

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMISSION
5.00PM 27 NOVEMBER 2009
COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL
MINUTES

Present: Councillors Mitchell (Chairman); Alford, Bennett, Elgood, Meadows, Older, Peltzer Dunn, Pidgeon (Deputy Chairman), Wakefield-Jarrett, Taylor and Turton

Also Present: Councillors Hamilton, Morgan, Simson and Watkins

PART ONE

51. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

51A Declarations of Substitutes

51.1 Councillor Keith Taylor attended as substitute for Councillor Bill Randall. Councillor Craig Turton attended as substitute for Councillor Warren Morgan.

51B Declarations of Interest

51.2 There were none.

51C Declarations of Party Whip

51.3 There were none.

51D Exclusion of Press and Public

51.4 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

51.5 RESOLVED: That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

52. REQUEST TO CALL IN THE 12 NOVEMBER CABINET DECISION; THREE - YEAR STRATEGIC GRANTS

- 52.1** The Chairman started the proceedings by telling members that she had sought advice as to the propriety of her chairing a Call-in meeting at which a call-in request to which she was a signatory was to be debated, and had been assured that this was both legal and constitutional.
- 52.2** A member made the point that although this might be the case, it could nonetheless appear to members of the public that there was a clash of interests here, and that the Chairman should consider her position in light of this. The Chairman thanked the member for his concern, but reiterated that she was comfortable with chairing the meeting.
- 52.3** The Chairman asked Councillor Turton to introduce the call-in request, and invited Councillor Simson, the Cabinet Member for Community Affairs, Inclusion and Internal Relations, to respond. Councillor Simson referred some matters to Richard Tuset, Head of Cabinet Support, John Routledge, the Communities Team Manager, and to Jonathan Best, the Grants Officer, to answer.
- 52.4** The Chairman also invited comments from Councillor Leslie Hamilton and Councillor David Watkins, members of the cross-party Members' Advisory Group which originally considered the 3 year discretionary grants programme.
- 52.5** Councillor Turton told members that he was concerned with the amount of information presented to Cabinet when it made its decision with regard to 3 year grants, and also concerned in regard to some of the information which may or may not have been conveyed to the member Advisory Group (MAG).
- 52.6** Councillor Hamilton noted that the MAG had to assess over 70 grant applications, and could not therefore be expected to go into detail about any particular application. Councillor Hamilton also stated that, as he recollected, when MAG discussed the Crew Club grant application, members were informed that alternative youth club facilities were being developed in Whitehawk (via the co-location project), such that, even if the Crew Club grant application was not successful, there would still be funding for a Whitehawk youth facility offering equivalent services.
- 52.7** Councillor Simson told members that consideration of the co-location project had formed no part of the formal discussion of the Crew Club application, and if it had been mentioned, this had only been in a general conversation about East Brighton.
- 52.8** In answer to members' questions, Councillor Simson told the committee that the Crew Club had received financial support in the past from the Children and Young People's Trust (CYPT) and had also received New Deal (EB4U) funding. The Crew Club had not previously been a beneficiary of or an applicant for council funding via the 3 year or the annual grants programme. It would be highly unusual for an organisation to be successful in a 3 year grant application if it was a first time applicant (and not already receiving support via the annual grants programme).
- 52.9** Jonathan Best responded to a question on the 3 year grants process by informing members that there was no appeals process for unsuccessful applicants. Having such a process in place would risk delaying funding for successful applicants.

- 52.10** Some members expressed concerns about the amount of information on the 3 year grant process presented to Cabinet. Councillor Simson responded by arguing that there would be little value in Cabinet duplicating the work of the MAG by covering the same ground. However, Councillor Simson and Richard Tuset agreed that there would be some value in including general background information in the Cabinet report for the next round of 3 year grant applications.
- 52.11** A member made the point that there might be value in looking at the way the MAG worked, as it appeared that its current workload precluded an appropriate examination of the issues. Jonathan Best responded that, although the MAG did make its grants decisions at a single meeting, detailed discussion of the various bids was in fact spread across several meetings, providing an adequate opportunity to discuss each bid in detail.
- 52.12** In answer to queries about the officer advice to MAG in regard to 3 year grant applications, Councillor Watkins told members that he could not recall the detailed advice in relation to the Crew Club application, but was sure that officers had advised that there would be funding for Whitehawk youth facilities whether or not the Crew Club bid was approved. Councillor Watkins also stated that, in general, this round of 3 year grant applications had been the best organised he could recall.
- 52.13** Councillor Simson noted that, in general, it would be fair to assume that unsuccessful 3 year grant applicants would be allocated alternative funding - for example via the annual grants programme, and it would be quite reasonable for officers to convey this fact to MAG members.
- 52.14** Councillor Warren Morgan addressed the committee as a witness. Councillor Morgan declared an interest in this matter, as he is a trustee of the Crew Club. Councillor Morgan informed members that, whilst Whitehawk Youth Centre provided some important youth services, it was not a universal provision youth club and could not replicate the Crew Club's services. Similarly, the Whitehawk co-location project does not currently include provision for a youth centre. Key East Brighton youth provision was therefore dependant upon the continuing existence of the Crew Club.
- 52.15** Members acknowledged the large amount of work undertaken by the officers and thanked them for their thorough approach to the assessments and for the details provided at this meeting.
- 52.16** The Commission then discussed whether or not to refer the original Cabinet decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration. On balance, members did not think that the decision should be referred back, in part because it was felt that Cabinet might then be obliged to reconsider all 3 year grant applications. It was therefore agreed that the original Cabinet decision be not referred back for reconsideration.
- 52.17** However, a member proposed that the Overview & Scrutiny Commission (OSC) should nonetheless agree to make the following recommendations to Cabinet:
- (a) A policy and methodology review should be undertaken of the Three Year Grants by the Communities Team, with the Member Advisory Group, and this should be referred to Scrutiny in advance of commencement of the next Three Year Grant process.

(b) That the Chairman of OSC should write to the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Governance Committee expressing concern that some decisions are being taken at cabinet without all of the necessary information being made available;

(c) That the Communities Team and other relevant officers explore, as a matter of urgency, alternative sources of funding for the Crew Club, the Bridge, and other projects which have received no funding via this round of grants.

52.18 Members voted on each of these amendments and agreed to amendments (a) and (c), rejecting amendment (b).

52.19 RESOLVED –

(1) the Cabinet decision of November 12 2009 in relation to 3 year grants be not referred back to Cabinet for re-examination;

(2) The Overview & Scrutiny Commission recommends that: (a) A policy and methodology review should be undertaken of the Three Year Grants by the Communities Team, with the Member Advisory Group, and this should be referred to Scrutiny in advance of commencement of the next Three Year Grant process and (b) the Communities Team and other relevant officers explore, as a matter of urgency, alternative sources of funding for the Crew Club, the Bridge, and other projects which have received no funding via this round of grants.

The meeting concluded at 6.35pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of