

On Tuesday 18 October 2023, Councillor Geoff Gollop moved a motion at Full Council regarding unlawful covert surveillance on SEND families, which was uncovered by a Bristol journalist in July 2022.

A subsequent internal investigation held by the council into its own behaviour was inaccurate, biased and contained defamation.

In the aftermath of this, Gollop called for a 'genuinely independent inquiry, conducted by the LGA or similar appropriate body into all the facts, faults and failings' surrounding the incident.

He said that this was 'in the interests of true transparency'.

The motion was carried after being voted for by a majority 39 councillors.

No independent investigation has been forthcoming.

I asked the following question at Full Council on 11 July 2023 and was given the below response:

Question

On Tuesday 18 October 2022, councillors voted for an independent investigation into social media.

Why has this not happened yet? Please include the timeline set for this to take place in the answer.

Answer

There has been an internal investigation and no wrongdoing was found.

Before taking any further action on an independent investigation, we decided to wait for our full OFSTED ILAC inspection. We took the Ofsted report to Cabinet and noted their comments regarding improvement in relationships with SEND parents.

We have recently appointed a new Director of Education and Skills, who will continue to lead our work in education alongside Bristol Parent Carer Forum and other partners

This failure to abide to the democratic process and facilitate an independent investigation breaches the Members Code of Conduct on the following points

2.1 (a) For which the Mayor has brought the role into disrepute not only for being potentially implicated in a spying scandal, but also for blocking access to an independent investigation.

2.2 (a) Not discriminating against people on grounds of protected characteristics. This failure to investigate a human rights violation of disabled people in Bristol by the council and potentially the administration discriminates against disabled people.

2.4 (a) The Mayor is failing to co-operate with external scrutiny – including by local residents

2.4 (b) The Mayor is failing to make the authority's decision making process open and transparent as possible and does not enable residents to understand the reasoning behind those decisions

2.5 (a) The Mayor is not listening to the interests of all parties, nor remaining objective and making decisions on merit.

2.5 (b) The Mayor is not being open to championing the needs of all residents and communities across the whole area of Bristol. He has not treated all the residents and communities in an equal and fair way. In fact, it is important when dealing with the Disabled community that equity is considered due to the systemic barriers faced which other people with protected characteristics can not experience. The Code of Conduct is highly inaccurate in treating people 'fairly'. Disabled people can and should be treated more favourably so they are able to access equity. This can be found in the Equality Act 2010.

It has not been possible to make this complaint earlier because Bristol has been waiting for Marvin Rees to take action on the independent investigation.

This complaint, however, comes in a timely manner following the release of Public Forum answers.