

Brighton & Hove City Council

Cabinet

Agenda Item 18(a)

Subject: Member Questions

Date of meeting: 17 July 2025

A maximum period of fifteen minutes in total shall be made available at each meeting of the Executive for questions from Members of the Council. The questions included on the list of questions referred to above shall be taken as read at the Cabinet meeting. The question will be answered either orally or at the discretion of the Chair by a written answer circulated after the meeting. Officers may assist the Leader or a Cabinet Member with technical answers to questions. No supplementary questions shall be permitted.

The following written questions have been received from Members:

(1) Councillor Fishleigh- Withdean Community Pool

Why is building a new swimming pool in the city more important than keeping existing libraries open?

(2) Councillor Fishleigh- Seafront Development Board

Do you agree that including a current community activist who lives locally such as Derek Wright on the Seafront Development Board would be a good idea and, if so, will you add a condition into the report to that effect please?

(3) Councillor McNair- Library Sustainability Plan

What has the council done to try to improve footfall to Hollingbury and Westdene libraries?

(4) Councillor Meadows- Library Sustainability Plan

Are there any plans to try to improve footfall across all libraries by adding more services to ensure all our libraries thrive?

(5) Councillor McNair- Library Sustainability Plan

Can we be assured that the books will be saved for other libraries, or perhaps more importantly locally in a school or community centre?

(6) Councillor Hill - Library Sustainability Plan

The administration has previously stated their support for 15-minute cities which we also support. Concerns have been raised by Councillors in my party and Cllr Mark Earthy that the library cuts are being justified partly by car ownership rates. The administration making an assessment that residents in places like Rottingdean will choose to drive to the library once their local library has closed. Making people drive to their community library

seems to go against the idea of the 15-minute city, would the administration agree?

(7) Councillor Hill - Seafront Development Board

Through what process was Lord Steve Bassam chosen for the position as chair? Were other people given the chance to put themselves forward for the role? On what criteria was Lord Bassam chosen?

(8) Councillor Shanks - Council Plan Refresh

Member development is mentioned as important in the plan, will the administration include opposition members in the development of any plans?

(9) Councillor Shanks - Council Plan Refresh

How will rent collection be improved?

(10) Councillor Shanks - Council Plan Refresh

Has the new system of customer service centres in the libraries been successful?

(11) Councillor Shanks - Council Plan Refresh

Is there enough capacity in the council to deal with the ongoing issues outlined in view of the Red status of the percentage change in employment?

(12) Councillor West – Seafront Development Board

Having previously disbanded a number of working groups and boards suggesting they were not a good use of officer time, the administration is now reversing their approach, setting up new boards that call upon considerable officer resources. How is this u-turn explained and justified?

(13) Councillor West – Seafront Development Board

The proposed SDB will have considerable power of influence and will make recommendations to the Cabinet. While board membership is proposed to include several members of the Labour administration, members of the official opposition are excluded. With no diversity of elected political representation, how will it be possible to ensure it meets the stated expectation that the “board is broadly representative of the wider community”?

(14) Councillor West – Seafront Development Board

The proposed SDB is to be created by the Cabinet and to report to the Cabinet. How will it be possible for the Opposition, Scrutiny and Council to hold the Board to account?

(15) Councillor West – Seafront Development Board

It is proposed that Cabinet agree to the appointment of Lord Steve Bassam to Chair the Board. Ennobled by Tony Blair, Lord Bassam is a former Labour leader of the City Council, Labour member of the House of Lords, and guru to the current Council Leader. This is a political appointment which risks undermining the integrity and independence of the Board's leadership and advice. Is it not, in fact, a prime example of the sort of 'jobs for the boys' nepotism that has so damaged public trust in government in recent years?

(16) Councillor West – Withdean Community Pool

3.9 of the report states "the council is committed to creating a swimming facility that is fully accessible and inclusive..." While it then goes on to describe welcome design features aimed to support the mobility impaired, what consideration has been made of the needs of the 1 in 3 UK adults who have hearing loss or tinnitus, including 1.2m adults who have hearing loss severe enough they would not be able to hear most conversational speech? What consideration has been given to matters such as: acoustics to minimise echo and suppress noise; corridor width to support comfortable conversation distances; lighting brightness and evenness to support lip-reading; information access; and contact methods such as Relay UK? Have hearing loss organisations, such as the RNID, been consulted for design advice?

(17) Councillor West – Withdean Community Pool

The report gives a great deal of focus to the provision for motorists, seeking to meet anticipated increased demand, including committing extra cost to create additional parking to mitigate spaces lost due to the development. Why is no significant consideration and investment given to improving accessible cycle parking and connectivity to the A23 cycle lane?

(18) Councillor West – Withdean Community Pool

With the higher utilisation of car parking spaces encouraging increased access by motor vehicles, how will safety and ease of access for 42% of respondents who said they will walk and 21% of respondents who said they would cycle and 13% who said they would use the bus, be improved and prioritised - especially given the highway space constraints under the narrow Tongdean Lane railway bridge? Why is it not proposed to reduce the speed limit under the bridge from 30mph to 20mph nor to re-configure the highway space there to better support active travellers? How many conveniently located Sheffield cycle parking loops will complement the current 15 at the main entrance?

(19) Councillor West – Withdean Community Pool

What facility will the pool offer to support the sport of diving?

(20) Councillor West – Library Sustainability Plan

With the proposed closure of Westdene Library, will the toilets within the library, which offer baby changing, wheel chair access and all gender facilities, remain open and publicly accessible, and if not how and when will they be replaced?

(21) Councillor McLeay – Housing Strategy

Increasing affordable Housing supply by all means possible is desirable and the councils progress in terms of new homes made available through acquisitions and new build need to be fully recorded. The council's actions in reducing housing supply should also be recorded and deducted - for example when the LPS block homes are removed from the available housing stock and left vacant as part of a decant decision. How will the council account for these homes going forward – the housing lost and the homes built to replace them?

(22) Councillor McLeay – Housing Strategy

Given the rise in households in temporary accommodation and rough sleeping, shouldn't the council prioritise setting and monitoring clear, ambitious targets for reducing homelessness, rather than relying on lengthy strategy reviews as referenced in HS20 of the action plan? What targets is the housing department working to currently while the strategy is worked on?

(23) Councillor McLeay – Housing Strategy

Given the high cost and quality concerns of private temporary accommodation, why is the council's 10% target for using buy-backs as in-house temporary housing (see HS17 in the action plan) so low? Can this be raised significantly, especially since the previous proposals, set during the long gone days of the housing and new homes committee, aimed for 100%?

(24) Councillor McLeay – Large Panel System Blocks

In light of concerning reports from Eastbourne about out-of-area placements in temporary accommodation, can you confirm whether residents from the 8 LPS blocks will need to be rehoused outside the local area during the decant process?

(25) Councillor McLeay – Large Panel System Blocks

Discussed briefly during a recent overview and scrutiny meeting was the challenge of financing this redevelopment. Given the national scale and cost of addressing safety issues in LPS buildings, and the recognition that housing providers cannot tackle this alone, what is the council doing to secure government funding and support? Will it actively join or lead calls for a coordinated, well-funded national strategy as urged by the Building Safety Regulator?

(26) Councillor Pickett – Withdean Community Pool

The proposal states that to cover the costs of building the pool there will be a reliance on future income streams from the introduction of padel courts at Withdean. If the padel tennis doesn't go ahead, a revenue pressure of £0.101m will mean the service will need to manage within the existing reserves. Can you explain further what that might actually mean for the day to day business of the Leisure Centre and does this mean the padel tennis is critical for the financial success of this project?

(27) Councillor Pickett – Library Sustainability Plan

The continuing squeeze on our statutory library services is worrying. This report claims that concentrating resources on fewer physical library locations, whilst maintaining a geographic spread across the city, will support longer-term sustainability of the wider city service, as well as safeguarding the quality of library provision. Can you confirm that once this current process is complete that there will be no more cuts to service for libraries including the reduction of hours or further community libraries forced to close?

(28) Councillor Pickett – Library Sustainability Plan

With formerly non-library services such as car permits now outsourced to libraries, how will these Council Help Desks fare with the reductions to library open times, taking into consideration the need to cut staffed hours in order to reduce the cost of running library services?

(29) Councillor Pickett – Library Sustainability Plan

I note that the report states that a reduction in opening hours at Jubilee could impact the service's ability to offer Libraries Extra as an option in community libraries, as this currently relies on library staff phone support from Jubilee. Won't this bring the statistical number of visits to community libraries down and open them up as they next option to cut?

(30) Councillor Pickett – Library Sustainability Plan

Where the report notes that where community libraries were transferred to local community groups at point of closure, the local authority no longer takes any responsibility for the operation or provision of these spaces. Can you please explain how this would work? Does this mean the library can remain in the original building? Are the books, furniture, etc., given over to the community group?

(31) Councillor Pickett - Library Sustainability Plan

When one takes into account the true impact cuts and closure such as these will have on older members of the city, can we really agree that the equalities impact has been properly taken into account here? Many older

residents cannot access digital services or travel around the city to find the next library. If the Libraries Extra service is to be impacted by reduction in hours at Hove and Jubilee libraries, this will also not work. What steps have been taken to help the older populace?

(32) Councillor Sykes – TBM

In Section 4.6, quote: "It is forecasted that by the end of the 2025/26 financial year the Schools' PFI contract will be overbudget by £0.265m. Despite receiving pressure funding to compensate for the reserve depletion in 23/24, it is not predicted to be sufficient to cover the higher-than-expected PFI contractor costs plus inflation."

Can the Finance Lead let us know what is left owing to PFI companies under the Schools and Libraries PFIs?

(33) Councillor Sykes – TBM

Temporary Accommodation costs. TBM shows a forecast variance in 2025/6 of £6.5m which is twice the original 2025/6 budget of £3.2m. For FY 2026/7, pressure funding for TA is £12m (this is from Item 27, General Fund 2026/7 planning). TA spending is out of control. Councils are at the whim of the market and additional costs are going to private landlords. This has potential to lead to bankruptcy for this and other councils. What urgent representations are they making nationally to control this crisis?

(34) Councillor Sykes – TBM

Page 741 refers to a new capital project namely the purchase and installation of 10 new beach huts for £51k. Is this the installation near the new Meeting Place cafe, for which the council has recently applied for retrospective planning permission?