

Brighton & Hove City Council

Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Agenda Item 37

Subject: Report of the Visitor Economy Task & Finish Group

Date of meeting: 3rd November 2026

Report of: Chair of Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Contact Officer: Name: Natalie Sacks-Hammond
Email: Natalie.sacks-hammond@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

Key Decision: No

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

1.1 This report presents the findings from the Visitor Economy Task & Finish Group (TFG) for consideration and review by Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The report focuses on the nighttime and winter economies, exploring factors that influence visitor behaviour and seeking to identify practical measures, informed by stakeholder evidence and best practice from other local authorities, to strengthen the visitor offer and support sustainable economic growth.

1.2 The report has produced 27 recommendations based on evidence gathered during the TFG process. The report is included as Appendix 1. The minutes from the evidence-gathering meetings can be found at Appendix 2.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee notes the Task & Finish Group report on the Visitor Economy attached as Appendix 1

2.2 Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee refers the findings of the Task & Finish Group on the Visitor Economy to Cabinet for consideration.

3. Context and background information

3.1 Task & Finish Groups

3.1.1 Brighton & Hove City Council's Constitution permits Overview & Scrutiny Committees to establish informal task & finish groups (TFGs) to look in depth at specific issues.

- 3.1.2 In December 2025, Full Council approved a Notice of Motion that recognised Brighton & Hove's successful visitor economy but also the areas of growth, particularly in encouraging more visitors to stay overnight and visit during the winter. At the 22nd July 2026 Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee, members agreed to establish a Task & Finish Group to explore initiatives that would enhance the visitor economy through increasing nighttime and year-round visitor numbers. The group's aim was to develop a report with recommendations to support and strengthen the visitor economy.
- 3.1.3 TFGs typically hold a series of meetings with witnesses, potentially including council officers, executive members, other councils, national organisations, businesses, and community members. Using the evidence gathered, the TFG agrees a report with recommendations which is then submitted for consideration, initially by the parent O&S committee. If the parent O&S committee so decides, the TFG report is then referred to the appropriate decision-making body, such as Cabinet or Council for consideration.

3.2 The Visitor Economy Task & Finish Group

- 3.2.1 The Visitor Economy TFG consisted of: Cllr Evans (Chair), Cllr Cattell, Cllr Miller (attended one meeting), Cllr Thompson (attended 2 meetings), Cllr Lyons, Cllr Lademacher, Cllrs Earthey and Fishleigh (alternating attendance).
- 3.2.2 The Task & Finish Group held 7 evidence-gathering meetings with a total of 23 guests who spoke to the group about their experiences and work in the visitor economy. All evidence gained during these meetings was used to form the recommendations.
- 3.2.3 The TFG ran from 3rd August until 30th September 2026 with the aim of presenting the recommendations at Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 3rd November. This tight timeline meant that not all avenues were able to be explored for such a broad subject and some key witnesses were unable to attend due to it being over the summer. This report needs to be considered within this context.
- 3.2.4 Brighton & Hove has a strong visitor economy, attracting over 11 million visitors annually and generating almost £886 million in spending. While the city benefits from a diverse year-round offer and experiences less seasonality than many seaside destinations, most visitors are day-trippers and overnight stays have declined. Recognising the greater economic value of overnight visitors, the Task & Finish Group examined opportunities to increase year-round visitation, support the nighttime economy, and encourage longer stays by building on the city's existing strengths and expanding its visitor offer.
- 3.2.5 **Night-time Economy:** Brighton & Hove's nighttime economy faces challenges including safety concerns, limited late-night transport, changing consumer habits, and a perception as a "party town", which can deter higher-spending overnight visitors. Rising costs and declining demand are also affecting traditional nightlife businesses. The TFG looked into new ways

to promote the city with a focus on nighttime, how to make nighttime activities more attractive to encourage people to stay overnight, the availability of late-night transport, the perception of the city at night, initiatives other councils have had success with, what challenges the industry are facing and what support might be needed.

3.2.6 Winter Economy: Brighton & Hove faces a number of challenges in attracting visitors in the off-season months, due to poor weather, a limited range of winter attractions, and funding pressures. Hospitality businesses are contending with rising operating costs, recruitment issues, and lower demand, which limits their ability to operate in the winter months. This highlights the need to strengthen the city's year-round offer and encourage more visits during the off-peak period. The TFG explored the Christmas offer for the city, how to extend popular summer events all year-round, new ways to promote the city in the winter, and new events and attractions to bring more people into the city off season.

3.2.7 The TFG engaged with a wide range of witnesses throughout the process, including council officers working in events, economic development, conferencing and marketing, including VisitBrighton; a range of business owners, members of groups such as the Tourism Alliance, the BID, the bus company; representatives from restaurants and hotels, event organisers, and other local authorities. The group also heard from the Cabinet Member, Cllr David McGregor, who talked about his vision for the city, and a representative from the Night-time Industries Association who gave an insight into the national picture.

3.3 Recommendations from the report

3.3.1 The TFG made 27 recommendations. These are:

1. Key finding: Lack of coordination

- Reassess the Visit Brighton model to reduce barriers to the effective promotion of hospitality venues, events and activities across the city.

Visit Brighton to be supported to:

- Host a central platform or guide that is easily accessible to the public so all information on activities in the city is in one place.
- Coordinate destination packages involving all hospitality businesses and attractions including transport providers.
- Encourage collaborations across travel providers, attractions and hospitality venues through the BID, LVEP, Tourism Alliance, and Seafront Development Board including cross-ticketing and cross-promotion.

2. Key finding: Marketing Brighton's unique identity

- To promote Brighton & Hove as a creative destination, focussing on what the city is known for including live music, LGBTQ+ scene, independent shops, seafront arches, art and culture.

- To explore partnering with Gatwick Airport to promote Brighton & Hove
- To explore understanding and the use of AI more efficiently and invest in visitor information, destination marketing and digital discovery, including AI-ready content.
- To promote Brighton & Hove as a food destination through restaurant offers and experiences, food trails, locally produced food festivals and other initiatives such as the introduction of a food hall.
- To look into bringing back the Ambassador programme

3. Key finding: Strategy and vision for events

- Develop a distinctive year-round visitor economy strategy including the nighttime economy.
- To create a flagship winter attraction
- Produce a more linked up year-round council-owned events programme with a focus on using local producers, artists and businesses including a collaborative art festival like White Night to potentially take place at the beginning of Spring.
- To look into expanding popular summer events such as a Winter Fringe or Winter Pride event
- To explore opportunities to tap into the emerging sauna economy, such as collaborating with the UK Sauna Association to have their Sauna festival become resident in Brighton.
- Plan collaborative events during quieter months, capitalising on the peak seasons for the arts and conference sectors to attract more visitors and encourage overnight stays.
- Support the visitor economy sector to prepare for Martyn's Law through training, information sharing and collaboration between businesses, event organisers, Sussex Police and the council.

4. Approach the SBSA

- BHCC agrees to use its influence in the SBSA to:
 - Consider increased funding for the visitor economy including attracting the international market as part of its Prosperity Strategy and the Local Growth Plan.
 - Support collaborative events and activities that expand across the wider Sussex region, such as creating multi-day itineraries that include local attractions such as wine tours.
 - Invest in attendance at international trade shows and strengthen collaboration between the conference team and local hotels to market the city and region to international business and leisure visitors.
 - To invest in better transport links at night across the whole Sussex region
 - To ensure that if the Visitor Levy is introduced, it will be re-invested into the visitor economy to support hospitality and events in consultation with the sector on where the funding is most needed.
 - To create stronger links with schools, colleges and universities to build the future workforce in hospitality in collaboration with the Local Skills Improvement Plan “Future Skills Sussex”.

5. Key Finding: Lack of data

- To set up a central platform to collect data from multiple sources to fully understand the needs and demands of the visitor economy and identify the target audiences.
- Develop a visitor economy performance dashboard to monitor progress against agreed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), enabling quarterly reviews to assess performance, identify emerging issues and inform future initiatives.
- To collect relevant data that would justify the introduction of a 24 hour economy

6. Key finding: Transport

- To explore options of using underused car parks in the city to encourage overnight stays for visitors
- To review the night bus offer, particularly after midnight, specifically the frequency, cost, and routes, to ensure an efficient service for those returning home after work or a night out.
- To ask the Mayor to lobby for 24 hour train service between Brighton and London to improve access to Brighton for those living near the mainline.

7. Key finding: Supporting the hospitality sector

- Encourage central government to continue to reduce costs for nighttime venues including reclassifying nightclubs as live music venues
- To maintain the look and feel of the city centre, ensuring it is clean and well-lit so it feels safe and welcoming to residents and visitors especially at night.
- Explore options for creating a Procurement group for businesses in the visitor economy sector to buy energy as a collective to reduce costs
- To consider lighting at night and what could be introduced, specifically in darker areas, to make the area attractive and safer, such as installing light corridors between parts of the city.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 Having noted this report, the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee could choose not to refer the findings of the TFG report to Cabinet.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 The TFG spoke to a wide range of local business owners as part of the evidence-gathering process.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from noting this report, however, implementation of a number of the recommendations could give rise to significant future revenue and capital costs, including marketing, events, staffing, transport, public realm and infrastructure investment. Any proposals progressing from these recommendations will require fully costed business cases identifying funding sources, ongoing budget implications and expected economic benefits before approval

Name of finance officer consulted: Ishemupenyu Chagonda Date consulted (21/10/2026):

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The report of this informally constituted Task & Finish Group is for noting only by Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee, with the recommendation that it is Cabinet for its consideration. No direct legal implications have been identified at this stage.

Name of lawyer consulted: Victoria Simpson Date consulted 20.10.26

8. Risk implications

- 8.1 There is a risk that some recommendations would require a certain amount of time from a relevant council officer, and it is acknowledged that there is low staff capacity in some areas. This may affect the implementation of some recommendations.

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 The recommendations seek to support an inclusive and accessible visitor economy that benefits residents, businesses and visitors from diverse backgrounds. Improvements to transport, public spaces, visitor information and cultural programming have the potential to enhance accessibility and participation for a range of groups, including disabled people, older people and LGBTQ+ communities. Equality considerations will be incorporated into the implementation of individual actions to ensure any potential impacts on protected groups are identified and addressed.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 The recommendations support the sustainable development of the visitor economy by encouraging greater use of public transport and promoting year-round tourism, helping to reduce pressure on infrastructure and make more efficient use of existing facilities.

11. Health and Wellbeing Implications:

- 11.1 The recommendations have the potential to support health and wellbeing by encouraging greater participation in cultural, leisure and outdoor activities, strengthening community vibrancy, and improving access to the city's attractions through enhanced transport connectivity.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 The committee is asked to refer the findings of the Visitor Economy Task & Finish Group report to Cabinet for consideration. The TFG recommendations are based on a robust process of hearing and evaluating evidence from a number of witnesses.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendices

1. Report of the Visitor Economy Task & Finish Group
2. Minutes from the Task & Finish Groups

