



**Brighton & Hove**

**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**  
**NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATEPAYERS**  
**CONSULTATION MEETING**

**10 FEBRUARY 2009 – 5:00pm**  
**Room 126 Kings House,**  
**Grand Avenue, Hove**

**MINUTES**

**Present:**

Councillor Mary Mears, Leader of the Council  
Councillor Jan Young, Lead Member for Finance  
Councillor Les Hamilton, Lead Finance Spokesperson for Labour Opposition

Representatives of Non-Domestic Ratepayers:

Eleanor Bell (Brighton & Hove Economic Partnership)  
Trevor Freeman (Federation of Small Businesses)  
David Sewell (North Laine Traders)

Brighton & Hove City Council:

Richard Szadziewski, (Interim Director of Finance & Resources)  
John Beard (NDR Team Leader)  
Nara Miranda (Democratic Services)

Apologies:

Tony Mernagh (Brighton City Centre Business Forum)

**1 WELCOME**

1.1 Councillor Mears welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## **2 INTRODUCTIONS**

- 2.1 All those present introduced themselves, including the representatives of the Non Domestic ratepayers.

## **3 REVENUE BUDGET/CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2009/10**

- 3.1 The Interim Director of Finance & Resources explained that the Council's Conservative Administration's had published its budget proposals on 30 January 2009. He stated that the proposals would be considered at Cabinet on 12 February 2009 and then taken to Council meeting on 26 February 2009. He outlined the key elements of the proposals and explained that any concerns and queries discussed at meeting today would be recorded and taken to the Council meeting above.
- 3.2 In addition to the main points highlighted, the Leader of the Council also reassured members that one of the administration's priorities was to work towards cushioning the city's economy in the next six months in face of the current economic situation.

## **4 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

- 4.1 The Representative from the Brighton & Hove Economic Partnership referred to the LABGI scheme and enquired whether any underspent would be brought forward to this year.
- 4.2 The Interim Director of Finance & Resources explained that there had been a delay in the release of the LABGI money, following consultation that had taken place about how to distribute the money, therefore the amount the city was to receive and when it was to be received was still unknown.
- 4.3 The Representative from the Federation of Small Businesses thanked the council for the effort put into bringing small businesses on board. He queried whether small businesses could claim business rates relief. The Leader of the Council indicated that ongoing discussions were taking place around this matter.
- 4.4 The Representative from the Federation of Small Businesses also thanked the council's initiative for the 'Shop Local' campaign. He stated that they were very pleased with the initiative and enquired whether the campaign would continue for next year. The Leader of the Council indicated that there was a need to collectively support the city both as officers and residents, and, therefore, the intention was to continue with this initiative into next year.
- 4.5 The Representative from the Federation of Small Businesses further enquired about the council's procurement position in relation to suppliers of small businesses. He explained that not many councils had signed up for the Concorde Act and queried what was Brighton & Hove's position on that.

- 4.6 The Leader of the Council explained that there were laws and regulations in relation to this matter that the city was required to abide for. She stated, however, that the procurement department was looking into this matter closely and there were proposals to organise 'breakfast sessions' with the aim of engaging with different businesses across the city.
- 4.7 The Interim Director of Finance & Resources echoed the constraints within the procurement remits. He indicated, however, that the procurement package was set to working on purchasing more locally. He explained that, currently, 49% was being spent within the BN postcode and that officers were setting targets to reach the 55% in the next three years.
- 4.8 The Representative from the Brighton & Hove Economic Partnership referred to the VisitBrighton scheme. She enquired whether there were any plans for attracting Europe as a focus of interest to the city and whether there existed any allowance in the budget to address this matter.
- 4.9 The Leader of the Council explained that Brighton & Hove used to belong to Euro Towns and that, currently, the city was moving into Euro Cities. She noted that this would provide a much greater platform for opening the city's market to Europe. In terms of the funding put into the scheme, she explained that the allowance came from current resources. However, if more funding was identified, it could be ring fenced from elsewhere within the budget.
- 4.10 The Leader of the Council reassured the Representatives present that a lot of work was being undertaken in terms of promoting and expanding the city market to attract visitors. She indicated that officers were conscious that visitors were the city's income and, therefore, the aim was to sell the city in the best way possible to encourage visitors to come to Brighton.
- 4.11 The Representative from the Federation of Small Businesses expressed their concern over parking charges, which were high. He sought clarification on the fact that, despite the above concern, there still seemed to be an incentive to attract people into the city.
- 4.12 The Leader of the Council indicated that the city's current parking charges were much lower than NCP fees. She indicated that officers were looking at revamping some car parking facilities in order to make them more user-friendly and, in this way, be in a position to attract more people into the city.
- 4.13 The Representatives sought update about the progress of major projects in the city.
- 4.14 In terms of the Brighton Centre development, the Leader of the Council was pleased to confirm that Standard Life, who currently runs the Brighton Centre, had agreed to invest in the city through this development. She explained that the next stage of the project would be to put notices out for architects to come forward to work on the design.

- 4.15 She acknowledged that this was an exciting project. She explained that B&H City Council was partner in the percentage of contribution and that the city was working with SEEDA to access some more funding. She reassured the Representatives that, if SEEDA did not contribute to it, the city would look elsewhere to find the required funding to proceed with the project.
- 4.16 The Interim Director of Finance & Resources further explained that, in the last two to three years, the city had managed to build a three million fund to put into the project. He indicated that the process of setting some money aside for this project would be ongoing for the next three to four years.
- 4.17 In relation to the Circus Street development, it was explained that there were issues arising from the council owned properties behind the proposed site for development, which contained one of the council's largest properties for families. In view of this, the developers were talking with those tenants to see how to move forward with the development.
- 4.18 The Leader of the Council also gave a brief update on the Preston Barracks development. She was aware that sensitive negotiations were taking place and indicated that she was still waiting for a further briefing about the project.
- 4.19 An update was also sought and given in relation to the American Express building. The Leader of the Council reported that negotiations were going well. She was pleased that the service, which could relocate anywhere, wanted to remain in Brighton & Hove and, in this way, bring other services to the city. It was also clarified that the proposal was to build in addition to what already exists and it is anticipated that it will attract a substantial number of new jobs.
- 4.20 The Representative from the Brighton & Hove Economic Partnership requested clarification on the Housing Local delivery Vehicle (LDV).
- 4.21 The Interim Director of Finance & Resources explained that, with the difficulties in decent housing stock, the LDV was the way found to lease houses into a company on rental stream. It was expected that the scheme would generate money in that those companies would be able to negotiate directly with banks for lending. The Director recognised the challenges that arise from the current financial situation. He indicated, however, that this could still be reasonably safe in terms of a steady return over a period of time in that the money would revert back into the housing revenue account due to the contract arrangements of the LDV.
- 4.22 The Director further clarified that the council would be applying for consent to move on with these arrangements and the next four weeks would be crucial for this matter.
- 4.23 The Representative from the Federation of Small Businesses expressed concerns about the current economic downturn and the impact it would have on business rates, bankruptcies and personal insolvencies arrangements,

which were due to continue and increase. He queried how the council proposed to deal with this matter.

- 4.24 The Interim Director of Finance & Resources indicated that the council had built in some contingencies and, therefore, could be resilient in such situations. However, any further funding requirement would have to be taken on Council Tax.
- 4.25 The Representative from the Federation of Small Businesses referred to the city's waste strategy. He indicated that councils were now required to reduce landfills targets; otherwise they run the risk of suffering penalties as a result of not achieving those targets. He queried what was Brighton & Hove's position on this matter.
- 4.26 The Interim Director of Finance & Resources indicated that the city was part of the Waste Private Finance Initiative together with East Sussex. He indicated that the city was within target, though the position would need to be reviewed next year.
- 4.27 The Representative from the North Laine Traders queried how Brighton & Hove was dealing with the matter of concessionary bus fares and what the relationship was with the city's bus company over this matter.
- 4.28 The Interim Director of Finance & Resources explained that Brighton & Hove used to be part of the Sussex scheme. However, the city had recently left the joint scheme and, as such, had to publish a new scheme, the Brighton & Hove scheme. He indicated that first discussions had taken place with the bus company in order to put this into place. He also clarified that bus users would not be affected in any way as a result of this change in scheme.
- 4.29 Discussions also took place in relation to the proposed free swimming scheme for under 16s and over 60s. It was recognised that such scheme could be good for the city in terms of generating business. However, concerns were also raised over a possible large intake from people coming from outside of the city. The Representatives also enquired about the publicity in place for the scheme, what sort of evidence would be required from people to prove their age and, in the event of the scheme proves to be heavily taken up, whether city residents would take priority.
- 4.30 The Interim Director of Finance & Resources indicated that all was very much unsure at this stage, but agreed to look at the issues raised above.
- 4.31 The Cabinet Member for Finance thanked the Representatives for attending today's meeting. It was agreed that any further comments or any major points that the Representatives wish to make could be submitted to the Interim Director of Finance & Resources by 23 February 2009.

The meeting concluded at 6.35 p.m.

Signed

Dated

day of

2009