



WORTHING BOROUGH
COUNCIL

Key Decision - Yes

Ward(s) Affected: All

New Priorities for Worthing Borough Council

Report by the Chief Executive Officer

Officer Contact Details

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Executive Summary

1. Purpose

1.1 Following the May 2022 local elections a Labour administration has been formed to lead Worthing Borough Council. The administration seeks to form a council that delivers change and further improve the lives of all who live and work in Worthing.

1.2 This report sets out the ambitions of the administration, including actions started in the first 100 days, as well as ambitions for the medium and longer term. Additional reports enabling the delivery of specific ambitions will be prepared and brought to members for agreement at later meetings, as required.

1.3 The plans identified for delivery in 2022 to 2023 will be resourced through existing budgets, with the exception being some additional community engagement work. The report therefore includes a recommendation for the release of £76,500 from reserves to resource this activity.

1.4 The plans described in the report are helping to shape and will be delivered through the new joint delivery plan currently being developed with Adur District Council.

2. Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1. Note and approve the plans for change and delivery set out in the report.
- 2.2. Agree the release of £76,500 from the capacity issues reserves to resource additional activities supporting community engagement, inclusion and participation.

3. Context

- 3.1. Following the local elections on the 5th of May 2022 the Labour group gained a majority of seats and a Labour led administration was subsequently formed to lead Worthing Borough Council.
- 3.2. The administration comes with a mandate for change and has set out plans to shape and develop the council and its services in a number of ways. Key priorities include being responsive to the needs of the community by opening up democracy and undertaking a more progressive approach to engagement and participation work. Reflecting the pressing issues of poverty and inflation, the council will also seek to strengthen support for residents and businesses through the cost of living crisis. In addition, the work of the council in responding to the climate emergency and achieving net zero will be further accelerated.
- 3.3. The administration has, from day one, been working with officers in order to develop and agree the plans and resources required to deliver upon their ambitions. The plans set out in this report include a range of key actions that are to start and where appropriate complete in the first 100 days of the new administration. Where plans involve a shared service, the borough will work in partnership with Adur, as appropriate.
- 3.4. Further projects and initiatives will come forward as part of the

administration's long term plans for change. These projects and initiatives will be developed in response to opportunities as well as needs, including those identified through community participation and collaborative decision making with communities.

4. Priorities and Actions

4.1 Governance and Engagement

4.1.1. The golden thread running through the work and approach of the new administration will be to listen to its communities, business and partners. In this way the council's intention is to become a community-first council, tapping into the enormous capability and enthusiasm seen across the borough's communities, exemplified perhaps most powerfully during the pandemic.

4.1.2. The ambition is for the council to gain a deeper understanding of its local communities, ensuring the priorities for Worthing Borough Council, and for the Town, are driven by the needs of its residents, partners and businesses. This means residents having the opportunity to be genuinely listened to and being able to work with the council in finding solutions to local problems. To help us move forward with this approach the council will undertake a range of actions and initiatives including the following:

4.1.3. Opening up Decision Making - The establishment of Worthing Executive meetings starting in July, where the council is able to focus on the issues and interests of the borough, forms part of an overall ambition to open up democracy and share decision making. Council meetings, for example, will be taken into community settings, encouraging participation and representation. We will investigate and consult on how the council, through a number of different ways, can better engage local communities in decision making processes. We will as part of this work undertake a process to review our overall budget to identify which funding could be released for direct spend in our local neighbourhoods and communities of interest. Ward councillors will play a key role in working with neighbourhood communities, making this a council wide initiative benefiting all wards.

4.1.4. Big Listening Campaign - Starting in the first 100 days we are going to embark on a town-wide Big Listening Campaign with Phase 1 running from mid summer to early Autumn 2022. The Campaign is the first step in exploring the potential role of the Borough Council in creating more opportunities for citizen participation, improved communication and inclusion. The campaign will

aim to listen to thousands of residents, in many different locations, sharing different ideas across every area of council activity. The campaign will be delivered through a range of engagement opportunities, such as evening events, online surveys and work with specific community groups, ensuring we are able to reach as many different residents as possible.

4.1.5. The outcomes from the campaign will be used to shape council strategy and direct the delivery of council services going forward. The approach will not be about identifying what more the council can do, but rather on making sure the council is doing or enabling the right things in the best way possible; supported and enabled by citizens and businesses playing their own important part in delivering changes and improvements.

4.1.6. Big Clean-Up Week - Alongside the Big Listening Campaign this summer, starting in the first 100 days of the new administration, the Council will also be running a Big Clean-up Week focusing on the town centre and seafront. We will work with the Worthing Town Centre Initiative, local businesses, residents and community groups in identifying problems, for example areas blighted with graffiti and litter, and work with the community in getting them cleaned up. Feedback from residents and businesses in undertaking this work will be used to further inform and direct regeneration work in these areas going forward.

4.2 The Cost of Living Emergency

4.2.1. The impact of the pandemic and now the cost of living crisis is affecting every household. Inflation reached a 40-year high in early summer (9%) and is set to rise further in the months to come. Inflation is being most visibly seen in the sharp rise in energy bills and the highest food price inflation in a decade. Whilst many households and businesses are struggling, it is the living standards and wellbeing of our most vulnerable residents that requires the most urgent action.

4.2.2. In response to this crisis the administration will seek to declare a 'Cost of Living Emergency' at the July full council meeting. As part of this declaration the council will work with residents, businesses and partners in the creation of an action plan to immediately start addressing needs. Actions will include how the authority can help prevent households entering crisis as well as helping those who are already struggling. This assistance includes making the most of the recent support packages announced by the Government plus support for food banks, the provision of advice and guidance through the Citizens Advice and our Proactive programme that is seeking to help

residents in crisis and to assist potentially vulnerable households, before problems arise. The council is also reviewing the Revenue and Benefits service (see below), to ensure it is more responsive and as part of this we are moving to an ethical debt collection policy.

4.2.3. In addition the £5 minimum council tax charge will be completely removed in 2023 and the council will consider the allocation of further resources to support residents in need, based on the outcomes of the Cost of Living Emergency action planning work described above and the changing support arrangements being made available by Central Government.

4.2.4. The action plan and its associated engagement processes will enable the council to better understand the scale of need, identify who most needs support and how best this support can be given. A further paper will be prepared for the Executive Committee in the autumn, presenting the action plan and identifying any additional resources, should these be needed in order to provide the help required.

4.3 Community Wellbeing

4.3.1. The council will, in this challenging context, seek to improve wellbeing and community safety, making Worthing a seaside town to start well, live well, and age well in. Areas of immediate focus include the following:

4.3.2. Communities - The main programme of work to support our communities starts with the above programme of engagement work. The council will be data led and will use, for example, findings from the Big Listening Campaign and the Census, to give unparalleled insight into our communities, helping to inform and guide our work with all communities.

4.3.3. In line with the council's focus on equality, diversity and inclusion, additional work will be undertaken over the summer to set up an access group to regularly meet with councillors and officers to identify accessibility problems and agree solutions. In the coming year the council will also seek to develop its relationships with other underheard minority groups, including the LGBTQ community and the borough's ethnic communities. The responsibility for refugees and asylum seekers sits with West Sussex County Council and the Borough will work actively with the County to ensure Worthing is a welcoming and safe place for those placed in the borough. Support for the Third Sector will also be prioritised to ensure communities have the resources and structures to facilitate advocacy, community voice, inclusion, engagement and participation.

4.3.4. Health and Wellbeing - The council will ensure Health and Wellbeing is properly integrated into all policy development and service delivery helping to develop a collaborative approach to health and wellbeing across the council. Through the Big Listening Campaign, other engagement opportunities (especially targeted at the most excluded) and information gained through data sources, we will test the existing strategy, address gaps in provision and ensure our services meet the changing needs of our diverse communities.

4.3.5. Young People - The pandemic and the ongoing impacts of the cost of living crisis have affected young people in many ways, including access to education and training, homelessness, social isolation and wellbeing, including mental health. The council intends to improve support for young people in the borough, directly where it can but also through partnership working and advocacy with agencies who are responsible for ensuring young people are able to thrive. Actions in the first 100 days include setting up a Young Person's group to meet regularly with councillors and officers to identify how best the council can support and meet the needs of young people in Worthing. In addition, we will explore the possibility of running a mental health engagement event for young people, identifying issues and the kinds of solutions needed by the young people of Worthing.

4.3.6. As part of this work, over the next 12 months, the council will explore provision for young people (14yrs - 17yrs) in Worthing. This will include council provision, youth clubs, recreational facilities and amenities utilised by our young people. This information and associated engagement with young people on their social needs will help us to formulate a long term plan to better support and enable the flourishing of young people living in the borough.

4.3.7. Community Safety - The council will actively work to ensure the successful implementation of the recently adopted Community Safety Partnership Strategy. The council will for example support stronger partnership working between the police, businesses, communities and the Licensing team, addressing concerns over impact of night-time economy both on health and wellbeing and community safety. We will, as part of this work, also work with partners to review recent issues with youth violence and using a multidisciplinary safeguarding approach, seek to reduce youth crimes, supporting both the families affected and victims.

4.4 Climate Emergency

4.4.1. The council is reviewing existing plans and strategies to ensure the climate emergency response is a golden thread running through everything the authority does and spends. Keys actions already started in the first 100 days include:

4.4.2 District Heat Network - The Council is reviewing the procurement process and business model for the Heat Network to ensure our ambitions and processes are sufficiently robust, delivering the very best sustainability outcomes and retaining as much investment as possible in the borough.

4.4.3 Reviewing Regeneration Schemes (see also improvement areas below) - The Council is pursuing an integrated area based approach that looks at the contribution each new development can make to our places and pays attention to the spaces in between. As part of this approach we will use eco design principles to retrofit and repurpose buildings and when new buildings are required this will be designed to the highest possible sustainability standards. To support this work the council will be running an eco design competition, to generate new ideas, learn from best practice and deliver long term sustainability outcomes.

4.4.4. Carbon Reduction Review - The Council will re-evaluate council owned and jointly owned buildings, green spaces and other council assets (including vehicles) to ensure climate change and carbon reduction plans are in place or will be put in place by the timetables agreed. We will as part of this work undertake an energy efficiency assessment of all emergency and temporary council owned accommodation. Where energy efficiency measures are required, Decarbonisation of the Public Sector funds will be applied for. The Council will also work with Turning Tides to better collaborate and deliver an energy efficiency assessment of all Turning Tides. In a similar way the Council will seek to work in partnership with the owners of 'Open Doors' properties and the owner/occupiers of properties with energy efficiency ratings F or below.

4.4.5. Outreach and Engagement - These and other initiatives will be supported through outreach programmes (part of Big Listening campaign) helping residents and businesses to better understand and benefit from energy efficiency measures.

4.4.6. Natural Areas - The Council, through the Environmental Services and Climate Emergency portfolio leads, will initiate and drive a set of meeting with

the South Downs National Park, to discuss the Climate Emergency impacts, mitigation and adaptation to ensure the future of Cissbury, Shepherds Mead land and the Sanctuary land in Salvington ward

4.5 Environmental Services

4.5.1. The council will create the greenest town on the South Coast by combining regeneration, with climate action and the protection of our seafront, parks and open spaces. As part of this ambition the council will work to ensure development projects enhance and protect nature and wildlife in the borough. The council will further support and develop our approach to waste collection, keeping our streets clean and protecting our quality public amenities. Additional work is being undertaken with the council's Public Health and Regulation Team, improving information, advice and regulatory support to our food businesses and licensees whilst also working to improve air and bathing water quality. Officers are also undertaking work to further improve the work of our Bereavement Services, ensuring they are able to meet the needs of our residents now and in the years to come. Specific actions include:

4.5.2. Waste and Recycling - In partnership with Adur, the council will start the development of a new Waste Management Strategy, incorporating Listening Campaign feedback on options around recycling provision, food waste collection and smart collection services. Immediate actions being underway include an audit to assess current bin provision at flats and smarter routing of waste collection vehicles. We will develop new resident engagement and communication plans that will increase recycling and reduce waste, for example by providing clearer guidance on what can and cannot be recycled. Food waste collection pilots will be undertaken in the next 12 months.

4.5.3. Parks and Open Spaces: In partnership with Adur, the Council will seek to prepare a Parks and Open Green Spaces Management Strategy (incorporating Listening Campaign feedback) helping the council make better and fairer use of its capital and revenue expenditure. As part of this, the council will undertake a strategic review of planned investment into parks (e.g. play equipment, grounds, seating and biodiversity improvements) and will seek to support and resource community groups to realise "Green Corridors" and "pocket parks" wherever possible. We will work with residents, business and the Foreshore Team to further improve bathing water standards and facilities with the aim of obtaining a high bathing water status from DEFRA for Goring Gap and Splash Point beach. The council will also identify the possibility of improved changing facilities on the seafront in both east and

west locations. Tree planting will be increased and the council will work with Highways and other partners to develop a revised street tree replanting programme, enabling communities to nominate locations that need trees or pocket parks. With the rise in dog ownership we will undertake a dog provision survey and use this to revise the location of bins and provide better support and guidance.

4.6 Citizen Services

4.6.1 The council will work in new and innovative ways to help ensure residents have access to suitable housing and will seek to implement development models that provide this in a sustainable way, for example by repurposing existing buildings and protecting our limited green spaces. We will review our benefits system to ensure it is fair and accessible; ensuring everyone can get the help they need. Specific areas of focus include:

4.6.2. Housing - Work is underway in planning a landmark housing conference for Worthing, where experts, partners, developers and communities will be invited to explore the best approaches for providing housing, including Council Housing provision, across the borough. Existing schemes are being reviewed to ensure they are able to provide the best possible housing provision for our residents and deliver on our ambitions to protect green spaces and respond to the climate emergency. The council's focus on preventing and responding to homelessness will be supported through this work and we will, as part of this, actively explore the development of a Worthing 'Housing First' model to tackle rough sleeping.

4.6.3. Revenue and Benefits - In partnership with Adur, we will seek to accelerate the process of digitisation ensuring the Revenues & Benefits system is more efficient and responsive to the needs of our residents. As part of this work we will ensure people can link their Universal Credit payments to local authority assistance, triggering adjustments to ensure residents get the right support. We will develop an ethical debt collection policy that supports and enables residents to resolve payment issues before they become problematic and the council will seek to stop the use of bailiffs for Council Tax collection wherever possible. The £5 minimum council tax charge will be completely removed in 2023 and the council will consider the allocation of further resources to support residents in need, based on the outcomes of the Cost of Living Emergency engagement and action planning work described above.

4.7 Regeneration

4.7.1. The council's regeneration approach will reflect our care for the borough and support our other objectives, for example, listening to the needs of our residents, protecting the environment, reducing climate impact, providing homes and responding to the cost of living crisis. In this way, existing and future developments will be carefully reviewed, and developments will enhance the environment, reflect the creativity and heritage of Worthing, as well as providing the housing and amenities that our town requires. The council will work with local businesses, colleges, schools and employers enabling them to flourish, providing the jobs and training opportunities that our residents, including our young people, need. Specific areas of focus include:

4.7.2. Improvement Area 1 - Over the summer the council will start its work on 'Improvement Area 1' (Town Centre and Seafront) with a 'Big Clean-up Week' that will run alongside the Big Listening Campaign. This event is described above and will involve the council working with residents, business and the TCI to bring neglected and forgotten areas back to life. In collaboration with stakeholders, the council will then plan, resource and start the implementation of a bespoke set of public realm, property related, climate action and other improvements for this area.

4.7.3. As part of this work the council has commenced a review of existing plans to identify the best way forward for major sites, including Colonnade House, Teville Gate, Union Place and the Lido. The council will in the next 12 months explore the creation of a car-free town centre and seafront, with a new network of pedestrian and cycling routes providing safe and easy access.

4.7.4. **Further Area of Focus** - The council will generate opportunities and social benefits by bringing economic activity to areas and communities where it is most needed. The council will as part of this approach rollout a 3 year programme of engagement and collaborative planning, guiding the implementation of similar regeneration schemes in further improvement areas outside the town centre:

- Improvement area 2 – Montague Street (West)
- Improvement area 3 – Brighton Road/High Street junction to Egremont
- Improvement area 4 – Chapel Road from St Pauls to Teville Gate

4.7.5. Green Inward Investment - The council will renew its commitments to actively working with local businesses and will work with the TCI and others

to support start ups and encourage more networking and collaboration between businesses, communities, the council and Not For Profits. As part of this work the council will seek to stimulate green businesses promoting low carbon economies and developing Sussex Bay as the powerful delivery framework for sustainable tourism, aquaculture and fisheries, carbon storage, renewable energy and nature conservation. We will also review the opportunities for the Decoy Farm to make a significant contribution to our Net Zero economic ambitions.

4.8 Culture and Leisure

4.8.1. The cultural offer in Worthing is rich and diverse and the council wishes to develop this further, providing the conditions and opportunity for the arts and creative industries to grow, thrive and be accessible to all. The council will, as part of this work, seek to support our home-grown talent and small independent venues throughout the town. The links between wellbeing and leisure will be actively reviewed and developed further. Specific areas of work will include:

- The council will review the Worthing Theatres and Museums (WTM) offer, clarifying and agreeing outcomes and performance indicators and making these available to the public (where they are not commercially sensitive). This work with WTM will include seeking to improve the cultural offer of the Trust to hard to reach communities.
- The council, with its partners will review the Time for Worthing Brand and consider options for the development of this key area of work.
- As part of the Listening Campaign, the council will review the status of the 'Meanwhile' project currently proposed for Teville Gate.
- The council will work with partners to provide better signposting to our arts, music and heritage venues. The council will also review and improve Broadwater Bridge temporary hoarding, improving one of the main entrances to the town.
- The council will ensure the Big Listening Campaign reaches minority groups to ensure communities have the services, education, language assistance and support for multicultural events they require.
- Feedback from the Big Listening Campaign will also be used to review and improve the quality and accessibility of the leisure offer in Worthing parks, seafront and foreshore.
- In the coming year the council will work with partners to establish an improved accommodation offer in Worthing for visitors and families and the council will explore the possibility of a Festival of Worthing.

4.9 Resources

4.9.1 Adur and Worthing face a range of social, economic and environmental challenges and the council's response needs to be equal to these challenges if we are to both overcome the difficulties and release new opportunities. The council will manage and use its resources carefully and responsibly, and will draw on community wealth building models (learning from successful areas such as Preston and using these learnings to build our own “Worthing model” to respond to the needs of a seaside town) to ensure we invest our money and resources in Worthing and its communities. The council will as part of this work undertake a comprehensive review of its assets, to make sure we are using them well and to the greatest benefit for our residents. This approach will increasingly see the council, with its partners, use economic levers to create a more resilient and sustainable local economy, with more diverse businesses, creating more employment and well-paid jobs for local people.

4.9.2 The council will review both the 2021/22 budget outturn and current budget allocations to identify areas for particular attention, potential areas in which savings can be made, and where possible, allocating these funds to support new areas of work. The council will maximise the opportunities provided to us through our procurement approaches giving additional emphasis to better outcomes for residents, investments in local supply chains and enhanced local employment opportunities.

4.9.3 The council will look to use its resources in a wide number of ways, responding to community needs and interests on a number of scales. This work will be across the portfolios and include the following examples:

- Explore how vacant buildings could be offered to charities on a short-term basis and identify pop up spaces for crafts and artists
- Consider if Decoy Farm could support green businesses development
- Develop plans to incentivise business to be more green
- Develop a support package for start up businesses
- Explore the possibility of developing a local Climate Bonds scheme
- Developing a Worthing Good Business Charter (in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce who have already signed up to the Charter)

Digital Access - Work will be accelerated to ensure free public space broadband is available across the borough, and the council will work with the County and other partners to improve digital access in our libraries, council offices, community hubs and children’s centres. The council will as part do this

seek to improve the provision of digital literacy support across our community hubs.

5. Engagement and Communication

- 5.1. Engagement and communication; leading to more inclusive participation is a central tenet of our overall approach. Engagement with our communities and partners, through the Big Listening Campaign, the opening of democracy and other engagement opportunities described in the report, will inform and direct the plans of the council going forward. We will make the connection between what we hear from the communities in Worthing to the decisions we make and we will do this to the highest standards of openness and transparency.
- 5.2. Delivery of specific projects will be communicated through the councils' communications channels, press releases, social media etc as appropriate but we will also use these channels to amplify community voices and to invite new ideas and contributions to the work of the Council.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. The majority of the commitments are in the current budget or will utilise existing budget allocations. However there are two commitments which will require funding:
 - Big Listening Campaign
 - Big Clean-Up Week
- 6.2. To facilitate this work it is proposed that £76,500 be released from the capacity issues reserve to take this work forward. The funding will be used to increase capacity within the organisation to undertake the 'Big Listening Campaign, hire venues and fund other costs associated with the campaigns.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000 provides all local authorities with the power to take any steps which are likely to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their area and residents. It also places a duty on authorities to develop a community strategy, together with other local bodies, for this purpose, and is a strategy that also contributes to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK
- 7.2 s1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the Council to do anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation
- 7.3 Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 (LGA 1999) contains a general duty on a best value authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness
- 7.4 Specific legal implications arising from any of the commitments referred to in this report, will be reported to Members, in each commitment specific report delivered as part of the usual decision making process.

Background Papers

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Sustainability & Risk Assessment

1. Economic

The council priorities set out in the paper will become one of the key documents informing the direction and prioritisation of the council's work with regard to economic development in the Borough. The plans for change and delivery for Worthing Borough Council, described in this report, have helped shape and will be delivered through the proposed shared delivery plan being developed in partnership with Adur District, for consideration by the Joint Strategic Committee.

2. Social

2.1 Social Value - Key priorities set out in the report include being responsive to the needs of the community by opening up democracy and undertaking more engagement and participation work. In response to the cost of living crisis, for example, the council will work with residents, businesses and partners in the creation of an action plan to immediately start addressing needs. Actions will include how the authority can help prevent households and businesses entering crisis as well as helping those who are already struggling. The action plan and its associated engagement processes will enable the council to better understand the scale of need, identify who most needs support and how best this support can be given.

2.2 Equality Issues -

2.2.1 The council is subject to the general Equality Duty set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The proposed changes will advance the council's legal duties by supporting further engagement with communities; helping to ensure services are designed and delivered in ways that better meet specific needs and address areas of historic and ongoing disadvantage and inequality. It is the clear intention of the council to actively engage with groups that have traditionally found it difficult to be heard in decision making spaces. This will be done primarily via the Big Listening work but will be developed in all programmes of activity.

2.2.3 As part of these arrangements, should council meetings be located out of the Town Hall and in community settings, an Equality Impact Assessment will be completed to help ensure equality of access by the community, Members and officers. For example, the assessment process will help ensure any new venue has appropriate access for those with impairments and that meetings are held in safe locations, with appropriate transport links and disabled parking. Similar impact assessment processes will be followed, as appropriate, for each significant project or policy change identified in the report.

2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

There are specific commitments in the report which relate to the promotion of communities as safe places. Delivery of these commitments by working in partnership through multidisciplinary teams is in progress and will be strengthened.

2.4 Human Rights Issues

The programme of work set out in the report will enable the council to identify solutions with other partners that will enable our residents, communities and neighbourhoods to flourish.

This plan specifically looks at aspects of inequality in our communities currently, from having a voice in our democratic system to being able to feed your family and heat your house. This Council is clear that these issues must be addressed for all in our communities

3. Environmental

Developing the council's role in responding to the climate emergency and in protecting and developing the natural environment are key priorities for the council and its ambitions.

4. Governance

The council's key priorities include being more responsive to the needs of the community by opening up democracy and undertaking more engagement and participation work. The approach and ambitions set out in this paper will be further developed through the constitutional review process being undertaken this summer in partnership with colleagues from Adur District Council.