

Annual report of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2024-25



Foreword by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairs - Councillor Joss Loader (Adur District Council) and Councillor Heather Mercer (Worthing Borough Council)

It has been a very busy year for the Committee and a lot of work has gone into the meetings of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Council year 2024/25. We are grateful to Committee Members and Officers for the time and commitment that they have put into ensuring that the Committee works well and has a meaningful role to play. We are also grateful for those local residents, stakeholders and Cabinet Members who have also attended and contributed to the meetings.

This year has been a very productive year but there are some important highlights. The meeting we held in September 2024 was a key opportunity to interview the Councils' Chief Executive and Leaders on the delivery of the strategic plan, 'Our Plan' and the Joint Strategic Priorities which had been agreed by the Councils following the May Council elections. In November we focused on a review of housing supply and the review of the Adur and Worthing Housing Strategy which is a key issue for the Councils and local residents. These issues will continue to be on the Work Programme as we look forward to the 2025/26 year.

In December 2024, we were able to review the very important work of the Adur and Worthing Safer Communities Partnership, speak with its Co-Chair and local Police Commander and Superintendent on work being undertaken by the Partnership and Police to reduce crime and disorder in Adur and Worthing and undertake the formal crime and disorder scrutiny role.

In January 2025, the Committee was able to undertake a review into the circumstances that led to the closure of Worthing Pier from October to December 2024 and the repair work which had been undertaken to enable the Pier to re-open. The closure of Worthing Pier was a key issue for the Town, local residents and businesses and its closure had impacted on the local economy and businesses affected by the closure so it was important for the Committee to be able to provide the additional oversight of the issue to ensure that Officers and Cabinet Members were held to account and future plans for the Pier and Lido reviewed.

In February 2025, the Committee was able to review the communications strategy and public engagement and how the Councils could better engage with local residents.

New for this year, the Committee was also able to set up a Working Group of its Members to undertake the important work in scrutinising the Councils' Budget development and also undertake Revenue and Capital Budget monitoring. This Working Group has been able to focus its attention in scrutinising the budget and financial planning process at a time when Council finances are under extreme pressure. A Working Group was also set up to review the work being undertaken to develop a Workforce Development Strategy and findings have been reported to the Joint Strategic Committee.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this important overview and scrutiny process and been involved with the work of the Committee.

Sadly, as part of this report we acknowledge the passing of former Adur Councillor Nigel Jenner who served on the Committee during this year as the Adur Vice-Chair. Nigel will be greatly missed and we appreciated the input and enthusiasm he made to the Committee during the year.

Councillors Joss Loader and Heather Mercer

Joint Chairs of the Adur and Worthing Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee - What does it do?

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) 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 2024/25, JOSC has undertaken a review of the Councils' budgets and the workforce development strategy using Working Groups.

The JOSC Work Programme is fluid, responsive and proactive with more public engagement.

The Work Programme for JOSC 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 2024/25:

Adur District Council – Councillors Joss Loader (Co-Chair), Carson Albury, Robina Baine, Emma Evans, Dan Flower, Pauline Higgins, Nigel Jenner (Vice- Co-Chair) and Debs Stainforth,

Worthing Borough Council - Councillors Heather Mercer (Co-Chair), Caroline Baxter, Cathy Glynn-Davies, Dan Hermitage, Jon Roser, Elizabeth Sparkes (Vice- Co-Chair), Samuel Theodoridi and Carl Walker

The JOSC met six times during the 2024/25 year and a summary of the work is given below:-

15 July 2024

JOSC Improvement Working Group report -

This item provided JOSC with a report and recommendations from a JOSC Working Group that had been set up to review the effectiveness of the JOSC process.

JOSC resolved to agree to the recommendations from the Working Group which proposed new ways of working for JOSC and implemented these changes for the 2024/25 year.

Review of the Teville Gate site sale -

This item provided JOSC with information on the events which led up to the freehold sale of the Teville Gate site in Worthing and the decision making processes connected with this sale. This enabled JOSC to scrutinise the issues and provide the additional layer of scrutiny and accountability to ensure that the correct processes were followed.

JOSC resolved to note this item and the decision making processes.

5 September 2024

Update on the delivery of 'Our Plan' and Joint Priorities - Including interview with Chief Executive and Adur and Worthing Council Leaders -

This item enabled JOSC to scrutinise the delivery of the Councils' Strategic vision 'Our Plan', the Joint Priorities that had been agreed after the local elections, the performance of the Councils and also speak with the Chief Executive and Council Leaders to ensure that the Councils were on the right track in progressing the aims set out in 'Our Plan' and delivering the Joint Priorities. It is part of the Scrutiny role to fact find/investigate in the form of questions and JOSC was able to direct questions to the Chief Executive and the Leaders as part of this item and had the opportunity to put recommendations.

JOSC Members asked a number of questions and recommended that the LGA should be invited to undertake a Corporate Peer challenge.

7 November 2024

Draft Housing Strategy for Adur and Worthing 2025-2030 -

This item enabled JOSC to review the Councils' plan to produce a new Housing Strategy covering the period 2025 - 2030 and make comments and provide feedback on the overall approach being taken, the draft Strategy, and the equality impact assessment as part of the Strategy development process that was due to be considered by the Joint Strategic Committee in March 2025. The Committee was able to interview relevant Officers, other stakeholders and the Adur and Worthing Cabinet Members with responsibility for housing.

JOSC was able to undertake detailed Pre policy scrutiny of the approach and plans being taken in developing the new Housing Strategy and proposals set out in the report, JOSC requested that the Consultation period should be extended to allow more responses to be received.

Report from the JOSC Budget Working Group -

JOSC received an updated report from the JOSC Budget Working Group that had been set up to scrutinise the budget development process. Work was ongoing to develop the budget for 25/26 but the Working Group was able to confirm that it was undertaking some oversight of the development of the budget and that good progress was being made working with Officers and discussions with the Cabinet Members responsible for finance.

Review of the Corporate Risks and Opportunities register -

This item enabled JOSC to review the Corporate Risks and Opportunities and the work being undertaken to manage those risks and opportunities. It is good practice as part of the overview and scrutiny process to undertake these reviews and the Register provides detail on the known risks and opportunities facing the Councils at this time. This enabled the Committee to consider what benefit scrutiny might have on the risks and opportunities and if appropriate to receive further information on items through officer reports.

3 December 2024

Crime and Disorder Scrutiny - Interview with local Police Commander and Superintendent and Scrutiny of the Adur and Worthing Safer Communities Partnership

This item provided JOSC with the opportunity to interview local Police and Cabinet Members with responsibility for community safety on local policing issues and the work being undertaken by the Safer Communities Partnership to reduce crime and the fear of crime. The Police and Justice Act 2006 allows the Councils to scrutinise the work of the Safer Communities Partnership under sections 19, 20 and 21 of the Act and Councils can also hold representatives from the Partnership Responsible Authorities to account, such as local police officers, through the JOSC. The approach to scrutiny of the Partnership is flexible.

JOSC welcomed the opportunity to undertake this scrutiny. Local residents attended the meeting and were able to ask questions of the Police.

Post decision review of Officer decision on replacement of Multi storey car park equipment -

This item was referred to JOSC by Worthing Council meeting for JOSC to undertake a full review of the Officer decision. The Council meeting also asked the decision maker on this issue (Assistant Director for Operations and Sustainability) to review his decision as part of this process. Scrutiny of this item enabled JOSC to review the decision to make sure that it was undertaken correctly and also to review lessons learned from the process.

JOSC noted the review of the decision which Officers had undertaken which proposed to continue with the original decision and was satisfied with the approach taken.

28 January 2025

Review of Worthing Pier closure -

This item was requested by JOSC to review the circumstances relating to the closure of Worthing Pier between October and December 2024 and the future long term plans for the Pier and Worthing Lido. JOSC was able to speak with the Chief Executive and relevant Officers involved in the repair work to the Pier and relevant Cabinet Members. This was a high profile issue and the closure of the Pier had an impact on the Town, the local economy, residents and visitors. It was important for JOSC to undertake the scrutiny to assess if any recommendations needed to be made to improve the processes for the future and to have oversight to ensure that the correct decisions were taken.

Joint Services Budgets and report from the JOSC Budget Scrutiny Working Group -

JOSC was able to review the Joint Services Budgets for the Councils proposed which would cover the 2025/26 Financial year. The JOSC Budget Scrutiny Working Group reported back on its work to scrutinise the development of the Budgets for 2025/26. The Working Group made several recommendations in support of the Councils' approach to developing the Budgets which included support for the action taken in respect of the Worthing Budget to request exceptional funding support from the Ministry for Communities, Housing and Local Government to ensure that the Worthing Council budget was balanced. The Working Group also agreed that it should continue its work to scrutinise the Budget to provide ongoing scrutiny.

JOSC supported the recommendations from the Budget Scrutiny Working Group and agreed that the Budget Scrutiny Working Group should continue with its work to scrutinise the Budget development process.

JOSC Workforce Development Strategy review -

JOSC received a report from the JOSC Working Group that had been set up to review the work that the Councils were doing to its workforce development strategy. JOSC endorsed the recommendations from the review which supported the direction being taken by the Councils in developing the Workforce Development Strategy and it was important for JOSC to review this work to provide a peer challenge/review on the scope and development of the workforce development strategy to help inform its development.

Review of the Risks and Opportunities management process -

This item enabled JOSC to review the Councils Risk and Opportunities Management framework and speak with the Leaders and the Chairs of the Joint Audit and Governance Committee who formed part of the framework. This scrutiny gave JOSC the opportunity to check if the framework was fit for purpose and consider if any changes needed to be recommended.

JOSC recommended that the Joint Audit and Governance Committee should consider how Risks and Opportunities were published and how Risks and Opportunities relating to Devolution could be included when the Council was clearer on the timelines involved.

27 February 2025

Communications and Participation activity 2024 -

This item provided JOSC with a comprehensive overview of the work of the Communications and Participations Team in 2024 and the achievements and future priorities for 2025/26. This enabled JOSC to review the activity of the Communications and Participation Teams, discuss how communications and engagement could be improved and also to speak with the Adur and Worthing Leaders on this work.

Commemorative events -

Following a request from a JOSC Member, this item was considered by JOSC to advise on the current work being undertaken by the Councils in

relation to commemorative events held in Adur and Worthing. This report provided the Committee with useful guidance in relation to the Council's current approach to supporting commemorative events, including the upcoming VE Day/VJ commemorations.

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended that the development of the new communications strategy, consider how it might include communicating a list of commemorative events to the public.

Review of the work of the West Sussex Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee (HASC)-

JOSC was able to review the impact of the work of the West Sussex HASC on the Adur and Worthing communities and receive a report from the Adur and Worthing representatives who attend the Select Committee. This was a very informative report on the health scrutiny work on health and social care issues which set out any related impact on Adur and Worthing.

Work Programme setting -

JOSC was able to set its draft Work Programme for Overview and Scrutiny work for the Municipal Year 2025/26 so that it has a plan for the work in the year ahead.

31 March 2025

Call-In - Review of the decision relating to the Worthing Multi Storey Car Park tariffs -

As part of a formal Call-In, JOSC was able to review the decision which had been made by the Worthing Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration relating to the car park tariffs on 28 February 2025. This meeting gave JOSC the opportunity to consider the decision having regard to the reasons given by the Call-in Members and the decision making principles set out in each Council's constitution at Article 12. It also provided JOSC with an opportunity to ask the decision makers to reconsider the decision.

Having reviewed the decision, interviewed the Worthing Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the Assistant Director Operations and Sustainability, JOSC decided that no further action should be taken. This meeting demonstrated the important role of the Committee in reviewing decisions and holding the decision makers 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:

 Mark Lowe, Risk and Policy Officer at Town Hall, Chapel Road, Worthing on 01903 221009

or on mark.lowe@adur-worthing.gov.uk