

COUNCIL

30 January 2024

Present: The Chairman (Councillor Simon Feldman)
The Mayor (Peter Taylor)
Councillors Ahmed, Allen-Williamson, Bell, Clarke-Taylor, Devonish, Dhindsa, Dychton, Ezeifedi, Hannon, Hill, Hofman, Jeffree, Johnson, Khan, Kloss, Martins, Newstead, Osborn, Pattinson, Rodrigues, A. Saffery, G. Saffery, Saunders, Shah, Smith, Stotesbury, Trebar, Turmaine, Walford, Watkin and Watling, Wenham and Williams.

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

Officers: Chief Executive
Group Head of Democracy and Governance
Chief Finance Officer
Director of Partnerships
Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services
Associate Director of Planning, Infrastructure and Economy
Mayor's Political Assistant
Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer (BR)

52 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies had been received from Councillors Grimston and Nembhard MBE.

53 **Disclosure of Interests**

As all members had an interest in minute number 61, the Group Head of Democracy and Governance, as Monitoring Officer, had given a general dispensation to allow all members to vote and debate the item.

There were no other disclosures of interest.

54 **Minutes**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 17 October 2023 were submitted and signed.

Official Announcements

The Chairman announced that the amount raised for charity was £741.94.

Remembrance Service

The Chairman advised that the annual Remembrance Service took place on Sunday 12 November at 3 pm at the Town Hall. Representatives of the Council, along with many others, paraded from St Mary's along the High Street to the Town Hall. There was an excellent turn out to remember those who had taken part in the two World Wars and other conflicts since.

Chairman's Event at Top Golf

The Chairman informed members that his event at Top Golf raised just under £1,200 for his chosen charity.

Holocaust Memorial Day

The Chairman stated that he had laid a wreath at the Anne Frank tree to mark Holocaust Memorial Day

King's New Year's Honours list

The Chairman congratulated all those across Hertfordshire who received an honour in the King's New Year's Honours List.

Neighbourhood Locality Funds

The Chairman reminded all councillors that their applications to spend their Neighbourhood Locality budget must be completed and submitted to Democratic Services by the end of February.

Related Party Transactions

The Group Head of Democracy and Governance had sent all members an email a week prior to the full Council meeting with a related party transaction form. All councillors would be required to complete the form for the auditors. The Chairman asked if all councillors could please ensure this was returned as soon as possible.

Council Vice Chairman 2024/25

The Chairman announced that at the next meeting, he would be announcing the nominations for the 2024/25 Vice Chairman. Each person nominated would need to be proposed and seconded. Council would then be asked to vote for their preferred candidate.

He advised members that the Democratic Services Manager would be writing to all councillors shortly with further details.

Rotary Club Dinner

The Chairman announced that the Rotary Club would be having a dinner on the 17th of February to celebrate their centenary. He would be attending this with the Mayor and the Lord Lieutenant. He noted Councillor Martins was the vice-president and have been doing some fundraising in the town, he then invited members to approach them with worthy causes. The Chairman stated that since the full Council he had attended many events.

56 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 Bell, Watling, Turmaine, Trebar, Martins, Dhindsa, and Ezeifedi indicated that they wished to ask questions.

The Mayor stated that his report was available and all members may ask questions about it. He praised Watford for being named as the number one place to live and work in the Lambert Smith Hampton Vitality Index, having been third the previous year.

1. Councillor Bell asked if the Mayor regretted procuring the Arriva Click service, which ultimately failed.

The Mayor responded that the council had introduced a number of transport schemes, of which the majority had been successful and he did not regret trying things or delivering on promises made in his manifesto.

Councillor Bell asked a follow up question enquiring if the Mayor would apologise for the cost of the project.

The Mayor replied stating that he had no apology to make. He made a promise in his election campaign and delivered it. He went on to say that, he was of the belief that there should be greater council control of bus services in Hertfordshire and that the current system was overly reliant on private companies.

2. Councillor Watling thanked the council for their work in reducing fly tipping and invited the Mayor to also thank the council for their work on reducing fly tipping.

The Mayor stated that he was keen to work with all councillors to tackle fly tipping.

3. Councillor Turmaine asked if the Mayor was aware of any postmasters in Watford affected by the recent Post Office scandal.

The Mayor answered saying that he was unaware of anyone who had been affected by the scandal but would be keen to support any that had been if he was made aware.

4. Councillor Trebar raised questions around supporting the parade in her ward with investment and funding for more green spaces and trees.

The Mayor replied saying that it was important to continue to invest in the local area and that Watford had a vibrant economy and he welcomed any further discussion around what needed to be done. He highlighted the success of the tree-planting programme in Watford and encouraged all councillors to put forward suggestions of locations for new trees.

5. Councillor Martins stated that Watford was challenged with planning related housing issues. He cited a case where the government had overruled the council when they rejected a planning application and asked how this should be dealt with.

The Mayor commented that Central government had tripled housing targets for Watford. He continued by making the case for more local control of planning policy on housing targets.

6. Councillor Dhindsa commented that the Beryl bike scheme was a great system, but he noted that the standard of bikes and stands had deteriorated over the years. He said he saw a number of bikes not left in bike racks and he asked how charging those who did not leave them in bike racks worked. He also asked what the council was doing to improve the standard of the bikes.

The Mayor responded stating that the scheme was being expanded to neighbouring areas and would include more electric bikes. He stated that 96% were returned to a bay while those who did not return them correctly incurred a surcharge.

7. Councillor Ezeifedi started by thanking the officers and the council for the work in getting the levelling up funding. She then asked how it would be spent and whether it would need to be matched.

The Mayor responded that there would be £8 million allocated to the Colosseum, with a further £8 million on a new Innovation and Incubation Hub.

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

No questions had been received.

58 Petitions presented under Council Procedure Rule 12.0

No petitions had been received.

59 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.

No urgent business has been brought forward.

60 2023-24 Polling District and Polling places review

Council received a report of the Electoral Services Manager. Various members of the council thanked Gordon Amos for his service to the council ahead of his retirement.

RESOLVED –

1. that the current arrangements for Callowland, Central, Holywell, Meriden, Nascot, Park, Stanborough, Tudor, Vicarage and Woodside wards, as set out in Appendix 1, continue without change.
2. that the existing polling place/polling stations within the School Hall at The Orchard Primary School for Leggatts Ward be retained in the knowledge

that the school will remain open on future polling days with effect from 2 May 2024 without addition for the reasons set out in Appendix 2.

3. That the current arrangements for Oxhey Ward polling district LB continue unchanged for the foreseeable future following the 2023 Review.

61 **Members Allowances 2023/2024**

Council received a report from the Democratic Services Manager in relation to members' allowances. Members were asked to review the recommendation of the Independent Members Remuneration Panel following the agreement of the local government national pay negotiations for 2023.

RESOLVED-

1. That the Independent Members Remuneration Panel's suggestion that the basic allowance be increased by 4.59% from 1 April 2023 be approved.
2. That the Independent Members Remuneration Panel's suggestion that the Mayor's remuneration be increased by 4.59% from 1 April 2023 be approved.
3. That the Co-optee allowance for the Independent member for the Audit Committee be set at £1500 per annum be approved.
4. That there be no increases in the Special Responsibility Allowances or the Group Leaders Allowances until the next full review of the members allowance scheme in 2026.

62 **Appointment of Independent Person to Audit Committee**

Council received a report from the Group Head of Democracy and Governance.

RESOLVED –

1. That an Independent Member of the Audit Committee is advertised for with a view to commencing on the committee from the start of the 2024 Municipal Year.
2. That a panel comprising the Chairs of Audit Committee and Finance Scrutiny Committee, Chief Finance Officer, and Group Head of Democracy and Governance be appointed to interview

candidates with a view to making a recommendation to Council in March 2024.

3. That remuneration for the position be set at £1,500 as recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

63 Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25

Council received a report from the Head of Revenues and Benefits.

RESOLVED –

That the Council adopts the new banded Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25 attached at appendix B.

64 Budget and Council Tax Resolution 2024/25

Council received a report of the Chief Finance Officer setting out the budget proposed and agreed at the Cabinet meeting on the 15th of January 2024.

The Mayor introduced the budget highlighting that it was designed to help Watford deal effectively with the current economic state. He then moved the budget and council tax to be approved, which was seconded by Councillor Watkin.

Councillor Khan moved an amendment, detailed below, seconded by Councillor Bell. The amendment was circulated prior to the meeting.

Labour Budget Amendments

Revenue Budget

Savings	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	Total MTFS £m	Comments
Removal of Political advisor post to Mayor	(0.057)	(0.058)	(0.059)	(0.174)	
Digitalising My Watford Magazine	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.078)	
Redesign communications	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.165)	

department to deliver 20% efficiency					
Town Boundary Signage			(0.002)	(0.002)	Revenue savings on borrowing costs from reduction in Capital Expenditure of £0.065m
Total Savings	(0.138)	(0.139)	(0.142)	(0.419)	

Expenditure	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	Total MTFS £m	Comments
Extra street cleaner within Veolia contract	0.034	0.034	0.034	0.102	
Lighting for safety within Cassiobury Park	0.015			0.015	This is to install lights so people feel safer walking through the park.
Mobile CCTV Chester Road (Fly-Tipping)	0.004			0.004	One off cost to redeploy existing mobile CCTV to this location.
Contribution to Economic Impact Reserve	0.085	0.105	0.108	0.298	
Total:	0.138	0.139	0.142	0.419	

Impact on reserves

Economic Impact Reserve	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m
Opening Balance	0.000	(0.085)	(0.190)
Contribution to reserve	(0.085)	(0.105)	(0.108)
Closing balance	(0.085)	(0.190)	(0.298)

Capital Program

	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	Total MTFS £m
Remove budget to upgrade Town Boundary Signage			(0.065)	(0.065)
Total Capital Programme Changes	0.000	0.000	(0.065)	(0.065)

The original motion and amendment was debated by Council.

The amendment was put to the vote.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the votes were recorded as follows:

Those members voting in favour of the amendment:

Councillors Bell, Dhindsa, Ezeifedi, Khan, Shah, Smith, Trebar, Turmaine and Watling.

Those members voting against the amendment:

The Chairman Councillor Feldman, Mayor Taylor, Councillors Ahmed, Allen-Williamson, Clarke-Taylor, Devonish, Dychton, Hannon, Hill, Hofman, Jeffree, Johnson, Kloss, Martins, Newstead, Osborn, Pattinson, Rodrigues, A. Saffery, G. Saffery, Saunders, Stotesbury, Walford, Watkin, Wenham and Williams.

There were no abstentions.

The amendment was **LOST** by 9 votes to 26 with no abstentions.

The original motion was then put to Council.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the votes were recorded as follows:

Those members voting in favour of the motion:

The Chairman Councillor Feldman, Mayor Taylor, Councillors Ahmed, Allen-Williamson, Clarke-Taylor, Devonish, Dychton, Hannon, Hill, Hofman, Jeffree, Johnson, Kloss, Martins, Newstead, Osborn, Pattinson, Rodrigues, A. Saffery, G. Saffery, Saunders, Stotesbury, Walford, Watkin, Wenham and Williams.

There were no votes against the motion.

Those members abstaining:

Councillors Bell, Dhindsa, Ezeifedi, Khan, Shah, Smith, Trebar, Turmaine and Watling.

The original motion was **CARRIED** by 26 votes to 0 with 9 abstentions.

RESOLVED –

1. That Council:

- a) 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 2024/25 is 35,532.1 as outlined in the report.
- b) Approves the budget (Attachment 1) as laid out in the report, including:
 - the revenue budget for 2024/25
 - the Capital Investment Programme 2023/24 to 2026/27
- c) Approves the Capital Strategy for 2024/25, and delegates to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Property, Resources and Customer Services responsibility for agreeing and maintaining the Treasury Management Strategy Statement. (Attachment 2)
- d) Agrees to increase the annual Council Tax for a Band D property 2024/25 by 2.99%. This will apply to all other bands.
- e) Agrees to the creation of a Redundancy Reserve and to rename the Riverwell Project Reserve to Commercial Risk Reserve

- f) Notes the key risks identified and approves their proposed mitigations as set out in Appendix 11 to Attachment 1 – Budget Setting Report.
- g) Notes the advice provided by the Chief Finance Officer on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves at Annex 3.
- h) Notes the indicative budgets for 2025/26 and 2026/27 as set out in Attachment 1 and Attachment 3.
- i) Approves the revenue virements for 2023/24 set out in Annex 4 (as noted by Cabinet on 15 January 2024 after consideration of the Financial Monitoring Report 2023/24 to Period 8).

2. Setting the Council Tax Requirement for Watford Borough Council:

- a) That the Council’s net General Fund expenditure for 2024/25 shall be £14.626m.
- b) That the 2024/25 band D precept is set at £299.55 and other bands and amounts are set in accordance with the table at paragraph 3.2 (E)
- c) That Watford Borough Council’s Council Tax Base for 2024/25 has been calculated at 35,532.1 in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012 made under Section 31B (1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended.
- d) That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2024/25 in accordance with Sections 31A to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:
 - (A) Being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act. (Effectively the gross expenditure and transfers to reserves) £94,166,929
 - (B) Being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act. (Effectively the gross income and transfers from reserves) £85,523,288
 - (C) Being the amount by which the aggregate at 2.5 (A) above exceeds the aggregate at 2.5 (B) above calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act as its Council Tax Requirement for the year £10,643,641
 - (D) Being the amount at paragraph 2.5 (C) divided by amount at 2.4 above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 33 (1) of the Act as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (at Band D) £299.55
 - (E)

Council tax valuation band	Conversion Factor to Band D	Watford's Share £
A	6/9	199.70
B	7/9	232.98
C	8/9	266.27
D	1	299.55
E	11/9	366.12
F	13/9	432.68
G	15/9	499.25
H	2	599.10

Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at paragraph 3.2 (D) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5 (1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in Valuation Band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36 (1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year 2024/25 in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

e) That a report including precepts of both the Hertfordshire County Council and the Police & Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire be presented to the Functions Committee on 21 February 2024 to set the total Council Tax.

65 Motions submitted under Council Procedure Rule 13.0

No motions had been received.

66 Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED –

that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item 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) of the Act for the reasons stated below in terms of Schedule 12A.

67 **Special Severance Payment**

Council received a report of the Chief Executive.

RESOLVED –

That having regard to the contents of the report, Council approves the recommendation.

Chair

The meeting started at 7.30 p.m., adjourned at 9.35 p.m.
Reconvened at 9.40 p.m. and finished at 9.50 p.m.