

Brighton & Hove City Council

Policy & Resources Committee

Agenda Item 90(1)

Subject: Council Finances – Deputation referred from the Public Engagement Meeting held on 16 December 2021

Date of meeting: 27 January 2022

Report of: Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources

Contact Officer: Name: Lisa Johnson

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Ward(s) affected: All

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

1.1 To receive the following deputation which was presented at and referred from the public engagement meeting held on the 16 December 2021.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Committee responds to the deputation either by noting it or where it is considered more appropriate, calls for an officer report on the matter which may give consideration to a range of options and writes to the deputation spokesperson setting out the committee's decision(s).

3. Context and background information

3.1 To receive the following deputation along with the extract from the public engagement meeting which is detailed in appendix 1:

(3) Deputation concerning Council Finances

Spokesperson Laura King on behalf of Brighton and Hove Citizen's Action Group

Projects and Schemes are being prioritised over council provision of Statutory Goods and Services paid for by our Council Tax with the result that the Statutory Goods and Services are getting cut.

Brighton and Hove City Council are also acting contrary to their own Statement of Accounts 2020-21 www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-09/BHCC%202020-21%20SoA%20FINAL%2029-09-21.pdf which cited pressure on 'income generating' areas such as parking income as likely to affect future council tax rises (page 41). BHCC's response has been to make the city an increasingly unwelcome, expensive and inaccessible place to anyone arriving by motorised transport. We propose a City First approach to ensure that Council Tax is primarily used for statutory goods and services only, with

other income streams and central government funding used to fund (publicly agreed) projects and initiatives.

Supporting information

Financial

As if the pandemic has not crushed the people of Brighton and Hove enough they have seen a 5% Council Tax rise in 2020-2021, (above national inflation rate of 3.8%), including £26m to tackle 'climate crisis' when, along with other initiatives, this is not an item listed as part of statutory goods and services so it should not be taken from Council tax, particularly with the risk that statutory goods and services could face cuts as a result.

Rather than have a 2-3 year council tax freeze to recover, the people of Brighton and Hove are now being told they will face another exorbitant 4.99% Council Tax rise for 2021-22 in the post-pandemic recession (also above national inflation rate of 3.8%).

Meantime taxpayers have seen their residential parking permits rise by up to 9% in 2021 (50% extra if they own a vehicle deemed 'high emissions' by the city council) and permit renewals have been months late in being issued, resulting in many wrongful parking tickets being issued to residents.

There is confusion over whether the council has a £10m surplus from 2020 or not. It has predicted a £14.839 million and £13.039 million shortfall for 2021-2022 budget www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/news/2020/setting-council-budget-and-council-tax-2021/22-during-covid-19 Or was the £10m surplus used to plug the black hole that is the i360 (estimated to be around £10m) following further payment failures on top of the £36m public works loan.

Why is nearly £400k currently being spent on recruiting travel and transport employees and where is this money coming from? This is in addition to more than £250k of such roles being advertised earlier this year.

A £1.17m loan was taken to invest in Bikeshare (which has removed at least 40 x paid parking spaces around the city, often unnecessarily when a hub could have been sited off-street). BHCC has asked for sponsors yet public bike schemes are proven to be loss-making and have been discontinued in a number of international cities as a result. Who will pay for BikeShare's planned expansion into Adur and Worthing? Have Adur and Worthing councils agreed to foot the cost for their areas?

New street cycle hangers have been procured (each holding 6 bicycles), which will again result in the loss of paid visitor and resident parking spaces. £500,000 was allocated by the council to provide 100 (which would make them £5k each. Actual cost checked with manufacturer finds they are £3,945 each including installation for single hanger order, (discount for bulk order). But where did BHCC get this money from and where is the surplus money going?

Why are people who walk/cycle already being bribed to do so under BHCC 'Move for Change' human tracking scheme and who pays for this? A scheme which discriminates against those unable to walk or cycle and does not meet council EDI commitments.

Meantime we understand that the cost of each new EV dustbin cart is likely to be four times the cost of a diesel dustcart, but further investigation is going on separately.

How much did bin strike cost city and where is that money coming from?

Madeira Terraces restoration fund appears to be missing from Statement of Accounts 2020-21. Where is it and why

are seven teams of consultants needed to use up a large chunk of the £11.2m?

Are Environmental/any bicycle pressure groups acting as council consultants and are they receiving any payment from Council?

Economy

Brighton and Hove is a visitor destination, yet more and more people are swearing never to visit or shop here again. What is BHCC doing to welcome visitors and encourage them to spend their money in the city versus rival towns and cities, particularly now most people are holidaying in the UK?

Visitor parking prices have continued to rise making Brighton and Hove the most expensive city to park in outside London. Furthermore hundreds of paid parking spaces are being removed throughout the city. We now see plans of the Madeira Terraces restoration showing none along that stretch. What is being done to reinvigorate the night time economy such as minimal or free parking?

Why is Churchill car park now closing at 8pm each night?

How does bus gate profiteering 310 x tickets in one day x £60 each x 365 days = £7,789,000.00 support or attract visitors?

How do planned emissions aka 'Clean Air Zone' charges support or attract visitors?

What evidence-based studies have been done on ULEZ's and re-allocating roads to cycle lanes to prove environmental and user benefit over creation of additional gridlock and pollution?

Conclusion

It is vital that Brighton and Hove citizens see their Councillors working for the city and not against it, particularly if our Councillors keep telling us that central government funding continues to be reduced. In which case BHCC need to account for every penny of our public money and spend it wisely. There must be no more hypocrisy and eco-bullying of us either if we are prepared to draw a line under the following:

Green Council leader Phelim MacCafferty leading by example by taking unnecessary internal flights.

Green Councillors Druitt and Phillips with their second home in France necessitating regular driving and/or flying to and from their property.

Green Councillor Steve Davis working as a Driving Instructor.

Green Councillor Jamie "Cyclists need to reclaim the road from cars" getting caught driving through the bus gate.

Green Councillor Hills driving her child to and from school each day while vigorously endorsing other people's streets be turned into 'pocket gardens'.

From now on, all projects need to be accountable and evidence-based with impartial and meaningful resident consultations and surveys to either back them or otherwise.

Supported by:

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|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Peter Harland | 2. Gary Ayling |
| 3. Andy Maclay | 4. James Forbes |

Wards affected: All

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MEETING

4.30pm 16 DECEMBER 2021

VIRTUAL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Robins (Chair), Allcock, Appich, Atkinson, Bagaeen, Barnett, Brennan, Brown, Childs, Clare, Davis, Deane, Druitt, Evans, Gibson, Hamilton, Heley, Hills, Janio, John, Knight, Mac Cafferty, McNair, Meadows, Mears, Nemeth, Nield, Osborne, Peltzer Dunn, Pissaridou, Powell, O'Quinn, Shanks, Simson, C Theobald, Wilkinson and Williams.

3. DEPUTATIONS

- 4.1 The Mayor reported that four deputations had been received from members of the public and that he would invite the spokesperson to introduce their deputation and then the relevant Chair to respond. He noted that 15 minutes were set aside for the consideration of deputations.
- 4.10 The Mayor invited Laura King as the spokesperson for the deputation to join and address the meeting; noting that the deputation related to council finances.
- 4.11 Laura King spoke on the deputation relating to the management of the council's finances and the proposed increase in the council tax for 2022/23.
- 4.12 Councillor Gibson thanked Ms King for presenting the deputation and stated that he was unsure about the figure of 4.99% for a council tax increase as the highest increase could only be 3.99%. He believed that the visitor economy had held up and stated that the council was doing all it could to ensure services were maintained and any increases in charges kept to a minimum. He also noted that the council tax only made up a small proportion of the council's finances and that the council had faced significant cuts in government grants. However, it continued to support those on low incomes and the report on the council reduction scheme which was due to be considered at the full council meeting was an example of this.
- 4.13 The Mayor thanked Ms King for joining the meeting and speaking on behalf of the deputation. He explained that the points had been noted and the deputation would be referred to the Policy & Resources Committee for consideration. The persons forming the deputation would be invited to attend the meeting and would be informed subsequently of any action to be taken or proposed in relation to the matter set out in the deputation.

