

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

4.00pm 28 APRIL 2021

VIRTUAL

MINUTES

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

PART ONE

53 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

(a) Declarations of Substitutes

53.1 There were no declarations of substitutes.

(b) Declarations of Interests

53.2 There were no declarations of interests.

(c) Exclusion of the Press and Public

53.3 **RESOLVED:** That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the items listed in Part 2 of the Agenda.

54 MINUTES

54.1 The minutes of the last meeting held on the 3 March 2021 and of the Special Meeting held on the 29 March 2021 were approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

55 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

55.1 The Chair gave the following communications:

Recovery and some hope in our Covid data positive to share some welcome news about efforts to bring down Covid-19 in our city. At the time of writing, data tells us there are zero reported cases of Covid-19 among the over 60s in Brighton & Hove. There are of course still cases in other age groups, and I am acutely aware that data could change in as little as a day. But given this was truly a desperate situation less than a year ago, this really is worth noting. After a year of hardship and tragedy, is truly reminder of what we can achieve; of efforts of people in our city; also reminds us that we need to stick at it: following guidance; hands, face space and social distancing. We need to keep those

figures low to protect people and ensure vaccination is successful.

Alongside other measures like self-isolation, hand washing, mask wearing and social distancing, regular testing is another tool we can use to identify cases and prevent transmission: and I hope people know you can pick up free asymptomatic test kits from many local pharmacies, Jubilee library, Hove Town Hall and other locations that can be found through the government website and council website. I'm really grateful to everyone who continues to test as of course we don't know yet when we may fully suppress this pandemic.

So today we have key proposals on the agenda as part of the Contain outbreak management funds report. This allocation of funding vital as the serious hardship many people are facing in our city is in no way over, despite what the roadmap may suggest. Many have lost their jobs and many sectors are still struggling.

We want to allocate funding to continue to help our early years providers, our schools, to support rough sleepers, and the exhaustive efforts of our local food banks and community groups. The pandemic has affected us all but it has not affected us all equally and women, LGBTQ+, BAME and disabled communities continue to be particularly hard hit. We need to support our local communities to recover but also to stay protected from the virus.

Exactly why the report today providing more funding so we can help people to self-isolate as we recognise the dire gaps in the current self-isolation support. Analysis of similar OECD countries shows that the UK has the lowest mandatory sick pay as a proportion of income. Too many people simply cannot afford to stay home from work. This is a false economy when we need to help people stay safe and given today is Workers Memorial Day it is all the more critical an issue.

Sadly, too many people left for work and didn't come back during the life of the pandemic. The report today also includes measures to increase the support available to those on low pay despite the gaps in the national 'self-isolation' strategy and payments and I hope it gains support.

Virtual meetings as we meet online again I am also very much aware that today we have learned the outcome of the legal challenge to government made by the Association of Democratic Service Officers and Lawyers in Local Government on behalf of councils up and down the country.

The end of the Covid-19 legislation on 7th May will unfairly lead to councils being told they have to meet in person, before many are vaccinated. Despite the obvious limits of virtual meetings, the government has simultaneously dismissed any advantages of remote access to meetings by saying that decisions won't count unless they are made 'in person.' This archaic way of dealing with local government decision making that dates back to the 1972 act could have been modernised, as virtual meetings in many cases have improved access for both members of the public and allowed greater flexibility for carers. I recognise the limits of virtual meetings of course – but we also recognise the importance of safety for our colleagues. We have already been planning for this outcome and discussing it in consultation with group leaders, all councillors have already been briefed including independent councillors.

They will now be re-briefed, further discussions will happen with group leaders and we will have more information for both them, and independents and members of the public and press in good time, so we have everything we need ready for the first meeting under the new rules which will be P&R on 13th May.

At the same time as we are dealing with decisions from government today, we've seen another government announcement proposing to speed up academisation of schools. This of course cannot be ignored when our local context is the fight against the academisation of Moulsecomb primary; and want to champion the incredible efforts of the community, staff, parents and pupils at Moulsecomb Primary who are rallying against the forced government academisation of the school. The fight continues and the ongoing action prove that this school is embedded in the community and is in such stark contrast to the remote management of an academy with no connection to the area.

Green wall, Finally I want to also take a moment to address the important issue of the section of the green wall that was cut back. I trust that colleagues will have seen the clear information that this was not a decision that was escalated to councillors at any level. It didn't have our approval. However, I do want to assure the committee that we: immediately referred this to planning enforcement for investigation, immediately began discussion with the exec director for an investigation to understand what has happened have asked for the investigation to include a review of the decision making and sign off process that led to this happening.

Further to the discussion with the Executive Director this has now been referred to Audit who are going to conduct a full and thorough investigation most importantly our focus has been on how the teams on the ground can rapidly scale up work to revive the greenery on this section of the wall. My fellow councillor Jamie Lloyd has met with Building Green, and their expertise and positive contribution is invaluable. A series of actions are being undertaken to help revive the plant life and we will of course be monitoring this extremely closely and pushing for updates to all councillors.

Needless to say, however we are profoundly disappointed that this happened, and we are determined to act to uphold the high environmental standards our city expects and deserves. That means now we are developing a future management plan for the whole of the wall in liaison with Building Green. As I've made clear this wasn't escalated to councillors, I have invited the Executive Director to ensure you are updated more fully. He has been asked to comment on this before we progress with the rest of the agenda.

55.2 The Executive Director gave the following statement:

Firstly, I would like to that we are sorry for the way that a section of Green Wall at the bottom of Dukes Mound was cut back in this way in early March. As part of the Black Rock regeneration project a road safety audit was carried out. This found that the greenery at this point at the bottom of Dukes Mound severely limited visibility for road users.

At the detailed design stage, the plans included cutting the vegetation back in response to recommendations in the Road Safety Audit. However, whilst this was required to

improve visibility, we recognise that the cut back was excessive and has caused understandable alarm, and that the communication with councillors and stakeholders was not what it should have been.

I have requested that our audit team undertake a review into the overall governance arrangements for the Black Rock Project and specifically how this excessive cut-back happened. This will include the decision making and sign-off processes within the project team and what lessons need to be learnt from it. The review will also identify whether there were any contractual issues that need to be addressed, and whether any planning or wildlife rules were broken when this happened.

The outcomes of the review will be reported to councillors through the Black Rock cross-party project board. We also recognise that the project team should have engaged with Brighton & Hove Building Green when it became clear that this vegetation needed to be cut back. Building Green is a local voluntary community network who support the management of the Madeira Drive green wall to restore it to its former glory. The project team have spoken to them to apologise and we are committed to ensuring further engagement in the future. We are particularly grateful for their involvement in identifying the next steps for supporting regrowth and the wider restoration of the green wall.

The two main species evident in the area concerned are a large Fig bush and Spindle. Both species are resilient to hard pruning and given the age and likely strong existing root network, will potentially recover as all the strong root network remains in the ground. We can see that regrowth is beginning to occur. We are therefore working with our landscape consultant on the following measures to promote regrowth:

- Removal of all loose material and deadwood to the soil surface
- Retention of the existing material rooted into the soil
- Installation of a series of sturdy horizontal wires to the wall at regular intervals to train the Fig and provide support up the wall
- A regular watering regime, starting immediately and running through Spring and Summer

Care of this section of the wall is now underway, with feeding and watering to maximise the regrowth. The project team will also be working with colleagues in City Parks, and will liaise with Building Green, to establish a future management plan for the whole green wall and ensure that there are resources identified for regular maintenance.

We will also be looking at the longer-term arrangements for the management and maintenance of the green wall in response to Building Green's suggestion that we incorporate the full linear extent of the green wall into the Madeira Terraces restoration project.

Overall the Black Rock project is an important part of the wider regeneration of the eastern seafront and will involve environmental, heritage and infrastructure improvements that will help to prepare the area for future leisure and recreation development in line with the Council's City Plan, as well as improving the connectivity between the eastern seafront, Black Rock and Brighton Marina. It's a key project that will support the city economy's recovery from the pandemic.

The project will be planting many native species of plant on the shingle to encourage a new area of wildlife from the Volks railway to Black Rock, as well as over 30 new trees in the area as part of the revitalised public realm.

However, we fully acknowledge that there is great attachment to this section of the green wall and the full wall behind the terrace. The audit investigation will help everyone to understand how and why this occurred. We are extremely sorry this happened in the way it did, and we will be working hard to revive the space and to ensure that this is not repeated.

56 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

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

57 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

57.1 The Chair noted that there were no Member items for the current meeting.

58 COVID-19 RECOVERY & RENEWAL PROGRAMME UPDATE

58.1 The Executive Director for Economy, Environment & Culture introduced the report which provided an update on the progress of the Covid-19 Recovery Programme. He noted that the focus would now be on the recovery and renewal programme to restart services and re-open the city.

58.2 The Committee welcomed the report and raised questions in relation to the support for volunteers, the long-term situation for addressing homelessness, catch-up funding and how the council's own buildings would be opening up.

58.3 The Executive Director for Economy, Environment & Culture stated that the sustainable model to support volunteers and organisations going forward. He noted that officers were working with the Business Improvement District and Economic Partnership to look at how businesses could begin to re-open.

58.4 The Executive Director or Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities stated that the government had announced further grant funding opportunities to help address homelessness matters and officers would be preparing bids for this. She was not able to confirm what the government's long-term vision was, but positive action was being taken with the provision of additional housing units in the city.

58.5 The Chief Executive stated the Ways of Working Project Group was looking at how to re-open the council's office space and enable staff to return to working in the office. It was likely that staff would be encouraged to continue working from home until September and then there would be a need to look at how a return to work was phased in and how it would work going forward as it was likely that it would be a mixture of home and office working.

58.6 The Chair noted the comments and put the recommendation to note the report to the vote.

58.7 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

59 ALLOCATION OF CONTAIN OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT FUNDS

59.1 The Acting Chief Finance Officer introduced the report which detailed the range of payments made from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund to support proactive containment and intervention measures. He noted that the government had confirmed that 2021 grants could be carried forward and that the proposed allocation of funding was listed in the report.

59.2 The Committee welcomed the report and Members noted the proposed allocations and suggested that it would be helpful to have a clearer idea of the alternative options that were considered in future reports. It was noted that changes to budget allocations could be made and assurance was sought that funding was being put into the Covid response and not into the Council's own budget areas. It was suggested that if necessary priorities could be reviewed if there were not the staff available to manage the actions associated with the responses.

59.3 The Chair noted the comments and stated that there was a need for the council to ensure it had the infrastructure in place to enable the actions relating to the response to be implemented. He then put the recommendations to the vote.

59.4 **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the receipt of £6.815m Contain Outbreak Management Fund from central government for 2020/21 and a further £2.070m for 2021/22 be noted;
- (2) That the carry forward of 2020/21 Contain Outbreak Management Funds of £6.815m to 2021/22 be approved;
- (3) That the allocation of the remainder of the £6.815m Contain Outbreak Management Funds carried forward from 2020/21 to meet the unapproved costs identified in Table 2 of the report be agreed;
- (4) That any adjustment to approved allocations from the 2020/21 COMF funding be delegated to the Director of Public Health in consultation with the S151 Chief Finance Officer and the Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee;
- (5) That it be noted that information on the usage of the funds against the approved allocations will be reported in the regular Targeted Budget Management (TBM) monitoring reports to Policy & Resources Committee; and
- (6) That it be agreed to defer the allocation of 2021/22 Contain Outbreak Management Funds until later in the financial year when more information on potential local test, trace and support to self-isolate and surge testing costs will be known together with information on the city's progression through the roadmap to recovery.

60 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

60.1 The Chair noted that the part two minutes had been circulated to Members and therefore proposed that they be noted and remain exempt from disclosure.

60.2 **RESOLVED:** That the item contained in Part 2 of the Agenda remain exempt from disclosure to the press and public.

61 PART TWO MINUTES

61.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes be approved as a correct record and noted.

The meeting concluded at 5.33pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of