

**Minutes of a meeting of the Council
held in the Gordon Room, Worthing Town Hall
on**

12 December 2023

The Mayor Councillor Jon Roser
The Deputy Mayor Councillor Ibsha Choudhury

Councillor Helen Abrahams	Councillor Charles James
Councillor Noel Atkins	Councillor Kevin Jenkins
Councillor Mike Barrett	Councillor Nigel Morgan
Councillor Caroline Baxter	Councillor Richard Nowak
Councillor Ödül Bozkurt	Councillor Hilary Schan
Councillor Sophie Cox	Councillor Dawn Smith
Councillor Ferdousi Henna Chowdhury	Councillor Elizabeth Sparkes
Councillor Claire Hunt	Councillor Emma Taylor-Beal
Councillor Russ Cochran	Councillor Samuel Theodoridi
Councillor Dr Beccy Cooper	Councillor Hazel Thorpe
Councillor Dan Coxhill	Councillor John Turley
Councillor Rita Garner	Councillor Carl Walker
Councillor Cathy Glynn-Davies	Councillor Vicki Wells
Councillor Dan Hermitage	Councillor Andy Whight
Councillor Margaret Howard	Councillor Rosey Whorlow
Councillor Daniel Humphreys	

C/43/23-24 Apologies for Absence

The Mayor received apologies for absence from Councillors Heather Mercer, Richard Mulholland, Dale Overton and Steve Waight.

C/44/23-24 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Richard Nowak declared an interest in relation to agenda item 7A as the Vice-Chair of Worthing Community Chest as the organisation holds a small charities lottery licence.

Councillor Kevin Jenkins declared an interest as a Director of Worthing Town Football Club as the organisation also held a small charity licence.

Councillor Hazel Thorpe declared an interest as a member of Worthing Community Chest as the organisation holds a small charities lottery licence.

Councillors Caroline Baxter, Noel Atkins, John Turley, Dawn Smith and Henna Chowdhury all declared interests as Members of West Sussex County Council.

C/45/23-24 Confirmation of Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 17th October 2023 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Mayor.

1. Question submitted by Ian Davey, a Worthing Resident, to the Leader

West Sussex County Council recently consulted on their Active Travel Strategy. This included a route from Littlehampton to Worthing.

The Goring, Sea Lane to Worthing West Parade section included an option to build a segregated cycle track "across Goring Greensward". This has understandably caused some concern among local residents.

I know that you have been working on the George V Avenue to Sea Lane section for some time. My understanding was that you were drawing up plans. As I understood it these would be for a widened promenade route from George V Ave to Sea Lane cafe.

Could you please provide an update on how those plans are progressing and indicate whether or not Worthing Borough council would support a segregated cycle track across the Goring Greensward.

The Leader replied that the Council was committed to exploring the George V Avenue to Sea Lane Cafe scheme and Officers were currently pooling resources together (via Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 contributions) to start feasibility work. This would look at the possibility of extending the promenade.

In terms of the Goring Greensward, the Council hadn't seen any details from WSCC regarding these proposals, and whether this was even feasible, however the Council believed in maintaining and improving its greenspaces for residents to enjoy, hence why it was looking at the options around extending the promenade area rather than across the Greensward.

2. Question submitted by Bryan Turner, a Worthing Resident, to the Cabinet Member for the Environment

"How many trees have been planted in Worthing due to the Trees for Streets Scheme?"

The Cabinet Member for the Environment advised that the tree planting season for Trees for Street - Year 1 in Worthing would take place between January and March 2024. There were 26 new street trees ordered for Spring planting, with a further 15 being processed. A total of **41** for the first year of this urban tree planting scheme.

Trees for Streets had confirmed that the average net trees per local authority for 2023 was likely to be 100. In comparison to other authorities Worthing compared very favourably with almost 50 requests in a 6 month period given that Worthing had around half to a third less population than most authorities that Trees for Streets worked with.

West Sussex County Council had confirmed that they had planted 30 trees to date in 2023/24 in Worthing with 2 of those trees being through their 'Donate a Tree' scheme.

The number of park trees planted in Worthing this year was 29 with an additional 275 trees planted as part of the Ash Die Back Whip with another 30 trees to be planted in January.

The Mayor informed Council that he had attended a number of events since the October Council Meeting.

“A large part of the past month or so has had a theme of remembrance from unveiling the Memorial stone dedicated to the late Queen in Beach House Park, the Remembrance week services outside the Town Hall and up to and including the Pigeon Memorial, again in Beach House Park and the lighting of the Menorah last Thursday for Jewish Hanukkah!

All of which made me think that we are fortunate to live in times when we do not have to send our young people, not much older than some of the Cadets, Scouts and guides I have met recently, to fight for the freedoms we might take for granted.

One highlight was a visit to the Town Hall by a group of cubs from the 1st Worthing troop who were full of enthusiasm and questions, especially whether or not there are secret rooms in the Town Hall and who we kept in the dungeons. I assured them that no one is locked up in the basement nowadays!

We also held the first of my Mayor’s Charity Events which was very successful and raised about £800. There will be more events in the New Year.

To finish I would like to take this opportunity to wish all councillors, officers and members of the public a Happy Christmas and a prosperous and peaceful New Year!”

The Leader provided the following update on the financial position of the Council:-

“Like every other local authority in the country, we continue to face tight financial restrictions caused by a reduction in central government funding and increasing pressure outside of our control from inflation and cost of living challenges. However, thanks to savings in year, our budgetary position has improved in recent months, so that we will now only need to use some of our financial reserves this year. Thanks again to these savings, our invest to save programme and further savings we will make in 2024/25, we predict a balanced budget next financial year. It has been reported in the press recently that we could have to issue a section 114 notice soon because of our financial position.

That is entirely untrue.

Furthermore, current budget plans for next year are very much still subject to further financial information, not least the increasingly late settlement decision for Local Authorities from the National Government. It would be irresponsible of us to put out figures when there is so much flux - we trust that Members understand their responsibility as Councillors under the code of conduct and will remember that we serve our residents. As the administration, we set the priorities for our Council, work with our senior officer team to ensure that they are understood and that we are all aware of the resources available to achieve our aims, and officers are then tasked with operationalising these strategic directives with their excellent officer teams. Decisions we make not only allow our Council to deliver the services required today, but also build towards a long term plan for our Borough. These are difficult financial times, but let us do the public the courtesy of dealing in facts, allow the officers space to do

their work and let us as local political representatives remember the key fact that we serve the public, not ourselves”.

The Council received the following Cabinet Member announcements:-

The Cabinet Member for the Environment updated the Council on public toilet improvements, bathing water categorisation, sustainable planting and the opening of a Cafe at Brooklands.

The Deputy Leader provided the Council with a Cost of Living update, the Household Support Fund and the Low Interest Loan Scheme with Boom.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency updated the Council in regards to the Worthing District Heat Network.

There were no announcements from the Head of Paid Service.

C/48/23-24 Items raised under Urgency Provisions

There were no urgent items.

C/49/23-24 Recommendations from the Cabinet and Committees to Council

Council had, before it, recommendations from the Worthing Licensing & Control Committee, Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee.

Extracts of these minutes had been circulated as items 7A, 7B and 7C.

Item 7A Worthing Licensing & Control Committee - 18 September 2023

Licensing Act 2003 - Review of Statement of Licensing Policy

The Chair of the Licensing & Control Committee, Councillor Henna Chowdhury, proposed the recommendations from the Worthing Licensing & Control Committee meeting held on 18 September 2023.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Cathy Glynn-Davies and unanimously supported following a vote.

Resolved: That Worthing Borough Council approved the adoption of the Statement of Licensing Policy.

Item 7B Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) - 30 November 2023

Review of JOSC Work Programme

The Vice-Chair of JOSC, Councillor Elizabeth Sparkes, proposed the recommendation from the meeting held on 30 November 2023.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Daniel Humphreys and noted by the Council.

Members wished to place on record their extreme disappointment with Southern Water for their lack of willingness to engage with the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee (JOSC). It was noted that Southern Water had been invited to attend the JOSC meeting in January 2024 but had refused to answer questions in an open meeting.

Resolved: That Worthing Borough Council noted the changes made to the JOSC Work Programme since it was agreed by both Councils in April 2023.

Item 7C Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee - 5 December 2023

Council Tax Support Scheme for Worthing Borough Council in respect of 2024/25

The Leader and Chair of the Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee, Cllr Beccy Cooper, proposed the recommendations from the Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee meeting held on 5 December 2023.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Emma Taylor-Beal and supported by the Council.

Resolved: That Worthing Borough Council approved the Council Tax Support scheme for Worthing Borough Council in respect of working age customers for 2024/25 which would

- a) Be based upon the current Council Tax Support scheme for 2023/24 with no restrictions; and
- b) Not be further altered with any other changes beyond necessary technical amendments required to keep the scheme consistent with the national rules in respect of Housing Benefit.

C/50/23-24 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.

Questions were received in relation to proposed budget savings; implementation of the plastic free working group study and carbon emissions.

C/51/23-24 Members Questions under Council Procedure Rule 12

The Mayor announced that the Proper Officer had received 5 questions from Members in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12. He advised that one supplementary question could be asked which must arise out of the original question, or, the reply.

It was noted that there were 30 minutes allowed for questions with 2 rotations of speakers possible. At the end of 30 minutes the Mayor explained that he would extend the time to conclude the current rotation of questions.

The Mayor advised that the following Councillors had submitted questions:

Councillors Hunt, Jenkins and Thorpe.

Rotation 1

Question 1 from Councillor Kevin Jenkins to the Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing

Councillor Whorlow you were unable to make the recent JOSM meeting that reviewed the work of the Safer Communities Team. Can you please give us an update on your team's work with the night time economy and support measures that you have put in place to support the most vulnerable.

The Cabinet Member replied that the Councils continued to work closely with both the Business Improvement District Team and Pubwatch to promote safety in the night time economy.

This had recently included support to apply for Safer Streets funding, the use of Safer Streets funding to employ taxi marshalls for key dates, targeted work with children known to offend in the town centre and promotion of the Safe Spaces app to identify hot spots where people report feeling less safe. We have also funded Bystander Intervention training for 17 late night businesses to ensure premises are equipped to identify and intervene where situations appear unsafe. We continue to work with the community and businesses to identify opportunities to promote safety in the night time economy and our town centre in general.

Question 2 from Councillor Hazel Thorpe to the Cabinet Member for the Environment

I have listened to a representative of the Waste collection industry and noted the high percentage of spend of taxpayers money on the environment and waste.

A) Can you clarify why this council continues to support expensive maintenance of a fleet of vehicles that are rapidly out of date and not fit for purpose B) Have you considered leasing more modern vehicles with new technologies to save ongoing and escalating costs C) Have you reviewed this area of the budget, if not, when will this happen and when will backbencher councillors and the public get the information?

The Cabinet Member replied that the Council's waste, recycling and cleansing services were amongst the most visible of all the services provided. The Council collect refuse and recycling from every single household, and garden waste from households on a subscription basis. Like all councils, Worthing had to rely on a specialised fleet to provide these services. Most of these vehicles were currently fueled by diesel, accounting for approximately 45% of the Council's carbon emissions. The Council had started to replace some of its smaller vehicles with EVs, expecting four transit type vehicles in the next few months to replace some of the older diesel vehicles.

Most of the Council's large vehicles were due for replacement in 2026/27 and the Council had completed a study to assess alternatives, including EV and hydrogen technology, to help it meet the 2030 net zero target. As part of this, the Council would consider different finance models that provided best value for residents.

Officers were developing a fleet strategy, based on the study mentioned, which would set out recommendations for the Council's future vehicles, including what type of vehicles should be

used to meet net zero targets, and the best way to finance them. This would include an analysis of the whole life cycle cost. The strategy would be presented to members for adoption in the New Year.

Question 3 from Councillor Claire Hunt to the Deputy Leader

How much weight are councillors meant to give to insights from this year's budget consultation, when the less favourable scores given to certain operations like Planning, Arts & Culture, cycling infrastructure, could be attributed to the format of the consultation itself? By that I mean, if people had been given information about the role played by those services, their current level of budget and staffing, their income generating potential, their potential to contribute to priorities like carbon emissions reduction or inclusivity, their rating might be more similar to the services that need less explanation. So how valid are the insights as guidance for councillors in budget-setting?

The Cabinet Member replied that the Council recognised that explaining what the Councils services did and how they were resourced in advance of engaging residents on the budget priorities may have enabled them to make more informed decisions when coming to prioritise the areas in order of preference.

The Council also acknowledged that it would be important in the future to explain how the Councils were funded and how that funding was distributed across different services. These were areas of improvement that the Council would factor in when engaging residents on the budget in the future.

The Cabinet Member stated that the document was a useful starting point and that some of the findings were valid, others had question marks that needed to be unpicked over the coming year.

The Cabinet Member was also open to a conversation on this subject following the meeting and invited opposition members to meet with him.

Rotation 2

Question 4 from Councillor Kevin Jenkins to the Cabinet Member for Resources

In the Budget 2024/25 paper, in order to avoid bankruptcy and the issuing of a section 114 notice by the Chief Finance Officer; it is identified that Worthing Borough Council would need to identify new savings amounting to some £2,629,000. Given your comments at a recent JOSC meeting, how do you see that impacting on services that you described as 'all being important'.

The Cabinet Member replied that Council's couldn't go bankrupt and he urged the use of more accurate terminology in future.

In terms of the impact on services, the focus was on delivering outcomes that residents most value. A fresh view was being taken as to how to achieve these outcomes.

The organisational redesign, which was outlined in the budget paper, accounts for a lot of the savings. The redesign was about more than savings though. It was about looking at new ways to do things that reflect modern practice and modern technology.

The Council was looking to improve how services were delivered, despite the financial challenges it faced.

Proposals would be shared in the new year, once these had been finalised and the Council had received the final details of the government's settlement which was needed to complete the budget.

The Council would be in a much better position if there had been a proper overhaul of local government finance. The failure to do this had left many Councils wrestling with their finances.

Question 5 from Councillor Hazel Thorpe to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration

It has been noted that the fire safety of pier is in question due to the current sprinkler system but due to lack of funds these will not realistically be updated at least until 2025 and the Northern Pavilion will be left on the existing system, unlike the Amusements Arcade and the South Pavilion which will be phased in if funds allow.

Q Why have essential updates to our iconic pier been given such a low priority?

The Cabinet Member replied that she could assure councillors that the existing system provided fire safety provision across the pier and that the Council took its responsibilities for safety very seriously.

However, like every local authority, Worthing Borough Council was having to juggle reduced funding from central government with dramatically increased costs caused by factors outside its control such as inflation and the rising cost of living impacting services. These were extremely challenging times for local government, so the Council was working extremely hard to ensure that every pound spent brings good value for residents and that every action taken for the community is needed now.

All capital spend, including reactive maintenance, needed to be prioritised against risk, competing priorities and resources. Therefore, this project was now being carried out on a phased basis, with the infrastructure for the sprinkler system for the southern pavilion having been carried out in conjunction with the refurbishment in 2020/21.

Funding had been secured in the current capital programme for the second phase of work, (installation of the sprinkler to the central pavilion, the booster pump and housing, and the supply pipework to the end of the pier) which would enable the central and southern pavilions to be activated. It was anticipated this work would be carried out in 2024/25.

The northern pavilion, unlike the other buildings, had a manual sprinkler system already installed and therefore carried a lower risk profile. In order to keep the pier as safe as reasonably practicable from fire, a number of measures were in place including: the presence of a linked and monitored fire alarm system; emergency lighting; agreed emergency procedures; and regular fire drills undertaken with key stakeholders, [the last one being carried out on the 14th November 2023]. Additionally, it had been agreed with West

Sussex Fire and Rescue Service that an enhanced two pump arrangement would be in place in the event of a call out.

C/52/23-24 Motion on Notice

Council received a motion on notice proposed by Councillor Claire Hunt and seconded by Councillor Sophie Cox.

In accordance with the constitution, the motion was debated and then referred to the Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee for consideration and determination.

Resolved:

That the Council referred the motion on notice to the Worthing Joint Strategic Sub-Committee for consideration and determination.

The Mayor declared the meeting closed at 8.33pm, having commenced at 6.30pm.

Mayor