

Fairness Commission – BSL video (Part 2)

Travel and the environment

People said that travel around the city was very important. They thought it was very important for people with additional needs so they could go to activities and be able to enjoy all the things in the city just like everyone else. People said it helped stop older or disabled people being isolated. Residents said some of the bus routes were not good – like the bus routes between different neighbourhoods across the city - and that the bus fares were very high.

Older people and disabled people who could not walk to a bus stop wanted better community transport and many people said the community transport wasn't sufficient for them. People who needed support to go out and didn't have money for taxis felt very isolated without community transport.

Residents also wanted the city's parks and green spaces to be kept well maintained and clean with suitable essential things such as benches and toilets. Without these, it was difficult to go out to parks. They said that residents should do more to keep the pavements and parks clean and not to throw litter. But they said the council should take responsibility for rubbish collection and recycling.

Many people, especially older and disabled people and mothers with children, said that there were too many obstructions on pedestrian routes – things like advertising boards and tables and chairs outside cafes. They said that this made it very difficult for them to get around the city.

Recommendations

We make 2 recommendations:

- Firstly, we are asking the council, the Brighton & Hove Bus Company and other bus operators in the city, to ensure that there is better awareness of existing discount arrangements.
- Secondly, we are asking the city council and its partners to invite proposals from suitable Social Enterprises or appropriate organisations that can deliver better community transport in the city.

Housing

Housing was the most important thing for the council to improve. Residents told us of high rents, houses and flats that were in very poor condition with damp. They told us that very high rents made it difficult for people to manage on low incomes and stay out of debt. It was also making more people homeless.

Many people had to choose between heating their home or eating and this was really bad for children – it stopped them doing well at school and was bad for their health. It is important to make all homes energy efficient and this would help many families who need support.

The shortage of housing stops many local people, especially the sons and daughters of the city, to have their own home.

Recommendations

The shortage of affordable and decent housing in Brighton & Hove is a cause of inequality.

The Fairness Commission makes recommendations for action by the city council, landlords, the Universities and the Clinical Commissioning Group. We also make recommendations to national government, to help the city provide the homes needed and to ensure good standards and affordability for homebuyers and for renters.

We are asking the city council to offer council-owned land to housing co-operatives, self-build groups and community land trusts to develop affordable social housing with the guarantee it will go to local people.

We are asking the council and partners to look at creating low-cost and “meanwhile” housing quickly for homeless people on temporary sites, like Preston Barracks, using converted sea containers that can be moved to other sites when necessary.

We recommend an ethical lettings agency for the city for private rented housing similar to Let to Birmingham which offers “a range of services for landlords including Let Only or Full Property Management, and matching with suitable tenants.”

Finally, we would like the council to develop and publish an Action Plan to ensure full implementation of the new Housing Strategy and report back regularly on progress.

Recommendations for national government

Some things that we recommend cannot be done by the council – they need to be done by the government so we will ask the government to:

- Raise the cap on council borrowing for council house building so that the city council can build more council housing.
- To introduce rent controls in the private rented sector. This would give tenants more security and protect them from big rent increases.

We make more recommendations to other partners and these are in the full report.

How we live

We need to be a city that is the best place to be born, grow up, be educated and grow old in.

The best place to grow up

Every child born in Brighton & Hove should have the very best start in life, especially those who are living in poverty. The city must do more to prevent child poverty and the city’s schools and children’s centres should be used as fully as possible, so that they support better opportunities for children and young people.

We need to prioritise very early years and do more so that children can achieve at school. We believe that investing more in children when they are very young would save money later on.

Schools are becoming more and more expensive for some families – there are a lot of costs in sending a child to school – bus fares to school; computers for doing homework; books; school trips; school meals and uniforms. Children are not able to participate if their families cannot afford these costs and that has an impact on their achievement at school. Educational attainment is very low for some groups of children who face particular barriers and difficulties: young people in care; young carers; children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), children and young people with Mental Health issues, some Minority Ethnic groups and Gypsy and Traveller children. We met with these groups or invited them to send their evidence to us and what they needed to make life fairer for them.

We spoke to young people and Youth Workers and saw the good work that Youth Workers in the voluntary sector are doing in neighbourhoods across the city. Youth work is important for young people and also for the communities where they live – it can help increase understanding and better relationships between the generations.

Recommendations

We need to protect children from the rise in poverty expected in the next few years; and make sure our schools are a key driver of opportunity and support young people to get a job.

We recommend that the city council, working with city schools, should introduce the ‘Poverty-proofing the School Day’ initiative so that no child misses out on the opportunities and experiences at school because of low family income. This initiative works in schools to support them to change the ways they work so that children from low-income families don’t miss out on opportunities.

We are asking the city council to get support from partners to offer free school meals in school holidays so that no child goes without at least one proper and healthy meal a day.

We believe that the city council should support children’s centres and let communities use them outside of core hours so they can be better used by communities.

Finally, we are asking the city council and partners to do more to prevent people getting into debt, or further into debt, by supporting and better promoting East Sussex Credit Union, the Advice Partnership and Moneyworks.