

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

4.00pm 9 OCTOBER 2024

MINUTES

Present: Councillor O'Quinn (Chair) Sheard (Deputy Chair), Cattell, Czolak, Helliwell, McLeay, Meadows, Shanks, Simon and Thomson

Other Members present: Councillors

PART ONE

8 MINUTES

8.1 The minutes from the last People Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 9th July were approved by the members

9 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

9 a Declarations of substitutions: Doug Thompson for Sara Fulford (Older Peoples Council)

B Declarations of interest: Cllr O'Quinn declared a personal interest, noting that she – has been lobbied by parents from a particular area.

C Exclusion of the press and public: There are no part two items

10 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

10.1 The Chair gave the following communication:

There is a considerable amount of work that goes on behind the scenes with regards to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in order that the Committees truly fulfil their purpose. There are many meetings between the officers and the Chairs and also with Executive Directors and other officers from the relevant departments plus regular meetings with relevant members of the Cabinet. As Chair of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee I also do my best to have meetings with as many relevant organisations, charities and people as possible in order to further understand the issues that exist and possible ideas of how to improve matters via scrutiny. Examples of this are that I met with Caroline Ridley, CEO of Impact Initiatives and visits to the Young People's Centre in Ship St and Stopover near St Peter's Church were arranged which were invaluable in adding to my knowledge of the services that exist for young people in the city. I also attended the launch of the Wellbeing Festival organised by Impact Initiatives and this supports older people in the city by providing

many activities over a two week period. Regarding homelessness in our city, I met with Ray Bloom and his daughter who are engaged in some very positive and innovative schemes to assist in this area. To help understand the issue of loneliness, a growing issue for young people, I liaise with Together Co who are carrying out research with other partners on this subject. I am attending a Pedal People event next week in order to support them in their trailblazing work with 'Elder Care Rides' and I am also attending a Black History Month event at One Church. The councillors who sit on this committee are also very involved in finding out what is happening in the city by having meetings and talking to people so there is a considerable effort to understand what matters to people and where more scrutiny is required.

We've got 3 items to consider today.

I know that members were keen to look at issues concerning school places and catchments, so I have asked for an item on school organisation. As this is a scrutiny committee, we want wherever possible to hear different voices when we consider issues, so I have invited Curtis and Beth from Class Divide to attend the meeting. Class Divide is a grassroots organisation that campaigns to highlight and reduce education inequalities in Brighton & Hove. I have also invited some academic experts in the field of educational inequalities to the meeting. They are Professor Steven Gorard from Durham University and Dr Ellen Greaves from Exeter University.

We will first hear from Cllr Jacob Taylor and from officers, and I'll then ask Class Divide and our academic experts to each briefly address the committee. If members want to ask questions of our guests, or if our guests have any questions they'd like to ask Cllr Taylor, please feel free to do so.

For our second item, I have asked for a paper on the council's work to refresh our strategy for dealing with Transition from children to adult services. This can be a very difficult process for some of our most vulnerable people and it is crucial that we get transition right.

We are fortunate to have Fiona England from the Parent Carer's Council (PaCC) as a co-opted member of this committee. I have also invited Sally Polanski from Amaze to today's meeting. Amaze is an organisation that gives information, advice and support to families with children who have educational special needs and disabilities. Both PaCC and Amaze have been involved in the development of the strategy.

We will hear initially from Cllr Tristram Burden and from officers. I'll then ask Fiona and Sally to address the committee, before opening up for discussion and questions. Again, I'm sure that Sally and Fiona would be happy to answer questions and they are welcome to ask them also. The third item is on the refresh of the council's Drugs & Alcohol strategy. We don't have any external guests for this one, so we will go straight to Cllr Burden and to officers to present.

For all of these items, they are coming to scrutiny in part so that members of People committee can seek assurance that these key issues for people in the city are being properly planned for. If any members don't feel fully assured that this is the case, we can always look at specific issues in more depth at a later meeting or request more information in another way. However, we're also here to make a positive contribution to the development of thinking, so if members have ideas for how a piece of work could be improved, please don't be shy – the relevant Cabinet Members are here today to listen to your ideas.

11.1 There were no public questions.

12 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

12.1 There were no member questions.

13 SCHOOL ORGANISATION

13.1 Cllr Jacob Taylor presented the report on school organisation to the committee.

13.2 Curtis James and Beth from Class Divide spoke to the committee about their campaigns on education inequality. Curtis set out the campaign that Class Divide has run since 2019. He said that research has shown that diversity in schools improves outcomes for the poorest students, and that mixing children from different backgrounds creates a richer learning environment. Curtis said that Brighton & Hove ranked 53rd out of 144 local authorities for school segregation. He said that he wanted the city to do everything possible to avoid losing another school. Curtis spoke about some of the concerns that he had received from parents. Beth spoke about her lived experience as a mother in Whitehawk with 3 children, highlighting the lack of choice for parents, and the expense of travel for children getting to school.

13.3 Professor Stephen Gorard, Director of the Durham University Evidence Centre for Education, spoke to the committee. Professor Gorard said that internationally and nationally, poorer children clustered together is strongly linked to an attainment gap. The most disadvantaged students do worse in areas where they are most clustered together in schools. By not clustering, it raises the level of attainment of everybody. The most disadvantaged gain the most, but there are no losers. Brighton & Hove is thinking of doing things along the right lines, but it needs to be done with the least disruption. It would be good to move to a system where it didn't matter which school children went to. Making schools more representative and raising the attainment level for all will help move to a system where it doesn't matter which school children go to.

13.4 Dr Ellen Greaves, Lecturer in Economics at Exeter University, spoke to the committee. Dr Greaves has carried out research on school admissions in England and said that most local authorities across England have a geographical based admissions criteria which tends to produce clustering effects. One model to mitigate this is a pupil premium basis, which BHCC is doing. Another model is to have a percentage allocation for pupils outside of the catchment area. A less widely used model is random allocation as a tie break. Dr Greaves said her personal view would be to evaluate the free school meals (FSM) intake before changing too much else. The FSM policy will go some way to address educational disadvantage. The issues of pupil admission numbers (PAN) and attainment disadvantage should be kept separate so as to be able to evaluate the FSM policy. The main driver of school segregation is at residential level. Many parents would like to make a school choice but cannot due to transport distance. She said that changes should be made in a reasonable time with the minimum disruption to all involved.

- 13.5 Cllr Shanks asked a question about governance processes. Cllr Taylor responded that changes to catchments would need to be agreed at full Council before February 2025. Only changing PANs would not require full Council approval, but would require statutory consultation. Cllr Taylor said that he was happy to take criticism if the basis of the current engagement exercise was not communicated clearly enough, but it is important that the city has this conversation.
- 13.6 Cllr Sheard asked a question about the percentages of pupils eligible for FSM in the proposed options. Cllr Taylor responded that the estimated FSM numbers for each option are indicated. Option B provides the most rebalancing. We don't yet know what impact the new admissions policy around FSM will have.
- 13.7 Jasmine Oquosa-Withers from the Youth Council asked a question about the risk that adopting some of the options may lead to rising house prices as more families move into the catchment area of higher performing schools. Cllr Taylor responded that demand for schools and housing are linked and it is possible that demand for schools could increase demand for housing. However, moving to a system with a more equitable distribution of pupils across city schools should reduce these pressures by addressing the disparity between schools' performance that is a consequence of unbalanced intakes.
- 13.8 Cllr Czolak asked questions about transport as a potential barrier to pupil mobility and whether we would only hear from the loudest voices in any consultation. Cllr Taylor agreed that transport was an issue both in terms of routes and affordability. Ideally, all transport for children in education would be free, but this is not affordable. Cllr Taylor also agreed that we need to hear from more community voices, and noted that efforts are being made to do this.
- 13.9 Cllr Mcleay asked when the data on the impact of the FSM policy would be available. Richard Barker responded that this was anticipated around March 2025. Cllr McLeay also asked what can be done to work with academy or religious schools where the council has no direct ability to determine PAN. Cllr Taylor said he is working well with head teachers and has spoken with Cardinal Newman about them voluntarily reducing PAN.
- 13.10 Cllr Helliwell asked a question on the minimum intake numbers for schools to remain viable. Richard responded that no school is being asked to go below 180 pupils, or six forms of entry, which is enough to deliver the core curriculum. Dr Greaves said very few schools had PANs of less than less than 180 pupils; falling numbers means retention of staff is worse and in turn fewer parents wanting to choose it. Prof Gorard said that smaller schools on average have worse staff retention.
- 13.11 Cllr Helliwell asked about Government plans to give councils more control over PAN and catchments for all schools. Cllr Taylor responded that a Bill was anticipated. We will need to see the detail of proposals before we can be sure what additional latitude this may give the council going forward.

- 13.12 Cllr Helliwell asked a question about school segregation. Curtis responded that it is impossible to justify a situation where some schools in the city have FSM rates as low as 15% and others rates at 50% of pupils.
- 13.11 Jo Martinadale asked about different ways of engagement outside of formal consultations, noting that The community and voluntary sector across the city can help with engagement. Cllr Taylor agreed and said the council hadn't got engagement right over many years.
- 13.12 Cllr Meadows agreed that everyone wanted children to have a good education. She spoke about the long distances traveling to school and the impact on friendship groups and the stress on children. Parental choice is something that parents should have, especially as schools specialise. Cllr Meadows emphasised the costs of transport even if families are not on FSM, and urged caution because of the need to evaluate the FSM policy before changing anything else. Beth agreed with the stress of transport to school and spoke of the three buses to Longhill that arrive within three minutes of each other. Cllr Taylor thanked Cllr Meadows for her comments, and agreed that transport was important. He did not think that choice was the most important factor, but said that everyone should have good service.
- 13.13 Becky Robinson said that the information on offer was light regarding SEN children, and asked if the council will work with PACC. Cllr Taylor said that if any proposals were taken forward, they would engage with them.
- 13.14 Dr Anusree Biswas Sasidharan said that she agreed with everything that had been said. She felt a consultation wasn't always the best method as middle class residents were typically more likely to respond than other groups. She suggested going to talk to people where they were. Choice of schools should not be such an issue as every local school should be good enough. She also expressed concerns about families who just miss the FSM eligibility.. Cllr Taylor said it was a good challenge and is an issue the whole city needs to tackle. Events in communities is a way to keep the conversation going.
- 13.15 Cllr Cattell asked Cllr Taylor what the outcome would be if nothing was done, particularly the PANs. Cllr Taylor said on the PANs 3 or 4 schools would remain very large with healthy budgets whilst other schools would experience falling numbers, would struggle to have the breadth of offer and would have to cut costs. Cllr Cattell asked if the do-nothing option was therefore not an option. Cllr Taylor said that was his view.
- 13.16 Cllr Simon asked a question on timescales, and also if the council could look at other local authorities with problematic distribution of secondary schools. Cllr Taylor responded that any decision on catchments needs to be made by the end of February, and working back from that there are deadlines for engagement and consultation. The experts might know about local authorities with comparable geographical problems. Brighton & Hove has similar economics to London boroughs and has inequalities like everywhere but we have geographic concentrations of deprivation that London boroughs do not typically experience.

13.17 Cllr Shanks asked whether there was evidence of negative impacts on middle class pupils attending schools with high rates of FSM. Prof Gorard replied that as long as disadvantage is spread amongst schools it doesn't affect the attainment of middle class children.

14 TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD STRATEGY

- 14.1 Cllr Tristram Burden, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Service Transformation; and Steve Hook, Interim Corporate Director Health and Adult Social Care, presented the paper on the Transition to Adulthood strategy.
- 14.2 Sally Polanski from Amaze and Fiona England from the Parents and Carers Council also addressed the committee.
- 14.3 Cllr Meadows asked what had gone wrong with the approaches of the previous strategy to require a refresh and why performance was so patchy. Steve Hook responded that services are being assessed against relatively new standards introduced in 2022. While services have not necessarily performed poorly, these new standards take a much broader approach to transition which requires a different focus for services. The refresh will support Different services to work more closely together. Previous strategies have been focused on children's or adult social care, but we are now looking at a much wider cohort going into adulthood not just at young people eligible for adult social care services. Cllr Burden added that, with a Labour council and government, there is an opportunity for a reset to focus on a one council approach.
- 14.4 Cllr Czolak asked questions about engagement with service users, and whether there is a particular focus on mental health, given the rising prevalence of mental and emotional health issues in young people. Steve Hook responded that, in terms of engaging with adults with lived experience, part of engagement has been with SpeakOut who work with adults who have learning disabilities. Issues around transition have been raised with them. Mental health is a key area of focus, and the council has worked with NHS Sussex on this. The mental health integration board has a lived experience advisory board and we plan to work with them.
- 14.5 Cllr Shanks asked question about engagement with schools and about streamlined support. Steve Hook responded that in terms of engagement with schools is key. The ambition is to get coordination right between schools, SCN caseworkers and social workers, and for people with complex health needs, the lead clinician. In terms of health services, young people with complex health needs are dealt with by a paediatrician who coordinates their care, but as adult they typically have to engage with a number of discrete services. The ambition is to develop a more coordinated approach to supporting adults with complex health needs.
- 14.6 Cllr Helliwell asked a question about the 'neuro divergent with and without disability' category in the draft strategy. Steve Hook responded that currently there are clear pathways for some neuro divergent young people, but not for others, and the ambition is

to have clear pathways for everyone, including people who will not be eligible for ASC support.

- 14.7 Cllr Mcleay asked about The resource implications of the refresh. Steve Hook replied that it is important to recognise that poor transition planning has cost implications: providing crisis services can be much more expensive than planned services. It is unlikely that there will be much, if any, additional funding available, but we know that good planning can save money and deliver better outcomes for people. Examples of what the council is doing already include developing a service in Woodingdean on the site of a former care home to rehouse young people with complex needs who would otherwise have been placed out of the city.
- 14.8 Cllr Simon asked about best practice at other local authorities. Steve Hook responded that the council has looked at best practice across the country, with a particular focus on Birmingham City Council which has developed a through care service supporting young people from 14 to 24. However, every place is different and what works elsewhere might not work here; we want to preserve what is good here and enhance it. Cllr Burden added that he had recently read a book on transitions in which Brighton was cited as a best practice exemplar, particularly in terms of the work of the Oasis Project on young people with substance abuse.
- 14.9 Adam Muirhead said it was good that consideration had been given to children with SEND, mental health needs, neurodiversity, and looked after children; but why not youth offending services and probation? Steve Hook welcomed this challenge, noting that this may be more about the presentation than the contents of the strategy. There have been workstreams that have involved the leaving care team, probation and youth offending. Officers will reflect on how to communicate this important work more effectively.
- 14.10 Cllr Sheard asked a question about why there are distinct pathways for neurodivergence and learning disabilities. Steve Hook replied that the reason they have been separated is that there is a lot of complexity there.
- 14.11 Jasmine asked about the extent of which care leavers have been engaged with. Steve Hook said that they had really good representation from care leavers in the steering group and there has been significant input from them.
- 14.12 Dr Anusree Biswas Sasidharan welcomed the strategy and the sharing of transition strategy standards which will allow meaningful benchmarking. She said that this shows that the council is a learning organisation. She asked about representation from the police. Steve Hook said that the council attempted to be ambitious but needs to take into account resource limitations. In terms of the police we have attempted to engage with them but they haven't been able to attend the steering group to date.
- 14.13 RESOLVED – that the Committee notes the Transition Strategy report.

15 REDUCING HARMS FROM DRUGS & ALCOHOL - BRIGHTON & HOVE DRUGS & ALCOHOL STRATEGY

- 15.1 Cllr Tristram Burden, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Service Transformation, and Caroline Vass, Interim Director for Public Health, presented the report to the committee.
- 15.2 Dr Anusree Biswas Sasidharan asked a question about data collection Ms Caroline Vass responded that data collection is robust, but sharing data across services was less so, and work is ongoing to improve this.
- 15.3 Dr Sasidharan asked about input from different ethnic groups. Ms Vass responded that services have tried to increase involvement from people from racially minoritised groups, but this has been difficult, with respondents being predominantly white males.
- 15.4 Jo Martindale noted that council strategies had a problem in the degree to which they link up with other strategies. Ms Vass agreed, and said that this was an area of focus.
- 15.5 Cllr Sheard asked about the groups like CGL, police, ES Veterans Hub, and the work with Project Adder. Could we piggy back on some of the work that they are doing. He also asked about the use of Naloxone, and how the council are working with partners to roll this out. Cllr Sheard asked how do you fight something that is so engrained in young people? Caroline Vass said It is not going to be an issue that we can tackle in a short space of time, which is why we are taking about a generational shift. We work very closely with East Sussex, and the police work across Sussex but we made a decision that our strategy would be about Brighton & Hove only, although we are working with neighbours on an alert system. Caroline said that earlier this year they funded someone from CGL to work on Naloxone to develop training and roll out. It is also being rolled out in police custody suites. Cllr Burden added that he is working to improve Councillors' understanding of Naloxone with councillors and on training of cityclean frontline workers.
- 15.6 Becky Robinson asked if they were aware of the link of ADHD and drug use and if there was working being done on this. Caroline Vass responded that this has been included in the Equality Impact Assessment; we are only just beginning to understand the link.
- 15.7 Cllr shanks asked if needle exchanges well publicised. She also asked if injecting rooms were being looked at and about the potential to prescribe heroin. Caroline Vass replied that needle exchange is widely advertised to people who may be taking drugs intravenously. that the issue of injecting rooms is complex and it will be interesting to see what happens in Glasgow with their pilot. However, providing injecting rooms would be very expensive and in fact not currently legal in England. In terms of opiate prescription, the city has a very stable methadone programme that people can access through their GPs. Buprenorphine is long acting, is working well, and also has positive feedback in terms of stabilising people and getting them off the habit.
- 15.8 Cllr Czolak asked about future funding for drugs work. Ms Vass responded that there has been additional Government grant funding which is due to end in March 2025. To date there has been no confirmation that this funding will continue, and there would be significant issues across the country if the funding does end.

15.9 Cllr Czolak asked about the link between drugs and housing services, noting that there is good practice from other places such as Birkenhead. Caroline Vass responded that partnership with housing is a key focus of the strategy.

15.10 Cllr Mcleay noted that drugs-related issues were a significant problem in her ward, but that residents tell her they don't feel supported in reporting problems. More could be done to make this process easier.

15.11 RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 8.22pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of