



Meeting **Bath City Forum**

Date **Wednesday, 20th September, 2017**

Time **6.00 - 8.15 pm**

Venue **Council Chamber - Guildhall, Bath**

	Subject		
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AGM 6.00-6.30pm

1.	Statement for the outgoing Chair The outgoing Chair will provide a statement and report back on the key work that has been achieved by the forum over the last year.	Cllr Bob Goodman	5 mins
2.	Nomination of the Chair	Ashley Ayre	15 mins
3.	Nomination of Vice Chair Rosie Phillips has stated an intention to stand for re-election as the Vice Chair.	Chair	10 mins

Public Service Updates 6.30-7.00pm

4.	Police Update	Steve Kendal	15 mins
5.	Fire Service Update	Gareth Lloyd	15 mins

Break 7.00-7.15pm

Ordinary Meeting 7.15-8.15pm

6.	Minutes of the previous meeting 24.07.17	Chair	
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7.	Unregulated Holiday Lets in Bath	Harry Tedstone and Robin Kerr	30 mins
8.	Neighbourhood Portion of CIL	Cllr Fiona Darey	20 mins
9.	Any Other Business	All	5 mins

Bath City Forum

Annual General Meeting, 20th September 2017

Procedure Note Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair of Bath City Forum

This procedure note should be read in the context of standing order Rule 4, set out in Appendix 1

- (i) The AGM will be opened by an officer of Bath & North East Somerset Council
- (ii) This officer will seek nominations for the Chair of the Bath City Forum. Where nominations have been made in advance, these will be announced to the meeting. Self-nominations are allowed. Only the 12 elected Bath Councillors serving as members of the Bath City Forum are eligible to be nominated for the Chair. Nominations are able to be taken from the floor during the meeting and may be made by both elected and co-opted members.
- (iii) The officer will ensure that each nomination is duly seconded.
- (iv) Each candidate who has been validly nominated and seconded will be invited to make a series of remarks (of no more than two minutes in duration) in support of their candidature. No questions will be asked of candidates or any debate entered into.
- (v) Officers will then supervise the conduct of the election for the post of Chair. A secret ballot may be held if agreed by the meeting, a motion to this effect having been duly moved and seconded. The name receiving the most number of votes from those members of the Forum present will be elected Chair. As of 24 August 2017, the following are members of the forum and therefore eligible to vote:

Cllr Patrick Anketell-Jones – Conservative
Cllr Rob Appleyard – Liberal Democrat
Jeremy Boss - Co-opted Member
Cllr Dine Romero – Liberal Democrat
Cllr Fiona Darey - Conservative
Virginia Williamson - Co-opted Member
Cllr Andy Furse – Liberal Democrat
Cllr Bob Goodman - Cabinet Member
Leslie Redwood - Co-opted Member
Sally Harris - Co-opted Member
Michael Hill - Co-opted Member
Matt Humberstone - Co-opted Member
Caroline Kay - Co-opted Member
Robin Kerr - Co-opted Member
Penny McKissock - Co-opted Member
Cllr Shaun McGall – Liberal Democrat
Michael Norton -Conservative

Cllr Lin Patterson - Green
Cllr Chris Pearce - Conservative
Rosie Phillips - Co-opted Member
Cllr Colin Blackburn - Independent
Cllr Joe Rayment - Labour
Dr Christopher Roche - Co-opted Member
George Samios - Co-opted Member
Cllr Peter Turner - Conservative

- (vi) On being elected as Chair of the Forum, the elected Chair will take the chair of the meeting and will then undertake the process of electing Vice Chair of the Forum, using a similar process to the above. Only co-opted members of the Forum are eligible to be nominated for the post of Vice Chair. However nominations may be made by both elected and co-opted members. The name receiving the most number of votes from those members of the Forum present will be elected Vice Chair.

Appendix 1

RULE 4 – CHAIR OF BATH CITY FORUM

The Bath City Forum will elect a Chair and Vice-Chair at its first inaugural meeting. Thereafter elections for these posts will take place at the subsequent Annual General Meeting.

The Bath City Forum will elect its own Chair and Vice Chair from its membership. The Chair shall be drawn from the 12 elected Bath Councillors serving as members of the Bath City Forum. The Vice Chair shall be drawn from the co-opted members

The Chair and Vice Chair will act independently and work on behalf of the Forum for the wider benefit

The Chair and Vice Chair will meet with the Bath & North East Somerset Council Forum Sponsor as a Steering Group to agree agendas, resolve issues and report on actions as appropriate.

Voting for the Chair and Vice Chair will be available only to those existing members of the Forum, notification of which will be made in advance.

The existing Chair and Vice Chair may seek re-election. Nominations for Chair and Vice Chair may be received prior to and at the AGM. This includes self-nominations for both positions

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NOMINATION FORM- POSITION OF CHAIR / VICE CHAIR OF THE BATH CITY FORUM

I,.....

As a member of the Bath City Forum, hereby propose/second (*please delete as appropriate*)

.....
For the position of Chair/ Vice Chair (*please delete as appropriate*) of the Bath City Forum, to be determined at the AGM on 20th September 2017. The nominee has confirmed they are willing to stand for the post.

NOTES

1. Nominations may also be made at the AGM itself
2. All proposals will be required to be seconded for a nomination to be valid.
3. Only the 12 elected Bath Councillors serving as members of the Bath City Forum are eligible to be nominated for the position of Chair.
4. Only co-opted members of the Bath City Forum are eligible to be nominated for the post of Vice Chair.
5. Co-opted members and elected members may nominate for either role
6. Self-nominations are accepted
7. The nominee is invited to set out in the box below a brief statement in support of nomination. All valid nominations and supporting statements received before 5pm 12th September 2017, including information about who has made the nomination, will be circulated to the Bath City Forum members in advance of the AGM.

Signed:

Date.....

Please return the completed form to : Mark_Hayward@bathnes.gov.uk

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NOMINATION FORM- POSITION OF CHAIR / VICE CHAIR OF THE BATH CITY FORUM

I, Robin Kerr, as a member of the Bath City Forum, hereby propose, and Councillor Bob Goodman, also as a member of the Bath City Forum, hereby seconds:

Councillor Colin Blackburn.....

For the position of Chair of the Bath City Forum, to be determined at the AGM on 20th September 2017. The nominee has confirmed they are willing to stand for the post.

NOTES

- 1. Nominations may also be made at the AGM itself**
- 2. All proposals will be required to be seconded for a nomination to be valid.**
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Colin started work in retail management in Bath in the Mid 1980's. As a born and bred Essex lad this was a major contrast but he fell in love with Bath and the unique 'feel' about the city and the people who live and work here. It stirred a curiosity in diversity and culture that lead to a career in international trade, which saw him move throughout the UK and also travel for business across the globe. He is fortunate to have friends now across 5 continents.

He met his wife whilst on a business trip to Abu Dhabi 12 years ago, Madeline was teaching in a girls' college after she had also experienced ex-pat working life in the US, Australia and New Zealand but was persuaded to return to the UK!

After 10 years living in Nottingham and many trips to Bath to visit family who live and work locally, they decided it was the best place to raise their family and re-located 'back' to Bath in 2011, just in time for the arrival of their second child.

Colin was quickly aware of June Player, independent councillor for Westmorland, as he set about refurbishing a derelict house in 'her' ward. He finally felt settled enough and ready to commit to supporting his local community.

Colin and Madeline launched an international student work experience business in 2012 and now employ 10 staff in their offices in Brassmill as well as owning and

managing another business, based in Belfast, which they bought and 'turned around' in 2014. This also now has 10 staff.

Elected as a independent councillor in Westmorland in May 2015, Colin works alongside June to provide a balanced partnership to their ward residents of action, volunteering, passion for their immediate environment as well as a desire to enhance the city for all who live and work here.

Colin's 'scrutiny' commitments in Planning, Housing and Economic Development have made him even more committed to improving the city. Bath City Forum is the foundation to strengthen the voice of city residents, sometimes lacking when influenced by many outside of our city environment.

As an independent councillor, a parent of young children, a Bath Minis rugby coach, an employer and standing committee member of the Charter Trustees, Colin feels well placed to listen to the people who make our great city live and breathe and carry the position of Chair of Bath City Forum. He wishes to work to enable it to help move the current format into a structure that has a powerful voice of representation for the city.

Signed:

Date...12th Sept 2017.....

Please return the completed form to : Mark_Hayward@bathnes.gov.uk



**Note of the meeting of the Bath City Forum
held on Monday, 24th July, 2017
in Banqueting Room - Guildhall, Bath**

Meeting Attendance

In Attendance
Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones
Councillor Rob Appleyard
Councillor Colin Blackburn
Jeremy Boss
Martha Cox
Councillor Fiona Darey
Maggie Depledge
Dave Dixon
Councillor Andrew Furse
Mark Hayward
Michael Hill
Wera Hobhouse
Robin Kerr
Penny McKissock
Councillor Paul Myers
Tim Newark
Ben Palmer
Councillor Lin Patterson
Councillor Christopher Pearce
Timothy Rawlings
Councillor Joe Rayment
Leslie Redwood
Residents (x9)
Fran Riches
Councillor Dine Romero
Councillor Richard Samuel
Councillor Shaun Andrew Stephenson-McGall
Councillor Peter Turner
Virginia Williamson
Alan Young

Apologies Received from
Ashley Ayre

Councillor Bob Goodman
Sally Harris
Matt Humberstone
Alaa Al Khourdajie
Gareth Lloyd
Rosie Phillips
Dr Christopher Roche
George Samios
Sarah Williams

1. Welcome from the Chair of the Forum

Councillor Paul Myers explained that before the meeting progressed that the Forum was in the unusual circumstance of having the Chair, Vice Chair and Sponsor all absent. As this situation had occurred 90 minutes before the meeting was due to start a temporary Chair arrangement was needed.

The constitution for these matters would normally ask that another member of the forum would step in, as this situation had happened at short notice Councillor Myers was prepared to Chair the meeting in his position as the Cabinet member for Communities, unless any other member wished to do so. The forum voted in favour of Councillor Myers chairing this meeting.

Dave Dixon explained that at the process to elect a new Chair for the forum will take place at the next meeting of the forum in September. There will be details sent to forum members before September which will allow for nominations to be submitted. At the next forum meeting nominees will be asked to give a 2 minute statement of why they wish to take on the role, this will be followed by a ballot for all forum members to vote.

2. Meet the Provider (Virgincare) with an introduction from the CCG

A presentation was given by Martha Cox and Fran Riches from Virgincare and Tamsin May from CCG B&NES. This presentation looked at the vision for the population of B&NES and introduced the B&NES Citizens' panel concept. A copy of the presentation is included with these minutes and available online.

Questions

1. Councillor Rob Appleyard – What impact on patients have the issues in your IT systems had on patients? And what resilience do you have if one of your centres goes down?
Response – There has been an implementation programme where PC's have been replaced and a new IT desktop package has been introduced. This has seen some impact on Virgincare staff but not had an effect on Patients. We have learnt from the incidents that have taken place and we always put patient care first, our systems are heavily tested and data integration testing is carried out.
2. Councillor Dine Romero – Are the IT issues an unexpected complication? And was the new virtual solution what was proposed in your tender document?
Response – The issues were not expected and an investigation is taking place into why this happened. The solution we have implemented was in the tender.
3. Councillor Dine Romero – Will the citizens panel give patients what they need or could they end up be a 'knee-jerk' reactive group?

Response – The panel will be comprehensive, we have seventy contractors/groups that have been asked to input, and existing relationships will be used along with a broader diverse set which represent people with disabilities and ethnic groups. This will be a wide panel that will be broken down to cover tailored areas.

4. Councillor Joe Rayment – What assurance can you give on there being no further IT failures?

Response – An internal incident has been raised which is being strongly scrutinised by four executive directors as part of the governance structure that we maintain. There is a reporting schedule we will be following that links into our programme board.

5. Councillor Joe Rayment – The Virgin contract is set to run over a seven year period, what reassurance can you provide that the quality of services won't decline in the later years?

Response – We are clear that we will have a constant standard of delivery. The steps we are taking to save money through ways of working and better technology will provide this.

6. Councillor Peter Turner – How will you be monitoring how GP surgeries are organising themselves?

Response – The GP's are all separate businesses we will be looking to work alongside the practices to integrate but this can be challenging.

7. Councillor Lin Patterson – What will be the maximum number of people that will be on the citizen's panel? and how often will these meet?

Response – There is no set upper limit to members on the panel, there will be varying regularity for different topics that are covered by a number of groups. Some groups may never hold meetings and others could have regular get-togethers, we will look at IT solutions for online feedback where suitable to do so.

8. Virginia Williamson – How does Virgin fit in with the Health and Wellbeing Board and Select committee? and what will be the criteria that you will be setting out on your performance indicators?

Response – The Health and Well-being Board is attended by different organisations and all have an input, these meetings are publicly webcast. There are over 1,400 performance indicators which Virgincare report on, next year we hope to have a version which reports to the public what they need to know.

9. Michael Hill – Who are the customer for reporting from Virgincare?

Response – B&NES Council and the CCG are the customer who Virgincare is reporting to, KPI's will be made available.

Councillor Dine Romero asked what the forum is being asked to do with the information that has been shared at this meeting.

Cllr Paul Myers explained that information that comes to this forum is for the local people and representatives present to consider and share with the community. This is not a scrutiny panel, this forum should be looking to be asking issues questions about the impact in Bath and looking to follow up with any further issue that they would like to see addressed on the topic.

3. Local Police Matters

A Police representative was not available for this meeting. A commitment has been made for neighbourhood police representatives to attend future forum meetings.

4. Waste Services Update

Tim Rawlings, Waste Campaigns Manager for Bath and North East Somerset Council provided an overview of the changes that are being made to Waste Service collection in Bath from November 2017; this handout is included with the meeting minutes.

A number of questions and points were raised by the forum:

1. Councillor Peter Turner – What is happening with the trial of 70 litre bags in Alfred Street and will this be tested in flats in the wider area?
Response – We have learnt from the trial and it appears to have been a success.
2. Councillor Lin Patterson – Where residents have asked for smaller containers, there has been an unwillingness to deal with the concerns and this has created ill will. Have all the people that raised concerns had a response?
Response – The allocation of containers has been dealt with using fair methods. These are based on the criteria where the container is appropriate for the property (both the current occupant and any future occupants). If somebody has raised an issue they have had a response. We will of course consider any new issues which residents have which have not been considered previously.
3. Councillor Dine Romero – We are being told that the changes to collections will see increased recycling levels, how will this be achieved as no new materials are going to be collected?
Response – The limitation of how much rubbish residents can put out (contained within their bag or bin), will result in some people having to consider alternative ways to present their waste, which in turn will encourage more recycling. There is no limit on how much recycling can be put out and it is collected every week.
4. Councillor Andrew Furse – Some residents have stated that they do not wish to have a wheelie bin delivered and are being told they have no choice. A further review is needed as there are conservation areas where bins on the edge of properties are not going to work well and weekly sack collections would be a better fit.
Response – When bins are being delivered we will be monitoring that they are not being left on the edge of properties for too long. Residents can opt out of the new service if they do not want a bin but this means they will not be able to put any rubbish out for collection and would have to take their rubbish to one of our recycling centres. If residents wish to opt out they can speak with one of our team by calling 01225 39 40 41. If residents were to change their mind they are likely to be charged for the delivery of the bin. Properties within the heritage area of Bath will have a weekly collection from a 70 litre re-usable rubbish bag to prevent the build-up of rubbish between collections.
5. Councillor Joe Rayment – A policy that aims to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill should be welcomed. Could the projections for the expected savings be shared with this forum?
Response – The service change is preventing a significant increase in costs rather than reducing costs. For example there is a £450k grant from government which has stopped so we have to find a way of continuing the waste service without this funding. I will see if my colleagues are happy to share any further details of projected savings with the forum.

6. Robin Kerr – Nowhere in the literature being given to residents is there instructions on how to reduce the levels of non-recyclable waste. Where too much waste is accumulating issues such as fly tipping and rats nesting start to increase. What can be done to improve this?
Response – We do have an effective enforcement policy on fly-tipping. Residents with a large quantity of waste are being proactively approached. Our literature going out in August and with the new containers shows in detail how to recycle, what to recycle, and how to sort it in boxes.
7. Councillor Rob Appleyard – Out of the total 3,000 requests that were made from residents to have their options changed, who will be re-assessed post the change in policy? How is fly-tipping levels between now and after the changes going to be monitored?
Response – There is a targeted budget that is used to deal with the priorities that we are working towards. Council Connect collects data on fly tipping on the CRM system. Where assessments have been carried out we will give everybody a fair chance to put forward their points. There hasn't been a change in policy and we haven't changed any of the criteria used for decision making. We have been listening to residents' concerns and making assessments based on practicalities of individual properties, where terrain prevents the use of a wheeled bin. We aren't reassessing if there is no reason to.
8. Michael Hill – The residents are being asked to recycle more, how are they going to know that extra boxes are available for them? It has not been clearly set out in the guidance how additional box request work, many residents just will not bother.
Response – Extra boxes simply have to be requested and they are delivered to resident with no extra charge. More information is being provided to residents and being delivered in September and with the bins and bags. Containers are free to be ordered on line, over the telephone or by email. Residents will soon also be able to collect them from our HWRCs if that's easier for them.
9. Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones – There are many properties that have small petite gardens, the aesthetics of having a bin in the front will be terrible.
Response – We have had mixed reactions from residents, however we are keen for residents to give the new bins a try. We will make further assessments in exceptional cases where the resident comes back to us and says they can't manage.
10. Councillor Richard Samuel – Having trialled a 70 litre sack over a two week period I have seen that it is possible to achieve meeting my needs with this size bag. Council has agreed that 140 litre bags can be changes to 70 litres if requested. Why can we not start with a 70 litre size?
Response - Our policy has not changed. We will be delivering the allocated bag to properties and if resident do not manage with the 140 litre bag we can assess this after the start of the new service. If that is the case they will be able to take the 140l bag to a one stop shop and swap it for a 70 Litre bag.
11. Councillor Colin Blackburn – When will the new collection vehicles be brought into use and how will these reduce waste?
Response – We will see the new vehicle being used from November 2017. The methods for loading the vehicles will see efficiencies made. The vehicles themselves will not reduce waste; it will be the change in behaviours of some residents who will recycle.

12. One additional point that needed further clarification that was about the use of dustbins.
Response: Our position is as follows: Residents that have been allocated a wheeled bin must use it. For residents that have been allocated a re-usable rubbish bag (only) they can use their dustbin instead. But we will only collect rubbish from one container (either the dustbin or re-usable rubbish bag).

5. Notes of the previous meeting and matters arising

The notes of the previous meeting on 29 March 2017 were agreed as an accurate record by Councillor Rob Appleyard and seconded by Jeremy Boss.

6. Dementia Action - Working in Bath

Presentations were provided by Alan Young, Dementia Action Alliance and Maggie Depledge, Dementia Co-ordinator for the RUH. A copy of the presentation is included with these minutes and available online.

Questions:

1. Councillor Rob Appleyard – What additional support is needed to increase the awareness of issues and the profile of dementia?
Response – The RUH does not have designated dementia wards, as patients come through outpatient's services; we identify the patients and carers who require extra support. Although our staff is our biggest asset we do still heavily rely on volunteers assistance.
2. Councillor Dine Romero – Is Bath and North East Somerset Council seen to be a dementia friendly local authority? And what more can be done to help people with issues that can prove problematic, for example help with consultations.
Response – There is good support from the Council although we see this as work in progress. There have been good levels of support from Councillors and its leaders. Time is the challenge in society in general; we all have to become more disciplined in dealing with people.
3. Councillor Shaun Stephenson-McGill – There are forty-five organisations that are signed up to support your cause, what is the position with the Police, Fire and First Bus?
Response – Public services uptake has been positive and open when approached, we have made contacts with the Police, Fire and First Bus. Some organisations are more of a challenge to get on board; we are a developing organisation and are encouraged by the initial overtures.
4. Penny McKissock – Southside is a domestic abuse service that is linked into twenty-four GP surgeries and the RUH A&E. What can refuges do to help?
Response – The service can provide connections and we would be happy to work with you on this.
5. Jeremy Boss – What steps do we need to take in making Bath a dementia friendly city?
Response – The city approach is a reasonable one although North east Somerset also needs to be included. The aim is for organisations to be enlightened and informed and the people within to be enlightened and informed individuals. Dementia Action Alliance wants to assist all sectors and if anyone requires help they simply need to ask.
6. Councillor Fiona Darey – In my life every day I have experienced what care and services are available (as a carer). In Somerset I experienced care provision that lacked in information on dealing with situations. The hospital was also in crisis and advice in

dealing with diminishing finance issues was lacking. The difference I have witnessed in care provided in B&NES has been brilliant, additionally the Police in both Somerset and B&NES have provided a brilliant experience.

Response – Families have a great deal to learn and go on an emotional journey; this will include many practical issues that need to be sorted. Having an advanced care plan or a power of attorney in place can help carers. The RUH wards do offer Carers the facilities to be able to stay overnight.

7. Forum Updates

Neighbourhood Portion of CIL – Councillor Fiona Darey

Since the forum workshop took place we have met with a number of other council departments to gain a better understanding of how once the neighbourhood CIL projects have been agreed, what lead times will be required to be able to implement delivery. This is important as we have to have the input for projects that are to be delivered by highways, parks or any form of infrastructure, on how these will fit the extra requests into their programmes. The next steps will be to agree a criteria document and form for expressions of interest. Once these documents are completed we will circulate these to the forum members and publish on the Councils website. This would mean that by the time the forum meets in September we could have the process in place.

Economic Development – Jeremy Boss

Work with Bath Bridge on how the City Identity work could be taken forward Conclusion and recommendations for the BCF:

- That the work to develop the Brand is taken forward accepting the offer of Bath Bridge to co-create the work [A good offer to develop something tangible for the City]
- We should aim to work together to create a united shared vision for the City supporting the likely recommendations of the Destination Management Plan [There is a clear need and opportunity that we can deliver on]
- The BCF should be the client for the work and champion its development
- A strategy group should be formed based on an augmented Economic Development Sub Group [The groups already exists and is willing to take this forward with some further help from other stakeholders]
- Bath Bridge will develop working groups to engage with key groups from across the City, including younger people and underrepresented communities, with the support of BCF members [Working together we can reach a wide audience across the City]
- The first deliverable will be the brand strategy by the end of 2017 [Working at pace to deliver outcomes]

Councillor Dine Romero asked that the working group bring together a united, shared vision with an assurance that, the weight for recommendations will include input from unrepresented communities.

Jeremy Boss put forward the Sub Group requests that the Bath City Forum endorse these conclusions and approves that work on the brand identity working with Bath Bridge should proceed. Councillor Peter Turner seconded this recommendation; all other votes were in favour of endorsing the work to move forward.

Bath City Conference Steering Group – Councillor Colin Blackburn

- “Building a stronger Bath” is the overarching theme for this years
- Housing, Economic Development and Strong Communities are three exhibition areas for participants.
- We are still looking for suggestions for keynote speakers, at least two, the first at 1pm and the second at 4.30pm.
- ‘Ask the panel’ will take place in the evening 5.30-7.00pm.
- Bath Studio School are to produce a film that will show people from Bath giving their views on “what is important to them about the City”. This film will be shown at the start of the ‘ask the panel’ session.
- Visits will take place in September at several Bath schools prior to the conference, where pupils can put forward “what is important to them about the City”. If it is possible that this will be captured on film.
- The Conference takes place on Friday 13th October and the exhibition stands open between 12:30pm-4.30pm.

Forum members are asked that they engage with their networks for participants for the event and Contact Mark Hayward with any further suggestions.

Transport

A request has been made that a forum member to take over chairing the Transport sub group. A forum member needs to chair the group but they can co-opt additional experts who are not forum members to take part in the work of the group.

Councillor Joe Rayment asked that whoever is appointed as Chair of this sub group takes on the role without pre conceived ideas and carries out the role with impartiality.

Fire and Rescue

An operational update providing local information was provided by Gareth Lloyd, Bath Fire Station Manager. Councillor Dine Romero commented that the Fire Service attendance would be welcomed at future meetings.

Robin Kerr raised the concern around the forty-eight party houses that exist in Bath and would welcome an explanation on how many have had fire safety inspections?

8. Any Other Business

Consultations

- (i) The forum is reminded that there is presently an open consultation that is asking people in Bath to [have their say on restricting the consumption of alcohol in public places in Bath](#).
- (ii) The consultation on the location of a combined Library and One Stop Shop in Bath. There are copies available as well as this being online.

Virginia Williamson asked that a more time realistic agenda for future meeting could be considered. The presentations need to be shorter and the time for discussion broader to allow for better engagement opportunities.

Michael Hill asked if an update on what the future plans are for the South Quays Team development could be brought to the next meeting.

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Party Houses in Bath – FoBRA statement for Bath City Forum

I want to paint a picture for you of “partying” in central Bath, two years hence. 67 large houses in the city are no longer inhabited by families, who would be quietly going about normal life and looking after their neighbourhood. This is because these 67 will be “Party Houses”, empty during the week, but erupting into a blaze of noise, bad behaviour and fire danger at the weekend by offering just under 700 beds for Hen and Stag Parties. It’s very good business for the owners because the Hens are prepared to pay a lot, and these Party Houses are untaxed, unregulated, unlicensed, free of planning approval or much in the way of overheads, and the law on them is so weak it can largely be ignored; but, on the other hand, it’s terrible for the neighbours; and central Bath has been inexorably ‘hollowed out’ by a combination of Airbnb and Party Houses (like Florence or Venice, and, in the UK, York and Brighton), though the disruption of Party Houses is much worse than from short term lettings. That’s what it will be like in 2019 unless we do something about it. In 2014 we had 23 of these Party Houses with 10 or more beds – some as many as 20: now we have 50, and more are in the pipeline. Is this what we want?

Bath is a beautiful place to spend the weekend, with plenty of pampering, great shops and things to do. The problem is that the partygoers habitually celebrate into the small hours and even go in for lewd behaviour, such as naked butlers or blow-up genitalia tied onto the front entrance door. The behaviour is often visible, either through the windows (no curtains!) or in the garden. With a hen party, almost always there is much drinking, dancing to loud music and a lot of candles – a potent recipe for a serious accident as well as the noise and the terrible disruption.

Here’s what neighbours say: *“We are isolated between two houses which are empty all week, depriving people of making these lovely houses their permanent home.” “One guest said: ‘We’ve hired this house and we can do what we like.’ “I’m not a killjoy but the regularity and inevitability of the whole procedure is extremely depressing.” “Luckily my bedroom is at the front of the house but I feel incredibly sorry for the residents on the ground floor.” “If they had said ‘We’re going to let it to hen parties every weekend’, we would have complained, but we didn’t, because nobody knew.” “I think it’s incredibly unfair that, essentially, what’s happening is a very lucrative business that they have no licence for.”*

There are not many applicable regulations, and the law is confused. Bath’s party houses would normally be occupied by one family or perhaps several families if the building is divided. So, the number of properties available for people to call their home is decreasing - by at least the current 50 party houses so far. The sense of community is greatly diminished. The Council says it is proud of the 10,000 people who live in the centre of the City, which is Council policy, and the Placemaking Plan,

calls for another 1150 homes in Bath, as it is good for Society, for security and for the maintenance of these great houses that constitute part of the attraction of our World Heritage Site. However, numbers must be nudging down to 9,000, as the Party Houses are not now used for living, but partying. Some might say that opposition to party houses is just rich residents being mean-spirited, trying to preserve their quiet quarter of Bath. However, the opposite is actually the case: central Bath houses are usually flatted and often occupied by families or individuals on modest incomes who buy or rent their house and want to preserve the buildings. They, like all of us, have a right to quiet enjoyment of their homes.

So, what is to be done? Firstly, the law needs to be strengthened: at present there is only one example of Case Law which applies, and two refused Planning Appeals, the problem being that these places do not fall clearly into a planning use category; by default they are treated as C3 (residential), but they are clearly not being used for normal residential purposes. There is case law for treating them as a 'special'; but this is not satisfactory in the long term, and the law needs to recognise it as a defined use. I am pleased that our new MP is aware of the problems and is already taking some action. The National Organization of Residents' Associations has briefed the Ministry on this problem, and will be taking part in discussions with them later this month. Selective Licensing may offer another route to control, but it needs detailed investigation. Moreover, there are good examples to be found abroad, notably in Amsterdam.

Secondly, the frightful fire hazard, which Party Houses are, needs to be brought in line with the regulations which apply to hotels, B&Bs and HMOs. Party Houses do not, at present, have to be inspected or comply with fire regulations, not least because most are operating unlawfully, without the correct planning consent. Of this lack of formal notification, Avon Fire & Rescue Service were unaware, but have now been alerted, with details of the large Party Houses in Bath – we don't want another Grenfell Tower!

Thirdly, the owners and operators of Party Houses need to pay business rates, because they are obviously operating as a business, presumably making a profit from the very high costs (and very low overheads) of renting a party house.

Lastly, the Council has to play its part by recognizing the problem. They say they receive few complaints from neighbours, but this is largely because neighbours dare not blight their properties with an official complaint or no one will buy it. The Council must either take action to require owners to apply for planning permission, thereby ensuring that other planning, building, and fire regulations are obeyed, and providing a chance for neighbours and statutory bodies to have a chance to oppose it; or introduce Selective Licensing.

The key question our Councillors and Council officers should ask themselves is "Would YOU want to live next door to a Party House?"

Robin Kerr, FoBRA Chairman, final, 11th Sep 17