

# **GREATER BRIGHTON ECONOMIC BOARD**

**10.00am 2 APRIL 2025**

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

### **MINUTES**

**Present: Councillors:** Sankey (Chair) Cox, Eggleston, Jones, Gardner and Lury

**Officers:** Jess Gibbons, Ian Duke, Catherine Howe, Peter Sharp, Natasha Bridge, Andy Hill, Ian Fitzpatrick, Andy Williams and Shaun Hughes

**Business Partners:** Stephen Lightfoot, Dean Orgill, Andrew Swayne, Debbie Keeling, Dan Power, Debbie Keeling, Jo Havers, Ana Christie

### **PART ONE**

#### **1 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

##### **a) Declarations of substitutes**

Joanne Havers substituted for Prof Rusi Jaspal (University of Brighton).

##### **b) Declarations of interests**

There were none for this meeting.

##### **c) Exclusion of press and public**

There were no Part Two items on the agenda, therefore the press and public were not excluded.

#### **2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

18.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2025 were agreed.

#### **3 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

19.1 Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this meeting.

Brighton & Hove City Council are hosting a LGA Peer Challenge this week. Some of our peers will be observing the first part of today's meeting. We're pleased to welcome them to see the Board in action and how we work in partnership across a wider geography.

A round of introductions please.

I'd also like to welcome Ana Christie, Chief Executive of the Sussex Chamber of Commerce as a first-time observer today. The Chamber, which is accredited by the British Chambers of Commerce, has extensive business networks, feeds in the local business voice to central government, has regional economic insights, and strong credibility in effective collaboration across Sussex, for example in leading the Local Skills Improvement Plan work. I had a very positive meeting with Ana recently where we discussed the potential of our region and the opportunities of devolution and it's great to have you here today.

As Sue Baxter from Uni of Sussex is attending virtually (and Andy will also be dialling in if he can) can I remind people to use the mics so the virtual attendees can hear.

## **Devolution**

Since we last met as a Board, I am delighted to say that our wider region of Brighton and Hove, East and West Sussex has been successfully accepted onto the Government's devolution priority programme. Competition for this programme was perhaps fiercer than expected with many regions expressing interest. For Sussex and Brighton to be one of only six areas accepted, is a huge vote of confidence by our new Government in our beloved region. I'd like to pay tribute to the leaders represented here today for your role in delivering this outcome as signatories to the early joint expression of interest to the Deputy Prime Minister last September which set out a vision for devolution on a Sussex footprint which has clearly persuaded Government. Sussex will be working to the most ambitious timetable for devolution, including the establishment of a Mayoral Strategic Authority over the next 12 months and the first Mayoral elections expected in May 2026. The Government's consultation on devolution in our region remains live and there are a few weeks for residents and businesses to make their voices heard. The separate but related process around local government reorganisation to unlock devolution is also live, with interim plans being submitted and a deadline for proposals this September after which Ministers will determine our new local government boundaries across the region.

Reflecting on the private discussion that this Board had on devolution at our last meeting at the start of February I feel hugely inspired and optimistic about the ideas and contributions that we all as partners have for how we can unlock more opportunities, prosperity and inclusive growth for our residents and businesses. I'd like to particularly encourage our non-political partners to keep their ideas and contributions coming, you will all be essential in the success of this new entity and new approach.

This Board was established of course through the Greater Brighton City Deal Agreement, the Board created the Greater Brighton Investment Programme. Since 2014, over £160m of Local Growth Funding has been secured which has unlocked around £2bn of private sector investment, created 24,000 jobs, built 18,000 homes and delivered 750,000m<sup>2</sup> of employment floor space. These achievements are clear evidence of the benefits of strategic regional cooperation, and the type of ambitious and forward-looking gains that can be accelerated through the devolution of powers and investment. Last year and in one of my first acts as Chair of the Board we launched Sussex Energy our pan-region initiative for securing energy independence and sustainability in Sussex by 2040. Again, a demonstration of the power of mission-led

convening and collaboration to ensure that our common objectives on climate change can be achieved.

I am pleased that next week, Jim McMahon, Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, will be hosted by one of our members, Cllr Michael Jones, Leader of Crawley Borough Council when he visits the region to discuss our devolution plans and we look forward to welcoming him to the City Region.

## **Papers for today**

### Sussex Energy Update

Today, we'll receive an update on the Sussex Energy programme, including progress on a roadmap to 2040 and the drafting of a 2025 plan, which helps provide clarity, alignment, and highlight the scale and ambition of the programme. This initiative is a cornerstone of our commitment to addressing climate change, a priority that aligns with the Board's strong stance on environmental sustainability. With the formation of the new Strategic Authority, we must ensure that climate action remains a key priority, integrating strategies across various sectors to recognize and mitigate their impact on the environment.

### Operational Arrangements

In recent years this paper has been presented at the first meeting in the municipal year, but given we have the Strategic Workplan Paper it makes sense to bring this report forward this meeting. It also provides clarity to Board Members around the financial contributions being sought at the very start of this new financial year which are significantly less than previous years.

### Strategic Workplan 2025/6

Our Strategic Workplan paper aims to build on the momentum towards greater collaboration and strategic thinking in the region and proposes that along with existing work streams the Board commissions an independent study to review the economic opportunities for the region, in cooperation with the respective growth boards of the three upper tiers, fully considering the enhanced strategic powers, capability and perspective of a Strategic Mayoral Authority.

Our approach will stay flexible and responsive as further details emerge regarding the directions and requirements of the Strategic Mayoral Authority, enabling us to provide a strong foundation from the outset.

## **Biosphere Event**

Last week the region hosted the annual gathering of national UNESCO Biospheres. We welcomed colleagues from the six other UK biospheres as well as a delegation from UNESCO. Our biosphere is an example of Sussex and Brighton's ability to work across boundaries in a collaborative approach, an essential strength to highlight as we work towards devolution. The gathering was a real opportunity to showcase some of the local flagship projects around conservation & biodiversity and environmental education and

also demonstrate the alignment and synergies between the work of Living Coast and the Board's key priorities, specifically Sussex Energy. The timing of the event is important as The Living Coast is in the final stage of its designation renewal process for 2025-2034 that includes a geographic expansion request. The response for this is expected at the end of September following the 5th World Congress of UNESCO Biospheres.

### **DSIT Quantum Visit**

Following on from the successful DBT Tech Team visit in November, the Board Support Team worked with colleagues at the University of Sussex to arrange a ministerial visit to showcase this regions' potential to be a global leader in quantum technologies. At the end of February, Baroness Jones, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at DSIT attended a session where we outlined how and why this region can be at the forefront of quantum computing innovation. A lab tour then followed which brought the technology to life. The session was extremely positive with Baroness Jones impressed with what she saw and the level of ambition that we have. We are following up with the Secretary of State for DSIT to keep the conversation going.

### **LVEP**

And finally partners have been clear that we must stay focussed on delivery so I'm pleased to report that since we last met, the East Sussex, Brighton & Hove and West Sussex Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) has unveiled a transformative [10-year strategy](#) to enhance Sussex's reputation as a thriving, vibrant and regenerative destination. The strategy aims to enhance the economic, social and environmental value of the local visitor economy, targeting a significant increase from its current 2024 value of £5 billion to £7.5 billion by 2034.

## **4 SUSSEX ENERGY UPDATE**

- 20.1 Natasha Bridge (Brighton and Hove CC) introduced the report to the board.
- 20.2 Councillor Martin Lury (Arun DC) considered there was wasted energy in shops and offices and reductions could be employed.
- 20.3 Natasha confirmed that funding was being looked into, and a steering group has been established, and funding streams were being investigated.
- 20.4 Stephen Lighfoot (NHS Sussex) noted this was an ambitious project and NHS needs to follow. A roadmap with milestones along the way would be helpful.
- 20.5 Andrew Swayne (Adur & Worthing Business Partnership) supported the project and considered everyone needed to work together and it needs to get underway.
- 20.6 Councillor Sophie Cox (Worthing BC) considered the project showed local government could work together. Short- and long-term targets would be appreciated.
- 20.7 Councillor Michael Jones (Crawley BC) considered a roadmap would be good with an itinerary.

- 20.8 Ana Christie (Sussex Chamber of Commerce) considered the planning authorities need to agree energy efficiency of new builds and businesses need to look at carbon footprints.
- 20.9 Natasha confirmed that planning policy was being looked at across the region.
- 20.10 Jess Gibbon (Brighton and Hove CC) considered that small businesses and landlords also need to look at how to improve their carbon footprint. Learning needs to be shared and how to unlock funding.
- 20.11 Councillor Bella Sankey (Brighton and Hove CC) noted relations between Brighton and east and west Sussex were good.
- 20.12 Dean Orgill (Brighton and Hove Economic Partnership) considered that new businesses need to be brought into the existing network.
- 20.13 Jo Havers (University of Brighton) noted they were working with companies for future builds.
- 20.14 Councillor Jeremy Gardner (Adur DC) noted the benefits of devolution would be the partnership working, a fundamental for the future.
- 20.15 Councillor Lury considered viability to be an issue in planning terms. Developers need to be incentivised to build. Resilient homes need to be built to last.
- 20.16 Ian Duke (Crawley BC) considered that investible propositions were needed and there have been great projects across the region including the healthy homes programme.
- 20.17 Councillor Sankey noted an action for all chief officers to discuss ways forward.
- 20.18 Debbie Keeling (University of Sussex) considered it was great that the region was learning and moving forward.
- 20.19 Councillor Cox wished the developers would be invited into 'the room' to ensure forward movement, enabling through working together.
- 20.20 Councillor Lury noted that big developers outbid small developers and that the bigger developers need to build better.
- 20.21 Ana Christie agreed that the percentage of social value developers could bring to a community was important. Developers should work with local businesses, as per the recommendations of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI).

Vote

- 20.22 A vote was taken, and the recommendations were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That the Board notes the progress on Sussex Energy and notes the positive communication and engagement between officers from Local Authorities including East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council.
- 2.2 That the Board supports the next steps needed to take Sussex Energy forward as set out in the workstreams identified in section 3.5.
- 2.3 That the Board agrees to receive a further update on Sussex Energy at the next Board meeting.

## **5 GREATER BRIGHTON OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS 2025/26**

- 21.1 The report was introduced to the board by Natasha Bridge (Brighton and Hove CC).
- 21.2 Councillor Michael Jones (Crawley BC) noted no objections; however, they wished the financing would be at the start of the year.
- 21.3 Councillor Bella Sankey (Brighton and Hove CC) considered more conversations would be had going forward.

Vote

- 21.4 A vote was taken, and the board agreed the recommendations unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Board:

- 2.1 Notes that it has around £300,000 of budget based on carry-forward from 2024/25 and therefore agrees that much reduced budgetary contributions be sought from partners to fund the cost of running the Board and delivering its workplan in 2025/26.
- 2.2 Agrees the proposed expenditure in paragraph 3.4.
- 2.3 Agrees that in the context of devolution the Board will need to be agile and may need to consider requesting further funds from members if suitable project opportunities arise.
- 2.4 Agrees that Brighton & Hove City Council shall continue to act as Lead Authority for the Board in 2025/26.
- 2.5 Agree the process set out at sections 3.12 to 3.18 by which the Chair of the Board shall be nominated for 2025/26.

## **6 STRATEGIC WORKPLAN 2025/26**

- 22.1 Natasha Bridge (Brighton and Hove CC) introduced the report to the board.

- 22.2 Andrew Swayne (Adur and Worthing Business Partnership) considered the report to set out good reasoning, however, there was a need to keep delivering. Re-organisation meant staff changes and the board should support staff and have respect for officers.
- 22.3 Councillor Martin Lury (Arun DC) considered that the region needed to learn from Europe when considering transport. Sussex is rural and the road network is not working. There is a need to think outside the urban areas and about different modes of transport.
- 22.4 Debbie Keeling (University of Sussex) considered the ordering of priorities to be essential with a high level of community engagement.
- 22.5 Jo Havers (University of Brighton) considered the sharing of knowledge to be good.
- 22.6 Councillor Bella Sankey (Brighton and Hove CC) considered that strategic opportunities would be unlocked by working together. It was noted that there were transport issues in the city and sustainable transport was a priority.
- 22.7 Councillor Jeremy Gardner (Adur DC) was informed that a time scale for an independent study on economic growth of the region would be agreed soon.
- 22.8 Councillor Sophie Cox (Worthing BC) considered the region needed to speak with 'one' voice, with no duplications.
- 22.9 Councillor Sankey has written to other boards to ensure no duplication.
- 22.10 Dean Orgill (Brighton and Hove Economic Partnership) asked that the South Downs National Park be included.
- 22.11 Ana Christie (Sussex Chamber of Commerce) considered speaking with 'one' voice was good. Trade requirements should also be looked into. It was noted that the Gatwick airport expansion would affect the whole region.
- 22.12 Jess Gibbon (Brighton and Hove CC) noted the commitment to engage and talk to other boards.
- 22.13 Councillor Sankey agreed to talk to other boards to ensure movement forward.

#### Vote

- 22.14 A vote was taken, and the board agreed the recommendations unanimously.

#### RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That the Board commissions an independent study to review the economic opportunities for the region, in cooperation with the respective growth boards of the three upper tiers, fully considering the enhanced strategic powers, capability and perspective of the MCCA.
- 2.2 That the Board supports the proposed 2025/26 work programme priorities outlined in 3.19-3.40 to focus on three areas of competence with a devolved region lens:

Environment and climate change, Economic development and regeneration, and Transport and infrastructure.

- 2.3 That the Board acknowledges that we are entering a transition period, with significant changes expected within a short timeframe, meaning that there needs to be some fluidity and adaptability within the work plan.

The meeting concluded at 11.50am

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of