

**THE OLDER PEOPLE'S COUNCIL - BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
BUDGET PROPOSALS - THE IMPACT ON OLDER PEOPLE**

Older People's Council (OPC) - recommended for dissolution

The OPC currently has 11 members with a mixture of elected and co-opted members. Members serve a four year term and are volunteers who receive no allowances for the time and effort they give to the work of the OPC. Current OPC members range in age from the 60's to the high 80's with six men and five women. They are elected by older people living in Brighton & Hove. In the past the OPC were entirely composed of ex-Councillors but since 2011 they have become a minority. Any Brighton & Hove City resident over 60 years can stand for election and vote in the election.¹ The last election took place in 2011 and the next one is due to take place on the 2nd July 2015. Electoral services have been notifying residents of the need to register in "Your Vote Matters" leaflet for some time.

For the purpose of the election Brighton & Hove is divided into 9 electoral zones. Each zone is based upon a group of 2 or more wards. Each zone elects one member to the OPC. ²At a previous election over 28,000 older people across the City were registered to vote. Voting only takes place where there is more than one nominee for the same Zone. In 2011 this occurred in two Zones with Harry Steer (North Portslade, South Portslade & Wish) and Peter Terry (East Brighton & Queens Park) being elected. Unfortunately Peter had to retire during his term of office due to ill-health.

Participation in the postal votes in these areas was respectable with Harry Steer gaining 1194 votes, so demonstrating keen interest by older voters in contested elections to the OPC. Because the OPC has many older people serving, it is sadly the case that during the last four year term one member has died and two have retired due to ill health. The Council has not been willing to fund any interim elections during the four year term, so the OPC has co-opted members to assist in the work. The OPC members sought to achieve a greater gender equality and skills mix to the work of the Committee through the use of co-options.

The OPC web site www.olderpeoplescouncil.org.uk contains full details of the members and of our activities. It was created and is maintained by our Chair, Mike Bojczuk, who works full time in London. His work for the OPC is principally done at weekends, evenings and by taking annual leave. Of the 11 members of the OPC only four are former City councillors. Members give their time freely to attend council meetings, seminars, events and consultations over decisions that affect older people.

¹ Currently 1904 residents aged 60-70 are registered to vote and 22468 over 70s. Over 70s are automatically registered but those aged between 60 to 70 have to request registration.

² Zone1 Rottingdean Coastal & Woodingdean, Zone2 East Brighton & Queens Park Zone 3 Hollingdean & Stanmer, and Moulscroomb & Bevendean, Zone 4 Hanover & Elm Grove, Preston Park & St Peters & North Laine, Zone 5 Patcham & Withdean, Zone 6 Brunswick & Adelaide, Goldsmid & Regency, Zone 7 Hangleton & Knoll & Hove Park, Zone 8 North Portslade, South Portslade & Wish, Zone 9 Central Hove & Westbourne.

So, the majority of members are not retired Councillors despite this being an old chestnut often repeated by our detractors such as Adam Trimmingham in The Argus .³ The OPC have drawn up a briefing rebutting the assertions of the Green administration seeking to justify abolishing the Older Person's Council. To add insult to injury, they propose creating an Older People's consultative committee which will not be elected, has yet to be defined and will lack the independence of the OPC. It should not be forgotten that the OPC was established after extensive consultation with older people across the City who wanted an independent body, chosen by older people, that would not be in hock to any political party in the City. Current members of the OPC span a wide range of political views and try to steer away from party politics.

Budget Proposals for 2015/16 presented to Policy & Resources on 4th December 2014

Hardly surprisingly not many residents have the time to read through a report of 164 pages issued just before Christmas which has buried within it drastic cuts to services which older people value and need. The OPC has been through the proposals and seeks to ensure that older residents become aware of these proposals before they are set in stone. We are currently in a consultation period whereby we can seek to influence these proposals but little effort has been made by the Green administration to put them into an understandable format so that meaningful consultation can happen.

What follows is an attempt to highlight some of the proposals, many of which in our view are contradictory and with little financial detail as currently set out in the December P&R papers. BHCC's income is £778.1 million with the largest part coming from fees, charges and rents ranging from parking charges to care costs at £112 million.

Adult social care is the third largest expenditure element of the budget at £111.4 million and has the least grants.⁴ The amount of students in the City is an ongoing issue particularly as they and more importantly their landlords are exempt from council tax. There are also a high number of single people in the city - so that 40% of households get a council tax discount. Income from Council Tax makes up £106.8 million of income which is only slightly more than the Government grants of £103m. Council Tax only forms 14% of total income for Brighton & Hove City Council.

³ The Argus "Talking Shops that waste money could be scrapped - 14th January 2015. Members that have been Councillors are valuable to the Committee because of their experience of BHCC so it is a positive that a significant number are prepared to continue to participate in public life without payment.

⁴ The delivery of Phase 4 of the Value for Money programme which covers Adult Social Care is a key component of the savings yet Adult Social Care has failed to meet these savings targets from previous years and the report identifies that pressure is currently showing a continuing upward trend which will place the VFM savings under serious threat both in the current year and beyond unless remedial action can be identified. £2.93 savings target is defined as "uncertain".

The budget gap is £26 million in 2015/16. If the Council have a referendum for a 5.9% increase in Council Tax it will still have a budget gap of £21.25 million. If Council Tax is increased by 2% then there will be a budget gap of £25.45 million.

Adult Social Care

Budgetary pressure has been building up in Adult Social Care over recent years. Basically, demand from the vulnerable and unwell elderly is greater than the resources allocated. Hence there has been an overspend of £4 million this year due to pressures to meet the needs of those that are unable to continue caring for themselves. Many elderly people live alone, do not have close family and when frail or with dementia cannot carry on safely living alone. At present the philosophy is to close residential homes and keep people in their own homes. However, many elderly in Brighton & Hove live in poorly heated accommodation on a limited budget. Being kept in your own home with insufficient home care is not a desirable choice and often leads to emergency hospital attendance due to falls or illness. It is difficult to understand how and where the help needed for frail, vulnerable elderly people is going to come from.

The NHS and the Council are jointly seeking to reduce A&E attendance and have less people in residential care. Because of the growing pressures they need to get people out of hospital quickly and into care but end up paying more because of the pressures on care in the community. Because of reduced income from central government BHCC is seeking to get the NHS to pay for services that were once clearly funded by Adult Social Care. The budget proposals specifically acknowledge that it is expected that further funding or savings may be needed over and above current assumptions. The value for money savings target of £2.9 million has not been achieved and it is uncertain if it can be achieved.

The glaring contradiction comes in the budget proposals which repeats the mantra that we need to reduce the number of people going into residential/ nursing care and get them back home. Anyone who has dealt with elderly relatives that are unwell will know that there is often a critical need for interim care before they are ready to return home. Yet the budget proposals suggest cutting £1 million from resource centres for older people at Craven Vale, Knoll House, Ireland Lodge and Wayfied Avenue. With the growth of dementia and the need for family carers to have access to respite care, this proposal makes no sense.

The report also refers to unachievable (p119) previous year savings against Extra Care Housing. A cut of £400,000 is proposed for Home Care. This is the service most needed for those unable to cope without help in their own homes. This cut is described as providing a “Potential to invest in the community rather than in beds.” It is difficult to understand where the help needed for frail, vulnerable elderly people is going to come from. The budget proposal goes on to state “Reduce service and agree funding with NHS”. The OPC suspect that the NHS locally will be under pressure

with their own budgets and conflicts over budget allocation will be a theme of the future.

Not enough Doctors, Not enough hospital beds.

An oft repeated rather unpleasant phrase describes older people in hospital as “bed blocking” . The suggestion that ill elderly people want to stay in hospital and are the cause of the crisis in A&E. This is to scapegoat elderly people and is inaccurate.

A recent OECD⁵ review of 34 countries showed that the UK was below the OECD average number of physicians at only 2.8 per 1,000 population. This compares very unfavourably with, for example, Germany which has 4 per 1,000 population.

A worse pattern emerges with hospital beds per 1,000 population. According to the OECD, the UK had 2.8 per 1,000 population which left them 28th out of the 34 countries surveyed. The OECD average was 4.8 per 1,000 population. This is the root cause of the hospital bed crisis - we need to increase capacity.

Fundamentally, we have a major shortage of hospital beds in the UK. Older people are being scapegoated and spoken of as a problem. But, in reality there is a chronic lack of hospital bed availability and this has reached crisis point in the City. The budget is travelling in the opposite direction to the rhetoric with the projected £4 million overspend and talk of decommissioning or reducing some services to include bed based services to older people which will only exacerbate the problem.

The language of savings opportunities

The language used in the budget proposals is almost Orwellian. It speaks of “saving opportunities” and “opportunities for efficiencies through better alignment of functions” and then at a stroke identifies major savings with no indication of how this will really be achieved. This is why there are budget over spends each year because the need outstrips the “savings” identified year on year. But with no details many of the figures cited as “savings” are fairly meaningless and unlikely to provide a saving. Overall, a total cut of £6 million is identified from the Adult Services budget. To suggest that this can be achieved without real distress to older people in the City is to stretch credibility beyond breaking point. The 7 month forecast variance for Adults Assessment is showing an overspend of £2.71 million. Over 65s are reporting a pressure of £0.628m of which the majority relates to the balance of unachievable previous year savings against Extra Care Housing. The overspend also includes staffing pressures on respite services.

Overview & Scrutiny

One of the key reasons why the Green Administration is proposing to dissolve the OPC is because we are currently serviced by the Overview & Scrutiny team. The staff in scrutiny are hard working & helpful. But, the budget proposes to delete the

Overview & Scrutiny function in the Council. So, if the staff are to be made redundant there would be no team to support the OPC and hence the need for us to disappear. The Scrutiny team maintain our email address but we answer all the queries, they have a phone number for the OPC but members of the OPC answer this on a rota basis. We organise our own web-site and correspondence. However, staff minute take at our committees and public meetings, book rooms, liaise with speakers, arrange for the printing of our Annual Report and act as a link to the OPC for the outside world. They are very helpful to OPC members seeking to find the right person in the Council to challenge or seek information from about an issue of concern to older people. This can relate to housing, planning, transport, public health, sporting activities or our work on the OPC initiative for Brighton & Hove to become an Age-Friendly City. Councillors were happy to vote to support our bid to the World Health Authority (WHO) for Age Friendly City status for BHCC but the Green Administration seems less keen to recognise our crucial role in initiating and contributing to this process. Indeed, the proposal that a consultative committee would do a better job than the OPC is not about saving money. This is because the amount to fund this “consultative committee” is identical to our current budget i.e. £9,000 in officer time. It is rather to remove an independent group of older people and replace them with a less independent, ill resourced group, who are not elected & unaccountable. This is to denigrate the contribution that many OPC members (some now deceased) have made over the years.

Reductions in services that will impact on older people

City Clean (p36) - the budget proposes yet another service redesign which will require fundamental changes to how the service operates as well as reducing service levels in some low priority areas. This is supposed to save £600,000. Reductions in street cleaning quickly make any area look run down and create an unpleasant environment. Given the debacle with the refuse in recent years this can only spell big trouble and watch out if you are in a “low priority area”

City Parks (p37) - a proposal to save £80,000 due to ceasing planting any new or replacement trees. They acknowledge in the impact section that stopping planting new trees will gradually erode the number of trees in the city which will have an impact on the street scene. Is this a Green Council?

Planning (p39) - Staff cuts which will impact on the ability to manage planning applications promptly and stop proactive heritage work. The OPC has raised our major concerns about the lack of affordable housing, particularly sheltered and extra care housing in the city. We believe that more affordable housing for older residents should have been created by the Council rather than the huge amount of student housing concentrated in the city centre. The Council aim for but seldom achieve the 40% affordable housing and this will add further problems for older residents as the pressure on housing in the City is at an acute level now. How will older people have an opportunity to input into the planning process with less staff to advise them? They

lack the resources of the developers and need guidance when proposals are made that are not supported by local residents.

Housing (p43) - Review the use of discretionary decorating and gardening schemes. A reduced number of tenants will be eligible for gardening or decorating of their homes. The service will be for those in priority need - over 75 and /or disabled tenants and in receipt of housing benefit. Saving identified as £38,000. This will affect the oldest and most vulnerable with just enough income not to be eligible for benefits.

Housing benefits outreach worker (p48) - this post supports extremely vulnerable people. Given that 20% of households in the City are on housing benefit those most in need of support will be told to go to the voluntary sector. This will affect all residents claiming housing benefit but hit particularly hard those most vulnerable and least able to understand the bureaucratic maze that relates to claiming housing benefit. But will there be anyone there to give them the advice they need?

City Services (Revenue & benefits) (p49) - the saving opportunity defined in this proposal is classic. The implementation of a completely online claiming system. "The change enforces a behavioural change to customers similar to that anticipated for universal credit". I don't think that many older people in the City, many without access to a computer or with the inclination, eyesight, money, mental or physical capacity to go on line will appreciate this suggestion. However, clearly another marvellous saving opportunity for the Council but a reduction in support and service for older people who want to deal with humans rather than machines when they access a Council service. The average 85 year old with early stage dementia and no local support will be frightened and confused by this proposal. Which apparently will in the event is projected to save £10,000. How this figure has been arrived at is unclear.

Graves maintenance (p49) - the plan is to prioritise maintenance in cemetery areas where there are more visitors. It is acknowledged that this will be a reduction in service and will be a visible decrease in standards of upkeep in the cemeteries. For those with loved ones in less frequented areas this reduction in service will hit hard and seems such a mean proposal.

Public Conveniences (p55) - a map identifying the location of toilets across the City is on the OPC web site. This proposal is quite stark. Reduce opening times and reduce cleaning frequency and close sites where there are alternatives. The proposal is blatant and states :-

"Toilet provision would be focussed on areas with high visitor numbers such as the seafront and destination parks. Closing toilets in more suburban areas would have a more significant impact on the elderly population and people with medical conditions which mean they need to access public toilets more frequently".

Toilets for Tourists and less Loos for Locals seems to be the message. A saving of £160,000 is identified with these reductions in facilities. This will mean a dramatic decline in facilities for residents in the future.

Bus Service Cuts - Cuts to weekend and weekday evening services for the 21, 38A, 21A.21B, 81A and weekly limited service for 84. These reductions need 12 months notice to achieve savings from December 2015.. It is recognised that the cumulative impact of these service reductions may lead to other services becoming unviable and their further termination by the Bus Operators. This indicates the potential for a spiral of decline in bus services if these go ahead.

Private Sector Housing Team - providing advice and guidance to help improve housing conditions in the private rented and owner occupied homes through improving energy efficiency, thermal comfort and reducing fuel poverty and CO2 emissions. This cut is estimated to save £74,000. Given the rise of fuel poverty and the problems and costs of heating poorly insulated homes this reduction is singularly inappropriate in Brighton & Hove.

OPC EVENT - KEEP WARM AND SAVE MONEY THIS WINTER

THURSDAY 22ND JANUARY - 10.00 - BRIGHTHELM CENTRE

The OPC is running a “Keep Warm & Save Money this Winter” partnership event at the Brighthelm on the 22nd January at the Brighthelm centre. Details are on our website. It is a free event with a free lunch for those that attend. Funding is being sourced via Brighton & Hove Energy Services Co- operative. This organisation is also facing its own financial pressures despite a great track record of giving free advice to lots of residents across the City.

However, one event no matter how useful, cannot replace a continuous service helping older people. Again, this is a Green administration cutting back on energy efficiency support at a time when it has never been more needed. Fuel poverty is a major issue for the UK, unlike many other countries that have colder climates but do not understand the concept of fuel poverty.

What can older residents do to challenge these proposals?

Tell your Councillor what you think about the Budget proposals. The OPC belongs to the older people of Brighton & Hove who will lose their right to vote and have an independent voice on the Council. They may also lose the regular public meetings where they can challenge Councillors and Council officers about a range of issues. Get your views in before the next Policy & Resources Committee on the 12th February. The Budget Council meeting is on the 26th February.

Older residents need to make their views known to their local Councillors about the above proposals. See the Brighton & Hove Council website for contact details www.brighton-hove.gov.uk. Under Council & Democracy, then Councillors & Committees, then Find Your Councillor.

Write to any named Councillor or:-

The Chief Executive Penny Thompson ,Brighton & Hove City Council, Kings House, Grand Avenue, Hove. BN3 2LS

To Leaders of Groups:-

Councillor Jason Kitcat - Leader of the Council & Convenor of the Green Group - 01273-291011 jasonkitcat@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk

Councillor Geoffrey Theobald OBE - Leader of the Official Opposition & Conservative Group - 01273-291195/556665 geoffrey.theobald@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk

Councillor Warren Morgan - Leader of the Labour & Co-operative Group 01273-294362 warren.morgan@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk

Local Media

There are a wide range of outlets in Brighton & Hove and these include:-

The Independent, The Argus,

Radio Sussex, Grey Matters Radio - podcasts on OPC website, Brighton & Hove News (on-line),

The Pensioner. c/o Age UK Brighton & Hove, 29-31 Prestonville Road, Brighton BN1 3T.

OPC website - look at for updates on the campaign. www.olderpeoplescouncil.org.