

Appendix 1: Minutes from Task & Finish Groups

Contents (control + click to follow link)

Task & Finish Group Meeting 1 – 18/08/26	1
Task & Finish Group Meeting 2 – 02/09/26	9
Task & Finish Group Meeting 3 – 16/09/26	21
Task & Finish Group Meeting 4 – 25/09/26	26
Task & Finish Group – Meeting with Bath & Northeast Somerset Council – 15/09/26 ...	29
Task & Finish Group - Meeting with Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council – 24/09/26	32
Task & Finish Group – Meeting with Donna Close – 24/09/26	34

Task & Finish Group Meeting 1 – 18/08/26

Members present: Cllrs Evans (Chair), Cattell, Earthy, Lademacher, Lyons

Apologies: Giles Rossington (Scrutiny Manager), Luke Proudfoot (Overview & Scrutiny Officer)

Witnesses/Officers supporting: Ian Baird (Outdoors Events Development Manager), Charlotte Barrow, (Senior Marketing Executive, VisitBrighton), Natalie Orringe, (Head of Communications and Engagement), Jack Cregan, (Commercial Executive), Natalie Sacks-Hammond (Overview & Scrutiny Officer).

Cllr Evans (AE) welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanking witnesses for finding the time to attend. She reminded everyone that the meeting was not in public, but that the Task & Finish Group (TFG) would be producing a report which would be published, with evidence from witnesses referenced or quoted. A note of the meeting will be circulated to all witnesses to check for accuracy.

IB talked through the slides acknowledging that the Events Programme is mainly summer-focused but this boosts the visitor economy by creating different reasons to visit the city. It also enhances the nighttime economy offer and supports local businesses. “On The Beach” festival producers have conducted an economic impact study this year looking at how many people attended their events and stayed overnight, which was encouraged through their multi-day format. An important part of the Events Programme is that it establishes Brighton’s national identity as a creative destination. People from outside the area associate Brighton with its beach and as a place for stag and hen dos but locals see it differently and are more clued into the city as a creative destination. This is the story of the city that needs to be told more widely. It’s all about creative talent, is a driver for the student population and creates a sense of joy, giving the sense of an active and lively city. There were 3 major events in 2025 which were the Women’s Rugby, the Marathon and Pride. There are 10 other festivals

hosted by the city including the Brighton Festival, the Fringe, Great Escape, Land Beyond, On the Beach and so on. There are around 150 community events that range in size from school fetes, to free fireworks provided by Coles in Preston Park. It's a busy events programme but mostly takes place in the summer. Around 500,000 people participate or get involved in the events. Looking at old data from 2018, the approximate economic value was £120 million. Using the national calculation for economic value for this year, it puts the onward value between £1.50 and £2.80 per £1 generated by the event, which is a more complex calculation. For example, "On The Beach" generates £3 million - £4 million income through sponsorship which gives an onward value to the city of 2.8 multiplied by that amount which ends up at around £8 million - £9 million. Pride has done an updated economic impact study this year and had 20 researchers on the streets over Pride weekend gathering data to enhance the other data available. There is also an economic impact study coming from the marathon this year and one from the Fringe next year.

AE commented that although these are summer events, there will be an impact on the nighttime economy. For events like Pride, people coming from outside the city are more likely to stay overnight.

IB said that a lot of people also stay overnight before the marathon due to the early start. Around 60,000 – 80,000 people travel in and out of the city by train for Pride which leaves a couple of 100,000 people here for the weekend.

IL asked about whether they have taken into account those people who don't come into town because they want to avoid events like the marathon due to disruption, traffic, etc.

IB said that is hard to gauge, and they don't have any data to quantify that. There are people who purposefully avoid Pride but also benefit because they rent out their house for the weekend.

ME suggested comparing a normal busy Saturday in August with Pride data and work out the difference to get this information.

IL said he has been told by residents that people go elsewhere when events are on.

AE said that the shops might take less when there is an event on but the bars would take more.

IB said the North Laine shops actually do very well and have increased sales. For example, when the Pride parade is over, people tend to pass through these areas to move elsewhere. When considering the winter economy, they would like to develop a centrepiece event for Christmas. After the Valley Gardens work was completed, there was a Christmas market that didn't land so well and was slightly underprepared. They came back the next year with a reduced footprint but decided it wasn't financially viable in the long term. In 2025, there was another offer that planned to operate over 3 weekends but was unfortunately hit by massive storms. They have learnt that Brighton is unique in terms of its winter offer compared to other cities who have a retail focused winter offer because that's something they don't inherently have in their city. Brighton has an incredibly successful independent shopping offer and has something that equates to a Christmas market 365 days a year in the North Laines. From talking to the traders in there, they don't see the benefit in trading at a different location like a Christmas market; they also don't want to compete with out-of-town traders. This is why Christmas markets don't work in Brighton. What Brighton needs is a winter

experiential offer as opposed to a retail piece, which is what they are working towards. There isn't anything planned for 2026 but there are early stage proposals for 2027.

IL asked if there were any New Year's events like Hogmanay in Edinburgh. People do travel there and spend a lot of money on tickets and accommodation.

IB said that Edinburgh benefits from having a controllable space which is something Brighton needs. Preston Park isn't really an option as the residents won't like it, particularly as there are a lot of summer events held there. Other cities have a natural town square. Valley Gardens is a possibility, but its elongated shape is tricky. IB presented a slide of a new potential Christmas attraction like a Winter Wonderland proposed by a well-respected operator called Sevanta who have been successful in Bournemouth and Cambridge. The attraction offers a funfair, food hall, curling experience, festive forest, alpine lodge and Christmas tree maze. The proposal is large enough to become a destination piece. This would run from St Peter's Church to North Road.

AE said that it would also be vulnerable to bad weather and asked whether high fencing would be put all around it.

IB said they are planning to have much harder structures rather than stretch tents which the market struggled with. They will also provide indoor space. The fencing is more tricky as they need the ability to lockdown the space and make it secure. It also needs to be managed in terms of capacity of attendees and alcohol sales. Fences can be made to look more appealing. There would be multiple entrances and no one-way system.

IL asked how many days and nights this would be taking place.

IB said around 6 weeks to 2 months minimum, from November to Christmas.

IL asked about impact on transport in the area.

IB said it would hopefully result in busier buses but no other impact other than around the build as it would be taking place on an area that is already pedestrianised.

JaC said that Valley Gardens has three areas for events which will be a key focus for winter. They have trialled things that have been unsuccessful but this attraction is an anchored winter event. The city is a creative tourist-led city without a winter market so this idea ticks all the boxes and from it, the nighttime and winter economies can develop. It doesn't look good that this year doesn't have anything to offer especially as the ice rink won't be there and there are no plans for New Year. We have the Laines and Christmas shopping.

IL asked if this attraction would encourage people to stay overnight.

IB said not necessarily but it creates a platform to put on entertainment that could encourage people to stay overnight such as corporate dining, hire spaces out for the night etc.

IL said it looks more like an event for local people to come out, have fun and go home.

IB said that we don't want events solely for people from out of town, which is a common criticism from residents, which isn't true. The data from Pride shows on the Saturday that 53% were from within Brighton with 22% coming from London.

ML said that the Christmas market was depressing because it was a mismatch of things like a bit of dancing, food, etc but didn't have an identity. This proposal is a whole experience that you can move around. ML said that AirBnbs are all offering free saunas and questioned why hotels aren't doing this. ML also said that licensing hours needs to be looked at as pub gardens all close early, and most venues close at 1am. The city has an economy based on going out but the licensing hours stifle that.

AE said that licensing had changed recently.

IB said that he had attended an urgent meeting regarding the recent announcement of LGBTQ+ venues closing where they looked at the licensing arrangements and thought they would benefit from exploring more about how they are being applied. However, the main problem is business rates and utility costs which are too high and not within the Council's control. Licensing laws allow venues to operate 24 hours a day, and the system should reflect this by supporting those venues that are suitable to remain open later. AE said that pub gardens close early because many have residents living nearby.

JaC talked about what was trying to be achieved, whether it was visitor numbers or overnight stays, and whether we are competing with the wider Sussex region or not. To make more of a compelling offer for the hotels, there needs to be an anchor point like this proposal and that it would be beneficial to challenge the operator to make it more "Brighton". A suggested idea was Winter Pride which would automatically make people stay overnight. This would involve performances and tickets with cross-promotion such as a hotel room offer. He also suggested targeted promotion once bookings have been confirmed that said, "did you know that Winter Pride is on".

ML commented that it would benefit from having more of a "Brighton" flavour and Winter Pride would do that.

NO suggested partnerships are set up through VisitBrighton as it is a platform already set up to do this.

IB said the ice rink is unlikely to return to the Pavilion. However, they are making plans to build a substation at the Old Steine with plans to have the ice rink there using the fountain as the centrepiece. This would give Brighton city centre a critical mass and become the hub to the Christmas experience in Sussex. The message would be to use Brighton as a base, to go on day trips in the wider Sussex area such as wine tours, then return to Brighton to eat and stay overnight. It would also be beneficial to have advertising at Gatwick airport to suggest visitors turn west rather than go straight to London.

JuC suggested promoting Brighton as a food destination and spoke of a recent interview with FatBoySlim about his favourite food spots in Brighton and Hove.

IB said at the moment they open their books and ask who wants to do something in Brighton and that they need to have more of a year-round Event Programme that links up and makes sense. They should use local promoters and local businesses at events. For example, bringing back Paddle Round the Pier and to connect with and promote local charities. They could run the heats on the Saturday with the final on the Sunday which would encourage people to stay overnight. Another idea would be to do something in the autumn like celebrating the harvest.

JuC said there is a good farmer's market in Shoreham but Brighton doesn't have one.

ML said it would be good to celebrate Sussex food.

IB said they are looking to develop New Road as a market space and possibly Valley Gardens. The one in Shoreham is costly and run by enthusiastic residents.

IL asked if Winter Pride was a done-deal

IB said he has been talking to Pride about having more presence in the city all year round, possibly doing something in St James' Street. It is currently an open conversation.

IL said he doesn't think Pride and the Christmas experience goes together. Pride attracts mostly young females as indicated by the data on the slides but the group is trying to get more people to stay overnight and spend a lot of money. Therefore, young females might not be the best target group and maybe more wealthier, slightly older people would be better.

IB said that data from Pride in the park shows that more younger people attend but older people are more likely to spend money in the city centre pubs during Pride.

AE said we are trying to get more people to visit in the winter so anything that attracts people is positive. The city has almost too many day visitors over the summer and we need more all year round.

ML said her friends always visit in the summer but not during the winter.

IB said Brighton does well compared to other coastal towns but that people do have a preconception about coastal destinations in the winter. The challenge is to make them forget they're on the coast. We need to sell pub culture, independent shopping and cosy spaces.

NO also suggested theatres and performances

AE suggested a Winter Fringe

JaC said we need to make a space for the winter experience and have a good brand for the city. We need to capitalise on things that Brighton is already known for. We also need support and to partner with places like Gatwick and cross-promote.

NO talked about place-based marketing and that the city has an iconic cityscape but we don't own it. The city needs to wrap all its assets together in the same way that New York and Copenhagen have done. We need to reach out to residents and bring them with us. We also need to bring Brighton into the wider Sussex area. She said it would be worth looking at the designer, Wayne Hemmings, who is recently famous for the girl guiding uniform but talks a lot about culture and civic authenticity and history as drivers for economic growth.

IL said we should get some of the biggest hotels in the room and ask them what would fill up more beds, what kind of people spend more money and stay longer. They might come up with things we haven't thought of.

CB said they have been working in partnership with the hoteliers for a long time and from talking to them in the past, they're not too concerned with the nitty gritty, they just want a hook, something to bring the customers in. They really care about having people coming through the door.

NO said that we need to define the proposition; make it clear what to expect from us, how they will benefit, provide marketing assets for them to use, create a vision and to bring them in. We should also include independent businesses and make sure everyone is working together for mutual benefit. Heritage and culture are really important.

CB said she has worked for VisitBrighton for 20 years and has seen the change from Brighton being known for “dirty weekends” to people getting to see the city as classier and more cultural and has evolved away from its original reputation. It is also an important gateway to the countryside.

NO said that the sauna economy is emerging with the city being seen as a place for wellness. She would like to do some research on changing spending patterns of visitors with people drinking less alcohol and not eating out at restaurants.

IB said there is one thing they are trying to get over the line for this Christmas which is a light trail at St Ann’s Well’s gardens. The light trail would be based around the story of St Ann and the well and tells the story of why the garden is there and its history. It’s near the shopping hubs so people can do their Christmas shopping and head over.

NO said that the St Ann’s Wells festival has been really successful.

ML said that wellness embeds itself into lots of things from music to art etc and that the Trans Pride Event did this very well.

IB talked about the new beach weddings offer near the Volks railway where they will have a marquee and chairs on the beach. They have linked up with the local businesses there; the sauna, Sea Lanes, Reading Room and Volks railway to offer customisable packages. They wanted to use everything embedded in the area in a different way.

JuC said that one of the arches in the Madeira Terrace project could be used for weddings.

IB said the wedding set would be portable so could be packed up and taken to other locations in the city like Stanmer Park.

JaC said that there are a lot of assets in the city, like the Theatre Royal, Royal Pavilion, Brighton Dome, the Laines etc but they are disconnected.

JuC said it would be nice to see the Registry Office promoting itself and what a “Brighton wedding” would look like.

JaC said the bandstand had a 73% conversion rate from those who enquire and suggested increasing the fee.

AE said that weddings were something you can increase because people will pay. It’s not like parking charges that you need to be careful with.

NO said that the inside of Brighton Town Hall is beautiful for weddings but the outside is a problem.

IL asked about the Amaze charity doing a Book Bench trail around the city.

CB said this was taking place over the autumn, and they will be using it as a hook. There will be a story trail on the website, they will talk about literary links to the city and that it’s beneficial to health and wellbeing as it encourages people to walk.

AE asked about the link between VisitBrighton and Visit Britain.

CB said there is no financial link between the two but that they work closely together and have set up local visitor economy partnerships. This is founded by Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council.

AE asked about cross-ticketing with transport providers.

CB said VisitBrighton has supported cross-ticketing through marketing. Govia used to have a “Days Out” campaign which they would run but approach VisitBrighton for help with promotion and advice on who to partner with. There isn’t a budget for a city-wide visitor ticket although it would be a really good idea. At one point the Royal Pavilion, Sealife Centre and the i360 had a promotional ticket but there were operational complications.

IL asked if hotel beds were not being filled because Brighton doesn’t have a Park & Ride.

CB said a Park & Ride would be good but parking is not a huge barrier for visitors and being seen purely as a coastal destination is more of a problem.

JuC said the city has a history with the cinema which isn’t well known. One of the first cinemas was in Regency Square and the city was the centre of film making.

NO said the city has an extraordinary identity and queer history, people used to visit the bath houses, and it had one of the first Indian curry shops and the original Body Shop.

JaC asked what other cities are doing that Brighton isn’t. For example, York has a really good winter package that makes use of its market, town square, light shows and heritage assets. Brighton could make use of its image of being independent and boutique and partner with hotels in Regency Square. It could be marketed as the best coastal getaway, Christmas by the sea.

NO talked about the winter events like Burning the Clocks, ghost walks, pagan fireworks and to do something that reflects its old fishing village traditions. Tourism is changing and people want something that feels unique and not corporate.

IL asked about the Hippodrome.

JuC said it is currently being kitted out and will open next year.

IL said that theatres have deals like book a show, stay at a particular hotel at a discount.

CB said that some hotels occasionally do this. These kinds of deals are not under the control of VisitBrighton but up to the hotels if they want to offer this.

JaC said they need to get adverts for Brighton at Gatwick airport as everything there advertises London at the moment.

IB talked about the Santa Bus being very successful as it doesn’t need a huge amount of planning and it creates a feel-good factor and sense of Christmas. The Christmas lights could reflect Brighton a bit better. It all needs to be brought into a package.

CB said that VisitBrighton is the vehicle to do this.

AE mentioned the Christmas market hosted by the Sealife Centre with local traders in the central hall surrounded by the fishtanks.

NO said they also did cocktail evenings there.

JaC said that people used to travel from all over to do late night shopping in the Laines. The Unitarian Church hosts a good creative market.

IB said that Etsy often takes over the markets and it would be better to offer stalls to local artists.

JuC suggested using one of the big shops on Western Road that are currently empty, that we could host something there like a Christmas event or market.

JaC suggested Portslade Town Hall

IB suggested Middle Street School that is closing and they could create a Santa experience there with elves in a workshop.

AE asked who we are targeting.

CB said we are chasing the money so families are not the target audience but more those who can stay during the week typically aged before or after having children. They have a strong Facebook presence for slightly older people.

AE talked about foodies and the city now has a Michelin Star restaurant.

ML said Brighton restaurants are very good at social media.

JaC suggested a winter food trail to encourage more partnership working.

IL asked about attracting people off season and the marathon is good for this as it is held in April when the weather is a bit chilly. He suggested Halloween in October.

IB mentioned White Night and the Zombie Walk which have since ceased to take place. The Zombie Walk got out of control. There once was a lantern trail at the rockery near Preston Park. Octoberfest never worked in Brighton.

ML said that the Hanover Beerfest is really popular.

JaC said that the biggest wins will be in December and we should get that right and then look to expand into October.

IL talked about an indoor dry ski slope in Newhaven being very successful.

JaC said that this year Brighton hosted the Sauna Summit and it would be great to host a sauna festival by the beach and promote health and wellbeing.

IL suggested putting saunas by the nudist beach.

CB said the nudist beach was one of the most popular pages on the VisitBrighton website.

IB said it is important that the council owns the events rather than allowing operators to come in, brand themselves and make the money. There needs to be a strategy to make it "Brighton", promote Brighton businesses and charities. There could be a Food Festival with all local traders and food businesses and get BIM students to do the music entertainment.

IL said Brighton is known for having a lot of vegans and vegetarians and whether this could be a hook, such as "Veganuary" activities.

IB said Brighton is known for being quirky and always doing crazy things and we need to lean into that.

Task & Finish Group Meeting 2 – 02/09/26

Members present: Cllrs Evans (Chair), Lyons

Apologies: Cllrs Fishleigh and Cattell, Luke Proudfoot (Overview & Scrutiny Officer)

Witnesses/Officers supporting: Cllr David McGregor (Cabinet Member for the Economy, Culture, Heritage and Tourism), Gavin Stewart (CEO of BID and Chair of the Destination Experience Group), Ben Garcia (Business Development Manager, Brighton & Hove Buses) Ivanka Majic, (Restaurants Brighton), Pascal Dowers & Paulina Anzorge, (The Adelaide Salon), Julia Weeks, (Brighton & Hove Tourism Alliance), Ian Baird (Outdoor Events Development Manager), Natasha Bridge (Senior Local Growth and Visitor Economy Officer), Giles Rossington, (Overview & Scrutiny Manager), Natalie Sacks-Hammond, (Overview & Scrutiny Officer).

Cllr Evans (AE) welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanking witnesses for finding the time to attend. She reminded everyone that the meeting was not in public, but that the Task & Finish Group (TFG) would be producing a report which would be published, with evidence from witnesses referenced or quoted. A note of the meeting will be circulated to all witnesses to check for accuracy.

Cllr David McGregor (DM) gave his thoughts on the visitor economy in the city. One issue is the lack of late-night transport services, which effectively cuts off the nighttime economy and there is a lack of structure and strategy around the offer. It's only recently that the transport part of this has been up and running with more night buses. The city is attracting more tourism than ever before but spending is down, which is why the visitor economy is struggling. DM's overarching idea is to have a 24-hour economy in Brighton and make sure there is an option for everyone. People can go to the beach for almost no money and then there are others who go out for food and drinks who may end their night at 1am and be able to get the bus or train back home at a later time. The council has recently made changes to the licensing policy to allow restaurants to stay open later, which will justify the next step of getting the trains to run 24/7. He would like bigger events taking place in the city, although he acknowledged that there is a lack of hotel space during the peak season.

The other issue is that we are very summer-focused and need to do more to get people visiting in the winter, so Brighton is also seen as a winter destination. DM talked about the LGBTQ+ venues which are not really focussed on in economy strategies but they are a large part of what Brighton is known for. Pride is the biggest event of the year but DM questioned what we are doing to make sure we have the most cohesive and accepting LGBTQ+ scene in the country and seem to have missed out on this to places like Manchester. We need to honour what Brighton is known for.

DM wants to look at how VisitBrighton works within the next 12 months and ensure that it is up to date and working for people. The city needs to attract new people – young people, families, conferences, and to really utilise social media to do so. DM would like to see a Nighttime Economy Strategy that will be based off the work of this Task & Finish Group

making it a key focus. Access and travel are a huge part of it as well as making sure events and LGBTQ venues are key pillars of how we get people to come to the city. We need to make the summer season last longer and be more tourist focused.

Pascal Dowers (PD) said that there is a big cultural and artistic element that should be promoted and asked DM what his thoughts were on that.

DM said it is part of what Brighton is, but the city is an expensive place to live and creative types and young people cannot necessarily afford to be here so it's important to create spaces for them. This week they have opened up some buildings specifically for creative use and making this a key point in economic policy. They want to encourage people to come to Brighton specifically to start a creative business or art or a shop and don't want to lose this. Lots of creative businesses have left the city and we need to bring them back.

PD said Brighton is a big home for creatives but they don't have enough exposure of their work. There are facilities in the city and new space will hopefully encourage more people. PD gets a lot of people visiting from London but feels that the hotel pricing is not dynamic enough and should provide a different offer to those visiting from the home counties and London than those travelling further or internationally. The bigger hotel chains don't have a local marketing budget. More and more people don't stay in Brighton because it's cheaper to get a taxi home than stay in a hotel.

Paulina Anzorge (PA) added that the cost of parking for 24 hours is very high and it could be different prices for the summer and winter months.

PD said that if the hotels were more accessible for people living within an hour, they might not need to use a car and could be persuaded to stay overnight.

AE said there's no changing the fact that Brighton is a seafront city that's in a long, narrow strip and there's never going to be the space for lots of parking.

PD and PA host an art salon from home called the Adelaide Salon. They used to live in London which has a high level of visual arts unlike Brighton. There are a lot of people in Brighton working in the creative sphere but are not working here or displaying their work, instead they are travelling to London or internationally. Once Covid hit, the creative links were reduced, which meant people were expecting more from where they were. Along with the cuts in art funding, the sector was disappearing. They have an old Regency building that has space for hosting the salon, which evolved from a meeting of like-minded people trying to create something new. They used the Open Houses as the main vehicle for promotion, which is a festival that attracts thousands of people. It's purely philanthropic with an ambition to create a hybrid economy. They hosted an Art Gala with the Royal Pavilion that was about supporting the arts with heritage, activating spaces, and highlighting the quality of what is here. They had more visitors from London than Brighton. There are lots of people who could fill the hotels but due to the high costs, would choose to return home.

PA said they work with lecturers, philosophers and artists from the local universities bringing them into the conversation around arts. The concept of the salon is a movable concept and can host 100 people but the appetite has grown so they have partnered up with the Brighton Museum, Dome and Brighton University. There are internationally recognised artists living in Brighton who work abroad and there's no focus on Brighton. They exhibited at the Brighton Pavilion with support from big names like Thom Yorke from Radiohead and introduced the

idea of an Art Gala which was held at the end of May. They want to elevate the perception of Brighton as a creative city and help emerging talent and encourage a different form of philanthropy.

Julia Weeks (JW) asked why they held the gala in May. PA said it was timed with the Brighton Festival when there is a lot going on in the city.

AE said that they could capitalise on it in the winter season and there might be more opportunity to have a conversation with the hotels and restaurants and create a destination package.

PA said they are planning a visual arts show in the Autumn as that is when the art sector normally thrives.

PD said in Brighton there is a cultural void except for the music sector that people will travel down for. It all needs coordination and a silo approach doesn't work well.

JW said she is planning an arts festival in October and has lots of people involved, however, she is finding it difficult to get the word out.

PA said that people will buy art in London and come to Brighton for entertainment. They had engaged with Nick Cave about exhibiting his art but it didn't work out, they hope to do this next year but it needs to be curated.

JW talked about "October Unpacked" which was deliberately held in October to extend the summer season. There is the comedy festival in October and music events and they want it to become as busy as May. Getting other organisations to share it on their channels and networks is difficult.

PD said there is a silo mentality and that art revolves around the grants system which means everyone is a potential competitor and they don't want to share clients. However, if you promote something for someone else, they are more likely to promote your activity.

JW said that VisitBrighton do share with their partners but they are only allowed to promote partners who have paid.

Ivanka Majic (IM) gave praise to Adelaide Salon and said that Brighton's strength is its diversity and if we start embracing it, we can have the highbrow – the people who don't think they can buy art in Brighton, to see things differently. There is a silo mentality and Brighton is a bit cliquey. Ivanka works for Restaurants Brighton and they have a huge audience with only 5 staff members but they are happy to promote things without being paid.

PD said we need one central place to have everything listed, like a Brighton version of "Time Out". Everyone should subscribe to each other's newsletters and reach out on social media. He said some people are suspicious and ask what's in it for them. At some art events, a lot of the attendees are other artists and other people don't always feel welcome. People also recoil if people are constantly trying to sell them things. 4,500 people came to their Open House which shows there is appetite, they had a Marina Abramovich performance which had people queueing outside to experience.

JW talked about White Night and how she would like to bring it back. IB explained that it had originated from the "Nuit Blanc" movement in France around the activation of city spaces at night bringing different artists together. The first one was a co-production with the place in

France, however, it ran out of funding. JW said that Copenhagen has a “culture night” that is self-funded through ticketing, and they put on interactive activities, performances and visual arts.

PA said it took 2 years for Network Rail to support Open Houses and they now have some visibility at train stations. JW said that Network Rail and GTR are members of the Tourism Alliance, which she represents. PA suggested using billboards and digital screens to help with promotion in the winter months.

IB asked what prevented the Adelaide Salon event at the Pavilion from being bigger and whether being in a heritage location was a barrier for some people.

PD said it was a self-imposed capacity as it was the first year and they could expand. The event ran from 7.30pm until midnight and had a production of 90 people, it was a long show and there was a lot going on. It was a subsidised event with free champagne and free food from The Ivy. It cost attendees £100 which would seem acceptable in London but in Brighton seems very expensive. It was meant to be an event in Brighton for Brighton people.

JW said that she had done some surveying and asked people why they would come to Brighton out of season and not one person had an answer. One problem is that they don't link up with the hotels and restaurants to create packages, and are not marketing to a specific audience. Everyone is targeting their own email lists. There is also a change of behaviour which has meant 40% of all nightclubs nationally have closed, students don't go out anymore and drinking culture has changed, people want to go somewhere decent to eat much later but there isn't much choice and delivery companies are feeding people at home. We need to look at who the audience is now and their demographics. The LGBTQ+ scene has stayed fairly “old school” putting on drag performances but Pride has changed due to the type of acts that are playing in the park which are more mainstream and attracts a different kind of audience. JW listed the main issues being the silo approach, different behaviour habits, and the lack of one body to coordinate everything. A lot of people visit for conferences and they want to know what they're doing outside of the conference. A lot of independent restaurants don't open on Mondays and Tuesdays so miss out on these customers. The BID will put their members first, which is understandable. It is unclear how people find out about things going on in the city.

Cllr Ivan Lyons (IL) said that he has a lot of feedback from the residents in his ward, and he often asks them “why don't you go into Brighton?” and the comments are that it is dirty, there's graffiti everywhere, it's unwelcoming, they feel threatened by tramps asking for money outside shops and parking is an issue. In the winter, more than 50% of people come to Brighton by car as it's wet, cold, and dark. A lot of them live more than 5 miles outside the city centre choose to travel by car and are more likely to go elsewhere like Worthing, Crawley etc which they feel is more welcoming with cheaper parking charges. Local businesses in Brighton are reporting that footfall has dropped.

PD said that Brighton lacks public spaces to relax and kill time, there isn't much to do if you're between meetings other than sit in a coffee shop. In the summer you can go to the beach or sit in front of the Pavilion but there are not many resting spaces. You can't kill time wandering around an art gallery, shopping is really the only activity on offer.

IL said that his cousin visited from Brisbane for one night and chose to spend her day in Kingston because she wanted to go to John Lewis. The car park charge was half of what it is in Brighton, and it's much cleaner.

IM said she normally ends up walking down the pier and her daughter really likes going around the Pavilion. They have a deal where residents can visit multiple times on one ticket. They also like to go around the Brighton Museum. It would be good if there was more of a "wow factor" to pull in more people to the city centre.

IL mentioned the Martlett's art trails and how they made people go to parts of Brighton they wouldn't normally go to. Most visitors will typically go to the beach, SeaLife Centre, have a coffee and then go home again.

IM said there is a lack of data. She works for Restaurants Brighton, which is a business that markets restaurants, they are positive spirited and are always looking to share positive things that are going on. They have a weekly newsletter and work with restaurants and suppliers, some pay, some don't. There can't be a restaurant scene based around 1 restaurant, there needs to be different kinds of restaurants for different people. Restaurants are closing faster than ever over the last 4 years but new ones are opening just as fast. IM doesn't think there are too many restaurants, but possibly too many coffee shops and bakeries. The state of the restaurant industry isn't great; a big challenge is staffing as they have to pay high wages for inexperienced people. They have been liaising with the Met College who are introducing a course for young people to work in the restaurant business. They also run the BRAVO awards and got 73,000 people voting for their best restaurant.

IB said staff are the underestimated piece of the puzzle as it's seen as a job and not a career. IM said that is a UK thing. She has spoken to a director of HR on cruise ships who hires restaurant staff from Croatia because people study hospitality for 2 years and it's seen as a career. In the UK, it's often students being hired as waiting staff who just want to earn a bit of money. The experience during Covid showed people that working in hospitality is stressful and a lot of people left the industry, the cost of living is a big factor as is Brexit, which was the catalyst for the decline when the numbers of front of house staff fell. VAT is also an issue. If someone wanted to be a career chef, there isn't anywhere to go to get experience. Some restaurants have asked for license extensions until 1am, this isn't just about extending their business, it's a way of diversifying their customers to get more through the door in order to survive. Some restaurants choose not to open on a Monday or Tuesday, Terre a Terre deliberately opens then to plug the gap. Others do a set lunch menu.

JW said there are a lot more industry deals being introduced like First Table which offers 50% off your meal.

IM said they are working on a sustainability project with the University of Brighton and published a co-authored paper on sustainable seafood. Brighton is on a UNESCO Living Coast which ties in really nicely with sustainable seafood; you could have a weekend of sustainable seafood around the city with restaurants offering the "catch of the day". It would be a reason for people to visit and travel sustainably. IM talked about data and that she would like to do a "hospitality pulse" monthly survey to see what footfall is like across the city and see how everyone is doing. It could be an open source project within the industry and the data would be shared. There is a lot of data on website and social media traffic where

their most popular pages are Sunday Roasts, Brunch and Offers. The challenge for the city is how to fill the quiet times like November.

IL said that breakfasts are popular and AE added that Moksha often has queues on the weekend.

IM talked about cooking experiences being popular and that there is a lot more that can be done with food. Hamburg hosted a project called “Bauhaus by the sea” where coastal cities participated in talks about how to live in a changing climate and offered tasting experiences such as different kinds of miso.

Gavin Stewart (GS) said that there is a cultural black hole in Brighton when it comes to contemporary art, there is no central place to act as the fulcrum for this kind of activity. Black Rock is being looked at for this, but it is also important to have short and medium term plans. GS said that footfall in the city isn’t declining, it’s the fact that people are not spending money that is the issue. There is a churn of businesses, entrepreneurs want to try out new things and Brighton is a good place to try random ideas. There are 500 businesses who are part of the BID. The vacancy rate in the city is 5% compared to 14% nationally. IL said that there are a lot of vacant offices.

GS is involved with the BID, Destination Experience Group, the LVEP and the Brighton & Hove Growth Board, which is a collaboration between the council and East and West Sussex County Councils. The DEG is for tourism focused businesses. The visitor economy is built on experience, culture and events. There is a lot going on in the city and the outdoor events are a big driver. BID had received matchfunding from the Arts Council which funded a walk-in cinema and they projected films onto the side of buildings which acted as a walking trail around the city. Collaboration is key to organising an event like White Night. Brighton hosts 3 major events every year, a range of festivals, with many of them run by the council. They need to diversify the nighttime offer. Commercial partners need to be willing to take a risk and lead the charge. Businesses have been saying that there is a strong demand but soft spending habits and so far the year has been met with cautious optimism mixed with real pressure. The Sealife Centre has had its highest performing year hosting strong evening events, the Pier reported a really good Christmas period, conferencing has been successful and the bus service is seeing growth. Hospitality and leisure are struggling, spending is down, there is a lack of confidence and recruitment has slowed. People are coming to the city, but it’s a good place to go and spend no money, particularly in the summer. The North Laine is buzzing during the day but is completely empty at night. The city had tried to have late night shopping but the businesses said it wasn’t worth it.

Transport is a frequently raised issue such as delays, rail replacement buses, and traffic. If the trains aren’t running, then it goes very quiet. Brighton & Hove buses are doing well, the City Sightseeing is very popular and expands the connections with the rest of the region. It needs to feel effortless to move around the city. Business events and conferences in the city are growing in strength and cultural venues are seeing increased demand in the evenings.

PD questioned whether the hotels should be contributing more to the city as they benefit from the promotion, particularly for conferences. IB said they had been looking at a visitors levy but the hotels didn’t want it. JW said that the hotels aren’t happy because they have to pay VisitBrighton to be promoted and then have to pay the conferencing team, effectively paying twice. More hotels are deciding not to be part of VisitBrighton as they can still attract

conference attendees without paying thousands. Hotels are a member of the Tourism Alliance but the General Managers now report to big umbrella companies so it is difficult to agree things with those who ultimately make the decisions. If there was a tourist tax, it could be reinvested into creating something to attract people to the city.

GS said shortages of talent, skills and workforce are one of the biggest threats to the hospitality industry. It would be worth them linking up with schools and colleges to encourage young people into the sector as a career. The University of Sussex is creating opportunities for student engagement and Erasmus is back; there is a need to invest in the talent pipeline. GS talked about AI and a new trend that is emerging where visitors use AI driven discovery to find new activities. AI can be used to create ready built itineraries for a week and people use AI platforms to search for things rather than SEO. Businesses need to be ready for this. VisitBrighton gets a lot of website hits and its content is optimised for AI discovery. It is a strategic shift and LVEP need to take this on and expand into the wider Sussex area.

JW said that people can look something up on AI and then directly book via a link, for a taxi or a table at a restaurant. IM said restaurants would struggle with this.

GS said we need to tap into international markets such as China, the US and Scandinavia. It would be good to promote via Gatwick but we need to catch tourists at the point of sale so that they receive some information or a link at the point of booking that promote an activity. Brighton has great restaurants and it would be good to promote gastro-tourism for the foodies. There are Sussex Wines that are well-known, some that have won regional and international awards. There is an opportunity at Black Rock to redevelop and create a future cultural anchor. There is a lot that can be used to promote the city; such as heritage assets, anniversaries such as the Albion's 125th anniversary, untapped student market, and regional collaborations that could be better aligned through the LVEP and the Sussex and Brighton Strategic Authority. Following devolution, there will hopefully be more investment from central government.

The Look and Feel of the city is important, it was felt that the council could be doing more with the deep cleansing programme as GS hasn't noticed a huge difference. A visitor levy could be spent on improving how the city looks.

PD said that in a recent Time Out poll, Brighton was number 8 globally for the best city to go out. IB added that 84% said that Britain is a welcome place to go, people like to bar hop and it offers a diverse experience.

Ben Garcia (BG) works for Brighton & Hove buses, Spirit of Sussex coaches, the Destination Experience Group, Possibility People and Metrobus. Brighton & Hove Buses, Metrobus and Spirit of Sussex operate over 500 vehicles and carry the highest number of bus passengers per head in the UK, with over 50 million journeys per year. Successful partnerships have been delivered through discounted tickets with attractions including Sea Life Centre, Volks Railway and Brighton Museum. The "Days Out" campaign promotes attractions and events across the city. Metrobus operates a 24-hour bus service via Gatwick, connecting visitors to Crawley. From Crawley, the 273 operates a fast service to Brighton. The City Sightseeing bus receives positive feedback. There are nine night bus routes, eight operated by Brighton & Hove, providing overnight connections to places such as Lewes, Peacehaven and Eastbourne and supporting the 24-hour economy. To put the scale of the network into context: Greater Manchester has 19 night bus routes and approximately 1,600 buses. Brighton & Hove has 9 night bus routes and approximately 300 buses. Of Greater

Manchester's 19 night routes, serving all ten boroughs, only two operate seven nights a week. Brighton & Hove has eight night routes operating seven nights a week, at least hourly throughout the night. Greater Manchester has a population of around 3 million people, compared with around 280,000 people in Brighton & Hove. Greater Manchester has around ten times the population of Brighton & Hove and more than five times the number of buses. Despite this, Brighton & Hove operates four times as many night bus routes that run seven nights a week. With eight all-week night routes, Brighton & Hove has one of the most comprehensive night bus networks in the UK for a city of its size, helping support residents, visitors, hospitality workers and the wider night-time economy both within the city and across the wider region. The bus company has leader status in accessibility and has been working with disability groups to introduce low level flooring, audio announcements, discounted tickets for unpaid carers, dementia friendly flooring, the helping hand scheme and create space for 2 wheelchairs. They are working with the council on Park & Ride service. JW asked about the Sightseeing bus and how long it operates for. BG said it stops in November and the number 77 reduces its service over the winter months.

IL said having an open top bus along the seafront would attract more people. BG said this was trialled but there wasn't much demand.

PA asked about the Christmas markets and ice rink. IB said there won't be an ice rink this year and there isn't the power infrastructure to run an ice rink except to use diesel which they felt was irresponsible. DM said the provider doesn't want to use diesel and they had looked at every option. Christmas markets haven't worked in the city. He suggested the buses had an announcement at some bus stops to say "get off this stop for the i360 etc". BG said they do have some of those announcements, such as Preston Manor, but are happy to look at specific suggestions. Next-stop announcements on buses provide vital audio and visual information to ensure all passengers can travel confidently and independently. Primarily, these systems deliver essential accessibility support for blind, partially sighted, or hearing-impaired passengers who rely on clear cues to navigate their journeys. They also offer valuable reassurance to tourists and passengers unfamiliar with a route, keeping everyone informed of upcoming stops, route directions, and sudden service diversions. Furthermore, providing these clear announcements is increasingly becoming a legal requirement for local bus and coach operators under UK Department for Transport rules.

DM said it would be good to get more people to explore the wider Sussex region. JW said a visitor card would be good that includes transport and entrance fee to attractions. IM said it needs a strategic leadership and vision.

AE said if these schemes existed, what channel would be used to promote it. It would be good to have deals where you buy a rail ticket from a different city that offers discounted entry to a Brighton attraction to encourage them to visit.

JW asked when the last train is back to London and the general feeling was it was too early. BG said it is an issue and East Sussex Council says people spend more when they travel by bus than by car.

Prepared notes from Gavin Stewart shared after the meeting:

The State of Tourism in Brighton & Hove (2026)

Good afternoon everyone, my name is Gavin Stewart and I am the CEO of Brilliant Brighton, the city's Business Improvement District. I also chair the city's Destination

Experience Group (DEG) and sit on the Sussex LVEP. The DEG is made up of wide selection of tourism focused businesses, from hotels and attractions to transport, retail and education.

Drawing on feedback from the DEG, as well as day to day observations from the Business Improvement District, I want to take ten minutes to reflect on where Brighton & Hove's visitor economy stands today - its strengths, its pressures, and the opportunities we must seize together.

1. A Visitor Economy Built on Experiences, Culture, and Events

Brighton & Hove continues to punch above its weight as a cultural and experiential destination. The city's outdoor events programme remains one of the most significant drivers of visitor activity. As Ian Baird highlighted to the DEG group, the city hosts three major events, ten festivals, and over 150 community events, generating more than £120 million in economic benefit.

Events like Pride, the Marathon, the Great Escape, and the Rugby World Cup don't just bring visitors - they shape the city's identity. And the council's renewed strategy, with the appropriate events planning permissions now being secured across key sites, shows a commitment to keeping events central to our visitor offer.

But we also heard a clear message: we need to diversify into shoulder season and winter programming, and that will require commercial partners willing to take on risk. The opportunity is there; the question is whether the ecosystem can support it.

2. A Mixed Picture for 2026: Strong Demand, Soft Spend

Across the sector, the story of 2026 so far is one of cautious optimism mixed with real pressure. It's too soon to get an overall feel for the 2026 summer season, so we will need to revisit this in the near future, however, feedback up until mid-July suggested that some attractions are performing exceptionally well. As Sea Life noted, "2025 was one of their highest performing years," and they continue to see strong evening event demand linked to conferences. The Palace Pier reported a good Christmas period. Bus services are seeing year on year growth.

But hospitality and leisure businesses are facing a different reality. Rising costs, business rates, and inflation are biting hard. As one member of the DEG put starkly, "Spend is down on hospitality and there is a lack of confidence." Rates are dropping, recruitment is slowing, and secondary spend is under pressure.

This divergence - strong footfall but weaker spend - is becoming a defining feature of the city's visitor economy.

3. Transport, Mobility, and the Visitor Experience

Transport continues to be one of the most frequently raised issues. From Valley Gardens delays to weekend rail replacement services, travel friction is affecting both residents and visitors.

Brighton & Hove Buses are doing excellent work - new sightseeing services, expanded regional connections, and partnerships with attractions - but the broader

picture is more challenging. Coastal congestion, east west connectivity, and parking pressures remain structural barriers to growth.

If we want visitors to stay longer and spend more, movement around the city must feel effortless. Right now, it doesn't.

4. Business Events: A Growing Strength

One of the most encouraging trends is the growth in business events and conferences. VisitBrighton's 2026 diary is strong, with a solid event bookings in the conferencing diary (such as NEU, IATEFL, PCS and BISA). Hotels are hosting healthcare conferences, fam trips, and international delegations. Cultural venues are seeing increased demand for evening events linked to conferences.

As we all know, this matters because business visitors spend more, stay longer, and return for leisure. The city's ability to attract and retain this market is a major competitive advantage.

The rise of multi venue events, as noted by IMEX, also plays to Brighton's strengths: compact geography, diverse venues, and a strong cultural backdrop.

5. Talent, Skills, and the Future Workforce

Skills shortages remain one of the biggest threats to the visitor economy. Hospitality Connect's model - linking venues with schools, SEND provision, and careers hubs - is exactly the kind of long term intervention the city needs.

The University of Sussex's expansion—from 4,000 to 7,000 beds—creates new opportunities for student engagement, internships, and consultancy. Erasmus and youth mobility schemes will bring more international students, who are both visitors and part time workers.

If we want a resilient visitor economy, we must invest in the talent pipeline now, not wait for the next crisis.

6. Digital Discovery and AI Driven Visitor Behaviour

A major emerging trend is how visitors find and choose destinations. As discussed in the July DEG, AI driven discovery is reshaping trip planning. Businesses were encouraged to ensure their content is "clear, accurate, and optimised for AI-driven discovery."

It's important to stress that this is not a technical detail - it's a strategic shift. If Brighton's digital presence is fragmented, inconsistent, or poorly structured, we will lose visibility to destinations that invest in digital storytelling.

The LVEP work is crucial here: aligning branding, content, and regional narratives so Brighton & Hove is discoverable, compelling, and competitive.

7. Regional Partnership Opportunities

Work with the Visit Gatwick Partnership looks positive moving forward, with VB being a central supporter of upcoming China fam trips to the city and region. The role of the Sussex LVEP too is important in placing B&H as a central pillar of the wider

regional tourism story, ensuring we are front and centre of international campaigns along with the region's other major assets.

Upcoming work in this area includes:

- i. Guanxi China Roadshow
- ii. VisitBritain China Fam Trip dinner
- iii. Arrivals graphics within Gatwick terminals showcasing the Brighton & Hove and Sussex offer.

8. Opportunities We Must Seize

Looking ahead, several opportunities stand out:

- Gastro tourism and Sussex wine: a growing regional brand with huge potential for itineraries, experiences, and storytelling.
- Black Rock redevelopment: a future cultural anchor with meanwhile uses already underway.
- Anniversaries and heritage moments: from the Regency Ball to BHAFC's 125th anniversary, these are ready made narratives for destination marketing.
- Student engagement: a major untapped market for both workforce and visitor activity.
- Regional collaboration: the Combined County Authority and LVEP structures give us a chance to align transport, growth, and visitor strategy at scale.
- Look and Feel: this comes up time and time again with BID and DEG businesses. The BID has delivered a short-lived chewing gum and graffiti removal scheme, which was well received but costly. The council has begun a deep cleansing programme, which is welcomed, but we could maybe be doing more to advertise this and let people understand that the city cares about the visitor experience at every level.
- Focus on specific markets: We all want more people who fly into Gatwick to head south instead of north to London, but the reality is, that decision is made at point of booking, not point of landing. We need to work on those territories with focused campaigns to drive visits to the city. A good example of this is the great work that VB has done with the Nordic markets as well as the proposed partnerships to focus on the Chinese market which I've spoken about previously. Building on that success feels like an obvious positive move.

9. A Realistic Conclusion

Brighton & Hove's visitor economy is resilient, creative, and full of potential. But it is also under strain. Costs are rising, confidence is fragile, and transport challenges persist.

Yet the city's strengths remain undeniable: culture, events, experiences, business tourism, and a brand that resonates nationally and internationally.

If we can align strategy, improve mobility, invest in skills, and embrace digital discovery, Brighton & Hove will not just maintain its position - it will grow it.

The visitor economy is not a side industry. It is one of the city's greatest assets. And with the right coordination, leadership, and ambition, 2026 can be a year of renewal rather than retrenchment.

Thank you.

DATA

Brighton & Hove's visitor economy generates significant economic output, with clear, well evidenced headline figures. These bullet points summarise the latest available data from the 2024 Cambridge Economic Impact Model, published by VisitBrighton.

Economic Output of the Brighton & Hove Visitor Economy (2024)

- £1.39 billion total economic value generated by tourism (direct, indirect, and induced).
- 12.2 million total trips (day + staying).
- £979 million direct visitor spend from trips.
- £414 million indirect and induced spend, supporting supply chains and wider economic activity.
- 25,677 actual jobs supported, representing 18% of all employment in the city.
- Staying visitors generate 65% of total tourism value (£909 million), despite being only 14% of trips.
- International staying visitors contribute £233 million, with longer stays and higher spend.
- Day visitors generate £378 million, representing 35% of total value.
- Overnight visitors spend significantly more per trip:
 - Holiday visitors: £359.87 per stay
 - Business visitors: £324.64 per stay
- Breakdown of direct expenditure:
 - Accommodation: £200m
 - Retail: £229m
 - Catering: £281m
 - Entertainment: £117m
 - Transport: £91m

Strategic Overview

- Brighton & Hove's visitor economy is high value, not just high volume.
- Staying visitors - especially international - are the core economic engine.
- Tourism is one of the city's largest employment sectors, underpinning nearly one fifth of all jobs.
- The sector's value is spread across accommodation, food, retail, culture, transport, and events, making it central to city centre vitality.

Task & Finish Group Meeting 3 – 16/09/26

Members present: Cllrs Evans (Chair), Cattell, Earthey,

Apologies: Cllr Lyons, Thomson,

Witnesses/Officers supporting: Lucy Davies, CEO, Brighton Dome and Festival, Michael Kill, [Night-Time Industries Association](#), Howard Barden, Head of Culture and Events (BHCC), Darren Johnson, Conference Sale Manager (BHCC), Emma Thurlow, Business & Sales Manager (BHCC), Ian Baird (Outdoor Events Development Manager), Neha Holmes (Local Growth and Visitor Economy Officer), Giles Rossington, (Overview & Scrutiny Manager), Natalie Sacks-Hammond, (Overview & Scrutiny Officer).

Cllr Evans (AE) welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanking witnesses for finding the time to attend. She reminded everyone that the meeting was not in public, but that the Task & Finish Group (TFG) would be producing a report which would be published, with evidence from witnesses referenced or quoted. A note of the meeting will be circulated to all witnesses to check for accuracy.

Lucy Davies (LD) explained that the Brighton Dome's work is strongly place-based, with most attendees being local residents who typically walk to the venue. During Brighton Festival, activities extend across the city and attract a wider regional and national audience, increasing visitor numbers. While the Dome plays an important role in fostering a sense of belonging and supporting the city's identity, the Festival makes a more significant contribution to the visitor economy. Their activities are closely linked to the nighttime economy, as most events take place in the evenings. LD described the experience of walking across Waterloo Bridge in the wintertime and looking at the lights on the South Bank, which are effective in making the area attractive at night, making it feel warm, alive and safe. When putting on events, there is going to be tension between meeting the obligations of Martyn's Law such as bag checks, and keeping activities inclusive and welcoming. The conferencing team at the Dome have said that conference delegates are future leisure visitors and we need to create easy ways for them to be familiar with the city through things like walking tours to persuade them to come back again with their family. Some organisers add a leisure day at the end of the conference. There also needs to be good links between the venue and the hotels. Cross-promotion is underdeveloped and attractions could collaborate better, such as doing more with the Pavilion Estate. The busy times in the artistic calendar are February, March, October and November; it would be good to see how to share the volume of activity and tap into it more. The touring companies are a potential source as they stay in the city for work but could be incentivised to stay longer or return later. LD talked about the National Theatre trialling earlier start times for their shows at 6.30pm and to encourage pre-show and post-show dinners. LD said they are planning a collaborative show at the Leonardo Hotel in February, which is a new, creative idea using a different space in the city and could be used to attract visitors in a less busy month. LD is a member of the newly formed Culture Sussex, which aims to join up with cultural leaders across East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove. It's a very dynamic group producing lots of new ideas linking in with the new Prosperity Strategy being put together by the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority.

Ian Baird (IB) said it was an interesting idea to introduce an earlier start time for shows as there is a gap between cafes closing at 4pm and the nighttime venues opening around 7pm. This could bridge that gap for a non-alcohol lead audience outside of an alcohol dominated

environment. IB said he had been talking with the Flour Pot Cafe who also want to bridge this gap but don't have the market for it. It would be good to explore opening up different spaces and support businesses to find that market to open between 4pm and 6pm to lead into the nighttime economy.

LD said that February works for them and the hotel because it's quieter and they have the capacity to try new, exciting things. AE said that there are some restaurant offers in the 4pm to 7pm gap such as pre-theatre menus and First Table. There are places like Red Roaster in New Road where there are options for nibbles or coffees or proper meals.

Cllr Cattell (JC) said she had seen a show at the Komedia which started at 6.30pm and they had been able to book a table at a restaurant for 8.30pm which worked really well. They could encourage people to book at specific restaurants or even book a table at the same time as booking the show.

AE said that lighting at night is important. JC said lighting in trees is very effective in London and that it would help to make people feel safe, particularly on the seafront. Michael Kill (MK) said 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. It transformed the way people moved around the city. AE said some parts of Brighton are spooky at night. JC said we could encourage different venues to introduce uplighting and they could do something with the twittens, for example, projections on the ground.

MK is the CEO for the Nighttime Industries Association, which is a trade body of 10,000 businesses across the UK and has strong links with central government. Local level representation is recognised as important. The appointment of the new Prime Minister has led to cautious optimism, as recent policy suggests a more supportive approach towards the sector. The sector has lost 28.7% of all nighttime economy businesses with 36.1% of nightclubs closing but more recently there has been a bounce back of around 4%. The sector has suffered due to safety issues and the transport offer after midnight. While there may be ambitions for a 24-hour city, businesses are unlikely to remain open later without clear evidence of demand. For the first time, they are seeing the evening economy outperforming the nighttime economy. There has been a 13% drop off for the late night economy – after midnight. Day parties are becoming more popular. Manchester is cited as performing very well which could be attributed to Andy Burnham and the "halo" effect that drives confidence for investment. Younger people spend less but the 35 – 40+ year old market are coming back; going out more and spending. There are different expectations where younger people want more tech-driven experiences and older people want more face-to-face human contact activities. The cost base has changed in the sector; the highest cost is staffing, but the second highest is now energy, which is a concern moving forwards. Businesses are creating procurement groups to collectively reduce energy costs as it is now 40% more expensive to operate than it was in 2020. This brings together businesses and the local authority to develop procurement strategies that help reduce operating costs. They 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 NTIA did a research piece asking consumers aged 18 to 30 what would make them go out later. The answers were: having more money, feeling safe at night and the guarantee of getting home easily. There are policy implications as well such as Martyn's Law which has made operating even more expensive. The security sector is moving to PAYE which creates additional costs. They will need 100,000 more security operatives to fulfil Martyn's Law.

National Insurance contributions have impacted young people finding work as everyone is paid at the same rates, so employers will hire the more experienced people. The Employment Rights Bill has also had an impact creating less flexibility in seasonal work, which has reduced the amount of work available for students. The sector is becoming more promoter driven who can hold events in non-traditional licensed spaces such as pop-up spaces and house parties, which bring a new set of challenges to police. The nights are getting earlier and people only have so much money and stamina so the challenge is how to keep them out.

MK talked about visiting China and how mobility is linked to commercial output, that transport should be treated as an economic infrastructure. In China it costs the equivalent of £2 to go anywhere in a taxi. Data is very important and the NTIA does a quarterly data review, which could be something that would benefit Brighton & Hove to really understand the state of the visitor economy. People want to go out but it is expensive. AE said that Brighton is recognised as the second most expensive place to go out in the UK.

JC said that a new Statement of Licensing Policy was introduced last year giving restaurants the flexibility to stay open later if they wanted to. It also has a focus on protecting music venues. She asked if the club culture had moved on. MK said it has evolved and the main challenge is that it is too expensive to operate clubs. The support measures offered during Covid were not good enough and clubs went into debt. The policing and transport offer doesn't exist after midnight so people are going home earlier. Young people, particularly students, tend to go to house parties more or if they are going out, they "pre-load" beforehand which means they spend less when at the club.

IB asked if there was a particularly successful city that is doing things the right way. Brighton is popular because it's small and people can venue-hop. He asked about the Purple Flag Scheme. MK said the Purple Flag Scheme allows the council to demonstrate that they're doing things the right way, but the industry doesn't rate it, and consumers don't know what it is. It does support consistent delivery and provides a clear framework. A stronger approach would be to establish a clear data structure, maintain performance indicators focused on cultural and social outcomes, and align these with wider policy objectives. New South Wales in Australia is a good example, and they have the first Nighttime Economy Minister in the world. They do quarterly reviews of data, judge how successful they are and adapt as needed. In the UK, people talk highly about Manchester whereas London has more challenges.

IB said that Brighton has some established night zones and asked whether it is beneficial to concentrate on those areas or to be more flexible. MK said that being adaptive is preferable because the market is flexible. It's tricky to shoehorn people into one location and it can result in pushback from the industry. It's better to be aware of what is going on in real time and be able to respond to the shift. He gave the example of Brick Lane in London that used to be a "no go" area and is now a hub of culture and creativity. This was caused by the market starting something new. We need to have a holistic approach to where people want to go and be up to date to adapt and ensure that the right services are in place.

Cllr Earthy (ME) asked what proportion of the cost base is for energy. MK said it was between 200% and 400% higher than it used to be. He suggested that the principle of bulk purchasing, such as for energy, could also be applied to staffing by creating a shared pool of people that organisations could access, which may be particularly useful for security personnel

ME said that he used to work in the energy business and that 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. ME offered support to help facilitate this arrangement.

Darren Johnson (DJ) said he echoed the issues about late night transport and that he had been speaking to restaurant and bar owners who need to leave work early just to get home on the last bus or train. AE said there are a small number of night buses and there is a gap between the regular service ending and the night bus starting. MK said that transport is a commercial entity and you can't deliver transport without customers and customers come from the businesses, so if they aren't going to provide things for the customers, it's a bit of a lost cause. There needs to be a collective approach to encouraging customers to stay later and use the transport services to make them viable. AE said that some people, particularly those working in the health service, work at odd times in the night and need transport to get home. Emma Thurlow (ET) said that young people tend to live further out from the city centre as rent is too high. AE said this is something the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority could look at. There is a good bus service in Brighton & Hove but since most bus companies were privatised, they send the money out of the city to the parent company every year in profit. If a bus route doesn't make a profit, then they close it without considering whether the people in that area depend on that bus route.

DJ presented slides on the conference provision in Brighton & Hove. He explained that Visit Brighton is split into 3 departments: conferencing, partnership and marketing. Neha Holmes reaches out to the business community to sell partnerships and enable them to access benefits. Charlotte Barrow deals with the international marketing of the city. Darren and Emma work in the conferencing sector where they proactively go to conference organisers and bring them into the city. They generate proposals and host site visits. They have confirmed over 55 events per year and generated £1.1million in revenue for accommodation providers. Unfortunately, social and free time for conference delegates is an afterthought for the conference organisers. They are provided with suggested itineraries which some share with their audience and others don't. They do pre and post communications encouraging delegates to extend their stay especially if the conference leads on to a weekend. They offer a delegates deals card where discounts are provided at some bars and restaurants. They tie in with any outdoors events that are going on and will inform the organisers about the Brighton Festival in May, On the Beach festival etc which helps to sell the destination. Cultural activities and live music are very popular. They try to include local experiences like a Food Tour or a Health Walk and get these included on the conference registration site. There is an ambassador scheme working with local leaders in hospitals and universities to help drive their events into Brighton. They explored the idea of having an app but it was very expensive and many conferences have their own apps anyway.

AE said that 51 events translates to 1 per week and asked about capacity to expand. Howard Barden (HB) explained that Visit Brighton covers all venues in the city, not just the Brighton Centre. The conference market is in the spring and autumn so it brings people into the city in the less busy months. It is fairly quiet during mid June to early September. There are trade events that are less seasonal. JC asked if the Brighton Centre was a big enough venue. HB said that some conferences need a really big area with breakout spaces and the Brighton Centre doesn't have that capacity. It is a good venue because of its location as it has great sea views, lots of hotels nearby and transport hubs. The Brighton Centre has

grown with the industry and now plays a major role in entertainment for the city. It also hosts political party conferences and university graduations.

ET said she looks after the conference sales team at the Brighton Centre and they have recently opened up a new space at the back of the building called The Wing. It has been re-branded and can host conferences with an 80 – 400 delegate capacity. The Brighton Centre has 2 main sources of commercial income which are conferences and live entertainment. The Brighton Centre sells exclusive hire to one conference at a time which normally last around 4 days. Conferences have got shorter due to the cost of living as people want to meet in person but for not as long. The number of bed nights has dropped. Return customers are very beneficial and they get bookings way into the future. There is a return customer booking for 2037. They have hosted almost 100,000 delegates in 2026.

ET talked about The Wing which has been refurbished to have a younger, fresher vibe and is a multi-purpose space. They offer a simple day rate which includes all the spaces, catering, and the AV which is more accessible to new markets, including local communities and businesses. They have hosted the BTN Illustration Fair, job fairs, Create Conference and will be hosting the auction for the Amaze Book Bench trail.

JC asked if The Wing could host small gigs. HB said the AV isn't set up for that and they don't want to compete with smaller venues in the area who already offer this.

ET said the economic value of confirmed conferences was around £46 million in 2022 and is now £55.5 million in 2026. The average lead in time is 2 years and they are always looking at the future. Setbacks can have a big impact. DJ said there is a lot of value in international business as people will stay longer. He used to represent Brighton at international trade shows and events, but budget issues have meant he hasn't gone for a while. There are big trade shows in Barcelona and Frankfurt.

HB said there may be more money available with the new Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority and that a tourism levy might be coming. He questioned where the money generated from the levy would go. Liverpool has introduced a levy and directed the money into an international campaign and that Visit Liverpool is very big. Asked if the international market had a lot of repeated custom, HB said it did not as they tend to move conferences around different countries.

JC said that people would travel internationally to gigs for the big names. HB said the Brighton Centre is too small and they would go to the AMEX stadium or the cricket ground instead. They do host a lot of comedy because the space is big enough but still intimate. JC said the tourist offer is really important as it underpins hotels and retail and offers gateway jobs. ET said that shops and restaurants would close without tourism.

AE said that what benefits one business will benefit all. Visit Brighton only promotes its partners who have paid which means if a business isn't a partner they won't be promoted. HB said that a large proportion of Visit Brighton's membership is from the hotels and if they decided not to pay, it leaves it quite vulnerable. ET said that Visit Brighton is seen as a money generator and is always under scrutiny because it is not statutory. It needs to be nurtured and invested in because it's work is so important to the city.

JC said it would be good to make Brighton Town Hall into a proper civic space but it desperately needs repairs done. That space could be sold to people. ME said it used to be a venue at the Festival for ghost stories. ET said there is a potential for it to be used for cultural tourism tours. ET referred to an event called Brighton Unconventional that VisitBrighton and the council are hosting in collaboration with their hotel and venue partners across the city. It will take place in 2027 weekend 7-9th of May it will include a drinks

reception at Brighton Royal Pavillion and a Brighton hotel and venue exhibition for event buyers in the Skyline at the Brighton Centre. They have partner buy-in and expect to bring around 150-200 event buyers to the city for this event.

HB said that the Brighton SEO conference started in a room above a pub and is now hosted at the Brighton Centre. It is now going to America with the same branding and name, which is good promotion for the city.

Task & Finish Group Meeting 4 – 25/09/26

Members: Cllrs Amanda Evans (AE), Mark Earthey (ME), Ivan Lyons (IL)

BHCC Officers: Ian Baird (IB), Natasha Bridge (NB), Natalie Sacks-Hammond, Giles Rossington

Witnesses: Natalie Wyatt, Managing Director, Liverpool City Region and Destination Partnership (NW); Carly Heath, Nightlife Culture (CH); Herve Guyat & Rekha Sohun, Hotel representatives (HG) (RS)

Apologies: Cllrs Alison Thomson, Julie Cattell, Marina Lademacher, Bridget Fishleigh

Evidence from Natalie Wyatt, MD, Liverpool City Region Destination Partnership

NW described Liverpool City Region Destination Partnership:

- Responsible for promoting whole of city region, but uses Liverpool as access brand
- Public/private sector board chaired by Lord Birkenhead (Tony Hall, former BBC Deputy DG)
- Funded by Combined Authority and by Liverpool City Council
- Focus on increasing overnight stays through better marketing
- Liverpool is a recognised brand, but more needs to be done to promote local coast and countryside
- Work closely with local hospitality industry on workforce and workforce skills issues
- Work very closely with local and regional transport operators
- The local visitor economy has grown by 9% in recent years, but day trip numbers are doing better than overnight stays
- The Partnership works with a range of partners, including local authorities, universities, transport operators, attractions/venues, and the culture and business sectors
- Universities are a key partner as they have students from all around the world. Also, academics have a role to play as ambassadors
- The Partnership has a programme to plug downtimes across the year
- The Partnership employs an International Bidding Manager. This is an important role as business tourism is critical
- Data is key to understanding where to invest and promote. The Partnership works with an organisation called Sojourn to understand the ways in which marketing has

impacted (e.g. whether marketing campaigns have had a positive impact on train ticket sales). Also developing a data dashboard

- The Partnership works closely with LCC Culture team. There is regional funding for culture – e.g. £600k pa mayoral pot
- Business tourism – the Partnership looks at local business strengths across the city region, with a focus on promoting conference opportunities
- Labour Conference represents a major opportunity to promote the region. Events like this are important and may justify subvention - currently via ABID (Accommodation Business Improvement District) funding, but potentially via OVL (Overnight Visitor levy) in the future
- Focus on making venues accessible, both because it's the right thing to do and because there is value in promoting accessibility tourism
- Measures of success include overnight stay rates, hotel occupancy rates, visitor spend, number of events/conferences held, perceptions of city region as a destination
- Challenges include funding issues across public sector, competition from other UK destinations, and hospitality workforce pressures
- Recommendations for other areas would include: focus on growing your local partnerships and focus on value rather than volume.

IL: Are ambassadors paid? NW: no, all are unpaid. They do it because they are committed to the region and because it can help them professionally. The Partnership runs events to promote the ambassador role.

IL: has the ABID impacted negatively on visitor numbers? NW: no. The ABID charges a small amount to overnight visitors, raising C£4.9M pa. This is used for various things, including subvention of Lab conference. OVL is expected to raise significantly more than the ABID and there are commitments to reserve it to support the visitor economy. There are some practical issues here as ABID is due to end before OVL begins and planning will be needed on how to bridge this gap. IB: important to note that B&H does not have an ABID so the difficulties of moving from ABID to OVL do not apply. However, it will be important to ensure that local OVL funding supports a focus on attracting more high-spend visitors.

ME: where do your overnight visitors come from? NW: target market is mainly Europe and USA. There are lots of more local overnight stays also but not sure where these tend to come from.

NB: how joined up is marketing across the city region? NW: it's becoming more joined up, with Liverpool used as the 'attract brand'. There has been discussion about forming and centralised marketing team.

IB: what's the read-across to nighttime economy? NW: there's a nighttime economy rep on the Partnership board who lobbies on parking etc. The Partnership does promote nightlife as an attraction to visitors. Key to a successful nighttime economy is transport. The Partnership lobbies on this – we're not all the way there yet, but are making progress and more devolved powers will help.

AE: tell us about accessibility. NW: this is important. The Partnership holds 2 accessibility events pa and encourages local businesses to be more accessible, to share best practice

and to support bids for accessibility funding. People with disabilities have money to spend, so there is a financial incentive to get accessibility right. **Possible REC?**

Evidence from Carly Heath (CH), Nightlife Culture

CH works independently but previously worked with Bristol City Council (BCC) as their Nighttime Economy Advisor. CH told the TFG:

- 41% of Bristol's jobs are 6pm-6am. This is because of a large nighttime economy, but also Bristol has a large commercial tidal port which is often at its busiest at night
- Bristol has C60k students, soon to rise to 80K. The city has a very young population, even younger than BH.
- Rent to earnings ratio is now one of the highest in the UK
- There are big challenges with transport – CH wishes Bristol had BH level bus services
- The nighttime economy is relatively stable, having recovered well from Covid
- The city uses 'meanwhile' space effectively to support cultural activity
- Music is hugely important to the city economy. There is much more activity than indicated by licensing data. Much of this activity is delivered by small venues
- BR relief has helped the music industry survive. However, nightclubs are not eligible for relief which makes no sense
- 'Bristol Rules' was intended as a time-limited nighttime safety campaign but has been very successful and has effectively become embedded
- Lots of effective partnership working. There's a single city centre bid (managed by Visit Bristol/Visit West) and the city universities are increasingly good at working in partnerships
- There has been good work with experience businesses to integrate experiences into the Bristol visitor offer
- There is a well-established Bath/Cotswolds itinerary for international visitors and Bristol does try and tap into this, although it's generally a different type of tourist that's attracted to Bristol – lots of counter-cultural tourism. Bristol attracts lots of regional tourism from SW England and S Wales.

IL: what about Park & Ride? CH: there are 3 on the edges of Bristol. However, they are not available for overnight visitors. Bristol does not welcome cars into the city centre – there is a clean air zone that discourages drivers + very high parking charges.

IL: year-round tourism? CH: Bristol is actually busier in the winter than the summer, when it competes with Devon/Cornwall. There are year-round events such as St Paul's Carnival, Balloon Fest, Harbour Festival

GR: Are you worried about impact of Martyn's Law? CH: not really – Bristol is predominantly about smaller venues which aren't required to do a lot more under the new laws. BCC Licensing Team works very closely with businesses also.

Evidence from Herve Guyat (HG) & Rekha Sohun (RS), Hotel representatives

RS is General Manager, Brighton Hilton. She told the TFG:

- BH is a great city to operate in, but there are challenges in winter where there's a big drop in occupancies
- The city doesn't have much to offer in the winter – it doesn't feel very festive: no Christmas Market, no decorations on the seafront, no winter events
- Not enough is done to market BH – the fact that Visit Brighton no longer regularly attends trade shows is damaging
- We need a better narrative to sell BH – people in rest of world don't know what BH has to offer, its proximity to London etc.
- BH would benefit from a central marketing team
- Cleanliness is a major issue which really impacts on visitors. The council needs to ramp-up its operations in the summer

HG runs a small hotel in Kemptown. He told the TFG:

- Hotels are closing due to lack of winter custom
- The lack of events in the winter is a major issue, particularly as the ice rink won't be operating this year
- There are clear benefits to the city of people staying overnight – more needs to be done to encourage this
- BH must not become a seaside town in the summer that shuts in the winter. AE agreed, noting that particular efforts should be made to avoid boarded-up shops in iconic locations like Dukes Lane
- ASB is a real issue, particularly on St James St. Many visitors do not feel safe in Kemptown even in day time. RS agreed – similar issues on the seafront and especially around Regency Square. Police do little to help.
- BH should not be contemplating introducing an OVL when the city is unsafe and dirty. RS added that if OVL is introduced it should be ringfenced to tourism.

Task & Finish Group – Meeting with Bath & Northeast Somerset Council – 15/09/26

Members present: Cllrs Evans (Chair), Cattell, Earthey, Thomson, Lademacher

Apologies: Cllr Lyons, Luke Proudfoot (Overview & Scrutiny Officer)

Witnesses/Officers supporting: Robert Campbell (Director of Culture and Heritage, Bath and Northeast Somerset Council) Ian Baird (Outdoor Events Development Manager) Giles Rossington, (Overview & Scrutiny Manager), Natalie Sacks-Hammond, (Overview & Scrutiny Officer).

Cllr Evans (AE) welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanking witnesses for finding the time to attend. She reminded everyone that the meeting was not in public, but that the Task & Finish Group (TFG) would be producing a report which would be published, with evidence from witnesses referenced or quoted. A note of the meeting will be circulated to all witnesses to check for accuracy.

Robert Campbell (RC) said that Bath and Northeast Somerset is unique in the UK culture visitor attraction sector because they have an asset in the Roman Baths and Pump Room that delivers a net surplus back to the council. This year, the service will turn over £29 million

returning a surplus of £13.2 million back to the council. This is one of the only heritage attractions in the UK that delivers a profit, most other famous national institutions like the British Museum are operating at a loss and subsidised by national government. Bath accommodates a million visitors each year and the council is so reliant on the visitor economy that it would be bankrupt without it. The council will receive a similar amount from its parking estate and some from being a freeholder for properties in the city centre. The council's finances are intertwined with the fortunes of the visitor economy. As with most councils, the statutory pressures have increased and government grants have decreased which makes the risk profile much higher. At the end of August, they were £560,000 down on income targets primarily because there are less inbound visitors coming to the UK with a large decrease from America. The council doesn't have a visitor economy strategy and Robert is the only member of staff working on tourism. Before Covid, the council took the robustness of the visitor economy for granted and now need to put some strategies in place to make sure that Bath remains a significant destination in the UK. They are very seasonally driven and have traditional spikes during the school holidays, and mid-summer months which is when tourists visit and it gets very busy. They don't have any initiatives to bring people to the city off season but make the most of the busy periods through variable pricing structures by charging higher ticket prices in the busier months. This generates more income.

Cllr Cattell said she was surprised it was only Robert working with tourism and that their Cabinet Member is also responsible for the economy and sustainability. RC said that before Covid they had 20-years of consistent growth with steady income. Visitors don't vote so there isn't anyone representing them when there are well connected vocal people who have paid a lot to live in the city centre who are not welcoming to tourists. They support policies that prioritise the needs of residents over tourists. It's become a financial imperative as the money is plateauing and the council needs to make more people focussed on the importance of the visitor economy and not take it for granted.

Cllr Evans asked if he would get more staff. RC said it wasn't necessarily about having more people but better joined up working and having a strategic framework that prioritises the visitor economy when developing other policies such as transport or place management. They need to be aware of the visitor economy and make sure everything else supports it and makes it part of the process. The council is 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 region. The overnight visitor levy is coming.

Cllr Thomson asked about the freehold properties and whether they are rented to visitors. RC said they are part of the commercial estate and the council doesn't own any short-term lets or hotels. These properties are retail. There are 5.3 million trips made by visitors to Bath and the city centre has a vibrant retail and hospitality economy. There are around 90,000 residents which increases by around 30,000 students during term time whereas the total population of Bath and Northeast Somerset is 200,000, so visitors outweigh residents in the city. It is very popular due to being a filming location for shows like Bridgerton and the Roman baths attract a lot of people. The council has a number of assets which are economy dependent on attracting tourists, so when there is a global downturn it gets tricky, with factors such as the decline in America's economy and the war in the Middle East. This means there are less people visiting from abroad and it has an impact on the income generated.

Cllr Evans asked about the Christmas market which is always popular. RC said that it doesn't fall under his remit but there is a publicly available evaluation on the market on their website. The market is very central in the heritage core of the city and surrounds the Roman Baths and goes up the main shopping street. It is organised by the council but barely breaks even, the main economic benefit is for the businesses in the city including accommodation. Increasing security costs are an issue since the introduction of Martyn's Law as they spend a

large amount of money on vehicle mitigation bollards, enhanced CCTV in the city centre, and barrier systems.

Ian Baird asked about the retail offer; whether they are independent or high street outlets and what their attitude is towards the market. RC said that there are strong independent retail shops especially in the food and beverage sector. They used to complain about the market but they were reassured after being presented with the data that demonstrated that the market supported other businesses.

Cllr Cattell asked if they work with the rail company to offer deals or linked ticketing. RC said they had not but the attractions would like a joint ticket which would be a discounted offer to visitors. However, since the Roman Baths attract around a million visitors, they would essentially lose money if they were part of a linked ticket. They are not in the financial position to do so. They would like more people visiting from London and acknowledge at some parts of the day there are empty trains so a linked ticket could benefit both the council and the rail company.

Cllr Cattell said we are trying to encourage more people to stay overnight, that there are a lot of hotels on the seafront and the Seafront Development Board is seeking investment for new sites to improve those areas.

RC said that destinations prosper when they have a really clear idea of who their audience is. The council has outsourced its destination marketing to the Local Visitor Economy Partnership who are doing a good job but they need to work closer with them, the public and private sector who are all a part of the place management vision. It can be tricky working with the private sector as there are some tensions.

Cllr Earthey asked about a joint train and bus ticket. RC said they do not have this but that they have recently got a new mayor for their Strategic Authority and she is bringing these ideas to the table as they start to look more at the regional area than just the cities.

Cllr Thomson asked about space to develop in the city centre. RC said that they need to be creative, there are some sites but it's more about renovation of existing ones. They have a £45million project to create a new fashion museum in the city which is a redevelopment of an anchor building. Bath has an issue with a number of significant properties being landbanked by developers, which have a necrotic effect on retail sites around them. The council bought back the leasehold for the fashion museum which shows the council demonstrably driving inward investment into the wider retail estate across the city. They didn't do a compulsory purchase order as it came up for auction. Cllr Thomson talked about Dukes Lane and how it had 80% vacant units; it is owned by Kent County Council and they weren't interested in whether the units were vacant or not, only the value of the property. There was a similar issue with the Imperial Arcade which ended up being bought by a private company and those units are now shops and cafes. Could compulsory purchase orders be used to regenerate an area? RC said it's not an easy answer and there are large sums of money involved. They bought the building with a repayable grant from the Strategic Authority.

Cllr Thomson asked about the demographics of visitors to Bath and whether they tend to be older and more affluent than those visiting Brighton. RC explained that the starting point is to identify the audience you believe is most likely to engage with the offer and assess whether they align with the desired outcomes. Interventions can then be developed to attract or influence the target audience. Cllr Thomson noted that her ward sees a significant number of hen and stag parties, who often stay overnight and contribute to the local economy through accommodation spending.

Task & Finish Group - Meeting with Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council – 24/09/26

Members present: Cllrs Evans (Chair), Thomson,

Apologies: Cllrs Lyons, Earthey, Fishleigh, Cattell, Giles Rossington

Witnesses/Officers supporting: Amena Matin (Director of Investment and Development, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council) Ian Baird (Outdoor Events Development Manager), Natasha Bridge (Senior Local Growth and Visitor Economy Officer) Natalie Sacks-Hammond, (Overview & Scrutiny Officer).

Cllr Evans (AE) welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanking witnesses for finding the time to attend. She reminded everyone that the meeting was not in public, but that the Task & Finish Group (TFG) would be producing a report which would be published, with evidence from witnesses referenced or quoted. A note of the meeting will be circulated to all witnesses to check for accuracy.

Amena Matin (AM) said that Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) have a thriving seasonal economy with 11 million visitors per year. However, this only translates into 1.65 million overnight stays. BCP has similar challenges to Brighton & Hove, and they have put clear strategies in place to meet them. They benefit from having three towns that offer something different and unique to visitors with 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. Poole runs 36 international events per year which attracts people from abroad who will stay overnight. BCP has a good balance of attracting different kinds of audience demographics. They have been working on converting daytrippers into overnight stays and have 3 strategies to do so. The strategies are: working with existing partners and thinking of who else needs to be brought in; having a really clear plan and place marketing; and building their profile through external partners like Visit England. They have a Destination Management Board (DMB) which is like a tourist board who were set up in 2020 to advocate for the place. They have all the relevant businesses represented such as the BID, hoteliers, foreign language schools and universities. It has a diverse sector representation which is very valuable as they provide feedback on the current visitor economy offer and the reasons why people aren't staying overnight. Analysis shows that this is due to the cost of living as it's expensive to travel and stay overnight. To combat this, the DMB go out to different businesses and sectors and create a tourist partnership, which helps with the branding and marketing profile but also allows them to add to the visitor economy through individual offers. They feedback insights to the group, such as the hotels seeing people bringing food into the rooms rather than spending money in restaurants. To combat this, the team will reach out to local food and beverage retailers to create an offer to encourage them to spend in the local economy. They are working with their partners to build tourist partnerships and develop discounted offers that can be put into a value package for visitors. They work with the DMB to come up with a strong profile; the DMB do all the marketing and own all the websites. They are currently developing a "culture clash diary" to have one central place for the 1000 community and culture events to be listed and easily accessed by residents and visitors. They work with their Local Visitor Economic Partnership with Dorset and adopt a Destination Management Plan that's all about how they increase off-peak products throughout the year. This includes their markets, festivals and cultural programmes. They are in their 16th year of the Purple Flag Scheme. They use this in their promotion to challenge the perception that it's not safe to visit BCP.

Cllr Thomson (AT) said that safety is a key issue especially around recent reports of someone being spiked and mugged. She asked where BCP promote, whether it's national, the local region or including places like London. AM said the DMB are being less localised

with the promotion and looking more outwards including London. They opened Poole Museum this summer, which was funded with £10 million from the Arts Council, which will be a pull for visitors. They also do international trade shows with the hoteliers to encourage visitors from abroad. They are also working with the airport to promote the destinations. European countries and cultures like walking so they are creating walking trails, heritage trails and building packages that they think would attract those visitors.

AE asked about the international water sport events and whether they were one day or multiple days. AM said they tend to be during the week with some taking place over a series of days. They have competitions and participants generally stay in the area. People do travel to watch these events. They tend to take place during peak season although some stretch into the autumn but it depends on the quality of the water. Paddle Boarding events go into the autumn. They also provide courses and training and are building up the experience offer.

AE said they had a huge discrepancy between day trips and overnight stays and asked about the available accommodation. AM said the Bournemouth Hotel Association comes together to share intel and what the occupancy is looking like. The hotel offer varies in quality, with some properties benefiting from significant investment while others, despite their prime locations, offer a lower standard of accommodation. This provides a range of options, allowing visitors to choose between higher-quality hotels at a premium price and more affordable accommodation at a lower cost. The visitor economy levy acts as an incentive for hoteliers to improve their stock. BCP also has issues with short-term lets and they are trying to keep prices affordable.

AE asked if the hoteliers welcome the tourist tax as some can be resistant to it. AM said there is an appetite for the tourist tax but as long as it is reinvested into the place. In Scotland the levy was invested into other things like social housing. BCP have promised that it will go back into the visitor economy. Smaller hotels are concerned about the financial hit and there is a broader understanding that it could help if it was done well.

Ian Baird (IB) asked about the Purple Flag Scheme and whether they track the impact of it, do visitors know what it is and factor this in when choosing where to visit. AM said it's hard to measure but the main benefit is that it helps them promote the area with the ability to say it has been independently validated as a safe place. They also have Green and Blue Flags. They ask the hotels to collect data on their customer's reasons for visiting. The Purple Flag Scheme doesn't cost a lot and it is funded collectively by their partners.

IB asked about their commitment to reinvest the tourist levy if the powers for this is being transferred to the strategic authority. AM said they are not a devolved authority yet but they have been developing their growth plan with a stronger focus on the visitor economy. They are the main coastal attraction in the new proposed authority area.

Natasha Bridge (NB) asked about the data analysis and whether this was gathered directly from the hotels or through a third party. AM said the hotel association meets monthly and feed directly into the DMB that the council sits on.

AE asked to hear more about the DMB and their plans to specifically target year-round visitors. AM said that the DMB was set up in 2020 and are the tourist board for the area. It is chaired independently and made up of hoteliers, foreign language schools, universities, the town council, chambers and a whole mix of stakeholders. Their purpose is to champion the visitors economy in the area. They give updates on what is going on in their sectors that month, identify trends or issues and whether anything needs to be put in place. For example, the foreign language schools were having safety issues so they worked with the police to improve the situation. The members are any business that has a visitor or external person as part of their business and they feedback via the board. They come together as investment partners and generate income from the tourist websites they own. They say any funding would have the most impact on branding and marketing. They are developing the Culture

Clash Diary and using the cultural programme to attract year-round visitors. They have the Bournemouth International Centre that hosts big music events and conferences including the LGA but there are also smaller venues who also get some promotion. The Culture Clash Diary brings everything together so visitors can see everything and plan their visit. They have a festival called "Arts by the sea" which is held in September and aims to attract people back post-summer.

AE asked whether they have a big festival. AM said the "Arts by the sea" weekend is their main festival and there are others which are run by the BID all year round. They are planning a big event on the beach for next year which is out of season. AE said weather can be risky. AM said they need to keep people interested, to demonstrate that they are more than just the beach and there are other things happening. Following such as warm summer, they can use this to get people into the city centre to places with air con such as the museums. AE asked if the smaller festivals are indoors. AM said they are mostly outside at the moment but they are looking to do more indoor ones. They need to bring empty shops back into use in the city centre and plan to do pop-up events, music events and work with the universities to put things on. The Arts Council has a pot of funding for grass roots venues which they could bid into.

AE said that the high streets are struggling nationally, although Brighton is lucky to have so many independent shops. AT talked about Dukes Lane in Brighton which was 80% empty units and that EDF had sponsored some pop-up events there. During Pride, they had a drag act there. They do have some local investment in the city centre with Ikea buying Churchill Square and Uniqlo opening up soon. One empty unit is being turned into a boxing gym. AM said the high street comes up as the biggest challenge.

NB asked if having an external body marketing the city has been successful. AM said that the DMB has its own marketing team and it is successful because it is the industry putting together what they believe their place marketing should be. They use a membership model which is used to fund marketing. Each sector markets themselves as a sector so there is one distinct brand for the hotels, one for the football club and so on. For example, the hotel sector collectively contributes funding towards marketing, decides how those funds are allocated, and ensures the interests of the sector are represented.

Task & Finish Group – Meeting with Donna Close – 24/09/26

Members present: Cllrs Evans (Chair), Earthey

Apologies: Cllrs Lyons, Fishleigh, Thomson, Cattell,

Witnesses/Officers supporting: Donna Close (Director of White Night), Ian Baird (Outdoor Events Development Manager), Natasha Bridge (Senior Local Growth and Visitor Economy Officer) Giles Rossington (Scrutiny Manager) and Natalie Sacks-Hammond, (Overview & Scrutiny Officer).

Cllr Evans (AE) welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanking witnesses for finding the time to attend. She reminded everyone that the meeting was not in public, but that the Task & Finish Group (TFG) would be producing a report which would be published, with evidence from witnesses referenced or quoted. A note of the meeting will be circulated to all witnesses to check for accuracy.

Donna Close (DC) presented the slides on the White Night Festival. At the time, Donna was Head of Arts at Brighton & Hove City Council and festival development was part of her remit. She is now a Director of a company called Festivals and Events International where she has developed festival and event strategies for major cities such as a winter festival in Glasgow, a Halloween offer in Ireland that spans seven hubs and developing new concepts for places like Scarbrough Fair.

White Night ran from 2008 – 2011 from 6pm – 6am on the evening that the clocks go back. It became a new ritual for Brighton in the same way that Burning the Clocks did. Its tagline was "Do something different in the middle of the night". At the time, there was a lot of anti-social behaviour on Saturday nights and West Street was seen as a "no go" area. The festival encouraged people to go out at night and challenged artists to do something different and innovative. Everything was free and set in a public space in Brighton. It became so successful that it formed part of the council's bid for Purple Flag status and Donna spoke at a few conferences around the UK about it. White Night embodied the qualities that people associate with and take pride in about Brighton: being bold, independent and willing to take risks. Launched at a time when emerging technologies were opening up new creative possibilities, it provided artists with innovative ways to engage audiences. The event celebrated Brighton's identity as a European city, extending its vibrant café culture into the evening and partnering with the French sister festival, 'Nuit Blanche'. Transforming the entire city into a stage, it brought streets and public spaces to life through projections, installations and performances. Over four years, the festival grew significantly, attracting audiences of up to 45,000, expanding from 15 to 76 events, and showcasing more than 250 performances. They worked with a sound artist called Martin Ware and Driftwood Productions to create an immersive sound sculpture for when people came out of the clubs on West Street that would chill them out and make them happy. This was broadcast live to the University of Brighton where an academic who was a body language expert, was commenting on how the sound affected peoples' behaviours. They won an award for innovation. They also installed street pianos around the city. There was a takeover at the Open Market where they ran a soup kitchen and outdoor cinema. They had an act singing opera in the streets. They used the swimming pool and installed a film archive called "Dive in movies", they hosted a rubber duck hunt with 1000 ducks and had an underwater rave. These new partnerships allowed artists to be confident and ambitious and many of them went on to tour their work internationally and develop new careers. The budget was £2 million over four years which equated to £500,000 per festival. A million of this came from EU funding, which is obviously no longer available to the UK. The council, the Arts Council and partners all put funding towards the festival. They had a theme each year such as "love", "fortune" and "utopia". The festival took 18 months to plan. DC said that White Night shouldn't be recreated as it was and to make it relevant for the current time, as tech has developed and there are different challenges. It would be beneficial to focus on being truly "Brighton" and lean into this.

AE said that budget is a big challenge and it would cost a lot more to put a similar festival on now. Cllr Earthey (ME) said they could do an indicative budget in terms of who could bid in and questioned whether it would be open to commercial businesses or would that change the vibe in the same way that Pride has drifted away from its fundamental message. DC said it would be risky to call it "White Night" as for some people, there would be a high expectation. It would be better to call it something else and adapt to current times. They could make it very exciting to attract funders but it would need a lot of careful planning. We

don't want to set ourselves up to fail. AE said referring to "white" might have a connotation to the rise in racism and it wouldn't be good to have that kind of misinterpretation. IB said that people do remember White Night and the impact of it and the key thing now is its ability to make people think differently about the nighttime economy and how they interact with the city at night. It is a good opportunity to show the cultural organisations that they are valued and respected at a time of uncertain funding and budget cuts. There needs to be a reasonable budget because artists need to be paid effectively for the work that they do and not be reliant on doing it just for the good of the city.

DC said there is money out to be had out there, and you can be accessible and inclusive through charging those who can afford it and putting provisions in place to ensure those who can't can still have access. It is key to make sure activities are relevant to the now, co-creating with partners and planning it properly. White Night was cost effective because a lot of people were bringing their own resources, building it into their national portfolio funding applications or their own project funding because they really believed in it. To encourage more overnight stays, they could hold it over multiple nights, have multiple entry points, different trails and tours, and bookable offers.

AE asked about the winter festival in Glasgow and the Halloween event in Ireland. DC said that Fáilte Ireland (the Irish Tourist Board) wanted a new iconic festival to attract travellers. Ireland is the home of Halloween with the ancient pagan festival of Samhain. They pitched to the Irish government to invest in a 3 year project and was given funding of 750,000 Euros to develop the "Puka" festival. It was set near an ancient hill where the first fire was lit in 500 AD, which was part of the area that visitors didn't normally go to. It has turned into a bigger project called "Home of Halloween" which involves 7 different local authorities working to develop their unique visitor offer within that concept. It runs from mid-October and mid-November to coincide with the traditions of Samhain which are about the end of harvest, the coming of the darkness and the end of Autumn. Food is an important part of the festival and they have food fairs and nighttime feasting which are all bookable. DC noted that Glasgow's Christmas market offer was relatively limited, and there were many communities running separate seasonal activities. The city also had a range of lighting projects, cultural institutions and museum programmes operating independently. DC helped bring these various elements together into a coherent visitor offer, creating a unified winter festival experience for residents and visitors alike.

AE asked if there were other winter experiences that DC had been involved with. DC said she had been working on Scarborough Fair which had been commissioned by the Council. It became five different festivals including Scarborough Lights, that is held in January, which is a light show taking advantage of heritage buildings. This was funded by £1 million from the combined authority. It is effective because they understand what is already happening in the city at those times and tie them together into a cohesive offer.

AE said there was a clear story for White Night with the antisocial behaviour and the idea of reclaiming the streets at night. IB said they are opening another safe space at night near the Volks nightclub.

DC explained that White Night came to an end due to a lack of funding and the impact of austerity, which reflected a wider shift in attitudes towards cultural investment. She noted that her team was reduced from nine staff members to just Donna, illustrating the significant

capacity pressures and budget cuts experienced within the council. Further reductions have followed since then, creating additional challenges as councils are increasingly required to prioritise statutory services, with arts and culture often among the first areas to face cuts.

DC suggested holding the new version of White Night at the beginning of February to tap into the hope that winter is coming to an end and the beginning of spring.

