

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

4.00pm 12 SEPTEMBER 2013

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor J Kitcat (Chair) Councillors Littman (Deputy Chair), G Theobald (Opposition Spokesperson), Morgan (Group Spokesperson), Hamilton, Mitchell, A Norman, ***Peltzer Dunn***, Randall and Shanks.

PART ONE

44. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

(a) Declarations of Substitutes

44.1 Councillor Mitchell declared that she was attending the meeting as substitutes for Councillor Lepper.

(b) Declarations of Interest

44.2 There were no declarations of interest.

(c) Exclusion of the Press and Public

44.3 The Committee considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any of the items listed on the agenda.

44.4 **RESOLVED:** That the press and public not be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the items contained in agenda.

45. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

45.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that he was being shadowed by a television crew from BBC South-East and had therefore given permission for them to film and record the meeting.

45.2 The Chair noted that it was the committee's first meeting since July and stated that a lot had happened in the interim. He then outlined a few highlights:

- **Pride** was a great success and raised over 40K for local charities. We are already working with the organisers to ensure next years event is just as successful – if not more so.
- Just before Pride we were recognised for our work on tackling homophobia in schools and I'm pleased to report we have just submitted our Stonewall submission for this year. I'm keen that we remain amongst the very top employers in relation to our LGBT staff and that we maintain Brighton's position and international reputation as a diverse, celebratory and supportive city for LGBT peoples
- In matters related to our **city's heritage**; over the summer we unveiled blue plaques; one celebrating the work of John Constable and the other recognising the pleasure that Hove held for King Edward the Seventh.
- And looking ahead; we are developing plans to **commemorate the First World War** in a way appropriate to the city and in partnership with civil and military organisations. This is at a very early stage but has already generated a lot of interest; we look set to be recognising the event both formally and informally, utilising the very best the city has to offer in terms of its history, culture, arts, partnerships and community groups.
- We have made use of **new technologies** by upgrading some parking meters so that drivers can use mobile phones to pay. And I've been delighted by the reaction to the Digital Festival which has showcased many artists, developers and IT experts locally and from further afield
- In relation to **our local environment**; we were awarded six green flags over the summer for the quality of our local parks and we also re-opened the renovated Rock Garden and part of our - already highly regarded – re-design of The Level.

45.3 The Chair then stated that the committee would recall that following a report on home to school transport prepared by Children's Services it was resolved to cease to support the 96 bus service which runs from the Westdene area to Hove Park and Blatchington Mill Schools at the beginning and end of the school day, and to consult with schools and parents on possible alternative arrangements. Following this consultation, officers recommended that the service should be supported for one further year, as the number of children involved exceeded any minibus arrangements the schools were able to arrange. This recommendation was agreed by the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with him and parents had been informed. The number of children travelling from the Westdene area to these two schools will decrease further in 2014, and the schools themselves will be responsible for discussions with the parents about future arrangements.

45.4 He noted that the Committee had also resolved that there should be a change in the pick up points and routes at the end of the school day for the 94 bus service, a commercial service which serves Dorothy Stringer and Varndean Schools. Following consultation with the two schools the officers recommended that this change could be too disruptive for the large number of Dorothy Stringer students using this service. Some safety improvements have been made in Ditchling Road to help address the

concerns about Varndean students crossing this road, and officers will discuss further with the schools whether better arrangements for the end of the day can be achieved. Again, the officers' recommendation was agreed by the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with him.

46. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- (a) Petitions**
- (b) Written Questions**
- (c) Deputations**

45.1 The Chair noted that there were no matters to be taken under the Public Involvement item.

47. BUSINESS RATES EMPTY PROPERTY RE-OCCUPATION INCENTIVE

47.1 The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director for Finance & Resources which detailed a proposed scheme for the creation of a localised Empty Property Occupation Discount. She stated that there had been positive feedback from various organisations and local businesses on the proposed scheme and it was intended to introduce the scheme for a period of 6 months and to then report back to the committee on its implementation.

47.2 Councillor Littman welcomed the report and stated that he hoped the proposed scheme would benefit small to medium businesses in the city and see the use of empty properties increasing and therefore bring added benefits to the local economy. He also wished to thank the officers concerned for their work in bringing the scheme forward.

47.3 Councillor G. Theobald welcomed the report and stated that it was an excellent example of enabling local businesses to benefit and develop.

47.4 Councillor A. Norman also welcomed the report and queried what would happen if the scheme proved to be successful and the funding set aside to support it ran out.

47.5 The Executive Director for Finance & Resources stated that if the scheme proved to be a success then it should become self-financing as it would generate business rate income in the long-term. It was also a reason for the proposal to review the scheme and report back to the committee in 6-months time.

47.6 Councillor Hamilton welcomed the opportunity to encourage job creation in the city and hoped that it would see an increase in the number of small businesses that came into operation.

47.7 The Chair noted the comments and stated that property agents would be a key factor in highlighting the scheme and the opportunity to benefit from utilising an empty property. He then put the recommendations to the vote.

47.8 **RESOLVED:**

1. That the business rates Empty Property Occupation Discount scheme described in the report and specified in full at paragraphs 3.1 – 3.13 and Appendix 1 to the report be approved;
2. That delegated authority be granted to the Executive Director for Finance & Resources:-
 - (i) to implement, manage and operate the scheme from 1 October 2013 or as soon as practicable thereafter, until 31 March 2015; and
 - (ii) to take such measures in connection with the scheme as are needed to comply with relevant legislation and statutory guidance.
3. That the Executive Director for Finance & Resources be instructed to review the effectiveness of the Discount Scheme after six months of operation and to report the findings to the Policy & Resources Committee, together with any recommended amendments.

48. MODERNISING THE COUNCIL - WORKSTYLES PHASE THREE

- 48.1 The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director for Finance & Resources which detailed the proposed third stage of the council's Workstyles programme. She stated that the third phase followed on from the previous two and continued to develop the Council's corporate priority to modernise the council and provide up to date technological support and an appropriate working environment for its employees. She noted that the committee had previously agreed to the two options detailed in the report being refined and brought back to the committee for consideration. She also noted that the option to do nothing had associated costs for ICT and maintenance of the buildings that had no identified funding. She stated that in bringing forward the two options, officers had concluded that there were no obvious alternative premises in the city that could be purchased and that the sale of Kings House and the improvement works to Hove Town Hall were the best way forward. It was a complex project and as much information as possible had been placed in the public domain.
- 48.2 Councillor Littman welcomed the report and stated that she believed it enabled the council to modernise its infrastructure and serve the community more effectively by investing in its workforce and IT and thereby achieving savings in the long-term.
- 48.3 Councillor G. Theobald referred to the amendment from the Conservative Group that had been circulated and which sought to change the recommendations listed in the report. He formally moved the amendment and stated that the need to modernise and the Workstyles project was supported by the Conservative Group, along with the sale of Kings House. However, the Conservative Group believed that there was a pressing need for a new primary school in Hove to meet the demand for school places, and the use of the rear of Kings House for such a school was an opportunity to be taken. He hoped that this opportunity would not be overlooked and that the provision of a new school in an excellent position to serve the residents of Hove could be considered as a priority.

- 48.4 Councillor A. Norman formally seconded the amendment and stated that the provision of a primary school on the Kings House site would mean that it had excellent accessibility, the traffic movement was likely to be no greater than that currently and there were no other sites anywhere nearby that could accommodate the a new school.
- 48.5 The Chair noted the comments and asked the Executive Director for Children's Services to clarify the position in regard to the number of school places that were being sought.
- 48.6 The Executive Director for Children's Services stated that for the last school year, a total of 52 children who resided within a 1 mile radius of Kings House had been directed to schools elsewhere across the city. It was anticipated that numbers would fall over the next few years and that a peak had been reached. He acknowledged that there was still a pressure for places in Hove and that this would be given further consideration.
- 48.7 The Executive Director for Finance & Resources stated that the proposed amendment would require officers to undertake further work and report back to a future meeting. The current recommendations contained in the report were based on market research and income generated from the sale of the whole site; whereas the provision of a school at the rear of the building would mean a lower capital receipt and that would impact on the implementation of the Workstyles Phase Three proposals. She also noted that from some provisional investigations into the proposed use of the building for a school, the need to provide a double-height hall meant that it could affect the available open play space that could be provided.
- 48.8 Councillor Morgan stated that he believed the decision before the committee was a key corporate decision and one with such significance since the decision to purchase Kings House in 1996. There was a clear corporate priority to modernise and this had to include making the best use of assets. The improvements to Hove Town Hall would provide a modern flexible working environment and the sale of Kings House would enable the provision of much needed affordable housing in the city. He questioned whether the provision of a school would be achieved in time to meet the demand and therefore could not support the amendment. He believed that further work was required to identify how the demand for school places could be met but felt that it was imperative to enable the provision of more housing in the city. He also suggested that the changes would provide an opportunity to take meetings out of the city to different locations across the city and thereby open up the decision-making process and engage residents.
- 48.9 Councillor Mitchell thanked the officers involved in bringing the report forward and for the work that had been undertaken. She was aware that the changes to date in relation to phases 1 and 2 had not been easy and noted that staff affected had managed these and continued to provide services. She believed that it was right for the council to reduce in size and have a fit for purpose building in Hove Town Hall and realise the benefits from the sale of Kings House. The question of the provision of school places was difficult to grapple with and needed further consideration but it was not one that should be associated with the modernisation of the council. She therefore fully supported the recommendations and could not support the amendment.
- 48.10 Councillor Shanks stated that the question of the use of Kings House as a school building had been raised previously but it was felt that it was not the most appropriate use and would not enable the council to realise the necessary capital for investment into

Hove Town Hall and the IT infrastructure that was needed. She stated that there were a number of very good schools in the city which had capacity to take more children and therefore parents should be encouraged to use these. She also noted that the forecast for pupil places was showing that a peak had been reached and that numbers were likely to decline at primary level. She therefore hoped that the recommendations contained in the report would be agreed,

- 48.11 Councillor Littman stated that he believed the amendment would result in a council asset being effectively handed over to the Government without any benefit to the council. He could not support the amendment.
- 48.12 Councillor G. Theobald stated that the need for school places was recognised by all the Groups and that the sale of Kings House provided an opportunity to address the demand and enable residents to send their children to a local school. The proposed development at the King Alfred was likely to add to the number of children seeking school places and therefore increase demand in the locality.
- 48.13 Councillor Hamilton drew the committee's attention to the number of schools and places available in Portslade and suggested that those parents living in Hove should be encouraged to use the schools in Portslade. He suggested that it would be beneficial for officers to look at the number of 4-year olds in Hove and Portslade requiring places in September next year and the number of available places that existed and to then consider if demand could be met by the existing provision.
- 48.14 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to the report and queried whether there was a discrepancy in the proposed marketing of the site in 2014 as detailed on page 30 and in appendix 6 to the report. He also queried whether there had been any community consultation bearing in mind that the proposed changes to Hove Town Hall would result in the loss of a community facility that had been available for over 100 years and whether there would be any changes in regard to the Police accommodation.
- 48.15 The Chair stated that the Police facilities would remain in situ and that there were no proposed changes to their accommodation. He also stated that Hove Town Hall would remain as a community facility and should prove to have more flexibility as a venue. He noted that there was a need to market Kings House as an office building and that the information contained in the report and the appendix gave an indicative time frame.
- 48.16 The Executive Director for Finance & Resources stated that it was intended to retain the council chamber at Hove Town Hall, albeit that it would be a more flexible space to accommodate varied uses. It was intended to undertake consultations as matters progressed and as services were affected and it would include both staff and residents on a service by service basis.
- 48.17 The Chair stated that it was a fundamental project and he believed any delay given the budgetary pressures was questionable and he welcomed the opportunity to provide much needed affordable housing in the city. He thanked all the staff involved with the project to date and looked forward to its completion.
- 48.18 The Chair then put the Conservative amendment to the vote which was lost. He then put the recommendations as listed in the report to the vote which was carried.

48.19 RESOLVED:

1. That the findings of the updated business case and options appraisal for the two previously shortlisted options for implementing Workstyles Phase Three (Option A and B) as detailed in the report be noted;
2. That the risks and financial liabilities associated with the “no change” Option C as detailed in the report be noted;
3. That the implementation of Workstyles Phase Three through Option A which incorporates the refurbishment of Hove Town Hall to modern environmental and technological standards and the re-location of the remaining services and staff from Kings House be approved;
4. That delegated authority be granted to the Executive Director for Finance & Resources to commence appropriate engagement and communications and to implement the works associated with Option A in full;
5. That the following be agreed:
 - i) the disposal of the freehold of Kings House;
 - ii) the grant of long leases in respect of 76-79 and 80 Buckingham Road; and
 - iii) lease areas of Hove Town Hall associated with Option A, on terms to be negotiated by the Valuer and Head of Law.
6. That the Executive Director for Finance & Resources be authorised to use her delegated authority to approve the detailed terms of the disposals referred to in recommendation (5) above, provided that they are certified to be the best consideration obtainable by the Valuer and that the Head of Law be authorised to complete all necessary documentation required in connection with such disposals.

Note: Councillors G. Theobald, A. Norman and Peltzer Dunn wished their names recorded as having voted for the amendment and then against the recommendations contained in the report.

49. ITEMS REFERRED FOR COUNCIL

- 49.1 Councillor G. Theobald requested that Item 48, Modernising the Council – Workstyles Phase Three be referred to the Council meeting in October for information.
- 49.2 **RESOLVED:** That Item 48 on the agenda and the decision taken be referred to the Council meeting on the 24th October 2013 for information.

The meeting concluded at 5.00pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

2013

Note: The minutes were amended to show Councillor Peltzer Dunn being present and his name spelt correctly at paragraph 48.14 as shown in bold italics, following approval at the committee meeting on the 17th October 2013.