

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Council held in the
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Worthing**

13 December 2022

6.30pm

The Mayor, Councillor Henna Chowdhury

Councillor Noel Atkins	Councillor Nigel Morgan
Councillor Roy Barraclough	Councillor Richard Mulholland
Councillor Mike Barrett	Councillor Richard Nowak
Councillor Ibsha Choudhury	Councillor Dale Overton
Councillor Russ Cochran	Councillor Jon Roser
Councillor Beccy Cooper	Councillor Helen Silman
*Councillor Dan Coxhill	Councillor Dawn Smith
Councillor Jim Deen	Councillor Sally Smith
Councillor Rita Garner	Councillor Elizabeth Sparkes
Councillor Cathy Glynn-Davies	Councillor Emma Taylor
Council Lionel Harman	Councillor Sam Theodoridi
Councillor Dan Hermitage	Councillor Hazel Thorpe
*Councillor Margaret Howard	Councillor John Turley
Councillor Daniel Humphreys	Councillor Steve Waight
Councillor Charles James	Councillor Carl Walker
Councillor Kevin Jenkins	Councillor Vicki Wells
Councillor Martin McCabe	Councillor Andy Whight
Councillor Heather Mercer	Councillor Rosey Whorlow

*=Absent

C/40/22-23 Apologies for Absence

The Mayor received apologies for absence from Councillors Dan Coxhill and Margaret Howard.

C/41/22-23 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

C/42/22-23 Confirmation of Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 18th October 2022 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Mayor.

C/43/22-23 Questions from the Public

The Mayor advised that 3 questions had been received in advance of the meeting.

1. Question submitted by Luke Houghton, a Worthing Resident

As Mr Houghton was not present, the Mayor requested that a written response be provided to his question.

2. Question submitted by Ian Davey, a Worthing Resident

Question: *Cycling infrastructure in Worthing is appalling.*

It has been some years now since, with public consultation, the Borough Council aimed to address this and agreed the Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).

Could the leader of the council please outline what cycling infrastructure has been implemented since.

The Leader replied that the Council adopted the LCWIP a couple of years ago and there had been little progress made in relation to infrastructure changes during this time period. There were improvements being made along the A24 in Findon but that wasn't one of the priority routes in the plan.

The new administration came in with a priority in relation to sustainable travel which they had been pushing forward. Highways were the responsibility of West Sussex County Council (WSSC) so Worthing Borough Council had to work in partnership with WSSC.

The Council was negotiating a new growth deal with WSSC, with sustainable transport at the heart of it. The deal sets out what the priority projects are across the Borough and considers the funding which WSSC could access nationally to support those projects.

The Council wanted to ensure that whenever infrastructure development was being considered, that cycling, walking and public transport were put forward as an emergency priority.

At a recent meeting with WSSC, 2 north to south and 2 east to west priority routes were considered. Officers from WSSC had now undertaken feasibility studies for the north to south routes, which was the first stage towards obtaining cycle route funding. The next stage was going out to public consultation.

WBC have been prioritising sustainable travel and put together a sustainable travel steering group. The intention was to merge the steering group with the established Active Travel Group which was made up of officers from WBC and

WSSC. In the new year, Members would be actively speaking with stakeholders, including the Worthing Cycling Forum.

3. Question asked by Ian Davey, a Worthing Resident

Question: *The Adur & Worthing sustainability framework talks of shifting to sustainable transport and improving air quality. Actions include implementing improvements identified in the LCWIP and introducing bike share with 50% e-bikes in 2023. To this end the Borough Council had been planning to join the new bike share scheme soon to start in Brighton & Hove. Could the council leader please outline the rationale behind the recent decision to abandon this plan in favour of continuing with the existing Donkey Bike scheme.*

The Leader replied that due to the Council's financial position, the Council needed to review a number of commitments that would have a significant impact on the budget - one of those commitments was bike share.

After a complete review of the scheme it became clear that, currently, the original plan to partner with Brighton & Hove City Council was unaffordable due to the high capital and revenue investment required. Officers very diligently looked for a more economical solution, hence the recommendation to proceed with the expansion of the Donkey Bike scheme.

Whilst we appreciate Donkey Bike's won't give us full coverage across the Borough as the Brighton & Hove scheme would have done, this does mean we can deliver an affordable scheme over the short - medium term. There will be an additional 40 bikes in operation across the scheme, which will include Adur, with 3 new hubs in Worthing extending out to Brooklands in the east and Goring Road to the west.

Again, due to the associated costs of e-bikes the Council hasn't the financial capacity for these to be included in the initial expansion but we are committed to reviewing the scheme on a regular basis to see if we can implement new additions, such as e-bikes, as soon as possible. This will have to be set in the context of the overall financial position of the Council. Equally, the Council will be keeping abreast of any external funding that could help contribute to further expansion or improvements within the scheme.

A question was also received from a Member of the Public in attendance at the meeting.

4. Question asked by Bryan Turner, a Worthing Resident

Question: *The Council had already declared a Climate Emergency. Would the Leader therefore agree that it was important that residents were able to access their homes, their workplaces and their leisure facilities in a sustainable manner, along the lines of the 15 minute city concept. Did the Leader agree that the Local Plan met that objective through its focus on the social environment and economic goals.*

The Leader replied that she was all for sustainable travel across the Borough. It had been necessary to defer the adoption of the Local Plan to another date but that in no way negated the importance of the plan or the information contained within it which had been developed by both sides of the chamber. The Local Plan was iterative, it took many years to develop and then once it's adopted, we start the iterative process all over again.

C/44/22-23 Announcements by the Mayor, Leader of the Council, Executive Members or the Head of Paid Service

The Mayor provided a summary of the events that she had attended and supported since the last Full Council meeting and details of the upcoming Mayor's charity events.

The Leader introduced Sianna Hearn, Member of the Adur and Worthing Youth Council, who gave a presentation and answered questions in relation to the makeup of the Youth Council and some of its recent initiatives.

The Deputy Leader updated Council on the Cost of Living Emergency Work, thanking Officers for their work in getting 'warm spaces' up and running and the Community Venues who had come forward and to offer support to those most in need this winter, helping to create a network of warm hubs which would make a big difference.

Councillors were also informed of the recent launch of a crowd fund to support food groups and the Deputy Leader thanked local businesses who had come forward at short notice to support this initiative.

The Cabinet Member for Citizen Services announced that a Housing Conference would be held on the 23rd February 2023 in the Rooms Worthing.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration wished to thank all those who had taken part in the 'your space' design competition advising that the second phase was due to end on the 16th December.

The Cabinet Member for Environment updated the Council on the National Bathing Water results announced by DEFRA and the most recent Council Poo Patrol which had been established to raise awareness of the problems with dog fouling in the Borough.

The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure reminded Members that a couple of culture organisations (Worthing Theatres and Museum and Audio Active) were offering holiday activities for young people who qualified for free school meals.

There were no announcements from the Chief Executive.

C/45/22-23 Items raised under Urgency Provisions

There were no urgent items raised under the urgency provisions.

C/46/22-23 Recommendations from the Executive and Committees to Council

Council had, before it, recommendations from the Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Joint Audit and Governance Committee.

Extracts of these minutes had been circulated as items 7A, 7B, 7C and 7D(i) & (ii).

Item 7A Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee - 8 November 2022

Worthing Local Plan

The Mayor advised Council that consideration of agenda item 7A, the Worthing Local Plan, was to be deferred to an alternative date.

The Council had become aware of an inaccuracy in the supporting information to the Worthing Local Plan which required consideration. The Mayor advised that this information was deemed exempt as it related to the business and financial affairs of the Council.

As the Local Plan was a very important document, the Council was pausing the process whilst this issue was considered further.

Item 7B Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 24 November 2022

JOSC Work Programme review

The Chair of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Roser, proposed the recommendation from the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 24 November 2022.

During debate of the item, Members raised concerns about the size of the work programme and the number of Cabinet Member Interviews.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Dan Hermitage and unanimously supported.

Resolved,

That Worthing Borough Council noted the changes made to the JOSC Work Programme since it was agreed by both Councils in April 2022.

Item 7C Joint Audit & Governance Committee - 29 November 2022

Members Allowances 2022/23

The Chair of the Joint Audit & Governance Committee, Cllr Mike Barrett, proposed that the recommendations from the Joint Audit & Governance Committee meeting held on 29 November 2022. The proposal was seconded by Cllr Dan Hermitage.

The motion was debated with consideration given to the budget, the current scheme of allowances and the amount of work undertaken by Councillors.

Councillor Thorpe wished to place on record that she would not be accepting the 5.82% rise to her basic allowance and that all councillors could choose to do the same.

Following a vote (For 22, Against 1, Abstentions 12), the motion was supported.

Resolved,

That Worthing Borough Council approved that Members Allowances for 2022/23 be increased by 5.82% in line with the weighted average of the NJC pay bargaining agreement for 2022/23.

Item 7D(i) Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee - 5 December 2022

2023/24 Budget Update

The Leader of the Council proposed the recommendations from the meeting held on 5 December 2022.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor John Turley and unanimously supported.

Resolved:

That Worthing Borough Council approved the use of capital receipts to support the delivery of the budget as set out in appendix 4.

Item 7D(ii) Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee - 5 December 2022

Outcome of the public consultation in respect of the working age Council Tax Support Scheme for Worthing Borough Council in respect of 2023/24

The Leader of the Council, proposed the recommendations from the meeting held on 5 December 2022.

Following debate of the item, the proposal was seconded by Councillor Samuel Theodoridi and supported following a vote (For 21, Against 0, Abstentions 14).

Resolved,

That Worthing Borough Council approved that with effect from 1 April 2023 the following changes should be made to the local Council Tax Support scheme for working age residents in Worthing:-

1. The £5.00 weekly restriction would no longer apply.
2. The discretionary budget to support those in severe financial difficulty would no longer be required as a result of the removal of the restriction.
3. A valid claim for Council Tax Support would be deemed to have been made by customers who had been awarded Universal Credit and indicated that they wished to claim Council Tax Support (unless further information was required to enable entitlement to be determined).

4. No other changes would be made beyond necessary technical amendments required to keep the scheme consistent with the national rules in respect of Housing Benefit

C/47/22-23 Report of the Leader on Decisions taken by the Executive

The Leader of the Council presented their report on decisions taken by the Cabinet since the last meeting of the Council, which were detailed in Item 8.

During consideration of the item, questions were raised in relation to the introduction of charging for car parks that were currently free to use; the size of the reserves held by the Council; the Corporate Debt Policy and the proposed increase to car park charges for off street car parking.

**** The meeting was adjourned at 8.52pm and reconvened at 9.00pm.**

C/48/22-23 Members Questions under Council Procedure Rule 12

The Mayor announced that the Proper Officer had received 8 questions from Members in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12. She advised that one supplementary question could be asked which must arise out of the original question, or, the reply.

Questions would be asked in rotation of the Groups represented in the Chamber and there were 30 minutes allowed for questions with 3 rotations of speakers possible. The Mayor announced that the following Councillors had submitted questions:

Councillors Nowak, Thorpe, Cochran and Jenkins.

First rotation

Question 1 from Councillor Richard Nowak to the Leader

In Labour's manifesto entitled "A Council for the Community" a commitment was made to "invest in Local Climate Bonds to raise money for local sustainable projects".

Perversely, this was the one proposal considered by the Adur & Worthing Climate Assembly in 2020 which failed to achieve the necessary 75% support for it to become a final report recommendation.

Nevertheless it is one of this administration's manifesto commitments and therefore my question is a simple one – 6 months downstream from taking charge of the Council why has there been no progress on this promise to Worthing residents?

The Leader asked the Cabinet Member for Resources to respond to the question.

The Cabinet Member replied that the Council had been very successful in leveraging in external funding to date for its decarbonisation programme and so there had been no need to go to the market for borrowing.

The Council had sourced an intermediary to administer any potential green bond, and intended to use these as a source of funding for large scale projects such as the development of a solar farm.

Once the Council had an approved series of unfunded projects, then the green bond would be used as a source of funding. However, given the Council's constrained financial position, it would continue to seek external funding first as this represented the best value to the public purse.

Any bond was an alternative form of finance and so did not increase the amount available for investment in decarbonisation. It did however enable the community to support this important agenda.

The Council was particularly keen to explore models that encouraged local residents to donate all or part of their investment back, emphasising community wealth building outcomes, tapping into investors' increasing desire to invest "hyper locally".

It was expected that options for a local scheme would be developed and assessed during the spring / early summer.

Question 2 from Councillor Hazel Thorpe to the Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing

Two local schools are under discussion of merging due to the predicted dwindling numbers of children coming through the system.

Whilst education is a major part of the County Council's brief, they are still one of our partners and education impacts upon everything we do.

What is your view on the merging of two of our local schools, impacting upon other schools, with the high probability of loss of teaching and other jobs?

The Cabinet Member replied that West Sussex County Council was responsible for this matter, however, there were clearly significant implications for Worthing Borough Council, with any merger being disruptive for all concerned.

It was noted that a consultation had commenced which was due to close at the end of January.

Question 3 from Councillor Russ Cochran to the Leader

With the Labour party Manifesto now at the core of the council's current directives, have any key priorities listed in it, that directly affect the whole borough, changed since arriving as an administration?

The Leader replied that six months into a new administration, the Council had not significantly changed direction on any of the key priorities. However, some of them had come into sharper focus, particularly issues around the cost of living emergency. Work was ongoing to see what could be done creatively with the very limited budgets available.

An audit of public conveniences had identified that £1m worth of work was required to bring these facilities up to the standards desired but there was only £100k in the budget for this work. Similarly, the crematorium, which provided an important service for residents, was much valued and provided an important income for the Council, required significant investment in order for it to be the best facility that it could be.

The administration would be meeting in January, as a group, to review its first 6 months. Changes had been made from day 1 but longer term projects would be developed to shape the future of the town.

Question 4 from Kevin Jenkins to the Cabinet Member for Culture & Leisure

In July 2022, this administration published its new priorities for Worthing Borough Council and in there, under culture & Leisure, it stated that 'in the coming year you will work with partners to establish an improved accommodation offer in Worthing for visitors and families'.

The food and beverage industry and visitor economy relies on visitors to our town to support their businesses. 2022 as a season is closing and 2023 will soon be upon us, with the need to attract a fresh wave of visitors to the town. So can you tell me what work has been done so far and with whom, outside of the council, to improve the accommodation offer in Worthing for the 2023 season?

The Cabinet Member for Culture & Leisure replied that the Council was engaging with Experience West Sussex (EWS) and West Sussex County Council (WSCC) regarding a wider piece of work regarding an accommodation review across the county. The Council's Officers will be included in the membership of the steering group which would ensure that Worthing had a clear, loud voice in the design of the review and that the voice of Worthing businesses would be heard.

The proposed remit of the review was as follows:-

- to gather intelligence on national trends on accommodation expectations;
- holding a workshop for existing providers on the grants and other support which was available to them; and
- Identifying the gaps in provision and then working with investors both here and overseas to ensure that through our involvement there was an understanding of the potential that Worthing has within West Sussex.

Working with EWS, the Council was able to get more than if it worked on its own and it was hoped that this piece of work would give providers the information, from experts in the sector, on which they can then make decisions to ensure that their businesses meet the expectations of visitors, including families, in the future.

Second rotation

Question 5 from Councillor Richard Nowak to the Cabinet Member for the Climate Emergency

Copies of the 2020 Climate Assembly Recommendations Report were much in evidence on the Council's stand at the recent Green Dreams Festival and one might therefore

reasonably assume that the Labour Administration fully supports the 18 recommendations made by Assembly members.

Is this correct or are there some report recommendations that the Council no longer supports, and if that is the case which recommendations will no longer be supported and brought to fruition?

The Cabinet Member for the Climate Emergency replied that the Climate Assembly had been an excellent first step in engaging the community with the climate crisis. The Council continued to respond to the recommendations and many would be incorporated into forthcoming strategy and community work in 2023.

The Council had unlocked £76k of DEFRA funding for kelp recovery research, which related to the first Assembly Recommendation, and the Natural Environment Research Council had also funded the kelp work by supporting the formation of a research partnership with 4 local universities (Brighton, Sussex, Portsmouth and Surrey), representing a further £170k of funding.

Local communities were working with the Council on plans to restore Cissbury Fields which Worthing Borough Council acquired, and the Council had worked hard to re-nature its parks and open spaces.

In 2023 work would begin as one of two Sussex Local Nature Partnership supported pilots, creating a Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which would encompass small and large sites and propose green corridors, with a view to unlocking payments from developers through new Environment Bill biodiversity net gain legislation.

The Council was currently working with West Sussex County Council to roll out EV charging points and significantly expand the Bikeshare scheme.

As mentioned in the previous question, the Council would look at community financing models for climate initiatives in early 2023, and would work with key groups and communities to pick up and develop further responses across the 18 recommendations, all of which the Council was keen to develop and support.

**** A decision to extend the meeting beyond three hours in duration was taken at 9.30pm.***

Question 6 from Councillor Hazel Thorpe to the Cabinet Member for Citizen Services

What is the Cabinet Member for Citizen Services response to Michael Gove's letter on Housing standards in Rented Properties with particular regard to mould and dampness?

The Cabinet Member for Citizen Services replied that the Council's Officers had already responded to the letter with an initial response setting out how the Council was prioritising the enforcement of housing standards, including plans to drive up standards in the private rented sector. The next step was to provide more detailed reports by the 27th January.

The Council's private sector housing team routinely included works to address a range of hazards, including those identified in the hazard profile of damp and mould growth, using the appropriate enforcement action. Work would now be done to present those figures based purely on this hazard type and once these were available, they would be shared with Members.

C/49/22-23 Motion on Notice

Members had a motion before them proposed by Councillor Kevin Jenkins which was seconded by Councillor Russ Cochran.

A motion without notice, to go to a vote without debate, was proposed by Councillor Andy Whight, seconded by Councillor Samuel Theodoridi and supported.

Following a vote, the substantive motion was supported unanimously.

Resolved:

That Worthing Borough Council requested that the proposed Schedule of Meetings for 2023/2024 onwards, to be approved at Full Council, took into account the new Budget Procedure Rules and provided that Council meetings were scheduled in such a way so as to avoid a gap in the Schedule between December and April.

C/50/22-23 Motion on Notice

Members had a motion before them proposed by Councillor Sally Smith and seconded by Councillor Samuel Theodoridi.

The motion was debated and following a vote, was supported unanimously.

Resolved:

That Worthing Borough Council reaffirmed its commitment to developing and maintaining healthy, sustainable housing for the residents of Worthing.

The Mayor declared the meeting closed at 10.06pm

Mayor