

## **CABINET**

**7 SEPTEMBER 2015**

Present: Mayor (Chair)  
Councillors D Scudder, S Johnson, I Sharpe and P Taylor

Also present: Councillors Bell, Khan and Mehta

Officers: Managing Director  
Head of Regeneration and Development  
Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services  
Legal and Democratic Section Head  
Corporate and External Communications Section Head  
Economic Development Manager  
Partnerships and Performance Section Head  
Corporate, Leisure and Community Client Section Head  
Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks & Streets)  
Mayor's Political Assistant  
Democratic Services Manager

### **11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Mark Watkin.

### **12 DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST (IF ANY)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

### **13 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2015 were submitted and signed.

### **14 CONDUCT OF MEETING**

Councillor Bell spoke on behalf of the Labour Group and Councillor Mehta spoke on behalf of the Conservative Group at this meeting. Councillor Khan was invited to speak at item 5 on the agenda.

### **15 A REVIEW OF THE CEMETERY SERVICE IN WATFORD**

A report was received from the Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks and Streets). A review of Watford's cemetery service had been carried out in order to understand the present service, highlight current challenges and provide direction on future potential changes. The review was supported by the Institute of Crematorium and Cemetery Management

(ICCM). Engagement had also taken place with a range of stakeholders to provide them with an opportunity to feedback on the current service and share their views on future provision. As a result of the review further work was required to develop a Cemetery Strategy and action plan to address the areas identified.

The Mayor highlighted that a petition had been received for this item and a full debate had taken place at the Council meeting on 24 June 2015. During the debate at Council the cemetery review was referred to and now Cabinet had the result of the review at the meeting. The Mayor invited Councillor Khan as the lead petitioner and councillor who had moved the motion at the Council meeting to come to the table to be part of the discussion of the item.

The Mayor continued that the issue of the cemetery service had been a concern for a while and it was important not just to address one aspect of the service but to consider all the issues which were identified. The review should establish the service for the next decade.

Councillor Scudder commented that the review had begun some time ago and had been influenced by a report from the ICCM on the service. A number of issues had been identified: provision of a weekend and bank holiday service; limited space at the cemeteries; reviewing the opening hours and staffing; and regulations relating to memorials. As a result there were a number of recommendations in the report before Cabinet.

In relation to weekend and bank holiday services Councillor Scudder explained that there was a recommendation for the council to pursue working with the Garden of Peace organisation who currently carried out this service for St Albans City and District Council. With regards to the decreasing amount of burial space, Councillor Scudder pointed out that provision of this service was not a statutory requirement but something that the council had chosen to provide. There was a proposal in the report to look at possibly restricting burials to Watford residents only, however, there needed to be some flexibility around this.

Councillor Scudder continued that there would be a review of opening hours and the resilience of the service and how this could be addressed. Finally the regularisation of memorials with regards to size limits and specifications including how they could be placed in the ground had been brought in following accidents due to unstable memorials in other areas of the country.

Councillor Bell thought it was a positive report and thanked officers. Councillor Khan expressed that the direction of the council was very positive and offered his time to officers to work on the right way forward. Councillor Khan commented that with regards to the issue of space running out it was important that this was resolved as soon as possible.

The Mayor explained that the council would be actively pursuing the Garden of Peace option. Councillor Khan responded that he had already spoken to

St Albans Council and that the organisation also provided the service to Luton Council.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head explained that consultation had taken place in face to face focus groups which had helped to crystallise the issues which had been identified in the ICCM report. A useful meeting had also taken place with a group from the Muslim community which had helped to clarify issues. There had been positive feedback on the service generally for example the upkeep of North Watford Cemetery. A meeting had also taken place with representatives from the gypsy and traveller community to whom the memorial issue was very important. The Gardens of Peace option had been identified through meetings with the Muslim community.

In response to a question from Councillor Khan, The Head of Corporate and Client Services explained that the timeframe would involve meeting with Gardens of Peace within the next few weeks to discuss how they would run a service, costs etc. Future timescales would depend on these initial discussions and whether any issues emerged.

The Mayor proposed an amendment to recommendation 2.2 to add that delegation be agreed to the Head of Service in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to move forward with the Garden of Peace option.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services outlined that there would now be work done on the strategy document which would come back to Cabinet in February with an action plan and timetable. Included in the action plan would be options to increase the current provision for example woodland burials in North Watford Cemetery and reuse of historical sites at Vicarage Road cemetery.

Cabinet AGREED the recommendations subject to the change in 2.2

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

1. Note the contents of the ICCM Cemetery Report (Appendix I) and the range of issues raised during engagement with local stakeholders (Appendix II) and that the majority of these would be taken forward in a Cemetery Strategy and detailed action plan but with the issues identified in 2, 3, 4 and 5 below to be acted on immediately.
2. Note the review findings in relation to introducing a weekend and bank holiday (to be defined) burial service for those residents and community groups who require burials to be carried out as soon as possible after death for religious or cultural reasons and agree to pursue the option of working with the Garden of Peace charity to provide this service. Agree to delegate to the Head of Service in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to

move forward with this option. See 3.3.1 to 3.3.4.

3. Note the findings of the review in relation to the decreasing amount of burial space available at North Watford Cemetery and agree that a policy be explored which limits burials to Watford residents only but that will also allow for some degree of flexibility and officer discretion in certain circumstances (to be defined). The same policy to also provide details of other options which could be explored to maximise remaining burial space for the benefit of Watford residents. A report detailing this policy, including any financial implications, to be brought to Cabinet for final approval. See 3.3.5 to 3.3.7.
4. Note the findings of the review concerning the need to standardise the dimensions of new memorials erected within Watford cemeteries and agree the recommendation in 3.3.8 on the dimensions of memorials. This to be approved and implemented immediately. A full review of the cemetery regulations and development of any appropriate enforcement policy would also be undertaken. Cabinet is asked to agree the delegation to the Head of Service in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to approve changes to the regulations and policy.
5. Note the review findings regarding the need to improve the resilience of the cemetery service and allow for more customer focused office hours by reviewing staff cover and agree to further consultation being undertaken. See 3.3.9.

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## **VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK 2016-2019**

A report was received from the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services regarding the council's commissioning framework. The framework was a mechanism that set out priorities for a range of leisure and community services to be delivered by commissioned voluntary and third sector organisations between 2016-2019 on behalf of the council. The current commissioning framework was due to expire on 31 March 2016.

Councillor Scudder introduced the report and commented that the voluntary sector was very key and that it was important to get the framework right. The review of the framework was on a three-year cycle and the current review had been informed by the Community Centres Scrutiny Task Group along with consultation with groups across the town. There would be continuation of the current situation regarding supporting community centres though some timeframes had changed. The council continued to work with and support major partners within the town such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Watford and Three Rivers Trust. The small grants programme was also continuing and at present there was no reason to reduce the budget.

The Mayor commented that in the past the council had had difficult issues to resolve on historic funding of some groups. There had been a change in

priorities for the council and a decrease in budget available which meant some difficult decisions were taken. However, of all the groups that the council had stopped funding there was only one who had not continued. The others were surviving and thriving and at a recent meeting with the Chief Executive of Watford and Three Rivers Trust it was reported that charities had become more inventive and autonomous in the current climate.

Councillor Bell drew attention to the section of the report on the Meriden Community Centre and noted that Watford FC Trust had been asked to submit a business plan regarding becoming self sustaining from 2019. Councillor Bell was concerned there was no deadline given for the business plan and questioned the level of commitment from the Watford FC Trust.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services responded that Watford FC Trust had been successful in securing some funding from Sport England, the Football Association, Watford Community Housing Trust, Watford Borough Council and some smaller charities. However, there still remained a gap between the cost of refurbishment and the funds raised so far. Also Sport England had insisted that their £500,000 funding would only be released if the Trust was successful in obtaining funding for the complete project from other streams. The Trust would hear about another funding bid in November. The council's legal service was progressing the actions required in support of the Sport England and Football Association bids. Once the funding streams had been resolved and they were able to bring back staff and focus on new service delivery at the community centre then the Trust would be asked to provide a business plan on how it would become self sustaining. In order to give them stability in the meantime the council would provide funding for up to three years. There would be milestones set before the 1 April 2016 framework was implemented.

The Mayor commented that the council sustained other centres. Although the Meriden Community Centre had been disappointing they would find a way to make it work and there were other centres such as Holywell, Orbital and Leavesden Green which were thriving.

Councillor Bell also commented on the proposal in the report that the CAB would be used to give generic advice. He was concerned that the CAB struggled to get sufficient staff and asked whether if CAB did not have the capacity currently would the council be prepared to give them further funding.

The Mayor responded that the issue was about capacity not funding. The funding which the CAB was given went into running their buildings and paying employed staff. The CAB was limited by the number of volunteer advisers who were asked for a large commitment in terms of undertaking extensive training and giving up a significant amount of their time. The CAB addressed the issues of all residents which was reflected in their figures as well as in emerging trends. Their annual report would be expected in November which would provide further detailed figures. Councillor Scudder commented that how the CAB worked had changed in recent years on a

national scale and their service was focussed on signposting people and providing telephone advice in order to help more people.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services explained that the next stage of the Commissioning Framework would be to look at the organisations' performance and funding. It would be clear what was expected of the organisations and the council was willing to have some flexibility around how funding was deployed. If an issue did emerge then it would be subject to the Council's growth bid process or helping to direct the organisations to other sources of funding.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework 2016-2019 priorities and areas of focus as identified in Section 3.6 of the report.
2. Delegate responsibility to the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to implement the next steps and key milestones as described in Section 3.7 to ensure services were in place from 1 April 2016 subject to council approval of the Budget 2016/17.

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## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

The Cabinet received a report on the Economic Development Strategy. The Strategy had been revised and contained an Action Plan to 2018. The objective of the Economic Development Strategy was to maintain, develop and grow the town's economic development activity. The strategy was developed using evidence from the council and also third party stakeholders. It was also informed by a companion document, the Watford Economic Growth and Delivery Assessment.

Councillor Sharpe introduced the report and commented on the amount of work which had been put in by officers. Looking back at the strategy for 2010-2015 demonstrated why it was important that local authorities did not leave economic development to the private sector. Local authorities had a role in driving forwards and making things happen. It made a difference to whether a town attracted jobs or stagnated. It was better for the council to be in a position where it was managing success rather than decline.

Councillor Sharpe continued that there were five different strands to the report but a key focus was on sustainable development. The transport theme within the strategy had been branded as transport and digital connectivity. A big success for the area had been to get the funding for the Metropolitan line extension. This had involved a commitment from the district council by lobbying government and putting in the council's own resources which may have influenced the final outcome. The Town Centre wi-fi and refurbishment of the

car parks made the town attractive to businesses. The Economic Development Strategy made sure all the sections of the community would benefit and going forward the Business Improvement District if successful would be the product of hard work to bring the business community together.

The Mayor thanked officers and commented on the issue of employability and skills and the challenge of identifying where further skills were needed. She wanted the focus to be on jobs to be a skilled employable town in order to attract people.

The Economic Development Manager outlined that consultation had taken place with stakeholders. He described how Watford had an enviable position and had been able to grow to the benefit of its residents. However, the town was running out of space and a key theme of 'balance' ran throughout the strategy. With regards to skills, as the national economy improved employers were experiencing difficulties in getting the right skills to meet demand. A future aim was to improve Watford's standing as an education hub by working with West Herts College. European Union funding had been delegated to Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) level and Hertfordshire had received €60m. Watford had been working closely with the LEP and would use a skills board to harness some of the funding.

Councillor Bell thanked officers for the report and commented on business start ups and why although the number of start ups was above average the number which survived for more than five years was below average and whether there was anything that could be done about this.

The Economic Development Manager responded that although there were a large number of start up companies by their nature innovative companies did not always work out. The council was working with Wenta and in 2010 funded a business incubator which had a 90% success rate with small businesses. There was an action plan in the strategy to further strengthen Wenta.

In response to a question from Councillor Bell regarding retaining businesses in the town the Mayor commented that feedback from Wenta had been that rates and rents were high in Watford. The level of business rates was set nationally. The state of the units within the town was also an issue and the Council had thought about a policy regarding key buildings to give a short period of rate relief. However, the council would have to be clear about why it was doing this for a particular business.

The Head of Regeneration and Development responded to Councillor Bell's question about why St Albans Road was not mentioned in the strategy by highlighting Councillor Khan's proposal for a scrutiny task group on this area including a business questionnaire to find out their issues. She also described the Project Initiation Document which had been received for Watford Junction and how the proposed significant investment could have a large impact on the area.

The Mayor also responded that the council had protected the main area of shops on St Albans Road from being made into residential units but there was an issue around how many shops a town could sustain. The Mayor had undertaken a survey of businesses in the area and the main issues were parking and business rates, however, the businesses also had different ideas about what would work. The previous St Albans Road study had introduced the current parking arrangements.

Councillor Johnson welcomed the report and reiterated the need for balance and for housing.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. Note the progress made against the 2010 Action Plan
2. Agree the 2015-2020 Economic Development Strategy
3. Agree the 2015-2018 Action Plan.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 7.55 pm