

# Brighton & Hove City Council

## Public Engagement Meeting

## Agenda Item 15

### BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

### PUBLIC & MEMBERS ENGAGEMENT MEETING

4.30pm 3 FEBRUARY 2022

### VIRTUAL

### MINUTES

**Present:** Councillor Robins (Chair) Allcock, Appich, Atkinson, Bagaeen, Barnett, Brown, Childs, Clare, Davis, Deane, Druitt, Evans, Fishleigh, Gibson, Grimshaw, Henry, Hills, Hugh-Jones, Lloyd, Mac Cafferty, McNair, Meadows, Mears, Miller, Nemeth, Osborne, Peltzer Dunn, Powell, Shanks, Simson, C Theobald, Wilkinson, Williams and Yates.

## 7 MINUTES

- 7.1 The minutes of last meeting held on the 16 December were approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

## 8 COVID HEROES

- 8.1 The mayor stated that it was intended to recognise the work and contributions of people during the covid pandemic at council meeting during the year and welcomed those invited to join virtually for today's meeting.

Today I wish to pay tribute and celebrate the everyday heroes in this city who went above and beyond to help others, support their community or keep the city running during an unprecedented chapter in our city's and our country's history.

Nearly two years ago the global pandemic turned the world upside down. For many people this was a time of fear and uncertainty, and it will continue to have an impact on Brighton & Hove and indeed the world for many years to come.

However, just as life got very hard for so many, there were individual people, organisations and public services who did everything they could to help others in need and give hope, kindness and support to our city during a time of crisis.

All of us here are united in wanting to celebrate Brighton & Hove's values and most inspiring citizens as demonstrated by these Covid heroes. In summer 2021 the city council awarded the honorary Freedom of the City to all those who helped during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Since then we have been asking the people of Brighton & Hove and council staff to nominate and share stories of our residents, organisations and colleagues who are Covid heroes, and I'm delighted to share a small selection of some of those stories with you here today.

From the nationally appreciated charity St John Ambulance where their local volunteers pivoted to provide a huge 15,000 volunteer hours to support nurses at the Royal Sussex Hospital as well as training vaccinators, to the story of a much-loved community treasure right here in the city with The Bevy Pub.

While the pub was closed during the Covid-19 pandemic the team at the Bevy worked hard for the community they care about by delivering a 'meals on wheels' service to vulnerable local people and continued supporting people.

However, it wasn't just national charities and local communities who did whatever it took to help their neighbourhoods in need. Dozens of names of individual residents have been shared with us such as Jessica Bavinton.

As soon as the first lockdown arrived Jessica sprang into action setting up an Ovingdean C-19 Action group in days to help the residents of Ovingdean creating a support network that took action to help vulnerable people with shopping, supplies, talking to people facing loneliness, and provide PPE for Blind Veterans UK. Jessica was and continues to be supported by 150 amazing volunteers in the village who provide a huge range of activities to support their community.

Finally, I want to recognise our own council staff who, like others, not only had to deal with the monumental changes and difficulties the pandemic presented to their personal lives but had to adjust to new ways of working to provide vital services the city needed and continue working hard to restore services in a changed world.

The council's new PPE Team was set up in 2020 by Rima Desai, Sharmini Williams and Jenny Garlick, as part of the council's Covid response to combat a lack of protective equipment (masks, gloves, hand sanitiser, aprons etc) in care homes, charities, council services and other organisations in the city. Between them, they pulled together some incredible people who got the PPE out to the people in most desperate need, quickly setting up new systems from scratch. The gratitude from care home staff when receiving their much-needed PPE was unbelievably heart-warming.

These people represent some of the best of Brighton & Hove and their stories demonstrate humanity at its best. A full list of these names and their stories has been published on our website and is being publicised on social media.

I want to thank all those who took the time to make sure that these stories were heard. I look forward to sharing more stories and celebrating our Covid heroes at future sessions of council.

**9 TO RECEIVE PETITIONS**

- 9.1 The mayor invited the submission of petitions from councillors and members of the public. He reminded the meeting that petitions would be referred to the appropriate decision-making body without debate and the person presenting the petition would be invited to attend the meeting to which the petition was referred.
- 9.2 Ms Bundy presented a petition which had been signed by 724 people online and noted that there were additional paper signatures to be added to the total. The petition called for the council to prevent the installation of 5G masts on land in the city.
- 9.3 The mayor thanked Ms Bundy and stated that the petition would be referred to the Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee for consideration.

**10 WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

- 10.1 The mayor stated that 8 written questions had been received from members of the public and invited Mr Hill to join the meeting and put his question to Councillor Heley.
- 10.2 Mr Hill thanked the mayor and asked; in 2019 13% of all deaths in Brighton & Hove were from respiratory disease. 14% of our population suffer asthma, 2% COPD, lung cancer is the most deadly cancer locally. Recent studies have strengthened the evidence that air pollution causes and worsens these and other diseases with sensitive groups most at risk. Solid fuel burning is one of the largest sources of particulate pollution in the UK. Brighton is the largest city in England without a city-wide smoke control area. I asked the question about smoke control areas two years ago; why are we still unprotected?
- 10.3 Councillor Heley replied, as Joint Chair of the ETS Committee, I am sure that I can also speak on behalf of other colleagues who will have an interest in this matter, such as the Health & Wellbeing Board and TECC committee. Having clean air in our city is a priority for us and requires everybody to play their part. We therefore need people to consider if, or when, they need to burn wood, and to do so responsibly.

Our Air Quality Officer and our Environmental Protection Team have continued to work very hard over the last two years to maintain service levels during the challenging period of the pandemic. We have maintained monitoring, produced two Air Quality Annual Status Reports, reviewed and renewed the city's Air Quality Management Areas, and tackled statutory nuisances which can include smoke, so residents do have some protection, but we recognise that we need to do a lot more.

I recognise that you are asking for more and this is something that I am keen to explore within our next Air Quality Action Plan, which will be published for consultation later in the year. Local authorities are meeting with Government officials to discuss its policy on smoke control and help steer guidance towards the Environment Act amendments published last year. This will provide a better understanding of the powers and resources that will be available to local authorities under national legislation.

The Environment Act has further raised the profile of the need to deliver clean air and for councils to meet their statutory requirements in this area. I am also really pleased that our committee has agreed to develop a real-time air quality monitoring system to provide a greater level of reliable information about air quality, and we are continuing to secure funding to invest in cleaner transport in the city.

While that work progresses, we have and will continue to ensure that the right messages and advice are available to inform people of the effects that woodburning and smoke can have on their own and people's health. I have asked officers to review and update the council's webpages on smoke and woodburning to ensure the correct messages and advice are included. These changes will be made very soon and will be publicised to further raise awareness.

- 10.4 Mr Hill then asked a supplementary question, I'd like to thank councillors and the officers for the work they did in the investments for air monitoring and especially Councillor Fishleigh and Councillor Osborne and yourself and all the parties who voted for it, monitoring will help to understand and inform and help people reduce their exposures to air pollution and a better information and understanding of individuals or help them avoid those areas and those times that air pollution is worse.

I feel updating a website will help and it's welcome but is there anything more you can do in terms of media maybe a leafleting campaign or something like that? to get that message out there around wood burning. Especially that it is harmful, and it should be advised against pretty much all the time. I think above all that the smoke control area could do the most.

Just one more thing about the air quality at that that the smoke control areas for government has given extra powers to councils to enforce the smoke control areas, and I think that was one of the biggest problems in the past.

- 10.5 Councillor Heley replied, I will just briefly respond and, Adrian, you can email me afterwards. I'm as frustrated as you are with this issue. I am aware of other Councils, for example Camden. I believe that have stronger messaging on wood burning, which I've been asking us to follow suit with.

From my understanding, the main issues with smoke-controlled areas. It is our lack of capacity, lack of funding as a local council to manage the enforcement of those. So that's obviously a wider conversation around austerity and cuts that we need solving by national government. I fully support everything all are campaigning for and will do as much as we can.

- 10.6 The mayor thanked Mr Hill for joining the meeting and putting his questions to Councillor Heley and invited Mr Trangmar to join the meeting and put his question to Councillor Davis.

- 10.7 Mr Trangmar thanked the mayor and asked, in November 2019 I presented a petition requesting the installation of traffic calming measures/other options for Bristol Gardens to prevent motorists using the road as a rat run and make the road safer for non-road users. Since then, I have been back to ETS, but nothing has happened so far.

Please would you give me an update including likely timescales for a local consultation and resulting works, whatever they are to commence?

- 10.8 Councillor Davis replied, as a former resident of Princes Crescent I understand your issues here. Unfortunately, there has been no change to the Council's position since our last response which was provided in September 2021. The early proposals for Bristol Gardens were put on-hold, along with a number of other schemes from the LTP programme, at the start of the pandemic so that staff resources could focus on the delivery of the Transport Covid Action Plan. The delivery of this plan is still on-going as the team deliver the second tranche of the Emergency Active Travel Fund programme which is due for completion in 2022. Further funding for Tranche 3 has also been bid for and is awaiting a response.

There are currently no immediate plans to recommence the design process for Bristol Gardens however once resources are available then any proposals that are taken forward will be subject to consultation with the local community.

Bristol Gardens has a very good safety record and also relatively low speeds, all of which are well below the speed limit of 20 mph when measured recently within the last three years. Whilst we understand the concerns of residents in this location, we are unable to justify prioritising this scheme above and beyond the current agreed programme of works based on the information that is available, however we will be bringing a report to ETS Committee looking at our broader Road Safety Strategy that will be looking at speeding at locations such as Bristol Gardens.

- 10.9 Mr Trangmar asked a supplementary question, anecdotally the speeds are not good, and the road is used as a cut through, but the more important point is with the Black Rock development probably coming towards planning. Can something be done when the assessment for the increased traffic for the Black Rock development is assessed that our street and the surrounding streets are assessed as part of that so that there's a coherent traffic management plan for the whole area and all those new people that are going to move into that development and so that it could be bolted on to that assessment?
- 10.10 Councillor Davis replied, I think it's a really good point David considering what's going to be happening around there and I'm and I'm happy to bring that to officers when that piece of infrastructure is started to be built and I'm happy for you to follow up with emails for me as well.
- 10.11 The mayor thanked Mr Trangmar for joining the meeting and putting his questions to Councillor Davis and invited Mr Walker to join the meeting and put his question to Councillor .
- 10.12 Mr Walker thanked the mayor and asked, for the last 28 years Philip Winnan has been cleaning flats in Lewes Crescent and Sussex Square. He operates with his son through a small, limited company called Chartsworth. An Environmental Enforcement officer has told Philip he will be fined £400 for placing household waste in the communal refuse bins. This is tragic for Philip's livelihood and all paid-for carers in the city who look after older residents who will be criminalised for taking out household rubbish. Is this official council policy?

- 10.13 Councillor Heley replied, this is slightly different to the question that I received, but I will respond to the question that you submitted, and we can discuss anything else by email. It would not be appropriate for the council to discuss an individual persons' circumstances in a public forum like full council meeting. Mr Winnan has not been in contact with the council himself to discuss his circumstances and we would be keen for him to do so.

I can confirm that a household cleaner or carer would not be fined for disposing of a residents' normal household waste in a domestic communal or kerbside bin. However, commercial cleaners contracted to remove waste from common areas of flats are not lawfully permitted to dispose of waste in domestic bins and would be subject to a fine if they did so.

- 10.14 Mr Walker asked a supplementary question, I think from everything I've read and the acts that I have been told about, I believe that the Council's position is wrong on this, both from a legal sense and also from the fact is rubbish produced in the communal part of the building is part of the residential building and, if you look at the Environmental Protection Act, it states that the two acid tests are - where did the rubbish come from? Which it comes from part of a residential building and who created the rubbish or when it's behind a locked door and you can't access your flat without going up a staircase then that rubbish is by definition produced by the residents of that building and that is where, I believe, that the Council's position is wrong.

- 10.15 Councillor Heley replied, we were happy to get the legal team to check it for you.

- 10.16 The mayor thanked Mr Walker for joining the meeting and putting his questions to Councillor Davis and invited Ms Anderson to join the meeting and put her question to Councillor Osborne.

- 10.17 Ms Anderson thanked the mayor and asked, I have a monthly Freedom Leisure membership and myself and my two boys aged 8 and 9 go swimming at the King Alfred every weekend.

Two weeks ago we were leaving the centre, when a man started shouting angrily at the top of his voice: "Just look at this place! It's falling apart! It's a disgrace! It's been like that for 20 years!"

I would like to know whether there are any plans to either redevelop or upgrade the King Alfred, which is clearly now reaching the end of its lifespan and not fit for purpose anymore?

- 10.18 Councillor Osborne replied, I'm very sorry to hear that that's been your experience at the King Alfred. I think you have been in previous correspondence with Councillor Mac Cafferty about this over the last few weeks, so you may already have a know what I'm going to be seeing here, but I'll, I'll repeat it just for everyone else so that they know that you've got your response. Over the past 20 years there has been significant public funding that's being spent on updating the King Alfred.

To ensure that it remains open and operational for residents of the city and this funding has led to some improvements in the wet changing rooms and the toilet refurbishment

and there's also been a new cafe added in the foyer area and that's all to support the demand for swimming at the site. However, it is recognized that the building is near the end of its lifespan and is in need of replacement, so previously the Council have tried to find a developer led solution to the redevelopment of the site, but since the termination of the partnership with Crest Nicholson in relation to the proposed redevelopment of the King Alfred, the Council has undertaken a thorough review of its sports facilities, this includes their current condition, the maintenance costs that they have, the current facilities provided, latest demands and investment options, This work informed the sports facilities Investment Plan, which is from 2021 to 2031 and that was developed in order that the future provision of the Council's indoor sports facilities can be considered strategically across the city. This investment plan was concluded last summer and provides a strategic city-wide approach to improving the facilities. The plan outlines a capital investment required to create more modern facilities which will increase participation in sport and the physical activity across the city. With the plan now agreed, there's major capital projects which will include the replacement of King Alfred and we are currently being advanced to a more detailed stage and there will also be some more planned maintenance work on the pool later this year. So rest assured this there is further direct work planned to address some of your concerns, and we fully knowledge that our sports facilities need the level of investment in the city that all users expect and deserve.

- 10.19 Ms Anderson asked a supplementary question, why does the redevelopment of the King Alfred have to be linked to housing?

The social housing argument has been kicked like a political football from one side to the other for decades to the detriment of everyone in Brighton and Hove?

I quote an article from the London Economic:

“Across Europe, almost every village or town in Germany, Denmark, Spain and France has a public use municipal sports club, swimming pool or leisure club. This is funded by local taxation or central government funding”

We should be doing the same here.

- 10.20 Councillor Osborne replied, I think there may be different funding mechanisms in some of the European countries, and certainly the central government. We've had a government that's being cutting budgets for the past ten years or 11 years, it's been very difficult for that funding to be found. I think that's why the Council have tried their best to go towards a developer led solution, but we're definitely happy to lobby government for more funding.

There was an interesting Sports England report that came out last year, which was suggesting that many of our sports facilities and swimming pools will probably be having to close over the next 10 years if there's no further investment. We are happy to lobby on further investment from the government and this plan going forward is expecting to put £10s of millions into our sports facilities, so we are committed to that plan going forward. I know historically there's been other alternative solutions that have been tried. With this plan now in place, I think we can commit to it.

There is much more reassurance, there about committing to the future of the sports facilities going forward. I'm sorry about what has happened over the past 10-20 years and then those facilities that have not materialized. But we've got that plan in place now, so hopefully will be able to see that through.

- 10.21 The mayor thanked Ms Anderson for joining the meeting and putting her questions to Councillor Osborne. He noted that Mr Tower was unable to join the meeting and had asked Councillor Fishleigh to put his question to Councillor Osborne on his behalf.
- 10.22 Councillor Fishleigh asked, in light of the latest delays to the restoration of Madeira Terrace. Does the council believe that Madeira Drives' primary purpose is that of a car park and should lost revenue from spaces be allowed to delay the redevelopment of the Terrace any further?
- 10.23 Councillor Osborne replied, the Council is committed to improving the quality of life of all those that live work and visit Brighton & Hove. It is aware that significant contribution that a restored Madeira Terrace would add to the quality of life for all our residents and as such the Council is committed to supporting the progress of this project wherever possible.

There was a major public consultation held prior to Christmas about proposals for Madeira Terrace and the wider eastern seafront and feedback from these events have been used to take forward that project. Specifically on the plans and the question you raised about the revenue from parking. The revenue derived from parking is obviously vitally important to the operation of the Council and revenue from paid on street parking, for example alone, is worth £10 million. All the surplus generated from that is redirected into the bus subsidies and local transport plan etc. as I'm sure you know. As part of the phase one of the Madeira Terrace restoration project, its proposed to remove some of the parking along Madeira Drive and that's primarily intended to improve pedestrian access to the newly restored section of the Terrace, however, we also improve the setting of the structure, so there's a long process that will be involved on removing some of the on street parking, which involves some of the bays that have been near to the location. The project team are going to be going forward with that and they will provide a full update at the next Madeira Terrace Advisory panel, happening over the next month. Planning is a statutory function of the Council, Transport Plans for the city are brought to ETS if there was something there was to be happening of getting rid of parking spaces it would be coming back to ETS and so if there are further questions you can take back as the Council does believe that there's a need for car parking. The revenue is important and any further plans that might be changing will be brought back to committee.

- 10.24 Councillor Fishleigh asked a supplementary question, I think maybe you missed the gist of this question, and I don't know how well known it is amongst other councillors, but the highways department is in dispute with the major projects team at the Council about how many parking spaces will be taken up by equipment for the restoration and so that seems to be the major delay why work isn't starting. The supplementary is, and it's very peculiar that no one actually thought about this when you spent weeks and weeks talking about re jiggging Madeira Drive, is have you got a date when the restoration of Madeira terraces will actually start?



- 10.25 Councillor Osborne replied, I'm not on the project board and I think it would be good to take that question to the next board. I think they do have the planning application and it is going to be submitted in springtime and meant to be determined by autumn as per Phase 1 and then Phase 2 is next year. But I'm not sure on the exact timescales but I'm sure we can get those in a written response.
- 10.26 The mayor thanked Councillor Fishleigh for putting the questions to Councillor Osborne on behalf of Mr Tower and invited Mr Harris to join the meeting and put his question to Councillor Mac Cafferty.
- 10.27 Mr Harris thanked the mayor and asked I refer to agenda item 71 titled Arrangements for Council and Committee Meetings: these proposals are a stealth power grab and at best a paranoid response to an ever-weakening virus. There are no legal reasons to make these proposed changes and they should be scrapped.

This is a move away from a public facing council and committee system to what looks like a less accountable segregated cabinet system. Debates behind closed doors.

Vital public engagement is proposed to be side-lined to a separate virtual meeting, where members are not even required to attend and listen anymore. For such big changes why was no public consultation undertaken around this?

- 10.28 Councillor Mac Cafferty replied, I am not sure the premise reflects accurately the proposals and the reports. Far from limiting accountability or transparency the proposals are aimed at precisely the opposite and we are trying to hold on to the democratic decision-making process in a way that reduces the way that reduces the way that contact to protect the health and safety of member of the public, councillors and officers. No decisions will be made behind closed doors all meetings for council and committees continue to be open to the public. People will be able to follow different meetings by attending in person or by following the web cast which you have done this evening yourself and by allowing people to follow the proceedings we've actually been able to enhance transparency and public engagement.

If it is true to say that there are some signs of reduction in the number of people infected with the Omicron variant, but anyone who thinks that COVID is ever weakening, or that the pandemic is over is mistaken, and there are still number of variants of concern, including B1621B2, and as long as global vaccination doesn't happen, we continually run the risk of not being able to say for certain when COVID-19 will be behind us. 10s of thousands of citizens are being infected with the virus every day with, sadly, many of them dying and in Brighton & Hove we have already lost 543 people to this pandemic.

We have a legal, if not a moral, civic duty to make sure that proceedings are conducted in a way that ensures health and safety of everyone. All this complication of course could have been avoided if we had the necessary legislation to enable our Council to carry on meeting remotely. During the period it was allowed it worked well, public participation increased. Unfortunately, we didn't win that legal case. Finally, I want to reassure you that the measures are temporary running until April, they will be reviewed in May and in all cases, we will have to take account of the prevailing conditions as well. But protecting everyone's health is always our top priority.

- 10.29 Mr Harris asked a supplementary question, it just makes me wonder from that response because every Saturday I can go to the football at Amex with thousands of people, the courts are running bingo halls are open, theatres are open, pubs, restaurants, everything is open. Yet I can have a phone call at 10:00pm in the evening with a woman who's been evicted, she's got a 14-year-old son who is disabled. She's in an absolute trauma and terror, she can't get into the council offices. The worry is, you're saying that things aren't being subverted and put across, but with the budget coming up soon, my worry is, do you feel that you guys are going to get voted in with these continuous, outrageous proposals? Let's get on with the job and actually deal with and actually give a public service.
- 10.30 Councillor Mac Cafferty replied, on the specifics of your case, by all means forward over anything that you think I can help with, I am more than happy to help, and I can accelerate and query with the Executive Director, and indeed with the Co-Chairs of the Housing Committee. In terms of your specific question as well, if someone had a problem at 10:00 o'clock at night, pre pandemic they couldn't come into Hove Town Hall. If there was an emergency there is an out of hours number which is still operational at the moment. We are in the process of beginning to try and reopen the Council services and will be more about that coming soon. But I take your point and we do accept the challenge about accessibility and accountability we're trying to do our best on it, I think the pandemic has made that very complicated. Thank you for supplementary and please do send over any specific questions.
- 10.31 The mayor thanked Mr Harris for joining the meeting and putting his questions to Councillor Mac Cafferty and invited Ms Upton to join the meeting and put her question to Councillor Davis.
- 10.32 Ms Upton thanked the mayor and asked, as someone who designed and used questionnaires, I am concerned about the robustness of the questionnaire that accompanied the consultation "improving accessibility on the A259".( There are more questions on the ethnicity part of the questionnaire than about the plans themselves!) I am at a loss to understand what questions "do you want improved crossing points", or "more provision of disabled parking bays" - questions that any fair-minded person would answer positively- tell us about the respondents' views of these plans as a whole.

The idea that such an important matter of reallocating road space can be decided in six questions is to misunderstand wider issues. Please explain why questions have been "dumbed down" to such a degree that no meaningful conclusions can be drawn about the hugely varied opinions of local residents and traders.

- 10.33 Councillor Davis replied, the survey has been designed in a fair, inclusive and accessible manner with the hope that it allows people to give their opinion on a range of proposed measures contained within the overall A259 scheme. People were asked for their opinion for each key element of the scheme and rate accordingly from Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, and Don't know. It would not be practical to ask very specific questions about every detailed aspect of the scheme and we know from past experience and feedback that people are less inclined to engage with overly long complex questionnaires. It is also worth noting that

a number of staffed exhibitions were held at The King Alfred Leisure Centre where local residents, traders and visitors had an opportunity to engage directly with Council officers and provide face to face feedback. In terms of questions on ethnicity, this is important data we collect to ensure we are reaching all members and groups in our community.

- 10.34 Ms Upton asked a supplementary question, in the last active travel plan when comparing comments about the A259 Seafront Rd and the Old Shoreham Rd cycle lane, the majority of respondents were against them. Of the comments about the A259 cycle lane 239 were negative and 31 were positive.

The negative feelings most stated about the Old Shoreham Rd cycle lane where there were 49 residents who wrote positive and 510 who were against yet both cycle lanes were put in place. How confident can the public be that democracy will be upheld and the Council will take any notice of this consultation?

- 10.35 Councillor Davis replied, I think it's an interesting question. There's a very interesting report from the bicycles group this afternoon on social media about the actual amount of people that did vote against the Old Shoreham Road and consultation, to be clear, this is our policy as an administration, and it's a consultation and it's not a referendum we, you know we need to implement this for various reasons, but we are happy to engage all stakeholders along the way as much as we possibly can, and I'm happy to engage you further if you feel that you could contribute to all our consultation processes.

- 10.36 The mayor thanked Ms Upton for joining the meeting and putting her questions to Councillor Davis and invited Ms King to join the meeting and put her question to Councillor Yates.

- 10.37 Ms King thanked the mayor and asked, last year the Council apologised for failing to publish details of Councillors' expenses for three years as reported in The Argus on 11th April 2021. The Local Authorities Regulations states a council must publish the information as soon as practicable after the end of a year to which the scheme relates. What was the reason why Brighton and Hove City Council failed to publish these details as was required by the Regulations?

- 10.38 Councillor Yates replied, that in itself would be a matter for the administration, the failure to deliver that, but the information that I've received is that it was a simple administrative error and oversight. As soon as it was identified and raised with the appropriate person it was rectified and apology given. All the information regarding allowances is published and can be seen on the Council's website, I went in this afternoon and all of the expenses claims from 2002 onwards are published as in PDF form on the Council website including for last year, which was published in May, having that year having closed as of April. So, within six weeks or so of the close of that year's accounts.

All councillors' expenses that are published are determined in accordance with the Scheme for Members Allowances that is prepared on the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel with full Council's approval and all claims for expenses are checked and verified by officers before any payments made. Members of the public do have the ability to examine Council expenditure as part of the Councils

annual audit system and we do welcome challenge and we frequently receive challenge from members of the public on some very specific parts of council expenditure, which is only right.

- 10.39 Ms King asked a supplementary question, in the audit and Standards Committee meeting of the 25th of January, you said that you'd been given assurances that all dependent childcare claims for the years ending 2020 and 2021 were correctly claimed and there were no grounds for an audit. The B&H Constitution says that DCA is claimable for specific circumstances, and myself and my colleagues have looked at where this would be possible for the year ending April 2021s and can only come up with less than 1/3 of what was claimed by Councillor Phillips. Do you feel it would therefore be sensible to welcome an audit of these figures to finally resolve this matter and restore public confidence, an independent audit?

What we want to do is make a formal request for those figures to be re-audited.

- 10.40 Councillor Yates replied, as I said at the at the meeting of Audit & Standards last week, I would welcome any information that people have questioning the validity of the claims that were submitted over those years. I'm more than welcome to receive and more than welcome to pass that on to our internal auditors. Obviously our internal auditors, although they work on behalf of the authority, they do have a certain level of independence, and it's primarily not the job of councillors to dictate to them the other work that they undertake, but more to raise with them issues that we would like them to consider to undertake and to approve their annual schedule of audits so if you want to pass that information through to me, I'd be very welcome to receive it and have a look through it.

That would have to come through the Audit & Standards Committee itself, so if you if you want to send that to me then I can raise it at the next Committee and more than happy to do that on your behalf.

- 10.41 The mayor thanked Ms King for joining the meeting and putting her questions to Councillor Yates and noted that brought an end to the public questions.

## **11 DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

- 11.1 The mayor noted that one deputation had been received from members of the public and invited Mr Bailey as the spokesperson for the deputation to join the meeting and address the council.
- 11.2 Mr. Bailey thanked the mayor and outlined the reasons for the deputation which sought the council's support to provide free bus travel in the city for young people who were in education. He stated that it would be a positive action to support those families who were struggling and promote independence and self-confidence in the young people. It would also benefit the environment with less car journeys taking place and he hoped that officers could work with local providers so that a report could be produced for consideration that would see free bus travel provided for young people.
- 11.3 Councillor Davis thanked Mr Bailey for presenting the deputation and noted that bus fares were not generally set by the council, although it did provide a subsidy for certain

routes. However, the issues and potential benefits raised were something that the council recognised, and it was hoped to bring a new bus service improvement plan to committee in due course for approval. In the meantime, the cost of providing an additional subsidy to enable free bus travel was a significant budgetary commitment that the council could not meet on its own, which was why officers were looking at potential support from government sources. He would welcome the opportunity to discuss the matter further outside of the meeting and would ensure that a full response was sent to Mr Bailey.

- 11.4 The mayor thanked Mr Bailey for joining the meeting and speaking on behalf of the deputation. He explained that the matter had been noted and the deputation would be referred to the Environment, Transport & Sustainability 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.

## 12 ORAL QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 12.1 The mayor noted that oral questions had been submitted and that 30 minutes was set aside for the duration of the item. He asked that both the questioner and responder endeavour to keep their questions and answers as short as possible, in order to enable the questions listed to be taken.

(1) Councillor Appich – Void turnaround times

- 12.2 Councillor Appich asked, would one of the Co-chairs of Housing please let me know what the void turnaround times have been over the last six months, what they currently are and what the plans are going forward.

- 12.3 Councillor Hugh-Jones replied, I'm not sure whether I've got the exact figure for the last six months, I think that would be more the subject of a written question. I do have some figures and obviously the aim is to reduce the number of the voids and improve void turnaround times. We have seen a significant improvement in our lettings activity which is heading back towards pre pandemic levels. In this financial year, we've let 395 council homes, which, compared with 213 during 2020-21 and 445 during 2019-20 so as of the 31st of January, the current number voids is 282, which is down from 293 at the end of December. Council officers have introduced void tracker, so I have a bit more detail, but a snapshot of the situation in December showed that 131 of 293 voids were awaiting repairs, with a further 5 undergoing major work. That left 157 voids, 52 of which were ready for letting, with viewings arranged. What I am trying to illustrate is that the voids picture is more complicated than it might appear at first sight. It is not just a question of them all waiting for repairs. A further 62 were advertised or the advertisement date had been set, a further 38 were empty for a variety of reasons, including the previous tenant having left property there. I am sure that members will agree that having the tracker will prove a useful tool in identifying the issues around voids and reducing them over time.,

If you would like any more details, I can put that to you in writing.

- 12.4 Councillor Appich asked a supplementary question, I would appreciate further detail in writing if you have it, particularly on the turn-around times because we can compare them with other authorities. My supplementary is about voids in sheltered housing and what the situation is with particular reference to sheltered housing for older people and I'm happy for a written answer on that.
- 12.5 Councillor Hugh-Jones replied, the turn-around times the average number of days or home was empty in December was 164, which was down from a high of 192, and that's including some long-term voids which obviously impact the average. For specifically on seniors housing, I'll have to get back to you with a written response.
- (2) Councillor Nemeth – Return to full operation
- 12.6 Councillor Nemeth asked, whether the council would be stopping inspections of empty homes and leaving hundreds of vulnerable residents in dire situations or shutting the parking office, leaving thousands of elderly or even computer illiterate residents frustrated and upset, or stopping residents and their representatives such as us from coming to Council meetings to raise urgent and legitimate concerns, there's been a theme throughout of putting the interests of councillors and the Council corporately above those residents whom we are here to represent – how can this be justified?
- 12.7 Councillor Mac Cafferty replied, I think what you're failing to understand is that council services have re-opened. Our customer service Centre has reopened and we're well on our way to reopening other customer services, I think what really sticks in my throat about this question though is how misinformed it is because actually aside from a very small number of staff who were furloughed for a very short time our staff have been at work over the last two years unless they have fallen sick. Many of our staff who tested positive for Covid and may have felt unwell continued to work from home using the technology that we scrambled together for them to do this. What we have done is to follow the scientific public health and health and safety advice from the government about how to keep people safe. Let's be honest who could miss the fact that this question, being submitted by conservative councillors the same week when the Conservative Party Prime Minister in order Kingdom is under police investigation for claiming to be at work while he was hosting dozens of parties the Gray Report, I'm clear who has been working hard through this pandemic and who has not.
- 12.8 Councillor Nemeth asked a supplementary question, along the lines of hypocrisy, which is what the leader of the Council is alluded to, what would he say to those councillors who do not wish to attend Council meetings in a highly controlled environment with tests, masks, spacing and screens? But who are quite happy to post photos day in day out of their own attendance of packed events, conferences, flights, protests, concerts, social events and other gatherings?
- 12.9 Councillor Mac Cafferty replied, I'm not clear on the specifics of the question. I'm more than happy if you want to email me, I'm more than happy to look into that.
- (3) Councillor Allcock – Chronic and persistent missed refuse and recycling collections
- 12.10 Councillor Allcock asked, long suffering residents in Devonshire Court on Wilbury Ave in my ward have experienced chronic and persistent problems with their rubbish and

recycling, not being collected with frequent and long gaps in between their service. They had no collection for five weeks during September and October than two weeks during the recent strike and then one collection on the day the strike ended, then another two-week gap before another collection, then a three week gap followed by collection after the Council was contacted by a journalist on the matter, then another two week gap over the winter break until the 9th of January. I've over 40 emails on my file on missed collections at Devonshire Court and trying to liaise and try and get this solved. Unfortunately, this isn't just an isolated case I've been made aware of other situations in other words, such as Westbourne Ward where they have only been three collections in three months at a number of flats in the Pembroke area and Rutland Gardens where collections are also regularly missed. Central Hove where it took six months to get the recycling collected at Grove Court. Do you, representing the green Administration, know if City Clean are actively monitoring when and where collections from council taxpaying residents are being missed?

12.11 Councillor Heley replied, I do believe this City Clean monitor that.

12.12 Councillor Allcock asked a supplementary question can you, on behalf of the administration confirm that now whether City Clean have adequate vehicles, and sufficient crew to collect from the apartment blocks across the city and if not tell us why this is?

12.13 Councillor Heley replied, I am proud that the Administration has committed to a 10 year fleet replacement program which is already delivering improvements and I can speak to our fleet manager to get the answer on this specific question for you.

(4) Councillor Simson – Madeira Terrace restoration

12.14 Councillor Simson asked, another year has passed but still the Madeira Terrace restoration hasn't been started. We're all getting fed up of excuses as to why this hasn't happened, especially those members of the public who have been fund raising for several years. At the previous budget meeting, the Conservatives put an additional £9.15 million into their restoration. Yet here we are, another year later with nothing happening. My question was to ask you to tell us why the restoration works at Madeira Terrace restorations haven't started and when we can this start to happen, but I did note from the answer to the public question earlier that you don't know as "You are not on the Board". As the member of the Administration with responsibility for this, don't you think you should know?

12.15 Councillor Osborne replied, there's a comprehensive written question that was answered from Councillor Carol Theobald, which talks about the delay I can forward you on that response.

12.16 Councillor Simson asked a supplementary question, I obviously haven't seen the answer to that question yet because we haven't been furnished with those papers, so I don't know what that says. My supplementary is: We can see failings in this administration's ability to manage our heritage right across the city, with graffiti and a half torn off poster on the plinth of Queen Victoria statue, we see the state of Valley Gardens and the sinkholes in deteriorating fountain in the old steam. Yet this

administration continues to prioritize cycle lanes and losing revenue from the loss of parking spaces. Does this administration care anything about this city and its heritage?

12.17 Councillor Osborne replied, we care about heritage in the city and it was the last green administration that brought through the conservation strategy in 2015, which we're seeing through from 2015 to 2025. And that's a good document that I think you would appreciate looking at and seeing the recommendations in that, that we've followed. Last year there was a motion that was brought forward for the Register of Heritage assets, which I appreciate that was a Conservative, Notice of Motion and we're happy to bring forward later in the year. Then there's further work being done on a report coming later in the year about some of the heritage assets that are at risk. There is a lot of work that's going to be done, as well as the Local List, which has been delayed due to the pandemic. In terms of the wider heritage work there is a lot going on, and I direct you to the Local Heritage Projects Board for a more specific answer on Madeira Terraces.

(5) Councillor Fishleigh – Madeira Terraces

12.18 Councillor Fishleigh asked, the first part of my question just requires a number as a reply. The second part could be a long list of potential funders who I would be grateful if you would email to me within the near future.

How much new money from external sources was raised in 2021 for the restoration of Madeira Terraces - and which grants, High Network Individuals and other funding pots will the council be targeting in 2022?

12.19 Councillor Osborne replied, I don't think that we can be expected to have figures at hand, but I do know that the Levelling Up Fund was a bid that was made for last year which we were unsuccessful at, but we did receive some positive feedback on and there's potential for bids to be put in the Heritage Lottery fund for this year. I don't have a number for you there, but I'm sure we can get it to you and will be looking at Levelling Up fund and Heritage Lottery Fund for later this year.

12.20 Councillor Fishleigh asked a supplementary question, restoring Madeira terraces has always been about money, which is why it's extremely frustrating that the Council still, after all these years, hasn't got a grip on fund raising. There's a funding gap of £10s millions, getting bigger every week. When will a professional fundraiser be appointed to raise money for Madeira terraces?

12.21 Councillor Osborne replied, I'm sure officers are looking at that. I'm sure they wouldn't be not trying to raise funding and we can. If you would like to ask a further question for officers, we can forward that on and we can get you linked into the project team. And but I'm sure officers are doing what they what they can to raise money.

(6) Councillor Wilkinson – Empty homes

12.22 Councillor Wilkinson asked, at a time when many families in Brighton and Hove was struggling to find affordable homes in the city due to rise in house prices and rents, it's unacceptable that so many properties are left empty by private landlords instead of being put to good use. Empty properties can define your neighbouring homes, look



unsightly, and attract squatters and vandals and government data shows that one in 37 homes were empty last year. I know of many in my ward. What work has the Administration done to bring empty properties of social, including Council owned and private back into the housing stock?

- 12.23 Councillor Gibson replied, the council house aspect of it was answered by my Co. Chair Hugh Jones in terms of Voids. In terms of the other sectors I'll make a few remarks which I hope will be helpful.

It's not good to have an empty homes and quite a lot of effort of officers has traditionally in the past and continues to be made to reduce the length of time to which homes are empty and considerable success has been achieved in that. If you look at a snapshot of empty homes, the last time this was done at about 2002 had been empty for less than six months, 1189 for more than six months, and then between two and five years 165 and over five years 27. Most homes that are empty are in a transition, which leads to them being occupied within two years. It is the 165 and 27 that we have to focus on. We have a team and we have a target, we have a joint program on housing and homelessness which we work too with our Labour colleagues on the Housing Committee and we've set ourselves at target of increasing the number of empty homes that we bring back into use. And in spite the pandemic last year we bought 145 homes back into use. The key target homes which is 165 so to do 145 in the middle of a pandemic was really good and not much less than we've done in previous years, but we are setting a higher and more ambitious target, and I hope that, if we get asked this question in the next financial year that we will be able to report that we will have achieved that will certainly work hard on that. I would add I think the other thing that's important not to assume that an empty home when it's brought back into use will be affordable. Most empty homes are privately owned or privately rented, and they come back at high rents or to a homeowner and they're not necessarily affordable in this high-cost city. A lot of our focus is on expanding the supply of truly affordable homes, which is why we've achieved over 276 since 2019 with our joint program, which is far in excess of the previous administration.

- 12.24 Councillor Wilkinson asked a supplementary question, thousands of people in our city live in temporary housing locally with hundreds at night staying in emergency housing. I'm acutely aware that local authorities need more support from central government to take action and was dismayed when the government length and the time it takes before Council can intervene over an empty home from six months to two years as a last resort. But Council can use enforcement action such as compulsory purchase orders and enforced empty dwelling management orders. How are these legal sanctions currently working in Brighton and Hove? What steps will you take to encourage their better use? And do you agree that would be useful to integrate an empty home strategy with our homelessness strategy? Or else we will still be here in a few years discussing the same problems?

- 12.25 Councillor Gibson replied, it takes an awfully long time to achieve compulsory purchase, it is a last resort, it is integrated into our empty homes policies, and I will get officers to send you the procedure. The number of homeless people in emergency accommodation that you referred to is disappointingly high, but thankfully, at the peak of the pandemic of 811, we are now down to 681, which is good for the cost to the

Council. And it's good for the people in homeless households that really don't want to be living in emergency accommodation any longer than needed.

(7) Councillor Mears – Audit of funds received

- 12.26 Councillor Mears asked, Brighton and Hove City Council has received government funding for just under £22 million for homeless and rough sleepers. We have asked for an audit at Housing Committee and Audit & Standards, but this was not agreed so we are delighted that the Homeless Reduction Board, chaired by Councillor David Gibson, has agreed to an audit. My question is around the time frame for this and the process of reporting back.
- 12.27 Councillor Yates replied, that would be a matter for the Homeless Reduction Board. I think it's best that Councillor Gibson deals with that, it won't be a matter for our internal Audit Team coming from some other pots of money.
- 12.28 Councillor Mears asked a supplementary question, I would like to thank Councillor Gibson because I believe he really understands the need for a clear, open and transparent audit to ensure this amount of £22 million that we've received from government is spent and how it's spent and also for the future, so we know where not to be spending money. My request, I will put back again, and perhaps if Councillor Gibson might like to answer, it really is around the reporting back and the timeline and the framework to ensure this does happen and it doesn't get kicked into the long grass and disappear.
- 12.29 The mayor noted that Councillor Gibson would reply to the supplementary question and sought confirmation that he would provide a written response.
- 12.30 Councillor Gibson replied, yes, I will provide the fullest possible answer.

(8) Councillor Childs – Former East Brighton gas works

- 12.31 Councillor Childs asked, the scoping report into the Black Rock gas works found evidence of significant quantities of asbestos, lead, complex cyanide and benzopyrene. The report holds that disturbance at the site will release dust to a radius of at least 500 meters, a conservative estimate. Given that two schools in significant residential areas are situated within a 500-meter radius, will the Council give an assurance to residents that local people will not be exposed to elevated background levels of lead and other toxic chemicals as a consequence of future development of the Black Rock site?
- 12.32 Councillor Osborne replied, that's a fairly technical question which I don't know all the detail for, what we can do is get the local planning authority and the local planning officers who are working on this to come to reply to you. I'm sure that there was a lot of work and there are a lot of details and documentation that has to be done for planning applications to be validated to go through. If the information hasn't been provided to you already or is it not available or isn't of good enough standard so I'm happy to work with you and the local planning authority to find you an answer.

12.33 Councillor Childs asked a supplementary question, given the high risks involved and evidence from unsafe decontamination of other former gas works in the UK? Would Council agree, as part of the process, to commission its own independent contamination survey, which will include recommendations to keep residents safe should the area be redeveloped?

12.34 Councillor Osborne replied, if there is an independent study, we have to have to ask the planning officers whether that would be something that they would think would be necessary. It sounds like an interesting idea, and I think we should take that to them.

(9) Councillor McNair – Patcham roundabout

12.35 Councillor McNair asked, after years of hard work in trying to get Patcham roundabout to look like a gateway the city can be proud of. In September 2021, Patcham councillors were told a major milestone had finally been reached and the plan to beautify the roundabout was almost agreed. What is still to be done to ensure Patcham roundabout becomes an attractive feature as soon as possible?

12.36 Councillor Osborne replied, I am aware of the project that was reported about the Patcham roundabout but I think it is a City Parks and highways that was talked about and that is not my side of contact, but we can get an answer and update on the project to you.

12.37 Councillor McNair asked a supplementary question, could we have a hard deadline for when this project will be completed. I am aware that you might not be able to do that now, but in writing within the next few days?

12.38 Councillor Osborne replied, we can ask officers that, and I am aware that there are ongoing discussions around your amendment which was for welcome signage and there are meetings that need to be organized for that this month, so I don't know whether that has caused any delays, but we can tie up those projects - the beautification project, the welcome signage in that meeting.

(10) Councillor Barnett – Hangleton Way schools' zone

12.39 Councillor Barnett asked, Schools, headteachers governors, traffic officers, and parents are all calling for the Council to install a proper pedestrian crossing at Hangleton way schools to improve safety for the children. This is what the Council promised when they relocated the King school to the site in 2019. However, it has never been delivered. All there is at the moment it's a red patch on the road which is not a proper crossing and is making the situation more dangerous. The local school community are unhappy with the responses from the Councillors Transport Department and feel they are being ignored. Would the chair of the committee offer to meet with me and my colleague Nick at the schools in Hangleton Way to listen to the schools the parents and their concerns?

12.40 Councillor Davis replied, I would.

12.41 Councillor Barnett asked a supplementary question, I didn't hear the reply though. The schools are also concerned about the inadequate signage on the school zone. The signage is so poor it is not clear at all to the motorists that they're entering the school zone. Will the Chair of the committee take steps to improve the signage in the vicinity? And please, could I have the answer to whether they're going to meet me at the school?

12.42 Councillor Davis replied, I am happy to and will bring a transport officer too so we can look at some of the signs around the school.

(11) Councillor Peltzer Dunn – Completion of seventy years of the Queen's reign

12.43 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked, could I refer their leader of the Council to page 69, question 18 in the agenda papers because I did ask a written question and of course no fault of his own. But the answer hasn't been published yet. Could the Leader kindly read out the answer that he has given to my written question in order that I may formulate my supplementary?

12.44 Councillor Mac Cafferty replied, the Policy, Partnerships and Scrutiny Team are working with teams across the council to develop and coordinate events and initiatives relating to the Jubilee. The high-level objectives of the group were set out as follows

- To coordinate the council and city response to Platinum Jubilee celebrations, with the emphasis on supporting communities to celebrate.
- To coordinate the specific response on initiatives that are council related e.g. lighting of the beacons, 'The Queen's Green Canopy', supporting communities with street parties, responding to other requests made by councillors or residents through the democratic process etc.
- To create a timetable of events that include those taking place across the city and to coordinate attendance to those events.

A preliminary report was taken to TECC committee in December outlining initial plans, with a subsequent report being prepared for committee on 10th March, which will contain further and more complete information.

The Council will support communities to hold street parties, participate in the lighting of Beacons, as well as the planting of trees as part of 'The Queen's Green Canopy' initiative.

We will have a dedicated pages on the council's website with relevant information, guidance and links for people to understand how they can take part, as well as a programme of events that are being held in the city. This information will be promoted across social media, in 'Homing In' - the council's newsletter mailed out to all council tenants and leaseholders - and the information will also be sent to local newspapers and community websites. Councillors will also be updated so can they share the information with their residents directly.

12.45 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked a supplementary question, we are getting very close to the date and it we're already talking about getting things put into plans for March, it's

leaving a bit late. Could I ask what specific celebrations the Council has organised for Sunday the 6th of February, which is probably one of the most important historical days that we will ever live through, the 70th anniversary of Her Majesty's accession?

- 12.46 Councillor Mac Cafferty replied, we will be launching the dedicated pages on the Council's website, the information that will be available will be launched for the accession on Sunday the 6th of February, which is the accession of the Queen to the Throne. So that will be there this weekend so that that that will be the recognition of the City Council.

**13 CLOSE OF MEETING**

- 13.1 The mayor thanked everyone for joining the meeting and noted that the full council meeting would start at 6.30pm; and closed the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 6.07pm

