

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
STRATEGY, FINANCE & CITY REGENERATION COMMITTEE

2.00pm 4 AUGUST 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sankey (Chair). Goldsmith, McGregor, McNair, Muten, Pumm, Robins, Rowkins, Thomson and Williams

PART ONE

39 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

a Declarations of substitutes

39.1 Cllr Goldsmith was present as a substitute for Cllr Shanks

Cllr McGregor was present as a substitute for Cllr Cattell

Cllr Thomson was present as a substitute for Cllr Taylor

b Declarations of interests

39.2 Cllr Robins declared that he was a Trustee of the Royal Pavilion & Museums Trust. The Monitoring Officer advised that they should leave the Chamber during the discussion of Item 45A Royal Pavilion Estate Capital Project Phase 2.

c Exclusion of the press and public

39.3 In accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the Act"), the Committee considered whether the public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any item of business on the grounds that it is likely in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during it, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act.

39.4 **RESOLVED** – There were no Part Two items on the agenda and so the public were not excluded from the meeting.

40 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

40.1 The Chair gave the following communication:

Good afternoon everyone. There are three reports before us to today, on the Royal Albion Fire, the Accessibility Strategy and the Royal Pavilion Garden bid.

Royal Albion Fire

I would like to start the meeting by thanking the emergency services and our first response team here at the Council for their brilliant response to the Royal Albion Hotel Fire. The fire took hold on a hot and windy day last month in a 219 bedroom, 6 storey, 3 wing hotel. The fire service, our wider partners and our council's emergency response was excellent, evacuating people safely, standing up a rest centre at the Brighton Centre, extinguishing the fire, salvaging as much of the historic and iconic hotel as possible and securing the site so that partial demolition could take place.

I also want to pay tribute to our residents, businesses and visitors for their patience and understanding, at the time of the fire and over the course of our demolition work. The outcome could have been very different if it wasn't for the professionalism of our public servant first responders. I visited East Sussex Fire & Rescue on Monday 24th July to give our thanks to them for their outstanding response. Over 50 appliances and 200 community firefighters attended, putting themselves at risk to keep us safe.

I also visited the demolition site on the same day to see our operation for itself. I was hugely impressed by the painstaking and difficult work going on to secure the site. Parts of the building were incredibly fragile and the iterative operation is fraught with complexity. I was impressed by the work of our Building Control team and our contractors. As the report notes, decisions were taken swiftly to enable us to make the building safe and officers are already working to recover our costs from the owners of the hotel and their insurers. I have been kept updated and involved at every step from the moment the fire started and I am confident that this work is being done diligently.

Accessibility Strategy

This is Brighton & Hove's first Accessible City Strategy. The aim of the strategy is to put accessibility at the heart of how we design and deliver all our services and make it easier for everyone, particularly the elderly and the disabled, to get the council services they need and to be able to enjoy the city.

The strategy includes those people who have visible and invisible disabilities, for example those who are deaf or neurodivergent, who live in, work or visit Brighton & Hove. The strategy is intentionally focused on developing a holistic, integrated systemic approach to change that will shift how the council thinks and works as a service provider and employer.

The council recognised it needed to develop a more strategic approach to accessibility and disability inclusivity rather than piecemeal, inconsistent, stop-start changes and improvements.

This strategy will start the council on a path towards fully addressing the issues faced by disabled people in the city. Crucially we are adopting an approach based on the social model of disability. Accessibility will be a default consideration informing how we think, practice, and deliver.

We want to go beyond compliance with the Equality Act, identifying opportunities and actions to go above and beyond.

We will actively identify, remove, and prevent the creation of barriers. Our Administration is committed to the mantra that every individual in our City has the right to reach their full potential and to thrive. This is in sharp contrast to the Green Administration which seemed content with ignoring the rights of disabled residents. The Disability News Service – a national media outlet – reported in May that the full pedestrianisation of Gardner Street has left a disabled resident imprisoned in her home. We are now undertaking urgent work to end this imprisonment and to bring about changes that will allow our resident to enter and leave her property.

Royal Pavilion Gardens Bid

I am delighted that following the completion of our stunning Corn Exchange, we are now moving to our Phase 2 bid – an application for £4.4 million to the National Lottery Heritage Fund - for the Royal Pavilion Estate which is before us today.

This bid is an ambitious restoration of our unique and historic Royal Pavilion Garden. It includes plans for new plants and pathways, an education hub, original railings that will give the Garden a greater sense of place and it is part of the wider project to tie this estate together and to ensure that it works in harmony.

Importantly – and I note the huge resident interest in this – our Administration has decided to allocate £250, 000 to a brand new Pavilion Gardens public toilet which will include a Changing Places toilet. The Royal Pavilion Gardens are at our epicentre and are a key visitor location in the City. Groups, Tours, elderly and disabled residents and visitors frequent the Pavilion Garden Café and need an accessible toilet. In the meantime we are working hard to ensure that there are accessible toilets available in the Garden. Additionally, following the end of the Van Gogh exhibition at the Corn Exchange the public will be able to use the toilets there.

Significantly, our Administration has also decided that 24 hour access to the Gardens must be retained. This is a public park and it must remain public. Once a lockable gate is built, whatever the original intention, it would have begun a slide towards the Gardens being closed off to the public for events and fundamentally changed the nature of this majestic public realm.

We recognise concerns about ASB in the Gardens and surrounding areas which is why we are now pressing ahead with plans to bring partners together to address this issue and its underlying complexities, including identifying greater funding to tackle the challenge. Benches and gardens don't create ASB and removing them doesn't end it, it merely displaces it. We need a proper strategy to tackle street homelessness, addiction and mental health.

We hope this bid is successful.

Following this stage we anticipate a third bid for the estate. As an Administration we are fully committed to doing what we can to ensure that the two new statues proposed by residents for the Gardens can be made and exhibited. The first is the Indian Soldiers statue – a monument to our brave soldiers who fought in WW1, many of whom were

later nursed at the Pavilion. The second is a statue of Mary Clarke, the first suffragette to die for a women's right to vote who lived in our City. Both statues provide vital historical context for the Garden. They will prevent the risk that it becomes a colonial era garden and instead help connect the women of this City and our Global Majority communities with their heritage – in pride of place in our world-class Royal Palace estate.

41 CALL OVER

41.1 **RESOLVED:** All items on the agenda were reserved for discussion.

42 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

42.1 There were no Petitions or Deputations.

42.2 Mr R Lowe submitted a Written Question for the meeting but was unable to attend, and so a written response was provided.

The question and response:

Question:

Will the information that is detailed in the accessibility strategy fully address the issues faced disabled people in the city?

Response:

The strategy sets out the council's vision and aims for advancing the accessibility of the council and the city. The strategy is intentionally focused on developing a holistic, integrated systemic approach to change that will shift how the council thinks and works as a service provider and employer. The council recognised it needed to develop a more strategic approach to accessibility and disability inclusivity rather than piecemeal, inconsistent, stop-start changes and improvements. This strategy will start the council on a path towards fully addressing the issues faced by disabled people in the city. The period for the strategy is five years; to fully address issues will take longer and the council is committed to change beyond these first five years. The work we do towards meeting the aims of the strategy should start to address the barriers and poorer outcomes that disabled people experience. We are adopting an approach based on the social model of disability. Accessibility will be a default consideration informing how we think, practice, and deliver. We want to go beyond compliance with the Equality Act, identifying opportunities and actions to go above and beyond. We will actively identify, remove, and prevent the creation of barriers. We will adopt inclusive design as standard for services, projects, policies etc; to be barrier-free as a matter of course. We will make inclusive adjustments for individuals where barriers remain. We will adopt the approach of 'Nothing without us', and continuously improving current engagement practice. We will take an intersectional approach; recognising some D/deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse people face multiple layers of barriers because of their additional intersecting identities, for example their ethnicity, legal status, class, sexual orientation, faith, gender.

The strategy sets out our vision and our aims. Alongside it sits actions that the five directorates of the council will pursue over the strategy's lifetime. Such actions include (see strategy for full list of actions):

- Create a Good Practice Design Guidance to identify opportunities and set out priorities to improve access in and around the city's built environment.
- In environment, economy and culture directorate train and upskill our understanding as individuals, the leadership team and services via learning and development delivered by the lived experience of disabled people's organisations.
- Evaluate and review current engagement, consultation and coproduction arrangements across Families, Children and Learning directorate, ensuring it hears from disabled and other not heard groups.
- Ensure all health and adult social care commissions include accessibility statements and all services must assure us that they meet the accessibility standards required.
- Review Direct Payments service based on engagement activity considering for accessibility.
- Develop and implement a toolkit to encourage businesses to become more accessible for older people and people with dementia.
- Identify best practice in accessible and inclusive council housing design and ensure that this is reflected in our approach to solving maintenance, housing, and building access issues including day-to-day repairs and capital works, as well as new build, and approach to building design and maintenance.

43 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

43.1 There were no Petitions, Written Questions, Letters or Notices of Motion

44 ACCESSIBLE CITY STRATEGY

44.1 The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities regarding the Council's Accessible City Strategy.

44.2 Members were pleased to note that regular updates and reviews on the Strategy would be brought to the Equalities, Community Safety & Human Rights Committee.

44.3 Members suggested that officers look at providing a more accessible format for the Strategy and any updates be presented in a way that met the full spectrum of accessibility needs. Officers said that discussions would be held with the Chair of the Equalities, Community Safety & Human Rights Committee as to when the updates would be provided, but it would certainly be on an annual basis, and any updates would be provided in an accessible format. Resident and community scrutiny was important, and officers were looking at different ways of communicating progress and one way was to set up an Equalities Hub on the Council's website where the public can find out what the Council was doing. However not everyone was online and so officers were continuing to work with groups to provide information through different channels.

44.4 Members asked if there would be a survey of accessibility across the city. Officers said that they would be happy to discuss this further.

- 44.5 Members said that some residents had difficulty accessing council services, with limited in person customer service and some telephone lines only being open until 1pm, and asked if the strategy would mean that in person customer service would be increased to later in the evening and at weekends and the phone lines open for longer. Officers said that no specific plans to do this had been discussed, but it was important to ensure that we were responding to the communication requirements of residents. A survey had been undertaken of services across the council on what was being provided, and whether changes were needed.
- 44.6 Members recalled that a number of years ago there was a scheme where able bodied people could put heavy weights on their legs and arms etc to show how difficult it could be to move when you had a disability and asked if such a scheme was still available whether it could be introduced to councillors. Officers said they would look into that.
- 44.7 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee approved the Accessible City Strategy

45 ROYAL ALBION HOTEL FIRE: CONTRACTS AND WORKS REQUIRED

- 45.1 The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture which set out the decisions taken to date, including officer urgency decisions making powers, following the fire at the Royal Albion Hotel on 15 July 2023.
- 45.2 Members noted that there were eight households who had been displaced and still weren't able to return to their homes. Officers said that now the council had completed demolition of the south elevation and made the area safe, and were now working on the north elevation and when completed tenants and residents would be able to move back to their homes. Staff were liaising with Britannia Hotels on a daily basis to encourage their support for residents.
- 45.3 Members asked when the A259 would reopen and were advised that the west bound carriage was now open, but the east bound carriage was still closed from Poole Valley. It was hoped that it would fully open as soon as possible but due to the unstable structure the timeframe couldn't be confirmed.
- 45.4 Members asked if the Council would review feedback from residents on the communications provided from the Council and were advised that they would.
- 45.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee –
1. Noted decisions made to date by officers to address the fire at the Royal Albion Hotel, Kings Road, Brighton, to make the building and the surrounding site safe, including the use of Officer Urgency Powers;
 2. Delegated authority to the Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture to enter into contracts necessary to carry out the works;
 3. Delegated authority to the Executive Director Economy Environment & Culture to complete the works required by the Notice served under section 78 of the Building Act

1984 and to then hand the site back to the owners and to seek full recompense for all costs to the council.

4. Approved the actions taken so far and authorises the Executive Director for Economy, Environment & Culture to take all other steps necessary or incidental to securing the safety of the public and the building.

A 45A ROYAL PAVILION ESTATE CAPITAL PROJECT PHASE 2

45A.1 Councillor Robins left the Chamber during discussion and voting on this item.

45A.2 The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture which provided an update on the planned Phase 2 works to the Royal Pavilion Estate Garden.

45A.3 Members suggested that the availability of public toilets at the Corn Exchange and Dome be publicised more. Officers said they would take that forward but said that whilst the toilets were open most days if there was an event taking place the public couldn't access those buildings and use the facilities.

45A.4 Members asked how confident the Council was that the bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) would be successful. Officers said the Council had a long partnership with the NLHF and they had been very supportive and believed that it would be successful. It was noted that this was the only Royal Palace in the hands of a local authority.

45A.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee –

1. Noted the planned submission by RPMT and the council of the National Lottery Heritage Fund Round 2 bid for the capital works with the project aims set out in paragraph 3.5.
2. Agreed that a contribution of up to £0.250m from capital funds set aside by Budget Council for toilet refurbishment is made to this project. Details are set out in paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9.
3. Delegated authority to the Executive Director Economy, Environment and Culture to agree the final value of the contribution up to £0.250m for new public toilets to be included in the project;
4. Delegated authority to the Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture, subject to a successful National Lottery Heritage Fund Round 2 bid and the requirements laid out in paragraph 3.12 and 3.13, for the council to procure and appoint a Main Contractor to carry out the restoration works to the Royal Pavilion Garden within the project cost plan;

5. Noted the Garden restoration proposals include the reinstatement of the boundary railing but that 24 hour public access to the Garden will be maintained as described in paragraph 3.3 and further discussions to agree a strategy for addressing anti-social behaviour in the city centre as described in paragraph 3.4.

46 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

- 46.1 **RESOLVED** – There were no Part Two items on the agenda

47 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL

- 47.1 **RESOLVED:** No items were referred to the next meeting of Full Council due to be held on 19 October 2023.

The meeting concluded at 2.55pm