

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

QEII Room, Shoreham Centre, Pond Road, Shoreham

7 September 2023

Councillor Joss Loader (Chair)

Adur District Council:

Carol Albury
Ann Bridges
Lee Cowen
Sharon Sluman

Worthing Borough Council:

Heather Mercer
Cathy Glynn-Davies
Dan Hermitage
Daniel Humphreys
Richard Mulholland
Hilary Schan

Absent

Councillors Mandy Buxton, Tony Bellasis, Paul Mansfield, Elizabeth Sparkes,
Margaret Howard

Substitutes

JOSC/31/23-24 Declaration of Interests

JOSC/32/23-24 Substitute Members

JOSC/33/23-24 Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the 25 July 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman

JOSC/34/23-24 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

JOSC/35/23-24 Members Questions

A Member asked “Does the committee know the full extent to which Adur Homes buildings are affected by dangerous concrete, and if not, would tenants and leaseholders be protected by commissioning an urgent audit to determine the extent of RAAC across our whole estate?”

Members were informed that as far as the Council was aware, no Adur Homes had any RAAC installed within the housing stock. A full intrusive survey would be required to fully

assess its presence but construction types such as traditional build e.g. bricks and cavity, timber framed, had not identified such a material.

Consultation with connections in the housing structural world was underway to help understand the professional opinion of this in relation to homes. It was the understanding that the use of RAAC predominantly related to schools and possibly other corporate buildings. Feedback from the Estates Team had been requested.

A Member asked “It is great to see in a report from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Wellbeing that an Antisocial Behaviour conference is being planned for Autumn. ASB is something our traders are asking for support for regularly. Can I be informed what this will consist of and what the threshold is for reporting ASB and then to the allocation of police resources please?”

Members were informed that in February that year, The Safer Communities Team held a successful event, working with Adur Traders to raise awareness of the work of the team and wider council services and the police. This covered promoting reporting mechanisms, the context of the work and how partners’ work could help tackle the drivers of crime and ASB. This approach was to be repeated in the Autumn as there was awareness that businesses were experiencing ongoing issues around shoplifting and ASB.

There was no threshold for reporting ASB as the ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014 acknowledged that the impact was subjective. However, there needed to be a pattern for the council to be able to use their powers. Whilst it was for the police to respond to how their resourcing was allocated, the consistent message to those experiencing crime and ASB was to always report incidents, as resources would be prioritised (for all agencies) where there was persistent crime or ASB.

JOSC/36/23-24 Items Raised Under Urgency Provisions

There were no urgent items.

JOSC/37/23-24 Consideration of any matter referred to the Committee in relation to a call-in of a decision

There were no call-ins

JOSC/38/23-24 Financial Performance 2022/23 - Revenue Outturn

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 8, which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes. This report outlined the revenue financial monitoring position for the end of the 2022/23 financial year for the Joint Strategic Committee, Adur District and Worthing Borough Councils.

A Member asked “can we have these reports at JOSC before they go to full council next year?” Members were informed that yes this could happen.

Resolved: The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

JOSC/39/23-24 Developing a Revenue Budget for 2024/25 in Difficult Economic Circumstances

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 9, which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes. This report proposed a budget strategy for the development of the 2024/25 budgets.

Members asked if officers were satisfied the council was in the best place possible to benefit from the business rate income with some of the new developments?

Members were informed that while there were a lot of unknowns they were working with information that was available. That the system did have a safety net and Council could not go below a certain level of income.

Resolved: The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

JOSC/40/23-24 Interview with Worthing Cabinet Member for Environment

The Committee had a report before it, attached as item 10, which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes. This report set out background information on the Portfolio of the Worthing Cabinet Member for the Environment to enable the Committee to consider and question the Cabinet Member on issues within their portfolio and any other issues which the Cabinet Member was involved in connected with the work of the Council and the Worthing communities.

A Member asked “In your achievements, you've listed the increase of 3.57% in points of recycling between April and June - bringing it up to 49.61%. Does this continue a trend to where you'd hope the statistics would be at this point?”

Members were informed the recycling stats were trending in the right direction and had seen a steady increase year on year. Over shorter periods the figures had to take into account a lot of factors involved. Stats such as, weather, amount of green waste collected, seasonal variations and also strike action the year before. However there was an upward trend from previous years results. It's where they expected it to be but not where they wanted it to be.

The cabinet member advised that they had to be mindful that the levels could fluctuate - so an annual figure was more accurate - including all seasons, weather and cost of living. The waste data flow annual figure was returned in June.

A Member asked “When the cabinet member was last questioned by this committee, a member asked about the proposed reductions to the budget for Worthing Borough Council's foreshore team. In a written response the cabinet member informed the committee that it had subsequently been decided to make the savings by reducing the budget for the parks function instead. However, when the budget was passed by the cabinet and full council cabinet members made no mention of this change. Can the cabinet member explain the comments in her email including whether the funding for the foreshore operation in Worthing is lower than it was last year, whether the funding for the parks operation has been reduced as she suggested, how this decision was made and what opportunities were given to councillors who are not on the executive to scrutinise this important budget decision?”

Members were informed the budget set for the year included an allowance for savings to be made by the Parks & Foreshore Team of £44k. The savings were being achieved as a

result of a successful re-organisation of the service which had focussed on reductions in management expenditure rather than cutting any 'frontline' services. Funding for the Foreshore Team was unaffected by these changes and was not reduced. This decision was made through the normal process of budget setting which includes discussion of options with the officer team and colleagues in the wider group.

A Member asked "The cabinet member's report highlights the implementation of the kerbside collection of waste electrical items as an achievement and quotes the increases in recycling percentages. Since the introduction of this service has the council recorded a drop in the amount of residual (grey bin) waste (by tonnage rather than percentage) and is the cabinet member able to tell the committee whether there has been a reduction in the amount of waste electrical equipment being recycled at the county council's recycling centre (or tip)."

Members were informed WSCC figures did not show a noticeable reduction in small WEEE going through the recycling centre in Worthing but they did know that approx 4t per month had been collected - successfully diverting materials from landfill.

They could not determine a reduction of residual tonnage collected at kerbside since the introduction of kerbside WEEE for two reasons:

1. Current figures for residual waste had been skewed due to the industrial action. Eg they didn't demonstrate a stable baseline.

2. The WEEE service had not completed a full year so could not estimate future results at the time. They would have a full year WEEE data in Oct 2023.

But below is the overall from two years previous which showed a significant drop which could not be attributed to just WEEE collections. They were seeing a significant drop which could not be attributed to just WEEE collections.

April 2021 - July 2021 (Pre industrial action)

6,839 tonnes of residual waste

April 2023 - July 2023

6,351.68 tonnes of residual waste

This represented a reduction of 487.72 tonnes which was significant when you factored in approx 2,500 new properties (including Columbia House, flats above Beals/Bentalls, new Durrington Estate etc) that had been serviced since April 2021. Part of the 487 tonnes reduced would include small WEEE but at the time they could not identify how much.

A Member asked about details on future plans for food waste collection.

Members were told that in Worthing, the separation of food waste was a top priority as it represented 28% of grey bin waste. A feasibility study funded by WRAP, estimated the scheme to cost 1.5 million to facilitate. The timeline on implementation relied on funding from central government.

Resolved: The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to refer to the working group for consideration, the matter of budgetary changes made to papers previously submitted to JOSOC and how if wanted by the committee JOSOC might consider amendments for further scrutiny.

JOSC/41/23-24 Interview with Worthing Cabinet Member for Housing and Citizen Services

The Committee had a report before it, attached as item 11, which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes. This report set out background information on the Portfolio of the Worthing Cabinet Member for Housing and Citizens Services to enable the Committee to consider and question the Cabinet Member on issues within their portfolio and any other issues which the Cabinet Member was involved in connected with the work of the Council and the Worthing communities.

A Member asked “In the financial report we received for this meeting, it is noted that there has been a marked increase in homelessness due to the Cost of Living crisis. As we head into Winter, it can be assumed this will only continue to be the case. You note in your briefing about adequate provision. What plans are in place to ensure we can protect those in our communities facing homelessness this Winter?”

Members were told the strategic approach was to develop supply to ensure all those experiencing homelessness were provided with housing. This was a mix of developing the Councils’ own stock, contracting with private providers and partnering with others, the long term aim being to achieve a pathway for single homeless that would prevent the need for anyone to rough sleep. They had a pipeline of schemes which included supported accommodation for those with complex needs and supported temporary accommodation to reduce the impacts on those experiencing homelessness and support them more quickly into independence. This was not without challenges given the existing market conditions with development costs rising and would not be achieved for this winter.

Plans for the coming winter were to provide temporary accommodation with support, they had procured additional accommodation and were working with Turning Tides to make plans for those rough sleeping to have accommodation. Turning Tides provided day services and the administration continued to work with them.

A Member asked “You mention in your briefing note about improvements to communications via the online customer portal. What is the process and how easy is it to present as homeless to the council if you do not have access to the internet?”

Members were informed anyone who did not have access to the internet could call the service or attend Portland House, appointments were given to see an officer in person. Those threatened with or experiencing homelessness could either receive support to complete the form online, or a paper form was completed and the team created the online application on their behalf. The West Sussex Strategic Homeless Group were funding posts hosted at Chichester, to work on projects across the county. One of the current pieces of work underway was testing access to homelessness services, in particular, making an online application and website content to enable improvement to access of homeless services across the county. The Cabinet Member was committed to preventing homelessness; and ensuring the most vulnerable could access the team and unlike most local authorities, provide a service where people could present to the service and either be seen on the day or offered an appointment, though resources made this a challenge for the team

A Member asked “Reflecting over the last period, what are the biggest learnings taken from what has become one of the most challenging periods in local authority housing and

supporting those most in need and what specifically from these learnings can you take forward to the next phase of the portfolio?”

Members were informed they were in the process of fact finding and data gathering as part of their work to create the next Housing and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention strategies. Data - qualitative and quantitative would form the Housing Needs Assessment, as well as the voice of those with Lived Experience. Preventing homelessness was always the best option and this required the right support and the right housing offer that met need at the right time. They would use the data to ensure they could identify and respond to the triggers as well as creatively partnering to ensure they supported the development of homes and supported accommodation that met need.

Providing homes was only one part of the picture, providing the right support was also crucial, they were currently working with WSCC and Sussex Partnership trust on programmes to provide support, as well as using the Homelessness Prevention Strategic Board to work strategically with key partners around shared aims to prevent homelessness and improve health and wellbeing outcomes.

There was a need to move into a more preventative approach and focus on how they could support the housing front door, making it easier and clearer for people at risk of homelessness to self serve and find the right pathway. Work was needed with communities to help create a new kind of conversation around the challenges of homelessness.

A Member asked “The cabinet member’s report is very comprehensive but there is no data on the estimated number of rough sleepers in Worthing. This data used to be collected in regular overnight counts. Are these counts still being conducted and if so, what is the current estimated number of rough sleepers in Worthing?”

Members were told the last data collected was in July, and recorded 17 people in a single night. Rolling over the month saw over 30 rough sleepers.

A Member asked how confident the Cabinet Member was in the hardcopy paper system that existed to help those who did not have internet access. Members were informed the Cabinet Member had full confidence in the system and officers responsible for it.

A Member asked “The Cabinet Member is prioritising an increase in housing supply in Worthing to address the housing crisis. The leader of the council has recently issued another press release restating her opposition to housebuilding on Chatsmore Farm. These aims appear to be at odds with each other. Does the cabinet member agree with the leader of the council that there should be no housebuilding on Chatsmore Farm and if so, how does the cabinet member explain the apparent inconsistency between the two positions?”

Members were informed the Cabinet Member was proud of Cllr Cooper’s stance on housing at Chatsmore Farm. A climate emergency had been declared and Chatsmore Farm had not been allocated as a development site. In Worthing there was less than a snooker table of green space per person. If new homes were built on Chatsmore Farm, it would do nothing for the homeless situation. The argument made was that there were enough buildings but not enough homes. That housing was now seen as a commodity rather than a home.

JOSC/42/23-24 Interview with Worthing Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing

The Committee had a report before it, attached as item 12, which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes. This report set out background information on the Portfolio of the Worthing Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing to enable the Committee to consider and question the Cabinet Member on issues within their portfolio and any other issues which the Cabinet Member was involved in connected with the work of the Council and the Worthing communities.

A Member asked “A couple of months ago, I took part in the Council's LGBTQ+ Big Listen event and heard of the fear these communities continue to experience when visiting pubs and bars in our town, as they are unsure of where they may be treated with hostility or even worse, experience hate crime. What is being done to protect the LGBTQ+ community in Worthing and show that we are an inclusive town that has a zero tolerance approach to prejudice and abuse?”

Members were informed the LGBTQ+ Big Listen event was held to ensure there were good community conversations with the LGBTQ+ residents, this was in addition to holding celebratory events around the month of Pride and the annual Pride event. The Cabinet Member said they stand with the LGBTQ+ communities against hate crime and actively encouraged such crimes to be reported. The Safer Communities team was there to support the community if additional assistance was needed in respect of Crime and Antisocial Behaviour.

A Member asked “Last year it was reported that 1 in 10 women in Britain say they have had their drink spiked at some time. What is being done to protect women from this crime and what more can be done to raise awareness of it and increase reporting?”

Members were told they proactively engaged with appropriate campaigns about women's safety and publicised national and regional campaigns, such as those run by charities like Drinkaware and/or Stamp Out Spiking, this was alongside a suite of other campaigns such as Ask Angela, a campaign around women feeling unsafe in settings such as pubs and clubs and Ask Ani where there were concerns around domestic abuse.

The A&W Licensing Team coordinated a two date Drink Spiking Awareness event in South Street Square, Worthing. The event went well and the team spoke to over 100 people over two days. Giving out all the 100 anti-spiking scrunchies and over 200 anti-spiking bottle stops. The A&W Partnership Team were looking to repeat the event and Sussex Police Licensing used it in other areas such as Chichester. Feedback was good with the majority of people saying 'the event was a great initiative'. The support received from the 7 late night venues and other partner agencies was amazing.

A Member asked “The Local Plan has a social objective to 'ensure new development integrates into existing communities, supporting local centres to enhance the well-being of all people, and reduce inequalities'. How do you feel the council communications have been in speaking to all members of the community and enhancing the well-being of all residents?”

Members were informed that much of this was covered in the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration however, they were doing participation work in West Durrington in relation to the housing development there. This process had been inclusive and involved different groups within the community in the development of local

community facilities, focusing on local needs and wants of the local population. Going forward they were building on the work here in relation to the future development of a community facility, ensuring that this was coproduced with local communities

A Member asked for Members of the opposition to be better informed of events ahead of time so they too could contribute and participate.

Members were told that the expertise of opposition Members was welcome and this was a lesson for the future to work more closely together.

JOSC/43/23-24 Annual review of the recovery of the Adur & Worthing evening and night time economies (ENTE)

The Committee had a report before it, attached as item 13, which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes. This report set out the revised discussions and recommendations from the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) Working Group which was created as part of the JOSC Work Programme to review the previous JOSC reports and recommendations on the Adur and Worthing evening and night time economy (ENTE) from 2020 through to 2023.

A Member asked for details on future partnerships with bus companies.

Members were told that while the quality bus partnership had ended years previously, a new partnership had been worked on in the last 6 months, which included all the buses that ran through Worthing, with a plan to look at ENTE and sustainable travel. In that forum, they could gain some traction with operators.

Resolved: The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to

1. Note the contents of the report
2. Receive an annual review report on progress with the works to improve the evening and night time economies as part of its Work Programme at a future meeting

JOSC/44/23-24 Review of the JOSC Work Programme

The Committee had a report before it, attached as item 14, which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes. This report outlined progress and plans for implementing the work contained in the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) Work Programme for 2023/24.

Members discussed the proposed attendance of the Police and Crime Commissioner and local commander at the meeting of JOSC on 30 November as well as the attendance of a representative from Southern Water. The committee had received an invitation to attend a tour of the East Worthing water treatment works to be followed by a Q&A.

Resolved: The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to:-

1. Note the progress to deliver the JOSC Work Programme;
2. Accept the invitation of Southern Water to tour the water treatment works on a date to be confirmed but that Southern Water also be requested to attend a meeting of JOSC to answer questions from the committee (Preferably 2 November);

3. Hold an interview with the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner and local Police Commander at the JOSC meeting on 30 November 2023; and
4. Defer the interview with the Chief Executive regarding 'Our Plan' from the meeting on 30 November to an alternative date.

JOSC/45/23-24 Interview with Adur Cabinet Member for Communities & Wellbeing

The Committee had a report before it, attached as item 15, which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes. This report set out background information on the Portfolio of the Adur Cabinet Member for Communities and Wellbeing to enable the Committee to consider and question the Cabinet Member on issues within their portfolio and any other issues which the Cabinet Member is involved in connected with the work of the Council and the Adur communities.

Members asked about community tensions and response to youth crime. Members were informed that the Cabinet Member had met with the inspector to improve policing and discussed new techniques that were being introduced. That a lot of crimes were now being reported back to the police and they were working on procedures to process all the new data. Members were also informed that the governments' policy on restorative justice was a good tool to have available though it wasn't the answer to everything and that both the charity sector and senior schools had done great work in this area.

JOSC/46/23-24 Interview with Adur Cabinet Member for Adur Homes and Customer Services

The Committee had a report before it, attached as item 16, which had been circulated to all Members, a copy of which is attached to a signed copy of these minutes. This report set out background information on the Portfolio of the Adur Cabinet Member for Adur Homes and Customer Services to enable the Committee to consider and question the Cabinet Member on issues within his portfolio and any other issues which the Cabinet Member is involved in connected with the work of the Council and the Adur communities.

A Member asked "Given that we have overspent in Adur by 447k in 22/23 and we have only put aside 381k for overspend in the 23/24 budget, do we need to consider increasing this in the face of predictable increased demand?"

Members were informed budget setting would take account of the increasing costs, in the meantime there were things in place intended to reduce the current predicted overspend and burden on the temporary accommodation budget:

- new supply of General Needs stock that would be realised in financial year that would increase move on from temporary accommodation and reduce the burden on the budget
- New supply of temporary accommodation through contracting as well as potential within the Southwick buy back scheme
- Homelessness Prevention work, where Household Support Fund and Homelessness Prevention fund would increase the prevention activity to reduce the flow into temporary accommodation

A Member asked “A portion of Adur's discretionary housing payments to cover shortfalls in resident's housing benefit or universal credit was sent back to the treasury. It spent 89% of its allocation. Councillors are often contacted by residents unable to afford rents so it's not like the demand isn't there. Could you tell us why all of this money wasn't allocated?”

Members were informed there was a DHP underspend since 2018 of between £10k and £30k each year in Adur. The main criteria for awarding a DHP was that the customer must show that they were in financial need, there were subsidiary considerations regarding the effectiveness of an award - that if an award was made it would enable them to make long term changes to better afford their property. Other factors such as a person's health and household would be taken into account when making any award. The main reason for most unsuccessful awards was that they had not demonstrated that they were in financial need - i.e. when completing the application form they had stated that their income was actually higher than their expenditure. The next reason would be that the property was unsuitable/ unaffordable in the long term and the tenancy could not be preserved following a short term award. Not every DHP application met the criteria applied to receive a payment.

A Member asked, “I received an email from a tenant of Adur Homes as her kitchen was unusable. This tenant lives in a 2 bedroom property and has 3 children. The kitchen in the property was in a poor condition when she moved in 7 years ago, but she was told that it would be repaired, which did not happen. 2 years ago it was reported to Adur Homes as being unusable and was inspected on 3 occasions, confirming that the property required a new kitchen. On contacting Adur Homes as not informed when, the tenant was told that the work would be done by Christmas last year but since then nothing has been done.

I contacted Adur Homes on 20th July and copied in Cabinet Member for Adur Homes and Customer Services. I sent a reminder on 3 August and received a reply on 10 August saying that they were liaising with the repairs team. I sent a further reminder on 27 August, as did the Cabinet Member for Adur Homes and Customer Services. I have since heard nothing. The question I wish to ask is , is it now Policy that a tenant with three children living in an Adur Homes property has no facilities to cook meals for their family and is it even legal?”

Members were informed that without specifics, the response was that it was certainly not the Adur Homes policy to allow a home to be let without a gas or electrical point for a cooker to be installed. If repairs were needed or the kitchen needed replacing then this was now completed during the void period but in occupied properties then repairs should be reported through the correct channels and an operative would visit to repair. If the question was about the suitability or size of the kitchen then this was a different matter and a large scale programme of works to upgrade kitchens as per Decent Homes requirements was being developed. These would be individually designed and installed as per the size and restrictions within the existing space of the kitchen. If repairs were needed then these would be carried out in the interim as and when reported to the repairs service.

A Member asked, “because of the council's referral to the social housing regulator, the council cannot apply for Homes England funding. Which of our current social housing and emergency housing projects in the pipeline are impacted, and in the interim what alternative sources can the council draw on?”

Members were informed that Ashcroft and the smaller site developments had been impacted by the pause in Homes England funding for new homes. It had been proposed to use Brownfield Land Release funding to progress Ashcroft to a demolition phase. Around £1m 1-4-1 RTB receipts were available plus a projected additional £1m in year receipts to progress some of the small site projects such as the schemes at Daniel Close, Gravelly Crescent and South St. Projects which had already been awarded Homes England funding were unaffected and would continue to be funded. At present it was believed it was only delivery of the scheme at Ashcroft which would be significantly affected by the funding freeze which they were working to address.

The council was in conversation with Homes England and the Regulator to establish what was needed to have in place for the notice to be rescinded, it was a standing agenda item for meetings and they were making continuous progress, with the regulator indicating they were happy with the progress to date.

A Member asked, "Councillors are often contacted by private housing tenants unable to continue renting after their rent was hiked up by their landlord. They face homelessness which has terrible consequences on the individual and the family. For the council this is an extra burden. Many private tenants are already in receipt of housing benefit, but as we know housing benefit is capped at the level of the local housing allowance (LHA). In principle, LHA rates are supposed to be fixed at the 30th percentile point for rents in each size category of dwelling based on market rents paid by tenants, but there are literally no rental properties available at that rate anywhere in Adur.

With your housing strategy and housing enabling hat on, do you think the level of the local housing allowance is too low and is there anything you can do to lift it?

Members were informed that yes, there was a significant gap between LHA and private sector rents, there was criteria for being eligible to request a review of the Broad Rental Market Area which they did not believe they currently met, but this was an area being explored as there was the possibility that they may be eligible to request a review in the future.

The meeting was declared closed by the Chairman at 9.06 pm, it having commenced at 6.30 pm

Chairman