

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

1.30pm 7 FEBRUARY 2025

HOVE TOWN HALL - COUNCIL CHAMBER

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Evans, Baghoth, Fowler, Hewitt, Sheard, Thomson, Shanks, Lyons, Earthey and Mackey

Other Members present: Mark Strong (CVS)

PART ONE

33 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

1 Procedural Business

1 a Declarations of substitutions

1.1 Cllr Shanks for Cllr Sykes

1.2 Cllr Baghoth for Cllr Cattell

1.3 Cllr Mackay for Cllr Winder

1.4 Cllr Earthey for Cllr Fishleigh

1.5 Mary Davies, Co-optee for the Older Peoples' Council is unable to attend today so we have invited Angela Stretton, another OPC rep, to ensure that older peoples' concerns are heard at the meeting.

1b Declarations of interest:

1.2 There were none.

1c Exclusion of the press and public

1.3 There are no Part Two items today, so the press and public won't be excluded.

34 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

34.1 The Chair gave the following communication:

Today we are holding a special Place Overview & Scrutiny meeting as part of the budget scrutiny process. The minutes of this meeting and any specific comments made by committee members will be shared with the Cabinet to inform their planning.

We will be looking in depth at the details of the budget plans ahead of the Cabinet meeting on 13th February. We are joined by Cllr Jacob Taylor, Deputy Leader of the Council and cabinet member for Finance & City Regeneration, and Nigel Manvell, the council's Chief Financial Officer, who will be talking to us about the budget and then taking questions from members. We are also joined by Cabinet members and officers who are on hand to help with any questions and I'd like to welcome them to the meeting. Cllr Williams can only stay until 2.30pm so please can we have any questions specifically on housing first.

Although we only have one item on the agenda, there are a lot of us here this afternoon and so we will have a lot of questions to get through. Can I therefore please request that both those asking and answering questions are as brief and to the point as possible. We want everyone who wishes to contribute to have the opportunity.

35 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

35.1 There were no public questions.

36 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

36.1 There were no member questions.

37 GENERAL FUND 2025/26 - SCRUTINY OF BUDGET PROPOSALS

37.1 Cllr Taylor gave a summary of the budget and the background context. He said that the budget gap had closed from £36m to £16m and the situation had significantly improved. The 3 key areas of demand on the budget are adult social care, homelessness and temporary accommodation. There have been significant wins such as the expansion of food waste recycling, expansion of the recycling service to include plastics, foil etc, freezing parking tariffs, gaining funding for street cleansing, parks and open spaces and to build new homes.

37.2 Nigel Manvell said that the large savings programme did well but falls short in some areas. The external auditor is concerned about the financial sustainability of the council.

37.3 Cllr Hewitt asked about the freeze of parking fees and what mechanism they used to evaluate the impact on income

37.4 Mark Strong said that the majority of people in Brighton don't travel by car and subsidising parking fees for car users was detrimental to public transport and goes against the equity and environmental policies of the council. This would create more congestion and make bus journeys slower. By reducing costs for parking and increasing the fare for the Volks railway gives the wrong message.

37.5 Cllr Earthy suggested increasing the charges in a different way based on the time of day and that NHS staff shouldn't be charged a fortune to park at the hospital.

37.6 Angela Stretton said that the Older Peoples' Council are happy about the hourly charges in light touch areas but that in some parts of the city remain difficult to access. Many older people rely on "drop in" visitors and this parking proposal will make this very difficult to continue. She suggested expanding the hourly charges in residential areas and reserve for older people who could be identified by their bus pass, for example.

37.7 Cllr Thomson asked about maximising capital from car parks. There are huge waiting lists for parking permits in zones Y and Z and residents can't afford to park all year round in a car park. Would it be possible to allow those on the waiting list to park in the car parks overnight.

37.8 Cllr Sheard commented that not increasing these tariffs with inflation actually means it's a cut

37.9 Cllr Shanks said she does not agree with the freeze in parking fees and that there are areas in the city with no parking schemes, she suggested they could introduce new zones to generate more income.

37.10 Cllr Lyons welcomed the parking fee freeze and would like a further reduction and asked how much extra revenue they expect over the next 12 months.

37.11 Cllr Muten addressed each of these questions. He said that parking charges had been increasing by 15% every year under the previous administration which meant areas like near the hospital had quadrupled in cost. This penalises key workers who work out of hours when there are less bus services running and the view that all car owners are wealthy is unhelpful. The impact of high parking charges is that people are not coming into the city centre and creates a barrier for those on lower incomes. The council has a growth agenda and want people to come into the city and high parking charges is a barrier to this. They do want to encourage people to use public transport and have good active travel for the city but it needs to be done in a strategic way. The public transport offer in other parts of Sussex is poor and they want those people to come into Brighton. Cllr Muten said that they will be working to make paid parking meters more accessible and to work better for the community. They are looking into new parking zones in Hollingdean and the Nevill Road area in Hove. There have been deputations and members of the public asking for better parking systems so they will also be looking at Portslade and Rottingdean. Freezing parking charges does effectively mean a cut but as it was so high previously, this will bring it to a more reasonable level but it will continue to be monitored. Using the car park overnight has still got a high cost even though it was reduced by £10. They are looking at space in car parks near London Road to allow people living nearby to use those spaces.

37.12 Cllr Evans said she had concerns around proposed cuts to the Planning Department as it is already under-resourced and the team brings in revenue streams.

37.13 Cllr Shanks asked if there was enough in the capital budget for the council to meet their housing target.

37.14 Cllr Sheard asked about emergency accommodation budget as there was a huge spending increase in 25/26 but much smaller investment for the following 3 years and he wanted to know what the plan was with this. He asked another question about offering temporary accommodation out of the city.

37.15 Cllr Williams responded that there is enough money in the budget that is ringfenced for housing to meet the regulatory standards. There were over 2000 households needing help with accommodation last year. They will be establishing a housing company and will buy more homes off the market for temporary accommodation, therefore avoiding charges from a

provider, and giving the council more control. They will be building more homes, there are hundreds in the pipeline including 214 new houses in Moulsecoomb.

37.16 Cllr Taylor said they didn't want to reduce the headcount in planning policy or enforcement. They have seen drops in the income generated by the Planning Team and the proposal reflects the resourcing demands. The reduction should be managed through vacancies and the remaining staff will be able to continue to work on the City Plan and enforcement. They want more developers and more income coming in. Cllr Evans suggested that the income may have dropped because of the current lack of resource to bring it in. Cllr Taylor said that the income is driven by applications and developments. Max Woodford clarified that the reduction would be in the planning policy team and not the enforcement team.

37.17 Mark Strong said that people on low income drive cars less and that there have been steeper increases in bus fares. He said that flexible charging would be better than a blanket freeze. They should be charging for filming as well. The EIA is only looking at the change in the parking bays in light touch areas, not looking at fees as a broader issue, which would raise the issue of those on low income, disabled and so on.

37.18 Cllr Taylor said that older people want to drive into town or to go to the hospital and shouldn't be expected to pay extortionate fees, it puts people off. They want people to use the buses but to also help those who want to use their cars. Cllr Evans added that not everyone can and will drive and others cannot afford the bus fare, particularly big families with lots of children.

37.19 Cllr Muten said that there is an impact on people with lower incomes who do have cars, such as keyworkers whose shift patterns don't work well with bus timetables and small increases can have an impact on their cost of living. There are policies in place to provide for the whole city that includes good public transport, safer cycling and walking infrastructure, and affordable electric vehicles.

37.20 Cllr Shanks said it is a public health issue and was concerned of the impact of cars in the city. She asked what data they have to base the proposal on.

37.21 Cllr Lyons asked about the data available evidencing the occupancy of car parks and that if charges were reduced further, then more people would use them and income would increase.

37.22 Cllr Muten said they have data on the car parks but that the council doesn't own them all. The variable tariff will form part of the parking review. There has been a loss of 500 spaces due to closing car parks in Preston Circus and Madeira drive as well as for cycle hangars, which is an income loss of around £1 – 1.2m per year. The impact is that visitors come into the city looking for somewhere to park which increases congestion and contributes to air quality issues.

37.23 Cllr Hewitt asked a question about food waste collection and for more information on the review; a question about the King Alfred redevelopment and costs in relation to the Withdean swimming pool. Cllr Robins said that the £52k was for the existing King Alfred building which will remain until the new one is ready. The £2423,000 is for the architects to design the new building. There is a similar set up for Withdean where £100k is for the initial design and then £2349,000 to build a modular pool.

37.24 Cllr Thomson asked a question about charging delegate fees at the conference centre. Cllr Miller said this is additional revenue. The north side of the Brighton conference centre has been refurbished and turned into a smaller day conference centre and they are expecting to generate around £30,000.

37.25 Cllr Shanks had concerns about low collection of council tax and rent and asked about the solution there; and that the customer service team is being cut at City Clean. She asked if there was a capacity issue. Nigel Manvell said there was no issue with resourcing but there are very high demands on the service. The high cost of living is causing issues and more people are getting in contact. They are moving towards pre-enforcement work for those who are struggling to pay by signposting them to advice services for help. This can create a delay.

37.26 Cllr Earthey asked about shared funding responsibilities with the NHS and whether savings there have been maximised as much as possible. He also asked a question about the process for claiming insurance when council property is damaged by an individual. Nigel Manvell said that insurance premiums are very high for the council and that the process would be via the Claims and Litigation team.

37.27 Mark Strong asked a question about CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) and that he didn't want to see competition between community groups. He also said that there is no possibility for small businesses to pay the council to take their recycling and this is a lost income stream. Cllr Rowkins said that they are looking at expanding commercial recycling for small businesses. He said that food waste collection was long overdue and they are reviewing the wider waste rounds as it is not evenly spread between workers. The waste collection service is being modernised using a digital system that can make changes to rounds much quicker as needed.

37.28 Cllr Thomson asked if they can be assured that services won't be affected by the cuts; about the expansion of commercial waste activity, and whether the bins could look a bit nicer as part of the look and feel work. Cllr Rowkins said there is increased demand for trade and garden waste. The look and feel work was impacted by cost pressures in some areas but they are looking at the role of public art and murals to create a more vibrant city.

37.29 Cllr Shanks was not happy about CIL being used with no discussion around how it will be distributed as this is not what it's designed for. She asked about charging people running exercise classes in the parks in the same way that mobile dog groomers are charged. She asked about plans for New England House and commented that the reduction in service for City Clean will mean people will struggle to contact them. Cllr Taylor said that there are two elements of CIL, one tied to specific locations and the other for the overall city. He suggested getting a briefing on CIL from officers as there is a new system. In relation to New England House, the budget is allocated but they haven't decided on the plans yet. Cllr Robins said that people come to the council with ideas for activity in the parks such as dog grooming and cafes but charging exercise classes is worth considering. Cllr Rowkins said that the performance data for City Clean is improving which means the number of complaints is decreasing, reducing the demand on the customer service team.

37.30 Cllr Evans raised a concern about cuts to the Visit Brighton budget as this risks income streams from the tourist industry when we need to bring money into the city and need staff to do this. Cllr Miller said that the team has been brought much closer to the council and cabinet

team in the council redesign which gives it higher prominence and brought into the centre of operations.

37.31 Cllr Evans asked about the medium term financial plan and how plans for Devolution will affect this. Cllr Taylor said there may be concerns around resources, time, energy and focus but until there is a proposal nothing changes and we continue as we are.

37.32 Cllr Thomson asked if the paddling pool in Hove will be replaced. Cllr Robins said it will shut for a year due to building works in the area. However, it is expensive to maintain but is very popular so they will be looking into other ways to fund it. It needs to remain a free, accessible play area.

37.33 Mark Strong asked a question about cutting the out of hours service dealing with dangerous structures and if something happened again like the Royal Albion fire, who would deal with it. Max Woodford said that the council would deal with fencing off the area and making it safe out of hours. They can't guarantee that the person on call would be qualified to deal with all issues.

37.34 Cllr Evans summarised the concerns expressed by the committee as parking charge freezes, cuts to the Planning department, and cuts to Visit Brighton. There was a commitment from Cllr Taylor to do a briefing on CIL. Suggested ways to increase income were: charging open air classes, expand commercial and waste recycling, charging for filming and looking at flexible parking charges.

RESOLVED that Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee notes the 2025-26 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budget proposals and will send the above comments to Cabinet.

Meeting closed at 15.21