

## **CABINET**

**16 January 2017**

Present: Mayor (Chair)

Councillors P Taylor, K Collett, S Johnson, I Sharpe and  
M Watkin

Also present: Councillor Bell (minute numbers 59-66)  
Mr Stuart Taylor, petitioner

Officers: Managing Director  
Deputy Managing Director - Place Shaping and Corporate  
Performance  
Shared Director of Finance  
Legal and Democratic Section Head  
Planning Policy Section Head  
Finance Business Partner (Projects)  
Energy & Renewal Surveyor  
Democratic Services Manager

### **59 Apologies for Absence**

No apologies were received.

### **60 Disclosure of Interest (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

The Legal and Democratic Section Head explained that it was a requirement that there was a recorded vote on the budget. Members of Cabinet were also granted a dispensation in order to discuss the budget as all members had a pecuniary interest in that item.

### **61 Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2016 were submitted and signed.

62            **Conduct of meeting**

Councillor Bell spoke on behalf of the Labour group.

63            **Petition**

Cabinet received a petition regarding parking in Rose Gardens. Mr Stuart Taylor attended to present the petition to Cabinet. At the time of publication of the agenda the petition contained 37 signatures.

The Mayor thanked Mr Taylor for attending the Cabinet meeting.

Mr Taylor explained he had been a resident in Rose Gardens since 1999. He was a parent of two children, one of whom attended Laurance Haines School. There was a continuing parking issue when parents were dropping children off and picking them up from the school. Mr Taylor had written to the school and the parking shop, however, the problem was escalating. There would also be a new underground station opening close to Rose Gardens. Mr Taylor had started the petition after talking to residents about the problems they were experiencing, such as motorists parking on residents' gardens and over dropped kerbs. The local newspaper was interested and had published a picture of Mr Taylor's partner and children. The Cassiobury estate had parking restrictions and Rickmansworth Road had a restriction to stop cars turning left at a certain time of the day. Mr Taylor was proposing that there should be no parking permitted for 1 hour at 8-9am and 3-4pm for any residents including permit holders.

The Mayor responded that there were parking issues around schools across Watford. Within current parking regulations there was a 10 minute grace period which could be time for a parent to drop off their child and made parking enforcement difficult. With regards to the opening of the new station, the Mayor agreed to look at protection for residents around both the new stations. The Mayor explained that there were different parking restrictions across the Town as each situation would be looked at on its own merits; there was not a 'one size fits all' approach. With regards to Rose Gardens the council needed to look at who was parking there and take account of the potential commuters and then make proposals.

Councillor Bell thanked Mr Taylor for bringing the petition. He agreed there was a particular problem with Rose Gardens and that there would need to be a survey carried out. With a lack of school places within the Borough there were more parents who lived further away from the school. A year ago 80-85% of children were travelling to school on foot as they lived locally but now more parents were driving to school as they lived further away.

RESOLVED - Cabinet asks officers to look into the issues experienced by Rose Gardens residents and to also take into account the impact of the future Metropolitan Line Extension station.

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### **Financial Planning**

A report was received from the Shared Director of Finance which asked Cabinet to consider the service level expenditure, funding and council tax levels for the medium term 2017/18 to 2019/20 including consideration of the use of reserves and balances.

The report had also been considered at the Budget Panel meeting on 10 January and the minutes were circulated at the meeting.

The Mayor introduced the item and thanked Budget Panel for their feedback. The key purpose of Budget Panel was to scrutinise the sound position of the finances. It was an important role of the opposition to see whether the budget was sound and if the council had good financial health. The result from Budget Panel's discussion would suggest they had no issue with the building of the budget.

Councillor Watkin explained that the budget was fairly neutral as it was not making radical changes but instead was announcing a change to how the council would have to run its finances in the future as the government removed the Revenue Settlement Grant (RSG). The council had to raise income or reduce costs in order to find £1m. This budget was about launching the council to be ready to do this; it would be a year for planning and preparation. The key items in the budget were about prudence and being in good shape for the future.

Councillor Watkin continued that for council tax there was a proposed increase of £5 or 2% which equated to 10p per week for a band D property. Since the last council tax increase the Retail Price Index had increased by 19%. There would continue to be council tax support for those disadvantaged members of the community. There were small changes on fees and charges which would be reflecting inflation. The key decision limit would increase to £250,000 in order to take account of increasing commercialisation and the need to react quickly to changing circumstances.

The Shared Director of Finance explained that there were other projects which had not yet been included within the budget such as further phases around the Watford Health Campus and more work on the joint venture with Watford Community Housing Trust. Both of these would bring income for the council in the future.

The Mayor commented that, compared to many councils, Watford Borough Council was in a good place and had been working towards not relying on a grant from the government for many years. There would be future uncertainty, particularly over business rates. However, members could reassure residents that the budget was safe, prudent and entrepreneurial. The council was therefore in a good position to meet the challenges ahead. It would also be possible to continue with free fireworks and paddling pools which brought the community together.

In response to a question from Councillor Bell regarding risk, the Shared Director of Finance explained that the council would need to ensure that commercial income and income from property investments would continue and also to monitor dividends from Watford Health Campus. The Mayor continued that it was important that the council continued to hold some funds in reserves. Another risk was the new homes bonus and uncertainty over what the government would choose to do with this in the future. There was an assumption by the government that councils would increase council tax as a result of the removal of the RSG.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the votes were recorded as follows –

Those in favour

Mayor Thornhill, Councillors Collett, Johnson, Sharpe, Taylor and Watkin

The resolutions as set out in the report were CARRIED by 6 votes to 0

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet:

1. Delegates 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.

That Cabinet recommends to Council:

That Council:

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 2017/18 is 32,062.1 as outlined in the report.

2. Approves the continuation of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2017/18. This will then be subject to a review which will be carried out in 2017/18 with the intention of implementing a new scheme from 2018/19 onwards.
3. Approves the estimate of surplus and deficit position on the Collection Fund.
4. Approves the budget as laid out in the report, including:
  - the base budget estimates
  - The growth and savings
  - The Capital Investment Programme 2016-2020
5. Approves the schedule of fees and charges.
6. Approves the strategy for flexible use of capital receipts.
7. Approves an increase in the annual Council Tax for a Band D property of £5.00 (2.00%) in 2017/18. This percentage increase will apply to all other bands.
8. Approves the increase of the Council's Key Decision Limit to £0.25 million with immediate effect.
9. Approves the key risks identified and has regard to the advice provided by the Director of Finance on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves.
10. Notes the indicative budgets for 2018/19 and 2019/20, the Council's future spending plans which are supported by internal borrowing (see para 6.4 onwards of the main report) utilising the Council's reserves and cash balances.
11. Approves the Treasury Management Strategy for 2017/18.

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### **Appointment to Watford Health Campus Partnership LLP Partnership Board**

Cabinet received the report of the Head of Democracy and Governance regarding appointing the Deputy Managing Director, Place Shaping and Corporate Performance to the Partnership Board of the Watford Health Campus LLP. Following the departure of the Head of Regeneration and Development there was a vacancy on the Partnership Board so the Deputy Managing Director would be the third Council representative on the Board.

The Mayor introduced the report and welcomed the Deputy Managing Director to the Cabinet meeting.

RESOLVED -

1. That Nick Fenwick be appointed as the third Council representative on the Partnership Board of the Watford Health Campus Partnership LLP.
2. That the Watford Health Campus Partnership LLP be informed of the appointment.

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### **Watford's Monitoring Report 2016**

A report was received from the Planning Policy Section Head on the Authority's Monitoring Report which was produced annually to outline the progress made on the local plan timetable and assess the effectiveness of planning policies against various targets to see whether the local plan objectives were being achieved. Part of the work included mandatory information in accordance with current planning regulations.

The Mayor explained that it was important for the council to measure demographic change in order to know how Watford's population was changing and therefore what services to provide. The Local Plan 2 would also need to take account of changes within the town.

Councillor Sharpe commented that although there was no legal requirement for the report to come to Cabinet it was felt that the very thorough report should have a wider exposure and it was an opportunity for Cabinet to consider the purpose of the report. It also allowed Cabinet to see whether planning policies were being implemented successfully, whether changes were needed and to have a wider contemplation of planning situation in Watford. Planning was important to building a successful environment and ensuring areas were successful. The council was required to work to a national framework and expected to provide for housing and employment growth. It was therefore necessary to adapt and change or decline and decay. To be a successful town and manage that success. The council was ahead of housing completion targets and a dip in housing numbers this year had been offset by over achievement in other years. There was continued progress on economic development and creating jobs.

Councillor Sharpe continued that the current government was driving towards a growth agenda without investing in infrastructure. The council had invested in infrastructure by building Thomas Sawyer Way which was key to maintaining the hospital. The council would also continue to press towards the Metropolitan

Line Extension in order to expand the rail network and tackle traffic congestion. Nationally there had been a period where urban areas were declining in favour of out of town shopping; it was now the case that urban areas had rallied but looking to the future it would be necessary to fight to get the infrastructure needed to support this.

Cabinet further discussed the report and recognised challenges such as the removal of subsidies for social housing and a struggling infrastructure. However, these were also national issues and the council was trying to work to address them. Within the town there was only one area in Central Ward which was on the national deprivation ranking.

The Planning Policy Section Head commented that a key challenge was affordable housing as small houses had seen a £100,000 increase in property prices since early 2014. He drew to Cabinet's attention that nearly all the development in the town had been on previously developed land (brownfield sites) so the town was looking after its green spaces.

Cabinet thanked officers for the report.

RESOLVED -

That Cabinet notes the information provided by the AMR 2016.

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### **Procurement of Housing Stock Modelling Exercise - exemption to contract procedures**

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Community and Customer Services regarding an exemption to contract procedures for the procurement of Housing Stock Modelling Exercise. There was a requirement for local authorities to understand the condition of their housing stock (all tenures) and to develop strategies to address issues of concern.

Councillor Johnson introduced the report and explained that the council was going for a different model since the last time the exercise was carried out in 2009. Using The Building Research Establishment (BRE) would mean that instead of the usual survey of around 800 households, this time would be about being smarter with data collection using sources such as the Ordnance Survey in a stock modelling service. It would also help to identify Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO). The results of the survey would be more reliable data but would cost less with BRE than the previous survey had in 2009.

The Energy and Housing Renewal Surveyor explained that the exercise would be about helping us to understand what housing stock the town had, and how much

it had changed in 8/9 years. This would give huge potential for future strategies on fuel poverty and housing efficiency and would help the council to attract funding.

In response to a question from the Mayor, the Deputy Managing Director agreed to look into whether it would be possible to track changes made to properties through permitted development rights e.g., offices into residential. He would circulate any information to members.

RESOLVED -

1. That Cabinet notes the approved exemption to the Council's Procurement Procedures in relation to the appointment of the BRE to carry out the specialist stock modelling exercise.
2. That the Deputy Managing Director circulates information to members on whether it was possible to track changes to properties made under permitted development rights.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 7.50 pm