

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMISSION
4.00PM 27 MARCH 2012
COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL
MINUTES

Present: Councillors Mitchell (Chair); Janio (Deputy Chair), Follett, Littman, Morgan, K Norman, Powell, Summers, Wealls and MacCafferty

PART ONE

73. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

Councillor Gill Mitchell the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission welcomed everyone and reminded the meeting that OSC was being recorded and kept on record for repeat viewing.

Members agreed to a change in the running order of today's agenda; Item 79 would be heard after Item 77.

73a Declarations of Substitutes

73.1 Councillor Wealls was substituting for Councillor Brown and Councillor MacCafferty was substituting for Councillor Rufus.

73b Declarations of Interests

There were none.

73c Declaration of Party Whip

There were none.

73d Exclusion of Press and Public

In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

RESOLVED: That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

74. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

74.1 Councillor Mitchell said this was the last OSC for this Council year. She thanked all colleagues for their attendance and great work with the Commission throughout the year, and thanked the Scrutiny Team.

74.2 Councillor Follett and Councillor Janio thanked the Councillor Mitchell for excellent Chairing of the Commission.

75. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 31 JANUARY 2012

75.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2012 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

76. PUBLIC QUESTIONS/ LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS/REFERRALS FROM COMMITTEES/NOTICES OF MOTION REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

76.1 There were none.

77. DATA SHARING REGARDING VULNERABLE PEOPLE - REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL

77.1 Councillor Ruth Buckley, Chair of the Scrutiny Panel, introduced the report on Information Sharing Regarding Vulnerable Adults.

77.2 East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service had asked for this subject to be investigated and Councillor Buckley was glad that ESFRS representative, Andy Reynolds had served on the Panel. She thanked Councillors Ken Norman and Alan Robins for their work and also Julia Riches of the Scrutiny team for her excellent support.

77.3 Councillor Buckley explained that 'vulnerability' had not been defined as its meaning depended on individual circumstances. However the Panel had been able to make practical recommendations as listed in the report, that would have great benefit to vulnerable people. For example the Panel agreed that processes in place for cases of high risk should be extended to include lower risk cases. An 'unseen' benefit of the scrutiny review had been new links for joint working between organisations, created as a result of Panel meetings.

77.4 Councillor Ken Norman thanked Councillor Buckley for her Chairing of the Panel. He was pleased to have been a Panel Member as these important issues had needed detailed attention for some time, and he fully backed the recommendations. Councillor Norman also thanked Julia Riches for her support for the scrutiny review.

77.5 Councillor Warren Morgan said this was an excellent and worthwhile report. He pointed out that there were other aspects of vulnerability, such as community safety, that were not included within the remit of this Panel. It was important that agencies worked well together to benefit service users, especially vulnerable people. However special care was needed to protect confidential and personal information.

77.6 The Deputy Chair Councillor Tony Janio thanked the Panel for their work and reinforced the need for care over data protection and confidentiality.

77.7 Councillor Stephanie Powell, disability champion also welcomed the report and in particular Recommendation 2, on Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference for lower-risk cases.

77.8 Members discussed the use of information from Mears housing repairs contractors.

77.9 The Chair Councillor Mitchell thanked Councillor Buckley and on behalf of OSC welcomed the report. The scrutiny findings should be shared with other local authorities, she said.

77.10 RESOLVED

- 1) that the scrutiny report and recommendations be endorsed
- 2) that the report be referred to the relevant executive committee, requesting that they enact the Panel's recommendations.

78. THE COUNCIL'S PROPERTY ESTATE

78.1 Head of Property Services Angela Dymott gave a presentation and update on the Council's Property Estate, worth a total of approximately £2 billion, and how the estate was managed in line with the Council's Strategic Priorities. This included an operational portfolio of 12,350 houses and flats and 500 non-housing properties such as schools; a non-operational portfolio of commercial premises including retail and seafront property, an investment portfolio of 600 properties and more than 10,000 acres of Downland.

78.2 The Head of Property Services is responsible for the Corporate Property Strategy and Asset Management Plan that are available on the Council's website. Because of the size of the portfolios it is particularly important to maximise income from assets (currently around £10million), balanced with customer and service needs, value for money and social and environmental factors, contributing to keeping the Council Tax down.

78.3 Members of OSC were invited to view the Council's Property Performance database that informs the Asset Management Planning process and Building Maintenance Strategy and an explanation was given as to how property performance reviews were used to inform decision making. The building maintenance programme amounted to some £4million per year. Recent work included maintenance and improvements to the operational portfolio and the creation of Bartholomew House Customer Service Centre and refurbishment of some of Bartholomew House through the Accommodation Strategy under the Workstyles transformation programme.

78.4 Sustainability measures are included in property improvements to achieve energy efficiency and reduce the council's carbon footprint eg: Photo Voltaic installations, lighting

schemes and thermal insulation. The Architecture Design team undertake capital works including schools extensions and introduce sustainability and energy saving design features where ever possible to help reduce carbon emissions.

78.5 The Head of Property Services heads the City Property Group of public sector bodies to discuss property matters in the city that look to share accommodation and collaborate on property efficiencies and functions such as procurement.

78.6 She outlined the regeneration team work in Property bringing together land assemblies and redevelopments of sites like the Jubilee Library, Community Stadium, Hollingbury Industrial Estate, and regeneration work on major development sites such as Circus Street, Preston Barracks, New England House, Black Rock, King Alfred and Brighton Centre.

78.7 The Council's non-operational portfolio of retail, commercial and industrial premises is generally managed by outsourced consultants; the seafront portfolio is managed in-house. The Downland Initiative had been developed and led by Property aiming at encouraging diversification on the council's Downland Estate whilst protecting the environment, social and economic factors

78.8 Corporate Landlord Strategy has been delegated to the Head of Property Services that bring together all the Council's property functions. Council and office buildings were being rationalised to concentrate the council's 3,000 staff into the main office buildings at Bartholomew House, Brighton and Hove Town Hall; services are also being brought together and co-located at neighbourhood Hubs across the City, for instance at Whitehawk and Mouselcoomb.

78.9 Councillor Warren Morgan said there were lessons to be learnt from the Whitehawk Hub on coordinating with partner agencies eg lighting and access issues, and how to explain to users the benefits of co-locating services. It would be helpful for local Ward Councillors to be included more closely in the masterplanning to help in communicating with residents in future, he suggested.

78.10 The Head of Property Services answered Members' questions on: car parks; the decision matrix and process for property disposals; corporate funding for the capital programme; the new Hove Town Hall customer service centre and Police accommodation; and rent reviews and market rents including flexibility on a case by case basis to help avoid boarded up shops. She confirmed that freehold premises were preferable assets for the Council compared with leaseholdings as they presented better value for money and are easier to control.

78.11 Referring to a map of the City's West, Central and East Hubs, the Head of Property Services gave a detailed overview and of the buildings including Portslade Town Hall, Locks Hill, Heversham House in the West, Bartholomew House, Brighton Town Hall in the centre and Moulsecoomb and Whitehawk hubs in the East. She agreed with a suggestion that the map could be clearer to show the Hove / Portslade Hubs.

78.12 Councillor Mitchell, Chair of the current Retail Sector Scrutiny Panel commented on the high value of retail properties as a proportion of the total figure and asked about supporting small local shops, and policy on 'pop-up' shops. The meeting heard the Council currently had

no voids and were working pro-actively with landlords and agents where possible, encouraging short-term leasing arrangements.

78.13 Asked about the Strategic Construction Partnership, the Head of Property Services has led on this approach as City Architect that is nationally recognised and the council work collaboratively in a partnership contract with Westridge contractors and design consultants. This approach minimises risks and improves outcomes, so that projects are delivered early or on time and under or within budget. This collaborative partnership had informed the procurement of the 10-year housing partnership with Mears.

78.14 Regarding a question about charity shops from Deputy Chair Councillor Tony Janio, the Head of Property Services noted that there was no specific policy but this could be investigated.

78.15 On accessibility to customer services by disabled people, queried by Councillor Stephanie Powell, the meeting heard that the team's Access Officer worked to ensure public buildings with access to the public are accessible under the former Disability Discrimination Act under the Equality Act. Accessibility and sustainability were an integral part of the property programme and customer services across the city were being designed to be focussed on the needs of services users and neighbourhoods.

78.16 The Chair welcomed the report and thanked the officers. She reflected comments from a number of Members; that this information was of key interest to all Councillors. It would be useful for Scrutiny to be kept updated at a suitable time, she said.

78.17 RESOLVED that an update on the Council's Property Strategy be recommended for a future scrutiny committee.

79. TRANS SCRUTINY SCOPING REPORT

79.1 Councillor Mitchell reminded the meeting that Councillor MacCafferty had asked for a scrutiny review of trans equality issues in Brighton & Hove at the 31 January OSC meeting. The scoping report on today's agenda gave more information to enable OSC to decide whether scrutiny action was needed.

79.2 Councillor Warren Morgan thanked Councillor MacCafferty and welcomed his request. He summarised the main local concerns and related research and projects in this area. The issue was overdue for scrutiny and he would be pleased to serve on a Panel, hearing directly from representatives of local communities and organisations, he said.

79.3 Councillor MacCafferty gave details of his request for scrutiny and the reasons for it. This was a less known subject that should be investigated. Councillor MacCafferty wanted the Council to help eliminate discrimination and lead on best practice to benefit the trans community. He would be honoured to serve on a Panel, he said.

79.4 Councillor Janio said, having heard some of the issues, he was in full support of a scrutiny panel. Other Councillors also spoke in favour.

79.5 The Chair Councillor Gill Mitchell referred to the Count Me in Too research published in 2008 and said work needed to be updated. Councillor Mitchell summarised OSC's general agreement for setting up a scrutiny panel.

79.6 Councillors Morgan and MacCafferty would be Panel Members and the third Member nomination would be requested from the Conservative group. Councillor MacCafferty's information would be passed on to the Panel.

79.7 RESOLVED; that a Scrutiny Panel be established on trans equality issues in Brighton & Hove.

80. ICT STRATEGY - UPDATE

80.1 Head of ICT Paul Colbran gave a presentation on the ICT Strategy. He remarked that today's agenda included informing sharing re vulnerable adults, the Workstyles programme and the Police moving into Council accommodation. These examples illustrated ICT's central role in supporting city-wide changes in public services; multi-agency working, commissioning and closer relations with customers and citizens. ICT was working towards common aims, removing technical barriers, protecting information assets and maintaining proper governance controls on information.

80.2 He welcomed the involvement of Members, not least because ICT was often seen as a 'back-office' function. ICT was key to help achieve savings eg by reducing service delivery costs, maximising mobile working, reducing office space requirements and improving collaborative working, he said.

80.3 Paul Colbran outlined areas for improvements in the current ICT systems and described the workstyles programme. He gave examples of recent work developing web services for better on-line transactions, mobile solutions for sessional workers that improved staff flexibility plus a more effective room booking system. He was closely involved in supporting the cross-Sussex LINK consortium, updating key networks involving County Councils, Districts and Boroughs, libraries, universities and joint procurement, to deliver services in partnership with public, private and third sector organisations.

80.4 The Head of ICT explained how better use was being made of information as a core asset, by improved data capture, analysis and presentation that supported for instance decision-making, the reporting requirements of education and social care services and Human Resources and health and safety programmes.

80.5 Paul Colbran was looking to extend successful work with schools to new areas such as GP Commissioning. Early involvement of the ICT department in corporate change processes, meant that risk management and business preparedness could be improved, he said.

80.6 The investment programme was based on economies of scale, good use of existing assets, and linking facilities, data and budgets with the Council's partners. It took into account constantly changing markets at a time of reducing budgets and higher business demands.

80.7 Answering a question from Councillor Warren Morgan on the balance between maintaining existing systems and replacing with new equipment, the Head of ICT pointed out that replacing legacy systems did give good opportunities for new services and solutions. He gave the example of customer records.

80.8 There was a drive to update desk-top systems with laptops. In due course, tablets would likely have a role in reducing printing and paper requirements of the Council's Committees. However, in his view tablets presented unnecessary data protection risks for the local authority at present.

80.9 Replying to a comment from Councillor Tony Janio on high-profile failures of large national IT programmes and centralised systems, Paul Colbran said a recently-appointed Records Manager would be looking at the quality and relevance of data currently held, to help determine where migration would be worthwhile. Cloud computing had security implications and required a major change from capital to revenue based funding. At present the approach was to make better use of existing facilities.

80.10 The Chair Councillor Gill Mitchell thanked the officers and congratulated the team on the wide range of work in progress. It would be useful for Scrutiny to be kept updated with progress.

80.11 RESOLVED: that the report be noted and ICT be recommended for adding to the scrutiny work programme.

81. ITEMS TO GO FORWARD TO CABINET, CABINET MEMBER MEETING OR FULL COUNCIL

81.1 Members noted the Scrutiny Panel report would be referred to Cabinet. The Scrutiny Annual report would go to full council.

The meeting concluded at 5.40pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of