

Brighton & Hove City Council
Children, Young People & Skills Committee

4.00pm 6 March 2023

Council Chamber, Hove Town Hall

Minutes

Present: Councillor Allbrooke (Chair) John (Deputy Chair), O'Quinn (Opposition Spokesperson), Brown (Group Spokesperson), Hamilton, Lloyd, McNair, Meadows and Nield

Part One

47 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

(a) Declarations of Substitutes

47.1 Cllr Sankey substituted for Cllr Grimshaw.

b) Declarations of Interest

47.2 There were none.

(c) Exclusion of Press and Public

47.3 There were no Part Two Items and so the press and public were not excluded from the meeting.

48 MINUTES

48.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

49 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

49.1 The chair gave the following communication:

I'd first like to welcome Leon who is my mentee from the mentoring scheme for councillors as part of the Power of Youth Charter.

As this is the last Committee before the local elections, I wanted to use my chair's communications today to reflect on some of the things I'm most proud of in the nearly three years that I've been chair. Although it started slightly rocky with the closure of the Friends Centre within my first week, I believe that adult education in this city has a bright

future through the Adult Education Hub. This truly excellent council-run service is supporting adults to learn, including refugees, in our city. Our Youth Council is now bigger than it was when I first became chair and full of excellent young people and our Care Leavers Forum is taking a leading role in our Corporate Parenting Board. We launched our Fairer Brighton & Hove framework, which links together work tackling those who face barriers. The Youth Employment Hub is excellent, and I really hope the Department for Work and Pensions continue funding this beyond the end of the year.

In April, some of our children's centres are transitioning to family hubs which means they will support children and young people up to the age of 19 rather than 5. Our Youth Offending Service received an Outstanding inspection in all twelve categories, which is incredibly rare. Our Anti-Racist Education Strategy and the recruitment of the country's first ever Anti-Racist Lead Practitioner in social work. Our Trans Inclusion Schools Toolkit was reviewed, and version 4 continues to make the lives of young trans people better. We fought academisation at Moulsecoomb, even though unsuccessfully and we will fight it at West Blatchington. We lobbied the Government, and we even caused our very own Boris Johnson to u-turn over school closures in January 2021. Our City, Our World has seen so much work going on in schools on environmental education which you will hear more about later on today. We got home to school transport back on track. We became the first council to sign up to the Power of Youth Charter.

I have had the pleasure as chair of this Committee of working with some fantastic people both inside and outside the council, so I wanted to give my thanks to some of those I've worked with the closest in my time as chair. Firstly, Alison Michalska and Richard Tyndall from SESLIP, who have always been great advisors and supporters when I needed someone who could tell me whether I'm on the right track. Chris Robson, our independent scrutineer. Brendan, Brian, and Alan in Comms as well as Sarah, our Local Democracy Reporter.

Everyone I've met with from the third sector who have helped guide us – Katie and Ryan from Allsorts, Jo and everyone at H&KP, Mike and everyone at BYC, Sally and her predecessor Rachel at AMAZE, Laura and her team at Oasis, the team at TDC, Vanessa and the team at BMEYPP and PaCC.

All of our schools heads, governors, and wider community – thank you for being so engaged with what we have done. And a huge thank you to the Educators of Colour Collective for being so brilliant. I also want to thank those who've been on this committee – Adam, our parent governor reps, our youth council reps, our colleagues from the voluntary aided sector and of course PaCC.

And within the council: Emma, Lisa and Clare who have supported this Committee from Democratic Services. Chris and James in the background making the webcast work. Natasha who is brilliant both during and outside of this Committee as our legal advisor. All of the many Debbies – Debbie Corbridge, Debbie Greensmith and Debbie Garrett. Carolyn Bristow – who is always behind the most excellent things. Richard, Saul, and Gillian for all their work on pupil admissions. Tracie and John who support our fantastic youth council. Carla, Amir, and the team at both the Adult Education Hub and Youth Employment Hubs. Jo and the newly created Family Hubs team. Katie and Mita who support young people in environmental education. Mark, Ashley, and the standards & achievements team. Sarah and EMAS. Camille and others in our PSHE and equalities

team, including Sam who of course no longer works for BHCC. Sue Franklin and her team of education psychologists. Mia and the Home to School Transport Team. Tom, Gerry (sorry), Karen, Kirsty, Tania, Millie and every single one of our pod managers and social workers. Justin, our Head of Safeguarding, and his team. The two Clare's who support foster panel, as well as our chair, Elaine Dibben. Lastly - Anna, Georgina, and Jo – and of course, I would never not mention the brilliant Deb Austin who I have enjoyed working alongside immensely. We are lucky to have such a brilliant leadership team in Families, Children and Learning.

This will be the last committee for some colleagues who are standing down at the next set of elections or may not get re-elected or sit on this Committee again. I wanted to therefore end by recognising that Councillor Vanessa Brown is standing down at this set of local elections after an incredible 28 years as a councillor for this city. Vanessa has in her time been focused on children & young people, including as Cabinet member for four years. She can count in her many achievements, her relentless focus on making the lives of young people in our city better. Although we may not always agree, I have always respected Vanessa for her knowledge, experience, and willingness to work together across political divides. I hope Committee will join me in thanking Vanessa for everything she has done.

50 CALL OVER

- 50.1 The chair proceeded without call over since there was only one presentation and three reports on the agenda.

51 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

a) Petitions

- 51.1 Ms H Berendt presented the petition 'Take Action to Protect Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children in Brighton & Hove'.

- 51.2 The chair provided the following response:

Thank you for your petition. I note that the existence of Home Office run hotels in our city are a terrible way to treat vulnerable refugees and that it is deeply worrying that young people have gone missing. I want to take some time to address this because it's so important.

Firstly, I want to highlight that although as a local authority we have a responsibility to be involved when children go missing, it is Sussex Police who have a responsibility to find missing children, as is the case when any child goes missing.

Contrary to the narrative that some councillors have repeatedly attempted to paint, this council has continued to work to close the hotels for asylum seekers, including the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) hotel and those operating for children and families. The UASC hotel is currently not operating.

To understand responsibility in this crucial matter we need to understand the recent history of it. As a local authority we do not run the hotel; it is the Home Office who

opened it, the Home Office under contract with the hotel the Home Office that provides the staffing and we cannot close it but despite this we have continued to challenge its operation.

We received less than 24 hours' notice that the hotel was opening back in July 2021, being advised at the time that it was "temporary". It followed Kent County Council advising they could no longer provide interim care for the sheer numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, or "UASCs", arriving in this country, primarily through Dover.

A week before the hotel had been opened, greens sounded the alarm at a meeting of Full Council where we pointed to our concerns regarding care for UASC and how many other councils did not meet their moral obligations to provide care for UASC through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS).

The NTS works like this, when an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child arrives, if the place they arrive at has above 0.1% of their child population as UASCs in care, they can transfer the young people to another local authority's care. UASC may also arrive in an area as a "spontaneous arrival" – both of these are ways that Brighton & Hove City Council takes UASC into care, where we have consistently remained above that quota.

Councils receive some funding from government for providing this care, but the reality is it is not enough. We spend at least £500,000 a year extra in Brighton & Hove above the funding we receive. We do this because it's the right thing to do but it is a struggle. The council continues to have huge financial challenges, as evidenced by our recent budget. In addition, we have big struggles in finding foster parents, supported living arrangements or residential care places for all children in care. It is this reason why many councils will look the other way.

In response to Kent, the Government upped the rate local councils would receive for taking young people through the NTS - but this wasn't enough – which led to the hotels being opened a few weeks later. These hotels are supposed to be a temporary stay for a matter of days until another local council takes them into care, although the average length of stay is 18.5 days. The majority of children who go missing, go missing within the first 3 and over 1600 young people have stayed in the two UASC hotels that operated in Brighton & Hove.

As soon as the hotel opened, we were requesting meetings with the Home Office. We held one meeting within 24 hours, which was attended by the Department for Education (DfE). In this, as councillors we challenged the DfE on safeguarding and on the circumstances behind its opening but the Home Office did not even show up. We were repeatedly advised by the Home Office that this hotel was temporary, but in October 2021 they then opened a second hotel in the city. At the time they once again "apologised as they didn't like to work this way" but cited extreme pressure that they were under in finding places to care for UASC.

In November 2021, the Government made their next policy attempt to close the hotels by making the NTS. This meant councils were forced to take UASC if they weren't at the, at the time at their 0.07% quota. And this did in part work – the second hotel was closed in Brighton & Hove in January 2022 and the first had a temporary closure as I

announced in my chair's communications last January. However, sadly it re-opened again.

Throughout this period, both councillors and officers highlighted our concerns about the hotels to the Home Office and so did local MPs. I truly believe that although this challenge did not lead to the closure of the hotels, it has at least, and indeed at most, led to them operating better. When the hotels first opened there were no qualified social workers on site, young people weren't being registered with the NHS, the local authority was given no details on the young people arriving, no arrangements were in place should children go missing and the thriving community and voluntary sector in this city were being shut out. We pushed for all of these things to happen, and our Head of Safeguarding in particular has been consistent in reviewing the operations at the hotel and challenging to the Home Office. The Home Office did eventually commission a charity to provide advocacy to the young people in the hotel and allow our community and voluntary sector to support.

We have also sought legal advice on our position throughout to consider whether we could launch action against the Government. I don't think it is appropriate for me to address at this stage here in case it prejudices any action the council may decide to take. I have mentioned the hotel repeatedly in my chair's communications at this committee, mentioning it in almost every meeting since the hotel opened. I was hoping this would lead to further scrutiny of the hotel from opposition councillors, however this did not come until a few months ago when Labour suddenly woke up to the issue. They were clearly not listening to those chair's communications or reading the minutes of this meeting as last week it was claimed it was never highlighted as this meeting when it was.

In late 2022, and in response to persistent media coverage, in particular about Manston as well as the cost of hotel accommodation for all refugees in this company, the Government then introduced their third policy attempt to close the hotels. They upped the quote from 0.1% to 0.17% under the NTS and also bribed councils with £15,000 as long as they took UASC from hotels. They would receive the money immediately, but not have to take the young people until the end of February. This meant that councils took the money but took longer than they usually would to take UASC into care, prolonging the stay of young people there. However, it has now resulted in what I expect to be a temporary closure of the hotel.

Brighton & Hove Safeguarding Partnership last week released a scrutiny paper which aimed to review the response of Brighton & Hove City Council, Sussex Police and the NHS in response to children going missing from the hotel. It highlights that, and I quote:

Local safeguarding agencies have responded to the situation with advice, training, consultation and full engagement in safeguarding referrals made on a case-by-case basis.

It further notes:

I [the author] am reassured having spoken to Police, Local Authority and the Home Office that children who go missing from the hotel are dealt with in the same way all children would be.

And further, another quote says:

There is clear evidence of a genuine will to work in partnership to ensure that the UASC placed in the hotel are afforded every opportunity to be safe and cared for. I have been provided with details of the partnership approach to safeguarding generally and specifically around missing episodes. Whilst the issue of children going missing is persistent (to varying degrees depending on the time of year) and needs further consideration, the response is thorough, appropriate and multi-agency. The three main agencies charged with safeguarding children in the city all play an active role and work together well.

The scrutiny paper makes 7 recommendations, the majority of which are targeted at the Home Office, however there are recommendations for us as a council to work multi-agency. I believe this report provides clear reassurance that the council has acted where the Home Office have been absent.

The scrutiny paper makes it clear that there needs to be planning for the summer ahead. We know that the number of small boat crossings will increase as the weather gets warmer and we know that this may put more young people at risk.

In the meantime, the council will continue to play its part but I would urge everyone to put their fire instead on the Government, who are responsible for this situation. It is the government who have created a hostile environment to refugees and who are, as reported in the press today, now proposing to break United Nations conventions towards refugees. It is the Government who have failed to create a better solution caring for UASC. It is the Government who have failed to address the chronic shortages in care placements for young people, meaning that councils will turn the other way.

As a council we want the Government to close the hotels and this is something we have always been clear on. But in the interim, we also want to ensure proper safety and regulation through OFSTED inspections rather than through the Border Agency, and for the legal status of these young people to be properly addressed.

We will always do our bit to care for UASC, through caring for them ourselves where we remain one of the councils who are the highest proportion of those caring for UASC and through challenging the Home Office in every possible avenue. We won't always do it publicly and indeed we haven't throughout this last nineteen months, but we give our commitment to communities that we will do everything we can.

- 51.3 The Committee agreed to note the petition since a report on the matter was called for at the Extraordinary Meeting of the Council on 2 March 2023.

b) Written Questions

- 51.4 There were no written questions.

c) Deputations

- 51.5 There were no deputations.

52 ITEMS REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

52.1 There were no items referred from Council.

53 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

53.1 There were no petitions, written questions, letters, or notices of motion.

54 OUR CITY, OUR WORLD PRESENTATION

54.1 The Head of School Organisation, Environmental Education Officer, Varndean School Head, Shelley Baker, and former headteacher and consultant, Jonathan Cooper, delivered the presentation on the Schools Climate Strategy, 'Our City, Our World'.

54.2 Cllr McNair queried how the curriculum engaged children's critical thinking skills.

54.3 The chair and Cllrs O'Quinn, Lloyd and John congratulated and thanked those involved for the quality of the presentation and their excellent work.

54.4 Cllr John raised several questions regarding how councillors could support the work, teachings about the impact on the Global South and measurement of feedback loops.

55 WEST BLATCHINGTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

55.1 The Head of School Organisation and Head of Education Standards & Achievement introduced the report which provided an update on the consultation being undertaken by the governors of West Blatchington Primary and Nursery School to consider becoming an academy as part of the Pioneer Academy.

55.2 The Chair noted that there was a Green Group amendment and invited Cllr Nield to move the amendment.

55.3 Cllr O'Quinn raised concerns that the amendment covered the areas that would be discussed in a debate and suggested it should be taken at the end.

55.4 Cllr Nield moved the amendment, which was seconded by Cllr John, who reserved her right to speak.

55.5 Both Cllrs Brown and Meadows expressed concerns of scaremongering, intimidation and supposition in the Executive Director's letter to West Blatchington.

55.6 Cllr O'Quinn raised points regarding the consultation, the impact of academisation, complexities of governorship, student achievement and disadvantage.

55.7 Ms Robinson echoed concerns regarding the consultation and ASC facility, particularly given a lack of communication with PaCC and mASCot.

55.8 Cllr Meadows raised points about the consultation timing and if the legal requirements were met, the content of the Executive Director's letter and lack of Council support for governor's.

- 55.9 Cllr Sankey raised questions regarding translation of the consultation and support for consulting non-native speaking parents, school improvement, governors quorum, networks for federation and contacting parents regarding concerns.
- 55.10 Cllr Hamilton raised several points regarding consultation government regulations, federation options and criticism of the treatment of the Executive Director Families, Children & Learning.
- 55.11 Cllr John outlined the reasoning for the amendment, highlighted the factuality of the Executive Director's letter, and asked for clarification on what would happen to the building if academisation happened.
- 55.12 The Committee voted on the amendment, which was carried.
- 55.13 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee –
- i. Noted the details of the consultation undertaken by West Blatchington Primary and Nursery School and agreed with the response of the Executive Director of Families, Children and Learning outlined in Appendix 1 that it had not offered the opportunity for 'full engagement'.
 - ii. Noted opposition to these plans from unions representing staff at the school - Unison, GMB and NEU.
 - iii. Further noted that there were options West Blatchington Primary and Nursery School should consider, including federation and reviewing the school's partnership arrangements.
 - iv. Agreed that academisation was not the best option for West Blatchington Primary and Nursery School and urged the school to halt any plans in that direction.
 - v. Further agreed to have another report to a future meeting of the Children, Young People & Skills Committee outlining the Council's feedback on the published consultation report and any progress towards academisation.

56 EDUCATION CAPITAL RESOURCES & INVESTMENT 2023/24

- 56.1 The Head of School Organisation and Head of Education Standards introduced the report which outlined the level of available capital resources allocated to support education buildings and recommended a capital programme for 2023/24 in respect of School Condition Allocation (SCA) and Basic Need funding.
- 56.2 Cllr Meadows raised questions regarding the unallocated Basic Need funding from previous years, re-use of mobile accommodation and Section 106 funding.
- 56.3 Cllr O'Quinn had queries regarding the Cedar Centre funding, Homewood College and the Community Infrastructure Levy and requested a table was provided which outlined the expenditure on Homewood works.
- 56.4 Cllr Nield sought more information on Legionella funding.

56.5 Cllr Brown requested further information on the progress of the Cedar Centre satellite sites.

56.6 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee agreed –

- i. That the level of available capital resources totalling £5million for investment relating to education buildings financed from capital grant be noted.
- ii. The allocation of funding as shown in Appendices 1 and 2 and recommended this to Policy & Resources Committee on 16 March 2023 for inclusion within the Council's Capital Investment Programme 2023/24.
- iii. To recommend to Policy & Resources Committee that they grant delegated authority to the Assistant Director of Property & Design to procure the capital maintenance and basic need works and entered into contracts within these budgets, as required, in accordance with Contract Standing Orders in respect of the entire Education Capital Programme.

57 ANNUAL REPORT ON EDUCATION STANDARDS 2022

57.1 The Head of Education Standards & Achievement introduced the report which provided an analysis of the End of Key Stage results for children and young people for the 2021-2022 academic year and outlined some of the implemented and planned interventions to address areas of under-achievement and work happening as a result of the disadvantaged strategy and its impact.

57.2 Cllr O'Quinn thanked officers and teachers for their work in an exceptionally challenging period and expressed concerns regarding the attainment gap and impact on the most disadvantaged.

57.3 Cllr Meadows raised questions regarding the anticipated duration of interventions and strategies, details of the schools judged to require improvement and as inadequate, the support mechanisms in place and barriers to support.

57.4 Cllr Nield had queries regarding Key Stage 1 results and the creation of Communication Friendly settings.

57.5 Ms Robinson raised points regarding the comparison of data for SEND and non-SEND children and requested further data for SEND children who haven't undertaken assessments/ exams.

57.6 Cllr Hamilton raised points regarding early years intervention and asked if there were services such as a scheme or maths advisors for those with numeracy issues.

57.7 Mr Muirhead highlighted the importance of a system-wide response to educational disadvantage and establishing practical ways to work collaboratively.

57.8 Cllr Sankey thanked teachers for continuing to deliver quality teaching to children in a difficult time and asked what systemic interventions the Council could implement to effectively tackle disadvantage.

57.9 Cllr John raised points regarding engaging with and supporting Class Divide, funding for non-educational issues, early provision and support for communities.

57.10 Cllr O'Quinn had queries regarding attendance, particularly in special schools.

57.11 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted –

- i. The report and supported the focus across the city on improving outcomes for all children and young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- ii. That education of all children and young people had been negatively impacted because of the pandemic and this had impacted on outcomes as it had nationally.

58 ITEMS REFERRED FOR COUNCIL

58.1 No items were referred to the next meeting of Council.

The meeting concluded at 7.00pm