

Appendix 2

OSC Work Programme: Update

Seafront Infrastructure (11)

Requested by: ELT

What's the issue? The council is in the process of refreshing its seafront strategy. An important related issue concerns the state of the seafront infrastructure. The heritage structures and infrastructure managed by the council along the seafront require significant investment – not all existing assets have received the investment needed to meet the changing patterns and demands of usage. Key issues include the condition of the seafront arches which house many businesses and provide structural support to the A259, and Madeira Terrace, which needs extensive refurbishment. There are significant risks for the council here: maintaining seafront infrastructure is currently one of the highest priority issues on the corporate risk register.

However, maintenance and renovation will require considerable resources, and the council will need to prioritise any spending carefully, ensuring that it is targeted so as to best support the aspirations of the Seafront Strategy. The council will also need to investigate how best to fund any renewal programme – i.e. whether some or all of this should come through council borrowing, or through commercial investment, asset transfer etc.

A scrutiny panel would look at the seafront infrastructure, identifying the highest priority areas for work and seek to agree on how this work might best be funded and delivered.

Notes: This is a referral from senior managers following Cllrs Morgan/Rufus writing to P&R requesting more scrutiny involvement in key corporate issues.

Clearly, the seafront is an integral part of the city's offer in terms of tourism, visitors, conferences and retail as well as being an important asset for local people. There is a significant opportunity here for scrutiny to be involved at a formative stage in decisions around the development of the city's seafront – this seems too good an opportunity to miss.

It is important that any scrutiny work on seafront infrastructure is timed so as to feed into the refresh of the Seafront Strategy – the development of the strategy has been paused to allow a project around infrastructure to be progressed. Timings will be determined with reference to seafront strategy timetables, but, if members want to commit to this issue, it would make sense to agree a panel and choose some members as a matter of urgency since it is likely that work will commence in the near future.

Recommendation: Agree to establish a panel on the issue of seafront infrastructure. To commence ASAP (in line with planning around the Seafront Strategy).

Models of Service Delivery (12)

Requested by: ELT

What's the issue? The current and future financial landscape for local government is such that councils are increasingly having to think innovatively about the services they commission and provide, seeking to reduce costs whilst maintaining or improving quality, and, where possible, generating additional income. This is a key strategic issue and one which is increasingly urgent, with the requirement to make very significant savings from 14/15 budgets following the reduction in local authority funding announced in the recent Government Spending Review.

A major focus here will be on the organisational models used to deliver services – i.e. whether the traditional in-house provider model is best, or whether other models might make more sense – such as sharing services, encouraging the setting up of mutuals, the establishment of arms-length trading companies and out-sourcing.. The panel could describe/map/research what those alternative models could look like to help services which are considering this issue.

Notes: Scrutiny members (via HWOSC) have already agreed to be involved in a specific project looking at future service models for adult social care (ASC) provider services. However, ASC has very specific service pressures which make it unlikely that any decision around its organisational models would set a useful precedent for service models in general. (The same can probably be said for any specific piece of work on service models.) Nonetheless, the ASC initiative should still provide a useful reference point for more generic work on service models. This is not an instance of duplication, but rather an opportunity to scrutinise an important issue at both a concrete and an abstract level. To realise maximum advantage from this, the more generic piece of work should succeed the ASC work and ideally should involve the same members.

Rather than look at the specific issues for any given service, the proposed piece of work would seek to look more generically at the challenges facing the council and the pros and cons of particular service models. Although it is unlikely that members will unanimously identify a preferred model or models, the hope is that we will be able to create a map of service models, agreeing how to define specific models, identifying those models that all groups can agree to consider as possible options, and those models that some groups may be implacably opposed to.

A recent Notice of Motion to Full Council saw members from all groups express support for mutuals, and it was agreed that the council's Policy team would be charged with developing this area of thinking. It is proposed that the Models of Service Delivery scrutiny review would also progress this piece of

work as the mutuals option is one of the key models we would be focusing on in any case.

Recommendation: Agree to establish a panel on the issue of future service models, to commence following the scrutiny work on ASC service models (Autumn 13).

Party Houses (13)

Requested by: Cllr Bowden and Queen's Park LAT (also supported by Cllrs Powell, Randall and Morgan)

What's the issue? Cllr Bowden submitted the following letter:

"I would like to request a scrutiny panel be established to look into the issue of 'Party Houses' across the city. The proliferation of premises hosting as many as 15 guests, predominantly, but not exclusively, catering for the stag and hen party market is causing concern about how they are managed, the impact they have on neighbourhoods and whether they being correctly classified as 'temporary holiday lets'.

A cursory Internet search identifies numerous such properties across the city attracting large parties of visitors, offering a range of additional services and activities either at the property or in the local area. Random test bookings on their website indicates that some have the potential of generating as much as £5,000 income per weekend booking.

Recent Local Action Team (LAT) meetings in Queen's Park have highlighted this as an increasing nuisance problem to local residents. However, the estimate of the number of such properties in Brighton & Hove vary widely from as few as 50 to as many as 300. Indeed with such a wide variation in figures the first stage of any such scrutiny review would be to establish the precise proliferation of such premises.

While I acknowledge that properly managed 'party houses' can bring financial benefit to the city contributing to the visitor economy, I and many other councillors across the city are concerned that such premises can cause considerable local disruption, cost and nuisance to local communities.

Often located in residential areas that are unsuitable for this type of operation, the council needs to consider now best to respond to the growth of such operations, as they appear to be creating problems for neighbourhoods which, all too often, have to endure anti social behaviour at all hours of the day. I would urge a focused scrutiny review into this issue taking in licensing, planning, noise control, parking, and community safety.

At the very least the council should be looking to ensure a level of safety as it does with HMO properties and that planning alterations acknowledge that these are, in essence, business premises requiring a change of use. Indeed reclassifying them as businesses could be a means to manage their

expansion, while generating business rates for city. It would also mean that owners would be required to pay for commercial waste disposal.

A scrutiny review of 'party houses' and their impact would seem to present an excellent vehicle to bring together the different council departments that need to respond to the issues I have outlined, alongside partner organisations, such as Sussex Police and East Sussex Fire and Rescue, who also have an interest in these matters."

Notes: This request has been independently supported by several members, and the issue is clearly of considerable concern across a number of city wards. Although council officers have explored related issues before, it is evident that the number of party houses is growing quickly, significantly increasing the impact of these 'businesses' on local communities. This is therefore a timely issue. It is also one that relates directly to broad issues about how we define Brighton & Hove – and specifically how we balance the economic benefits of our 'party' culture against the rights of local people to be protected from noise, nuisance and anti social behaviour.

Recommendation: Agree to establish a scrutiny panel.

Credit Unions and Pay Day Loans (18)

Requested by: Communities Team

What's the issue? The phenomenal growth of pay day loan companies, offering short term loans at very high interest rates, is now having a major impact across the country, and is causing particular problems for the most deprived communities (with similar problems caused by illegal loan-sharks).

Local authorities have an important role to play in this issue, both because of our general legal and ethical duties to support vulnerable people and because we have a direct financial interest in local people being able to meet their financial commitments in a sustainable manner (as we need residents to be able to pay council Tax, social housing rents etc).

Glasgow city council has recently launched a scheme in which every local teenager is given a credit union account (with £10 in it). The intention is, that by offering people an affordable and sustainable way to borrow money (whilst also encouraging them to save), many will be diverted from pay day loans and illegal lenders. More on this scheme:

<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=10084>

Other possible actions include blocking pay day loan companies from advertising in council publications or on the council's website, offering advice and support to particular groups of people etc.

Notes: The Scrutiny team has close links with our colleagues in Communities, and we have worked very effectively with them in the past, notably around trans equalities scrutiny.

It is evident that the issue of pay day loan companies, and more generally of individuals and debt, is one that is of great concern to a wide range of members and to the organisation as a whole.

This would be a short, focused piece of work, ideally in the form of a one meeting workshop style event, with the Communities team presenting a number of ideas to help tackle the problem of pay day lenders to members. There would therefore not be a great demand on scrutiny resources.

Recommendation: Agree to hold a scrutiny workshop in partnership with the Communities team on the issue of credit unions and pay day loans.

BHCC Interactions with Debtors (19)

Requested by: Cllr Littman

What's the issue? The council is currently reviewing its corporate debt policy. Individuals may owe the council money for a variety of reasons – e.g. due to housing rents, Council Tax, other fees or charges etc. In general it appears to be the case that we collect these debts in different ways rather than having a single, unified approach to debt collection, debtor advice, debt consolidation etc. There are clear benefits in agreeing a universal approach to individual debtors, and to the various council departments concerned working together rather than separately (and potentially in competition with each other).

Given the current national financial situation this is obviously a timely issue, as the number of people owing the council money is likely to increase in the near future. Whilst the impacts of recent and imminent benefit changes are still unclear, intelligence from the pilot sites does indicate that some benefit changes may, at least in the short term, lead to greater indebtedness (for example, paying Housing Benefit directly to tenants).

Notes: this is a referral from Cllr Littman, who has asked for OSC involvement prior to the new corporate debt policy being agreed and presented to P&R. In terms of OSC playing a part in the development of policy and the furtherance of corporate objectives this is therefore a very welcome proposal.

Agreeing a common approach to corporate debt will be a complex task, and one which for the most part will be undertaken by an officer-led steering group. Scrutiny involvement would be relatively limited, with members being used as a sounding-board for ideas rather than being expected to themselves offer solutions to the more difficult problems inherent in the project. Therefore there would only be a limited demand on scrutiny resources.

Again, the intention would be to progress this work via a single scrutiny workshop, with input from the policy steering group.

There are obvious synergies between this request and that focusing on pay day loans. However, the plan would be them to form relatively discrete pieces of work in terms of organising meetings – largely because the council 'clients'

are different in each case. It may be however, that OSC would prefer both panels to be undertaken by the same members and/or a report to encompass both workshops.

Recommendation: Agree a scrutiny workshop on this issue.

Community Engagement Framework (10)

Requested by: Cllrs Powell, Buckley and the FED

What's the issue? This request questions whether the Community Engagement Framework (CEF) is being used properly, or whether BHCC departments (and others) are ignoring the CEF when engaging with local people and representative groups around development plans.

Notes: There is potentially a significant issue here: the CEF sets out agreed ways for consulting with local communities and it is important that all signatories to the CEF do actually use it in the ways it was intended. However, it is unclear what value a scrutiny panel would add, at least at this point. Instead it might be useful initially to have a committee report on the CEF and to invite the FED and CVSF to contribute. This would allow members to better gauge whether the CEF is being adhered to before deciding on further action – which might include a panel or the OSC Chair writing a letter to senior officers.

Recommendation: Report to the next OSC meeting setting out CEF successes and challenges (with an opportunity for the FED and CVSF to contribute).

Community Use of School Playing Fields (15)

Requested by: Cllr Buckley

What's the issue? Cllr Buckley submitted the following letter:

"In light of recent events regarding the BHASVIC Field, Government changes to the amount of outdoor space schools require and the possibility of public spaces being used for school's PE curriculum, I would like to request a scrutiny to look into:

1. *How school playing fields can be shared with the local community*
2. *Legalities, safeguarding and liability issues*
3. *How other authorities and countries use their green spaces e.g., in London, schools are already using public parks; in the US, streets are closed in front of schools to allow a space for children to play*
4. *Compromise agreements between parties going forward, in light of diminishing open/green space*
5. *Setting up community boards to oversee use*
6. *Research into raising income through sports clubs, events and activities*
7. *Requesting an up-to-date Open Spaces Strategy"*

Notes: There are two main issues here: the potential for greater community use of school playing fields, and the potential for schools to make better use of community spaces and public leisure facilities. (There's obviously a potential quid pro quo where a school might encourage community access of its facilities in return for improved access to community facilities, but it seems likely that the schools most eager to use community facilities will be those that have few facilities of their own.)

There are some really interesting ideas in this scrutiny request, but it would be useful to find out more about practical issues and problems before doing in-depth scrutiny work – e.g. who owns school playing-fields and who ultimately controls access; whether the council has already attempted to negotiate with schools over community access to playing fields etc. Without this additional information it is not currently clear how much practical potential there is to develop these ideas – i.e. if it's ultimately up to schools whether or not to allow community access to their fields, and if it's clear that schools are generally disinclined to do this, then there may not be much value in pursuing the idea.

Recommendation: Report to the next committee meeting addressing the potential for a) increasing community access to school playing fields/leisure facilities; b) developing schools access to community leisure facilities. The report should also clarify: (1) who owns city school playing fields; (2) who ultimately determines access to playing fields both in and outside school opening hours; (3) best practice nationally; (4) pertinent legal, safeguarding and liability issues.

