

COUNCIL

16 October 2018

Present: Councillor R Martins (Chairman)
Mayor P Taylor
Councillors A Barton, N Bell, S Bolton, S Cavinder, K Collett,
J Connal, K Crout, J Dhindsa, J Fahmy, A Grimston, I Hamid,
K Hastrick, M Hofman, P Jeffree, J Johnson, S Johnson, A Khan,
P Kloss, R Laird, B Mauthoor, M Mills, M Parker, G Saffery,
D Scudder, N Shah, I Sharpe, R Smith, N Steele, I Stotesbury,
M Turmaine, D Walford, M Watkin and T Williams

Also present: Mavis Tyrwhitt and Norman Tyrwhitt, Freemen of the
Borough

Officers: Managing Director
Head of Democracy and Governance
Deputy Managing Director and Director of Place Shaping and
Corporate Performance
Communications and Engagement Manager
Democratic Services Manager
Mayor's Political Assistant
Member Development and Civic Officer
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

31 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bashir and Dychton.

32 Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures of interest.

33 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2018 were submitted and signed.

Official Announcements

Past Mayor Peter Kiely and former Councillor Hugh O'Hanlon

The Chairman stated that the council had been saddened to hear of the passing of former Councillor Hugh O'Hanlon in August.

The Chairman added that in the same month the council had been informed of the passing of Peter Kiely, who had been mayor in 1992-93.

The Chairman said that everyone's thoughts were with their families at this time. He asked everyone to stand and observe a minute's silence.

Heritage Open Day Friday 14 September 2018

The Chairman informed Council that the Heritage Open Day had been a very successful event. He, and the Mayor, had shown members of the public the Council Chamber and Chairman's Parlour. One lady had donated some valuable concert pamphlets to the Museum.

Fundraising Coffee Morning, Cheslyn Gardens, Saturday 22 September 2018

The Chairman thanked the Freeman, Mavis and Norman Tyrwhitt, for all their hard work organising the coffee morning and helping to raise funds for his charities, Guideposts and Signpost. The event raised £540.31 and he was happy to receive further donations.

World Mental Health Day, Wednesday 10 October 2018

The Chairman and Mayor held a small networking event with the Chairman's charities and other mental health organisations from Watford and Hertfordshire. The event raised the profile of Guideposts and Signpost and enabled groups to talk to each other; exchanging information and discussing this important issue.

Rough sleeper count

The Chairman informed Council that New Hope was asking for volunteers to help them count the number of rough sleepers in Watford. The count was carried out annually by New Hope on behalf of the council. The count was due to take place over 15 and 16 November. Councillors should contact New Hope if they were interested in volunteering.

Emergency Shelter Service

The Chairman advised Council that New Hope was leading on setting up an emergency shelter at St Mary's Church in central Watford. This would provide a safe place to sleep for rough sleepers from 1 December 2018 to 31 January 2019. The work was being done in partnership with local churches and the council. Again New Hope was looking for volunteers and councillors should contact them if they were available to help.

35

Mayor's Report

A report of the Mayor had been circulated with the agenda.

Prior to the councillors' questions being put to the Mayor, he said he wanted to inform Council of the tragic passing in September of Councillor Mandy Perkins, the Leader of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council. He commented that she had been very welcoming to him when he was first elected to the role of Mayor.

The Chairman invited Members to indicate whether they wished to ask a question of the Mayor. Councillors Hofman, Smith, Dhindsa, Cavinder, Bell and Mills indicated that they wished to ask questions.

- a) Councillor Hofman referred to a report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The conclusion stated that governments and civil societies needed to act now to limit global warming to below a rise of 1.5 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels. Otherwise there could be an increase in extreme weather events. Transport was the most polluting sector. It was a matter of urgency that Hertfordshire County Council took electrical vehicles seriously. The county council needed to work with the borough council to roll out a comprehensive charging network and infrastructure throughout Watford and Hertfordshire.

The Mayor thanked the councillor for his question and said that he agreed with the comments about climate change. Watford had the highest rate of electrical vehicle usage in Hertfordshire; three times higher than any other district. He said that the council wanted to do more. Officers worked with the county council to try to increase the number of on-street charging points. The council provided charging points in its own car parks. He added that he was keen to work with Councillor Hofman and others to ensure support for electrical vehicles and other modes of sustainable transport across the town.

- b) Councillor Smith said that he had read in the report about the ongoing improvements to the High Street. These were welcome. He felt other

councillors would agree that there were other shopping centres that needed improvement, namely St Albans Road. He asked the Mayor if St Albans Road would be the next location to get investment.

The Mayor agreed with the councillor's comments about the High Street. He acknowledged that it was not the only place that councillors and county councillors had worked hard to improve, for example Goodwood Parade. He said that it was correct about St Albans Road. He had been impressed with Councillors Stotesbury and Laird who were working with businesses, residents and organisations. The council was keen to work with all groups, including the county council and officers. However, practical suggestions were needed for improvements on St Albans Road.

- c) Councillor Dhindsa said his question related to anti-social behaviour. The Vicarage ward councillors met the police at the police station to discuss issues within the ward. They also visited the ward collecting information. Drugs was becoming a problem in the town. He asked the Mayor if he had met the Police and Crime Commissioner to discuss cuts to the police budget. He also enquired whether the council had any budget that could fund Police Community Support Officers (PCSO). He requested that the Mayor also needed to speak to the Police and Crime Commissioner about the closure of the town's police station. He hardly saw any police officers on the street.

The Mayor said that he agreed with the comments about police officers needed on the streets. His group had campaigned for officers. He had met the Chief Inspector for Watford several times. He was keen to meet the Police and Crime Commissioner and a meeting had been arranged. He agreed that it was important to work with the police and was aware of the walkabout the ward councillors had with the police in west Watford. It had been successful and well received. Others had taken place, for example in Central. During his meetings with the police he had pressed the importance of tackling drugs. He was aware of a number of arrests and prosecutions over the last few weeks.

The Mayor said the council was one of the few that funded CCTV, which included monitoring 24/7. He agreed that a police station was needed in the town centre. He was keen to work with the police.

- d) Councillor Cavinder referred to the Boundary Commission's decision to move the Woodside ward into the St Albans Parliamentary constituency. This was despite a petition signed by hundreds of residents and their concerns and wishes had been ignored. These were ridiculous proposals for the local community; the majority of whom considered themselves to

be Watfordians. There was little evidence that the Watford MP had communicated with Woodside residents about this matter. It appeared from media reports that he would be voting for the proposals. He asked the Mayor whether he agreed that the Woodside residents had every right to be considered Watfordians. He requested that the Mayor write to Richard Harrington MP and remind him of his obligations to his constituents and to vote against the proposals.

The Mayor agreed with councillor Cavinder's comments. It would mean that as Mayor he would represent 12 wards, 11 of which were represented by the MP for Watford and then Woodside by the MP for St Albans. It would make no sense. People contacted him to say how unhappy they were with the proposals. He said he would raise it with the MP, who appeared to have accepted the proposal.

- e) Councillor Bell thanked officers for the responses to his written questions about the market, which had been circulated earlier that evening. He stated that there had been an Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel on 9 July and TCM's debt situation was not mentioned. He asked why the situation had not been referred to at the scrutiny panel, allowing councillors to be made aware of the problems with the company.

The Mayor responded that the council had acted very swiftly to keep a market in Watford. The town had a royal charter to hold a market and the council was committed to protecting it. He outlined some of the issues but stressed the council acted swiftly when needed. With regard to Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel, he commented that it was right that Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel had the ability to question the decision. However, he had not seen the agenda for that meeting, but expected it was very full. He added that the council was open and transparent and it had acted properly in this case.

- f) Councillor Mills referred to the Cabinet decision to introduce parking charges at Cassiobury Park car park. She asked the Mayor whether blue badge holders and local residents would be able to park for free.

The Mayor stated that blue badge holders and Watford residents would get two hours free in accordance with the proposals agreed at Cabinet. Two-thirds of people visiting Cassiobury Park were there for less than two hours. He regularly visited the park with his three young children and two hours was plenty of time. The car park charge was a small amount of money when compared to other car related costs. The money would be used to keep the high quality services provided in the park. The council was not

considering special discounts for different groups; in the agreed decision everyone was entitled to park free for up to two hours.

36 Questions by Members of the Council under Council Procedure Rule 10.0

Questions had been received from Councillors Khan and Bell. The responses were circulated at the meeting and attached as Appendix 1 to these minutes.

37 Questions by Members of the Public under Council Procedure Rule 11.0

A question had been received from Ms Herron, which was included on the agenda.

Ms Herron referred to her question and said that at Watford Community Housing's Annual General Meeting (AGM) residents had been informed that 75 social housing rents had been converted to affordable housing rents. This had not been well received by the residents present. She asked who was monitoring the trust as they did not seem to be consulting the tenants before the changes took place. This was completely against the original reason for the trust being set up. She also enquired whether this was in line with the transfer of stock from the council.

Councillor Watkin thanked Ms Herron for her question. He apologised for the legal aspects of the reply but said that these were key factors in the reason the council was prevented in taking a direct interest in Watford Community Housing's actions. He confirmed that a written response would be sent to her, attached as Appendix 2 to these minutes.

Councillor Watkin explained about the transfer of the council's housing stock to Watford Community Housing and the requirement under the agreement that existing tenants would retain the same rights under Watford Community Housing. It did not cover any new tenants. He informed her that Homes England (previously known as the Homes and Communities Agency) was the regulator of registered providers of housing, such as Watford Community Housing. He referred to the Government's spending review which coincided with the Localism Act 2011 which provided registered housing providers and councils with housing stock the opportunity to offer flexible tenancies and the gave ability to access additional borrowing. This required the conversion from social rented properties to affordable rents. At that time Watford Community Housing's Board decided not to take up this opportunity as it required a one for one conversion rate. Later the conversion requirement was removed and Watford Community Housing took the opportunity to access the funding. Subsequently the rules were changed again and recent programmes have required conversions. The trust negotiated a one to four ratio with Homes England, which had been

acceptable to the Board. He said that the actual number of converted properties to affordable rent was 28. This had generated grant funding for an additional 157 homes. Another item on the agenda showed how the trust was working with the council to produce new properties.

The Chairman asked Ms Herron if she wished to pose a supplementary question.

Ms Herron commented that Councillor Watkin had advised that 28 properties had been converted. At the AGM the trust's Chief Executive had mentioned 75.

Councillor S Johnson confirmed that Watford Community Housing had informed the council that 28 properties had been converted.

38 **Petitions presented under Council Procedure Rule 12.0**

No petitions had been received.

39 **Business especially brought forward by the Chairman or the Head of Paid Service which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered as a matter of urgency.**

There was no urgent business.

40 **Voter ID Pilot**

Council received a report of the Managing Director asking Council to agree to participate in the Voter Identification Electoral Pilot in May 2019 and to note the evaluations of last May's pilots.

RESOLVED –

1. that Council agrees to participate in the Voter Identification Electoral Pilot for the May 2019 Borough Ward elections and any County Council by election.
2. that the evaluations of last May's voter ID pilots be noted.

41 **Business Rates Pilot for 2019/20**

Council received a report of the Director of Finance seeking approval to enter the Business Rates Pilot or Hertfordshire Business Rates Pool for 2019/20.

RESOLVED –

1. that approval be given to enter into the Business Rates Pilot, or if that bid is not successful the Hertfordshire Business Rates Pool for 2019/20.
2. that delegated authority be given to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Customer Services to make the final decision on entering either the Pilot or Pool for 2019/20.

42

Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Principles 2019 - 2022

Council received a report from the Licensing Committee (Licensing Act 2003) meeting held on 26 September 2018, which included the Head of Community and Environmental Services' report to the committee and draft Statement of Principles for 2019-2022.

RESOLVED –

1. that Council, acting as the licensing authority for the Borough of Watford, adopts the Statement of Principles under the Gambling Act 2005, as set out at Appendix 1 to the committee report, to take effect from 6 January 2019 upon the expiry of the existing policy.
2. that, under section 166 of the Gambling Act 2005, the council continues with the policy not to issue any casino premises licences as it believes a casino would detract from its aspiration to create a safe, prosperous and family-friendly town centre.

43

Proposed Licensing Act 2003 Statement of Licensing Policy 2018-2023

Council received a report from the Licensing Committee (Licensing Act 2003) meeting held on 26 September 2018, which included the Head of Community and Environmental Services' report

RESOLVED –

that Council, acting as the Licensing Authority for the Borough of Watford, adopts the amended Statement of Licensing Policy for 2018-2023, as attached to the report as Appendix 1 at the Licensing Committee (Licensing Act 2003) at its meeting on 16 October 2018.

Exclusion of press and public

Councillors confirmed that they wished to discuss some of the information contained in the Part B appendices for the following two items. The main discussion would then continue in the open meeting.

RESOLVED –

that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during consideration of the item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Section 100(1) Schedule 12A for the reasons stated in the reports.

Opportunity to increase the provision of social rented housing

Council received a report from the Cabinet meeting held on 10 September 2018, which included the report and appendices presented at the meeting.

RESOLVED –

that £2.65 million from the funds currently earmarked for the provision of new temporary accommodation are allocated to support this project, the money being split between 2018/19 and 2019/20 financial years.

Cycle Hire Scheme and Demand Responsive Transport System

Council received a report from the Cabinet meeting held on 8 October 2018, which included the report and appendices presented at the meeting.

RESOLVED –

1. that £27,000 is allocated from the Programme Management Board budget and £68,000 is allocated from the Economic Impact Reserve for project management and business case development costs for the provision of Cycle Hire Scheme and the Demand Responsive Transport System, and
2. that the Community Infrastructure Levy receipts that had previously been committed towards funding the Metropolitan Line Extension be made available to fund the Cycle Hire Scheme and the Demand Responsive Transport Schemes, including any supporting infrastructure allowed by the appropriate legislation.

Motions submitted under Council Procedure Rule 13.0

Council was informed that four motions had been received.

Motion 1

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Stotesbury and originally seconded by Councillor Dychton; at the meeting councillors were informed that it was now seconded by Councillor Kloss

“Full Council ‘People’s Vote on Brexit’ Motion

Council notes that:

1. While Watford's EU referendum result was the closest in the UK, and marginally in favour of Leave, recent opinion polls indicate that there has been a significant swing in favour of a 'People’s Vote' on the final Brexit deal
2. The Government’s own impact assessments show that the UK is likely to be worse off in every scenario after Brexit
3. There will be severe damage to our international relationships, reduced influence with other states, and the complete loss of say and control over the rules of the European Single Market and Customs Union, the largest market in the world
4. There are a large number of non-UK EU nationals living in Watford who are concerned about the impact of Brexit on their lives, and that their current rights are not being fully protected
5. That the Government has totally mismanaged the Brexit negotiations. The ‘Chequers Statement’, issued on 6th July 2018, (the closest indication yet of what a final deal might look like), has been rejected by EU negotiators and has also managed to alienate both supporters and opponents of Brexit
6. The NHS is experiencing severe problem in recruiting nurses and doctors since the decision was made to leave the European Union, and this is having a real negative impact on the health of local residents.
7. The UK economy is now the slowest growing economy in Europe, reducing the prosperity of the UK and our local residents. New investment in the area is being jeopardised and new job opportunities are being lost.
8. Inflation caused by Brexit-related depreciation of the pound is driving up living costs for our poorest residents, further squeezing their living standards
9. There will be a negative impact on our established mutually beneficial partnerships and links with European cities.

Council therefore:

1. Believes that the people should have scrutiny of what is being negotiated on their behalf and an opportunity to vote on the final deal, including the option to remain in the EU
2. Formally adds its voice to those calling for a public 'People's Vote' on the final Brexit deal
3. Asks the Mayor to write to Watford's MP expressing these views and asking him to support a 'People's Vote'"

Members debated the motion.

On being put to council the motion was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

Full Council 'People's Vote on Brexit' Motion

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5. That the Government has totally mismanaged the Brexit negotiations. The 'Chequers Statement', issued on 6th July 2018, (the closest indication yet of what a final deal might look like), has been rejected by EU negotiators and has also managed to alienate both supporters and opponents of Brexit
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8. Inflation caused by Brexit-related depreciation of the pound is driving up living costs for our poorest residents, further squeezing their living standards

9. There will be a negative impact on our established mutually beneficial partnerships and links with European cities.

Council therefore:

1. Believes that the people should have scrutiny of what is being negotiated on their behalf and an opportunity to vote on the final deal, including the option to remain in the EU
2. Formally adds its voice to those calling for a public 'People's Vote' on the final Brexit deal
3. Asks the Mayor to write to Watford's MP expressing these views and asking him to support a 'People's Vote'

Motion 2

The following motion was moved by Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor Stotesbury

"This Council fully endorses and supports the end to the use of unnecessary Single Use Plastics (SUPs) in Watford and to take the following measures to achieve this:

- a) Watford Borough Council to become a full signatory of the 'Plastic Free Pledge', by phasing out the use of unnecessary SUPs in all Borough Council buildings, and working with commissioning partners to reduce, with the aim to end the purchase and procurement of SUPs through the Watford Borough Council supply chain.
- b) to encourage the town's residents, organisations and businesses to go 'plastic free,' providing practical guidelines and advice to help the transition from SUPs to sustainable alternatives.
- c) to encourage traders on Council land/with Council Permission to sell re-usable containers and invite customers to bring their own, with the aim of phasing out SUPs; including investigating the possibility of requiring food and drink vendors to avoid SUPs as a condition of their event/hire permission.
- d) to continue to install drinking fountains in our parks to in order to reduce the use of plastic in purchased water bottles and the consequent pollution and cost of rubbish disposal. There's already a drinking fountain established in Cassiobury Park with another one to be installed, and further drinking fountains planned for Oxhey Park and Woodside."

Members debated the motion.

On being put to council the motion was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

This Council fully endorses and supports the end to the use of unnecessary Single Use Plastics (SUPs) in Watford and to take the following measures to achieve this:

- a) Watford Borough Council to become a full signatory of the ‘Plastic Free Pledge’, by phasing out the use of unnecessary SUPs in all Borough Council buildings, and working with commissioning partners to reduce, with the aim to end the purchase and procurement of SUPs through the Watford Borough Council supply chain.
- b) to encourage the town’s residents, organisations and businesses to go ‘plastic free,’ providing practical guidelines and advice to help the transition from SUPs to sustainable alternatives.
- c) to encourage traders on Council land/with Council Permission to sell re-usable containers and invite customers to bring their own, with the aim of phasing out SUPs; including investigating the possibility of requiring food and drink vendors to avoid SUPs as a condition of their event/hire permission.
- d) to continue to install drinking fountains in our parks to in order to reduce the use of plastic in purchased water bottles and the consequent pollution and cost of rubbish disposal. There's already a drinking fountain established in Cassiobury Park with another one to be installed, and further drinking fountains planned for Oxhey Park and Woodside.

Motion 3

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Bell and seconded by Councillor Khan

“This Council notes that Arriva Rail London (ARL) and Transport for London (tfl) are proposing to close 51 ticket offices including Watford High Street and Carpenders Park station.

This Council notes the advantage of having manned ticket offices to provide advice and additional services in particular to vulnerable users and those with a disability and the elderly.

Insufficient ticket machines can cause delays and platform congestion and having no staff will make users feel less safe and secure.

This Council notes that the Conservative Government's harsh austerity policies have led to the £700 million cut to tfl's funding.

This Council, therefore, resolves through the Mayor to write to Arriva London and demand that they put people before profits and to withdraw the threat of these cuts to staff.

Also to write to London Travelwatch emphasising the concerns of Watford Council on behalf of our residents and to strongly urge that these cuts do not go ahead."

Members debated the motion.

On being put to council the motion was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

This Council notes that Arriva Rail London (ARL) and Transport for London (tfl) are proposing to close 51 ticket offices including Watford High Street and Carpenders Park station.

This Council notes the advantage of having manned ticket offices to provide advice and additional services in particular to vulnerable users and those with a disability and the elderly.

Insufficient ticket machines can cause delays and platform congestion and having no staff will make users feel less safe and secure.

This Council notes that the Conservative Government's harsh austerity policies have led to the £700 million cut to tfl's funding.

This Council, therefore, resolves through the Mayor to write to Arriva London and demand that they put people before profits and to withdraw the threat of these cuts to staff.

Also to write to London Travelwatch emphasising the concerns of Watford Council on behalf of our residents and to strongly urge that these cuts do not go ahead.

Motion 4

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Turmaine and seconded by Councillor Mauthoor

“Ethical Debt Collection Policy

This council notes:

That ‘problem debt’ or over-indebtedness affects an estimated 8.3 million people in the UK, according to reports by the National Audit Office.

The use of bailiffs by local authorities and commissioned debt collection agencies brings unparalleled levels of stress to people who are already experiencing extremely challenging circumstances.

In some instances, the inability of people suffering problem debt to pay debt collection agencies can lead to them becoming homeless. This places additional financial burdens on the local authority (and council tax payers) owed money as well as forcing further stress, challenge and change on the families of those affected.

This council resolves:

To implement an ethical debt collection policy and align itself to best practice in both the private sector and other local authorities, which have abandoned the use of bailiffs for debt collection.

To ensure that value for money for council tax payers is maximised by pursuing debt repayment plans that will enable money to be paid back to the local authority through managed debt collection.

To avoid additional costs being incurred such as those arising from needing to re-house people made homeless as a result of a non-ethical debt collection policy.

To enshrine the above in contracts held with agencies operating on behalf of Watford Borough Council and to work with them to implement an ethical debt collection policy.

This council further notes that an ethical debt collection policy is not a ‘no debt’ collection policy and that everyone who owes money to the local authority is obliged to repay it.”

Councillor Watkin moved the following amendment to the original motion; it was seconded by Councillor S Johnson

“Ethical Debt Collection Policy

This council notes:

That ‘problem debt’ or over-indebtedness affects an estimated 8.3 million people in the UK, according to reports by the National Audit Office.

In some instances, the inability of people suffering problem debt to pay debt collection agencies can lead to them becoming homeless. This places additional financial burdens on the local authority (and council tax payers) owed money as well as forcing further stress, challenge and change on the families of those affected.

This council resolves:

- To continue to operate an ethical debt collection policy and align itself to best practice in both the private sector and other local authorities.
- To ensure that value for money for council tax payers is maximised by pursuing debt repayment plans that will enable money to be paid back to the local authority through managed debt collection.
- To avoid additional costs being incurred such as those arising from needing to re-house people made homeless as a result of a non-ethical debt collection policy.

This council notes that it reflects the above in contracts held with the three agents operating on behalf of Watford Borough Council and continues to work with them to implement its ethical debt collection policy.

This council further notes that an ethical debt collection policy is not a ‘no debt’ collection policy and that everyone who owes money to the local authority is obliged to repay it.”

Councillor Turmaine accepted the amendment but proposed that it be amended further

“An additional bullet point to be added

- To review ethical debt collection schemes in operation elsewhere and evaluate Watford’s practice against them at the end of the Municipal Year.”

Councillor Watkin was happy for the amendment to be changed to include Councillor Turmaine's additional bullet point.

Members debated the amended motion.

On being put to council the amended motion was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

Ethical Debt Collection Policy

This council notes:

That 'problem debt' or over-indebtedness affects an estimated 8.3 million people in the UK, according to reports by the National Audit Office.

In some instances, the inability of people suffering problem debt to pay debt collection agencies can lead to them becoming homeless. This places additional financial burdens on the local authority (and council tax payers) owed money as well as forcing further stress, challenge and change on the families of those affected.

This council resolves:

- To continue to operate an ethical debt collection policy and align itself to best practice in both the private sector and other local authorities.
- To ensure that value for money for council tax payers is maximised by pursuing debt repayment plans that will enable money to be paid back to the local authority through managed debt collection.
- To avoid additional costs being incurred such as those arising from needing to re-house people made homeless as a result of a non-ethical debt collection policy.
- To review ethical debt collection schemes in operation elsewhere and evaluate Watford's practice against them at the end of the Municipal Year.

This council notes that it reflects the above in contracts held with the three agents operating on behalf of Watford Borough Council and continues to work with them to implement its ethical debt collection policy.

This council further notes that an ethical debt collection policy is not a 'no debt' collection policy and that everyone who owes money to the local authority is obliged to repay it.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm
and finished at 9.40 pm

Appendix 1

Questions by Members of the Council under Procedure Rule 10.0

Council – 16 October 2018

**Question from Councillor Asif Khan
Received on 08.10.18**

Question

Q. The independent charity, End Child Poverty, has shown that Leggatts and Holywell ward have the highest child poverty figures in Watford. What has the impact been following the redundancy of play workers and the end to supervised play available for families at the Adventure playgrounds in The Harebreaks and Holywell on child poverty figures in Watford?

Answer

The provision of free supervised play facilities does not impact on child poverty figures in Watford.

Watford Borough Council recognises that all areas do have families who need a little more support and hence we have invested in areas which we know make a difference to Watford families to ensure there is an exciting range of activities on offer they can enjoy.

We provide:

- Free Big Events – which we know are well attended by Watford families. The Big Beach is a great way for families who might not be able to get away for a holiday to give their children a seaside experience. The annual Cassiobury fireworks event is free – one of the very few that does not charge for entry.
- Free supervised play activities – for Easter and summer holidays with a mix of indoor and outdoor fun including sports, adventurous play, arts and crafts. These are held across the borough so that families can find an activity close to home
- Free gym and swim for under 18s at our leisure centres in the Easter and summer holidays
- Cassiobury Park – free splash pools from April to September
- Cassiobury Park – free mini explorers (under 5s) and Forestry school (over 5s)

- Watford Museum – free to enter and holds a wide range of free activities for children and families
- Harwoods and Harebreaks Adventurous Playgrounds – which are well-used and extremely popular

And our plans for Oxhey Activity Park and Woodside will create even more opportunities for our younger residents to enjoy themselves – no matter what the income level of their family.

For more information please contact: Kathryn Robson, Head of Corporate Strategy & Communications, Kathryn.robson@watford.gov.uk

**Question from Councillor Asif Khan
Received on 08.10.18**

Question

Q. How much money will the council give to Hertfordshire County Council for the running of the replacement 324 service?

Answer

Hertfordshire County Council in conjunction with the Bus Operators have put the following replacement services to cover the 324 service.

- Uno 635 rerouted via Meriden
- W1 new Mon-Fri peak period service Watford - Kingswood or Francis Combe Academy
- W2 new Mon-Fri off-peak service via Radlett Road reintroducing operation via York Way and Phillipers
- 319 Mon-Fri rerouted via Kingswood to provide off-peak links to Watford town centre
- W3/W4 new Saturday services (when the 635 does not operate)

HCC have had to procure the new contract on an “Emergency” basis so it only runs until the end of the financial year and they will need to include the long-term replacement in their next annual local bus tender round. HCC are currently gauging the effectiveness of the new services and review any public feedback.

It is the primary responsibility of Hertfordshire County Council to fund bus routes and

at present Watford is not making a financial contribution to the replacement services as we do not have a budget for this. We will continue to work with Herts County Council and bus operators to ensure that there are adequate services to replace the 324 route.

For more information please contact: Andy Smith, andy.smith@watford.gov.uk

Question from Councillor Nigel Bell
Received on 11.10.18

Question

Q. What is the latest position on the £70,000 owed to the Council by the company that formerly ran Watford Market, TCM?

Answer

The council is still owed the sum detailed above. The previous market operator, Town & Country Markets (TCM) has entered a company voluntary arrangement (CVA). The council is listed as a creditor to TCM.

For more information please contact: Chris Fennell chris.fennell@watford.gov.uk

Question from Councillor Nigel Bell
Received on 11.10.18

Question

Q. When did the Council first know that TCM were in financial trouble and on what date did Officers and the Mayor know that such a large sum was owed to the Council?"

Answer

The timeline below details the correspondence from TCM to the council:

- 20 December 2017, TCM write to the council regarding cash flow issues linked to a development in Cornwall

- December 2017 – July 2018 WBC followed its debt recovery process, taking appropriate actions to recover any monies owed
- 3 July 2018 the council was sent a letter from TCM's legal representatives confirming that they had applied for a CVA
- WBC issued invoice for approximately £25,000, which was duly paid by TCM, so preventing the amount of owed monies escalating
- 31 July WBC takes back operational control of the market

For more information please contact:

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Questions by members of the public under council procedure rule 11.0

Portfolio Holder, Councillor Mark Watkin's response to Ms Herron

Ms Herron, Chairman, Mayor and fellow Councillors

Thank you for your question. I apologise in advance for the legal aspects of this reply, but these are the key factors that prevent us from taking a direct interest in what the Housing Trust does. I will make sure that you receive the written version of this statement.

The Council transferred its housing stock to Watford Community Housing in 2007. Watford Community Housing is a Registered Provider of Housing and is therefore subject to oversight by Homes England (previously called the Homes and Communities Agency) not the Council.

When the Council transferred its stock there was a Stock Transfer Agreement and that did impose an obligation on Watford Community Housing to keep those tenants who had been Watford Council Tenants and who transferred over to them with the same tenancy conditions that they had when they were Watford tenants. This obligation did not apply to anybody seeking to become a tenant after the stock was taken on by Watford Community Housing.

Affordable Rent was introduced in response to the October 2010 spending review which reduced capital funding available for new homes up to 2014-15. Although the introduction of affordable rent did not need legislation it was worked up alongside the Localism Act 2011 which enabled registered providers like Watford Community Housing and councils who still had their own housing stock the ability to offer flexible tenancies.

This was done to provide additional borrowing capacity to registered providers which could be generated from the conversion of social rent properties to Affordable Rent at re-let, as well as borrowing capacity generated by the net rental income stream of the new properties developed.

So in 2011, the ability to convert from Social Rent to Affordable Rent was formerly introduced in 2011.

These conversions went side-by-side with the issuing of capital grant by Homes England for new projects, on the basis that that the increased rents from the higher affordable rents would enhance a registered provider's development capacity, alongside the grant received.

When the prospectus for this was issued in 2011, the Board of Watford Community Housing Trust considered the proposed requirement for 1:1 conversions – i.e. for every

grant funded home, a conversion would be required – and that they elected not to pursue grant under those circumstances owing to the impact upon their stock. However, they did secure grant funding later in the programme when the conversion requirement was removed.

Subsequently, the Government changed the rules again and most recent grant funding programmes have required conversions. To their credit, Watford Community Housing negotiated a 1:4 ratio with Homes England which was acceptable to the Board.

This was later translated into a financial value of increased capacity which is monitored by Homes England to ensure that Watford Community Housing do not exceed the amount which it approved when issuing the grant allocations.

The actual number of properties which have been converted to Affordable Rent is **28**, which has enabled the consequent grant funding for an additional **157** homes. Finally I refer you to item 14 on this Agenda which describes how WBC will be working jointly with WCHT to produce an additional 50 socially rented homes in the next two years.