

## Independent Street Trees Inquiry Public Meeting – Record of Questions & Answers

1<sup>st</sup> September – Online via Zoom

Panel: Cllr Julie Grocutt (JG), Cllr Douglas Johnson (DJ), Kate Josephs (KJ), Ryan Keyworth (RK)

### Questions answered live

Questioner	Question
Kythé Beaumont	Would it be possible to have a written copy of the draft person specification for the chair for this discussion? Might help focus my thoughts!
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: Yes, we'll circulate this to everyone attending.	

Questioner	Question
Alan Billings/Maggie Linford	What is the budget for the Inquiry?
<b>Answer</b>	
RK: That will depend on the scope of the terms of reference and will be a decision for Councillors to make, following a conversation with stakeholders and the chair. There is no budget envelope at this stage.	

Questioner	Question
Marcus Combie	Cllr Grocutt, you mention you only heard about this in the news media in your opening statement. Doesn't it pose a problem for the inquiry that records around statements from Cllr Lodge to the Guardian and the media cannot be found despite searches conducted by the council?
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: We are trying to find everything that is relevant from the point of view of the archive, and the inquiry will have access to all of that. Our intention is that the chair and inquiry will have access to all the information from SCC that they need, including any media. We will have a look at the specifics of this issue.	

Questioner	Question
Lee Armstrong	How are you going to support the chair to establish the scope & terms of reference, and make them deliverable? We all know the inquiry needs to be able to investigate many different parts of the council's operations (commercials, governance, FOI, finance, environment, councillors, management, policing, communications, legal, culture, project management, health and safety, etc, etc)? I want to understand how you will ensure the inquiry has the right expertise, funding and access to achieve its objectives.
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: The Chair's appointment is a critical first step and as soon we have appointed we will have a sense of their strengths and where support might be needed. We expect to establish a team to support the chair alongside the development of the Terms of Reference. The Co-op Exec are keen to get this up and running but we need to make sure we do it well.	

DJ: The big challenge will be how focused the inquiry is – we can find a chair and ask to take the lead but there is a risk that it gets sidetracked into looking at things that aren't relevant. We could have 1m pieces of paper – no one can read all those, what are the things we really want the inquiry to focus on to the exclusion of others?

Questioner	Question
Albert Thwiepp	Will the time period covered by the Inquiry begin at the start of the PFI procurement process?
<b>Answer</b>	
RK: That will be covered in the Terms of Reference – we expect to consult on this as part of the Terms of Reference development.	

Questioner	Question
Benoit Compin	Are the trials going to be reviewed as people are waiting, and council officers lied in court?
<b>Answer</b>	
RK: We cannot imagine that period will be excluded from the ToR.	

Questioner	Question
Anonymous Attendee	Has there been/will there be, a formally announced halt to SCC's normal document retention policies?
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: I will take this away and come back with a response.	

Questioner	Question
Anonymous Attendee	Can interested parties be offered credible reassurance about the Council's sincerity re the II in the light of the well-publicised and continuing FOIR, SAR and formal complaint non-compliance?
<b>Answer</b>	
<p>KJ: You can be absolutely assured of my sincerity regarding a commitment to openness, as a public servant, around sharing information and transparency. FOI has been impacted by staff shortages due to Covid and we are addressing this. We have made a clear commitment to address this.</p> <p>I suppose the proof of this will be in the way we establish and conduct the Inquiry. Hopefully the conversations we're having and the approach we are taking is a step in the right direction.</p>	

Questioner	Question
Marcus Combie	Will the Street Tree Archive be presented where possible in a searchable format or database? With both original copy and machine readable/searchable text.
<b>Answer</b>	
<p>KJ: I'm happy for us to commit that everything that is possible to achieve this will be done.</p> <p>Additional information following the meeting: Yes, as far as it is possible. The catalogue will be fully searchable and each document / item individually catalogued and capable of being downloaded by the reader.</p>	

Questioner	Question
Maggy Linford	If a potential witness wants legal advice before giving evidence will it be paid for by the council?
<b>Answer</b>	
RK: We haven't considered this question at this stage: I'm aware that some Inquiries have paid and others haven't. We'll take advice on this and answer when we can. I'd prefer not to see an Inquiry where everyone feels that they need a lawyer to accompany them – that would go against the spirit of reconciliation that we're trying to achieve.	

Questioner	Question
Graham Wroe	Will SYP fully cooperate with the Inquiry?
<b>Answer</b>	
Alan Billings confirmed they would.	

Questioner	Question
Alan Billings	Until we have pinned down the Terms of Reference and made clear what is and isn't in scope the potential for this to go on forever is vast – is thought being given to being very precise about the focus and what this is an inquiry into, and whether this should be time limited? I can see the potential for this work being never-ending, and am concerned as a citizen of Sheffield.
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: Points around time limit and focus are well made and considerations for SCC to take as we firm up the process. The purpose of this meeting is to share openly discussions and thoughts we are having and ensure those who have interest can share questions, thoughts, reflections on what should and shouldn't be included. We won't initiate the inquiry until those things are in place.	
JG: Alan makes good points and it's important that Terms of Reference are clear for everyone. I agree that we need to avoid this being a never-ending piece of work and need to ensure we focus on the things that matter and that people want some clarity and resolution to.	
DJ: It's really important to have focus on what goes in and what comes out of the inquiry – it would be useful to have reflections from those attending on that question.	
RK: email address to be circulated following the meeting: we welcome responses and thoughts from those attending.	

Questioner	Question
Isabel O'Leary	What is being done to prevent destruction or hiding of relevant docs?
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: Absolutely clear that is integral part of PS duty to be committed to Nolan Principles, standards and code of conduct, and expectation that officers adhere to these. We will reiterating that commitment to staff.	

Questioner	Question
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Ruth Hubbard	Pleased there will be consultation on the terms of reference. Is it the council's expectation that this will have an impact or influence? Can the chair be asked to be clear about how these 'consultations' have had an impact?
<b>Answer</b>	
RK: Yes, to both parts of the question.	

<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Question</b>
Anonymous Attendee	Does Ryan envisage that 'witness' invitations are published? I.e. will the public be aware of refusals by those invited?
<b>Answer</b>	
RK: I would expect the Chair to decide on this, taking legal advice into account. It is a non-statutory Inquiry that will have no formal powers to compel participation. A key skill of the Chair will be to establish and conduct the Inquiry in a way that encourages participation, but there's a role for all stakeholders in ensuring this too.	

<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Question</b>
Margaret Riley	As an interested citizen I'm finding it difficult to get my head round how big or small this should be and how much it will cost as a citizen of Sheffield: it's controversial for some, for others not on the radar. How long will it take to appoint the chair and get Terms of Reference – if this takes a while, what does this mean for length of the inquiry? If lessons learned take too long to get out there we have lost the opportunity to learn. How to ensure its proportional in terms of cost, efficiency and effectiveness – have we considered specifying what is out of scope so can be clear on what it won't deliver?
<b>Answer</b>	
KJ: We shouldn't extrapolate from the time it takes to appoint a chair to the length of time to conduct the inquiry – we need to get this right. Once the chair and other things are in place we can crack on. There are trade-offs to be made in terms of depth/scope/cost – we need to be honest with Sheffield about this.	

<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Question</b>
Christine King	How will it work? Will people just turn up with evidence?
<b>Answer</b>	
RK: We are having a conversation with external lawyers at the moment about that. We expect that once the Terms of Reference are sorted there will be a review of the archive material, we expect the chair to invite written submissions, we expect the inquiry to hold public hearings. The detail of how that will work and timescales haven't been worked through yet – part of this is with chair, but also influenced by breadth and depth of the Terms of Reference. Key questions for written submissions could be set out in the Terms of Reference – but also could be in-person hearings.	

<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Question</b>
Graham Wroe	Does the archive include video evidence? How do you submit evidence to the archive?
<b>Answer</b>	

Question answered in follow up communications: Yes – if you contact [pete.evans@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:pete.evans@sheffield.gov.uk) who is our Archives and Local Studies Manager he can advise on how to submit.

Questioner	Question
Marcus Combie	What has the council identified so far as what went wrong and what needs to be looked at?
<b>Answer</b>	
<p>KJ: That's the point of the Inquiry: we are trying really hard to focus on what we need to do to support the inquiry and do not want to muddy the waters.</p> <p>DJ: Looking at what could come out of this is the opportunity for people to tell their stories; that is something I would like to see.</p>	

Questioner	Question
Ruth Hubbard	Follow up to Marcus....you have asked about the kinds of outcomes people would like to see. What views exist so far about the kinds of outcomes the council - officers and councillors - would like to see?
<b>Answer</b>	
<p>JG: We want this to bring all interested parties together with a resolution that can satisfy everyone, so that people can feel heard, so that the Council can learn lessons and so we don't find ourselves in a situation like this again. It's about how we put things right in a way that makes sure everyone can have their say and tell their story, and as a city we can move forward and show what a great place we are again. We'll only achieve that if everyone feels listened to and understood.</p> <p>KJ: As officers we are proud to serve our city and believe it is a fantastic place with huge potential, and what we want to see is the ability of us all to move forward together. We need to invest time in listening and learning lessons, but also recognise it's important for the future of the city to be able to do that. Until we've got to a place where we can say we have learned from this it will always be a drag on our potential.</p>	

Questioner	Question
Justin Buxton	Please could Kate assure citizens that the council will not use the inquiry as an excuse to avoid pursuing personal complaints against the council?
<b>Answer</b>	
<p>KJ: There is a complaints procedure for the Council that we follow diligently, and it is really important to me – we need to ensure this is able to continue, whether it's about trees or any other item of Council business.</p> <p>RK: No, we will not use the Inquiry for this purpose. We will seek to respond to all complaints provided that we can do that in a way that does not prejudice the Inquiry. If people who have made complaints feel the Council is using the Inquiry in this way, please get in touch and we will look into it.</p>	

Questioner	Question
Justin Buxton	Will the chair of the inquiry have access to documents deemed to be LPP?
<b>Answer</b>	

RK: The presumption will be 'yes' unless there is a compelling reason not to – sorry for the caveat, but I'm not familiar with all the documents or the reasons for redactions in the past.

KJ: My starting assumption is that everything will be made available to the Chair.

### Questions answered in text or following the meeting

Questioner	Question
Alan Billings	Is the chair appointed? or how will the chair be appointed?
<b>Answer</b>	
Not yet. We've drafted a person specification which we're talking about at the public meetings. Appointment of the Chair will follow a similar process to that for senior council staff and there will be the opportunity for stakeholders to feed into that process. The final appointment decision will be made by Councillors. There will be an open advert for the position of Chair and we may choose to supplement that advert by using recruitment consultants to ensure that we get a broad range of applicants and therefore a strong shortlist.	

Questioner	Question
Alan Billings	What support staff will the chair have?
<b>Answer</b>	
We will build a team around the chair to complement their skills and experience. To be clear, we expect a dedicated team to be put in place to support the Inquiry process.	

Questioner	Question
Isabel O'Leary	Institute of Gov suggests purpose of inquiries should be 1)What happened 2) What went wrong 3) Who was at fault 4) Recommendations
<b>Answer</b>	
Your point is noted: we've also engaged external legal advisors who have extensive experience of setting up and supporting inquiries to make sure we get it right.	

Questioner	Question
Christine King	Comment from non-attendee that I also think would be useful and could help in clarifying the scope: "I'd like to see a timeline of key events, consultations, negotiations along with named personnel and departments/agencies involved in each activity. That would provide an overview of events and those responsible"
<b>Answer</b>	
Clearly one for the Chair and the Terms of Reference, but we think a clear timeline will be critical to the Inquiry	

Questioner	Question
Paul Selby	I was a member of STAG, and am now a member of the Street Trees Partnership Group. People will not be compelled to give evidence to the inquiry
<b>Questioner</b>	
Maggy Linford	I suspect the success of the inquiry will depend on who attends and gives evidence.

**Answer**

Absolutely. We want to ensure that the Inquiry is conducted in a way that encourages all stakeholders to participate. It is a non-statutory Inquiry that will have no formal powers to compel participation. A key skill of the Chair will be to establish and conduct the Inquiry in a way that encourages participation.

**Questioner**

Sue Laing

**Question**

You mentioned the importance of Nolan Principles and without pre-empting anything in the enquiry - this was probably a major issue for complainers - and therefore I think it's important to continue to reiterate these principles throughout the process together with the principles for people in public life.

**Answer**

KJ: I'm happy to Sue: they are the core of our work as public servants and will be a given in the inquiry.

**Questioner**

Albert Thwiepp

**Question**

Ms Josephs' intro included phrase 'public inquiry'. I think Kate meant 'in public'. Important distinction.

**Answer**

KJ: I did use incorrect phrasing, apologies - and you are right.

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