

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

QEII Room, Shoreham Centre

14 July 2022

Councillor Joss Loader (Chairman)
Councillor Mandy Buxton (Vice-Chairman)

Adur District Council:

Carol Albury
Tony Bellasis
Ann Bridges
Paul Mansfield
Sharon Sluman
Debs Stainforth

Worthing Borough Council:

Ibsha Choudhury
Dan Hermitage
Margaret Howard
Daniel Humphreys
Heather Mercer
Elizabeth Sparkes

Absent

Councillors Sluman and Sparkes

JOSC/1/10/21-22 Declaration of Interests

Councillor Buxton declared an interest as a tenant of Adur Homes

Councillor Mandy Buxton and Councillor Debs Stainforth declared an interest as members of Shoreham-by-Cycle.

JOSC/1/11/21-22 Substitute Members

Councillor Robina Baine declared a substitution for Councillor Sharon Sluman

Councillor Jenkins declared a substitution for Elizabeth Sparkes

JOSC/1/12/21-22 Confirmation of Minutes

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the 9 June 2022 be approved as the correct record

JOSC/1/13/21-22 Public Question Time

The Leaders of the Council were present at the meeting and questions had been submitted by the Council for their attention.

A Member of the public asked the following question: *One of the most household recyclable things is garden waste. Why then do the council charge such a large amount, compared to other councils, for a green bin. If the council are really committed to being "green" then surely by not charging for a green bin this would encourage household to help achieve the targets. Comments please?* The Adur Leader stated that the subscription service was popular. Not everyone had a garden and it was unfair for those residents to subsidise the service for those that had gardens. The Worthing Leader stated that all things would be reviewed but echoed the Adur Leaders comments about a universal service leading to those without gardens subsidising those with gardens.

A Member asked the following question to the Adur Leader: *The Leaders list of responsibilities includes responsibility for 'public consultation, including community engagement and citizens panels.'* Therefore could the Leader give a progress report on community consultation and involvement and information on any citizen's panels that have taken place? The meeting was told that the Council was shaping a more strategic approach to participation and how we can develop more effective ways of consulting , engaging and involving residents and local businesses in local democratic decision making. This included shaping roles within the Council To help further this work. The Leader gave examples of the work including participatory work in Lancing to reimagine what Lancing should be, the Citizen's assembly on climate change had been a success. There was engagement in New Salts Farm to develop a partnership and a five year plan. There were also other programmes including programmes on the Southwick Estate and the recruitment of a Community Participation Lead to help with engagement with residents of Adur Homes.

A Member of the Public asked the following question: *Can the Leader explain the Council strategy to ensure that the waiting list for social homes is steadily reduced over the next 5 years and can he confirm that plans factor in potential increase in levels of need as a result of cost of living increases?* The Adur Leader told the Committee of the Council's construction of a number of socially rented homes including Albion Street, Cecil Norris House and Ashcroft. Members were also told of homes delivered through the planning process which included those on New Monks Farm and the old civic centre site.

A Member asked the following question: *The Strategic Housing Market Assessment analysis 2020 of older persons housing needs in Adur up to 2036 states that due to considerable growth in the population of over 65s there will be an increase of 414 residents with dementia and 976 with mobility problems. Adur will need 490 units of housing with support, 430 units with care and 188 homes for wheelchair users. The authors of the report, Icenj, recommended that some of these units should be included within large developments where appropriate. What plans does the council have for meeting these needs given the dwindling amount of available building space, particularly in town centre locations, the lack of inclusion so far within the larger developments and the lack of progress on the Pond Rd site?* Members were told that there were a number of units being constructed with disabled adaptations. There were a number of purpose built sheltered accommodation properties including at Ashcroft. In relation to Pond Road the Leader stated that there had been frustrations in relation to this. There were continuing meetings with the NHS and other partners. However ultimately it was within the gift of the NHS as to final decisions.

A Member of the public asked the following question: *West Sussex County Council is failing to deliver the primary strategic routes so vital to the network identified in Adur & Worthing Councils' Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. This strategic*

document was developed through extensive consultation and expert input, before being unanimously accepted in 2020 and strongly endorsed by you, Cllr Parkin. Will you (along with ADC's Executive Member for the Environment Cllr Evans) make representations to WSCC to challenge its selective interpretation of its own consultation results, and its lack of evidence-based decision-making? Would you agree that WSCC's lack of rigour and quality design ambition for primary routes like Upper Shoreham Road appears to be standing in the way of Adur District Council achieving the goals and targets you have set around sustainable travel routes for the expanding population of our district - as well as the council's net zero ambitions? The Leader told Members that temporary cycle route erected during lockdown had muddied the water. Executive Members were pursuing the matter with West Sussex 'ferociously'.

A Member of the public asked the following question: *After Worthing Borough Council declared publicly that it is replacing Glyphosate-based herbicides with environmentally-friendly, non-chemical products, will Adur Council please follow suit? Glyphosate is recognised as deadly for pollinators as they visit dying plants, and dangerous to us as it is carcinogenic. Let us follow the example of Worthing, Brighton, Hampshire, and 38 other Councils, and ban its use for cosmetic purposes. Let the Council adopt safe ways of maintaining our pavements and verges, without the use of toxic chemicals.* The Adur Leader told the meeting that pavements and verges were the responsibility of West Sussex.

A Member of the public asked the following question: *Is it possible to abandon party politics in local government. All candidates should be independent and live in the area that they intend to represent for at least 5 years. Therefore they could truly represent the interests of the people of their area without the shackles of party dogma. Do you agree?* The Leader told the Committee that legislation was in place that set out the rules concerning Councillor selection. The Leader did not think that it would be possible to abandon Party Politics in Local Government.

JOSC/1/14/21-22 Items Raised Under Urgency Provisions

There were no urgent items

JOSC/1/15/21-22 Consideration of any matter referred to the Committee in relation to a call-in of a decision

There were no call-ins

JOSC/1/16/21-22 Adur Leader Interview

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability and Resources, a copy of which was circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes as item 7. The report set out the background information on the Portfolios of the Adur Leader to enable the Committee to consider and question the Leader on issues within their portfolio and any high-level strategic issues which the Leader was involved in and connected with the work of the Council and the Adur communities.

The Adur Leader was present to answer questions

A Member asked a following question: *One of your areas of responsibility is consultations. Why are WSCC consultations on cycles continually allowed to override the*

local consultation held by AWC on its walking and cycling plan? The Leader told Members that the responsibility lay with West Sussex County Council

A Member asked the following question: *How will you work with an executive who wants to change the general direction of Worthing Borough Council in ways that might conflict with your overall vision, strategy and priorities?* Members were told that both Councils had always been individual Councils and that it was up to each individual Council to decide on its own course.

JOSC/1/17/21-22 Worthing Leader Interview

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability and Resources, a copy of which was circulated to all members a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes as item 8. This report before Members set out background information on the Portfolios of the Worthing Leader to enable the Committee to consider and question the Leader on issues within her portfolio and any high-level strategic issues which the Leader was involved in connected with the work of the Council and the Worthing communities.

A Member asked the following question: *It seemed to take you a long time to appoint members to the executive. Could you tell us the process that you used to select those members please?* Members were told that the process had developed over a period of time alongside listening to residents during listening surgeries and roles had been created to match issues that had come up as part of that process. Members had been selected to fill those positions according to their individual skill sets.

A Member asked the following question: *Since the new administration was elected in May the council's communications team has issued a number of press releases, including Q&As, some of which include quotes from executive members. How much input do executive members have in the drafting of those quotes and how much is drafted by council officers?* Members were told that matters from the Joint Strategic Committee tended to come from a Council official alongside a quote from Cabinet Members. The recent Q and A with new Cabinet Members had been written by Cabinet Members.

A Member asked the following question: *You have appointed an executive member to champion young people's interests. There doesn't appear to be anyone on your executive with a remit to look after the interests of older people. Will you be appointing someone to that role?* Members were told that the creation of the post had arisen out of themes emerging from work in communities. It had appeared that there was a need for greater representation for younger people. With regards to older people they would of course continue to receive a focus through Citizens Services and the Wellbeing Portfolios. The big listening campaign would be designed in such a way as to hear the voices of older people.

A Member asked the following question: *You have appointed a nine member executive meaning that one third of the available councillors (the Mayor and Deputy Mayor being ineligible) are now executive members. This is very unusual - could you explain the rationale behind having such a large executive please?* Members were told that the portfolios had been developed as necessary to deliver the manifesto. In relation to culture and leisure the portfolio related to the wider aspects of the title and not specifically to trusts setup in that regard.

A Member asked the following question *You have announced a 'Big Listening' exercise. Elsewhere in the country, and here in Worthing, Citizens' Assemblies have proven an effective means of engaging with a cross section of the public on important issues. Why have you chosen the big listening exercise over more citizens' assemblies?* The Worthing Leader told members that it was not an either or situation and that citizens assemblies were one of the methods that could be utilised to enable more deliberative democracy sessions. The big listening campaign could be used to shape a medium / longer term approach to participation. Examples had been sought from other Local Authorities on different approaches including that of Wigan Council.

A Member asked the following question: *You have made a commitment to being a council that listens to the public and that is an admirable aim. How will you balance opinions that you receive if those opinions stand in contrast to hard data that you know exists?* The Worthing Leader told members that it was an important point. The big listening campaign was in part to judge how the data related to resident's everyday lives and how to meet the needs of communities. The aims of the Authority would be adjusted and refined through the big listening campaign. Where there were discrepancies the data would need to be more closely examined. Learning outputs would be used to shape the data moving forward.

JOSC/1/18/21-22 Financial Performance 2021/22 - 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 a signed copy of these minutes as item 9. The report before members outlined the revenue financial monitoring position for the end of the 2021/22 financial year.

The Head of financial Services introduced the report to the Committee.

A Member asked how much the strategic investment fund had raised in the financial figures and was told that this figure was between £4m and £4.5m more details on the figures could be supplied to the Committee.

Resolved: that the report be noted

JOSC/1/19/21-22 Developing a revenue budget for 2023/24 against a backdrop of high inflation

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital Sustainability and Resources, a copy of which was circulated to all members, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes as item 10. The purpose of the report before was to propose a budget strategy for the development of the 2023/24 budgets with the added challenge this year of high inflation. When the 2022/23 budget was set, the war in Ukraine had yet to start and that continued to affect global economies with a prolonged impact on the energy markets and the consequential cost of living challenges which confront communities as well as the Authorities.

The Head of Financial Services introduced the report to the Committee. The Worthing Cabinet Member for Resources was present to answer questions.

A Member asked what percentage staffing accounted for in the overall Councils' budget. Members were told that this was about £28m

A Member asked how confident the Financial Services Manager was that inflation would fall back to 2% after two years. The Financial Services Manager told the Committee that this forecast had been supplied by the Bank of England. Members were given assurance that the Councils' financial plan was reviewed three times a year.

A Member asked the following question: *Can you confirm if there is any realistic prospect of the councils facing a "£6m funding gap" as was stated in a recent press release from the Councils?* The Cabinet Member informed the Committee that it was important to be honest about the scale of the challenge facing the Council. There was confidence that the organisation would use its creativity and resourcefulness to meet the challenge.

A Member asked the following question: *In section 6.5 with reference to Platform 4, the report states that you are reviewing existing fee earning services and that "services which operate on a commercial basis will be encouraged to maximise profit margins". This implies that some fees are going to be raised - are there any areas in which you would like to rule out* Members were told that it was premature to rule anything out at this stage. However the strategy was focussed on profit margins rather than fee levels and so there may be some fees where either fixing or reducing the fee level would stimulate demand.

A Member asked the following question: *The papers detail how the council's investment scheme has supported income which in turn has kept vital services running. At the same time the papers report that the council's borrowing position is under borrowed. These facts stand in stark contrast to claims made in a council press release issued on the 6th June in which Councillor Martin McCabe was quoted as saying "we'll tackle the council debt we've inherited" and other social media posts by Councillor McCabe including one on the 8th of June which stated that the Labour administration would "tackle the financial hangover from years of Tory debt-fuelled binge-spending". Do you agree with the factual statements in your budget strategy or the opinions of your colleague Councillor McCabe?* Members were told that as at the 31st March 2022 our debt level was £130m whereas our long term assets were valued at £280m. The council has a robust MRP policy in place which will ensure that the debt is prudently repaid over the life of the assets acquired through borrowing. The Council provided for the repayment of £1.6m debt last year and will provide £1.7m this year. Members were told that local property would be invested in instances where the investment could generate income.

A Member asked the following question: *How do you see the budget challenges affect service provision?* Members were told that it was premature to answer the question at the current time. The intention was to protect service provision as much as possible. There were different ways to provide services including ways to reduce costs which could help protect other services.

A Member asked the following question: *The papers detail how the council's strategic property investment scheme has provided significant income, which in turn has kept vital services running. Locally as a land owner or through investment, this council is currently sitting on a number of key long term revenue generator sites that could provide a raft of income to the council. When will these sites come on-line and improve the budget provision?* Members were told that the Council was working on a number of sites that would improve the Council's financial position either through a rental stream to the

Council as a landlord, through increased business rates or through increasing the Council tax base.

Resolved: that the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report

JOSC/1/20/21-22 JOSC Work Programme review

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability and Resources, a copy of which was sent to all Members, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes as item 11. The report before members outlined progress in implementing the work contained in the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2022/23. The report included a scrutiny request which was attached as item B to the report.

The Scrutiny and Performance Officer introduced the report to the Committee. Members were updated with the programme of interviews with Cabinet and Executive Members. The Committee were also updated with the Joint Strategic Committee's response the Working Group on the evening and night time economy, members were told that the Joint Strategic Committee had asked for the report to be reconsidered in light of the cost of living crisis.

Members discussed the extension of the Working Group for the Evening and Night time economy and it was agreed that the working group would be reconvened to consider the matter and that Cllrs Albury, Mansfield, Dan Hermitage and Daniel Humphreys be appointed.

Members discussed the Scrutiny request to review the administration of the shared prosperity fund. It was agreed that the matter be added to the work programme.

Members discussed the need for a working group into matters surrounding temporary accommodation and agreed to formation of one. Cllrs Stainforth, Buxton, Mercer and Howard were appointed to the Working Group.

Resolved: that the work programme be noted as amended

JOSC/1/21/21-22 JOSC Working Group- Review of the Adur Homes repairs and maintenance service

The Committee had before it 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 a signed copy of these minutes as item 12. The report before Members set out information received by 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 and work being undertaken to improve the services as part of the overall housing transformation.

The Head of Adur Homes and the Housing Transformation Manager were present to answer questions from the Committee. The Cabinet Member for Adur Homes and Customer Services was also present to answer questions.

Members asked questions about the regularity of information supplied by Adur Homes concerning Void properties and it was agreed that a regular process of updating members would be put into place. There were also questions on the reasons for voids being held void for an extended period and were told that the process could be held up by rebate or by tenants leaving with large bills unpaid.

Members were given information on the filling of vacant positions including positions relating to asset management.

Members asked questions about progress of discussion of maintenance and were told that an Audit was being put together of all Adur Stock and there was in-depth consideration being undertaken on maintenance in a proactive sense.

A Member asked if there was consideration of the positions of Adur Homes Rangers and was told that maintenance issues were under review.

Resolved: that JOSC note the report

The meeting was declared closed by the Chairman at 9.00 pm, it having commenced at 6.30 pm

Chairman