



BRISTOL

2015 EUROPEAN GREEN CAPITAL

Stephen Williams
Former Member of Parliament for Bristol West

Via email:
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Reply to Nicola Yates
Telephone 0117 35-74173
E-mail nicola.yates@bristol.gov.uk
Our ref
Your ref
Date 3rd March 2016

Dear Mr Williams

Thank you for your letter of 2nd February 2016. I am responding in my capacity as City Director of Bristol City Council.

As you will be aware we reported to the Council Overview & Scrutiny Committee which took place yesterday on the 2nd March, and we will be reporting again to Audit Committee on 11th March. The papers for both of these committees are in the public domain. Therefore, the information I am providing below is that which is not covered in these two reports. For ease of reference I have used your letter as format for responding to the questions contained within.

2nd February 2016

For the attention of the Chief Executive and Chief Internal Auditor at Bristol City Council

Dear Nicola Yates and Melanie Henchy-McCarthy

Re: your reply concerning the Government grant of £7million given to Bristol City Council to support European Green Capital 2015

I write in response to your letter, dated 28th January 2016, which was the response to mine of the previous day.

Firstly, let me assure you that I did not write my letter from a position of ignorance of the facts. I was of course aware of the limited break down of the £7m DECC grant and £1m city council funding that had been provided to councillors, in particular members of the Audit Committee. I was also aware of the numerous freedom of information requests from members of the public, asking for further information. It was the refusal of the council to give them a more detailed breakdown that led me to write to you. Your reply simply republishes the information already in the public domain and fails to provide the level of transparency that I would expect from the custodian of taxpayers' money.

I would appreciate your response to my detailed questions set out below, within the next two weeks. I have two queries about the Local Government Transparency Code and the structure of Bristol 2015 Limited. I have a set of questions about the amounts budgeted and spent from the central and local government funds.

City Director

Nicola Yates OBE
City Director

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1 Local Government Transparency Code

The Department of Communities and Local Government published a revised and tightened Local Government Transparency Code in February 2015. I was Communities Minister in the department at the time and am well aware of the Coalition Government's intention to require more transparency about expenditure and procurement contracts right across the public sector. It was an issue that I had campaigned for myself, specifically to open up the public sector to value for money challenge from small businesses, social enterprises and community groups.

The Code requires disclosure of expenditure by local councils of amounts above £500. The details of contracts valued at more than £5,000 should also be disclosed. The information should be published by councils on a monthly basis. It's now a year since the Code was introduced so Bristol City Council has had plenty of time to comply. The grant of £7million from DECC has been broken down into ten headings, ranging from £2million to £138,892. You decline to publish any detailed information below these amounts. The same applies to the £1million of Bristol Council's own resources.

Please could you advise me whether you believe the level of detail provided to councillors, campaigners, members of the public and me complies with the Code? Have you taken legal advice in order to justify your compliance or otherwise with the Code?

The Councils Monitoring officer has provided the following legal advice on this topic:

- The [Local Government Transparency Code 2015](#) applies to all local authorities in England
- One of the requirements is that each individual item of expenditure exceeding £500 must be published
- The definition of expenditure includes 'payments for goods and services' which applies to the contract with Bristol 2015 Ltd

As per the [guidance](#), "the term 'payments' only applies to payments made directly from local authorities' budgets

Therefore, any detail regarding spend by Bristol 2015, a private company, is not disclosable under the Code but the company has voluntarily disclosed figures to aid the public understanding as to how the funds provided to the company have been spent.

2 The Structure of Bristol 2015 Limited

It would seem from some of the answers to Freedom of Information requests that part of the reluctance of the council to publish detailed amounts stems from the belief that as some of the expenditure was undertaken by a limited company there is an exemption from Fol requests. Is this the basis for your refusal to be transparent?

As I understand it, Bristol 2015 Limited was set up by the city council. The Companies House records for company 08917477 show that on 28 February 2014 the original six subscribing members and directors included Mayor Ferguson and all gave City Hall as their correspondence address. Only one set of abbreviated

accounts has been filed so far, to the year ended 28 February 2015. The cash disclosed on the balance sheet at that point was £557,264. How much of the DECC grant of £7m was transferred to the company during that year (the council was awarded the money in April 2014) and how much has been transferred in the current year to 28 February 2016? How much has been transferred from the city council's own £1m budget for green capital?

Information about Bristol 2015 Ltd is in the public domain and available on the BCC Green Capital commonly asked questions page <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/bristol-green-capital/green-capital-commonly-asked-questions>

Please confirm whether any of the directors who have served to date (Philippa Bayley, George Robin Paget Ferguson, Carolyn Hassan, Luke Jerram, Guy Orpen, Kulveer Ranger, Andrew Garrad, Helen Bowring, Bevis Watts, Peninah Achieng-Kinserberg, Jane Stephenson, Malcolm Shepherd, Robert Barr and Elizabeth Zeidler plus Quayseco [Burgess Salmon] acting as Company Secretary) have received any emoluments or expenses from the company or the council. Please confirm whether any of the directors and members, their family members or other connected parties, their businesses or professional bodies have received any grants, commissions, awards, contracts or any other benefit financed wholly or in part from the £7million DECC grant or the £1m city council green capital budget.

The information on DECC and BCC budgets is included in the report to Audit committee on the 11th March.

At the Cabinet Meeting which determined the Strategic Grants (16th December 2014) the Cabinet of Bristol City Council declared a number of interests.

This information is in the public domain and can be found on the minutes at: https://www2.bristol.gov.uk/committee/2014/ua/agenda/1216_1300_ua000.html

Please provide details of any city council staff seconded to work for Bristol 2015 Limited and comment on whether their salaries and pension contributions continued to be made by the council or were met by the company. What has been the total payroll cost of seconded staff to date?

With regards to City Council staff seconded to work for Bristol 2015 Ltd, two members of staff were seconded to work for Bristol 2015 Ltd. Bristol 2015 Ltd. paid Bristol City Council £350 per day for 5 days per week for the Communications and Marketing Director. Bristol 2015 Ltd. paid Bristol City Council approximately £25,000 in total for 50% of a 1 FTE PR Officer which was shared jointly between Bristol 2015 Ltd. and Bristol City Council.

Finally on the company, I understand from an Fol request that the council is refusing to publish the report by Grant Thornton on the corporate governance of Bristol 2015 Limited. I was astonished to read in the council's response that the report was being kept secret as the company only agreed to cooperate with the review if the findings were kept confidential. What concerns led to the commissioning of the review? Why has the council agreed to withhold its findings from the people of Bristol? The report

apparently cost £8,700 – was this amount met from DECC money, the council's green capital budget or other resources? Have you read the report? Has the council taken any action as a result of the report? Has the company taken any action, as far as you are aware, as a result of the report? Will you now publish its findings?

The Council's Section 151 Officer as part of his own due diligence commissioned this report in preparation for making DECC funding available to Bristol 2015 Ltd.

Bristol 2015 Ltd. agreed to the commissioning of this activity at the outset on the basis that it was a commercial and in confidence report. Section 41(1) of the Freedom of Information Act (Information provided in confidence) therefore applies.

The recommendations from the report were subsequently noted by both organisations and informed the internal controls which were put in place to support delivery of the year.

We can confirm that the £8,700 fee was met by Bristol City Council.

3 Expenditure met from the DECC grant of £7million

These questions are based on the council's audit committee report from 27th November 2015, appendices A and B to item 14, which detailed the forecast or budgeted expenditure from the grant and the outturn to date.

Further information is included in the report to Audit committee on the 11th March.

a) Summits £1,679,409 forecast (with £979,153 outturn to November)

How many of these summits have been held in Bristol?

All of the summits were held in Bristol except COP21.
Further information can be found in the public domain:
<https://www.bristol2015.co.uk/get-involved/bristol-summits/>

Please break down the costs between venue hire, speaker fees, hotel costs of delegates, entertaining and subsistence for delegates and travel costs of delegates split between motor car, train, air and any other mode of transport.

Bristol City Council does not hold the detailed information you are asking for with regards to costs.

Specifically for the Paris COP21 climate change conference, how many delegates were funded to attend? It is a matter of record that Mayor Ferguson attended, how many people attended as part of his retinue? What were the travel, hotel and subsistence costs? Will the closing event scheduled for this coming Friday at the Colston Hall be met from this budget or another? Please state the cost of the event and any associated events

We did not pay any delegates to attend COP21, but travel and accommodation costs were met for the following team from Bristol City Council:

- Mayor of Bristol (speaker)
- Assistant Mayor of Bristol (speaker)
- Director of Bristol Futures (speaker)
- Strategic Director for Place (speaker)
- Project Manager (Event coordinator/ team support)
- Sustainability Service Manager (speaker)
- European and International Service Manager (Advisor and senior team support)
- Head of Brussels Office, International team (Advisor, and Mayor support)
- European and International Officer (Advisor and key liaison for European Green Capital session)
- PR and Media Service Manager (Key Media contact, Advisor and Mayor support)

Mayor Ferguson was supported by the Head of our Brussels Office and our PR and Media Service Manager.

Bristol City Council allocated the following costs for travel, hotel and subsistence to cover attendance over the two week period:

Travel: £3,661

Subsistence: £3,165

Accommodation at Le Bourget: £29,000

b) Green Tech £561,253 (£536,825)

It is stated that these plans were scaled back from the original £1.4m budget for green technology prizes. How many competitions were eventually staged? What was the cost of the competitions and the value of the prizes? Where can I find a list of the prize winners? Who were the judges?

One technology competition was held – the Green Capital Digital Challenge. This information is in the public domain at:

<https://www.bristol2015.co.uk/events/green-capital-digital-challenge/>

<https://www.bristol2015.co.uk/news/bristol-tech-teams-scoops-50000-digital-challenge-prize/>

c) Schools £1,111,134 (£577,639)

How much has been paid direct to Bristol schools? Please list the amounts received by each school. How much has been paid to organisations other than Bristol schools? Please list each recipient with the amount received. What assurances have been received that the amounts were used to fund new activities, in addition to those already carried out by schools as part of their regular curriculum?

The schools programme was a programme for schools rather than payments to schools.

Information about this can be found in the public domain at:

https://www.bristol2015.co.uk/get-involved/schools_main/ and the new national schools programme website <https://www.sustainablelearning.com/>

d) Neighbourhood arts £349,273 (£254,245)

Please list the projects that have or are to receive funding, with the amounts. Who decided which projects would receive funding? Was it Bristol 2015 Limited, councillors, council officers or some other organisation? I assume these projects were separate to the Arts Council funding of approximately £750,000 that I believe has also been spent on green capital art projects?

The list of Neighbourhood Arts projects is available on the Bristol 2015 website, along with a description of the process for selecting the projects:

<https://www.bristol2015.co.uk/nap>

The Neighbourhood Arts projects were funded from Bristol 2015 Ltd. resources.

e) Local funding £261,851 (£201,468)

Please list the projects that have or are to receive funding, with the amounts. Who decided which projects would receive funding? Was it Bristol 2015 Limited, councillors, council officers or some other organisation?

The projects receiving Local Funding were identified through the discussions between DECC, BCC and Bristol 2015 Ltd as part of determining the DECC agreement. Further information is contained in the Audit Committee report.

f) Strategic, small and neighbourhood grants £2,000,000 (£1,935,637)

Please define the three categories and state the total amount allocated to each of them. Please list the projects that have or are to receive funding, with the amounts. Who decided which projects would receive funding? Was it Bristol 2015 Limited, councillors, council officers or some other organisation?

This information is in the public domain. Details of the grants programmes and the recipients are found on the Bristol 2015 website.

<https://www.bristol2015.co.uk/get-involved/grant-funding/>

Strategic grants were determined at Cabinet on the 16th December 2014. The minutes can be found at:

https://www2.bristol.gov.uk/committee/2014/ua/agenda/1216_1300_ua000.html

Small grants were decided by the Quartet Foundation.

Neighbourhood Grants were determined by the relevant Neighbourhood Partnerships.

g) Volunteers £272,228 (£166,505)

How many people have volunteered? Was the voluntary activity for funded green capital events or for organisations that might be associated with sustainability organisations in the city? What is the split of expenditure between managing volunteers or for the expenses of volunteers? Please list any organisations that received money for organising volunteers.

Bristol City Council does not hold this information.

h) City dressing & public awareness £347,230 (£277,692)

In plain English and in the normal language used in accounts may I assume this is advertising and marketing? Please list the companies and consultancies that received payment for advertising and marketing, together with the amounts. Please further analyse the expenditure by format, viz advertising on billboards and other public display points, advertisements in publications, advertorials in publications and any other examples of "city dressing and public awareness".

City Dressing was specifically agreed as a requirement in the contract between Bristol City Council and Bristol 2015 Ltd.
Also included in the contract was development and delivery of a marketing and communications strategy.
Bristol City Council does not hold the detailed information you are asking for with regards to expenditure.

i) Welcome events £277,784

First, I should declare that I was a guest at the dinner in MShed that marked the first day of Bristol as European Green Capital. Please state the cost of that event and the number of attendees. Please list the other welcome events and split the costs between venue hire, speaker fees, hospitality and travel. Did Bristol meet the cost of any guests from outside the city?

Bristol City Council does not hold the detailed information you are asking for with regards to expenditure.

j) The Bristol Method £138,892 (£87,575)

This is worthy of a prize in itself as the most obscure description I have ever seen in a list of accounting categories. I have looked at the Bristol 2015 web site (see further questions below) and this is described as a knowledge transfer programme. Please could you elaborate? Has anyone been paid to develop "The Bristol Method"? Will this knowledge transfer continue beyond this week once green capital status has passed to Ljubljana?

This information is in the public domain:

<https://www.bristol2015.co.uk/method/>

There are currently more than 20 case study modules which remain on this site and are being used as the basis of further communication via city networks such as Eurocities and ICLEI. The number of modules is still being added to.

**4 Expenditure met from Bristol City Council's green capital budget
£1million**

a) Commissioned partner Go Green £140,000

Who are this organisation? Who is the beneficial owner? What activities were funded from the grant, over and above what the organisation was already doing in the course of its business?

This information is in the public domain.

Go Green is a project run and managed by [Business West](#) and [Low Carbon South West](#). Further details can be obtained at: <http://gogreenbusiness.co.uk/about-us/>

b) Commissioned partner Big Green Week £140,000

Who are this organisation? Who is the beneficial owner? What activities were funded from the grant, over and above what the organisation was already doing in the course of its business?

This information is in the public domain.

Big Green Week is an event operated by Love the Future which is a not-for-profit Community-Interest company. For further details please see <http://www.lovethefuture.co.uk/about.html>

c) Happy City £25,000

Who are this organisation? Who is the beneficial owner? What activities were funded from the grant, over and above what the organisation was already doing in the course of its business?

This information is in the public domain.

Happy city is a charity and community interest company. For further details please see <http://www.happycity.org.uk/about>

d) Solar balloon £80,000 (£76,316)

Who are this organisation? Who is the beneficial owner? What activities were funded from the grant, over and above what the organisation was already doing in the course of its business? Where is or was the balloon? Where is it now? Is it owned by the council or was the payment a hire fee?

This information is in the public domain.

The solar balloon was built and operated by Cameron Balloons.

<http://www.cameronballoons.co.uk/>

<https://www.bristol2015.co.uk/events/solar-balloon/>

Ownership of the Balloon will transfer to Bristol City Council on conclusion of the Council contract with Bristol 2015 Ltd.

e) Web site and digital £245,000

To whom was the payment made? Would I be correct to assume this is for the development and maintenance of www.bristol2015.co.uk ? The site does not mention who built it, which is quite unusual. The Terms and Conditions section states that it is owned by Bristol2015 Limited. The privacy section states that the data is held jointly by the company and the council. Will full control of the site pass to the council when the green capital year comes to an end this month? Was any part of the £245,000 for activities other than the web site I have mentioned? What specifically were the digital activities? The website is not interactive.

Details of this item are included in the Audit Report of 11th March.

Development and maintenance of the website cost £245,000. This is an asset which will pass to Bristol City Council on the closure of Bristol 2015 Ltd

f) Support costs £410,000

Were these Bristol City Council in house recharges or payments to external organisations? Please analyse.

Further details of the support costs are covered in the Audit Committee Report of 11th March.

5 Conclusion

Given that I have derived my questions from the council's own reports to its Audit Committee and that the amounts are very precise, I do not anticipate you having any difficulty in answering my questions.

For 17 years prior to my election as Bristol West's MP in 2005 I was a corporate tax consultant, working with the accounts of large and complex organisations every day. I was also a member of Bristol City Council and as Leader of the Opposition on the council sat on the main finance committees. In all that time I have not come across such an opaque set of arrangements in either the private sector or public sector as those that are the subject of this letter. It is simply not credible for you to maintain that you do not have access to the financial detail that lies behind the 16 broad, and in accounting terms somewhat odd, categories that have been used for the very limited disclosure of expenditure sourced from taxpayers' money.

The public have every right to know how their money is being spent. I trust that you will now furnish them with at the very least the information I have requested in this letter. If you maintain your refusal to be open and transparent then I will have to ask my former colleagues at DCLG to intervene.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Williams

Former MP for Bristol West 2005-2015

ENDS

I trust that this information and the links provided are useful.

Yours sincerely



Nicola Yates OBE
City Director

