

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

Worthing Town Hall

19 January 2023

Adur District Council:

Joss Loader
Tony Bellasis
Debs Stainforth

Worthing Borough Council:

Cathy Glynn-Davies
Ibsha Choudhury
Dan Hermitage
Margaret Howard
Daniel Humphreys
Jon Roser
Elizabeth Sparkes

Absent

Councillor Mandy Buxton, Councillor Carol Albury, Councillor Ann Bridges, Councillor Paul Mansfield, Councillor Sharon Sluman and Councillor Dr Heather Mercer

The Chairman announced that item 14. Review of the JOSC Work Programme would be moved after consideration of item 11. Interview with Adur Cabinet Member for Environment & Leisure

JOSC/61/22/23 Declaration of Interests

Councillor Glynn-Davies declared an interest as a Landlord
Councillor Jenkins declared an interest as a Director of Worthing Town FC

JOSC/62/22/23 Substitute Members

Councillor Jenkins was substituting for Councillor Mercer

JOSC/63/22/23 Confirmation of Minutes

Resolved: the minutes of the meeting of the 24 November 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

JOSC/64/22/23 Public Question Time

No public questions were received.

JOSC/65/22/23 Members' Question Time

No member questions were received.

JOSC/66/22/23 Items Raised Under Urgency Provisions

There were no urgent items.

JOSC/67/22/23 Consideration of any matter referred to the Committee in relation to a call-in of a decision

There were no call-ins

JOSC/68/22/23 Response from Joint Strategic Committee on the Adur and Worthing evening and night time economy review

To consider 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.

This report provided the Committee with the response from the Joint Strategic Committee (JSC) on 6 December 2022 which considered the report from the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) on its review of the Adur and Worthing evening and night time economies (ENTE).

JOSC was recommended to note the formal response from the JSC consideration of the JOSC report on the review of the ENTE.

Resolved: Members noted the formal response to the report

JOSC/69/22/23 Review of progress on the delivery of the Housing Strategy

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 9, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes.

The purpose of the report was to update the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee on progress made against the commitments in the Housing Strategy 2020-2023 'Enabling communities to thrive in their own home'.

A Member asked "In 2021-2022 Adur spent over £1 million and thirty six thousand pounds gross on temporary accommodation. How does this compare nationally, considering we are a small Local Authority?"

Response -

Nationally (England), temporary accommodation spent for the year 2021-2022 had increased by 61% compared with five years previously.

To note, local authorities were capped as to what they could charge for temporary accommodation rents, at 90% of 2011 LHA.

As a comparison, at last reporting (Qu2 22/22) Adur and Worthing spending combined was slightly less than Crawley Borough Council but slightly more than Arun District Council. Adur District Council's spending was more than Chichester District Council but less than Mid Sussex.

A Member asked "A concerning number of those owed Relief Duty left this service with 52 days elapsed. Whilst acknowledging the specific challenges of the market in Adur, what more can our service do to achieve a successful outcome for more people?"

Response -

The data showed Relief cases where '56 days have elapsed'. Relief cases where the 56 days had elapsed did not indicate that households had left the service but that their homelessness had not been relieved and a decision on the ongoing housing duty needed to be issued.

Increasing successful outcomes for more people was multifaceted and work was continuous in these areas:

- Increasing supply of affordable housing both in the private and social rented sectors. Examples of work in this area: Opening Doors, Pathways to Affordable Homes, Landlords Forums, Accommodation for Ex-Offenders, Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme, Housing First pilot, Housing Conference and Landlords Round Table were planned.
- Partnerships and early identification of triggers for homelessness was ongoing and would be developed further with the relaunch of the new iteration of the Homelessness Forum. Examples of the work:
 - Working closely with Children's Services, WORTH, Adult Social Care, JobCentrePlus
 - A 'Duty to Refer' route for social landlords.
 - Mental Health Housing Advisor in post to work with those in mental health settings homeless or at risk of homelessness.
 - Weekly Rough Sleepers Team meeting that also case managed single people at risk of homelessness as well as rough sleepers, including 'Duty to Refer' cases - e.g. prison releases and hospital discharges
- Support for those who needed it to prevent homelessness - the councils joint fund Pathways Homes service to support those at risk of homelessness.
- Digital tools to help identify those at risk of homelessness - e.g. they were piloting Telljo.
- Increasing staff resources to enable more prevention work - recruiting triage and move on officers as well as additional homeless officers in post.

A Member asked "Re paragraph 5.3 - Would it be possible to speak to the length of stay in temporary accommodation- average length of stay, and how long is the longest stay for a family and a single person in temporary accommodation currently?"

Noted more Worthing households placed in Adur than Adur households "

Response -

Re: note, yes this was the case, conversely there was a high number of Adur households in Worthing (52 at time of snapshot)

They did not hold the average length of stay as requires a manual calculation and a variety of factors 'skewed' the picture e.g. repeat homelessness where people left and return, people whose length of stay was due to housing history or rent arrears when RSLs would not accept them as a nomination.

A snapshot average stay figure would be produced and supplied at a later date.

Longest stays in temporary accommodation:

- Adur single person longest stay: 2 years 10 months
- Worthing single person longest stay: 5 years (but has had spells in supported accommodation during this period)
- Adur family longest stay: 3 years 2 months
- Worthing family longest stay: 4 years 11 months

Longest stays in leased temporary accommodation (total stock x15 properties. All let to families)

- Adur: 6 years 7 months
- Worthing: 6 years 6 months

A Member asked "Re Paragraph 8.7 - continue to be concerned about voids and the cost is £0.5m a year. What progress is being made to reduce the number of voids and the void turnaround time, all contributing factors being already well understood?"

Response -

The Councils had brought in additional capacity and expertise to improve the quality and turnaround time for void properties. The current numbers were high and they were focusing attention on reducing these levels and ensuring that they achieved a good standard in re-lets. They did know that the quality of re-let's had significantly improved.

A Member asked "Paragraph 5.2 of the report explains the level of expenditure that is predicted to rise in this financial year. The cost of living crisis and legislation will cause extra expenditure.

In Para 5.10 it explains that the current policy was written in 2017 and was due for review in 2020. Of course the pandemic has caused disruption and there's been a road to return to pre-pandemic levels and the extension of current policy will be requested in March. With such rapid changes occurring so regularly, can you explain how the paper coming to the Joint Strategic Committee in March will reflect a situation drastically different to that of 2017?"

Response -

The paper in March would request an extension to current policy and proposed a timetable for the delivery of the new policy and a new Rough Sleeping and

Homelessness Strategy as well as updates on the work streams that were linked and dependent on one another to achieve the missions of preventing homelessness and increasing supply of all housing.

Given the present-day pressures, increase in homelessness and gaps in meeting the supported housing needs of single homeless people, a Housing Needs Assessment was being commissioned to enable a robust data set to inform the development of the policy and strategy and support further a partnership approach to the delivery of outcomes and give a basis to relaunch the new iteration of the Homelessness Forum.

Whilst the Temporary Accommodation Policy was out of date, the increase of supply was a priority and this work continued under the Pathways to Affordable Homes strategy.

Further questions were asked about Victoria road developments and current assessment of council owned properties that could be used as accommodation.

Members were told that all council assets were being looked at with the context of budget allowance and prevention work. There would be a briefing available for all Members on the TellJo scheme that works alongside proactive and prevention work.

Resolved: Members noted

1. The progress made over the last 12 months and;
2. The Department for Levelling Up Communities and Housing funding update.

JOSC/70/22/23 Southern Water Consultation & Designation of the River Adur as bathing water

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 10, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes

The purpose of the report was to advise the Committee of the recent Consultation undertaken by Southern Water on their draft Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan.

The report also considered and responded to the JOSC recommendation “To work together to designate the river Adur in Shoreham as a bathing river to enable bacterial testing” following discussions between Officers and Cabinet Members.

A Member asked “It’s great news that the council is looking into bathing water status for the river Adur. Will the council consider how it could deploy volunteers, such as citizen science, to gather the data required to meet the Defra standards?”

Response -

The desire to improve river quality was fully acknowledged by Officers and Cabinet Members but designating the River Adur as a bathing water would not achieve this in the short to medium term. There were currently both public safety and public health risks associated with bathers using the River Adur and further work was required before looking at applying for bathing water designation. Should the Council be in a position to proceed with applying for bathing water they would be looking to work with volunteers.

A Member asked "In order to improve water quality in the River Adur, consideration must be given to addressing the sewage output from the 40 homes on the river, which flows downstream with the tide. What are the plans in place to tackle this?"

Response -

Water quality along the length of the River Adur was affected by a number of factors including agricultural livestock, wildlife, birds, houseboat sewage and road drainage as well as misconnections of foul and grey water into storm water sewers which fed into the river. An initial meeting had already taken place with Southern Water to examine mechanisms for first time connections for the houseboats and examining funding solutions. Further meetings were planned where these issues can be explored further.

Members wished to clarify that a large number of swim groups, paddle boarders, scouting groups etc used sections of the river creating traffic. Members asked about action taken to prevent overflows leading into the river and what tests could be made for new forms of bacteria.

Members were told that the operation of overflow discharges was the responsibility of the Environment Agency and Southern Water had a plan for how to improve this, but that the council would monitor their work and apply pressure to achieve the best outcomes. Members were also told that the council can test for known bacteria while the Security Agency test for new strains.

Resolved:

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the content of the report

JOSC/71/22/23 Interview with Adur Cabinet Member for Environment & Leisure

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 11, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, this item was been deferred to a later meeting.

JOSC/72/22/23 Review of the JOSC Work Programme

The Committee had a report before it, attached as item 15, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of these minutes.

Due to scheduling, the Chairman brought this item forward on the agenda.

This report outlined progress in implementing the work contained in the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) Work Programme for 2022/23.

Members discussed if 8 weeks would be long enough for Cabinets to present on the Adur and Worthing evening and night time economy review. It was agreed that a report be presented at a meeting in July.

Members also discussed if the Cabinet Member for Resources should return to elaborate about information concerning car parking charges, it was purported that information had been previously withheld about this issue when questioned at a previous meeting.

Members agreed that the Cabinet Member for Resources come back to JOSC at a future date to be decided by the Joint Chairs.

Resolved: that the Committee

1. Receive a follow up report on the evening and night time economy in July;
2. To have the Worthing Cabinet Member for Resources attend a future JOSC meeting, the date of which was to be decided by the Chairs.
3. That the updated work programme for 2022/23 be noted (as amended)

JOSC/73/22/23 Interview with Worthing Deputy Leader

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 12, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes.

A Member asked “Can you please give us an update on the Big Listen exercise including how much of the £70,000 budget has been spent so far, how many people have engaged (broken to conversations and website responses) and what tangible impact the responses have had on decisions taken by the executive?”

Response -

The Big Listen was developed to enable the Council to develop its approach to participation and find new ways of engaging with residents. It had been an attempt to create spaces to genuinely listen to concerns and hopes shared.

The Council held 264 conversations (respondents) over the course of the summer. In total, 399 people contributed to the Big Listen campaign by interacting with the content. Just over 1,800 visits to the Common Place site and 204 registered to receive direct communications about the Big Listen.

The outputs from the exercise had helped teams look at their current and future projects and reflect on their overall target impact and outcomes. The data from this programme had been collated and specific themes relating to core issues - for example - housing - had been shared with key officers in the Council, including Heads of Service and those formulating team strategies and priorities.

The results of the Big Listen were already making a direct impact into the work of officers. Accessibility and inclusivity, along with green spaces were two of the key Big Listen themes. This information had been shared with Officers overseeing public realm, regeneration and major projects and had resulted in greater scrutiny and planning around these issues.

Projects undertaken and aligned to the Big Listen had resulted in a total spend of £26,000.00.

A Member asked “One of your responsibilities is developing community participatory decision-making structures. You haven’t held any citizens’ assemblies and I am told that you are reducing the number of participatory leads employed by the council. How are you proposing to improve participatory decision-making structures within that context?”

Response -

They were not reducing participatory posts. They were redesigning participatory functions and working up more detailed plans around participation which was outlined in the new corporate plan. As part of this they would be shaping a policy paper and a longer-term roadmap / clear vision for participation and engagement. This would set out how they aimed to involve residents in local decision making.

Citizens assemblies were one method that had been used. As part of the work they would be looking at a variety of methods and tools that they could use alongside building the right capabilities in the staff to do this work well.

Members also asked about the public awareness of council programmes, the coverage of the Big Listen initiative and maximising council assets to tackle homelessness.

Members were told that the council is exploring every avenue to advertise initiatives like the warm spaces, that the Big Listen is a multi-phase plan and phase 2 will aim to cover the areas that might have been missed in phase 1. Members were also told that a written response would be provided to detail what assets were available and how they were being used but it was a regular item on the Cabinet agenda and something they were frequently looking at.

JOSC/74/22/23 Interview with Worthing Cabinet Member for the Environment

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 13, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes.

A Member asked “Can you give us an update on when you will be implementing the weekly food waste collections that you committed to last year please?”

Response -

The Council were keen to prevent food waste in the first instance, but where it did arise offer a separate collection service. Under the provisions of the Environment Act all local authorities would be required to collect food separately. Separate food waste collections would be very costly for the council as the collection authority, requiring investment in additional vehicles, collection containers whilst also increasing revenue costs in terms of staff and fuel.

They had anticipated that DEFRA would have announced the details of new burdens funding, and support with capital funding for the provisions of the Environment Bill, which included food waste collection the previous year. Unfortunately announcements from central government on this subject had been repeatedly delayed. It was still unclear when further announcements would be made by central government.

In the meantime the council had undertaken a modelling exercise, funded by WRAP, to assess different options for food waste collections in Worthing, the likely impact on recycling and composting rates, and revenue and capital costs.

In the meantime officers were scoping a small scale trial for food waste collection by the end of March. Subject to being able to secure the required resources the Cabinet Member was hopeful that they could start the trial later in the year.

A Member asked “Members of staff in the waste and cleansing teams report that they have been informed that they will be subject to random drug testing by the council in future. If this is true, can you please explain which members of staff will be subject to the testing, what the rationale is and what the perceived problem is that you are attempting to remedy.”

Response -

The aim of the Alcohol and Drugs policy was to protect the health, wellbeing and safety of employees and the public and to help anyone who may have problems with drug or alcohol abuse. This policy explained the Councils’ position on alcohol and drug misuse and provided a procedure whereby employees who had a problem of drug or alcohol abuse/misuse can seek and be offered help in confidence.

Members of the team subject to random drug and alcohol testing include the whole management team and all frontline staff.

Members also asked about engagement with members of the public not associated with any groups or organisations, an update on the figures of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) and how coastal services will be effected by a reduction in budget.

Members were told that the council was exploring every avenue to promote communication with the public, including schools and scouting groups. That WEEE was looking at an average collection of a tonne per week and that services should not be affected due to reorganisation and looking at new ways of working.

The meeting was declared closed by the Chairman at 9.03 pm, it having commenced at 6.30 pm

Chairman