

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

Remote Meeting

26 November 2020

Councillor Keith Bickers (Chairman)
Councillor Karen Harman (Vice-Chairman)

Adur District Council:

Stephen Chipp
Joss Loader
Carol Albury
Ann Bridges
Paul Mansfield
Debs Stainforth

Worthing Borough Council:

Margaret Howard
Charles James
Richard Nowak
Jane Sim
Bob Smytherman

Absent

Councillor Carl Walker, Councillor Catherine Arnold and Councillor Brian Coomber

JOSC/43/20-21 Declaration of Interests

Councillor Sally Smith declared an interest as an employee of the health central surgery

Councillor Charles James declared an interest as a trustee of Southdown Leisure

JOSC/44/20-21 Substitute Members

Councillor Sally Smith declared a substitution for Councillor Carl Walker

JOSC/45/20-21 Confirmation of Minutes

Resolved: that the minutes for the meeting of the 15 October be approved as the correct record

JOSC/46/20-21 Public Question Time

There were no questions from the public

JOSC/47/20-21 Items Raised Under Urgency Provisions

There were no items raised under urgency provisions

JOSC/48/20-21 Consideration of any matter referred to the Committee in relation to a call-in of a decision

There were no items called in

JOSC/49/20-21 Executive Members for Resources 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 Resources 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.

The Worthing Executive Member for Resources introduced the work of the portfolio and welcomed any questions that members might have

A Member asked the following question: There was an unprecedented, urgent reorganisation of staff during the first lockdown - what has the impact of this been on staff well-being? Members were told of the resilience and flexibility of staff during the lockdown crises in light of the rapid way in which staff were expected to change the way that they worked. Some staff had been asked to redeploy and had learned a lot from the experience and their wellbeing had been positively affected. The Executive Member explained to the Committee processes for 1:1s, surveys and the employee assistance programme

A Member asked the following question: Teams responsible for housing and for community safety have seen a massive increase in demand for their services, is sufficient support being put in place for these teams in particular? The Executive Member told the Committee that the Councils' were keeping under review the impact of demand on our services, particularly during our Covid response. In relation to work with the Safer Communities Partnership, this was being reviewed and refreshed in the new year and the ASB policy would also be reviewed in 2021. Through all of this demand and capacity would be considered.

A Member asked the following question: Given the new £95,000 exit cap agreed at Joint Staff Committee, how many employees on lower incomes are expected to be impacted by this given the regulations on pensions, particularly for those who have long service, as they stand at the moment? Members were told that the £95,000 cap on exit package was now a statutory requirement which would include the total of any exit payment, pension strain costs and pay in lieu of notice. The briefing at Joint Staff Committee informed the members of the Committee of this new requirement and the potential associated changes to the Pension Regulations which are expected early in the new year. The new cap was not of relevance to staff over 55. It was impossible to forecast how many staff would be impacted by the change as it depended on age, pay and length of service. Of the 5 staff made redundant in the previous year none had been affected by the cap.

A Member asked the Committee to consider a recommendation to the Executive Member and Joint Strategic Committee to remove the Council Tax minimum £5 per week charge to be paid for by the removal of the landlords discount on empty properties (this matter was due to be considered by the Joint Strategic Committee at its december meeting. The recommendation was seconded and on a vote was not carried.

The Adur Executive Member for Resources introduced the work of their portfolio and asked for any questions

A Member asked the following question: I have heard anecdotally that recent vacant units in Southwick Square were offered at higher rents than other businesses in the Square. During these incredibly difficult times for all businesses, and in particular small businesses, can the Executive Member assure me that as landlords we are doing all we can as a Council to support our local businesses and that we are realistic with rent levels for tenants? Member were told that there were no vacant units in Southwick Square although there had been some assignments but these had been agreed in line with other premises in the parade

A Member asked the following question: In terms of your role with data protection can you please give a definitive answer as to what the Council is able to view on my business mobile with the device policy for the Google apps we all use as Councillors? Members were told that when a work profile was added to a personal device, some details about your device are visible to the Digital Service, however Apps and data in the personal profile were not visible and could not be accessed.

A Member asked the following question: Procurement - page 82 Para 4.7 of Platform for Places talks of effective procurement and contract management but doesn't mention local. What work goes on to ensure that we employ both local companies and small companies. Particularly important to avoid unnecessary carbon and boost local economy in light of Covid? Members were told that the Councils were bound by public procurement legislation which meant that it could not unreasonably restrict access to the councils business based upon location. However the Councils had a policy of promoting access to tendering opportunities for local companies.

A Member asked the following question: Personnel and staffing - what work goes on re: surveying staff on their contentment, skills identification and happiness in the role? Members were told about undertaken and planned surveys, schemes for 1-2-1s with managers and employee assistance programmes

A Member asked the following question: Has any analysis of funding gaps due to EU component Coast to Capital grants been carried out? Members were told that there were not currently any EU funded projects, however the councils were still investigated potential funding prior to 2021.

A Member asked the following question: During the unprecedented times that Adur and Worthing have had to cope with during Covid 19, the first and now the second Lockdown, do you think that Digital Transformation has aided the Covid Response and do you agree that this has been beneficial, and are you able to give some examples? Members were told about the flexibility of systems that allowed staff to work from home, the use of systems that enabled decision making to continue remotely. The low code platform had allowed the council to build systems that allowed those that needed support during the lockdown to connect with suitable volunteers.

Resolved: that the interview be noted

JOSC/50/20-21 Towards a sustainable financial position - Budget update

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. This report provided an update on the budget strategy position for 2021/22 and beyond.

The head of financial Services introduced the report with the Committee and highlighting in particular the challenges created by the Covid lockdowns.

A Member asked the following question: Regarding the Fall out of SDLT pension costs page 29 and the Triennial pension under valuation and reduction in contributions, has the same under valuation happened with pensions for Council staff and can the reason for the fall out of SDLT pension costs be expanded upon? Members were told that the reduction in pension costs were due to a reassessment of the pension fund position by the actuary. Consequently, the actuary had reduced the level of contributions required for the three years 2020 - 23. The Councils were required to ensure sufficient contributions were made to the pension fund to pay all likely liabilities (pension payments) as assessed by the actuary over a 20 year period. Under the terms of the contract, the Council funded the difference between the initial pension contribution (16.8%) and the current pension contribution (25.3%). This was a typical risk sharing approach for the cost of LGPS pensions within local authority contracts and ensured that the contractor did not price in pension risk into the contract price. The SDLT trust pension payment reduction was due to staff retiring or leaving where the Council was no longer required to fund the difference between the contribution rate specified in the contract and the current pension contribution rate.

A Member asked the following question: Can you explain 3.3 point 6 (page 10) of the agenda, what surplus assets are in the criteria and can you give some examples please? The Committee was told that Surplus assets were assets that were no longer required for operational requirements or had failed to meet property performance indicators regarding revenue performance and long term management costs. Examples included underused car parks, vacant former caretaker properties and isolated commercial premises with little or no alternative use prospects and diminishing returns based on maintenance costs. Officers were working through the council's asset list to evaluate assets on a case by case basis and individual decision notices would be brought forward after consultation with relevant members to approve any disposals.

A Member asked the following question: On Page 17, there is reference to the reduction in interest rates and the impact on council investments in 2021/22. We are all familiar with these historically low rates - please can you give us an overview on how the council is looking to maximise its return and brief details of any new, innovative investment projects. Members were told that whilst cash investments were extremely low the Council had mitigated the impact of this in two ways: Firstly Adur Council had invested £3m in the CCLA property fund. This was providing a 3% return. Secondly, the councils had been funding the capital programme via the cashflow rather than borrowing. Typically borrowing costs over 2% compared to the 0.1% that the councils generated from investment, so this reduced the cost of funding the capital programme. The Councils were also investigating investing in energy renewables to reduce our carbon footprint, reduce our energy costs and obtain an income stream through the sale of surplus energy to the grid.

A Member asked the following question: Do the Council have any input on which pension provider is used by SDLT and how many staff this relates to? Members were told that those staff who TUPE transferred to SDLT were entitled to access the LGPS (Local Government Pension Fund) or an equivalent scheme under the pension regulations (Best Value Authorities Staff Transfer (Pension) Direction 2007). However, SDLT were responsible for determining their own pension provider for any new staff that they employed.

A Member asked the following question: Page 13, changes to business rate forecast £99,000 please explain what happened to lead us to the deficit net use of business rate smoothing reserve and what this latter term means? Members were told that The overall position for business rate income has improved since July by £99,000. Nevertheless the Collection Fund was in deficit (Adur - £1,111,000) and this is explained in more detail in the report. There are several factors sitting behind position: The amount that could be taken from the Collection Fund was set before the start of the financial year via a government return (NNDR1) and could not be changed in year. Consequently if there were any changes in-year within the Collection Fund, this was not passported through to the General Fund and the preceptors until later years (1 or 2 years later). The Council has granted more reliefs than originally expected within the collection fund. Reliefs could increase during the year due for a couple of reasons - the Government changes the business rate relief scheme in the Spring Budget or more businesses qualify for reliefs than expected in January. Whilst a large proportion of these reliefs are funded by the Government via grants (S31 grants), these grants are paid into the General Fund in year. This leads to the situation where the cost of the reliefs are funded a year or two after the impact in the collection fund whilst the General Fund benefits from the compensatory grants within the year. The inherent timing difference in the collection fund led to the creation of the business rate smoothing reserve which was designed to address these differences. There was an unexpected substantial revaluation of the Power Station in June 2020 (valued downwards from £1.5m to £1.32m) with the change backdated to 1/4/2017 - this reduced the income to the collection fund in year (and was a contributory factor in the deficit for 2019/20). Similarly there had been two major national changes to the valuation methods - Doctors purpose built surgeries which reduced by one third and ATMs within supermarkets which are no longer rateable. This happened in May and was backdated to 2010.

A Member asked the following question: What can be done by the Council to prevent the pension costs of both Trusts continuing to increase above what would be expected if these Trusts (SDL and Theatres) remained under the Council pension fund? Members were told that pension costs of both trusts related to those staff who had TUPE transferred across the the new trusts. The risk associated with pension costs was mitigated due to factors including staff who were entitled to LGPS retiring or leaving, and the way that the actuary valued the pension fund contribution for contractors.

A Member asked the following question: 6.3 page 20, a contributory factor to the - - 422k figure in 24/25 assumes the cost of food waste will be borne by AWC and not central gov funding WSCC? Are you being cautious, or expecting this? Members were told that the public finances for non protected services like local government would be difficult. Government commitment to other sectors meant that there may not be sufficient funding to completely fund significant new commitments. WSCC was under significant financial pressure although there would be some savings to the County through avoided landfill costs. The Councils were therefore planning to find a significant proportion of the costs

and would have a clearer picture closer to the time (both of the associated costs and any available funding)

Resolved: that the report be noted.

JOSC/51/20-21 Working with our communities and partners to prevent and reduce the harms caused by anti-social behaviour

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Communities, attached as item 9. The purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the work undertaken by Adur & Worthing Councils to prevent and reduce harm to the community, caused by anti social behaviour.

The Head of Wellbeing introduced the report to the committee and gave an outline of the work undertaken as part of work to prevent and reduce the harms caused by anti-social behaviour. As part of the outline members were told about specific areas of concern and multi-agency work being undertaken to tackle those challenges including targeted youth outreach and tackling issues around rough sleeping.

Members asked questions about specific instances of anti-social behaviour and were advised that reporting issues allowed relevant authorities to build up a picture of what was happening so that appropriate action could be taken

Resolved: that the report be noted

JOSC/52/20-21 Adur and Worthing Housing Strategy 2020-2023

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Communities, attached as item 10. The report updated members on progress so far with the commitments in the Housing Strategy.

The Director for Resources introduced the report to the Committee and gave a synopsis of work on the strategy including the challenges presented by the Covid Pandemic.

A Member asked if in relation to the opening doors programme, whether agents as well as individual landlords had been consulted with about the programme and members were told that discussions had not as yet been had with agents but that the picture relating to private properties had been changing and consideration was being taken on how opening doors could proceed.

A Member asked who was providing psychologically informed training for staff members and was told that the information would be sent to the member

A Member asked to a reference concerning the early help service which had been under pressure and wondered what conversations had taken place with WSCC about the service and any possible reductions. Members were told that regular discussions had been taking place and that the County realised the importance of working with the District/Borough there had been joint efforts so that those at risk of homelessness got joint advice concerning housing and social services issues. This reduced the number of intentionally homeless which equated to savings. Resources were combined to help the most vulnerable families.

A Member asked about the recognition of the work carried out by health central surgery and it was agreed that the work carried out by the surgery with regards to homeless people and compliance within temporary accommodation during the covid outbreak was invaluable.

A Member asked about emergency and temporary accommodation: where properties were sourced and what criteria were used to source this property. Members were told that the Councils had a landlord acquisition team and a major projects team that identified and acquired properties to meet demand, however, the nature of demand had changed and the focus was now on investigative work to identify the type of demand and subsequent type property required moving forward.

Resolved: that the report be noted

JOSC/53/20-21 Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2020/21 - Update

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability 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 outlined progress with the work contained in the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) Work Programme for 2020/21 and recommended that the changes made to the Work Programme since it was agreed in July 2020 be reported to the next Council meetings in December 2020 for noting.

The Committee discussed the report and noted that it had nothing to add and the update should be sent to Councils for noting

Resolved:

- i) That the progress in implementing the 2020/21 JOSC Work Programme be noted; and
- ii) That the meetings of Adur District Council and Worthing Borough Council be recommended to note the changes made to the JOSC Work Programme since it was agreed by the Councils in July 2020.

The meeting was declared closed by the Chairman at 8.45 pm, it having commenced at 6.30 pm

Chairman