

## **COUNCIL**

**12 March 2024**

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

Officers: Chief Executive  
Group Head of Democracy and Governance  
Chief Finance Officer  
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)

### **68 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies had been received from Councillors Hill, Kloss, Osborn and Wenham.

### **69 Disclosure of Interests**

Councillor Pattinson declared an interest in minute 78 as she was on the Board of Watford Community Housing. She left the meeting during this item.

### **70 Minutes**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 30 January 2024 were submitted and signed.

## **Official Announcements**

### **Councillor Penelope Hill**

Speaking on behalf of the council the Chairman congratulated Councillor Hill and her husband on the birth of their son, Alasdair Frederick Henry Hill.

### **Ex-councillor Steve Palmer**

The Chairman informed the Council of the death of ex-councillor Steve Palmer on Sunday 17 February. He had written to Steve Palmer's partner and passed on the council's condolences. He then invited Councillors Bell and Williams to speak.

Councillor Bell stated that Steve Palmer had served the council for four years and his greatest achievement was making Watford debt free. He had done a lot of great work for Watford and always offered an honest opinion. Councillor Bell offered his condolences to Steve Palmer's family.

Councillor Williams spoke, saying that he remembered ex-councillor Palmer with great fondness and as a man with a great sense of humour who made a number of great contributions to the community.

Council observed a minute's silence in memory of Steve Palmer.

### **Ramadan**

The Chairman sent best wishes all those observing Ramadan.

### **International Women's Day**

The Chairman mentioned the recent International Woman's Day and acknowledged the women of Watford.

### **Chairman's Engagement**

The Chairman spoke about some of his engagements since the last meeting. He highlighted several events including raising the flag on Monday to celebrate Commonwealth Day as well as a successful event in the Town Hall annexe supporting mental health. He had joined the High Sherriff of Hertfordshire, Liz Green, on a tour of the two libraries in Watford.

## **Thank you**

The Chairman thanked those councillors who were standing down at this year's elections for their service to the council and Watford residents over the years.

The Chairman invited notices from other councillors.

Councillor Newstead spoke and introduced the Watford Jazz Junction Festival, taking place at Watford Pump House Theatre.

Councillor Allen-Williamson spoke about a recent One Life fundraising event and highlighted its success.

Finally, the Chairman congratulated all those who took part in the Big Sleepout.

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## **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, Trebar, Watling, Dhindsa, and Turmaine indicated that they wished to ask questions.

The Mayor began his report by also thanking those councillors who would be standing down at the election. He highlighted the financial difficulties facing the council as well as the good work being done by both councillors and officers. He introduced his report and welcomed any questions.

- 1) Councillor Bell noted the concerns raised by the Police in relation to a dangerous batch of class A drugs in Watford. He asked the Mayor if he had heard about it and what his thoughts were.

The Mayor stated that all class A drugs were dangerous and that the police must take all steps to keep people safe.

Councillor Bell stated that there was a need to encourage residents to report drug dealing to the police to help tackle drug use in Watford.

The Mayor responded that it was very important that the police were aware of what was happening. He praised the new police station that had recently opened in the town centre.

- 2) Councillor Trebar asked for an update on the hospital, in particular when Watford would get the new hospital.

The Mayor responded that the current timeline had a start date by 2026 with the hospital opening in 2030. He highlighted that there was a need for central government to release the funds promised. He agreed that it was very important and stated that the council had done everything it could to support it.

- 3) Councillor Watling asked if the Mayor agreed that specific racial characteristics should not be used as a tool on the doorstep for garnering votes.

The Mayor stated that there was a need for councillors to be more diverse and that the Liberal Democrats had made improvements in that area. However, he agreed that it should not be used as a tool on the doorstep and voting should always be based on the best candidate.

- 4) Councillor Dhindsa raised the issue of Beryl bikes noting the decline in the quality of the service.

The Mayor spoke about the improvements being made to the Beryl bike scheme and highlighted work with neighbouring authorities.

- 5) Councillor Turmaine asked when the council would see the menopause policy.

The Mayor responded stating that it was very important, and that work was being done. He invited Cllr Pattinson to speak.

Councillor Pattinson updated the council on the menopause project.

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

No questions had been received.

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

No questions had been received.

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

No petitions had been received.

76 **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 had been brought forward.

77 **Vice Chairman 2024-25**

Council received a report of the Democratic Services Manager which set out the procedure and nominations for the election of the Vice Chairman for 2024/25. It was noted that Councillor Ezeifedi had been nominated and duly seconded.

The Chairman announced that following members' votes, Councillor Ezeifedi had been elected as Vice Chairman for 2024/25.

RESOLVED –

that Council approves the election of Councillor Ezeifedi as Vice Chairman for 2024-2025.

Councillor Pattinson left the meeting

78 **Allocation of disposal proceeds to acquire TA properties**

Council received a report of the Senior Regeneration Manager which requested that Allocation of Disposal Proceeds to Acquire TA Properties be added to the Capital Programme.

RESOLVED –

That a capital budget of £1.250 million is set up to grant fund Watford Community Housing to contribute to the purchase of properties in Watford for temporary accommodation.

Councillor Pattinson returned to the meeting

79 **Council Pay Policy Statement - April 2024**

Council received a report of the Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development which set out the Council's Pay Policy Statement for 2024.

RESOLVED –

that the Council Pay Policy Statement April 2024 be approved.

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**Motion - Fly tipping**

The following motion had been proposed by Councillor Trebar and seconded by Councillor Watling:

“We live in a beautiful town with many beautiful parks and green spaces which are enjoyed every day by our residents. What a shame it is, therefore that if you turn down any main street in Watford on many corners of that street you will see at least one item of rubbish left on the floor or a household item dumped.

“Sustainable Watford”, is the re-branded new Environmental Strategy 2023-2030 and Delivery Plan 2023-2025, however it does not deal with the central issue which consistently plagues Watford; disgusting, disgraceful and unsafe fly tipping.

According to the Watford Observer 21st January, the number of fly-tipping incidents in Watford apparently decreased last year from 1,342 in 2021-22 to 1,168 fly-tipping incidents in Watford in the year to March 2023. I would argue that these are reported cases and do not show the true extent of the problem.

Veolia do an excellent job of picking up fly tipping in Watford in areas they know and regularly pick up rubbish from hotspots from these areas. They should be commended for their service. However, not all these areas are reported regularly because the fly tipping is often picked the next day, by Veolia. This does not go to the root of the problem. We need the CCTV to be circulated to different places to catch the perpetrators and deter them. Where the current CCTV is placed is based on recorded ‘hot spots’ not other areas which need to be considered - not on how often residents (the victims of this crime are reporting it) but based on areas where there is constant fly tipping and Veolia regularly pick up rubbish from.

Fly tipping is not a victimless crime. We are all victims of it. We need to show across the whole town that we are taking it seriously and that we are actively acting to stop it across all wards.

We have to use all resources to hand to tackle this. CCTV and hefty fines are one of the best ways to deter criminals who fly tip but there are other methods we should consider at the same time.

This council resolves that the Mayor:

1. Should encourage all residents and businesses to behave responsibly and with community spirit to avoid littering. This could be achieved through the use of social media and print outlets such as 'My Watford Magazine' to inform residents that fly tipping is illegal and to tell them that we are actively working to bring the criminals to justice. We should also inform them of how to arrange for large items to be collected by the council to create greater awareness.
2. Continue working to promote and encourage measures and initiatives to reduce waste and support more reuse and recycling.
3. Commend and thank Veolia for all their hard work and continue to work with the contractors of the Council to fulfil their obligations to keep our borough clean.
4. Continue to support robust enforcement, including via CCTV evidence, directed at those making Watford a less pleasant place to be and where possible increase CCTV into other known fly tipping areas."

Councillor Rodrigues moved an amendment to the motion, which was seconded by Councillor Williams.

*"Council notes that:*

- We live in a beautiful town with award winning parks and green spaces which are enjoyed every day by our residents. Watford has recently ranked number 1 in the Vitality index which monitors the best places to live and work in the country.
- Watford Council has an imbedded strategy to deal with fly tipping and illegal waste disposal.
- As detailed in the Watford Observer of 21st January 2024, the number of fly tipping incidents in Watford decreased by 13%.
- Veolia do an excellent job of picking up reported fly tipping. Where Veolia Street Operatives see unreported fly tipping, they collect this material and include it in the reported figures. The Council supports this approach taken by Veolia.
- Watford Council will consider all economically viable approaches to gather evidence to hold those that fly tip to account.

- Fly tipping is not a victimless crime and we are all victims of it. Watford Council informs residents across the whole town that we take fly tipping seriously across all wards. The Council has been educating residents in certain fly tipping hot spot areas in Callowland, of how to dispose of their excess waste. This project includes installing posters in hot spot locations and having 'mock' crime scene tape to encourage debate of fly tipping by residents and not normalise this illegal behaviour.
- The Council has recently made the decision to double the FPN's for fly tipping and this will take affect from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024. In 2022/23 Watford issued the most FPN's across Hertfordshire and in ranking performed second best in the ratio of FPN's issued to fly tipping incidents. Overall Watford performed 263% better than the Hertfordshire average in this ratio.
- Watford Council acknowledges and appreciates that some residents might not be able to afford bulky waste collections and so offers a 50% discount for residents receiving Council related benefits upon presentation of proof of this.

*Council resolves to:*

- Ask the Mayor to continue to encourage all residents and businesses in behaving responsibly in not littering or fly tipping. Keep using social media and the About Watford magazine to inform residents that fly tipping is illegal and to tell them that we are actively working to enforce the law. About Watford routinely reports the work done by the Council and partners on fly tipping and recycling.
- Maintain communication around informing residents of how to arrange bulky waste collections and how to dispose of excess waste.
- Continue working to promote and encourage measures and initiatives to reduce waste and support more reuse and recycling.
- Ask the Mayor to thank Veolia and council officers for all their hard work and continue to work with contractors of the Council to fulfil their obligations to keep our borough clean.
- Continue to support robust enforcement, directed at those making Watford a less pleasant place to live and work."



Councillor Trebar accepted the amendment. Members then debated the substantive motion.

On being put to Council the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED –

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- Continue to support robust enforcement, directed at those making Watford a less pleasant place to live and work.

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### **Motion - Interfaith Association**

The following motion had been proposed by Councillor Dychton and seconded by Councillor Stotesbury:

“Watford Council notes:

1. The considerable and positive work done by the Watford Interfaith Association since it was established in 1977.
2. That the Watford Interfaith Association brings people of all faiths and none closer together through their annual interfaith pilgrimage, Peace Garden and other events and activities.
3. Reports of a concerning rise in hate crimes in the UK, including increased cases of antisemitism and Islamophobia.

4. The decision of the UK government to end all funding for the Interfaith Network for the UK, which will result in the closure of the charity.

Council believes:

1. The work of interfaith associations has never been more important.
2. At this time, every effort should be made to bring faith communities together to tackle the challenges our society faces.
3. That it is deeply regrettable that the government has decided to end all funding for the Interfaith Network for the UK.

Council calls on the Elected Mayor of Watford to write to the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, to outline our opposition to this decision.”

Members debated the motion.

On being put to Council the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED –

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1. The considerable and positive work done by the Watford Interfaith Association since it was established in 1977.
2. That the Watford Interfaith Association brings people of all faiths and none closer together through their annual interfaith pilgrimage, Peace Garden and other events and activities.
3. Reports of a concerning rise in hate crimes in the UK, including increased cases of antisemitism and Islamophobia.
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3. That it is deeply regrettable that the government has decided to end all funding for the Interfaith Network for the UK.

Council calls on the Elected Mayor of Watford to write to the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, to outline our opposition to this decision.

## 82 **Motion - Stop the Conservatives punishing local councils for building houses**

The following motion had been proposed by Councillor Glen Saffery and seconded by Mayor Taylor:

*“Council Notes that:*

Watford Council was recently identified, alongside 58 other Councils, by the Conservative government as failing the 'Housing Delivery Test.'

Despite the fact that over 700 new homes have been constructed in the Borough in each of the last two years measured by this test, the Conservatives have opted to punish Watford Borough Council for apparently not building enough, requiring the council to produce an 'action plan' and continuing to place us under the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development.'

This will further weaken local control over the type of development that is appropriate for our area and could lead to more applications for increasingly tall buildings. It also significantly weakens the Council's hand when defending appeals against our decisions to refuse proposals that do not adequately meet local policy or housing need.

The Council has made significant efforts to meet local demand through our award-winning Local Plan, approved by the Government's own planning inspectorate and adopted by this Council in November 2022.

However the Conservatives' approach unfairly penalises these efforts to actively contribute to solving the housing crisis. It rides roughshod over local policy, compromising both the quality and affordability of new homes and increasing the density of development in areas like Watford that are already built up. It increases the burden on local infrastructure without the requisite investment from national government to support it. Perversely, the Government's approach even fails to prioritise the area of most acute need – the provision of family-sized social and affordable housing units.

The Council expresses its dismay at the government's continuing punitive measures despite our constructive efforts to address the national housing shortage – prioritising sustainability, affordability and quality through our local plan.

Council strongly voices its concerns regarding the overly-centralised planning system, emphasising the fact that local councils doing their part to deliver new homes should not face unwarranted punishment.

Council acknowledges that some local councils are contributing almost nothing to addressing national housing shortages, and yet it is councils making substantial efforts that bear the brunt of penalties.

*Council resolves to:*

1. Ask the Elected Mayor to write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, seeking assurance that local councils with strong and up to date local policies to address housing need will not be subject to punitive measures.
2. Ask the Secretary of State to reform national policy to make housing targets fairer and more evenly spread.
3. Urge the government to consider the impact of cuts on local councils and to provide support rather than punitive measures for those actively working towards meeting housing targets.

This motion aims to safeguard local councils from unjust sanctions, instigate a fairer assessment of housebuilding efforts, and encourage closer dialogue between Local and UK government to address the housing crisis more effectively.”

Members debated the motion.

On being put to Council the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED –

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Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm  
and finished at 9.50 pm