BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL: WE’RE BEING ROBBED!

More cash disappearing from ‘of concern’ authority - this time from cash-in-transit

WE’VE already REVEALED on the internet that Bristol City Council’s money management is ‘OF CONCERN’ and that they’re unable to account for LARGE SUMS of our money. Now The BRISTOLIAN can reveal that considerable sums of money have disappeared from their internal CASH-IN-TRANSIT service.

That’s the department that collects CASH from across the authority and ensures it is safely BANKED! We’re talking about money that comes from stuff like car parking, council tax, rents and licence fees. Hard-earned cash that we hand over to the council on a daily basis.

A council report - quietly released last month and exposed by The BRISTOLIAN - listed a huge number of major FINANCIAL CONCERNS. Topping the list of problems was a case of ‘material income misappropriation’ or ‘THEFT’ as it’s commonly known. Now it’s been confirmed to us here at The BRISTOLIAN that this theft took place in the very council service trusted to collect and protect our cash!

Specific details of the scam are still sketchy. However, in similar circumstances that let £165K in the council’s MARKET SERVICE go walkabout without explanation, it appears that very basic cash management procedures and financial checks and balances have been systematically IGNORED by managers. Helpfully creating a culture where money can disappear with IMPUNITY and with little chance of discovery.

The council’s response to this latest scandal, so far, has been PATHETIC. Their internal audit team plan to develop an ‘action plan’ to deal with it. That’s right. No investigation; no cops called and no blame dished out! This is said to be because, in another mirror of the MARKETS FIASCO, the accounts in the department have been so abused degraded and generally screwed by managers that investigators can justifiably state that there’s ‘no evidence of wrongdoing’.

But then that’s because there’s no evidence of anything contained in their accounts at all! Information on how much money they’ve actually bloody collected compared to how much they’ve put in the bank simply doesn’t exist!

And guess who’s overseeing this latest financial farce? Step forward Facilities Manager TONY ‘THE TOERAG’ HARVEY, the same man who oversaw the disappearance of £165K of our money in the Markets Service!

No doubt they’ll be giving him a pat on the back.

HOPTY-TOPTY’S PORK BARREL POLITICS SCAM

News is emerging that Green Cabinet member and Ashley Councillor, Sir Gus Hoyt-Topty, personally signed off a £62k payment for Bristol City Council to buy the ‘under threat’ Lynmouth Road allotments in his ward.

The allotments were put on sale by receivers Grant Thornton in September after Scout Enterprises, owners of the land, went bust. A brief campaign to save the land ensued and up popped Hoyt-Topty to save the day.

He put in a sealed bid of £62k from Bristol City Council for the land on September 25 despite a reserve price of just £20k. The price Hoyt-Topty was prepared to pay with our money is thought to be excessive as the land is protected by covenants and is of little value to developers.

Meanwhile Hoyt-Topty has been very coy about how much he spent to help voters in his own ward secure this land, simply announcing on Twitter that the land “cost a bit more that £20k”.

Visit TheBRISTOLIAN.net for the latest smitlage!

MAYOR GRASS FARCE

DESPITE being told by bosses to stop any lawn-mowing as the council can’t afford fuel for lawnmowers any more, there was no shortage of gardeners or fancy kit at Easton’s FELIX ROAD ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND last week.

Up to twenty men and ten vans were seen there working all day. Indeed, so keen were parks bosses to get a quality job done, a man was dispatched to collect the top class mower used for Queen Square and once finished the grass was carefully boxed and loose grass taken away in a gas-guzzling van!

And the cause of this sudden flurry of attention and resources for this neglected corner of the inner-city? A visit from his ROYAL TROUSERNESS the mayor the next day of course! Alas, it was all in vain as George cancelled his visit at the last minute and never got the Royal-style tour of the playground.

The only thing that might have added to the Alice in Wonderland feel of proceedings might have been if the Queen of Hearts herself had shown up to announce she wanted all the flowers individually painted!
FOR two years the Friends of Horfield Common have been fighting to get the WILLINGDON HILL Playing Fields protected and declared a Town Greens. They have been backed by the Bristol City Council, included in the fields in their notorious Green Spaces Strategy as a site FOR SOFT SPORTS.

The playing fields meet all the requirements of a Town Green and all that’s missing is that it be registered from the registration office. Once registered, the landowner, has other ideas. Why take a cheap, legal, efficient, legal route supported by a whole community when you can charge an expensive argument based on lies and DOGDY interpretations of the law backed by a few shadowy managers at the Counties League.

Two years on the council has not previously voted to an independent inspector. It is due soon. So step forward another council manager, Bob ‘the boring one’ Hopkins, a council landscape manager, presented the Public Rights of Way Committee some photos of ‘individual signs which were installed in Willingdon Hill Playing Fields’ that warned people that they were on a ‘Town Green’ and good, except that the signs weren’t from Willingdon Hill but from STOKE LODGE Playing Fields two miles away. With this scam exposed, the council then decided to spend loads of money employing a pricey QC to present ‘evidence’ about the land to a PUBLIC INQUIRY run by an independent inspector. Hearing is due soon. So step forward another council manager.

This time Areas Park Manager, Pete ‘pants on fire’ Clark, is presenting ‘evidence’ that the fields were gated and fenced in the 1990s, ‘proving’ the public hasn’t used the land ‘as of right’ for 20 years.

Unfortunately for Clark his claims are contradicted by his council’s own paperwork. A letter dated 1980 from Avon County Council Property to the Director of Education clearly states, ‘the boundary fencing and gate which used to be along the public footpath in Willingdon Hill has now disappeared’ and ‘it seems that opening up the playing field to the general public.

This confirms that any gates or fences, which may have once been there, were not there in 1980. Before the council’s track, Clark’s client asked what the gates and fences were for. Both were still there a decade later! This has caused anger among local residents. One says, ‘we don’t know how Pete Clark has got the front to the council. They had no 1980 evidence as well as we do that this is TOTAL RUBBISH!’

But when it comes to making up ‘total rubbish’ and presenting it to inspectors at great expense, Hopkins and Clark are beginners. During the seven year fight to get land at Whitchurch declared a Town Green, city council Property Manager Jan ‘third’ Reichel gave no less than four presentations or at different times for the legal status of this land! All of which, incidentally, turned out to be total BOLLOCKS.

The cost of this pointless exercise went into six figures. Why and who can they afford to put back out to account? COUNCIL MANAGER LAIDOWE DOOMED AND PATHETIC EFFORTS TO BLOCK Town Green.

Other concerns into applying for a Town Green include the £30,000 for a Town Green survey which has been hard to come by these days. But as one BRISTOLIAN reader found out, you’d better off pumping yourself in the face than accepting compensation from nobody ever out there.

‘Just’ contacted us to warn others about Clover Advertising. ‘I responded to an advert for an office-based ‘energy surveyor’. It was in an advert for a house. Councillor Derek Pickup.

And the brand spanking new facilities aren’t what they’re cracked up to be. The Oasis University, that was Portway School, have been in an expensive argument with the Indyredpants Selection Panel can’t be the same person as Stella Hender, freelance journalist who got herself mixed up in the John Astley case with the indyredpants selection panel can’t be the same person as Stella Hender, freelance journalist who got herself mixed up in the John Astley case with the independence of a portrait of richard Eddy with his hair.

Unfortunately what the paper fails to say is, meanwhile, has come over all independence and the council has now joined Hopeless in the exit lounge is.

The NEW POLITICS?

Billion dollar enterprise “It’s been a rough year for Clover, but thanks to the growing popularity of our products, we are confident that we will see continued growth in the coming years,” said Chief Executive Nicholas ‘Laci’ Gaga. “We are determined to make sure that our customers are satisfied with their experience.”

In the wake of the company’s financial difficulties in 2012, Clover has been forced to lay off hundreds of workers and temporarily shutter some of its operations.

But despite these challenges, the company remains confident in its future prospects. “We believe that we have a strong foundation on which to build,” said Gaga. “We are committed to investing in new technologies and expanding our product line in order to meet the needs of our customers.”

The crisis has also had a significant impact on the company’s reputation. “We have been working hard to improve customer satisfaction and rebuild trust with our clients,” said Gaga. “We are committed to delivering the highest quality products and services to our customers.”

While the company’s financial situation remains uncertain, Gaga remains optimistic about the future. “We are confident that we will emerge from this crisis stronger and more resilient than ever before,” he said.

Meanwhile, in Bristol - Clover - like other Appco companies - are accused of targeting young people with vague promises of “fantastic average earning potential”. Appco-linked firms don’t employ their doorstep canvassers either.

Instead they consider their workers self-employed (to don’t pay tax or National Insurance contributions) and only pay commission. That’s right – no basic wage. If you don’t sell anything you’re out of a job! Clover says it’s a fantastic style of employment but also means answering to the same boss every day, being contractually tied to the company and being forbidden to work for competitors.

So you’re like a charity street seller only without the hope that you’re working and don’t get to wear your badge anymore. If you can’t sell anything you’re out of a job! Clover says it’s a fantastic style of employment but also means answering to the same boss every day, being contractually tied to the company and being forbidden to work for competitors.

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B-L-I-M-E-Y

A merry-go-round of useless managers squanders £100k on lethal play equipment while our kids’ education suffers!

BUDGET slashing in Bristol has cut so deep that staffing at our kids’ nurseries and Children’s Centres are now reaching dangerously low levels, sources tell *The BRISTOLIAN*.

One popular nursery school in east Bristol, which scored ‘Good’ or above in all areas in its last Ofsted report, now faces a £100,000 budget shortfall – with staffing shortages meaning that qualified Early Years Practitioners are often forced to act as little more than nursery assistants. The situation for staff on the frontline is contrasted with the well-salaried upper echelons, where a recruitment revolving door has seen three new head teachers in little over a year. Each has attempted to stamp their mark on the Centre by remodelling the kids’ play garden. The total cost? In excess of A STAGGERING £100,000!

One garden makeover, which cost an eye-watering £70k, even had to be ripped up because it was UNSAFE.

Worryingly, there had been no proper health and safety assessment before it was built, and NO OVERSIGHT from Bristol City Council. The garden’s potential for injuring children was only picked up by chance – when someone who worked in H&S came to collect his grandchild and was alarmed by what he saw.

The garden then had to be immediately ripped up and children barred from using it until it could be made safe!

The cost of these EXPENSIVE VANITY PROJECTS by senior management has lost them the opportunity to employ extra staff to actually look after the children – yet comes at the same time as the current Head spends thousands on expensive consultants.

At least one such ‘expert’ is a former colleague of the Head, and is reportedly used mainly to cover staff shortages – when it would be more sensible and cheaper to hire full or part-time staff on permanent contracts.

So if this is what it’s like now, what’s it going to be like once Mayor Fergo pushes through his £90 million cuts package?

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CORPORATE FEED-IN FRENZY

China and big business cashing in on city’s solar power bonanza

WHILE leafing through our latest copy of Construction News, the ‘Magazine of the Chartered Institute of Building’, a headline leaps out: CONTRACTORS EYE UP BRISTOL'S £47M ‘DASH FOR SOLAR’

Maybe this is a reference to Mayor Fergo’s go-ahead earlier this month for a £47m plan to install solar panels on 7,000 council houses and a variety of public buildings in the city?

‘This is ‘triggering one of the biggest solar PV projects since the Feed-in-Tariff (FIT) was cut in November 2011,’ the magazine breathlessly informs its corporate readership. It then lists massive global companies including Lakehouse, Wates, Willmott Dixon and notorious blacklisters Carillion among the contractors who might be interested in this feed-in-frenzy. Hardly the kind of local businesses that MAYOR REDPANTS and his sidekick, solar-powered windbag SIR GUS HOYT-TOTTY seem so keen to promote at election time!

The article then finds Simon Green from Lakehouse - which grabs lucrative public sector contracts - waxing lyrical: ‘Because of MASS PRODUCTION IN CHINA, the unit cost of the kit has come down considerably and with the feed-in tariff the same as it was, then you have a large enough project, and the RATE OF RETURN is as big as it was before,’ he gushes.

Bollocks. Unit costs have not “come down considerably”; they’ve been driven down.

China has unlimited access to forced, slave and child labour and gives workers zero human rights. So they can undercut competitors in European markets by selling panels below cost. Why? To break Europe’s monopolies and get a monopoly.

Just the sort of practices we should be encouraging here in Bristol for our long-term benefit don’t you think? Anyway, with £47m to play with, why can’t we manufacture and install the damn things from Bristol?

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INDYREDPANTS’ UNWISE MONKEY’S HORROR NO-SHOW

Great news! Head of finance and operations at the Arnolfini Gallery BRENDA “WISE MONKEY” MCLENNAN, apparently an ‘independent’ member of Bristol City Council’s AUDIT COMMITTEE, has been promoted!

In June she was made Deputy Chair of this committee responsible for ensuring sound management of our money and clamping down on fraud and corruption within the council.

Recognise the name? Possibly, as the public-spirited, politically independent Ms Mclennan was the candidate for Clifton at the last local elections in May for the INDYREDPANTS PARTY, the ragbag of time-wasting cheerleaders for his Royal Hopelessness the Mayor. So, if nothing else, this unusual appointment of one of the mayor’s keenest public supporters brings a whole new meaning to the term ‘politically independent’.

Meanwhile Ms Mclennan has wasted no time in showing the kind of gumption needed to “shake things up” at Shitty Hall by, err … Not turning up for the most important Audit Committee meeting of the year! That’s right, for reasons unknown, Ms Mclennan, one of only two people providing allegedly independent oversight of council finances, failed to show at the committee meeting where the council’s audited accounts for the 2012 - 13 were agreed and signed off (without a hitch, natch).

Also on the agenda at the meeting was the report from the council’s Internal Audit Department cataloguing the series of gross financial failures across the organisation. These included theft, wholesale non-compliance with procurement regulations, dodgy management of cash accounts and – even - a very special mention for THE BRISTOLIAN’s late night, Facilities Service Manager Tony Harvey’s bent Markets Service!

So nothing there that would in any way interest an independent election candidate who wants to “shake things up” at Bristol City Council then?

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The BRISTOLIAN: “it’s been a hard day’s smile”!