

**FEBRUARY 2018**

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**Facebook - Knowle Councillors**

- **The Scandal Goes On**
- **Education in Knowle Matters**
- **The Council Budget**
- **Investment in Broadwalk Shopping Centre**
- **Somerset Road Bike Hangars**
- **A Further Community Problem**
- **Knowle Community Meetings**
- **Police and Crime Meeting**

### **The Scandal Goes On**

Some readers will remember articles telling the story of the Mayor paying off a previous chief executive of the council with £200,000, then employing a temporary replacement at £1,000 a day and then recruiting a further replacement through an improperly run recruitment process, and then that third one leaving with, it turned out, a very large cash payment to which she seems not to have been entitled. The Mayor tried to keep this secret and is blocking cross party calls for an independent enquiry.

We have been joined by Conservatives and the Green Party in the calls for an enquiry and non-publicly by some concerned Labour members and Cllrs.

We urgently need to get 3500 signatures on the petition demanding the enquiry. If you have not already signed this please give the call your support and encourage others to do soon the following link.

<http://www.taxpayersmoney.weebly.com/>

This will force the issue out into the open with a full debate in council.

### **Education in Knowle Matters**

Life as a Knowle Cllr is never dull, and over recent weeks I have been spending a lot of time dealing with education matters. I have been a governor at Knowle Park school(s) for 15 years and was glad to play a major part in the merger some years ago, which I believe was vital for the subsequent massive improvement. Governors were never keen on the academy model, but with the services and value for money from the local authority declining due to government policy, the schools are now cautiously moving towards a cooperative arrangement with other Bristol primary schools. Nothing is finalized.

Neighbouring Ilminster Avenue Primary School was one that has benefitted from acadamisation. Previously one of the lowest ranked schools in the country it has rocketed upwards and is now in the top 10% in the country for overall performance. E Act have certainly done well, but the question remains about what effective and timely action is taken with failing academies and free schools. Ilminster Ave specialist nursery was failing a year or 2 ago and dropping pupil numbers led to serious financial problems. Late in the day BCC officers stepped in and put in a great

temporary leadership team with staff seconded from Knowle West and New Fosseway. The results were great and pupils flooded back, but we were contacted by parents and governors when BCC's failure to deal with the historic debt threatened the ongoing progress. A high level meeting followed lobbying from yours truly and others and a good plan is now in place.

Finally everyone thought that secondary education in Knowle had been killed for good when Labour closed Merrywood, but hope was raised a year ago when Bristol Grammar School proposed a new all-through school. The secondary element had strong support from Chris and I, although some elements of the bid were not handled well, by council officers. It seems that our lobbying of the government minister may yet produce results as a secondary school in Knowle is now being actively pursued again.

### **The Council Budget**

2 and 3 years ago we exposed a Mayoral "slush " fund with the massively underestimated income projections for the coming year. By voting against and protesting we eventually got that corrected. We identified a further "slush" fund last year when we pointed out that borrowing need not be so high, as capital projects spending overall always slipped in time, and we showed how the saving could be used to protect some services.

Our amendment was supported by other parties but voted down by Labour Cllrs with accusations of us being irresponsible. We Note that this year's 5 year plan and budget now adopts that approach. This year we uncovered 2 more mayoral slush funds. The first is CIL money which is the levy on development.. The rate is calculated by a formula which could be ratcheted up, as the sector is now booming,,and the amount is £4M plus a year. This income was simply not declared in the Mayor's 5 year financial plan which was a shocking "oversight".

The second slush fund was the "double capital contingency". Before too many eyes glaze over, the Mayor was proposing to put £10M a year into a fund to cover over spends on capital projects. Firstly most projects already contain a fund to cover cost increases and the council has £20M ++ reserves. Secondly providing an easy out leads to overspending rather than control, as our experience taught us. Thirdly the proposal was to borrow this money and pay it back over 50 years. So the money used to repay this reduces the amount of money available for services up to 50 years ahead. Shocking!!

The Greater Bristol Bus Network, which needs a franchising system to get full benefits from, was delivered on time and on budget. This produced huge transport grants from government for rail and metro bus which were handed across to the previous mayor on time and budget. We have since had chaos, delay and overspend and delays on our roads.

With the identified cash we are proposing to save the libraries, parks, home adaptations for the disabled, schools in South Bristol and revive Bristol's flood protection plan. As expected, despite support from all the other parties, Labour used its majority to vote this down with some quite ludicrous justifications.

We are showing that contrary to what the Mayor says there are better options than

his slash and burn, despite central government being very tight on council grants.

### **Investment in Broadwalk Shopping Centre**

Gary and Chris met with the new owners of the Broadwalk Centre to discuss investment and development plans. We are agreed on many issues, with some issues still to be clarified, and expect in the not too distant future that the owners will be able to bring forward plans for public consultation .

We are cautiously optimistic that we can look forward to an enhanced shopping Centre and some high quality residential units being suggested.

### **Somerset Road Bike Hangars**

Chris and Gary have met with council officers in charge of the bike hanger scheme. When first suggested 9 months ago we were unfortunately not brought in to the process, and were contacted by a lot of angry people who did not want the scheme. We discovered that there were roughly the same number of people passionately in favour.

Objectors did not want them outside their properties because of the way they looked and because they took up some parking space and were noisy in use.. They also objected to there being no proof that this would reduce car numbers.

Supporters said that the hangers will help to promote cycling and reduce car ownership and make storage easier for those with limited space.

Officers needed to order 2 hangers to qualify for government grant money and there was a deadline.

After discussions officers have decided to look to install 1 hanger close to The George Pub and keep the second site under review. Chris and Gary also asked them to reconsider the entrance to the parkland at the bottom of Cleeve Rd and offered to explore improving the security. A further point was that we feel priority should be given to applicants without cars and those living in accommodation where storage is a major problem.

### **A Further Community Problem**

Readers will know that the Mayor abolished the Neighbourhood partnerships introduced over 10 years ago. These allowed for local road safety schemes, environmental grants, wellbeing funds and local planning gain money to be allocated by local Cllrs in consultation with local residents. At least 15% of the planning levy must according to national legislation be allocated locally. In the case of rural councils this means parish councils which generally have a smaller population than Bristol wards. The Mayor absolutely refused to consider local Cllrs making the decisions for their wards and instead tried to spread that local element city wide.

Eventually the wards have been grouped into 5 groups of 6 and one of 5. Knowle is allocated into a strip of six wards from Brislington East to Bedminster(Ashton). In other words right across the city. These wards although having some similarities are not local to each other and when the Cllrs came together for their first informal meeting they agreed that the sensible way to proceed was to split down into 3 groups of 2 . ie. The 2 Brislington wards, Bedminster and Southville and therefore having

Knowle and Windmill Hill working as a pair. This has yet to be ratified but it does make some sense of the Mayor's crazy proposal.

Meanwhile community organizations like Redcatch Community Centre are likely to have their rates support removed. Being super efficient Redcatch will survive but other community centres may be tipped over the edge financially towards closure.

### **Knowle Community Meetings**

In place of the defunct NP Forum meetings Gary and Chris are planning 3 Knowle Community Meetings each year in community centres around Knowle - everyone welcome. A chance to hear about issues effecting Knowle ; to ask questions of your Councillors; to bring forward issues and problems in the ward which need to be addressed.

The first meeting at Redcatch Community Centre gave residents a chance to hear about recent council issues; future local improvements and to let Gary and Chris know about any general concerns.

Look out for dates and venues of future meetings at The Park Centre, Daventry Road, and Knowle Park Community Association, The Square.

### **Police and Crime meeting**

The Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner recently gave up an evening, with some of our local police officers, to hold a public meeting at The Park, to hear any questions or of any issues. The meeting was poorly attended so people must be satisfied with the service they receive in Knowle! It was very reassuring to hear about the initiatives and modern approach to improve communications and the use of new IT programmes being developed by A & S to help use officers and resources more intelligently with the reduction in staffing levels and funding cut backs. There was much praise for the 'Mini Police' initiative being piloted at Connaught School. It was developed to build relationships with children at a young age, to give them an insight into what policing is all about.

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