

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
STRATEGY, FINANCE & CITY REGENERATION COMMITTEE

4.00pm 25 JANUARY 2024

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sankey (Chair) Taylor (Deputy Chair), Shanks (Opposition Spokesperson), Cattell, McNair, Muten, Pumm, Robins and Rowkins

Other Members present: Councillors

PART ONE

82 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

82a Declarations of substitutes

82.1 There were none.

82b Declarations of interests

82.2 There were none.

82c Exclusion of the press and public

82.3 In accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the Act"), the Committee considered whether the public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any item of business on the grounds that it is likely in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during it, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act.

82.4 **RESOLVED** - That the public are excluded from the meeting from items listed on Part 2 of the agenda.

83 MINUTES

83.1 **Resolved-** That the minutes of the previous meeting 7th December 2023 be considered by the next meeting on 8th February 2024.

84 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

84.1 The Chair provided the following communications:

Good afternoon colleagues and welcome to the first Strategy, Finance and City Regeneration Committee of 2024.

Today's meeting takes place against the backdrop of setting our Council budget for the 2024-25 financial year. Our authority has been asked by Central Government to accept a real terms cut of £33 million next year. The highest single year cut to date in 14 years of miserable austerity from the Tories. In its typical chaotic fashion, yesterday Michael Gove announced a surprise set of additional funding for local Government. But the funding gap for older people to get care, for kids to be protected from harm, for those facing eviction to be given temp accommodation is £2.4bn across the country, so with only £500k promised to Upper Tier authorities, where's the remaining £1.9bn? And the panicked nature of yesterday's announcement is indicative of a Government that has lost control of the nation's finances, has no vision and no plan for our country. The unprecedented nature of this announcement, is clearly thanks to the effectiveness of the Labour-led Local Government Association which has been lobbying hard on council financing, revealing the true disastrous picture, and so already delivering for communities across the country, despite Tory incompetence.

We still have no clarity on whether the Household Support Fund will be maintained beyond this year, providing as it does over £4million to our lowest income residents for emergency food provision and Free School Meals during school holidays. That we have no idea whether this cliff edge will come to pass, is indicative of a Government in chaos more focussed on fighting itself than the rising scourge of poverty in our society. A General Election cannot come soon enough.

Today we are discussing several very important matters. We will consider our Council Tax Base and our Business Rates projection for 2024-25.

We are pleased to be able to announce that despite the horrendous funding situation we are in, your Labour-led Council is proposing to protect the Council Tax Reduction scheme. This provides financial relief to around 19, 200 residents in Brighton and Hove, by giving a discount on council tax with the combined value of £18,700 million.

I am also pleased to announce that from 1 April 2024, we are proposing applying the empty property premium after 1 year, raising a projected income of £500k and most importantly, incentivising empty home owners to bring their properties back into use. Our Administration does not want any empty homes in Brighton and Hove.

Thirdly, I am very pleased to say that we are proposing a 100% council tax premium on second homes, projected to raise an additional £2.9 million from 2025-26 onwards. We are proposing that this premium is applied as soon as is allowed by legislation.

Today we are also considering a report concerning the KC investigation into CityClean. Our Labour Administration is pleased to be bringing forward a report which formally acknowledges the apology I've issued to staff on behalf of BHCC, adopts the 10 recommendations in the report and begins the process for recommended changes to disciplinary appeals, removing member appeal panels. I'm pleased to be able to share that following the publication of the independent KC report in November and the immediate action taken in response to change the culture at CityClean, there has been a marked improvement in the service for residents. Missed kerbside refuse collections reported via the council's website went from 2552 instances in the first two weeks of August, to 205 in the first two weeks of December. A reduction of over 90% in four

months. Missed kerbside recycling collections dropped by 68%. Only today I received an email from a resident:

I am moved to write to commend progress made recently on the refuse and recycling service. For the past two decades I have seen communal bins overflowing and recycling strewn about my local streets. With 2 bins outside my back door and 4 recycling bins, I have often had to step over unspeakable filth to get to my flat. The problem always peaked at Christmas and New Year but lo! What has happened! Bins emptied, spilt stuff swept up and all looking good.

As Leader of the Council, I enjoy visiting the depot regularly. Earlier this week I spent time at the workshop and with the team that manages our fleet. Last week I went out on a street round in East Brighton and was deeply impressed with the quality of the work being done, the hard graft involved, and the commitment and dedication of the team. I am excited about the plans we have to improve recycling rates in the City and to make further progress on the quality of the services to residents.

Lastly, today we're also considering proposals for a new modular pool at Withdean and to explore options for a pool in Moulsecoomb. As your Labour administration we are proudly accelerating plans to improve the sport, leisure and wellbeing offer in our City which is integral for health – both physical and mental – life chances and outcomes. We want to ensure in particular that those living in more deprived areas of the city have access to the high-quality facilities that everyone deserves.

85 CALL OVER

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85.1 The following items on the agenda were reserved for discussion:

- Item 88: Full Review of Polling Districts & Polling Places 2023/24
- Item 89: New Swimming Pool at Withdean Sports Complex
- Item 90: City Clean Independent Inquiry
- Item 91: Council Tax Base and Business Rates Retention Forecasts 2024/25.
- Item 92: Council Tax premiums on Second Home.

85.2 The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that all items listed above had been reserved for discussion.

86 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

86.1 There were none.

87 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

87.1 The question will be answered without discussion. The person who asked the question may ask one relevant supplementary question, which shall be put and answered without discussion. The person to whom a question, or supplementary question, has been put may decline to answer it.

87.2 The following written questions were received from Members:

(1) Councillor Shanks

In view of the eight-month delay in progressing with phase three of the Valley Gardens project - which had already undergone a full public consultation and was ready to move to tender - could you outline any additional cost in officer time resulting from the re-visiting of those plans and any additional consultation, and the subsequent impact on the budget of the inevitable increase in contractor fees and cost of materials due to inflation during that delay?

Councillor Sankey replied:

Dear Councillor Shanks, thank you for your question relating to the Valley Gardens Phase 3 review. Officer and consultant time associated with the review is estimated to be £20,530. These costs relate to; meeting preparation and attendance, responding to requests for information, and liaison with consultants and stakeholders. The project budget was approved prior to the review and this has not been altered. The procurement process will enable the council to achieve best value for the delivery of the scheme via a competitive tender process. The project will be delivered within the budget allocated using standard delivery processes such as value engineering, risk management and early engagement with the appointed contractor.

87.3 Councillor Shanks asked the following supplementary question:
When will it go out to tender?

87.4 Councillor Sankey replied;
I will provide a written response.

88 FULL REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS & POLLING PLACES 2023/24

88.1 The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources. The report dealt with the statutory review of all polling places within Brighton & Hove, within the period of 16 months that starts on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013.

88.2 Councillors Taylor, Robinson, Shanks, Muten and McNair asked questions and contributed to the debate. Councillor Rowkins praised the decent work carried out by Elm grove school.

88.3 Resolved

- (1) That Committee agreed the polling place scheme outlined in Appendix 3.
- (2) That Committee delegated authority to the Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources to take all measures as are necessary or incidental, as required by law, to implement the changes indicated in para 2.1.

- (3) That Committee delegated authority to the Returning Officer to designate alternative polling places, in the event of any polling place being unavailable, at any poll taking place prior before the next full review of polling places.

89 NEW SWIMMING POOL AT WITHDEAN SPORTS COMPLEX

- 89.1 The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Economy, Environment & Culture. New Swimming Pool at Withdean Sports Complex and Pool Provision in the East of the City. This report sets out a detailed proposal that has now been developed to add a community swimming pool at the city's 'North Hub', Withdean Sports Complex, which will not only address the shortfall of pool water space available in the city but will also act as a mitigation should the council be forced to consider a temporary or permanent closure of the current King Alfred Leisure Centre pools given the ongoing challenges relating to its age and condition.
- 89.2 Councillors Taylor, Rowkins and Shanks and Councillor Robins commented and contributed to the debate.

Resolved

That Committee;

- 1) Noted the importance of addressing the shortfall of pool water space in the city.
- 2) Agreed that officers should continue to explore the feasibility of where and how new pool water space is developed and delivered in the East of the city, (as set out in paragraph 3.35).

Recommends that the Strategy, Finance, and City Regeneration Committee

- 1) Agreed in principle to the development of a new swimming pool at Withdean Sports Complex, as set out in paragraph 3.18.
- 2) Agreed the provision of £451,000 (via capital borrowing) to complete detailed design and survey work and to achieve planning consent.
- 3) Authorised the Executive Director Economy, Environment and Culture to take all steps necessary to procure and award the contracts for the design work.
- 4) Agreed that a further report is brought back to the Strategy, Finance and City Regeneration Committee once the design work is completed to approve the progression of the project to implementation and the additional borrowing required for the remaining capital cost to deliver a new facility.

90 CITY CLEAN INDEPENDENT INQUIRY

- 90.1 The Committee considered a report of Director of Human Resources & Organisational Development 1.1 In July 2023 the Council launched an independent inquiry into serious whistleblowing complaints about behaviours and activity within the Council's waste service (City Clean).

1.2 The outcome report was received on 13th November 2023 and describes numerous accounts of appalling behaviour faced by staff and managers at City Clean. The report presented the findings of the inquiry and sought formal approval for the recommendations of the report and the subsequent action plan that had been developed to ensure the serious and devastating findings of the report were addressed.

- 90.2 Councillors Taylor, Rowkins and Shanks and Councillor Robins commented and contributed to the debate.
- 90.3 Councillors Shanks moved a joint amendment on behalf of the Green and Conservative Group which was formally seconded by Councillor McNair.
- 90.4 The Chair noted that an amendment to the recommendations had been moved and put to the vote which was lost.

Resolved

That the Strategy, Finance & City Regeneration Committee:

- 1) Noted the findings of the independent inquiry report, as detailed in Appendix 1.
- 2) Noted and reinforces the apology issued by the Council's leadership to every staff member who has been affected by these behaviours, past and present, and to residents whose service has been affected by the dysfunction that has resulted.
- 3) Approved all recommendations of the independent inquiry report, as detailed on pages 18-19 of Appendix 1, and the action plan in Appendix 2.
- 4) Gave delegated authority to the Director of HR&OD to issue and serve the necessary notice on or after 26th January 2024 to terminate the council's existing disciplinary and disputes procedures.
- 5) Authorised the Director of HR&OD to take all steps necessary or incidental to preparations for the implementation of arrangements that will replace the role of Personnel Appeal Panels in those procedures, and therefore cease any involvement of members in employment procedures from 26th July 2024 (aside from statutory responsibilities associated with disciplinary action against Statutory Chief Officers under the law or against other Chief Officers under the JNC terms and conditions).
- 6) Noted that a further report with the proposed new disciplinary and disputes procedure and necessary amendments to the Council's Constitution to remove reference to the Personnel Appeals Panel will be brought to Council or the Strategy, Finance & City Regeneration Committee for approval.

91 COUNCIL TAX BASE AND BUSINESS RATES RETENTION FORECASTS 2024/25

- 91.1 The Committee considered a report of the Chief Finance Officer. The report is an annual report and sets out the council tax base for the city.
- 91.2 Councillors Shanks and Councillor Sankey commented and contributed to the debate.

Resolved

- 1) That Committee agrees the calculation of the council's tax base for the year 2024/25.
- 2) That Committee notes the collection rate assumed is 98.75%.
- 3) That Committee notes that no change to the Council Tax Reduction scheme is proposed for 2024/25 except that, in accordance with the policy agreed by full Council on 3 February 2022, earnings bands will be uplifted to reflect government changes to the National Living Wage as set out in paragraph 3.7.
- 4) That Committee agrees that in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the amounts calculated by Brighton & Hove City Council as its council tax base for the year 2024/25 shall be as follows:-
 - i. Brighton and Hove in whole – 93,574.4 (detail in appendix 1)
 - ii. Royal Crescent Enclosure Committee – 29.7 (detail in appendix 2)
 - iii. Hanover Crescent Enclosure Committee – 42.7 (detail in appendix 2)
 - iv. Marine Square Enclosure Committee – 69.5 (detail in appendix 2)
 - v. Parish of Rottingdean – 1,706.2 (detail in appendix 2)
- 5) That Committee agrees that for the purposes of Section 35(1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the expenses of meeting the special levies issued to the council by the Enclosure Committees shall be its special expenses.
- 6) That Committee agrees that the Enclosure Committees and Rottingdean Parish are paid the required Council Tax Reduction Grant of c£4,000 in total, to ensure they are no better or no worse off as a result of the introduction of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the reasons set out in paragraph 3.13.
- 7) That Committee notes that the amount forecast to be received by the council in 2024/25 from its share of local business rates and section 31 Local Government Act 2003 compensation grants is £84.911m, based on the latest available data.
- 8) That Committee notes that the amount forecast to be received by the council in 2024/25 from its share of local Council Tax, including an Adult Social Care precept, is £185.100m based on latest available data.
- 9) That Committee delegates the agreement of the final business rates forecast and completion of the NNDR1 2024/25 form to the Chief Finance Officer following consultation with the Chair of this Committee and this will be reflected in the Budget report to this committee in February 2024

92 COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS ON SECOND HOMES

- 92.1 The report was introduced by the Chief Financial Officer, who gave the comparison on council tax on long term empty homes and second homes. The report sought formal committee approval of the intended policy to apply increased council tax premiums on second homes.
- 92.2 Councillors Sankey, Taylor, Rowkins, Shanks, and Williams asked questions and contributed to the debate.

Resolved

- 1) That the Strategy, Finance & City Regeneration Committee approves the proposal to apply the current 100% premium applicable to long-term empty and unfurnished properties after one year instead of two years from 1 April 2024 as permitted by the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023.
- 2) That the Strategy, Finance & City Regeneration Committee recommends to full Council that it formally approves the recommendation that a new 100% Council Tax premium be applied to empty furnished properties (second homes) from 1 April 2025.

Full Council:

- 3) That full Council adopts the recommendation of Strategy, Finance & City Regeneration Committee at para 2.2 above and formally approves the recommendation that a new 100% Council Tax premium be applied to empty furnished properties (second homes) from 1 April 2025.

93 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

- 93.1 **RESOLVED** – There were no the Part 2 Items listed on the agenda.

94 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL

The meeting concluded at 5:45pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of