

Minutes of an Extraordinary meeting of
Worthing Council
14 October 2020
at 6.30 pm

Councillor Lionel Harman (Chairman)
Councillor Sean McDonald (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Noel Atkins	Councillor Richard Mulholland
Councillor Paul Baker	Councillor Louise Murphy
Councillor Roy Barraclough	Councillor Richard Nowak
Councillor Mike Barrett	Councillor Helen Silman
Councillor Keith Bickers	Councillor Jane Sim
Councillor Ferdousi Henna Chowdhury	Councillor Dawn Smith
Councillor Rebecca Cooper	Councillor Sally Smith
Councillor Edward Crouch	Councillor Robert Smytherman
Councillor Jim Deen	Councillor Elizabeth Sparkes
Councillor Karen Harman	Councillor Hazel Thorpe
Councillor Paul High	Councillor Val Turner
Councillor Margaret Howard	Councillor Nicola Waight
Councillor Daniel Humphreys	Councillor Steve Waight
Councillor Charles James	Councillor Carl Walker
Councillor Kevin Jenkins	Councillor Paul Westover
Councillor Martin McCabe	Councillor Steve Wills
Councillor Dr Heather Mercer	Councillor Tim Wills

Absent

Councillor Mark Withers

C3020-21 Apologies for Absence

The Mayor advised that apologies had been received from Cllr Mark Withers and the Chief Executive.

C3120-21 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Carl Walker declared an interest in Item 4 as a co-founder of a mutual aid group in East Worthing.

Councillors Louise Murphy and Steve Wills declared personal interests as non-Executive Directors of Worthing Homes.

Councillor Elizabeth Sparkes declared a personal interest as an elected member of West Sussex County Council.

Councillor Beccy Cooper declared an interest in Item 4 as a co-founder of a mutual aid group in Marine Ward.

Councillor Margaret Howard declared an interest in Item 4 as a co-founder of a mutual aid group.

Councillor Noel Atkins declared a personal interest as an elected member of West Sussex County Council.

Councillor Sally Smith declared an interest in Item 4 as a member of a mutual aid group.

C3220-21 Questions from the Public

The following question had been received in advance of the meeting.

Mrs Shelley McCabe, a resident of Worthing asked;

Local Councillors say they haven't had a briefing from you since April.

As the Member responsible for public health and covering the community response to the Covid-19 pandemic, how informed do you think you've kept non-Executive Members of the Council, on a scale of 1-10?

The Executive Member for Health & Wellbeing replied that although Emergency Planning was not part of her portfolio she was able to confirm that during the first few months of the pandemic, the priority had been developing the swiftest and most effective response on behalf of local communities.

The lead Members for Emergency Planning were briefed each week and from July both Leaders of the Opposition were receiving weekly briefings.

A JSC report was provided to all Members in July detailing all of the work of officers during the pandemic

In the first two months of lockdown members and staff received regular emailed updates on the pandemic and the Councils action in response from the Covid Response Lead, Martin Randall, Director for the Economy. Many members expressed their thanks to him for this information. Mr Randall headed a twice-weekly Response Group meeting formed of senior officers charged with responding to the challenges arising from lockdown.

In addition to this, Councillors had also received periodic updates on the community efforts, the work on homelessness and more recently in relation to Covid-outbreak planning. This was alongside regular press release updates and monthly members briefings.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.1.10, Councillor Martin McCabe moved that the matter raised by the question be referred to the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The motion was seconded by Councillor Bob Smytherman but not supported following a vote.

Mrs Shelley McCabe, a resident of Worthing asked;

Section 5.12 of Worthing Council's Emergency Plan says,

“Members can provide a useful link with local communities and be a source of information in an emergency.”

Can you please outline:

How you have kept communities informed during the Coronavirus pandemic

The dates and types of media appearances you have made in order to inform the public about Coronavirus in the last six months

What your role has been in the Council’s Community Engagement Team, with reference to The Council’s Emergency Plan Section 3.7.1

The Executive Member for Health & Wellbeing replied that Worthing Borough Council had played an important local leadership role on the COVID-19 response, despite not having formal public health responsibilities (those sat with West Sussex County Council, Public Health England and the government).

At the outset an A&W Community Response partnership was established with other key stakeholders from charities, health and government to ensure that information about the pandemic and the community response had been reaching communities through partners. This met daily initially and was now meeting monthly.

Information on the local and wider Sussex response had and continued to be shared with at risk groups using those groups, including GPs and the Councils voluntary sector partners.

The A&W Communication Team had played a crucial role in informing residents of the latest health and prevention advice. Using all social media platforms, working in conjunction with media such as local press and radio and co-producing door to door leaflets the Team ensured as many residents were reached as possible. A special section of the A&W website was created with simple to understand Q&As and Social Media was used to drive residents to this crucial information. The website section had 162,907 visits from March to mid-June.

In addition the Communications Team supported the drive to build a Community Support network by informing isolated and shielding residents about how they could get help and then helping to build a network of volunteers who could deliver that help. Case studies of volunteers and those they were helping put together by the Team helped create a powerful narrative that encouraged others to seek help or volunteer.

Officers had also been providing information to local businesses about Covid-19 help and support and had provided a range of information, advice and guidance to support them through the period. This had been through a range of direct platforms, such as social media, emails, letters and updates to the very extensive COVID website pages on the Councils website, as well as Executive Members making a range of appearances in local media.

An example was the Welcome Back AW campaign which was extremely successful in promoting the steps local businesses had taken to make safe their premises after the lifting of lockdown. Early indications had shown this made a real difference in giving our town centre a boost while keeping staff and customers safe. Work to inform residents continued with prevention advice ongoing on a daily basis.

The Council had also developed a plan to manage outbreaks and through this had been recruiting volunteers and identifying community leaders (including Members) to help disseminate messages about covid-19 outbreaks.

The Executive Member also wanted to thank councillors from all sides for promoting the Councils work (such as spreading the word around business grants) and informing the Executive Member or relevant Senior Officers of information, intelligence and suggestions to improve our response. It was only by working together that the Council could deal with this crisis.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.1.10, Councillor Martin McCabe moved that the matter raised by the question be referred to the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The motion was seconded by Councillor Bob Smytherman but not supported following a vote.

Mr John Lovell, a resident of Worthing asked;

The Council's Risk and Opportunity Management Strategy refers to types of report and monitoring. On page 16 it says:

"Ad hoc reports need to be presented to the Council Leadership Team (CLT) when any new and significant risk and opportunities issues arise."

Can you confirm:

The number of ad hoc reports that you, as Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing, have submitted to the CLT in the last three months as Covid-19 infection rates have risen
Give an outline of the content of those reports
Explain the input you have made to any other ad hoc reports these past three months

The Executive Member for Health & Wellbeing replied that the responsibility for reporting during the pandemic had been through the Director for the Economy. Reports had been a standing item on the CLT agenda (bi-weekly) detailing the response efforts, key issues and resource decisions, challenges arising and recommended actions.

As outlined in an answer to a previous question, a full report had been presented to the JSC in July.

The Member with the portfolio for emergency planning had met with the Director for Economy each week and had been sighted on all of the issues and provided input and views in relation to policy and strategic issues.

Mr Ian Newman, a resident of Worthing asked;

We all recognise that the current situation with Covid19 has had a significant effect on everyone in our community and for some who may have a family member who is more vulnerable by virtue of their age, condition or illness, things maybe even more pressured and impact on their behaviours.

No one would deny the importance of Councillors being able to ask questions of the Council Officers or senior political leaders, many of those questions can and could easily be asked using technology including email or a phone call.

Could the Leader please explain the impact that this Extraordinary Meeting has had on Officer time in arranging, planning and calling this extra meeting, including providing the financial costs in terms of the extra officer hours incurred over and above their normal day and associated activities.

This is especially pertinent as normally a scheduled full council meeting is due to take place in only 6 days' time on the 20th October and in this context, many people will be thinking that this is an undue use of Officer time and public money, when these very same questions and the debate could be had in the normal course of business in 6 days' time.

The Leader of the Council replied that an estimated total of 32 hours of officer time had been spent in arranging, attending and dealing with post meeting matters at an overall cost to Worthing Borough Council of £1,920.

Mr Ian Newman, a resident of Worthing asked;

Could the Leader of the Council please advise if he has had any contact from the leaders of any of the opposition parties in Worthing seeking such an extraordinary meeting or raising significant concerns that might necessitate the calling of such a meeting, prior to the submission by Cllr McCabe.

The Leader of the Council replied that he had not received any contact from the leaders of any of the opposition parties in Worthing seeking such an extraordinary meeting or raising significant concerns that might necessitate the calling of such a meeting, prior to the submission by Cllr McCabe.

Mr Adrian Price, a resident of Worthing asked;

Are members aware of the important distinction between deaths 'from COVID' and 'with COVID' and the associated statistics? Here in the UK any death within 28 days of a positive RT-PCR test is recorded as a COVID death regardless of the actual cause. In addition, the Italian National Institute of Health found that of the deaths recorded as COVID, 88% were actually from other pre-existing co-morbidity factors that would have killed the subject anyway. The figure from the US Centres for Disease Control found the corresponding figure in the USA to be 94%. A corresponding figure for the UK does not seem to have been published, but if it was, say, 90%, this means that in the whole of the UK only around 4 - 5,000 people have actually died from COVID, yet on this account we have destroyed the economy and Human rights, with tens of thousands of 'lockdown deaths' resulting from the Government's grotesque and disproportionate reaction to a virus that is arguably no more dangerous than flu.

The Leader replied that he was aware of the distinction between deaths from Covid and with Covid and that the associated statistics did need to be taken seriously. The Leader also advised that there would be a national / parliamentary enquiry into the pandemic and associated responses to it. That was not within the remit of Worthing Borough Council.

Mr Price asked a supplementary question which sought assurance that the true nature of the actual statistics will be factored into any decisions and that proportional and reasonable measures be introduced.

The Leader replied that the issues the questioner had raised concerns about were not within the remit or powers of Worthing Borough Council and that there would be a parliamentary enquiry in due course.

Ms Paula Mitton, a resident of Worthing asked;

“Local lockdown rules are being based on results from the Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test. Are members aware that the PCR test can yield false positive results and that more than half the positives are likely to be false? This is according to Dr Mike Yeadon the former Chief Scientific Officer for Pfizer and several other independent doctors and scientists. What the PCR test actually measures is ‘simply the presence of partial RNA sequences present in the intact virus which could be a piece of dead virus, which cannot make the subject sick, cannot be transmitted and can’t make anyone sick’. The PCR test also cannot tell the difference between any of a number of the Coronavirus family and the SARS COV2 virus. In addition the PCR test was never designed to identify infectious diseases, according to the inventor Kary Mullis. As healthy, asymptomatic people are being classed as positive it would be useful to define what actually is a ‘case’.”

The Leader replied that he was aware to a degree, that the test identified a number of false positives. He also confirmed that Local Lockdowns would be being discussed at this Extraordinary Council meeting as it was not something Worthing Borough Council would be making a decision on.

Ms Mitton asked, as a supplementary question, whether Worthing Borough Council was in any position to challenge the government or have any influence over a public enquiry.

The Leader replied that lower tier local authorities were not in a position to direct such matters, decisions were being taken at higher levels.

C3320-21 Council's evolving strategy for playing its role in preventing and managing Covid-19 cases

Before the Council was a report by the Director for Communities, copies of which had been circulated to all Members and a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes as Item 4.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Daniel Humphreys and seconded by Councillor Kevin Jenkins.

Councillor Jim Deen proposed an amendment requesting that ‘the Leader produce a short summary report of the strategic direction of the Council during the ongoing pandemic and the second wave to be brought to the next meeting of Full Council (if possible for debate by the whole Council)’. The proposed amendment was seconded by Councillor Beccy Cooper. Following a vote, the amendment was not supported.

*Cllr Crouch left the meeting at 7.49pm.

Members debated the Council's response to the pandemic thus far, associated reports and the actions taken.

*Cllr Turner left the meeting at 7.58pm.

On a vote: For 22, Against 0, Abstentions 12

Resolved

That the Council noted the contents of the report.

C3420-21 Items raised under Urgency Provisions

The Mayor had not received any matters that met the legal or constitutional requirements for their urgent consideration at the meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm