

Brighton and Hove City Council
Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting
4pm 23rd July 2024
Council Chamber, Hove Town Hall
Minutes

Present: Cllrs Evans (Chair), Cattell (Deputy Chair), Fowler, Hewitt, Lyons, Pickett, Sheard, Thomson, Winder.

Others present: Mark Strong (CVS Representative), Mary Davies (Older Peoples Council)

1 a Declarations of substitutions: None. Cllr Fishleigh and the Youth Council Representative were unable to attend and sent apologies.

B Declarations of interest: There are none.

C Exclusion of the press and public: There are no Part two items

2 Minutes: As this is the first meeting there are no minutes to approve.

3 Chairs Communications: The Chair gave the following communication:

It was always likely to be challenging holding the first Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings following the change to an Executive and scrutiny model of governance. We're all on a learning curve, and there are decisions already being made that are realistically too far along for us to scrutinise in any meaningful way.

Therefore, in this first meeting, as in the People Overview as Scrutiny Committee a week or two ago, we are going to be hearing from those Cabinet Members whose portfolios align with our remit. They will be telling us about their priorities over the coming months and taking questions from us. In an Executive and Scrutiny system the relationship between the two is incredibly important. We want to form a good working relationship with the cabinet and to be able to be a critical friend to them. It's also so important, in my view, that we form good working relationships between ourselves as a committee.

During the training sessions provided I was quite inspired by some of the content about what makes scrutiny successful. Whatever our political views – and we do all have them, obviously – we are here either as co-opted representatives from partner organisations or as elected representatives of our ward residents & businesses and of the city as a whole.

While we can spend our time asking questions about decisions already made – and it is our right to do so – I believe we would serve our city much better if we concentrate our time and limited resources in those areas of upcoming decision making where we can help to inform and improve policy and hopefully make a real difference for all of us who live and work here. I am looking forward to taking part in site visits, setting up formal and informal working groups, and actively listening to as many residents and experts as possible to help this process, and I hope you all are too.

Given the length of the first People Committee, which had only four cabinet members to question – we have seven! - we will need to strictly limit the amount of time that we have with each of them to 20 minutes. So I thank them for having submitted slides in advance, which

you've all hopefully had a chance to look at. I would ask them to be as succinct as possible in presenting to us, for members to be brief with questions, and Cabinet members to also be brief in their answers. I will need to move on to the next presentation once the 20 minutes are up whether or not members still have questions to ask.

We are joined by Cllrs Gill Williams, Cabinet member for housing and new homes; Tristram Burden, presenting to this committee on service transformation; Trevor Muten, transport, parking and public realm; Mitchie Alexander who is covering Birgit Miller's position on culture, heritage and tourism, Alan Robins, sport and recreation; Jacob Taylor, finance and city regeneration; and finally Tim Rowkins, cabinet member for net zero and environmental services.

Following this meeting, I will ask officers to arrange an informal meeting for all Place committee members to agree an outline 2024-25 Place O&S work plan, drawing on the presentations we hear today plus additional ideas from committee members. Scrutiny is a member led process, so it is up to us to form our work programme, but we do need executive member and officer input to ensure we are adding value by our work.

Going forward into the Autumn and beyond, we will have a chance to look more closely at plans and strategies as they are formed, have an input into council policies, and to scrutinise decision making.

4 Public involvement: There were no public questions.

5 Member involvement: There were no member questions.

6 Place Overview and Scrutiny Terms of Reference:

6.1 The Chair outlined the first item of business, a paper setting out the terms of reference for the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee and welcomed Giles Rossington to speak on the report.

6.2 Giles Rossington introduced the report to the committee and said that he was happy to answer any questions.

6.3 Cllr Pickett asked a question around the size and political make up of task and finish groups and informal working groups set up by the committee. Giles Rossington responded that this was set out in the Constitution under Part 3C1 Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules point 20.4, which states that task and finish groups do not have to adhere to the proportionality rules as committee. He went on to say that members from all opposition groups should be invited but that the political make up and size of the group would vary depending on the subject matter and those members who wanted to be involved in it.

6.4 Cllr Lyons asked how items can be added to the agenda. The Chair responded that as she had said in the Chairs Communications that an informal meeting would be arranged to discuss adding items to the work programme for the year ahead.

6.5 Cllr Lyons asked what the time frame for getting items added to the agenda would be. Giles Rossington replied that this was included in the constitution under Part3C1 Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules point 5.5 which states that any voting Member of the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee is entitled, by giving at least seven working days notice

before the meeting to the Chief Executive, to request that an item relevant to the functions of the Committee be included on the agenda.

6.6 Cllr Lyons further asked about the timeframe for members of the public to bring items to the committee. Giles Rossington responded that there was a slot on the agenda for public questions, deputations and petitions and the normal timeframe for these is two days after the publication of the agenda.

6.7 Mark Strong made a point that as a community and voluntary sector representative he is speaking on behalf of between 300 and 400 groups varying in size, so it takes a long time for him to collect feedback from them and would be grateful if this was taken into consideration. He also asked about sharing information from the committee with these groups. Giles Rossington said that officers would be very explicit if any of the information was confidential and not to be shared and otherwise it could be assumed that they could be shared.

6.8 Cllr Winders asked a question regarding the implications section of the report and if these would change. Giles Rossington responded that the implications were only for this specific report and that as is normal for any council report the implications would be looked at and change for every separate report.

7 Cabinet Member Presentations

7.1 The Chair invited Cllr Gill Williams, Cabinet member for Housing and New Homes to present to the committee.

7.2 Cllr Williams presented to the committee. Her priorities for the year ahead included:

- Improving housing quality, safety, and sustainability
- Delivering the homes our city needs
- Preventing homelessness and meeting housing needs
- Supporting independence and improved wellbeing
- Providing a resident focused housing service

7.3 Alison Thomson asked a question on short term lets and asked if this was something that the committee could look into. Cllr Williams responded that she would be delighted if the committee looked into this issue as the Communities and Levelling Up Act promised powers in this area they have not yet been enacted. She said we could press the new government to give more powers such as registration of short term lets because we don't know exactly where they are, when there is a problem we don't know who owns them, and we don't know if they have all of the correct safety certificates that landlords are required to have. Cllr Williams suggested that we could potentially use existing planning powers such as article 4, but that the council wants more powers. With an estimate of between 4,000 and 6,000 short term lets in the city, Cllr Williams said this was damaging.

7.4 Cllr Cattell asked if the council could start working with landlords and letting agents to support them. Cllr Williams said that the council already does work closely with landlords to support them with things like damp proofing. She went on to state the landlord licensing helps landlords, particularly smaller non-professional landlords who may need support.

7.5 Cllr Fowler asked if Cllr Williams could expand on what help was available to help landlords with sustainability. Cllr Williams replied that there were some grants available and that they do direct landlords to these.

7.6 Cllr Lyons asked a question regarding families leaving the city because of the affordability of family housing and asked when more family housing would be coming. Cllr Williams responded that she completely agreed with the need for more family housing and that more was coming including 240 homes in Moulsecomb, purchasing 21 homes in Rottingdean, Portslade Village, and Whitehawk. Cllr Williams also mentioned that the apartments being built also included open spaces and balconies, which was needed for families.

7.7 Cllr Lyons asked if Cllr Williams had any plans for development on Benfield Valley. Cllr Williams responded that she had no plans for development on Benfield Valley but that private developers might try.

7.8 The Chair thanked Cllr Williams and asked Cllr Tristram Burden to present on the service transformation aspect of his portfolio.

7.9 Cllr Burden presented to the committee on his priorities for the year, which included:

- Increasing efficiency and improving productivity
- Embedding a one council approach
- Improving customer experience

7.10 Mark Strong asked a question regarding strategic partnership working and would voluntary groups, both large and small, be a part of this. Mark also asked a question regarding Cllr Burden's point about potentially putting customer service points in libraries, and suggested that community centres could also hold be used. Cllr Burden agreed that the council should be looking at a range of sites including community centres and family hubs. Cllr Burden also said that community groups were very important to the council and were definitely part of their partnerships.

7.11 Cllr Winder asked a question about how equalities data is reflected in customer service satisfaction data and was the satisfaction score broken down into different groups of people. Cllr Burden replied that the council does not always collect data on protected characteristics during customer contact as it can make the process take longer than necessary, saying did people want to spend time give this data when reporting that their bin collection was missed. Cllr Burden further said that the council could look at asking for the data as an optional extra in customer contact.

7.12 Mary Davies asked what Cllr Burden was doing to prevent digital exclusion. Mary further asked about Knowle House, a facility providing a step down from hospital, and what was being done with this. Cllr Burden responded that digital was meant to help everyone but that the council also want to see increased opening hours, more face to face contact, and improved telephone services. Regarding Knowle House Cllr Burden said that the site was being redeveloped into a facility for those with brain injuries.

7.13 Cllr Pickett asked about income generation and said that with so many commercial events going on in the city many residents were upset by these, and how would increasing income generation work without upsetting more residents. Cllr Burden said that many residents would not notice the planned income generation as much of it was not public

facing, giving the example of making IT systems and when they are deemed good enough selling them to other local authorities.

7.14 Cllr Sheard asked about digitisation and resistance to this change. He wanted to know what steps were being taken to ensure that the whole council was going along with this. Cllr Burden responded that culture change and ensuring that staff are empowered, supported, and have the right training was essential.

7.15 The Chair thanked Cllr Burden and asked Cllr Trevor Muten, Cabinet member for Transport and Public Realm to present to the committee.

7.16 Cllr Muten presented to the committee, his priorities for the year ahead included:

- Key issues for Local Transport Plan 5
- Protecting the city from flooding
- Highway maintenance

7.17 Cllr Lyons ask if the X bus service would be extended to other services as the 1X was working so well. He also said that it was a scandal that the city did not have a park and ride scheme and asked what was happening there. Cllr Lyons said that in his presentation Cllr Muten had spoken about flood protection and that the slide said the beach would be longer, he asked what this meant. Cllr Lyon further asked which parts of Valley Gardens would be omitted to keep the project within budget. Cllr Muten said that the Council are doing lots on buses and the 1X is a good example that is helping many people. There is a potential case for looking at this and seeing if other routes are suitable. He said that He agreed that the city needed a park and ride but that space for a big scheme was limited, but that the council could look at smaller schemes to start with, including talking to private car park owners and supermarkets. Regarding the beach Cllr Muten said that there would be more pebbles added to the beach as protection which would make the beach longer. Valley gardens Cllr Muten said that the council had quotes that were broadly within range with one or two tweaks, but the risks included how it was delivered with acceptable disruption.

7.18 Cllr Cattell asked a question around public realm and SUDS, asking if the council was planning more rain gardens, or in planning asking for more as part of big developments. Cllr Muten replied that Norton Road is a good example of a rain garden, and that the council had met with Southern Water several times because it is in their interest to have less water going into their combined sewers. Cllr Muten said that Southern Water had a substantial programme of work for urban drainage within their business plan, which is currently with their regulators. He further said that the council would absolutely be working with Southern Water to have more SUDS in the mix.

7.19 Cllr Fowler asked if as part of normal highways maintenance the teams could check drains to reduce flooding. Cllr Muten responded that sometimes it is not always possible to do different things at the same time because it requires a different team, but that a one council approach meant that the council can look at more coordination to do things when in a particular area.

7.20 Mark Strong asked a question regarding better engagement with community groups in a way that is not just 'do you like what we have come up with yes or no?' but engagement working with community groups beforehand. A further point was raised regarding a forward plan of when roads were going to be resurfaced long in advance so that community groups could offer suggestions for things that could be done at the same time such as cycle lane

painting. Cllr Muten replied that they had the Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan in place as a key component of the local transport plan, and that it was like having an action plan before setting out the strategy. Cllr Muten said that he had attend the Transport for the Southeast AGM in London, and that it was clear that the council are part of a bigger picture and needed to work with the regional components and particularly local neighbouring authorities to get the best for the city. Regarding a forward plan, Cllr Muten said that we needed to be able to connect these dots well, and he was concerned that in the past things have been looked at too much in isolation.

7.21 The Chair thanked Cllr Muten and said the committee would take a five-minute break.

7.22 Cllr Mitchie Alexander, Cabinet member for Culture, Heritage, and Tourism, presented to the committee. Her priorities included:

- Improving access to arts and culture
- Nighttime economy
- Seafront heritage

7.23 The Chair requested that the committee members please consider the questions that they were asking. She said that this session was intended to find out about the high level priorities of the cabinet members and ask questions looking to potential ideas for scrutiny work and that it was not an extension of members questions at full council for specific detailed questions.

7.24 Cllr Lyons asked for an update on plans for Madeira Terraces. Cllr Alexander said that as a major project Madeira Terraces came under Cllr Taylor's portfolio.

7.25 The Chair stated that this was an example of a member question and not what the session was for.

7.26 Mark Strong asked if the committee could scrutinise events for their costs and benefits to the city on an objective basis, because although residents feel events are great they do also bring a lot of disbenefits particularly to those living near to them, such as loss of bus services. The Chair said that this was certainly something that fell within the remit of the committee and was something that could be looked at in the future. Cllr Alexander responded that she had recently met with the Head of Outdoor Events and that this is something that is high up on their agenda, that events happen in a sustainable way that doesn't upset residents.

7.27 Mary Davies asked a question about the timing of the closure of public toilets and the nighttime economy. Cllr Alexander replied that the question of public toilets being open longer would need to be looked at as the nighttime economy is diversified.

7.28 Cllr Sheard asked how much of the nighttime economy strategy lies within the tourism directorate and how much lies within the licensing committee. Cllr Alexander said that there would need to be partnership working between them. Cllr Cattell said that she had met with Cllr David MacGregor, The Chair of the Licensing Committee, on this issue and are working on a review of licensing strategy, including violence against women and girls and cherished venues.

7.29 Cllr Sheard asked if the plans for seafront heritage included the Old Steine. Cllr Alexander replied that it did not include the Old Steine.

7.30 Cllr Thomson asked if the Seafront Heritage Fund was one of the funds that had to be bid for. Cllr Alexander said that as she was new to the brief she did not have the details and would have to get back with the details of the Seafront Heritage Fund.

7.31 Cllr Hewitt ask for clarification on the term Purple Flag Zone, and what the meaning of this was. Cllr Alexander said that she did not have the answer and would get back to Cllr Hewitt with an answer.

7.32 Cllr Evans thanked Cllr Alexander and asked Cllr Alan Robins, cabinet member for Parks, Allotments, Sport and Recreation to give his presentation.

7.33 Cllr Robins presented his priorities to the committee, which included:

- Maximising the use of allotments and community growing
- Realising the potential of volunteers and community involvement
- Sport and leisure provision in the East of the city

7.34 Cllr Lyons asked if the number of evictions from allotments could be made available to help the public understand the numbers being removed and encourage those not using their allotments to do so. Cllr Robins replied that people needed to help by giving up plots they are not using. He further said that he wanted to look at offering ¼ plots or a few beds to help people manage and get used to having an allotment. Cllr Robins said that the council were looking at hiring another allotments officer and improving allotments more generally.

7.35 Cllr Sheard asked a question on the sports and leisure facilities in the East of the city and if any new facility would be bigger to match the size of the area and the number of people in it. Cllr Robins responded that he wants a new facility that matches the needs of the local population without removing any of the current facilities in the area. Cllr Robins went on to say that he wants to get to grips with consultations to make sure that people feel engaged.

7.36 Cllr Fowler said that a number of local parks had lost their dog free status. Would this be brought back? Cllr Robins replied that he wasn't sure if PSPOs came under his remit, but as it was to do with parks he understood. Cllr Fowler said that the issue was previously being looked at under the committee system and was unaware if officers had sent the issue to Cllr Robins to look at, but believed the committee should be scrutinising PSPOs. Cllr Robins said that if Cllr Fowler emailed him with further details he would discuss the matter with officers to get an answer for her. Mark Strong asked to be included in these discussions as he had been involved with Friends of Queens Park and had managed to keep the dog free area in their park, so would be happy to help.

7.37 Cllr Cattell said that she was pleased about plans to increase the places that can be offered to people for allotments. She asked if Cllr Robins felt a task and finish group looking at land left over after planning to find out what space might be available there would be a good idea. Cllr Robins responded that he thought it was great idea and gave an example of the use of this land in Portslade for growing fruits and berries.

7.38 Mary Davies asked a question regarding inclusivity in sport and what Cllr Robins intended to do about increasing the number of open-air gyms in parks, as she felt older people did not use gyms. Cllr Robins replied that the council sometimes has put in place what they wanted rather than what residents wanted. He said that a range of options was needed and the council should listen to people who come to them with ideas of what they

want to see in their parks. Cllr Robins also said that he would be working with different friend of parks groups to reopen toilets in parks to increase their use.

7.39 Cllr Evans thanked Cllr Robins and asked Cllr Jacob Taylor, Deputy Leader and cabinet member for finance and city regeneration to present to the committee.

7.40 Cllr Taylor presented to the committee. His priorities included:

- Major regeneration projects
- Using council assets to deliver income and investment
- Unlocking sites and building new homes
- Budget

7.41 Cllr Hewitt asked if a review of City Plan 1 would have a knock-on effect on City Plan 2. Cllr Hewitt also asked for an update on Madeira Terraces. Cllr Taylor explained the process for the review of City Plan Part 2 stating that it is a long process. He said that it would link with City Plan Part 2 and that the interesting thing was that with a new government who have been vocal on house building and planning reform the council would need to wait to see the details of these policies and the targets that are set. Regarding Madeira Terraces said that a decision on this was going to be taken soon, and that an urgent meeting of the cabinet was due to take place over the summer.

7.42 Cllr Thomson asked if the committee could scrutinise the budget, and if it was too late to scrutinise Madeira Terraces. Cllr Taylor said that scrutiny can look at things that have happened to decide if they were good bad or somewhere in the middle, or scrutiny can look forward and think about other major projects that haven't started yet but would be of interest. Cllr Evans said that scrutinising the budget was within the remit of the committee and was on the list of things to scrutinise.

7.43 Mark Strong asked a question around housing numbers being the only target, saying that this can have an impact on small retail and leisure which is also needed in a neighbourhood. Cllr Taylor responded that he couldn't agree more and that because in his ward there is one road in and out what is there is so important. Because of this he is wanting to breath new life into the parade of shops in his area. Cllr Taylor said that they would not be looking at converting everything into housing units as it is important to have shops and leisure as well.

7.44 Cllr Lyons said that having lived in the city his whole life, he wanted to know what the vision was, where the next big marina type development was going be. Cllr Lyons also asked if the Council would consider issuing bonds to raise funds for such projects. Cllr Taylor said that one of the areas he was keen to focus on was East of the Palace Pier to the Marina. Cllr Taylor said that West of the Palace Pier looked very nice now but East of the Palace Pier was a mixed bag. However, he said, over the next five to 10 years it could be transformed into a real destination for people from outside of the city and local residents. Regarding funding Cllr Taylor said that the council would need to see what the new government does in terms of funding, but that the council has a good record of accessing funding pots. He went on to say that he didn't think any councils in the UK issued bonds any longer, except maybe for parks, but it was something that he would look into.

7.45 Cllr Pickett ask if the committee would be involved in the disposal of non-performing assets. Cllr Taylor said that he would refer to Giles Rossington in terms of the process. Giles

Rossington said that if Cllr Taylor wanted scrutiny input then he could ask the committee to look into it at an early stage, but that it would ultimately be a cabinet decision. Giles said that overview and scrutiny could look at it at an early stage to look at a variety of options or to help set definitions of productivity for an asset such as does it have community value or does it have commercial value. Cllr Taylor said that he was open to the idea either at an early stage or via a call-in after any decisions are made.

7.46 Cllr Evans thanked Cllr Taylor and asked Cllr Tim Rowkins, cabinet member for net zero and environment services to come and speak to the committee.

7.47 Cllr Rowkins presented his priorities to the committee, which included:

- Cleaning up the city
- Getting the city to net zero
- Expanding recycling and reducing waste

7.48 Cllr Winder said that it was a huge effort to change the culture at City Clean and asked how planned to retain values and any culture change with more and changing services. Cllr Rowkins said that he was getting good feedback from staff and that too often council services are silos. Cllr Rowkins added that once a month he goes out with a different City Clean service and always gains a long list of things he has learnt.

7.49 Cllr Cattell asked a question around the challenges of retro fitting in properties and asked if it would be a good idea to look at best practice from architecture firms to help put together guidance for local builders. Cllr Rowkins said that this was something that could be taken forward, as there are a number of challenges facing property owners wanting to retro fit things like insulation or new double glazing, particularly in conservation areas.

7.50 Cllr Cattell said that there was a real problem in the building industry in not having the necessary skills, and asked if the council could work with MET to form courses on these new methods. Cllr Rowkins said that MET College did provide a decarbonisation course focusing on new heating systems. Cllr Rowkins added that thousands of jobs would be needed in the future in this sector in the city and the wider region. Cllr Thomson commented that there were minimal options and high cost in the city centre for retro fitting.

7.51 Mark Strong said that he had been told that the Community and Climate Action Working Group had been disbanded, and asked will there be community engagement so that the reps from the CCAWG can sit on that. Mark also asked about recent press reports that community groups being fined for not recycling or using communal bins. He said that small businesses and community groups could not recycle because they can't put stuff in communal bins and could not afford to use big companies to do it. There is a potential income to be made here for the council, could some sort of scheme be looked at to provide recycling collection for small businesses. Cllr Rowkins said that he was not aware that the CCAWG being disbanded but that one meeting was postponed or cancelled because of the election. He also highlighted the importance of external expertise. Regarding the commercial waste collection Cllr Rowkins said that the council's trade waste collection service was growing and the issues raised was something that he would look at.

7.52 Cllr Pickett asked if there was a decarbonisation strategy. Cllr Rowkins said that the report was being finalised and would be published soon. Cllr Pickett asked if the report would be available this year. Cllr Rowkins said that he believed it would be available this year, but did not want to put a date on it.

7.53 Cllr Evans thanked Cllr Rowkins and closed the meeting at 19:05