

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 76

Subject: Written questions from Councillors.

Date of meeting: 2 February 2023

Report of: Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

The following questions have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answer detailed below:

1. Councillor Grimshaw

Housing Repairs:

How many repair call outs for both Brighton & Hove City Council and KTS have been recorded as 'resident not home' over the past two years?

Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chairs of the Health & Wellbeing Board

2. Councillor Grimshaw

Boiler Repairs:

Can the Chair of Housing confirm how many emergency call outs for repairs to boilers not working were the result of batteries running out in thermostats – in relation to the total number of emergency calls outs for boiler repairs?

Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chairs of the Housing Committee

3. Councillor Sankey

Budget Deficit:

Can the Leader of the Council tell me what proportion of this year's budget deficit can be attributed to flawed assumptions and projections set out at the start of the financial year? For example, with regards to parking fees revenue, what was the difference between projected parking income for Q1 – Q3 2022/23 and the actual amount of revenue received for Q1 – Q3?

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

4. Councillor Sankey

Cycle lane costs:

How much parking fee revenue has the council lost in 2022/23 in relation to previous years as a result of the installation of cycle lanes on Madeira Drive and the A259?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

5. Councillor Fishleigh

BHCC's property and land portfolio:

Please provide information about BHCC's property and land asset ownership excluding homes. How many assets are there, what is the floor area, the total value - and when was it last audited? How many assets have been identified for sale, and what is their estimated value on the current open market?

Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chairs of the Housing Committee

6. Councillor Fishleigh

Tackling Inequality

Please would you tell me what were the three largest expenditures from the £13.2 million allocated to tackling inequality in the 2022/3 budget and what are the measurements of success for the three.

Reply from Councillor Osborne / Powell, Joint Chairs of the Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee

7. Councillor Fishleigh

2021/2/3 Council Tax:

How much money raised from Council Tax was allocated into the capital budget and how much as revenue in 2021-2 and 2022-3?

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

8. Councillor Theobald

Withdean Park (puppy park):

Withdean Park in the Patcham & Hollingbury ward has a popular fenced off puppy park which is enjoyed by many dog walkers and their pets. Residents have requested that the Council install a water fountain in the park in time for summer, so do owners have access to water to keep their pets (and themselves) hydrated. Will the Council consider installing such a facility?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

9. Councillor Brown

Road sweeping in the Goldstone Valley:

The amount of longstanding litter and weeds/leaves on the pavements and roads of the Goldstone Valley, litter in the outer tree fringes of Hove Park and on the grass verge along King George VI Avenue has increased noticeably. The litter is also particularly noticeable on steep inclines such as Queen Victoria Avenue and the Droveaway by the Engineerium.

Is there any known hinderance or barrier to the regular and effective cleaning of roads and pavements on an incline? Residents have noticed council roadsweeper vehicles are not clearing the steeper roads. Residents would like to know how often council operatives sweep all the roads and pavements in these areas in the Goldstone Valley and how many council employees are allocated to street cleaning duties across Hove, and particularly to Hove Park Ward.

Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

10. Councillor Bagaeen

Council work patterns:

Many companies have now brought staff back to the office, after finding that employees were working longer hours yet productivity had not improved. These firms found that employees were finding no distinction between home and work and many employees were working in silos, with an impact on productivity and mental health of employees. Brighton and Hove City Council has been the slowest in the country to reopen and return to normal after the pandemic. The Greens and Labour have voted to require mandatory face mask wearing at the Council to continue indefinitely – even when Councillors are speaking – and also voted to move to a model of permanent remote service provision, which is excluding many people from receiving council services.

Can the Leader of the Council advise how many FTE staff are employed by the Council in office desk-based based roles and what proportion are currently working from home.

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

11. Councillor McNair

Pay rises:

It was recently reported in the press that the Council has said it is facing a budget shortfall because of a pay rise it has administered to staff. The recent budget strategy report showed that the Council currently funds 3508.7 FTE staff positions across its service budgets.

Can the leader provide further details of the cost impact to the budget of the recent pay rise it provided to council officers and the impact on the Budget position?

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

12. Councillor Lewry

Benfield Barn:

Benfield Barn in my ward of Hangleton & Knoll ward has been placed on the Historic England's 'at risk' register.

The Assessment by Heritage England states that Benfield Barn's Condition is 'Very Bad' and has a trend of 'deteriorating'.

Local residents are very concerned about Benfield Barn and are not happy with how it is being managed. There is upset that the historic flint wall has not been repaired after it was partially knocked down

Could the Chair please advise whether the Council has any plans to repair Benfield Barn to get it off the Heritage England at-risk register, including whether it has applied for any grants? Specifically, could an update be provided on the works needed to repair the flint wall which have now been going on too long.

Supporting information:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/search-register/list-entry/1452>

Reply from Councillor Osborne / Powell, Joint Chairs of the Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee

13. Councillor Nemeth

Portslade Station

The Council has failed to spend its funding for Gateway welcome signage at Brighton and Hove train stations that was agreed to at the City Budget in 2021-2.

In a previous update in October 2022, the Chair advised:

At Brighton Station a location was established for the installation but despite lengthy negotiation, Network Rail did not give permission to proceed. At Hove Station, the Network Rail were not able to offer permission in the station itself for an installation and at Portslade Station the budget provided is too small to commission something significant. Options are being explored.

Can the Chair provide an update on the Gateway signage project? Given that the Council has been unable to find a suitable location at Brighton or Hove Stations, would the Chair consider transferring the funds to Portslade station to make that project viable?

Supporting Information

Refer to Pages 23-25: <https://democracy.brighton-hove.gov.uk/documents/b37445/Addendum%20%20-%20Written%20Questions%2020th-Oct-2022%2016.30%20Council.pdf?T=9>

Reply from Councillor Osborne / Powell, Joint Chairs of the Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee

14. Councillor Barnett

Civic events for the elderly:

Cllr Lewry and I organised three events for the elderly in Hangleton & Knoll to bring people together after the pandemic, including for the Queen's Jubilee in June, for Christmas and New Year.

We raised donations from the generous local business community to help hold them.

Those attending said how important they felt it was to be socialising and meeting in person again after the pandemic.

I was disappointed to read the Council does not plan to hold any civic events for the Coronation in May, an occasion which we know many elderly people would want to watch. Nothing was done by the Council for the Jubilee.

The Council has events staff but is not organising events for the elderly.

Can the Chair advise how many staff are employed in the Council's events team and how much is spent on events annually in the budget?

Reply from Councillor Osborne / Powell, Joint Chairs of the Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee

15. Councillor Cllr Simson

Rottingdean Air Quality Management Area project group:

When is the next meeting of the Rottingdean Air Quality Management Area project group scheduled to be held?

This Group needs to meet to consider the vote of the Rottingdean Parish Council to remove the Rottingdean Planter which is causing traffic congestion in the East of the City.

The Council said on 7 December that 'We will convene a meeting of this group in the new year' and that 'If the group agrees with the parish council's vote we will take the matter to a future environment, transport and sustainability committee'.

However as yet no such meeting has been arranged. Residents believe that the Administration is delaying holding the meeting as it does not want the planter to be removed and wishes the matter to be deferred until after the local elections.

Can you assure residents otherwise?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

16. Councillor Bell

Toilet refurbishment programmes:

In 2022 Brighton and Hove City Council put out tenders for contracts worth approximately £2 million for toilet refurbishment in schools.

Can the Leader of the Council provide more details on this expenditure programme, including what the works will entail, along with its total budget.

Why have so many toilets required sudden refurbishment at the same point in time?

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

17. Councillor Meadows

Denton Drive:

The pavements in Denton Drive are in a bad state. They have been inspected I believe. Can the chair advise when they will be repaired?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

18. Councillor Wilkinson

How many council run 'changing places' toilets are there across Brighton and Hove and does the Co-Chair share my ambition to see further 'changing places' toilets added to the city's toilet facilities for the vulnerable members of our society?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

19. Councillor Wilkinson

In recognizing that public toilets are an essential part of our city's infrastructure, how many council run public toilets are there in the Kemp Town area of the city and does the chair share my view that there is inadequate public toilet provision for the many vulnerable and older residents living in the Eastern Road and Kemp Town areas seeking to use the businesses and services in the St James Street area?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

20. Councillor Wilkinson

A large number of residents have expressed concern about the diversions put in place due to the Western Road improvement scheme. Buses and other vehicles are being diverted along Upper North Street and Montpelier Terrace.

a. What specific monitoring of traffic levels has occurred on these roads to date in respect to the scheme and if so, at which locations?

b. Is there any indication to date that congestion is occurring in any part of the city as a result of the scheme?

c. Is there any monitoring occurring regarding the impact of the diversion of buses and other heavy vehicles on the houses on these roads?

d. Is air quality monitoring specific to the scheme taking place on Montpelier Terrace and Upper North Street and if so, how often that data will be reviewed in respect of safety levels. Please specify any roads on which this information is held and how residents can access such information?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Hills, Joint Chairs of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

