

# Brighton & Hove City Council

## Cabinet

## Agenda Item 109(c)

**Subject: Deputations**

**Date of meeting: 5 December 2024**

A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each ordinary meeting of the Council for the hearing of deputations from members of the public.

Notification of two Deputations has been received. The spokesperson is entitled to speak for 5 minutes.

**1) Deputation: Council's analysis of public responses to the engagement exercise on secondary school admissions**

We have been looking at the Council's analysis of public responses to the engagement exercise on secondary school admissions arrangements. While we appreciate the Council making this information available, we feel more detailed information is needed on the frequency and distribution of different responses, and we hope the Council intends to provide this. We would like to highlight some points from the Council's analysis and to express concern about issues from the engagement meetings that have been omitted from the summary.

The Council's summary analysis identifies the level of concern about distances to school under the Council's proposed options. Councillor Taylor also said in the previous Cabinet meeting that these concerns had been 'heard loud and clear'. The summary analysis also highlights concern about proposals that divide communities. This concern was raised across many different areas including Fiveways, Port Hall, Prestonville, the Friars/Surrenden area and Whitehawk. The Council's summary highlights that 'there were strong objections to reducing the size of well-performing schools'. This suggests a need to ensure published admission numbers (PANs) are aligned with where children live and reflect demand in different parts of the city. It also suggests there is not support for increasing numbers at Longhill School by decreasing numbers in schools that are regularly over-subscribed.

We are concerned about points from the public meetings that have not been captured in the notes. The Council was asked whether published admission numbers would be drawn up with a view to providing adequate places to accommodate children within their own catchment areas. The Council responded that published admission numbers have in the past been calculated in this way. The Council gave a similar assurance when it introduced its new FSM policy, when it said that the policy is unlikely to affect the chances of pupils within a catchment area obtaining a place at their catchment area school due to falling student numbers. This point has been omitted from the summary. We request the Council to confirm that this is still its position.

The Council has listed several sources by Prof Gorard but has not provided evidence of engaging with other sources. In the final public meeting, multiple people commented on the way in which Prof Gorard's evidence was being taken out of context. These concerns have not been captured in the summary. Prof Gorard's most relevant argument, based on the effects of Pupil Premium Funding, is that incentivising highly performing schools with a low proportion of disadvantaged students to take more disadvantaged students improves results for

those disadvantaged students without impacting adversely on other students in those schools. This evidence provides support for the Council's new FSM policy but does not seem to support measures that focus on preventing children attending their local schools.

These may be mere oversights in a complex note-taking exercise, but we are concerned in case the Council is continuing to be selective about the evidence it presents. This would run contrary to what has otherwise been a welcome change in the tone of the Council's leadership towards greater recognition of the legitimacy of many of the concerns that have been raised.

**Supported by:**

Mark Kennedy (lead spokesperson)

Sally Wright

Paul Bunkham

Matthew Boote

Adam Dennett

Imogen Miles

Tony Boland

Rebecca Korda

Tom Harrison

Esme Gaussen

## 2) **Deputation: Class Divide**

Class Divide is a grassroots campaign advocating for educational equality between East Brighton communities (Whitehawk, Manor Farm, and Bristol Estate) and the wider city. The group includes residents, education professionals, and those with lived experience.

Current Context:

- Brighton & Hove faces declining pupil numbers, with projected 500 surplus school places in coming years
- Recent engagement on admission reforms sparked concerns about travel times, friendship groups, school performance, and property values
- Not all community members have equal ability to voice their views or access consultation processes

Key Issues:

- Historical educational inequality has persisted in Brighton & Hove
- Some communities face barriers to participating in consultations (limited access to devices, data, professional networks, and resources)
- Current system perpetuates divide between "advantaged" and "disadvantaged" schools
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Class Divide's Requests:

1. Reform Secondary School Admissions to:

- Prioritise children from lowest-income families
- Provide meaningful school choice for all parents
- Maintain viability of all community secondary schools

2. Improve Communication:

- Exercise care when discussing schools to avoid stigmatisation
- Consider impact of language on students, staff, and families
- Acknowledge that all schools have strengths and challenges

3. Expectations for Leadership:

- Support proposal advancement to formal consultation if it meets above criteria
- Take bold action to address national issue of declining pupil numbers
- Create foundations for an equitable school system

**Supported by:**

Lewis Smith

Carlie Goldsmith (lead spokesperson)

Dave Bailey

Katie Mercer

Liza Zerb

