

Minutes of a meeting of the
Joint Strategic Sub-Committee (Worthing)
5 December 2022
at 6.30 pm

Councillor Dr Beccy Cooper (Chair)
Councillor Carl Walker (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Rita Garner
Councillor Martin McCabe
Councillor Helen Silman
Councillor Emma Taylor

Councillor John Turley
Councillor Vicki Wells
Councillor Rosey Whorlow

*= absent

JSS-C(W)/33/22-23 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Wells declared an interest in items 11 and 12 on the agenda as a former employee of Worthing Theatres and Museum with no other connection and was attending the meeting with an open mind.

JSS-C(W)/34/22-23 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes from the Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee meeting held on 8th November 2022, be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

JSS-C(W)/35/22-23 Public Question Time

There were no questions from the public.

JSS-C(W)/36/22-23 Members Questions

There were 4 pre-submitted questions received in advance of the meeting. The Chair indicated that the questions would be considered during the items to which they were related.

JSS-C(W)/37/22-23 Items Raised Under Urgency Provisions

There were no urgent items for consideration.

JSS-C(W)/38/22-23 2nd Quarter Revenue Monitoring Report 2022/23

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability & Resources, presented by the Cabinet Member for Resources, 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 6.

The report updated the Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee with the latest expenditure and income projections for both Adur District Council and Worthing Borough Council for the current financial year 2022/23, compared to the Revenue Budget approved by both Councils in February. Whilst the 'spend to date' was the position as at the 30th September 2022, the forecast outturn position reflected the latest information available to ensure an up-to-date forecast was presented.

As at quarter 2, the current outturn projection for the 2022/23 financial year for the Worthing Borough Council General Fund was a net overspend after reserve transfers of £2.017m. A breakdown was set out in section 4.4 of the report.

The following pre-submitted questions were received in advance of the meeting:-

Q1 - The 2nd quarter revenue monitoring report provides some sober reading, this is an authority that went into 2022/23 with a balanced budget, including agreed savings of £1.136M and yet only a matter of a few months later is now forecasting an overspend of £2.017M.

At section 4.13.3 you outline the council's financial sustainability, here it states that:

The level of earmarked reserves will reduce if they are required to meet the overspends currently forecast for the year. This is a particular issue for Worthing where the level of available reserves (excluding the Business Rates Smoothing Reserve, the Tax Guarantee Reserve and Grants and Contributions) will be reduced significantly. The predicted level of reserves undermines the Councils financial stability and potentially puts Worthing Council in an unsustainable financial position.

Clearly a lot of people reading this report will be rightly alarmed by this language as it indicates that if savings cannot be found, that either council fees or tax will have to rise significantly or services cut dramatically to provide a balanced budget or you have to raid the council's reserves and leave it with a perilously low level of reserves for future years.

So can you please elaborate further on this and in doing so, advise members of the public when you or the Chief Financial Officer will be able to say with confidence that the Council's financial position is sustainable, that their public services are no longer at risk and given the Council's current financial position, in terms of risk, how would you describe the council's current financial sustainability risk rating; High, Medium or low ?

Officers replied that 2022/23 had been an extremely difficult year, with many other Councils in a similar position. The situation was made more challenging in Worthing due to the levels of reserves held, which were not as significant as some neighbouring authorities. If the forecast is correct, experience indicates that the position should generally improve during the financial year, although it had been a highly unusual year due to the financial shocks experienced. However, the Council would have a very low level of reserves. This would be ok as long as the Council did not experience another year like this one and took proactive steps to improve the position. There was no

absolute level of reserves the Council needed to hold, guidelines suggest that it should be holding around 6% as a minimum. The Council was below this level. Therefore urgent action was necessary to improve the position going into the next financial year.

Q2 - In Appendix 1 at para 1.1 you identify that there are :

In addition there are unbudgeted cost pressures of £99,000 associated with transactional fees on electronic payment methods.

Previously this council has driven car park users down the electronic payment route as a preferred method of payment, how or why was this associated cost not factored into the budgetary planning or cost of introducing this payment method.

Officers replied that the Council had seen an accelerated trend towards electronic payments, almost certainly as a result of the pandemic. Up until this financial year, the Council had a very suppressed level of both income and associated fees so it hadn't been immediately apparent. As income levels had begun to return to normal, the Council was seeing a trend and needed to adjust as part of the development of the 2023/24 Revenue Budget.

Q3 - Para 1.5

It is good to read that this administration is building on the work of the previous administration and continuing to invest in property in Worthing that will create a revenue return to this authority. Clearly the declaration in this report of Southern House having been purchased has now placed this information in the public domain, from what was previously confidential material. Can you please advise the public how much this authority spent on purchasing Southern House?

** The Monitoring Officer advised that the information within the report remained exempt, however, the information requested was now within the public domain and no longer exempt.*

The Cabinet Member replied that the overall cost of the acquisition was £22,323,000 which included all associated costs (stamp duty land tax and professional fees).

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Turley, seconded by Councillor McCabe and unanimously supported.

Decision

The Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee noted the contents of the report and projected outturn position for the Joint Committee and Worthing Borough Council against the approved revenue budgets and proposed use of reserves (Appendix 2b).

Call-in

The call-in deadline for the decision will be 5.00pm on the 15th December 2022.

Monitoring 2022/23

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability & Resources, presented by the Cabinet Member for Resources, 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 7.

The report updated the Sub-Committee on the progress made on the delivery of the 2022/23 Capital Investment Programme for Worthing Borough Council. The programmes included schemes which supported the delivery of services by the Joint Services Committee.

The following pre-submitted question was received in advance of the meeting:-

Q4 - Looking at Appendix 2 - this council was successful in being granted £100k by the Government specifically for providing a new Changing Places facility in Worthing. The application indicated a town centre site.

Can you please advise where this £100k is profiled with the capital budgets ?

The Cabinet Member for Resources replied that the capital programme was due to be uplifted by the Changing Places grant of £100,000 as part of the development of the 2023/24 programme. The grant was on top of the £230k in the current capital budget of which £100k had been reprofiled into next year. Locations were investigated for the Changing Places facility and views and comments had been received as part of the Big Listen project. As a result, the changing places facility would be located near the Guildbourne Centre and delivered in the summer 2023. The grant had to be used by March 2024. Any additional funds required would come from the public conveniences capital improvement budget. In relation to public conveniences generally, the capital improvement priorities would be the Lido and High Street Multi Storey Car Park. These were also planned for 2023.

The Committee wished to place on record its thanks to the Officers for all of their work to enable the Council to carry on as a going concern, noting that this would require a significant amount to be taken out of reserves to balance the books.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Wells, seconded by Councillor Whorlow and unanimously supported.

Decision

The Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee

- i) noted the reprofiling of the Worthing Borough Council capital schemes as advised in paragraph 6.1 and appendix 2;
- ii) noted the schemes removed from the Capital Investment Programme as advised in paragraph 6.2;

- iii) noted the additional s106 receipt received for play area equipment at Bourne Close and Northbrook Recreation Ground and the addition to the budget provision already in the 2022/23 Capital Investment Programme as detailed in paragraph 6.3.1;
- iv) approved the provision of Commerce Way female facilities and upgrade of the male showers, and the addition of the schemes to the 2022/23 Capital Investment Programme funded from capital contingency as detailed in paragraph 6.3.2.
- v) approved the procurement of COSHH Management Software, and the addition of the project to the 2022/23 Capital Investment Programme funded from capital contingency as detailed in paragraph 6.3.3.

Call-in

The call-in deadline for the decision will be 5.00pm on the 15th December 2022.

JSS-C(W)/40/22-23 New Economic principles for Worthing

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability & Resources, presented by the Cabinet Member for Resources, 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 8.

The outlined Worthing Council's approach for supporting and developing the local economy and outlined those activities that would help deliver a new approach.

The key pillars of the Council's economic approach reflected the vision of the Council: fair, green and local. The paper outlined what those meant in economic terms.

The report set out the commitment to make the best use of council assets to deliver excellent quality services for residents together with the wider economic benefits associated with places that people value and enjoy.

A foundation to this economic approach was community wealth building. This was a people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirected wealth back into the local economy, and placed control and benefits into the hands of local people.

Members welcomed the report and thanked Officers for the significant amount of work that had gone into this area of work.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor McCabe, seconded by Councillor Silman and unanimously supported.

Decision

That the Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee agreed

1. To set up a working group to manage progress which should include officers, members and representatives from the local business and community groups and

delegated authority to the Director for Digital, Sustainability and Resources to agree the terms of reference for the working group in consultation with the Leader which would include the requirement to report back to the Committee (at such intervals to be agreed in the terms of reference) with further recommendations to the Committee.

2. That the Working Group design and develop outcome measures to be reported to the Committee with agreed outcome measures published every 6 months.
3. To Initiate a review of identified policies in section 7 in order to embed these principles.

Call-in

The call-in deadline for the decision will be 5.00pm on the 15th December 2022.

JSS-C(W)/41/22-23 2023/24 Budget Update

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability & Resources, presented by the Cabinet Member for Resources, 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 9.

The report provided members with a progress report on the delivery of the financial strategy for 2023/24, along with details of the proposals that would help to deliver a balanced budget for the next financial year and beyond.

The report outlined the medium term financial challenge through to 2027/28 and updated members, where possible, on government funding proposals.

Contained within the report were specific budget proposals to increase income, to deliver efficiency, and other savings initiatives for 2023/24.

It was noted that no comments had been received following the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee considering the report at its meeting in November. The Committee was also advised that the appendices referred to in the recommendations should read 1, 2, 3 & 4 rather than 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor McCabe, seconded by Councillor Turley and unanimously supported.

Decision

That the Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee

- (i) Noted the current 5 year forecasts at appendix 1;
- (ii) Noted the committed growth items as set out in appendix 2;
- (iii) Approved the proposed savings as set out in appendix 3 subject to any changes arising from consultation;

- (iv) Recommended to council to approve the use of capital receipts to support the delivery of the budget as set out in appendix 4.

Call-in

The call-in deadline for decisions (i), (ii) and (iii) will be 5.00pm on the 15th December 2022.

There is no call-in for recommendations (iv) to Worthing Full Council.

JSS-C(W)/42/22-23 Outcome of the public consultation in respect of the working age Council Tax Support Scheme for Worthing Borough Council in respect of 2023/24

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability & Resources, presented by the Cabinet Member for Citizen Services, 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 10.

At the meeting of the Joint Strategic Committee held on 11 January 2022 it was determined that a public consultation should be undertaken by Worthing Borough Council with a view to removing the £5.00 weekly restriction from the scheme for working age customers with effect from 1 April 2023.

At the meeting of the Worthing Borough Council Joint Strategic Sub-Committee held on 6 September 2022 refinement of the consultation questions was delegated to the Head of Revenues & Benefits in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Citizen Services.

The Council Tax Support scheme for pensioners was set nationally and Members therefore had no ability to determine local criteria.

The report detailed the consultation responses that had been received and recommended changes that could be made to the local working age Council Tax Support Scheme for Worthing Borough Council in respect of 2023/24.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Taylor, seconded by Councillor Whorlow and unanimously supported.

Decision

The Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee noted the content of the report and recommended to the Full Council 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:-

- a) The £5.00 weekly restriction will no longer apply;
- b) The discretionary budget to support those in severe financial difficulty will no longer be required as the result of the removal of the restriction;
- c) A valid claim for Council Tax Support shall be deemed to have been made by customers who have been awarded Universal Credit and indicated that they wish

to claim Council Tax Support (unless further information is required to enable entitlement to be determined)

- d) No other changes should be made beyond necessary technical amendments required to keep the scheme consistent with the national rules in respect of Housing Benefit

Call-in

There is no call-in for recommendations to Worthing Full Council.

JSS-C(W)/43/22-23 Worthing Theatres and Museum - Annual Report

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for the Economy, presented by the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, 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 11.

The report presented the Worthing Theatres and Museum Trust Annual Review for 2021/22.

A Member questioned whether the timing of the report could be looked at with a view to it being reported earlier in the year so that it could be considered alongside the budget strategy. Officers confirmed that Worthing Theatres and Museum (WTM) had agreed to bring forward the Annual Report. It was acknowledged that WTM had had a couple of exceptional years but that the Annual Report was too late in the year.

Another Member highlighted that WTM was a unique portfolio of venues, including the Pavillion Theatre and Atrium, the Connaught Theatre and Studio, the Assembly Hall and the Museum. It was good to see that KPIs had been set for the first time to help measure the key priorities. Footfall was mentioned for the museum but how much was known about the use of the other buildings. Officers acknowledged that there was a more accurate measurement for the Museum and that in future more granular data for the other venues would be provided.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Whorlow, seconded by Councillor Garner and unanimously supported.

Decision

The Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee

1. acknowledged and welcomed the achievements of Worthing Theatres and Museum over the year;
2. agreed to refer the report and the accompanying Annual Report to the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee for noting.

Call-in

The call-in deadline for the decision will be 5.00pm on the 15th December 2022.

JSS-C(W)/44/22-23 Review of the Pensions Fund arrangements for South Downs Leisure Trust and Worthing Theatres and Museum Trust

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for the Economy, presented by the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, 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 12. An exempt appendix to this report was shared with Members of the Sub-Committee as Item 14.

Following a request from Worthing Theatres and Museum Trust, the Council was reviewing the contractual arrangements for both Trusts with respect to the pension fund.

The revised arrangements, if approved, would provide the Council with a significant saving in annual pension contributions and would benefit the Trusts by supporting better management of the risks associated with the cost of pensions.

It was noted that the proposed arrangements did not represent a significant contractual change to either South Downs Leisure or Worthing Theatres and Museum. They sought to treat the staff of the two trusts as if they were Council staff and to remerge their pension pots back into the Council's pension pot. This would enable better management of risk for both the Council and the Trusts moving forward.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Garner, seconded by Councillor Wells and unanimously supported.

Decision

The Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee

- i. Approved that both South Downs Leisure Trust and Worthing Theatres and Museum Trust contracts be revised to include new clauses regarding pension risk sharing arrangements.
- ii. Agreed to extend the Pension Guarantee for Worthing Theatres and Museum Trust for the duration of the contract in line with the arrangements for South Downs Leisure Contract
- iii. Delegated authority to the Director for the Economy, in consultation with the Council's Monitoring Officer and the Chief Financial Officer, the agreement of the final wording for the new contract clauses.
- iv. Noted that this change would save Worthing Borough Council approximately £106,660 per year in additional pension costs.

Call-in

The call-in deadline for the decision will be 5.00pm on the 15th December 2022.

JSS-C(W)/45/22-23 Fair Trade Motion Response

Before the Committee was a report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability & Resources, presented by the Cabinet Member for Resources, 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 13.

A motion was raised at the meeting of Worthing Borough Council on the 22nd February 2022, which was subsequently supported by the Joint Strategic Committee in March 2022.

Since March 2022, the new administration had been developing its priorities working with officers, as illustrated in the New Economic Principles report on the Committee's agenda.

The purpose of the report was to acknowledge the strategic importance of Fair Trade in the Council's approach to the local economy, procurement and sustainability.

The report highlighted the opportunities in forthcoming strategy and policy development work where support for Fair Trade could be embedded.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Silman, seconded by Councillor Taylor and unanimously supported.

Decision

The Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee

1. Requested that officers engage with the Fair Trade Steering Group with a view to supporting their renewal of Fair Trade Community Status, and helping connect them with support and funding opportunities where needed.
2. Agreed that Fair Trade and its principles be embedded in the strategy and policy development work outlined in the New Economic Principles report presented on this agenda, including procurement and contracts.
3. Requested that officers appropriately promote Fair Trade through its communications channels as part of driving towards a fair, green and local economy.

Call-in

The call-in deadline for the decision will be 5.00pm on the 15th December 2022.