

CABINET ADDENDUM TWO

2.00PM, THURSDAY, 26 JUNE 2025

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

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ADDENDUM

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BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

CABINET

2.00pm 15 MAY 2025

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sankey (Chair) Taylor (Deputy Chair), Allen, Daniel, Muten, Robins, Rowkins, Williams, Alexander and Robinson

PART ONE

199 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

199a Declarations of interests

199.1 There were none.

199b Exclusion of the press and public

199.2 In accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the Act"), the Committee considered whether the public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any item of business on the grounds that it is likely in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during it, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act.

199.3 **Resolved-** That the public and press are excluded from the meeting from items listed on Part 2 of the agenda.

200 MINUTES

200.1 **Resolved-** That the minutes of the previous meeting be approved as a correct record.

201 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

201.1 The Chair provided the following communications:

"I am delighted to introduce today's business and particularly pleased to see weekly food waste collections included on the agenda.

We know recycling and reducing our impact on the environment is important to many of residents and that there has been frustration that so many have been wanting to do their bit by reducing food waste but not been able to be helped to do so by the council. In fact only this morning on BBC Radio Sussex I was asked, how can a City that's had two Green councils still fail to collect food waste. Quite.

That is about to change. If approved today, weekly food waste collections could start as early as September this year thanks to funding from central government and a £1.2million investment by this council.

Increasing recycling is a real priority for our Labour administration and this new collection will make a genuine difference. In Brighton & Hove around a third of household rubbish is food and drink waste - around 2.8kg per household each week.

Once up and running, this scheme will mean every home in our city - whether living in a kerbside or communal area - will be able to recycle their food waste.

Despite promises from previous administrations, our recycling rates have been historically low compared to other local authorities. We're determined to improve this, and our new collections will help us do just that.

Earlier this year we also expanded the range of things residents can recycle and trials for a new sorting processes have been taking place.

Getting additional materials, including food waste, out of the general refuse will boost our recycling rates and the food waste collected in this scheme will be turned into compost for use in and around the city.

Residents have been demanding improvements in this area, and we're delivering them.

Waste collection is an area residents rightly expect an efficient, regular service. Unfortunately, in recent months, this has not always been the case. We have seen the unwelcome return of unreliable garden waste, recycling and rubbish collections. We are tackling this.

This falls below our expectations for the service and are frustrating because I know how hard so many of our colleagues within Environmental Services are working to turn things round.

Today's agenda includes a report on steps we are taking to change the culture within this service and the significant investment we are making – and will continue to make - into modern infrastructure that will underpin our improvements.

We have some fantastic staff in our Environmental Services department who want to serve the city and provide a great service, but sadly we discovered on taking office that the service had some deep-rooted issues that had existed for many years, even decades. We are determined to address these issues and make the changes that this service and our residents have been crying out for for so long.

Significant efforts are now being made to achieve this – and we will reach the level of service our residents deserve.

But we are still experiencing concerning behaviour from a minority of people who seem determined to undermine the efforts of colleagues desperate to deliver a better service for the people of Brighton & Hove.

This should not come as a surprise to anyone who has read the KC report which we commissioned after receiving a whistleblowing complaint in May 2023. As you will all be aware, we fully accepted every single recommendation made in the subsequent KC report and implemented an action plan to address systemic issues of racism, misogyny, bullying and harassment, and to stamp out a highly toxic culture that had been left to fester. The report found that many of the individuals accused of these and other inappropriate behaviours were either GMB reps within the council, or are among a group of around 10 white men who were described to the KC by witnesses as having been particularly protected by the GMB reps within the council.

The report and its findings, however, were just the start. Sets of knives, nunchucks, baseball bats and a samurai sword were found at the depot in the office used by the GMB branch. One of their reps was charged after brave female witnesses came forward. However the CPS discontinued the prosecution, a decision the CPS has acknowledged

was wrong in law. The GMB branch has never offered any explanation as to why so many violent weapons were found in their office nor any action they took as a result.

And it doesn't stop there. Over the last 18 months we have seen direct sabotage of vehicles, threats to life, intimidation and the same bully boy tactics. Last year before a particularly bad period of disruption, the GMB Sussex twitter account warned of "chaos" coming to Brighton directly before we saw further deliberate defecting of vehicles. While this tweet was hastily deleted after it was reported to police, we've never have any explanation from the GMB branch of what kind of chaos exactly? Was is the sort of chaos that compromises workers safety - the very opposite of what any law abiding and decent trade union branch is supposed to do? If so that is gangsterism and not trade unionism.

The list of criminal or unacceptable behaviour is long.

And, last summer, a depot manager's car tyres were slashed along with sickening direct threats to their life and the lives of their family members.

My promise to fellow councillors, colleagues and residents – and indeed, those who still seem determined to undermine our service – is simple: we will not bow down or buckle in the face of such appalling behaviour. Each act of sabotage or intentional disruption to our service just makes us more determined to stamp it out.

Today's report not only reiterates that commitment but shows what steps we have taken and will take over the coming weeks and months.

We have made great strides in improving the culture and we are committed to a schedule of modernisation which will help our teams improve collection rates.

I'd like to thank residents for their patience as we undertake the overdue transformational work that is needed to deliver a consistently high-quality service.

Anyone who thinks they can stand in the way of that much-needed progress should think again.

We will support colleagues, invest in the necessary technology and processes, and do all we can to provide a fantastic service for this city.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to say that I am proud to lead what I would describe as a City of Friends in a Country of Neighbours. We are a City of Sanctuary that celebrates the extraordinary contributions of our migrant residents, many of whom are valued colleagues here at the City Council. As the descendant of migrants on one side of my family I understand how interwoven this country's history is with much of the rest of the world. I will always defend the rights of all human beings regardless of their nationality and this Council is proud to lead the country in our EDI programmes, our climate change work and to proudly fly our inclusive Pride flag at every opportunity.

In respect of the recent Supreme Court judgment while it may have clarified the interpretation of wording in the Equality Act, it has caused confusion and deep anxiety about the provision of services for trans people.

I want to make clear to our trans, intersex and non-binary residents and colleagues here at the council that we hear your anxiety and distress and that many aspects of daily life and routine have now been thrown into uncertainty.

The Supreme Court judgment made clear that the Equality Act protects trans people from discrimination and harassment and this principle must be upheld as the government considers the judgment and its next steps.

As drafted, the update provided by the Equality and Human Rights Commission would seem to create serious difficulties for trans people and their ability to access services and live with dignity.

Brighton & Hove City Council will fully participate in the consultation on the full guidance when published to ensure that the protections of the Equality Act endorsed by the Supreme Court are properly upheld".

202 CALL OVER

202.1 All items on the agenda were reserved for discussion.

203 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

203.1 No public representations were received.

204 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

204.1 A copy of the questions received was circulated ahead of the meeting. Responses provided both at the meeting and in writing are as follows:

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

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

Response: Councillor Rowkins

The service operates a planned establishment level based on what is necessary to deliver the service, allowing for normal levels of leave and absence. Where it is identified that staffing levels will fall below planned establishment levels, agency staff are hired in. The cost for this is met from service budgets. There were reductions on the spend in agency staff because of urgent work required to address in-year budget pressures during 24/25.. Agency staff are not a permanent solution, and the report sets out plans to increase resilience through having more relief drivers available as part of our permanent staffing establishment. There will continue to be a need for agency staff and the budget for this will continue to be available.

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

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

Response: Councillor Rowkins

Firstly, I'd like to apologise again to your residents, who I know experienced the worst of the disruption to garden waste collections. Unfortunately, garden waste was affected by a combination of staff shortages and vehicle defects. This was compounded by spending controls which reduced the number of agency staff we were able to deploy to cover staff absences.

I have been monitoring the service very closely and am pleased to see that all 3 garden waste rounds have been out as planned recently. Subscriptions have been extended by one month for all garden waste customers, and we have recently appointed a second PM crew that will help keep on top of missed collections, including garden waste.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

We do hold spares ourselves for the items we need regularly, and our main suppliers also maintain stock. However, waste vehicles contain some very complex systems. Given the thousands of parts involved across a wide range of vehicles it is not possible for us or a supplier to carry all the parts that might be required (some of which may sit on the shelves for several years and never be needed). The Head of Fleet is in constant dialogue with our supply chain to find ways to speed up availability of parts, and the fleet strategy set out in the report will help address the issues of vehicle breakdowns and reduce the need for spare parts over time.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

GMB employees who are not directly employed by the council have no role in council operations. Where former staff pose an identified risk to our staff we take specific steps to ensure they are not able to access our offices or attend meetings on teams calls whether they belong to GMB or not. Appointments within the GMB are a matter for GMB.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

The section you are referring to identifies the outdated paper-based systems as *one of several* factors that have affected the service, including age of fleet, vehicle defects, staff sickness and reduced agency capacity.

These paper systems do however very much impact delivery of the service. They prevent swift identification of problems when they arise, slow down communications between teams, and limit the flow information needed to update residents.

In addition to these elements, we have set out in the report our response to the poor conduct by some which, over many years, has impacted the service provided to residents. This was described in the KC report and in the previous update to a

council committee meeting in January 2024 at which we voted unanimously to accept all of the recommendations from the report. We have also communicated clear instances of sabotage to residents in the media.

As you would expect, we will only attribute service disruption to deliberate activity where there has been a thorough investigation supported by robust evidence.

We are also very careful to support the vast majority of our staff, who work extremely hard and just want to do a good job for the city.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

We now ask residents to hold bins for 48 hours if their collection is missed in order for us to arrange catch-up collections. We will shortly be publishing a list of missed streets each day drawn from our records. This will show where we have been able to reallocate missed collections and where we have not yet been able to and will save residents having to report things we already know about. As our digital programme moves forward, we anticipate being able to provide residents with information in real time about their collection. We expect to have that in place across the service later this year.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

The software changes are in the design phase. We expect testing to take place in the next few weeks and the offer to be rolled out later this year.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

The £360k is capital investment accounted for separately in table 1 of the report. The financial implications outline that the capital investment will be funded by PWLB by utilising underspends from other Environmental Services capital schemes to minimise the impact on the revenue budget. If this cannot be achieved, then there will be an annual revenue cost of c.£0.081m that will need to be managed within the revenue resources.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

We are very much focussed on delivering a fair and inclusive service, and assisted collections is a vital part of that. The introduction of in-cab will improve the reliability of assisted collections. These will be highlighted on the in-cab device to alert the driver to the assisted collection as they approach the property. This is particularly relevant for agency/cover drivers and new assisted collections. In the meantime, we have made improvements, including putting a notice in the driver beat sheets of any new assisted collections.

(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.

Response: Councillor Williams

We are sorry when repairs are not completed to a high standard or require multiple visits. We are committed to making the repairs process as smooth and accessible as possible.

We received 230 councillor enquiries, that's one for every 182 repairs, and we value this feedback as a vital part of improving our service.

Improving the quality of our homes is a Council Plan and Housing Strategy priority. We recognise that a home is not just a job number, it's where people live. We are listening, learning, and committed to getting it right.

To reduce repeat visits and raise standards, we are:

- Improving repair descriptions at first contact
- Upgrading van stocks to ensure the right materials are on hand
- Reviewing the "further works" process to increase first-time fix rates

(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?

Response: Councillor Williams

The judgement by the Regulator for Social Housing has prompted officers to take a more strategic look at feedback from tenants in terms of complaints, member enquiries and ombudsman decisions. It has also led officers to undertake the root cause analysis in the cabinet report.

We don't want tenants to rely on an Ombudsman report for their concerns to be taken seriously. The service is constantly seeking to improve our tenants' experiences, most recently, a reorganisation of trade teams has been undertaken with the aim of making the service more efficient and responsive to the needs of our tenants.

Our Repairs Helpdesk answered 94% of over 70,000 telephone calls within target times; and of the 9,112 tenants surveyed, 99% were satisfied with repairs standard of work and overall customer service.

(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?

Response: Councillor Williams

At no time have we suggested residents not to contact us. We are very proactive in our resident communications.

We regularly engage with tenants and residents through our Housing Area Panels, Leaseholder Action Group and when there are specific topics for discussion, we also arrange drop-in sessions.

We would encourage all tenants and leaseholders to contact the council with any concerns they have, and they will be investigated I would welcome the councillor sharing with officers the details of any specific cases that has prompted this question.

(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?

Response: Councillor Williams

Officers are currently working with the Housing ICT systems provider NECH on the implementation of a new Works Management System. Once complete, this means that all of the housing landlord service will have a common IT system. There is provision within this new system for more user-friendly online customer services.

The current priority is to complete the go live of the Works Management System by autumn 2025, we will then look at what system improvements we require, with the provision of an enhanced online customer offer a high service improvement priority.

(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?

Response: Councillor Williams

The Housing Ombudsman has assessed the council's overall complaint handling as in line with similar landlords. However, we agree further improvement is essential and we recognise concerns about slow response times to complaints about scaffolding, lighting, and maintenance, particularly at Stage 2. While Stage 1 complaints are performing well.

Stage 2 complaints have increased for Repairs & Maintenance in 2024/25. While some older cases still cause delays, response times are improving, and residents are now receiving regular updates. To building on the improvements, we've added additional staff to the Customer Feedback Team since last month.

We're also addressing concerns about inconsistent progress updates. Improvements include clearer record-keeping, officer training, and regular monitoring by Housing Leadership.

A report on housing complaints will go to Audit & Standards Committee on 24 June 2025.

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

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

Response: Councillor Rowkins

We have reached the limit of electrical power that can currently be supplied to the depot. As such, whether purchased or leased, we would not be able to reliably charge additional EVs.

In addition, we have an unacceptably large number of vehicles well beyond the optimum seven-year life cycle which is significantly impacting the reliability of the fleet.

You will no doubt be aware of my very strong commitment to decarbonisation, having accelerated our progress substantially since taking office in 2023. However, we have to be able to provide a reliable and resilient service for our residents, and we cannot afford to wait until additional grid capacity is in place before acquiring new vehicles.

That said, work has commenced to develop options to increase capacity and this will include engagement with UK Power Networks.

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

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

Response: Councillor Rowkins

The service is now named Environmental Services, and forms part of the wide range of services that the council provides directly. In this report, we have candidly presented the challenges faced by the service and the investment needed to improve the service. The council has put in place a programme of work to make the improvements identified. Outsourcing has not been considered because it is not felt to be the most effective way to deliver service improvement and the wide-ranging change needed to both culture and service delivery.

(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 in the 2019 Doherty report of 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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

As soon as we received the serious complaints about the culture in the service, we commissioned an independent investigation. We told the public we were doing so and then published it when it was finished. We then discussed its findings at a public meeting in January 2024, where we voted unanimously to accept the recommendations in full. And now, here we are at another public meeting, candidly discussing the progress made to date and the challenges that remain.

I believe we have passed the openness and transparency test.

The KC report makes clear that there have been many issues that have been known about for some time and also states that 'managers at City Clean and elsewhere in the Council have, until recently, been unable to respond appropriately to such behaviour by reason of the threat of industrial action and a (reasonably) anticipated absence of political support'. This of course includes the actions of you and your Green Party colleagues.

The public report also details the attempts made to manage the situation following both the 2017 LGA report and the 2019 Doherty report, and how this action was thwarted by threats of industrial action and political decision making at the time and subsequently.

In January 2024, following publication of the KC report, this administration and the council's Chief Executive, apologised for the previous failures to address things, and assertive action has been taken to redress the situation since then.

In the spirit of openness transparency, I'd invite you to share why the Green administration of 2020-2023 did not act on any of the Doherty recommendations, and why, unlike us, you have not apologised to staff for the impact of your political failings.

(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?

Response: Councillor Sankey

I find this question deeply distasteful Councillor Sykes, implying as it does at best that I am not somebody to follow due process and the rule of law and at worst that I am corrupting the criminal process. To be crystal clear we report every and all instances of suspected criminality immediately to the police. Given that I am the first Leader to take serious action on this issue, unlike Green Leaders, I'm surprised and disappointed (because I expected better of you) that of all the angles and all the questions you could ask about this very important subject, this is your approach. Where is the concern for staff dealing with criminality? Where is the show of your support for our Administration taking this on after decades of silence and inaction? Where is your call for the GMB branch to sort its house out. I find your approach truly staggering. Talk about completely missing the point. There is an ongoing process of continually sharing information with partner authorities including the Police. All incidents of alleged criminality are reported to the police.

(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?

Response: Councillor Sankey

Absolutely baffling allegation. Let me be clear any suspected criminal acts are, of course, reported me and by officers to the Police. There is a very clear protocol in place for this, managed directly by officers with Police colleagues. Copies of all of the tweets in question were retained and they remain publicly viewable via a Brighton & Hove news article.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

We continually analyse performance data and can see that there are clear spikes in performance issues at certain times. This is perhaps best illustrated by the extent to which missed collections reduced in the months immediately following the publication of the KC report and then rose dramatically when we began to implement the recommendations in early 2024. In particular, suspected criminality and sabotage has been linked with the progressing of disciplinaries and dismissals. Steps continue to be taken to improve the service, and it is possible that this can create issues in the short term.

The report explains that we have seen a significant setback since January 2025 because of a range of factors. We will continue to monitor the many reasons for disruption to services and to monitor the data to identify and address trends, and the cabinet report proposes additional resources to do so.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

A project team has been formed and recruitment under way to increase the size of the team as we move through the next phases.

There are workstreams on round design and validation, procurement of vehicles, caddies, boxes and bins, interface with Veolia, roll out communications and round management during roll out. A project board will exercise oversight on the next phases, and I am briefed on progress in my regular catch ups with relevant officers.

It goes without saying that we will update members and residents on the details of the service rollout as they become available.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

A project plan has been developed for a phased roll out to commence in September 2025. We will announce details of the first and second phase at the beginning of June.

The timetable is indicative as for each phase of the roll out, “go/ no go” decision making is in place to confirm that everything is in place for each phase.

(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?

Response: Councillor Williams

We fully support the principle of transparency in fire safety and recognise the importance of making Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) accessible.

Although we have a full set of up to date risk assessments for all our properties, in 2024 we commissioned a full new set of Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) on both our high risk and lower risk buildings. We now have updated FRAs for a total of 639 blocks - high rise, medium rise, low rise and seniors housing.

Having completed such a large number of Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) in a compressed timeframe we need to ensure that what we publish is accurate, legally compliant, as well as being shared in a way that is accessible so that residents can meaningfully understand the information.

FRAs contain technical and sensitive information, and in some cases, details which may pose a safety or security risk if shared without redaction. We’ve also been mindful of new regulatory requirements under the Fire Safety Act and Building Safety Act, and the evolving expectations of the Regulator for Social Housing.

(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?

Response: Councillor Williams

As outlined in the report, in 2024, the council completed a large number of Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) in a compressed timeframe. It is best practice to undertake FRAs for High Rise blocks every year. In 2025, a more phased approach has been adopted, with assessments scheduled from January to September. This change supports better planning and coordination of both assessments and resulting remediation actions. The current “Red” rating for FRAs in High-Rise Buildings reflects this approach, with the expected date of compliance being September 2025.

(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?

Response: Councillor Williams

While rising repair demand affected the pace of progress, we are on track to clear the backlog by July 2025.

Outstanding repairs open more than 28 days have fallen significantly (from 9,653 in June 2024 to 4,134 in March 2025). Backlog contractor jobs have also reduced, even as we continue allocating new tasks to support delivery.

We've also seen a steep rise in repair demand, averaging 3,520 new jobs per month (up from 2,951 last year) and a continued increase in tenant contact. This rising demand has limited the visible impact of backlog reduction, despite record monthly completions (e.g. 3,813 repairs in January).

To strengthen delivery, we've improved data quality, assigned trades to tasks, and validated orders to remove duplication. We're also reviewing our Asset Management Strategy to ensure long-term investment and reduce reactive repairs.

Progress is monitored by senior managers, and we remain committed to reducing wait times and improving tenant satisfaction.

(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?

Response: Councillor Williams

The reflections from staff in the report are concerning and the recent restructuring is designed to address this. We've clarified lines of accountability, created more direct oversight of statutory functions, and put senior leadership roles in place with a clear focus on safety, compliance, and workforce wellbeing. New escalation pathways, clearer expectations, and supervision structures have been introduced to ensure staff feel safe and supported in raising concerns.

We are embedding a sustained cultural shift to ensure psychological safety, active listening, and shared responsibility are the foundation of how we work going forward to ensure the safety of our residents' homes as well as the emotional wellbeing and psychological safety of those who maintain our homes for our residents.

(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?

Response: Councillor Williams

An Acting Head of Fire Safety is already in post to provide leadership during the transition, and planning for the two dedicated fire remediation teams is in progress. These teams will focus on high-rise and mid/low-rise blocks and are a key part of our estate-by-estate delivery model. Roles will be filled in phases, with operational delivery beginning as capacity builds.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

The reasons for short term investment in diesel vehicles relates to the electric supply and charging capacity at the depot and the fact that currently we have the maximum number of electric vehicles that we can accommodate.

In addition, the age profile of the fleet set out in the report demonstrates why we need more vehicles urgently to provide greater resilience. If we continue to procure a smaller number of EVs, we will exceed the charging capacity and prolong retain an unacceptable fleet age profile for longer.

This does not in any way represent a move away from zero emissions vehicles but is an essential short-term measure to update the fleet while additional charging capacity is developed.

(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.

Response: Councillor Williams

The root cause analysis identifies poor data quality and inconsistent data use as a key root cause of non-compliance — not just in repairs, but across all areas of safety and asset management. This meant the council didn't always have reliable information to assess risk, prioritise action, or provide clear oversight.

The Housing service has undertaken significant investment in new Housing ICT infrastructure, including moving toward a one-system approach.

We are taking a fundamental approach: getting the basics right so we can be led by evidence and provide proper assurance. This includes improving data accuracy, standardising how information is recorded and shared, and building dedicated capacity into the compliance structure to lead on data quality and oversight. We are also reviewing how systems interact, to reduce duplication and prevent issues from falling through the cracks.

The consistent performance in electrical compliance is a blueprint for use of data to inform planning and monitor delivery.

This work is ongoing. But accurate, trusted data is recognised as critical to ensuring compliance and, to keeping residents safe.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

Communal food waste bins are an addition to existing communal locations and will be deployed alongside other bins. Some communal bins have been relocated following conversations with residents and businesses since May 2023, and we will continue to keep locations under review.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

Once concluded, the Deed of Variation itself can be made publicly available with confidential information redacted.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

Food waste is already taken to the Hollingdean Waste Transfer Station in the general refuse, which is then sent to the Energy Recovery Facility in Newhaven. The haulage of black bag waste will reduce as food waste is separated out meaning overall changes to haulage activity is expected to be minimal.

Taking the food waste directly to the composting facility would be too time consuming, impacting on collection operations, fuel costs and carbon emissions and will result in the unnecessary need to employ more staff and vehicles.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

I can confirm that no food waste will be held longer than 24 hours. Legality aside, the Hollingdean site is very constrained and there is simply not the space to hold it longer. I have asked Veolia for a response on the storing of waste longer than 72 hours.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

The rollout of the digital system for managing collections does not involve procuring vehicles specifically for that purpose.

Ware is in the process of deploying the new system across all of our vehicles, both new and existing. This system has been operating in our Trade Waste service for some time, which has allowed us to iron out problems and ensure the system is operating as desired ahead of rollout across other parts of the service.

(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.

Response: Councillor Rowkins

Our standard large vehicle are 26 tons. We are procuring medium size 16-ton vehicles for food waste. This is the smallest vehicle available that offers a jet wash cleaner which will be necessary for our communal food waste bins.

In addition, the report also details the proposed procurement of four 12-ton "Mini-Matic" refuse vehicles and one 7.5 ton "Mini-Matic", precisely to ensure the reliability of the service in more constrained areas.

(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.

Response: Councillor Rowkins

Security is kept under constant review and a security specialist is currently undertaking a full assessment of our security arrangements. Given the threats we have faced, we of course will not comment on all the measures in place to ensure security but I can certainly assure you we take that very seriously indeed.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

I do not agree, no. The KC report is included as a link in the Cabinet report, and we invite anybody who hasn't already done so to read it in full.

It was a Labour majority administration that commissioned this report, published it, accepted all of its recommendations (including the removal of member appeal panels) and is now doing the hard yards to tackle the problems that have existed for decades, once and for all.

It was also this Labour majority administration, along with the Chief Executive, who apologised to our staff and to the city for what they have endured.

If the Green Party would like to apologise for their role, I'm sure it would be welcomed in all quarters.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

It isn't a blank cheque as set out in the report. A robust structure of programme and project management is in place and I am regularly briefed on the progress of projects through regular meetings with officers and am therefore confident oversight is in place. I will also be providing updates to members and the public as we progress.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

Firstly, I want to thank a very brave group of staff who have showed tremendous courage by speaking out and continuing to work for Environmental Services in extremely difficult circumstances.

Whilst you would not expect me to comment on an individual case, I can confirm that any staff affected have been provided with personalised security arrangements, both at work and elsewhere, and offered appropriate, tailored support. All of this is updated on a dynamic basis as and when there is a change in the situation.

I'd like to underline how completely unacceptable it is for anybody to be subjected to such threats simply by virtue of going to work each day. We will continue our unrelenting efforts to create a safe, respectful and enjoyable workplace for every member of our staff.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

The Stakeholder group has yet to commence. Discussions have started with both recognised unions Unison and GMB about the arrangements and commitments needed to participate in the Stakeholder Group. These discussions have not yet concluded.

(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?

Response: Councillor Rowkins

The programme has been successful so far in that it has started to address the recommendations of the KC report. It has enabled staff to receive training in equality and diversity, with active steps put in place to ensure a zero tolerance approach to bullying, harassment. Or any other type of abuse. It has provided support to those staff who experienced bullying and harassment.

Most staff are committed to improving the service we provide to residents. They do a good job day in day out, in all weathers, and want the poor reputation of the service to be something of the past. That said, although progress has been very good, it is clear from this report that we still have some way to go to ensure a reliable service for residents and a safe working environment for staff.

205 MATTERS REFERRED TO THE EXECUTIVE

There were none.

206 REPRESENTATIONS FROM OPPOSITION MEMBERS

206.1 Cabinet received a representation from Councillor Pickett on Item 207: Improving the Culture of Environmental Services.

206.2 Cabinet received a representation from Councillor McLeay on Item 209: Housing Safety and Quality Compliance Update.

207 IMPROVING THE CULTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

166.1 Cabinet considered a report that provided an update on the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Aileen McColgan report ('the KC report').

166.2 Councillors Daniel, Taylor, Muten, Robins and Sankey asked questions and contributed to the debate of the report.

166.3 Resolved-

Cabinet:

- 1) Agrees to note this update report, having indicated its support of the further efforts to ensure lasting changes in the culture of Environmental Services so that residents see visible improvements and benefits.
- 2) Approves a Service Recovery Programme investment budget of £0.892m for 2025/26 (£0.532m revenue and £0.360m capital), the funding of which is outlined in the financial implications, enabling the service to continue to drive the change needed.

- 3) Notes the investment of £3.875m required in 2025/26 to purchase replacement Environmental Services vehicles including vehicles for food waste collection.

208 FOOD WASTE AND RECYCLING

166.1 Cabinet considered a report that set out and sought permission for increased opportunities to recycle through increasing the range of dry recycling materials collected and by introducing a separate weekly food waste collection.

166.2 Councillors Alexander, Allen, Muten, Robins, Robinson and Daniel asked questions and contributed to the debate of the report.

166.3 Resolved-

- 1) Cabinet agrees to note the content of the report and agree the phased implementation of food waste collection, with roll out to be completed by March 2026 as set out a paragraph 3.20 of the report.
- 2) Cabinet agrees to collecting additional dry mixed recycling materials.
- 3) Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director, City Operations to: -
 - 1) Determine the phasing and implementation of the food waste collection service and additional dry mixed recycling materials collection services across the City in accordance with the above recommendations; and;
 - 2) Following consultation with the Director Governance & Law, to enter into all legal arrangements necessary to bring recommendations 2.1 and 2.2 into effect including the variation of the Council's disposal contract with Veolia and East Sussex County Council to allow for the increased Council collection services for the duration of that contract (end date 2033).
- 4) Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director, City Operations to procure food waste vehicles and other equipment associated with introducing the new collection services.
- 5) Cabinet approves additional revenue budget of £0.678m to the £1.2m already in the service budget. This is to be funded in full from new burdens funding provided by DEFRA for one year only.

209 HOUSING SAFETY AND QUALITY COMPLIANCE UPDATE

166.1 Cabinet considered a report that provides a six-month update on the council's housing safety and quality compliance progress following the Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) regulatory judgement of August 2024.

166.2 Councillors Allen, Taylor, Sankey, Robinson, Muten, Williams, Alexander and Robins contributed to the debate of the report.

166.3 Resolved-

- 1) That Cabinet note and comment on the progress made in addressing the issues identified by the Regulator of Social Housing.
- 2) That Cabinet note and comment on the findings of the root cause analysis.
- 3) That Cabinet note and comment on the next phase of co-producing a service-wide improvement plan.

210 PART TWO MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 210.1 **Resolved-** That the Part Two minutes of the previous meeting be approved as the correct record.

211 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

- 211.1 **Resolved-** That the confidential items listed on the agenda remain exempt from disclosure to the press and public.

The meeting concluded at 3.32pm