

**The following statements have been submitted – full details are attached:**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Subject</b>
CS01	CLr Kerry Bailes	Allotment Rents
CS02	CLr Tony Dyer	Safety Valve
CS03	CLr Mohammed Makawi	Sea Mills

## **CS01**

### **Members Forum statement from Cllr Kerry Bailes**

#### **Subject: Allotment Rents**

The issue of raising allotment rents across Bristol has sparked controversy and concern among residents, particularly those in poorer areas such as Hartcliffe & Withywood. The proposed increase in allotment rents, even if implemented over a period of several years, is seen as disproportionately affecting those who rely on growing their own food to be self-sufficient. This is a significant concern, especially when considering the fact that these areas have been described as 'food deserts,' with limited access to fresh and affordable produce. Moreover, the early mortality rates in Hartcliffe & Withywood, particularly for women, and the migration of benefit claimants from Tax Credits to Universal Credit, further exacerbate the impact of the proposed rent increase on the poorest in society.

In 2018, a study by Kellogg's revealed that three areas in Bristol, including Hartcliffe, were among the ten most deprived food areas in the country. The study looked at the combination of poverty and lack of access to decent and affordable supermarkets or greengrocers selling fresh and nutritious food. The results of this study clearly highlight the struggles that residents face when it comes to accessing healthy food. Hartcliffe, in particular, was found to be the second worst place in the country, with residents facing low incomes and limited options for affordable food shopping.

The lack of access to affordable supermarkets and greengrocers in the area has a significant impact on the cost of food for residents. The study found that people living in poorer areas are hit with an extra cost on their food bills, as they are forced to rely on convenience stores that offer less fresh produce at a higher price. This further deepens the divide between the rich and the poor, as those in wealthier areas have easier access to a wider range of affordable food options. Additionally, with 41% of households in Hartcliffe & Withywood not having access to a car, it becomes even more challenging to access good value food stores, making the situation even more dire for those living in poverty.

The council's decision to raise allotment rents in marginalised areas seems to go against its efforts to promote healthy living through initiatives such as social prescribing, community gardens, and inner-city farms. These initiatives aim to improve the health and well-being of residents, particularly those in poorer areas. However, the proposed rent increase for allotments will make it even more challenging for these residents to access fresh and affordable food, undermining the council's efforts to promote healthy living and self-sufficiency among its citizens.

Moreover, the migration of benefit claimants from Tax Credits to Universal Credit is another factor that will negatively impact the poorest in society. With their benefit payment protection ending a year after migrating from one benefit to another, claimants will have to live on even less money. This will further deepen the cycle of poverty and make it even more challenging for them to afford healthy food options, especially with the proposed increase in allotment rents.

The decision to raise allotment rents across Bristol, even if implemented over a period of several years, will disproportionately and negatively affect the poorest in society, particularly those living in food deserts such as Hartcliffe & Withywood. The lack of access to affordable and fresh produce in these areas, coupled with the early mortality rates and the migration of benefit claimants, makes the proposed rent increase a significant cause for concern. The council must reconsider its decision and take into account the impact it will have on the most vulnerable members of society. Efforts should be made to find alternative ways to generate revenue without burdening those who rely on allotments to grow their own food. It is essential to ensure that all citizens have equal access to healthy and affordable food options, regardless of their socio-economic status.

## **CS02**

### **Members Forum statement from Cllr Tony Dyer**

#### **Subject: Safety Valve**

There has been considerable discussion regarding my decision to agree to APR 16 being invoked to allow a late publication of cabinet papers regarding the Safety Valve Programme. This is understandable given the sensitive nature of the proposals, the considerable level of secrecy regarding the Safety Valve process, and the impact it is likely to have on a large number of children, parents and others, many of whom already feel considerably let down by the council.

Firstly, the decision to allow APR16 to be invoked was mine, and mine alone. If anyone disagrees with, or are angry with, my decision they are fully entitled to do so, but to imply this was some kind of behind closed doors cross party agreement to force through an unpopular decision would be incorrect. I am solely responsible for the decision to allow the late publication of the Safety Valve cabinet papers in my role as Chair of OSMB. Likewise, the decision being proposed in the Safety Valve cabinet paper is one that the Labour administration is making based on confidential negotiations between Bristol City Council(BCC) and the Department for Education (DfE) which has not involved councillors from outside the Bristol Labour Party Cabinet.

What is APR16?

Under the council's Access to Information Rules, APR16 is closely related to APR15, which both allow the council to take urgent decisions. In normal circumstances, the council produces a Forward Plan which is required to give a minimum of 28 days notice of any decisions coming to Cabinet. APR15 General Exception allows a decision that has not been included in the Forward Plan to be taken subject to certain criteria. However, this still requires 5 days notice, and thus if this cannot be provided then APR16 Special Urgency can be invoked.

APR16 allows a decision to be taken if the chair of a relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee agrees that the taking of the decision cannot be reasonably deferred. To be clear, this is not an opportunity for the relevant Chair to prevent or enable a decision to be made based on whether they agree or disagree with the decision, it is purely whether the Chair agrees that there is a Special Urgency that requires the decision to be made within the shorter timeframe.

Why is the decision urgent?

On Friday 1st March I was sent an urgent email by the Mayor of Bristol, requesting my agreement to invoke APR16 to allow an urgent cabinet decision to be made.

The reasons given by the Mayor were:

"I am writing to seek your agreement to add a report to the agenda for the Cabinet meeting on 5th March that was not included on the Mayor's Forward Plan (which gives 28 days' notice of Cabinet decisions).

In accordance with the Council's constitution (APR16), when prior notice has not been given for a key decision to be taken at Cabinet and there is less than 5 days before the decision will be taken, the chair of relevant scrutiny commission need to agree that the decision cannot be reasonably deferred.

The additional report is titled "Safety Valve Programme" and it cannot be deferred because the DfE require us to sign and return the agreement by the 11th March. We have been engaged in confidential negotiations with the Department for Education, who have now given their consent for us to make public the decision to enter into contract for the Safety Valve Programme. The full details are still under embargo, hence the cabinet report only deals with the financial aspect and provides high level outline of the proposed actions." Also copied into the email were the Cabinet Members for Children Services, the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, the Chief Executive, the s151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Executive Director for Children and Education, and the Director of Education and Skills.

Unless I was willing to accept that not only the Mayor of Bristol but also several senior officers were complicit in creating a false narrative around the urgency of the decision required by the Department for Education, then I had no evidential reason for refusing to agree to APR16 being applied.

I have since had a further detailed briefing from officers which has confirmed the urgency of the decision.

Nevertheless, councillors and education campaigners that I have considerable respect for have expressed concerns about the Safety Valve proposals going to Cabinet with almost no notice, and regardless of the need for urgency, the late publication of the report has prevented public scrutiny of the Cabinet papers. This has compounded the existing confidential nature of the discussions between BCC and the DfE, and there is also clearly differences of opinion about the levels of oversight provided to the Audit Committee, the Resources Scrutiny Committee, and the Schools Forum.

Regardless of the late publication of the cabinet papers and the reasons justifying that, there is a clear need in the interests of openness and transparency for opposition and back bench councillors as well as members of the public to be able to ask questions and make statements before this decision is finalised. That is why I reminded officers of the need for an explanation for why an Urgent Decision was needed to be brought to Full Council this Tuesday, and why I petitioned for an extension of the Public Forum deadline for this item. I have received multiple representations from councillors and from members of the public making it clear that they believe the proposals that went to Cabinet regarding the Safety Valve Programme fail to address key issues and also fail to meet key concerns expressed by multiple councillors and also members of the public.

I encourage the Mayor that at Full Council later today, the opportunity is taken by the administration to not only publicly explain the circumstances behind why this decision became an urgent decision, including clarification of whether the confidentiality was at the

request of BCC or DfE, but any statement from the administration should also accept that there is a need for additional public scrutiny of this entire process given that it will have ramifications for the funding of education in this city for at least the next six years.

The reality is that this is a six year agreement concluded between a local administration with barely two months left in charge and a department of a government that has barely 6 months left. Many of the financial proposals as published in the Cabinet paper that was taken as an urgent decision are dependent on future budgetary decisions by a future administration, and, potentially, future decisions taken by a new government which may, or may not, have a different view on how DSG funding is allocated.

A further Cabinet paper related to capital spending linked to the Safety Valve will be coming to Cabinet on 9th April. Following discussions with other Scrutiny Chairs, I intend to set up a Joint Scrutiny Session prior to that Cabinet meeting to publicly scrutinise both Safety Valve related Cabinet papers as they are clearly interlinked – I trust that the administration will fully engage in that scrutiny session.

**CS03**

**Members Forum statement from Cllr Mohammed Makawi**

**Subject: Sea Mills**

I stand before you today with a heavy heart to address the tragic events that have deeply shaken our community. The recent deaths of three innocent children in Sea Mills, Bristol, have left us all reeling with grief and disbelief.

First and foremost, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the emergency services for their swift response and tireless efforts in the face of this heartbreaking tragedy. Their professionalism and compassion during such challenging circumstances are truly commendable.

I also want to express my gratitude to the Bristol City Council Community Department for their unwavering support and assistance in providing specialist care and support to the families affected by this devastating loss.

To the residents of Sea Mills, your strength, solidarity, and kindness in coming together to support one another during this difficult time have been nothing short of remarkable. Your sense of community and unity is a beacon of hope amidst the darkness.

I must also acknowledge the invaluable role played by the church and Mr. Jo Jo for organizing the vigil in Sea Mills Square, providing a space for collective mourning and reflection.

We must now examine if there are any measures that could have been taken to prevent the loss of these three innocent souls and ensure that such a tragedy never occurs again.

As we continue to grapple with the profound grief and shock of this tragedy, it is imperative that we seek answers and understanding. Therefore, I call for a thorough inquiry.

In memory of Fares Bash, Joury Bash, and Mohammed Bash, let us come together as a council and a community to honour their lives and work tirelessly to create a safer and more compassionate city for all.

Thank you.