

STATEMENTS RECEIVED FOR AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING ON 4 MARCH 2024

Statement 1 - **Mike Oldreive**

Last month I raised my concerns about the management of the Stepping Up programme at Bristol City Council's Audit Committee.

My concerns were around the poor procurement & contract management processes in place for this scheme.

The Stepping Up Programme has been given financial support totalling over £1m from Bristol City Council, WECA and Bristol Waste.

Accounts have recently been published for Stepping Up Leadership CIC. This is a company co-founded by Bristol City Council Deputy Mayor Asher Craig (also known as Jennifer May Craig when registering company directorships on Companies House) and Christine Bamford.

As well as showing a loan of £54k from Bristol Waste (who also provided "back office, accommodation and cash flow transitional support") the accounts state that WECA has provided grants totalling £94k in 2022-23. (FOI requests suggest that WECA funding may also have been provided in previous years, including £150k from LEP reserves).

A key item of expenditure is "Staff consultant" costs (£133k) for which no further details are given.

The accounts include a Balance sheet that is not balance sheet- in that it doesn't balance and is incomplete.

I note a WECA Call decision dated 02.03.22 approves a payment of £48,000 to Stepping Up. It notes that "due diligence is incomplete and recommendation is conditional on reaching the appropriate threshold".

My concerns are :

- How does the public know it has got VFM from WECA spending on the Stepping Up initiative?
- were all applicants for the Community Support Fund treated equitably? (Stepping UP programme was effectively given a deadline extension to meet due diligence requirements - did all other applicants receive a similar extension?)(This approval "subject to" is effectively an extension of grant deadline and is unfair to other applicants who may not have been aware of this, did not submit an application because all requirements were not in place by deadline etc)
- what audit processes are in place and what part does the WECA audit committee play in monitoring LEP and Community Support Fund spend?