

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

POLICY & RESOURCES (RECOVERY) SUB-COMMITTEE

1.30pm 29 MAY 2020

VIRTUAL MEETING - SKYPE

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Platts (Chair) Mac Cafferty (Opposition Spokesperson), Gibson, Miller and Yates.

PART ONE

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1(a) Declarations of substitutes

1.1 There were none.

1(b) Declarations of interest

1.2 There were none.

1(c) Exclusion of press and public

1.3 In accordance with section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (“the Act”), the Committee considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during an item of business on the grounds that it was likely, in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of proceedings, that if members of the press and public were present during that item, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information (as defined in section 100A(3) of the Act) or exempt information (as defined in section 100(I) of the Act).

1.4 **RESOLVED-** That the press and public not be excluded from the meeting.

2 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

2.1 The Chair provided the following communications:

Welcome everybody. This is the first meeting of the P&R Recovery Sub-Committee, and it is being held virtually.

This sub-committee has been set up to help steer the council and the city through the recovery phase of the COVID-19 outbreak.

We have a report coming forward to update the sub-committee on the progress of the City Recovery Programme. I want to thank Council staff, key workers and partners across the public, voluntary & community and private sectors, who have pulled together and worked incredibly hard to respond effectively to the crisis.

We are distributing grants and support to local businesses, we are re-allocating road space to encourage active travel and facilitate social distancing, and we are working to ensure rough sleepers and homeless people continue to have safe accommodation – and will be working directly with the government's Taskforce for supporting rough sleepers on the next steps.

The council will continue to work with its partners across Brighton & Hove and the wider region to support the city's recovery following the Covid-19 outbreak.

We also have a report on supporting local businesses.

Since the government announced its grants scheme for small businesses, the council has paid out £63 million to more than 4,600 businesses in the city.

We estimate there are still up to 800 businesses who are eligible for business grants who have yet to apply. I want to take this opportunity to remind everyone that these are grants not loans, they do not need to be paid back, and to urge any business who thinks they may be eligible to get in touch with us.

We are continuing to work with local MPs and partners in the business community to get the word out and ensure all eligible businesses are aware of the grant funding available. But as I outlined at the Special P&R meeting on Wednesday, it may be the case that some of the 800 remaining businesses who have yet to apply are no longer in operation, have moved or, think they are ineligible. That is why I have asked for information so that we as Councillors, who cover the whole city and have good local knowledge of our wards, can help identify any remaining businesses we know to be open, or those that have changed their names or closed.

The discretionary fund will allow us to target further support to businesses who have fallen through the cracks and been ineligible for the government's business grant scheme, but who need our support to stay afloat and contribute to the local economy and our city's recovery.

We know the funds we are allowed to spend won't stretch to cover every business in need, but we can see the potential to help more businesses than government rules currently allow. I will be asking the government to make all of the remaining small business grant fund available – which is potentially a further £5.7 million – to spend on discretionary grants so that we can help more businesses to survive the public health crisis and rebuild a thriving local economy.

I welcome the inclusion of business representatives in the assessment panel for the discretionary fund, and I hope to see the criteria outlined in the report adopted today.

I also want to reiterate the need for physical distancing as we continue to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. I am pleased to see that we are operating beach marshals again this weekend – and I would ask for the support of all councillors in highlighting the need for physical distancing while people are out enjoying the sunshine, in order to reduce the spread of the virus and save lives. I'm sure many share my concerns about the speed in which we are being rushed to get things back to normal, especially for tourist destinations like Brighton & Hove. We look forward to welcoming visitors back when it is safe. In the meantime, we need people to stay away from the city so that our residents can maintain a safe physical distance when outdoors.

3 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

3.1 No items were received.

4 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

4.1 None were received.

5 COVID-19 CITY RECOVERY PROGRAMME UPDATE

5.1 The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Economy, Environment & Culture that outlined how the City Council and the city was responding locally following the publication of 'Our Plan to Rebuild' The UK Government's Covid-19 recovery strategy. The report also provided a progress update on the development of the City's Recovery Programme as agreed by Policy & Resources Committee on 30th April 2020.

5.2 The meeting was adjourned at 13.55pm and reconvened at 14.15pm

5.3 A joint Green Group and Labour Group motion was moved by Councillor Mac Cafferty and Councillor Platts to add a recommendation 2.2 and 2.3 as shown in bold italics below:

2.2 That the council's approach to a phased recovery from Covid-19 ensures delivery of the council's goal of lowering toxic emissions to achieve 'carbon neutrality' by 2030; and

2.3 That further to the council's planned work on Transport Network Management and Recovery, that the committee recognises:

- ***Government guidance ('Safer Public Places – Urban Centres and Green Spaces'), which focuses on practical interventions to adapt public places, particularly in areas of high footfall, to support health and safety as urban spaces become busier;***
- ***latest Government guidance indicating that non-essential retail will reopen on 15th June, requiring more immediate changes to our transport network to allow for safe 'social distancing,' than can be realised by the next meeting of Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee;***
- ***the strength of feeling in the city for transport network changes, to facilitate road safety, walking and cycling, reduce toxic emissions, as well as support the safe use of public transport;***

- ***plans agreed by Urgency Policy and Resources Committee to bring forward urgent transport changes, and the current LCWIP consultation;***
- ***news that the council has recently been allocated ‘emergency active travel’ funding from Government, some of which could be withdrawn if the initial tranche is not spent quickly;***

and therefore agrees:

- ***to identify and implement urgently needed changes to both public places and the transport network, to enable outdoor exercise, active travel and maximise safe public transport use, (including measures referenced in the Government guidance, such as timed road closures) that can take place prior to 15th June;***
- ***and to fast-track engagement with local communities and stakeholders, to help identify and prioritise such measures, prior to 15th June;***
- ***that further to guidance on reopening of schools, to swiftly progress safe ‘school streets’ initiatives across the city.***

- 5.4 Councillors Gibson and Yates formally seconded the motion on behalf of the Green Group and Labour Group respectively.
- 5.5 The Executive Director, Economy, Environment & Culture explained that should the motion be carried, there were many measures that would need to be undertaken before the 15 June 2020 that was the announced date for retail premises to re-open. The Executive Director, Economy, Environment & Culture stated that whilst the financial implications did not cover the cost of the measures proposed, a report agreed the meeting of the Policy & Resources Urgency Sub-Committee of the 13 May 2020 had given authority to officers to undertake an urgent action plan and the opportunity to take forward many measures that were outlined in the motion.
- 5.6 Councillor Miller welcomed the report and the motion to amend the recommendations and ask if the members of the Sub-Committee would agree to the motion becoming tri-party with his name assigned as joint proposer. Furthermore, Councillor Miller detailed several opportunities for innovation in the council’s recovery phase approach.
- 5.7 Councillor Gibson welcomed the report and emphasised the role reducing inequality would have in a successful recovery strategy. Councillor Gibson stated that he hoped there would be greater emphasis in future reports on the opportunities to harness and develop the community spirit and mutual aid that had arisen during the lockdown period.
- 5.8 In response to comments made, the Executive Director, Economy, Environment & Culture detailed some of the measures and support that would be provided to the events, hospitality and retail sectors as they re-opened.
- 5.9 The request to amend the motion to allow for Councillor Miller on behalf of the Conservative Group to become a joint proposer was unanimously agreed by the Sub-Committee.
- 5.10 The Chair then put the motion to the vote that was unanimously passed.

5.11 The Chair then put the recommendations as amended to the vote that was unanimously passed.

5.12 **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the localised response to a phased recovery and the progress updates on the city's recovery programme be noted;
- (2) That the council's approach to a phased recovery from Covid-19 ensures delivery of the council's goal of lowering toxic emissions to achieve 'carbon neutrality' by 2030; and
- (3) That further to the council's planned work on Transport Network Management and Recovery, that the committee recognises:
 - Government guidance ('Safer Public Places – Urban Centres and Green Spaces'), which focuses on practical interventions to adapt public places, particularly in areas of high footfall, to support health and safety as urban spaces become busier;
 - latest Government guidance indicating that non-essential retail will reopen on 15th June, requiring more immediate changes to our transport network to allow for safe 'social distancing,' than can be realised by the next meeting of Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee;
 - the strength of feeling in the city for transport network changes, to facilitate road safety, walking and cycling, reduce toxic emissions, as well as support the safe use of public transport;
 - plans agreed by Urgency Policy and Resources Committee to bring forward urgent transport changes, and the current LCWIP consultation;
 - news that the council has recently been allocated 'emergency active travel' funding from Government, some of which could be withdrawn if the initial tranche is not spent quickly;

and therefore agrees:

- to identify and implement urgently needed changes to both public places and the transport network, to enable outdoor exercise, active travel and maximise safe public transport use, (including measures referenced in the Government guidance, such as timed road closures) that can take place prior to 15th June;
- and to fast-track engagement with local communities and stakeholders, to help identify and prioritise such measures, prior to 15th June;
- that further to guidance on reopening of schools, to swiftly progress safe 'school streets' initiatives across the city.

6 COVID-19: SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES

6.1 The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Executive Director, Economy, Environment & Culture that set out the programme of business support work being undertaken by the Economy and Events Cell, which has been set up to respond the

Covid-19 Crisis. The report also proposed a package of support measures from the city council to help businesses.

- 6.2 Councillor Miller stated that he had received an unprecedented level of correspondence on the matter from residents and businesses in the city and the support provided by Government should be welcomed. Councillor Miller expressed his concern for the events and tourism sectors and an innovative approach would be needed to help those industries recover. With reference to paragraph 3.9, Councillor Miller stated that it would be difficult and time-consuming to qualify that a business was not in financial difficulty before 2019 and could be open to subjectivity. With regard to recommendation 2.3, Councillor Miller questioned whether there should be Member input into grant awarding Panel.
- 6.3 Councillor Mac Cafferty observed that the digital and IT sector appeared omitted from the table beneath paragraph 3.15. Councillor Mac Cafferty highlighted the key issue of those that were self-employed and freelance and asked whether there should be a local focus on this area given the uncertainty regarding ongoing support for those groups from central government. Councillor Mac Cafferty stated that rapid learning was required given the ongoing uncertainty relating the pandemic and how it would develop.
- 6.4 In response to the questions raised, the Assistant Director, City Development & Regeneration explained that government guidance set out what was defined as a business in difficulty and was a definition set out to ensure that businesses directly affected by Covid-19 were supported and not those that were failing before March. The Assistant Director, City Development & Regeneration clarified that the grant awarding panel would have to make rapid decisions and adding a further tier of decision making would make that difficult. The Assistant Director, City Development & Regeneration explained that the table at paragraph 3.15 set out some of the priority areas and the digital and IT sectors would certainly be able to apply.
- 6.5 Councillor Gibson welcomed the report and asked whether those paying the Brighton & Hove Living Wage could be prioritised and asked about the possibility of further funding from central government.
- 6.6 The Assistant Director, City Development & Regeneration clarified that the draft criteria did include scoring priority for those employers paying the Brighton & Hove Living Wage. The Assistant Director, City Development & Regeneration added that officers were continuing to lobby central government for both further funding and further powers to use the existing funding in a more discretionary way.
- 6.7 Councillor Yates stated his support priority scoring for those employers paying the Brighton & Hove Living Wage as they had demonstrated their support for the city and its residents in signing up to the scheme. Councillor Yates stated that it was fortunate that the Economic Strategy had recently been finalised as it would give a good basis to prepare and develop a post-Covid economic recovery. Councillor Yates proposed a cross-party letter to central government requesting greater flexibility to spend the funding awarded and requesting further funding to support businesses in the city.

- 6.8 The Sub-Committee members unanimously agreed to send a letter as proposed by Councillor Yates. At the suggestion of the Chair, it was agreed to ask the city's MP's and businesses to endorse that letter.
- 6.9 Councillor Mac Cafferty asked if more information could be provided on financial support being provided to Visit Brighton.
- 6.10 The Assistant Director, City Development & Regeneration explained that the businesses that were members of Visit Brighton would be given a payment holiday on their membership fees.
- 6.11 **RESOLVED-**
- (1) That members note the work being undertaken to deliver business rates relief and business grants to local businesses.
 - (2) Agree the rationale and process for administering the discretionary grants for business, and delegate the agreement of the detail of the application and assessment process to the Executive Director Economy, Environment and Culture, and acting Chief Finance Officer
 - (3) Delegate final approval to make grant awards to the Executive Director Economy, Environment and Culture, in consultation with a professional panel to include representatives of business groups who helped to prepare the Economic Strategy
 - (4) Agree to underwrite income to the Brilliant Brighton Business Improvement District (BID) for 2020/2021, up to a maximum of £350,000.
 - (5) Agree to waive the business membership fees for Visit Brighton for 2020/2021 for six months to a maximum cost of £100,000.
 - (6) Allocate £15,000 from the 2020/2021 Economic Development Budget to cover the operating costs of the Brighton and Hove Economic Partnership.

The meeting concluded at 3.45pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

