

Councillors Written Questions and the Responses

Full Council – 14 June 2021

(Questions in *italics* and Answers in **RED**)

Questions to Councillor Lamb (The Leader of the Council) from Councillor Crow

In 2018 Crawley Borough Council joined the Greater Brighton Economic Board, despite the fact that hardly anyone in Crawley believes our town to be part of a so-called 'Greater Brighton City Region'.

1. *To date, how much has the Council's membership of this body cost the Council?*

A total of £37,555 has been paid as part of the Council's membership of this body since the Council joined the Greater Brighton Economic Board in 2018.

2. *What direct benefits to the Crawley economy can be demonstrated from the Council's membership of this body?*

Full Council voted to join the board in October 2017. At that time I set out a case for joining on the basis that we needed a strong sub-regional voice in order to secure investment for major infrastructure in our part of the country.

With severe strain on key elements of our transport infrastructure, such as the Brighton Mainline and M23, there was a significant risk that the investment they need over coming years would instead go to those areas with a Metro Mayor, due to their lobbying position as a voice capable of speaking on behalf of the sub-region.

Greater Brighton Economic Board, as a legal entity established as one of the original Devolution Deals, is essentially the only structure in our area capable of delivering this. The importance of such a voice has only grown over the following years.

Since then, joint-lobbying by the Greater Brighton Economic Board and other local agencies has secured the first stage of investment necessary to bring the Brighton Mainline junction improvements forward, our main goal in joining the board.

This is critical, as these improvements will take over 20 years to deliver and without them it is projected that within a similar timeframe, trains from Brighton will have no spare capacity for any London-bound commuters from Three Bridges station.

Crawley's membership of the Greater Brighton Economic Board is bringing other hugely significant benefits to support our sustainable economic recovery

- Access to full fibre broadband “back haul” infrastructure – Crawley’s economy will gain access to major “back haul” digital broadband infrastructure through a direct full fibre infrastructure link for Crawley’s businesses to the Brighton Digital Exchange, which itself offers direct connectivity to the London Internet Exchange. This will significantly widen the ability for Crawley businesses to access ultra-fast 1 gigabit per second broadband speeds and these capabilities will be hugely significant in attracting high quality jobs and business investment into Crawley. Such a link to the Brighton Digital Exchange would not be possible without close partnership working involving Crawley and other members of the Greater Brighton Economic Board such as Mid Sussex District Council and Brighton & Hove City Council.

The Greater Brighton Economic Board has also placed on public record its support for the development of a “world class Innovation Centre” in Crawley. Membership of the Board means that Crawley’s economic recovery is in turn supported by major sub-regional players such as Brighton and Hove City Council. The support of the Board has contributed to persuading the government to ring-fence Getting Building Funding for the Crawley Innovation Centre scheme. The Innovation Centre seeks to consolidate and expand Crawley’s advanced engineering business base in Manor Royal by creating an Innovation Centre venue for hi-tech small businesses and university partners to drive product technological development in areas like clean energy and transportation technologies. This in turn will unlock high value jobs and business investment to help boost Crawley’s economic recovery from the pandemic.

Crawley’s closer working relationship with other members of the Greater Brighton Economic Board such as Brighton & Hove City Council has also given rise to opportunities to develop a Decarbonisation Academy programme involving both authorities alongside the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership. The purpose of this new initiative is to consolidate, design and develop a range of skills training programmes and qualifications in “green” construction skills. These are the skills needed to install alternative zero carbon and low carbon energy and heating appliances and technologies in homes. If Crawley is to play its part in the national effort to deliver net zero carbon by 2050, it needs a local workforce with the skills to deliver these changes and to benefit from the large number of jobs that will be required to make it happen.

Crawley’s involvement in this Decarbonisation Academy initiative will be a key mechanism for accessing resources to train up local residents in green construction skills so that the green energy and heating retrofit programme envisaged by the Crawley Towns Fund will be able to draw on the local workforce and so help drive economic recovery and tackle unemployment.

Other Greater Brighton Economic Board initiatives set to bring direct benefits to Crawley include:

- A Joint commitment to 10 Environmental pledges which in co-operation will dramatically drive down carbon emissions across the sub-region

- A Joint Energy and Water Plan for greater efficiency of use as part of climate change emergency agenda.
- A Digital Action Plan to drive roll out of digital infrastructure and growth in the Greater Brighton area
- An Inward Investment and Export Strategy to help attract business investment and promote Crawley as part of that
- A COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan – set of proposals to kick start Greater Brighton’s recovery, connecting into the council's own Economic Recovery Plan
- Opportunities for Crawley to participate in the Brighton Festival with events in the area going forward in the recovery phase (post COVID). These were planned in 2020 but were postponed due to Covid-19.
- Joint bidding for funding to Arts Council England to unlock resources to invest in cultural and events activities in Crawley.
- Support to attract greater university level programmes in Crawley working with Universities in Greater Brighton area (Sussex & Brighton) and Crawley College.

3. *Given that this body is dominated by Brighton City Council who under their current leadership are at best unsupportive of aviation, which is very important to the Crawley economy, how does Crawley Borough Council’s support for aviation and Gatwick Airport align with that of the Greater Brighton Economic Board?*

It is not the case that Greater Brighton Economic Board is dominated by Brighton & Hove City Council. The City Council is just one of seven local authorities represented on the Board by their Council Leaders. The other six comprise Adur, Arun, Worthing, Lewes, Mid Sussex alongside Crawley. Each local authority Leader has one vote at Board meetings which means that Brighton & Hove City Council has just one vote. There are also eight other business, education and public body representatives on the Board and decisions are taken collectively.

As part of a genuine partnership approach, the Board Terms of Reference contains provision to rotate the chairing of the Board between the member local authorities. I am pleased to announce that I will be taking on the role as Chair subject to ratification of the Board meeting on 20th July

The priorities identified by the Greater Brighton Economic Board are entirely separate and distinct from those identified by Brighton & Hove City Council. As part of sustainable recovery, the Board has expressed its support for Gatwick Airport in their lobbying of the government to provide more financial assistance for the aviation industry.

This is similar to the position taken by this Council. The Council's draft Economic Recovery Plan advocates sustainable aviation as part of the vision for Crawley's future.

Through policy GAT 1 of our submission Local Plan 2021-2037 this Council supports the sustainable growth of the airport on the basis of its current one runway two terminal model, provided the Airport can demonstrate that such growth is sustainable, its impacts are minimised and appropriately mitigated, and that the benefits to Crawley's economy and community are maximised.

We will continue to work closely with the Airport on economic recovery through the Crawley Economic Recovery Taskforce.