

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
FINANCE CABINET MEMBER MEETING
4.00pm, 23 FEBRUARY 2009
COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL
MINUTES

Present: Councillor Young (Cabinet Member)

Also in attendance: Councillor Hamilton

Other Members present: Councillors Harmer-Strange and Kitcat

PART ONE

46. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

46a Declarations of Interest

46.1 Councillor Harmer-Strange declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Item 57 in so far as he is the Chair of Governors of a SEN school.

46b Exclusion of Press and Public

46.2 In accordance with section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 ('the Act'), the Cabinet Member for Finance considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during an item of business on the grounds that it was likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press or public were present during that item, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information (as defined in section 100A(3) of the Act) or exempt information (as defined in section 100I(1) of the Act).

46.3 **RESOLVED** – That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

47. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

41.1 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meetings held on 13 October 2008 and 6 November 2008 be approved and signed by the Cabinet Member as a correct record.

48. CABINET MEMBER'S COMMUNICATIONS

48.1 The Cabinet Member welcomed everyone to the meeting.

49. ITEMS RESERVED FOR DISCUSSION

49.1 All items were reserved by the Cabinet Member.

50. PETITIONS

50.1 There were none.

51. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

51.1 There were none.

52. DEPUTATIONS

52.1 There were none.

53. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

53.1 There were none.

54. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

54.1 There were none.

55. NOTICES OF MOTIONS

55.1 There were none.

56. INCOME COLLECTION & RECOVERY 2008/09 - QUARTER 3

56.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Finance & Resources, which gave an update on income collection and recovery performance for 2008/09 as at quarter 3 (December 2008) and highlighted continuing improvement and best practice actions (for copy see minute book).

56.2 The Cabinet Member noted that good income collection and debt recovery performance were as important to the council as managing within budget and improving value for money. Among other things, she highlighted the Direct Debit take-up, which was either holding up or improving across most income areas enabling better financial planning and cheaper collection for both debtors and the council respectively.

56.3 The Cabinet Member also recognised that these were difficult times and was pleased to see that the various collection services were doing their best to help customers, tax payers and those on benefits to manage their affairs, whether through easier payment methods, access to better money advice or providing assistance to those in hardship. She hoped that the city could continue to balance performance against individuals' and businesses' needs over the coming months and years.

- 56.4 The Opposition Spokesperson disagreed with the indication that the Direct Debit take up had increased and noted that the information given in the report only showed a slight improvement to what it used to be previously.
- 56.5 The Opposition Spokesperson referred to the issue of Housing Rent in paragraph 6.2 of the report. He enquired whether the eviction flyers, which had been designed to be circulated in an area following eviction, would be circulated to all tenants or only to those tenants with a 'bad' record. He advised caution in dealing with this issue to avoid putting undue pressure on those people who conformed to their payments.
- 56.6 The Assistant Director, Financial Services, agreed to find out the information regarding who would receive the eviction flyers and agreed to inform Councillor Hamilton accordingly.
- 56.7 **RESOLVED** - That the contents of the report be noted.

57. IMPLEMENTATION OF PHASE I VFM (VALUE FOR MONEY) RECOMMENDATIONS

- 57.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Strategy & Governance, which provided an overview of the plans developed by each directorate to take forward the recommendations coming out of last year's corporate VfM programme and outlined the considerable programme of work underpinning the continued commitment to ongoing improvements in this corporate priority area (for copy see minute book).
- 57.2 The Cabinet Member indicated that regular briefings on the progress being made by services would be brought to her Cabinet Member meetings and stated that she would also have the opportunity to receive more detailed briefings as and when required.
- 57.3 The Opposition Spokesperson referred to paragraph 6.1 of the report and enquired whether there were plans to close down some special schools under the approach to restructuring special schools budgets. He was concerned that the transfer of children to mainstream schools was not always the best response, as the experience has been that they were not usually funded adequately. He also enquired, in relation to paragraph 6.10 of the report, whether the referred review of day care also meant the closing of accommodation or day care facilities.
- 57.4 The Assistant Director, Improvement and Organisational Development, explained that she was not aware of any proposals for closing down SEN schools or day care facilities. She noted, however, that she was not the lead officer for those matters and was, therefore, unable to give further information on the questions raised. She agreed to follow up the information requested and advise the Opposition Spokesperson accordingly.
- 57.5 The Opposition Spokesperson further enquired about the rationale behind the reduction of CityClean crew members from 19 to 15, as per information reported in paragraph 6.16 of the report, and whether any of this information appeared in any of the budgets documents that had been circulated to Members.
- 57.6 The Assistant Director indicated that most of these proposals had been discussed at length previously, though some of them were initial proposals for the next 12 months.

She explained that the report was intended for information and as an illustration of what is being considered at this stage, and that any plans would be taken in the necessary detailed format to the decision-making bodies they were required to go to.

- 57.7 Councillor Kicat, the Green Opposition Spokesperson, welcomed the opportunity to speak. He expressed concerns about the fact that both reports being considered at today's Cabinet Member meeting were for noting only. In view of this, he challenged the effectiveness of the Cabinet Member Meetings system and how they conformed to the council's priorities of value for money.
- 57.8 The Head of Law noted Councillor Kitcat's comments. He advised, however, that there were opportunities for Members to participate more fully in the system by presenting letters and questions to the Cabinet Member meetings. He indicated that this opportunity could perhaps be more utilised in future.
- 57.9 The Head of Law further explained that the Constitution of Brighton & Hove City Council was currently being reviewed. He explained that this review gave the opportunity to all interested to put proposals forward in order to look at ways of improving the functioning of the Cabinet Member Meetings.
- 57.10 The Head of Law also advised that the other means available to bring any concerns forward in relation to the Constitution were through the Governance meetings, Cabinet meetings or through a Group's nominated Opposition Spokesperson.
- 57.11 **RESOLVED** - That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 4.20pm

Signed

Chairman

Dated this

day of

2009