

COUNCIL

17 October 2023

Present: Councillor S Feldman (Chairman)
Councillor D Allen-Williamson (Vice-Chair)
Councillors P Taylor, S Ahmed, N Bell, K Clarke-Taylor,
M Devonish, A Dychton, F Ezeifedi, A Grimston, P Hill,
M Hofman, P Jeffree, S Johnson, R Martins, L Nembhard MBE,
C Newstead, T Osborn, J Pattinson, K Rodrigues, A Saffery,
G Saffery, C Saunders, N Shah, R Smith, I Stotesbury,
M Turmaine, D Walford, M Watkin and D Watling

Also present: Mavis Tyrwhitt and Norman Tyrwhitt

Officers: Chief Executive
Group Head of Democracy and Governance
Director of Performance
Chief Finance Officer
Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services
Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer (IS)

Special Announcement

Prior to the commencement of the official business of the Council, The Chairman asked all members and attendees to stand, and he gave a statement about the appalling situation in Israel and Gaza. Recent events in the Middle East reminded him of the human cost of wars and he then asked all those present to observe a minute's silence to reflect on the recent events and to consider how we could support our community to come together at this difficult time.

34

Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Councillors Dhindsa, Khan, Hannon, Kloss, Trebar, Wenham and Williams.

35

Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures of interest.

36 **Minutes**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 18 July 2023 were submitted and signed.

37 **Official Announcements**

Watford Interfaith Association

The Watford Interfaith Association would be holding prayers for peace on Sunday 22 October between 2.00pm and 3.30pm in the Peace Garden in Cassiobury Garden.

Understanding Menopause

The Chairman informed Council about an Understanding Menopause initiative, led by Martin Wetherilt and his family, following the tragic death of Martin's wife Annette. He thanked Councillors Pattinson and Trebar for their support in the development of the booklet. There would be 32,000 copies available for the women of Watford and these would be widely distributed. Councillor Pattinson stated that should any member wish to pass on the booklets, they should contact her and she would assist them.

Market Events

Council was informed that the market would be holding a Halloween Market Lates event on Friday 27 October between 6.00 pm and 10.00 pm, including craft beer, pop-up bar, street food and live music.

Big Events

Council was reminded that the free annual fireworks would be taking place in Cassiobury Park on 4 November. Entertainment would start at 6.00 pm with live music and the fireworks would commence at 7.30 pm. VVV were sponsoring the event and Watford Lions would be collecting for local charities including Herts Mind. Beryl would be offering free bikes for the day.

Remembrance Service

The annual Remembrance Service would be held on Sunday 12 November at 3.00 pm at the Town Hall. The parade would be starting at St Mary's Church. Anyone wishing to take part should arrive by 2.00 pm. Tea, coffee and biscuits would be provided after the service in the Mencap Café in the library.

Chairman's Event at Top Golf

The Chairman informed Council that he would be holding a fundraising event for his nominated charity, Hertfordshire MIND. The Chairman asked that anyone wishing to take part, to contact him.

Herts Mind Walks

The Chairman stated that he had attended the Herts Mind Walk and thanked Councillor Dawn Allen-Williamson for her support in recruiting people to take part.

38

Mayor's Report

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

The Chairman invited members to indicate whether they wished to ask a question of the Mayor. Councillors Ezeifedi, Smith and Watling indicated that they wished to ask questions.

The Mayor stated that his report was available and all members may ask questions about it.

1. Councillor Ezeifedi asked about the Mayor's views on the cost-of-living crisis and how it disproportionately affected single parents and ethnic minorities.

The Mayor responded, saying that he was Chair of the Cost-of-Living Group. The council was working increasingly with Watford Citizens Advice, ensuring funding, so they could continue their invaluable work. The Mayor also referenced the work of Homestart and food banks to assist those hit by the cost-of-living crisis.

The Mayor agreed with Councillor Ezeifedi's comment that this crisis disproportionately affected certain minority groups and assured the member that the council was doing all that it could to help.

2. Councillor Smith stated that he felt the Watford Fringe event was beneficial to the town and asked what more could be done to support community groups.

The Mayor replied that Sharon Gaffney, Lee Farman and their team had produced an excellent event and the Watford Fringe Festival was getting bigger every year. He added that the recent announcement about the expansion of the Warner Brothers studios would provide more work opportunities and investment locally. He stressed that small local businesses would benefit.

3. Councillor Watling asked if the Mayor agreed that an Israeli life was equal to a Palestinian life no more no less and that a Palestinian life was equal to an Israeli life no more, no less.

The Mayor stated that he agreed with Councillor Watling that all lives were equally important. He added that as a council, we did everything possible to ensure that hate had no place in Watford.

39 **Questions by Members of the Council under Council Procedure Rule 10.0**

No questions had been received.

40 **Questions by Members of the Public under Council Procedure Rule 11.0**

No questions had been received.

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

No petitions had been received.

42 **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.**

The Chief Executive had asked Council to consider an urgent report. The Chairman stated that all members had been sent a copy of the report and the report had also been published on the council's website. He added that this would be considered after the reports that had been published in the original agenda but before the motions.

The Chairman explained to Council that under council procedure rule 14.o, he had received an emergency motion, item 18 in the supplementary agenda pack, which had been requested as a matter of urgency. He had agreed to receive the motion as a matter of urgency but only on the caveat that it was moved and seconded with no further debate. Council was required to vote to confirm that members were happy to consider it was a matter of urgency on that basis. The motion had been circulated to all members.

The Chairman moved that the Council should consider the emergency motion as a matter of urgency with no debate. He added that if agreed it would be considered after the two motions published on the original agenda.

RESOLVED –

that the Council considers the emergency motion as a matter of urgency with no debate.

43 **Appointment to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Finance Scrutiny Committee**

Council received the report of the Democratic Services Manager which requested Council to agree the appointments to the vacant positions on Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Finance Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED –

1. That Councillor Nembhard be appointed to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
2. That Councillor Johnson be appointed to Finance Scrutiny Committee.

44 **Review of Licensing Act 2003 Statement of Licensing Policy**

Council received the report of the Licensing Committee from 28 September 2023, along with the officer's committee report which recommended the adoption of the amended Statement of Licensing Policy for 2023-2028.

RESOLVED-

that Council, acting as the Licensing Authority for the Borough of Watford, adopts the amended Statement of Licensing Policy for 2023-2028.

45 **Treasury Management Annual Report 2022/23**

Council received the report of the Audit Committee and Head of Finance of 26 July 2023 which required the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2022/23 to be noted.

RESOLVED –

That the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2022/23 be noted.

46 **Annual Review of Fees and Charges**

Council received the report of Cabinet and Head of Finance of 2 October 2023 which recommended that the draft Charging Policy for 2024/25 was approved and that Council noted the comments of the Finance Scrutiny committee of 12 September 2023, pertaining to the introduction of the proposed Fees and Charges from 1 January 2024 and 1 September 2024.

RESOLVED –

1. That the draft Charging Policy and proposed fees and charges be approved.
2. That, in respect of market licence fees, delegated authority to set the fees, be granted to the Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

47 **Budget Virement Requests - Quarter 1**

Council received the report of the Head of Finance, which recommended the approval of the requested virements as set out in the report.

RESOLVED –

1. that the revenue virements as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.
2. that the capital virements set out in Appendix 2 of the report be approved.
3. that an increase in the annual budget for the CCTV monitoring contract of £16,000 in 2024/25, £23,000 in 2025/26 and £30,000 in 2026/27 be agreed.

48 **Motion - Local Government Funding Settlement**

The following motion had been proposed by Councillor Bell and seconded by Councillor Turmaine, as Councillor Khan, the original seconder to the motion, had sent apologies:

“This council resolves that the Mayor writes urgently to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Jeremy Hunt, asking that he prioritises a better long term financial settlement for local government in his upcoming Autumn statement, so that Councils across the Country including Watford can have more financial stability for future planning.”

Members debated the motion.

On being put to Council the motion was carried.

RESOLVED –

That this Council resolves that the Mayor writes urgently to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Jeremy Hunt, asking that he prioritises a better long term financial settlement for local government in his upcoming Autumn statement, so that Councils across the Country including Watford can have more financial stability for future planning.

49

Motion - Mental Health

The following motion had been proposed by Councillor Pattinson and seconded by Councillor Martins:

“Preamble

On Tuesday 10 October it was World Mental Health Day. People with mental health problems aren't getting a fair deal. It's especially hard for people from ethnic minority communities, those of in poverty and young people. Physical and mental health should be treated equally in the NHS. Not enough resources reach front line mental health services and there is still a very long way to go to achieve real equity for mental health.”

The Impact on Hertfordshire Residents - Published: July 2023:

The Cost-of-Living Crisis has impacted the mental health of the majority of Hertfordshire residents, with 56% stating that rising costs has affected their emotional wellbeing. 16% felt their mental health has been affected “a lot” by increased costs, while 40% felt their mental health had been affected “a little”. Only 36% said their mental health had not been affected.

Mental Health in Watford Research Project - March 2022:

25,000 Watford residents are currently suffering from a common mental disorder. (NHS Herts CCG) and there has been a significant rise in adolescent mental health problems. During the pandemic these numbers doubled.

This Council Notes:

Our country is experiencing a national mental health emergency where too many people are ending up at the point of crisis in need of hospital care when they could have been supported at an earlier stage. This is harmful to people for whom acute hospitals are not the right setting, as well as for other people who may need these beds to treat their physical needs.

We're seeing the human cost as people wait days in A&E for mental health beds and people experiencing complex mental health problems struggle without help.

Supporting the mental health of residents is part of Watford Boroughs Council Plan.

As part of the Council's delivery plan, we are committed to 'Support improved health and well-being across the town' and currently act as a voice for residents into the Integrated Care System to help achieves this.

Working with a range of organisations across Watford & Hertfordshire to support mental health we have taken actions including resourcing and supporting:

- Watford Healthy Hub, which is supported by Mental health Professionals.
- Dementia Friendly Watford.
- Menopause support for residents.
- Business Wellbeing – 6 Steps Pledge.

This Council Believes:

We need to see commitment to providing the right care in the right place, at the right time, ending decades of underfunding and neglect to services.

A fundamental shift of resource to more services in the community is needed to help to prevent people from reaching the point of crisis. This will have benefits for people, and for the economy by keeping more people in the workforce.

Early intervention to prevent people from experiencing a mental health crisis and to minimise the number and duration of in-patient stays should be a priority for mental health.

We should continue lead the way in making Watford a diverse, happy and healthy town and support mental health by:

1. Putting our residents, community groups and local organisations at the heart of decisions for improved mental health in Watford.
2. Be a role model for other Councils in supporting employee mental health.
3. Ensure we make future corporate decisions that put wellbeing at the heart of them.
4. Campaigning for more resource to be allocated by the UK Government towards mental health for local councils.
5. To act as a role model for other organisations by completing the Business Wellbeing 6 Steps Pledge to improve mental wellbeing within Watford Borough Council for its employees.

6. To request that all future sub-contractors for Watford Borough Council are working towards supporting the well-being of their employees.

This Council Resolves To:

Request the Mayor to write to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

1. "Expressing that this Council believes there is a mental health emergency and that there should be an urgent significant increase in the amount of funding made to mental health services, so that there is parity of treatment between physical and mental health and that there should be more funding to further support the provision of resources for local councils to deliver mental health improvements for their residents."

On being put to Council the motion was carried.

RESOLVED –

Preamble

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1. Expressing that this Council believes there is a mental health emergency and that there should be an urgent significant increase in the amount of funding made to mental health services, so that there is parity of treatment between physical and mental health and that there should be more funding to further support the provision of resources for local councils to deliver mental health improvements for their residents.

50 **Appointment of Section 151 Officer**

Council received a report of the Chief Executive, which recommended the appointment of the current Head of Finance, Hannah Doney, as the Chief Finance Officer (s151 Officer) to Watford Borough Council.

The report also recommended that the current secondment agreement between Three Rivers District Council and Watford Borough Council be ended by mutual consent and a new secondment agreement be entered into.

RESOLVED –

1. That, with effect from 1 November 2023, Hannah Doney be appointed Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer) for Watford Borough Council.
2. That the current secondment agreement between Three Rivers District Council and Watford Borough Council be ended by mutual consent and a new secondment agreement be entered into reflecting the new arrangement set out in the report of the Chief Executive.

The Chairman welcomed Hannah Doney to Watford Borough Council and thanked Alison Scott for her service.

51 **Emergency motion**

The following motion had been proposed by Councillor Bell and seconded by Mayor Taylor.

“This Council recognises the serious crisis in Israel and Gaza and the fact that the terrorism carried out on October 7th and the subsequent military actions are having a devastating effect on thousands of innocent citizens In Israel and Gaza.

The Council recognises the impact this is having on Watford residents and across the U.K. among religious communities who have relatives and friends in Israel and Gaza and in the wider Middle East.

Watford Council members are united in wanting to show solidarity with ALL our religious and cultural communities at this time, especially considering the good community cohesion work that has always been carried out successfully amongst those religious leaders here in our town.

The Council resolves that the Mayor should write to all those religious and community leaders signifying our support for their communities at this very difficult time.”

As agreed under minute number 42 there was no further debate of the motion.

On being put to Council the motion was carried.

RESOLVED –

That this Council recognises the serious crisis in Israel and Gaza and the fact that the terrorism carried out on October 7th and the subsequent military actions are having a devastating effect on thousands of innocent citizens In Israel and Gaza.

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The Council resolves that the Mayor should write to all those religious and community leaders signifying our support for their communities at this very difficult time.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm
and finished at 9.00 pm