

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 26

Subject: Written questions from Councillors

Date of meeting: 28 March 2024

Report of: Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

The following questions have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answer detailed below:

1. Councillor Fishleigh

I thought that there is a hiring freeze, however, I keep seeing posts being advertised on BHCC's linkedin profile. Please would you confirm what the situation is with regards to recruitment.

Reply from Councillor Sankey, Leader of the Council

2. Councillor Earthey

Bin collection standards are slipping again, and there are fears regarding the outbreak of a strike at CityClean. What steps is the Labour Administration taking to raise bin collection standards to an acceptable level, while at the same time, seeking to maintain good industrial relations with the CityClean workforce?

Reply from Councillor Sankey, Leader of the Council

3. Councillor Earthey

Many residents have expressed great concern about BHCC's decision to re-introduce the use of Glyphosphate weedkiller and its consequent impact on biodiversity, even when applied in droplet form. What opt-out mechanism is BHCC proposing to offer residents so that they can choose to eliminate weeds from their pavements using more environmentally-friendly methods, rather than relying on BHCC's strategy?

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

Brighton & Hove City Council

4. Councillor Earthey

What steps is BHCC taking to align its new Glyphosphate-based weed-killing strategy with the strategies of neighbouring councils? There are cases where council boundaries run down the centre of a road such that one side is in BHCC and the other is in, say, Lewes District Council. It would make sense to agree a common weed-killing strategy along common boundaries, especially where biodiversity projects are nearby or span council boundaries.

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

5. Councillor Earthey

Looking across all B&H City Council buildings (excluding Council Houses), what percentage of electricity and gas meters have been upgraded to SMETS2?

Reply from Councillor Muten, Chair of Transport & Sustainability Committee

6. Councillor Earthey

In what position is BHCC in the league table of local government organisations having implemented SMETS2 meters across their portfolio of buildings?

Reply from Councillor Muten, Chair of Transport & Sustainability Committee

7. Councillor Earthey

If BHCC is below local government norms for fitting SMETS2 meters in its buildings, why has this situation been allowed to occur, and what steps is the Labour Administration taking to improving BHCC's standing in the league table?

Reply from Councillor Muten, Chair of Transport & Sustainability Committee

8. Councillor Earthey

Has BHCC investigated what savings in its energy bill it could make if it moved over to 100% SMETS2 meters, and if not, why not? If it has performed this calculation, what are the savings (expressed as both £ per year and percentage saving per year) on BHCC's energy bill? (Note that SMETS2 meter are free on demand from the energy supplier, who will give better prices where SMETS2 meters are implemented.)

Reply from Councillor Muten, Chair of Transport & Sustainability Committee

Brighton & Hove City Council

9. Councillor Earthey

Due to the criteria used in repairing potholes that focus primarily on the vertical depth of the pothole, subsidence around the pothole is often left unfilled, meaning another pothole appears almost immediately after the initial pothole is repaired (photo evidence can be provided on request). Given that BHCC has an increased budget for pothole-repair, can the repair criteria be broadened to include locational context (e.g. subsidence), because in some cases, the repairs are causing more problems than they are solving?

Reply from Councillor Muten, Chair of Transport & Sustainability Committee

10. Councillor Shanks

We have been disappointed to see that the organisation has lost two executive directors in quick succession, with no farewell or notification given to all councillors, including former chairs/spokespeople for the portfolios they represent. Announcements have been made about their departure after they have already left. Presumably these officers have left ahead of time and presumably with some level of pay off. What is the estimated cost to the council of the reorganisation of executive senior management and has any assessment been taken of staff morale in the teams where these changes are suddenly and swiftly occurring? In future can fundamental changes of personnel be better communicated so that members have the opportunity to thank these officers and say farewell?

Reply from Councillor Sankey, Leader of the Council

11. Councillor Hill

At the last Budget Council, Cllr Sankey stated that she had spoken with Shadow Cabinet members about the proposal for a National Care Service. My understanding is that Labour have U-turned on this issue as their manifesto will omit funding of social care reform from their manifesto. Without funding coming from national government, rather than local councils, there will be no National Care Service. I am glad nonetheless that it sounds as though myself and Cllr Sankey are of the same mind as to the importance of the National Care Service proposal. Can Cllr Sankey clarify the nature of the conversation she had with shadow cabinet members on this topic and whether there will in fact be a manifesto commitment to fund social care reform to create a National Care Service? As I wished to convey at Budget Council, to leave ballooning social care costs with Local Councils will surely only lead to misery for those who need social care and for the future of council finance.

Reply from Councillor Sankey, Leader of the Council

12. Councillor Hill

Brighton & Hove City Council

How does the council intend to carry out the functions of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee without having one? It is unclear how items usually reserved for HOSC should be carried out under the new Cabinet system arrangements.

Reply from Councillor Fowler, Chair of Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee

13. Councillor Pickett

Fixed Penalty Notices: There has seemingly been a huge rise in the number of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) issued to residents and businesses in the city, which appear to be fined for leaving their recycling by the side of a communal bin because the bin was overflowing, and the recycling would not fit inside. Another, vulnerable resident who says they received an on the spot fine after leaving some recycling temporarily outside of their home as they had to make several trips to the communal bin, and propped cardboard on the private pathway between trips. Considering the current increase in missed collections in the city, which means more people might be tempted to place bags of household recycling next to them. I would like to know whether enforcement officers are being given guidance on proportionality in cases where an 'offence' is related to an inability to place waste or recycling in a communal bin because it has not been collected?

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

14. Councillor Pickett

Glyphosate opt out: In light of a recent public meeting in which Cllr Rowkins stated that there was a council document of streets and roads in the city that would be exempt from glyphosate use, can the administration tell me why this opportunity was not afforded to every street in the city – or enough time given before use begins in April to allow streets and residents to contact the council and register their preference for being excluded? Can this documented list be made public so that residents can see if their road is included? Also, what are the barriers to enable residents to opt out before glyphosate is used?

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

15. Councillor Pickett

Funding for recycling improvements: In light of the government timeframe for implementing new recycling improvements, has the council received any clear information about what funds will be available and if so, will there be a shortfall? When will the new PTT recycling be introduced?

Brighton & Hove City Council

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

16. Councillor Pickett

City's allotments:

Last year, the council gave assurance that the allotment service was back to full strength and that the historic issues would now be addressed. However, a year later and things appear to have got worse: The allotment service has not completed full inspections at any site for at least the past two years, nor has it evicted a single tenant for not looking after their plot, and many plots are now overgrown and unused. The waiting list is at its longest ever (3000+) with people still signing up and paying £18 to join it. Plot vacancies are at their highest level for 10 years despite the demand being at an all-time high. The 10-year Allotment Strategy has now finished with only seven of the 83 recommendations completed. Could residents receive a timeline as to when the above will be achieved and if not, why not?

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

17. Councillor Pickett

School Closure Criteria: In light of recent school closures will the council commit to publishing detailed criteria which will be used in future to select schools which become identified for closure, or commit to an agreed period of consultation with staff and parents/guardians which will be carried out before any subsequent closures are able to progress? Furthermore, what steps are being taken to mitigate the current fall in PANs for primary schools in the city from impacting the future of secondary schools as those year groups progress through their education?

Reply from Councillor Taylor / Helliwell, Joint Chair(s) of Children, Families and Schools Committee

18. Councillor McLeay

The Housing and New Homes Committee meeting benefits from regular public involvement from concerned residents and housing activists. Before the council transitions over to a cabinet system – can you explain how concerned members of the public and Housing Committee members could engage with proposals and decisions brought through this committee? How will progress reports be shared for scrutiny? Will Area Panels continue?

Reply from Councillor Williams, Chair of Housing and New Homes Committee

Brighton & Hove City Council

19. Councillor McLeay

What will be the financial investment spent on converting the council from a committee system to a cabinet system? Was this budgeted for in the recent budget?

Reply from Councillor Sankey, Leader of the Council

20. Councillor McNair

How much money has the council paid out in compensation to residents who have tripped over paving slabs? In the period 01.01.23 – 31.12.23.

What percentage of claims are successful?

Reply from Councillor Sankey, Leader of the Council

21. Councillor Theobald

Scaffolding at Birch Grove Crescent block 61-72 remains despite residents being promised it would be removed in Full Council on 1st February. When will it be removed?

Reply from Councillor Williams, Chair of Housing and New Homes Committee

22. Councillor Theobald

Can you please tell me when there are going to be improvements to the Patcham Roundabout on the London Road, Patcham? Patcham councillors were informed last year that there would be a planting scheme in place by the Autumn of 2023. So far yet again nothing has happened.

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

23. Councillor Lyons

Why are Cityclean not collecting abandoned bicycles within Westdene & Hove Park Ward? More than 4 months after reporting & with regular chasing, nothing is happening. Staff shortages and limited resources can only be given as a reason for so long

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

Brighton & Hove City Council

24. Councillor Lyons

How deep does a pothole have to be before it is repaired within our City roads?

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

25. Councillor Lyons

When will the release of the results from ward consultations about the changes in parking restrictions be announced?

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

26. Councillor McNair

Why has the council only given 3 months' notice of works? Namely, filling two arches with concrete and temporarily removing the club from the remaining arch. The club has been at the premises for 80 years.

Are the works necessary? We are told strengthening works are required to enable lorries to use the Dukes mound ramp. The arches are in great condition considering heavy vehicles have used Dukes Mound for years. Have structural and traffic flow surveys been carried out? Would it be better to reinstate access to the Marina slipway via Black Rock?

What provision has the Council made for the longevity of Brighton and Hove Motor Club? Formed in 1904, one of the oldest Motor clubs in the country, it serves 400 members. The famous clubhouse has been occupied by the club since 1948 and is an important part of the history of Brighton.

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

27. Councillor Meadows

The drain and soakaway at the end of Surrenden Close are blocked. Residents' homes are flooded when it rains. Builders pour waste down the drain. When will the drain and soakaway be cleared?

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

28. Councillor Hogan

When will pavements be de-weeded using glyphosate in Patcham & Hollingbury and Westdene & Hove Park? Will residents be notified of the schedule of spraying to mitigate the risk of their pets being affected?

Brighton & Hove City Council

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

29. Councillor Meadows

There are no passing places in Carden Hill. Buses have been known to scrape and damage cars. Could the feasibility of a passing place be investigated to improve the flow of traffic?

Reply from Councillor Muten, Chair of Transport & Sustainability Committee

30. Councillor McNair

How many host families are currently being sought to house Ukrainian refugees in need of accommodation? East Sussex council has produced a new leaflet and poster campaign. What is Brighton & Hove City Council doing to attract host families?

Reply from Councillor Pumm, Chair of Equalities, Community Safety & Human Rights Committee

31. Councillor Meadows

What flood measures are to be put in place for the residents who suffer flooding every time it rains on Winfield Avenue/Ladies Mile Road?

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee

32. Councillor Meadows

When is it planned for Vale Avenue Park be able to have new playground equipment?

Reply from Councillor Rowkins, Chair of City Environment, South Downs & The Sea Committee