

## **Marvin's Chief Executive Saga**

Some of you may have seen some of the coverage regarding the various aspects of the employment of Bristol City Council's latest Chief Executive Anna Klonowski who started the job in Feb 2017 and left in Sept 2017.

She followed Nicola Yates, paid off by Marvin when he took over, at a cost of £200,000 as they could not work together. It was a temporary appointment at £1,000 a day to fill the gap. Now BCC is not to have a successor appointed, so we need to be wary of the return to 20 years plus ago when Labour got rid of its Chief Exec. This led to record poor performance with BCC regularly at the bottom of many performance tables.

The recruitment process for senior jobs like this is detailed and thorough, and is designed to ensure fairness, and that BCC gets the right appointment. The process was not followed and led to protests from Lib Dems and Tory Councillors. BCC senior management has recently had an unacceptable turnover and many key posts are filled by temporary staff. Key employees have resigned in numbers. In early September the Mayor announced that Ms Klonowski had resigned for family reasons.

The general air of chaos and confusion was then added to by revelations in Private Eye (Rotten Boroughs column) and other publications, that Ms Klonowski had received a very large payoff of £70,000 plus after her short stay. Had she resigned, as the Mayor claimed, she would not have been entitled to any compensation but the Mayor claimed that she was paid off in line with her contract. He has refused to answer questions. Gary and Richard Eddy, the Conservative on the selection panel, who complained about the recruitment process, have been joined by Green HR rep Paula O'Rourke in demanding that the council's auditors and the audit committee investigate this thoroughly and have put in a detailed set of questions.

A petition has been launched to back up this e <https://taxpayersmoney.weebly.com/>

Please sign the petition and pass it on to all your contacts. This is a huge amount of taxpayers money and by refusing to answer questions, and failing to give assurances about improving practice, we can have no confidence that this will not be repeated. The public deserve to know what happened to their money.

## **Bristol Arena Saga**

This week we had an announcement from the Mayor that he was reviewing the terms of his arena review. This has not surprisingly led to much gnashing of teeth and a prediction from many that the arena will never get built.

After parting company with the last contractor the Mayor has spent the last year with a new firm trying to get the cost of the Temple Meads arena down to a price he was prepared to pay. This seemed to be an incredible waste of time and money, as every

month spent reducing the design down to make it more basic, the cost actually went up. This was easily predictable with the drop in the value of the pound due to the Brexit vote pushing up material prices; and the cost of labour increasing as many Europeans depart; and the construction of the Hinkley Point Power Station starts to suck in capacity. A paired down scheme would also, of course, need renegotiation with potential operators, as a less flexible building would be used less.

So after another wasted year the Mayor has now decided to look at other sites. We have no objection to other sites being considered but it is pretty silly to not do it for a year and then try to do it in a rush. What is clear is that the main contender is the Brabazon hanger at Filton. This is claimed to be new thinking but is far from it. Simon Cook was for some years in the Lib Dem cabinet dealing with Culture and later Capital Projects. He was asked to carry on the portfolio by Mayor Ferguson when he took over, but part of that portfolio was then removed to the Mayor himself when Simon suggested that the Brabazon hanger should be looked at. This was 2012 and detailed work did not happen.

So 5 years on after millions have been spent there is to be a study done. There will no doubt be negatives for Filton as there are with every choice of site but if the evaluation had been done 5 years ago it might be operating by now. In a further bizarre twist the company that owns the Hanger is headed up by an insider from the Local Enterprise Partnership that was closely associated with the arena and two of the key senior staff are ex BCC staff that had been involved with the arena and council property. What inside knowledge do they have and does this put BCC at a disadvantage in negotiations?

Bristol City Council has over recent times had a senior staff turnover that makes Mao's cultural revolution look like a tea party. Does the council have the necessary skills left to do the job effectively? Is it envisaged to change the nature of the ownership and build? There are a huge list of questions to answer.

Would we have any grants or partnership money to hand back?

What has the council already spent at Temple Meads and can this produce a good alternative development?

What is the transport plan for Filton?

Would we have to seek a new operator?.

When was it known about the rising costs and what options were looked at?

The blocker on this for some years was the Regional Development Agency, but when they were shut down in 2010 and all the basic elements were made available to the Mayor in 2012, Bristolians had a right to expect progress.

You really could not make it up.

## **Council Meeting Chaos**

Yet more chaos at Bristol City Council. The September Full Council was cancelled because the mayor was going to London to meet government ministers. Only he didn't meet any and spoke to Jeremy Corbyn instead. Requests for an October meeting were rejected, leading to a massive pile-up of business in the Full Council Meeting on 14th November.

Petitions that reach 3,500 signatures trigger a debate in council and generally a list of public statements and questions in support. There are 3 protest petitions from various library groups, and the Parks Forum are protesting about the mad plans for decreasing parks spending to zero.

On top of that there is the spatial plan which endorses huge housing developments in many of the wrong places; Finance Report motions from Councillors - unsurprisingly on libraries and parks, and reports from committees. All this means that subjects that would normally get a large amount of public or media attention, like the report outlining the unacceptable number of ombudsmen complaints found against BCC, may be overlooked.

Cynics may suggest that this pile up is not accidental, but whether it is or not, there is still time for you to put in a written statement to council with your views. Deadline is 12.00 Monday for Tuesday's meeting and you can write to –

democraticservices@bristol [.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@bristol.gov.uk)

Some items, like the Mayor's plan to further curb democracy in the council, have been postponed until next month.