

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
POLICY & RESOURCES URGENCY SUB-COMMITTEE

12.00pm 12 SEPTEMBER 2019

HOVE TOWN HALL, - COUNCIL CHAMBER

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Councillor Platts, Mac Cafferty and Mears

PART ONE

2 SUPPORT FOR YOUTH STRIKES AND OTHER CLIMATE ACTION

- 2.1 The Urgency Sub-Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Families, Children & Learning, written in response to the Notice of Motion 'Support for Youth Strikes and Other Climate Action' which was considered at Full Council on 25 July 2019.
- 2.2 The Chair noted that present at them meeting were two representatives from the Youth Strike Action group: Uma Krieger and Annapurna Marley, and two representatives from the GMB Union: Mark Turner and Jo Viner.
- 2.3 Ms Marley thanked the Council and said that as far as she was aware it was the only one in the country which was taking action to support the youth strikes.
- 2.4 Mr Turner said that the GMB supported the Youth Strike Action group and had liaised with the police on the route for the forthcoming march. The GMB would accompany the Police on walking the route prior to the march, but said that it could still change on the day due to the extensive work on Valley Gardens. He said that the GMB would be part of the briefing with the police and the stewards which would take place at the start of the march and would support everyone where they could.
- 2.5 Councillor MacCafferty referred to paragraph 3.13 which said that staff leave would not be unreasonably withheld providing that 'reasonable notice' was given, and noted that as the strike was only 8 days away it would have been helpful if staff could have been made aware of that earlier. The Executive Director Families, Children & Learning said that the report was subject to the Sub-Committees decision today and so no directive could be given before that. However, he added that a week would probably be reasonable time to request leave.
- 2.6 Councillor Mac Cafferty referred to paragraph 3.18 and 'car free' days and accepted that resources would be needed to arrange it but questioned why action was needed from the Council, and said that as many cities were closing roads for the day this Council should too. The Assistant Director for City Transport said that the last car-free day in the

city was five years ago, and at that time there had been external funding which had meant that the Council were able to have an officer responsible for arranging it. However due to having to liaise with businesses, residents and consult on road closures etc, it had taken over a year to plan. He said that a report on how this could be arranged in the future would be considered later this year by the Environment, Transport and Sustainability Committee, but stressed that funding and resources would be required to take the matter forward.

- 2.7 Councillor MacCafferty thanked officers for the report and said that he would be supporting the recommendations.
- 2.8 Councillor Mears noted that Councillors were corporate parents to children in the City and asked what legal obligation they were under to ensure the young people's safety if they took part in the strikes, and what insurance would be in place for councillors if anything should happen to them. She said that it was important that parents did sign a letter confirming their children could attend the march, as they could be fined if their children were not attending school. Councillor Mears noted the Police's concerns as set out in the report, and whilst she noted the comments of Mr Turner from the GMB, asked if an updated report of the Police's action could be provided. She noted that some staff at the Council worked in front line services and asked what steps were in place if those people joined the march and there was then insufficient staff to cover the services. She said the report referred to teachers taking time out of school to accompany children on the marches and noted that such actions were not part of their contract. The report also referred to risk assessments being carried out and said that Members needed sight of those to be reassured that as corporate parents everything had been considered.
- 2.9 The Executive Director Families, Children & Learning said the safety of all children was his primary concern and his statutory duty was to ensure that they were safe. Councillors' role as corporate parent only related to children in care and not all children in the City. The Council as a corporate body had a role to ensure that matters were appropriately managed, so if there were any concerns that during the event children may be at risk it would be inappropriate for the Council to endorse the event. It was important to ensure that it was well organised, but no event could be completely risk free. The advice from the police following the agreement of the route had been significant, and the involvement of the GMB in terms of supporting the organisers with stewarding had been important in drafting this report. It was for schools to allow children time off from school, rather than the Council. The Authority had provided advice to schools which was that they should receive a signed letter from parents confirming that they were agreeable to their child taking time off school to join the march, and that schools should carry out their own risk assessment, and that assessment would then be the schools rather than the Council's. Whether teachers were allowed to leave school and accompany the children was again a matter for the schools rather than the Council. With regard to staff taking leave, it would be for individual departments to ensure that there was adequate cover before agreeing to annual leave being taken, as they would for any request for time off.
- 2.10 The Monitoring Officer wanted to clarify that the Council was not promoting the strike but was ensuring that it was done as smoothly as possible and reducing any possible risks. As the Council was the Local Education Authority it had a duty to give advice to both the schools and to parents and the advice contained in the report and the guidance

provided to schools fulfilled that obligation. With regard to insurance the Council did have public liability insurance, but this was not a Council run event and for the Council to be liable for any incident it would have had to have caused it.

- 2.11 Councillor Mears said that the Conservative Group supported young people protesting but did not think that the strikes should be held during a school day. Councillor Mears spoke to Ms Krieger and Ms Marley and said that there were serious issues around schools with parents dropping off children and the number of cars which caused pollution and congestion, and suggested that they look at the wider issue in the city and encourage parents to allow their children to walk to school. They agreed that reducing the number of children who were driven to school was a good thing, but said that the campaign was about the bigger picture, it was a global issue and as there was limited time to tackle climate change, and stopping people driving to school would be a small dent and going big was a better use of their energy. With regard to striking on a school day, they said that if the demonstration was held on a weekend no one would pay any attention. Currently, climate change was not in the school syllabus and so young people were educating themselves on climate strike days. There was a whole week of action and 23 September 2019 would be Climate Change Education Day and they wanted schools to teach pupils about the climate crisis.

2.12 RESOLVED: That the Committee

- (i) Agreed that the council should liaise with the police and with schools and to develop guidance to schools on the attendance of young people at the planned climate change event on 20 September.
- (ii) Agreed that should staff wish to participate in the 'General Strike on Climate' on 20 September 2019 that this can be facilitated through annual leave, flexi time or unpaid leave, subject to reasonable notice being given and the requirements for maintaining service delivery as set out in 3.12 and that guidance on this is issued to managers.
- (iii) Recommended that, subject to preliminary checks, Brighton & Hove City Council shall support the UN e-learning Climate Change course as soon as possible, with a view to train at least one teacher in every maintained school.

The meeting concluded at 12.40pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of