

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & CULTURE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item
22(a)

Brighton & Hove City
Council

Subject: Bowls Clubs – Extract from the Council Meeting held on the 19 July 2012

Date of Meeting: 2012

Report of: Strategic Director: Resources

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Wards Affected: All

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

4.30pm 19th July 2012
COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

DRAFT MINUTES

Present: Councillors Randall (Chair), Meadows (Deputy Chair), Barnett, Bennett, Bowden, Brown, Buckley, Carden, Cobb, Cox, Davey, Deane, Duncan, Farrow, Fitch, Gilbey, Hamilton, Hawtree, Hyde, Janio, Jarrett, Jones, Kennedy, A Kitcat, J Kitcat, Lepper, Littman, Mac Cafferty, Marsh, Mears, Mitchell, Morgan, A Norman, K Norman, Peltzer Dunn, Phillips, Pidgeon, Pissaridou, Powell, Robins, Rufus, Shanks, Simson, Smith, Summers, Sykes, C Theobald, G Theobald, Wakefield, Wealls, Wells and West.

PART ONE

7(C). BOWLING CLUBS

- 7.46 The Mayor stated that under the Council's petition scheme, if a petition contained 1,250 or more signatures, it could be debated by the Full Council and such a request had been made in respect of a petition concerning funding provisions for Bowling Clubs in the city. He also reminded the council that he would be taking Item 20(b), Notice of Motion as part of the debate, along with the two amendments to the report and an amendment to the Notice of Motion.
- 7.47 The Mayor invited Councillor Farrow to present the petition.
- 7.48 Councillor Farrow thanked the Mayor and stated that a total of 1,627 people had signed the petition which read as follows:

“We the undersigned call on Brighton & Hove City Council presently governed by the Green Party, to debate their intention to reduce by £100,000 the subsidy to City Parks/Bowling Clubs throughout the City.

We call on the Council to debate this issue at their Council Meeting in July 2012.

City Parks are in discussion with each Bowling Club, individually, in Brighton and Hove over how each club can operate with reduced subsidy. If the proposed reduction is implemented it could mean Clubs would have to increase their charges by 200% or face possible closure.”

- 7.49 Councillor Farrow stated the size of the petition showed the strength of feeling in regard to the proposed loss of subsidies to the various Bowling Clubs. He stated that the clubs provided their members and others with the ability to enjoy a sport, socialise and exercise, all benefits that should not be discouraged. The proposed reductions could see fees increasing by as much as 200% and it was very likely that a number of clubs would simply fold.
- 7.50 Councillor Farrow then moved an amendment to the report’s recommendation on behalf of the Labour & Co-operative Group to refer the petition to the Economic Development & Culture Committee and to request a report on the options to support the clubs and to invite a representative from the clubs to address that meeting.
- 7.51 Councillor Fitch formally seconded the amendment and stated that he believed the bowling clubs were being badly treated with no account in the proposed reductions being made of the size or the finances of each individual club. He suggested that the matter needed to be considered by the committee with clear options being presented and all clubs informed of the proposals beforehand.
- 7.52 Councillor Brown moved the Conservative Group’s amendment which also sought to refer the petition for consideration by the Economic Development & Culture Committee.
- 7.53 Councillor Mears formally seconded the amendment.
- 7.54 Councillor Brown moved the Notice of Motion on behalf of the Conservative Group and stated that she had serious concerns about the scale of costs that the clubs would be faced with. She accepted that there was a need for savings to be made but felt that the current proposals should be withdrawn and discussions held with the clubs to find a solution that could be achieved over a longer period. The clubs were already suffering because of the increased parking charges and having the increased level of fees imposed would see a number of them fold.
- 7.55 Councillor Mears formally seconded the motion and stated that the clubs were the only outlet for a number of elderly people who wished to remain active and to be able to socialise. She believed the situation went against the Sports Development Team’s publicity which aimed to encourage more people to participate in sport across the city. The increase of over 200% in fees for many of the clubs was too much and meant that they would not be able to cover their costs even with increases to membership fees. She noted that past Mayors had supported bowls in the city and that previously there had been a Mayor’s tournament and hoped that such support would continue.

- 7.56 Councillor West moved an amendment to the motion on behalf of the Green Group and stated that he wished to thank Councillor Farrow for bringing the matter to debate. He stated that the council was facing unprecedented costs which needed to be tackled and this had not been helped by the decision to freeze council tax. He recognised the health and wellbeing benefits from playing bowls, but noted that across the city membership was falling and some degree of rationalisation may be beneficial. The council maintained twenty greens in the city not all of which were used on a regular basis.
- 7.57 Councillor Phillips formally seconded the amendment.
- 7.58 Councillor West stated that the proposals had been raised with the clubs who had had time to adjust to the situation and there had been constructive discussions with officers with a variety of options being considered. He wished to thank the clubs for their co-operation and stated that there was no intention to prevent people from playing bowls, however there was a need to make use of the available facilities and to encourage people to take the sport up so as to increase memberships. He stated that discussions with the clubs would continue with proposals then being brought to committee for consideration.
- 7.59 Following a point of order, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Economic Development & Culture Committee held the delegated responsibility for the bowling greens and therefore should the council decide to refer the issue, it would be to that committee. However, he also noted that dependant upon the budgetary considerations resulting from any decision by the committee; it may then require the matter to be referred to the Environment & Sustainability Committee or Policy & Resources Committee.
- 7.60 Councillor Smith stated that the council had supported bowls in the city for as long as he could recall and did not understand how the clubs were being singled out in regard to subsidies. He noted that people were able to use the swimming pools, beaches and other such facilities without reference being made to these being subsidised. He therefore did not understand why bowls was being referred to in this way and hoped that a solution could be found whereby the clubs could continue to function.
- 7.61 Councillor Hamilton stated that he believed there were a large number of people involved in playing or supporting the clubs and that a solution needed to be found that enabled them to continue to enjoy their sport. He noted that the Corporate Plan for 2012/13 included an objective to increase sport and sporting activity in the city and yet it appeared to be the opposite with the current proposals. He therefore believed that the current proposals should be reviewed.
- 7.62 Councillor Barnett noted that the Olympics were due to begin shortly which would heighten interest in sport, and yet the council was seeking to reduce a sporting facility. She stated that the Hangleton & Knoll Bowling Club had expressed their concern over its future if the proposals were implemented and asked that further consideration be given to the matter.
- 7.63 Councillor Phillips stated that she had met with representatives from St Anne's Wells who understood the need for the review of fees and were looking at how to manage the club so that it could continue. It was a great example of being involved in the process

and she hoped would see a positive outcome. However, the council was in a difficult position because of the level of Government cuts that were being imposed and the need to maintain front-line services and she hoped that the amendment would be supported.

- 7.64 Councillor Jarrett stated that St. Anne's Wells club was a good example of a club that had recognised the pressures faced by the council and were willing to look at how they could continue with a lower level of support from the council.
- 7.65 Councillor Peltzer Dunn stated that a large number of people enjoyed the game and queried whether provision would remain for members of the public to simply choose to play on the public lawns. He accepted that aspects of the amendment could be supported but overall it did not achieve the aims of the actual notice of motion and therefore he would oppose it.
- 7.66 Councillor J. Kitcat noted the comments and stated that there was a need to take account of level of use of the greens which was limited to a period of 4-5 months and therefore a way forward needed to be found that was fair across all sporting facilities. The figures that had been referred to were approximations and no decision had been taken as yet, the intention had been to consult and to then bring forward proposals for consideration.
- 7.67 Councillor Brown stated that the proposals had caused the clubs concern about their futures and it appeared that the council was not listening which was why the notice of motion had been presented.
- 7.68 Councillor West stated that there was a need for a balanced approach and to seek to find a viable solution that would provide a better future for the clubs, which was why the amendment had been put forward.
- 7.69 The Mayor stated that he would put each amendment to the petition report first and then the amendment to the notice of motion and the notice of motion itself. He therefore put the Labour & Co-operative Group's amendment to the vote which was carried. The amendment having been carried, the Mayor noted that the Conservative Group's amendment became obsolete and therefore put the report's recommendations as amended to the vote which was carried.
- 7.70 **RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the petition be referred to the Economic Development & Culture Committee Meeting on the 20th September, 2012 for consideration;
 - (2) That a report be requested for presentation to the Economic Development & Culture Committee at its meeting on 20th September setting out options for the future support to Bowls Clubs for consideration in advance of council budget setting; and
 - (3) That the Chief Executive be requested to ensure a representative of the city's Bowls Clubs is invited to attend and address the Economic Development & Culture Committee at the meeting on the 20th September to set out their key concerns.

7.71 The Mayor then put the Green Group amendment to the notice of motion to the vote which was lost.

7.72 The Mayor then put the following notice of motion to the vote:

“This Council recognises that the sport of bowls is enjoyed by many residents of Brighton & Hove, particularly older residents for whom it is an important way of keeping physically and mentally fit and of maintaining social interaction in later life.

Therefore, this Council notes with concern proposals by the Administration to reduce the budget for the maintenance of bowling greens and other costs associated with running the city’s 14 bowls clubs by 60%, or £94,000, in 2013/14. A reduction in funding on this scale will make it virtually impossible for many clubs to survive. Furthermore, putting up membership fees to cover the increased costs would simply make bowls unaffordable for many older residents who are already struggling financially due to, amongst other things, the prolonged low interest rates on savings.

Therefore, this Council urges the appropriate Committee to:

- (i) Withdraw its proposals for drastic across the board cuts in support for the city’s bowling clubs;
- (ii) Seek a compromise solution that enables all clubs that wish to do so to continue operating, whilst exploring ways in which they can become more autonomous and less reliant on Council funding in the future;

And

- (iii) Requests officers to bring forward a report to the Economic Development & Culture / Policy & Resources Committee(s) later in the year with concrete proposals about how this can be achieved.”

7.73 **The motion was carried.**

