

## **Report to Council – 17 October 2023**

## **Report of Cabinet – 2 October 2023**

Cabinet met on 2 October 2023. The minutes are published on the council's website.

The following members and officers were present at the meeting:

Present: Mayor Taylor (Chair)  
Councillor Dychton (Deputy Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Community)  
Councillor Pattinson (Portfolio Holder for Housing and Wellbeing)  
Councillor Rodrigues (Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services)  
Councillor G Saffery (Portfolio Holder for Planning)  
Councillor Stotesbury (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Sustainability)  
Councillor Watkin (Portfolio Holder for Property and Resources)  
Councillor Williams (Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services)

Officers: Chief Executive  
Head of Finance  
Director of Performance  
Group Head of Democracy and Governance  
Spatial Planning Manager  
Democratic Services Manager

Minute 29 included recommendations for Council.

### **29. Annual Review of Fees and Charges**

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Finance which set out the draft Charging Policy for 2024/25, which would be forwarded to Council for adoption, and the proposed changes to the council's schedule of fees and charges.

The Mayor commented on the challenging situation for all councils given the rates of inflation, increasing costs and rising wage bills; noting several councils had declared themselves bankrupt. He stressed that it was important that this subject was looked at carefully, including the council's income and expenditure.

Councillor Watkin reiterated the Mayor's comments on the difficulties many councils were facing, including Watford, which, like other councils, was facing a shortfall in its funding, rising inflation and increasing demand on services.

During his time on the council, he had never witnessed the challenges the council was currently facing. For the current financial year, the council was facing an increase of £3 million in budget expenditure. The council had to respond to the situation as soon as and as effectively as possible. The council was therefore proposing a new schedule of fees and charges which would largely come into force from January 2024. Some fees and charges would be delegated to the Executive Director of Place and others incorporated into the upcoming budget proposals. The primary reason for the increase was due to the rise and state of inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index.

Councillor Watkin advised members that the charging policy included different categories that could be applied to fees and charges. The main three were:

- Recovery of some of the costs for the service, subsidised; usually applied to services the council felt were important to the local community.
- Full cost recovery, for example licensing and garden waste collection.
- Statutory charges, set by central government. The government had recently consulted on these and was expected to propose a 35% annual increase this year followed by an annual increase equivalent to the Consumer Price Index.

Councillor Watkin noted that the council was sympathetic to anyone struggling to pay the charges and within the report an explanation of concessions was provided and who would be eligible.

Councillor Watkin commended the recommendations to Cabinet for approval at Council.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Watkin and the officers for their work in preparing the information for the meeting. He noted that Councillor Khan, the Chair of Finance Scrutiny Committee, was unable to attend Cabinet to provide feedback from scrutiny. He asked the Head of Finance if she was able to provide some details of the discussions that had taken place.

The Head of Finance informed Cabinet that the scrutiny committee had discussed the principles of how the council set its charges and the timing of the current proposals. Members had also discussed the need to review the charges in light of inflation.

The Mayor thanked the officer for her overview of the scrutiny discussion. He added that it had been expected that inflation would fall more rapidly than it had. He was aware that officers had discussed in detail the fees and charges

with their Portfolio Holder. He invited Cabinet to vote on the recommendations.

RESOLVED –

1. that the draft Charging Policy and proposed fees and charges be recommended to Council for approval on 17 October.
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.