

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

QEII Room, Shoreham Centre, Pond Road, Shoreham

7 November 2024

Councillor Joss Loader (Chair)
Councillor Nigel Jenner (Vice-Chair)

Adur District Council:

Councillor Carson Albury
Councillor Robina Baine
Councillor Emma Evans
Councillor Dan Flower
Councillor Pauline Higgins

Worthing Borough Council:

Councillor Cathy Glynn-Davies
Councillor Dan Hermitage
Councillor Heather Mercer
Councillor Jon Roser
Councillor Elizabeth Sparkes
Councillor Samuel Theodoridi
Councillor Carl Walker

Absent

Councillor Dan Flower

JOSC/20/24-25 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest made

JOSC/21/24-25 Substitute Members

JOSC/22/24-25 Confirmation of Minutes

Resolved:

The minutes of the meeting of the 05.09.2024 were approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman

JOSC/23/24-25 Public Question Time

A resident asked the following question; "In general the Housing Strategy is very welcome and covers most of the issues but I would like to ask if thought had been given to those homeless who have addiction and mental health problems?"

The help that the Council and Turning Tides give does not seem to be suitable for this more needy part of the population. Simply giving them a room, although necessary, is not likely to lead to a long term improvement as often these people have come from chaotic families and their only peers are also the homeless."

The resident was informed that for the majority, support for addiction and mental health was provided separately to housing and delivered to the person irrespective of where they live.

There was mental health housing provision that sat outside of the council and Turning Tides stock and the homeless team worked closely with mental health services to refer into it for those who were homeless/threatened with homelessness, there was also an Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust funded Mental Health Housing Advisor co-locating with the team. Adur & Worthing Council Housing Needs Team sat on mental health and housing strategic groups and as well as mental health workers being part of the Rough Sleepers Team so that housing and support available could be targeted to those most in need, but services across the partnership were experiencing increased demand against limited resources.

For those with additional needs, as well as support in the community, there was also rehab options in addition to the Turning Tides recovery project, funding for these was awarded on a case by case basis.

Changing Futures programme was also piloting work and collating data across the county for those with multiple complex needs and the information was being considered by WSCC / Health and mental health partners to inform future commissioning and strategy work.

A Member of the public also asked if the Council would make land available for the Adur Collective Community Land Trust, in a bid to provide more affordable housing.

The member was told their question would be taken into consideration as part of the wider consultation and a written response would be provided.

JOSC/24/24-25 Members' Questions

There were no questions from Members

JOSC/25/24-25 Items Raised Under Urgency Provisions

There were no urgent items

JOSC/26/24-25 Consideration of any matter referred to the Committee in relation to a call-in of a decision

There were no call-ins

JOSC/27/24-25 Draft Housing Strategy for Adur & Worthing 2025 - 2030

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 8, which had been circulated to all Members and is attached to a signed copy of these minutes. A brief overview was provided with comments from the assistant director for housing and homelessness prevention, the Performance, Policy and Strategy Lead, the Adur Cabinet Member for Housing and Citizen Services, the Worthing Cabinet Member for Housing and Citizen Services, the Head of Property Services and the Senior Environmental Health Officer.

A Member asked "The first mission states: 'Making sure all our existing homes are safe, of good quality and are sustainable (they are affordable to run and have a low carbon footprint)' What would this look like in practice?"

Members were informed this looks different in different spaces, for example, for Adur Homes this aligned with work with the Regulator of Social Housing and the significant improvements being made in areas surrounding compliance and property safety. Adur Homes was also undertaking stock condition surveys, the data of which would inform the capital works for years ahead to ensure the right level of investment to ensure the quality of the homes. In respect of new developments for Adur Homes the Council had been installing air source heat pumps to support the energy efficiency and the longer term running costs.

As Worthing's stock of temporary accommodation increased the Council needed to ensure they were developing the most sustainable homes wherever possible, Victoria Road was a great example of this that would be delivered to PassiveHaus standards which had a reduced carbon footprint and had reduced ongoing utility costs for residents. Across both areas they needed to explore options to retrofit energy efficient options and ensure new developments were using the latest energy efficient solutions where viable. They would also look at how they worked with partners to ensure they could benefit from options that come with larger scale opportunities that we might otherwise miss if we do things alone.

Beyond council owned accommodation the Private Sector Housing Team routinely used their regulatory powers to improve accommodation in the private sector (including owner-occupied properties where needed). This work was primarily reactive and driven by complaints, but the proposed introduction of a selective licensing area in three wards in Worthing, where around 50% of all the Borough's privately rented accommodation was located, would enable for the team to be resourced to proactively inspect and license properties to improve standards in these areas. This would in turn free up existing staff to monitor accommodation in those areas outside of selective licensing.

A Member asked "Mission 2 seeks to ensure that there is "enough genuinely affordable housing" Does the term affordable relate to a percentage of the market value or to local income Levels?"

Members were informed that this related to rented homes capped at a percentage of local market rent levels (80%) and not exceeding Local Housing Allowance rates. This ensured that households requiring support with housing costs were able to have the rent met through housing benefit or the housing element of Universal credit.

A Member asked "What progress is being made to address the concerns and shortfalls in service provided by Adur Homes that prompted the Council to self-refer to the social housing regulator? How does this progress tie in with delivering the objectives of the draft Housing Strategy?"

Members were informed that Council officers met with the regulator of social housing on a monthly basis to review progress against the improvement plan. Good progress had been made in respect of compliance work with longer term contractual work being completed on an ongoing basis. This included stock condition surveys to inform longer term Adur Homes business planning and informing planned capital works to invest in homes ensuring they were brought up to a decent home standard where required.

Officers reported the progress against the improvement plan through the Joint Audit and Governance Committee twice a year and annually to the Joint Strategic Committee. Members were invited to review these reports for more detailed updates.

This aligned with the draft housing strategy aim to ensure all of our existing homes are safe, of good quality and are sustainable."

A Member asked “The strategy identifies the budget pressure due to out of area temporary accommodation and the cost of this. It also identifies that there has been a 98% increase in the last 3 years. The actual plans shared with the growth of 34 new units in Worthing and nothing stated for Adur. This will not be covering the growth forecast for next year let alone reducing the budget pressure. Are there over impacts of programmes that will have an impact on the demand and hence budget costs both next year and for the lives of the strategy?”

Members were informed that in addition to the provision of additional owned temporary accommodation in Worthing, a number of units were proposed for Adur (these would be delivered in advance of the strategy timeframe). In addition they were securing a number of longer term (3-5 year) lease arrangements from accommodation providers to mitigate reliance upon nightly paid temporary accommodation which was both the most expensive option and provided the least preferred option for residents.

They had also redesigned the staffing structure to increase resources within the homeless service recognising the increasing demand in this area. The team would be resourced in a way which allowed for protected officer time to focus on the key areas of homelessness. These included, exploring and implementing prevention options as early as possible, supporting immediate homeless need where prevention options had been unsuccessful and then decision making to support residents to have as short a stay in temporary accommodation as possible wherever possible.

A Member asked “Adur & Worthing councils have expressed a desire to trial cooperative living, cohousing and homeshare schemes. As this is a new initiative where will data be gathered from and against which criteria will it be evaluated?”

Members were informed data gathering and establishing evaluation criteria would be essential to assess suitability, sustainability and ultimately success of a possible new housing model. They would seek to review data from areas that have trialled or implemented schemes of this nature and evaluate success against criteria including longevity of tenancy, social benefit, affordability (for both parties) and take up.

A Member asked “How do you envisage the Government's initial announcement to 'end no fault evictions' will impact on our housing strategy?”

Members were informed that this would impact across the wider housing landscape in what could be perceived as both positive and negative ways. Initially this was positive, adding additional security for households renting within the private sector, increasing stability and longevity of tenancies.

There was however a risk that landlords may opt to leave the sector thus reducing the supply of private rented accommodation in the market which would increase the need for permanent affordable homes. They could mitigate this through continued development of the private landlord support offer which could include insurance schemes, tenant education programmes and tenant/landlord mediation services.

A Member asked “How varied is the council's mailing list of partners and community groups across the area and how confident are you that this list will return the much needed consultation responses from individuals and groups that aren't normally heard?”

Members were informed the contact lists had been generated through a variety of sources including existing forums for housing and homeless as well as health and wellbeing and community safety for example. These were established networks with well

connected groups and representative organisations that would be able to further share the consultation opportunity and / or gather responses (including lived experience) and share these on behalf of groups, communities and individuals. Also they had sought to make contact with groups such as the Clare Project, Churches Together, Food Banks and other faith groups, Worthing 4 Refugees and other groups linked to communities with protected characteristics identified in the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). In addition they were holding public consultation meetings in both Adur and Worthing where the general public plus these groups and organisations would be invited to attend. They were planning an additional engagement session with homeless and rough sleeping providers. This engagement was being supported by social media where they hoped to further extend their reach. Upon completion of the engagement period they would analyse the responses and as part of this process, determine where there were gaps and seek to address these through additional targeted outreach where possible.

A Member asked “By creating healthy, resilient and resourceful communities, what consideration is being taken in protecting or establishing access to nature, food networks (e.g. is there the potential for self growing), green spaces to exercise and access to clean energy, water and air?”

Members were informed both authorities were committed to working with partners to improve the environment, making Adur and Worthing the fairest and greenest coastal areas in the country. The draft strategy made commitments around sustainability including energy efficiency and sought to optimise opportunities to protect and enhance local nature value. Specific actions around access to nature, green space, foodbanks, self growing and so forth had not been made in the strategy at this point and they wanted to hear more about these ideas through the consultation process.

A Member asked “The two councils spent a combined £4.4m on temporary accommodation in 2023/24. The pressures these costs put on the housing and wider council budgets is unprecedented and unsustainable. These costs are projected to increase further in the next three years without significant changes in national policy and local service provision.” Given the scale of this challenge, does the cabinet member believe that the Housing Strategy can realistically deliver on the 5 stated missions?”

Members were informed yes, the strategy was a real shift from the previous strategy which was implemented during the COVID pandemic to be a call to action for all. As local councils they played a significant part in addressing the housing crisis but couldn't do it alone. This strategy was a call to action for wider partners working within the missions to make an impact together.

For the authorities more specifically and in respect of the increasing demand, it required a multi faceted response which included a shift in accommodation options in respect of temporary accommodation, the enabling of affordable housing wherever possible, recognising this was an extremely challenging area and also how the team was resourced and structured in a way to respond to the increasing demand.

A Member asked “The financial burden on both councils in dealing with homelessness, often caused by a lack of genuinely affordable and suitable accommodation, poses a very significant risk to the councils' budgetary sustainability. The broader policy landscape has exacerbated this situation further with a lack of appropriate funding to invest in social rented homes; the dramatic reduction in the supply of social and genuinely affordable housing through policies such as the Right to Buy and the lack of effective regulation in the private rented sector". How will you work with other local

authorities in the Region and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to address this?”

Members were informed there were a number of partnerships in place across the county and beyond. These included sharing good practice, pooling resources and collectively lobbying for increased funding. They had been part of All Party Political Groups (APPG), shared countywide resources to implement consistent approaches in a number of areas and sharing of data to highlight homelessness trends. They were also part of a nationwide information sharing group of good practice and had a good working relationship with the DLUHC homelessness advisor.

A Member asked “Have you looked at 'best practice' of any local authority who have been able to manage their voids effectively?”

Members were informed that looking at other local authorities' best practice was an option for going forward. There was a draft process that was being developed that had been built from the current team's experience of working in this area as well as tapping into other colleague's knowledge and understanding of the void process.

This new process would primarily be for when the numbers were lower and operating within a 'normal' void period/process and now the housing redesign was completed and recruitment to key roles was completed/underway, the process could start to be implemented once formalised.

The main issue they were addressing at the moment was clearing the backlog and having the level of resources and contractors in place to manage this to reduce the outstanding properties as quickly and efficiently as possible without compromising health and safety and ensuring the properties were returned to a lettable standard.

The resources were there and the contractors were increasing their labour to accommodate an increase in outputs that would hopefully start to be seen during November and the coming months. They were also investigating the possibility of employing an additional contractor(s) to support this work.

A Member asked “Does the Council have a policy and/or allocations to accommodate asylum seekers within our new builds?”

Members were informed no, households needed to meet qualification criteria set out in section 3.3.3 of the Choice Based Lettings Policy to be added to the Council housing register.

A Member asked “The Housing strategy speaks continuously about working with our communities to expand provision of accommodation. How will we encourage private sector housing, including those with space in their own homes, to work constructively with the council to address the housing needs of single people. Are there incentives we can use? How well are we promoting Government initiatives like the Rent a Room scheme?”

Members were informed that the authorities had expressed a desire to trial homeshare schemes, before launching a possible new approach they would need to see what had been done in other areas, how successful this had been and lessons learnt. If they then proceeded they would have a specific communications plan to highlight the option and have case studies from residents that may have been either renting to a resident or securing a room in a property.

They needed to continue to review the private sector incentives to support landlords to bring properties back into use. Did these remain of value, how much were they being used, how did these compare to other district and borough incentives.

A Member asked “Many people find themselves homeless as a result of relationship breakdowns. Are we offering support and intervention to enable residents to stay in their current accommodation?”

Members were informed the Councils had a number of specialist support provisions in place which includes WORTH services, supporting domestic abuse survivors to navigate the numerous and complex options available to them including securing existing accommodation where appropriate, securing a place of safety in an emergency and planning for resettlement into new locations. In addition to domestic abuse support they had also had a funded mediation service available to support both relationship breakdowns and landlord tenant disputes where appropriate.

Members also asked about the impact of new government policies on the strategy and plans for water conservation in homes. Members were informed that references to new government policy were in the draft strategy and aligned with similar changes already made to allocation and that there were lots of mechanisms to be explored from other areas and organisations with regards to sustainable homes.

Members went on to debate how likely it would be for the strategy to deliver on all of its goals, concerns about available resources and staffing to implement the policy, the complexity of the wording of the paper, finding ways to ensure developers provide social housing, involvement of youth panels and teachers and the length of the consultation period.

Resolved:

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Reviewed and noted the plans to produce a new Housing Strategy for Adur & Worthing Councils covering the period between 2025 - 2030.
- Recommended that the consultation period for the draft Housing Strategy be extended until the 20th of December 2024

JOSC/28/24-25 An interim report on the work of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group

The Committee had a report before it attached as item 9, which had been circulated to all Members and is attached to a signed copy of these minutes. This report set out a summary of the work of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) Budget Scrutiny Working Group which was set up as part of the 2024/25 JOSC Work Programme. The Working Group would provide further reports to JOSC as the budget was developed and reported to JOSC.

Members were informed that the working group had met twice so far and felt good, informed progress was being made with officers.

Resolved:

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report

JOSC/29/24-25 Review of Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2024/25 including review of the Corporate Risks and Opportunities

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

Members discussed current public involvement in the planning process and the scrutiny request submitted regarding the maintenance of Worthing Pier. Members discussed the appropriate time to scrutinise, the information that had already been communicated to the public, the level of public interest and expanding the scrutiny to include other grade II listed buildings such as Worthing Lido. Members also discussed which officer should attend the next meeting regarding Worthing Council's motion asking to review the decision on new equipment in car parks.

Resolved:

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee delegated the decision of when to bring the scrutiny of Worthing Pier and other Grade II listed buildings to a meeting of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to the chairs

The meeting was declared closed by the Chairman at 9.16 pm, it having commenced at 6.30 pm

Chairman