



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

BUDGET COUNCIL ADDENDUM 3 Minutes Extracts

4.30PM, THURSDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2026

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

ADDENDUM

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Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 91

Subject: General Fund Revenue Budget, Capital & Treasury Management Strategy 2026-27- Extract from Scrutiny

Date of meeting: 26 February 2026

Report of: Director of Governance and Law

Contact Officer: Name: Anthony Soyinka
Email: anthony.soyinka@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Action Required of Council:

- 1.1 That Council notes the minutes extract of the People and Place Overview Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 19 February 2026

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

4.30pm 19 FEBRUARY 2026

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL, NORTON ROAD, HOVE, BN3 3BQ - HTH/CC

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Cattell, Lyons, Mackey, Parrott, Sheard, Shanks, Winder, Asaduzzaman and Hill

Other Members present: Sara Fulford (Older People's Council), Joanna Martindale (Community Works Rep), Fiona England (PaCC), and Dr Anusree Biswas Sasidharan (Community Works).

PART ONE

41 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

41.1 Giles Rossington, Scrutiny Manager, welcomed everyone to the meeting and said:

“Neither the Chair nor the Deputy Chair of People Overview & Scrutiny Committee are in attendance today. Committee Procedure Rules state that “In the absence of the Chair or Deputy Chair at a meeting of a Committee or Sub-Committee, those voting Members present shall elect a person from amongst their number to preside over the meeting”. (Committee Procedure Rule 3.3)

I therefore need to ask if any member wishes to nominate themselves as Chair for this meeting only.”

Cllr Sheard nominated themselves to be Chair for the meeting.

Following a vote of voting members Cllr Sheard was elected as Chair for the meeting.

41.2 Cllr Assaduzzaman for Cllr Gauge, Cllr Hill for Cllr Mcleay. Apologies from Adam Muirhead (Community Works Rep), and Jasmine (Youth Council Rep)

42 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

42.1 There was no public involvement.

43 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

43.1 There was no member involvement.

44 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATION

Today we are here at this special meeting to scrutinise the 2026/27 budget ahead of the budget going to full Council on 26th February.

We are joined by Cllr Jacob Taylor, Deputy Leader of the Council and cabinet member for Finance & City Regeneration, and John Hooton, Interim Director of Property and Finance, who will be talking to us about the budget and then taking questions from members. We are also joined by Cabinet members and officers who are on hand to help with any questions specific to their service areas. They will not be presenting to us as they did at the previous budget scrutiny meeting. However, following the recommendation of the previous budget meeting, I have asked that there be a short presentation specifically on the public health budget to help inform members' discussion. Public health will also be considered as an item for a future scheduled committee meeting, so we can examine how this spend is being realised throughout the council operation.

In relation to amendments from the committee, can I ask that if you have any amendments if you can propose them as we discuss that item in questioning. This is so we know to which item you are referring to when noting it down, and we can have the item fresh in our minds as we discuss it. We will then read out each of these at the end of the meeting and vote on them as normal.

Also, to make sure that we get through all the cabinet members in a reasonable time, I will be asking for questioning of each cabinet member to not last more than roughly half an hour. I have tried to put those cabinet members who we wouldn't need to spend as much time on up first so we can spend more time focusing on those with larger briefs, but please bear in mind to not take up too much time from other members of the committee.

I will look to hold a ten-minute break at an appropriate point roughly halfway through the meeting.

45 SCRUTINY OF BUDGET 2627: GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET & HRA PROGRAMME.

45.1 Cllr Taylor introduced the budget and explained the process until now. He said that there were pressures on the budget from homelessness, temporary accommodation, adult social care, and children's services, being clear that it was not the fault of the users of these services. Cllr Taylor said that the final financial settlement from the government had come after the publication of the budget papers to Cabinet but that the gap was still around the same. Cllr Taylor explained about the additional support that had been asked for from government, which was largely for temporary and emergency accommodation. He explained the difference in the general fund for this was £8m but that demand was forecast to be £20m. Cllr Taylor said that they had to fix the underlying issue as it was not right for £20m of taxpayers' money to be going straight to private landlords. He said that the approach they were taking was to invest in temporary accommodation and reduce the number of people needing it. Cllr Taylor said that they had requested £15m from the government but put it in perspective by saying that Warrington had requested over £300m. He spoke about the in year overspend that was £4.8m in month nine and that there was a plan to get it down.

Public Health

45.2 Cllr Mitchie Alexander gave a presentation on public health setting out the functions of public health funding, both prescribed and non-prescribed. She went on to set out the 25/26 funding and said that the Department of Health & Social Care had to confirm that what public health funds were spent on was appropriate.

45.3 Cllr Shanks asked questions about domestic violence reviews and why they were in public health, and if an impact assessment had been done on schools counselling. Dr Nicola Lang, Director of Public Health, said that the review previously only took into account domestic homicides but now included suicides, and that it was usual for this to be funded through public health. Deb Austin, Corporate Director for Families, Children & Wellbeing, said that they were pulling together metrics on outcomes from the school counselling. She said that it stopped children having to go on waiting lists as the service was available in their school, and that it was used to intervene early and stop children requiring specialist intervention later. She said that the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapists were also reviewing the service. Cllr Alexander said that money not spent by the Families, Children & Wellbeing service helped the rest of the budget.

45.4 Cllr Hill asked about the 4.6 FTE posts that were being deleted and what they were. Deb Austin said that they were a very expensive consultant role, a vacant post due to retirement in the healthy lifestyle team and two vacant apprenticeship posts. Dr Nicola Lang said that these were posts that had become vacant and were no longer required due to rationalisation rather than kept vacant due to spending controls.

45.5 Cllr Assaduzzaman asked if the council was looking at different ways of using its ring-fenced Public Health budget and how have the changes been informed by a commitment to reduce health inequalities. Dr Nicola Lang said that work around drugs, alcohol, sex, and other children's work to do with health should be a strand of what they all do.

45.6 Cllr Lyons asked about the high suicide rates and how these would be affected by the changes. Dr Nicola Lang said that the Domestic Abuse Reviews would inform learning and that schools having counselling services will help catch children before they got into crisis.

45.7 Cllr Sam Parrott spoke about VAWG, death by suicide, and stresses on the system for this. She also spoke about the success of schools' mental health counselling services that she has been involved in and said that she would like to see more of it. Dr Nicola Lang said that VAWG was a particular interest of hers and that she was looking to work with CVS on this.

45.8 Cllr Mackey asked about the underspend on deleted posts and the influence of this. Deb Austin said that the of the deleted posts one was management and gave a big saving. The others were around sport and activity and not working with the most vulnerable in the city. Cllr Taylor said that vacancies have been held for some time but that this was not the way you want to run a council because it does impact teams and staff. He explained that there was a process for approving new posts that were vital. Cllr Alexander said that although the 4.6 FTE posts were being deleted the Public Health team were large.

45.9 Cllr Winder asked what the what the consultant was doing. Dr Nicola Lang said that they were carrying out analytics of drug use.

45.10 Cllr Hill asked how large the public health team was. Dr Nicola Lang said that she would need to come back to the committee with the full details.

Customer Services and Innovation

45.11 Cllr Jacob Allen spoke about the work within his portfolio including investing to save and ensuring that staff have the technology to help them. He spoke about AI pilots, some of which were specific to customer services, following councils like Derby and Peterborough.

45.12 Cllr Shanks asked about the committee's previous recommendations on consultations with the unions and CVS as well as the lobbying of government done by the council. Cllr Taylor said that consultation with the two unions had taken place before the draft budget in December and before this budget was published. He said he had had two meetings with them. He said that consultations around the staff posts affected by the budget were happening now and after the budget. Regarding the CVS he said that it was the same and that he had met a large group via community works and that they are now getting feedback. Cllr Taylor said that they were doing lots of lobbying of government on various issues including housing benefit and overall funding.

45.13 Cllr Parrott asked about adjustments to customer services to help people who will struggle to use technology and wanted resident facing services. She also asked about VAWG and economic abuse. Cllr Allen said that debt enforcement was not using AI, and that the corporate debt policy was updated in March 2025. He said that he would check if economic abuse was factored into this and if it was not then he would look and how it could be. Cllr Allen said that no avenue of contact was being closed and that they did provide reasonable adjustments.

45.14 Sara Fulford requested reassurance about customer facing services as one in three older people did not have access to IT. Cllr Allen said that there had been no loss of service and that there was nothing in the budget to change that. He said that last month the council answered 90,000 phone calls. Cllr Taylor said that they were aware of digital exclusion and want to maintain services. He said that he had recently found out that there was free IT skills training available at Jubilee Library.

45.15 Cllr Cattell asked about spending controls and the unintended consequences of these. She mentioned hearing of social workers being unable to pay for things while on day trips out with children. Cllr Taylor said that recruitment and spending controls were not the best way to work. Deb Austin said that funding had not been removed from the service mentioned but had been reduced.

45.16 Cllr Lyons said that the feedback on customer services that he had received from residents was not as good as Cllr Allen said. He said that the council website had not been updated since 2022. Cllr Allen said that the statistics for customer service were all in the refresh to the Council Plan that recently went to Cabinet.

45.17 Cllr Cattell spoke about homelessness and if it could be brought down in the next year so that the same issue was not being discussed in a year's time at the next budget. Cllr Taylor said that he hoped to bring down the cost from the £20m to £8m or ideally £0. He was confident that they could get the numbers down and said that they had to fix the issue.

Adult social care

45.18 Fiona England spoke about PACC's position statement on the budget and in particular Wellington House. She wanted to see equivalent and engaging day services provided. Fiona questioned the consultation on the closure of Wellington House. Cllr Alexander said that the consultation was not a tick box exercise and that the closure would only go ahead if they were happy with service provision going forward. Genette Laws, Corporate Director Homes and Adult social Care, said that the consultation would be meaningful and would involve public engagement. She said that those using Wellington House would get like for like services. Genette said that the saving was a net saving. She said that Wellington House provided services to those with the most need but that the council have people with a wide range of needs.

45.19 Cllr Hill spoke about a recommendation to pause the closure until a consultation was carried out. Cllr Taylor responded that this was what was happening and that Wellington House would not close until a consultation was carried out.

45.20 Sara Fulford spoke about the adult social care CQC report and said that there was a real concern about preventative services going. She asked that the EIA on adult social care savings be reviewed because it said that no impact on older people or the economically disadvantaged. Genette Laws said that the adult social care improvement plan focused on delays to assessment but that the report did say that once people received the service, they got a good service. She added that the consultation on Wellington House would also include the family of service users. Cllr Taylor said that there was not a proposal to stop services but to provide that in a different setting. Sara came back on these point and John Hooten said that looking at the savings and income that they were investing in adult social care with spending rising from about £152m to about £162m.

45.21 Cllr Sam Parrott said that she was concerned about the impact on other services, and the impact on staff. She also noted the importance of the consultation. Genette Laws said that they were looking after staff as they understood it was very difficult for them.

45.22 Cllr Shanks spoke about the decline of inhouse services, saying that the voluntary sector could not take them on. Cllr Taylor responded that the administration had not moved any services into the private sector, but that some services, such as the beach lifeguard service, were taken on by the voluntary sector. He said that most public services should be provided by the public but that they had to be realistic. He added that in some cases the voluntary sector could provide services better than the council and that some people feel more comfortable using services provided by the voluntary sector rather than the council. Genette Laws added that they were insourcing services in homes and adult social care.

45.23 Jo Martindale thanked Cllr Taylor for his comments on the voluntary sector. She said that the consultation on Wellington House was a chance for the council to build trust and was very important. She said that the next step would be co-production which was also really important. She urged the council to communicate well, be open, and transparent. Cllr Taylor said that it was helpful feedback and reiterated that it was a genuine consultation.

45.24 Cllr Ivan Lyons said that the closure of Wellington House would be devastating for a family he had spoken to about this and asked how they would get the services they needed. He also asked where the savings would come from if service users would get a like for like

service provided by someone else. Genette Laws asked him to share the details of anyone with concerns with her. She explained that there were another six providers in the community and that some families could take direct payments. She said that there were 21 people attending over the week with a day cost of £210, which was more expensive than other services charging £60.

45.25 Fiona England spoke about the 21 service users and highlighted that there were 17 young people leaving education who may require these services. She spoke about the need to reflect on the comms for the consultation and spoke on overdue assessments. Genette Laws said that she heard the concerns clearly from those attending now and those who would do in the future. She said that market engagement would be very important as they wanted to plan together.

45.26 Dr Anusree Biswas Sasidharan spoke of the value of prevention in adult social care and asked if they had additional resources what would they spend it on. Cllr Taylor said that between the costs and demands of the underlying issues from austerity and the housing market. He said that he would invest in housing as it affects so much of people's lives. Genette Laws said that she would do more prevention work.

45.27 Cllr Hill asked about the highly skilled staff at Wellington House and de-escalation skills as well as about any plans for the site should it close. Genette Laws said that the staff were highly skilled and the independent sector also highly skilled and trained. She said that should Wellington House close then they would look at the future use of the site. Cllr Taylor added that his first thoughts for the site would be temporary or emergency accommodation or services that the council provides.

45.28 The chair asked about any contingency plans should the outcome of the consultation be not to close Wellington House. Cllr Taylor said that there was no contingency plan and this is not something they would normally have for a budget saving. If Wellington House did not close, he said that the saving would become an in-year pressure which would have to be found.

Children's, Families and Youth Services

45.29 Cllr Shanks asked about the Roundabout Nursery and Youth Arts Fund. Cllr Emma Daniel said that the Youth Futures funding was compliant. She said that Roundabout Nursery is in the most deprived area and that they wanted to protect it for the long term. She said that they were looking to outsource it but that the contract would ensure the same offer provided, and that there would be a consultation. Cllr Daniel said that there had been no complaints about youth arts funding until the budget.

45.30 Cllr Cattell spoke about the number of new approvals for foster parents and gave a shout out to the council's dedicated social workers.

45.31 Jo Martindale was impressed with the staff retention and said that it was great that the council had been nominated as a youth partner.

45.32 Fiona England spoke about the short break offer for families represented by PACC and the need to look at the national picture. Cllr Daniel noted her comments and spoke of the difficulties faced when setting budgets due to a decade of austerity.

45.33 Cllr Assaduzzaman spoke about high-cost placements. Cllr Daniel said that family hubs would reduce escalation, that they were getting more foster carers but that the quality of placements for teens was concerning.

45.34 Cllr Mackey said that she was appreciative of the work on prevention and asked for assurances that SEND would not be disadvantaged by the budget. Cllr Daniel said that they were in as good a place as they could be.

45.35 Following the end of questions for cabinet members a recommendation was proposed by Cllr Hill to pause the closure of Wellington House until a consultation is carried out. This was voted down by the committee.

45.36 RESOLVED

That People Overview & Scrutiny Committee notes the Budget & Capital Investment HRA Programme 2026-27 and Medium Term Financial Strategy (and its appendices), and the General Fund Revenue Budget, Capital and Treasury Management Strategy (and its appendices)

The meeting concluded at 7.10pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

2.00pm 19 FEBRUARY 2026

HOVE TOWN HALL - COUNCIL CHAMBER

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Evans (Chair) Cattell, De Oliveira, Goddard, Mackey, Meadows, Sykes, Winder, Earthey and Sheard

Other Members present: Mark Strong (CVS), Bernadette Kent (OPC), Jasmine Oquosa-Withers (YC)

PART ONE

60 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

60. Procedural Business

60a Declarations of substitutions

60.1 Cllr Earthey attended as a substitute for Cllr Fishleigh

60.2 Cllr Sheard attended as a substitute for Cllr Fowler

60b Declarations of interest

60.3 Cllr Sykes declared that he is on the Board of the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership

60c Exclusion of the press and public

60.4 The press and public were not excluded

61 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

60.1 The Chair gave the following communication:

Today we are holding the second special Place Overview & Scrutiny meeting to look at the budget. The minutes of this meeting and any specific comments made by committee members will be shared with Cabinet.

At the last special budget meeting, we looked at the draft plans. Today, we will be looking at the final budget plans being proposed to Full Council on the 26th February for approval. We have already scrutinised much of the budget so today we will be focussing on changes made

to the budget since our last meeting. This includes the Housing Revenue Account which had not been part of the papers last time.

We are joined by Cllr Jacob Taylor, Deputy Leader of the Council and cabinet member for Finance & City Regeneration, and John Hooton, Interim Director of Property and Finance, who is only able to join us online today. They will be talking to us about the budget and then taking questions from members. We are also joined by Cabinet members and officers who are on hand to help with any questions, and I'd like to welcome them all to the meeting.

We will start with Cllr Taylor who will give a brief overview of the changes made to the budget since our last meeting. Following that, I'd like to open up for questions on the HRA first as our colleagues from Housing need to leave early. Then I will open up to questions on everything else.

Although we only have one item on the agenda, this is an important subject for scrutiny, so I imagine there will be a lot of questions to get through. Can I therefore please request that both those asking and answering questions are as brief and to the point as possible.

62 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

62.1 There were no public questions.

63 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

63.1 There were no member questions.

64 SCRUTINY OF BUDGET 26/27: GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET, MTFs, HRA PROGRAMME AND CAPITAL & TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

64.1 Cllr Taylor gave a summary of the current budget position; back in December they reported a budget gap of £25 million and a set of proposals for just over £12 million of savings, and noted that they would come back with a final budget once they had received the settlement from central government and understood the true financing picture. They noted the Fair Funding Review that did not benefit Brighton & Hove that much but the settlement from the government ended up being slightly higher than they were previously led to believe. They have now produced a further set of proposals which is what is being scrutinised at today's committee and is going to Budget Council next week for approval. Cllr Taylor talked about the application for additional funding from the government through a programme called Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) and they have asked for £15 million specifically to deal with the pressures from temporary accommodation and emergency accommodation. The costs for this have increased sharply; in the current budget they are working with £8 million which is forecast to go to £20 million next year due to more families needing support and a rise in general costs. It is a targeted request for support to fix the underlying issue, which is a huge problem for the city especially the families who are impacted; people need to live in settled accommodation, and we need more public and Council housing. The Council can't keep throwing money at private landlords who are the ones benefitting from people living in temporary accommodation. The Council is rapidly buying as many properties as possible to bring it back in-house, which is cheaper. The application for EFS is to help facilitate this plan, bridge the gap and fix the underlying issue. Cllr Taylor briefly

summarised the in-year position as forecasting a £4.8 million overspend which is significantly down from month 8 that predicted a £9 million overspend. In the medium term, there is a forecasted gap of £25 million which is what this budget seeks to address. They are currently working on a plan to become financially sustainable, part of this is to invest in digital means in order to be more efficient.

64.2 Cllr Sykes asked a question about the rent collection rate which is down and what plans there are to help with this. Cllr Williams said that a significant number of residents are in the process of moving to the new Universal Credit system which is making rent late. They don't want to penalise anyone for this and know that the money is coming. Martin Reid said the transfer to the Universal Credit system has caused rent to go into arrears in some cases and the housing income team has a recovery plan to deal with this. Part of this plan is to set up direct payments of Universal Credit, introduce automation to make processes more efficient, enhance early intervention and strengthen links with Money Advice.

64.3 Cllrs Cattell, Goddard, Sykes, Earthey and Meadows asked questions about the EFS. John Hooton said that they have not had confirmation on the extra funding yet and hope to hear very soon. Cllr Taylor was fairly confident that they would be successful in getting this funding but if they weren't, then they would look to amend the budget. Cllr Taylor said the plan for the £15 million if received, would be to accelerate the rapid acquisition of properties. Building new properties is not a quick process but it is the right time to buy back properties quickly as some landlords are exiting the market due to the Renters Rights Reforms and the Council can benefit by using them as temporary accommodation. Genette Laws explained that their ambition is to transform homelessness through early prevention, offering effective and good quality temporary accommodation and create more secure tenancies. Cllr Sykes put forward a recommendation that they reduce the amount of EFS they are asking for to the amount required to balance the budget for next year. This would avoid the Council ending up borrowing large amounts just to recharge the reserves, that £15 million at 6% is high and questioned whether the Council actually wants to do that. Cllr Taylor said this is the right thing to do to protect services and build up a level of resilience to make investments in other areas. John Hooton said the reserves are at a critically low level and below the recommended amount for a Council this size, there are significant budget pressures in social care and the LGA and external auditor have raised concerns about this; he would not recommend this suggestion.

64.4 Cllr Earthey said he had concerns that the amounts being borrowed would end up increasing each year as he didn't fully understand the financial cost of the EFS. Cllr Taylor said that the money comes at a cost but as long as it sits as cash, it will then be part of the treasury management function and they will get a yield on it. The recommendation for reserves is £9 million but John Hooton has revisited this and put it closer to £18 million. This is a one-off application for EFS and they do not intend to apply again next year. A big chunk of the borrowing is for the HRA to put into new stock and repairs; this will be paid back via rent. When comparing with other local authorities of a similar size, Brighton & Hove are below average when looking at overall debt. Most of this comes from investing in things like Madeira Terrace, a new swimming pool etc, which all come at a cost. They could deprioritise projects to reduce the costs, but they feel they have got the balance right.

- 64.5 Mark Strong (CVS) and Cllrs De Oliveira, Meadows, and Earthey asked questions about the proposed cut to child pedestrian training. The cost is £165k, which is high but there have been 150 children seriously injured on the roads and around 100 with minor injuries in the last 5 years. He said that effectively it is outsourcing the costs to the NHS and to the families of those children who were injured. The Council isn't measured on child pedestrian training in the same way that they are for bikeability training so it looks like they're cutting the pedestrian training due to that. Once it has been cut, it will be difficult to start it again and this valuable service will be lost. He suggested looking at the transport income fund to see if the money could be saved. Cllr Muten said that they have invested in a lot of initiatives other councils have cut such as the School Streets programme and crossing patrols and that pedestrian safety is valued. They will be communicating with schools about including information on pedestrian safety in assemblies and PSHE programmes. They are committed to the Safer School Streets Programme and will target schools in more deprived areas. They encourage young people to cycle safely but are aware that some families don't have access to bikes and the training encourages them to learn the skills and confidence to do so in the future. Councillors had received a letter from 2 schools on this subject asking them to reinstate this. Cllr Muten said that many parents do teach their children these skills but they need to provide something for those that don't.
- 64.6 Cllrs Meadows, Earthey and Sykes and Mark Strong asked questions about parking charges. Cllr Taylor said that the income from parking charges is presented as savings in the paper. Some parking charges have been frozen, there is a 3% increase on resident parking permits, in some areas visitor parking permits remain the same except for the city centre where it makes sense to increase them, and there has been an expansion of some parking zones. Cllr Muten said that parking charges are more flexible with more options of how long people want to stay. Efficiencies with staffing have been achieved through digitalisation of the service and some long standing vacancies can be lost. Carers' permits and those for doctors' etc have been frozen. Cllr Muten said that the charges have been based on modelling every single scenario which is very complex. If charges are put too high then it puts people off parking there and they need to balance the needs of the city.
- 64.7 Cllr Cattell asked about staffing and whether the ambitious programme of repairing the roads is still possible. Cllr Muten said they have grant funding from the government to fix the roads. Ali McManamon said they were increasing the number of apprenticeships in City Operations as there are some areas it is hard to recruit to. They have internal staff taking some of these on to learn new skills.
- 64.8 Cllrs Evans, De Oliveira, Sykes, Goddard and Mark Strong asked questions about the proposed cuts to the Community Composting programme. There are 1400 households and 150 volunteers affected by a cut of £35k. Councillors had received a letter from the Food Partnership and Cllr Sykes asked whether it really is a cut once the cost of displaced food waste and extra transport have been factored in, it could end up costing the Council. The Community Composting programme can help with the transition and they should be looking at how this works together with citywide composting. He has put forward a recommendation to remove this cut. Cllr Taylor said they have been in correspondence with the Community Composting group and are exploring options, there might be a way to find the funding. Cllr Taylor agreed that the third sector can lever in

more funding via match funding etc and the Brighton CVS is very strong; they will look at mitigations for this proposal.

- 64.9 Jasmine Oquosa-Withers from the Youth Council asked about charges for public toilets, where the £70k saving comes from, what the cost will be for buying and implementing the new charging stations and how long it will take to break even. She asked what evidence there was that people would take up alternative toilet schemes and how the flat rate can be justified for everyone when it will affect the more vulnerable people in society. Bernadette Kent from the Older Peoples' Council said they had been active in the campaign to reopen public toilets, and these charges will prevent older residents from using the city centre. Cllr Meadows said that reducing access to toilets could affect how confident people feel venturing out and that it's putting obstacles in peoples' way, such as the homeless who need free access to wash and may end up having to urinate in the streets. Cllr Taylor agreed that public toilets are really important and that the charges are limited to those with a very high volume of tourists using them and the small charge will help with the running costs. The EIA sets out the considerations and that they may remain free to some people. Ali McManamon said the £70k figure came from the analysis of high footfall areas which are generally where most tourists visit. There is no final decision yet and it won't be a flat rate for everyone. Cllr Taylor said the city has a high day visitor tourist economy which incurs lots of costs such as cleaning the beaches and there is no tourist tax levy in place. There are some groups who are keen to help such as those who run the Park Run and the suggestion of using toilets in cafes. They will look at this again.
- 64.10 Cllr Goddard said that the economic development function has been put into the Cabinet Office and has been under-resourced for too long; he wanted to know how it will flourish and whether it is being invested in. Cllr Taylor said that Visit Brighton has been brought into the Cabinet Office and a restructure is currently taking place. Economic development sits in Cllr Taylor's portfolio and that the activities that were set out in the economic plan remain important, including via the economic growth board but he would have also liked to see more investment and resources in this area.
- 64.11 Cllr Goddard asked a question about murals; that the city is falling behind others in using murals as anti-graffiti devices, to celebrate the city and potentially to generate income. It has been 3 years since the last mural strategy and Brighton & Hove Football Club have been wanting to put murals around the city for a year but has had no contact with Council officers. Cllr Miller said it has been a complicated process with the respective teams having gone through restructures but there has been progress on the mural for the Albion. There is a lack of Council-owned spaces in areas that they would like to put a mural so they are looking at ones under private ownership. Cllr Goddard said the Albion were willing to sponsor 10 murals to celebrate their 125 years in the city. This should be easily facilitated by one Council officer.
- 64.12 Mark Strong asked a question about waste collection charges for charities and that they get 100% rate relief but not waste relief and it shouldn't be a blanket charge. He also asked about Christmas tree collection proposals and that 2 providers already exist for this which is a valuable income stream for those charities; they are essentially setting themselves up as competition. Ali McManamon said they are not looking at a blanket approach for charging charities and will consider the size of the charity and number of

employees etc. They are looking into Christmas tree collection and possibly incorporating it into the garden waste service.

64.13 Cllr Meadows asked about the additional savings and whether they are looking into other ideas to make up the shortfall while waiting for confirmation from the government. Cllr Taylor said the budget gap in December was £25 million and the government settlement was what was assumed, however, there had been a small increase in overall funding. The additional savings is flagged in the paper.

64.14 Cllr Sykes asked about investment in AI and concerns at a national level around moving away from US technology companies, performance, cost, impact on the environment and safety. He asked whether the investment is fit for purpose or could be used elsewhere to alleviate pressures. Cllr Allen said that this is how staff are equipped to do more with less resources and help with budget pressures. They have done an AI pilot supporting staff in housing and adult social care, and there are other areas to explore with more time and investment such as predictive analytics for homelessness. There is particular investment being put into cyber security. Cllr Sheard asked whether it would make more sense to undergo organisational changes once the new Council is in existence following Local Government Reorganisation. Cllr Allen said Brighton & Hove will be a continuing authority and teams will undergo restructures to be more adaptable.

64.15 Cllr Sykes introduced the 3 recommendations from the Green Party:

1. Remove the £35k cut to Community Composting as this is unlikely to provide a real world saving once transport and treatment of displaced food waste is taken into account.
2. Reduce the quantum of borrowing under EFS Exceptional Financial Support from £15m (at an assumed 6% over 20 years) to only that required to balance the 2026-27 budget.
3. Consider whether the extent of investment in AI (under transformation budget /Digital and AI, and items such as individual Copilot licences) is appropriate and safe given multiple concerns, and consider whether a proportion of these recurrent and transformation funds could be better invested elsewhere.

64.16 John Hooton said that the reserves level is well below the recommended level and the application for EFS enables funding to go into budget pressures; he would not support recommendation 2. Cllr Evans explained that if any recommendation is approved, it is not binding but it will be formally shared with Cabinet for their consideration. Cllr De Oliveira seconded the recommendations. Members approved recommendation 1 and rejected the others.

64.17 **RESOLVED** – (i) That Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommends that the £35k cut to Community Composting is removed as it is unlikely to provide a real world saving once transport and treatment of displaced food waste is taken into account.

(ii) That Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the report.

The meeting concluded at 4.16pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

