

Public Forum

Audit Committee
29 July 2025



1. Members of the Audit Committee

Questions

Number	Name
1	Suzanne Audrey
2	Mike Oldreive
3	Dan Ackroyd

Statements

Number	Name
1	Jen Smith
2	Dan Ackroyd



FOI responses

Question 1. The Council is still failing to meet the guidelines for responding to Freedom of Information requests. What are the key reasons for this prolonged failure and when will they be addressed?

Response.

Each service area are responsible for responding to requests relating to their own area, supported by the central disclosures team. We are engaging with services, providing training and guidance on responding to requests. It is recognised that improvements are needed to bring our timeliness response rate up. Corporately we are working on an improvement plan to further engage with services and address the issues.

Values and Ethics sub-committee

Question 2. In February, I was told by the Head of Legal Services, in a query about the Values and Ethics sub-committee: "You raise a very valid point in that the information you have asked for [summary of complaints against councillors] should have been provided by way of a report to the committee this year. The oversight has been picked up and the Chair has asked that a report be brought to the next committee meeting setting out the number of complaints made since the last report and a summary of those complaints." When will this matter be addressed?

Response.

A report on Councillor complaints will come before the V&E Sub-Cttee on 6 October 2025.

Suzanne Audrey

Name: Mike Oldreive

Committee: Audit Committee

Question one title: Outstanding Debt owed to Bristol Waste Company by Stepping Up Leadership CIC

Question one: What is the current debt still outstanding from Stepping Up Leadership CIC to Bristol Waste as a result of Bristol Waste agreeing to pay invoices for Stepping Up Development Education Ltd via a "pass through agreement"? (This information has been disclosed via FOIs in the past, so I do not expect any censorship via "commercial confidentiality". This information is not available via SUL CIC published accounts as it has failed to prepare proper accounts, including a balance sheet, as required by the Companies Act.)

Response.

This question has been forwarded to BWC for response.

Question two title: Ongoing payments to Stepping Up by Bristol City Council

Question two: Despite concerns being raised around the probity of Stepping Up and its various companies, the City Council continues to use its services. In November 2024 a payment of £40,000 was made to "Stepping up Leadership CIC t/a Stepping Up learning Academy". a) Under what arrangements was this payment made ? (contractual, or ad hoc? Please provide a reference to the contract details and date) b) which company was providing the service and who was actually paid? (I'm not an expert on Company law, but I don't think it's lawful for one company to trade " as another", which is what is suggested by the narrative on this payment. I note that SU Learning Academy has recently applied for strike off at Companies House).

Response

- (a) Following a procurement process, Stepping Up was awarded a two-year contract in April 2023. The £40,000 payment was made as part of this contract. The contract reference is RES/RES Diversity Leadership Programme.
- (b) The contract was between BCC and Stepping Up Leadership Community Interest Company.

Name: Dan Ackroyd

Committee: Audit Committee

Question one title: CRR 60 timeline

My understanding of the sequence of events related to CRR 60, and the self-referral Bristol City Council made to the Regulator of Social Housing is as follows. November 2023 Bristol City Council commissioned Savills was to undertake a Consumer Standards Preparedness Review and Landlord Compliance Data Analysis. This was an attempt to understand how far BCC would be from compliance with the new law. 23rd January, 2024 The risks that would later become known as CRR 60 were scored at 21 (impact 7 * likelihood 3) for the "Q3 2023-2024 – December 2023" risk report presented at Cabinet. This score of 21 meant that they could be "managed at the directorate level" rather than being discussed in public. February 2024 Savills present their findings to BCC leadership, and it becomes obvious that BCC will not be able to be compliant with the new law due to the huge scale of work needed. 1st April 2024 New consumer standard regulations come into effect. 9th April, 2024 At a meeting of the "Corporate Leadership Team" a decision is taken to begin a Housing Transformation Programme. 15th April 2024 Bristol City Council makes a self-referral to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) detailing the non-compliance with the Safety and Quality Standard and other matters. This self-referral includes details of the Housing Transformation Programme, which allowed Bristol City council to avoid worse 'score' from the RSH. 14th May 2024 At a meeting of the CLB, the individual risks that had been previously given a score of 21 were given a entry in the Corporate Risk Register as CRR60, with a score of 28. My understanding is that the "CLB" meets every week. It would have been obvious from February, when Savills started presenting their findings, that there was no chance for BCC to be compliant with the law by April 1st 2024. Why was the risk kept at score '21' for so long and only promoted to have a score of '28' a month and a half after ?

Response.

This matter is currently the subject of a FOI request and will be responded to via that service.

Question two title: CRR60 manifestation

When a risk 'manifests' (aka can't be ignored any longer) it will become necessary for the council to respond. What is meant to be the process when a risk changes from a 'theoretical' risk to a situation where BCC is not compliant with a law that has already come into effect?

Response.

Bristol City Council's risk management policy is based on the ISO31000 principles and UK Government "The Orange Book – Management of Risk, Principles and Concepts". Risk Treatment – the policy/process allows for the most appropriate course of action to be taken in relation to risks. Where a risk exceeds the likelihood threshold (e.g. almost certain to happen or is happening) this becomes an Issue and would be managed accordingly through BaU or specific management measures.

Question three title: Records management

My question relates to Agenda item 9, Records management. It seems that BCC has a blanket deletion policy for emails that haven't been moved to a permanent storage system. Is this fully compliant with the Freedom of Information act and guidance from the relevant bodies?

Response.

Services are directed to store relevant information in the appropriate area (SharePoint/Line of Business System) in line with the retention periods stipulated by the legislation relevant to that information. Email is not a recognised system for long term storage of information.

Agenda Item 12 – Annual Report of the Ombudsman

Statement: The proposal for this report might just be for noting, but Audit should be aware that this report only tells part of a story regarding complaints against Bristol City Council. On 22 April 2025, I submitted a first stage 1 complaint regarding the council's failure to hold an independent inquiry regarding Send spying. As you are likely aware, in the absence of this – and whilst waiting – I took legal action against the council. It took a number of years as Bristol dragged this out as much as possible. When this came to a conclusion, I submitted a complaint regarding the failure to hold the inquiry. This was because the size of the operation of both online monitoring and in-person surveillance was significant and not just a little bit of looking at people's Twitter account. I heard nothing. On 03/06/2025, having heard nothing, I sent a follow-up email asking how much longer the response would be. I heard nothing. I am now writing this statement on 22/07/2025 – three calendar months later and have had no response. The three options I have are this: 1- Complain to the LGO about you not responding to the complaint so I can complain. 2- Complain to the council about them not investigating the stage one complaint. 3- Let it go. So whilst you are noting your report, the fact is, people aren't even getting a complaint into the system in the first place. I consider the reason for this is related to the fact that there are people at Bristol City Council who have gone out of their way to block justice against human rights breaches and continue to do so. For clarity, option 3 is not a consideration for me, so any chance Bristol can stop deliberately obstructing the complaints process?

Jen Smith

Dan Ackroyd

Committee: Audit Committee

Statement title: Stepping Up, CRR60 and FOI

Statement: First, I'd like to thank the secretary for fixing the internal audit reports that were initially uploaded in "locked" mode, so that they can now be searched and copied.

Chair, I must admire your boldness in announcing that the "Stepping Up" matter is closed.

I note that the Stepping Up company is currently paying back the loan that Bristol Waste made to it.

I highly doubt that loan would have been repaid if Mr Oldreive and others had stopped pursuing this when they were originally told that "there was nothing to see here", and the matter should be considered closed.

I actually do have some sympathy for officer who have to process FOI requests.

Perhaps if there was a better culture of openness and transparency then members of the public wouldn't be making so many requests.

But when decisions are taken in private, and it is not at all obvious whether that decision was taken lawfully, then people are going to send many FOI requests.

And regarding FOI requests, it is ridiculous that no details of the appeal against the enforcement notice from the ICO has been kept secret. I note that BCC are allowed to not implement the enforcement notice until the appeal has finished, and that appeal has been going on for over a year now.

Bristol City Council has a culture of secrecy and cover-up.

This needs to change.

Councillors, you do know that Reform are on the rise, right?

Finally, the "risk report" used to monitor CRR60 is a fundamentally incompetent way to manage "risks" that have manifested.

- It lacks an overview of how long the work will take.
- The "details" for the mitigating actions have one or two sentences each, and each represent millions of pounds of spending
- Due dates get changed without explanation, and some items that had due dates of years in the future were dropped from the report without explanation.

This is just no way to provide proper oversight of a Housing Transformation programme.