

CABINET

22 January 2018

Present: Mayor (Chair)
Councillors P Taylor, K Collett, S Johnson, I Sharpe and
M Watkin

Also present: Councillor N Bell

Officers: Managing Director
Deputy Managing Director and Director of Place Shaping and
Corporate Performance
Shared Director of Finance
Head of Service Transformation
Legal and Democratic Section Head
Head of Housing
Communications and Engagement Manager
Democratic Services Manager

53 **Apologies for Absence**

No apologies were received.

54 **Disclosure of Interest (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

55 **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2017 were submitted and signed.

56 **Conduct of meeting**

Councillor Bell spoke on behalf of the Labour Group.

The Mayor made some changes to the order of items on the agenda.

Financial Planning

Cabinet received a report of the Director of Finance. An extract of the Budget Panel minutes had been circulated from the meeting of 16 January 2018.

The Mayor commented that with regards to Budget Panel recommendations, these had been discussed. Budget Panel had recommended that burial fees for Watford residents should be frozen at current levels with proportionately higher fees introduced for non-residents. The Mayor explained that, as this was a non-statutory service, it should cover its costs as was required across the council. The West Herts Crematorium was a joint committee and made a surplus. There was therefore no reason why burials should be any different. The council had already introduced higher fees for non-residents for burials and the number of non-resident burials was very few. The Mayor was mindful of the desire of the Muslim community to consider the needs of their own burials and this could be something looked at by a new Mayor, particularly given the scarcity of space. Councillor Taylor commented that non-resident burial costs were already three times higher than residents' burial costs.

The second Budget Panel recommendation concerned freezing the current hourly parking rates for the pay and display machines within the town's controlled parking zones (CPZ). The Mayor responded that there was no evidence that the 10p increase in charges would make any difference to businesses. It was not an issue that had been raised and parking in Watford was cheaper than in surrounding areas. The recommendations in the budget papers therefore would continue to Full Council.

Councillor Bell commented that it was right for Budget Panel to put forward the idea of a freeze of burial costs and that some members of Budget Panel had abstained from voting as they did not have enough information. Councillor Bell questioned the 10p increase on the pay and display machines, if it did not affect the council's finance then why was it being proposed.

Councillor Sharpe explained that there were a number of smaller parking schemes coming forward in the next year which would require funding. Work on parking in the town centre, yellow lines and CPZ consultations could be at risk without the increase. Parking could not be subsidised by council tax. In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the votes were recorded as follows –

Those in favour

Mayor Thornhill, Councillors Collett, Johnson, Sharpe, Taylor and Watkin

The resolutions as set out in the report were CARRIED by 6 votes to 0.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet:

1. Delegates to the Director of Finance and Portfolio Holder the ability to amend the budget figures in accordance with decisions taken at the Cabinet meeting and any minor variations that may occur before the Council meeting.

That Cabinet recommends:

That Council:

2. Resolves in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the amount calculated by Watford Borough Council as its Council Tax Base for the year 2018/19 is 32,393.9 as outlined in the report.
3. Approves the continuation of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2018/19.
4. Approves the estimate of the surplus position on the Collection Fund.
5. Approves the budget (Attachment 1) as laid out in the report, including:
 - the base budget for 2018/19
 - the growth and savings
 - the Capital Investment Programme 2017-21
6. Approves the schedule of fees and charges (Attachment 2) and to delegate authority to the Director of Finance in conjunction with the Managing Director and the Portfolio Holder (Resources) to implement any recommendations emanating from a full review of the Council's discretionary fees and charges.
7. Approves the strategy for flexible use of capital receipts.
8. Agrees to increase the annual Council Tax for a Band D property in 2018/19 by 2.99%. This will apply to all other bands.
9. Approves the creation of an enhanced band 11 pay band for some of the section head posts within the Council. (Attachment 4)

10. Approves to delegate to the Managing Director, in consultation with the Director of Finance, authority to provide parental guarantees for the Council's projects as required subject to those guarantees complying with an approved business plan.
11. Notes the key risks identified and approves their proposed mitigations.
12. Notes the advice provided by the Director of Finance on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves
13. Notes the indicative budgets for 2019/20 and 2020/21.
14. Approves the Treasury Management Strategy for 2018/19 (Attachment 3). Within this strategy Council is requested to:
 - delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder, in consultation with the Director of Finance, to approve any variation to the Treasury Management Strategy during the year with the objective of maximising the Council's returns without significantly increasing risk. Any changes will be notified to Council at the earliest opportunity.
 - approve the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Strategy and Policy Statement (para 2.3 of the Treasury report).
 - approve the Council's treasury prudential indicators (para 3.3 of the Treasury report)
 - approve the Annual Investment Strategy (para 3.5 of the TMS report) including the counterparty list contained in the Annex A to the report (Treasury Management Practices 1).
 - approve the flexibility for the Property Investment Board to invest treasury funds within its scheme of delegation.

58

Homelessness Reviews Framework Agreement

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Housing. Revised recommendations were circulated at the meeting.

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and explained that the present contract would expire in August. Whilst housing was looking at renewing the contract, the framework was envisaging more work would be needed. Therefore it made sense to have more than one provider.

The Head of Housing explained the context with regards to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) that it was anticipated there would be an increased volumes of reviews. Presently homeless applicants had the ability to request a

review of up to two types of local authority decision made on their application. Under the HRA they could now review up to 13 types of local authority decision. The current independent reviewer was good but they were lacking capacity.

The Mayor commented that the council was required in legislation to have an independent person to carry out the reviews. The number of appeals would increase therefore it was important to have a robust system in place. The Mayor requested that the Deputy Managing Director ensure that Portfolio Holders were kept up to date with developments in this area.

Cabinet agreed the revisions to the recommendations.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet:

1. Agrees to the establishment of a framework agreement as referred to in paragraph 4.2 below and any subsequent framework process undertaken to enable the Council to appoint suppliers to undertake homelessness reviews and other related work;
2. Delegates to the Head of Housing the authority to select and appoint the suppliers to the Framework panel;
3. Delegates approval of the specific terms of any framework agreement and associated contract documentation to the Head of Housing, in consultation with Legal Services;
4. Delegates under Article 3 of the Local Authorities (Contracting Out of Allocation of Housing and Homelessness Function) Order 1996 the function of undertaking homelessness reviews under section 202 of the Housing Act 1996 and related homelessness reviews work to the selected framework panel providers on behalf of the Council.

59

Housing Service New Operating Model - Implementing the Homeless Reduction Act 2017

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Housing setting out the planned changes to the housing services operating model for dealing with the requirements of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and explained that the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) had been positive but would not produce any new housing. The HRA increased the ability of the council to help and support single homeless people. There were two main points in the report: asking for more

staff to cope with the expected increase in workload. This would mean going from 17 full time officers up to 21 full time officers. Secondly the IT system and support for a new IT system to ensure it was fit for purpose as more applications were being carried out online. The previous IT system would be retained until the end of the year as a fall back in case of any snagging issues. The changes would help to move the council forward to getting the right information from applicants the first time.

The Head of Housing explained that the housing service remodelling followed the Watford 2020 principles and would use technology to fill in online forms. It was recognised that there was a percentage of people who had difficulties with IT for various reasons and this would also be accommodated. Currently, people came to the CSC and officers had to deal with their issues without any prior knowledge of their situation. There would be a move to an appointment system which would enable officers to be better prepared. It would also tighten relations with partner organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and New Hope. At the appointments, there would be the appropriate specialist from these organisations, if required. With regards to Staffing, officers had spent time looking at time and motion studies and areas which had been through similar processes. In Wales they had experienced increases in volume of 50%, in London Boroughs there had been increases of 25%.

In response to questions from Councillor Bell, the Head of Housing explained that the £165,000 would be for increased staffing. The initial recruitment process would be internal but as there were more posts than current staff members there would be a need for some external recruitment. Following a question from Councillor Bell concerning a risk identified regarding the new IT system, the Head of Housing explained that there was a fallback position in place but that all the timescales for the new system were on track.

The Mayor considered that the London Boroughs' experiences would be more like Watford's than the example of Wales. However, it was an unknown situation and preparations were being made so that the council was not overwhelmed. An emphasis on prevention was welcome; however, the lack of social and affordable properties was clearly an ongoing concern. The Mayor commented that the government had awarded the council £35,000 for the additional burden from the new legislation.

The Head of Service Transformation explained that the IT system had been procured and implementation was on track. It was a cloud based system and there was mitigation in place if anything went wrong. This was the first of the Watford 2020 implementation projects and would join with other council processes in due course.

RESOLVED –

1. It is recommended that the new customer journey based on the Watford 2020 Vision and principles be adopted.
2. It is recommended that the services organisational redesign and its associated costings be approved.

60 **ICT Strategy 2017 - 2020**

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Service Transformation.

Councillor Watkin introduced the report and explained that it was fundamental to Watford 2020 that the IT department could offer a service which would deliver service improvements. He thanked the Head of Service Transformation and his team for constructing a way forward based on the principles in the report. The council was trying to reduce costs of ownership of hardware and to create a flexible environment. The ICT Strategy clearly set out the direction for the council.

The Head of Service Transformation commented that the council was in a good position to write the strategy following the last 12-18 months' work to create stable platforms which could be built upon. A critical part of the strategy was the business led element which would focus on business requirements and ensuring IT was meeting needs of services and residents.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Watkin and the Head of Service Transformation.

RESOLVED –

1. That Cabinet approve the ICT Strategy 2017 - 2020.
2. That any future minor amendments are delegated to the Head of Service Transformation in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Customer Services.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.30 pm

