

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
POLICY & RESOURCES (RECOVERY) SUB-COMMITTEE

5.15pm 3 MARCH 2021

VIRTUAL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Mac Cafferty (Chair) Miller, Platts, Yates and Clare

PART ONE

35 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

(a) Declarations of Substitutes

35.1 Councillor Clare confirmed that after the agenda had been published she had been appointed as a permanent member of the Sub- Committee in place of Councillor Gibson.

(b) Declarations of Interests

35.2 There were no declarations of interests in matters appearing on the agenda.

(c) Exclusion of the Press and Public

35.3 There were no Part Two Items.

36 MINUTES

36.1 **RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

37 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

37.1 The Chair gave the following communication:

Following both the announcement of a 'roadmap' and of today's budget announcement in Parliament there are a number of updates I'd like to offer.

Rates of Covid 19

In terms of Covid rates excellent efforts mean that infections in our city are comparably very low; we've come down from an extremely high position. But there's still a long way to go and we are not out of the pandemic. To maintain progress and focus on recovery

we must all continue to follow the Government's directive to stay home and to stay within our local area – this advice has not changed and I'd like to stress that. Also, restrictions will only be lifted on the dates of the four steps in the roadmap if we keep the virus under control. To some extent these could be the most testing weeks and months yet, as some services open up and we still await full vaccination and mass testing and sufficient contact tracing for all, as well as deal with new strains. Of course we have a keen eye on schools reopening on 8th March and the fact that what happens in terms of social mixing outside school is just as important as what happens in the classroom in terms of lowering infection rates.

Support for events and cultural economy

Keeping infections low is the best way we can support our local economy. I know people will share cautious optimism following announcements this week that suggest the city's arts, culture and hospitality offer – may be accessible to residents again this year. It's welcome news that some events are already adapting to the new circumstances. Our city's much-loved Brighton Festival will go ahead, albeit in a different way, adapted to ensure safe, online and socially distanced events. Online events offer more options for accessibility which is a plus and helps keep infection rates down. Because the pandemic is still with us, the City will still face challenges that we are keen to acknowledge. Hopefully councillors will have seen plans to rapidly scale up our seafront services, for example, in response to the warm weather we've already experienced and numbers at the beach. We will continue to talk to partners such as the police and health services about how we can support the economy to reopen sustainably this year. We do want our local blue light services and NHS to stay on their feet through the pandemic and not become overwhelmed. Keeping infection rates low will absolutely be the key that unlocks the opportunity for events in the city once again.

Existing and continued support amid the pandemic

While planning for summer we do need to also stay focused on what support people need right now. Today the Chancellor has just made a budget announcement that we are pleased to see after lobbying. This includes an extension of the business rates holiday, and of continued furlough and some new grant schemes and reliefs for businesses. In the same breath I thought, changes, for example, to the self-employed income support scheme and other grants will sadly come too little, too late for many in the city, such as freelance and company directors, who have faced a huge hit. We will of course continue to assist where we can.

Work on night-time economy and APPG

Work to influence national strategy continues. We have been speaking up for the night-time economy, through giving evidence to parliament. Businesses that form the cornerstone of the City's nightlife have contributed their experiences over the past year. Many venues and suppliers have reported annual losses of between 40 and 70% to their businesses. The evidence we submitted to parliament asserts this identity and the importance of a settlement for the night-time economy – a major draw for visitors to our city and the businesses in it, affected by the pandemic.

Local recovery work updates

That leads me on to positive updates.

The City Council and Brilliant Brighton, our Business Improvement District have teamed up to make use of vacant premises within Brighton City centre as part of the recovery programme. The temporary project aims to utilise empty properties in Brighton's city centre, by offering short-term pop-up shop opportunities to those looking to host their own store, restaurant, cafe or deli, but don't want a long-term commitment. The project hopes to also engage local artists to dress windows and create eye-catching window displays in empty properties - not only to improve the appearance of unused units (and reduce the risk of anti-social behaviour). It will not only provide new uses for empty buildings, it will help people struggling to find a platform during the pandemic and revive city centre shopping areas ready to welcome the safe return of visitors. In the last year we have seen our need for good quality internet connections increase with children having to be home schooled during periods of lockdown, more people working from home and connecting with friends and relatives by video. Work is beginning this month by CityFibre on an £80m rollout of full fibre broadband throughout the city, beginning with Moulsecoomb & Bevendean ward. Working with our partners at the Greater Brighton Economic Board, we have been pushing for faster and better internet connection for a number of years and so this is a significant investment.

Green Recovery

We're also progressing work on a green recovery so we can build back better. The government's announcements of green bonds was welcome, but I also know we can and should be going much further. Locally work continues apace including through our budget setting process last week that allocated funding for new green spaces, for a warmer homes programme to also boost local jobs, work on Covid recovery and renewal and funding to help support the arts and cultural sector recovery plan, as well as more investment in our young people and the city's regeneration.

38 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

38.1 There were no Petitions, Written Questions or Deputations

39 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

39 (a) Petitions

39.1 There were none

39 (b) Written Questions

39.2 There were none

39 (c) Letters

39.3 Councillor Platts presented her letter regarding the Build Back Better campaign.

39.4 The Chair gave the following response:

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to be an unprecedented shock to our lives, but we have seen an amazing collective response at the local level.

As major challenges to our wellbeing, our local communities, and economy continues, I agree that we must find ways to support the city to recover, whilst addressing the health, nature and climate crises together with a focus on local delivery. A green and fair recovery and meeting the city's 2030 net zero carbon target will be dependent on the city council leading, empowering and resourcing the city's recovery and renewal.

When it comes to Build Back Better, you can be assured that this is nothing less than the ambition of Greens. The Green Party called for a Green New Deal no less than 13 years ago, a public investment programme for green jobs and social welfare, and of course it was Caroline Lucas and Clive Lewis who have launched the Green New Deal Bill in Parliament. More locally, Green Councillors proposed that the city council here can, and should, demonstrate local leadership and back in 2019 we proposed a Green New Deal for our city – one that takes demands to a hyper local level, focusing on the opportunities to narrow the gaps in social inequality, create well paid, sustainable jobs in sectors that support the health and wellbeing of both people and planet.

As we've seen with the recent Green budget, this is something all of us councillors can seek to champion at a council level. This includes our recent proposal of millions of pounds of investment into warmer homes, for a programme to make energy efficient our thousands of council-owned housing stock, to both lower fuel bills, create employment and skills opportunities locally, and bring down the carbon emissions released from housing.

Later this month will be publishing the draft of our 2030 Carbon Neutral Programme which will sit alongside the recovery and renewal plans to support the city's transition to a carbon neutral city by 2030. This is of course explicitly linked to how we can and must create a better future – one cannot exist without the other. To be frank, the poorest bear the brunt of cuts and of climate chaos. Whether that's exposure to air pollution, cold, leaky housing, or the reality that when crisis hits – such as floods in the UK or elsewhere – those on low incomes are already held back from being able to escape its worst effects.

We have already made significant steps to place the city on a path to recovery. From the Arts & Culture Recovery Plan, agreed at this meeting in January and funded in our budget last week – to work on the downland estate plan. Of course, local authorities are by no means the only local actor delivery the city's recovery and transition to carbon neutral and to ensure a better future. We want to work with local people, community groups and the voluntary sector, the wider public sector, and our business community. By coming together as a range of public and private sector partners across the City to address the challenge that the city faces, we can get the city back on track.

Although government funding to deal with the crisis has been welcome, councils have seen huge new spending demands at the same time as seeing normal revenue streams reduced. The Government should consider how it can join up and simplify the funding that is already available to local government, how this can be focused on carbon emission reductions, and where it should be accelerated. Simply providing certainty around medium / long-term resourcing is of considerable importance in enabling councils to deliver a fair, green and healthy recovery. And there will be need for new funding, to support recovery with investment needed in low carbon infrastructure,

regeneration schemes that create jobs and in skills programmes to reverse the recession.

I am therefore happy to write to the Secretary of State, to demand support for a national Build Back Better plan through comprehensive national policy reform, and to work with other councils and the LGA to advance the aims of the campaign. I hope that we can get all three parties to join me in signing this letter.

The City Councils' unique insight into our local communities and circumstances, our service delivery and regulatory functions, and our convening power enables us to drive carbon emissions reductions and support recovery across our whole city in ways that can also deliver better public health, reduced inequalities, a healthier environment and thriving local economies. We know our city can thrive again, and through working together on recovery and renewal we can build a fairer and greener city.

39.5 **RESOLVED:** That the letter be noted.

39 (d) **Notices of Motion**

39.6 There were none.

40 COVID-19 RECOVERY & RENEWAL PROGRAMME UPDATE

40.1 The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture which provided an update on the progress of the Covid-19 Recovery & Renewal Programme.

40.2 Councillor Platts asked if there was democratic oversight on Food, Vulnerable People and Welfare Reform & Financial Hardship working groups. The Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture said that all members of the working groups were officers and stakeholders, with democratic oversight coming from this Committee and the Policy & Resources Committee.

40.3 Councillor Platts noted that the Children & Young People working group were looking at a number of issues including the mental health of children (immediate issues and the longer term impact of the pandemic), disadvantaged families within the city and employment and skills, and asked what action was being taken. The Executive Director Families Children & Learning said that they were concerned about the impact of the pandemic on disadvantaged young people and their families and so were developing a city-wide Disadvantaged Strategy which would include educational disadvantage and would link in with the Early Help review. The operational side was to ensure that services were provided at an earlier stage, and the 0-5 age group was key to addressing disadvantage and would put the children and their families in a much better position going forward.

40.4 Councillor Yates referred to the Crime and Community Cohesion in the report and noted that the Government had allocated £606k to the City for 2021/22. The intention of the funding was that it would allow Local Authorities to commission services which were currently funded MHCLG, and asked why the report had not set out how the Council intended to spend that money. The Chair said that a report on this would be coming to

the TECC Committee. The Executive Director Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities said the Council were in discussions with the MHCLG on how that funding could be used and what their expectations were.

40.5 Councillor Clare referred to the Ways of Working group who had been looking at the health and well-being of staff, and asked if there was a way to accelerate the review of allowing more flexible working arrangement for staff, and asked if a report on this issue could come to a future meeting. The Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture said that this issue was being considered by the Ways of Working group, and would bring a report to the next meeting.

40.6 **RESOLVED:** That the Sub-Committee noted the progress update report.

41 **EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS UPDATE AND CITY EMPLOYMENT SKILLS (RECOVERY) PLAN 2021-2023**

41.1 The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Families Children & Learning regarding the City Employment and Skills (Recovery) Plan 2021 – 2023.

41.2 Councillor Clare was pleased to note that the Council's bid to the DWP for the Youth Employment Hub had been successful. She asked if third sector providers could be involved in the recovery plan and noted that the number of youth employment was going down and asked if that was a trend. The Head of Skills and Employment said that she would welcome involving third sector groups and would discuss that further with Members and said that there had been a reduction in youth employment but it was too early to say if that was a trend or would change once lockdown was over.

41.3 Councillor Platts asked what funding had been secured and approximately how many people we were expecting to help, and how sustainable those jobs may be, and if those people would be paid a Living Wage. The Head of Skills and Employment said that there were a number of incentives which the Government had implemented such as the Kickstart scheme, and employers could top-up the salary if they wanted to pay a living wage. The funding which had been secured was from the DWP for the flexible support fund, and the de-carbonisation academy.

41.4 Councillor Miller suggested that there should be more focus on creating jobs within the IT sector, and attracting investors into the City, and for the Council to look at how it could create more jobs such as encouraging early retirement for Council employees to create vacancies. The Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture said that this was a short-term recovery plan and looking at current employment. There were skills which were needed for the Tech economy but that was not a direct need due to the impact of Covid. Item 43 on the agenda provided further information on the economy within the Greater Brighton Plan.

41.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Sub-Committee –

- (i) Approved the City Employment and Skills (Recovery) Plan 2021 –2023;
- (ii) Noted the general Employment and Skills update.

42 RECOVERY UPDATE: FOOD

- 42.1 The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture which updated members on the work that was being done around provision of food during COVID-19, in terms of emergency provision, an update on the winter Covid-19 grant for families, and consideration of a longer-term strategic approach to food.
- 42.2 The Chair noted that there was an amendment from the Labour Group and asked Councillor Platts to propose the amendment.
- 42.3 Councillor Platts said that there was a food crisis with many families having to rely on foodbanks. The amendment sought to clarify the Council's policy on ensuring residents were fed, and the Council needed to decide how funds could be allocated to do that. Councillor Yates formally seconded the amendment.
- 42.4 Councillor Clare said that it was clear that more work needed to be done on a national as well as local level and therefore the Green Group would be supporting the amendment.
- 42.5 Councillor Miller thanked everyone who was working with and donating to the foodbanks. However, he would not be supporting the amendment as it was the Conservative Group's view that the City's MPs should be lobbying the Government rather than the Chief Executive.
- 42.6 Councillor Platts asked what the Council's overall strategy would be to address the issues, and whether things like rent-free premises could be provided for foodbanks or to provide allotments so residents could grow their own food etc. The Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture said that In order to continue to drive the food agenda, the City Council has recently appointed a new Food Policy Officer and they provide strategic leadership on food policy and food economy matters within the Council.
- 42.7 The Sub-Committee voted on the amendment and it was agreed. Councillor Miller abstained.

42.8 RESOLVED: That the Sub-Committee –

- (i) Noted the work being done across the city around the emergency food response during the Covid19 pandemic, and the consideration of the implications surrounding the provision of emergency food in the longer term;
- (ii) Agreed that the Food Policy Officer continued to work with Brighton & Hove Food Partnership and the wider emergency food network on developing stronger analysis of options for moving to a more sustainable emergency food network, which builds upon the initial analysis outlined in paras 3.7 to 3.28 of this report;
- (iii) Agreed that the Food Policy Officer commenced the longer-term strategic food policy work outlined in paragraphs 3.49 to 3.55 of the report in partnership with city partners, the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership and the Greater Brighton Economic Board;

- (iv) Agreed that the Chief Executive writes to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and to the Chair of the Government's National Food Strategy (with the City's three MPs and the Local Government Association copied in), urging for the 'Right to Food' to be incorporated into the government's National Food Strategy, and into law.

43 RECOVERY UPDATE: ECONOMY

- 43.1 The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture which updated members on some key indicators as to how the city's economy is being affected by the Covid 19 Pandemic, as well as some of the activities that were happening to better understand that impact and to work towards a sustainable recovery of the city's (and city region's) economy.
- 43.2 Councillor Clare noted that the City had an above average number of both people who were home working and who had been furloughed and asked if that could impact on how the City could recover. The Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture said that furloughing staff had been helpful for the hospitality sector and had secured jobs although it may some time for the visitor economy to recover, and the City had a high number of residents who were self-employed or were sole traders which could have increased the number who were working from home.
- 43.4 Councillor Yates noted that the report made no mention of getting shops back into use. The Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture said that the Council were working with Brilliant Brighton to look at using empty shops and some suggestions were to allow short term pop-up shops, or to engage local artists to show case their work in shop window displays. More information on that would be provided in future meetings.
- 43.5 Councillor Miller said that there were 144 grant applications still to be decided and asked when that would be done, and noted that the Government had recently announced an further one-off grant scheme which would pay an additional amount of between £4k to £9k to businesses and asked when that would be paid. The Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture said that applications were being processed as quickly as possible and there were currently 96 being considered but that number did change on a daily basis, and with regard to the extra grants it was hoped that they would allocated in the next couple of weeks.
- 43.6 Councillor Platts asked whether as part of the ongoing strategy, officers were looking at shared working space. The Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture said that people were wanting to commute less but still wanted to meet colleagues in person and so that was something which would be looked going forward.
- 43.7 RESOLVED:** That the Sub-Committee –
- (i) Noted the latest position with regards to the city's economy and the impact of the pandemic;
 - (ii) Noted the contents of the Greater Brighton Sustainable Recovery Plan (appendix 1), and the update on delivery of that plan (Appendix 2).

