

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY PANEL ON THE BUDGET PROPOSALS

2.00pm 5 DECEMBER 2011

COMMITTEE ROOM 1, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor K Norman (Chair)

Also in attendance: Councillor Mears, Mitchell, Pissaridou, Summers and Sykes. Joanna Martindale (CVSF Co-optee)

Other Members present: Councillor Kennedy

PART ONE

6. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

6.1 Declarations of Interest

There were none

6.2 Declarations of party whip

There were none

6.3 Exclusion of Press and Public

As per the agenda

7. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

7.1 Councillor Ken Norman, Chair, reminded the meeting of the main aims of the Panel. He confirmed that Councillor Wakefield's Housing portfolio was included in the panel's Work Plan for 6 January 2012.

8. WITNESSES

8.1 Councillor Amy Kennedy CM for Planning Economic Development and Regeneration (AK) reminded the meeting of her remit; it did not include Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Licensing which were the responsibility of Councillor Ben Duncan. She said maintaining Development Control capacity was especially important; effective ways of working and new technology were key.

8.2 AK was concerned about possible changes to the Planning Policy team, not least because of the need to produce a robust and timely City Plan. She said the Council had to be realistic in the current financial climate when there was little funding for development and inward investment opportunities. Regarding rationalisation of Capital Projects team she said capital projects can still be achieved by working 'smarter.'

8.3 AK answered the Panel's questions together with Jeanette Walsh Development Control Manager (JW), Geoff Raw Strategic Director Place (GR) and Cheryl Finella (CF) Economic Development Manager.

a) CS: ICT migration – a big change seemingly with relatively small savings

JW: this project is due to be delivered in August 2012 and is a forward saving eg on stationery.

GR: it is part of a wider programme of reducing paperwork and improving efficiency.

b) GM: have other options been considered re: savings on major projects team. Potential sources of external income eg regeneration?

AK: there is almost no external funding at present. It is a very tough choice that will likely affect posts. There has to be a balance between front-line and non-frontline posts.

c) GM: is there adequate capacity and knowledge of staff in planning policy, economic development and capital projects?

AK: My portfolio pulls together officers from a number of teams with a wide range of skills which will enable us to review all major projects to identify those that are still viable in this economic climate.

d) MM: How many posts within your remit will be lost?

GR: Restructuring proposals will affect only a small number of posts (that are currently filled) and cannot be shared as they are subject to consultation

e) MM: How many posts in Planning and Public Protection are still vacant?

GR: A written answer can be provided.

f) KN: voluntary severance does not delete a post automatically, does it?

AK: No

g) AP: Is there a list of capital projects that are unlikely to go ahead?

AK: this is subject to review

h) AP: many posts seem to be proposed to be lost in your area.

AK: this is worrying; there are hard choices to be made.

i) KN: what are the risks to the Council of lost posts?

AK: There will still be capacity to produce the City Plan. Frontline services in Development Control (important both for the Council and for residents and developers) remain relatively unscathed under these proposals

j) CS: Do we have the capacity to carry out the Duty for neighbouring authorities to work together?

AK: there is good cross-border co-operation already eg over Shoreham Harbour, Waste and Mineral Plan and National Park Authority. There is capacity to continue this regular work. There would be more pressure if the Council were to support Neighbourhood Forums. Neighbourhood Plans are being looked at, but because they can only be used to promote not prevent development they would not seem to me likely to be popular with many residents and personally at this stage I am sceptical about them for a number of reasons.

k) OS: Will a proposed reduction in technical posts mean this work will go to consultancies instead?

AK: No

l) MM: Will the Planning department still have the capacity and specialist expertise to deal with the volume and complexity of work?

AK: The capacity of the DC team is to be protected; we are looking only to reduce expenditure at senior levels. Expert knowledge exists across all the posts.

m) JM: I welcome close links with the Communities Team on new neighbourhood plans proposals. Joint working with Planning is important. Residents may well be interested in Neighbourhood Councils, eg in involvement in allocation of S106 funding. There are potential sources of European funding that can be accessed via community and voluntary sector.

AK: We are looking at how the Community Infrastructure Levy could be progressed alongside the continuing S106 regime and would welcome wider joint working on this.

n) GM: re redistribution of managerial responsibilities for senior DC and planning posts, what is meant by focussing on core aspects and non-statutory work?

JW: DC has strong management; there will be consultation on this. As the City Plan is following from the Local Development Framework there is a huge change in how plans are drafted and developed. Non-statutory work covers eg communications, graphics, graphic design work. There is no intention to reduce posts in statutory work (such as conservation areas and listed buildings enforcement).

o) CS: in EIAs – page 90 – what will be the effect of reducing the availability of advice on home adaptations?

GR: The Council provides housing adaptation advice to private sector residents. We are exploring the opportunities to safeguard further funding. The Council has policy documents in place 'Lifetimes Homes Policy' and at present an Access consultant works for Planning 1 day per week.

AK The Disability Discrimination Act is law and remains applicable to newbuild.

p) AP: What does the Ordnance Survey budget pay for?

AK: we think a reduction in OS fees (not jobs) can be achieved

q) GM: Economic Development Unit?

AK: we've been able to retain the ED budget which is relatively small but provides initiatives that we think can still make a big difference.

GR ED is central to the Council's being able to address increasing unemployment and increasing deprivation that impacts on the health and well-being of the local community and the pressures on many other local services. An investment prospectus for the City is being drawn up to promote investment and employment in the city.

CF: ED is involved in 3 main areas:

- 1) business support (eg 'Ride the Wave' workshops on networking, supply chains and business clusters; fledgling Environmental Technologies sector which is small but strong and bringing new business into the City; Creative Industries eg digital media and gaming plus performing arts and artists with the Arts Commission; talent scouts in music industry; and business improvement district to support retailers in the town centre)
- 2) skills (City Employment and Skills Programme and working with FE and HE sector to help grow the economy)
- 3) support infrastructure (Brighton & Hove Local Employment Scheme for recruitment and training in construction; an Investment prospectus for the City to develop a strong brand for business {alongside leisure}; showcasing the City and its skills offer including major EcoTec event in June relating to environmental industries)

r) JM: how can we measure the impact of ED actions, on the wealth of the City?

CF: This is notoriously hard to measure but we do take feedback from the business community and engage with different groups eg re skills. We run questionnaires and an annual business survey. We can't always claim credit for increasing the economy but nor should we be held responsible when the economic situation deteriorates given this relates to the national and international situation.

s) JM: Adult Education doesn't seem to attract much funding. How can we help protect frontline services and support organisations?

AK: We are doing this, and emphasising access to education for all, as part of the City Employment and Skills Plan produced in partnership with City College and with the Universities and Amex.

t) JM: But it's difficult to implement a Strategy without resources

GR: Improving coordination and work by Director of People with schools and FE and HE means that more can be done without necessarily having to increase resources to help support children and young people, as much as we may wish to. CESSG is ably chaired by Phil Frier, Principal and Chief Executive of City College Brighton & Hove.

Chair: Thank you all for attending the meeting and answering questions. Thank you to the Press for being here.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

9.1 The next meeting would be on Friday 9 December at 2pm in HTH CR1.

The meeting concluded at 3.50pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

