

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 80

Subject: Petition for Debate – School and College-Based Counselling across Brighton and Hove

Date of meeting: 1 February 2024

Report of: Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources

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Ward(s) affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 Under the Council's Petition Scheme if a petition contains more than 1,250 signatures and is not petition requesting officer evidence, it will be debated by the Full Council.
- 1.2 The e-petition has resulted in triggering a debate at the council meeting, having exceeded the threshold with a total of 2189 signatures confirmed at the time of printing the report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the petition is noted and referred to the Children Families and Schools Committee for consideration.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION / CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

3.1 The Petition:

Dear Councillors across the Labour, Green, Conservative, and Independent Groups,

We are grateful for the support many of you have already shown to our Alliance in terms of the Mental Health Emergency our city faces. Our collective membership of schools, colleges, universities, unions, faith institutions, and community organisations (representing over 55,000 people) appreciates your efforts.

Between 2020-2022, the Brighton & Hove Citizens' Commission on Mental Health heard from students, parents/carers, and teachers across the city whose testimonies highlighted how existing services often failed to meet the psychological needs of children and young people. Overall, more than 5,400 people took part in face-to-face and/or small group discussions.

In December 2022, after many conversations with the Labour and Green Groups, a motion was passed at Full Council, and Brighton and Hove City Council became the first Council to declare a Mental Health Emergency in England committing, amongst other things, to look at investing in school- and college-based counselling across the city.

Subsequently, at a Brighton & Hove Citizens Assembly in April 2023, the Labour and Green Groups publicly committed to fund the provision of school- and college-based counselling (and other relevant interventions) across the city if elected.

School- and college-based counselling is a proven intervention for children and young people experiencing psychological distress. The cost of delivering six counselling sessions is approximately £450. By contrast, the average cost of a referral to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) is £3,000. School- and college-based counselling has been shown to minimise pressure on CAMHS services, as well as already-stretched SEND, Attendance, and Behaviour interventions. When school and college avoidance are at an all-time high in our city, we know (from what we've already seen happening in some schools and colleges) that counselling can considerably reduce pressure.

We know that counselling won't be the intervention that all young people will require. Some will need less support (already provided by Mental Health Support Teams). Some will need more support (usually provided by CAMHS). Some will need other interventions altogether.

We also note that what counselling looks like in Secondary Schools and Colleges will look different in Primary Schools where more play-based therapeutic approaches will be preferred. The Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), with whom we are working, are happy to share their knowledge and expertise when it comes to tailoring counselling approaches (by adequately trained, qualified, and supervised counsellors).

We ask that Brighton and Hove Council shows its commitment to justice in moving in the right direction by investing a part of its annual budget for 2024-25 to cover the cost of counselling in a significant proportion (if not all) of our city's schools and colleges, remembering that, in the words of Cllr Sankey, 'prevention is always better than cure' and that any money spent will be an investment, rather than a cost.

The BACP have offered to help with research and best practice, as well as a free impact evaluation.

We note that the Labour party, the Green Party, and the Liberal Democrats, at national level, have committed to our national network of Alliances (Citizens UK) to ensure that this eventually becomes centrally funded. We therefore ask our Council to secure the statutory provision of school- and college-based counselling in every school and college from September 2024 and until a time when such provision is centrally-funded.

We ask all Councillors to be our allies. We ask you to be leaders that turn away the tide and, between Downs and Sea, the captains that enable our city's young generation to flourish.

4. PROCEDURE:

4.1 The petition will be debated at the Council meeting in accordance with the agreed protocol:

- (i) The Lead petitioner will be invited by the Mayor to present the petition and will have up to 3 minutes in which to outline the petition and confirm the number of signatures;
- (ii) The Mayor will then open the matter up for debate by councillors for period of 15 minutes and will first call on the relevant Committee Chair to respond to the petition and move a proposed response. The Mayor will then call on those councillors who have indicated a desire to speak in the matter, before calling on the relevant Committee Chair to respond to the debate;
- (iii) An amendment to the recommendation in paragraph 2.1 of the report or to add additional recommendations should be submitted by 10.00am on the day before the meeting; otherwise it will be subject to the Mayor's discretion as to being appropriate. Any such amendment will need to be formally moved and seconded at the meeting;
- (iv) After the 15 minutes set aside for the debate, the Mayor will then formally put:
 - (a) Any amendments in the order in which they are moved, and
 - (b) The substantive recommendation(s) as amended (if amended).

