS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

In July 2021, Bristol secured £4.725 million of funding to help Bristol's high streets and get more people visiting and using these places. After engagement with residents in late 2021, the much-needed improvements to the Stockwood shops precinct were expected to be delivered in February / March 2023. Unfortunately, due to a series of setbacks, there appears to be no indication of when the work will start.

The condition of the paving in the area is a serious risk to health and safety. In addition, Avon & Somerset Constabulary's "designing out crime" team have said that the depilated state of the precinct is a cause of escalating vandalism, crime and ASB in the area.

1. Can the Mayor please ensure that priority is assigned to this project, and it is delivered as a matter of urgency?

REPLY

Unfortunately, there have been setbacks relating to covid, inflation and related contract arrangements for highway works. A review of the scheme has highlighted the need for more significant works and therefore budget required to carry out the works.

Highways Maintenance have agreed to allocate further funding to ensure safety works to the area are carried out as soon as possible.

We will provide Councillors with a programme in early January.



Questions to the Mayor from Councillor Tom Hathway

Subject: Deteriorating Buildings

The old Be In Bristol site at 59-61 Whiteladies Road has been shuttered since 2015. It is a significant building on the high street and the deteriorating state is a blight on local businesses. The leaseholder Fullers is stuck in a long-term lease and the owner has no incentive to terminate it and readvertise the site to bring it back in to use.

1. Could the administration attempt to convene the parties involved and leverage its position to get this prominent site back into active use?
2. What powers does the council have to enforce against commercial sites left to deteriorate and how frequently are they used?

REPLY:

1. As a councillor, we would encourage you to try and bring the parties together. Nobody in the council is aware of this specific case. However I've asked officers to look at the site in question and take a view on whether exercising the councils powers is appropriate and expedient.

I will request the City Centre & High Streets team to endeavour to make contact with the owner / leaseholder and other relevant parties with a view to bringing the building back into active use. Can I suggest that you support them?

2. The planning enforcement team do have legislative powers available that can be used under certain circumstances to take steps to require land (and buildings) to be cleaned up when its condition impacts the local amenity. For example, officers have had improvements made to derelict building sites by erecting an appropriate perimeter hoarding, however it is not commonplace for intervention in this regard.

This decision for intervention would consider the harm caused however also consider the resource available to the planning enforcement team whilst work volumes are very high within the wider planning team with limited resources available.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Breckels, St George Troopers Hill**Subject: Showcase**

I am deeply disappointed that Showcase in Cabot Circus has closed down, due to the cinema and the landlord not being able to agree on rent. I appreciate this is a dispute between two private companies, but is there anything the council is able to do to ensure Bristol's main shopping centre has a diverse range of attractions, including cinemas?

REPLY

We too were disappointed to hear about the closure of this Showcase Cinema. Bristol is a proud UNESCO City of film and we have expanded Bottle Yard Studios and the Bristol Film Office which have brought in just over £20m for each of the last two years.

We are in close conversation with Hammerson, who manage Cabot Circus, regarding the situation and reuse of the space in the future. We are encouraged that Hammerson are actively pursuing new tenants.

There is a wider challenge to maintaining the vitality of the city centre and its leisure and retail offer. We have just adopted the City Centre Development and Delivery Plan (DDP) which will bring people and families back into the heart of the city. The city centre can be quite an exclusive place and many people from our suburbs do not visit.

We are working to ensure a diverse range of leisure, culture and community uses comes forward in the Broadmead area – as set out in the City Centre DDP, which was endorsed by Cabinet on 5 December.

This plan committed to delivering an inclusive ground floor strategy for all new development in the area, safeguarding much sought after city-centre space for a diverse mix of community and cultural organisations and groups.

There are also night-time economy recommendations, and even suggestions for outdoor cinema events in Castle Park.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Jonathan Hucker (Stockwood)**Subject: UPGRADE TO LED STREET LIGHTING**

Avon & Somerset Constabulary's "designing out crime" team have requested improved lighting in the Stockwood shops area to combat escalating vandalism, crime and ASB.

1. Can the Mayor please confirm the expected date for the rollout of these enhancements at this location, and whether there is any flexibility in the timeline for delivery?

REPLY

The lighting is currently programmed to commence in Stockwood on the 18th March 2024.

The upgrade to LED streetlighting programme prioritised several factors, with the main one being the targeting of higher wattage streetlights to achieve greater energy and carbon savings. In most cases these streetlights are located on arterial routes into the city and are installed on the taller streetlights.

Other factors dictating the replacement programme are the communication infrastructure, such as the radio plans for the Central Management System (CMS) and the hardware to provide this infrastructure, which enable the streetlights to be controlled, monitored and supply data. This infrastructure can be very specific to certain areas of Bristol and restricts any deviations from the agreed programme of works.

Whilst every effort is made to assist with requests for flexibility, the agreed programme is heavily reliant on the having the radio plan, communications infrastructure, and hardware in situ before we are able undertake LED upgrade works in areas of Bristol. Specific areas have been strategically targeted to create a more stable communications infrastructure and ensure the LED upgrade is not interrupted or paused.



Questions to the Mayor from Councillor Patrick McAllister

Subject: Vauxhall Bridge

1. Please could the administration provide an update on the progress of repair works to Vauxhall Bridge, including if any unexpected problems have emerged yet and (if possible) whether it is believed that the original two-year schedule is still on target?

REPLY:

The current full programme for the bridge continues to be projected to be 24 months.

The bridge deck stone surfacing has now been removed, and we are conducting a full condition survey of the whole bridge. This involves installation of full access scaffolding and the enclosure of the bridge to grit blast off existing paint in controlled phases. We will then be able to update residents with more information.

All steelwork repairs or component part replacement will then be undertaken and we will keep residents updated as this progresses.

The bridge will then be repainted, resurfaced and reopened.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Breckels, St George Troopers Hill

Subject: DCB

Does the Mayor agree it is unacceptable that following the meeting of Development Control B, councillors carrying out their duties were left feeling scared to leave the meeting?

REPLY

It is of course unacceptable – not just in City Hall but anywhere in the city.

Councillors, officers, and members of the public have the right to be and feel safe. Those in positions of responsibility at meetings have a duty to make sure that is the case and to take concerns seriously. Unfortunately, there have been examples in the recent past where meetings were deliberately disrupted by councillors with disregard for the safety of staff.

I am also concerned the Green Party is appearing to use planning committees as a campaigning tool, coordinating with sitting councillors and their candidates for coverage. It doesn't serve our city to make the process so hostile, and certainly not our already hard pressed Planning department.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Sharon Scott (Westbury on Trym & Henleaze)

Subject: COMPLAINTS PROCESSES & PROCEDURES

I am aware of the Council's published timescales for responding to non-statutory & statutory:- Complaints procedures (bristol.gov.uk). However, these targets appear to be regularly failing to be met.

1. Can the Mayor confirm the latest statistics for departmental response rates to the public?
2. Can the Mayor explain why Members are frequently being contacted by constituents because their complaints against the Authority are not being dealt with in a timely manner or at all?

REPLY

1. The latest response rate for answering complaints is '86% answered within target', which means within 15 working days of receipt. The council target is 90%. This is for the period 1 July to 30 September 2023.

The majority of late cases are answered, between 20-40 days after receipt.

2. Given the figure above, I wouldn't expect you to receive that many complaints.

When we are referred enquiries sent to Members about late responses, they are investigated with the officers relevant to the handling of complaints providing explanations about delays.



Questions to the Mayor from Councillor Patrick McAllister**Subject: Cumberland Road Bus Gate**

I am supportive of the Cumberland Road bus gate – it is an important part of reducing Bristol's air pollution and promoting the modal shift we need to see away from cars as the default mode of transportation in our city.

However, the implementation of the project has left a lot to be desired. Residents have told me of the issues they have with getting into the city centre because of the unreliable bus service, especially on weekends when the bus does not run but the bus gate remains. There has been no special provision made for disabled drivers and other Blue Badge holders. Residents have also reported that their Royal Mail van is blocked by the bus gate despite being electric – this surely requires remediation.

The situation is especially prevalent due to the litany of transport problems facing Spike Island, notably the closure of Vauxhall Bridge which has cut many off from the nearest supermarket. Key walking routes have been cut off, both over the river and the Vauxhall Bridge access to the Chocolate Path.

Residents have not felt listened to by the Council during and since the consultation process, and that has seriously harmed trust in the Council and goodwill towards the bus gate itself. If Bristol is to successfully decarbonise and clean up our toxic air, the Council must ensure it takes residents' concerns into consideration in a meaningful manner – that has not been done on Spike Island.

A key ask of residents has from the start been for a permit system or for automatic number plate recognition to be used to allow local residents only to pass through the bus gate. This would continue the function of preventing rat-running commuters from outside Bristol, while preserving residents' freedom of access. It is also technologically feasible, as taxis and emergency vehicles are already exempted.

2. Could the administration please outline why a system of resident permits or ANPR exemptions was not implemented?

REPLY:

Yet another example of Green Party councillors supporting everything in theory and nothing in practice. Housing, a Liveable Neighbourhood in East Bristol, clean energy infrastructure, and now measures to improve air quality and bus prioritisation.

An exemption for all the residents of spike island with automatic numberplate recognition here would undermine the effectiveness of the bus gate, and does not support our approach to promoting walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport.

We understand the strength of local feeling on this matter and will continue to work with key stakeholders to improve accessibility to Spike Island. Your question at Full Council in September indicated you supported a closure of Avon Crescent; this is another example of supporting every campaign without understanding the impact of single issue politics. Keeping Avon Crescent open is important to maintain access to Spike Island.



The Metrobus service increased its frequencies in April which is a positive step for residents. We are working with the West of England Combined Authority to improve the service further going forwards.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Cole, Ashley Ward**Subject: Community Asset Transfers**

I am pleased to see the Coach House Community Asset Transfer coming to Cabinet. Black South West Network do fantastic work in the community - allowing them to take this building into community ownership will make the Coach House an even better asset for the St Paul's.

Can the Mayor outline the benefits of this Community Asset Transfer, and other Community Asset Transfers the Labour administration has completed both in the Ashley ward and Bristol as a whole?

REPLY

The transfer of the Coach House will enable the Black South West Network to access up to £4.9M of new funding and invest it in a complete refurbishment of this property. It is great that this move will bring an estimated minimum benefit to the local economy, from the start up and growth of Black and Asian-led enterprises supported by the Centre, of circa £712,040 GVA (gross value added) per year prior to refurbishment, and £1,068,060 after refurbishment.

The Council believes that VCSE organisations are often best placed to manage facilities in their local communities, through local knowledge, the extensive use of volunteers, and a more intensive use of these assets. Putting community-based organisations in 'the driving seat' empowers local people, encourages pride of place, and helps to generate wealth in Bristol's communities. Providing VCSE organisations with physical assets makes them financially more viable and reduces grant dependency.

Community assets will enable VCSE organisations to apply for funding that is not available to the Council and can also be used as 'match' funding to leverage additional funding from other funders.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Henry Michallat (Stoke Bishop)

Subject: BRISTOL WASTE EMERGENCY CONTACT

All Members will have received complaints from residents about missed waste collections. This inconvenience can often cause considerable frustration and distress.

1. Does the Mayor recognise the present online reporting system has some major shortcomings?
2. To improve matters, and avoid the necessity of referring incidents to senior officers in neighbourhood enforcement, would the Mayor investigate the possibility of providing Members (only) with a direct email emergency contact address for this company?

REPLY

1. We're aware of the challenges around missed collections, which is why Bristol Waste have conducted a whole project to improve the collection reliability. This has included changing days for some residents.

Most people approach our contact centre, and we pass that on to Bristol Waste. There is also an online form residents can complete. I am not aware of any problems with this as an escalation measure but if you are having problems then please let my office know.

2. Councillors are probably best to escalate incidents using iCasework as Bristol Waste aim to respond to councillors within 24 hours. Further escalation of incidents causing distress which remain unresolved could then be discussed with officers from the neighbourhood enforcement team in the usual way.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Cole, Ashley Ward**Subject: Highstreets**

Local high streets are crucial for local economies, but sadly, nationally we have seen their steady decline. The council has invested a significant amount of funding into Bristol's highstreets and the campaign showcased businesses in St Paul's and Mina Road in Ashley, which is to be welcomed.

Please could the Mayor provide a statement regarding the council's investment into highstreets both in Ashley and Bristol as a whole?

REPLY

From 2020 to 2023 over £24.2m of investment has been allocated to Bristol's high streets. This investment is key to supporting their recovery from the pandemic restrictions as well as driving inclusive, sustainable economic growth.

Support is ongoing, examples include:

- Business Development – 1:1 visits to businesses to understand their needs (1,049 businesses engaged, of which 483 have been provided further support).
- Vacant Property Grant – businesses can apply for up to £10,000 to bring a vacant commercial property into use. 104 applications have been approved.
- Marketing – including the "Where's It To?" campaign and Shop Local Bristol social media accounts, promoting independent businesses.
- Culture and events and street scene and greening – within the City Centre and nine priority high streets. Filwood Broadway regeneration has secured £14.5m from the Levelling Up fund which we're now working with community to deliver.

Ashley Road/Grosvenor Road is one of three new priority areas. Engagement on potential improvements is being planned for the New Year. It will be great to get your support as we continue to engage with residents and businesses.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Graham Morris (Stockwood)

Subject: STOCKWOOD MANOR FARM SITE DISPUTE

1. Can the Mayor please provide an update on his office's attempt to meet with the owners of the car park and changing rooms at the Manor Farm side of the Imperial Sports Ground and to see how we can unlock the land issue there?

REPLY

I share your frustration. As you know, a virtual meeting was initially held back in July 2022 with O&H where issues surrounding the lease break option were discussed.

It was suggested at that meeting that a follow up site visit should take place with myself and O&H. One pre-arranged date were subsequently cancelled by O&H and further attempts to arrange between October 2022 and July 2023 were met with multiple deferrals by O&H and later their property advisor.

Due to lack of response from O&H the site meeting has still not occurred, however we will attempt to contact them again and update you as soon as possible.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Rippington, Brislington East ward

Services

There's a lot of development planned in Brislington soon. It's clear that the only route out of our housing crisis is building more homes, but we need to ensure that social infrastructure keeps up with the new homes, not only for the benefit of existing residents, but new residents too.

The delivery of new infrastructure is fragmented, with different organisations being responsible for new healthcare, or new schools, and so on. How can we ensure we get the right level of service provision to keep up with our growing population?

REPLY

This is what the ICB process is looking to do. Our new draft Local Plan looks at all of these issues and the Integrated Care Board was set up to deal with these very issues and apply a better, holistic approach.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Graham Morris (Stockwood)

Subject: LONGSTANDING DESIGN DEFECT IN COUNCIL PROPERTIES

The upper end of Hazelbury Road, in Stockwood Ward, has an unusual design of Council homes which are well known for their lack of soundproofing. It is a matter of shame that BCC has known about those issues for decades and still not found a solution.

1. Can the Mayor please advise when work will be done to improve these properties and make them more habitable?

REPLY

I was not aware of this issue so thank you for raising here. I don't know if this is something you have discussed with the cabinet lead for housing services, or with housing officers, but I am sure Kye would meet with you to discuss in further detail.

Our policy approach to maintenance is set out in the Housing Investment Plan (HIP), which was agreed at Full Council this year without any amendment from your party.

The HIP prioritised interventions on fire safety, as well as the top response in our public consultation, improved energy efficiency and new council houses.

[Appendix A2 HIP 23-24.pdf \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#)



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Massey, Southmead Ward

Subject: CIL

We recently held an Area 2 Committee meeting to look at how to allocate money to improve the life of residents in these wards. As the poorest (in terms of funding for allocation) Area Committee in the City, we could not allocate any money to improve the life of citizens living in this area, apart from tree planting which comes from a different budget.

Does the Mayor agree that the Committee Model Working Group should be looking to make changes to the way CIL monies are distributed, to ensure it is more equitable and deprived areas like Southmead get their fair share of funding?

REPLY

It is not for me to advise the committee model working group on the approach. However, I understand that the Committee Model Working Group has been looking at this issue and will be bringing forward proposals to Full Council in 2024 suggesting amendments to the Local CIL allocations process.

It is worth noting that Southmead has been the beneficiary of a substantial Strategic CIL award of £7,620,000 towards the Glencoyne Square redevelopment scheme.



Question(s) to the Mayor from Councillor Massey, Southmead Ward

Subject: E-scooters

The public will be aware of the issues concerning privately-owned scooters, which are often used in an antisocial manner and sometimes modified to exceed speed limits.

The Government has long promised to bring in legislation to regulate private e-scooters. As a major UK city and highways authority, I would hope that it would have consulted with the council about this planned legislation.

Does the Mayor / Cabinet Member for Transport have any further information concerning the planned legislation to regulate private e-scooters?

REPLY

The Government has signalled its intention to legalise e-scooters but has not given a timescale for this and it is not scheduled to be done before the next General Election.

The Government recently announced that the current trials of rental e-scooters will be extended to at least May 2026. The Government intends to consult on plans to legalise personal e-scooters and will separately consult on plans to regulate rental schemes. They have not given a timescale for the consultations yet.

The use of private (personal) e-scooters remains illegal and any issues around their use and antisocial behaviour should be raised with the police.

