

# **BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**

## **PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY**

**4.00pm 7 FEBRUARY 2025**

### **HOVE TOWN HALL COUNCIL CHAMBER**

#### **MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillor O'Quinn (Chair) Sheard (Deputy Chair), Czolak, Grimshaw, Helliwell, Mcleay, Meadows, Shanks, Simon, Thomson. Sara Fulford (OPC), Joanna Martindale (CVS), Jasmine (Youth Council Rep).

#### **PART ONE**

### **28 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

A Declarations of substitutions: Cllr Grimshaw for Cllr Cattell.

B Declarations of interest: There are none.

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

### **29 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

29.1 The Chair gave the following communication:

Today we are scrutinising the City Council's budget ahead of it going to cabinet and full council. We will hear from Cllr Jacob Taylor and then I will take questions from members of the committee. We are also joined by relevant directors and cabinet members who can come forward to answer any service specific questions where necessary.

We are also joined in the audience by April Baker, CEO of Together Co, a loneliness charity in the city, and by Caroline Ridley, CEO of Impact Initiatives a local charity offering a range of services to both younger and older people. I have invited them to hear our discussions about their areas of work.

The minutes of this meeting will be shared with cabinet, and of course members of the cabinet are here, so the views of members of this committee will be heard.

### **30 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

30.1 There were no public questions, petitions, or deputations.

### **31 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT**

31.1 There were no member questions.

**32 GENERAL FUND 2025/26 - SCRUTINY OF BUDGET PROPOSALS**

32.1 Cllr Jacob Taylor presented the report to the committee, outlining the financial position of the council and the pressures that the council was under. Nigel Manvell outlined areas of risk in the budget plans and mentioned some of the ways in which these risks had been partially mitigated.

32.2 Cllr Grimshaw asked about the employability scheme and the government funding that was planned to replace the council's funding. Cllr Taylor said that the growth hub and growth funding was going towards this. Deb Austin said that the council is working with West Sussex on connect to work funding, available from June 2025 and funding from shared prosperity fund to fill any gap.

32.3 Fiona England of PACC asked questions about short break holiday funding as some families were not receiving this service; on lessons learnt this year; and on the lack of a designated social care officer. She also asked about Drove Road and workforce development. Cllr Taylor said that he was hearing the message from PACC and was nudging things in the right direction. He said that the overall budget for the directorate was increasing in cash terms, but he recognised that short breaks was an area under pressure. Cllr Taylor said that where there was a statutory duty the council would provide funding.

32.4 Cllr Simon asked about public health spending and the number of staff being cut. She enquired about an EIA and whether the money was going to be used in a different area. Cllr Burden replied that public health has only recently come into the directorate and that savings made in public health will be spent on other areas of the council. He said that the public health team had good outcomes for the money that they spent. Deb Austin said that this was not the most appropriate point for an EIA, which should follow staff consultation. Caroline Vass said that they had looked at reallocation of budgets, which was predominantly supporting family hubs, child and adolescence drug services, schools programming around mental health, reducing county lines drugs, rough sleeper services. She said that these are all services that meet the criteria for use of the ringfenced public health budget. Cllr Taylor said that the team were working through the announcement of more public health funding to see if it was a real terms increase. Cllr Taylor said that the council had over 3500 staff and the budget was looking at a reduction of 60 posts.

32.5 Cllr Shanks asked about increasing inhouse fostering placements and youth led grants. Cllr Taylor said that we don't celebrate the successes of children's services enough. He said we used to have the second highest number of children in care and the council is now under the average. Cllr Taylor highlighted the importance of finding children foster placements. On youth led grants he said he didn't want it to go entirely but wanted to look at participatory budgeting and using other funding such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) or the Fairness Fund.

32.6 Jo Martindale asked about the aging well reduction, saying it would have a significant impact. She also asked about working more closely with health colleagues to take a coordinated approach to funding. Cllr Burden said that there were lots of adult social care services that focus on prevention. Regarding the aging well contract, the saving is only a very small proportion of the contract, and will not have a major impact. Cllr Taylor said that they work very closely with health professionals and the NHS. Genette Laws said that she was

working really closely with health colleagues and had a meeting planned to collaborate further with them.

32.7 Jasmine, Youth Council Representative, asked about the youth-led grant funding cut and mentioned some of the causes that it helped to fund and asked how they can be supported without the funding. She asked a further question about audio active, a charity supporting children facing gang violence, and how this could be supported. Cllr Taylor said he would have liked to maintain the funding and is happy to work with the Youth Council to get funding from other pots and ensure that young people have a say. Regarding county line and drug dealing Cllr Taylor said it was a big issue and that the adolescent service did really good work. Caroline Vass said that the audio active programme could possibly be funded by the drug and alcohol reduction grant.

32.8 Cllr Czolak asked about child protection services, the increase in the case load and how this can be managed by staff, and about how CIC and CP numbers can be kept low. Cllr Taylor said that child protection and children's services are the most important services the council provides. He said that some of the reductions were from reducing headcount and that the service are confident that they can manage it. Deb Austin said that the service was in a very good position and were one of the few in the country which is not reliant on agency staff. She said that they had looked at the caseload numbers of social workers and that there is some capacity here.

32.9 Cllr Mcleay asked about missing EIAs and noted that at a previous meeting a comment was made about improving EIAs. She also commented about the short amount of time that was given to look at the budget papers. She also asked about the frequent use of phrases in the EIAs that said that other services or partners would pick up the slack when a service was cut, and queried whether all partners had been consulted about this. Cllr Taylor said that he agreed that the budget cycle was unhelpful and that this was because the funding settlement came later this year than last year. He said it was very difficult to publish a draft budget without knowing the funding and that ministers were keen to move to a multiyear funding model which would help to plan earlier. Regarding EIAs he said that he would talk with officers about EIAs that weren't there and if they needed publishing. Regarding health funding he said that £22bn increase had gone to the health service and that not everyone had got so much, and that he wanted to work with them as sometimes they might be able to pick up the slack. Deb Austin said that Drove Road facility had never been used for short breaks but was used by a vulnerable young adult funded by NHS Sussex while a permanent property was secured. Rainbow Lodge is planned to be opened early this year to enable four young people to come back into the city, and to use the flat as an additional income source.

32.9 Jess Sumner said that in the EIAs where it said that other services would pick up the costs, some of these conversations had not taken place. She also asked a question about partnership working saying that partners were working towards a certain amount of funding in a contract but then reductions are made within the budget, which made it very difficult to provide services. Cllr Taylor said that it was a good challenge and that in the budget they have looked at all things CVS and have managed to not significantly reduce funding to the degree of previous years. Genette Laws responded that making savings from existing contracts involved negotiation: reductions can not be forced on providers, but the council can explain the difficulty of its financial position. In terms of checking with NHS partners about their ability to step in to cover services reductions, she has definitely had these conversations with NHS colleagues, albeit perhaps not the same people that Ms Sumner had been speaking to.

32.10 Cllr Sheard asked about home to school transport and a budget reduction after the coming year. He also asked about universal free school meals, and about LCF GP young person's sexual health clinic. Cllr Taylor said that home to school transport the council has learnt the lesson on previous attempts to improve the model. In the medium term the council needs to look at different models, including in-house provision, but there will be no rush to do this without proper engagement, hence why funding is maintained at a high level for 25-26. On free school meals in capital funding he said he thought this was using CIL funding for holiday provision. Caroline Vass said that the sexual health service was a small service accessed via GPs, and was underused as young people preferred to access services online.

32.11 Cllr Grimshaw asked a question cuts in mental health services by the authority and NHS, and could we not ask the NHS to pay more.. Caroline Vass said that the £1.9m joint service was predominantly funded by the NHS with £290,000 from public health, which was being reduced by £20,000, so they did not feel that it would have a significant impact.

32.12 Cllr Meadows noted that public health resources were being diverted to support family hubs, but taht the budget includes a cut to the family hub in Hollingbury and Patcham.Cllr Taylor replied that the Hollingbury and Patcham site was used for fewer activities compared to other sites. Deb Austin added that it was a room in a school mostly used by health visitors.

32.13 Cllr Shanks asked about the reduced hours at libraries and removing the home delivery service, saying that if the home delivery was removed then libraries should be open longer. Cllr Pumm said that he was passionate about libraries. He said that any cuts in this area hurt and that an EIA would be carried out once staff consultation had taken place. Deb Austin said that any changes made to libraries would follow a statutory three-month consultation process and this was why an EIA was not provided. Cllr Taylor said that the council was not talking about closing libraries but possibly changing opening hours at some. Cllr O'Quinn noted that Cllr Pumm would be coming to the March committee to discuss library services.

32.14 Sara Fulford asked a question about adult social care and how cutting preventive services would help and why there weren't EIAs. She also asked if the council could be more imaginative with income. Cllr Burden replied that in some instances it would not be possible to conduct an EIA until detailed plans were developed. In terms of prevention, he spoke of the intense budget pressure in adult social care. He said Ireland Lodge was never designed to be long term and wasn't feasible in that way. Genette Laws said that Ireland Lodge would enable people to step down from hospital as this was not the best place to be, before returning home. Steve Hook said that the independence at home service relates to vacant posts so not reduction in current people, he said it also supports people on other care pathways. He said that repositioning the service to Craven Vale would provide a more streamline service. He said that he was also in negotiation with the ICB to fund this. In term of Ireland Lodge he said there was no reduction in beds or staff but a change to align with Craven Vale, to change from long term care to shorter term care. Regarding the reduction in social workers Steve said that a redesign would see career development carried out by managers therefore reducing back office staff.

32.15 Cllr Mcleay asked about saving of £5m plus to adult social care, and how providers not protected by NICs rises would be affected. She also asked about the staff vacancy factor. Steve Hook replied that the £5m reduction was a significant step. However, recent years have seen consistent uplifts in payments to providers, and in consequence Brighton & Hove has

some of the highest fees in the Southeast. Although there are risks associated with this saving, the local market is in a good position to manage. Regarding the vacancy factor of 4.6% he said it was not a deletion of posts but holding off on hiring. This would work at about 12 posts and would be about 0.6 of a post in each team, which is a challenge that can be met. Cllr Taylor said that these savings are a risk to deliver But that the council has to deliver a balanced budget and this requires that some risks are taken.

32.16 Cllr Helliwell asked about cuts to prevention services and if this was a sound decision, as these services stopped people from falling into high-cost services later on. Cllr Burden said that a lot of work was already focused on prevention. He felt that the adult social care budget was in a better position than last year, because of the focus on prevention.

32.17 Cllr Shanks asked a question about learning disabilities and outsourcing the residential provision. Cllr Taylor said that they wouldn't want to outsource any service if possible but that he had to be honest with people that the financial issues facing councils and the cost of adult social care meant that a range of options had to be pursued. Genette Laws said that they were looking at four out of eight homes and people would not be moved, and staff would not change as TUPE would apply. She said that providers were mainly third sector. Steve Hook said that keeping in house services is much more expensive particularly for learning disability services. He said that the shared lives service would be insourced. Steve said that the four homes were small group homes and that the city had a good market for these services.

32.18 Cllr Czolak asked about temporary accommodation and incentivising landlords. He also asked about proactively discharging people and if it was a 'do or die' attitude, and what a reasonable offer would be. Cllr Taylor said that the council was facing very high costs and a very high number of families presenting as homeless. Taxpayer's money is being used to buy very expensive private sector accommodation and this is not a good use of public money. The council is consequently exploring better value options including purchasing properties or entering into long term leases. The change in the allocation policy is that people are sitting on the waiting list for a very long time but people can now go into the private market and remain on the waiting list. This is cheaper than keeping people for long periods in temporary or emergency accommodation. The out of area policy is not about forcing people to leave the city, but on better supporting people who volunteer to do so, for example to join family in another part of the country. Genette Laws emphasised that it was about working with people who wanted to leave the area not forcing people to leave.

32.19 Cllr Mcleay asked a question about the risk of street homelessness for people refusing out of area offers. Geanette Laws said that the risk of people declining reasonable offers was there whether the placement was out of area or not. She reiterated that they were not making people leave the area who did not want to.

32.20 Cllr Simon asked about the Traveller liaison team and the council's ability to support the needs of the Traveller community. She asked who would do this work and if they had the expertise. Genette Laws said that the restructure would not lead to any redundancies and that it was keeping the same level of service.

32.21 Cllr Sheard asked if we were using budget and budget constraints to change our reconnection policy and will anyone be pressured into reconnection policy. Cllr Taylor said that there is no policy seeking to place people outside of the city against their will. It is about where

someone wants to leave the city. Cllr Taylor said many councils place out of area but that this is not something that we want to do.

32.22 Cllr Grimshaw said that changes to the allocations policy on lone adults had veterans are down as not being impacted. She said some veterans want to leave the city and go to specific veteran accommodation. The nearest is in Portsmouth. She said that maybe the new Sussex authority could look at this. Cllr Taylor said that officers would look at the EIA comments on veterans.

The meeting concluded at 18:36