

# Brighton & Hove City Council

**Council**

**Agenda Item 56**

**Subject:** Written questions from Councillors.

**Date of meeting:** 15 December 2022

**Report of:** Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources

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**Ward(s) affected:** All

**For general release**

The following questions have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answer detailed below:

**1. Councillor Appich**

**Mental Health Rapid Response service:**

The Mental Health Rapid Response Service was launched during 2015 to improve community mental health services across the city. Sadly, I am informed that it is neither rapid, nor responsive, and only staffed by one person. Despite numerous complaints, there appears to have been no discernible improvement in the service provision, as reported to me.

Could the Chair of the Health and Well Being Board explain what actions she will take to ensure this vital service is improved given the mental health crisis we are experiencing and that we are now in an era of partnership working with the NHS?

**Reply from Councillor Shanks, Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Board**

The Mental Health Rapid Response Service (MHRRS) was set up in January 2013 to improve the urgent care route for people in Brighton and Hove - the service was initially established to provide primary care with a rapid access assessment. The service accepts referrals from other professional groups including SECAMB and Sussex Police and notably is an open referral point for patients to self-refer.

The MHRSS is predominantly a telephone base service but also offers a Rapid Access Clinic to assess people face to face, within 4 hours of referral and supports the duty service of the Assessment and Treatment Service- Sussex Partnership's secondary care Community Mental Health Teams in the City.

The service is open from 0930-2200 7 days a week (after 2200HRS the service is switched over to the Sussex Mental Health Line).

The service operates with two qualified nursing staff and an unqualified worker each shift. The team have no current vacancies.

The MHRSS service takes an average of 50 to 100 calls per day. The service has strong links with NHS 111 and the Sussex Mental Healthline. The Trust has established the 'Press 2' for mental health services access route via NHS 111 from November this year. MHRSS works with a number of organisations including the community & voluntary sector. Many patients contacting MHRSS are not under the care of secondary mental health care services.

## **2. Councillor Grimshaw**

### **Roof Repairs:**

Please can I be provided with an update as to who is responsible for roof repairs of ex council properties if the premises below the roof is now in the possession of a leaseholder?

Who maintains responsibility for repairs to the roof?

### **Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chairs of the Housing Committee**

Thank you for your question.

If the whole property has been sold (e.g., a house) then the repair responsibility sits with the house owner.

If the property sold is a flat and the building as a whole remains in the ownership of the Council, then the repair responsibility for a roof repair would sit with the Council as Freeholder.

## **3. Councillor Allcock**

### **Weeds:**

How many times have each street in our City had weeds cleared by Council or other contracted staff since Summer 2020?

How many times have each street in our City had leaves cleared during the Autumn since and including 2020?

### **Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee**

Thank you for your question.

It is not possible to provide details of how many times each street has been cleared of weeds or leaves because this level of data is not collected. In 2022 447 roads were cleared and in comparison, 471 roads were cleared in 2020 and 416 roads in 2021. The tasks of the Street Cleansing Service is scheduled by day/week or month as the work is based on seasons.

In the City Centre, high footfall helps reduce weed growth and the majority of roads and pavements are cleaned twice a day. There are 39 barrow rounds operating on a 7 day a week rota. In the East and West of the City,

the barrow rounds are on a daily schedule, completing similar tasks each day, and there are 20 barrow rounds. These staff remove weeds as part of their daily duties, alongside clearing litter from the streets and removing stickers and fly-posts. This is supplemented by weed rippers and seasonal staff during the summer. Delays with delivery of equipment and problems with recruitment has had an impact on the effectiveness of weed removal this year. There is no data on how many times a road is cleared of leaves. On average, 35 roads are cleared of leaves for each barrow operative in the East and West of the city per week. Roads are cleared more frequently during leaf fall because the Council is able to use mechanical sweepers to sweep the leaves and this method is quicker and more effective than manual sweeping. It should be noted that when the Green Administration came into power, there was no plan for how to manage weeds after the unanimous decision to ban pesticides. Due to a global pandemic, a national labour crisis and the costs associated with Brexit there has been weed growth throughout parts of the city. Officers have been working hard to ensure that a there is plan to deal with weeds in for the new season

#### **4. Councillor Grimshaw**

##### **EPC legislation:**

Can the Chair of Housing confirm that housing associations who house residents through our Homemove policy are being urged to observe EPC legislation (in line with privately rented housing which came into force in 2020 but SHL have until 2030)?

##### **Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chairs of the Housing Committee**

Thank you for your question. The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) Regulations 2015 do not apply to Registered Providers of social housing in their role as social landlords. However, through the Clean Growth Strategy, the UK government has set a target for social housing providers to attain the minimum rating of Energy Performance Certificate C for rented properties by 2035 (2030 for 'fuel poor' households). Each Registered Provider will be required to assess and fully understand what is required within their stock and to implement their plans to reach the target. Housing Associations are required to follow the relevant legislation and are regulated independently from the local authority, through the Regulator of Social Housing. If social housing tenants have concerns relating to their home, they should first contact their landlord. Details would usually be on their landlord's website. If they are not satisfied with the outcome, they can escalate matters through the Housing Ombudsman.

**5. Councillor Grimshaw**

**Damp Surveys:**

Can the chair of housing confirm if Housing Association and Local Authority properties are surveyed by an CRDS or CSRT (certified remedial damp) accredited surveyor?

**Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chairs of the Housing Committee**

Thank you for your question.

I can confirm that the Damp Surveyor that the council's Housing Repairs and Maintenance service use is CSRT accredited.

**6. Councillor Grimshaw**

**Mould:**

Does the chair of housing agree that Mould is life threatening so should be investigated by a qualified expert as a vast subject? Can the chair of housing confirm that tenants are advised they should not try to remove themselves due to sporing? And recognise that hidden mould in cavities is more dangerous than visible mould? Dead mould is even more dangerous as particles/spores smaller so more invasive to humans. Condensation mould sits on the surface, dangerous toxic mould lives in building materials and is usually caused by water ingress or burst pipes. Can the chair of housing also confirm that training is given on Environmental Health and that the relevant housing staff should be properly educated about mould?

**Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chairs of the Housing Committee**

Thank you for your question. The sad news regarding Awaab Ishak's death has understandably caused concerns with Tenants, and our sympathy goes out to those affected at this difficult time. Following this tragic case, we are reviewing our approach to addressing the common issue of condensation dampness in our housing stock. Our proposed approach is to address both the large number of damp and condensation cases reported to the Housing service, while also working with Children, Families & Schools and Public Health colleagues to develop improved risk assessment processes to pick up health concerns to empower our front-line staff with the correct advice to enable them to identify high risk cases and escalate them quickly. In addition to making sure that our front-line teams are equipped to triage cases, in particular should there be health concerns, we wish to ensure that our tenants and residents don't have barriers to reporting issues. We are also increasing resources to tackle this issue in council homes. As you have identified in your question mould can occur in a number of different locations in a building structure. However, the most common location is on the internal surface of external walls, around window reveals and at high level in the corners of walls/ceilings.

This occurs when moisture laden air comes into contact with a cold surface and causes the water vapor in the air to condense and form water. If the surface remains wet, mould can then form. Mould can form within wall cavities and under floors however it is less likely that the resulting spores will enter the air space that is shared with tenants so less likely to be inhaled. The current advice is to remove mould as soon as it forms using household cleaners. This is the advice that we include in our “Combating Condensation” leaflet. along with various tips and lifestyle adjustments that could significantly reduce the amount of moisture produced within properties which subsequently reduces the risk of mould forming. This advice is aimed at small quantities of mould and is intended to advise tenants how to manage it in their homes. This self-treatment is not instead of a response from the council’s Housing Repairs & Maintenance service. With more complex or persistent cases of damp and mould we use a specialist CSRT accredited Surveyor. We will be publishing advice to residents in the next issue of HomingIn and thereafter annually in the Winter edition.

**7. Councillor Grimshaw**

**Ventilation:**

Can the chair of housing seek to ensure that ventilation in housing is a priority and that windows should have filtered trickle vents for fresh air entry? There should then be a quiet extractor strategically placed to draw the old air 24/7.

**Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chairs of the Housing Committee**

Thank you for your question. New windows are usually fitted with a trickle vent as standard, but it is not always possible to adapt existing windows to accommodate a trickle ventilator. Where ventilation is identified as a key component causing damp, we install mechanical extract systems in the kitchen and bathroom.

In more complex cases we have fitted larger scale ventilations systems which generally follow a recommendation from our damp surveyor.

**8. Councillor O’Quinn**

**Enforcement – dogs off leads and cyclists on seafront lower promenade:**

There are regularly a large number of dogs who are walked off lead on Brighton and Hove seafront, lower esplanade, which causes significant issues for those people who obey the rules and walk their dogs on leads. There are also a number of cyclists who cycle along the seafront where they are banned from doing so creating a hazard for pedestrians. How many enforcement notices have been given in the last year in the two situations described?

## **Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee**

Thank you for your question.

Zero Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued for dogs being off leads on the seafront areas as this is covered by a local byelaw, rather than the Environmental Enforcement Framework.

During the summer months, council Environmental Enforcement Officers enforce dog exclusion on the beach and dog fouling. These are all enforced under the PSPO, Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. They do not enforce dogs off leads, although they will try to engage and ask owners to place dogs on leads in the areas signed on the seafront.

Council Seafront Officers undertake patrols of the promenade every day throughout the year. While the team are out they engage with the public with regards to safety messaging and also enforce the byelaws with regard to dogs on leads and no cycling on the promenade. Each year the Seafront Officers engage with hundreds of cyclists on Hove Promenade and instruct them either to dismount or divert onto the cycle lane.

There has been a significant increase in both pedestrian footfall and cycling across the whole of the seafront since the start of the pandemic. As a result, the cycle lane has become busier and so too has cycling on the promenade. Observations by the Seafront Officers would suggest that the percentage split of those choosing to cycle on the promenade rather than the cycle lane has not really altered, however the increased number of cyclists overall might make it appear that the majority are cycling on the promenade.

Seafront Officers are unable to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for a breach of the byelaw unless the Police are present to take the name and address of the perpetrator. The Seafront Officers have undertaken joint patrols with the Police wherever possible. However, the priority for the Police is to respond to incidents of crime and disorder. The Police do not regard cycling bylaw offences as a priority.

### **9. Councillor Wilkinson**

#### **Parking Enforcement:**

Given the increasing numbers of parking schemes, ETROs, and TROs across the city, what plans are in place to increase officer capacity to take action on parking infringements?

## **Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee**

TROs and ETROs can play an important role in making our streets safer, more accessible and healthier. It was disappointing that at the last ETS, the Labour and Conservative groups halted a further TRO for Elm Grove which would have seen the end of the dangerous pavement parking on

that street. It would have given us a perfect opportunity to build a framework for further restrictions.

Over the last two years parking service officers have worked with NSL (our enforcement contractors) to increase the number of officers by 10 to take into account the increased enforcement across the city. This is an increase of 10% from 100 to 110. As part of existing EEC budget saving proposals for new parking schemes in 23/24 NSL are aware they'll need to recruit a further 6 FTE staff for new CPZ schemes taking the total up 116. Recruitment has been a problem in recent years and at the moment NSL are still 7 FTE staff down based on new contract levels. However, NSL have been working on an adult education programme and a range of other recruitment initiatives to improve recruitment and retention. Increasing the number of NSL officers further may be too ambitious at this time but officers will continue to review.

## **10. Councillor Wilkinson**

### **Hanover and Tarner LTN Pilot Scheme:**

- a) When can the city's residents expect to see the complete results of the consultation into the Hanover and Tarner Low Traffic Neighbourhood Pilot Scheme?
- b) What specific monitoring of traffic levels has occurred to date in respect to the scheme and if so, at which locations?
- c) Is there any indication to date that congestion will occur in any part of the city as a result of the schemes current design?
- d) Is air quality monitoring specific to the scheme taking place and what data is currently held on the levels of the various pollutants on the surrounding roads before the implementation of the LTN, now and what is predicted to happen on the surrounding roads. Please specify any roads on which this information is held and how residents can access such information?
- e) What criteria is to be used to evaluate the scheme and which areas will be included in any such evaluation. Will account be taken of the quality of life to people outside this area through any changes such as increase in traffic movements, compromised road safety for pedestrians and raised levels of pollution?
- f) Has any monitoring been carried out on travel behaviours or car ownership before the implementation of this Low Traffic Neighbourhood?

### **Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee**

Thank you for your interest in the Liveable Neighbourhood pilot Project for the Hanover & Tarner area. While Labour have lent their support to the trial publicly, the lack of engagement on it by Labour colleagues has been disappointing. I do hope your questions demonstrate a new level of interest in the matter which has generated a lot of engagement from residents in the area and interest from proponents of low traffic interventions.

You have asked a number of questions and therefore this is a rather long reply.

**a. When can the city's residents expect to see the complete results of the consultation into the Hanover and Turner Low Traffic Neighbourhood Pilot Scheme?**

**Response:** We have been pleased with the level of interest and response to the public consultation and officers are continuing to work on developing the design for the overall scheme. This work is taking the concerns of respondents into account and considering where they would like changes to be made, and the technical implications of such changes for the whole area. The outcomes of this work will be reported to the ETS committee in March, and this will include an analysis of the responses to the consultation.

**b. What specific monitoring of traffic levels has occurred to date in respect to the scheme and if so, at which locations?**

**Response:** The baseline data report, which has been made publicly available, shows the traffic flows that have been counted, by nearly 80 automatic counters and over 50 cameras. There are too many locations to list here but are included in the data report.

**c. Is there any indication to date that congestion will occur in any part of the city as a result of the schemes current design?**

**Response:** Modelling of the design is still being undertaken as part of the technical work to establish the potential changes that could occur as a result of the design.

Monitoring of the scheme will take place, which will enable an assessment of actual changes in traffic flows and conditions as modelling can only give us a prediction based on traffic at current levels, and this tends to drop as schemes bed in and the number of people travelling actively or by public transport increases. In addition, we will collect feedback from people to inform how well the scheme is working and identify where further change may be required.

**e. Is air quality monitoring specific to the scheme taking place and what data is currently held on the levels of the various pollutants on the surrounding roads before the implementation of the LTN, now and what is predicted to happen on the surrounding roads. Please specify any roads on which this information is held and how residents can access such information?**

**Response:** Over ten new air quality monitoring tubes have been installed as part of this project, which will complement existing monitoring sites.

These are located in the following streets, and some include more than one tube. The streets are Franklin Road, Elm Grove, Islingword Road, Southover Street, Queen's Park Road, Egremont Place, Carlton Hill, Morley Street and Richmond Parade. Data collection began in the middle of this year and will remain in place for two years following the implementation of the scheme.

Air quality data is reported each year to provide indications of average annual changes. The results will be reported in the council's annual status report on air quality, which is usually available in July and published on the council's website.

**f. What criteria is to be used to evaluate the scheme and which areas will be included in any such evaluation. Will account be taken of the quality of life to people outside this area through any changes such as increase in traffic movements, compromised road safety for pedestrians and raised levels of pollution?**

**Response:** The draft project monitoring framework for the project was agreed as part of the report that was considered by this committee in June this year. It includes a number of indicators that the project will be assessed against including traffic and cycle flows, air quality, collisions and public perceptions. A number of permanent improvements to streets bordering the scheme are being planned in consultation with local residents, subject to agreement at ETS. These are likely to include: a ban on pavement parking on Elm Grove; a number of additional crossings on Elm Grove and Queen's Park Road; measures to slow traffic; trees and greening. £1.1m of funding for these changes will come from the Carbon Neutral Fund.

The trial scheme will be implemented under a Experimental Traffic Regulation Order. A decision to remove or make the scheme permanent will be required before the end of the 18-month trial period. The council will welcome feedback from residents while the scheme is in place in order to assess and determine if any changes are required during the pilot period.

**g. Has any monitoring been carried out on travel behaviours or car ownership before the implementation of this Low Traffic Neighbourhood?**

**Response:** As part of the public consultation that took place for the project during August and September this year, questions were asked about travel behaviour in the area. This enabled people to rate conditions for walking/wheeling and cycling in the area, and express their perceptions of safety when walking/wheeling and cycling in the area. Data on levels of car ownership in the area will become available following the release of 2011 census data, which is expected soon.

## 11. Councillor Wilkinson

### **VAWG:**

What actions has the Council taken over the last 12 months to tackle the issue of violence against women and girls?

### **Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council**

Thank you for your question. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 the joint unit arrangements with East Sussex County Council were dissolved and a new Violence Against Women and Girls unit was established. Since then, the unit having been working on several areas to address Violence Against Women and Girls, including a public consultation which will inform a new strategy which will go to the council's TECC committee at a future meeting for approval. As well as this, the council's new unit has been developing work with the International Women's network to ensure marginalised survivors are supported. With the introduction of the new Domestic Abuse Act, the unit have been working with colleagues in the council's Housing services to update policies and procedures relating to domestic abuse. TECC committee agreed to the funding of a worker to sit within the new multiple compound needs team to support those affected by domestic abuse. New burdens funding has allowed the commission of 8 new services for those experiencing domestic violence and abuse as well as the development of a flexible fund and provision for translation services including British Sign Language. The new Violence Against Women and Girls team continue to co-ordinate and manage weekly Multi Agency Risk Assessment conferences for high-risk victims, and have held a development day, delivered with voluntary sector partners, including training sessions on domestic abuse. The council has also started work on its White Ribbon accreditation, including setting up a network of ambassadors and champions and holding a half day conference around standing up to domestic abuse. Training along with other pan-Sussex partners has been delivered including the impacts of domestic abuse on children, stalking, bystanders, and harmful practices training. The council, in partnership with East and West Sussex County Councils, and the Office of the Sussex Police and Crime commissioner, was successful in bidding for funding from Safer Streets tranches 3 and 4, run by the Home Office. This includes money for additional police patrols, taxi marshals, an additional beach buggy for the beach patrol, improved lighting in areas of the city identified as high risk places for Violence Against Women and Girls, the development of safe spaces a 'do the right thing' media campaign, and the development of training for door staff as well as the creation of a Violence Against Women and Girls coordinator post to sit within Sussex Police to co-ordinate the safer streets work. Following the re-commissioning of domestic violence services in the City last year, further to the VAWG strategy agreed in March 2019, a cross party members working group was established to scrutinise the procurement process. It found that the procurement was completed legally but it made a number of recommendations regarding commissioning of these types of services in

future which were agreed by Policy and Resources committed in July earlier this year. These related to increased oversight and involvement and the need for more qualitative and social value – focused procurement for such services. I am also pleased to announce that earlier this week we were informed that we have been allocated over £1.2m of additional new burdens funding from DLUHC over the next two years, to enable us to meet our duty under the domestic abuse act to support those in safe accommodation. While not limited only for women and girls, we will ensure that we use the money to continue to provide services for all experiencing domestic abuse into safe and supported accommodation

## **12. Councillor Wilkinson**

### **Care co-operatives:**

What work has the Council done to explore the role of co-operatives in the social care sector, and whether the co-operative model could support adult social care in Brighton and Hove, and what is your assessment of the viability and benefits of more co-operatism in the city's social care sector?

### **Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council**

Care co-operatives are in the majority developed, owned and managed by their members and as such the commissioning relationship is different from traditional care services. The city council has been working with a newly established care co-operative in the city to support with the feasibility and establishment of this new venture. They have now registered as a constituted group and are at the early stages of developing the organisation further, having initially had a workshop event to encourage people to come together to explore the opportunity of building on the mutual aid model. A small grant from the council was provided to support this development work. While in the main, cooperatives are small scale, they can offer a much needed and valuable service for the people they support. Given the continued enormous pressures on social care, service developments outside of the traditional services are welcomed. Cllr Shanks who Chairs the Health and Wellbeing Board will be meeting with the organisation shortly to discuss the establishment of this new co-operative.

## **13. Councillor Wilkinson**

### **Cost-of-Living Emergency:**

In October this Council supported a Labour motion to declare a Cost-of-Living Emergency in the city. It is clear to all that the cost-of-living crisis is spiralling out of control and will affect all our residents, from the most vulnerable to homeowners and renters, pensioners and businesses. What has the council done since to;

- a) Promote the emergency?
- b) Develop plans for a formal emergency response?
- c) Convene a cost-of-living summit?

## **Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council**

The city council continues to play a vital role in convening support with city partners and subsequently promoting this information. The council has created a new Cost of Living Support hub on the website which brings together useful information in one resource, showing residents how they can access help over the coming months. This isn't just an online service- the Community Hub continues to provide a point of phone contact for those who are not able to access information online. Furthermore, the city council has now distributed a leaflet to every household in the city. We know that this has had a notable impact because it has resulted in a substantial increase of applications to the Household Support Fund. Other promotional activity has included continued social media campaigns, repeat news stories to keep the issue alive in the press so as many residents know about existing support, with further messaging planned as we come into the traditionally coldest parts of the year.

We have been working for months with partners to support our residents through this unprecedented cost of living crisis and to suggest otherwise demonstrates a lack of awareness on the efforts of so many amazing community and third sector organisations. As a result of the promotion of the support available, demand for help is now incredibly high within both the voluntary sector and the council's welfare services. This means that delivery of services is becoming increasingly challenging, with capacity being stretched to the limit.

Residents are able to apply for help from the Household Support Fund through the council's portals. Funds have also been distributed to organisations across the community and voluntary sector, so that assistance can be given directly to parts of the community that need help most. The Household Support Fund is also bolstering the Energyworks service (Citizen's Advice Brighton & Hove and Money Advice Plus), ensuring that it will have a wider reach in the coming months. There are several other energy support schemes available, including the Energy Bills Support Scheme, warm home discount and the now-completed Energy Rebate programme, along with advice and help from BHESCo (Brighton & Hove Energy Services Cooperative). The work with BHESCo includes warm home advice visits with energy saving kits funded by Public Health, and nationally funded services LEAP (Local Energy Advice Partnership) and NEA (National Energy Action). We will also explore new options for supporting residents financially, further to grant applications and as and when funding opportunities arise.

As with previous years, the city council continues to work closely with the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership to ensure that food help is in place and promoted over the winter. The Warm Welcome Directory initiative is now well underway, connecting residents across the city from Whitehawk to Hangleton to a variety of free indoor places and activities.

Earlier in the year, a Justgiving page was set up in partnership with CAB and the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, to help people in poverty with food and fuel costs. The campaign initially provided a way for

residents to donate back the government's £150 energy rebate, but it has continued to raise funds throughout the year. The campaign hit a milestone of £60,000 last week which is testimony to the brilliant community spirit in Bright & Hove. This will continue to be promoted by the council and partners into next year.

Regrettably, even with all these measures in place, there is still a level of need in the city that cannot be met with the limited funding from government, no matter what we do locally. This is why, following the P&R report on 6 October, 17 individual lobbying actions were undertaken. I have written to relevant government ministers on everything from increasing the local housing allowance, freezing rents to providing more support for our local small and medium businesses, although to date we have yet to receive responses.

Plans for the Cost-of-Living summit are advancing, with the date set for 24 January. This builds on the partnership work that has been underway now for two years where I continue to meet to listen to and act where I can on the concerns of the local community and voluntary sector organisations as much as local small and medium businesses. The summit will enable organisations from the public, private and community and voluntary sectors to share local intelligence and identify gaps in support, whilst also discussing practical opportunities for collaboration. Invitations will be issued shortly to partners across the city.

**14. Councillor Yates**

Can the administration reassure residents of Moulsecoomb that the authority has no intention of allowing properties it owns the freehold of in Moulsecoomb Way become additional student housing. These properties provide valuable employment and economic benefits to the area and the whole city and should not be sold off or leased out for a quick buck from developers to the detriment of the local community.

**Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chairs of the Housing Committee**

The city council owns the freehold of a site in Moulsecoomb Way on which there are 2 ageing industrial buildings let on leases which have 33 years remaining, with a combined rent of £5,000 pa.

The head lessee of the site has been working with a developer on redeveloping the site. The council has received this proposal which looks to redevelop the site as student housing and employment space. Following an initial discussion of the proposal at the council's Asset Management Board on 29 April this year the developer was advised that the proposal for student housing in that location was not supported by the council.

With only a 33-year unexpired lease term it is not financially viable for the head lessee to redevelop the site without a new longer lease from the council. The Council has no rights to terminate the lease prematurely, and

thus no right to redevelop. The site could therefore remain undeveloped until 2055 providing a nominal income for the council.

While the Council is under no obligation to enter into negotiations or consider restructuring the existing leases to facilitate redevelopment, in order to be satisfied that the council has fully considered the proposal it has been recommended that officers present a more detailed briefing of the site redevelopment proposals to the next Asset Management Board meeting.

## **15. Councillor Bell**

### **Proposed Happy Valley cycle path**

The council is proposing constructing a new cycle path through Happy Valley adjacent to Falmer Road, whilst there is already a cycle path that runs between Ovingdean and Woodingdean that is well-used. The current path would be used even more if it had a proper surface which it doesn't, despite having been repaired several times.

Can the Chair provide a breakdown of how many times the walking & cycling path between Ovingdean and Woodingdean that serves Old Parish Lane has been resurfaced over the past five years, how much this has cost and the reasons why the Administration is considering funding a second path so close to the first one?

### **Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee**

Parish Lane bridleway links Ovingdean and Woodingdean. It was identified through the volunteer Path Warden scheme in 2017 as a popular commuter route, but was very deeply rutted from farm vehicle use. In agreement with the Local Access Forum, the northern section was levelled and resurfaced in road stone in 2018 (costing £34,500) and the southern section was resurfaced in 2019 (at a cost of £20,900). Road stone was used as per normal practice, which is hard wearing and thus suitable for use on farm tracks that are regularly used by tractors. However, local residents have raised concerns that the path is not optimised for cyclists / wheeled users due to the loose stone nature of it. Due to the importance of this commuter route between Ovingdean and Woodingdean options are being considered to improve the surface finish (using the previous road stone as a sub-base).

Parish Lane Path (Bridleway BW B26):



The path along the bottom of Happy Valley is currently a permissive bridleway and grass covered. Hard surfacing this would create a link between Woodingdean and Rottingdean and link up to the shared use cycle path further south along the Falmer Road – a route to Longhill School.

Both paths are being considered as they serve different communities (Ovingdean to Woodingdean / Rottingdean to Woodingdean) and are separated by a very steep hill between the two (Ovingdean Road). The proposals are also consistent with routes identified in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

#### Happy Valley Path (Permissive Bridleway):



## **16. Councillor Simson**

### **Problems with solar panels on council houses in Woodingdean**

Several years ago the council fitted solar panels to a small number of tenants' properties in Woodingdean.

There have subsequently been problems with birds nesting under the panels, as no protective netting was fitted at the time.

Also, I'm told by tenants living in those properties that they've never seen any reduction in the cost of their electricity supply, despite hosting these solar panels.

Can the Chair advise:

a) Why protected netting has not been fitted to solar panels on council houses to protect them; and whether council is considering installing such netting now?

b) What monitoring the council has done on these panels, including into whether electricity costs are being reduced, considering the substantial original cost of supplying them?

### **Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chairs of the Housing Committee**

Thank you for your question.

Where there are persistent issues with birds nesting under panels, and is causing a problem for residents, the council will install 'bird protection' measures to existing solar PV systems. It is also the council's intention to install this as standard as part of the new solar PV programme from 2023 onwards. The performance of solar PV systems is monitored through an on-line portal that the council has in place. This enables the council to identify any issues with its systems pro-actively in addition to direct reports from residents. The solar PV systems should be generating electricity during daylight hours throughout the year with the highest electricity generation on the sunniest days. This would mean that whilst the electricity is being generated residents in houses or bungalows will be using this rather than drawing it from the 'grid'. Residents can save money on their energy bills in this way; however, it would not show up specifically on an electricity bill, but the electricity bill should be lower than it would otherwise have been. To maximise savings, we encourage residents to use electrical devices during periods that the panels are producing electricity. If there are specific addresses where there are concerns about any of these issues, we would be happy to investigate further, including giving advice to residents about how to maximise the benefits of the panels.

## **17. Councillor Barnett**

### **Housing repairs answerphone**

Council tenants chasing up their housing repairs are still having to listen to a council voice mail when they call. The voice mail says that the council is behind on its repairs 'due to covid' and that the council is 'working hard to catch up'.

This information is not correct. Since the Council insourced the housing repairs service in March 2020, the housing repairs backlog has been going up each and every month and been increasing consistently. For example,

since October this year the backlog has increased from 9,000 to above 10,000. This is nothing to do with Covid and there is no catch-up going on.

Can the chair advise:

- a) Will this voicemail be changed to reflect the accurate current situation?
- b) When can residents expect to speak to a person when they call the Housing Department Housing Repairs line instead of receiving an answer phone message?

**Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chairs of the Housing Committee**

Thank you for your question. The council's Housing Repairs and Maintenance service Call Centre continues to exceed its call answering targets with 92%, 15,973 out of 17,315, calls answered in Quarter 2 2022/23. The target is 85%. While I understand receiving a recorded message answer can be frustrating the Call Centre continues to provide a good service with a high percentage of calls answered. Our KPI related to 'Surveyed tenants satisfied with repairs: standard of work' is above target at 99% against a target of 96% as is our KPI on 'Surveyed tenants satisfied with repairs: overall customer service' at 98% against a target of 96%.

Our KPI on emergency repairs completed within 24 hours has continued its improved performance and at Q2, 2022 / 23 stands at 98.6%, 2,645 of 2,682 repairs, against a target of 99%. Officers in the council's Housing Repairs & Maintenance service have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to provide tenants with an essential repairs service.

However, as reported to Housing Committee, a backlog of routine repairs and empty council homes has built up due to Covid19 impacting staffing levels and contractor capacity required to complete the typical number of jobs raised each month. As of November 2022, the number of outstanding tasks sitting with the service was 10,378, an increase on the previously reported figure. This increase is primarily due to seasonal change. For example, the Council received 317 roof repair requests in the first two weeks of November compared with 213 over the whole of October.

We currently have a contractor capacity issue with building work which has significantly impacted our ability to reduce outstanding tasks. We have been recruiting extra operatives to our service and are also reviewing options to increase our contractor base to address outstanding works.

**18. Councillor Barnett**

**Empty seniors council houses**

Statistics from the Council's Seniors Housing Department show that there are currently 37 seniors housing properties sitting empty.

Why, when there are many elderly residents in the city desperate for a place in a sheltered block, are there so many empty seniors council homes with no one living in them, right across the city?

**Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chairs of the Housing Committee**

Thank you for your question. We continue to show progress in our priority work of tackling the Covid related backlog of empty seniors housing properties. The number of empty senior housing properties changes daily and as of 7th December the council had 34 of this type of home empty. The council's Tenancy Services team has let over 100 seniors housing properties this year; however, some senior's homes are more difficult to let than other council properties. To increase the number of lettings Housing are working to maximise interest in seniors housing properties and make it easier for people to apply. If you know of individuals who are looking for a place in a sheltered block, please encourage them to come forward. The council is also carrying out targeted works to resolve a handful of longer-term voids.

## **19. Councillor Bagaeen**

### **Greenest city centres in the UK**

In a recent study on Britain's greenest city centres published in November, which compared 68 municipalities in Great Britain with populations of at least 100,000, Brighton and Hove came 40th out of 68.

Three metrics of "greenness" were used:

- 1) Tree cover using an algorithm to randomly sample recent aerial imagery
- 2) The presence of green spaces using open-source data from Ordnance Survey (Great Britain's national mapping agency)
- 3) The normalised difference vegetation index (NDVI), which uses satellite observations of light absorption and reflection to measure vegetation cover in a given area

This is another unwelcome ranking result for Brighton city centre, after it was ranked the 8th most crime-ridden out of 33,000 LSOAs in England and Wales.

Much of the vegetation in the city centre has been neglected by the Council and areas that were once vibrant vegetation spaces have become desolate and deprived of vegetation. Victoria Gardens is a case in point. Planter boxes are left vandalised and overrun with weeds.

Why after twelve years of Green/Labour Councils is Brighton performing so poorly in the greenest city centre national index and what steps will be taken to turn this around?

### **Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council**

Last year, the council invested £1 million in tree planting which led to an increase in staff which has significantly grown the organisation's ability to plant more trees- prior to this investment the council only had resources to plant an average of 80 trees a year. Last year council teams planted 425 trees and 2,530 young tree seedlings, known as whips. This investment comes despite twelve years of Conservative led austerity which has seen over £110m taken from our budget and the Treasury persistently refusing to specifically fund either climate mitigation or adaptation at a local authority level.

We are also working closely with local community groups who are an essential part of planting trees, growing plants and increasing biodiversity. Volunteers from the Brighton & Hove Green Spaces Forum have won £130,000 from the Urban Tree Challenge Fund to plant 272 large trees. This follows last year's successful funding bids to plant 138 trees across the city. The city council is also currently working with communities to improve access and biodiversity on Providence Place, Dorset Gardens, Turner Park, St Nicholas Churchyard and Regency Square. Our plans for the Royal Pavilion Garden focus on creating a wildlife haven in the heart of the city.

We have been working with our family of schools to plant 30 disease-resistant elm trees on Surrenden campus during National Tree Week a few weeks ago- this is thought to be the first avenue of elm trees planted in the city since Victorian times. This project is one way of ensuring the future of elms in our city, providing habitats for wildlife such as the [white-letter hairstreak butterfly](#) which breeds on elm. The avenue of trees will form a wildlife corridor in and out of the city centre, linking Hollingbury and Burstead Woods, the Dorothy Stringer nature reserve woodland, Balfour's wildlife reserve and Varndean's wildlife areas. The tree canopy will link up the mature tree line into Withdean and Preston parks and out into the South Downs National Park, bringing nature into the city.

Brighton & Hove's schools part of the City of Meadows project to create wildlife havens in schools grounds, and The Aquifer project, which is creating 'rain gardens' to soak up and purify water run-off from urban roads and provide new green wetland areas. Half of the city's schools (and growing) are involved with a new climate strategy called Our City, Our World and are working to bring nature and green spaces into their schools grounds.

Brighton & Hove is home to the national elm collection and is known nationally for the way it manages elm disease. We have also celebrated our fantastic elm collection for example with the St James' elm in Preston Park nominated as part of Queen's Green Canopy.

The city has sadly lost hundreds of trees due to elm disease and ash die back, the loss of trees is driven by the climate crisis as wetter winters create conditions for disease to spread. The Woodland Trust/National Trust predict the UK will lose 80-90% of ash trees. We're using this as an opportunity to develop areas with a wider range of species and habitat diversity to cope with disease (elm replanting is with disease-resistant elms). We've put in place a city-wide ash dieback regeneration plan and are planting 14,000 young trees (whips) this planting season. We are investing funding to explore innovative methods of planting trees on narrower streets across the city.

Further to the improvements in the Valley Gardens scheme, which has involved planting more than 100 trees and a wildflower meadow, 1,000 square metres of new biodiverse habitat were created in the heart of the city.

The next stage of Valley gardens redevelopment will see approximately 8,800 m<sup>2</sup> of new public space created and at least 30 new trees planted. All while the planning consent for the new Kingsway to the Sea project has greenlit a huge boost to plants and biodiversity on Hove's seafront with the new tree, grassland and perennial garden areas creating a renewed greenspace that offers more varied landscaped areas to facilitate a

significant increase in habitat and biodiversity. New planting will achieve the targeted 20% Biodiversity Net Gain over the existing site.

The council continues to protect nature through regional partnerships such as The Living Coast Biosphere and the Sussex Local Nature Partnership. Current projects include creating a new nature and wildlife habitat on the Eastern seafront, more chalk meadows in the city, planting 8,000 trees and shrubs on Carden Hill and rewilding at Waterhall to restore biodiversity on a former council golf course.

We continue to face accusations of how this administration is failing in its environmental duties yet we assert, with substantial evidence, the opposite. It was only months ago you claimed that we weren't doing enough on climate change by incorrectly citing scoring from the Carbon Disclosure Project. We've since been awarded among the top marks of any council in the country as part of the CDP, for our work.

Through your question today you have criticised the administration for not having enough vegetation but through the NOM you brought to September ETS you criticise the council for being too lenient on vegetation when it comes to street-growing wildflowers. You even contradict yourself in your question today saying that we are overrun with vegetation. Which is it?

The broader context is important too: the UK is one of the most nature depleted of any European country and this requires central government funding and projects that communities can deliver. To this end, the Government must end the rhetoric on caring for nature while simultaneously greenlighting new oil, coal and gas; it must urgently set credible, comprehensive and deliverable nature targets. The Environment All Party Parliamentary Group in October drew up a list of ten proposals that would improve nature- many of these, ironically, are things that the Conservative opposition describe as 'pet projects.'

## **20. Councillor Brown**

### **Hove drains**

Parts of Hove Park Ward, particularly Goldstone Crescent and Goldstone Close were very badly flooded recently. The leaves were obviously part of the problem but as a state of the art pumping tanker was unable to completely unblock a drain there has to be a serious maintenance failure.

How often are the drains inspected and what is going to be done about the badly blocked ones?

### **Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee**

The topography of the area and the location of properties in Goldstone Crescent and Goldstone Close means that during extreme rainfall events a lot of water is funnelled from adjacent roads such as Woodland Avenue. When it rains heavily on hills, water often flows over the gully tops and isn't absorbed until reaches gullies on lower point. Leaves when wet can obstruct gully grills and significantly slow the water from draining away, which in this case resulted in localised flooding.

The gullies in this area are cleansed annually but two gullies at the bottom of Woodland Avenue and two in Goldstone Close have blocked outlets and will be replaced, however, this was not the actual cause of the flood. It must be acknowledged that it is difficult to improve the existing highway drainage system to point where it will cater for extreme rain fall events alongside the impact of falling leaves. Both the highways and City Cleans teams are working hard to tackle the impact of leaves by focussing on areas where blockages are known to cause problems for residents

The sewer system into which highway drainage frequently discharges is managed by Southern Water and in many locations in the city the sewers are at or near capacity. When this system is overwhelmed, it affects ability of our gullies to discharge into it. The council and Southern Water are looking to use more sustainable urban drainage solutions where water from roads runs in to a series of natural basins from where it can be gradually absorbed into the ground. This is in its infancy and the current planned schemes are for areas where there is a high risk of property flooding and sewage surcharging.

**21. Councillor McNair**

**Security at the Gathering Place, Hollingbury**

The Gathering Place laundry keeps on being vandalised despite recently having a new door fitted. Would it be possible to have CCTV fitted to reduce the prevalence of antisocial behaviour?

**Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee**

Thank you for your question and for raising this disappointing occurrence of antisocial behaviour. The council are aware of the issue and as such there has been a request to repair the door and to provide a lock to help prevent further incidents.

There are no current plans to install CCTV at the Gathering Place but the council will continue to monitor the issues at The Gathering Place and exploring different options, including the use of CCTV, to address the issues.

**22. Councillor Meadows**

**Parking arrangements at Old Boat Community Centre, Hollingbury**

Many children and vulnerable adults visit the Old Boat Corner Community Centre and the Nautical Training Corp at the bottom of Carden Hill. Carden Hill is a major artery where cars drive fast, and there are many parked vans and a bend at the bottom of the road making crossing particularly dangerous. Would it be possible to investigate providing a pedestrian crossing at the bottom of Carden Hill to help children and adults negotiate the road safely?

**Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee**

Thank you for the request for a pedestrian crossing. Officers will engage with Cllr Meadows to clarify the location and then add this to our assessment list for the Pedestrian Crossing Programme. Officers will also provide further information on the Pedestrian Crossing Programme

**23. Councillor Theobald**

**Council flood prevention measures in Patcham**

Homes in Warmdene Road have gates to prevent water flooding their homes. During the recent torrential rain, it is also apparent that selected homes in Winfield Avenue also suffer from significant flooding, possibly because of inadequate drainage and also because of the camber of the road. Will Officers look into fitting gates for relevant flood victims in Winfield Avenue?

**Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee**

The Council has been working hard to adapt climate change mitigations right across the city. Without adequate government funding this is a difficult task but we are determined to do what we can to protect our residents.

The local flood risk strategy, which is currently in draft format, will be looking at the flood risk across the city. The resultant Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP) will identify areas around the city where a feasibility study will be undertaken to identify where further investigations and potential schemes will be needed.

The properties in Winfield Road will be considered as part of the SWMP.

In 2018 Brighton and Hove City Council undertook a property protection scheme for properties in Central Hove, Carden area and Portslade. This scheme was developed from the previous Local Flood Risk Strategy of 2016 and was funded through local levy payments from the Southern Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.

The Council has been actively promoting Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) schemes for the city, with a European funded project at Carden Avenue and Dale Drive, which proved to be successful in reducing reported flooding in the recent rain period.

The Council has secured funding from Highways England, to undertake a Rainscape project at Wild Park, designed to manage water in a natural and sustainable way.

The Council has also been working as partner to The Aquifer Partnership (TAP) in promoting and contributing to the SuDS in schools, which is a Department for Education initiative.

**24. Councillor Lewry**

**Bin service on Harmsworth Crescent, Hangleton**

There are recurring issues with the City Clean bin collection service at Harmsworth Crescent that are related to the council's dedicated bin storage area.

The bin storage area at Harmsworth Crescent serves three flats and was put in place by the council. However, City Clean frequently does not move these heavy bins out from the storage area for collection. This means that bins are often not collected, resulting in residents having to subsequently chase up catch-up collections with City Clean.

Can this situation be resolved, so that residents' bin services are completed each week for the residents of Harmsworth Crescent?

**Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee**

I am sorry to hear that there are issues with the bin collections from Harmsworth Crescent. I have asked Council officers to investigate the cause of the missed collections and work with colleagues to resolve the situation to enable the weekly bin collections to be undertaken.

**25. Councillor Theobald**

**Schedule of public toilet refurbishment**

At the last meeting of the Full Council, in response my oral question, I was promised a schedule of refurbishment for public toilets in the city, which I have yet to receive.

Please can you provide me with this information here, in written form.

**Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee**

Thank you for your question and I am sorry that we didn't share this information with you directly. We did inform councillors at the last ETS that the refurbishment of Station Road, Kings Esplanade, Daltons and Saltdean Undercliff started on Monday 28th November.

The refurbishment is scheduled to take several months but as may be expected it is not possible to give an exact date of reopening at present as this will likely result in the closures of other sites due to the current budget pressures. The team are working through what the options are.

Consideration is now being given to Phase 2 of the refurbishment, although no decisions will be made until Budget Council has set the budget for next year, taking into account the need for savings to the public toilet budget.

A report on public toilets will be presented at the January meeting of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee.

