

# Brighton & Hove City Council

## Council

## Agenda Item 39

**Subject:** Cost of Living Update including the Household Support Fund Tranche 3

**Date of meeting:** 20 October 2022

**Report of:** Executive Director Governance People & Resources

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**Ward(s) affected:** All

1. **Action required of Council:** To receive the report, amendments and draft minutes considered at the Policy & Resources Committee on 6 October 2022 for information.

**Brighton & Hove City Council**

**Policy & Resources Committee**

**4.00pm 6 October 2022**

**Hove Town Hall - Council Chamber**

**Minutes**

**Present:** Councillor Mac Cafferty (Chair) Druitt (Joint Deputy Chair), Gibson (Joint Deputy Chair), Allcock (Joint Opposition Spokesperson), Appich (Joint Opposition Spokesperson), Bell (Group Spokesperson), Allbrooke, Evans, McNair and Yates

**Also present:** Dr Anusree Biswas Sasidharan, Standing Invitee

**Part One**

**59 COST OF LIVING UPDATE INCLUDING THE HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND TRANCHE 3**

59.1 The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Governance People & Resources regarding the current cost of living increases, and the Household Support Fund Tranche 3. The report was introduced by the Assistant Director Policy & Communications.

59.2 The Committee noted the following Officer Amendment:

*Due to a technical fault, automated paragraph references in Item 59 have not correctly updated. The following error references should be corrected as follows:*

**Paragraph 2.8:** The wording Error! Reference source not found' should read **5.12**.

*The amended Paragraph 2.8 should read:*

*2.8 That the Policy & Resources Committee agrees the approach to developing potential warm banks for use over the winter period, including working with the Community & Voluntary Sector regarding their assets, as set out in paragraphs 5.9 to **5.12**.*

**Paragraph 2.9:** The wording Error! Reference source not found' should read **9**.

*The amended Paragraph 2.9 should read:*

*2.9 That the Policy & Resources Committee agrees the proposed communications campaign set out in Section 9 to promote awareness of available advice and support for those in need, and to re-promote charitable giving toward the Cost of Living crisis from those who are able and willing to help.*

**Paragraph 10.3:** *The wording Error! Reference source not found should read **3.1**.*

*The amended Paragraph 10.3 should read:*

*10.3 On a household-by-household basis, this means that vulnerable residents were assisted with a mixture of food vouchers, meals, help with fuel bills and other essential items. The various Cost of Living working groups (see paragraph 3.1) and the Cost of Living Officer Group have reviewed and discussed these allocations and there is general agreement that these allocations have worked well, have enabled widespread reach through a range of appropriate settings and avoid, as far as possible with the funds available, lots of re-referrals between different agencies and services.*

- 59.3 Dr Sasidharan referred to recommendation 2.2 regarding the Council lobbying the government for urgent and sustained support throughout the Cost of Living crisis, and suggested the issues raised should include an increase to the Household Support Fund and an increase to the discretionary housing payments to help rising homeless pressures and any unspent Covid relief funds be repurposed to support businesses that were struggling, and for the Council to make it easier for people to access advice centres and for households to track down support and to find local welfare assistance. It would also be useful to be more explicit that the Council would work with smaller voluntary organisations which were sometimes overlooked. She referred to the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and the section on Race/Ethnicity which stated that they had a 'distrust with government and council departments'. This was concerning as it characterised them as being problematic and instead the Council should be looking at what the barriers people faced in accessing the services and therefore suggested that the wording be changed. The Assistant Director Policy & Communications said that they would discuss with officers who completed the EIA and review the wording and make changes where required, and the points on lobbying the government were well made and would be considered. The Revenues & Benefits Manager referred to the EIA and said that it had been built on previous ones used during the pandemic, and the issues raised had been made before and not to characterise everyone in the same way and distrust of local authorities was not just linked to people with protected characteristics. This was pertinent to the service this related to with collecting council tax as well as delivering the welfare side, but accepted the points raised and the wording would be adjusted.
- 59.4 The Chair noted that there was an amendment from the Labour Group and asked Cllr Allcock to propose it.

59.5 Cllr Allcock said that the cost of living situation would be severe, and this was not a cost of living crisis but a cost of living emergency. Residents were saying that they were feeling an increasing sense of pressure trying to support family members and were worried about the future and were having to cut back on food, heating etc and were finding it difficult to pay their rent or mortgage. There would also be an unsustainable strain on an already oversubscribed public services. Although there were many positive actions in the report, there was a focus on asking the Chief Executive to write to and lobby the government. Unfortunately, we know that these asks aren't going to be heard, and therefore the administration and the Council must take a lead as if this was a civil emergency. The Labour Group were therefore proposing the following amendment (additional recommendation 2.13), for the Council to lead in coordinating support for residents across the city:

*2.13 That the Policy & Resources Committee agrees that the Council has a leadership role to play in co-ordinating support for residents across the city through this crisis. We agree to bring key partners together in a urgent 'Cost of Living Crisis Summit' to request commitments from the city's anchor institutions of how they can help to build longer term community resilience. This summit should bring together key stakeholder organisations in Brighton & Hove, including:*

- *Financial advice and support organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Money Advice Plus and the Credit Union*
- *Large private sector anchor institutions such as Legal & General, American Express, Brighton & Hove Football Club, Sussex County Cricket Club and others*
- *Brighton & Hove Economic Partnership*
- *Brighton & Hove Food Partnership*
- *Community Works*
- *Local Trade Unions*
- *The local NHS Integrated Care Board*

59.6 Councillor Evans seconded the amendment.

59.7 Cllr Druitt said that he agreed that the Council should take a leading role in addressing the crisis and noted that in February it published a leaflet delivered to all households with advice on dealing with fuel and food poverty and what help was available. The Council had been working with the Economic Partnership and Chamber of Commerce and had put in place a number of working groups to ensure a cognitive response to the cost of living crisis. However, the Council should always do more and the suggestion of a Summit was a good one and would be happy to support.

59.8 The Committee voted on the amendment and it was agreed, with the Conservative Group voting against.

**59.9 RESOLVED:** That the Committee –

- (i) Noted the updates on the local situation regarding the Cost of Living impact including the ongoing and planned work and actions, with

statutory and Community & Voluntary Sector partners, to provide advice and support to households in need;

- (ii) Agreed that the city council should lobby government for urgent and sustained support throughout the Cost of Living crisis including:
- Fully funding Cost of Living pay increases for schools and local government in the current year and 2023/24;
  - Immediately increasing the minimum wage in line with September 2022 inflation;
  - Reintroducing a top-up to Universal Credit of £20 pw until at least March 2024;
  - Introducing a rent freeze or cap to reduce the incidence of evictions and homelessness, as has been done by the Scottish Government;
  - Providing increases in Local Housing Allowance rates in line with rent increases and welfare benefits in line with RPI to ensure that they keep pace with inflation as a minimum;
  - Reintroducing a temporary ban on evictions during this exceptional inflationary period (until at least March 2024); and
  - Providing Free School Meals for every primary school child in England, and the city council will endorse this lobbying point by signing the [Free School Meals For All Open Letter](#) to the Prime Minister.
- (iii) Agreed that the city council should formally support the #BusinessSOS campaign and further recommend to government the measures and support for small and medium-sized enterprise (SME). The campaign has seen over 150,000 businesses from across the UK lobbying the government to support small and medium sized businesses by taking the following actions:
- Suspension of Covid loan debt repayments for up to two years (with potential eligibility criteria);
  - Reduction of tourism VAT to 5% (i.e. holiday and hospitality services and packages), and;
  - Introduction of dedicated Business Grant support for SMEs and pubs to help with costs over the winter (with potential eligibility criteria).
- (iv) Agreed that the council will work with the city's MPs to lobby for:
- Extension of business rates relief for all SME's and pubs – using usual Treasury relief mechanisms
  - Reduction of VAT on energy for businesses to 5%
  - Energy prices to return to 2021 levels for SME's and pubs
- (v) Agreed that the council will work with local business representatives to understand their members' concerns and work with them to continue supporting small businesses. These representatives include Brilliant Brighton (the local Business Improvement District - BID), the BH

Economic Partnership, BH Chamber of Commerce and BH Federation of Small Business;

- (vi) Instructed the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, advocating for the advantages and business literacy of adopting the Brighton Hove Living Wage;
- (vii) Agreed the council will work with regional public and private sector partners in the Greater Brighton Economic Board to assess the impact of the cost of living to support local SME businesses through sharing intelligence and offering mutual support;
- (viii) Agreed the approach to developing potential warm banks for use over the winter period, including working with the Community & Voluntary Sector regarding their assets, as set out in paragraphs 5.9 to 5.12;
- (ix) Agreed the proposed communications campaign set out in Section 9 to promote awareness of available advice and support for those in need, and to re-promote charitable giving toward the Cost of Living crisis from those who are able and willing to help;
- (x) Agreed the council will support the ['Warm This Winter'](#) campaign which calls for government support to provide immediate emergency support, help to upgrade homes and access to cheap energy to lessen reliance on gas and oil;
- (xi) Approved the proposed indicative allocation of HSF tranche 3 as set out at paragraph 10.7, noting the associated Equality Impact Assessment at Appendix 1;
- (xii) Agreed that officers may make adjustments to allocations where there is evidence of changing need throughout the 6 month period of HSF3, to ensure that all of the fund is spent;
- (xiii) Agreed that the Council has a leadership role to play in co-ordinating support for residents across the city through this crisis. We agree to bring key partners together in an urgent 'Cost of Living Crisis Summit' to request commitments from the city's anchor institutions of how they can help to build longer term community resilience. This summit should bring together key stakeholder organisations in Brighton & Hove, including:
  - Financial advice and support organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Money Advice Plus and the Credit Union
  - Large private sector anchor institutions such as Legal & General, American Express, Brighton & Hove Football Club, Sussex County Cricket Club and others
  - Brighton & Hove Economic Partnership
  - Brighton & Hove Food Partnership
  - Community Works

- Local Trade Unions
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