

**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**

**PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY**

**4.30pm 19 FEBRUARY 2026**

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

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillor Cattell, Lyons, Mackey, Parrott, Sheard, Shanks, Winder, Asaduzzaman and Hill

**Other Members present:** Sara Fulford (Older People's Council), Joanna Martindale (Community Works Rep), Fiona England (PaCC), and Dr Anusree Biswas Sasidharan (Community Works).

**PART ONE**

**41 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

41.1 Giles Rossington, Scrutiny Manager, welcomed everyone to the meeting and said:

“Neither the Chair nor the Deputy Chair of People Overview & Scrutiny Committee are in attendance today. Committee Procedure Rules state that “In the absence of the Chair or Deputy Chair at a meeting of a Committee or Sub-Committee, those voting Members present shall elect a person from amongst their number to preside over the meeting”. (Committee Procedure Rule 3.3)

I therefore need to ask if any member wishes to nominate themselves as Chair for this meeting only.”

Cllr Sheard nominated themselves to be Chair for the meeting.

Following a vote of voting members Cllr Sheard was elected as Chair for the meeting.

41.2 Cllr Assaduzzaman for Cllr Gauge, Cllr Hill for Cllr Mcleay. Apologies from Adam Muirhead (Community Works Rep), and Jasmine (Youth Council Rep)

**42 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

42.1 There was no public involvement.

**43 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT**

43.1 There was no member involvement.

**44 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATION**

Today we are here at this special meeting to scrutinise the 2026/27 budget ahead of the budget going to full Council on 26th February.

We are joined by Cllr Jacob Taylor, Deputy Leader of the Council and cabinet member for Finance & City Regeneration, and John Hooton, Interim Director of Property and Finance, who will be talking to us about the budget and then taking questions from members. We are also joined by Cabinet members and officers who are on hand to help with any questions specific to their service areas. They will not be presenting to us as they did at the previous budget scrutiny meeting. However, following the recommendation of the previous budget meeting, I have asked that there be a short presentation specifically on the public health budget to help inform members' discussion. Public health will also be considered as an item for a future scheduled committee meeting, so we can examine how this spend is being realised throughout the council operation.

In relation to amendments from the committee, can I ask that if you have any amendments if you can propose them as we discuss that item in questioning. This is so we know to which item you are referring to when noting it down, and we can have the item fresh in our minds as we discuss it. We will then read out each of these at the end of the meeting and vote on them as normal.

Also, to make sure that we get through all the cabinet members in a reasonable time, I will be asking for questioning of each cabinet member to not last more than roughly half an hour. I have tried to put those cabinet members who we wouldn't need to spend as much time on up first so we can spend more time focusing on those with larger briefs, but please bear in mind to not take up too much time from other members of the committee.

I will look to hold a ten-minute break at an appropriate point roughly halfway through the meeting.

**45 SCRUTINY OF BUDGET 2627: GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET & HRA PROGRAMME.**

45.1 Cllr Taylor introduced the budget and explained the process until now. He said that there were pressures on the budget from homelessness, temporary accommodation, adult social care, and children's services, being clear that it was not the fault of the users of these services. Cllr Taylor said that the final financial settlement from the government had come after the publication of the budget papers to Cabinet but that the gap was still around the same. Cllr Taylor explained about the additional support that had been asked for from government, which was largely for temporary and emergency accommodation. He explained the difference in the general fund for this was £8m but that demand was forecast to be £20m. Cllr Taylor said that they had to fix the underlying issue as it was not right for £20m of taxpayers' money to be going straight to private landlords. He said that the approach they were taking was to invest in temporary accommodation and reduce the number of people needing it. Cllr Taylor said that they had requested £15m from the government but put it in perspective by saying that Warrington had requested over £300m. He spoke about the in year overspend that was £4.8m in month nine and that there was a plan to get it down.

Public Health

45.2 Cllr Mitchie Alexander gave a presentation on public health setting out the functions of public health funding, both prescribed and non-prescribed. She went on to set out the 25/26 funding and said that the Department of Health & Social Care had to confirm that what public health funds were spent on was appropriate.

45.3 Cllr Shanks asked questions about domestic violence reviews and why they were in public health, and if an impact assessment had been done on schools counselling. Dr Nicola Lang, Director of Public Health, said that the review previously only took into account domestic homicides but now included suicides, and that it was usual for this to be funded through public health. Deb Austin, Corporate Director for Families, Children & Wellbeing, said that they were pulling together metrics on outcomes from the school counselling. She said that it stopped children having to go on waiting lists as the service was available in their school, and that it was used to intervene early and stop children requiring specialist intervention later. She said that the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapists were also reviewing the service. Cllr Alexander said that money not spent by the Families, Children & Wellbeing service helped the rest of the budget.

45.4 Cllr Hill asked about the 4.6 FTE posts that were being deleted and what they were. Deb Austin said that they were a very expensive consultant role, a vacant post due to retirement in the healthy lifestyle team and two vacant apprenticeship posts. Dr Nicola Lang said that these were posts that had become vacant and were no longer required due to rationalisation rather than kept vacant due to spending controls.

45.5 Cllr Assaduzzaman asked if the council was looking at different ways of using its ring-fenced Public Health budget and how have the changes been informed by a commitment to reduce health inequalities. Dr Nicola Lang said that work around drugs, alcohol, sex, and other children's work to do with health should be a strand of what they all do.

45.6 Cllr Lyons asked about the high suicide rates and how these would be affected by the changes. Dr Nicola Lang said that the Domestic Abuse Reviews would inform learning and that schools having counselling services will help catch children before they got into crisis.

45.7 Cllr Sam Parrott spoke about VAWG, death by suicide, and stresses on the system for this. She also spoke about the success of schools' mental health counselling services that she has been involved in and said that she would like to see more of it. Dr Nicola Lang said that VAWG was a particular interest of hers and that she was looking to work with CVS on this.

45.8 Cllr Mackey asked about the underspend on deleted posts and the influence of this. Deb Austin said that the of the deleted posts one was management and gave a big saving. The others were around sport and activity and not working with the most vulnerable in the city. Cllr Taylor said that vacancies have been held for some time but that this was not the way you want to run a council because it does impact teams and staff. He explained that there was a process for approving new posts that were vital. Cllr Alexander said that although the 4.6 FTE posts were being deleted the Public Health team were large.

45.9 Cllr Winder asked what the what the consultant was doing. Dr Nicola Lang said that they were carrying out analytics of drug use.

45.10 Cllr Hill asked how large the public health team was. Dr Nicola Lang said that she would need to come back to the committee with the full details.

### Customer Services and Innovation

45.11 Cllr Jacob Allen spoke about the work within his portfolio including investing to save and ensuring that staff have the technology to help them. He spoke about AI pilots, some of which were specific to customer services, following councils like Derby and Peterborough.

45.12 Cllr Shanks asked about the committee's previous recommendations on consultations with the unions and CVS as well as the lobbying of government done by the council. Cllr Taylor said that consultation with the two unions had taken place before the draft budget in December and before this budget was published. He said he had had two meetings with them. He said that consultations around the staff posts affected by the budget were happening now and after the budget. Regarding the CVS he said that it was the same and that he had met a large group via community works and that they are now getting feedback. Cllr Taylor said that they were doing lots of lobbying of government on various issues including housing benefit and overall funding.

45.13 Cllr Parrott asked about adjustments to customer services to help people who will struggle to use technology and wanted resident facing services. She also asked about VAWG and economic abuse. Cllr Allen said that debt enforcement was not using AI, and that the corporate debt policy was updated in March 2025. He said that he would check if economic abuse was factored into this and if it was not then he would look and how it could be. Cllr Allen said that no avenue of contact was being closed and that they did provide reasonable adjustments.

45.14 Sara Fulford requested reassurance about customer facing services as one in three older people did not have access to IT. Cllr Allen said that there had been no loss of service and that there was nothing in the budget to change that. He said that last month the council answered 90,000 phone calls. Cllr Taylor said that they were aware of digital exclusion and want to maintain services. He said that he had recently found out that there was free IT skills training available at Jubilee Library.

45.15 Cllr Cattell asked about spending controls and the unintended consequences of these. She mentioned hearing of social workers being unable to pay for things while on day trips out with children. Cllr Taylor said that recruitment and spending controls were not the best way to work. Deb Austin said that funding had not been removed from the service mentioned but had been reduced.

45.16 Cllr Lyons said that the feedback on customer services that he had received from residents was not as good as Cllr Allen said. He said that the council website had not been updated since 2022. Cllr Allen said that the statistics for customer service were all in the refresh to the Council Plan that recently went to Cabinet.

45.17 Cllr Cattell spoke about homelessness and if it could be brought down in the next year so that the same issue was not being discussed in a year's time at the next budget. Cllr Taylor said that he hoped to bring down the cost from the £20m to £8m or ideally £0. He was confident that they could get the numbers down and said that they had to fix the issue.

Adult social care

45.18 Fiona England spoke about PACC's position statement on the budget and in particular Wellington House. She wanted to see equivalent and engaging day services provided. Fiona questioned the consultation on the closure of Wellington House. Cllr Alexander said that the consultation was not a tick box exercise and that the closure would only go ahead if they were happy with service provision going forward. Genette Laws, Corporate Director Homes and Adult social Care, said that the consultation would be meaningful and would involve public engagement. She said that those using Wellington House would get like for like services. Genette said that the saving was a net saving. She said that Wellington House provided services to those with the most need but that the council have people with a wide range of needs.

45.19 Cllr Hill spoke about a recommendation to pause the closure until a consultation was carried out. Cllr Taylor responded that this was what was happening and that Wellington House would not close until a consultation was carried out.

45.20 Sara Fulford spoke about the adult social care CQC report and said that there was a real concern about preventative services going. She asked that the EIA on adult social care savings be reviewed because it said that no impact on older people or the economically disadvantaged. Genette Laws said that the adult social care improvement plan focused on delays to assessment but that the report did say that once people received the service, they got a good service. She added that the consultation on Wellington House would also include the family of service users. Cllr Taylor said that there was not a proposal to stop services but to provide that in a different setting. Sara came back on these point and John Hooten said that looking at the savings and income that they were investing in adult social care with spending rising from about £152m to about £162m.

45.21 Cllr Sam Parrott said that she was concerned about the impact on other services, and the impact on staff. She also noted the importance of the consultation. Genette Laws said that they were looking after staff as they understood it was very difficult for them.

45.22 Cllr Shanks spoke about the decline of inhouse services, saying that the voluntary sector could not take them on. Cllr Taylor responded that the administration had not moved any services into the private sector, but that some services, such as the beach lifeguard service, were taken on by the voluntary sector. He said that most public services should be provided by the public but that they had to be realistic. He added that in some cases the voluntary sector could provide services better than the council and that some people feel more comfortable using services provided by the voluntary sector rather than the council. Genette Laws added that they were insourcing services in homes and adult social care.

45.23 Jo Martindale thanked Cllr Taylor for his comments on the voluntary sector. She said that the consultation on Wellington House was a chance for the council to build trust and was very important. She said that the next step would be co-production which was also really important. She urged the council to communicate well, be open, and transparent. Cllr Taylor said that it was helpful feedback and reiterated that it was a genuine consultation.

45.24 Cllr Ivan Lyons said that the closure of Wellington House would be devastating for a family he had spoken to about this and asked how they would get the services they needed. He also asked where the savings would come from if service users would get a like for like

service provided by someone else. Genette Laws asked him to share the details of anyone with concerns with her. She explained that there were another six providers in the community and that some families could take direct payments. She said that there were 21 people attending over the week with a day cost of £210, which was more expensive than other services charging £60.

45.25 Fiona England spoke about the 21 service users and highlighted that there were 17 young people leaving education who may require these services. She spoke about the need to reflect on the comms for the consultation and spoke on overdue assessments. Genette Laws said that she heard the concerns clearly from those attending now and those who would do in the future. She said that market engagement would be very important as they wanted to plan together.

45.26 Dr Anusree Biswas Sasidharan spoke of the value of prevention in adult social care and asked if they had additional resources what would they spend it on. Cllr Taylor said that between the costs and demands of the underlying issues from austerity and the housing market. He said that he would invest in housing as it affects so much of people's lives. Genette Laws said that she would do more prevention work.

45.27 Cllr Hill asked about the highly skilled staff at Wellington House and de-escalation skills as well as about any plans for the site should it close. Genette Laws said that the staff were highly skilled and the independent sector also highly skilled and trained. She said that should Wellington House close then they would look at the future use of the site. Cllr Taylor added that his first thoughts for the site would be temporary or emergency accommodation or services that the council provides.

45.28 The chair asked about any contingency plans should the outcome of the consultation be not to close Wellington House. Cllr Taylor said that there was no contingency plan and this is not something they would normally have for a budget saving. If Wellington House did not close, he said that the saving would become an in-year pressure which would have to be found.

#### Children's, Families and Youth Services

45.29 Cllr Shanks asked about the Roundabout Nursery and Youth Arts Fund. Cllr Emma Daniel said that the Youth Futures funding was compliant. She said that Roundabout Nursery is in the most deprived area and that they wanted to protect it for the long term. She said that they were looking to outsource it but that the contract would ensure the same offer provided, and that there would be a consultation. Cllr Daniel said that there had been no complaints about youth arts funding until the budget.

45.30 Cllr Cattell spoke about the number of new approvals for foster parents and gave a shout out to the council's dedicated social workers.

45.31 Jo Martindale was impressed with the staff retention and said that it was great that the council had been nominated as a youth partner.

45.32 Fiona England spoke about the short break offer for families represented by PACC and the need to look at the national picture. Cllr Daniel noted her comments and spoke of the difficulties faced when setting budgets due to a decade of austerity.

45.33 Cllr Assaduzzaman spoke about high-cost placements. Cllr Daniel said that family hubs would reduce escalation, that they were getting more foster carers but that the quality of placements for teens was concerning.

45.34 Cllr Mackey said that she was appreciative of the work on prevention and asked for assurances that SEND would not be disadvantaged by the budget. Cllr Daniel said that they were in as good a place as they could be.

45.35 Following the end of questions for cabinet members a recommendation was proposed by Cllr Hill to pause the closure of Wellington House until a consultation is carried out. This was voted down by the committee.

45.36 RESOLVED

That People Overview & Scrutiny Committee notes the Budget & Capital Investment HRA Programme 2026-27 and Medium Term Financial Strategy (and its appendices), and the General Fund Revenue Budget, Capital and Treasury Management Strategy (and its appendices)

The meeting concluded at 7.10pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

