

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Adur District and Worthing Borough Councils**

Remote Meeting via Zoom

15 October 2020

**Stephen Chipp (Chairman)
Joss Loader (Vice Chairman)**

Adur District Council:

Carol Albury
Catherine Arnold
Kevin Boram
Ann Bridges
Paul Mansfield
Debs Stainforth

Worthing Borough Council:

Keith Bickers
Karen Harman
Margaret Howard
Charles James
Richard Nowak
Jane Sim
Bob Smytherman
Carl Walker

*Absent

JOSC/33/20-21 Declaration of Interests

Cllr Walker and Cllr Howard declared an interest as a food bank coordinator for a charity in Worthing.

Cllr Arnold declared an interest as an organiser of a food cafe for poverty.

Cllr Stainforth declared an interest as an organiser of a mutual aid organisation in Adur

JOSC/34/20-21 Substitute Members

There were no substitutions

JOSC/35/20-21 Confirmation of Minutes

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the 17 September 2020 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman

JOSC/36/20-21 Public Question Time

There were no public questions

JOSC/37/20-21 Items Raised Under Urgency Provisions

There were no urgent items

JOSC/38/20-21 Consideration of any matter referred to the Committee in relation to a call-in of a decision

There were no call-ins

JOSC/39/20-21 Executive Members for Customer Services interview

The Committee had before it a report attached as item 7, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes. The report before members set out background information on the Portfolios of the Adur and Worthing Executive Members for Customer Services to enable the Committee to consider and question the Executive Members on issues within their portfolios and any other issues which the Executive Members are involved in connected with the work of the Councils and the Adur and Worthing communities.

A Member asked the following question: Temporary Accommodation Management - can you talk through the 3 major challenges and tell us how you are overcoming issues with lack of cooking facilities? The Executive Member for Customer Services (Adur) listed the following three main challenges and why they were important: Ensuring the supply of good quality and affordable permanent accommodation, accommodating single people with complex needs and reaching people before they need temporary accommodation. In relation to cooking facilities members were told that All households with children are in self contained accommodation. 57% of all households are accommodated in self contained units with cooking facilities, and. 24% are in Houses of Multiple Occupation with shared kitchen facilities. The Councils were building properties precisely because of the knowledge of how important access to a kitchen and other facilities were.

A Member asked the following question: Do you think the changes that are taking place in the staffing restructure of the Repairs and Maintenance section of Adur Homes, are happening at a fast enough pace? If not, how would you suggest this is moved forward to hasten this change? Members were told that the Council had implemented changes in the management of the Repairs and Maintenance Service. Three supervisory roles were created to ensure trade operatives receive better supervision. A Repairs and Modernisation Manager started in April 2020 and managed Building services, which dealt with repairs. In the previous 12 months, a Fire Safety Manager role had also been created and filled. A wider transformation programme to improve the service had started. The programme, which would involve tenants in rethinking how the service is delivered, would improve the technology, processes and practice, and ensure that the staffing and skills required to deliver an excellent customer experience was in place. While the journey to achieve an excellent service for the residents of Adur Homes still had a long way to go, feedback from tenants show that some of the early measures put in place to support the staff and ensure accountability were achieving the desired effect.

A Member asked the following question: What training are Adur Homes staff receiving to help them become better at assessing the needs of the residents by working more closely with them? The Executive Member explained that Housing services created an annual training plan to ensure officers received the training they needed to deliver the service. Three Adur Homes staff were currently on an apprenticeship course. This year,

the training on the plan for Adur Homes staff included professional boundaries, identifying health and safety hazards in properties, managing and supporting tenants with rent arrears and psychologically informed training to enable service to respond to needs. Also, staff received direct support from their line manager on areas of development identified through one to one supervision or weaknesses in service delivery (e.g. complaints). In addition there is a rolling programme of tenancy audits to identify the support needs of our tenants. During lockdown Tenancy Services called all residents and connected them to support where needed, calling sheltered residents on a weekly basis.

A Member asked the following question: Could you fully explain the hidden Homes project , and is this going to be rolled out throughout the whole of Adur? The Executive Member told the Committee that the Hidden Homes project was an initial feasibility of available land that could be utilised for developing new council homes. The project predominantly focused on small areas of vacant land and garage sites owned by Adur Homes. A JSC report titled 'maximising space for homes in Adur' was approved by Joint Strategic Committee on 6th October. This detailed a programme of delivery of 9 new development sites to build new council homes in Adur.

A Member asked the following question: I note that Adur District Council is ranked the 11th worst social housing provider in the country for dealing with complaints and Ombudsman involvement, according to some robust analysis by Inside Housing. What plans are in place to improve how complaints about Adur Homes are handled, and how they are reviewed to ensure that we learn lessons, make amends, and prevent repeating the same failures?Members were told that the Council regularly reviewed the complaints it received. Only a few of the complaints about Adur Homes got to the Housing Ombudsman, with most of the complaints successfully resolved at either Stage 1 or 2 of the Council's complaint process.Lessons from the complaints were a key part of efforts to improve the service delivered by Adur Homes, especially in repairs and maintenance. The Complaints Failure Index was created by Inside Housing, a Social Housing Magazine, and published in its most recent edition. The rating is not based on social landlords current performance on complaints. It used complaints from 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 and used a formula which rated landlords based on the number of times the landlord was found at fault against it relative to the size of its stock. The rating did not take into account the number of Housing Ombudsman investigations where the landlord was not found at fault. Between that 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20, the Housing Ombudsman found Adur Homes at fault partially twice and fully three times, a total of 5 faults within the three year period Inside Housing considered. Adur Homes was rated 11th because it had a smaller size stock compared to other social landlords who had more decisions against them but had a larger stock.

A Member asked the following question:Are there any commitments to support the Adur Tenants Forum financially, to improve the numbers of tenants they can reach, and ensure that they are supported with IT, digital inclusion, and that people are adequately compensated for their time? The Executive Member explained that the Council was currently working with Adur Homes tenants to create a new Tenant Engagement Strategy. This strategy, which would be linked to a wider Participation Strategy, would include the support required to enable residents to engage meaningfully across the participation ladder. A new strategy was necessary to ensure the Council complies with the Regulator for Social Housing's Consumer Standard.

A Member asked the following question to the Worthing Executive Member for Customer Services: What provision is being made for Worthing residents who may find themselves

homeless over the next six months? Members were told of proactive work to reach people before they are in need, working with opening doors and other schemes to open up the supply of housing and of a successful bid from the MHCLG to help support the needs of the Councils most complex customers.

A Member asked the following question: Platforms for our Places: Going Further" and "Platforms for our Places And Then.." both make reference to developing a "Housing First" model for addressing entrenched rough sleeping involving those with complex needs and no housing options. Platforms for our Places: Going Further describes this as a proven model. Would Cllr Mercer please provide JOSC with some detail please on this model and advise the Committee how far along the Council is in developing the model for implementation in Adur and Worthing, and any anticipated budgetary implications. The Executive Member explained that the Housing First success rate was averagely around 80%, there were currently no budgetary implications and that the councils were supporting Turning Tides with an area pilot, exploring further options with Registered Social Landlords and Housing First 'led' units in Temporary Accommodation and Opening Doors.

A Member asked the following question: Given the predicted post-furlough unemployment numbers, what strategic work is currently happening to ensure that the impact on the temporary and emergency housing stock is manageable? Members were told that there had been Commissioned research work to help understand where greatest housing fragility is so that we can preempt housing need more effectively and that the Councils continued to manage closely the availability of good quality and cost effective Temporary Accommodation. A bid to the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) was successful with funding of £234,423.00 (Worthing) and £27,868.00 (Adur) secured to assist with rough sleepers and those accommodated during COVID-19 lockdown during the winter period. Discussions were ongoing with landlords to procure suitable accommodation, especially for this winter. The Councils had already secured two 6-bed accommodations.

A Member asked the following question: In view of the housing shortages identified in Worthing, are there any plans to purchase property in Adur and Worthing such as Harbour House in Southwick, which could house 21 households, with 11 of those being for families? The Executive member told the committee that the councils were interested in acquiring suitable properties This had been demonstrated through the acquisition of Rowlands Road and Downview, and the Councils were in discussions on other sites. In acquiring properties, the Councils ensured that these properties could be used to meet existing need for either temporary accommodation or permanent housing and that the property acquired would not lead to others being made homeless. The property referred to in Harbour House was currently advertised as already full let, therefore, it was unlikely to meet the objectives stated.

A Member asked the following question: 'And then' reiterates the importance of Housing First and Opening Doors. With the current and impending strain on housing, what are specific numeric targets for scaling up 'Opening doors' over the next 12 months so that it includes a greater number of landlords to cope with demand? Members were told that the councils were not setting targets at the moment as the authorities were looking to understand the best balance with the market The councils were taking proactive steps to make sure that it is closely managed financially and that the programme scaled sustainably.

A Member asked the following question: 'And then', our strategic update, points out on page 8 that we can expect to see the development of new models to create much needed new housing across all tenures, rapidly exploring other ways to access funding and skills needed to bring forward new homes. Can we have detail on exactly what these new models are and the timeline for delivery? Members were told that As outlined in the housing strategy, a new development strategy was currently being drafted. The models for delivery were still under review as part of this ongoing work. The development strategy would aim to set out the future development ambitions of the Councils and next steps in terms of delivery.

A Member asked the following question: What are your biggest strategic customer services concerns for the next 12 months? Members were told that the customer service team had diversified and now staff were able to work both face to face and over the phone which had freed up capacity to support people with complex needs. The biggest concern was that Covid would continue to have a detrimental impact on communities with the greatest impact being on vulnerable people and those on lower incomes. Forecasting what the demand would be, in terms of volume and type was difficult and the authorities have had to respond quickly in previous months, for example in relation to issuing business grants and the current work to administer self isolation payments. It was expected that there would be more urgent work needing to be completed in the future as the situation evolves. However the teams had now got some really strong experience in standing up new accessible services, literally in a matter of days. A lot of this extra work was putting additional pressure on our staff and the councils needed to continue to support them to be able to deliver this critical work.

A Member asked if the Councils were meeting the demand for disabled facilities grants. Members were told that all the grants were able to be fulfilled aside within budget, however there were some instances where contractors were not able to carry out the work due to covid restrictions.

The Executive Member explained the financial situation of Theatres and the status of the trust and asked members to please visit the theatres.

Resolved: that the interview be noted

JOSC/40/20-21 Discussions on Food Poverty

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital and Resources, attached as item 8. The report before Members provides an overview of the work being undertaken by the Councils relating to food and support for the vulnerable experiencing food insecurity.

The Head of Wellbeing introduced the report to the committee. A representative from community works explained how the organisation worked within the community to coordinate matters during the covid 19 crisis.

A Member asked if in the case of another lockdown it is likely that there would be an increase in the need for food, had WBC asked for increased funding from a govt fund. Members were told that a DEFRA granny had gone to WSCC and if there was a requirement for emergency food need residents could be directed to WSCC. A further £10k had been allocated to Adur and Worthing. Officers were working on building

resilience should there be an increased need. Community works were a valuable tool for finding additional funding.

A Member expressed concerns that A&W only had a small percentage of the money allocated to WSCC. It was asked whether the Councils were supporting mutual aids enough. Members were told that the councils were in communication with WSCC and assessing need as the situation developed the demand for resources and the projection of that demand was an ongoing matter.

Resolved: that the report be noted

JOSC/41/20-21 Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2020/21

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital and Resources, a copy of which had been circulated to all members, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes as item 9. The report outlined plans to implement the work contained in the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) Work Programme for 2020/21 and also provided information on 15 scrutiny requests which had been received from members of the public.

Members discussed the scrutiny requests and the decisions are summarised as follows:

- Request A - that the request be not added to the work programme and the requester be contacted with reasons as to why;
- Request B and C - that the request be accepted and that a report come forward from the safer communities team and that the committee determine at that point if a further working group is warranted based on the report;
- Request D - that a statement from the relevant Executive Member be received;
- Request F,G and H - that the matters be not added and the resident be directed to the relevant County Councillor;
- Request I - that the resident be directed to the councils LCWIP and WSCC and that the matter be not added to the work programme;
- Request J - that the matter be not added due to ongoing work elsewhere in the authority as part of the councils' sustainability framework;
- Request K - that the matter be not added to the work programme due to the completion of a working group on the matter. The individual issue could be discussed at a future meeting of the working group if appropriate;
- Request L - that the matter be referred to the Executive member for the environment to provide a response to JOSC at a future meeting
- Request M - that the matter be looked at across both areas, initially as a report from officers to the January meeting;
- Request N - that officers provide an explanation as to why there are gaps in tidal defences
- Request O - that the matter be not added to the work programme and that the ward councillor take the matter up with the resident directly

The committee discussed the work programme in general and asked that the media team be thanked for promoting the work of the committee.

Resolved: that the work programme as amended be noted

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital and Resources, a copy of which had been circulated to all members, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes as item 10. The report set out the work and recommendations from the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) Working Group which was created as part of the JOSC Work Programme to review the Adur Homes Repairs and Maintenance service.

The Chairman of the working group introduced the report to the Committee which was received without contest.

Resolved: that the report and recommendations be sent to the Joint Strategic Committee for consideration.

The meeting was declared closed by the Chairman at 9.30 pm, it having commenced at 6.30 pm

Chairman