

COUNCIL

11 July 2017

Present: Councillor J Dhindsa (Chairman)
The Mayor (Dorothy Thornhill)
Councillors D Barks, S Bashir, N Bell, S Bolton, S Cavinder,
K Collett, J Connal, K Crout, A Dychton, J Fahmy, A Grimston,
K Hastrick, M Hofman, P Jeffree, J Johnson, S Johnson, P Kent,
Ahsan Khan, Asif Khan, R Laird, R Martins, B Mauthoor, M Mills,
M Parker, G Saffery, D Scudder, N Shah, I Sharpe, R Smith,
N Steele, P Taylor, M Turmaine, D Walford, M Watkin and
T Williams

Also present: Freemen of the Borough, Mavis Tyrwhitt and Norman
Tyrwhitt
Mrs Pearse, local resident

Officers: Managing Director
Deputy Managing Director and Director of Place Shaping and
Corporate Performance
Principal Solicitor
Democratic Services Manager
Mayor's Political Assistant
Member Development and Civic Officer
Assistant Communications and Engagement Officer
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

17 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

18 Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures of interest.

19 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2017 were submitted and signed.

Official Announcements

Former Councillor Ruth Atkin

The Chairman informed council of the passing of former councillor Ruth Atkin on 20 June. He was sure that everyone's thoughts were with her family at this time.

Big Events

The Chairman reminded Council that the Big Screen on the Beach would start on 28 July and continued until 28 August.

Mayor's Report

A report of the Mayor had been circulated with the agenda.

The Chairman invited Members to indicate whether they wished to ask a question of the Mayor. Councillors Bashir, Connal, Bell, Turmaine, Kent and Mills indicated that they wished to ask questions.

- a) Councillor Bashir said that it was good to see the Mayor back in the chamber following her recent hospital treatment. He stated that he had noted there was something missing in the Mayor's report. There was no update on the Metropolitan Line Extension. Everyone in the chamber agreed that the extension had to go ahead in order to unleash the economic prospects for the town. He commented that he was a member of the planning committee that had recently agreed to a massive regeneration project in Ascot Road and at Watford Riverwell. Both units had an underlying premise, namely that the infrastructure had to be in place for those projects to go forward. He asked the Mayor to give assurances and an update on the situation with regards to the Metropolitan Line Extension, particularly following comments by the previous Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, and Chris Grayling MP.

The Mayor advised that there had been no further information to add since her last report. The council was clear that there was an agreement with the Minister for Transport, Chris Grayling MP, through to the Watford MP, the council's partners including the County Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership. Transport for London agreed to take on some of the funding and absorb any uplift in costs. The London Mayoral election then took place and a Labour Mayor was returned. Some of the previous agreements between the Mayor's office and the Minister for Transport were withdrawn. She said that the council had sought legal opinion about the Mayor of London being able to overturn a decision made by the previous

Mayor. He was able to overturn previous mayoral directions. She felt Watford was in the middle of a political row. The Mayor of London's plan supported suburban lines but not the Metropolitan Line Extension. However she felt that at heart he would support the extension scheme.

The Mayor informed Council that she had not given up. The Metropolitan Line Extension was too good a scheme which had cross party agreement. Many businesses had invested millions in Watford on the back of this scheme going ahead. She understood that the Watford MP was meeting with someone from the Treasury. The council would continue working through its formal routes; working with officers from Transport for London to try and progress the scheme. She was sure that when there was good news everyone would share it.

- b) Councillor Connal said that Watford was a Fairtrade Town. She had noticed that Sainsbury's was not providing as many Fairtrade products. Many items had the sign 'fairly traded'. She asked the Mayor to join her in telling people that 'fairly traded is not Fairtrade'.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Connal. She felt that 'fairly traded is not Fairtrade' was a good slogan. Watford was one of the first Fairtrade Towns in the country. It was disappointing that a company like Sainsbury's was trying to pull back from the Fairtrade ethos. She felt that there was a campaign to be set up or at the very least they should be written to and told that they were misleading people.

- c) Councillor Bell welcomed the Mayor back and in better health. He referred to the item about breaking ground at the new Muslim Youth Centre. He had wanted to ask a question at Cabinet but had another meeting he needed to attend. He had also raised it with the Managing Director. He asked the Mayor about the £150,000 loan agreed at Cabinet. He was unsure whether the Managing Director or Head of Democracy and Governance had had a second thought on this matter as one of the members of the Trustee Board was a leading member of the local Liberal Democrats. Being aware of how influential he was with the Liberal Democrats, Councillor Bell felt that members may have thought twice about taking this decision at Cabinet. In addition he asked whether the Managing Director or Head of Democracy and Governance raised this matter with the Mayor.

The Mayor replied that she was not sure of Councillor Bell's problem. She was aware that people voted in different ways and were members of political parties, from every community group across the town. She did not ask all the committee members who they voted for in elections.

The Mayor said that she was interested that he had raised this matter now. The project had been ongoing for 25 years. It had been a Labour-led project; councillors had been involved in it. It had been tied to the Single Regeneration Budget, which had funded feasibility studies. However the project had not taken place.

The Mayor stated she did not understand what Councillor Bell meant about 'influence'. She was proud that a group of Watford people were able to raise £1 million to provide a community facility to cater for their needs. She said the councillor should be ashamed for not supporting them.

The Managing Director informed Council that at the start of Cabinet, members were required to declare any personal, pecuniary or prejudicial interests. This was a self-determination process. Both he and the Head of Democracy and Governance did not consider the decision had been prejudiced by outside connections.

- d) Councillor Turmaine said that he wished to talk about Harwoods Rec. He asked for an update on efforts to redeploy staff who had worked in the supervised play area prior to the changes.

The Mayor responded that as far as she was aware the process had been carried out. There were some jobs available for redeployment and some of the staff applied. This was the normal process for redundancy situations. Staff were supported with help for interviews and given training. Staff had access to a lot of support from Human Resources (HR), if they wished to take it. No employer was able to guarantee someone another job within their organisation. The Council followed the proper employment practices and helped staff to move on to other employment.

Councillor Collett, Portfolio Holder for Community, confirmed that some staff had been redeployed to other jobs within the council. They had been given support by HR. Some chose not to seek redeployment within the council.

- e) Councillor Kent referred to the tragic events at Grenfell Tower. He asked the Mayor to explain what actions had been taken to prevent a similar incident happening in Watford in the future.

The Mayor said that she wished to state and to have it recorded on behalf of the council, its regret and sympathy for those who had lost their lives, their families and friends. Nothing could prepare anyone for the horrors

that were seen and it was important to make sure that everything was done to ensure it did not happen in Watford.

The Mayor advised that she had taken immediate action to ensure Watford residents were not at risk. She had written to all the housing associations across the town; the fire brigade's station commanders; chief inspectors and the Chief Executive at the County Council. She had asked that every possible precaution had been taken and had received assurances. She hoped that everyone would agree that the response from Watford Community Housing Trust had been swift and thorough. Tenants had contacted her to say they were reassured. Safety checks were carried out regularly and additional checks had taken place since the fire. The annual fire assessment had taken place week commencing 19 June, as normal. There had been no major issues. Neither of the tower blocks had cladding. She advised members that the fire brigade used the Meriden high rise blocks for practices. A public meeting had been held with the fire service to reassure residents. The Trust was actively considering the installation of sprinklers.

The Mayor stated that the Chief Fire Officer had confirmed that the local resilience plans were robust and prepared for major incidents. Practices regularly took place. The fire brigade continued to carry out their usual visits and providing more reassurance.

The Mayor commented that she had been concerned about the 'stay put' policy. Personally she would want to get out of the building. She had been assured that it was still the correct advice. It had worked well in a recent fire in Abbey View, where the fire had been contained and extinguished.

The Mayor added that the council had made sure all its own operational buildings had been assessed. Risk assessments were up to date. The Town Hall complex's assessment had just been reviewed.

The Mayor then referred to the issue of planning applications for tall buildings and felt this would be better covered during the debate on the motions. However, she did advise that the planning system should not duplicate another statutory regime, for example building regulations. Notwithstanding that there had been concerns about the Ascot Road application. She understood that the committee members had been reassured that the fire safety for the tower was considered to be of a very high standard. This would be reviewed further by building control. The council needed to wait to see the 'lessons to be learned' from the public inquiry but it would do all it could to protect its residents.

- f) Councillor Mills said she wished to ask about Harwoods Adventure Playground. She had visited the site after it had opened and had been very impressed. However she was disappointed to see a massive hole in the fence, which she felt was very dangerous as it was by the main road. A few days later she was advised that temporary fencing had been placed over it. She asked for an update on the situation.

Councillor Collett responded that she had walked about the whole site and had noticed the opening. It was located near to the picnic benches and where children played ball. She immediately went to the Parks and Open Spaces Section Head and Head of Community and Environmental Services and asked them to get it repaired straight away. She was aware they were working on it. The open gate provided access to the contractor when they needed to gain entry to cut the grass. She had stressed to the officers that the most important thing was to protect the children. The Section Head was dealing with the issue. She had also told him that the temporary cover was not good enough. She thanked Councillor Mills for raising the matter.

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

No questions had been received.

23 Questions by Members of the Public under Council Procedure Rule 11.0

A question had been received from Mrs Pearse, which was included on the agenda.

Mrs Pearse asked what additional annual revenue the council expected to receive by charging for green bins as outlined in the summer 2017 About Watford magazine.

Councillor Taylor, Portfolio Holder for Client Services, thanked Mrs and Mr Pearse for coming to the meeting and writing in with the question. He advised that it had been calculated that it would raise £30,000 per annum. He reminded council that everyone was entitled to one green lidded bin and there would be no charge. The scheme would only affect those people who had more than one green bin. He was aware of one household which had 11 green bins. The question was whether the council should subsidise those with many green bins when the council's finances were under great pressure.

The Chairman invited Mrs Pearse to pose a supplementary question if she wished to do so.

Mrs Pearse referred to the article in About Watford. She said that the majority of Watford residents would consider the most vital service the council provided was a clean environment and the disposal of general and recyclable waste. Council Tax was paid to provide this service. She noted the 'Love Food Hate Waste' article. It mentioned that less waste going to landfill was better for the environment. People who recycled their waste were saving the council money. The article had said that 670 tonnes of green waste had been collected in two months. Based on a disposal rate of £86 per tonne, this would save the council £58,000 for two months or £350,000 for the year. She considered this to be a saving to the council. Those residents who recycled the most saved the council money; they were now to be charged an additional green bin tax.

Mrs Pearse said her supplementary question was to ask what additional tonnage the council anticipated would go to landfill as a consequence of this environmentally damaging and short-sighted decision to tax additional green bins.

Councillor Taylor thanked Mrs Pearse for her additional question. He advised that Watford Borough Council was the only Hertfordshire local authority that still provided a weekly waste and recycling collection. He considered it to be an excellent service. Half of Hertfordshire's authorities charged for all green waste collection, including Three Rivers District Council. He said that tough decisions had to be made and the council had to consider various options, including whether to reduce the frequency of collections or charge those who had many green bins. When looking at other authorities, for example Three Rivers, the take up had been much higher than officers had anticipated. People had continued to use the service as it was convenient and represented good value for money. The decision had not been taken lightly. He felt that people should be proud of the fact that Watford was the only Hertfordshire council which still provided weekly recycling and waste collections. Also Watford was one of half of Hertfordshire's authorities who provided a free green waste collection. This was a service the council was not legally required to provide to residents.

24 **Petitions presented under Council Procedure Rule 12.0**

No petitions had been received.

25 **Business especially brought forward by the Chairman or the Head of Paid Service which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered as a matter of urgency.**

There was no urgent business.

26 **Appointment to West Herts Crematorium Scrutiny Committee**

Council received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer asking members to agree the appointment to the West Herts Crematorium Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED –

that Councillor Rabi Martins be appointed to the West Herts Crematorium Scrutiny Committee.

27 **Neighbourhood Forum Annual Report 2016/17**

Council received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer which included the Neighbourhood Forum Annual Reports for all 12 wards.

RESOLVED –

that the Neighbourhood Forum Annual Reports 2016/17 be noted.

28 **Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Amendment**

Council received a report of the Head of Revenues and Benefit setting out a request to disregard any charitable payments when calculating a resident's entitlement to local council tax reduction.

RESOLVED –

1. that Watford Borough Council uses its ability under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to fully disregard any amount received by a resident in receipt of Local Council Tax Reduction.
2. that any future trusts and charitable payments made following a terrorist attack or major catastrophe are disregarded in full.

29 **Motions submitted under Council Procedure Rule 13.0**

Council was informed that four motions had been received, two of which were on a similar subject.

Motion 1

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Mark Hofman and seconded by Councillor Asif Khan

“Council notes:

That on Friday 16th June, Herts Valleys CCG informed families across Watford that they would no longer be funding its contribution of £600k to run Nascot Lawn Children’s Respite Service. Consequently Nascot Lawn will be forced to close on 31st October 2017.

Council further notes:

That Nascot Lawn Respite Centre provides regular overnight respite and care for a community of 60-80 children and young adults with severe learning and physical disabilities with additional complex medical needs. A day care service for children under 5 is also provided.

That Nascot Lawn is the only CCG funded respite centre in Hertfordshire, operated by Hertfordshire Community Trust.

That Nascot Lawn allows parents and carers to take a much needed break, confident in the knowledge that their child is receiving the highest standard of care by familiar staff.

That the CCG has been formally placed in ‘financial turnaround’ by NHS England and £45m cuts to health and care provisions must be made.

Council believes:

- That removing services at Nascot Lawn will have a devastating effect on the families who are most in need of support, and that the CCG should reconsider their decision.
- That providing support for the most vulnerable children in our society is a basic function of a health and care system, and that withdrawing this service will have a disproportionately negative impact on those who need access to respite care the most.
- That the £45m cuts forced on the CCG by the Government are the reason for this decision.
- That the £600k saving that the Herts Valleys CCG will achieve will be dwarfed by the additional costs incurred by the County Council in providing replacement services for these families and young people.
- That the 31st October 2017 deadline for closure is unrealistically too short to enable the County Council to establish alternative provision for these families and young people within Watford.
- That as it has a legal responsibility to support these children that the County Council uses £600k of its recent £3m underspend of funds to

ensure the continuing operation of Nascot Lawn for a further year to enable it to conduct a full review of all such services across the county.

Council therefore resolves:

That the Mayor as a matter of urgency writes to the Chief Executive of the Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group and the Chief Executive of Hertfordshire County Council to:

- Inform the CCG that this council strongly opposes the closure of the Nascot Lawn respite centre.
- Ask that HVCCG and Herts County Council work together to ensure that Nascot Lawn patients are able to access the appropriate respite facilities for their needs, and that Herts County Council are given the time necessary to find suitable alternatives that provide a high standard of support for the children and families that rely on Nascot Lawn care services in Watford.

Council further resolves

That the Mayor writes to the Secretary of State for Health, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to:

- Inform them that the decision to enforce £45m of cuts on HVCCG is impacting severely on vital front-line services which cater for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in our town and county. These enforced savings, combined with continuing reductions to Hertfordshire County Council's budget have created a situation where it is simply not possible to provide the level of care required to meet the needs of Watford's residents.
- Seek Government support to ensure HVCCG is able to adequately fund health and social care provision in accordance with patient need.
- Ask that in the event of austerity measures being relaxed across the UK, Health and Social Care services are prioritised as areas which require immediate additional funding.

Write to Richard Harrington MP that he:

- Immediately contact the Health Secretary, demanding that CCG be given the funds required to keep Nascot Lawn respite centre open.
- Contacts and write to his fellow conservative MP's in Hertfordshire and call upon them to lobby the Secretary of State for Health and the

Prime Minister to ensure that the centre remains funded and fully open.

- Ensures that all health services are funded properly and that further cuts to vital health care are not made.”

Members debated the motion.

On being put to council the motion was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

Council notes:

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- That removing services at Nascot Lawn will have a devastating effect on the families who are most in need of support, and that the CCG should reconsider their decision.
- That providing support for the most vulnerable children in our society is a basic function of a health and care system, and that withdrawing this service will have a disproportionately negative impact on those who need access to respite care the most.

- That the £45m cuts forced on the CCG by the Government are the reason for this decision.
- That the £600k saving that the Herts Valleys CCG will achieve will be dwarfed by the additional costs incurred by the County Council in providing replacement services for these families and young people.
- That the 31st October 2017 deadline for closure is unrealistically too short to enable the County Council to establish alternative provision for these families and young people within Watford.
- That as it has a legal responsibility to support these children that the County Council uses £600k of its recent £3m underspend of funds to ensure the continuing operation of Nascot Lawn for a further year to enable it to conduct a full review of all such services across the county.

Council therefore resolves:

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Council further resolves

That the Mayor writes to the Secretary of State for Health, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to:

- Inform them that the decision to enforce £45m of cuts on HVCCG is impacting severely on vital front-line services which cater for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in our town and county. These enforced savings, combined with continuing reductions to Hertfordshire County Council's budget have created a situation where it is simply not possible to provide the level of care required to meet the needs of Watford's residents.
- Seek Government support to ensure HVCCG is able to adequately fund health and social care provision in accordance with patient need.

- Ask that in the event of austerity measures being relaxed across the UK, Health and Social Care services are prioritised as areas which require immediate additional funding.

Write to Richard Harrington MP that he:

- Immediately contact the Health Secretary, demanding that CCG be given the funds required to keep Nascot Lawn respite centre open.
- Contacts and write to his fellow conservative MP's in Hertfordshire and call upon them to lobby the Secretary of State for Health and the Prime Minister to ensure that the centre remains funded and fully open.
- Ensures that all health services are funded properly and that further cuts to vital health care are not made.

Motion 2

The following motion was moved by Councillor Ahsan Khan and seconded by Councillor Matt Turmaine

“This council is totally sympathetic to Watford licensed taxi drivers who are worried about the effect of the unprecedented intrusion of cabs in Watford, operated by the American firm Uber, which has recently become embroiled in storm of controversy and complaints both nationally and internationally.

This council recognises that the potential danger to the travelling public of using an Uber cab should not be underestimated. These dangers arise because these vehicles and drivers are not licensed by this Council and therefore not subject to its strict driver and vehicle checks. A passenger has no idea whether the vehicle is roadworthy or that the driver may have serious criminal convictions or is even properly insured.

The council further recognises that the licenced operator and taxi driver pay a significant amount of money to this Council for their driver, vehicle and operator licences and that they deserve their concerns to be addressed, in particular, effective enforcement against taxis which are not licenced by this council and are operating freely in this councils jurisdiction with impunity.

In light of the above, this council resolves that:

- a. Given the widespread concerns and the impact on taxi and private hire services in our area the Council asks the Cabinet Member for licencing to

produce a report for next Council on the issues and options for a way forward on this matter.

b. It writes to Uber requesting it to suspend its operations in Watford until such time that it is granted a licence by this council.

c. It will seek legal opinion on Uber cars ranking in Watford, particularly near Watford Junction and near the town centres effectively plying for hire and seek to prosecute those drivers that do rank in Watford.

d. The Council can reduce the intrusion of those cabs not licensed by it directly, by adopting a policy that its licensing enforcement officers regularly get out on the streets to carry out driver and vehicle checks in conjunction with the police and not let them rank in places like the Sainsbury car park on top of the High Street and near Watford Junction.”

Members debated the motion.

On being put to council the motion was LOST.

Motions 3 and 4

Council received two motions on a similar subject and were related to the fire at Grenfell Tower in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The Chairman stated that the motions would be moved by the respective councillors and then debated together. The council would then vote on each motion separately.

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Nigel Bell and seconded by Councillor Asif Khan

“As a consequence of the terrible tragedy at Grenfell Tower and the safety implications for Watford residents from high rise buildings in the town and any future planning applications we demand an urgent review into the Council’s tall buildings policy.

As Councillors we would be showing a dereliction of duty if we didn’t call for a review and a full safety audit of all high rise buildings in our town as Councils across the Country are now carrying out.

The review should also look at the cladding and maintenance of all the social housing units in the Borough high or low rise in conjunction with all registered social Landlords as well as the implications for any privately owned blocks.”

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Peter Jeffree and seconded by Councillor Iain Sharpe

“In the light of the recent tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, council reiterates the importance of maintaining the safety of buildings in Watford and ensuring that we have effective plans in place to deal with serious emergencies.

Council notes that:

- The Mayor has written to the Chief Executives of Watford Community Housing Trust and Hertfordshire County Council and the Fire Station commanders at Watford and Garston to:
 - Seek assurance that all possible measures to prevent a similar incident occurring in Watford have been taken.
 - Seek assurance that all partners are ready to work together quickly and effectively to respond to the needs of victims and their families and communities should an emergency occur.
 - Ask that authorities carry out visits to tenants in the two WCHT high-rise blocks to speak to concerned residents.
 - Ask whether existing advice to residents should be updated.
- Watford Borough Council is an active partner in Herts Resilience, the county’s emergency response organisation.
- Watford Borough Council regularly tests and reviews emergency planning, and that the council’s plans meet the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

Council commits to ensuring that we take all necessary actions within our powers that arise from the investigations and public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower, with regard to the design, management and use of residential buildings within the borough.

Council resolves to continue working closely with all relevant agencies, including the Fire and Rescue Service, Hertfordshire Constabulary, Hertfordshire County Council, Watford Community Housing Trust and other social and private landlords to ensure the safety of all our residential accommodation.

Council proposes that a scrutiny task group be set up to review existing safety arrangements and to ensure that any emerging conclusions arising from the

Grenfell Tower investigations, that are relevant to Watford, are implemented by the relevant agencies.”

Members debated the motions.

Councillor Sharpe moved that both motions be submitted to the proposed scrutiny task group. This was accepted by Councillor Bell.

On being put to council Councillor Sharpe’s proposal was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

that both motions be forwarded to scrutiny.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm
and finished at 9.55 pm