

WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

The following questions listed on pages 41 - 44 of the agenda have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answers listed below:

a) Councillor Hyde

“As a Brightonian I am very distressed at the Administration’s proposal to sell off the iconic mayoral number plate – CD 1 to raise a one-off sum of money. Can I ask the Leader of the Council to confirm that no more articles, historically associated with the mayoralty, will be sold off?”

Reply from Councillor Randall, Leader of the Council.

“In these tough economic times and with the authority facing an above-average cut of a third to our grant from Government, we have to take every opportunity to protect services by looking for savings across the Council.

I can confirm that there are no plans in the administration’s budget proposals to sell any other items associated with the mayor’s office”

b) Councillor C Theobald

“How much will children’s music fees be increased by from 2012/13 as a result of the proposed ending of all Council subsidy to the Music Service and is the Cabinet Member concerned that this will make it considerably less likely that children from lower income families will learn to play a musical instrument?”

Reply from Councillor Shanks, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

“We have listened to the views of people in the city and will be preserving all funding for the music service from the council this year and only reducing funding by 25% next. Central government cuts mean there is a reduction in funding and we therefore need to ensure that we support those children in most need. The service will concentrate on ensuring that children from less well off families continue to access our services.

The fees for Music & Arts service activities such as instrumental tuition will increase by 7.5% from April 2012. This takes into account inflationary pressures and also forms a part of a package of measure being taken to address the reduction in the level of Government grant available for the service as lead partner of our developing Music Education Hub. The subsidised tuition scheme available to families on low incomes will remain in place as will the subsidised instrument loan scheme, which is a central part of the service offer to support access and to enable children to practice and develop their musical skills.”

c) Councillor Peltzer Dunn

“Can the Cabinet member for Housing please tell me whether the Ainsworth House redevelopment contract was awarded before Christmas as she stated at the last Council meeting and when is she expecting building work to start?”

Reply from Councillor Wakefield, Cabinet Member for Housing.

“I am pleased to confirm that Kier Property (part of the Kier Group) was appointed as preferred contractor on 23 December 2011, following a comprehensive procurement process.

The contract has been drawn up for signing and sealing by both parties. We expect this to be completed next week. Kier will then take formal possession of the site and commence works shortly.

The Tenants Working Group, which has been involved with every aspect of this project from the start, will be liaising closely with Kier during the build process to ensure that the 15 new environmentally friendly council homes meet our key requirements.”

d) Councillor Janio

“Welcome new regulations issued by the Government mean that Local Authorities will now have to secure support from the local business community before introducing any workplace parking levy scheme. As this was one of the Administration’s key manifesto pledges, will Cllr. Davey please confirm if any discussions with local businesses have taken place on this and, if so, what level of support he found?”

Reply from Councillor Davey, Cabinet Member for Transport and Public Realm.

“Thank you for your question Councillor Janio.

I recall the question on this subject that Councillor Carol Theobald asked my colleague Councillor Kennedy at the council meeting in July 2011.

Councillor Kennedy indicated that the inclusion of workplace parking charges in our election manifesto reflects our commitment to sustainable transport. Transport measures to reduce the impact of congestion and pollution on the city are an integral part of the administration’s priorities.

Councillor Kennedy also clearly stated that any decisions would be based on engagement, in this case primarily with the city’s business community.

Engagement remains a priority of this administration and any decisions or changes will take into account responses from with people who live and work in the city.”

e) Councillor A Norman

“At the last Council meeting, in response to a question from Cllr. Carden on Cityclean, Cllr. West stated that “over 4 years there will be a cut in council public spending of 33%”. Would Cllr. West or Cllr. Kitcat please take the opportunity to correct this misinformation and apologise for misleading members and residents about the Council’s Budget?”

Reply from Councillor J Kitcat, Cabinet Member for Finance and Central Services.

“The response from Cllr West to Councillor Carden’s question about gutter clearing and weeds and grass in North Portslade should have read by way of context that the Council is experiencing a reduction in its formula grant of 33% over 4 years, not a reduction in council public spending of 33% as stated. This was indeed an error but should not detract from the fundamental point that this council is seeing unprecedented reductions in funding. This is not just in relation to the main formula grant but a whole range of other government funding sources. These austerity measures are ill-considered and damaging to the economy.”

f) Councillor Peltzer Dunn

“Will the Cabinet Member for Housing provide an estimate of the number of City Council properties that are currently sub-let and will she join with myself and the Leader of the Council in welcoming the Government’s recent initiative to make sub-letting of council housing a criminal offence?”

Reply from Councillor Wakefield, Cabinet Member for Housing.

“The administration recognizes that there is a dire need for good quality affordable housing in the city, and that there is a ‘perfect storm’ brewing with significant Government changes to housing benefits and a stall in house-building across the country.

We are fully committed to tackling tenancy fraud and broadly welcome the government’s proposals to make sub-letting of council housing a criminal offence. Social housing is an important commodity for people in need, and abuse of its provision will not be tolerated.

The Audit Commission has estimated in their report ‘Protecting the public purse’ that there is a 2.5% level of tenancy fraud in London with an assumption that there is a 1% level in other parts of the country .

On this basis it could be estimated that up to 120 Council properties are sub-let at any one time in Brighton & Hove. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that levels of subletting have historically been below the national average in Brighton & Hove, but may be on the increase. There have been 64 reports of suspected tenancy fraud in the Council’s housing stock since April 2011.”

g) Councillor G Theobald

“Given the offer from the Government of £2.6 million to the Sussex Police Authority to freeze their council tax precept in 2012/13, can the Council’s representative please update members on how he intends to vote, on behalf of the residents of Brighton & Hove, at the forthcoming Authority Budget meeting?”

Reply from Councillor Duncan, Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety.

“Thank you for your question. There have been several debates throughout the year on the Sussex Police Authority Budget for 2012/13. All are available to watch using the webcast facility on the SPA website, and I urge interested members to watch the debates in full.

The SPA budget will be agreed at a special meeting to be held on February 16th. Only at that meeting will I have full access to all the relevant facts: it would be irresponsible of me to prejudge my position at that meeting, and I won't do so here.

That said, I have made my position fairly clear throughout the debates: that I will vote in line with residents' wishes to keep our streets safe in the face of enormous cuts to the Sussex Police budget imposed by Government “C the cuts, about £50m in three years, will hit local policing hard.”

h) Councillor G Theobald

“At the last Council meeting I asked Cllr. Davey if he would provide a figure for the budgeted parking income (both on and off street) for 2012/13. In his answer he only told me how much extra will be raised by the Administration’s new proposals so please could he now give me the total figure for the whole city?”

Reply from Councillor Davey, Cabinet Member for Transport and Public Realm.

“The budgeted parking income (both on and off street) for 2012/13 (exclusive of Penalty Charges income, for which the council has no control over charging level) is £19,807,760

[Note: In 2012/13, Penalty Charge income is budgeted at £4,890,280]”

i) Councillor Cox

“At the CMM on 30th November it was stated by the Administration that their proposed increases in city parking charges will lead to a 15% reduction in people parking across the city. Have they undertaken any research which would show a) how many of these people will simply take their trade to other shopping centres

outside of the city where parking is either much cheaper or free? and b) what the estimated loss in turnover to local businesses in the city will be?"

Reply from Councillor Davey, Cabinet Member for Transport and Public Realm.

"The Visitor Survey conducted by the council in 2009 shows that the key factors for customers when choosing where to visit include the quality and range of shops, cultural activities, events and natural attractions like the beach.

The cost of parking actually accounts for a relatively small proportion of visitor spend and does not play a significant role in overall choice. It may, however, influence the choice of transport mode, which in turn could help to improve the visitor experience with reduced congestion and reduced pollution.

Research also shows that where towns have attempted to attract visitors by making parking very cheap, or free, the actual impact has been at best insignificant.

On this basis, we do not expect there to be a loss in turnover to local businesses as we expect visitors to continue to come to Brighton and Hove."

j) Councillor A Norman

"Can the Cabinet member for Children & Young People please tell me the value of the contract between Brighton & Hove City Council and Resource Futures / the Sussex Wildlife Trust to deliver environmental education in the city's schools, when this contract was awarded and by whom?"

Reply from Councillor Shanks, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

"The budget for environmental education was formerly used to fund the post of a council officer. A review upon the post being vacated in 2010 under the last administration recommended that the budget be used to fund a tender for the work.

During the 2010/11 academic year School Futures, with the support of the Sustainability Team, undertook consultation with schools and other connected council services and produced a tender document. The tender required bidders to design and deliver an environmental education service supporting the councils' key aims and interest was expressed from all sectors. A shortlist of five were asked to bid and the panel, made up of officers from School Futures, the Sustainability and Procurement teams, awarded the contract to a bid from, the not for profit company, Resource Futures in September 2011. Their bid was submitted in partnership with local charity, the Sussex Wildlife Trust, who will be delivering the bio-diversity elements of the contract.

The contract is for three years from November 2011 and will cost £46,500 for Year 1 and £40,000 for each of Years 2 & 3. The contractor will support the city's

schools in working towards Eco Schools Awards, offer training to school staff, arrange workshops, conferences, assemblies and competitions for pupils and support the work of council teams advising schools on energy, transport and waste issues. A steering group of eco contacts from the city's schools has been formed to advise upon need and future direction and the council is monitoring progress."

k) Councillor K Norman

"Can the Cabinet member confirm how much extra money Brighton & Hove will receive as part of the Coalition Government's 'new deal' to help enable older people to continue to live comfortably in their own homes?"

Reply from Councillor Jarrett, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health.

"While I welcome the announcement of the 'New Deal for Older People', I can't give you any details, as the coalition government has not shared this information with local authorities yet. I will provide an update once more information is available".

l) Councillor G Theobald

"Given that it is now over 12 weeks since the new Agency Workers Directive, signed up to by the previous Labour Government, was introduced, can the Cabinet Member please give me a more accurate picture of the additional costs to the local authority and across the city as a whole?"

Reply from Councillor J Kitcat, Cabinet Member for Finance and Central Services.

"The agency worker regulations came into force on the 1st October 2011 and any uplift in cost would be from 24th December 2011. Therefore, the first real uplift will be reflected in the January figures which we will not see until the February data comes out. However, I have asked HR to update you as soon as those figures are available.

Agency workers who were on continuous assignments of twelve weeks prior to this date received pay and benefits comparable to permanently employed council staff. However, December saw the council's costs from the use of agency workers drop to its lowest level at £171K. The costs for the same period in 2010 were £269k.

The costs would have been held down by the holidays over the Christmas period but the figure continues to reflect the council's reduction in agency spend.

We are expecting an uplift in costs in January as all agency workers will be entitled to additional holiday entitlement as a result of the new regulations. It is also a five week month without the distortions created by the extended Christmas

holiday. We would expect that the January figure will still be less than that for the comparable period in 2011.”

m) Councillor Bennett

“In their local election manifesto the Green Administration made a commitment to create a ring-fenced fund for communities to make local environmental improvements. Can the Cabinet Member for Environment please update Council on how this is progressing?”

Reply from Councillor Duncan, Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety.

“Thank you for your question. As you know the Government is imposing enormous budget cuts on the city and this council, reducing the amount of money available for core services to the city's most vulnerable.

In this context I am delighted to report that we have been able to embed a dedicated funding stream for Environmental Sustainability projects into this Council's grants programme, which supports smaller organisations across the city.

In 2011/12 this fund paid out grants of approximately £25,000 to beneficiaries including the Friends of Saunders Park, Bevendean Community Garden, the Brighton and Hove Fair Trade Steering group, and many others. In 2012/13 we anticipate that the fund will be worth a similar amount.”

n) Councillor Farrow

“It is being reported that there are proposals for the overall budget for Community Development to be cut by £100k. Would the Cabinet Member for Communities please confirm the exact amount of the cut that is being proposed and will he state what Community Development support will continue within Moulsecoomb and Bevendean Ward to enable this much needed work to continue.”

Reply from Councillor Duncan, Cabinet Member for Communities and Community Safety.

“Thank you for your question. I am delighted to confirm that there is no cut in the Community Development budget in the proposals that the administration will put before Council next month.

The £400,000 budget for community development will be targeted at those areas where need, inequality and capacity are greatest. It will also support measures to improve local democracy and hand control of neighbourhood budgets to local people.

The allocation to Moulsecoomb and Bevendean in 2012/13 will be approximately £65,000 per year.”

