WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

The following questions have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answers:

(a) Councillor Hamilton

"I understand that as part of the current organisational transformation the council intends to produce a comprehensive approach to the management of talent. When do you expect to have this in place? Will career pathways be part of the employment framework of the council? Will this lead to greater career and development opportunities for all employees who seek them, and will there be a structured approach for all abilities as a way of motivating and retaining the existing workforce?"

Reply from Councillor Alford, Cabinet Member for Central Services.

When do you expect to have this in place?
"We hope to begin work on a talent management strategy for the organisation from April 2011. This allows time for the leadership team to work with HR to analyse the current workforce profile, predict the future needs and develop a workforce plan by end of March 2011. The thinking involved in doing this will allow the talent management plan to be targeted to BHCC needs."

Will career pathways be part of the employment framework of the council?
"We already have career pathways in some areas of the organisation e.g. legal services. It is intended with the introduction of job families, for this practice to widen, however we are at early stages in our thinking. Job families enable more flexible use of the workforce and for employees themselves to identify development needs required to move up in their existing job family or transfer to another job family."

Will this lead to greater career and development opportunities for all employees who seek them? Will there be a structured approach for all abilities as a way of motivating and retaining the existing workforce?
"Our intent would be for any talent management strategy that we put in place to be about motivating, retaining and developing the talent that the organisation needs to be successful. It is not clear yet how it will be applied across the organisation."

(b) Councillor Elgood

"Can the Cabinet Member for Finance give a progress up-date on the implementation of the Coalition Government's requirement for councils to publish items of expenditure over £500, and to explain why the council has yet to implement it when other councils already have?"

Reply from Councillor Young, Cabinet Member for Finance.

"The Council will publish items of expenditure over £500 on 25 October 2010. This will include both a detailed breakdown of expenditure incurred in 2009/10 accessible through a user friendly free software package "Spotlight on Spend" and monthly files showing expenditure for 2010/11 derived from our creditor system. This provides a huge amount of information on council spending for example the April 2010 spending data file alone runs to 8,875 lines, and at has taken some time to process all this data in a form that satisfies the draft regulations. A recent survey has shown that so far 27% of all councils in the South East Region had published their spending data, but most of the authorities were small districts and only 16% of Unitary and County Councils had published their data."

(c) Councillor Elgood

"Can the Cabinet Member for Children & Young People confirm the number of users of the Connexions service (for the year from September 2009) listed by council ward?"

Reply from Councillor Brown, Cabinet Member for Children & Young People.

"We are currently not able to give the requested information listed by council ward. However, the citywide figures for the period requested, by age of young person, are as follows:

Age	Number of young people using Connexions 1/9/2009 – 31/8/2010
13	73
14	228
15	629
16	1375
17	1392
18	1233
19	1312
20	803
21	159
22	61
23	36
24	29
25	23
Total	7353

Please note that this table shows individual, different young people. The vast majority had more than one intervention over the year. Interventions can range from sending out information, telephone support through to a full intensive one-to-one interview."

(d) Councillor Kitcat

"The latest Sitemorse local government website benchmarking report placed Brighton & Hove City Council's site in 331st place out of 429 Local Authority sites reviewed. Among other things the report flagged the site's accessibility as being 'impaired'.

Given the key role the new media industry plays in the local economy, can the Cabinet Member responsible explain what plans are in place to remedy this situation so that the site is improved and is accessible to users of all abilities?"

Reply from Councillor Alford, Cabinet Member for Central Services.

1. Accessibility is a key requirement for the ongoing development of the Council website. The website has been designed to meet established industry standards and conforms to recognised accessibility guidelines.

2. The council subscribes to The Society for IT Management (SOCITM), an association for ICT professionals in the public and third sectors. In the 2010 SOCITM review of all local authority websites, the Brighton & Hove website received a 3 star rating. This is assessed against a range of different factors including accessibility.

3. Sitemorse is a private organisation which sells its consultancy and audit services to organisations. The Sitemorse ranking of the Council website is based on their own diagnosis and prioritisation of a range of different factors.

4. We are currently implementing the first of a three phase web development program as part of a channel shift strategy which underpins our commitment to citizen centric services.

5. Stage 1 will review and improve the design and navigation aspects of the existing website. Working with Community Contact Point staff we will incorporate user feedback to inform future design and accessibility needs.

6. Stage 2 will include significant changes to the structure and architecture of the website to move it closer to the council's ambition of a personalised, transactional and transparent web experience which meets the needs of all its customers.

7. Officers are establishing an approach using the established Equalities Impact Assessment process which will directly address accessibility issues across all services impacted under this programme.

(e) Councillor Kitcat

"Will the Leader of the Council commit to wherever possible now publishing Council information, including spending data, under an open licence such as Creative Commons or the National Archive's new Open Government Licence?"

Reply from Councillor Mears, Leader of the Council.

"The Council is committed to openness and transparency and will always make information available to the public unless there are good legal or other reasons not to do so, such as the need to protect people's privacy.

The exact form in which information is published depends on the subject and the intended audience. We will always adopt the most appropriate means taking into account legal requirements, good practice as well as government guidance.

On the issue of publishing expenditure, I confirm that we will publish items of expenditure over £500 on 25 October 2010. This will include both a detailed breakdown of expenditure incurred in 2009/10 and monthly files showing expenditure for 2010/11 derived from our creditor system. We will be using Data.Gov terms and conditions for our published information which is in line with government guidance to ensure that the data is presented in a usable format.

I hope this answers your question"

(f) Councillor Kitcat

"The option of a return to the committee system for this Council as a part of the Localism Bill is not to be even voted on in Parliament until late 2011. Given this fact, can the Leader of the Council explain why the Independent Remuneration Panel's report on councillor allowances still has not been voted on by this Council?"

Reply from Councillor Mears, Leader of the Council.

"As you will be aware, the Independent Remuneration Panel's report was deferred at Full Council in March because of concerns raised by some of the Members over a number of the recommendations put forward. Since then Group Leaders have had an opportunity to put forward any comments for the Panel's consideration and as you will have seen, their report is on the agenda for today's meeting together with an officer report.

The matter of a possible return to the committee system is a subject for separate debate and in no way affects the decision we will be making today."

(g) Councillor Duncan

"Does the Cabinet Member believe that American Express is doing enough to compensate residents suffering severe inconvenience, and in some cases loss of earnings from working at home, as a result of the construction of the firm's new facility in the Carlton Hill area of the Queen's Park ward?"

Reply from Councillor Fallon-Khan, Cabinet Member for Enterprise, Employment and Major Projects.

"I would like to thank Councillor Duncan for his question

It is my understanding that Amex is doing a great deal to assist local residents who may be suffering inconvenience.

In addition to a range of long term community benefits secured through the planning permission under a section 106 Agreement, AMEX has arranged a range of measures to reduce the impact of the works on the local community. These include:

- Monthly residents' liaison meetings and a monthly newsletter distributed by hand to 250 neighbours informing them of the progress of the works.

- An information website.

- Providing residents with prior warning of any particularly disruptive construction activities which are unavoidable.

- Appointing a full time neighbour liaison manager who is contactable on a freephone number during working hours.

- A free fortnightly window and car cleaning service to 166 households around the site. I understand that 108 households have taken up the window cleaning and 54 households the car cleaning.

- An off site community room for home workers and residents to use free of charge. This has been equipped with four computers, a printer, wi-fi, 2 sofas, TV, kitchen facilities and is available by pre-booking. This room has been available for two months now, although I understand that only 4 passes have been issued and 5 bookings made to date.

I am aware that senior officers of the council are continuing to work with local residents and Amex representatives to help ensure that any inconvenience is kept to a minimum.

(h) Councillor Duncan

"The weekend of October 9th-10th was one of the warmest October weekends in years. Temperatures reached 20 degrees, and the beach in many areas was packed, both with tourists and local residents, some of whom were enjoying swimming in the sea. How many council-provided lifeguards were on duty?"

Reply from Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Culture, Recreation and Tourism.

"The council provides a full beach lifeguard service from the end of May until the first week of September. The service is made up of 26 seasonal lifeguards and patrol boat crew and covers 11 stations across our 13 km of Seafront.

During the summer months byelaws come into place which provide designated bathing zones which are identified by yellow marker buoys. These zones are lifeguarded from 9.30 am – 7.00 pm 7 days a week and red and yellow flags are used to inform the public when it is safe to swim. All buoys and flags are removed at the end of the season and anyone choosing to swim does so at their own risk.

Outside of the summer season the Seafront is managed by a team of 6 permanent full time Seafront Officers. The team is based at the Seafront Office and operates 365 days of the year.

On the weekend in question there were 4 full time Seafront Officers on duty who are all beach lifeguard qualified. The Seafront Officers patrol the seafront but are not permanently based on the beaches as lifeguards are in the summer.

The water temperature drops considerably after the summer season and Seafront Officers would not encourage people to swim unless they are equipped for these conditions. A rescue undertaken by Seafront Officers on 25th September this year resulted in one officer and 2 casualties being taken to hospital suffering from hypothermia after having been in the water for only 20 minutes."

(i) Councillor Duncan

"Do you think the system by which tenant participants are involved in decision-making about the council's housing policies, through Housing Management Consultative Committee meetings, and in other ways, could be improved in any way?"

Reply from Councillor Caulfield, Cabinet Member for Housing.

"Council housing residents have a very powerful influence in the development of housing policies in Brighton & Hove. Our recent annual report demonstrates how closely a wide range of residents are involved in shaping our housing policies and priorities and in checking on our performance.

We currently support around 70 resident associations, four Area Housing Panels and nearly 20 other resident groups, including the City Assembly. Housing Management Consultative Committee is the meeting where final policy proposals are debated by both Members and residents, but much wider consultation takes place before reports are presented to the committee.

During the last 12 months we have increased the range of ways in which tenants and leaseholders can get involved. We now have a database of nearly 2000 residents who are interested in getting involved. We use the database to involve residents from under-represented groups and to involve residents in ways which suit them, including using social networking media.

Through our involvement of residents we empower them to gain new skills. We've trained resident volunteers as 'mystery shoppers' to test our customer

service, involved residents in a 'rate your estate' initiative and offered training for residents to become energy advisers.

Residents are involved in the procurement of new contractors such as the new repairs partnership, and a new group looking at building new Council homes. Residents also control a yearly Estate Development Budget for improvements to their neighbourhoods.

The Council is continuously working with residents to further improve their meaningful involvement in the management of their homes and neighbourhoods. Residents are currently working with us on the development of our Resident Involvement Strategy and over the next two weeks we are holding a series of 'Tell us what you think!' events to find out resident priorities for our services."

(j) Councillor Duncan

"Members of Brighton and Hove Older People's Council have warned that the withdrawal of the Free Swimming Scheme for over-60s will have a negative impact on some people's health, and ultimately will cost society more money than it saves.

Will you reconsider the council's decision not to subsidise entirely swimming locally for all under-18s and over 60s, and reinstate free swimming for all children and older people in the city's public swimming pools with immediate effect?"

Reply from Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Culture, Recreation and Tourism.

"The Free Swimming Initiative was originally to be funded for a limited period of 2 years.

Following the government announcement in June that the funding would cease 8 months earlier than planned, the Council explored the option of retaining the initiative. With the continued support funding from NHS Brighton & Hove, we have been able to continue to offer free swimming to children aged 11 and under until 31st March 2011.

We shall continue to work in partnership with NHS Brighton & Hove to explore further options to extend the initiative beyond this date. This will be subject to available Council and NHS Brighton & Hove funding.

In the meantime, over 60s continue to benefit from the concessionary rate for swimming which provides a discount of approximately 40% off the standard price.

There are also plans to develop a leisure card scheme to encourage further use of the Council's sports facilities.

*Note – We have yet to begin discussions with NHS Brighton & Hove on the extension of an initiative beyond 31st March 2011."

(k) Councillor Randall

"Can Councillor Caulfield tell us when the survey of potential sites for social housing in the city on council-owned land will be published?"

Reply from Councillor Caulfield, Cabinet Member for Housing.

"As reported at Housing Management Consultative Committee, the Cabinet Member for Housing has announced that the Council wish work with tenants to take advantage of potential investment opportunities to build new Council homes. The Proposals are being developed in partnership with a Tenants Working Group on Building New Council Homes Chaired by Cabinet Member for Housing and consisting of representatives from the Repairs & Maintenance Monitoring Group and Asset Management Panel. A paper is being brought to HMCC and Cabinet in November updating on progress.

The aim of the Tenant Working Group is to 'To work together to provide quality new council homes that meet the needs of our residents'. The objectives are:

- Identify suitable sites for development
- Advise on acceptable design and unit mix for sites
- Assist with the tender process to identify a suitable build contractor
- Assist with the design of a local apprenticeship programme
- Monitor the contract to ensure the necessary standards are achieved
- Advise and assist with promotional activity for any new scheme
- Advise and assist with local lettings plans for new developments
- Help with the official opening and welcoming new tenants onto the scheme."

(l) Councillor Randall

"Can the Leader of the Council give an assurance that charitable organisations running public events in the city that require street closures will not be charged for loss of parking revenue?"

Reply from Councillor Mears, Leader of the Council.

"Historically there has been no charge for loss of parking revenue due to road closures for a defined number of events on Madeira Drive. In addition to this, we do not currently charge for suspended parking bays during the London to Brighton Bike Ride or during Pride.

The council also facilitates a number of other charitable events and community events that can involve road closures, often without charge.

It would not be possible to offer a blanket no charging policy otherwise we would face an avalanche of requests for road closures that could be disruptive

to general movement across the city. However there is normally only a nominal fee for charitable organisations where it is possible to accommodate such requests."

(m) Councillor McCaffery

"Petitions to the council demand a lot of time and work from residents who believe they will be listened to. I therefore ask this Council:

1. How many petitions were received by the Council between May 2009 and May 2010?
2. How many of these petitions resulted in the outcome requested by the petition?"

Reply from Councillor Alford, Cabinet Member for Central Services.

"I can confirm that for the municipal year 2009/10 a total of 77 petitions have been received by the council.

Individual petitioners themselves will be best placed to follow up on any actions they have asked for. It would be extremely time consuming for officers to determine exactly how many of the 77 petitions have resulted in the outcome requested by the petition, not least because the outcome is often not clear cut.. Petitions may be noted at the time by the Cabinet Member or other body and, whilst often not resulting in any immediate action, can be built into future work programmes. Examples of this are many road safety and parking related petitions. I would, therefore, recommend to residents that it is always worthwhile petitioning the Council to raise awareness of any matter of concern to them – the Council agenda before us today perfectly illustrates why."