



**WATFORD  
BOROUGH  
COUNCIL**

# **COUNCIL MEETING**

**13 October 2020**

**7.30 pm**

**Virtual meeting**

## **Contact**

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For information about attending meetings please visit the [council's website](#).

**Publication date: 13 October 2020**

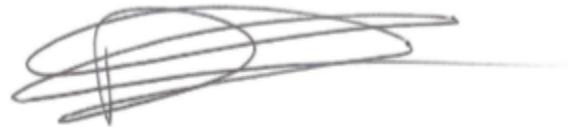
Town Hall  
Watford

13 October 2020

Councillor

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Council of the Borough of Watford to be held on Tuesday, 13 October 2020 starting at 7.30 pm at the Virtual meeting to take into consideration and determine upon the following subjects, namely: -

6. **Questions by Members of the Council under Council Procedure Rule 10.0 (Pages 3 - 10)**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Donna Nolan', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

**Donna Nolan, Managing Director**

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

Council – 13 October 2020

### Questions from Councillor Turmaine Received on 8 October 2020

Question: What is the council doing to help deal with homelessness in Watford? What numbers of rough sleepers are currently on the streets? and What is being done to protect them from COVID-19 in the coming winter months?

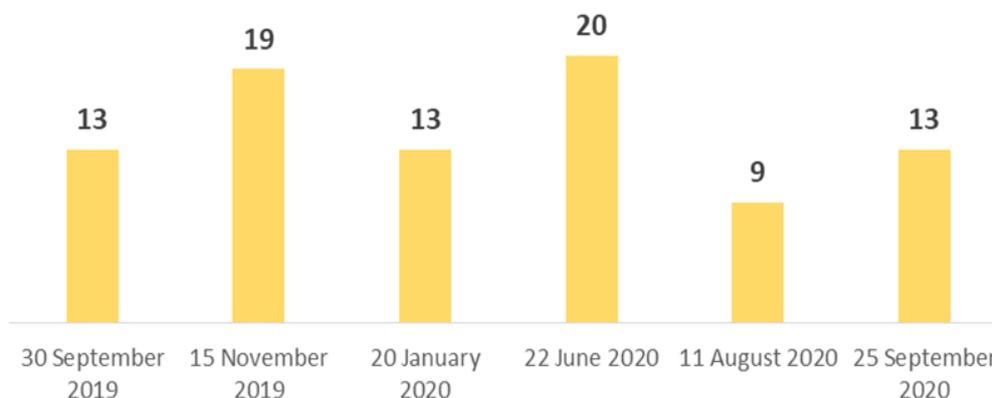
#### **Answer**

*The council and its voluntary and statutory sector partners have been working hard together to ensure that rough sleepers assisted into accommodation during March-June 2020 remain off the streets and are working innovatively with those still on the streets to find ways to assist them into accommodation. The levels of homeless households not affected by rough sleeping has been fairly stable over the last few months mainly because of government measures put in place to supplement incomes and prevent evictions. We are monitoring the situation as these government measures are withdrawn or reduced.*

*The data below shows some of the current context around homelessness in the borough.*

- *Average number of households (families and single people) in temporary accommodation as part of the council's duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act, since April 2020: 97*
- *Rough sleepers currently accommodated through the Everyone In initiative (end March to end June 2020): 49*
- *The chart below shows the number of rough sleepers found on the streets during bi-monthly counts between September 2019 to September 2020 (note that a bi-monthly count in March did not take place due to the lockdown):*

### Street count data over the last year - September 2019 to September 2020



- *Of the 13 rough sleepers found on 25/9/20: six had been evicted from Everyone In accommodation during the period March to June 2020, three had refused an offer of Everyone In accommodation and four people were new to Street Outreach staff.*

*Cabinet agreed a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy in January 2020 which contains an extensive action plan for the period 2020-2025. One of the main action points is to achieve and maintain zero rough sleepers on the streets of Watford. This will be measured through annual (usually November) rough sleeper counts supplemented by bi-monthly counts. Another action plan point is to apply for relevant funding to assist the council in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.*

*The council has been very successful in securing funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to assist with combating rough sleeping in the borough. For 2020/21, the following funding has been obtained:*

- *£413,000 Rough Sleepers Initiative funding for:*
  - *The continuation of the multi-agency Street Outreach Service (based at and managed by New Hope) delivering street outreach with mental health and substance misuse recovery support to rough sleepers. The agencies involved in delivering this service are Herts Young Homeless, CGL Spectrum and New Hope.*
  - *The continuation of the multi-agency Intervention Team (based at and managed by New Hope) delivering more complex needs support around mental health, substance misuse recovery support, financial and legal support for rough sleepers, including helping them into access accommodation. The agencies involved in delivering this service are*

*Herts Young Homeless, CGL Spectrum, Watford Citizens Advice and New Hope*

- *Rough Sleepers Co-ordinator (council-based) – in post since July 2020 working closely with all voluntary and statutory agencies, including the council, who are working with rough sleepers in Watford. The aim of this role is to develop a pathway from the street into quality accommodation and support for rough sleepers in the borough utilising good practice from other local authority areas*
- *Medium Complex Intensive Support Service at One YMCA Charter House – complex needs support workers to work with 22 ex-rough sleepers. This initiative has been in operation since the beginning of July 2020 with its key outcome being to enable ex-rough sleepers to obtain the mental health or substance abuse recovery or other support they need to stay off the streets permanently. It is already having considerable success with no evictions so far and currently three people ready to move on into more independent living settings.*
- *£1.8m Next Steps Accommodation Programme which will fund:*
  - *Covid-19 compliant accommodation over the winter (October 2020 to March 2021) for up to 20 rough sleepers including during severe weather emergencies. The council is currently sourcing suitable accommodation and liaising with a range of providers to deliver the outcomes required for this funding. Provision will be put in place as soon as possible.*
  - *Delivery of a second Medium Complex Intensive Support Service (MCISS) at One YMCA's Charter House with support funding till the end of March 2021. The second MCISS will benefit 22 rough sleepers who were accommodated by One YMCA under the Everyone In initiative at the end of March. These individuals have similar levels of complex needs to those in the first MCISS and will benefit from the same approach being taken there.*
  - *21 self-contained homes for ex-rough sleepers. Ten of these units will be for the council's [Housing First](#) project aimed at entrenched rough sleepers who have failed to thrive in supported hostel environments and repeatedly returned to rough sleeping. The other 11 units will be located in the One YMCA Charter House building and will form part of the pathway for ex-rough sleepers leading leaving the streets permanently. The delivery of these units has to be completed by the end of March 2021. The funding also enables complex needs staff to be appointed to support the occupants of these new homes until the end of March 2024.*

*The council itself is developing a 40 bed hostel which will provide accommodation and support to single people currently placed, without the support they need, in the*

*council's temporary accommodation facilities as part of its duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act. This facility will come on stream from April 2021 and will also target remaining rough sleepers in the borough.*

*In conjunction with New Hope, the council has set up the Watford Rough Sleepers Taskforce which is an operational forum comprising the council, local voluntary accommodation and support agencies, statutory agencies (including mental health, GPs, the probation service and the DWP and Herts County Council), housing providers, Herts County Council commissioned services for substance misuse and mental health, other support agencies like Watford Citizens Advice. Within a GDPR-compliant space, the Taskforce has discussed 20 rough sleepers so far of which four have been accommodated, for example, at the MCISS at Charter House. Innovative ways of engaging with some rough sleepers have been found and action taken by agencies which has smoothed the path of rough sleepers discussed which might otherwise never have occurred. Two examples include:*

- Discussion of one rough sleeper case included the fact that their benefits were paid into the bank account of a "friend" who then did not hand over the funds. DWP took action to stop this arrangement and are currently paying the rough sleeper's benefits to New Hope so that he can get his money from them whilst the Intervention Team assist him to obtain his own bank account and enable his future independence with his money.*
- Identifying that a rough sleeper whom the Street Outreach Service had found difficulty engaging with was reported to be regularly attending the services of another Taskforce member, CGL Spectrum. Collaboration between the Street Outreach Service and CGL Spectrum has now taken place to work with this individual to help him into accommodation and support.*

*As an initiative, the Taskforce has been very successful in bringing together a wide range of agencies to achieve positive outcomes for individual rough sleepers. This way of working has never happened before. It is now more appreciated by everyone involved how work with rough sleepers is not easy and takes time. Hertfordshire County Council are monitoring how the Taskforce is operating and intend using it as an example of good practice to be rolled out across the rest of Hertfordshire.*

*All of the above areas of work will assist the council in its objective of achieving and maintaining zero rough sleepers on the streets of Watford.*

*In terms of working with other homeless households, the council's Housing Department continues to source affordable private rented accommodation to enable to them to leave temporary accommodation as soon as possible and restart their lives. Social rented homes are still becoming available to let through the choice based lettings system but so far the number of lettings is significantly down on last year.*

*There were no lettings at all during April and May due to the lockdown. They have picked up slowly since then.*

*The Housing Department monitors weekly the numbers of households approaching it because they are homeless or are facing homelessness. It is expected that higher numbers of households will begin to approach the council for homelessness assistance as the moratorium on evictions ended in September and Covid-19 income support measures, such as furloughing, are replaced with less generous measures over the coming weeks.*

Question: What plans does the council have to proactively support businesses in our town, following the failures of retail and hospitality venues in Watford?

### **Answer**

*Since the beginning of the pandemic the council has been working hard to support businesses across all of our sectors – to keep them going, stay open and operate safely for their employees and customers.*

- *£17,355,493 in grants has been paid to 1,507 small businesses*
- *£36,046,669 in business rates credits has been given to 841 businesses in our retail, hospitality and leisure sector*
- *£273,967 in business rates credits has been given to 18 nursery properties*
- *More than 1,400 businesses have been visited and provided with advice and guidance*
- *More than 1,500 businesses have been written to with sector specific information*

*Through the business survey we conducted in June and ongoing engagement with our businesses we know that some need additional help responding and adapting their business to operate in the current economic environment which is why we are actively working to identify and implement new ways of supporting them.*

### **Rejuvenating our town centre**

*Since June, the Elected Mayor has chaired a task group to make sure our town centre is best placed to bounce back from Covid-19. The council has worked with partners at Watford BID and intu as well as Hertfordshire County Council and the Police to create a safe and welcoming town centre so that businesses have the best possible environment to reopen, and stay open, during the pandemic. The council's work has ranged from securing effective closure of the lower end of the High Street so people can social distance and enjoy a more traffic free shopping experience, providing*

*practical support and advice to businesses to livening up the town centre through summer entertainment and additional attractive planters. The council is working with Watford BID on plans for the Christmas period, which is so vital to many retailers and businesses.*

*Whilst these are tough times for the High Street, Watford has seen new investment with Next taking space in the former Debenhams store and other businesses expressing interest in locating here. The council is clear that Watford remains a great place for business and is engaging in a number of new initiatives that provide the practical help they need at the moment.*

### **WhatsApp Business**

*At the beginning of the month we announced a unique partnership – the first in the UK – with WhatsApp to support a group of small, independent businesses on Market Street to download and configure the WhatsApp Business app; providing them with a digital presence to promote their business and communicate with their customers.*

*The WhatsApp Business app is free to use, so there is no financial cost to the business. It is used by more than 5m small businesses worldwide, so it is tried and tested. The app lets business owners communicate with their customers in real time, on a platform that many are already familiar with as it closely resembles the WhatsApp app many of us use to keep in touch with family and friends.*

*This is the start of the journey for the Market Street businesses in the pilot project as they become more confident in using the app and communicating with their customers through it, and is an exemplar of how other small businesses can use the app to support their businesses. We have already been contacted by a number of small businesses interested in using the WhatsApp Business app in their own businesses and are actively following up with them, and will be posting further information for businesses soon.*

### **Business Recovery and Growth Programme**

*We are investing over £80,000 to establish a partnership with Wenta to provide additional support to existing businesses and also to help residents who are interested in self-employment or starting a business to do so.*

*The support will be free to Watford businesses and residents and provide a combination of 1:1 and group support, webinars, workshops, access to online information and help to access further, relevant business support programmes and services.*

*The programme is ambitious and aims to engage with 1000+ businesses and residents in Watford and funnel them into the programme.*

*Of these 1000 it is expected:*

- 300 will receive light touch support – this will typically be around general business advice and support, including referral to existing support programmes delivered as part of the Hertfordshire Growth Package.*
- 300 will receive more intensive support – this will provide more in depth 1:1 support, including access to business webinars.*
- 30+ will receive high intensive support – this will provide 4+ hours of in-depth 1:1 support plus access to business webinars.*
- 100+ will participate in workshops and webinars.*
- 25 will be given specialist partner referrals, e.g. intellectual property.*

*At all stages businesses will benefit from referral to the most appropriate partner activity, e.g. Hertfordshire Growth Package and Government enterprise and innovation programmes, and networks that could benefit their business growth.*

*We particularly want to reach small businesses and parts of our business community that don't usually engage with county or national programmes to provide them with the business advice and support that they need.*

*The needs of businesses will be monitored throughout the 6-month programme and delivery updated in response.*

*Work is going to finalise delivery and the customer journey, a programme navigator has been appointed and a launch press release will be sent out at the end of this week (w/e 18 October) with details of the programme and how to access it.*

### **LocalValu**

*We are also developing a partnership with LocalValu, a new to market customer loyalty platform that rewards local people for supporting local businesses. This is at an early stage but is progressing well and we expect this to launch in early November.*

### **Travel with Confidence**

*We have established the Travel with Confidence marque with funding to support our licenced taxi drivers to improve their Covid-19 safety through a grant and training programme giving people the confidence to use companies and drivers accredited by the scheme. This innovative programme has been picked up by local authorities across Hertfordshire and is being rolled out across the county.*

### ***Business information hub***

*We continue to make businesses aware of the support to them through our websites, social media platforms and e-newsletter.*

### ***Watford indoor Market***

*In order to support the immediate financial viability of Watford Market and support the traders during the Renewal Phase the council will offer a rent reduction of 50% for September, 25% October, November and December.*

Question: How many plastic food bins have been distributed across the borough and what was the cost of producing and distributing them to residents?

### ***Answer***

*Total number of food bins delivered was 36,945*

*total cost for purchasing the containers was £113,927.30*

*total cost for distributing was £31,567.08 (including delivery of liners and leaflet)*