

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL

3.00pm 27 FEBRUARY 2025

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Asaduzzaman (Chair), Grimshaw (Deputy Chair), O'Quinn, Atkinson, Alexander, Allen, Bagaeen, Baghoth, Burden, Cattell, Czolak, Daniel, Davis, Earthey, Evans, Galvin, Fishleigh, Fowler, Goddard, Goldsmith, Guilmant, Helliwell, Hewitt, Hill, Hogan, Lyons, Mackey, McGregor, McLeay, McNair, Meadows, Miller, Muten, Nann, Oliveira, Pickett, Robins, Robinson, Rowkins, Sankey, Shanks, Sheard, Simon, Sykes, Taylor, C Theobald, Thomson, West, Wilkinson, Winder and Williams

PART ONE

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 1.1 Councillor McNair declared a personal and prejudicial interest as a Governor at Carden Primary School. He confirmed that he had been granted dispensation to speak and vote on the item by the Monitoring Officer.
- 1.2 Councillor O'Quinn declared a personal and prejudicial interest as she was a Governor at Rudyard Kipling Primary and Nursery School. She confirmed that she had been granted dispensation to speak and vote on the item by the Monitoring Officer.
- 1.3 Councillor Robinson declared a personal and prejudicial interest as she was a Governor at St Andrew's Primary School. She confirmed that she had been granted dispensation to speak and vote on the item by the Monitoring Officer.
- 1.4 Councillor Simon declared a personal and prejudicial interest as she was a Governor at Longhill High School. She confirmed that she had been granted dispensation to speak and vote on the item by the Monitoring Officer.
- 1.5 Councillor Wilkinson declared a personal and prejudicial interest as he was employed in an SEND provision college within the city. He confirmed that he had been granted dispensation to speak and vote on the item by the Monitoring Officer.
- 1.6 Councillor Theobald declared a personal and prejudicial interest as she was an Associate Member at Patcham High School. She confirmed that he had been granted dispensation to speak and vote on the item by the Monitoring Officer.

- 1.7 Councillor Bagaeen declared a personal and prejudicial interest as a Governor at Cardinal Newman. He confirmed that he had been granted dispensation to speak and vote on the item by the Monitoring Officer.
- 1.8 Councillor Heliwell declared a personal and prejudicial interest as a Governor at Peter Gladwin Primary School. She confirmed that she had been granted dispensation to speak and vote on the item by the Monitoring Officer.
- 1.9 No other declarations of interests in matters appearing on the agenda were made.

2 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 2.1 There were no Mayor's Communications.

3 TO RECEIVE PETITIONS AND E-PETITIONS

- 3.1 There were no petitions from councillors or members of the public.

4 WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

- 4.1 The mayor reported that 2 written questions had been received from members of the public and invited them to come forward and address the council.

1. Richard Owen asked a question:

How does the council justify moving N. Whitehawk into the Stringer/Varndean catchment in the name of increasing opportunity for deprived children, whilst simultaneously removing similar opportunity from equally deprived estates (worst 10% of multiple deprivation) in Kemptown, Manor and Bristol areas?

Councillor Taylor, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and City Regeneration replied:

Thank you for your question, Richard, it's nice to meet you online. We've also exchanged emails, and I know you've made significant contributions to the overall debate which we thank you for and which we've been reading. There's a second part of your question, which I know you didn't read out, that sort of implied potential social harm. I guess I want to slightly rebut the premise of that question, which is that we don't believe that social harm is inflicted on going to any of the schools in the city.

But to specifically answer the thrust of your question, which is about that catchment area change: what the proposed catchment area change does, as is set out in appendix 3 and 4 in the papers, is it changes the make up of the free school eligibility in those areas. What it shows is that post the change in catchment area there is a more balanced mix of free school meals in the two different catchment areas. It's also worth noting that in each of these areas, none of the areas mentioned are really in walking distance of any of the three schools. They all require transport and so therefore we think it is a reasonable proposal to make in terms of catchment area which of course we will debate later today.

Richard Owen asked a supplementary question:

We see similar contradictions with the open admissions, where incidences of social justice are randomly negated by social harm to others with legitimate needs. There are many, especially those with SEND needs and also the people in the Queens Park catchment in Queens Park School, who would say that harm is being done. All catchments are diverse, there would be no triage with open admissions for who should be prioritised over another. Will the council commit to pursuing ONLY policies that improve education and opportunities for everyone, and avoiding adverse impact?

Councillor Taylor replied:

I don't quite agree with the concept of social harm, but I understand the thrust of your question. The end of your question, which is focusing on policies that improve education overall, absolutely, and we should be clear that our school admissions arrangements and policies are one tool in our overall education system. They are not the school improvement strategy which exists separately, and indeed school improvement boards are appointed at individual schools where we think improvement is needed. The council has a reasonable record of improving schools that have had lower Ofsted ratings, getting them back to good, and there's also many other strategies on disadvantage, on transport, on SEND. So yes, absolutely the council is focused on policies that make positive changes to the education system in the city.

2. Alison Woolfenden asked a question:

Transitional protection for free school meals ceases next month, pupil premium monies are paid in arrears and distribution of children on free school meals and feeder primaries will change dramatically this September and next. Therefore, please describe very specifically (dates, face to face meetings, information) what inputs, impacts and data you have sought directly from schools (heads, governors, teachers) who are on the FRONT LINE of these plans regarding the impacts of these proposals on their resources, provision, planning, recruitment, and ultimately on improving student attendance and outcomes to close the attainment gap highlighted by the consultation and Class Divide.

Councillor Taylor replied:

Thank you, Alison, for your question, nice to see you in person again. In terms of our interaction with schools and chairs of governors throughout the process, I won't name every single date but let me just give a sort of sense to Full Council.

We met with all head teachers before the engagement exercise was launched twice, so we talked through the engagement exercise. We met with chairs of governors at the beginning of the engagement exercise on two separate occasions. We had a meeting with one specific governing body, Varndean School, throughout the engagement exercise; a long meeting where we were looking at both numbers and the overall plans. Before launching the consultation, we met with head teachers specifically to talk through the plans. We met with governing bodies before the consultation launch. We then met with individual schools throughout the consultation. Of course, we then held a number of consultation events, I understand the most consultation events that have been held in

the history of school admissions on the council, which I attended and participated. Many of them were at specific schools.

The specific information that you request – what the council does every year is share forecast pupil numbers fairly early on in the admissions process. After the admissions close we give schools an idea of their overall numbers which obviously then feeds into budget planning, and then as you get to national offer day full numbers are provided to schools. Further forecasting was obviously included in the consultation exercise and, indeed, is included in the papers today. So we've provided as much information as we can throughout the process and we've met regularly with schools in both formal consultation meetings and in individual meetings with them.

Alison Woolfenden asked a supplementary question:

Please specifically lay out the templated data you have requested from schools to suitably evidence the council's planning for these overlaying proposals to avoid undesirable, unintended consequences. For example, threats to financial viability, redundancies, changes to attendance, curriculum offer or attainment, and the extraordinarily high risk of potential conversion to academies or free school meals. I'm requesting specific details requested by the council of schools, not the schools own freeform responses submitted to demonstrate comparable, robust risk assessment.

Councillor Taylor replied:

To answer your question directly Alison, I don't believe that we issue a template for schools that we then ask them to respond to in terms of either pupil numbers or finances.

Clearly there's a very rigorous process overall for finances and the setting of draft budgets that then process a challenge between the council and schools in setting those budgets and eventually, in some cases, the agreeing of deficit budgets. There is lots of information shared between the council and schools. In terms of numbers of pupils, largely that's in the other direction. We don't ask schools to forecast pupil numbers – we provide the forecasts which then clearly feed into budget planning. So it's a two way process. I don't believe there's a specific template but hopefully that provides some insight into how the process works.

5 DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

- 5.1 The mayor reported that four deputations had been received from members of the public and invited the lead spokesperson(s) for the deputations concerning School Admission Arrangements to come forward and address the council.

1. Alice Bartlett presented their deputation.

Councillor Rowkins, Cabinet Member for Net Zero & Environmental Services replied:

Thank you, Alice. I found myself feeling quite emotional during that. So, thank you for that really powerful deputation.

I think one of the points you made there is that this whole process has really highlighted the challenges that we face in the city around education outcomes, inequality, and parent choice and so on. I agree with you, the current system is basically just not fair. I can't see any real justification for some families having a choice of two schools, with essentially 100% chance of getting one of them, while other families have only one choice which, of course, is essentially no choice. If you were devising the system today with a completely blank canvas, there's no way you would arrive at such disparity in choice.

I welcome the open letter that we received, signed by eight of our secondary schools, in support of the compromise we've reached following the consultation process, and of course the one from the academics from Sussex, University of College London, Institute of Education, Cambridge, Bath and various others in support of the principle that we're seeking to establish.

I attended two of the in-person consultation events as well as various others, including the one at Longhill and the one at Varndean. I think what you said about stargazing at Longhill, I know my little boy would love it, and to be honest I would as well so I'd probably be volunteering to help out on that day. I've obviously read countless emails and met with several groups of residents in my own ward, and we're very grateful to everybody who's expressed their views no matter where they sit on the debate because, of course, we have to make the most informed decisions we can. Much like yourself, and I think this is what really echoed with me and connected with me when you were speaking then, I have to also layer on my own personal situation. I live, like you, in the Dorothy Stringer and Varndean catchment area and I have a son who will not meet any of the priority criteria. There are many things that I want for him and his future and, of course, going to a good local school is one of them and there's nothing wrong with people feeling like that. But I also want him to grow up in a fairer society where he and his peers' educational outcomes are not stubbornly linked to socioeconomic circumstances.

As I mentioned earlier, we've read lots and lots of emails from all sides of the debate but there were several that really struck me, actually, particularly from parts of the city and from families who don't have the choice currently that you and I have at the moment. In a snippet from one of them, this resident said: in the course of my work, I see daily the dramatic differences of life experience in different parts of the city. It continues to shock and upset me daily, as it does many many of my colleagues in primary care, secondary care and social care who see the acute challenges of poverty played out in the different levels of need for all our services. The school system mirrors and contributes to these problems and has done for two decades now. It cannot be justified that a local authority policy continues to consciously disadvantage these same groups of children'.

Clearly this city doesn't work for everybody and, of course, these proposals won't be the sole solution to inequality in the city and, of course, we need to continue to make improvements in our schools more broadly. But I believe they will make an important difference. I'm very grateful for you coming and speaking so powerfully to us today. Thank you.

2. Roland Smith presented their deputation.

Councillor Sankey, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Chair replied:

Thank you, Roland, and thank you to the members of the Parent Support Group who have worked hard over recent months, I know, to consider the impacts of these changes to school admission arrangements, and to ensure that the council clearly understands your groups views on the proposals.

We note your point. A couple of points of clarification. Our manifesto of May 2023 was clear that we would review catchment areas that have not been significantly changed since they were created in 2007, and these proposals are brought forward collectively by the Labour Group in the delivery of that manifesto promise on which we were all elected. I also want to reassure you that your group has not been ignored but have actually been very influential in the shaping of this final set of proposals.

As you acknowledged, 8 out of our 10 local headteachers have written this week to welcome and support our compromise in reducing open admissions from 20% to 5%. The headteachers recognise, and I quote, 'the council's willingness to engage in thoughtful dialogue and to find a balanced approach to school admissions that addressed the concerns of all stakeholders. We understand that this decision represents a considered response to the diverse perspectives raised during the consultation and we are appreciative of the effort to safeguard the best interests of both local students and the wider community'.

The heads have also made clear their commitment to our ongoing collaborative work. You're right to say that there was opposition to the open admission proposal from responses to the survey with 61% saying they were opposed. But notably, when asked a further question about the different percentage options for open admissions, more responses supported 5% or higher than reiterated that they opposed open admissions.

We aren't expanding the catchment area, and parents across the city have always been free to express their preference for any of our schools, but until now catchments or proximity have generally been king whenever a school is oversubscribed. This means that meaningful choice in selecting a city school is illusory for those in single catchments in the outer lying areas in our city. It's always been made clear in our published admission arrangements that living in a catchment area does not guarantee a place at the catchment school if the school is oversubscribed. It merely gives a child in that catchment a higher priority and, if agreed today, the new admission arrangements will not change this position.

We're not deliberately seeking to displace children, but to provide greater equity in the process of application and allocation, so that a child's postcode isn't the only factor in determining whether they can access a preferred school. On transport, we've committed to reviewing our school transport policies and arrangements as outlined in the recommendations. We don't want to accept any child making an overly long or complex journey to school, and in this context it's important to note that there is already a bus and train service that runs through central Brighton to BACA and we would be keen to consider further dedicated bus services should preferences require that.

On SEND, my colleague Councillor Emma Daniel will be responding to this in the debate today.

I don't agree that the consultation was flawed or unlawful. I accept that there are points of learning, but fundamentally it was a thorough process and with a high level of engagement from city residents. It is saddening that there has been such division over these proposals. That was also the experience in the past whenever previous administrations have sought to address these long-standing issues, and more often than not ducked them. This council has not sought to cause division, but we cannot ignore the division that exists due to the inequity of the current system which is felt so strongly by many.

Councillors have been provided with all consultation responses and have received numerous representations from residents and, as such, I feel that we are fully aware of the differing views expressed about these proposals. Thank you again for your detailed consideration of our proposals.

3. Essie Marks presented their deputation.

Councillor Alexander, Cabinet Advisor for Community Engagement, Food Insecurity and Allotments replied:

Thank you so much for coming to the council chamber this afternoon to deliver your deputation. I myself live in the BN24 postcode and I'm very well aware of how children from our area just do not have the same full book of opportunities available to them. I have received many emails on this topic, both objecting and supporting the proposals. It is a very delicate subject, as it's about children's education and where they will spend five years of their lives preparing for their futures.

If you live in the Coombe Road area, or in Bevendean, or in Moulsecoomb, you have one school in your catchment, even though it's very easy to jump on a bus to reach other schools which your child might prefer to attend. In our consultation we talked about a 20% proposal for out of school catchment places, but we have been mindful that some families in the city were against this. But we've also borne in mind the families who supported this proposal and, as such, after listening to all the voices we are now proposing 5% out of catchment places.

And, by the way, I love the phrase you used of being porous and allowing for movement. Life is porous and movement should always be given room. For children in your neighbourhood, or our neighbourhoods, having one catchment school is static and restrictive, and as a council we need to give every child in the city room to grow.

I know that there are families in the city who just do not understand why we are proposing the open admission places, and there are also some families who are asking why we aren't going further with proposals. It's delicate, and it's emotional, and I will be supporting the proposals and always have done as I strive for a city where the gap shrinks between those who have opportunities to thrive and those whose opportunities have been limited.

You asked in your deputation that consideration is given for out of catchment sibling links. It was too late to introduce that this year as legally we need to consult on this, but I can confirm this is something we are keen to consult on next year.

Before I finish, I need to say it was really reassuring this morning that all councillors were forwarded a letter signed by 8 out of our 10 secondary schools formally supporting our proposal for the 5% open admission places. The letter also contained the following words: 'We also want to acknowledge the moral purpose behind the local authority's proposals, particularly in promoting socially mixed schools and reducing educational inequality. We too advocate for an inclusive and equitable system that strengthens social cohesion and supports our collective mission to provide an education system where every pupil has the chance to reach their full potential'.

Receiving this letter this morning that eight out of our secondary schools are in support affirms to me that this is the move our administration have to make to take our city another step towards total fairness and inclusion for all our children. So thank you so much for coming.

4. Dave Bailey presented their deputation.

Councillor McGregor, Chair of Licensing Committee replied:

Thanks, Dave. Thank you for taking the time today to come and share your deputation with us. The impact of educational inequalities is personal for me and the vast majority of my colleagues. You've highlighted many of our concerns and I want to thank you for all the work that you've done to tackle it. The historic failures to many of the outskirts of the city highlight that change is needed and why it can't be delayed any longer, and your work to give residents in the outskirts of the city a real voice in this chamber is remarkable. As a wee Scottish guy that came from a council estate, I want to say thank you for all the work that you've done and all the work that Class Divide have done. I've personally spent countless hours speaking with families that have been impacted by these failures over so many decades, and I understand the anger, hurt and hopelessness that comes when you feel left behind or ignored during your time in education. Since day one that's been a priority for this administration and I hope you know, and all the people that you work with know, that when it comes to inequality, we are all working together to tackle it.

While this has been an emotional debate across the city, I want to thank every single person who got involved, whether that's for or against. The administration has looked at every single e-mail, letter, paper, to decide the best system for every single child in our city. And while the debate has been quite fierce, I've been immensely proud of our city because we all came together to basically accept one thing, and it's that educational inequality isn't something we'll accept in Brighton & Hove anymore, and a greater social mix and a proper choice for families gives every child within our city a fair chance at life.

I also want to thank you for bringing up the SEND issues and the frustration within communities that's come up very clearly in the consultation, and we agree that this is of vital importance and children continue to get the right opportunities and support to thrive alongside their peers.

We've heard during this consultation, and I've sat personally on doorsteps and listening to families who don't even send their children to school anymore because they don't think it's an option and it simply can't continue, and we know that it can't continue, and we're fully committed to improving choice and opportunities for children with SEND across the city.

So, I want to thank you, Dave and Carly, Katie, Lewis and Lisa who supported this deputation. Thanks very much.

5.2 Resolved:

- 1) That the Deputations be noted.

6 SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2026-27

6.1 Councillor Taylor introduced and formally moved the report.

6.2 Councillor Meadows moved an amendment on behalf of the Conservative Group which was formally seconded by Councillor Theobald.

6.3 Councillor Earthey moved an amendment on behalf of the Brighton and Hove Independent Group which was formally seconded by Councillor Fishleigh.

6.4 Councillors Goddard, Daniel, Hill, Shanks, Pickett, Atkinson and De Oliveira spoke on the matter.

6.5 The mayor then put the Brighton & Hove Independents Group amendment to the vote.

		For	Against	Abstain			For	Against	Abstain
1	Alexander		x		28	Lyons		x	
2	Allen		x		29	Mackey		x	
3	Asaduzzaman		x		30	McGregor		x	
4	Atkinson		x		31	McLeay	x		
5	Bagaeen	x			32	McNair		x	
6	Baghoth		x		33	Meadows		x	
7	Burden		x		34	Miller		x	
8	Cattell		x		35	Muten		x	
9	Czolak		x		36	Nann		x	
10	Daniel		x		37	O'Quinn		x	
11	Davis		x		38	Pickett		x	
12	De Oliveira			x	39	Pumm	Not present		
13	Earthey	x			40	Robins		x	
14	Evans		x		41	Robinson		x	
15	Fishleigh	x			42	Rowkins		x	
16	Fowler		x		43	Sankey		x	
17	Galvin		x		44	Shanks	x		
18	Gauge	Not present			45	Sheard		x	
19	Goddard		x		46	Simon		x	
20	Goldsmith	Not present			47	Sykes		x	

21	Grimshaw		x		48	Taylor		x	
22	Guilmant		x		49	Theobald		x	
23	Helliwell		x		50	Thomson		x	
24	Hewitt		x		51	West		x	
25	Hill		x		52	Wilkinson		x	
26	Hogan		x		53	Williams		x	
27	Loughran	Not present			54	Winder		x	
						Total	5	44	1

6.6 The mayor confirmed that the amendment had been lost by 44 votes to 5 with 1 abstention.

6.7 The mayor then put the Conservative Group amendment to the vote.

		For	Against	Abstain			For	Against	Abstain
1	Alexander		x		28	Lyons	x		
2	Allen		x		29	Mackey		x	
3	Asaduzzaman		x		30	McGregor		x	
4	Atkinson		x		31	McLeay		x	
5	Bagaeen		x		32	McNair	x		
6	Baghoth		x		33	Meadows	x		
7	Burden		x		34	Miller		x	
8	Cattell		x		35	Muten		x	
9	Czolak		x		36	Nann		x	
10	Daniel		x		37	O'Quinn		x	
11	Davis		x		38	Pickett		x	
12	De Oliveira		x		39	Pumm	Not present		
13	Earthey		x		40	Robins		x	
14	Evans		x		41	Robinson		x	
15	Fishleigh		x		42	Rowkins		x	
16	Fowler		x		43	Sankey		x	
17	Galvin		x		44	Shanks		x	
18	Gauge	Not present			45	Sheard		x	
19	Goddard		x		46	Simon		x	
20	Goldsmith	Not present			47	Sykes		x	
21	Grimshaw		x		48	Taylor		x	
22	Guilmant		x		49	Theobald	x		
23	Helliwell		x		50	Thomson		x	
24	Hewitt		x		51	West		x	
25	Hill		x		52	Wilkinson		x	
26	Hogan	x			53	Williams		x	
27	Loughran	Not present			54	Winder		x	
						Total	5	45	0

6.8 The mayor confirmed that the amendment had been lost by 45 votes to 5 with 0 abstentions.

6.9 The mayor then put the recommendations as set out in the report to the vote:

		For	Against	Abstain			For	Against	Abstain
1	Alexander	x			28	Lyons		x	
2	Allen	x			29	Mackey	x		
3	Asaduzzaman	x			30	McGregor	x		
4	Atkinson		x		31	McLeay	x		
5	Bagaeen		x		32	McNair		x	
6	Baghoth	x			33	Meadows		x	
7	Burden	x			34	Miller	x		
8	Cattell	x			35	Muten	x		
9	Czolak	x			36	Nann	x		
10	Daniel	x			37	O'Quinn	x		
11	Davis		x		38	Pickett		x	
12	De Oliveira	x			39	Pumm	Not present		
13	Earthey	x			40	Robins	x		
14	Evans	x			41	Robinson	x		
15	Fishleigh	x			42	Rowkins	x		
16	Fowler			x	43	Sankey	x		
17	Galvin	x			44	Shanks	x		
18	Gauge	Not present			45	Sheard	x		
19	Goddard	x			46	Simon	x		
20	Goldsmith	Not present			47	Sykes	x		
21	Grimshaw	x			48	Taylor	x		
22	Guilmant	x			49	Theobald		x	
23	Helliwell	x			50	Thomson	x		
24	Hewitt	x			51	West		x	
25	Hill		x		52	Wilkinson	x		
26	Hogan		x		53	Williams	x		
27	Loughran	Not present			54	Winder	x		
						Total	38	11	1

6.10 The mayor confirmed that the recommendations had been carried by 38 to 11 against with 1 abstention.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That Full Council agrees to make no changes to the council's admission arrangements other than the proposed changes listed below in recommendations 2.2 to 2.11. The full admission arrangements are set out in Appendix 5.
- 2) That Full Council agrees to increase the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Rudyard Kipling Primary School from 30 to 45 for entry into reception year from September 2026

- 3) That Full Council agrees to amend the catchment area boundary between Longhill High School and Dorothy Stringer and Varndean schools, as set out in section 20 below.
- 4) That Full Council agrees to reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) at Blatchington Mill School from 330 to 300 for entry into year 7 from September 2026.
- 5) That Full Council agrees to reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) at Dorothy Stringer School from 330 to 300 for entry into year 7 from September 2026.
- 6) That Full Council agrees to reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) at Longhill High School from 270 to 210 for entry into year 7 from September 2026.
- 7) That Full Council agrees to make a change to the admissions priorities for community secondary schools, to provide that at any school the percentage of places for pupils eligible for Free School Meals within the oversubscription priorities 1-5 should be set at 30% of the Published Admission Number (PAN).
- 8) That Full Council agrees to the introduction of a new Criteria 6 within the oversubscription criteria for entry into community secondary schools in the city, to be referred to as Open Admissions. This is to be set at 5% of the total PAN of those schools and is only available to pupils living within a single school catchment area in the city.
- 9) That Full Council agrees to increase the number of preferences that families can express from three to four for admission from September 2026 onwards.
- 10) That Full Council agrees to make no change to the 'relevant area' for school admissions purposes.
- 11) That Full Council agrees to the proposed primary and secondary school coordinated schemes.
- 12) That Full Council notes the intention to review the Home to School Transport Policy informed by the admissions arrangements determined by Full Council, review capital expenditure on school buildings in 2025/26 and evaluate the educational disadvantage strategy, Better Outcomes, Better Lives.

7 CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting concluded at 4.54pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

2025

