

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

Remote Meeting via Zoom

15 July 2021

Councillor Joss Loader (Chairman)
Councillor Ann Bridges (Vice-Chairman)

Adur District Council:

Carol Albury
Vee Barton
Mandy Buxton
Joe Pannell
Sharon Sluman
Debs Stainforth

Worthing Borough Council:

Charles James
Richard Nowak
Russ Cochran
Louise Murphy
Jon Roser
Sally Smith
Carl Walker
Tim Wills

JOSC/9/21-22 Declaration of Interests

Councillor Charles James declared an interest in agenda item 9 as a trustee of South Downs Leisure

Councillor Louise Murphy declared an interest as a Policy Advisor to the Executive Member for Customer Services

JOSC/10/21-22 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members

JOSC/11/21-22 Confirmation of Minutes

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the 10 June be approved as the correct record

JOSC/12/21-22 Public Question Time

A question had been received in advance by a member of the public that was read out by the Chairman of the Committee

With respect to the installation of renewable energy measures to council buildings: given the councils' extensive property portfolio and the award of funding from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, what are the specific plans for installation of solar PV panels, battery energy storage, heat pumps and other energy saving measures in ALL council-owned buildings to reduce direct energy consumption and associated greenhouse gas

emissions, and how will this be tracked and reported on to ensure PSDS funding is used for the purposes for which it was awarded?"

The Chairman read out a response to the question as follows:

The Councils adopted the Carbon Neutral Plan: Working towards the 2030 target in December 2019.

Alongside 'business as usual' reductions in carbon emissions being achieved through improvements in renewable and energy efficiency technologies both locally and nationally, this identified priority areas for investment and intervention in the councils' estate. It also noted that in order to achieve their ambitious plan, the councils will have to rely upon various factors outside of the councils' control - including identifying appropriate funding streams to deliver decarbonisation projects. The councils were quick to react to the announcement of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and were two of only 5 successful bidders from within Sussex.

The specific projects being delivered utilising the £1.7m of Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme grant funding were discussed at Joint Strategic Committee on 9 February 2021 and, once completed, will reduce the councils' total emissions from buildings by over 10%. As can be seen in that report, the confirmed sites that will benefit from this PSDS funding are as follows: Shadwells Court, Marsh House, Shoreham Centre, Eastbrook Manor CC, Goring Recreation Ground, Worthing Town Hall/Assembly Hall, Commerce Way depot.

The Carbon Neutral Plan also identified a number of other projects that the councils could deliver in order to further reduce carbon emissions and the councils recognise the urgency that action must be taken in order to achieve our net zero ambitions. The council will continue to identify local opportunities to seek external funding and supplement its ongoing capital programme to deliver new decarbonisation projects. The councils are committed on reporting on carbon emissions to BEIS and Joint Strategic Committee each autumn - the most recent report identified a 13% year-on-year reduction. Furthermore the councils are working with local businesses to collaborate and support them in their own Net Zero ambitions.

A question had been received in advance by a member of the public that was read out by the Chairman of the Committee

Whilst council officers are to be congratulated on their plan to reduce council emissions by 2030 - would it not help us to prioritise and get perspective as a whole community if the necessary actions to reduce the other 99% of emissions were quantified and targets set with the community and ongoing measures put in place which can then be reported on by the council?

The Chairman read out a response as follows:

It is a fair point, that whilst the councils can show leadership by addressing our own carbon footprint, this is just 1% of the emissions of Adur & Worthing. This statistic was identified in a study produced in June 2020 which also set a pathway for reducing emissions across the area. The Study is called:

'A Carbon Neutral Study for Adur and Worthing: Exploring pathways to achieve the target.'

In order to work with partners to try to address more at the area wide scale, the councils have produced SustainableAW a unique shared plan for action across the communities of Adur & Worthing, in which over 200 stakeholders were involved in developing collaborative actions to address the climate emergency. This will, if adopted by JSC on 13th July, be reported on annually.

SustainableAW is a plan to work across all agendas on the range of sectors that impact climate change, and will soon be posted on the councils website showing actions from many organisations, meanwhile the actions can be seen in the JSC report

JOSC/13/21-22 Items Raised Under Urgency Provisions

There were no urgent items

JOSC/14/21-22 Consideration of any matter referred to the Committee in relation to a call-in of a decision

There had been no call – ins

JOSC/15/21-22 Joint Leaders interview

Before the Committee was a report by the Director of Communities, a copy of which had been circulated to all members, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes

The Leaders were present to answer questions posed by the Committee.

A member asked the following question: *What do you view as the biggest threat to the Council's operational effectiveness over the next 12 months? How do you plan to respond?* The Leader of Worthing explained that the Council had put in place a number of agile infrastructures to enable the Council to be able to cope with the unexpected pandemic including new digital systems. This had enabled the Council to come through the pandemic relatively well.

A Member asked the following question: *What do you identify as any areas of council activity that we could most improve and what would be the strategic plan to address this/these?* The committee was told that the Leader would not single out any individual area over another and sought constant improvement across all areas. The Leader was looking forward to improve on areas connected to digital and data capability.

A Member asked the following question: *Lancing Parish Council has committed to improve its working relationships with ADC and WSCC. This commitment already appears to be working well. Can the Leader give any examples of where this new working relationship has already made a difference and any future plans for the co-working agreement?* The Leader told the committee that there had been strong collaborative working and cited examples such as the introduction of the lancing farmers market.

A Member asked the following question: *The Adur & Worthing Climate Assembly focussed local efforts to address the climate emergency. What other community consultations are planned over the next 12 months to address issues of concern to the*

community? The Worthing Leader told the committee that the Council used a number of different ways to consult across different areas and there was constant development of the way that engagement was carried out and would continue to carry out good consultations. The consultation on the climate change had demonstrated the value of holding assemblies on certain issues.

A Member asked the following question *Given the 11,500 people in council tax arrears and the potential risks to business rates due to issues with the viability of town centre shopping (outlined in Para 4.13.2 in Item 10 regarding the council owned retail premises), what concerns do you have that item 10 (Para 3.2) suggests we are relying increasingly heavily on these as our sources of income?* The Leader told the committee that the arrears issue was negligible in relation to Council owned premises as the council did not have housing stock. In relation to Council Tax the authority had a good record of collection and very high levels of payment. The Council would continue to work with people to offer support where it could. In relation to rental income the Council did not enter lightly into agreements and that risk had been spread to diversify the portfolio and minimise risk.

A member asked the following question: *How will you address the potential contradiction between our financial reliance on car parking revenue and our commitment to addressing the climate emergency?* The Leader explained to the committee that there was currently a transitional period where many people were still car reliant and the councils needed to cater for all road users. There was collaboration with county to procure an EV operator to deliver an extensive EV charging network in all the councils' car parks which would offer renewably powered, consistent, accessible EV charging across our places. The authorities were also pursuing the vision, stated in the A&W LCWIP, that walking and cycling would be the easiest way to travel. To that end, the council was working with BHCC to bring a bike share scheme into A&W, which planned to offer 322 rental bikes: 50% e-bikes and 50% pedal cycles. The authority would also work with the county to improve cycle infrastructure, maximising use of the government's active travel fund to build safe new cycle lanes.

A Member asked the following question: *Given persistent issues with affordable housing and health inequalities across the town, what strategic work will be done in the next 12 months to address these?* The Leader told members that the strategic work could be found within the 'platforms for our places' document and the 'and then' document. The council would continue to deliver housing support to people who had needs.

Resolved: that the interview of the Leaders be noted.

JOSC/16/21-22 SustainableAW update on progress and new targets for councils and community

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 9. The report updated members on progress made around the successful implementation of SustainableAW 2020-23, the councils' shared framework for action on sustainability.

The Director for Digital, Sustainability and Resources introduced the report to the committee and invited questions.

A Member asked if there was sufficient resource to implement the councils programme. The Director availed the committee of current staffing and believed that it was sufficient for both carbon reduction and sustainability.

A Member stated that there had been a huge amount of success and asked what were the biggest concerns and what could derail 2030 targets. The Director explained that the plan was complicated and there were some risks such as crematoria and vehicle fleets. There was a need to test the reliability of technologies.

Members also asked questions about the Southern Water fine for sewage spills and barbed wire clearance on Shephard's Mead.

Resolved: that the report be noted

JOSC/17/21-22 Worthing Theatres and Museum - Annual Review

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for the Economy, a copy of which has been circulated to all members, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes as item 8

The report before members presented a review of the first full year of operation of Worthing Theatres and Museum Trust. The Director for the Economy introduced the report to the Committee and invited questions

A Member noted that there had been 25 redundancies made over the pandemic and asked what the percentage had been voluntary and what percentage compulsory. The Director told the Committee that this information was not available to the director as the trust was responsible for those matters. The Director explained that the move of Theatres and Museums to a trust had allowed the organisation to apply for further funding streams. Against the backdrop of the pandemic Theatres and Museums across the country had regrettably out of necessity made redundancies.

The Committee discussed further the review of the function of the Theatres after the lockdown and noted that as the contract manager the councils would be analysing aspects of the operation on a quarterly basis

Resolved: that the report be noted

JOSC/18/21-22 Financial Performance 2020/21 - Revenue outturn

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 the revenue financial monitoring position for the end of the 2020/21 financial year. The Head of Financial Services was present to introduce the report and respond to questions.

A member asked the following question: *Re Paragraph 4.11.5 please could you give more information about the parks service £36,000 underspend (Worthing) especially at a time when our parks and green spaces are very heavily used?* The committee was told

that the team had a very difficult operating environment with social distancing in mobile teams in vans, reduction in staff on the ground due to sickness and shielding which meant that there was a need to reduce the service that was able to be delivered to accommodate those restrictions. This therefore meant that there was a reduction in spend to run alongside this.

A member asked the following question: *Re Para 4.11.1 - Although it is difficult to predict, what level of increase in temporary housing need, and associated costs to the council, is being modelled for given the prohibition of evictions and furlough scheme end?* The committee was told that the authority was forecasting a net increase of three cases per month in both Adur and Worthing. As at 13/7/2021 81 households in Adur were being supported and 203 in Worthing. However, in parallel to this the Council had been successful in attracting funding from Central Government and via the County Council COMF funds to implement measures to both prevent homelessness and support vulnerable persons who have been made homeless. The project included a digital tool to help identify those with difficulty meeting housing costs to target support to prevent homelessness as well as a flexible fund that will support this work for those that were not eligible for Discretionary Housing Payments.

A member asked the following question: *Re Para 4.12.1 - Regarding parking losses, do we have a sense of what the full loss to the councils may be following the cessation of the government sales, fees and charges scheme?* In 2020/21, the net loss to the Council for parking after government support was £1.9m for Worthing Borough Council and £124k for Adur. This reduces down to £520k for Worthing and £30k after allowing for government grant. Looking ahead to 2021/22, income to car parks was recovering well; both Councils reduced the car parking income budget in the to reflect known closures and the impact of changing car parking habits. Income in car parks had been improving month on month and was at approximately 80% of the budget in Worthing and virtually back to normal levels in Adur. Overall the Councils expected losses of £208k in Worthing in the year which after allowing for potential income from Sales Fees and Charges will reduce to £90k. However much depended on the pace of recovery.

A member asked the following question: *Re Para 4.13.4 - A key issue is outlined regarding the continued support needed for South Downs Leisure re the timeline for the easing of social distancing measures and the length of time support will be needed. Is there a predicted cost for this at this stage?* The Councils had agreed with SDLT a recovery plan which provided support of £608k in 2020/21 and had allowed for additional support of £198k in 2021/22 which was built into the budget. In parallel to this the Council had successfully secured funding of £214k to support the reopening of Leisure Centres.

Resolved: that the report be noted

JOSC/19/21-22 Developing a revenue budget for 2022/23 at the time of a pandemic

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 11

The report before members outlined a proposed budget strategy for the development of the 2022/23 budgets against the background of the pandemic.

The Head of Financial Services was present to introduce the report to the committee and take questions from members.

A Member asked the following: *Page 106 - How does Ikea's absence impact the Councils expected income from business rates?* Members were told that there would be no immediate impact from the loss of Ikea. Any additional income from business rates was not built into the forecasts until there was certainty about when the building was likely to be completed and occupied. In any event the Council would have only benefited from around 20% of any net gain in rates under the retention system.

A Member asked the following question: *Re Para 4.4.6 point 2. Apologies if I couldn't see it from the figures but how do we perform at exceeding the government target on business rate collection?* The committee was told that in relation to the amount of income the Council raised in relation to the target rather than our collection rate itself. This was shown on the tables below paragraph 4.4.6 and was titled 'Retained Surplus'. This represented the 20% share that the Council could retain so the overall performance was much higher.

A Member asked the following question: *Re Para 4.5.8 - Given the current Council tax arrears, and the importance of council tax as a source of income, is it possible to model the expected fluctuation in council tax arrears in the coming year?* Members were told that the impact of both arrears and the provision for bad debts was allowed for in the calculation of the income from Council Tax. In effect it was assumed that there would be a loss on average of 1% - the Authorities tended to collect over 98% each year with a proportion collected the following years, although in 2020/21 the collection rate was lower (96.3%) in part due to a suspension of debt recovery action through the courts.

A Member asked the following question: *Re Platform 2 page 119 - Is there a prediction of the amount of council tax and government reward grant that will be collected on new homes being developed in Worthing over the next 12 months?* Members were told that with respect to Council Tax the Councils were modelling for the purposes of the MTFS for Worthing annual growth of 0.4% per year. This would be refined later in the year when actual new units expected for the forthcoming year would be substituted for this estimate based on intelligence from Council Tax and Building Control. The New Homes Bonus system was being reviewed by MHCLG and there is no certainty about the shape of the new system (known unknown). However in the past two years the reward grant has only been for 1 year rather than the previous system of awarding the grant for four years. Consequently, we have adopted an approach of setting aside this grant to fund new projects rather than using it to fund the base budget.

Resolved: that the report be noted

JOSC/20/21-22 Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2021/22

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability, 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 12.

The report before members provided an update to the Committee on progress of the work programme to date. The report presented three new applications for additional to

the work programme. These related to Worthing Promenade, Lancing regeneration and a review of scrutiny at Adur and Worthing. All three applications were refused upon a vote.

Resolved: that the progress of the work programme be noted

The meeting was declared closed by the Chairman at 8.38 pm, it having commenced at 6.30 pm

Chairman