

CABINET

20 JANUARY 2014

Present: Mayor (Chair)
Councillors D Scudder, K Crout, I Sharpe and M Watkin

Also present: Councillor Bell

Officers: Managing Director
Shared Director of Finance
Head of Community and Customer Services
Head of Regeneration and Development
Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services
Legal and Democratic Section Head
Corporate and External Communications Section Head
Section Head - Parks and Open Spaces
Cassiobury Park Project Officer
Democratic Services Manager
Head of Democracy and Governance

50 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from Councillor Dhindsa, Chair of Budget Panel who would usually have attended this meeting to present the Budget Panel's comments.

51 **DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST (IF ANY)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

52 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2013 were submitted and signed.

53 **CONDUCT OF MEETING**

Councillor Bell represented the Labour Group at this meeting.

54 **PROCUREMENT RULES EXEMPTION - HOMELESS REVIEW CONTRACT**

The Council's Contract Procedure Rules allowed for exemptions to be made to the usual procurement process in exceptional circumstances. Proposed exemptions had to be approved by the Managing Director and Head of Service and the decision reported to the next Cabinet meeting.

Cabinet was informed that an exemption had been approved in relation to the contract to carry out Homelessness Reviews on behalf of the Housing Service. In addition Cabinet was asked to retrospectively delegate to Minos Perdios the function of undertaking reviews under section 202 of the Housing Act 1996.

Councillor Crout advised Cabinet that the number of cases being passed to the supplier had increased to a level where competitive procurement should be entered into. In response to questions from Councillor Bell regarding a number of legal challenges referred to in the report, the Head of Community & Customer Services explained that the challenges related to the legality of contracting out and whether this complied with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and Constitution. In addition the Council could be challenged on the delegation of the function to Minos Perdios. It had therefore been decided to implement an extension to the existing agreement through the process for exemptions within the Contract Procedure Rules and ensure that the delegation was officially documented. The Legal & Democratic Section Head advised that there had been an increasing tactic in recent years to attempt to challenge the procurement process – a recent high court decision regarding another local authority had provided some guidance on process in this area and so it was necessary to make sure the Council was covered.

The Mayor added that it was important that the Council was able to provide independent and impartial advice for appellants.

RESOLVED

1. that Cabinet notes that an exemption has been granted in line with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.
2. that with effect from 1 July 2010 Minos Perdios is delegated pursuant to Article 3 of the Local Authorities (Contracting Out of Allocation of Housing and Homelessness Function) Order 1996 the function of undertaking Homelessness Reviews under section 202 of the Housing Act 1996

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UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS OF CASSIOBURY PARK HLF PROJECT AND TO SIGN OFF AND APPROVE CURRENT DESIGNS.

Cabinet received an update on the progress of the Cassiobury Park project leading towards a Round 2 submission to the HLF/BIG 'Parks for People' programme in February 2014. The designs and associated plans for Cassiobury Park had developed and progressed since Round 1 and a decision to approve the final editions prior to submission was being sought.

The report outlined the design proposals in the park for both Landscape and Building works, related capital costs, proposed management & maintenance structure and associated costs and phased programme for construction.

Councillor Crout introduced the report and complimented officers on the considerable amount of work done. He also commented on the incredible

number of detailed responses to the consultation exercise. He highlighted key proposals including a new landscaped entrance from Rickmansworth Road; re-location of the bandstand; the extension and refurbishment of Cha Cha Cha; refurbishment and reconfiguration of the Gade Car Park; improvement to the pools and establishment of a Hub Building containing changing rooms, a café, an exhibition, area a store for parks equipment, and management offices for the Park Rangers.

The Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks and Streets) explained the concept of the proposals which was to create a park “hub” to bring the whole area together. HLF was very happy with progress; it was planned to submit the round 2 bid in February.

The Mayor said she welcomed the “soft” elements of the scheme such as landscaping which would enhance the area for years to come. She was aware that the Interfaith Group wanted a spiritual area for peace and meditation and that there were plans for a community garden. She congratulated officers on a very thorough piece of work which appeared to cover everything.

Councillor Watkin referred to the amount of work already being done by volunteers and was pleased that the scheme encouraged greater involvement and “ownership” of the park.

In response to a question by Councillor Bell regarding the height of the hub building, the Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks and Streets) advised that, whilst it would be two storey, looking down from the hill it only appeared as one. It had also been designed with the less attractive features such as services and utilities being concealed underground. Solar panels would also be of a reflective design so they were less apparent. A lot of thought had gone into the design.

Councillor Bell asked about the proposals for car park charging in the Gade Avenue Car Park. The Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks and Streets) advised that this would form part of a separate business plan. The car park was currently being used by commuters which was not the intention.

The Mayor commented that charging for the car park would hopefully encourage parking elsewhere; it was not a commuter car park. It was not unusual for authorities to impose a small charge for park car parks and the income could be used to cover expenditure.

In response to a further question from Councillor Bell, the Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks and Streets) confirmed that there was the possibility that a charge may be imposed for some events. The Mayor added, however, that there was no intention to charge for use of the pools.

RESOLVED

that Cabinet:

1. approves the designs and plans presented for Cassiobury Park (Appendix A).
2. **recommends to Council** approval to increase the capital allocation to this project of £294,311 which has arisen through progress of the development stage from unallocated S106 funds.
3. approves the refurbishment of Gade Avenue car park and subsequent implementation of car-parking charges subject to a business case being developed.
4. approves the proposed phased programme of works for Cassiobury Park.
5. approves delegated authority to the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services in consultation with the portfolio holder for any future changes to the design and specification.
6. notes the contents of the report and the progress made to date and the Round 2 submission to HLF/BIG in February 2014.

56

WATFORD'S MONITORING REPORT 2013

Authorities' Monitoring Reports (AMRs) had to be prepared and published at least once a year. Watford's Monitoring Report 2013 covered the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 and included the progress made on local plan documents and a suite of indicators which measured the effects of planning policies within both the Watford District Plan 2000 and the Core Strategy (adopted 30 January 2013). Other indicators used in the document provided a wider context on such aspects as the population and environment.

The purpose of the report to Cabinet was to raise awareness of the information provided by the AMR 2013 which had to be published on the council's website as soon as reasonably practicable. Members' attention was specifically drawn to the Executive Summary attached as Appendix 2 to the report

There was no requirement for formal public consultation; the AMR 2013 had previously undergone internal consultation within the Council and with Hertfordshire County Council. It also featured in the January 2014 Members' Bulletin.

Councillor Sharpe introduced highlights from the report including:

- Watford could demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, which was 137.7%, above the National Planning Policy Framework requirement of 105%;
- in 2012/13, 97% of housing completions were on previously developed land;
- an increase of approximately 1,000 total jobs per year in Watford since 2009;
- ongoing maintenance and improvement of the town's parks and open spaces – particularly important for a densely populated urban town like Watford
- Investment in other schemes including conservation areas such as King Street and Lower High Street.

He stressed the importance of investing in existing buildings and not allowing emptiness and dereliction. He said it was important to have plans for SMART growth; without this there was a risk of having to grant planning permissions which were not suitable.

The Mayor drew Members' attention to the graph indicating GCSE and equivalent results for young people; percentage achieving 5+A*- C. This showed a significant improvement and reflected the fact the Watford had some of the best schools in the country.

She went on to speak about the Index of Multiple Deprivation at Appendix 2 of the Report. She observed that there were "pockets" across the borough and this was something that needed to be monitored.

Councillor Watkin referred to the graph illustrating earnings which demonstrated that wages for people in Watford were higher than other Hertfordshire Councils and significantly higher than the national average illustrating the prosperity of the town.

Councillor Crout expressed some concern about the levels of life expectancy in deprived areas. He said that now public health had been handed over to the county with some responsibilities at local level it was important to see what could be done to improve the situation.

Councillor Bell referred to the Building for Life Assessments 2012/13 and asked how the Council could ensure that more developments scored highly, like Rainbow House in Water Lane.

The Head of Regeneration & Development advised that staff had been trained in building for life assessments so were in a better position to influence developers. She said, however, that there were still some old schemes in the plan. She added that they were making positive efforts to influence developers including setting up a forum. She said it was disappointing that builders did not always see the value of building to a higher standard.

Councillor Bell then asked about the 5 year housing land supply assessment and how much related to the Health Campus. The Head of Regeneration & Development responded that the proposals for the Health Campus did not include the building of houses in the next five years and that the first phase would involve the road and commercial units.

In response to a question by Councillor Bell regarding deprived areas, the Mayor advised that the Council's GIS team was working on very refined data which would enable the drilling down of information to establish exactly where these areas were.

The Mayor welcomed the information relating to car use and the fact that people were opting for different means of transport. She also commented on the "myth" that the town did not need any more flats and advised that there was hard evidence to show that there was a need for 1/2 bedroom homes.

Councillor Scudder referred to the details on re-cycling rates which had been maintained at a rate of around 40%. He advised that the new system of co-mingling had resulted in a significant increase – up to 45 -50% - which was extremely good for a town such as Watford.

The Mayor concluded by thanking everyone involved in producing the Report including the Planning Policy Advisory Group.

RESOLVED

that Cabinet notes the information provided by the AMR.

57

DRAFT REVENUE AND CAPITAL ESTIMATES 2014/2017. TO AGREE THE COUNCIL TAX BASE TO AGREE THE DRAFT REVENUE AND CAPITAL ESTIMATES 2014/2017.

Cabinet received a report on service level expenditure, funding and council tax levels for the medium term 2014/15 to 2017/18 including consideration of the use of reserves and balances. This budget was a component part of the 2014/15 Council Tax calculations and Cabinet was recommended to agree the Council Tax Base to apply for 2014/15. The report included advice from the Director of Finance on the adequacy of general reserves and balances in the context of the four year planning horizon 2014-2018 and set out:

- the draft revenue estimates for the period 2014-18
- the draft capital programme for the period 2014-18
- the Treasury Management Strategy 2014-17

The report had also been considered by Budget Panel at its meeting on 15th January and the minutes were circulated at the meeting.

The Mayor advised that the budget proposals would be going to Council the following week. She commented that she was extremely pleased with Watford's financial position; services and staff were not being cut and this was due to the excellent staff who had managed to maintain a firm hand and take some tough decisions in the past. She added that the Council was in "steadier waters" now. She then asked the Portfolio Holder to introduce the report.

Councillor Watkin affirmed the Mayor's comments and advised that the only slight blip related to NDR where the income to the Council had dropped to the Government determined safety net level. The business rates retention scheme was very volatile but it was anticipated that the situation would improve soon.

He referred to the situation in respect of the New Homes Bonus which had been reduced nationally but would be offset by the RSG. Expenditure was up slightly but not by much and the £750k contribution to the pension fund was noted. The position with regard to capital expenditure was healthier than the previous year

with a schedule of spending in place. The Council remained debt free and the local Council Tax Scheme could continue to be funded. Cabinet would be recommending to Council that its Council Tax be frozen for another year.

In response to a question from Councillor Bell about reserves of £36m, the Director of Finance advised that there were £12 -14m in reserves, although she added that the levels were not usually monitored at this time of the year. There was £36m in cash investment but this was not all available to spend.

The Mayor thanked staff for the work done on the budget.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. 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 2014/2015 is 30,112.10 as outlined in paragraph 7.5 and summarised at Appendix 7 of the report.
2. approves the estimate of surplus and deficit position on the Collection Fund.
3. approves the 2014/15 savings of £754,970 as detailed at Appendix 1.
4. approves the 2014/15 growth of £139,280 and as detailed at Appendix 2.
5. approves the proposed increases in fees and charges as detailed at Appendix 4
6. approves all the assumptions made within the Medium Term Financial Strategy at Appendix 5 which includes a council tax freeze for 2014/2015.

That Council be recommended to approve:

7. the General Fund Budget Requirement for 2014/2015 of £14,313,080 (before use of grants and reserves) and as outlined at paragraph 7.1
8. the Capital Programme as set out at Appendix 10.
9. the financial risks and the level of reserves and balances (Appendices 8 & 9 refer).
10. the existing Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme to continue from 1 April 2014 (paragraph 7.6.4 refers)
11. the Treasury Management Strategy for 2014-2017 as set out in Appendix 11.
12. to delegate to the Director of Finance and Portfolio Holder the ability to amend the budget figures in accordance with decisions taken at the Cabinet meeting and any minor variations that may occur before the Council meeting on 29th January 2014.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.50 pm