

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

2.00pm 4 SEPTEMBER 2026

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

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Parrott (Chair) Ahmad, Cattell, Czolak, Mackey, McLeay, McNair, Shanks and Winder

Other Members present: Fiona England (PaCC), Michael Creedy (OPC), Sally Polanski (CVS), Adam Muirhead (CVS), Anusree Biswas (BRM representative), George Woodhams (Youth Council), Kendrick Tugwell (Parent Governor)

PART ONE

15 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

15(a) Declaration of substitutes

15.1 Cllr Evans attended as substitute for the vacant Labour position on the committee.

15.2 Sara Fulford (Older People's Council) sent apologies. Michael Creedy attended as a guest representing the OPC.

15.3 Joanna Martindale (VCS) sent apologies. Sally Polanski attended as a guest representing the VCS.

15(b) Declaration of Interests

15.4 Cllr Czolak declared that he is an NHS trust governor. Cllr Parrott declared that she is an NHS trust governor and also a governor at Downs' View school.

15(c) Exclusion of Press & Public

15.5 The Press & Public were not excluded from the meeting.

16 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATION

16.1 The Chair gave the following communications

I'd like to thanks everyone for attending this special meeting. I've called a special meeting as I felt it was important that People O&S members had the chance to comment on plans for day

services for people with learning disabilities in advance of the Cabinet decision which will take place on 17 September.

The draft Cabinet report and its appendices are included in today's meeting papers. Cabinet papers will be published on 09 September so there is time between this meeting and Cabinet to make changes to the report should Cabinet choose to do so in response to scrutiny suggestions.

We're joined today by Cllr Mitchie Alexander, Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities, Public Health and Adult Social Care, and also by Steve Hook, the council's Director of Adult Social Care. In a moment I will ask Mitchie and Steve to present on their plans for the future of day services for people with learning disabilities.

Before we start, I want to make a point about today's meeting. As with all Council meetings, local residents are welcome to attend and observe the meeting. However, this is not an opportunity for people to directly engage, and I do ask that members of the public don't interrupt the meeting. There will be opportunities for people to ask questions or present deputations or petitions to the 17 September Cabinet meeting.

17 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

17.1 There were no public questions.

18 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

18.1 There were no member questions.

19 PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF WELLINGTON HOUSE

19.1 The item was introduced by Cllr Mitchie Alexander, Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities, Public Health and Adult Social Care, and by Steve Hook, Director of Adult Social Services.

19.2 Cllr Alexander presented slides and explained to the committee that the proposed decisions around Wellington House align with the Council's Learning Disability Strategy, 'Big Plan', and with the Transitions Strategy. The proposals will not reduce day opportunities, but will contribute to a more flexible and cost effective service. Wellington House is highly valued, but the building is not fit for purpose and requires significant investment, services cost substantially more to deliver than independent sector alternatives, and there has been decreasing attendance and referral over recent years. The independent sector already supports around 86% of learning disabled people requiring day care in the city at a lower cost than Wellington House. The proposals will generate an estimated recurrent saving of £336,000. The council will seek to re-deploy Wellington House staff if possible. Potential redundancy costs range from £192,000 to £575,000. An extensive Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed. The EIA identifies a number of risks and mitigations, for example reviewing all clients within 6 weeks of a new placement. Everyone understands that people are very attached to Wellington House, but this is the best decision in financial terms and in terms of the best way to support people with learning disabilities.

19.3 Cllr Evans asked about the implications of closing Wellington House should placements of people with complex needs fail. Would this risk impacting the individuals concerned, and would there be an increased financial risk for the council, which, with no recourse to in-house services, would be forced to pay whatever the local market demanded for a new placement? Mr Hook replied that only a minority of current Wellington House clients have complex needs. The council has a mature and positive relationship with independent sector providers in the city, including providers able to accommodate people with complex needs and the council is confident that it will be able to negotiate reasonable deals should placements fail. The recent re-commissioning of the community support service is evidence of this good relationship. It also means that there are set service specifications and prices for various types of care, including care for people with complex needs. In addition, the council will continue to run Beach House, and this has capacity to be used as a place of safety if necessary.

19.4 Cllr Evans asked about contingency planning if there is a delay in finding placements for the 2 current Wellington House clients with complex needs. Mr Hook replied that there is no fixed end-date for the closure of Wellington House. Bespoke transition plans will be developed for the people concerned. Providers supporting people with complex needs will typically seek to recruit additional staff once a placement is agreed, so the fact that there may not currently be spare capacity for people with complex needs in the independent sector is not a cause for concern. Cllr Alexander added that she has spoken with providers who manage complex needs and they have explained that, if they contract to support people from Wellington House, they will recruit to ensure that support staff have the skills required to meet clients' individual needs.

19.5 Cllr McLeay questioned whether the draft Cabinet report adequately addresses concerns expressed by parent-carers and the generally negative consultation feedback. Mr Hook responded that the Cabinet report does address these issues, particularly in appendices 8 and 11 and in the EIA (appendix 3).

19.6 Cllr McLeay asked for more detail of the review and quality assurance of alternative placements. Mr Hook replied that every client provided with a new placement would be reviewed within 6 weeks of the placement commencing. They would then be subject to an annual review, unless problems had been identified in the initial review, in which case there would be earlier follow-up. Mr Hook also explained the roles played in quality assurance by the Service Improvement Panel and the council's Quality Monitoring Team.

19.7 Cllr McLeay expressed concerns about a reference in the Cabinet report to private providers having leaner running costs, particularly in terms of service quality and the council's duty to encourage sustainable employment practices. Mr Hook replied that the private sector delivers high quality services. It is inevitably the case that this will be at a lower cost than the council can provide services at due to the council having higher costs in terms of employer pension contributions and corporate on-costs. Given the difficult financial position the council is in and the need to make savings of more than £10 million from the Community Care budget in the coming year, there is little alternative.

19.8 Cllr McLeay asked whether it might be more prudent to delay making an irreversible decision given the commitments the new Prime Minister has made to transforming social care. Mr Hook responded that the council is eager to contribute to the Casey Review. However, this will not be a short-term fix, and funding pressures need to be addressed in the meantime.

19.9 Cllr McNair asked about how significant the building condition issues at Wellington House, why the property had been allowed to deteriorate and when the decision was made to close it. Cllr Alexander and Mr Hook replied that substantial sums have been spent on the building in recent years. However, older buildings can be expensive to maintain. The building is nearing the end of its useful life and repair costs would escalate in future years. The decision to close Wellington House was taken in December 2025.

19.10 Cllr Barton Ahmad asked what would happen if placements cannot be found for current clients, noting that trade unions were sceptical that the city market is capable of meeting the demand. Mr Hook replied that he is confident that placements for 16 of the 21 current clients can be swiftly arranged. Finding the right placements for some of the remaining clients may take more time, and some individuals may benefit from having a relatively long transition between placements. A full staff consultation must also be undertaken. Ideally, all new placements would be in place by March 2027, but this will depend on the needs of each individual. The council has a long and stable history of working constructively with the local day services market and is confident that all current clients can be placed appropriately.

19.11 Kendrick Tugwell (parent governor) asked about future demand projections and consultation with special schools. Mr Hook responded that the council had not specifically consulted special schools but is confident that modelling is robust. The number of people requiring placements is increasing year-on-year as reliance on residential care is being reduced, but most of this additional demand has been effectively managed by the independent sector.

19.12 Cllr Mackey asked about the financial and personal costs of future placements breaking down. Mr Hook responded that there is also a financial impact to maintaining the status quo which has to be considered. In terms of financial risk, the council is confident that the local market is robust and able to increase capacity at an acceptable cost. There has been no specific modelling on service failure as this is considered low risk due to the robust mitigations in place, which included the potential use of Beach House. In addition, most of the current Wellington House clients live in local authority funded places, which presents a lower level of risk than clients living with their families. The council is very alive to the human impact of Wellington House closure; this is reflected in the mitigations detailed in the EIA which include measures to minimise people's anxiety.

19.13 Cllr Shanks asked whether alternative premises for Wellington House services had been considered, and what the situation was regarding NHS 'continuing care' funding. Cllr Shanks also expressed concern that Wellington House is a successful community that will be very difficult to move people on from. Mr Hook replied that he agrees that current clients like and value Wellington House. However, the current model has 21 clients, some of whom do not attend every day, and they are supported by 21 staff. This is a high cost, unsustainable model. Most of the unsustainable costs are associated with staffing, so using alternative premises with lower maintenance costs would not have a significant impact on sustainability. The council recognises that moving will be disruptive for current clients and will seek to maintain current friendship groups where possible when making placements. In terms of NHS funding, most clients who are in receipt of NHS continuing care funding will also be living in residential care and are unlikely to require day services.

19.14 Fiona England (Parent Carers Council) told members that PaCC felt that there should have been a more detailed response to concerns raised by parent carers as well as specific

engagement with special schools. PaCC has also raised concerns that there are a significant number of families who will avoid contact with social care until they have no alternative, for example as carers of adults reach an age where they can no longer cope. Basing forecasts of adult needs on young people in receipt of care risks missing this. Similarly, there are families who are currently educating their children outside the city, but these people will eventually return and increase the number of adults requiring support. PaCC welcomes commitments from the council to work with parent carers, but notes that this has not yet started. The quality of the built environment is very important. Wellington House is good in this respect as it has spare space for breakout areas and is also wheelchair accessible. It is unclear whether alternative accommodation will have these advantages. The council also needs to be aware that, if its actions cause families to fall into crisis this will have significant financial impact. Mr Hook replied that a number of these comments are relevant to the council's Transitions Strategy. There has been extensive engagement on this already and there will be more as implementation begins. In terms of Wellington House's facilities, it does need to be recognised that the spare space at the facility is partly due to under-occupation. Whilst it is important to be cautious about projections of future need, the council has framework contracts with local providers and is confident that the market can provide a substantial additional number of places if required. Ms England asked if Mr Hook would commit to meeting with special school heads and Mr Hook responded that he would be happy to. Cllr Parrott noted that she would like to see the implementation of the Transitions Strategy at a future People committee meeting.

19.15 Anusree Biswas (Black & Racially Minoritised representative) asked about support for carers. Mr Hook replied that the council has consulted the Carers Centre on plans. As current clients will be offered an equivalent services, a significant impact on carers is not anticipated, but carer's assessments will be undertaken where appropriate and carers are included in individual care and support plans.

19.16 Cllr Winder asked how the plans relate to broader strategic thinking. Mr Hook replied that the changes, and others such as the recent negotiation of a new contractual framework with providers, are aligned with the priorities in the council's Learning Disability Strategy, The Big Plan. Additional funding will flow to the independent sector as a consequence of the closure of Wellington House and this will help encourage new providers into the city.

19.17 Cllr Evans asked about the risk of losing valued staff. Mr Hood replied that the council will fully consult with staff over changes and will offer redeployment where possible, for example to Beach House or to care homes.

19.18 Sally Polanski (VCS) told members that Amaze had not been directly engaged, but that it supports the concerns raised by other responders and by the governors of Hill Park School. Specifically, Ms Polanski raised concerns about the precarity of independent sector provision in the city and about the readiness of the market to take on more work. More generally, there are concerns with the way that major change is managed across the city. Mr Hook responded that there has been one new placement at Wellington House in the past 3 years. In the same period there have been more than 70 new placements in the independent sector, which has an excellent track record of accommodating demand. The local day services market is robust. However, this is perhaps not fully detailed in the Cabinet report which will be revised to include more detail of the recent re-commissioning process and assurance this has provided around market-readiness. In terms of managing change, the Wellington House consultation was robust, garnering many high quality responses. Consultations can raise expectations and negative responses do need to be carefully weighed against financial pressures.

19.19 The Chair asked for assurance that the consultation feedback did feed into commissioning decisions. Mr Hook responded that there was engagement around the re-commissioning of contracts for all adults with care needs which did inform the development of a new contract framework and decisions to grow market capacity. Following the budget decision to consider the closure of Wellington House, the council also undertook specific market engagement to ascertain whether there was sufficient market capacity to replace Wellington House. There was also a specific consultation with the current clients at Wellington House and other interested parties.

19.20 Michael Creedy (OPC) asked about user engagement. Cllr Alexander responded that there was lots of engagement with service users, although engagement with individuals is not listed in the Cabinet report in order to respect privacy. Mr Hook added that it had been agreed that there would not be direct engagement with current clients regarding the closure of Wellington House, but Speakout was involved in working with clients.

19.21 Cllr Cattell asked about new providers. Mr Hook replied that there are 3 new providers. All have a good track record of working with learning disabled people; one has a strong presence in the city already, whilst another has a presence in a neighbouring local authority area.

19.22 Cllr Evans asked that everyone who had taken part in the recent consultation should be written to, informing them of the final Cabinet decision. Mr Hook agreed to this.

19.23 Ms England said that, were she in a position to make recommendations, she would recommend that the council engage with special school heads and also look at future demand in terms of the number of children being educated outside the city. Mr Hook reiterated that he would be happy to engage with headteachers. The Cabinet report is concerned with the future of Wellington House rather than future demand for learning disability day services, so this information is not relevant to the report.

19.24 Mr Hook agreed to take away a number of actions requested by the committee. These are:

- To arrange to bring the implementation of the Transitions Strategy to a future meeting of People Overview & Scrutiny Committee during 2027 after the recruitment of the Transitions Programme Manager has had sufficient time to implement the Delivery Plan
- To engage with heads of special schools
- To write to all recent consultation respondents informing them of the final Cabinet decision
- To consider how the city Learning Disability Partnership Board could do more to support community involvement in service resilience planning
- To consider how to more fully involve PaCC and other community groups in the delivery of the Transitions Strategy
- To revise the Cabinet report to make clearer how the recently completed re-commissioning work has provided assurance that the local day services market can and will absorb additional capacity if Wellington House is closed.

19.25 Members considered a recommendation proposed by the Chair:

People O&S committee recommends that, should Cabinet decide to close Wellington House, Cabinet requires that Adult Social Care ensures that annual assessments of current service users are prioritised, so that all assessments are completed within 6 months of the closure of Wellington House, and any issues arising from the transfer of vulnerable people to alternative provision are identified and addressed in a timely manner. This should be reported back to People O&S committee.

Members voted to agree this recommendation.

19.26 Members considered a recommendation proposed by Cllr McLeay:

- ***That Cabinet does not proceed with the decision to close Wellington house. That the council undertakes a comprehensive assessment (involving partners and users of services) of current and projected need for learning disability day services across the city, including an evaluation of unmet and hidden need. Looking as a one council, in the context of changes to Adult Social Care by national government, to see how we can be sure of providing for appropriately in the future including for young people leaving college and school.***

Members voted to reject this recommendation.

19.27 Cllrs McLeay, McNair, Baron Ahmad and Shanks asked that it be noted that they have particular concerns about the transfer of services from the council to the independent sector, as a large portion of the savings identified will be due to lower pay in the independent sector. There is a concern as to whether private sector provision will genuinely be of the same standard as council provision, given the lower rates of pay on offer. There is also a more general concern that the Council has duties to encourage local employers to pay sustainable wages and offer decent working conditions and this work is potentially undermined by decisions such as this one. The council is rightly proud of the public services it provides and the fact that it offers excellent terms and conditions so we should be reluctant to change that.

19.28 RESOLVED – (1) That the Cabinet Report be noted;
(2) that an extract of the People special meeting draft minutes be shared with Cabinet;
(3) that People O&S committee recommends that, should Cabinet decide to close Wellington House, Cabinet requires that Adult Social Care ensures that annual assessments of current service users are prioritised, so that all assessments are completed within 6 months of the closure of Wellington House, and any issues arising from the transfer of vulnerable people to alternative provision are identified and addressed in a timely manner. This should be reported back to People O&S committee.

The meeting concluded at 5:30 pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of