

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Joint Governance Committee
Adur District and Worthing Borough Councils**

Remote Meeting via Zoom

22 September 2020

Councillor Kevin Boram (Chairman)

Adur District Council:

Paul Mansfield
Ann Bridges
Brian Coomber
Debs Stainforth
Catherine Arnold
Liz Haywood
George Barton *

Worthing Borough Council:

Louise Murphy
Mike Barrett
Steve Waight
Steve Wills
Rebecca Cooper
Hazel Thorpe

*Absent

JGC/29/20-21 Substitute Members

There were no substitutions.

JGC/30/20-21 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Louise Murphy declared a personal interest as a Non-Executive Director of Worthing Homes.

JGC/31/20-21 Minutes

The minutes of the Joint Governance Committee meeting held on 30 July 2020, were agreed as a correct record.

JGC/32/20-21 Public Question Time

There were no questions from the public.

JGC/33/20-21 Items Raised under Urgency Provisions

There were no urgent items raised.

JGC/34/20-21 External Audit Planning Report Update

Before the Committee was a report from the External Auditors, copies of which had been circulated to all Members and copies are attached to the signed copy of these Minutes as Item 6.

Helen Thompson and Hannah Lill, Ernst & Young LLP, attended the meeting to present the audit planning report updates for both Adur and Worthing Councils.

The reports updated the Committee regarding risk identification for the 2019/20 audit, reflecting the changes in risks identified in the current year. Members were advised that following the coronavirus outbreak (Covid-19) in March 2020, the external auditors had re-assessed their audit scope and strategy. The reports also provided an update to the significant accounting and auditing matters and audit approach outlined in the Audit Planning Report.

The Committee sought clarification as to how satisfied the external auditors were that Adur & Worthing Councils were 'going concerns'. It was noted that it was a requirement the Councils prepared. The auditors highlighted the work undertaken to form the basis for judging financial sustainability.

The Committee questioned the basis for increasing the audit fee and sought the views of the auditors in relation to their work regarding the Commercial Property Investment Strategy. It was noted that the price for the external audit work was increasing due to the new Financial Management System and, in the opinion of the external auditors, audit fees were not sustainable at current levels. The Committee was advised that the Commercial Property Investment Strategy had been considered in regards to its financial stability, the impact of borrowing on the Medium Term Financial Plan and income provision.

A Member questioned the wisdom of purchasing commercial property. The Committee was advised that it was not the auditors role to judge decisions taken by the Councils or to say whether they were wise or not. Councils were not benchmarked against one another or compared in performance tables. However, Members were informed that Adur & Worthing Councils spending was consistent with other bodies.

The Auditors also provided clarity around their Value for Money judgements and conclusions.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Kevin Boram, seconded by Councillor Louise Murphy and supported by the Committee.

Resolved

That the Joint Governance Committee noted the contents of the report.

JGC/35/20-21 Internal Audit Progress Report

Before the Committee was a report by the Acting Head of Internal Audit, copies of which had been circulated to all Members and copies are attached to the signed copy of these Minutes as Item 7.

The report updated Members of the Committee in relation to:

- the performance of the Internal Audit Section;
- summary information on the key issues raised in final audit reports issued since the last report to the Committee;
- the status of the implementation of agreed audit recommendations;
- the Priority 1 recommendations outstanding past the agreed implementation dates; and
- fraud work conducted by the Councils' Corporate Investigations Team.

The Head of Housing, Akin Akinyebo, attended the meeting to update Members regarding the implementation of outstanding agreed audit recommendations. The Committee was informed that steps had been taken to clear the outstanding audit recommendations which had been reduced from 30 to 9 outstanding recommendations. Members noted that a Leaseholder Management Policy report was due to be considered by the Joint Strategic Committee in October 2020 and a Recharging report would be taken forward for later in the year. Lots of work was going on in relation to housing repairs. A policy had been drafted and was currently out for consultation. Officers advised in addition, work was being carried out on a New Tenants Handbook, newly recruited members of the team were taking up their posts and a transformation plan was being implemented.

An update was sought regarding regulatory issues in relation to asbestos and gas safety. The Head of Housing advised that the service was 99% compliant with gas safety and that an action plan had drawn up for managing asbestos with new procedures being put into place.

The Chairman wished to place on record the Committee's thanks to the Housing Team for all of their work.

The Committee also gave consideration to audit recommendations regarding GDPR and Leaseholder Charges.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Kevin Boram, seconded by Councillor Roy Barraclough and agreed unanimously.

Resolved

That the Joint Governance Committee noted the contents of the report.

***Councillor Debs Stainforth left the meeting at 7.29pm**

JGC/36/20-21 Risks & Opportunities Report

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability & Resources, copies of which had been circulated to all Members and copies are attached to the signed copy of these Minutes as Item 8.

The report provided updates on the management of the Councils' Risks and Opportunities.

During consideration of the report, Members asked questions and sought clarification in relation to a number of issues including:

- Covid-19 Internal Controls & Outbreak Planning - Officers advised that the Community Response App was being adapted for the purpose of advising and helping people who had lost their jobs. The Councils were supporting West Sussex County Council in regards to the implementation of the Public Health Plan. This involved a number of activities including the role of the Environmental Health Officers to provide guidance and enforcement to local restaurants and local businesses;
- IT Disaster Recovery - Officers advised that although this was an ever present risk, extra reliability and resilience had been built into services;
- Risks associated with Teville Gate & Chatsmore Farm Sites - Officers agreed to provide a written update following the meeting;
- Social Landlords re: eviction resulting from rent arrears - Officers advised that most social landlords had their own policy and the Housing Team were encouraging them to raise issues at the earliest opportunity. It was noted that the Housing Team had no power to prevent evictions but would seek to influence outcomes wherever possible;
- Climate Emergency - Officers updated Members on work to decarbonise the Councils buildings and vehicles and offset 50% of the Councils carbon emissions through investing in renewables and carbon sequestration.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Paul Mansfield, seconded by Councillor Ann Bridges and agreed unanimously.

Resolved

The Joint Governance Committee

- noted the progress in managing risks and opportunities;
- requested further information in relation to the risks associated with both the Teville Gate and Chatsworth Farm sites and Covid-19 Grants available to small businesses; and
- agreed to receive a further progress report in January 2021.

**** The meeting was adjourned at 8.31pm and was reconvened at 8.36pm**

JGC/37/20-21 Scheme of Officer Delegations

Before the Committee was a report by the Monitoring Officer, copies of which had been circulated to all Members and copies are attached to the signed copy of these Minutes as Item 9.

The Committee noted the importance that Councils have appropriate officer delegations and committee delegations in place to ensure that decision making is made by the appropriate person or committee.

The report sought to update the Councils' Scheme of Delegation to Officers in relation to planning matters.

The Committee was asked to approve the proposed changes to the Councils' Scheme of Delegation to Officers as set out in the report and recommend their adoption to each full Council.

The Committee requested further information in regards to the number of planning applications that were called in by Members and the percentage of those applications which had been called in for non-planning reasons. In addition, the Committee wished to better understand how many applications would be delegated if the proposals in the report were adopted.

It was proposed by Councillor Louise Murphy that the item be deferred in order for the Committee to receive more information from the Planning Service. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Steve Waight and was supported by the Committee.

Resolved

The Joint Governance Committee deferred consideration of the item in order for additional information to be provided by the Planning Service.

***Councillor Debs Stainforth rejoined the meeting at 8.40pm**

JGC/38/20-21 Recruitment and Appointment of Independent Persons

Before the Committee was a report by the Monitoring Officer, copies of which had been circulated to all Members and copies are attached to the signed copy of these Minutes as Item 10.

The Committee was recommended to consider the Council's recruitment and appointment of Independent Persons.

The Chairman thanked Mr Simon Norris-Jones for his work, on behalf of the Joint Governance Committee.

The Committee sought clarification regarding the appointment process for Independent Persons. The Monitoring Officer set out the process adopted and advised that Human Resources were consulted to ensure that Equalities and Diversity issues were encompassed. It was also noted that statutory guidelines outlined certain people that could not be appointed as Independent Persons.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Steve Waight, seconded by Councillor Roy Barraclough and supported by the Committee.

Resolved

The Joint Governance Committee

1. noted the updated position in respect of the forthcoming recruitment process for additional Independent Persons;
2. recommended to Adur District Council and Worthing Borough Council that the appointment of Mr Simon Norris-Jones as an Independent Person be extended for a further term of 4 years.

JGC/39/20-21 Annual Review of Complaints Concerning Member Conduct - 2019/20

Before the Committee was a report by the Monitoring Officer, copies of which had been circulated to all Members and copies are attached to the signed copy of these Minutes as Item 11.

The report outlined the complaints received by the Monitoring Officer that Elected Members had breached the Code of Conduct. Complaints received related to Elected Members of Adur District Council, Worthing Borough Council, Sompting Parish Council and Lancing Parish Council.

The report covered all complaints received during the municipal year 2019/20, and those that were unconcluded at the end of the 2018/19 municipal year, action taken by the Monitoring Officer, and/or the Council, including any attempts at informal resolution and the outcome.

The Committee thanked Officers for the report, welcomed the format and requested that future reports include data identifying trends in the complaints received.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Paul Mansfield, seconded by Cllr Debs Stainforth and supported unanimously.

Resolved

The Joint Governance Committee noted the contents of the report and the actions taken by the Monitoring Officer and / or Council.

The meeting was declared closed by the Chairman at 9.27 pm, it having commenced at 6.30 pm

Chairman