

COUNCIL

17 October 2017

Present: Councillor J Dhindsa (Chairman)
The Mayor (Dorothy Thornhill)
Councillors D Barks, S Bashir, N Bell, S Cavinder, K Collett,
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, B Mauthoor, M Mills, M Parker, R Martins, 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: Mavis Tyrwhitt and Norman Tyrwhitt, Freemen of the
Borough
Mr John Dowdle, local resident

Officers: Managing Director
Head of Democracy and Governance
Deputy Managing Director and Director of Place Shaping and
Corporate Performance
Shared Director of Finance
Communications and Engagement Section Head
Democratic Services Manager
Mayor's Political Assistant
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

30 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bolton and Connal.

31 Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures of interest.

32 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2017 were submitted and signed.

Official Announcements

County Councillor Robert Gordon and Past Mayor Robert Caton

The Chairman informed council of the passing of County Councillor Robert Gordon, who had also been a Watford councillor and was a past Chairman. He also referred to the passing of Robert Caton in August, who had been Mayor between 1972 and 1973. He was sure that everyone's thoughts were with their families at this time. He asked everyone to join him in a minute's silence.

Councillor Bell and Mayor Thornhill paid tribute to Robert Gordon and Councillor Watkin spoke about Robert Caton.

Audentior Awards

The Chairman thanked everyone who had attended the Audentior Awards. He was pleased to announce that over £1,600 had been raised for his charities, Watford Foodbank and Watford Mencap.

VC paving stone unveiling

The Chairman reminded councillors that they had received an invitation to attend a paving stone unveiling for Victoria Cross recipient Major General George Pearkes on 30 October. He asked councillors to contact the Member Development and Civic Officer if they would be attending.

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 Turmaine, Asif Khan, Smith, Shah and Bashir indicated that they wished to ask questions.

- a) Councillor Turmaine said that he wished to ask the Mayor about the Football Lads Alliance march on 7 October 2017. The organisation was intended to bring together football supporters who could gather together to pay respects to the victims of terror. There are now genuine fears that the English Defence League (EDL), Britain First and other similar organisations were trying to use it to stir up racism and islamophobia, as reported in the media. He asked the Mayor if she would be seeking assurance from Watford Football Club that it would monitor the situation and disassociate itself with this group if the fears were realised.

The Mayor replied that this was a challenging situation. The EDL was a legitimate group and everyone had their views about the group. She assured everyone that nobody from the Liberal Democrat group condoned their views and actions. There was always a worry that an event could be hijacked by them. The council had similar concerns when the Royal Anglian Regiment wanted to march through the town. There had been problems in Luton at their Freedom of Entry march. In Watford, there had been relief when the same problems did not arise. This had been in part due to the positive response of the local Muslim community, the police and local people.

The Mayor added that she had sent a message to the club to discuss it. The police were aware of the issue. It was something everyone was worried about. She was also aware of some speakers at Mosques and how their comments could cause certain people to be upset. Everyone needed to be careful of things that may inflame the situation but it was not possible to deny people their freedom of speech and right to assemble. It was a matter she cared about and got involved in. She thanked the responses of the local community who were always positive.

- b) Councillor Asif Khan referred to a BBC news article about councils giving one-way train tickets to homeless people. He asked the Mayor for assurance that this council did not follow the same practice in Watford.

The Mayor advised that she was unable to give that reassurance. New Hope had done this. When it was done, it had been the most humane and sensible thing to do. If someone was trapped in Watford, homeless and desperate and the only thing stopping them going back home was they would never have the money to join their family and it was their express desire, then it was the right thing to do. In conjunction with New Hope, the council had flown family relatives to Watford to help their family member. If it was the right thing to do and done in the right way, then the council would do it.

- c) Councillor Smith said that he was sure that everyone had heard about the roll out of Universal Credit and that it was not being smoothly implemented. He asked the Mayor for information about how the council was ensuring a smooth roll out in Watford.

The Mayor responded that as yet Watford had not had to do anything. The reports were from the pilot councils. At Watford officers would be making note of what had happened in those local authorities. The Mayor said she did not understand how it could take six weeks to switch a person from one form of benefits to another. She had asked questions at a national level

about the situation. She had asked for details of why people fell into arrears and the reason for the gap in payments. She had heard that the roll out would be delayed. The council was gathering information, learning from the pilots and considering how it might affect Watford residents.

- d) Councillor Shah said that her question was to ask about the level of consultation with local disability groups with regard to the relocation of disabled bays from the town centre to streets outside the centre.

The Mayor said that the council did not consult when the administration was clear about what it wanted to do. If one consulted then it gave people the impression that something may not happen. The objective for the centre of the town was absolutely clear. The town was not a car park. The aim was to make it a better environment for young children, families, the elderly and vulnerable people. It had been clear that it would not be made fully pedestrianised. However, the council did want to cut down on pollution and improve safety.

The Mayor added that her group cared about blue badge holders, taxi drivers and other users. The new proposals would ensure there was more provision than the current arrangements. The spaces would be located in different places. The information was available on the council's website and responses had been received. The scheme had been amended from the original version. The council had been clear about its objectives for the town centre. She said that it was important to remind the community that every car park in the town centre had spaces for blue badge holders. The spaces were wide and clean and the car parks were safe. There would be some people who were unable to park where they used to by some of the shops, but the town centre would be better for many people, less polluted and a better environment.

- e) Councillor Bashir referred to the council's IT services and how they had not been in a satisfactory state, particularly when they had been outsourced. In a recent Budget Panel report he had been surprised to read that the council had incurred an unbudgeted overspend of £476,000. This equated to 3% of Watford's contribution towards Council Tax. This had principally related to employing contractors and agency staff as the council could not hold on to its own staff. He asked the Mayor to agree with him that this was an unsustainable and unacceptable situation. He asked for assurances from her that she would be looking into this matter closely and find a resolution in the next 12 months.

The Mayor responded that she did not recognise the councillor's comments as being true or accurate. It was not an overspend in that sense. The

council had decided to bring the contract back in-house. She said that it appeared the councillor was blaming outsourcing; the in-house service had not been acceptable. The Mayor commented that if there was a problem with a service, whether it was provided in-house or outsourced, it was necessary to find a way to solve the issue. The important thing to understand was that the council was not prepared to allow the problem to carry on and it had wanted to solve the problem. In order to bring the service back in-house, and get it properly staffed it, was necessary to commit additional money which had not been included in the original budget agreed previously.

The council had the money available as it was prudent and well-run. It was agreed to commit the additional money needed to bring Watford into the 21st century. The council wanted a step change in its IT, known as Watford 2020 in the council. Staff were excited about it. It enabled the council to use IT for the many different opportunities. The council could have 'limped on' until budget setting in January, but she did not want to mess around. This was not an overspend; it was additional money for additional things. The total figure quoted included an amount for Three Rivers District Council's IT, as it was a shared service. The money would be used to raise the level of IT. It had already made a difference in the services provided.

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

No questions had been received.

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

A question had been received from Mr John Dowdle, which was included on the agenda.

Mr Dowdle referred to his question printed in the agenda. He questioned whether there was sufficient space in the allocated area to accommodate all 10 proposed vehicles.

Councillor Sharpe responded that the precise location of the new bays in Church Street was on the grass area immediately adjacent to Church car park. Each bay would be 2.4 metres wide by 4.8 metres long and had a 1.2 metre shared strip to enable those who needed to fully open their car doors. There would also be a path along the back of the bays in order to gain access to the rear of the vehicles. The path would be on the same level as the bay to enable step free circulation.

Councillor Sharpe referred to the Mayor's earlier comments about the consultation on the scheme. There were still matters being considered and

discussed. He had suggested that only six bays should be created, which reduced incursion on to the grass area and maintained the line of the current path way. Even if reduced this would nearly double the number of bays being included in the scheme when combined with those proposed in Wellstones.

The Chairman invited Mr Dowdle to pose a supplementary question if he wished to do so.

Mr Dowdle stated that he had based the question on the diagram shown on the website, which showed the bays just to the north of the path way. He considered there to be space for a maximum of four cars. He questioned the extension of the bays on to the grass area, which would mean the loss of open space in the area.

Councillor Sharpe advised that he understood the plans showed the bays located within the grassed area. This suggestion was first proposed in 2015 as part of an enhancement scheme by the parks team for the conservation and green flag open space at St Mary's. It would provide additional parking possibly for use by the church. The grassed area was probably not of a high amenity value as it was located immediately next to the Church car park. This scheme provided an opportunity to have a much wider enhancement of the High Street and the public realm. It would be designed in a way that satisfied the conservation and parks teams, ensuring it was sympathetic to its environment.

37

Petitions presented under Council Procedure Rule 12.0

Council received two petitions from the public. It was noted that the second petition, submitted about Northfield Gardens, had been withdrawn from the agenda. The petitioner had agreed to present the petition to the Highways Liaison Meeting later in the week.

A petition, signed by 105 Watford residents, had been received in the following terms

“We the undersigned, call on Watford Council to immediately cease work on destroying St Mary's historic Town Square. The One Bell Pub extension is taking almost half of our historic Town Square and needs urgently to be stopped, and St Mary's Square fully reinstated.”

Mr John Dowdle was invited to present the petition to the council.

Mr Dowdle said that he was attending the meeting to address council on the development of the One Bell public house and the impact it would have on a locally listed building and St Mary's Square which were located in the St Mary's

Conservation Area. He referred to the petition and asked that all works were stopped on the redevelopment of the One Bell. The proposed extension would permanently take away almost half of the historic town square.

Mr Dowdle informed council that he lived near the development in the conservation area. The extent of the development was immediately apparent to him. All residents in the almshouses had signed the petition and had confirmed that they had not been informed about the development, even though it had a major impact on their view of the town centre. The failure to consult local residents was one of many flaws. He felt the planning application process had been questionable and referred to the planning application. He showed council the planning applications' advert printed in the Watford Observer. Mr Dowdle raised questions about the honesty and probity of the planning application. The Managing Director invited Mr Dowdle to provide evidence so that the matter could be investigated or withdraw the inference.

Mr Dowdle asked council to call-in the application for scrutiny in order to understand the entire saga. In addition, all work on the One Bell and St Mary's Square should be halted immediately. Work should start in removing the hoarding. If the current owners were not prepared to undertake the work then the council should exercise its powers to compulsorily purchase the One Bell and create a town centre visitor's centre, community centre and arts and culture centre for the people of Watford and visitors.

Councillor Sharpe acknowledged receipt of the petition. The application had gone through the normal consultation processes and comments were received about the proposal. Many issues the council had to consider gave rise to different opinions. He disagreed with those views put forward by the residents. The plans for restoring and extending the One Bell public house were a proactive piece of conservation; giving a historic local landmark a new lease of life. He referred to listed properties in Watford that had lain empty for some time and the work being done to bring them back into use. Smaller licensed establishments were struggling to survive and either closed down or had to undergo alterations. It was in this context the One Bell should be judged. It was a locally listed building and not nationally listed. Prior to the closure it was in a bad condition and did not have a universally positive reputation. The current hoardings were deemed necessary to ensure public safety. The council was keen to ensure there was engagement with the applicant to ensure it did not become empty and derelict. Detailed negotiations took place about the proposal. The current building was not suitable for modern occupiers with limited internal space. A derelict building in the area for a prolonged period would run the risk of attracting further anti-social behaviour and detract from the Grade one listed St Mary's church and conservation area. He acknowledged that not everyone would like the design.

Councillor Sharpe added that he disagreed about the claims regarding the impact on the neighbouring historic space. The space between St Mary's church and the One Bell had only been created in 1999 after the demolition of a row of shops. The extension did not take up half of the square as claimed in the petition. The important thing was to get the building back into use. It would be awful if it continued to be boarded up. The principle of getting the One Bell back into use was a positive contribution to the town centre and ought to be regarded as a good thing.

The Chairman invited other councillors and the Mayor to debate the petition. Following the debate the Chairman thanked Mr Dowdle for attending and presenting the petition.

38 **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.

39 **Business Rates Retention Pilot**

Council received a report of the Mayor following her delegated decision. The Director of Finance's original report to the Mayor had been included in the agenda.

RESOLVED –

that Council agrees to sign up to the Hertfordshire Business Rates Pool pilot or a business rates pool for 2018/19.

40 **Local Plan Review 2016 - 2036**

Council received a report of the Deputy Managing Director setting out information about the Local Plan Part 2.

RESOLVED –

that the Local Plan Part 2 is not submitted for examination and that resources should now be focussed on progressing the Local Plan Review to cover the period 2016-2036.

41 **Scrutiny Annual Report**

Council received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer which included the Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny n Watford Borough Council for 2016/17.

RESOLVED –

that the Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny for Watford Borough Council 2016/17 be noted.

42 **Members' Performance Scheme - Self Assessments**

Council received a report of the Democratic Services Manager which included individual councillors' self-assessments for 2016/17. It was noted that further assessments had been received since the publication of the agenda; these would also be uploaded to the individual councillors' web pages.

RESOLVED –

that the summary of the members' self-assessments for 2016/17 be noted.

43 **Amendment to Council's Scheme of Delegation**

Council received a report of the Head of Democracy and Governance which sought approval for a change to the council's scheme of delegation following a request from the Head of Community and Environmental Services.

RESOLVED –

that the scheme of delegation be amended as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

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

Council was informed that four motions had been received

Motion 1

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

"The council notes that the Herts Valley Clinical Commission Group (HVCCG) has withdrawn its legal defense against the closure of Nascot Lawn. We also note

that this was as a result of the great campaign run by the parents of children who go to Nascot Lawn, respite and medical centre.

We call upon the council to

- write to the chair and chief executive of the HVCCG to honour its commitment to continue to fund the much loved respite centre, noting that we are deeply concerned that staff are still leaving the centre and that no attempt is made to retain them, thus enforcing a backdoor closure.
- write to the chief executive of Herts County Council, calling him to work with HVCCG to come to a funding proposal which will see the permanent survival of the Nascot lawn.
- write to Watford's MP, Richard Harrington, to get the required funding from central government, for the funding of Nascot Lawn and other health services in Watford which are due a cut of £45 million."

Members debated the motion.

On being put to council the motion was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

the council notes that the Herts Valley Clinical Commission Group (HVCCG) has withdrawn its legal defense against the closure of Nascot Lawn. We also note that this was as a result of the great campaign run by the parents of children who go to Nascot Lawn, respite and medical centre.

We call upon the council to

- write to the chair and chief executive of the HVCCG to honour its commitment to continue to fund the much loved respite centre, noting that we are deeply concerned that staff are still leaving the centre and that no attempt is made to retain them, thus enforcing a backdoor closure.
- write to the chief executive of Herts County Council, calling him to work with HVCCG to come to a funding proposal which will see the permanent survival of the Nascot lawn.
- write to Watford's MP, Richard Harrington, to get the required funding from central government, for the funding of Nascot Lawn and other health services in Watford which are due a cut of £45 million.

Motion 2

The following motion was moved by Councillor Mills and seconded by Councillor Shah.

“We, as Councillors for West Watford call on the Mayor and her Liberal Democrat Cabinet to show they are finally taking the issue of fly tipping seriously for the whole of our town, by immediately installing CCTV cameras at the notorious dumping area at the Junction of Harwoods Road and Chester Road.

Our residents are fed up with having this constant anti-social behaviour blight on their doorsteps just as we are fed up having to report it to Council Officers with no effective deterrent introduced by this administration.

As residents constantly remind us the Mayor wouldn't let this happen on the streets of Oxhey Village, the Cassiobury estate or Nascot ward or Tudor Avenue, so let us see her and this Council take strong action to show all areas in the Borough are being treated equally.”

Members debated the motion.

On being put to council the motion was LOST.

Motion 3

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Taylor and seconded by Councillor Grimston.

“Council notes:

- That the next censuses in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will be conducted in 2021.
- The ‘Count Them In’ campaign of the Royal British Legion, Poppy Scotland, Help for Heroes and others to highlight the lack of information on members of our armed forces, their communities, where they live and their needs.

Council believes:

- That it is very important that all local councils meet their Armed Forces Covenant commitments.
- That no member of the Armed Forces community should be left disadvantaged because of their service.
- That the public and voluntary sectors would benefit from knowing whether an individual has ever served in the Armed Forces, the dates that they

served and whether an individual is directly related to someone who has served in the Armed Forces.

- That the 2021 census should include questions concerning our Armed Forces community.

Council therefore resolves:

- That the Mayor writes to the MP for Watford and Secretary of State for the Cabinet Office to.

- Highlight the contribution made by the Armed Forces community to our town and region.

- Explain our support for the 'Count Them In' campaign and ask for the 2021 census to include questions about our Armed Forces community."

Members debated the motion.

On being put to council the motion was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

Council notes:

- That the next censuses in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will be conducted in 2021.
- The 'Count Them In' campaign of the Royal British Legion, Poppy Scotland, Help for Heroes and others to highlight the lack of information on members of our armed forces, their communities, where they live and their needs.

Council believes:

- That it is very important that all local councils meet their Armed Forces Covenant commitments.
- That no member of the Armed Forces community should be left disadvantaged because of their service.
- That the public and voluntary sectors would benefit from knowing whether an individual has ever served in the Armed Forces, the dates that they served and whether an individual is directly related to someone who has served in the Armed Forces.

- That the 2021 census should include questions concerning our Armed Forces community.

Council therefore resolves:

- That the Mayor writes to the MP for Watford and Secretary of State for the Cabinet Office to.
 - Highlight the contribution made by the Armed Forces community to our town and region.
 - Explain our support for the 'Count Them In' campaign and ask for the 2021 census to include questions about our Armed Forces community.

Motion 4

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Taylor and seconded by Councillor Williams.

“Council notes:

- Ward Councillors in Watford regularly receive complaints from residents about the poor standard of road resurfacing works and repairs carried out by the Highways Contractors Ringway.
- That Ringway has been fined over £1m for substandard work on Hertfordshire's highways between October 2012 and April 2016.
- That despite this poor standard of work by Ringway on roads in Watford and elsewhere in Hertfordshire which clearly represents poor value for money for Council Tax payers of Watford that the Hertfordshire County Council intends to extend the highways contract for Ringway until September 2024 without a new re-tender process.

Council believes:

- That the condition of roads in Watford has deteriorated significantly since the Ringway contract started in October 2012 because of poor quality standards within Ringway and a failure by HCC to manage the works contract adequately
- That renewing the contract gives Ringway the green light to continue to provide Watford residents a sub standard service

- That it is a dereliction of duty by HCC not to market test by re-tendering the service to ensure that Watford and Hertfordshire residents are getting value for money and the highest possible standard of service.
- That the highways budget should be increased and more funding devolved to local county councillors so that they are able to target roads in the worst condition as well as monitor the quality of works before sign off

Council therefore resolves:

- That the Mayor, as a matter of urgency, writes to the Leader of Hertfordshire County Council to:
 - Highlight the failure of the current highways contractor, Ringway, to repair and maintain the roads in Watford to an acceptable standard
 - Review the level of investment in Hertfordshire's roads and pavements and if necessary increase it
 - Ask that Ringway's contract is not automatically extended until 2024 but that a full retender process takes place."

Members debated the motion.

On being put to council the motion was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

Council notes:

- Ward Councillors in Watford regularly receive complaints from residents about the poor standard of road resurfacing works and repairs carried out by the Highways Contractors Ringway
- That Ringway has been fined over £1m for substandard work on Hertfordshire's highways between October 2012 and April 2016.
- That despite this poor standard of work by Ringway on roads in Watford and elsewhere in Hertfordshire which clearly represents poor value for money for Council Tax payers of Watford that the Hertfordshire County Council intends to extend the highways contract for Ringway until September 2024 without a new re-tender process.

Council believes:

- That the condition of roads in Watford has deteriorated significantly since the Ringway contract started in October 2012 because of poor quality standards within Ringway and a failure by HCC to manage the works contract adequately
- That renewing the contract gives Ringway the green light to continue to provide Watford residents a sub standard service
- That it is a dereliction of duty by HCC not to market test by re-tendering the service to ensure that Watford and Hertfordshire residents are getting value for money and the highest possible standard of service.
- That the highways budget should be increased and more funding devolved to local county councillors so that they are able to target roads in the worst condition as well as monitor the quality of works before sign off

Council therefore resolves:

- That the Mayor, as a matter of urgency, writes to the Leader of Hertfordshire County Council to:
 - Highlight the failure of the current highways contractor, Ringway, to repair and maintain the roads in Watford to an acceptable standard
 - Review the level of investment in Hertfordshire's roads and pavements and if necessary increase it
 - Ask that Ringway's contract is not automatically extended until 2024 but that a full retender process takes place.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm
and finished at 10.10 pm