

**Brighton & Hove City Council**  
**Policy & Resources (Recovery) Sub-Committee**

**4.00pm 20 January 2022**

**Hove Town Hall - Council Chamber**

**Minutes**

**Present:** Councillor Mac Cafferty (Chair) Allcock (Opposition Spokesperson), Miller (Group Spokesperson), Appich and Clare

**Part One**

**20 PROCEDURAL MATTERS**

**(a) Declarations of Substitutes**

20.1 There were no declarations of Substitutes.

**(b) Declarations of Interest**

20.2 There were no declarations of interests in matters listed on the agenda.

**(c) Exclusion of Press and Public**

20.3 There were no Part Two items on the agenda

**21 MINUTES**

21.1 The minutes of the last meeting held on the 4 November 2021 were approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

**22 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

22.1 The Chair provided the following communication:

We completely disagree with government's plan to ease Plan B restrictions, coming into effect next week but without any further safeguards in place despite the chaos Omicron has caused. It is obvious this is being done to distract from the endless parties disguised as work meetings in 10 Downing St and to try and save the Prime Minister's political career. The decision to reverse restrictions comes as there are no extra pledges on ventilation for schools, 300,000 children are out of school in just the second week of term. While we saw 438 deaths nationally just yesterday.

We are concerned government is once again shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted; yes cases have gone down – but so has reported testing, so it follows less

tests equals less cases – we’re not out of the woods by a long shot and we don’t want to end up here again. If this follows the form of most other pandemics, Omicron sadly won’t be the last variant so this is premature. The reality – researched by the World Health Organisation and the government’s own scientific advisors is that the pandemic is far from over. While NHS surgeons, nurses and managers warned us only this morning the action is premature and the risks are still deadly serious.

We’ve remained and remain a mask friendly city we have remained so as we put our resident’s health and safety first, not Boris Johnson’s ailing career; please continue to look out for each other – there are still many people who are clinically vulnerable. On top of all of this of course we are contending with huge staff shortages due to sickness, not least in our health and care system underlined by the more than 93,000 staff vacancies in the NHS. The NHS is suffering a huge backlog of operations they are struggling to get through. This is why minimising cases offers us the best chance of helping the vulnerable and those people on waiting lists and securing our city’s recovery. Do keep testing; council has been instrumental in providing support to businesses and residents struggling to get LFD test kits and you can still get these from HTH and jubilee library.

We are also supporting the ‘week of walk ins’ – there will be no appointment needed at vaccine sites across the city, in multiple locations, and walk ins resume at Churchill square – you can find a full list of locations on the Sussex health and care partnership website.

Finally we’re resolutely focused on the city’s recovery – despite the strain of the pandemic and cuts to council budgets incredible strides have been made – reports today show hundreds of people are accessing the council’s Adult Education Hub where they can access courses, training, education and employability skills; our Youth Employment hub continues to support young people; the business community continues to benefit from targeted council and partner work and training

Today’s reports also include further update on the roll-out of government funds to local businesses based on government eligibility criteria, and though additional funds provided to us on top of this are meagre, we will be squeezing as much as we can out of this to support hospitality, retail, leisure, events businesses that have been otherwise frozen out of accessing other government grants – we anticipate we can offer around 288 grants with this other money.

Our arts culture recovery plan continues to bear fruit and brings much needed light to the city during our darkest months – as we meet the Third Thursdays project is a new, arts music and culture programme, filling the centre of Brighton with local arts, events, performances, film projections and new commissions – tonight’s take place through East Street, the North Laine and Lanes between 4:30 and 6:30pm and I would encourage residents to have a look. Hopefully we can get out of committee rapidly to enable many colleagues here to enjoy this new project, that all forms part of the council’s collaborative ABCD arts and culture recovery plan we drew up during the height of the pandemic.

**23 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

23.1 There were no Petitions, Written Questions or Deputations

**24 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT**

24.1 There were no Petitions, Written Questions, Letters or Notices of Motion

**25 COVID-19 RECOVERY & RENEWAL UPDATE**

25.1 The 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.

25.2 The Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture advised that officers had also provided a presentation which provided greater detail on the recovery progress of two key areas: City Employment & Skills Recovery Plan and the Cultural Recovery Plan. As the intention was to try to limit the time Councillors spent in the Council Chamber, those presentations had been sent to members of the Sub-Committee for information and not included on the agenda. Officers would be happy to take any questions or comments on those presentations. Those presentations had also been published on the Council's website.

25.3 Councillor Miller asked if the Council were now looking at a return to normal business. The Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture said the Council were increasingly working on recovery and a return to core business, rather than 'normal' business as it's not necessarily a return to normal business. As we go through the different waves of the pandemic there would be a need to re-set and re-think how we look at recovery as there would be different impacts with each wave. As we move out of the pandemic the focus may be more on resilience and how we can support the city and the economy, alongside the commitment to tackle climate change.

25.4 Councillor Appich referred to customer service and said that she was still receiving complaints from residents who couldn't access services by phone and asked what plans there were for improvement. The Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture said the Council were going through massive changes as more services moved to digital provision, but it was important to ensure that customers who weren't able to access services online would be able to do so in other ways. The Chief Executive said that there had been huge changes in the way we worked which had been accelerated by the pandemic, and many residents preferred to access services online, for example 95% of our customers paid their penalty charge notice online and 99% of residents paid for their parking permit online. However, the Council recognised that not everyone wanted, or had access, to do that and that was being addressed.

25.5 Councillor Allcock noted the extortionate increase in energy costs, and asked how the allocation, distribution and delivery of the Household Support Fund was progressing for those in need. The Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture said that he didn't have that information but would provide a response after the meeting.

25.6 Councillor Allcock referred to housing and homelessness and said that colleagues were concerned about how effective the Street Link system was and asked for more information on how expensive and responsive it was. He also noted that rough sleepers had no where to go during the day, and First Base was supposed to supply that, but it was only open for two hours in the morning during the week and so it would be useful to have more information on that and the costs involved. It would also be useful to have more information about SWEP as the location was being kept under wraps. This could be for a good reason, but it would be useful to know so rough sleepers could be directed there whilst they wait for assistance. The Chair said that these were issues which were a concern for many councillors and that a full written response to the points raised would be provided by the Executive Director Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities

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

## 26 COVID-19 ADDITIONAL RELIEF FUND (CARF)

26.1 The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer regarding the Covid 19 Additional Relief Fund (CARF) and the Additional Restriction Grant (ARG).

26.2 Councillors thanked officers for all their work in distributing the grants.

26.3 Councillor Allcock noted that the report said that there was potential for the demand to outstrip the funds available, and the money would be distributed on a first come first served basis and asked how officers proposed to manage that. The report referred to tax avoidance and not wanting to fund those business and asked how they were identified. The report stated that government guidance said that Maintained schools, Academy schools and Further/Higher Education Institutions would be excluded from funding and asked if that included grant aided schools, Free schools and Public schools. The Head of Revenues & Benefits said that with regard to CARF there was about £7m for 1,800 businesses who may be eligible. The proposal was to allow around 1000 grants and that would be done on a first come first served basis. The key thing was to promote the available grants and ensure that those businesses who really need it would apply and receive funding. With regard to tax avoidance, on previous rounds there had been certain circumstances where businesses had been set up around possible tax avoidance. These were difficult to assess but fraud prevention requirements were in place which were being followed, such as not allowing grants to be paid into a non-British bank account. The Council were still waiting for clarification on the schools and would advise Councillors when that was provided.

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

- (i) Agreed to the development of a CARF local scheme following the principles laid in this report;
- (ii) Agreed to delegate authority to the Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer to finalise the design of the CARF scheme, including the appropriate option for the level of awards, implementing its introduction and overseeing the allocation of awards in accordance with the timetable and principles of this report;

- (iii) Agreed to the development of an ARG local scheme following the new guidelines provided by government when they emerge and using the principles already established in the previous ARG scheme which was approved by Members of the Policy & Resources Recovery Sub-Committee in November 2020;
- (iv) Delegated authority to the Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer to finalise the design of the ARG scheme, implement its introduction and oversee the appropriate allocation of awards within the quickest timeframe possible.

The meeting concluded at 4.50pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

