

CABINET ADDENDUM ONE

2.00PM, THURSDAY, 15 MAY 2025

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

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ADDENDUM

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Brighton & Hove City Council

Cabinet

Agenda Item 204(a)

Subject: Member Questions

Date of meeting: 15 May 2025

A maximum period of fifteen minutes in total shall be made available at each meeting of the Executive for questions from Members of the Council. The questions included on the list of questions referred to above shall be taken as read at the Cabinet meeting. The question will be answered either orally or at the discretion of the Chair by a written answer circulated after the meeting. Officers may assist the Leader or a Cabinet Member with technical answers to questions. No supplementary questions shall be permitted.

The following written questions have been received from Members:

(1) Councillor Fishleigh- Improving the culture of Environmental Services

Will BHCC consider allocating money to pay for agency staff to cover absentees?

(2) Councillor Fishleigh – Improving the culture of Environmental Services

Why has the garden waste service, which was previously pretty reliable, also gone downhill?

(3) Councillor Fishleigh- Improving the culture of Environmental Services

Why is the timescale/problem of getting spare parts for vehicles still an issue and why can't parts be stockpiled?

(4) Councillor Fishleigh- Improving the culture of Environmental Services

Are any GMB officials who are no longer paid for by BHCC still active within BHCC operations?

(5) Councillor Meadows- Improving the culture of Environmental Services

Page 15 shows an increase in missed refuse and recycling for 2024-25 and this has been picked up in ward work. The reason given by the council is the change from paper to digital which residents do not understand as that should not impact on service delivery. That's a back-office function. If, however, the council are admitting to poor conduct and behaviour at the Depot, we should have been told that as residents would not support bad behaviour affecting the rounds, and we feel there would be more support for officers during these times. Why are we not allowing residents to understand the real problems?

(6) Councillor Meadows- Improving the culture of Environmental Services

The website for reporting complaints is also poor with residents claiming it's hard to navigate and can crash, meaning they cannot report anything except through their ward councillors. What is being done to cure this problem?

(7) Councillor Meadows- Improving the culture of Environmental Services

Real time updates would be very helpful and appreciated by many residents – when will this function be completed?

(8) Councillor Meadows- Improving the culture of Environmental Services

I didn't think we were allowed to use Public Loan Works Board funding (£360k page 18) for revenue services. When and how did this change?

(9) Councillor McNair- Improving the culture of Environmental Services

Assisted collections are not mentioned in the report but are very unreliable. We are supposed to be 'a fair and inclusive city' yet our most vulnerable residents are not getting the service they need. Why is this? What is being done to improve the service?

(10) Councillor Meadows- Housing Safety and Quality compliance update

Tenants feel that the reporting of repairs is still difficult unless they involve a Ward Councillor as nothing is carried out properly. Repair officers are not responsive as they go out and if they find it requires other works they will just go back and report it, without doing the original work they are contracted to do. 4.28 tells us what was happening however tenants are telling us they still need to complain as repairs are not finished to a high standard. The council should remember it is their home not just a works or job number.

(11) Councillor Meadows- Housing Safety and Quality compliance update

It is good that there has been acknowledgement of the officers lack of focus on tenants and their repairs but tenants have been talking about this for years – why is it now only being recognised or will it require a Housing Ombudsman report every time?

(12) Councillor Meadows- Housing Safety and Quality compliance update

Although its mentioned briefly, where is the tenants and leaseholders voice in all this? I am aware that some tenants are concerned about the health and safety aspect of where they live, however, they have been told not to contact the council! Effectively muzzling those concerns that have been raised when the council should be listening and hearing those concerns. Why are officers and lead councillors not responding in a positive way to tenants who feel the need to complain?

(13) Councillor McNair- Housing Safety and Quality compliance update

Why are residents still unable to make claims for personal injury and/or property damage online? The form is very difficult to complete e.g. requiring residents to draw a map (p.4). When is this important form going to be updated and made easier for residents to complete?

(14) Councillor McNair- Housing Safety and Quality compliance update

Residents are finding response times to stage 1 and especially stage 2 complaints regarding lighting, scaffolding and maintenance extremely slow. When councillors request progress updates, the information does not tally with the information residents provide. Why are important complaints taking such a long time to respond to, and what improvements to the process are planned?

(15) Councillor Shanks- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

Is it possible to lease electric vehicles rather than buy diesel?

(16) Councillor Shanks- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

What alternatives to Cityclean service provision, including possible outsourcing, have been looked at?

(17) Councillor Sykes- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

The report implies that some issues were only uncovered by the 2023 KC report when in fact they were known about for far longer. Clear recommendations about Member appeal panels, secret agreements and the union Facilities agreement were made in either in the 2019 Doherty report or the 2017 LGA peer review. Nothing was done after those recommendations. Does the Administration think openness and transparency are a prerequisite for being a learning organisation?

(18) Councillor Sykes- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

The Council Leader said in comments in her 22 April 2025 Argus article about issues at the depot, where she writes of challenging the GMB about GMB tweets threatening 'chaos', after which the GMB tweets were deleted. She said 'this is gangsterism not trade unionism.' Will the Leader confirm whether, if she believed that the tweet may have been made by someone connected to criminality, she first informed council officers or Sussex Police of her intention to approach the perpetrator and take matters into her own hands?

(19) Councillor Sykes- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

From the Argus column, the Leaders' approach appears to have led to the deletion of what may have been evidence useful to the police investigation, so I'd like to be clear on why she felt this course of action was appropriate

and followed legal and police advice. Given the previous incidences of sabotage and criminality, and the threat this poses to the introduction of a new service and expansion of items recycled, it is important that risks around this are addressed and clear processes about the handling of such issues are clear – ie concerns about criminality are dealt with via a clear legal process and with the involvement of the police. Do you agree?

(20) Councillor Sykes- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

Performance issues, Incidents of sabotage, and toxic behaviours in the service deteriorated again from January 2025. Is there any analysis of why this performance and issues got worse again from late 2024 /start 2025?

(21) Councillor Sykes- Food waste and Recycling

There is little detail in the report about how the phased implementation of food waste will work. Greens support the introduction of a service, and welcome the fact that the new laws coming into force following the Environmental Act 2021, and the central government funding that it brings means this will happen. However, it is vital that in the lead up to the March 2026 national and legal deadline for implementation that the council has robust processes in place that it knows will work. How will this be achieved?

(22) Councillor Sykes- Food waste and Recycling

There is no detailed timetable for implementation in the report. What are the different stages, how many will there be, which areas will be trialled first, how will the council collect and monitor feedback to assess issues and changes needed before full implementation? The report is very much lacking in detail and we are just 10 months away from a new citywide service being added to a department which is currently in deep distress and unable to manage existing collections. This is not good enough and more detail is urgently needed. When will detail of this level be shared by the administration, or is the answer that plans are still being worked up?

(23) Councillor McLeay- Housing Safety and Quality Compliance Update

It is suggested in these papers that the cabinet model was to support more timely, joined-up decision-making while preserving transparency and public engagement. Could the cabinet member for Housing New Homes explain why a year on, BHCC continue not to publish FRAs (fire risk assessments) online or share them with residents?

(24) Councillor McLeay- Housing Safety and Quality Compliance Update

The progress report for fire safety compliance and actioning FRAs in High Rise buildings is currently in Red in terms of direction of travel and meeting the expected date of compliance. Is there a plan to remedy this to meet the compliance date? How will the team manage this?

(25) Councillor McLeay- Housing Safety and Quality Compliance Update

In a cabinet meeting on 26 September 2024, we were told that the council had appointed two contractors to assist with reducing the backlog of routine repairs, and that the backlog of routine repairs is expected to be clear by the end of that financial year. Can you share an update on that progress to date and how successful the contractors have been in meeting that target?

(26) Councillor McLeay- Housing Safety and Quality Compliance Update

In 4.28, it was concerning to read about that leadership and culture were a root cause for non-compliance in social housing health and safety. That frontline staff did not consistently feel empowered to escalate concerns or act confidently and that leadership created psychological unsafety. Could more clarity be given on this root cause? Were incidents of bullying reported within this department? Have the problems in staffing and “unhealthy” hierarchy been addressed following the recent department reshuffle?

(27) Councillor McLeay- Housing Safety and Quality Compliance Update

A big part of the improvement plan laid out is to hire new staff resources, establishing two dedicated fire remediation teams as well as Acting Head of Fire Safety. Is there an estimated date for these new roles to be appointed? Has recruitment started?

(28) Councillor McLeay- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

It is noted that BHCC can't afford to invest in electric vehicles at this time, so will be investing in diesel vehicles. In the housing health and safety report there is the suggestion of investment activity and long-term decision-making. Is this not short-sighted in terms of investment? Has a more long-term approach been considered where we invest in less vehicles so we can afford electric vehicles but less of them?

(29) Councillor McLeay- Housing Safety and Quality Compliance Update

Data quality and use were a key root cause given for the shortfall in compliance. How is this going to be addressed? We have heard for years that residents submit repair requests and they go missing.

(30) Councillor Pickett- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

When will the review into communal bin locations that the administration's councillors promised residents and businesses in their 2023 manifesto take place, and why are the administration not ensuring this happens before food waste bins are added to the city's streets? Is the lack of consultation another manifesto U-turn, and why are administration councillors not allowing residents and businesses to have a say?

(31) Councillor Pickett- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

How and when will more information about the variation of the council's disposal contract that will allow for an increase in collection services for the duration of the current contract (end date 2033) be shared publicly so it can be scrutinised by residents?

(32) Councillor Pickett- Food Waste and Recycling

Residents living near the Hollingdean waste site are concerned about an increase in volume of traffic, and they have asked why collected food waste cannot be directly taken to its final destination rather than be taken to the waste site to be processed there and then taken elsewhere after. When will a traffic survey be completed and published by the council to confirm trip volumes and further details about any increase in traffic in Hollingdean to deliver food waste to the depot and then to move elsewhere for further processing?

(33) Councillor Pickett- Food Waste and Recycling

Can the administration confirm the current planning conditions in place about the storing of waste at the Hollingdean WTS, which residents believe to be a 72 hour period. Will they confirm whether there are any incidences of waste remaining at the site for longer than this timeframe and share data on this?

(34) Councillor Pickett- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

It is my understanding that new digital waste vehicles were ordered under the previous Green administration. Why have these vehicles not materialised? I understand that it takes approximately 18 months for the order to arrive so it would seem that this order, unless it was cancelled should have arrived by now. Can we have an explanation as to what may have happened?

(35) Councillor Pickett- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

What model of collection vehicles is the council buying? Officers have suggested previously the council is looking to buy larger vehicles to minimise the tipping required. Whilst this may reduce movement of food waste around the city, what assessment has been made of the need for additional smaller vehicles to be available for collections in streets where access issues can be problematic? Small streets in some locations have frequently been cited as a factor in missed recycling and waste collections and it is important that street size and access vehicle issues are factored into decision making about vehicles being purchased.

(36) Councillor Pickett- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

What steps are the administration taking to mitigate sabotage risks of new equipment purchased? E.g. what CCTV and monitoring is in place at the

depot, and are any additional measures being considered to try and reduce risks further? This question is being asked in the context of not only recent media reports of deliberate sabotage at the depot, but also the frequency of previous issues with vehicles, and other incidents, such as fires, which have occurred at periods of disquiet, or close to unsettled periods and disputes at the depot. It is vital that every effort is taken to keep this new equipment not only safe for those using it but to keep it on the roads doing the job it was acquired to do.

(37) Councillor West- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

The report discusses the McColgan recommendations, and in many cases quotes the findings and reasoning that led to the recommendation. However, 3.11 mentions the recommendation to remove member appeal panels, but fails to relate the findings of McColgan and Doherty (McColgan paras 19, 23 & 33) of conflict of interest and political interference by Labour politicians in 2019: “witnesses indicated that there were close links between the Labour administration and GMB reps”, “witnesses described a high degree of interference from politicians in the disciplinary process”, “allowing panels whose members may have received (and declared) GMB funding to ‘completely, unashamedly just reverse officer decisions’”, and “...City Clean managers expected their decisions to be overturned”. This serious omission seeks to avoid the obvious conclusion that Labour, not just GMB reps, are responsible for the development of the toxic culture and untouchability of perpetrators at City Clean. Do you not agree?

(38) Councillor West- Food Waste and Recycling

Given the scale of the undertaking for City Clean to successfully implement a whole new collection service for food waste by March 2026, and the complete lack of detail presented in the thin cabinet report on how this will be successfully achieved, are cabinet confident they are showing due diligence and good governance in agreeing a recommendation (2.1) for the roll-out on the basis of what appears to be effectively handing officers a blank cheque? Are we to regard this as a transparent and competent approach to public administration?

(39) Councillor Hill- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

What support has been given to council officers who have received death threats and other abuse?

(40) Councillor Hill- Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

As the local GMB branch have not apologised for their role in the toxic culture at Cityclean, is it appropriate that they should have a seat at the table in Cityclean culture change meetings? Have these meetings been productive with the GMB?

(41) Councillor Hill: Improving the Culture of Environmental Services

In a response to a question I asked last year about the Cityclean Culture Change Programme, the administration stated that 'The aim of this next key phase of the programme is to secure wider involvement and joint ownership of new ways of working together.' How successful has the council been in securing this new way of working?