

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

FINANCE CABINET MEMBER MEETING

4.00pm, 13 OCTOBER 2008

COMMITTEE ROOM 1, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Young (Cabinet Member)

Also in attendance: Councillor Hamilton (Opposition Spokesperson)

Other Members present: Councillors Harmer-Strange and Fallon-Khan

PART ONE

29. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

29a Declarations of Interests

29.1 There were none.

29b Exclusion of Press and Public

29.2 In accordance with section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 ('the Act'), the Cabinet Member for Finance considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during an item of business on the grounds that it was likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press or public were present during that item, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information (as defined in section 100A(3) of the Act) or exempt information (as defined in section 100I(1) of the Act).

29.3 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

30. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

30.1 **RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting held on the 21 July 2008 be approved and signed by the Cabinet Member.

31. CABINET MEMBER'S COMMUNICATIONS

31.1 The Cabinet Member welcomed everyone to the meeting. She explained that items 32 to 40 would have no consideration, since no information had been received for today's meeting. She indicated that she wished the spaces provided on the agenda for consideration of such items were used in a more effective way.

32. ITEMS RESERVED FOR DISCUSSION

32.1 There were none.

33. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

33.1 There were none.

34. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

34.1 There were none.

35. PETITIONS

35.1 There were none.

36. DEPUTATIONS

36.1 There were none.

37. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

37. There were none.

38. NOTICES OF MOTIONS REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

38.1 There were none.

39. MATTERS REFERRED FOR RECONSIDERATION

39.1 There were none.

40. REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

40.1 There were none.

41. INCOME COLLECTION & RECOVERY 2008/2009 - QUARTER 1

41.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Finance & Resources on income collection and recovery performance for 2008/2009 as at Quarter 1 (June 2008). The report highlighted continuing improvement and best practice actions (for copy, see minute book).

- 41.2 The Cabinet Member was pleased with the information provided and noted the importance of the reports as they helped to keep track of the Council's financial position.
- 41.3 The Opposition Spokesperson referred to the table appended to the report and sought clarification in relation to the 14% of transactions regarding housing rent payments. He indicated that he believed that many people would not have the facility to make direct debit payments and was unsure as to whom exactly that percentage related to.
- 41.4 The Assistant Director, Financial Services, clarified that 14% was a percentage of the total number of people who were liable to pay rents.
- 41.5 Councillor Hamilton also requested to know the total number of people making repayments in respect of Housing Benefit overpayments. The Assistant Director offered to find out more about this enquiry and report back to Cllr Hamilton directly.
- 41.6 **RESOLVED** – That, having considered the information and the reasons set out in the report, the Cabinet Member accepted the following recommendation:
- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.

42. CORPORATE FEES & CHARGES POLICY

- 42.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Finance & Resources concerning fees and charges. The report updated the Cabinet Member for Finance about recent developments in relation to discretionary charging and the application of fees and charges. The report also recommended a Corporate Fees & Charges Policy (for copy, see minute book).
- 42.2 The Opposition Spokesperson accepted that fees should go up in accordance with inflation, but thought that there were areas where the raising of fees would prove difficult to sustain. He stated that he was against the general rearranging of all fees and indicated that he and his colleagues in the Labour group were concerned with the proposed budget process outcome referred to in paragraph 3.18 of the report.
- 42.3 The Cabinet Member clarified that the Council needed to go through this process because the Government had introduced legislation (the Local Government Act 2003) to encourage Local Authorities to effectively review the application of fees and charges. In addition, the proposed policy was also in response to the Audit Commission's recommendation of good practice.
- 42.4 The Assistant Director, Financial Services, further clarified that the policy encouraged services to be clear and explicit about the reasons for providing concessions and subsidies to services where fees and charges were applicable. He explained that the primary aim of the policy was to ensure a consistent and robust framework for reviewing fees and charges. The policy itself did not recommend specific fees or charging levels.
- 42.5 The Opposition Spokesperson referred to paragraph 3.2 of the report. He considered the sentence "charge for discretionary services if the recipient agrees" unclear and confusing. He felt that Members should be aware of what discretionary services and statutory services were, but there appear to not exist clear information about that.

- 42.6 The Head of Law clarified the sentence meant that people did not have to receive the service if they did not want to pay for it. The Head of Law recommended that officers reviewed the wording on the referred paragraph 3.2 in order to make the sentence clearer.
- 42.7 The Assistant Director explained that the council's website provided information about what were discretionary and what were mandatory services. He accepted there were areas where the council was unclear about this matter, and this was one of the reasons why the review was appropriate.
- 42.8 The Cabinet Member asked officers to provide Cllr Hamilton with the various information he had requested.
- 42.8 **RESOLVED** – That, having considered the information and the reasons set out in the report, the Cabinet Member accepted the following recommendations:
- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.
 - (2) That the proposed Corporate Fees & Charges Policy, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, should come into force for the 2009/10 budget setting cycle for proposals to change fees and charges (other than by inflation) and in full from the 2010/11 cycle as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, be agreed.
 - (3) That the report be referred to Cabinet for information.

The meeting concluded at 4.25pm.

Signed

Chairman

Dated this

day of