

Elected Mayor's Report- January 2018

Partnership Work:

Everyone Active

I'm pleased that Everyone Active were successful in their bid for the new contract for the leisure centres. Since Everyone Active took over our leisure centres in 2008, they have provided Watford with a first class service that makes the Borough Council a profit. In particular, I'm pleased that Everyone Active will be offering a cheaper service than other competitors, especially free swimming at the Watford Central Leisure Centre every Sunday from 2pm until 5pm starting in June 2018. Meanwhile, 11- to 15-years-olds will also be able to attend free Gym Active sessions that will be offered across various dates and times. There will be significant improvements made to Watford Woodside, with an extended gym being added, new changing rooms and a new toning suite. I thank Cllr Peter Taylor and officers for their work in helping secure this contract. Hopefully this is what our town needs to get active!

Veolia

At Cabinet in December we took the decision to increase the fixed penalty notice charges for those committing fly tipping. The Fixed Penalty Charges are increasing from £200 to £300, with that charge being reduced to £150 if it is paid within 10 days. We know that most people who are issued with a fixed penalty notice are much less likely to continue to fly tip. We're sending a clear message that people can't simply get away with this. If residents spot fly tipping, I would urge them to report it directly to Veolia at watford.gov.uk/flytipping. I'd also like to thank Veolia staff who have been working throughout December to make sure our bins were collected and streets kept clean despite some difficult icy weather conditions.

Duty to cooperate

I have had several productive meetings with my colleagues in our neighbouring councils about Hertfordshire's future housing needs. Most councils, including in Watford, are being asked by central government to significantly increase their housing numbers. In Watford that might mean double the number that we are currently planning to build which would have a significant impact on our local schools, transport links and doctors surgeries. Working with our neighbours is going to be key if we are going to be able to deliver this without impacting negatively on our local infrastructure.

Watford Community Housing Trust

We have been doing some fantastic partnership work with Watford Community Housing to try and deliver genuinely affordable housing in the town through the Hart Homes Partnership scheme. I'm also pleased that work will start soon on the Watford Community Housing project in the Meriden Estate, which is one of the most ambitious projects the borough has seen in recent years to provide much needed affordable homes for social rent. I look forward to seeing the scheme develop.

Community Events

Although this is my last few months as Mayor, I still have the privilege of attending many events across our community seeing some of the fantastic work some of our community groups do. Here are just a few events that I have attended:

I visited the Laurance Haines Primary School in West Watford in December to see them receive the Marjorie Boxall Quality Mark Award from the Nurture Group Award. This is a major national award and they deserve the recognition for the work they have been doing to help create a nurturing environment for their pupils. In particular they've been praised for the work they do to help the difficult transition period from preschool to school.

I met with volunteers from Signpost, my chosen Mayor's charity, to present them with their cheque from my Christmas card appeal. I found out more about their work locally in helping give our local young people the help and support they need.

I was honoured to attend the Milad Parade that took place in the centre of Watford this month. It is fantastic that Watford has such a vibrant and diverse community where we can share and respect all faiths and religions.

I have been invited to speak at various church services, including the Stanborough Ministry and Wellsprings

Finally, a massive congratulations to Watford band Rak-Su for winning the 2017 X Factor. The whole town is very proud of you.

Big Events

Cassiobury Fireworks

This went off without a hitch in November, with one of the largest crowds we ever had for the Cassiobury Fireworks. I'm proud that we host one of the largest free of charge firework displays in the country.

The Big Skate

It was good to see the Big Skate event return to the top of the High Street again in time for the Christmas period. This event was very popular and working closely with Watford BID we have minimised any potential disruption the rink could have caused to local businesses on the High Street.

The Big Word Fest

This will be returning to Watford in March 2018 with more details to be announced shortly. Hopefully this will be a great chance to engage people from across the town to celebrate literature.

Major Projects

High Street Improvements

Work started on the changes to the High Street on the 8th January, with parts of the High Street being shut off to vehicles until the works are completed in September ahead of the completion of the Intu Extension. The works will involve reducing cars on the High Street by the introduction of moving bollards, the creation of more disabled parking by Church Street, improving cycle ways and create a better street scape. All of these changes should make the High Street greener, safer and more attractive to shop in.

Intu Extension

I met with Vicki Costello, General Manager of Watford Intu in December and am pleased to report that this project is coming on leaps and bounds, with the Imax cinema now starting to take shape. The Extension is still on time to be opened later this year, with major retailers

on board and a new state of the art Imax cinema in the town centre. This will bring a huge amount of business to the town as well as footfall to our high street

Metropolitan Line Extension Update

I and senior officers of the Borough Council met with Deputy Mayor of London Jules Pipe, in December to discuss this project and show him round Watford so he can see for himself the benefit the extension would bring to the town. He was very impressed by what he saw and how serious the planning was for this project. We are expecting an announcement about funding for this plan very soon.

West Herts Hospital Trust

I was delighted that after careful management and hard work from staff that West Herts Hospital Trust has come out of special measures, two years after being placed in them by the CQC. This is a great achievement. However, there is still work to do. This is a now an opportunity to crack on with bringing the hospital facilities into the 21st century. We will support them as a Borough Council with this in whatever way we can.