

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 5

Subject: Deputations from members of the public

Date of meeting: 27 February 2025

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. Each deputation may be heard for a maximum of five minutes following which one Member of the council, nominated by the mayor, may speak in response. It shall then be moved by the mayor and voted on without discussion that the spokesperson for the deputation be thanked for attending and its subject matter noted.

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

1. Deputation concerning the council's proposed changes to the school admissions system

Supported by:

Alice Bartlett (Lead spokesperson)
Melanie Vandenbrouck
Richard Willis
Emily Barker
Lachlan Murray

Summary of deputation:

This Deputation will be delivered by Alice Bartlett, a Preston Park resident, in support of the council's proposed changes to the school admissions system. Speaking as a parent in the area Alice will speak of her personal journey to understanding the consultation and represent the views of other parents in the Varndean/Stringer catchment area whose voices have not been heard above the vocal and active opposition to the changes also coming from this area.

Key points:

- Initial response to the consultation, a lack of understanding of how admissions worked
- Learning about the proposals, the problem they are trying to address
- Support for the proposal as published on Wednesday 19th of Feb
- Encouragement to keep working on improvements to the school system, and work with families to make these changes a success

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2. Deputation from the Parent Support Group concerning school admissions

Supported by:

Chris Reynolds
Adam Dennett
Tom Harrison
Matthew Boote
Mark Kennedy
George Moody
Natasha Priest
Laura Ward
Paul Bunkham
Sally Wright
Roland Smith

Summary of deputation:

We are disappointed but not surprised to see that the Council's leaders are trying to push ahead with a damaging set of proposals and that the Council has chosen to ignore the views of families and schools.

The Council has ignored the opinion of all the LA-maintained secondary schools who unanimously opposed the introduction of an open admission priority. We are amazed that the Council has not considered it necessary to work closely with secondary schools to develop proposals that would benefit the city's schools and its children. The data the Council has provided from the consultation indicates that there was also widespread opposition from parents. Simply reducing the percentage does not address the problems with the proposed open admission priority that have been highlighted throughout the consultation process.

The combined effect of the Council's contradictory proposals will be to create an artificially oversubscribed catchment area for Dorothy Stringer/Varndean by simultaneously increasing the number of children and reducing the number of places. The Council's own numbers indicate that the proposals would leave 63 children with no priority anywhere (54 from the Dorothy Stringer/Varndean catchment area and 9 from the Patcham catchment area). Many of these children would have to make long, complex and isolated journeys to school. The reduction in the percentage of places reserved for the open admission priority reduces the number of children who would be displaced, but it does not alter the negative effects that those children, chosen at random, would experience.

The Council papers identify the level of concern that was raised about the way the consultation process was conducted including failure to comply with the requirements of the School Admissions Code. The Council ran a divisive and confusing consultation. It started with only the Cabinet documents and then put out new information during the consultation. Its consultation documents contained major errors and misleading explanations of the Council's proposals, and failed to provide basic information to allow people to understand the impact.

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We urge Councillors to provide genuine democratic scrutiny. We ask every Councillor to consider whether they are comfortable with the fact that the proposals deliberately seek to displace some children from their catchment area schools, and whether they are comfortable that those who are displaced from their catchment area will get a lower priority than any other children. We also ask every Councillor to consider the length and complexity of the journeys that displaced children could have to make, in isolation and separated from their friendship groups.

3. Deputation from Equity in Education concerning school admissions

Supported by:

Nicola Clewer
Essie Marks
Maggie O'Callaghan
Jo Jones
Niki Buck
James Baird
Lesley Reeves
Leila Erin-Jenkins

Summary of deputation:

Introduction

- Representative from Equity in Education advocating for north-east Brighton

Context

- Deprivation in north-east Brighton
- Social segregation and educational disadvantage
- Unprecedented level of participation from BN2 4

Response to proposals:

- Support for the proposed catchment area changes. This change establishes that catchment boundaries are neither naturally occurring nor permanently fixed. It will succeed in delivering catchment change where others have failed. This acts as a reminder that enduring social segregation at BACA could be addressed through boundaries changes in future.
- Support for the introduction of Open Admissions which (while 5% is disappointing) establishes the principle that choice should be open to all and that instead of being rigid agents of social segregation, catchment areas should be porous and allow for movement
- OA proposals welcomed as a step in the right direction but need to be reviewed/revised alongside a reconsideration of the removal of the sibling link for children living out of catchment

Concluding remarks

- Why changes are crucial for the city and what they mean for north-east Brighton

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- Appeal to councillors to vote through the proposal

4. Deputation concerning educational inequality in Brighton & Hove's school system

Supported by:

Carlie Goldsmith
Dave Bailey
Katie Mercer
Lewis Smith
Liza Zerb

Summary of deputation:

This deputation will be delivered by Dave Bailey from Whitehawk, addressing educational inequality in Brighton and Hove's school system. Speaking as a parent, grandparent, and former school governor, Bailey will present both personal experiences and historical context to highlight ongoing issues with the city's school catchment system.

The deputation will outline how postcode-based inequality has persisted despite multiple reform attempts over twenty years, including the creation of a 'golden catchment' in 2007 that further disadvantaged poorer areas. Bailey will use his family's experiences - from his children's different but successful pathways through Longhill school to current challenges accessing support for his grandson with autism - to illustrate both the potential and limitations of the current system.

Key Points:

- Historical context of failed reforms, including proposals in 2005, 2007, 2015, and 2017, demonstrating a pattern of missed opportunities for systemic change.
- Personal testimony spanning three generations of experience within Brighton's education system, providing concrete examples of both successes and failures.
- Current inequalities in the catchment system that limit educational choices based on geographical location within the city.
- Urgent need for reform, particularly in support for children with special educational needs and addressing the disparity between different areas of the city.