

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 35

Subject: Written questions from councillors.

Date of meeting: 20 October 2022

Report of: Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

The following questions have been received from Councillors and will be taken as read along with the written answer detailed below:

1. Councillor Grimshaw

Removal of flooring and furniture in housing – The minutes of the Housing Committee held on 22 June 2022, presented to Housing Committee on 28 September 2022, under clause 10.4 read as follows:

“10.4 Councillor Evans was informed by the Assistant Director Housing Management that the removal of flooring was not done automatically when tenants move. Furniture recycling project was being expanded and flooring was being left in place now. The service has changed.”

With this in mind, can the Chair of Housing Committee please confirm the date that the furniture recycling project was expanded and flooring was being left in place as of?

Can the Chair of Housing please explain the process of how recycling is carried out? Does an officer attend properties and make judgements about what can be kept? If it is agreeable, for example, that flooring can be kept, who receives this information and how is this passed on to operatives who are tasked with clearance of properties?

What household items and items in the garden are considered as useful and beneficial to be kept in place? Can I have a list please? Is this list open to common sense situations where, for example, say a rotary washing line is left in a garden but it is not on a list, can an officer make the decision to keep it for the benefit of the new homeowner and to minimise waste? And if this decision is made who is responsible for ensuring it is kept and who has oversight?

Is the Chair of Housing aware of any properties where the recycling project guidelines have not been adhered to and why? Who checks up on properties to see if guidance has been followed and completed?

Is there a difference between recycling in council-tenanted local authority property and those being bought back under the Buy Back Scheme?

Does the Chair of Housing agree that items such as blinds, curtain poles, laminate flooring, vinyl and garden sheds and washing lines etc. are all items that could be considered to be of huge benefit to future tenants and that asking those selling back to BHCC under the Buy Back scheme to remove them is utterly wasteful and contributes to requests to the Brighton Fund where families frequently ask for help – especially with flooring?

Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chair of the Housing Committee

2. Councillor Grimshaw

Do Brighton & Hove City Council provide any supported housing accommodation for vulnerable people that qualify for 'Exempt Accommodation'? If so can I request an update of which of the providers and which accommodation this is and how many residents are housed with 'exempt accommodation' in the city and the financial impact?

Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chair of the Housing Committee

3. Councillor Grimshaw

Please can the Chair of Housing explain why Councillors no longer receive two-weekly Homemove advert cycle updates? Can this situation be rectified and updates sent as previously?

Can the Chair of housing give an update on any issues with residents accessing Homemove - as social media feedback is showing there are a lot of accessibility issues with people being locked out and unable to bid for various reasons?

Reply from Councillor Gibson / Hugh-Jones, Joint Chair of the Housing Committee

4. Councillor O'Quinn

What has been the cost of the materials and human resources put in place to support Homewood School since it was placed in special measures in late 2021?

Reply from Councillor Allbrooke, Chair of the Children, Young People & Skills Committee

5. Councillor O'Quinn

Will the pruning of street tree side shoots, some of which are now mini-hedges, take place this Autumn and if not, why not?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Heley, Joint Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

6. Councillor O'Quinn

A number of drains are blocked by weeds and soil in Goldsmid Ward and other areas of the city. In heavy rain these drains will be unable to divert water as they should and this will cause flooding. What is the planned schedule for dealing with this issue?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Heley, Joint Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

7. Councillor Wilkinson

Can the Co-Chairs of the Environment, Transport and Sustainability Committee explain why they have decided to limit the number of member-involved written questions at recent meetings and is this decision replicated in other council committees and council?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Heley, Joint Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

8. Councillor Wilkinson

The national Green Party co-leader recently said that he would back Brighton and Hove's Green administration if it held a referendum to raise council tax by more than 3%.

Has the administration given any consideration to raising council tax by more than 3%?

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

9. Councillor Wilkinson

The cost-of-living pressures currently facing councils are immense with many facing considerable challenges in sustaining essential services because of the rising costs of energy and other inflationary pressures. Many of these, for example libraries, leisure centres and community hubs-are the very services that people depend on to stay healthy and connected, and to access advice and support.

Will the Leader of the Council confirm that there will be no cuts to the city's library services, including to the splendid renaissance style Carnegie Hove library?

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

10. Councillor Wilkinson

In light of the cost of living crisis, what plans does the Council have to (a) support residents to access help with energy bills and (b) to help the extremely large number of residents who very likely will not be able to afford to heat their homes, in particular how vulnerable residents will be supported and whether 'warm banks' in Council-owned buildings are being planned?

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

11. Councillor Wilkinson

Will the Leader of the Council explain what help is being considered by the council for people who find themselves struggling with the rising cost of living but are not in groups previously classed as vulnerable?

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

12. Councillor Wilkinson

Will the Leader of the Council outline what steps the administration is taking to support disabled people who are disproportionately affected by the rising cost of living?

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

13. Councillor Wilkinson

Is the council considering grant funding to organisations working with those affected by the cost-of-living crisis, such as food services, money and debt advice organisations, networks for older people and vulnerable adults and those working with families in need?

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

14. Councillor Grimshaw

Procurement – At At P&R on the 29th July 2022, the recommendation from the cross party working group looking to procurement recommended that any future procurement that affects people with protected characteristics and will have impact politically on the city should involve councillors. Also Community Wealth Building must be taken into account.

Has this taken place with the procurement of the old brewery Portslade? Why have third sector organisations in the city lost contracts to a charity from the north of England?

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

15. Councillor Fishleigh

How much Council Tax was billed for 2022/23 and to how many homes in the marina, Roedean, Ovingdean, Rottingdean and West Saltdean? Please would you break out the info by area.

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

16. Councillor Bell

Twin Victoria monuments

There is concern for current state of the city's heritage in the Old Steine Gardens and Victoria Gardens precinct and a strong sense among residents and their associations that this council has stopped caring for our heritage.

Under this Council, the City's twin Victoria monuments have been allowed to enter into disrepair and veterans have reported that the Old Steine War Memorial has not been cleaned ahead of important commemorations on several occasions.

The Twin Victoria monuments include the Victoria Fountain and the Queen Victoria Statue. The Victoria Fountain dates back to 1846 and the Victoria statue to 1897. The Fountain was last restored between 1990 and 1995, when it was reopened by Prince Charles on his visit to the City. This is recorded in a plaque at the base of the Victoria Fountain.

The Victoria Fountain (a grade II listed structure) was last switched off by the Council in 2019 at the end of the summer season. It was not switched back on because it was found to be listing and tilting. This situation was not helped when the Council allowed a giant ferris wheel and other heavy fairground equipment to be stationed next to the fountain during last year's Brighton Christmas Festival. After the equipment was removed a sinkhole and several depressions appeared in the surface of the fragile Old Steine Gardens, which had been turned into a muddy quagmire. It seems there was little thought for the Victoria Fountain which was known by the council to be tilting and in need of repairs. This caused public outcry from the Old Steine Community Association.

In the 2022-3 City Budget, £250,000 was secured to fix the Victoria Fountain. A timeline was set out by the Council in its February briefing for undertaking this work. It was stated that between June and November the following would be undertaken:

Contract mobilisation, site set up for works, hoardings erected, crane moved in. Fountain to be dismantled in specific order for repair by specialist sub-contractor. Electrical and water repairs to be carried out.

Fountain to be re-assembled in specific order.

The plan was for the site to be made good in December.

It would appear the council is behind in this repair schedule as there are currently no signs of any hoardings at the site and the Fountain still sits covered in weeds and graffiti, awaiting repairs.

Further up Valley Gardens, the Victoria Statue has also fallen into disrepair and there have been a number of reports in the press recently following the arm of the statue falling off. There has been no explanation from the Council as to why this occurred.

Monuments such as the Victoria Fountain and Statue are highly valued by local residents and visitors to the city alike and a source of city pride. For most local authorities, such wonderful heritage assets would be looked after and be centrepieces of public parks.

It is a great shame that the Council is not maintaining or looking after its heritage. Under this Council we have seen an the city's historic lamps put up for sale on facebook marketplace and Madeira Terraces fall further into delapidation.

The Conservatives want to see a city that respects its heritage. My belief is, if you don't respect the past, then you have no investment in the future.

Can the Chair please outline:

- a) What is the current status of the budgeted work to repair Victoria Fountain?
- b) What was the cause of the damage to Victoria statue? Has CCTV been reviewed to determine what caused the damage?
- c) What is the current status of the work to repair Victoria Statue?

Reply from Councillor Osborne / Powell, Joint Chair of the Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee

17. Councillor Nemeth

Public Toilets

In its briefing on 6th October the Council announced that it would be closing 10 of the City's public toilets over the course of the winter season, which the Council defines as the period between 1 October 2022 and Good Friday (7 April 2023). The reason given was 'the measures are needed to effectively manage the public toilet budget'.

These 10 public toilets that the council is closing for the next 6 months are listed as:

- Blaker's Park
- Easthill Park
- Queen's Park
- Rottingdean Recreation Ground
- Royal Pavilion Gardens
- Stanmer Village
- The Level
- Vale Park
- West Pier Arches
- Wild Park

In addition to these 10 closures, the Council has stated that a further 3 public toilets will also close while awaiting refurbishment (King's Esplanade in Hove, Saltdean Undercliff and Station Road in Portslade).

This means that 13 out of the city's 31 public toilet blocks (over 40% of the City's public toilet facilities) will be closed to the public over the next 6 months.

This is unacceptable and has not been properly explained by the Council. Other Councils are keeping their public toilets open and in good condition all year round. Brighton & Hove City Council is classified as a high taxing local authority and charges some of the highest council tax rates in the country. Residents should be receiving a better service for their high council tax contributions.

This follows the summer when there have been recurring stories in the local newspaper of the poor state of the public conveniences

Will the Chair:

- a) Provide a further explanation as to why Brighton & Hove City Council is closing 40% of its public toilets over the next 6 months;
- b) Advise if any other measures will be put in place to compensate for the closures; and

- c) Outline which public toilets are due to be upgraded over the next 12 months and whether this includes the notorious Pavilion Gardens toilets?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Heley, Joint Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

18. Councillor Meadows

Carden park in Hollingbury has an excellent new playground, while Mackie Park's new playground, close to three schools, has had less money spent on it and has been disappointing to many parents and children. When will the new consultation for Mackie park be held? How much will be spent on the upgrade? Can we be assured the equipment will be for older children? And when will Vale Avenue park be upgraded?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Heley, Joint Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

19. Councillor Lewry

City Clean breakdowns

It has now been one year since the Brighton & Hove bin strikes that took place from 5-19 October 2021 and there are still major problems with the services that residents are receiving.

One issue we are seeing lately in Hangleton is the regular break-downs of city clean bin lorries midway through their routes. After these breakdowns, the areas of the round not completed are never returned to by other vehicles and residents are left with overflowing bins for the week.

Other excuses given to residents so far include that the council forgot to charge the city clean vehicle fully or that the weather was becoming too hot.

I am aware of several areas that have been affected by problems up to 9 times this year. Some examples of the problems with the service include:

- **Meads Avenue** - 3 missed bin collections, with overflowing rubbish and lots of flies during the summer.
- **Lark Hill, Park Rise and High Park Avenue** - 9 missed collections so far this year. With nothing being collected until the usual day the week after the problem or breakdown, residents are left in the lurch. They have had enough and want answers.
- **The Community bins at Harmsworth Crescent** - These were overflowing on the day of the Queen's funeral when the community centre was showing the funeral in its entirety for residents to sit with others so not to be alone and also for residents to enjoy some complimentary tea and homemade cakes. Contents of the overflowing bins were strewn all over the ground with rats, seagulls

and foxes having a field day. Residents had to clear the site filling five black bags before the event started.

Can the Chair advise:

- a. How many city clean mid-round breakdowns have been recorded in the past twelve months since the bin strikes concluded?
- b. Is there is a problem with the road worthiness of the city clean fleet that services the Hangleton area?
- c. Can a policy be put in place whereby rounds impacted by breakdowns or other issues such as 'hot weather' or 'failure to charge vehicles beforehand' are fully completed by other vehicles when this occurs?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Heley, Joint Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

20. Councillor Bagaeen

Gateway signage projects

Projects to install large gateway signage and artwork at several key entry points across the city to welcome tourists and provide a sense of place for locals as well were agreed to at the City Budget in 2021-2.

Funding for these projects was secured by the Conservative Group as part of a package of proposals aimed at boosting the City's tourism industry and restoring civic pride post-pandemic.

The proposals budgeted and agreed to included the following:

- a) New signage installations were agreed for the City's three main gateway train stations at Brighton, Hove and Portslade, the entry points for many visitors
- b) Additional signage and an iconic piece of welcoming artwork was proposed for the Patcham Roundabout for those arriving in the City by car.
- c) A second set of signage for the seafront, with iconic 'Brighton' and 'Hove' signs - similar to those in other cities around the world that lend themselves to social media and go onto promote the City as a destination - set to be commissioned

All these measures were designed to help attract overnight visitors, with more to do, rather than just day visitors to the city, with a flow on boost to the city's £886m tourism sector, which is such a big part of the City's overall economy. We also hope this gateway signage will help to lift city pride.

In the last update received (December 2021) the Council advised that planning and commissioning phases had begun and that a long list of artists was being developed in partnership with Brighton's Centre for Contemporary Art for which is part of the University of Brighton. A project manager was to be appointed to work on the site negotiation and development of artworks. The artists' brief had been expanded to explore ideas of welcome through different artforms such as sculpture, painting and installations.

Can the Chair please provide an update to all Councillors on the status of the above Gateway signage projects as it has been a significant amount of time since the last time Councillors were updated on this matter.

Reply from Councillor Osborne / Powell, Joint Chair of the Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee

21. Councillor McNair

Patcham & Hollingbury dog poo bins

Many of the dog poo bins around Patcham & Hollingbury ward, for example at Greenfield Crescent, have suddenly been removed by the Council without warning.

As a result of these removals the remaining dog poo bins in the ward are overflowing and other areas are a mess, with examples of dog poo bins being left on residents' walls. Places where bins are overflowing include: Rotherfield Crescent, Keymer Road, Chelwood Close (2); Horsdean Recreation Ground (2); Wilmington Way and Carden Park.

The dog poo bins still there also look in poor condition. Patcham and Hollingbury has many dog walkers so we desperately need new bins to make it easier for the waste to be disposed of. The vast majority of dog walkers take dog poo home but bins should be provided.

There are hardly any bins near prime dog walking sites such as the nature reserve at the top of Ladies Mile where they are really needed.

Can the Chair please advise:

- a) How many dog poo bins have been removed from the Patcham & Hollingbury ward this year?
- b) Why have they been removed without being replaced?
- c) Will the removed dog poo bins eventually be replaced?
- d) Is there a plan for bigger dog poo bins to be installed in Patcham & Hollingbury ward in the near future?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Heley, Joint Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

22. Councillor Barnett

Benfield Valley

Residents are unhappy with several issues at Benfield Valley which remain unresolved, including (a) dumped chalk and (b) the damaged flint wall next to Benfield Barn.

The Chalk was dumped in April 2021 but still hasn't been removed, despite an enforcement notice having been issued by the council at the time. The historic flint wall behind Benfield Barn has been in a state of disrepair for a similar amount of time after being partially destroyed.

Can the Chair please provide an update on the council's progress relating to:

- a) The implementation of enforcement notice issued by the Council to have the dumped chalk on Benfield Valley removed.
- b) Organising the repair of the historic flint wall at Benfield Barn.

Reply from Councillor Davis / Heley, Joint Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

23. Councillor Simson

In January, residents of McWilliam Road Woodingdean were left unhappy after pavements were left in a patchwork state following the contractual work to install fibre optic broadband.

Holes in the pavements were covered over with tarmac, leaving mismatched walkways.

Back in January when concerns were raised, the Council indicated that its policy on the restoration of pavements had been breached and that it would work with the company to redress the issues and ensure the finished surface was consistent in future.

This however hasn't solved the situation on McWilliam Road, which remains a patchwork of tarmac and paving slabs.

Can the Chair advise whether McWilliam Road will be resurfaced and restored to a consistent surface, as should have happened in line with the Council's policy on restoring pavements?

Supporting information:

<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/19865456.construction-works-leave-woodingdean-residents-furious/>

Reply from Councillor Davis / Heley, Joint Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

24. Councillor Theobald

Parking revenue

Since the last Council Elections how many roads have had bicycle lanes introduced in place of car parking and how much annual income has been lost by the loss of parking fees?

How many roads are proposed to have bicycle lanes and what will be the amount of annual income that will be lost by the Council from removing the car parking?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Heley, Joint Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

25. Councillor Brown

Ongoing parking issues in Nevill Avenue & Nevill Road

Residents are unhappy that at the most recent Environment, Transport and Sustainability Committee meeting, the Chair voted against their request for an officer report to explore solutions to ongoing parking issues in Nevill Avenue and Nevill Road, without providing any explanation why.

The residents spent a great deal of time preparing their deputation in good faith, which was dutifully presented to the full council and then referred to the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee meeting in accordance with the Council procedures. They do deserve a response as to why the Chair and the Administration voted against a report.

Can you please provide the reason why the Greens voted against such a report into addressing ongoing parking issues on Nevill Avenue and Nevill Road?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Heley, Joint Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

26. Councillor Nemeth

Speed Trials

Despite the great efforts of the organisers of the Brighton Speed Trials, there was huge disappointment again amongst motor-racing enthusiasts concerning the non-participation of motorcycles.

The decision to not allow motorcycles ultimately stems from a decision by the Auto-Cycle Union (ACU) to not grant a track licence following concerns about surface materials. Last year, there were concerns about the green

cycle lane. This year, there were concerns over the type of white paint that has been used for line markings.

The ACU has clearly stated that there are suitable types of white paint which are available for the job in question.

Given that this Council resolved to ensure that this event continues – with no excuses or caveats – please detail precisely what conversations and meetings took place (with dates) with the appropriate licensing authorities prior to the paint being administered.

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

27. Councillor Nemeth

Welcome Back Fund

A response to a written question at Full Council on 7th April 2022 confirmed broad funding arrangements for the five high streets to which the Welcome Back Fund applied.

The project included both planting and street-cleaning elements.

Please now provide a full breakdown of costings for each street along with an explanation as to why plants were picked that immediately died.

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council

28. Councillor Theobald

A27 litter clean-up operation

It was good to see a five-night council operation to clear A27 roadside litter take place from 26-31 September between Portslade junction and Falmer.

Can the Chair provide an update on the results of this including the following:

- a) How much litter was removed?
- b) Did the council identify where the litter mostly came from (for example construction materials or general rubbish) and will any further action taken based on these conclusions?
- c) What was the cost of this 5-day litter clearing effort to the budget?
- d) How many times per year are these operations carried out and at what annual budgeted cost?

Reply from Councillor Davis / Heley, Joint Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee

29. Councillor Atkinson

Preparing for winter and the fuel/cost of living crisis – vulnerable elderly people

Can you outline what plans the council are putting in place for elderly and other vulnerable residents, who may be in fuel poverty, to keep warm this winter?

Are we looking to offer public buildings as a warm haven for residents and, if so, how will this be publicised?

Also, are we also looking to use facilities such as sheltered accommodation lounges and other council buildings?

How can we facilitate travel to these facilities if and when they are available?

Reply from Councillor Mac Cafferty, Leader of the Council