**JOINT MEETING OF HORSHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL AND HORSHAM ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS**

 MINUTES of the JOINT MEETING

 **Held on Thursday 19 June 2025 at 6.30 pm at**

 **Council Chamber, Beeson House, Southwater**

**Chairman - Cllr Graham Watkins (Southwater Parish Council)**

(Appendix 1 to these minutes lists those that signed the meeting’s Attendance Sheet)

1. Agenda item 1- Welcome

1.1 The Chairman welcomed all those in attendance including those representing Horsham District Council (HDC) and the speakers on the following presentations at Agenda items 2, 3, 4 and 5:

2.Agenda item 2-Local Plan & Neighbourhood Plans (a brief update for those who were unable to attend the HDC workshop)

2.1 Catherine Howe opened the presentation by explaining that, at the Local Plan Inquiry into the examination of the Horsham Local Plan 2023-2040, the Local Plan Inspector had informed HDC that he considered it had failed to meet its legal “duty to cooperate” and the Plan should be withdrawn.

 2.2 HDC does not agree with this decision and is currently considering how to address the situation in the best interests of the residents of the district. A factor in that decision making process is the significant increase in housing that would now have to be provided in the district because of the present Government’s methodology.

2.3 Thus, there is uncertainty for those with made and emerging Neighbourhood Plans and the workshop organised for earlier that afternoon had been undertaken to provide useful guidance for the Parishes including the reference to section 70 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which states that, where it is not possible to provide a housing requirement figure for a neighbourhood area, an indicative figure can be provided based on various factors.

2.4 The Chairman agreed that questions could be taken after each presentation instead of at agenda item 6 and the following answers were given in respect of questions relating to the following;

2.5 Local Plan- Were HDC considering a judicial review of the Local Plan Inspector’s decision or proceeding to start a new Local Plan? HDC responded that no firm decision has been made as to how to respond to the decision taken by the Local Plan Inspector including whether to challenge or complain but, given the water neutrality issue and the resulting increase in housing numbers, it is unlikely that the present plan would be considered “sound”.

2.6 Neighbourhood Plans – HDC addressed questions regarding the preparation and updating of Neighbourhood Plans and, given that housing supply figures in the current adopted Local Plan are out of date, it would be much harder to defend speculative applications for housing development. Nevertheless, in terms of Neighbourhood Planning, HDC is prepared, pursuant to section 70 of the NPPF, to provide bespoke advice as to indicative housing numbers to Parishes if they so request.

3. Agenda item 3 - Local Government Reorganisation & Devolution

3.1 Jane Eaton provided the presentation (a copy of which is attached to these minutes as Appendix 2) and informed those present that discussions with the Leaders was progressing well and that the 16 options had been refined down to 4 but others have not been ruled out. A workshop and meetings had been held to try and meet the Government’s criteria (shown on slide 3)

3.2 The four options being considered comprise (1) a single county option; (2) the two unitaries- east/west split; (3) two unitaries split -north/south and (4) Adur/Worthing to Brighton & Hove. They all had challenges to consider including achieving the indicative population size and the imposition of financial burdens on areas where financial support for homelessness etc would be greater.

3.3 Slide 8 informs of the future dates that are to be met in terms of submitting the business case; the decision by S of S; the election of a mayor and the vesting date (1 April 2028).

3.4 Following receipt of a report on the initial progress that has been made, the Government responded with various requirements and guidance as set out in slides 10-12. Emphasis has been placed on Town and Parish Councils being part of the community engagement and it was noted that, recently, the Government has indicated that it is considering area committees.

3.5 Various questions and comments were raised about area committees; the “vagueness” regarding the form of consultation that will take place and misleading rumours that have emanated from some County Councillors. HDC informed the meeting that the final version of the consultation has not yet been agreed but it is likely to be in the form of questions/possibly maps.

3.6 It is anticipated that the consultation will take place in the second week in July with responses to be received by 26 September 2025. A second consultation will then take place by the Government on the preferred proposal.

3.7 If Parishes require any clarification on “misleading” information that maybe circulating the Clerks are asked to contact Trevor Leggo (CEO) and he will ensure that investigations are undertaken.

4. Agenda item 4 - Community Asset Transfer

4.1 Paul Anderson presented this agenda item and kindly provided a comprehensive copy of his notes which are attached as Appendix 3 of these minutes.

4.2 In essence it was explained that a list of assets and an asset transfer policy were being drawn up by HDC to enable assets to be transferred to those Parishes that wished to be responsible for a local asset that would continue to benefit their community.

4.3 It has taken time to compile a list of assets which, often, are known under more than one name and, although the list is “work in progress”, HDC would be grateful if Parishes would notify them of any errors/discrepancies.

4.4 The Asset Transfer Policy will be shortly presented to HDC for approval and provides that existing Parishes applying for an asset transfer will have to meet 7 criteria as set out on page 2 of Paul Anderson’s notes. Parishes are encouraged to contact HDC before submitting a business case to discuss the assets that are available; their condition (which will be of a reasonable standard) and any maintenance arrangements/issues.

4.5 A question was asked as to whether assets would be transferred to community groups and HDC answered that they could be if the community groups were able to meet the provisions of the Asset Transfer policy. In dealing with other questions, it was emphasised that the policy was a means of securing valued assets to benefit the local community and not a commercial venture.

5. Agenda item 5 - Reform of Planning Committees- technical consultation

5.1 Barbara Childs gave a presentation (attached as Appendix 4 to these minutes) on a consultation on the reform of planning committees. The Government’s objectives for the reform are set out on slide 1 and include that planning committee members are to be fully trained. The option given is either for the training to take place at national level or locally where local issues specific to an area could be advanced.

5.2 It is proposed that there be a scheme of delegation where planning applications would be placed in two tiers – the first where applications (listed on slide 4 of the presentation) must be delegated and decided by planning officers and the other tier (listed on slide 5 of the presentation) only would go to a planning committee for a decision.

5.3 The intention is to limit the size of committees to a maximum of 11 members. Parishes would continue to be consulted on applications but there would be no opportunity to ask that an application be referred to a committee for a decision.

6. Agenda item 6 – Questions and Answers

6.1 Please see Minute 2.4 re this agenda item

7. Agenda item 7- Any Other Business

7.1 No other business was raised.

The meeting was **closed** by the Chairman with thanks being given to all those that had attended and participated.

Signed by the Chairman ……………………………….

Date………………