

Brighton & Hove City Council

Policy & Resources Committee

Agenda Item 75(b)

Subject: Member Questions

Date of meeting: 1 December 2022

The question will be answered without discussion. The person who asked the question may ask one relevant supplementary question, which shall be put and answered without discussion. The person to whom a question, or supplementary question, has been put may decline to answer it.

The following written questions have been received from Members
This Committee:

(1) Councillor Fishleigh – Reallocation of money for Saltdean Oval Park

Residents would prefer money to be spent on a water fountain in the playground rather than bike racks in Saltdean Oval Park as we already have plenty of railings to lock our bikes to. How much money has been set-aside for these bike racks and what is the process for re-allocating these funds to a water fountain?

(2) Cllr McNair - The cost of living in and visiting the city

It has recently been reported that Brighton and Hove is the 5th most expensive City for parking in the UK. Recent Council policies have dramatically increased all sorts of parking fees in the city, with some of the biggest parking charge increases in the city's history having come into effect in May. At this year's budget, the Council hit residents with a 'double whammy' increase to their residential parking permits; increasing fees not just once, but twice - and well beyond that which was recommended by officers. First the Greens introduced steep increases to parking permits at the Draft Budget stage. Then Labour proposed further increases to this on Budget night, which the Greens agreed to and voted for. Residents are furious about the excessive nature of these increases: Increasing parking permit charges once was bad enough (particularly given the poor service in the Council's parking permit department), but this double increase has no doubt make it harder for families to go about their day to day life, increasing their cost of living. One resident, Jonny Whiting, has set up an action group and spoken out on Radio Sussex about this. These double increases have backfired on the Council's own financial position, with the recent targeted budget management report showing that demand for parking has fallen substantially as a result of the higher fees and that the council now faces a £1.477 million shortfall in parking revenue it had expected to receive this year.

These shortfalls include:

- £0.605m shortfall for parking tariff increases and;

- £0.872m shortfall for resident parking permits, where demand has substantially reduced.

Does the Leader of the Council accept that he has gone too far with excessive increases to parking charges in the city, to the point where we now see a £1.477m black hole in the council's finances as a result?

(3) Councillor Nemeth - The cost of working in the city

The Council has significantly increased the cost of Traders permits in the City. A traders permit now cost approximately £800 per year for a standard permit, compared to under £400 before the Green-Labour councils started 11 years ago. The Council is now targeting traders with older vehicles and charging them up to £1400. This compares unfavourably to other local authorities. In Bristol for example, a traders permit costs £224 per year and there is no targeting of older vehicles. In addition to cost, traders in Brighton & Hove have been hit by other inconveniences to doing business in the city in recent years, such as new road restrictions and bus gate fines. The high permit charges are impacting traders cost of living and ability to do business. Some traders have had enough and are now moving out of the city, which is showing up in the census figures.

Does the Leader of the Council accept that the Council has gone too far and can he explain why a standard traders permit in Brighton and Hove costs £576 more than in Bristol?

(4) Cllr Nemeth - Council structure and bureaucracy

Under the Labour/Green Council there has been an increase of council bureaucracy since 2019, with an explosion of bureaucratic bodies, boards and working groups. Between 2003 and 2019 there were typically just a few working groups, boards and task and finish groups operating that were focused on completing specific jobs. There were generally never more than 5 or 6. Most of these groups are hidden or obscure to the public, do not publish minutes and are not webcast. In the last three years since 2019, under this Labour/Green Council, the number of these bureaucratic bodies has increased to 40. With this higher burden of council bureaucracy, services have got worse, accountability has been dissipated and decision-making has become more obscure. There is a sense among residents that decisions are taken 'behind closed doors' and before residents can have their say or have an influence. This has been exacerbated by the Memorandum of Understanding between Labour/Greens which created new secretive channels for decision-making, codified in a document that was never formally released to the public but provided to council officers.

Will the Leader of the Council review the burden of council bureaucracy that is hampering the performance of the council and commit to restore democracy and decision-making to the public view where residents can have an influence?