

## **Bath City Forum - letter to the Chronicle**

Dear Editor,

At last Thursday's full Council meeting an important opportunity was missed, and the people of Bath are the poorer for it. Bath is the largest city in UK without its own separate legal existence or governance. Keynsham and Radstock have Town Councils, but Bath has nothing of its own: residents are represented only through their ward councillors at the level of the Local Authority, B&NES. For the last year and a half, a cross-party working group of Councillors has been meeting, joined sometimes by other stakeholders, to investigate ways to provide Bath with a useful form of its own governance so that the people of Bath can have an effect on the issues which beset it. Many of these are collective, City of Bath, urban matters that require special expertise and focus.

A consultation last year considered either parishing Bath (which could include a single City Council with parish council powers) or a "Voice for Bath" area committee of Bath Councillors (and possibly co-opted stakeholders), which would exercise some of the B&NES Council functions which are currently carried out in other ways. Such a committee could, for example, have delegated responsibility for matters vitally affecting the city, such as the Bath Transport Strategy or the World Heritage Site Management Plan.

Unfortunately, as you perceptively pointed out in your editorial, none of these options has been chosen. Instead the Cabinet decided to create a talking shop called the Bath City Forum with no defined delegated powers, tasks or resources: not even those which a Parish or Town Council has. South Stoke Council has more powers and responsibilities than this paper tiger. There were positive suggestions at the Council meeting of tasks which might be delegated to it, such as oversight of the Community Infrastructure Levy, the World Heritage Site Management Plan, implementation of Bath's Transport Strategy, Parks and Open spaces, and Tourism, but all were ignored.

We have experience of talking shops like this: the Conservatives created one called the Bath City Liaison Forum seven years ago and, worthy though it was, it died from lack of interest in a few years. These animals have to be given purpose and roles or they are pointless, but this new Forum doesn't even have a mechanism by which its mission and objectives can be developed. Bath deserves better than this, especially after a year and a half of study. FoBRA calls on the new Cabinet to think again, try harder and come up with a viable solution to the problem of Bath's democratic deficit.

Robin Kerr, Chairman FoBRA

20<sup>th</sup> Jul 15 - final