

**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**

**PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY**

**2.00pm 19 JANUARY 2026**

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

**MINUTES**

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

**Other Members present:** Maria Cowler (Catholic Church diocesan representative), Sara Fulford (Older People's Council), Joanna Martindale (Community Works Rep), Adam Muirhead (Community Works Rep), Fiona England (PaCC).

**PART ONE**

**29 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

29.1 Cllr Meadows for Cllr Lyons. Cllr Thomson for Cllr Gauge. Apologies from Dr Anusree Biswas Sasidharan.

29.2 There were no declarations of interest.

29.3 There were no Part Two items.

**30 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

30.1 There was no public involvement.

**31 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT**

31.1 There was no member involvement.

**32 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATION**

32.1 The Chair gave the following communication:

Today we are here at this special meeting to scrutinise the draft plans of the 2026/27 budget ahead of the budget going to Cabinet on 12th February and budget Council on 26th February.

The scrutiny team are in the process of arranging a joint special scrutiny committee meeting to allow us to scrutinise the final budget. This is planned for Monday 16th February and details will be sent out to members shortly. So we will have a second opportunity for budget scrutiny.

The minutes of this meeting and any specific comments or recommendations made by committee members will be shared with the Cabinet to inform their planning.

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, and I'd like to welcome them to the meeting.

We will start the meeting with an overview of the budget plans from Cllr Taylor. I will then ask each Cabinet Member in turn, supported by Cllr Taylor and by the relevant officers, to briefly talk about their portfolios and then take questions.

Although we only have one item on the agenda, this is an important subject for scrutiny, so I imagine there will be a lot of questions to get through.

Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee is due to begin at 17:00 and therefore we will need to finish this meeting by 16:30 and so will need to stick to timings to ensure the next meeting can start at the advertised time. Can I therefore please request that both those asking and answering questions are as brief and to the point as possible.

In the interests of time and to ensure that everyone gets the chance to contribute, I'm going to ask members to refrain from asking multiple questions and to ask one question to each Cabinet Member. If you have more questions for the Cabinet Member, and if we have time, I will come back to you once everyone has had the opportunity. I need to be mindful that we have many service areas to cover and only limited time. I will move on to the next topic if I feel we need to, even if there are questions still to be asked.

Please can members keep to questions that will be relevant to the city, rather than asking questions that are ward specific. These questions will be referred for a written answer after the meeting.

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

### **33 GENERAL FUND DRAFT BUDGET AND RESOURCES UPDATE – 2026-27 TO 2029-30**

33.1 Cllr Jacob Taylor began by giving an overview of the draft budget. He said that there was a budget gap of £24.9m, in December funding had been increased by £16.9m but that service pressures were set to increase by £34m which was above inflation. He gave examples showing that since 2010 there had been years where the general fund had been cut in cash terms. He said that in the last two years it had gone up by £18.4m and when the report was published it was £16m. Cllr Taylor said that the draft budget contained savings of £12.4m mostly from changes or redesigns rather than service cuts. He said that there was still a gap of £12.4m, but that this had increased by £900,000. Cllr Taylor said that the details of the savings were included in appendix 1.

33.2 Cllr Shanks asked about the government's fair funding, and Brighton & Hove weren't getting more funding due to the homelessness problem. Cllr Taylor that the calculations for

funding was complicated and that the increase given to Brighton & Hove was not as much as they thought it might be. Cllr Taylor explain that under the fairer funding review more deprived areas received more money and that although Brighton & Hove has significant areas of deprivation overall it is about in the middle compared to other areas. Cllr Taylor said that he had been calling for more money from the government but that it is right that areas of greater deprivation received more money. He said that the way that the homelessness funding was calculated hadn't helped Brighton & Hove and he thought that the government could be more flexible with this.

### Children, Families, & Youth Services

33.3 Cllr Emma Daniel, cabinet member for Children, Families & Youth Services, spoke to the committee about the focus that the administration is placing on services for young people, and that savings in this area were low. She said that the £1.2m savings were reflecting the shift from crisis management to prevention work. Cllr Daniel said that this shift had to be done carefully. She explained that the council had 0% use of agency social workers compared to a 16% average. She said that savings included a greater use of the public health budget and that there were small savings from unused budgets, greater government investment, and less demand for home to school transport.

33.4 Cllr Sheard asked about savings that were arising from reductions in demand for services and if she was sure that demand would not rise. Cllr Daniel said that she was confident that the savings were achievable as they know the number of pupils in schools and that the number of children in the city was falling.

33.5 Cllr Meadows asked about the schools budget and the support for schools in deficit. Cllr Taylor responded that what she was referring to was the deficits for the high needs block and SEND, which Brighton & Hove hasn't had a big problem with like other councils. He said that schools were able to have a deficit for up to three years and that the council oversee these budgets and help schools.

33.6 Cllr Shanks spoke about the use of public health funding, asked about the removal of a post within the adolescence service and about young futures funding. Cllr Daniel said that young people's mental health was a public health issue and that adolescence services were a priority. She said that regarding the young futures funding they had kept services going even when they were not statutory. Cllr Taylor said that public health funding was ringfenced and that in the past it had been seen as very separate.

33.7 Jo Martindale thanked the team for the investment in young people. She asked what would be lost in public health. Deb Austin said that the funding was taken from underspends in the 2025/26 budget and therefore nothing was going to be lost. Jo Martindale then asked if that meant that the funding was one off or reoccurring. Deb Austin confirmed that it was one off funding and that the areas would need to be looked at again in the following year. The Chair asked what areas of public health had underspent. Deb Austin said that she did not have the figures to hand.

33.8 Adam Muirhead spoke of the work of the local community and voluntary sector with young people and thanked Deb and the team for their support. Cllr Daniel said that over the last decade that Adam and Jo had kept the flame going on youth work.

33.9 Fiona England asked a question about the reduction of £40,000 from renegotiating the services for young people with SEND short break service. Cllr Daniel said that she was grateful to Fiona for raising the issue and that the reduction was not about reducing hours or services but contract management.

33.10 Cllr Mackey raised concerns about schools in deficit and what was being done to support them. Cllr Taylor said that it was not progressive to have half empty schools and that headteachers and school governors did not have many leavers to pull. He said that it was better to have fewer schools with higher pupil numbers. He said that the council was increasing support and challenge to schools as well as looking at other options such as school partnerships or federations. Cllr Daniel said that they were being creative in wider children services and gave an example of putting specialist speech and language therapists in Rudyard Kipling School.

33.11 Cllr Mcleay asked about school overspends and if the council were moving money from the general fund to schools. Cllr Taylor said that it was not shifting millions and that the override was only on SEND.

#### Adult Social Care

33.12 Cllr Mitchie Alexander, cabinet member for Communities, Public Health, & Adult Social Care, spoke to the committee saying that adult social care was the largest budget in the council, with significant and sustained demand. She spoke about the demand pressure continuing to rise, of the adult social care improvement plan, and of the planned savings.

33.13 Cllr Sheard asked about the £880,000 saving to reablement and if this was a saving to reablement or saving made from the use of reablement and about the margin of error in the savings given the high demand. Steve Hook said that it was an ambitious target and that the current reablement service gives a good idea of future demand. He said that a small reablement offer can provide good savings and that they were investing in the service, giving the example of a new programme manager.

33.14 Sara Fulford asked about cuts to independence at home service. She said that 60% of adult social care users were older people and that she was sceptical that the cuts could be made. Cllr Alexander said that they were not cuts to services but savings made from providing a better service. Cllr Taylor said that there had not been cuts to adult social care as the budget had risen very sharply each year. He said that they were trying not to cut services but providing services at a better cost. Steve Hook said that the EIA had not identified negative impacts on groups.

33.15 Cllr Parrott asked a question on the key areas of friction within the reablement service and the monitoring of these. Steve Hook said that it relied on working closely with colleagues from the NHS.

33.16 Cllr Meadows asked if any money was made from the Brickfields site, and about increasing capacity at Ireland Lodge when some of it was closing down. Steve Hook said that the Brickfields site would be 28 flats supporting working age adults to live more independent lives. Steve said that the council was an outlier in placing a lot of young adults on registered residential care and Brickfields would allow them to resettle working age adults in expensive residential care. The £300,000 savings for Brickfields was only for part of the year as it won't

open until midway through the year, but should see a reduction in the cost of supporting those people and give them a better chance in life. Steve said that Ireland Lodge had 34/35 beds in it but for quite some time some of those had been decommissioned for a few years and so had been running on 24 beds. Part of the facility has gone over to children's services to support them and a number of the remaining beds have been switched to support rehabilitation. Although there aren't more beds in terms of volume, the way they are used will help people return home more quickly.

33.17 Fiona England asked about the CQC report and overdue assessments. Steve Hook said that they were coming back to next week's People Overview & Scrutiny Committee to discuss the CQC report and the Adult Social Care Improvement Plan and that the data on assessment was from November 2024. He said that the Pod 2 team from children's services carried out the services that she was referring to.

33.18 Cllr Shanks spoke about adult social care national funding and asked why Brickfields was sold on a 125 year lease to an external provider rather than being run in house by the council. Steve Hook said that Brickfields was not kept in house as a lease provides greater income from housing benefit. He also said that they were about to provide a more efficient and specialist service with a rigorous contract.

### **Libraries**

33.19 Cllr Alan Robins, cabinet member for Sport, Recreation, & Libraries, spoke about what had happened at People Overview & Scrutiny committee in November, what had been decided at Cabinet in December regarding libraries, and then said that there were no new savings within libraries.

33.20 Cllr Mcleay asked about the unanimous decision at the November People Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting to recommend that all of the planned library closures did not go ahead and why this was ignored. Cllr Robins said that it had not been ignored and was discussed at Cabinet in December.

### **Customer Service, Innovation**

33.21 Cllr Jacob Allen, cabinet member for Custer Services & Public Realm, spoke about the work in his area to, community & engagement, and resilience work. Savings included working smarter to utilise office space and contract conciliation to deliver substantial savings for facilities and buildings. He said that they were using new innovative operating models, streamline structures and rationalised core services.

33.22 Cllr Parrott asked about being a disability confident employer and ensuring that digital transformation did not leave behind the digitally excluded. Cllr Allen said that in person support would remain available.

33.23 Cllr Mcleay asked about the savings made to the information rights team and the risks posed by this. Cllr Allen said that the information rights team were holding vacant posts and that this is where the savings came from. He also said that he wanted the council to be able to deal with more complaints at stage one rather than have them get to stage two or to the ombudsman. Alan Steeden, Director of People & Innovation, spoke about improved monitoring and the use of technology and AI, within the law.

33.24 Cllr Sheard said that for many young people the only way they would contact the council is through digital services, and if they couldn't, they would give up and therefore making sure that digital services were available across all council services was very important. Cllr Allen said that technology changes should not just be a novelty but make services better for residents or reduce burdens on staff.

33.25 Cllr Shanks asked about customer services in libraries and if there was room at Hove Town Hall for the additional staff moving into it from Barts House. Cllr Taylor said that it was not good to have underused buildings as it is spending taxpayers money on things that it doesn't need to be spent on. We have to bring staff along with us. By freeing up Barts House we have options to get income for the council.. Cllr Allen said that the council had not changed the employment contracts of any librarians as library officers have always been expected to help residents to access services. Alan Steeden said that a lot of learning had been taken from the customer service move into libraries.

33.26 Cllr Thomson spoke about the investment in resilience. Cllr Allen said that the council had a statutory duty to organise and coordinate the emergency services in an emergency and gave several examples of when they had recently done so. He said that they were investing a further £150,000 in this area.

33.27 The Chair said that his portfolio covered a lot more than the committee had realised and that she would like him to come back to the committee to talk more about it.

### **Housing**

33.28 Cllr Gill Williams, cabinet member for Housing, spoke to the committee about the pressures within her portfolio, the work being done to alleviate this, and the savings being made.

33.29 Cllr Mcleay asked about the use of council housing as temporary accommodation. Cllr Williams said that it was only a temporary situation involving around 80 voids. She said that they are building more council properties and buying more and were approaching their 500<sup>th</sup> but back. Cllr Taylor said that they wanted to rotate more properties into council housing, that landlords were leaving the market and that the council wanted those properties. Harry Williams, Director of Housing People Services, said that they wanted to transform homelessness services and get to people earlier before they experience homelessness, therefore providing much cheaper intervention and much better outcomes for people. He said that they were looking at digital innovation like predictive analytics. He said that they wanted to provide better quality temporary accommodation as well as the wider housing stock.

33.30 Cllr Thomson said that she was pleased that the council was buying council property but wanted to know what could be done to challenge landlords of temporary accommodation who were charging a lot but failing on standards. Cllr Williams said that bringing temporary and emergency housing in house would save money and improve standards. Harry Williams said that the private sector was important but that a balance was needed.

33.31 Cllr Meadows asked about how the full cost recovery would be implemented. Harry Williams said that the amount that the council can get back from temporary housing was fixed by housing benefit and the local housing allowance but by owning or long-term leasing the

property they could increase the level of housing benefit that they could access from the property.

33.32 Cllr Sheard asked about the risk of not realising the proposed savings. Harry Williams said that it was a very difficult climate with legislation change and demand that would remain unpredictable.

33.33 Cllr Shanks asked whether tenants needed to be consulted about a change in the allocation policy. Cllr Williams said that the change was very short term and only for three months.

33.34 Cllr Cattell spoke about the planning application for the Slipper Bath being submitted and asked what the Greenwich Model is in terms of reducing the cost of existing temporary accommodation. Harry Williams said that this was where they could look to apply the standard local housing allowance on properties that the council either own or lease on a longer-term basis. He said that at the moment they had a much lower level of local housing allowance through housing benefit income per property, but that they found that they could apply that standard rate, which is more per night, for properties that they own on a longer-term basis. Cllr Taylor suggested a briefing note on this for all councillors as it was a complex issue.

33.35 The committee resolved to recommend:

1. That the public health budget be examined with all information about the grant and what it can be used for at an additional scrutiny meeting.
2. That a full account of consultations with unions and community groups be brought to this meeting or a future scrutiny.
3. That People O&S committee agrees to use its scheduled meetings to scrutinise, at the earliest opportunity, Adult Social Care improvement planning, with a specific focus on the successful implementation and delivery of supporting people to successfully live in their own homes and as part of the wider community.
4. People O&S committee recommends that the final budget papers include details of the council's engagement with the Treasury and with the Department for Housing, Communities & Local Government regarding the financial settlement for Brighton & Hove, with specific focus on funding for housing and homelessness.
5. That People Overview & Scrutiny committee note the General Fund Draft Budget and Resources Update – 2026-27 to 2029-30.

The meeting concluded at 4.45pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of