

# Brighton & Hove City Council

**Council**

**Agenda Item 55**

**Subject:** Petition for Debate

**Date of meeting:** 19 December 2024

**Report of:** Corporate Director for Corporate Services

**Contact Officer:** Name: Anthony Soyinka  
Tel: 01273 291006  
Email: [anthony.soyinka@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:anthony.soyinka@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

**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.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the petition is noted.

### 3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION / CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 To receive the following petition signed by 2468 people at time of publication:

#### **Smartphone Free Schools for Brighton & Hove**

We, the undersigned parents of children attending schools within the Brighton and Hove district, are writing to express our collective concern regarding the increasing prevalence of smartphone usage among pre-teens and young teenagers in our community. Recent evidence highlights significant safeguarding issues and developmental concerns associated with early smartphone ownership. We respectfully request the support of the council in addressing this matter by recommending new school guidelines that advocate for delaying smartphone usage among children, both during and outside school hours.

Extensive research has shown that early smartphone usage can negatively impact children's mental health, academic performance, and social interactions. Studies indicate that excessive screen time is linked to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and disrupted sleep among young people. Additionally, smartphones often provide unfiltered access to social media platforms, which can expose children to cyberbullying, inappropriate content, online predators, and negative influences that may promote unhealthy attitudes and behaviours, including sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination.

There is a growing movement advocating for a smartphone-free childhood, and many schools across the country are adopting this stance with the city of St Albans

becoming the first to endorse this initiative. In a concerted effort to mitigate the adverse effects of smartphone usage among students, several state schools in a London borough have also collectively decided to steer their pupils away from smartphones and address the downsides. According to the Headteacher of the City of London Academy, the collaboration was prompted by the observed negative impact of smartphones on students' well-being and education, often manifesting during school hours. Under the new policy, any phone used during the school day is confiscated, with smartphones being returned only after up to a week or when collected by parents. This measure affects over 13,000 students and includes a "whole-school" approach in several institutions, with secondary and primary Headteachers working together towards a borough-wide implementation.

The pervasive and unregulated influence of technology, coupled with the sophisticated tactics used by tech companies, can make it challenging for any parent to fully shield their children from potential harms. Therefore, it is essential to implement additional protective measures and guidelines to ensure the safety and well-being of all children, while also providing support to families struggling to implement boundaries due to increasing issues such as teenage aggression and smartphone addiction.

We understand that the council cannot mandate parental choices, but it can play a pivotal role in raising awareness and providing evidence-based guidance. We propose that the council encourages schools to adopt guidelines recommending that parents delay providing smartphones to their children until they are older and promote the use of basic mobile phones or smartwatches that allow parents to stay in contact with their children without exposing them to the risks associated with smartphones. We urge the council alongside this to potentially launch an educational campaign aimed at informing parents about the potential dangers of early smartphone usage. This campaign could include arranging workshops, and collaborating with local schools to disseminate this vital information through a variety of channels.

Furthermore, we ask that the council provides resources and support to schools to implement these new guidelines effectively. This could involve training sessions for teachers and staff, as well as creating a platform for parents to share their concerns and experiences.

In conclusion, by supporting these initiatives, the council will be taking a significant step towards ensuring the safety and well-being of children in Brighton and Hove. We believe that with the council's backing, we can foster a community that prioritises the healthy development of our young people and mitigates the risks associated with early smartphone use.

#### **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 Cabinet Member 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 Cabinet Member 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:
- (v) (a) Any amendments in the order in which they are moved, and  
(b) The substantive recommendation(s) as amended (if amended).

