



ADUR & WORTHING  
COUNCILS

**Adur and Worthing Joint Overview  
and Scrutiny Committee**

**Annual Report 2023/24**

## Message from the Chairpersons



### **Councillors Joss Loader (Adur) and Dr Heather Mercer (Worthing) Joint Chairpersons of the Adur and Worthing Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2023/24**

The role of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) in Adur and Worthing is vital in holding decision makers, both inside and outside the Council, to account. It also plays an important part in developing and reviewing policy and decisions. The Committee can also invite in expert, external perspectives and scrutinise the work of external organisations and partners.

On behalf of the Adur & Worthing Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) we are pleased to present the Annual report for 2023/24. This report presents a short overview of the highlights of the last year of Joint Overview and Scrutiny in Adur and Worthing which recognises the level of the hard work and demonstrates the breadth and depth of ward Councillors/frontline Councillors in the important work of overview and scrutiny.

## **What does the JOSC do and how does the JOSC work in Adur and Worthing?**

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee is the overarching body which is responsible for the management and co-ordination of the Councils Overview and Scrutiny function.

Although not a decision making body, effective Overview and Scrutiny has enormous potential to influence and inform decisions made by both the Councils and partner bodies connected with the areas. The Committee is vital in promoting local accountability as it allows frontline Councillors (backbench) to hold the Council's Cabinet Members (Executives) to account. Importantly, other partners that provide services within the Council areas such as the local Police services and Southern Water can also be subject to informal scrutiny so the JOSC process also acts as an important tool for frontline Councillors to champion the interests of residents and focus on particular issues.

In Adur and Worthing the JOSC not only is responsible for examining the services of the Councils and monitors Council performance but it also is responsible for actively contributing to developing policy and can conduct research and make recommendations on how services can be improved.

JOSC helps shine a light on and brings transparency to Council services and decisions by bringing the evidence into a public arena and gives frontline Councillors a chance to question and inform services.

To develop policy and examine specific issues in more depth JOSC also has the option to establish Working Groups of JOSC Members and as part of this work JOSC Members will often hear from witnesses, question key officers and Cabinet Members, consult with relevant stakeholders and can conduct site visits. Findings from Working Groups are fed back to JOSC

and conclusions referred to the Cabinets/Cabinet Members or external partners for action. In previous years JOSOC has undertaken reviews of Climate Change, Refuse and Recycling collection arrangements, the Worthing Business Improvement District (BID) and a review of Worthing Cultural Services including the procurement of Worthing Theatres to an outside provider in 2019.

This year JOSOC, has also set out to review its own effectiveness and set up a Working Group to assess how it is performing to ensure that it can provide the best resource for the Councils and enhance its ability to scrutinise the services of the Councils and the Cabinets. The findings for improvement from this Working Group are due to report in Summer 2024 and these are proposing a fairly radical reset of the way of working to make the Committee more effective in holding decision makers to account and improve how it develops and reviews policy and decisions. The new Work Programme will be more fluid, responsive and proactive with more public engagement.

The Work Programme for JOSOC is usually developed at the start of the Municipal Year but items can be added at any time if important issues arise.

There is one Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee made up of sixteen Councillors (eight Adur and eight Worthing) representing wards across the areas. The Committee as a whole meets usually at least seven times a year and the meetings are open to the public.

Detailed procedure rules regarding the operation of overview and scrutiny can be found in the Council's Constitutions at [Procedure Rules](#)

**Membership of the Committee in 2023/24:**

Adur District Council – Councillors Joss Loader (Co-Chair), Carol Albury, Tony Bellasis (Replaced by Councillor Andy McGregor during the year), Ann Bridges, Mandy Buxton, Lee Cowen, Paul Mansfield and Sharon Sluman

Worthing Borough Council - Councillors Heather Mercer (Co-Chair), Cathy Glynn-Davies, Dan Hermitage, Margaret Howard, Daniel Humphreys, Richard Mulholland, Hilary Shan and Elizabeth Sparkes

### **Highlights from the year -**

JOSC met seven times during the 2023/24 Municipal Year. Highlights from the Committee year include:-

### **Interviews with all Adur and Worthing Cabinet Members - Holding to account role**

The Committee focused on scrutinising the work of all the Adur and Worthing Cabinet Members and held question and answer interview sessions on issues contained within the Cabinet Member Portfolios and also relating to high level strategic issues which the Cabinet Members were involved in connected with the work of the Councils and the local communities.

**Outcomes** - JOSC has been able to question the Cabinet Members to find out what they and the Councils were doing to address and deliver the key issues within their remits for the benefit of the Adur and Worthing communities.

### **Crime and Disorder Scrutiny - Interview and question and answer session with the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner and local Adur and Worthing Police Commander**

Addressing the concerns of local residents, JOSC

Members were very keen to find out more about local policing matters which had affected local Adur and Worthing residents and to question the Commissioner on her work in holding to account Sussex Police and the strategic direction and priorities for Sussex Police.

The Commissioner, Katy Bourne and local Police Commander, Chief Inspector Sarah Leadbeater, attended a JOSC meeting in November 2023 and answered public and Member questions relating to policing issues and policing and crime objectives.

**Outcomes** - This provided JOSC Members with an excellent opportunity to scrutinise the work of the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner and the work of local Adur and Worthing Sussex Police. It also enabled local residents to submit questions for the Commissioner and local Police Commander which helped improve public engagement.

### **Crime and Disorder Scrutiny - Interview with the Chairs of the Adur and Worthing Safer Communities Partnership**

As part of its crime and disorder scrutiny role, JOSC has also interviewed the Chairs of the Adur and Worthing Safer Communities Partnership and the relevant Adur & Worthing Cabinet Members.

**Outcomes** - This has enabled JOSC to find out more about the priorities for safer communities and what is being done to deliver these and make Adur and Worthing safer places. JOSC Members were able to ask questions which included questions about anti social behaviour issues and local policing in Lancing and Police priorities.

### **Interview with the Chief Executive and review of the new Corporate Plan -**

JOSC received two separate updates from the Councils Chief Executive, Dr Catherine Howe, on the progress in delivering the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan - 'Our Plan' and this included an update on a draft Performance framework which was being developed for 'Our Plan' to be introduced in 2024.

**Outcomes** - This in-depth Scrutiny has enabled the Committee to investigate the progress in delivering the objectives of 'Our Plan' to make sure it is on track and question the Chief Executive about a number of issues which included shared services, the delivery of 'Our Plan', the Growth Deal, the cost of living emergency, Freedom of Information, Environmental Information Regulations and Data Subject Access requests. Scrutiny of the Plan will continue during 2024/25 to monitor progress and support performance improvement.

### **Financial scrutiny including scrutiny of the 2024/25 Budget -**

JOSC plays a key role in scrutinising and influencing budgetary matters and reviewing financial information. The Committee has undertaken regular reviews of financial information during the year and in 2023/24 the Committee undertook a review of the Revenue Outturn, the Budget Strategy and also the Budget and savings proposals for 2024/25.

**Outcomes** - Financial Scrutiny provides the primary mechanism for those Councillors not in any finance facing role to provide a check on the finances and ensure that the Council Cabinets are held to account and making decisions in the best interests of the communities. This regular check on the Councils' financial position has enabled the Committee to question Council Officers and the Cabinet Members on the status of the current financial position and for an explanation on current and future expenditure including the cost of living and other inflationary pressures on the Council finances.

## **Review of the Housing Strategy -**

JOSC has also been able to scrutinise the progress in delivering the commitments set out in the Housing Strategy for the Councils 2020-2023 - 'Enabling communities to thrive in their own home'.

**Outcomes** - This scrutiny has enabled JOSC to review the progress in delivering the Housing Strategy, the overall provision of housing related wellbeing and support, the provision of better homes and stronger communities and affordable housing. JOSC has also been able to question Officers and relevant Cabinet Members to ensure that resources are being directed accordingly to control these key issues. JOSC Members asked questions relating to care leavers in emergency accommodation, out of date policies, increases in rough sleeping, the importance of partnership working and a rise in temporary accommodation.

## **Update on Climate Change delivery - Carbon Management Plan -**

JOSC received further information on the progress which the Councils were making with regard to climate change delivery and the reduction in carbon emissions. Details of the new Carbon Management Plan which had been agreed by the Councils was also reported to JOSC.

**Outcomes** - Members asked questions of Officers.

## **Review of the procurement and contract process relating to the transfer of Worthing Theatres in 2019**



JOSC had set up a Working Group to review this issue and review the processes followed by the Councils when making the decision to externalise the culture service in Worthing via a new charitable organisation and to assess whether or not the externalisation process was robust or not.

**Outcomes** - Having considered the evidence and other information presented to the Working Group it was satisfied that the externalisation process, including the procurement aspects, was robust and in accordance with the legal requirements of such processes. The conclusions from the review were also referred to the Worthing Cabinet.

### **Call-In meeting - Decision to award a service contract to acquire nomination rights to emergency accommodation**

JOSC also held a meeting to consider a Call-In relating to the joint decision for the approval of a service contract to acquire nomination rights to emergency accommodation and the delegation of authority to the Director for Housing and Communities to enter into a service contract for the purpose of acquiring temporary accommodation. The decision had been made by the Worthing Cabinet Member for Citizens Services and the Adur Leader in the absence of the Adur Cabinet Member for Adur Homes and Customer Services. The Call-In had been made by three Members of Worthing Borough Council.

**Outcomes** - Following the review of the matter JOSC agreed that no further action was required. Consideration of this matter allowed JOSC to undertake its role in considering Call-Ins and review the decision to consider if it had been made correctly and also enabled a review of the matters with relevant Council Officers and Cabinet Members. Members of the public were also able to attend the meeting and ask public questions which has improved public engagement with JOSC.

## **Scrutiny of Southern Water**

JOSC Members were also concerned at the provision of water services by Southern Water in Adur and Worthing and in view of this made a request to Southern Water for their representatives to attend a JOSC meeting to answer questions from JOSC Members on the provision of water services to the Adur and Worthing communities.

**Outcomes** - Unfortunately the request was declined by Southern Water, however, representations expressing the JOSC disappointment were sent to the Southern Water Chief Executive and Members of JOSC were also able to undertake a site visit to the local Southern Water Worthing Wastewater Treatment works to see the services provided by Southern Water and the processes applied in this area of the work. The Committee Chairs also issued press releases to highlight the concerns of JOSC and its ongoing efforts to make Southern Water more accountable and work is now ongoing with Southern Water and other local authorities in the region to find a workable arrangement for Southern Water to be held to account.

## **Attending meetings of the Adur and Worthing Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee or requesting items for Scrutiny -**

The Committee has Procedure Rules which assist members in providing strong scrutiny, transparency and also to ensure that all local decision makers are held to account for their decisions.

**The JOSC welcomes input from local residents and businesses with suggestions for its Work Programme.**

Local residents are welcome to attend meetings of the JOSC.  
**Come along to a meeting** - The Committee would like more public engagement in its meetings and would encourage local

residents to attend the public meetings of the Committee which are held at the Shoreham Centre and Worthing Town Hall. Meetings are currently held at least seven times a year. Public questions relating to Council issues can be put to the meetings if submitted in advance or asked at the meeting.

### **Have your say...**

You can find out more about the work of the Committee on the internet at [Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#) where you can look at the reports that have been received, the recommendations, the minutes of the Committee meetings and view the JOSC Work Programme.

Adur District Council and Worthing Borough Council are committed to being more responsive to the way in which they provide services. They want more people to feel that they have the opportunity to influence matters that affect them. The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee can look at these issues and the Committee would like to give more people the chance to contribute to its work.

### **Suggest a topic for scrutiny**

Each year the Joint Committee sets a Work Programme of issues that it would like to review. The Joint Committee reviews its Work Programme regularly throughout the year to make sure that it is working on topics that it can make a major impact on. The Work Programme is, therefore, subject to change in agreement with the Committee. The Committee would like local residents and stakeholders to get more involved in the scrutiny process so if there is an issue or service which you think that Councillors should review, please make a 'scrutiny request' using the online Scrutiny request form which is accessible at <http://www.adur-worthing.gov.uk/scrutiny>

The Committee will consider your request and when considering items for the Work Programme will be guided by the Council's Strategic Objectives set out in the Corporate Plan

'Our Plan' and the separate Adur and Worthing priorities. The Committee will also be guided by the ability to have influence and/or add value on the subject and the PAPER criteria (Public Interest (P), Ability to change (A), Performance (P), Extent (E) and Replication (R)). Requests are then considered initially by the Chair and Vice-Chair and reported to the next available meeting of the Committee.

**To find out more you can contact:**

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