

WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

The following questions listed on pages 73-76 of the agenda have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answers listed below:

(a) Councillor Hamilton

“In the dying days of their administration, the Conservative Cabinet voted to sell off half of the council owned site in Victoria Road, Portslade, home of the former Portslade Urban District Council. The disposal was to include the Council offices, a bowling green, the car park and the public toilets. There is widespread concern about this proposal in Portslade. Extension of the bowls pavilion, relocation of staff from other buildings, a police presence in the building and a home for any future community forum are all options that have been proposed by local people. Will you agree to put the proposed disposal on hold and carry out a full appraisal and consultation on the future use of the site?”

Reply from Councillor J Kitcat, Cabinet Member for Finance and central Services.

“The entire Portslade Town Hall site (including the Town Hall, housing offices, car parking, public toilets, bowling green, practice area and pavilion) has been identified through the asset management process as an under-used site with the buildings being in a poor condition. The Town Hall itself is well used by local groups but is expensive to maintain and requires substantial investment to improve and prolong its life.

The council has a duty to ensure that it is making best use of its land and property assets.

We propose to show our commitment to Portslade Town Hall and use the capital receipt from the disposal of the under-used part of the site to reinvest in the Town Hall. We plan to refurbish and extend it to create new offices to support a new neighbourhood customer service contact and access point. All the features of Portslade Town Hall are to be retained and enhanced, especially historical artefacts and the Compton organ. Our aim is to ensure the Town Hall’s long-term viability as a publicly-owned resource for the community.

This proposal is currently being consulted on with a variety of local clubs and organisations who use the Town Hall regularly and a broad range of local community groups (approx 12+) who may wish to use it in the future. The feedback is positive so far.

Other voluntary and public sector organisations are also showing interest in using it for similar customer access functions, including the police. Consultations are on-going, and again are enthusiastic.

Car parking concerns are being met through approx 10 dedicated public car spaces around the Town Hall. This is a reduction but the area is well served by nearby car parks that could be used when required through appropriate negotiations.

The proposal also includes an extension to the bowling green to square it off so that it can be played on from both sides. There is an area for a new bowls pavilion next to the Green with access to the car parking. The bowlers should gain from all these changes.

Consultations are carrying on with the various interested stakeholders and will inform the development of the informal planning and marketing brief. A better use of the site for much-needed new housing; a viable, refurbished Portslade Town Hall and the other benefits previously mentioned is what we are working towards for the benefit of the local community.”

(b) Councillor Pidgeon

“Could the Cabinet Member for Finance and Central Services confirm how many full time equivalent trade union representatives and local constituency representatives were employed by the Council during 2010-11 and how this compares to other similar unitary authorities?”

Reply from Councillor J Kitcat, Cabinet Member for Finance and central Services.

“Corporate representatives

In 2010-11 we had one employee who was employed full-time as a trade union convener for GMB.

In addition, we had a number of employees who were granted release from their substantive posts to represent their members within the council's workforce. The total Full Time Equivalent (FTE) of these representatives broken down by union was 9.65 (Unison 6; GMB 3; NUT / ATL / NASUWT 0.65).

The table below sets out how this figure compares with some other similar Unitary Authorities:

| Council | Level of Trade Union Release |
|-----------|------------------------------|
| BHCC | 10.65 FTE |
| Council A | 2.0 * |
| Council B | 19.0 * |
| Council C | 1.0* |
| Council D | 3.3 FTE |
| Council E | 4.0 * |
| Council F | 3.0 * |

Note: * from the information available it is unclear whether this figure relates to headcount or FTEs

It would appear from our research that other local authorities do not hold detailed information on trade union release. This makes it difficult to compare the level of trade union release within BHCC with other authorities in a meaningful way.

Local constituency representatives

A number of other council employees (164) were allowed release on an ad hoc basis to represent their members within their local service area. The time these individuals spent on trade union duties is not recorded centrally.

It is worth pointing out that the vast majority of these representatives generally do not get involved in representing colleagues in formal procedural matters. This role tends to be carried out by those employees on corporate release. Instead they play a key role in disseminating information within their respective constituencies.”

(c) Councillor C Theobald

“Can the Cabinet Member for Planning, Employment, Economy & Regeneration tell me whether any work is currently being carried out, or will be carried out in the near future, on assessing the economic impact of introducing a ‘workplace parking levy’ in Brighton & Hove as set out in the Green Party’s local election manifesto?”

Reply from Councillor Davey, Cabinet Member for Transport and Public Realm.

“Thank you for your question Councillor Theobald.

The priority we accorded to work place parking charges in our manifesto is an indication of one of the ways that we intend to give the city a fresh start. Transport measures to reduce the impact of cars on the city are part of how we will achieve this and the proposal is consistent with the 3 main priorities that Cllr Randall set out last month. But this measure is about more than just the economy.

This measure will help tackle and reduce some of the inequality that exists in journeys to work, because not everyone has access to a car. Car traffic and busy roads can affect local communities and reduce people’s quality of life.

It will contribute to making Brighton & Hove the greenest city in the UK by addressing the impacts of commuter car journeys, by reducing vehicle emissions.

And it will only be introduced, following consideration of the responses we receive through involving the community more in decision making, especially local businesses.

At present, no work is being carried out on this initiative but we will be asking officers to prepare briefings on the options and opportunities available to begin this process. This will include consideration of the economic benefits and impacts. Learning from the experiences of other cities that have considered the idea – especially Nottingham – we will be able to assess the likely effects of introducing the measure.”

(d) Councillor Peltzer Dunn

“Would the Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Public Protection confirm that it is the Councils duty to enforce bye laws which are legally in place within the City?”

Reply from Councillor Duncan, Cabinet Member for Communities, Equalities and Public Protection.

“There is no mandatory duty or automatic requirement to prosecute for breaches of bye laws. We are required to look at each case on its merit and, as I understand it, a blanket policy of prosecution for each and every breach, apart from being costly and impracticable, would, in itself, be unlawful and could be challenged by way of judicial review.

The Council has in place an enforcement protocol, where enforcement is the last resort and not the first.

Normally, unless serious, a warning should be given and this generally deals with the problem.

We also have to be aware whether it is in the public interest or the interest of justice to take action. The Council as well as the Crown Prosecution service are subject to good practice guidance which requires prosecution to be undertaken only when in the public interest. Minor technical breaches will, generally, not be prosecuted. It is normally where there are serious or persistent breaches that we will consider action.”

(e) Councillor Carden

“Will the Leader confirm exactly how much money this council has spent on dealing with unauthorised Gypsy and Travellers encampments since the new administration came into power in May 2011?”

Reply from Councillor Randall, Leader of the Council.

“Since 05 May 2011, The Council has spent £30,368 in relation to the management of unauthorised Gypsy and Travellers encampments. This figure consists of:

- Clear up costs, and waste management - £21,803

- Removal and storage of Traveller vehicles following eviction - £2,850.00
- Legal costs - £5,715.00

These costs include those incurred by two unauthorised encampments that were established prior to the new administration forming, where services were provided after 5 May 2011. These two encampments were evicted on 9 May 2011.

With the exception of the storage of Traveller vehicles, this reflects normal costs associated with managing unauthorised encampments at this time of the year.”

(f) Councillor Mitchell

“Would the Leader of the Council please give details of the current number of council employees that have accepted or been offered voluntary redundancy packages, the number of deleted posts and the number of any permanent redundancies occurring since 1st April 2011?”

Reply from Councillor Randall, Leader of the Council.

“The council has a good reputation for working in partnership with trade unions to reduce the need for compulsory redundancies.

Since April 2011 four employees (excluding schools based employees) have left the council with a voluntary redundancy package. These posts have since been made redundant. We are maintaining a robust approach towards vacancy management with establishments being managed locally.

The approved council budget for 2011/12 included savings proposals that were expected to result in a reduction of approximately 250 full time equivalent posts including value for money proposals to reduce management and administration costs. In order to achieve these reductions, the council is currently running a voluntary severance scheme so as to try and reduce the need for compulsory redundancies arising from budget cuts.

Alongside the deletion of existing vacancies and expected normal turnover during 2011/12, the voluntary redundancy scheme is seeking to attract approximately eighty employees who are prepared to leave the authority on pre agreed financial terms. Decisions arising from this scheme will be made later this month, and we hope to find eighty approved applicants.

It is likely that, following the completion of the voluntary severance exercise, a number of local consultation exercises will take place which would then result in movement of some colleagues into new or different roles and posts being deleted. Only when all of this activity has been completed will we know the final reduction in the number of full time equivalent posts.”

(g) Councillor Mitchell

“Does this administration:

- a) share my concerns regarding the consistent overspending of the council’s communications service, who in 2009/10 overspent by 46.3% (£272,000), in 2010/11 overspent by an increased 109% (£459,000) and are this year predicted to overspend by £311,000, and;
- b) what does this administration plan to do about this consistent overspending by the communications team, at a time when services such as children and young people and adult social care are facing unprecedented cuts?”

Reply from Councillor J Kitcat, Cabinet Member for Finance and Central Services.

“As the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the council finances I am of course concerned about any overspends by council services. As soon as I took my position I looked into the communications budget in some detail.

The historical position has been that each directorate (and now service unit) has held its own communications budget. The central corporate communications unit has also had a small budget (the communications operational budget), which is the one being reported as overspent.

Previously directorates and service units could, and did, spend their communications budgets with a wide variety of suppliers. This resulted in inefficient use of funds and failed to take advantage of the council’s size to negotiate the best prices.

The central communications unit are leading a process of drawing all the Council’s communications budgets into a single budget line which will enable smarter spending, consolidation of suppliers, standardised branding and economies of scale. In the previous year this process already has saved £650,000; however this saving was shown in individual directorates’ budgets, not the central communications unit’s operational budget.

The communications operational budget has been overspending for the last 2 financial years due to a shortfall on the advertising budget, specifically City News, and staffing pressures. Unfortunately the budget consolidation has also been slower than planned, adding to these budgetary pressures.

An accelerated timescale to consolidate communications budgets from across the Council has now been agreed with a target to introduce key changes by the end of this financial year. As a result of these changes the overspend will be resolved.

In meantime the Communications Team have been holding vacancies to reduce costs (headcount has reduced by 19%). However, this is starting to cause significant pressures.

I continue to keep a very close eye on communications spending. I am also reviewing future plans for City News and other communications to make sure they are cost effective and deliver best value for our citizens.”

(h) Councillor Marsh

“What is the administration’s view on the Education Bill and its proposals to remove:

- a) local parents’ ability to challenge decisions about admissions and exclusions
- b) make a local complaint
- c) the local admissions forum
- d) this city’s successful school places lottery

Can you explain how this administration:

- a) intends to encourage faith Encourage faith schools to subscribe to the local authority admissions system, rather than set their own admissions policies, as stated in your manifesto?
- b) will encourage local schools to collaborate and share best practice, as stated in your manifesto?
- c) will protect youth services, especially for young people at risk of becoming NEETs (Not in Education Employment or Training) or falling into the criminal justice system, as stated in your manifesto?
- d) plans to campaign for a reinstatement of Building Schools for the Future money, as stated in your manifesto?
- e) is going to help groups of schools develop in-house environmental officers posts to save money and reduce the city's carbon footprint, as stated in your manifesto?”

Reply from Councillor Shanks, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

“The Council is preparing a full response to the consultation on the proposed new School Admissions Code. This will make plain the Council’s opposition to any removal of parental rights of complaint, the proposed removal of a statutorily constituted Admissions Forum, and any limitation on the use of random allocation as a tie break for Community Schools. The proposed changes on school admissions and the Admissions Code are mixed, with some positive changes, but some, such as the proposal to remove coordination of admissions in year, would in our view have an extremely negative impact on children and families. Our position will be made clear through this Council’s response to the consultation.

Can you explain how this administration:

a) Intends to encourage faith schools to subscribe to the local authority admissions system, rather than set their own admissions policies, as stated in your manifesto?

Councillor Marsh will be aware of the fact that they have a legal right to prioritise admissions on the basis of religious affiliation. That does not mean that faith schools are excluded from ongoing discussions and consultation on the provision of school places. At a time when there is growth in the demand for school places in the City. However, we believe that a collaborative approach is the right way forward, and we do recognise that faith schools operate within a different legal framework to Community Schools. Nonetheless we do want to have a conversation with faith schools around the possibility of their offering a proportion of local community places that do not rely on religious affiliation.

b) Will encourage local schools to collaborate and share best practice, as stated in your manifesto?

Collaboration and sharing of best practice amongst schools is already a reality, and the Council is strongly supportive of school led initiatives in this area including cluster working, the Behaviour and Attendance Partnership and the Learning Partnership. My administration will encourage the development of these and other initiatives which will drive towards a cohesive and fully inclusive education system.

c) Will protect youth services, especially for young people at risk of becoming NEETs (Not in Education Employment or Training) or falling into the criminal justice system, as stated in your manifesto?

Officers of the Council are working with schools and colleges to ensure the right provision so all young people will have a suitable placement age 16. The Youth Employability Service will work with young people aged 16 – 18 who are NEET and 4 Advisers will work with young people with SEN to support them from school into FE or work with training. Consultation on a commissioning strategy follows the Youth Service review. The Administration has considered the Youth Review findings and will consult on a three year commissioning strategy to improve outcomes for all young people, and to reduce inequality and child poverty including those at risk of becoming NEET or falling into the criminal justice system.

d) Plans to campaign for a reinstatement of Building Schools for the Future money, as stated in your manifesto?

It is our view that a replacement programme is essential to ensure that capital is available to improve and enlarge the secondary estate outside of the Academy option. This view will be made known to Ministers. The James review contained 16 recommendations regarding the future of capital expenditure in schools, the fundamental premise of these recommendations is that funding should follow need, either in terms of additional school places or the condition of

the school estate. The review suggests that better value for money can be obtained by increased central procurement and frameworks for procurement.

e) Is going to help groups of schools develop in-house environmental officers posts to save money and reduce the city's carbon footprint, as stated in your manifesto?

I stand by our commitment to develop in-house environmental officer posts. There are many individual examples of work already undertaken in this area and broader initiatives including Eco-schools status. I believe that we are pushing against an open door as schools are already well down the road of carbon reduction and environmental awareness. A network of designated school staff will help share best practice on carbon reduction, and lower energy consumption will lead to savings for schools.”

(i) Councillor Farrow

"What is the council doing to attract new media enterprise to the city, as well as supporting current media business in the city?"

Reply from Councillor Bowden, Cabinet Member for Culture, Recreation and Tourism.

“The city has rightly been identified as a new media enterprise hub for the whole country – most recently in studies published by IBM and HSBC. The Council works closely with partner organisations such as Wired Sussex, the Brighton & Hove Economic Partnership and both Universities to support the development of the existing business base in Brighton & Hove and to attract more companies.

The city council has an approved Business Retention and Inward Investment Strategy that identifies the creative industries /digital media sector as a key sector for growth in the city. Support for the sector includes tailored property searches for media businesses, the delivery of six targeted workshops over the last 18 months (attended by over 450 business representatives), part funding a successful digital internship programme with Wired Sussex and the University of Sussex and disseminating information on key international opportunities for partnerships and funding.

Our Administration is also looking at the future of New England House as a potential Media Hub and we would support actions to develop the media sector through the Local Enterprise Partnership.

In supporting the wider cultural sector in the city, we are also creating and maintaining the environment that these kind of businesses need to grow and flourish.

I am particularly looking forward to the Digital Festival this September led by Lighthouse - an excellent example of the strength and vibrancy of the sector.”

(j) Councillor Wealls

“Would the Cabinet Member for Housing give a pledge to continue with the commitment of the previous Conservative Administration to ring-fence Supporting People funding, which provides housing-related support for some of the most vulnerable residents in Brighton & Hove?”

Reply from Councillor Wakefield, Cabinet Member for Housing.

“The current administration is fully committed to protecting the successful Supporting People Programme that funds housing-related support services that make a real difference to local vulnerable people in our city. The programme has consistently delivered positive benefits to a range of service users, from people that are homeless, rough sleeping, people with mental health and substance misuse problems and older people with support needs.

Our local providers have effectively delivered services of high quality, performance, excellent value for money and good outcomes. We recognise the strong commitment from previous Conservative Administration to protect Supporting People services.

We as the new Green administration fully support the current Supporting People Strategy signed off by the previous administration.”

(k) Councillor Barnett

“Would the Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability confirm who authorised a provision of the bund at the 19 acre site, the date of the provision of the bund and the cost of same? Will he further confirm the authorisation of the removal of the bund, the date of same and the cost for carrying out such works?”

Reply from Councillor West, Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability.

“A Bund has been in place at this site for at least 10 years. A new long section of bund was provided to cover the 19 acres site in May 2011 at a cost of £1000. This section of bund was further reinforced in early July 2011 at no cost to the Council, as a highway contractor was working on site and had surplus chalk.

The authorisation for the levelling of a small 3 metre section of bund was made by Senior officers of the council on the 8th July 2011 and was carried out by the in-house city parks team no cost to the Travellers Liaison Service. For information a typical cost for re-instating this section of bund would be £80, with a further £37 if more chalk material is required.”