

**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMISSION
4.00PM 15 DECEMBER 2009
COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL
MINUTES**

Present: Councillors Mitchell (Chairman); Bennett, Elgood, Meadows, Older, Pidgeon (Deputy Chairman), Randall, Janio and Taylor

Also Present: Councillors Fallon-Khan and Young

PART ONE

53. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

53 Declarations of Substitutes

Councillor Meadows was substituting as voting member for Councillor Morgan. Councillor Janio was substituting for Councillor Peltzer Dunn. Councillor Taylor was acting as substitute for Councillor Wakefield-Jarrett.

Councillors Alford and Morgan gave their apologies

53b Declarations of Interests

There were none.

53c Declaration of Party Whip

There were none.

53d Exclusion of Press and Public

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.

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

54. MINUTES OF THE SCHEDULED MEETING HELD ON 20 OCTOBER 2009 AND CALL-IN MEETING HELD ON 27 NOVEMBER 2009

54. **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the scheduled meeting held on 20 October and the call-in meeting held on 27 November both be approved and signed by the Chairman.

55. PUBLIC QUESTIONS/LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS/NOTICES OF MOTION REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

55. There were none.

56. CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

56. There were none.

57. TARGETED BUDGET MANAGEMENT (MONTH 6) 2009 - 2010

57.1 The Director, Finance and Resources introduced the Targeted Budget Management (Month 6) 2009 – 2010 report pointing out the improvement in forecast outturn on revenue and capital position as of the end of September compared with Month 4.

57.2 OSC needed to be assured that key issues within the TBM report are adequately reflected in the Directorate budget strategies where appropriate.

57.3 The Director answered specific questions on overspends in housing strategy and CYPT, area social work teams, Collection Fund performance, capital spend and concessionary bus fares.

57.4 **RESOLVED:** That OSC note the report to 12 November Cabinet and extract from the draft minutes.

58. SCRUTINY OF DIRECTORATE BUDGET STRATEGIES

58.1 The Chairman welcomed Cabinet Members Councillors Young and Fallon-Khan to the meeting. Councillor Young introduced this item, stating that scrutiny comments would be considered carefully, however Departments had little flexibility in achieving a balanced budget.

58.2 Councillor Fallon-Khan outlined the service pressures for the Finance and Resources Directorate. Reduced income such as from business rents and commercial rates was largely due to the effects of the recession.

58.3 Responding to questions the Director, Finance and Resources told the meeting that it would take time and money to deliver significant savings. More effective procurement, rationalised office accommodation and better use of ICT were being considered. A consultancy would be looking to achieve significant future savings under Value for Money (Phase 2) and initiate project management across the Council. This would be progressed by an in-house implementation team.

58.4 Replying to queries she explained the resources available to cover risks as set out in Table 4 of the report, pointing out that £1 million is proposed to be set aside for Looked After

Children. Additional proposals for CYPT savings will be presented at the 5 January CYPOSC budget meeting.

58.5 The Director explained the Equalities Impact Assessment process that had been used for the budget proposals. Information on this could be presented before the final budget report to Council is produced.

58.6 Using an external firm to review single person Council Tax discounts was debated at length and questions on the approach to the process were answered in detail. The report on Council Tax Collection Policy appeared as Item 60 later on this agenda.

58.7 Asked about the anticipated borrowing for operational vehicles the Director said that this would allow for savings and reduction in the carbon footprint via a more central procurement policy. The Director was asked that this be reported to the Sustainability Partnership.

58.8 Information as requested on payments made to consultancies would be made available.

58.9 The Commission asked for more information on budget pressures from staff sickness and absence.

58.10 Councillor Fallon-Khan highlighted the budget proposals for Strategy and Governance Department. He expressed his congratulations to the officers including the legal team who were embracing new ways of working and working hard to achieve the best Value for Money within a tight budget at a time when income was falling.

59.11 The Director, Strategy and Governance answered questions on Members Allowances (inflationary increase being proposed) and the deletion of two Assistant Director posts in the Department to give flatter management structures (Head of Policy and Head of Improvement & Organisational Development). A reduction of one post in the media team was proposed.

58.12 He said Performance would be reshaped, and Information and Analysis and Policy brought together.

58.13 Savings were planned by amalgamating some software licences and other supplies and services.

58.14 There was concern about the proposed move of the Brighton History Centre. Councillor Randall as Chair of Culture Tourism and Enterprise O&S Committee was asked to follow this up.

58.15 RESOLVED

a) That the following requests/issues be followed up:

- Early information on CYPT savings proposals before presentation at CYOPSC 5 January 2010 meeting
- Further information on how the budget proposals were Equality Impact Assessed
- A report on operational vehicles to be presented to the Sustainability Partnership
- Information on payments to consultancies and budget pressures brought about by staff sickness are provided to OSC members

- o CTEOSC to follow up issues raised on the Brighton History Centre
- b) That 26 January 2010 OSC receive comments from the O&S Committees relevant to their remits to be incorporated into a single scrutiny response to the budget.

59. VACANCY MANAGEMENT

59.1 The Director of Finance and Resources introduced the report on Vacancy Management, set out the key determinants for holding posts and confirmed that the list comprised posts currently being held and not necessarily to be deleted.

59.2 The Commission asked that this information be included annually as part of the budget proposals papers.

59.3 The Commission asked questions regarding the potential implications of holding posts in areas such as libraries, food safety, adult social care and housing and requested that the O&S committees discuss the matter in debating the budget proposals.

59.4 RESOLVED

a) OSC requests that this information be included annually as part of the scrutiny of budget proposals.

b) That the overview and scrutiny committees be recommended to question staff vacancies as part of the scrutiny of the budget proposals.

60. COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION POLICY

60.1 The Head of Scrutiny handed around an updated version of the front page of the report.

60.2 The Cabinet Member for Central Services was pleased that this service area had been called in for Overview. A lot of work had gone on to improve the service to customers, however the extent of the work was not well known. He was glad of the opportunity to thank the officers in the award-winning Revenues and Benefits section for the improvements that had been made.

60.3 If residents started to get into arrears they were encouraged to contact the council at an early stage to try to make sustainable payment arrangements and avoid accumulating debt.

60.4 The Head of Revenue and Benefits and Assistant Director, Customer Services introduced the report and explained in answers to questions that legislation did not allow for all residents to pay in 12-monthly instalments. However this could be arranged under some circumstances; for example if people contacted the service to say they were having difficulties.

60.5 There are close working links between Revenues and Benefits, Adult Social Care, Housing and Pension Service and Electoral Services.

60.6 A team of officers are available to help in person, the small minority of people who do arrive at court, as the result of having received a summons, to set up sustainable repayment arrangements.

60.7 Members praised the officers for a thorough and interesting report.

60.8 **RESOLVED:** that the report be noted.

61. SINGLE EQUALITY SCHEME

61.1 The Chairman welcomed the report on the first draft Single Equality Scheme as an example of pre-decision scrutiny.

61.2 The Head of Equalities and Inclusion described the consultation that had taken place so far and presented the new Action Plan that covered the next two years.

61.3 Answering questions the Head of Equalities and Inclusion said that the staff bus had been raised at a scoping meeting of the staff disabilities scrutiny panel. She would investigate disabled access and the design of major projects.

61.4 At report Recommendation 2 (b) Members requested 6-monthly rather than annual monitoring.

61.5 In order to give fuller consideration to the draft scheme an informal Commission meeting was suggested and this was agreed.

61.6 **RESOLVED** a) That an additional OSC meeting be held in early January to review the draft Single Equality Scheme and provide feedback to inform the final document.

b) that members request a for 6-monthly monitoring report (not an annual report) as set out in paragraph 5 of this report.

62. COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN

62.1 The Council's Forward Plan was noted.

63. OSC WORK PROGRAMME

63.1 The Commission's work plan was noted.

64. ITEMS TO GO FORWARD TO CABINET MEMBER MEETING, CABINET OR FULL COUNCIL

64.1 There were none.

The meeting concluded at 6.10pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of