

## **CABINET**

**8 FEBRUARY 2016**

Present: Mayor (Chair)

Councillors D Scudder, S Johnson, I Sharpe, P Taylor and M Watkin

Officers: Managing Director  
Shared Director of Finance  
Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services  
Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks & Streets)  
Corporate and External Communications Section Head  
Legal and Democratic Section Head  
Economic Development Officer  
Democratic Services Manager

### **46 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies were received from members of Cabinet.

Apologies had been received from both opposition group leaders.

### **47 DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST (IF ANY)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

### **48 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2016 were submitted and signed.

### **49 CONDUCT OF MEETING**

No changes were made to the order of the items on the agenda

### **50 SKILLMAKERS**

A report was received from the Head of Regeneration and Development. Skillmakers was a business and community led initiative intended to bring businesses and education closer together, to support future economic sustainability and improve employment opportunities for local people. There was an investment required of £115,000 to support year 1 staffing. This would be covered by a loan from Herts Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for 80% of the funding. The remaining 20% would be funded by a 50/50 loan between West Herts College (WHC) and Watford Borough Council (WBC.)

The Council would offer a loan of £11,500 from 1 April 2016 repayable at the end of Year 3 2018/19 with interest applied.

Councillor Sharpe introduced the report. Skillmakers came from an initiative by West Herts College supported with LEP funding in order to improve skills and help Watford to have a skilled workforce. Contained within the recommendations of the report was the offer from the Council of a £11,500 loan to start the project. Cabinet had previously considered the Council's own economic development strategy and it was good that the Council's partners were also thinking about this.

The Mayor commented that Watford had low unemployment. This initiative was about increasing skills within the town so that local people could have local jobs.

The Economic Development Officer continued that there were gaps which meant that it was hard for businesses to get the right skills. Skillmakers was led by businesses to see what could be done locally to enable existing businesses to access the skills they needed and make sure local people could access what they need. It was about looking at the whole workforce and enabling them to have better employment opportunities.

The Mayor commented that it would mean that residents would not have to move away in order to get better jobs. She gave the example of Freedom Communications where, due to the fast paced nature of the technology industry, the company looked for certain aptitudes within their employees which meant their staff would be able to adapt as the industry changed.

Following a question from the Mayor about apprentices, the Economic Development Officer explained that Skillmakers would connect businesses with provision. There was an apprenticeship programme which gave access to training and workplace schemes. There was also in-work development and pre-employment training. Apprenticeships were one element of the spectrum of opportunities on offer.

In response to a question from Councillor Scudder the Economic Development Officer commented that there had been a piece of work carried out which had identified gaps in skilled plasterers and specialist construction. Skillmakers would connect employers with the right schemes in order to get provision for the future. The scheme was about helping businesses to talk to providers and build a pipeline of workforce.

The Mayor was pleased that the LEP was going to be the main funder. It was noted that the LEP had invested heavily in Watford and she congratulated officers on successfully pitching for funding.

It was noted that there was an error on page 15 of the report and that the cost of permanent staffing in year 3 should still say £115k not £90k.

## RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. agrees to the Council being a board member of Skillmakers and that the Managing Director be the Council's nominated representative.
2. agrees that the Council offers the company a £11,500 loan to be repaid by the end of 3 years on similar commercial terms to that of the LEP loan to go towards the start up costs of Skillmakers.

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### **PROGRESS ON DELIVERING A GREEN SPACES STRATEGY FOR WATFORD FOR 2013-2023**

A report was received from the Environmental Services Manager (Parks, Open Spaces & Projects). The ten-year strategy had been adopted in November 2013.

Councillor Scudder introduced the report and described the strategy as a blueprint for green spaces across the town. The report before Cabinet was a progress update on what had been done since the strategy was adopted in 2013.

A short presentation was delivered by the Environmental Services Manager (Parks, Open Spaces and Projects). He highlighted the following:

- Watford Borough Council had outsourced parks and open spaces to Veolia and this was working well.
- The Council had adopted a strategic approach to parks which was something being promoted nationally as best practice.
- The Council had invested in allotments, play areas and parks.
- The flagship project was the Cassiobury Park restoration.
- The vision for parks and open spaces was around quality and value
- With regards to allotments there had been an investment of £810,000 across 11 sites. The Council hardly received any complaints on the quality of allotments.
- Play – there were improvements made to many play areas in Watford and vandalism was very low.
- Parks – an example was given of Oxhey Park which had new steps. The entrance to Oxhey Park had been improved and there were new footpaths. There had also been community involvement with the Friends of Oxhey Park and Oxhey Park was now one of the cleanest in the borough. The park had received the Council's fourth green flag.
- Another example was Callowland Rec. This had previously experienced some anti social behaviour (ASB) and was the only open space in the area. Improvements and investment had been made and the park now had a green flag and there was much less ASB.

- A future green flag opportunity was Waterfields Rec as it had a new entrance and was now landscaped which included some public art.
- The Cassiobury Park restoration project was now at delivery stage. The project included a new Hub and the relocation of the bandstand. There were many activities in Cassiobury with the team which included Debbie and Tabitha. Activities included: bug hunts, young rangers, working in Whippendell Woods, bug hotel, green gym (which also included people with mental health issues), Halloween in Whippendell woods and Jive Swing dancing on the site where the bandstand used to be.
- A meeting had been held with Borrás who had been appointed as the contractor. The project would follow a 55 week programme, which was due for completion in April 2017.
- Future plans within the 10 year strategy were to achieve more green flags (Waterfields and North Watford Playing Fields had been submitted). Also working with Veolia for a 9<sup>th</sup> flag possibly at North Watford Cemetery.

The Mayor commented that Borrás, the contractor for the Cassiobury Park restoration, was a St Albans firm whose Managing Director used to live in Watford and was very pleased to be working on a project with a local connection.

The Mayor continued regarding future projects. She suggested opening up the river as she had been with a group of residents recently who were unaware of the river. There was more that could be done around riverside walks and cycle tracks.

The Mayor explained that the reason for all the investment in parks and open spaces was due to it being raised in consultation as something which the public were proud of and wanted to be good. She was pleased to hear about the reduction in ASB and vandalism. Previously the Mayor would get phone calls or e-mails on this issue but it was now very infrequent. As a former teacher, she felt that if you gave people ownership and high quality they would respect and value it. The Mayor praised the community involvement.

Cabinet thanked the Environmental Services Manager (Parks, Open Spaces and Projects).

## RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. notes the progress with the Green Spaces Strategy Action Plan as appended to the report in Appendix 1.
2. notes the progress on the Cassiobury Park project.

## **A CEMETERY STRATEGY FOR WATFORD 2016-2026**

A report was received from the Environmental Services Manager (Parks, Open Spaces and Projects). This set out the final findings of a review of Watford's cemetery service and recommendations for a ten year cemetery strategy. This also included an update on the establishment of a weekend and bank holiday service for those who required it for religious and cultural reasons.

The Council currently managed and maintained four cemeteries:

- North Watford Cemetery
- Vicarage Road Cemetery and
- Two closed cemeteries (All Saint's Cemetery and St Mary's Church Grounds – grounds maintenance only).

Councillor Scudder introduced the report. The cemetery strategy had been developed as a result of a comprehensive review of cemetery provision in Watford and following extensive consultation. Areas the strategy covered included how to manage supply as the Council had limited supply available. It looked to the future at any ways to increase supply which was more difficult. The strategy also focussed on service improvements for visitors, users and staff. The strategy included increased staffing provision and some improvements to the Council's premises particularly at North Watford cemetery.

Councillor Scudder explained that the strategy was also about income generation in order to help cover costs. The service provided was expensive and currently did not cover its costs. With regards to increasing provision to enable the Muslim community to bury their deceased at weekends, the Council was working with the Gardens of Peace charity and was close to finalising an arrangement.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services stated that it was anticipated that a weekend or bank holiday service would be used approximately six times per year. She continued that the plan was over a 10 year period. The report listed the key objectives. These included the weekend service, managing demand for burial space, looking at memorial regulations regarding safety and also improving staff cover. The costs would be covered by increased fees and charges.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services continued that progress had already been made with a detailed audit of existing space being commissioned. This would identify how the Council could improve the use of the existing space. With regards to weekend services there would be a consultation in March with the service starting in April.

In response to a question from the Mayor, the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services explained that the Council's chapels' improved heating and roofing work at North Watford was scheduled for later in 2016. Work had already been carried out on Vicarage Road chapel last year and it was now in quite good condition.

The Mayor suggested approaching Christians Across Watford to adopt the chapels in order to increase community involvement and so there could be community activities such as spring clean days as were currently held at some of the churches.

The Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks, Open Spaces and Projects) commented that in the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management report which the Council had commissioned, it had suggested holding carol services and clean-ups. The Vicarage Road cemetery was full. However, it was a very historic cemetery which could potentially be a Heritage Lottery Fund project. The Council would look at the use of space in a different way in order to celebrate the heritage.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. notes the contents of the Cemetery Strategy and Action Plan and approves for adoption with any subsequent amendments delegated to the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services.
2. receives regular updates to Cabinet on progress made.
3. notes the progress in relation to establishing a weekend and bank holiday burial service in partnership with the Gardens of Peace charity.

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#### **PROCUREMENT OF THE E-PROCUREMENT PORTAL - EXEMPTION TO CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES.**

A report was received from the Head of Democracy and Governance. The Council had been using the Delta eSourcing e-procurement portal since 2011. It was now a legal requirement, under the Public Procurement Regulations 2015, that tenders must be sought electronically and the portal provided that full functionality. The contract would be extended for a further five years. The portal was used across Watford Borough Council and Three Rivers District Council for all tender exercises.

Councillor Watkin introduced the report and explained that it had to come to Cabinet as the Managing Director had taken a decision to extend the contract as an exemption to the Council's procurement procedures. The Council already used the portal for procurement. The County Council had chosen a different portal which would have disrupted Watford Borough Council's work and there were no grounds for change so the Managing Director had agreed to the continued use of the current provider.

The Managing Director explained that if the Council continued to use a contract beyond its term or appointed without a tendering process then this had to be brought back to Cabinet to be noted for transparency.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet notes the approved exemption to the Council's Procurement Procedures in relation to the e-procurement portal.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 7.35 pm