

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 54

Subject: Petition for Debate

Date of meeting: 15 December 2022

Report of: Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources

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Ward(s) affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 Under the Council's Petition Scheme if a petition contains more than 1,250 signatures and is not petition requesting officer evidence, it will be debated by the Full Council.
- 1.2 The e-petition has resulted in triggering a debate at the council meeting, having exceeded the threshold with a total of 1,359 signatures confirmed at the time of printing the report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the petition is noted and referred to the Children, Young People & Skills Committee for consideration.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION / CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

3.1 The Petition:

Save Bright Start - Brighton's City-Centre Council-Run Nursery!

This is a petition against the planned closure of Bright Start Nursery in Barrack Yard. We refute the rationale set out by the council for the closure and instead believe that closing the nursery deprives the city of an essential service and further disadvantages the city's vulnerable population.

The global pandemic and political turmoil of the past few years has had a significant impact on children under 5, and throughout this period the staff at Bright Start have been exemplary in providing support and care to all children who go there, allowing many key workers with families to work essential jobs during lockdowns and beyond. The skills and expertise of the staff reflect a track record of providing high quality care to children in Brighton for several decades. Shutting down Bright Start would show a total lack of regard for the wellbeing and dedication of the staff who have given so much to our community over the years.

As one of only a few council-run services in the town centre, Bright Start provides affordable, accessible childcare for parents throughout the city, many of whom work in the city centre, but also many of whom commute to work outside of Brighton. It's central location close to public transport routes makes it accessible to families without cars. In fact, Brighton has very few nurseries who provide care all year round, for all children aged 3months-5years, from 8am-6pm every day. Bright Start is one of them. Losing this kind of care will impact families who have to work long hours, single-parent families, and families who cannot afford to take longer periods of parental leave.

The staff at Bright Start also have specialist knowledge and training in dealing with a range of children with complex medical, disability and special educational needs. At a time when many of the other services for children with additional needs are being squeezed, closing down the nursery will mean depriving them of one of the few remaining sources of support available to them. Furthermore continuity of care is essential for the well-being of these young children, some of whom face the extra upheaval of having to find a new nursery for only a few months before they then move on to primary school.

We do not believe the council has sufficiently considered the significant impact that the closure of Bright Start will have, not only on the staff and families of the children who currently go there, but on the community as a whole. There are not enough suitable childcare settings that equal the provisions that Bright Start can offer to such a diverse range of needs. Moving the more than 50 children who currently go to Bright Start to the few other nurseries that provide comparable care (if that is even possible) would decrease the staff:children ratios at these nurseries creating further strain on already over-stretched services. We believe Bright Start needs to be kept open in order to provide essential services for all families in the city and its closure will be a huge loss to Brighton.

Lead Petitioner – Suda Perera

4. PROCEDURE:

- 4.1 The petition will be debated at the Council meeting in accordance with the agreed protocol:
- (i) The Lead petitioner will be invited by the Mayor to present the petition and will have up to 3 minutes in which to outline the petition and confirm the number of signatures;
 - (ii) The Mayor will then open the matter up for debate by councillors for period of 15 minutes and will first call on the relevant Committee Chair to respond to the petition and move a proposed response. The Mayor will then call on those councillors who have indicated a desire to speak in the matter, before calling on the relevant Committee Chair to respond to the debate;
 - (iii) An amendment to the recommendation in paragraph 2.1 of the report or to add additional recommendations should be submitted by 10.00am on

the day of the meeting; otherwise it will be subject to the Mayor's discretion as to being appropriate. Any such amendment will need to be formally moved and seconded at the meeting;

- (iv) After the 15 minutes set aside for the debate, the Mayor will then formally put:
- (v) (a) Any amendments in the order in which they are moved, and
- (b) The substantive recommendation(s) as amended (if amended).

