

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

4.00pm 10 NOVEMBER 2025

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL, NORTON ROAD, HOVE, BN3 3BQ - HTH/CC

MINUTES

Present: Councillor O'Quinn (Chair) Cattell, Lyons, Mackey, McLeay, Parrott, Shanks, Sheard and Winder

Other Members present: Cllr Bridget Fishleigh, Lesley Hurst (Church of England diocesan representative), Bernadette Kent (Older People's Council), Adam Muirhead (Community Works Rep), Dr Anusree Biswas Sasidharan (Community Works), and a Youth Council Rep

PART ONE

24 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

24.1 There were no substitutions.

24.2 There were no declarations of interest.

25 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

25.1 A deputation was presented by Clare Hayes concerning Rottingdean Library. The chair gave the following response: Thank you, Clare, for coming to this evening's meeting and for presenting your deputation to the committee. This is clearly an important issue for you and other Rottingdean residents. Members of the committee will take on board your views as we discuss this issue during today's meeting. We also have the cabinet member and senior officers responsible for libraries with us who will have heard what you have said. As is set out in the report, no decision on this matter has been made and the proceedings today will feed into the decision-making process ahead of the cabinet meeting in December.

RESOLVED:

People Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the deputation concerning Rottingdean Library.

25.2 Alicia Buckingham presented a deputation concerning Westdene Library. The Chair gave the following response: Thank you, Alicia, for taking the time to bring this deputation on the potential closure of Westdene Library to us today. As mentioned previously no decision has been made regarding the proposals that have gone out for consultation. The decision will be made at December's cabinet meeting on the 11th of December. Today's committee provides the opportunity for members to make comments which will be considered during that decision making process, and we will be considering the points you have raised during the discussion.

RESOLVED

People Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the deputation concerning Westdene Library.

25.3 A deputation concerning Westdene Library was presented by David Powell. The Chair gave the following response: Thank you, David, for presenting your deputation to the committee. Your thoughts have been heard by committee members and our cabinet member responsible for libraries and so will be taken into consideration both this evening as we question Cllr Robins and going forward as cabinet colleagues deliberate ahead of making their final decision at cabinet on the 11th of December.

RESOLVED

People Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the petition concerning Westdene Library.

26 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

26.1 There was no member involvement.

27 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATION

27.1 Today we are here at this special meeting to discuss the important issue of possible changes to the library service in the city. As we have heard from the deputations this is an emotive issue with strong feelings from the communities who may be affected if the changes consulted on were to go ahead. As members will have seen from the report, no decision has been made yet, and that is not what we are being asked to scrutinise this evening. None the less there is plenty of information in the report for us to scrutinise and this meeting gives us an excellent opportunity to look at this issue again and as set out in the recommendations of the report in 2.4 to make comments and recommendations which will be considered in the development of the final recommendations to cabinet in December.

28 SUSTAINABILITY PLAN FOR LIBRARIES

28.1 The report was presented to the committee by Cllr Alan Robins, Cabinet Member for Sport, Recreation, & Libraries. He was joined by Anna Gianfrancesco, Director of Commissioning & Communities, and Ceris Howard, Head of Libraries Services. The main points of the presentation included: the proposals consulted on, the process followed, consultation data & key themes, and ideas & alternative options.

28.2 Members asked questions around the following areas:

- the costs of Rottingdean Library as BHCC owns the freehold
- the need for further consultation should proposals change
- a request for the breakdown of footfall figures & demographics
- whether footfall figures captured repeat visitors
- the need for community spaces
- the impact of the opening hours reduction at Jubilee Library on the Library Extra service
- the low response to the consultation from young people
- Implications of the coming end of the Jubilee Library PFI deal
- the need to consider time spent in the libraries not just footfall

- the suggested amendment to the council's budget in February 2025 which would have reduced the proposed cuts
- the need to work with CVS
- whether officers had actually walked the distance between libraries that are being suggested as alternatives
- libraries as a warm space for people struggling with fuel bills
- the use of community events and groups in libraries to combat loneliness
- the impact on older people of library closures
- the higher percentage of older people in Rottingdean
- the impact on suggested alternative libraries
- the reduction in local government budgets over the last 15 years and increasing pressure on remaining budgets from adult social care and children's services
- whether profit from things like sports facilities could be used to fund libraries
- mitigations to stop people from feeling or being deprived if their local libraries close
- if closures will impact other services
- whether the issue should go to full Council after cabinet
- whether any libraries that are closed could be mothballed until the completion of the Library Strategy refresh
- the cost of the consultation
- the correlation between footfall and number of events hosted at each library
- the need to protect vulnerable people
- libraries being a safe space for refugees
- the tension between aims to be more inclusive and cutting the services
- the impact of library closures on young people and the need for specific mitigations for them
- staff redundancies.

28.3 Issues that were strongly raised by several members were: the desire to have been able to see the EIA to better understand the impact the closures would have on vulnerable people, and the timing of the proposals, impacting only a short time before a new libraries strategy.

28.4 Cllr Mcleay raised the social benefits of investment in libraries, citing research commissioned by Libraries Connected East which found that a typical public library generates approximately £1m of social benefits per year. Using Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) spending data for the year 2021/22, illustrated a return on investment of at least six times cost. Cllr Mcleay listed several initiatives connected to libraries across the country and the social benefit that they provided as examples. Cllr Mcleay recommended that the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIAs) for December cabinet analyses the economic value as well as social benefits generated by public libraries. Spend to save - the prevention schemes that will be impacted - impact on other services.

28.5 Cllr Shanks proposed an additional recommendation be added to recommend to Cabinet that they do not proceed with the proposed libraries closure. This was seconded by Cllr Lyons. Members voted unanimously to agree this additional recommendation.

28.6 Cllr Parrott proposed an additional recommendation that the committee recommend that, if Cabinet chooses to proceed with library closures, the library buildings are mothballed until the refreshed Libraries Strategy determines the future use of city libraries. This was seconded by Cllr Sheard. Members voted unanimously to agree this additional recommendation.

28.7 RESOLVED:

That People Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

agrees to note the public consultation and stakeholder engagement that have been carried out, as well as the data gathered, in Summary of Consultation Responses report, Appendix 3.

agrees to note the steps currently underway to analyse the consultation responses data and to take it into account when developing final proposals, including but not only the steps underway to further develop of the Needs & Use Analysis and to assess the equalities implications of the proposals.

agrees to note the opportunity this Report affords it to provide input on the proposals which were consulted upon, by making comment which will be taken into account in the development of the recommendations to be put to Cabinet.

recommends that Cabinet do not proceed with the libraries closure plan at this time.

recommends that if Cabinet chooses to proceed with library closures, the library buildings are mothballed until the refreshed Libraries Strategy determines the future use of city libraries.

The meeting concluded at 6.40pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this _____ day of _____