

BRIEFING NOTE

BRISTOL MAYOR, MARVIN REES

On Thursday 5th May 2016, Bristol chose Marvin Rees as the new mayor, following George Ferguson's four-year term as the first elected Mayor of Bristol.

Following a rigorous period of campaigning across the city, Rees took centre stage by a significant margin, earning 68,750 votes, compared to 39,577 awarded to Ferguson. The election of Rees as mayor formed part of a clean sweep of directly elected mayors for the Labour Party, in which Sadiq Khan also became the Mayor of London and Joe Anderson was re-elected Mayor of Liverpool.

Rees has publicised his priorities as mayor as:

- A housing target of 2000 homes (of which 800 will be affordable) per year by 2020;
- Delivery of work experience and apprenticeships for every young person;
- Putting a stop to the spread of resident parking zones across the city, while reviewing those existing;
- Protecting children's centres;
- Increasing school places and ensuring a fair admission process;
- Driving Bristol to become a completely 'clean energy city' by 2050; and
- Leading a European Capital of Culture bid to make culture and sport accessible to all.



A clear priority among all the mayoral candidates was the issue of housing. Bristol is currently facing a housing crisis as indicated by the need for 85,000 new homes across the West of England area over the next 20 years¹. Given how crucial affordable living is for the prosperity of a successful city, with circa 30,000 new affordable homes required over the same period², Rees has pledged to create balanced communities where the gap between deprivation and mass gentrification can be closed. Rees justified his housing ambitions in his inaugural speech on 9th May, identifying a new post of 'housing czar' to drive his programme. The new mayor has proposed a council owned company to oversee housing projects across the city that would establish a 'Bristol Bond' whereby people can invest into local housing schemes. In addition to this, Rees is keen on promoting brownfield sites for development.

As Bristol Mayor, Rees will have the difficult task of representing Bristol's interests across the former Avon area in emerging planning and transport policy. Crucially, this includes the distribution of housing under the emerging Joint Spatial Plan and the approach to transport under the Joint Transport Plan being prepared by the West of England Councils. The selection of the mayor's cabinet will determine who is responsible for these areas and the new mayor has pledged to have a rainbow cabinet despite Labour achieving a majority within the Council under the 2016 elections.

Currently, Bristol City Council is in an ever more difficult position with regards to delivering affordable housing, not least due to the pressure to deliver the necessary numbers of new homes in the city. The Council's current policy seeks 30-40% affordable homes within housing developments of more than 15 dwellings. However, many key brownfield sites around the city present significant costs to development that limits the possibility for viable delivery of such affordable housing provision. Given this situation, it is not surprising that the Council has been forced to grant planning permission for development proposals with lower affordable housing numbers than desired.

As a result, Rees is up against a continual demand for housing and will have to find ways in which Bristol can deliver substantial levels of new housing in order to increase supply in the face of such overwhelming demand. This also offers the challenge of securing further affordable homes in developments as stated in Bristol's planning policy. To do this, Rees has stated his intention to work closely with developers and investors and it remains to be seen whether the establishment of a council-owned company to deal with development will prove effective.

Rees has also pledged to 'get Bristol moving', seeking to balance the competing pressures between Bristol's drivers and the need for improved public transport networks and alternatives to the private car to serve the ever increasing demand for transport. Rees wants to undertake an extensive review of resident parking zones and restrictions on parking in view of the ongoing vitality of businesses. Of equal importance to him is the creation of an integrated public transport network, including investment into local railways. A Bristol Rail Plan will outline how the Portishead railway line can reopen, as well as the Henbury Loop and associated Park & Ride facilities. Rees will lobby for a 20-minute frequency on Bristol's local train network. This will undoubtedly be part of a greater plan to deal with Bristol's ongoing congestion problem which will only become better by improving modes of transport other than the private car, not making it more difficult to travel in one.

Rees has a challenging four years ahead of him and will no doubt approach it with the same gusto as with his campaign!

Notes to Editors

¹ As established by paragraph 5.92 through the 'Objectively Assessed Need of the Wider Bristol HMA Strategic Housing Market Assessment - Volume One: Defining the Housing Market Area and establishing Objectively Assessed Need (July 2015 - Opinion Research Services) as commissioned by the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership

² As established by paragraph 6.15 of the same document.

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