

Final report of the Visitor Economy Task & Finish Group

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Chair's Foreword

The starting point of this task-and-finish group was the awareness that our beloved city-by-the-sea already has a thriving visitor economy, that in this area – as in many others – we punch above our weight, while many other formerly successful coastal towns and cities struggle. Brighton & Hove is consistently high up in the UK tourism rankings, and the enormous numbers of visitors each year bring both economic and social benefits to all of us who live and work here.

However, it isn't lost on anyone that a vast number of our millions of visitors each year are summer day-trippers, here to spend a day on the beach, while possibly visiting the Pavilion, the pier, the i360 and a café or bar or two.

Whilst they are of course bringing a very welcome boost to the economy, particularly the businesses on or near the seafront, there are also issues with this sometimes overwhelming sunny-day influx, for example the struggle to deal with the sheer volume of litter left behind.

We aren't alone in this – many other visitor destinations have the same problem: how to provide a visitor offer that is tempting all year round, and that supports the nighttime

economy by encouraging a higher percentage of our visitors to stay over for a night, a weekend, or even a full week.

Not that the weather in the UK is fully reliable even in the summer months, but we set out to explore what we can offer once the heat can't be expected at all – are we a perfect sporting destination? How can we support and expand our Arts offer outside of May festival time? Are our conference facilities promoted to their fullest extent? Do people know how many fantastic independent restaurants, bars and shops we have across the city? Could we have a winter festival that incorporates entertainment, ice skating, a market, even a winter Pride? What is our offer in November, or could we greet the arrival of the earliest spring flowers and coming lighter evenings with a major event in chilly February? Can the new Sussex and Brighton Strategic Authority provide opportunities to promote tourism across the region so that the whole county benefits?

We talked to business and council experts both locally and in other towns and cities around the country, and have come up with a series of recommendations that we believe might help us to grow our year-round and overnight numbers, and it only remains for me to thank my fellow TFG members and our numerous guests and witnesses for their fantastic, sometimes eye-opening input, as well as our brilliant scrutiny officers, especially Natalie Sacks-Hammond, without whom we'd never have got to this report!

Executive Summary

The Visitor Economy Task & Finish Group was established to examine how Brighton & Hove can increase overnight visitor stays and strengthen its position as a year-round destination, with a particular focus on the nighttime and winter economies. The Group gathered evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, including businesses, event organisers, tourism representatives, local authorities, cultural organisations and council officers, to identify opportunities to enhance the city's visitor offer and support sustainable economic growth.

Brighton & Hove already benefits from a strong visitor economy, attracting more than 11 million visitors annually and generating significant economic impact. The city has many strengths, including its coastal location, cultural assets, independent businesses, events programme, LGBTQ+ heritage, creative industries and proximity to the South Downs. However, while visitor numbers remain high, the evidence highlighted a continuing reliance on day visitors and a decline in overnight stays. Given that overnight visitors contribute significantly more to the local economy, increasing the length of visitor stays was identified as the greatest opportunity for future growth.

A recurring theme throughout the review was the need for stronger coordination across the visitor economy. Evidence suggested that businesses, attractions and event organisers often operate independently, creating a fragmented visitor offer. The Group concluded that a more collaborative approach is needed, centred around stronger destination management and improved promotion of the city's assets. VisitBrighton was identified as having a potentially important role in coordinating activity, improving visitor information and encouraging collaboration across the sector.

The Group also found that Brighton & Hove could do more to promote its unique identity. Witnesses highlighted the city's strengths as a creative, cultural and inclusive destination, but felt these characteristics were not being consistently reflected in current marketing activity. Greater emphasis on arts, culture, food, live music, independent businesses, wellness, LGBTQ+ heritage and the city's wider natural environment could help attract higher-spending visitors and encourage repeat visits. Opportunities to develop relationships with Gatwick Airport and target key international markets were also identified.

The evidence demonstrated the importance of developing a stronger year-round events programme. While the city has a successful summer events offer, stakeholders highlighted a lack of major attractions during the quieter winter months. The Group heard support for the creation of a flagship winter attraction, the expansion of established events into off-season periods, and the development of new cultural and community-led events that showcase Brighton & Hove's distinctive character. Particular opportunities were identified in aligning activity with sectors that already perform strongly during spring and autumn, including conferences, arts and cultural festivals.

The newly established Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority presents a significant opportunity to raise the profile of the visitor economy regionally and secure additional investment. Witnesses emphasised the importance of ensuring that tourism and hospitality are reflected within emerging regional economic strategies and investment plans. The Group also identified opportunities for greater collaboration across Sussex, including joint marketing, transport improvements, skills development, international promotion and the creation of multi-day visitor itineraries.

The need for better data and intelligence emerged as another key finding. Stakeholders consistently highlighted the importance of understanding visitor behaviour, measuring performance and targeting investment effectively. The Group therefore recommends the development of stronger data collection mechanisms and a visitor economy performance dashboard to support evidence-based decision-making and monitor progress against agreed objectives.

Transport connectivity was identified as both a strength and a challenge. While Brighton & Hove benefits from strong bus services and good links to London, concerns were raised regarding late-night transport options, rail reliability and parking costs. Improved night-time connectivity was seen as particularly important for supporting both visitors and workers, while stronger regional transport integration could help support a more diverse and accessible visitor offer.

The Group also recognised the significant pressures facing hospitality, cultural and nighttime economy businesses. Rising operating costs, workforce challenges and changing consumer behaviours continue to affect the sector. As a result, future ambitions for expanding the nighttime and winter economies must be accompanied by appropriate support measures and realistic funding arrangements. In many cases, successful delivery will require partnership working and investment from regional bodies, external organisations and industry stakeholders as well as the Council.

The recommendations contained within this report seek to support the sustainable growth of Brighton & Hove's visitor economy, increase overnight stays, strengthen year-round visitation and improve the overall visitor experience. Collectively, they aim to ensure that the city remains a distinctive, vibrant and competitive destination, while delivering economic benefits for businesses, residents and visitors alike.

Recommendations

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.

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of the Visitor Economy Task & Finish Group was to review Brighton & Hove's current visitor offer, with a particular focus on the nighttime and winter economies. It examined the barriers that may deter visitors from coming to, or staying in, the city and identified opportunities for improvement. The group developed and explored initiatives aimed at converting high levels of day visitors into overnight stays, while also strengthening the city's appeal as a year-round destination. The group developed a report containing recommendations for consideration of the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee and, subject to the committee's endorsement, the report recommendations will be referred to Cabinet and/or partners for consideration.

Members of the group: 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). Ian Baird, Outdoors Event Development Manager, Natasha Bridge, Senior Local Growth and Visitor Economy Officer, and Neha Holmes, Local Growth and Visitor Economy Officer, were invited as the relevant officers to provide any additional information and to stay updated on the group's progress.

The Task & Finish Group Process: 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 has been used to form the recommendations.

The Task & Finish Group 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.

Focus

In December 2025, Full Council approved a Notice of Motion¹ 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. This 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 [63 Winter Economy LG Amendment.pdf](#)

The Issue

Brighton & Hove attracts over 11 million visitors each year, generating almost £886 million in visitor spending². The city benefits from excellent transport links, its proximity to London and Gatwick Airport, and a diverse visitor offer including the beach, culture, shopping in the Lanes, major events, the South Downs, and attractions such as the Royal Pavilion and Palace Pier. The city continues to attract visitors throughout the year due to its strong shopping, dining and nightlife offer, with seasonal fluctuations being less pronounced than in many other seaside destinations. However, the majority of visitors are day-trippers, while overnight visitor numbers have declined. This presents a challenge because overnight visitors contribute significantly more to the local economy through spending on accommodation, food and drink, transport and activities. While Brighton & Hove does have much more of a year-round visitor economy than many cities, there is still a drop-off in visitor numbers in the colder months. There is therefore an opportunity to strengthen Brighton & Hove's year-round visitor economy by encouraging longer stays and developing attractions and experiences that draw visitors throughout the year.

The Brighton & Hove Visitor Economy Strategy 2018-2023 states that "Brighton & Hove should focus on attracting higher-spend, year-round overnight visitors, both business and leisure, who will visit on weekdays as well as at weekends."³ The Task & Finish Group explored how the city can build on its existing strengths, support a vibrant nighttime economy, and broaden its year-round visitor offer to increase overnight stays and visitor spending.

Nighttime economy

Brighton & Hove's nighttime economy faces a number of challenges that impact its ability to attract higher-spending overnight visitors. While the city is renowned for its vibrant culture, independent shops, diverse entertainment offer and LGBTQ+ scene, concerns around safety, including excessive alcohol consumption, anti-social behaviour, and limited late-night transport, can deter people from staying overnight, particularly during the winter months. The city's reputation as a "party town" may also discourage more high-spending visitors seeking a broader city-break experience. At the same time, alcohol-led businesses face rising operating costs, declining attendance at pubs and nightclubs, and changing drinking habits, particularly among younger people and students. There is also a limited range of activities available between the daytime and evening economies, creating a reliance on pubs during this period. Together, these challenges highlight the need to diversify the nighttime offer and develop a wider range of evening experiences that encourage visitors to stay longer. Visitors are more likely to stay overnight when there is engaging evening activity, something worthwhile to experience in the morning, and when they feel that their stay is both convenient and good value.

Winter economy

Brighton & Hove experiences challenges to attracting visitors all year-round, such as poor weather, including rain and strong winds, that can reduce the appeal of the city's coastal offer and limit the viability of outdoor events and attractions. While Brighton & Hove has a strong programme of major summer events that drive visitor numbers, several winter attractions, including Christmas markets and the Burning of the Clocks, have had limited success or not taken place due to funding challenges, which results in a more limited winter offer. The planned relocation of the Royal Pavilion ice rink, one of the city's most established winter attractions, may present a further challenge for 2026. At the same time, hospitality businesses face lower visitor demand alongside rising operating costs, including energy and

² [Microsoft Word - Brighton & Hove Visitor Economy Strategy.docx](#)

³ [Microsoft Word - Brighton & Hove Visitor Economy Strategy.docx](#)

food prices, which can affect staffing levels and capacity. Together, these challenges highlight the need to strengthen the city's winter offer, improve the visitor experience, and encourage more people to visit outside the traditional summer season.

To develop its recommendations, the group heard evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, including council officers responsible for events, economic development, destination marketing and tourism, alongside local businesses, event organisers and representatives from other local authorities and national organisations. The evidence gathered informed the key findings and recommendations set out in this report, which aim to strengthen Brighton & Hove's year-round visitor economy and increase overnight visitor stays.

Key findings:

Lack of coordination

Brighton & Hove is an attractive city for visitors with many unique tourist attractions, independent retail offer and vibrant and diverse hospitality sector. The city attracts high numbers of visitors, particularly over the summer, but suffers from a lack of coordination among visitor businesses with a fragmented and siloed approach to promotion across the city. Witnesses reported to the Task & Finish Group that businesses, venues and event organisers marketed independently, often competing rather than collaborating, which makes it difficult to bring the attractions of the city together as a coherent destination package. There is a lack of a single body that has oversight of everything that is going on in the city with the ability to showcase it effectively to potential visitors.

The group discussed the role of VisitBrighton, which is a known brand, and is best placed to take on this central role as it is already set up as a platform for marketing and partnership working. However, its current membership model can act as a barrier where promotion is restricted to paying partners and it cannot promote other attractions, making city-wide destination packages difficult. In the same way, the Business Improvement District (BID) will prioritise its members over others. This leaves a disjointed approach to promotion of the city which makes it complicated for visitors to find the information they need and for businesses to target them. The membership model for VisitBrighton is problematic as it depends on funding from its members but it was reported to the Task & Finish Group that many hotels are choosing not to be part of it as it is not meeting their needs and is too expensive. The model needs to be reassessed to identify alternative options that will raise funds for its work but also be more inclusive.

RECOMMENDATION:

VisitBrighton model to be reassessed to reduce barriers to the effective promotion of hospitality venues, events and activities across the city.

The group heard that there is no single source of information on what is going on in the city, so visitors simply do not know what is on offer. Participants commented on the need for a Brighton version of "Time Out" magazine bringing together information on activities across the city in one place. With over 1000 community and cultural events taking place, it is difficult for visitors to navigate. VisitBrighton is the perfect platform to do this via their website, social media and guides. Amena Matin⁴ from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) reported that they were developing a "Culture Clash diary" as the central place for

⁴ Amena Matin, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council, TFG Meeting 24/09/26

events to be listed and easily accessed by residents and visitors. This is something VisitBrighton could explore. It would also allow VisitBrighton to create destination packages and make suggested itineraries involving all hospitality businesses, attractions and transport providers, bringing the city's wide range of visitor assets together in one offer.

VisitBrighton could also be utilised to encourage better collaboration between travel providers, attractions and hospitality venues using existing bodies such as the BID, LVEP, Tourism Alliance and the Seafront Development Board, including cross-ticketing and cross-promotion schemes. Suggestions included city-wide visitor tickets, bundled accommodation and attraction offers and sharing each other's posts on social media. Once a visitor has booked their accommodation, there could be a message displayed saying "Did you know that On the Beach festival is taking place during your visit?" Or, once a theatre ticket is booked they could be encouraged to stay at a particular hotel. These initiatives could help increase the number of overnight stays and visitor spend. Participants stressed that benefits to one part of the visitor economy ultimately benefit the wider destination. Amena Matin⁵ said their Destination Management Board take on promotion of the city which is successful as industry-led partnerships collectively fund and direct destination marketing activity. The evidence indicated that stronger collaboration and cross-promotion would help maximise the city's visitor offer, improve awareness of events and attractions, and support increased year-round and overnight visits.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

VisitBrighton 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.**

Marketing Brighton's unique identity

Brighton & Hove has a unique identity that witnesses felt was not being utilised to its full potential in order to bring visitors into the city. The silo approach from businesses and restricted promotion from central platforms like VisitBrighton doesn't allow visitors to get a full picture of what Brighton is about and can offer. Witnesses identified several strengths that could be promoted more effectively, including the city's LGBTQ+ venues, heritage assets, live music scene, wellness offer, proximity to the South Downs and wider Sussex countryside, independent businesses, food and drink scene, and thriving arts and cultural sector. Whereas some visitors might associate Brighton as a beach destination full of stag and hen dos, locals see it more as a creative destination, which needs to be recognised. The owners of the Adelaide Salon commented that there are a lot of famous artists who live locally who are not getting the exposure they need⁶. The city would benefit from a big art gallery and there are plans to develop this with Black Rock as a potential location.

Other councils reinforced the importance of promoting what makes a place unique. For example, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole market the distinct strengths of each town;

⁵ Amena Matin, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council, TFG Meeting 24/09/26

⁶ Pascal Dowers and Paulina Anzorge, Adelaide Salon, TFG Meeting 02/09/26

"Bournemouth being the place to go for the beach, entertainment and nightlife, Poole is about the harbour, water sports and marine heritage and Christchurch is a typical market town with heritage, nature and the harbour and is the more relaxing destination"⁷, while Bath and North East Somerset successfully promote the Roman Baths as a defining attraction. Cllr David McGregor commented that Brighton isn't doing enough to make sure it has the most cohesive and accepting LGBTQ+ scene in the country and seem to have missed out on this to places like Manchester when this is a key part of the city's history⁸.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **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.**

Several witnesses commented on the lack of promotion for the city at Gatwick airport and that visitors are pointed in the direction of London. It was suggested that tourists don't realise how close Brighton is to London and that they could use it as a base for their UK visit. Amena Matin said that Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council work closely with their nearest airport to market the region, which is effective⁹. They also create packages that they think are attractive to the European market such as walking and heritage trails. Key international markets were identified as the US, Scandinavia and China and it would be beneficial to work with Gatwick airport to target these audiences.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **To explore partnering with Gatwick Airport to promote Brighton & Hove**

Gavin Stewart from the BID told the group that artificial intelligence is changing the way people look for information online and is being used in new ways that visitor economy businesses need to be aware of and adapt to meet¹⁰. This includes ai-powered search tools based on data scraping and algorithms rather than key words, and using itinerary generators and automatic booking services. Businesses need to ensure that their marketing content can be accessed and interpreted by ai platforms to ensure they remain visible and don't get left behind. VisitBrighton's website is already optimised to improve ai discovery and gets a lot of hits as a result.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **To explore understanding and the use of AI more efficiently and invest in visitor information, destination marketing and digital discovery, including AI-ready content.**

Brighton & Hove is seen as a "foodie" place with a thriving food sector and a diverse range of restaurants that could be further developed through coordinated promotion of restaurants, independent food businesses and local produce. Witnesses talked about winter food trails and other culinary experiences to encourage off-peak visits. Ivanka Majic from "Restaurants Brighton" suggested capitalising on the city's status as the UNESCO Living Coast and introducing a weekend based around sustainable seafood with restaurants across the city

⁷ Amena Matin, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, TFG meeting 24/09/26

⁸ Robert Campbell, Bath & North Somerset Council, TFG Meeting 15/09/26

⁹ Amena Matin, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council, 24/09/26

¹⁰ Gavin Stewart, BID, TFG Meeting 02/09/26

offering locally sourced “catch of the day”¹¹. This would raise the profile of the local food scene and help support local businesses through encouraging more overnight stays.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **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.**

Business tourism was identified as a growing market which draws visitors to the city to stay overnight all year round and typically during the week. It is a good audience to target to spend in the local visitor economy. The Conference Team used to run an Ambassador Programme that worked with influential local people, including representatives from universities, hospitals and other institutions to promote the city as a conference destination. Academics from universities were particularly valuable due to their international networks. Natalie Wyatt from the Liverpool City Region Destination Partnership commented that “Universities are a key partner as they have students from all around the world”¹² and are willing to bring visitors to the city unpaid because it can help develop their professional careers. In Brighton, the scheme was subjected to budget cuts and no longer exists but could be something to consider bringing back in the future.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **To look into bringing back the Ambassador programme**

Strategy and vision for events

Brighton & Hove hosts a large number of events with around 500,000 people participating or getting involved.¹³ The majority of events take place during the summer season, although many are designed to encourage overnight stays. For example, the early start time of the marathon and multi-day events such as Pride often lead visitors to stay in the city for one or more nights. However, there is a need to extend these successes into the winter months. Witnesses felt that there wasn't a strong strategic vision to encourage visitors all year-round. Cllr David McGregor echoed this and talked about aspirations for a 24-hour city and the need to develop a year-round visitor economy strategy which includes the nighttime economy¹⁴. The city is attracting more visitors than ever, but spending is down and this is why the sector is struggling. Carly Heath, who works in Bristol, talked about how they use events to extend the summer season such as Balloon Fest, St Paul's Carnival, and the Harbour Festival¹⁵. Donna Close talked about working with Glasgow where she brought separate seasonal activities such as lighting projects and museum programmes under one umbrella offer which demonstrated how stronger strategic coordination can enhance existing assets and create a clearer narrative for both residents and visitors¹⁶.

RECOMMENDATION:

¹¹ Ivanka Majic, “Restaurants Brighton”, TFG Meeting 02/09/26

¹² Natalie Wyatt, Liverpool City Region Destination Partnership, 25/09/26

¹³ Ian Baird, Outdoors Events Development Manager, TFG Meeting 18/08/26

¹⁴ Cllr David McGregor, TFG Meeting 18/08/26

¹⁵ Carly Heath, Nightlife Culture, TFG Meeting 25/09/26

¹⁶ Donna Close, Director of White Night, 24/09/26

- **Develop a distinctive year-round visitor economy strategy including the nighttime economy.**

A recurring theme was the lack of a main winter event for the city that would draw visitors in. Particularly with the absence of the ice rink this year, hoteliers and other business representatives felt there was no "hook" to increase overnight visitor numbers. Ian Baird, Outdoors Events Development Manager, explained that Christmas markets did not work in Brighton due to its year-round offering of independent shopping in the Lanes/North Laine and that it needed an experiential attraction rather than one based on retail. Ian shared a proposal for a "Winter Wonderland" experience featuring a funfair, food hall, curling experience, festive forest, alpine lodge and Christmas tree maze¹⁷. The proposal is large enough to become a destination piece, encouraging visits from outside the city and generating opportunities for overnight stays. A flagship attraction could provide a platform for evening entertainment, corporate events and hospitality offerings, increasing visitor spend and supporting the night-time economy. The group commented that it would benefit from asking the operator to make it more "Brighton" but were impressed with the proposal and were in support of it.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **To create a flagship winter attraction**

Ian Baird explained that currently, the Events Team put calls out for event organisers to put events on in Brighton & Hove but that this creates a disjointed, unrelated programme of events that doesn't always make sense¹⁸. They would benefit from developing a more coordinated and strategic programme of events throughout the year that showcased the culture and assets that make Brighton & Hove unique and tell the story of the city. Ideas included more community-focussed events, seasonal celebrations such as harvest time and ensuring that events take place over multiple days where possible. Ian spoke of reviving "Paddle Round the Pier"¹⁹ and extending it over a weekend with the heats are held on the Saturday and the final on the Sunday, which would encourage overnight stays. Amena Matin said that Poole held international watersports events and competitions which would run over multiple days and increased the number of overnight stays²⁰. One of Brighton's key strengths is its abundance of creative organisations, and events should move away from external organisers to using local producers, artists and businesses.

The success of White Night was repeatedly referred to as evidence of the city's ability to deliver innovative cultural events. Between 2008 and 2011, White Night grew into a major cultural event attracting audiences of around 45,000 people across more than 70 events. It was originally created as a cultural ritual held on the night the clocks went backwards during a time of high antisocial behaviour in the city. White Night encouraged people to explore the city at night, supported local artists and challenged visitors to "do something different in the middle of the night"²¹. Donna Close, who was the Director of White Night, suggested that a modern version could potentially be held in early spring to tap into the hope that winter is coming to an end. Residents have positive memories of White Night and it could have the support and buy-in to once again showcase Brighton's creativity while supporting the night-

¹⁷ Ian Baird, Outdoors Events Development Manager, TFG Meeting 18/08/26

¹⁸ Ian Baird, Outdoors Events Development Manager, TFG Meeting 18/08/26

¹⁹ Ian Baird, Outdoors Events Development Manager, TFG Meeting 18/08/26

²⁰ Amena Matin, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council, TFG Meeting 24/09/26

²¹ Donna Close, Director of White Night, TFG Meeting 24/09/26

time economy during quieter months. This could potentially become a key off-peak event in the year-round events programme.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **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.**

Brighton & Hove needs to build on what it's most well-known for and its popular summertime events successfully bring visitors into the city. It would be beneficial to see if any of these events could be expanded into the wintertime with a view to building the same kind of levels of visitors. The group discussed developing "Winter Pride" or a "Winter Fringe" that would build on the reputation and audience loyalty of the summer versions. These kinds of well-known, strong brands already have established audiences and marketing reach that could be utilised to develop new off-peak attractions.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **To look into expanding popular summer events such as a Winter Fringe or Winter Pride.**

Brighton is increasingly gaining a reputation as a place to go for health and wellness, due to its proximity to the South Downs for walking and nature experiences, sea-swimming and range of wellbeing organisations. Natalie Orringe, Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement, identified the emerging sauna economy as being an opportunity for the city and to consider collaborative events such as hosting a sauna festival on the seafront²². In 2026, the UK Sauna Association held a sauna festival and convention in Brighton, which could be built on to become resident to the city. Related events could be developed to be year-round and further diversify the tourist offer.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **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**

The group learned that there are sectors that thrive during the off-peak months that attract visitors to the city. Lucy Davies, CEO of the Brighton Dome and Festival informed the group that the busy times in the artistic calendar are February, March, October and November²³, and this was echoed by the owners of the Adelaide Salon. Julia Weeks said she promotes "October Unpacked" in the Autumn, which is a celebration of Brighton's food, drink, arts and culture, bringing visitors into the area and extending the summer months²⁴. The Conference Team informed the group that their busiest time of year is during the spring and autumn and they are fairly quiet over the summer²⁵. There is an opportunity to align off-peak events at

²² Natalie Orringe, Head of Strategic Communications and Engagement, TFG Meeting 18/08/26

²³ Lucy Davies, CEO of the Brighton Dome and Festival, TFG Meeting 16/09/26

²⁴ Julia Weeks, Tourism Alliance, TFG Meeting 02/09/26

²⁵ Darren Johnson & Emma Thurlow, Conference Team, TFG Meeting 16/09/26

these times and target these particular audiences. Conference delegates come to the city for business and can be targeted to extend their stay or return at a later date.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **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.**

The group heard about the implications of Martyn's Law, which requires publicly accessible venues and events to assess and improve their preparedness for potential terrorist attacks, helping to protect staff, visitors and the public. It is expected to come into force in 2027. Lucy Davies from the Brighton Dome and Festival said that there will be tensions between meeting the obligations of Martyn's Law and keeping events inclusive and welcoming²⁶. Measures such as bag checks, vehicle bollards, enhanced CCTV, security personnel and evacuation plans could affect the chosen location of an event and increase the cost. Michael Kill from the NTIA said that nationally, they will need 100,000 more security operatives to fulfil Martyn's Law and with the sector also moving to PAYE, this will significantly increase costs²⁷. Work is already underway at the council to prepare for Martyn's Law, but it will need to be a collaborative approach with the relevant organisations in the sector to adapt to the new requirements and maintain a vibrant and accessible events programme.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **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.**

Approach the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority (SBSA)

The Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority (SBSA) provides an opportunity to strengthen collaboration across Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex on economic growth, transport, skills and investment. The Authority's emerging Prosperity Strategy and Local Growth Plan presents an opportunity to raise the profile of the visitor economy at a regional level, support investment in tourism infrastructure and marketing, and develop a more joined-up approach to attracting visitors to Sussex as a destination. Witnesses working in other regions in the UK commented that their Strategic Authorities have recognised the importance of the visitor economy and provided additional funding. There are two Councillors from Brighton & Hove City Council on the SBSA who represent the interests and needs of the city, which could be used to enhance the visitor economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **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.**

²⁶ Lucy Davies, CEO of the Brighton Dome and Festival, TFG Meeting 16/09/26

²⁷ Michael Kill, NTIA, TFG Meeting 16/09/26

The visitor economy falls within the scope of the SBSA's emerging Prosperity Strategy and Local Growth Plan, providing an opportunity to secure greater investment for the sector. Robert Campbell from Bath and Northeast Somerset Council (BNS) said they were part of the West of England Combined Authority which recognises the visitor economy in its 10-year growth strategy and links up better with the wider region²⁸. Gavin Stewart from the BID emphasised the importance of targeting key international markets, including China, Scandinavia and the United States, and highlighted Gatwick Airport as an important gateway for attracting overseas visitors to Brighton & Hove²⁹. Lucy Davies told the group she is a member of "Culture Sussex", which brings together cultural leaders across East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove³⁰. It's a very dynamic group producing lots of new ideas linking in with the new Prosperity Strategy being put together by the SBSA, which could play an important role in attracting more visitors to the region.

- **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.**

Ian Baird talked about promoting Brighton & Hove as a base from which visitors can explore the wider Sussex region. This could include developing multi-day itineraries that encourage visitors to take day trips to attractions such as vineyards, cultural destinations and countryside locations before returning to Brighton & Hove to dine and stay overnight³¹. A more regional approach would help extend visitor stays and spread the economic benefits of tourism across Sussex while strengthening Brighton & Hove's position as the gateway to the region.

- **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.**

Witnesses from the conference sector told the group that conference delegates represent a valuable source of future leisure visitors. Providing delegates with a positive experience of the city can encourage them to return for longer stays in the future, often bringing family and friends. Some conferences offer a leisure day, and the organisers arrange activities such as a health walk or food tours. The Conference Team have already introduced a delegate discount card with local bars and restaurants and will tie in with anything already taking place in the city such as the Brighton Festival, On the Beach Festival, cultural activities and live music. Darren Johnson said they used to go to International Trade Shows, such as in Barcelona and Frankfurt, to showcase the city as a business destination but this has stopped due to budget cuts³². Amena Matin from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, said that they attend international Trade Shows with the hoteliers as a key way to attract visitors from abroad³³. International visitors have a much larger spend per head than domestic visitors and are a key driver for a greater economic impact. The SBSA could invest in the attendance of the international Trade Shows for the wider benefit of the Sussex region.

- **To invest in better transport links at night across the whole Sussex region**

A number of witnesses highlighted the importance of improved regional connectivity, particularly at night, to support the visitor economy and enable visitors and workers to travel

²⁸ Robert Campbell, Bath and Northeast Somerset Council, TFG Meeting 15/09/26

²⁹ Gavin Stewart, BID, TFG Meeting 02/09/26

³⁰ Lucy Davies, CEO of the Brighton Dome and Festival, TFG Meeting 16/09/26

³¹ Ian Baird, Outdoors Events Development Manager, TFG Meeting 18/08/26

³² Darren Johnson, Conference Team, TFG Meeting 16/09/26

³³ Amena Matin from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, 24/09/26

more easily across Sussex. Better integration between transport services, including the potential for a combined rail and bus ticket, could improve access to attractions across the region and support a broader visitor offer. Stronger regional transport links could also encourage overnight stays by making it easier for visitors to access destinations and events throughout Sussex. The SBSA would be well placed to coordinate and support such initiatives through a collaborative approach with East Sussex and West Sussex County Councils.

- o **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.**

The SBSA will have the ability to consider introducing an overnight visitor levy following consultation with businesses, residents and other stakeholders. If the visitor levy were to be introduced, feedback from witnesses, including hoteliers, the BID and other councils, was to ringfence it so the money is reinvested into the visitor economy. Suggestions were to improve the look and feel of the city, to be put towards international marketing or cultural activities to improve the visitor experience. Amena Matin reported that when the visitor levy was introduced in Scotland, it had been used to boost funding for social housing and that Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council have committed to reinvest it into the visitor economy once introduced³⁴. Some hotels were resistant to the visitor levy, and this promise of ringfencing has helped to gain their buy-in.

- o **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"**

The group heard that the workforce in hospitality is a significant challenge for the sector. Recruiting and retaining skilled staff is an issue as hospitality jobs are often viewed as a temporary job rather than a long-term career and often students are hired as waiting staff who just want to earn a bit of money. Venues have to pay high wages regardless of the level of experience, which often means older applicants may be more successful, therefore reducing the number of jobs available to younger people. Ivanka Majic spoke of a cruise ship who only hires restaurant staff from Croatia because people study hospitality for 2 years there and it's seen as a career³⁵. It was reported that the Met College and the University of Sussex are creating courses for young people in hospitality and there is a need to invest in the talent pipeline. Evidence from other destinations suggested that stronger partnerships between the hospitality industry, schools and further education providers can help develop skills pathways, encourage young people to consider hospitality careers and strengthen the long-term resilience of the sector. This could be included as part of the SBSA's Local Skills Improvement Plan which is currently being developed.

Lack of data

Many of the witnesses emphasised the importance of data to truly understand the current state of the visitor economy and of changing visitor habits, which is essential in identifying the target audience and developing effective interventions. Destinations prosper when they have a really clear idea of who their audience is. There is a lot of data available, with many organisers and venues keeping track of their own visitor data including digital insights gained from web traffic and social media interactions. Ivanka Majic from "Restaurants Brighton" wanted to set up a "hospitality pulse survey" to see what footfall is like across the city and

³⁴ Amena Matin from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, 24/09/26

³⁵ Ivanka Majic, "Restaurants Brighton", TFG Meeting 02/09/26

see how everyone is doing³⁶. It could be an open-source project within the industry and the data would be shared to present a full picture.

Julia Weeks listed the changing visitor habits as one of the main challenges to the visitor economy sector³⁷. Michael Kill from the NTIA commented that young people generally spend less but the 35 – 40-year old market is increasing and could become the main audience target as they typically have more to spend³⁸. Younger people's habits have changed with fewer drinking alcohol and more interested in technology-driven experiences than face-to-face activities. The lack of late-night transport and policing is acting as a deterrent to activities taking place after midnight.

Evidence from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole demonstrated the benefits of bringing together intelligence from across the visitor economy through a Destination Management Board³⁹. Representatives from hotels, businesses, universities and other sectors regularly share information on visitor trends, spending patterns and barriers to overnight stays. This has enabled targeted interventions, such as developing offers with local food and drink businesses after hotels reported increasing numbers of visitors bringing food into their accommodation rather than spending in restaurants.

The approach in Brighton is somewhat siloed, and it would benefit from creating a central platform to collect data that all businesses could access and contribute to.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **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.**

Michael Kill from the NTIA stressed the importance of data and the ongoing monitoring against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). He spoke of the model in Sydney, Australia, where they do quarterly reviews of the data, judge how successful they are against the KPIs and adapt as needed⁴⁰. Natalie Wyatt from Liverpool, highlighted the importance of using data to identify where investment and promotional activity should be targeted, as well as to assess the effectiveness of marketing efforts and understand which specific campaigns have had the greatest impact on ticket sales⁴¹. They are also developing a data dashboard. It would be beneficial for Brighton & Hove to develop an accessible dashboard to monitor the sector to assess performance, identify emerging issues and inform future initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **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.**

While the idea of a 24-hour city could bring potential benefits to increase visitor overnight stays, any development towards this would need to be evidenced. Transport services are a

³⁶ Ivanka Majic, "Restaurants Brighton", TFG Meeting 02/09/26

³⁷ Julia Weeks, Tourism Alliance, TFG Meeting 02/09/26

³⁸ Michael Kill, NTIA, TFG MEeting 16/09/26

³⁹ Amena Matin, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, 24/09/26

⁴⁰ Michael Kill, NTIA, TFG Meeting 16/09/26

⁴¹ Natalie Wyatt, Liverpool City Region Destination Partnership, 25/09/26

commercial entity and if late night services are not profitable the provider will discontinue the service. If there is no demand for restaurants to open much later, it will affect their profit margins, and they will choose not to do so. If there is nothing open late at night, visitors will not be encouraged to stay out. Therefore, the move towards a 24-hour city needs careful planning and there is a need to be innovative and diversify the offer to encourage visitors to stay out late. Collecting and analysing data on visitor demographics, behaviours and preferences would be essential in determining whether the conditions exist to support a successful 24-hour economy.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **To collect relevant data that would justify the introduction of a 24-hour economy**

Transport

Transport was consistently identified as both an enabler and a barrier to the visitor economy. Witnesses highlighted concerns around early last train services to London, rail disruption and replacement bus services, the cost of parking, and connectivity with the wider Sussex region. At the same time, the Group heard positive evidence about Brighton & Hove's strong bus network, successful night bus services and opportunities to better integrate transport with the wider visitor offer through partnerships, visitor passes and integrated ticketing. The city benefits from 9 night bus routes that run on an hourly basis all night and connect the surrounding areas such as Lewes, Peacehaven and Eastbourne. This supports the 24-hour economy by allowing visitors to experience nightlife and support residents travelling home and shift workers getting to work. However, they also identified areas where the service could be improved, such as expanding some routes, reviewing the cost and frequency. It was reported that some hospitality workers had to leave work early in order to catch the last available bus home, while others highlighted a gap between the end of regular bus services and the start of night bus operations.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **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.**

Transport connectivity between Brighton and London was repeatedly identified as a key issue affecting the visitor economy. Witnesses highlighted concerns about the timing of the last train to London, which was considered too early to fully support the city's evening and night-time offer. Cllr David McGregor reported that recent changes to licensing arrangements may provide greater opportunities for businesses to operate later, strengthening the case for improved rail services in the future⁴². Gavin Stewart from the BID warned that when the trains aren't running due to delays or engineering works, everything goes very quiet⁴³. A lot of young people have moved to the outskirts of the city or its surrounding towns due to the cost of living and later trains servicing the London to Brighton mainline route could persuade more to stay out later in the city centre as well as enabling hospitality sector workers to travel to and from work.

⁴² Cllr David McGregor, TFG Meeting 18/08/26

⁴³ Gavin Stewart, BID, TFG Meeting 02/09/26

RECOMMENDATION:

- **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.**

Several witnesses highlighted parking costs as a barrier to overnight stays, particularly during the quieter winter months when a larger proportion of visitors choose to travel by car. Concerns were raised that the cost of parking for longer periods can discourage visitors from staying overnight or lead them to choose alternative destinations. Witnesses suggested that exploring seasonal pricing, overnight parking offers or the use of underutilised car parks could help make overnight stays more attractive and support the local visitor economy during off-peak periods.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **To explore options of using underused car parks in the city to encourage overnight stays for visitors**

Supporting the hospitality sector

Throughout the Task & Finish Group meetings, a range of challenges facing the hospitality industry were identified including difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, skills shortages, rising wage costs, increasing business rates and higher utility bills. Witnesses also emphasised the importance of attracting visitors into the city in the first place. Hoteliers highlighted the need for a strong “hook” attraction that encourages people to visit and stay overnight. Evidence also showed that major events generate significant benefits for hospitality and retail businesses. For example, businesses in the North Laine area have increased sales following the Pride parade as the crowd disperses, demonstrating that visitors continue to spend money across the city after attending headline activities⁴⁴.

The nighttime economy continues to face financial pressures, and it is important that existing support measures remain in place. Business rates relief has played an important role in helping parts of the music industry survive challenging trading times. However, it was noted that nightclubs are not currently eligible for the same relief despite playing an important role within the wider nighttime economy. Michael Kill of the NTIA said that 36.1% of nightclubs in the UK had closed and there had been a 13% drop off for the late-night economy after midnight⁴⁵. Reclassifying nightclubs as live music venues could help reduce operating costs and improve the long-term viability of the sector.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **Encourage central government to continue to reduce costs for nighttime venues including reclassifying nightclubs as live music venues**

The Group heard that it was important for the visitor economy to create an attractive and welcoming environment in the city centre, particularly after dark. Feedback shows that visitors are put off by dark, dirty streets that feel unsafe. The hoteliers reported that some of their visitors took taxis everywhere because they didn't feel safe walking the streets⁴⁶. Lucy

⁴⁴ Ian Baird, Outdoor Events Development Manager, TFG Meeting 18/08/26

⁴⁵ Michael Kill, NTIA, TFG Meeting 16/09/26

⁴⁶ Herve Guyat & Rekha Sohun, Hoteliers, TFG Meeting 25/09/26

Davies described the experience of walking across Waterloo Bridge in London during winter and seeing the illuminated South Bank, noting how lighting helped create a warm, vibrant and safe atmosphere that encouraged people to spend time in the area⁴⁷.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **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.**

Michael Kill of the NTIA stressed that the safety element of lighting is important and talked about “light corridors” that were created in Luton to link hospitality hubs across the city to enable safe routes for people to go from one to the other and how it transformed the way people moved around at night⁴⁸. There are areas in Brighton that are very dark at night and do not feel safe, including the seafront. It was suggested that venues could be encouraged to introduce decorative uplighting and exploring creative lighting solutions in twittens and other pedestrian routes, such as ground projections and lighting installations on the seafront. These measures could improve wayfinding, enhance the visitor experience and strengthen feelings of safety while maintaining the city's distinctive character.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **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.**

Michael Kill described how the cost base has changed in the sector, that staffing has always been the highest cost but that the second highest cost was now energy, making it now 40% more expensive to operate than it was in 2020⁴⁹. He talked about a new initiative where businesses are creating Procurement Groups to collectively reduce energy costs. This idea could be introduced in Brighton where the local authority and businesses could be encouraged to work collectively to purchase energy and other services, helping to lower their cost base and ease some of the immediate financial pressures they face.

The idea of forming a collective purchasing group as a single block with a supplier such as Octopus Energy, could be challenging. This is because for around four months of the year, the early evening period is the most volatile part of the energy market in terms of pricing. As a result, while suppliers may be willing to offer a group deal, it is unlikely to be as favourable as businesses might hope. Suppliers would also be likely to require members to commit to a tightly defined consumption profile, as significant changes in energy use during peak times can end up costing a lot. Any collective arrangement would need a mechanism to ensure that all participating businesses adhere to the agreed profile with the ability to penalise individual members whose energy usage deviates significantly from that agreement. Despite these challenges, witnesses expressed a willingness to support the exploration of such models and to share expertise on how collective purchasing arrangements could be developed.

RECOMMENDATION:

- **Explore options for creating a Procurement Group for businesses in the visitor economy sector to buy energy as a collective to reduce costs**

⁴⁷ Lucy Davies, CEO of Brighton Dome and Festival, TFG Meeting 16/09/26

⁴⁸ Michael Kill, NTIA, TFG Meeting 16/09/26

⁴⁹ Michael Kill, NTIA, TFG Meeting 16/09/26

Conclusion

Brighton & Hove's visitor economy is a major contributor to the city's prosperity, supporting employment, businesses and investment across a wide range of sectors. The city benefits from a distinctive and diverse offer, including its cultural assets, events programme, independent businesses, coastal location and vibrant communities, which provide a strong platform for future growth.

The Task & Finish Group focussed on ways to increase overnight stays and encourage visitors all year-round, particularly during the quieter winter periods. It would be beneficial to expand events and popular activities into the spring and autumn months and to take advantage of the sectors that thrive during those times such as art and cultural festivals and conferences. Taking a different approach to marketing such as branding the city as a creative destination, highlighting what makes it unique and strategically targeting specific audiences would attract higher numbers of visitors. Making use of geographical connections such as Gatwick Airport and the wider Sussex region could be built on and expanded. Evidence suggested that improved coordination, collaboration and strategic thinking was needed to work with local businesses and groups to create a more coherent, accessible and attractive visitor offer.

The establishment of the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority presents an opportunity to strengthen the profile of the visitor economy at a regional level, improve strategic coordination and attract additional investment. Significant improvements in data collection and performance monitoring are vital to understanding the current state of the visitor economy and identifying who the target audience is. Transport connectivity, particularly at night, is an important factor when looking to develop a 24-hour economy, helping to attract visitors, support the nighttime economy and enable businesses to extend their operating hours sustainably.

It needs to be recognised that some businesses are facing significant financial pressures, particularly in hospitality and the nighttime economy and would need support if they were expected to increase their operation hours into the off-season months or into a 24-hour economy. Suggestions have been made throughout the Task & Finish Groups to help with this, but it remains an important factor to consider. The need for investment in certain areas has been highlighted in the recommendations but realistically, the Council is not able to fund everything and therefore, approaching external organisations to take on some initiatives where necessary should be considered.

The recommendations in this report are intended to support sustainable and inclusive growth, ensuring that the benefits of the visitor economy are shared by residents, businesses and visitors, while protecting and enhancing the unique qualities that make Brighton & Hove a successful visitor destination.

