

# Public Document Pack

Minutes of a meeting of the  
Worthing Council  
20 February 2024  
at 10.30 am

Councillor Jon Roser (Chairman)  
Councillor Ibsha Choudhury (Vice-Chair)

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

## **Absent**

Councillor Ferdousi Henna Chowdhury, Councillor Dan Coxhill, Councillor Dr Heather Mercer, Councillor Richard Mulholland, Councillor Elizabeth Sparkes and Councillor Steve Waight

## **C/53/23-24                      Leader's Announcement**

The Mayor used his discretion to enable the Leader to announce a change to the membership of the Planning Committee.

The Leader advised Council that Councillor Cathy Glynn-Davies would be replaced by Councillor Andy Whight on the Planning Committee with immediate effect. The Leader proposed that Councillor Andy Whight be appointed as the Chairman of the Planning Committee and that Councillor Odul Bozkurt be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee.

The proposals were seconded by Councillor Carl Walker and unanimously supported.

## **C/54/23-24                      Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Henna Chowdhury, Dan Coxhill, Heather Mercer, Richard Mulholland, Elizabeth Sparkes and Steve Waight.

## **C/55/23-24                      Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Nigel Morgan declared an interest in item 6a as the owner of a Buy to Let Property.

Councillor Charles James declared an interest in item 6a as a private landlord.

Councillor Kevin Jenkins declared an interest in item 6a as a private landlord.

Councillor Richard Nowak declared an interest in item 6a as a private landlord.

Councillor Cathy Glynn-Davies declared an interest in item 6a as a private landlord.

## **C/56/23-24                      Confirmation of Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of both the Ordinary and Special meetings of Full Council held on 12th December 2023 be approved as correct records and that they be signed by the Mayor.

## **C/57/23-24                      Public Questions and Deputations**

### **C/58/23-24                      Questions from the Public**

#### **Submitted Question from Mr Ian Davey, a Worthing Resident**

*The 2023-24 Capital budget included £60,000 for design and feasibility work for the George V to Sea Lane "cycle lane".*

*The 2024-25 Capital Budget also contains funds to "deliver design and feasibility work" for this, it also states that: " a delivery plan for full implementation will be worked up during the year".*

*Assuming that this budget passes? Could you please give reassurance that the design and feasibility work will take place this year, and when you expect that and the delivery plan to be completed.*

*There is a great deal of public interest, with high expectations in this project, so progress on completing this vital "missing link" would be very welcome.*

The Leader replied that it was absolutely the intention to deliver the design and feasibility work in the calendar year. In terms of the actual cycle lane being built, that would be significantly more expensive and therefore the intention was to use Community Infrastructure Levy funding provided by developers for this purpose. It was anticipated spend at this stage, so it wasn't possible to say when the cycle lane would be built.

The Council was working with West Sussex County Council, through the Sustainable Transport Working Group, who were fully aware that this was the Council's number one priority cycle lane and would seek to apply for Active Travel funding as and when it became available.

## a                                    **Deputation to the Council regarding the conflict in Gaza**

The following deputation was presented on behalf of Parents for Peace, Worthing.

### ***Background***

*We are submitting this deputation to the council because we are horrified by the continuing violence and the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza and call for our local council representatives to show solidarity with all people affected by the conflict and lobby the government for an immediate permanent ceasefire and the upholding of international humanitarian law.*

*Latest figures indicate that following October 7<sup>th</sup> attack in which an estimated 1,200 people died and up to 138 hostages remain held by Hamas, over 28,000 people have been killed in Gaza, including more than 11,500 children.<sup>1</sup> To put this into context, this is more than the entire primary school population of Worthing.<sup>2</sup>*

*Over 63,000 people in Gaza have been injured and with health facilities decimated (only 4 out of 40 hospitals remain partially functioning in the Gaza strip), access to medical care is severely limited.*

*According to UN figures, 80% of Gaza's 2.3 million residents have been displaced, many repeatedly<sup>3</sup>. Tens of thousands are living in makeshift tents or under plastic sheets with conditions worsened by the cold winter. Current UN estimates suggest 60% of homes have been destroyed or damaged, nine in every 10 schools have suffered "significant damage", and most hospitals have stopped working.*

*With closed borders, the UN has warned that famine is imminent, access to safe drinking water is a "struggle" and infectious diseases are spreading<sup>4</sup>. It states that all children under five in Gaza (335,000) are at high risk of severe malnutrition and preventable death, with estimates that in the coming weeks at least 10,000 children under five will need therapeutic foods to help treat the most life-threatening form of malnutrition and will require urgent treatment.<sup>5</sup>*

*The Palestinian people are not Hamas, and the response to the violent attacks by Hamas on 7th October cannot be the mass death of thousands of innocent Palestinians. Humanity is at stake and as parents and fellow human beings, we cannot condone the disproportionate devastation this is having on innocent civilians, particularly children and all upon the UK government to call for a ceasefire.*

<sup>1</sup> *Reuters article, Feb 10th, 2024*

<sup>2</sup> *7,682 primary school students in Worthing 2023/24*

<sup>3</sup> *Israel-Gaza War: 'Displaced Gazans living in the open' UN says BBC News article 30/12/23*

<sup>4</sup> *Famine in Gaza is being made 'inevitable', says UN Rapporteur Guardian News article, 28/01/24*

<sup>5</sup> *Statement by UNICEF on the risk of famine in the Gaza strip 22/12/23*

*This is a matter that is causing great concern to people in our community. Local groups have been established to show solidarity with the Palestinian people, with vigils and*

*events well attended, demonstrating the strength of feeling among our community on this issue.<sup>6</sup> Feedback from those attending these events has highlighted frustration within our community at the lack of an adequate governmental response.*

*We understand that international issues do not fall under the council's jurisdiction. However, other councils (such as Preston, Oxford and Luton) have written to the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary to urge them to support calls for a ceasefire.*

***This deputation therefore requests***

*As residents of Worthing, we call on our representatives to show leadership on this issue, stand with humanity and use their voice to publicly lobby the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary to call for:*

- *An immediate, permanent ceasefire*
- *Unfettered access to humanitarian aid in Gaza*
- *Release of all hostages*
- *Compliance with the ICJ ruling and with international humanitarian law*

*We look forward to your support in representing your constituents' concerns and doing all within your limitations to call for an end to this catastrophic level of violence.*

The Deputy Leader responded to the deputation by thanking Parents for Peace, Worthing for taking the time to bring this important deputation to Worthing Borough Council. The situation was of great concern to many of Worthing's residents, many outside of Worthing and beyond. With 'Council in the Community' being part of the Deputy Leader's Portfolio, Cllr Walker stated that he intended to respond to this deputation in the following way:-

As the deputation called for locally elected representatives to lobby the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, Cllr Walker proposed the following motion without notice, to be voted upon by members, 'that under Council Procedure Rule 15.1(d), this deputation be referred on by Worthing Borough Council, to the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary as requested'

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Kevin Jenkins and following a vote, was unanimously supported.

**C/59/23-24                      Items raised under Urgency Provisions**

There were no urgent items raised under the urgency provisions.

**C/60/23-24                      Recommendations from the Cabinet and Committees to Council**

Council had, before it, recommendations from the Worthing Cabinet and the Joint Strategic Committee.

Extracts of these minutes had been circulated as items 6A, 6B, 6C and 6D.

## **Item 6A          Worthing Cabinet - 6 February 2024**

### **Council Tax Premiums and Discounts for Empty Properties and Second Homes**

The Leader introduced the recommendation to the Council which was seconded by Councillor Emma Taylor-Beal and supported following a vote (In Favour 24, Against 0, Abstentions 7).

#### **Resolved,**

The Council approved,

1. That from 1 April 2024 to continue to levy the maximum level of premium for empty properties as follows noting the change for empty homes after 1 year:-
  - Premium of 100% for dwellings which are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished (Empty Homes Premium) after 1 year up to 5 years of becoming empty;
  - Premium of 200% for dwellings which are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished (Empty Homes Premium) between 5 years and up to 10 years; and
  - Premium of 300% for dwellings which are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished (Empty Homes Premium) for 10 years or more.
  
2. From 1 April 2025, the application of a premium for second homes (Second Homes Premium) of 100% for all dwellings that are no persons' sole or main residence and which were substantially furnished.
  
3. (Exceptions to premiums) that mindful of the current consultation by government which recommends exceptions in certain circumstances, to the second homes premium to be charged, and subject to the outcome of that consultation, that the Section 151 Officer being given delegated authority to implement this Council's policy on premiums in line with statute and any following guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
  
4. No changes to existing Council Tax Discounts.

## **Item 6B          Worthing Cabinet - 6 February 2024**

### **Budget Estimates 2024/25 and setting of the 2024/25 Council Tax**

The Mayor advised that the recommendations from Worthing Cabinet would be considered under Item 9 on the agenda.

## **Item 6C          Worthing Cabinet - 6 February 2024**

### **Investing in our Places - Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2026/27**

The Mayor advised that the recommendations from Worthing Cabinet would be considered under Item 9 on the agenda.

**Item 6D            Joint Strategic Committee - 8 February 2024**

**Joint Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy  
2024/25 to 2026/27, Adur District Council and Worthing Borough Council**

The Leader introduced the recommendation to the Council which was seconded by Councillor John Turley and supported unanimously following a vote (In Favour 31, Against 0, Abstentions 0).

**Resolved**, that the Prudential Indicators and Limits, and MRP Statements be approved.

**C/61/23-24            Members Questions under Council Procedure Rule 12**

**First rotation:**

**Question 1 from Cllr Richard Nowak to the Deputy Leader - Cllr Carl Walker**

*As you are no doubt aware, age is a protected characteristic under the 2010 Equality Act. Given the recently announced reduced hours of operation of the Customer Call Centre and a two year commitment to services redesign which will no doubt see more and more interactions with residents being redirected via the internet, how does this administration propose to protect the many older residents of this town from becoming disengaged, disregarded and unlawfully discriminated against?*

*The Deputy Leader referred the question to the Cabinet Member for Housing & Citizen Services - Cllr Emma Taylor-Beal on the basis of portfolio responsibility.*

Cllr Taylor-Beal replied that age was indeed a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, although it was a bit of a stereotype, to assume that age in itself was a barrier to accessing online services. There will be some older residents who lack the confidence or the will to engage online which was understandable and fine. However, digital poverty was as much, if not more, of a barrier to people of all ages accessing online services.

The current change to the contact centre, had been carried out to ensure that the Council's hard working and dedicated staff were able to focus on prioritised calls and follow up admin appropriately. It was anticipated that once citizens got used to the new and slightly reduced access hours, they would see an improvement in the number of people available to take calls within that time.

The next phase of the organisational redesign, will see the Council go out to consultation with service users and speak to partners about how they can help the Council deliver the best possible service for all citizens. It would be at this point that a full equality impact assessment will be completed. The results of which would be considered when making choices about which and how many functions go online. There was no intention at all to stop people being able to call in if they wanted to. Instead, those who wish to help themselves online, will be able to when they like and support themselves without needing to speak to someone. This will free up the Council's highly skilled teams, to be able to help those who want and need this service and really value speaking to somebody.

**Question 2 from Cllr Hazel Thorpe to the Cabinet Member for Resources - Cllr John Turley**

*What contingency plan and budget does the Council have in place should the funding from Homes England not materialise?*

*The Cabinet Member for Resources referred the question to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration - Cllr Caroline Baxter on the basis of portfolio responsibility.*

Following the September 2023 Worthing Joint Strategic Sub Committee, the Council had been exploring the potential sale of Teville Gate to Homes England. Cllr Baxter looked forward to reporting on the outcome of this work at the March Joint Strategic Sub Committee, but as you will know, the aim of working with the national agency for regeneration and the delivery of new homes has been to see if the Council could break the seemingly never ending cycle of schemes that have failed to deliver.

Teville Gate was a complex site and much has changed in the last few years which means that securing a great scheme that delivers new homes for Worthing remains a real challenge. The intention this time then, was that Homes England should purchase the site from the Council; secure planning permission; and commit to delivering the development as part of an integrated approach to the regeneration of the town.

The Cabinet Member looked forward to reporting on the outcome in March, but to answer your question directly, were this land deal not to go ahead for some reason, the Council would still be in a very good position to seek an alternative development partner and actively market the site using all of the due diligence that had been undertaken to get to this advanced stage.

**Question 3 from Councillor Russ Cochran to the Deputy Leader - Cllr Carl Walker**

*Apart from use of CIL money, which is there for that very reason, how much, in financial terms and from what sources or available budgets, is being put into youth provision across the borough?*

The Deputy Leader replied that the Council did not have a specific budget for youth provision because this was the responsibility of West Sussex County Council. However there were initiatives that the Council did support periodically through external funding, including for example:

Using Safer Streets 4 funding, the Council had also funded Sid Youth and Audio Active to provide mentoring to children facing barriers to thriving. The Council had also supported local youth organisations to apply for funding from the Police Crime Commissioner. We continue to work closely with the West Sussex Violence Reduction Partnership to direct resources to services in Worthing that were supporting the most vulnerable children in the Borough.

There was one other fund - Youth Investment Fund - that was made available for specific infrastructure for youth facilities in Northbrook Ward. However, the requirements of this fund (land being owned / leased by the Council) were not in place for the fund to be accessible on this occasion.

**Question 4 from Councillor Kevin Jenkins to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Citizen Services - Councillor Emma Taylor-Beal**

*As of January 2022 you had 29.35 full time equivalent posts allocated to the contact centre, in January 2023 you had 33.23 such posts and now in January 2024 you have 29.3 such posts. Can you tell me now as of January 2024 how many of those posts are currently occupied by a member of staff and how many are being carried as vacancies.*

The Cabinet Member advised that as at January 2024, the Council had 26.48 FTE occupied roles in the contact centre. Customer Services was part of Resident Services which was one of the areas within Organisational Design. The Council would be redesigning the service in a way that gave residents the ability to self-serve for transactional queries, but were still able to speak to advisors with more complex queries.

This means identifying the best resourcing, structure and skills needed to deliver the service. The 4 vacant roles would be deleted as part of the redesign work. There was a further role which would remain vacant, due to secondment. The Council would engage and consult staff on the future model to get their views and engage residents to ensure the changes were as smooth as possible and focused on supporting residents most in need.

**Question 5 from Cllr Noel Atkins to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration - Cllr Caroline Baxter**

*Can you please tell us in the form of full time equivalents, how many staff posts were allocated to the Coastal Office team as of the 1st January 2022, how many as of the 1st January 2023, how many are allocated now as of the 1st January 2024 and of that number in January 2024 how many of those posts are currently occupied by a member of staff and how many are being carried as vacancies.*

The Cabinet Member replied that on 1st January 2022, the Council had 5 staff posts allocated to the Coastal Office.

3 Coastal Wardens, 1 Senior Coastal Warden and 1 Support Assistant. This had not changed, and continued to be the case and has remained unchanged throughout the period January 2022 to date.

All of these posts are currently occupied and the Council had zero vacancies.

**Question 6 from Councillor Richard Nowak to the Cabinet Member for the Environment - Councillor Vicki Wells**

*In the budget proposals which are laid before us today, and in the light of the declared Ecological Emergency in the town, how much money has the cabinet member fought for and secured to ensure the delivery of the management plan for Cissbury Fields, which I would remind you is the premier flagship nature recovery and biodiversity gain project this administration has inherited from its predecessor?*



The Cabinet Member thanked Cllr Nowak for his question. There was no question that the Council's finances aren't strained as a direct consequence of the national government. This couldn't have happened under worse circumstances than the Ecological and Climate Crisis.

In real terms, allowing for inflation, the Council's spending power had been reduced by 40% in the last 13 years. This means government funding had reduced by 72% in the same period. The Cabinet Member could not fight for and secure funds that don't exist. Given the financial constraints faced by the Council, a service redesign was in progress. Officers would be reviewing the resourcing needed to deliver this ambitious management plan.

That said, it doesn't mean that delivery of the management plan for Cissbury is going to be stopped in its tracks. It could be that the plan has to be adjusted to deliver elements over a longer period of time. The Cabinet Member gave a categorical assurance that the Cissbury Management Plan would be honoured.

External Funding was paramount to the success of the plan and the Council's Officers had already secured funding via South Downs National Park for 35 local varieties of apple and pear trees to create a community orchard. The trees will be planted by the end of March. In addition, they are standing ready to apply for CIL funding from South Downs National Park Authority and they are ready to apply for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The Cabinet Member was looking forward to seeing the rest of the management plan come into effect over the next few years.

#### **Question 7 from Cllr Hazel Thorpe to the Cabinet Member for Housing & Citizen Services - Cllr Emma Taylor-Beal**

*We appear to have an increased number of landlords who are buying up local properties for the sole use as air B&B's. This impacts on our ability to provide affordable housing for local people.*

- A. What are the statistics for such dwellings,*
- B. how much Council Tax does the Council receive from such properties and*
- C. how is the council dealing with this - does the council have a policy to keep this phenomena in check ?*

The Cabinet member replied that as at 15th February 2024, there were 493 properties classified as second homes. The Council did not hold data on these properties with regard to those being used as holiday lets.

If certain criteria was met for renting out properties for holiday lets, then they could be rated under Non Domestic Rates, instead of Council Tax. Again, depending on certain criteria, small business rate relief may also apply to those properties. There were currently 30 properties rated for Non Domestic Rates, 28 of those were getting small business rate relief and therefore no rates were due.

The total charge for the 493 properties classed as second homes, using current band figures, was £984,371.64

A report was taken to Worthing Cabinet on 6 February 2024 with regard to recommended changes in respect of Second Homes. The report identified decisions to be made by Full Council and made recommendations to change the council's approach in respect of certain discretionary areas within council tax legislation. Having been agreed, changes to Dwellings Occupied Periodically (Second Homes) will take place from 1st April 2025. These changes arise from the The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 which enabled councils to make further amendments to the levying of council tax premiums within the Borough.

The report recommendations sought to reduce the number of empty homes within the Borough in line with the Council's Empty Homes Strategy and to encourage the use of premises as main residence by local residents rather than as second homes. Having been confirmed earlier in this meeting, the application of a premium for second homes of 100% would be implemented from 1 April 2025.

### **Question from Cllr Kevin Jenkins to the Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing - Cllr Rosey Whorlow**

*Now that you and your cabinet colleagues are formally proposing to reduce the level of security patrols in the town centre MSCPs, what impact do you consider that will have on the night time economy?*

The Cabinet Member replied that the current arrangement was put in place in order to support car park staff with respect to out of hours use of the car parks and we will be updating this approach to a more targeted one. These are not patrols that were at any point designed as visible to users of the night time economy and we therefore don't expect this to have a direct impact on the night time economy.

*\* Councillor Russ Cochran left the meeting during consideration of item 7 at 11.20am*

### **C/62/23-24                      Suspension of Council Procedure Rules**

The Council was asked to suspend Council Procedure rules where they conflicted with the budget procedure rules in accordance with paragraph 7.2 of the budget procedure rules.

Having been proposed by the Leader, seconded by Councillor Carl Walker, the Council unanimously agreed to suspend Council Procedure Rules for the consideration of Item 9 on the agenda.

*\* The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 11.45am and reconvened at 12.02pm*

### **C/63/23-24                      Council Tax 2024/25**

The Mayor introduced the item explaining that items 6B and 6C, recommendations from the Cabinet, would be considered as part of this discussion with the full proposed recommendation being contained in the papers circulated with the agenda.

As required by the Regulations there would be a recorded vote on any amendments to the proposed budget together with a final vote on the substantive motion.

The Mayor clarified that the item would be dealt with under the budget procedure rules and therefore, ordinary rules of debate did not apply.

The Mayor invited the Leader of the Council to address the Chamber.

The Leader of the Council introduced the budget and setting of the council tax to members and a copy of the Leaders budget speech is appended to these minutes as Appendix A.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor John Turley.

The Leader of the Conservative Group on the Council, Councillor Kevin Jenkins, addressed the Council.

*\* Councillor Noel Artkins left the meeting during consideration of item 9 at 12.25pm*

*\* Councillor Daniel Humphreys left the meeting during consideration of item 9 at 12.45pm*

The Green Party Councillor Claire Hunt addressed the Council.

The Liberal Democrat Councillor Hazel Thorpe addressed the Council.

Members in the Chamber debated the proposed budget.

In accordance with Budget Procedure Rules, the Leader was given a right of reply.

The Mayor put the substantive motion, including Appendix A & Appendix B (as amended), to the Council for a vote. A recorded vote was taken, the results of which, are set out below:-

**For (24):** Councillors Abraham, Barrett, Baxter, Bozkurt, Choudhury, Cooper, Cox, Garner, Glynn-Davies, Hermitage, Howard, Hunt, Overton, Roser, Schan, Smith, Taylor-Beal, Theodoridi, Thorpe, Turley, Walker, Wells, Whight & Whorlow

**Against (4):** Councillors James, Jenkins, Morgan & Nowak

**Abstentions (0):** None

## Resolved

1. It be noted that on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024, the Executive calculated the Council Tax Base 2024/25 as **39,330.7** [Item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the “Act”)];
2. The Council Tax requirement for the Council’s own purposes for 2024/25 is **£10,527,260**.
3. That the following amounts be calculated by the Council for the year 2024/25 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
  - (a) **£71,118,506** being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act.
  - (b) **£60,591,246** being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.
  - (c) **£10,527,260** being the amount by which the aggregate at 3(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 3(b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R), in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
  - (d) **£267.66** being the amount at 3(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (1(a) above), calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.
  - (e) **£0.00** being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act.
  - (f) **£267.66** being the amount at 3(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 3(e) above by Item T (1(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.

4. That it be noted that for the year 2024/25 the West Sussex County Council and The Police and Crime Commissioner for Sussex have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each category of dwellings in the Council's area as indicated in the table below:-

<b>All of the Council's Area 2024/25</b>	<b>Band A</b> £	<b>Band B</b> £	<b>Band C</b> £	<b>Band D</b> £	<b>Band E</b> £	<b>Band F</b> £	<b>Band G</b> £	<b>Band H</b> £
<b>Worthing Borough Council</b>	<b>178.44</b>	<b>208.18</b>	<b>237.92</b>	<b>267.66</b>	<b>327.14</b>	<b>386.62</b>	<b>446.10</b>	<b>535.32</b>
<b>West Sussex County Council Total as split below:</b>	<b>1,143.30</b>	<b>1,333.85</b>	<b>1,524.40</b>	<b>1,714.95</b>	<b>2,096.05</b>	<b>2,477.15</b>	<b>2,858.25</b>	<b>3,429.90</b>
West Sussex Council – Core	977.58	1,140.51	1,303.44	1,466.37	1,792.23	2,118.09	2,443.95	2,932.74
West Sussex County Council – Adults Social Care element	165.72	193.34	220.96	248.58	303.82	359.06	414.30	497.16
<b>The Police and Crime Commissioner for Sussex</b>	<b>168.61</b>	<b>196.71</b>	<b>224.81</b>	<b>252.91</b>	<b>309.11</b>	<b>365.31</b>	<b>421.52</b>	<b>505.82</b>

5. That the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the amounts shown in table shown above, as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2024/25 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.

	<b>Band A</b> £	<b>Band B</b> £	<b>Band C</b> £	<b>Band D</b> £	<b>Band E</b> £	<b>Band F</b> £	<b>Band G</b> £	<b>Band H</b> £
<b>All of the Council's Area</b>	<b>1,490.35</b>	<b>1,738.74</b>	<b>1,987.13</b>	<b>2,235.52</b>	<b>2,732.30</b>	<b>3,229.08</b>	<b>3,725.87</b>	<b>4,471.04</b>

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The meeting ended at 2.09 pm

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## Worthing Borough Council Budget Speech – February 2024

Good morning everyone.

Before we get started on Worthing's 2024/25 Budget, I would just like to offer some thanks. Firstly to all my fantastic colleagues for everything they do and in this case in particular to **Cllr John Turley** for seeing us through one of the toughest financial years in the history of this council. And he does it so calmly! And there's me, tearing my hair out! It's amazing, it really is.

I would also like to thank the officers - especially **Emma Thomas and the Finance Team**, along with our **Chief Executive, Directors and all the dedicated staff of the council**. And a special mention for **Martin Randall** who is retiring after many years of service in Local Government. Our thanks for all your hard work Martin and we all wish you well in your next adventures.

We live in a wonderful part of the world and are rightly proud of our town and borough. As the local Council, we are one of many partners contributing to the health and wellbeing of all our residents, helping them to thrive. So when we are setting our annual budget and choosing how to spend the public resources available to us, we do our best to make sure that we are reflecting the priorities of our communities and are working productively with our partners.

In 2023-24, in spite of very tight resources, we managed to achieve some great things with our communities and to start some projects that will bear fruit this year and in the years to come.

For example, one of our priority areas is social housing, ensuring that all our residents, regardless of their incomes, are able to access good homes. This year we have invested £4.2m in developing emergency and temporary accommodation provision within the Borough. This will allow local residents who find themselves homeless (often through the scourge that is no fault evictions) to remain within their social networks and not have to make long, expensive daily journeys to their places of work and children's schools. Housing is a major budgetary pressure for us (costing £5m in 23/24) and a reduction of B&B bills and out of town placements is good news for both our communities and Council.

However, reducing B&B costs is of course only a halfway house to providing good homes. This year, as well as strengthening our relationship with Worthing Homes and other housing association partners, progress has been made toward developing our own social housing offer. Focussing on our key brown field sites means that we expect to see work underway at Union Place later this year and an offer finalised with Homes England for the development of Teville Gate. If it feels like these projects have taken forever to see the light of day, it is not least because our Officers have had to take endless time away from their day jobs to find significant savings in the budget! But more about that later...

This year, we have also prioritised urban greening and sustainable living, protecting and enhancing our green spaces and wherever possible, increasing biodiversity in

our urban areas by planting native and sustainable species, for example on our High Street and Prom. I should also say that protecting and enhancing our coastline is very much part of this work too, but I don't know if urban blue'ing has quite the same ring to it!

We continue to work with the Friends Of Groups who do so much great work in our parks and green spaces – this type of community partnership is in many ways the backbone of our town and we greatly value these relationships.

Of note we have delivered a new playground in Palatine Park with a full refurbishment planned and budgeted for, for Homefield Park. And it is great to finally see the café in Brooklands open and doing well.

In our blue spaces, Sussex Bay goes from strength to strength, aided by additional funding successfully brought in by our officers. Our local fishing community will also benefit from this revival, with Councillors and Officers set to secure long-term fishing licences that underpin the sustainable practices of our historic coastal heritage.

And the Fisherman's Society of Worthing are only one of the many beneficiaries of our revamped Community grants scheme. Good use of the Community Infrastructure Levy has been a key goal, ensuring that we are reflecting the needs of our neighbourhoods in the allocation of available resources. This work was Borough wide, Council wide (cross Party) and Community wide and I would like to thank everyone who gave their time and effort in championing these 45 projects and ensuring that funding was allocated fairly and transparently.

This, alongside the Big Listen and large-scale public realm initiatives in areas such as West Durrington, will be at the heart of our Council transformation work. We were elected on a manifesto promise to be a Council for the Community, and in order to do this we are moving to a neighbourhood model where officers and residents can work side by side in community settings.

But before I come to next year with all its challenges and opportunities, I want to return to my earlier comment on time spent by officers (and members!) in finding the large amount of savings needed in order for the Council to get to the end of this year as a going concern.

After 14 years of callous, chaotic and clueless Tory government, it should come as no surprise that councils up and down the country are now stretched to breaking point. Shockingly, in real terms, Worthing Borough Council is receiving around £7m less in central government funding than it was in 2010.

In order to try to replace some of that funding, Worthing, like so many other Councils, has dedicated precious officer time and money to commercial investments. The Strategic Property Investment Fund is generating a good return but there remains a shortfall in our Budget. The significant reduction in funding means that when inflation and the cost of living crisis hit, Worthing Council, like so many others, did not have enough resilience in its budget. The only way forward has been to hit pause for several months on work that benefits our communities, in order to strip the old structure of the Council to its bare bones and to prepare for a rapid transformation. I



repeat that our plan was always to transform into a Council for the Community – a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council model which is flexible, resilient, digital and embedded in its neighbourhoods. But that was a 5 year plan! We anticipated a transition that would allow enough time for the Council and Community to adapt to new ways of working, and new iteratively-built structures.

However, thanks to the appalling lack of trust and respect of Local Government shown by the Conservatives, we have no choice but to shortcut much of this transition time, and work as hard and as fast as we can to put our transformed model into practice. And despite this inevitably being a bumpy ride, our S151 officer is assured that our budget is sound.

We are asking a lot of our Council staff and community members, and I want to thank them for their ongoing creativity and passion for Worthing. Our Communities continue to suffer from and to pick up the pieces of this broken National Government and I invite them to be as disgusted as we are that Westminster remains both blind and deaf to the consequences of their own inept decisions. We are furious that the Conservatives continue to use Local Government as their scapegoat for the ills that they have inflicted on our residents – unaffordable housing, lack of actual investment in their so-called levelling up agenda, washing their hands of so many in our Community as their bills soar and their living standards plummet.

In spite of this cynical approach from a thankfully dying Conservative government, we are resolved to carry on and to work hard with and for our residents next year.

So in order to do this, what does our overall budget position look like? At the end of this financial year, we estimate that we will need to utilise £1.6 million from our working fund reserves to balance the budget (our ring-fenced, earmarked reserves remain intact). Going into 24/25 our usable reserves balance will be £242,000, which is very low. We will therefore need to put any surplus from this year into reserves. The 24/25 budget has been balanced, with the provision of £200k to go back into the reserves. We will seek to further increase our reserves as much as possible from 24/25 onwards.

In short, the work that we undertake in 2024/25 will continue to be within financial constraints and we will need to be extremely creative to achieve our ambitions within these limitations. As I said, we are determined to do this but we are under no illusion – this is a big ask and will require us all to pull together to transition so quickly into our 21<sup>st</sup> century Council.

We retain the vision of becoming the greenest, fairest Coastal town in the UK. We have learnt a lot from our community and council officers in our first two years of administration and have honed our priority areas as follows:

- Creating a clean, green, fair Borough
- Development of social housing
- Town centre & seafront regeneration

Our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council is going to look and feel different to what has gone before, but it will still of course need to prioritise our statutory services. Most of these are

delivered as joint services with Adur Council – which is currently run by a Conservative administration (at least for now!). But I am pleased to say that we have developed a constructive way of working together to deliver those shared services.

They include waste and cleansing, both of which are essential to delivering our priority of a cleaner borough. Digitalisation will allow these teams to work more efficiently with the resources available. In cleansing, there will be a review undertaken to ensure that key areas such as street cleaning are not delayed for example, by cars parked along the road. We are also acutely aware of the need to find new life for our town centre and night time economy, and keeping the area clean and attractive is a vital part of that.

In waste, we need a solution to our aging fleet that is sustainable and will contribute to our net zero target. If we are to transition to electric vehicles, we need to consider the total cost, waiting time for new vehicles and charging infrastructure. This year, we will put together the best solution, that takes into account possible opportunities to work with other local authorities and travel partners.

We are also awaiting further financial updates on the Environment Bill, which will require us to collect food waste separately from our regular bin collections. We absolutely welcome this direction of travel in terms of being a green and sustainable Borough, but we cannot implement this with the current suggested financial settlement from Central Government. As this is the same for pretty much every Council up and down the Country, we live in hope that there will be sense seen and that the requisite funding for this long overdue service will be forthcoming.

Creating a fair Borough is a central tenet of our Labour administration and is considered in each strategic decision that we make. It means expanding opportunity and we continue to encourage inward economic investment by actively working with local businesses, the Worthing BID and others to support start-ups and encourage more collaboration between businesses, communities and the council.

It also includes our determination to provide decent, sustainable social homes. As mentioned, this year will see work beginning in Union Place and the introduction of Homes England to finally provide long overdue sustainable homes and green spaces for Teville Gate. We are fully aware that Teville Gate continues to be one of the blockers for this town in terms of development, and while we work with Homes England to ensure delivery of this project, we will be making sure that this space is maximised for Community usage.

Another ongoing issue is Montague Place. As part of our town centre regeneration, we will be using developer contributions for public spaces to turn Montague Place into Montague Gardens. It will be green and clean with areas for young children to play, older people to meet and a central stage venue that will give young people the opportunity to perform, watch outdoor cinema and above all feel at home and welcomed in the heart of our town.

Helping to create a fair community also means allocating resources according to need. We will continue to work with and to support our fantastic community organisations to provide a safety net through food banks, warm hubs and meeting

places for old and young. We are also aware of how important it is for us all to have access to art, music and leisure activities and will therefore be once again showcasing the very best of our town's creative talents with the Worthing Festival.

For such a constrained budget, we are still packing a considerable punch and I am incredibly proud to present this budget plan to Council today. The Cabinet Members will give more detail in the debate on some of the specific Capital projects and revenue services that they are working on, with their officer teams to take forward. We are being fiscally responsible, whilst at the same time using all our strategic and operational strengths to deliver a future that is full of possibility, innovation and creativity. Is it risky? Yes, but it is managed to the very best of our ability. Is it the right thing to do? Undoubtedly. Would it be easier if we were properly resourced? You bet! But to realise our vision of becoming the fairest, greenest Coastal Town in the UK we will ultimately need hard work, brains, determination and teamwork. And we know that this Labour Council and our Worthing Communities have those in abundance!

Many thanks.

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