

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
POLICY & RESOURCES (RECOVERY) SUB-COMMITTEE

4.00pm 6 JANUARY 2021

HOVE TOWN HALL - COUNCIL CHAMBER

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Mac Cafferty (Chair) Miller, Platts, Yates and Clare

Other Members present: Councillors

PART ONE

27 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

(a) Declarations of Substitutes

27.1 Councillor Clare declared that they were attending the meeting as a substitute for Councillor Gibson.

(b) Declarations of Interests

27.2 There were no declarations of interests in matters appearing on the agenda.

(c) Exclusion of the Press and Public

27.3 There were no Part Two Items.

28 MINUTES

28.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

29 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

29.1 The Chair provided the following communication:

First and foremost I want to wish everyone in the city a happy new year. While the festive period was very different for all of us, I hope you did find time to step back momentarily and spend time through technology with loved ones.

We are now in the third day of a new nationwide lockdown. The new Covid-19 strain is a cause for really serious concern we are worried that it will exacerbate the problems in the government response that many have already highlighted. Scientists advise it is up to 70% more transmissible. As of 29th December, our city's Covid-19 rate was more than

700% higher compared to when the November lockdown ended. This sharp increase in cases is continuing.

We have moved quickly to understand the impact of this new strain. As a Council we will continue to support residents, especially those who are more vulnerable, businesses and in education, as we have done since the start. We have taken some urgent immediate steps since lockdown was announced Monday evening and I want to provide a quick update on the following:

- Unfortunately our leisure centres and the museums are closed and we are in the process of closing our outdoor sports courts and skate parks as per government guidance

- In our public spaces, we are refreshing our signage on social distancing to re-emphasise this message. We will put new banners in places where weather conditions allow them to remain. We will stencil the lower promenade. Given some concerns about crowds at the seafront, I also want to remind residents of the many wonderful open spaces and parks across our city available for exercise near people's homes.

- As already approved by P&R committee, marshals are already in place and we plan now to also have four marshals patrolling the seafront and this can be increased if needed. Their role is supporting the police and providing advice on adhering to guidance. It is the police, not marshals, who are responsible for enforcement.

We remain in constant liaison with public health, officials and partners across our city including blue light services, our NHS and school leaders. Following the data on the sharp increase in cases across all ages - including among school-age children – councillors and those watching at home will be aware that local schools were advised to move to remote learning but are still open for vulnerable children and children of key workers only on Monday 4th.

The government u-turn on school closures has only reaffirmed our conviction that this was the right thing to do to help prevent transmission. We are now working to continue to support our schools and families in the city, as we remain concerned about government support- on free school meals, and provision of devices and wifi access. Anyone in need of urgent support is encouraged to contact the council's community hub online or phone 01273 293 117 which has various different options.

Despite the challenging times that we find ourselves in, reports on today's agenda show how we continue to ensure that we are preparing the city for recovery – whether it's through ensuring that we are deliver grants to businesses as quickly as we can, or supporting our brilliant arts and culture sector to recover

There is no denying the challenges facing our local businesses are immense. The government has now created a web of 7 different grant streams. We have moved to try to simplify this as best as we can: businesses here only need to use one form on our website to apply. City council teams are working hard to distribute funding and will get to grips with the latest announcement when guidance is provided. We have paid out £4.1m to over 3600 businesses to date and are continuing to respond to the various changes that are being made to the grants programme as we have moved from November

lockdown to Tier 2 to Tier 4 to current national lockdown.

We continue to work in partnership with the NHS to support the roll out of the vaccination programme. However, there is no one action that will be delivered across our population in time to fully put a stop to the scale of the crisis we face in the here and now.

We must think of the most vulnerable, stay at home, and only leave home for the reasons allowed.

These coming weeks will be the hardest we have faced yet, as we fight the more contagious B117 strain of the virus that is spreading fast, and I know we all are determined to support our communities as we have done throughout. It's also vital we support our council staff who may be affected by the virus. I know that it will be hard for all of us, both in our working and our personal lives. Thank you and stay safe.

30 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

30.1 The Chair noted that there were no public items for the current meeting.

31 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

31.1 The Chair noted that there were no items raised by Members for the this meeting.

32 BRIGHTON AND HOVE: RECOVERY PLAN FOR CULTURE

32.1 The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture which provided an update on plans for recovery in the culture and creative sectors where the pandemic has had greatest impact. The Executive Director was accompanied by the Assistant Director Culture Tourism & Sport.

32.2 Councillor Platts referred to the Creative Worker Income Guarantee and asked for more information on how that was going as she was aware that many businesses relied on seasonal workers and asked how people could contribute. The Assistant Director Culture Tourism & Sport said that many people within the culture and creative sectors worked for themselves and they were being affected by the current pandemic, and they felt that their value to the economy was not being recognised. The conversations with them have primarily been to look at this as a research initiative as it will be a complex project and potentially quite expensive. The Council were looking at working with academic partners to make a joint application for research funding. This would be a long-term initiative, and it was important to meet with the research partners quite quickly with a view to making a bid in the next year.

32.3 Councillor Clare asked if it was anticipated that additional funding would be needed and was advised that the Council were hoping to attract funding for the plan and organisations across the City had been successful in doing that. The Cultural Recovery Fund opened today, and the Council would be holding a supporting training course for organisations, and additional funding sources were likely to be announced by the

Government which the Authority would bid for. The Council would like to support the recovery plan but that would be budget based.

32.3 Councillor Miller referred to the five thematic strands and suggested that it would be useful to have to more tangible recommendations with them. With regard to the Creative Worker Income Guarantee, he suggested it might be a distraction and the focus should be on tangible recommendations which would boost the cultural economy in the City. The Assistant Director Culture Tourism & Sport said that the pandemic had highlighted that small businesses or those who work for themselves had been the worst hit and so now was the time to look at the societal impact and benefit on them, and so it was right that this was part of the plan and the research programme.

32.4 Councillor Yates noted that the budget would be agreed in February 2021, but information on Government funding until after that, and so it would not be known how much money would be available when the budget was set. The Assistant Director Culture Tourism & Sport said the Government had provided a lot of money for businesses and it was expected that this would continue, and the Council wanted to be ready to bid for any future funding.

32.5 The Chair said that due to the lockdowns everything was taking longer than usual, but that did give the Council more time to be fully prepared to apply for any funding. He had discussed the funding with the other seven local leaders, at the Greater Brighton Economic Board and through the LEP.

32.6 RESOLVED: That the Sub-Committee –

- (i) Noted that the culture and creative sectors had been badly affected by the Pandemic for over nine months now, and normal activity levels were not expected to return until the second half of 2021;
- (ii) Noted the key aspects of the Recovery Plan for Culture as laid out in sections 3.4 and 3.5 of the report, which placed the regeneration of livelihoods for thousands of creative workers at centre of a series of projects over 2021 and 2022.

33 COVID-19 RECOVERY & RENEWAL UPDATE

33.1 The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture which provided an update on the progress of the Covid-19 Recovery & Renewal Programme.

33.2 The Committee were advised that since the report had been published there had been a number of updates. Under the Business Support Grants, there had now been over 3600 applications and £4.1m of grants paid to businesses. Under the 'Local Restrictions Grant Closed', from the 26 December this would now be the main on-going grant payment through national lockdown, for every four weeks we would be paying between £1,334 and £3,00 to eligible businesses. For the 'Local Restrictions Grants Open' this was now only applicable to the 24-day period between 2 December to 25 December and the Council were ensuring that those grants were awarded in the appropriate way. For the

'Additional Restrictions Grant', the Government announced yesterday that a further £594m nationally would be provided, and the Council were awaiting guidance on how we would receive. For the 'Christmas Support Payments', 185 applications had been received which were currently being processed. The Government had recently announced an further one-off grant scheme which would pay an additional amount of between £4k to £9k to businesses.

- 33.3 Councillor Yates asked how businesses could check on the progress of their application. The Head of Revenues & Benefits said that there weren't the resources to provide a tracking system, but applicants would receive notification that their application had been received. Up to 19 December 2020 the applications were up to date, but there had been a high number of new applications over the Christmas period and they were being processed as quickly as possible. There was a generic email address economic.development@brighton-hove.gov.uk, which was on the application form and could be used. Officers were concentrating on processing the forms and getting the payments out, however if there were urgent issues Councillors could contact the Head of Revenues & Benefits directly.
- 33.4 Councillor Yates referred to post-Brexit recovery and asked whether there would be a replacement for the European Structural Fund as the Government had announced in November 2020 that there would be a UK Shared Prosperity Fund but that would not be rolled out until 2022. He asked if the LEP, or an alternative, would be able to bridge the gap. The Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture said that the Government hadn't yet announced details as to when the Shared Prosperity Fund may become available, but the Council were working with the LEP about their recovery plans for both the local area and nationally.
- 33.5 Councillor Platts referred to BAME businesses and asked if officers had been able to assess whether they had been able to make claims and how many of those businesses the Council was supporting. The Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture said that during the first round of grants the Council had looked at the impact on BAME businesses and how many had applied for grants and it was found that there was a proportionately lower take up. That data was then used for publishing the second round.
- 33.6 Councillor Platts noted that gyms had had to open and close a number of times and asked whether they were able to apply for any grants. The Head of Revenues & Benefits said that they should make an application for grants and officers would then assess what they may be entitled to.
- 33.7 Councillor Platts referred to the Tech Take Back scheme and how the refurbished laptops were being distributed. Councillor Clare said that since April 2700 laptops had been donated and the Council and schools were distributing them to children who were eligible for Free School Meals or had the support of a social worker, and it was expected that another 1000 laptops may become available. The Council had also spoken with schools to assess whether there was any difficulty with children having access to wifi at home and it was found that generally it wasn't a problem. Anyone who wanted to apply for a refurbished laptop should either contact Tech Take Back directly or contact the Families, Learning & Children directorate and officers would forward the request to the right place. The Chair noted that some telephone companies had spoken about looking

at relaxing people's contracts to allow them to access more data and suggested that if that didn't happen that the Council should lobby them and would welcome cross party support to do that. Councillor Yates noted that there was provision for schools, local authorities and trusts to ask the providers to provide additional data access for those didn't have wifi but did have access to other mobile devices, and there was an online form which could be completed and suggested that it would be useful to publicise that. Councillor Clare confirmed that that information had been passed to schools. Councillor Platts suggested that it would be useful to put the information on the Council's website.

33.8 Councillor Platts noted that the report referred to the potential for a green recovery and asked how the community could be involved in that. The Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture said that officers had been working to make sure that all the strategic plans were aligned. They had worked to ensure that the LEP's plan for recovery included 'build back greener' as well as 'smarter and stronger', and that the Greater Brighton plans reflected some of the opportunities around green recovery, so the plans for Coast to Capital level or Greater Brighton level or City level there would be a thread running through them on how we could ensure that we attracted investment to de-carbonise the economy and create jobs at the same time.

33.9 Councillor Platts asked how the Council could ensure community wealth building in the recovery. The Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture said that officers were looking at what specific aspects of our economy could improve social equality, and Brexit, Covid and the Climate Emergency had given an opportunity to look at new ways of doing things.

33.10 Councillor Miller asked if there was data on people who had moved from full-time to part-time work and were then having to claim universal credit. He referred to the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) and that £5.8m was awarded. He noted that first four weeks of the tier 2 period a further ARG had been allocated to provide a flat rate top up to the grant awards to each business for this period. This was an extra £2000 for businesses receiving LRSG (closed) or LRSG (sector) grant for this period and suggested that it was rather arbitrary to just top up some of the grant categories, and asked if it was not possible to encourage more businesses who may be eligible to apply. He asked if unsuccessful applicants were advised that they hadn't been successful. The Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture referred to the employment figures and said that it was likely that there had been a move to part time work, but due to furlough it was hard to assess the level but he would try and obtain the information for a future meeting. For the ARG, the approach was to maximise take-up and to maximise the number of businesses which could be helped and helped quickly. The amounts awarded were not huge and the extra amount was quite modest. Nationally there had been a lower take up of the ARG. With regard to unsuccessful claims, no one had yet been informed as the Council had so far only made provisional decisions to refuse and they would all be reviewed. New guidance was being issued by Central Government and some of the parameters for awarding grants were changing, so it was possible that on review some of those applications could be successful. The Council wanted to ensure as many businesses as possible were awarded grants.

33.11 **Resolved** - That the Sub-committee noted the progress update report.

34 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

34.1 There were no Part Two items

The meeting concluded at 5.35pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of