

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
CHILDREN, FAMILIES & SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

4.00pm 12 JUNE 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL, NORTON ROAD, HOVE, BN3 3BQ

MINUTES

Present: Councillor ; Councillors Heliwell (Joint Chair), Taylor (Joint Chair), Hamilton (Deputy Chair), Shanks (Opposition Spokesperson), Allen, Daniel and Hogan

Co-opted Members:

PART ONE

1 Procedural Business

(a) Declarations of Substitutes

1.1 Cllr Alexander substituted for Cllr Goddard, Cllr Hill substituted for Cllr Goldsmith and Cllr Rowkins substituted for Cllr Mistry.

b) Declarations of Interest

1.2 There were none.

(c) Exclusion of Press and Public

1.3 There were no Part Two Items and so the press and public were not excluded from the meeting.

2 Minutes

2.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Chair's Communications

3.1 The chair delivered the following communication:

I'd like to start by reiterating our thanks to the people of Brighton & Hove for putting their trust in Labour and electing the first majority council in over two decades. We see it as an honour and privilege to serve the city. It is also a significant responsibility, and nowhere more so than in the policy area of Children, Families and Schools.

I'd also like to start by extending our genuine thanks to the fantastic officers within the directorate – particularly Deb Austin, and her team of Assistant Directors, who have been extremely responsive, helpful and supportive in our first month in administration. Lucy, myself and the whole Labour team have all been struck by their knowledge, passion and dedication to the children and young people in this city. I'd also like to thank our Democratic Services Officer, Emma Thomson, and our lead lawyer, Natasha Watson, for the efficient and knowledgeable way in which they made preparations for the first Committee of the new administration.

I'd like to say a few words about our priorities as an administration in the vital policy area of Children, Families and Schools. There is no greater responsibility for a local authority than our duty to act as Corporate Parents for young people and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. That's why I was delighted to attend the first Corporate Parenting board of the new council last week, where the leader of the council, Councillor Sankey, demonstrated the importance this administration places on Corporate Parenting, by co-chairing the meeting with Sophie, one of our brilliant care-experienced young people. It was fantastic to see a large number of Councillors from all parties at that meeting, and I hope that will continue.

It's worth noting that almost every type of public service in this country is creaking under the weight of Tory government under-funding, inflationary pressures, and a society that is orientated around market forces and private interests, as opposed to one that is built around fairness and social justice. The provision of care placements for children is one such area that is under increasing pressure. As such, I am pleased that this Committee will be considering a proposal to increase allowances for foster careers, to bring us in line with neighbouring local authorities, and help to incentivise more foster parents to come forward. Placing children with foster families is the preferred outcome for those young people and is also considerably less expensive than residential home care placements. This administration recognises the vital importance of successfully placing children with foster parents, or in residential homes, and will focus on developing measures to support the effectiveness of that provision.

I would also like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to the many fantastic social workers in Brighton & Hove. It is a difficult job, with huge responsibility and pressure, and we are clear as an administration that we want Brighton & Hove to remain an authority where social workers are keen to come and work.

We must also acknowledge that some of the schools in our city are under pressure, including many of our primary schools. It is no secret that primary age pupil numbers in the city have fallen in recent years, partly as a result of how unaffordable the city is for working families. Falling pupil numbers results in significant challenges for school budgets. This administration will approach this issue carefully and seek to provide solutions that are best for pupils and parents – using creative ideas and pragmatism where possible.

We have some fantastic schools in the city that we should all be proud of. We are also acutely aware that some secondary schools in the city are under pressure from falling pupil numbers, and that this closely aligns with the issue of educational inequality and the gap in attainment for disadvantaged pupils. This administration strongly believes in a 'family of schools' in Brighton & Hove, and we know that certain secondary schools will

require increased support to help them improve, and thus attract higher pupil numbers. It will be a priority for this administration to improve attainment outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, and we believe this objective can only be achieved by the whole city taking responsibility for this issue, as well as schools and the local authority.

In the area of special educational needs and disabilities, I was pleased to see the recent Ofsted report on Brighton & Hove City Council and NHS Sussex, which concluded that services for SEND children 'typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes'. However, I know I speak for officers and the whole administration when I say that Brighton & Hove City Council will work tirelessly on the areas of improvement that were highlighted and continue to engage with parents groups to ensure our services for SEND children are the best they can be.

In the coming months we will be setting out how we'll implement the bold policies in our manifesto. We will be listening to parents, to teachers, to social workers, and most importantly of all, to our children, so that we can understand what they think is needed to strengthen education and children's services in the city.

4 Call Over

4.1 All items except for item 8 were reserved for discussion.

5 Public Involvement

5.1 There were no petitions, written questions or deputations.

6 Items Referred from Council

6.1 There were no items referred from Council.

7 Member Involvement

7.1 There were no petitions, written questions, letters, or notices of motion.

8 Constitutional Matters

8.1 The recommendations as set out in the report were agreed without discussion.

8.2 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee agreed –

- i. That the Committee's terms of reference, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted and;
- ii. The establishment of an Urgency Sub-Committee consisting of the Chair of the Committee and two other Members (nominated in accordance with the scheme for the allocation of seats for committees), to exercise its powers in relation to matters of urgency, on which it is necessary to make a decision before the next ordinary meeting of the Committee be approved.

9 Proposals for the future of Hertford Infant and Hertford Junior Schools

9.1 The Head of School Organisation introduced the report which outlined the proposals to consider the future of Hertford Infant and Hertford Junior schools.

9.2 Cllr Shanks welcomed the proposal and queried why consultation wasn't been done at the infant school.

9.3 Cllr Helliwell raised questions regarding temporary usage of the infant site pending the education secretary's decision.

9.4 Cllr Hill queried the costs that would be incurred from the building being unoccupied.

9.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee agreed –

- i. To undertake a consultation on the proposal to create a one form entry Hertford primary school on one site and for this to be implemented by relocating Hertford Infant School to the junior school site and extending the age range to pupils aged 4-11 years.

10 Review of Fostering Allowances

10.1 The Head of Service - Fostering Adoption & Permanence introduced the report which endorsed an increase in allowances paid to Brighton & Hove City Council foster carers to compete with Independent Fostering Agencies and adjoin Local Authorities in the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

10.2 Cllr Hill sought clarification on the payment difference outlined in appendix 2.

10.3 Cllr Daniel supported the recommendation, thanked foster carers and raised questions regarding Staying Put and the number of placements with Brighton & Hove foster parents, independent fostering agencies and residential placements.

10.4 Cllr Hill raised points regarding considerations being given to increasing proposals further.

10.5 Cllrs Hamilton, Allen and Shanks echoed their support for the uplift.

10.6 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee agreed –

- i. To increase fostering allowances as detailed in Option 2 in paragraph 4.2 of the report.

11 School Meals Contract

11.1 The Head of School Organisation introduced the report which outlined proposals to re-tender the school meals contract to take effect from August 2024.

11.2 Cllr Allen raised questions regarding the percentage of schools that buy into the centralised contract for school meals, the available data on what percentage of Pupil Premium children take up their free school meals and what was done to increase that number.

- 11.3 Cllr Hill raised points regarding best practice from other local authorities, health and safety concerns and considerations to conditions of outsourced workers compared to in-house.
- 11.4 Cllr Daniel queried how the contract would help maintain a sustainable food approach.
- 11.5 Cllr Shanks raised points regarding secondary schools and the lack of information about children with allergies and requested that the report that went to the Procurement Advisory Board was shared and a further report came back to Committee once the contract was agreed.
- 11.6 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee agreed –
- i. To grant delegated authority to the Executive Director, Families, Children and Learning to take all necessary steps to enter into a contract for the provision of school meals for an initial term of four years with an option to extend for a further two periods of 12 months.
 - ii. To grant delegated authority to the Executive Director, Families, Children and Learning to extend the contract subject to satisfactory performance of the contractor.

12 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment

- 12.1 The Childcare Strategy Manager - Free Entitlement introduced the report which informed the Committee about childcare sufficiency in Brighton & Hove, parents' and providers' views of childcare in the city and the national and local policy context.
- 12.2 Cllr Hill raised points regarding the overall satisfaction of SEND children and the number of parents with SEND children that responded.
- 12.3 Cllr Helliwell queried if any studies had been undertaken to establish why parents in Brighton & Hove are less likely to access their full allowance of early years free entitlement.
- 12.4 Cllr Hamilton raised questions regarding rates for children from East Sussex and West Sussex coming to Brighton & Hove.
- 12.5 Cllr Hill requested if a report could be completed outlining the number of parents with SEND children surveyed and their satisfaction rates, which the chair suggested was submitted as a written question to the next Committee for consideration.
- 12.6 Ms Robinson advised PaCC could create a survey relating to paragraph 4.7 of the report, to establish the difference in data between parents and carers with SEND children and those without.
- 12.7 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee agreed –

- i. To note the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) (Appendix 1), which is published to parents and childcare providers so that childcare providers can develop their provision to meet local needs.
- ii. That further work is carried out with early years childcare providers to assess their capacity to offer the extended childcare support offer.
- iii. That early years providers are supported to review their business and operating models, as resources allow, to ensure that with the anticipated increase in funding, standalone Early Years Free Entitlement (EYFE) provision is available as widely as possible and further support should be put in place for staff recruitment and retention once DfE plans are known.
- iv. That Family Hubs develop support for parents through the direct service and the digital family hub to ensure that they are able to take up their full EYFE, including the extended childcare support offer, as well as access government support with childcare costs.
- v. That the increased funding rates for providers for additional support and inclusion for children with SEND which came into effect from April 2023 are monitored to see whether these result in improved parental satisfaction.

13 Items Referred for Council

13.1 No items were referred to the next meeting of Council.

The meeting concluded at 4.55pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of