

We Are Bristol History Commission Terms of Reference

September 2020

“History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations”. **James Baldwin**

Purpose

To develop a city-wide conversation to help Bristol rediscover and understand our history and how that history led to us to becoming the city we are, so we are better equipped to decide who we want to become.

Aim and Scope:

- The commission will agree a programme of topics and will work in six monthly cycles (unless otherwise agreed) by offering questions and leadership to guide research, conversations and dialogue with the city.
- The commission will work with Bristol City Council’s Culture and Creative Industries Service to:
 - Advise on matters of contested heritage as and when they arise, including offering expertise and consultation to the Mayor on any emerging controversies over statues, street names, and memorials.
 - Create fora, through which individuals and groups across the city will participate in telling Bristol’s stories past and present.
 - Identify, and re-present existing research, including from across the world, giving voice to new perspectives.
 - Collate, create and promote good quality resources for all in the city to learn about their own history and the history of the city and empower people to make the changes they want to see in their communities today.
 - Collaborate with existing history societies and other groups across Bristol.
 - Coordinate activities with the Legacy Steering Group, mindful of that group’s responsibility for leading on memorialization related to transatlantic slavery.
 - Promote a more inclusive view of the city’s past which is fair-minded, historically well-informed and evidence based.
 - Liaise with other History Commissions in Britain and further afield to share best practice.

- After a period of facilitating a civic conversation at the end of each period, the findings will be presented to the city through a variety of platforms. These findings could include unanswered questions, contradictions, complexities, commonalities and recommendations for further investigation and action.
- The commission will report to the Mayor who will use it as a way of communicating and further engaging with the city.

Membership

- The commission will comprise of members appointed by the chair in conjunction with the Mayor's Office.
- The commission may appoint members for a temporary period, for a particular theme/research project or as a permanent member of the commission

Chair

- The chair will be appointed by the Mayor. The chair will bring overarching continuity and the commission will appoint a co-chair for the period of each theme i.e. six months.

Meetings

- Meetings to be chaired by the chair and current co-chair and lead for the theme.
- Any decisions needed should be made by consensus. If not possible, then through majority vote. If there is deadlock, the overall chair will make the final decision.
- Meetings will be held on a frequency agreed by the commission and will be held in Bristol and by Zoom or other video conferencing channels as necessary.
- Meeting agenda and notes will be made publicly available

Administration

- The Mayor's Office will provide secretariat support to the commission and Bristol City Council will supply services as required.

Attendance by Non-Commission Members

- Invitations may be extended to non-commission members, where their input or advice supports the discussion taking place at the meeting.

Term of History Commission

- These Terms of Reference are effective from 28 January 2021.
- The initial term to be three years from this date.

Tenure of Membership:

- For a number of three years, following which commission members can continue for a second term if appropriate.
- New members will join as agreed during the life of the commission.