

3. Can the Directly Elected Mayoral Model Deliver? Innovation, limitation and adaptation: Lessons from the City of Bristol

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Abstract

This chapter analyses the position of a directly elected mayor as a mechanism to deliver transformative change to local government in England. Through a narrative exploration of the trajectory of mayoral governance in the City of Bristol, analysis interrogates where the model has succeeded, where it has met barriers, and the capacity of the position of elected mayor to innovate in order to overcome those challenges. Through the use of thematic vignettes, the argument is made that whilst the model offers significant potential for transformative change, a number of historic, structural and contextual factors have significantly limited the capacity for the model to deliver the transformative change that advocates of the model assert is possible. Conclusions are made around which elements restrict the capacity of the mayoral role to reach its potential and the how the model might be adapted in future to enable its full benefits to be realised.

Introduction

When Bristol's first directly elected mayor Independent George Ferguson was elected early on the morning of the 16th November 2012 he asserted "I believe today we have voted for a new way of doing things" (Ferguson, 2012). This chapter seeks to explore the capacity of the role to enable things to be done differently. Beyond legalistic conceptions the role of directly

elected mayors is itself contested. The constitutional vagueness of the role coupled with the variable geometry of City Deals negotiated before and after the mayoral election posed challenges as well as opportunities for the incumbent mayor. There were significant opportunities for innovation available to the mayor following a City Deal which gave scope to leverage growth in Business Rates, exert greater control over a wide property portfolio of over £1bn worth of assets and utilise a new Growth Hub at The Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone to draw in investment and incubate growth (Cabinet Office, 2011). The position of elected Mayor also afforded the incumbent to deliver change on the basis of an electoral proposition from a direct mandate from the citizens of Bristol. As such the mayoral model also conferred a different type of legitimacy. Conversely the capacity to do things differently is naturally bound by a pre-existing institutional system where the roles, functions and procedures are historically informed and institutionally engrained and often slow to adapt to change. The chapter explores a series of individual challenges met by the first incumbent of the role of directly elected mayor of Bristol during his first term of office and the challenges faced by his predecessor Marvin Rees. By addressing them in turn it assesses the capacity of the role and direct mandate of an elected mayor to innovate, adapt and overcome the temporal, structural and institutional barriers to achieve change. The data for this chapter comes from a series of interviews across three years with councillors including former council leaders and cabinet members and council officers from a larger project contrasting councillor perceptions of leadership roles in local government. The project was funded by a Central Research Grant from Oxford Brookes University. Assessment also derives from a situated appraisal by the author as an academic, community activist and resident of the City of Bristol.

Collective action problems and lobbying from above

As residents of ten large English cities voted in referendum on introducing elected mayors there was hope for a reinvigoration of local democracy and a redefinition of relationships between local government and the centre. The referendums were preceded by significant announcements from David Cameron and Cities Minister Greg Clark which laid out a series of benefits of a yes vote. The strongest incentive came with the proposals for Mayors to be 'leading citizens' who would meet bi-annually within a Cabinet of Mayors under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. The much vaulted 'Cabinet of Mayors' posed a magnificent opportunity for Cities to have a hotline into the heart of Whitehall and the autonomy to choose their own solutions to achieve the growth which the government hoped devolution could deliver. As the returning officers announced the results of all ten referendums it was clear that only Bristol had opted for a Directly Elected Mayor and the new incumbent of the role faced a significant collective action problem. Whilst George Ferguson was given a clear mandate on a turnout of 27.9% and the advantage of high visibility and prominence as an Independent candidate he faced a significant barrier to achieve the lobbying power of the leaders of other English cities. Although the government had a vested interest in delivering for the only city that had chosen its flagship policy in adopting a mayor, and despite access to government ministers over the course of his first term the mayor came back from Whitehall with little more than had previously been offered by the pre-existing City Deal. Lacking the administrative machinery and networks of comparative city leaders from the main political parties the newly elected mayor faced an uphill struggle to lobby for, and deliver financial resources and new powers alongside others with more established clout in Whitehall.

Ferguson moved quickly to position himself as an integral part of the Core Cities group taking on the lead on Low carbon and Energy. An architect by background, he came into power after Bristol had secured European Green Capital Status for the year 2015 so was well placed to adopt this portfolio. The Mayor also looked to build new networks and draw in resource and expertise from international sources with a great deal of success. In 2013 Bristol was one of thirty three Cities selected by the Rockefeller Foundation Resilient Cities Centennial Challenge for funding. The funding award provided resource to employ a Chief Resilience Officer to develop a resilience strategy as well as access to experts and services to assist in the implementation of such a strategy. Bristol also took a formative role in the nascent Global Parliament of Mayors founded by Ben Barber. Barber is a strong advocate of the power of Mayors as a collective solution to the intractable problems of urban governance (Barber, 2013).

With the position of elected mayor delivering few if any additional formal powers, the mayor looked to maximise 'soft power' in the form of positioning Bristol as an exemplar in doing things differently. Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi when in position as Mayor of Florence posited that "This city doesn't need a mayor; it needs a marketing expert". In some respects, so did Bristol, which was lagging behind cities such as Manchester, Cardiff and local neighbour Bath as cultural and tourist destination. In an interview with the Guardian Newspaper George Ferguson outlined his priority as "making Bristol known across the world so we don't have to say it's a port somewhere near Bath, which I have found myself saying in China, America and India" (Guardian, 2013). To address the perceived shortfall Ferguson smartly leveraged Bristol's position as European Green Capital to give it a platform on the international stage in particular at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP21). In moving Bristol onto a more international footing the mayor sought to

lobby from above as well as below. Whilst the tangible benefits of this international approach are yet to be fully realised, the autonomy of the mayor and the mandate which gave him a platform to speak for the City was utilised to its maximum potential to position Bristol on the international stage.

Institutional Roadblocks

Another significant challenge for the incoming mayor came in the form of a series of significant clashes between systems and individuals competing within the formal governance framework of the City. When considering competing models of governance in English local government Lowndes and Leach (2004) stress that changes to governance systems are conditioned by well engrained local norms and practices. This assertion was seemingly manifested by the conflicted and contested environment which ensued during the early days under mayoral governance in Bristol.

An election campaign which targeted party politicians as the short-termist, self-interested groupings which held Bristol back resulted in there being little love lost between the Independent Mayor and the formerly dominant Labour and Liberal Democrat groupings on the council. Following the campaign which depicted the Labour candidate Marvin Rees as the puppet of the Labour party in London, the decision of the local Labour party to turn down invitations to join a multi-party cabinet (Bristol Post, 2012) went some way in defining relationships between many local councillors and the newly elected mayor for his first year of office. As the mayor began his time in office suddenly councillors found that many elements of their traditional role were taken away or lost. The first political hurdle for the elected mayor would come when seeking to put through the first budget of his term of office. At the

Full Council meeting the elected councillors were unwilling and the procedural systems ill-equipped to let go of old ways of working. In line with a requirement to make upwards of £35 million worth of cuts handed down from central government the task of the mayor to deliver a successful budget was unenviable.

The governance arrangements of the mayoral model required the mayor to set a budget which could only be overturned by a two thirds majority and if overturned could result in an intractable legal stalemate. This led to a complex interplay of suggested amendments from the main political parties. The Liberal Democrats in particular who as the outgoing administration were well placed to know where the budget could be adjusted and reserves utilised in order to offset elements of the cuts. What played out was a succession of ‘claim making’ actions from the mayor and councillor groups whereby each took credit for reversing or altering cuts. The mayor came away with an agreed budget settlement having given a number of concessions from his original outlined plans. Over the next two years the mayor successfully managed to avoid the breadth of concessions on his budget by reasserting the notion of his mandate and using his platform as figurehead to significantly broaden the extent and focus of the budget consultation. In adopting a more direct engagement process the mayor managed to circumvent councillors and be able to take credit for concessions delivered before the budget vote and thus prevent his mandate being undermined within the public Full Council Meeting. During the 2014-2015 Budget Consultation over 3,900 people responded to the budget survey, there were approximately 10,000 views of the consultation website and over 1,300 people turned out a series of public meetings. This represented a significant upturn on previous years and allowed the mayor to both amend his proposals on the basis of responses before the decisions came to Full Council and also gave him a platform to suggest

his proposals carried public opinion, evoking direct democracy and a different form of accountability and legitimacy to his predecessors.

Catching up with scrutiny

The strongest criticism of the mayoral model from its detractors is that far from dispersing democracy it concentrates too much power in the office of mayor and too much power in the hands of one individual running the risk that mayors try to rule in ‘Napoleonic fashion without being held to account’ (Kenny and Lodge, 2008). An Inquiry Day held at Bristol City Council in advance of the mayoral election considered the potential role of overview and scrutiny under mayoral governance model identified and outlined clear risks. Firstly, that the new Mayor could ignore or side-line scrutiny activities, leaving councillors significantly weakened in their capacity to call the mayor, his policies and council officers to account. The other risk was that the relationship between the new mayor and the Council could become increasingly conflict ridden with scrutiny moving further from scrutinising policy and more about internal infighting.

In the case of Bristol, the movement to the mayoral model drew power away from local councillors and neighbourhoods and the procedural mechanisms of council meetings and formal scrutiny process were initially ill equipped to cope with the new model of governance. Whilst needing a significant boost in light of the changes, elements of scrutiny were downgraded, notably and most visibly being a reduction in number, attendance and length of

scrutiny meetings according to the majority of interviewees. With potentially contentious decisions being made over the sale of land at the Port of Bristol, Metrobus (a long planned rapid transport route between the South and North of the City) and proposals for a 12,000 capacity Arena near Temple Meads railway station, councillors felt forced to ‘call in’ decisions which they perceived to have been made without ‘proper consideration by anyone outside of the executive team of mayor and officers’ (Liberal Democrat Former Cabinet Member). Two of the ‘call ins’ pertained to issues being removed from individual scrutiny commissions, with councillors feeling they had little control or ownership over the scrutiny work programme, whilst others related directly to strict confidentiality clauses precluding councillors from accessing and sharing council papers without signing a ‘blank exempt status’ to access the data. This culminated in an unprecedented joint statement from Group Leaders and Scrutiny Chairs which effectively suggested that they had been gagged (Bristol Post, 2014). A study of on ‘The Impacts of Mayoral Governance in Bristol’ also noted councillors felt their ‘ability to scrutinise policy and decision making under model was less so than under the previous system’ (Hambleton and Sweeting, 2015:40).

The mayor moved to stem criticism with a reinvigoration of constitutional arrangements with a new constitution being adopted on a ‘suck it and see basis’ at Full Council in June 2014. The acceptance of the new constitution was bound up with negotiation over submissions to the Electoral Commission over a maintenance of councillor numbers in the upcoming boundary review (Bristol City Council, 2014). The City Council also commissioned the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) to conduct a Review of Overview and Scrutiny in the City. The CfPS highlighted a number of problem areas. In particular, the report called directly for greater transparency and clarity about the process of how policies are made, agreed and implemented, greater use of pre-decision scrutiny, and the creation of greater capacity for

scrutiny to fulfil a policy development role (CfPS, 2015). Overall whilst it is widely acknowledged that scrutiny in local government is failing to achieve its potential the position of elected mayor in Bristol was severely limited in its potential by systems which positioned councillors as external and reactive to policy making. Forced to retreat into a reactive and rear guard action due to a constitution and organisational system ill-suited to mayoral governance councillors found themselves far from any tangible form of policy influence, and where influence was possible it could be met by a simple veto.

The issue was exacerbated by the complex dynamics between an independent mayor and councillors of five political parties. The mayoral system left councillor roles diminished and ill-defined. Councillors re-asserted themselves as local ward champions, caseworkers and electoral campaigners but the loss of their creativity in policy making through robust overview and scrutiny created a significant divide between what one former cabinet member defined as ‘council's officers and mayor on the one hand and the rest of the council on the other’ (Former cabinet member, Interview June 15th 2015). To evoke a simple model of the policy process the system removed scope for councillors in the areas of agenda setting and policy formulation, allowed them to be democratically bypassed at policy legitimisation and focused their attention on post hoc often unconstructive scrutiny. With both underdeveloped scrutiny mechanisms and party political dynamics it remains no surprise that councillors continue to struggle with the role of mayoral scrutiniser (Copus, 2008).

Lines of accountability

Early evaluations of the directly elected mayoral model in Bristol have shown that the mayor is better known, more visible and often a clear focal point for engagement with the electorate.

Survey data collected pre and post the introduction of the mayoral system in Bristol showed clearly that respondents across three realms, political, public management and professional, and community and business believed the city had improved in terms of the visibility of its leadership (Hambleton and Sweeting, 2015). The Independent Mayor George Ferguson has adopted a position of ‘change agent’ (Stoker, 2004) with a clear focus on delivering the city council out of a period of turmoil and a failed system of party politics. To do this Mayor Ferguson sought to create a rainbow cabinet or a ‘Cabinet of all the talents’ as self-defined. Despite early difficulties when during the first six months of his term the local Labour party refused to allow its members to join the cabinet, the rainbow cabinet has continued and been shuffled according to council composition at each election. Bristol until 2016 had been elected by thirds, a contributing factor to the perceived political instability and stagnation of previous years. The rainbow cabinet embodied Fergusons new politics and was a significant political innovation in the City, the innovation was further augmented in late 2015 as two Green Party councillors, Fi Hance and Daniella Radice entered Ferguson’s Cabinet on a job share basis.

Whilst choosing a broad and experienced cabinet, Mayor Ferguson opted to hold ultimate responsibility for all major policy decisions, whilst some of this responsibility could have been delegated or shared with Assistant Mayors; he decided to keep this function. The advisory function of cabinet members’ left them as a tenuous institutional bridge between mayor and full council. One former cabinet member highlighted in an interview that meetings between the Cabinet allowed everyone ‘to speak freely, but ultimately the mayor kept his own counsel, we could put markers down on our positions for the record, mainly in line with the stance of our party groups, but beyond the nuclear option of resignation we held little to no power’. Instead assistant mayors were drawn into managerial aspects of their individual

portfolios, and found striking a balance between this role and being part answerable to party groupings 'complex' and 'challenging'. The difficulty was compounded as assistant mayors were tasked with attending scrutiny on behalf of the executive. Outlining a particular instance where a scrutiny chair was questioning the motives for a particular policy another cabinet member felt unable to offer a full account for mayoral policy 'I found myself deferring to the officers time and time again, they were answerable to George and often better placed to know, all the avenues led to the mayors door'. In practice the mayor's cabinet was 'little more than window dressing' (Group Leader Interview, 2014) for the majority of councillors interviewed. This led to many policy decisions being made before then being dissected and reconstructed in the public arena at council meetings, most notably on Residents Parking Zones, where the mayor's individual decision on a blanket roll out of parking zones to combat commuter parking was met with fierce opposition at Full Council from all parties. A motion to Full Council which called on the mayor to halt the process and take a more phased approach gained striking cross party support at Full Council (49 in favour, 2 against with 9 abstentions) (Bristol City Council, 2013:8-9). Subsequently the Mayor admitted he 'had kicked a hornet's nest' (Bristol Post, 2013) by rolling out his plans too quickly.

Whilst it is simple to suggest that political naiveté and a lack of trust in party politicians came together to create the policy difficulties, structural factors rendered such an outcome likely. In spite of the cloudiness pertaining to the mayor's status as an independent amongst party politicians it was an uphill struggle for the mayor to road test his policy ideas. With an advisory cabinet the Mayor lacked the democratic back room environment where he could try out ideas and have the rough edges knocked off before they entered the public domain. The mayor lacked the robust informal pre-decision scrutiny enjoyed by his predecessors, council leaders who enjoyed a responsive if not coherent party political group environment, where

policy ideas could be shaped, improved and any perceived failures addressed and avoided. At the start of Ferguson's term the Labour and Liberal Democrat party groupings were composed of a great number of councillors who had held experience in leadership and opposition. This coupled and developed by a formalised and institutionally supported group structure meant that there was a long standing schedule of group meetings ahead of all full council and scrutiny meetings. This gave councillors the time and intellectual room to smell and road test ideas amongst colleagues from diverse areas of the city and come to collective decisions on votes, debate speakers and where colleagues were allowed to abstain or evade the whip. The Mayor didn't have this recent institutional knowledge, or the benefits of constructive criticism by colleague operating under the same political grouping. The collective institutional knowledge also held by the Labour and Liberal Democrat councillor cohorts also presented them a clear advantage of knowing what had been tried, and with it the learning and potential pitfalls. The administration churn delivered by elections by thirds also meant predecessors had developed a cohesive rapport and institutional knowledge across party lines. Whilst the previous model of governance is depicted as leading to periods of 'dysfunctional decision making' (Fenwick and Elcock, 2014:17), the system had engendered a highly developed system of cross party briefing, and soundings through party whips and leads, delivering a coherent rapport through shared experience across party lines. An officer who worked under both governance systems highlighted the efficiency of the previous model in delivering consensus; 'It was amazing how quickly things moved, we would leave a meeting with a cabinet member thinking a policy decision would be stuck for a while, and suddenly it would be good to go for a vote at Full Council, often even ahead of the Full Council whips meeting, the back channels were really well developed'. Whilst there are implications in terms of transparency of conducting such business behind closed doors, the mayor was negatively affected by the lack of this resource and left with the local press as a test bed for

ideas. This effect was compounded as in the more open and visible world of direct election, it was clear that any mistakes were his and his alone, and there were few offers to help. Both in terms of institutional hardware (formal rules and structures) and institutional software (practices taking place around and within the hardware) (Skelcher, Mathur and Smith 2005) the role of mayor was restricted in its capacity to deliver policy change in Bristol.

Shifting sands and someone else's agenda

With the notable amplified focus on the mayor as an individual there was a challenge for the mayor to show both individual leadership and make agendas his own. With the City Deal settlement negotiated by the outgoing Liberal Democrat administration with the leaders of North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset Councils and the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership the mayor had to try to adapt and work with a pre-existing devolution settlement. There was also a significant responsibility to deliver the European Green Capital year in 2015. As the first UK city to receive the award and with the award being secured by work from previous Labour and Liberal Democrat administrations, all eyes were on the mayor to deliver.

With the mayor standing on an electoral platform which directly put him at odds with a key element of the existing City Deal offering to 'strike a new City Deal with Government that includes enhanced rail, tram and bus service alternatives to the flawed BRT bendy bus (Metrobus)' (Bristol 1st, 2012) the task of negotiation with Central Government was substantial. Ultimately the intractability of the existing settlement from government meant Ferguson succeeded only in re-routing a section of the route away from Bristol's Harbourside. This early interaction with government exposed the depth of challenge the

Mayor faced in both creating and securing his own agenda. Government money for capital investment beyond the City Deal came into the city via other avenues. £7m arrived to support Bristol Green Capital following extensive lobbying of Chief Secretary to the Treasury Danny Alexander by Bristol West MP Stephen Williams. Other funding relating to the Bristol Arena project was secured by the Local Enterprise Partnership to purchase a derelict Royal Mail Building (£5.4m) and begin work on an Arena Island Bridge (£11m) with the respective funds coming from the Department for Communities and Local Government and Homes and Communities Agency. Whilst the mayor did not have great success in securing government funding directly he did manage to secure funding and other commitments via commercial partners. Taking a hands on and direct approach drawn both from his background as a successful architect and entrepreneur Mayor Ferguson managed to utilise his formal status and the associated perception of that status to assert increase opportunities for investment and influence. With the assistance of then Assistant Mayor Councillor Mark Bradshaw, he negotiated with local bus companies gaining concessions on fares and routes. Whilst it is hard to delineate the relative effect of leadership approach and the status of elected mayor, it is unlikely that council leaders would have been in a strong position to negotiate such concessions. The Mayor also enjoyed success in securing an operator for the proposed Bristol Arena near Bristol Temple Meads. The Mayor's zeal in leading the City as opposed to the Council placed Bristol firmly on an International stage e.g. launching the Bristol Declaration on Climate Change at COP21 opened up previously underdeveloped opportunities to secure funds through collaborative working.

Whilst the Mayor faced a large test to secure a coherent personal policy platform for Bristol he was also hampered by the shifting sands of the changing context of government options for further devolution. Being the sole rider of the first referendum wave that chose to adopt

an elected mayor he faced a distinct challenge. He found himself on a restricted and lonely path, constrained by the pre-existing devolution settlement in the form of the City Deal and bound with local government partners each invested in that original deal. The capacity to negotiate a better deal for Bristol from the already Bristol centric settlement would prove too difficult. Whilst scope to deliver greater powers and funds for the Bristol initially diminished new avenues seemed to open in the light of alternative growth settlements and collaborative governance arrangements. The growth agenda whilst remaining focused on functional economic geographies shifted to alternate models of governance in the form of Combined Authorities. Greater Manchester, Sheffield, Liverpool and West Yorkshire and the North East moved quickly to put the case for bespoke devolution settlements following the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill 2015, whilst Bristol seemed stuck with the cards it had played. Following a protracted internal debate Ferguson moved to broaden Bristol's options by submitting a new devolution bid with his existing West of England partners which stopped short of the governments originally preferred Devo-mayor, whilst also entering into a collaborative agreement with Cardiff and Newport in the form of 'South Western Powerhouse', the Great Western Cities scheme.

Delivering democratic change and accelerating policy

Whilst changing contextual and intergovernmental factors restricted scope to make significant inroads in terms of transformative change. The position of elected mayor opened up local government in the City of Bristol in new ways. In terms of policy the agenda progressed as the mayor advanced existing policy innovations in terms of 20mph zones, residents parking zones, and the launch of Bristol Energy an alternative energy provider

developed by the City Council. European Green Capital helped the Mayor to deliver significant environmental policy initiatives, in particular building Filwood Green Business Park in the South of the City, investment in renewables and community energy schemes and the Warm Up Energy scene which co-funded through Green Deal subsidies targeted insulation and energy saving interventions to those suffering fuel poverty. These initiatives set in train by previous administrations were accelerated under George Ferguson doing so with an assured mandate as an independent and an individual drive to get things done. The Bristol Arena plan for many also represented an important step forward in the cultural development of the city and its place as a viable competitor in the UK leisure and entertainment industry. To move forward this Arena plan marked a significant step, which again can be attributable to the personal leadership characteristics of the Mayor to set and force the agenda coupled with the revenue opportunities emerging from his inherited City Deal.

Unsurprisingly evaluative discussion of the mayoral model centres on around arguments about democracy. The mayor's advisory cabinet, centralised model of decision making and fractious relationships with other elected representatives stand out strongly for critics of the mayoral model. Significant questions were asked about the roles of councillors as they looked to re-assert themselves in this new governance context. Interestingly however the mayor has advanced other democratic initiatives during his time in office in alternative ways through sidestepping elements of representative democracy in favour of novel methods of engagement with citizens. The City Council and even more so the mayor are tangibly more evident and accessible (Hambleton and Sweeting, 2015:21). The challenge of a significant restructuring of the council's leadership secretariat and a refurbishment and rationalisation of the majority of the Council's municipal buildings to bring efficiency savings was successfully

delivered. The Mayors approach to a more direct form of engagement also led to a series of other democratic innovations, including Mayor's Question Time town-hall meetings across the city, on the radio and online, and an annual State of the City Address. The mayor maximised his use of the platform of elected mayor to position himself as an active and engaged mayor, taking the role out of the council house, and onto social media and the world stage.

The new opportunities for citizen engagement also represented a change from the norm; the depth of consultations particularly around the budget was notable in terms of accessibility. Attention and effort was drawn away from negotiation with councillors and channelled into a more direct discussion with citizens. The creation of an 'Ideas Lab' online crowdsourcing platform also represented a novel innovation even if its potential has yet to be fully realised. Consultative governance was widened further in 2013 with the introduction of five independently chaired Mayoral Commissions. Each commission sought to address key priorities for the city, defined as Education and Skills, Fairness, Homes, Sports, and a Women's Commission. The increased profile of the mayor and his conception of doing things differently have proved to be the catalyst to open up new forms of democratic engagement and a modernisation of consultative processes.

Conclusion

When the government pushed the agenda of directly elected mayors it alluded strongly to the idea that once a city went down the mayoral route, it was more likely to receive extra resources and additional powers. When Bristol was the only city to opt for the deal through a referendum it was set on a singular course and suddenly the rules of the game changed. This

chapter has given an illustrative narrative account of how the role of the mayor was limited by history, context and structure. Furthermore, examples have shown how through a capacity to adapt his approach along with being consistent and assertive in the definition of his role and capabilities, Bristol's Independent Mayor has managed to deliver across a number of dimensions to overcome longstanding barriers to change.

Academic attention on the subject of elected mayors in England has often concentrated on the relative stickiness of the concept (Marsh, 2012) as it remains contested as to whether the role of directly elected mayor is a successful governance innovation to improve policy making, democratic engagement and a solution to the complex issues and fiscal challenges of local government in England. The case of Bristol contributes to the evidence base to support the positive benefits of elected mayors whilst giving equal fodder for those who believe the idea should finally be lost. One element which should be appreciated in evaluating the case of Bristol is that as the Mayor entered office it represented a single significant change which the institutional hardware i.e. the rules and procedures of council, scrutiny and accountability processes are still adapting to. The waters clouded by a simplistic but definitive divide between a strongly independent mayor and a wounded series of political groups resulted in a clash of cultures where the institutional software; the shared practices and understandings of policy making were also lost or corrupted. The mayor whilst benefitting from the perception as someone who was taking hard decisions upfront subsequently suffered as policy initiatives slowed or stalled distracting from perceptions of the role being able to deliver a new form of governing.

The mayor's choice of an advisory cabinet left lines of accountability unclear. Without formal delegated powers assistant mayors were asked to be held to account on the basis of a

policy platform other than their own and the resultant scrutiny process left councillors more often than not deferring to officers for information on the Mayors plans. The lack of pre-decision scrutiny was marked, even at formal cabinet meetings which were left as little more than a simple rubber stamping exercise. With the fiscal challenges becoming deeper with further reductions in the financial settlement from central government, the mayor was increasingly challenged to look beyond the individual and in order to use all the resources in their armoury, and maximise the lobbying of the council needed to carry the councillor contingent with him. As advocated by The Institute for Government if the mayoral model is to work to its full potential under an Independent mayor, they will need to ‘proactively engage with councillors and make use of pre-decision scrutiny’ and ‘seriously consider the delegation of executive powers to individual cabinet members as a way of attracting talent to their cabinets and sending a signal they are willing to work with the rest of the council (2011:43).

Criticism of the mayoral model highlights the danger posed by a concentration of power in the hands of one individual. Whilst in terms of the tried and tested mechanisms of representative democracy in Bristol things have remained static, the role of elected mayor has been utilised to significantly drive a more direct form of political interaction. The mayor is the epitome of ‘place based leadership’ (see Hambleton, this volume), taking leadership of the City of Bristol, as opposed to leading the council. George Ferguson significantly raised the profile of Bristol on a national and international stage.

The power of a clear and direct mandate in tandem with a sense of individual autonomy derived from his status as an independent allowed George Ferguson to open the black box of elected mayors and unlock some of the promise of what the mayoral role can deliver. The

role itself gave scope to innovate and a capacity to do things differently from the norm, and whilst constrained by circumstance in a number of areas, the Mayor has been able to deliver a more direct and interactive form of citizen consultation, leveraged a deal with local bus companies and progressed plans for a significant capital investment in Bristol Arena. In playing to his own strengths, stressing his mandate, building on notions of direct democracy he successfully asserted his locally rooted legitimacy and used soft power to achieve his aims.

Clear democratic questions remain in relation to the representative role of councillors, what is their role in shaping policy, in a world with only one fall guy, how can they influence or take credit without undermining the mayor? Are councillors left as mere mouthpieces, civil servants and reactive scrutineers? With an advisory cabinet where all roads lead to the mayor's door, who can they trust, can an independent truly delegate to party political elected members and if not how can they expect to manage and provide adequate oversight to the associated workload. To counter the critique of a power shift upwards solutions could come in two forms, firstly through an offer of sustainable democratic solutions where democratic engagement is a regular occurrence not simply the chance every four years to deliver a coronation or the boot. By offering a devolution of power and responsibility down to ward level there is also a possibility to re-invigorate the role of local councillors. With a successful outward facing mayor there is plenty of room the councillors to deliver local place based leadership with an equal level of dynamism if assured of both the power and mandate.

Addendum: Marvin Rees, lessons learned and new prospects for Mayoral Governance in Bristol

Labour's Marvin Rees became Bristol's second directly elected mayor by a decisive margin of 68,750 votes against 39,377 for incumbent George Ferguson following elections on the 5th May 2016 on a turnout of 44.87% of registered voters. The turnout was significantly up on the 27.92% of 2012 and came alongside the city's first all-up elections which also delivered a Labour majority of seats on the council. Despite this dominance Rees continued the pattern of appointing a cross party cabinet instigated by Ferguson but chose to increase the size of his cabinet to ten including himself. Of the ten members over half are women and the other parties on the councils are represented by one member (one Liberal Democrat, one Conservative, and one from the Green Party). Whilst increasing the number of portfolios and voices around the cabinet table Rees like his predecessor also chose to retain ultimate responsibility for all major policy decisions as opposed to delegate or share this with Cabinet members. In his inaugural speech Rees alluded to a more holistic approach to City Leadership as a 'collective endeavour' and laid out plans to set up a City Office to bring together the expertise and priorities of institutions and individuals and ensure that all 'major elements that make up civil society will not just be consulted, but empowered to lead' (Rees. 2016).

Rees leadership model seems to borrow from Total Place and other partnership approaches; learning drawn from his time as Director of the Bristol Local Strategic Partnership and partnership roles in the National Health Service. Against an increasingly challenging financial climate, where continued cuts need to be made, alongside the responsibility to maintain statutory services, Rees is moving to bring partners and their budgets around the table in a move to increase the effectiveness of investment across local partners. In a recent interview Rees stressed he was striving for 'whole public spending approach where the police, health, education and Job Centre Plus all work together in the area for wider social

justice goals', highlighting that 'we can only really deliver on some of the "wicked problems" if we're coordinated and we agree what the shared priorities are.' (Progress, 2016:IV).

The choice of a party mayor as opposed to an independent also represents a shift away from the previous incumbent who often found himself hampered by the dynamics of a multi-party council without a cohesive collective behind him or his ideas. Rees with both a Labour majority on the council and a potential unbroken four years without elections has greater scope to deliver his policy platform. Yet Rees is confronted with the same challenges which stymied his predecessor including a thinning financial settlement from central government and the challenges of working across local authority boundaries. A new West of England devolution settlement is currently out for consultation between Bristol City, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire Councils (North Somerset initially chose opt out of the deal). The proposed £1 billion devolution deal could deliver a West of England Combined Authority and potentially a directly elected West of England Mayor as well as further powers many of which are highly relevant to addressing many of the challenges the City of Bristol faces over the next 4 years. The proposed Combined Authority will be given powers over transport including the ability to franchise bus services, implement Clean Air Zones, and take responsibility for the Key Routes Network of roads all of which could be tools to address Bristol's main transport challenges. In Housing, the Combined Authority will be given stronger strategic planning powers including around compulsory purchasing, powers to set up Development Corporations to facilitate house building, and powers to determine cross-boundary infrastructure applications which so often in the past have been mired in parochial, logistical and governance complexity. Rees like Ferguson has inherited a devolution deal which is not his own, but one which offers more significant opportunities particularly around confronting two of Bristol's most intransigent issues housing and transport.

For Marvin Rees the challenge is equal to that faced by George Ferguson but with an additional complexity and insecurity following Britain's vote to exit the European Union. However, by taking some of the approaches and lessons learned from the experiences of Bristol's first directly elected mayor alongside a more partnership based approach Rees may also find that the strongest benefits of mayoral governance come not from the powers of the role but instead the leadership approach taken by the individual.

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