

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 74

Subject: Written questions from Councillors

Date of meeting: 29 January 2026

Report of: Director of Governance & Law

Contact Officer: Name: Anthony Soyinka
Tel: 01273 291006
Email: anthony.soyinka@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

The following questions have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answer detailed below:

1. Councillor Bagaeen asked:

If the new city licensing policy is meant to keep our communities in the city safer, why have we as a council allowed a substantial number of vape shops, lit up like show rooms, to operate on the North Street – St James's Street corridor?

Response provided by Councillor McGregor, Chair of Licensing Committee:

Vapes and tobacco do not currently fall under the licensing regime provided for by the Licensing Act 2003 and as a Council we do not have the powers to prevent these businesses opening nor close them down. Therefore, regular inspections involving Trading Standards, Police, Border Force Immigration and HMRC are conducted at these premises with any illicit product identified being seized as well as co-ordination with other Council departments such as Planning for any other breaches of legislation.

We are aware of an increase in vape shops opening around the North Street / St James's Street corridor as well as the rest of the city and the potential issues that may arise from this. Therefore, the Trading Standards team have taken part in national operations focused on cash businesses for example Operation Machinize where Hundreds of barbershops were targeted in NCA-coordinated crackdown as reported on the National Crime Agency website. Operations are carried out regularly to disrupt those businesses that are carrying out illegal activities.

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We are also awaiting the progression of the Tobacco and Vape Bills through Parliament, which will allow the Government to introduce a licensing scheme for both tobacco products and vapes, making enforcement more straightforward. If premises selling these products are brought under a licensing regime, the Council would then be able to develop a policy to address concerns about their proliferation, similar to how the Statement of Licensing Policy currently manages other licensable activities such as alcohol.

2. Councillor Bagaeen asked:

What went wrong with gritting during the icy weather in early January at the start of the year and are we learning from past mistakes? This was a reminder of the significant disruption in the city in early January 2025 as a result of a lack of gritting (<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/24844990.snow-chaos-brighton-council-explains-roads-werent-gritted/>).

At the beginning of this January, there were a large number of complaints on Facebook pages for groups in Westdene, Patcham and many others across the city. A number of cyclists sustained injuries during this period for lack of gritting, a postman in Westdene fell and broke his elbow, and our refuse collection service in Westdene and food waste collection services ground to a halt as refuse trucks were unable to access a number of streets.

Response provided by Councillor Muten, Cabinet Member for Transport & City Infrastructure:

Thank you for your question, Cllr Bagaeen, and I'm sorry to hear about your concerns. As you are aware, the article you referred to relates to last winter and a severe snow event on 8th January 2025. Since then, we have improved the way we operate our winter service, with dedicated contractors available 24/7 to provide a more resilient and agile response.

This winter, temperatures have dropped below freezing very early in the season and on several occasions, including Christmas Day and Boxing Day and days around the New Year. Between 24 December 2025 and mid-January 2026, our dedicated winter decision maker closely monitored the weather forecast, and we mobilised our road gritters on 20 occasions, including along key routes in Patcham and Westdene.

We are unable to treat the entire road network, so we prioritise 234 km of key routes, including bus routes and roads leading to critical destinations such as hospitals. Gritting every road in the city would cost several million pounds, which is not feasible from either an operational or financial perspective.

We have also checked and refilled the 400 grit bins across the city – ahead of the cold snap in late December. These are available for residents to use to help clear icy pavements around their homes and within their neighbourhoods.

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With over 1,000 km of pavement in the city, it is not practicable to grit all footways. However, we have contractors on standby during severe weather to help clear snow and grit essential pedestrian routes, particularly near hospitals, schools, and other medical facilities.

Finally, it is important to note that salting and gritting cannot guarantee roads will be free of ice or snow. At very low temperatures typically below -5°C salt becomes ineffective.

We will continue to review our Winter Maintenance service to ensure the improvements made over the past year serve our city well. Though our public communications, we will continue to emphasise the importance of taking extra care when it is cold and icy, to always drive, walk, wheel and cycle responsively to meet the conditions. We will encourage communities to use their communal grit bins to help treat pathways surfaces and generally look out for their neighbours.

We have launched a new online map showing grit bin locations and our gritting routes: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/parking-and-travel/grit-bin-and-route-map

Request a grit bin to be refilled, relocated or repaired www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/grit-bin-request-refill-move-or-repair

3. Councillor McNair asked:

All major roads in Hollingbury such as Westfield Crescent, Hartfield Avenue, Fernhurst Crescent and Elsted Crescent should be gritted because of the steepness of the roads and lack of sunlight, making the pavements and roads particularly challenging for the elderly. Could grit lorries be diverted along these roads while in the area to avoid the elderly and vulnerable being left isolated?

Response provided by Councillor Muten, Cabinet Member for Transport & City Infrastructure:

Thank you for your question, Cllr McNair. The winter service covers over 233km of the road network, prioritising key routes, including bus routes and roads that lead to places like hospitals and the city centre. It would cost the council several million pounds to grit all the city's roads.

The gritting routes can be seen on our council website: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/parking-and-travel/grit-bin-and-route-map

Depending on the weather forecast, our hilltop routes and steep slopes are prioritised but of course this does not cover all the hills in the city.

Salting and gritting won't guarantee that roads are free of ice and snow. At very low temperatures (usually below -5°C), salt will have no effect at all. Salt will not clear heavy snowfall.

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We have made improvements to our service this year to ensure gritting teams are on standby 24/7 from 1st November to end of March; and use advanced weather forecasts to treat our priority road network and pathways around key services with technology to ensure grit is applied to meet the conditions.

We also promote the use of communal grit bins which can be used by residents to grit their pavements and look out for their neighbours. Residents can request a grit bin to be refilled, relocated or repaired at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/grit-bin-request-refill-move-or-repair

It is important that residents keep an eye on the weather forecast and in severe weather consider if travel is necessary and where it is, to drive, walk, cycle or wheel carefully to meet the conditions.

4. Councillor McNair asked:

Over Christmas, there were many missed rubbish and recycling collections across Patcham & Hollingbury (e.g., Sunnysdale Avenue, Orchid View) and Westdene; is this due to a shortage of crews despite real-time collection updates, and has crew availability for collections changed since May 2023?

Response provided by Councillor Rowkins, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Net Zero & Environmental Services:

Since May 2023 there has been some increase in crew and vehicle availability across the service, including additional staff for new services such as the collection of food waste. We continue to take measures to increase the resilience of the service, with recruitment of additional drivers. Over the Christmas period, we did have some issues with vehicle and staff availability, and also experienced issues with the icy weather which impacted our collection service due to the dangerous conditions. 5 members of staff were injured as a result of the ice and we had to run a reduced service for several days so that crews could work in daylight and assess the risk accordingly. Our 'safety-net' PM crews (of which there are 2) were unstaffed which severely limited our ability to recover quickly. We are now back on track, and have the PM crews fully staffed, and the improvements in the service since 2023 will continue.

5. Councillor Meadows asked:

When the owners of Patcham Place submitted a planning application to the South Downs National Park Authority to build homes on the site, was the council informed, and if so, why weren't councillors and residents notified, and can the council liaise with the SDNP to ensure residents' views are considered in decisions within our local authority boundaries?

Response provided by Councillor Taylor, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & City Regeneration:

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There are two current applications relating to Patcham Place that are been considered by the South Downs National Park. Planning permission and listed building consent is sought to change the use of the stable block to visitor accommodation.

The responsibility for consultation within the South Downs National Park rests solely with the South Downs National Park Authority. Whilst the Council could choose to make a representation on the application, the council cannot influence or interfere with the decision-making process of the South Downs National Park.

6. Councillor Meadows asked:

Local residents in Patchdean are looking for a place where their children can play and the vacant land at Patchdean appears ideal. It is situated below 27/29 Patchdean on Carden Avenue/Winfield Avenue. It has already been established that it is housing land. I have asked if the residents can be given permission to use it for their children as a safe place to play, but received no response. The individual gardens in Patchdean are too small for many activities. This would require the two entrance points by Carden Avenue to be gated off so no child can run out in the road and to protect any furniture placed in there. Could this be completed under the Estate Development Budget?

Response provided by Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing:

Thank you for your question. I am sorry that you haven't received a response to your suggestion that residents be given permission to use this vacant Housing land for their children as a safe place to play.

Following your proposal our surveyor has visited the site and whilst there are some potential site constraints, there are also some potential options for a play area that

It would be good for members of the Housing team to meet with you, other ward councillors and residents on site to run through the options and discuss what we may be able to achieve for residents in response to the proposal, including options for funding including through the Estate Investment Budget.

Officers will be in touch to arrange this meeting.

7. Councillor Theobald asked:

Residents have written to the Safer Better Streets team concerned about their children crossing Carden Hill at the top of County Oak Avenue. They were told it would be undertaken this year (2025/6) and if it meets the initial criteria, fully assessed next year (2026/7). Has this location been assessed yet and if not, do we know when?

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Response provided by Councillor Muten, Cabinet Member for Transport & City Infrastructure:

Thanks for your question, Cllr Theobald highlighting concerns from residents about their children crossing Carden Hill at the top of County Oak Avenue.

We can confirm that Carden Hill / County Oak Avenue (SBS 231) has been included on the 2025/26 list. An initial assessment will be carried out shortly.

If a location is successful at this stage, we undertake a more in-depth full assessment to determine how urgently improvements are needed, this will take place in financial year 26/27. This full assessment considers a wide range of social and safety factors, including vehicle speeds, collision history, and access to public transport.

Following this process, we produce a ranked list of the top ten locations where improvements are most urgently required. These are then presented to councillors for approval, subject to higher-ranking priorities and available funding.

I will ensure ward councillors are involved at each stage and there is public engagement with local residents on the proposed design including public consultation via the Council's YourVoice platform.

8. Councillor Theobald asked:

How much CIL money is expected from the Royal Mail development and when can residents expect to receive it?

Response provided by Councillor Taylor, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & City Regeneration:

Assuming this refers to the application to build a new sorting office at Patcham Court Farm, then CIL doesn't apply because the approved charging schedule for CIL does not cover use class B8 (Storage and Distribution).

9. Councillor Lyons asked:

Last month we were assured at Full Council that lessons were learned for the city to be winter prepared & ready. How come that during the first period of icy conditions, roads in Westdene, that in particular were not on a bus route, were not gritted, causing accidents, falls & preventing residents leaving their homes?

Response provided by Councillor Muten, Cabinet Member for Transport & City Infrastructure:

Thank you for your question, Cllr Lyons.

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Our winter service is in a much better position than it ever has been with Contractors on hand 24/7 from 1st November to the end of March.

Officers annually review and update the Winter Service Plan following a risk- and practice- based approach. The service is designed using guidance from the 'well-Managed Highway Infrastructure' code of practice created by the UK Roads Liaison Group (UKRLG) and aligned with the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG).

It is widely acknowledged that councils across the UK are not in a position to treat every road surface and, therefore, must prioritise those roads of strategic importance to limit rather than eliminate the risk of icy on the roads. So, while it is not practicable to treat all roads it is vital that we do treat the most critical routes including high volume routes and bus routes.

We prioritise 234 km of key routes, including bus routes and roads leading to critical destinations such as hospitals. Gritting every road in the city would cost several million pounds, which is not feasible from either an operational or financial perspective.

Though our public communications, we will continue to emphasise the importance of taking extra care when it is cold and icy, to always drive, walk, wheel and cycle responsively to meet the conditions.

With over 1,000 km of pavement in the city, it is not practicable to grit all footways. However, we have contractors on standby during severe weather to help clear snow and grit essential pedestrian routes, particularly near hospitals, schools, and other medical facilities.

We encourage communities to use their communal grit bins to help treat pathways surfaces and generally look out for their neighbours. We checked and refilled some 400 grit bins across the city – ahead of the cold snap in late December. These are available for residents to use to help clear icy pavements around their homes and communities.

10. Councillor Lyons asked:

I understand from an Officer that the Council has specialist graffiti removing machines that are stored away under bubble wrap, purchased at some considerable expense, some time ago, but never used. Is this proof that the Administration have a laissez-faire attitude towards graffiti removal?

Response provided by Councillor Rowkins, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Net Zero & Environmental Services:

This is not correct. We currently do not have a specialist graffiti removal machine.

To improve our capability, we are progressing a business case for the purchase of a laser graffiti removal machine. This equipment represents a

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modern, environmentally responsible solution, as it operates without the use of chemicals.

Subject to approval, we anticipate that the procurement will be confirmed in April. This investment reflects our proactive approach to improving graffiti removal methods and maintaining the quality of our public realm, and build on our previous decision to expand the graffiti team from 4 members of staff to 10.

11. Councillor Hogan asked:

What are the council doing to make local tourist attractions more attractive to the public?

Response provided by Councillor Miller, Cabinet Member for Culture, Heritage & Tourism:

Brighton & Hove City Council is working together with public and private partners throughout Brighton & Sussex to support the city's visitor attractions. The Council is investing in improving public spaces and the seafront, making the city more appealing and enhancing the experience for visitors so that they want to return. The post of city centre manager, focused on improving the look and feel of the centre of the city, was introduced in response to concerns raised by members of the Destination Experience Group and the Brighton & Hove Hoteliers Association. Alongside these efforts, there is a strong line-up of outdoor and cultural events throughout the year to boost tourism even outside the traditional busy seasons, helping local attractions draw more visitors year-round. VisitBrighton, which is supported by the Council, also promotes Brighton & Hove as a top choice for conferences and business events, attracting higher spending visitors who visit attractions beyond the summer months.

Through VisitBrighton, destination marketing is guided by data to attract visitors who stay longer and visit at quieter times. In 2025, the website visitbrighton.com had 2.6 million page views; *Things to Do* pages were viewed 625,257 times. The *What's On* section attracted 1.2 million views, while Attractions pages saw 107,754 visits, directly helping local venues gain exposure. VisitBrighton also connects with about 168,000 followers on social media, sharing over 1,000 posts that reached 4.2 million impressions and 1.3 million video views. This helps encourage visitors to turn day trips into overnight stays - giving them more time to discover what the city offers and supporting the local economy.

These initiatives align with the Sussex Visitor Economy Strategy for Growth, which guides improvements in quality, sustainability, and variety of visitor experiences across the county. The strategy highlights the importance of partnership work, lengthening the tourist season, supporting skills and investment, and spreading the benefits of tourism more broadly. Within this bigger picture, the Council is focused on making local visitor attractions both more appealing and resilient.

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12. Councillor Pickett asked:

Re: Item 46b (amended Notice of Motion on Gaza and Council financial exposure) of the meeting of Council on 13th October 2025: Will the administration specify the precise timescale for the report from officers, on the Council's exposure to companies on the OHCHR list?

Response provided by Councillor Taylor, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & City Regeneration:

A report will come to Cabinet in February 2026.

13. Councillor Pickett asked:

Which other local authorities within the East Sussex Pension Fund were contacted following the Notice of Motion, when were they contacted, and what responses were received?

Response provided by Councillor Taylor, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & City Regeneration:

A report will come to February Cabinet detailing the correspondence we have had with East Sussex Pension Fund on this matter.

14. Councillor Hill asked:

Does the administration support calls to remove the Aim to Permit principle from the Gambling Act 2005? The principle places a legal duty on licensing authorities, including local councils, to favour the approval of new gambling premises unless there are clear grounds to refuse them. Critics argue this significantly restricts councils' ability to respond to local concerns about the social impact of gambling. Politicians including Dawn Butler MP and campaigners from across the political spectrum, have said that the rule 'ties the hands' of local authorities and forces them to grant licences 'regardless of clear social harm or strong local opposition'.

Response provided by Councillor McGregor, Chair of Licensing Committee:

The Gambling Act 2005 is national legislation, and the "aim to permit" principle set out in Section 153 remains a statutory requirement for all licensing authorities. This principle means councils must generally seek to permit gambling premises where applications comply with:

- The Gambling Commission's codes of practice and guidance
- The licensing objectives (preventing crime and disorder, ensuring fairness, and protecting children and vulnerable persons)
- The council's own Statement of Gambling Policy

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While this creates a presumption in favour of granting licences, it is not absolute. Licensing authorities can refuse applications or impose conditions where necessary to uphold the licensing objectives, comply with guidance, or align with local policy. If representations are made, a hearing must be held under Section 162 of the Act.

In terms of reform, the Government completed a review of the Gambling Act and published its White Paper in April 2023, *"High Stakes: Gambling Reform for the Digital Age"*. This sets out over 60 measures, including online stake limits, mandatory affordability checks, and a statutory levy on operators. These reforms are now being implemented through secondary legislation and Gambling Commission consultations, with an evaluation programme underway. There is no new review of the Act at present, but the Government continues to progress these changes and consider further measures to reduce gambling-related harm.

Should a national review or call for evidence be announced in the future, the administration could consider whether to contribute to that process.

15. Councillor Hill asked:

In Wales, the Children and Families Measure 2010, introduced a Play Sufficiency Duty on Welsh local authorities to assess and secure enough play opportunities. I believe there should be a similar legal obligation for English local councils to ensure sufficient, high-quality play opportunities for children in their areas, recognizing play as crucial for health, happiness, and development. Leeds is seemingly leading the way in England by becoming the first city to complete a Play Sufficiency Assessment, should Brighton & Hove follow?

Response provided by Councillor Robins, Sports, Recreation & Libraries:

In Brighton & Hove we value children's right to play. In 2021 we started a major £6 million refurbishment programme for the city's play areas. The focus of our programme was to provide inclusive and accessible play areas and ensure they can be enjoyed by children of all ages and abilities for many years to come.

We now have 53 council-owned play areas, 22 multi use games areas and nine skateparks all of which are free and open to the public. We also have leisure facilities, parks, open spaces and woodland that allow for play. Play areas are mapped and on our website for people to find as well as locations for parks and open spaces.

While we support the work of Labour run Wales and Leeds, we do not have capacity or funding to undertake a play sufficiency assessment, we are committed to revisiting this as soon as resources allow. We see this as an important priority for the future.

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16. Councillor West asked:

On 2 January a Special Urgency Notice reported that a decision had been taken by the Leader of the Council on 31 December to direct award contracts to a temporary accommodation provider. The thin published report, covering less than seven pages, states the contract will run for 6 years, with a total value of £18.861m. The reason for the urgency and use of Direct Award are unclear other than the stated need to address a £4.8m in-year over-spend and suggestion this contract will save £1.127m annually. No explanation is offered as to why the decision could not have waited until the 22 January Cabinet meeting or been taken at the Special Cabinet arranged for 9 January. While I appreciate the administration is panicking about their failure to manage budget costs, is it appropriate to railroad through such significant decisions without consultation and opposition scrutiny of potential alternatives?

Response provided by Councillor Sankey, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Chair:

The decision was taken under Special Urgency because the council is facing an immediate and significant in-year overspend of £4.8m on nightly-paid Temporary Accommodation. As a financially responsible Labour Administration we believe in taking timely action to manage our budget pressures and to ensure the Council remains financially sustainable. This is not 'panicking' it is good prudent governance. By contrast the Greens are a Party of no or little action, only waking up to financial repercussions after disaster has occurred and in the case of the i360 seemingly never waking up at all.

Within the context of the national housing crisis, high demand and limited supply, the report explains that urgent action was required to secure lower nightly rates and ensure financial sustainability within the current financial year. A Direct Award to an existing provider enables the Council to convert 209 units already in use from costly ad hoc arrangements to a contracted rate, delivering an estimated annual saving of £1.127m.

The urgency arrangements were agreed with the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as permitted by Regulation 10 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) Regulations 2012.

Waiting until 9 January would have delayed the move to lower contracted nightly rates. Deferring the decision further to 22 January would mean that we were paying £50,000 more than the new contract would cost. Given the scale of the in-year overspend and the immediate savings achievable through the Direct Award, postponing the decision would have had a material financial impact.

17. Councillor West asked:

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I am grateful to the cabinet member for his response to my recent question about the summer park and ride. This clearly reveals the scheme to have been an expensive experiment that made little, if any, difference to travel choice. Rather than repeat this political vanity project this summer, can I ask, has any consideration been given to the alternative of investing these precious public funds into supporting and incentivising use of scheduled sustainable transport journeys arriving into the city, e.g. by offering visitors bus and rail ticket price discounts or local retail rewards for taking the green option?

Response provided by Councillor Muten, Cabinet Member for Transport & City Infrastructure:

Thank you for your question, Cllr West.

The Labour Government is already incentivising use of scheduled sustainable transport journeys into the city by subsidising bus fares, so customers only have to pay no more than £3 per journey. Recognising the value and importance of public transport, we have chosen to continue to further subsidise short and medium journey bus fares through our Bus Service Improvement Plan revenue funding. We continue the popular free travel for up to 4 children accompanied by an adult and 50p off peak fares for under 19s. Our concessionary travel offer is better than the statutory minimum and is available to both residents and visitors. Our bus operators provide further offers and incentives.

To reiterate my response to your previous question on park and ride, last summer's Park and Ride trial was implemented so we can learn lessons, understand potential demand, and use these to build the business case for a permanent facility. There are several examples of successful Park and Ride schemes across the UK and Brighton and Hove needs one to provide additional choices to those coming to the city by car. Our Park and Ride trial demonstrated the need for and potential to reduce congestion and improve air quality.

We will continue working towards this goal. The approach taken for our Park and Ride trial offers an opportunity to make better use of existing third-party under-utilised car parking space towards the edge of our city - a proven next step in developing Park and Ride. For instance, my exploratory site visit to Portsmouth found this use of third party car park approach has been used ahead of then establishing their permanent location.

In many places, Park and Ride services are subsidised and form a key part of a wider package of transport interventions. It is a great shame that there has not been the political will to enable this previously. In fact, had the foresight of some of the resource available been used to develop Park and Ride under a previous Green administration rather than Green Party's ultimate vanity project – the I360 - we would not have had to write off £52 million of precious public funds and our residents may instead be now

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benefiting from fewer visitors driving into the city centre, less congestion and cleaner air as a result of viable and sustainable Park and Ride for the city.

We do not believe the best option is to continue to encourage drivers to drive into the city centre, but rather to strengthen our public transport and active travel offers as we are demonstrably continue to do, as well as to provide Park and Ride so that our city environment and vibrant city visitor economy can flourish.

18. Councillor Lademacher asked:

It transpired in December that the annual fire safety letter sent to residents in Dudeney Lodge, an LPS block found to no longer meet current safety standards for withstanding a collapse in the case of an explosion or large fire, gave residents incorrect evacuation information - advising them to stay put in their homes rather than evacuate. Following this serious mistake was highlighted to the council by an alert resident and Sian Berry MP, the council did thankfully send a corrected letter to residents in the block. The explanation communicated since for the error was "it was an automated mailshot and unfortunately had not been checked for the updated information". Will the administration confirm that all other automated annual fire safety letters sent to residents in other blocks have now been checked to ensure that incorrect fire evacuation advice has not been miscommunicated in any other council blocks.

Response provided by Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing:

We are grateful that the concern regarding incorrect information on the current evacuation strategy in the annual fire safety letter sent to residents of Dudeney Lodge was brought to our attention. This was an error and officers have apologised for any confusion or concern this caused for residents.

In order to rectify this situation, we hand delivered an updated annual fire safety letter to residents at Dudeney Lodge following this matter being brought to our attention.

Security professionals operating at Dudeney Lodge remained clear about the fire safety arrangements for this building, including the correct evacuation strategy, and how to support tenants to evacuate safely should there be an incident. The correct evacuation strategy for the block is reflected in the fire action notice signage on display in the block and has been shared at various resident meetings.

Officers have reviewed the process for issuing these letters to ensure that this doesn't happen again and that future annual fire safety letters include the correct information about the evacuation strategy.

19. Councillor Lademacher asked:

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Have all fire risk assessments of external walls (FRAEWs) identified as being required in fire risk assessments undertaken by the council been completed. If any have not yet been completed or commissioned, how many are outstanding, and when will the FRAEWs be completed or commissioned?

Response provided by Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing:

The council has completed all fire risk assessments of external walls required at this time. We continue to keep our compliance with FRAEW requirements under regular review to ensure ongoing compliance.

20. Councillor McLeay asked:

A recent report regarding a new Temporary Accommodation (TA) contract states that the council's use of TA has increased, with 2,150 households placed in such accommodation at the end of November 2025. In January 2023, reports show the number of homeless households in TA were falling, but numbers have since risen. To what extent is the new allocations policy responsible for the increase, and what lessons can be learnt from previous years when numbers were declining?

Response provided by Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing:

Like many local authorities, Brighton & Hove is facing an acute housing crisis, with demand for affordable housing far outstripping supply.

Alongside wider work to strengthen early intervention, the council updated its Housing Allocations Policy in April 2025. This included a new option allowing households experiencing homelessness to remain on the housing register even after accepting settled accommodation in the private rented sector.

As a result of these measures, the council expects to prevent homelessness for 534 households this financial year, compared with 416 last year – an increase of around 28%.

The rise in the number of households in Temporary Accommodation is largely driven by a growing number of single adults, a trend first emerging in 2023. Many of these individuals present with complex needs and arrive at services in crisis, where opportunities for prevention are extremely limited. Our Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025–2030 reflects the emergence of this vulnerable cohort and the priority of prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping.

21. Councillor McLeay asked:

As we approach budget council, what actions are being taken to improve HRA rent collection, given that the current rate of 92.75% is down from 98%

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previously and below the 95.92% benchmark for similar-sized councils, considering that matching the benchmark by 3% could generate over £2 million (enough to fund energy efficiency upgrades for approximately 200 homes) and, while universal credit is an issue for all councils, why are we underperforming and what is the plan to close this gap?

Response provided by Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing:

Rent collection has been affected this year by the large number of tenants moving from legacy benefits to Universal Credit (UC). Between April and December 2025, at least 1,145 tenants are known to have migrated, and this concentrated transition has reduced collection rates. UC is paid monthly in arrears, which often leads to early-stage debts during the first assessment period. While all councils face similar challenges, Brighton & Hove has higher levels of vulnerability linked to mental health. Mental ill additional barriers and has a direct impact on the level of support tenants need to sustain payments during benefit transitions.

To address this, we have strengthened early intervention. Income Officers contact every tenant identified as moving to UC, with complex or vulnerable cases escalated to our Senior Income Advisor to ensure the correct protections and “run-on” payments are applied. We have also significantly increased direct payments from the DWP, securing £15.7m this year compared with £9.8m last year.

We have enhanced our tenancy sign-up process, implemented a rolling programme of additional training for staff around money guidance to improve service access and continue to apply system enhancement to support our collections processes. A Rent Collection Strategy is being developed to consolidate improvements and help close the gap with benchmark councils.

22. Councillor McLeay asked:

How does BHCC justify awarding a 6-year Temporary Accommodation contract to Base One, a company incorporated only in 2023, after a two-week decision process without sharing oversight on alternative options, and what safeguards are in place to ensure quality and transparency given reports of poor conditions in other licensed TA properties?

Response provided by Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing:

The council used a Direct Award because urgent action was required to address an anticipated £4.8m in-year overspend on -nightlypaid Temporary Accommodation. Base One is already an established provider housing 209 households for the council under existing arrangements. The Direct Award converts these -highcost nightly placements into a contracted arrangement, generating estimated annual savings of £1.127m. This approach also ensures

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continuity for households already living in those properties, avoiding the disruption associated with changing provider-.

The transparency notice issued on 16 December complied with the Procurement Act 2023, and the urgency arrangements were formally agreed with the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny. A longer procurement process was not feasible within the financial year and would likely have resulted in further significant overspend.

The council is aware of historic concerns about conditions in some licensed TA properties, which is why the contract includes key performance indicators covering weekly inspections, repairs responsiveness, safeguarding, anti-social behaviour enforcement, and 24/7 staffing. Base One has a proven track record of meeting these standards under existing arrangements and officers will continue to robustly contract manage such services.

23. Councillor Sykes asked:

At end December 2025, how much of the £125k budget allocated to the Palmeira Sq north works from the Parks capital budget remains, will this be spent within financial year and if not will it be carried over to 2026-7?

Response provided by Councillor Robins, Cabinet Member for Sport, Recreation & Libraries:

Approx £29,000 spent and committed to date, on securing the site, re-landscaping and pathways. Approx. £15,000 in further planned spend this year (on planting and safety work), leaving approx. £81,000 remaining. Options for this spend was discussed at the Palmeira Square Working Group meeting 15 January 2025 with key consideration of the centre piece (to be decided and consulted on) as well as further path improvements, rails, edging etc.

24. Councillor Sykes asked:

At O&S Place on 21st Jan 2025, when asked about publication of fire risk assessments, I was told that:

“it is our intention to publish them, but at the moment we’re going through and verifying them all and looking at all the information to make sure it is up to date. So we’ve given assurances that we want to first publish the fire risk assessments for large panel system blocks where a lot of our work has focused, and then we’ll have programme to publish them going forward.”

A year on, why have fire risk assessments still not been published if it remains the council's intention, and by what date will this happen so residents can access and scrutinise important information about the safety of their homes?

Response provided by Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing:

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The health & safety of our residents and those visiting and working on our homes is the council's key priority.

As set out in Cabinet and Place Overview & Scrutiny reports the council have undertaken a full new set of fire risk assessments across our 639 blocks in order that we have a complete and up to date appraisal of fire risks and remediation requirements. This work is ongoing, particularly in relation to our High-Rise Residential Blocks.

A number of FRAs have already been shared with MPs, members and residents in response to enquiries.

We are committed to transparency around proactive sharing of all FRAs, rather than in response to enquiries and have reflected this in our responses to member questions about publication of FRAs at Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee in their consideration of our Housing Safety & Quality Update report in both January 2025 and September 2025. Questions about publication of FRAs have also been responded to at previous Council meetings.

In order to progress and enable the publication of our 639 FRAs in a form that is accessible to residents, including meaningful commentary to provide a guide to the contents, our 2025/26 HRA budget planning includes identification of an additional resource to focus on FRA publication, so that all FRAs are in placed the public domain in a managed way. This additional resource will ensure FRA publication doesn't impact on the capacity of the existing team and their focus on ensuring our residents are safe and we are compliant with legislative and regulatory requirements, including ensuring effective management of FRAs and timely delivery of remediation actions.

25. Councillor Shanks asked:

What progression has been made on the agreed policy to bring Seaside homes in to council housing provision and what savings will be achieved from this?

Response provided by Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing:

As agreed at the joint Housing and Policy & Resources Committee meeting, the Council continues to seek to end the current Local Delivery Vehicle arrangement in order to bring the temporary accommodation currently leased to Seaside Homes back into Council control.

In line with the delegated authority, the Council will undertake due diligence required to make a final decision. As part of the due diligence financial information that will include calculation of any savings will also be included.

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Given the complexity related to the contractual relationship with the organisation, we have brought in dedicated resources to complete the council due diligence by summer 2026 and intend to report back to Cabinet in the autumn.

26. Councillor Shanks asked:

What is the Administrations decision on the future of New England House?

Response provided by Councillor Taylor, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & City Regeneration:

A report into the future of New England House is planned to come to a meeting of the Cabinet in March or April. I'd be pleased to engage with Cllrs Shanks and McLeay as ward councillors at an early stage.

27. Councillor Fishleigh asked:

When will the second (or third or fourth...) hand street bins that recently appeared on Longridge Avenue in West Saltdean be replaced?

Response provided by Councillor Rowkins, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Net Zero & Environmental Services:

Thank you for your query regarding the street bins on Longridge Avenue. I understand your concern about the second-hand bins that have recently appeared in the area. There are times when the service needs to reuse older bins due to shortages in stock. These bins will be replaced with new bins within the next 2 weeks.