

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
POLICY & RESOURCES (RECOVERY) SUB-COMMITTEE

4.00pm 4 NOVEMBER 2021

HOVE TOWN HALL - COUNCIL CHAMBER

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Mac Cafferty (Chair) Allcock (Opposition Spokesperson), Appich and Clare

PART ONE

13 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

13 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

(a) Declarations of Substitutes

13.1 There were none

(b) Declarations of Interest

13.2 Councillor Appich declared that she was a member of BHESCO and asked for dispensation to speak and vote on Item 19. Councillor Clare also declared an interest as she had shares in BHESCO. The lawyer advised that as neither of them were in a position of management or control of the organisation that no dispensation was needed and they could speak and vote on that item.

(c) Exclusion of Press and Public

13.3 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.

13.4 **RESOLVED:** There were no part two items in the agenda.

14 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

14.1 The Chair gave the following communication:

I want to start by acknowledging that things are far from back to normal in terms of the pandemic and services continue to be affected. The government has reintroduced mandatory mask-wearing in parliament; there has been a Covid-19 outbreak in the parliamentary estate; we have had to cancel meetings here due to Covid cases and across the country, cases and hospitalisations are rising. Staff shortages are affecting local services, including the NHS. For

this reason I once again urge us **all** to take precautions, wear a mask, and take any symptoms – even if you think it's just a cold- seriously; get tested, get the vaccine and take up the booster when offered.

Food report

On our agenda today I also want to acknowledge the outstanding work that is being done in partnership to tackle food poverty in the city. I want to thank the incredible efforts made by community food organisations and food banks, who have shaped the report today. Food bank workers and volunteers have told us what they need in terms of support. We have listened and this report shows we are taking action.

The proposals recognise the necessity of a sustainable, supportive food network to tackle the scourge of food poverty and inequality in our city. Building on our work to create the council's first 'food policy' officer, and being the UK's first city to win the 'Gold Sustainable Food' award, I'm clear the city is leading the way. This is being recognised. This week the council and the fantastic Brighton & Hove Food Partnership have been shortlisted out of cities - not just in the UK - but across Europe for affordable food work. We're awaiting to find out if we've won at the awards ceremony in Leipzig. This report once again demonstrates our clear ambition to tackle food issues in this council in a way that, in all my time here, I can say simply has not been done to this extent before, and that is being noticed all over the world.

That's because the city's food work is also being profiled in Glasgow as part of the vital climate conference, COP26. I was proud to sign Brighton & Hove up to the Glasgow Food Declaration – that aims to put food systems at the core of discussions at COP about our climate. Alongside the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership we'll say loudly in Glasgow this week that we need action for sustainable food and to protect our food supply and communities. It will be an honour to do this alongside the former United Nations Special Rapporteur for Food and Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon. Brighton & Hove is now on the global and local stage when it comes to food work that supports our communities, and there is more to do. This is also reflected in the work being done to allocate the newly awarded Household Support Fund which to me is a clear acknowledgement from the government that extra money would be needed to mitigate the poor decision to remove the £20 increase to universal credit. People shouldn't have to choose between heating and eating which is why our work on recovery is also about our housing stock, tackling rising fuel bills and the cruel removal of the £20 uplift to universal credit. The council is working hard to reach communities affected by this through the Warmth for Wellbeing Programme, the local energy advice partnership service that can offer free insulation and advice and through moneyworks and citizens advice. Do get in touch with the community hub if you are in need.

15 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

15.1 There were no Petitions, Written Questions or Deputations

16 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

16.1 There were no Petitions, Written Questions, Letters or Notices of Motion

17 COVID-19 RECOVERY & RENEWAL UPDATE

- 17.1 The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture which provided an update on the progress of the Covid-19 Recovery & Renewal Programme.
- 17.2 Members were advised that paragraph 3.9.6 stated that ‘£10,878,798.37 of Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) funds have been awarded to 5,651 businesses’, and it was clarified that was an error and whilst 5,651 grants had been awarded some of the businesses may have received two grants.
- 17.3 Councillor Appich referred to the Customer Experience Strategy and asked officers to ensure that no one was digitally excluded. The Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture agreed that it was important to ensure that services were available to everyone and the report set out work which was being undertaken to do that.
- 17.4 Councillor Clare noted that there were staff shortages at the Brighton Centre and asked what the impact on that was and what was being done to recruit. The Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture said that a full programme of events was still being provided. Recruitment agencies had been contacted and agency staff were being used when necessary.
- 17.5 The Chair wanted to understand what impact the pandemic had had on the delivery of Council services and what was being done to mitigate any issues and asked if an audit on that had been done. The Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture said that all areas had business continuity plans in place, but overall services were being managed.
- 17.6 RESOLVED:** That the Sub-Committee -
- (i) Noted the work being done to help businesses mitigate the economic impact of Covid 19, and the use of funds from the Additional Restrictions Grant to provide targeted business support through the Business & Intellectual Property Centre Sussex (see Section 3.8.6 of this report for details);
 - (ii) Noted the progress updates in this report.

18 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY UPDATE: FOOD

- 18.1 The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture which updated members on the work that is being done around provision of food during COVID-19, in terms of emergency provision and consideration of a longer-term strategic approach to food. The report was introduced by the Assistant Director City Development & Regeneration and the Food Policy Co-ordinator.
- 18.2 Councillor Clare referred to emergency food provision and noted that the demand was expected to increase when both furlough and the £20 Universal Credit uplift ended and asked if that had happened. Officers advised that an increase had been noticed, but they would know more by the end of the month.

- 18.3 Councillor Allcock asked if the food banks were able to cater for different groups who may have certain dietary requirements due to cultural, religious or dietary needs. Officers confirmed that there were a number of food banks who did that, and the Council liaised with them to ensure that an appropriate range of food was available.
- 18.4 The Chair noted that there was an amendment to the report from the Labour Group and asked Councillor Appich to propose the amendment (as set out in Addendum 1). Councillor Appich proposed the amendment and Councillor Allcock formally seconded it.
- 18.5 Councillor Clare said that the Green Group were happy to support the amendment but said that direct payments was something which people who represented disabled in the city raised with the authority, and whilst the intention was to consult with them it would be good to have that confirmed in writing and therefore proposed an additional amendment to recommendation 2.8 to add “after consultation with groups who represent disabled people”. Councillor Appich agreed, and Councillor Allcock formally seconded that amendment.
- 18.6 The Sub-Committee voted on the amendments and they were agreed.
- 18.7 RESOLVED:** That the Sub-Committee -
- (i) Noted the work happening around the city to provide residents with food and put on record their thanks to all the volunteers and the staff involved;
 - (ii) Agreed that as a city Brighton and Hove should continue to take a vouchers/cash first approach supported by food/essential items provision;
 - (iii) Noted the ongoing needs of the Emergency Food Sector in para’s 3.17 – 3.50 which currently costs over £0.931m per annum and the unfunded budget of support needs in financial year 2022/23 as laid out in the table 3.51 of £0.302m;
 - (iv) Considered Emergency Food needs in future budget setting decisions to prioritise and redirect funding to the ‘Food Cell’ approach. This will develop the mechanism to underpin recovery, renewal and will lead to long-term resilience;
 - (v) Agreed the following commitments:
 1. That the annual cost of £3,400 for parking dispensations and staff time to administer the scheme be incorporated in the 2022/23 General Fund Revenue Budget including through the use of one-off resources if necessary.
 2. That the underwriting of a 3-year lease and associated staff to coordinate premises to provide storage and processing space for emergency food (as described in paragraph 3.21 – 3.23) at an annual cost of £65,142 be incorporated in the 2022/23 General Fund Revenue Budget including through the use of one-off resources if necessary.
 3. That options for addressing the remaining funding shortfalls in 2022/23, laid out in the table 3.51, of £233,399 are kept under review as the strategy developments and, if necessary, consideration is given to making allocations

to address the shortfall if one-off resources or grant funding become available in 2022/23.

4. That options for addressing the potential £24,582 funding shortfall for the purchase of food for this Winter 2021/22 are kept under review and allocations from existing resources and/or grants made subject to availability.
- (vi) Requested to instruct Officers to amplify and support a food & essential items donations campaign through the communications team at the council, to bring public attention to this issue, which, if feasible, should include instating donation points at Brighton & Hove City Council public buildings;
- (vii) Instructed officers to commission an exploratory piece of work to look at strengthening organisations supporting Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee & Asylum Seekers to provide food access, by working together and providing staff capacity and reporting back to the appropriate committee;
- (viii) Instructed officers to undertake further work to explore the need for financial help with meals, including reviewing the provision and cost of community meals, potentially as part of direct payment arrangements, and report back to the Adult Social Care Sub Committee after consultation with groups who represent disabled people.

19 HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

- 19.1 The Committee considered the report of the Acting Chief Finance Officer regarding the allocation of the Household Support Fund. The Revenues & Benefits Manager assisted in presenting the report.
- 19.2 Councillor Allcock asked how Members could be sure that the fund was allocated effectively particularly in these challenging times with an increase to national insurance and fuel prices and asked what mechanisms were in place to monitor it. The Chief Finance Officer said that the allocation was based on experience over the last 18 months and officers had tried to come up with a balanced approach, officers had asked for a delegation in consultation with the Chair of this committee and opposition councillors to review the allocation as it did need to be tracked closely as it may be that the demand for some of the discretionary fund elements changes as the economy improved. The impact on the increase to national insurance and fuel prices wasn't yet known. The Revenues & Benefits Manager said that there were DWP monitoring requirements, and in addition officers were developing a process where all organisations fed in the stats of who they were providing support for; this would not be names, but numbers of those who had been provided and whether they were a family of children etc. The Head of School Organisation referred to Free School Vouchers and said that the number of vouchers utilised was 90-95%.
- 19.3 The Chair noted that there was an amendment from the Labour Group and asked Councillor Allcock to propose it.
- 19.4 Councillor Allcock said that the economic impact of the pandemic, Brexit, increase in national insurance and the fuel crisis had affected everyone and the additional reduction

in universal credit had further hit the poorest families. The number of children entitled to free school meals had increased significantly over the last two years with the number now at 6568. A healthy diet for children was important and the amendment sought to alter the allocation of the fund to increase the amount of the supermarket food voucher to those entitled to free school meals from £15 to £20. The amendment also requested that this Sub-Committee received a briefing on funding available from a number of areas so there could continue to be an overview of how the funding was allocated.

- 19.5 Councillor Appich formally seconded the amendment.
- 19.6 Councillor Clare said that she agreed with much of what had been said, but a lot of thought and engagement has gone into how the Fund would be allocated and was designed to help as many people as possible,
- 19.7 The Chair said that the Green Group could support the amendment to 2.5, but not to 2.1 and asked the Labour Group if they would be happy to take a vote on the changes separately. The Labour Group agreed.
- 19.8 The Sub-Committee voted on the amendment and 2.1 was not agreed but 2.5 was. The amendment was therefore partially agreed.

19.9 RESOLVED: That the Sub-Committee

- (i) Approved the allocation of funding as outlined in the table at 3.8 of the report;
- (ii) For the reasons outlined at para 3.23, the committee delegates necessary adjustments to the approved allocations to the Chief Finance Officer following consultation with the Chair of Policy & Resources Committee and Opposition Spokespersons, provided any adjustment is compliant with the council's rules for virement as defined under Financial Regulations;
- (iii) Noted the Urgency Decision taken under officer delegations by the Chief Finance Officer and approved by the Chair of Policy & Resources Committee on 22 October 20221 regarding the allocation of funding from the Household Support Fund to provide vouchers for free school meals over the October Half-Term holiday period (see Appendix 4);
- (iv) Approved the proposed re-allocation of duplicate Contain Outbreak Management Funding (COMF) of £0.190m to homeless prevention by re-allocating funding to top up the Discretionary Housing Payments budget as set out in paragraph 3.13 of the report;
- (v) In order to ensure better decision and transparency about the delegated management of these funds - the committee receives a briefing that sets out consolidated details of funds available from:
 - the Household Support Fund;
 - COMF;
 - any unfunded costs referred to in this report and the report on Food (Item 18);
 - proposed spend in this and future financial years, and the allocations criteria.

The meeting concluded at 6.00pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of