

COUNCIL

13 March 2018

Present: Councillor J Dhindsa (Chairman)
The Mayor (Dorothy Thornhill)
Councillors D Thornhill, S Bashir, N Bell, S Bolton, S Cavinder,
K Collett, J Connal, K Crout, A Dychton, J Fahmy, A Grimston,
M Hofman, P Jeffree, J Johnson, S Johnson, P Kent, Ahsan Khan,
Asif Khan, R Laird, 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

Officers: Managing Director
Head of Democracy and Governance
Deputy Managing Director and Director of Place Shaping and
Corporate Performance
Interim Head of Finance - shared services
Communications and Engagement Manager
Democratic Services Manager
Mayor's Political Assistant
Member Development and Civic Officer
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

59 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barks and Hastrick.

60 Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures of interest.

61 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2018 were submitted and signed.

Official Announcements

Chairman's Events

The Chairman informed Council that the previous day he had participated in two national events. He had raised the Commonwealth flag to mark Commonwealth Day. Later he had lit a fourth candle which would be placed in the trophy cabinet as a commemoration of the end of the First World War.

Chairman's Charity Quiz

The Chairman reminded members that his charity quiz was taking place the following evening. It was a sell-out event and he looked forward to seeing those who were taking part in the teams.

Mayor Dorothy Thornhill

The Chairman stated that this would be the Mayor's last Council meeting. He invited Councillors Peter Taylor and Nigel Bell to say a few words.

Councillor Taylor noted that the Mayor had first been elected to the council in 1992 as a councillor. He had been informed that during her first year on the council she did not make any speeches in the Council Chamber. She was then elected in 2002 to be the town's first elected Mayor. Also she was the first female elected Mayor in the country. Today there were still only four female elected Mayors across the country.

Councillor Taylor commented that the Mayor had experienced 97 Council meetings since being elected as Mayor. At the first meeting there had been a motion submitted by Councillors Tim Williams and Robert Gordon about the need to improve the council's finances. During her time as Mayor the council had seen dramatic improvements in the council's finances. The Mayor had overseen improvements in the town's parks, the leisure centres, community events and there was an excellent well-run council. This was largely due to her fantastic leadership. She managed to combine both strategic leadership and years of service with friendship and warmth. Many residents referred to her as a friend due to her warmth. There were very few people who were able to combine years of service, ability to provide strategic leadership but also warmth and a human touch. On behalf of Liberal Democrat councillors, both past and present, He thanked the Mayor for everything she had done for the town, her years of service, her inspirational leadership and her friendship. He added that whoever was the next Mayor would have a tough act to follow.

Councillor Bell said that after many occasions opposite each other in the Council Chamber and disagreeing many times, he recognised that all members were elected to do their best for Watford residents. The Mayor in her way, with her mandate, had done that. She had left her mark on the town whether or not everyone agreed with her policies. It was quite an achievement to have been an elected member for 26 years continuously. There had been 10 years as a backbench councillor and then 16 as the directly elected executive Mayor. She had carried out the work that encompassed personal and family adjustments, along with the political responsibility of her role. There had been many long-standing councillors over the years. He said that it was right to personally wish her well and recognise her service to the town.

The Mayor was presented with bouquets of flowers.

The Mayor thanked the councillors for their warm and kind words.

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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, Mills, Ahsan Khan, Bashir, Connal and Smith indicated that they wished to ask questions.

- a) Councillor Turmaine noted the Mayor's number of election wins. He referred to their debates during the General Election campaign in 2015. It was difficult when a party was losing its leader. He said that at least one on the opposite seats was destined for a parliamentary career. Watford had shown that it was possible as a Liberal Democrat to lose in the General Election but would still be able to make it to Parliament with a seat in the House of Lords. He enquired whether that was true.

The Mayor responded that the coalition period had not been comfortable for her group. For many years the Liberals and Liberal Democrat party had been the parties of protest and opposition. She had been clear that she had wanted to govern with a team of Liberal Democrat councillors. She acknowledged that there were more ways into that Palace than one. She added that as she had said in her report she intended to be an ambassador for decentralisation and handing powers down to local government. Local government was part of the solution for many of society's current ills and certainly not the problem or cause of it, which included building houses.

- b) Councillor Mills asked whether the Mayor was aware that child poverty in Watford was highest in Leggatts and Holywell. These were the two places

stripped of their adventure playgrounds, which gave children and young people the opportunity to access food, drink, warmth and companionship. She asked the Mayor how this made her feel.

The Mayor said that child poverty in Watford was better than the national average. She acknowledged that there were pockets of deprivation across the borough. They were small areas of poverty. She would not apologise for making a facility more widely available to hundreds of young people to enjoy seven days per week and renewing a facility that people could be proud of. There were families who relied on the adventure playgrounds in a particular way. Someone in charge of a council was aware of budgets being considerably slashed and could not help but make some decisions that would impact on some people. However she was able to state that this council had made far less of those types of decisions because of the authority's financial prudence. This council was not in the position of some other councils who were slashing basic services and affecting lots of people.

- c) Councillor Ahsan Khan noted that in the Mayor's report she had said that Watford was a truly multi-cultural town. In the Corporate Plan it mentioned that 31% of Watford's population was non-white. He asked why the Liberal Democrat party did not reflect the make-up of Watford.

The Mayor acknowledged that it was true at the moment. However, she looked back with pride that the party had the first Muslim female councillor and several others. She said that the same as the Labour group all parties struggled to attract high calibre candidates. This was a matter that the Liberal Democrats took very seriously. The national party had recently done some work on this subject. It was hoped this would be addressed. There were no barriers to anyone from any culture. In addition to having the first female Muslim candidate, the group had the first Polish woman councillor. The make-up of councillors had an ebb and a flow. It could look very different next year.

- d) Councillor Bashir echoed Councillor Bell's comments about the Mayor's long service and the respect she had from all communities in Watford. He said his question related to the cost to the Council Taxpayer for the office of the Mayor was over £200,000. In 2002 the Mayor had campaigned that, if she were elected, a referendum would be held on the mayoralty issue. This had not been done in the last 16 years. The Labour mayoral candidate had publicly pledged that, if elected, he would give the people of Watford a choice through a referendum about the current mayoral system and if it should continue. He asked whether the mayor and her party would commit to a referendum on this issue.

The Mayor said the answer was 'no'. The people of Watford would make that decision. In Watford there had been no demand to abolish the mayoralty. This inferred to her that the people believed that having a person who was accountable to them in a very public way was something they quite liked. A Meriden resident had said to her that although he did not always agree with her actions, he knew who she was and why she did it. She had responded that his comment would be her political epitaph as that was what she considered the role to be about.

The Mayor stated that the choice was simple, whether the town was run by someone chosen in a 'smoke filled' room by a small group of councillors from one political party or the person who led the town to be someone residents had voted for and could 'boot out'.

The Mayor referred to the comments about cost. Since the Liberal Democrat group had been in charge of the council £14 million had been saved. If the staff in the Mayor's office were not employed in there, they would have to be employed elsewhere within the council. It was a fictitious saving. The Mayor's Casework officer had her finger on the pulse, understanding what people were concerned about, and the services the council delivered. She would have to be in the Customer Service Centre. The only real difference between a Leader and a Mayor was the salary. She referred to the service residents should receive from their Mayor, the time to fight for the best deal for Watford, to bring the right people together. She regarded being in the role a privilege. She mentioned when Labour had been in administration and all the support the group had in the council; active Labour party members in prominent positions within the council. It felt uncomfortable.

The Mayor said she was sure that some people would hear the message from Labour but the vast majority would rather have a Mayor who they elected, be able to complain to and forward petitions to, rather than an anonymous Leader of the Council. All the research carried out about the mayoral role, showed that people did not know who their Leader of the Council was but most knew who their Mayor was. This explained the increase in elected Mayors.

- e) Councillor Connal commented that the Mayor was leaving and they had aged together. She said that she was concerned the council had not done enough for the elderly residents in the town. In the report pack there was reference to Mayfield homes. She was concerned about the future for the elderly residents. She asked for assurance that more suitable housing was going to be built.

The Mayor noted Councillor Connal's reference to the Mayfield. Generally the company's developments were very up market. When the company approached the council she had made it clear that was not the type of accommodation needed or wanted in Watford. The company was making amendments to their scheme. This highlighted one of the most difficult challenges of being an elected Mayor of a district council rather than a unitary authority. All of the responsibility for elderly care rested with the county council. It was therefore difficult to make a direct impact. The role in a district required influencing skills. In Watford the family households were increasing and the elderly numbers were decreasing. She felt it was likely to be due to the fact that Watford was seen as a town for young families and older residents were moving out of Watford. It was right to be concerned about older residents and was one of the reasons that adult social care was the number one issue in the entire country. Nationally the Liberal Democrats were suggesting that 1p should be added to income tax to pay for adult social care. An extra care building was being developed in the Meriden scheme. The group had an awareness of the issue and Councillor Taylor was very committed to Watford being a dementia-friendly town. The ability to work on the issue would be easier as a unitary authority.

- f) Councillor Smith noted in the report that there was reference to social and affordable housing. There was also awareness that it was an issue across the country. He asked the Mayor what more could be done to build more social and affordable housing without viability being used as an excuse.

The Mayor suggested that if viability was considered an excuse, the Labour group should speak to the Mayor of London who was creating an office to challenge viability. She felt that people were naïve if they thought viability was an excuse. It was not an excuse. By making viability a consideration, the Government had cut out social housing. It was the subject of her most recent speech in the House of Lords. With regard to social and affordable housing, the council had just been shortlisted for an award for affordable housing, due to the work currently being done in the joint company with Watford Community Housing. The issue was a difficult problem which would not be going away. She added that it would be useful if the councillors on Development Management Committee voted in support of those applications which met policy.

Questions by Members of the Council under Council Procedure Rule 10.0

Question had been received from Councillors Matt Turmaine and Asif Khan. The questions and answers are attached as Appendix 1 to these minutes.

65 **Questions by Members of the Public under Council Procedure Rule 11.0**

No questions had been received.

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

No petitions had been received.

67 **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.

68 **Review of Corporate Plan 2020: revised for 2018/19**

Council received a report of the Managing Director and the minutes from Cabinet held on 5 March 2018.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Corporate Plan 2020 be approved.
2. that Council notes the work programme within the plan will underpin service plans and staff individual work programmes as set out in their annual performance development reviews.
3. that Council notes the work programme set out in the plan will be monitored through the year.

69 **South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan**

Council received a report of the Deputy Managing Director which outlined the issues, benefits and implications of a South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan.

RESOLVED –

1. that the council works with the other South West Herts Authorities (Three Rivers, Dacorum, Hertsmere and St Albans Councils) to prepare a Joint Strategic Plan. Details of working arrangements and governance structures will be included in a Memorandum of Understanding which is currently being worked on. A timetable and the relationship with individual local plans will be set out in a Statement of Common Ground, to be agreed by all partners.

2. that the council progresses a Memorandum of Understanding as the framework for governing joint working arrangements and for the final terms of the Memorandum of Understanding to be delegated to the Deputy Managing Director for agreement.
3. that officers progress work on the joint plan and that this will come back to Council for final approval.
4. that the support of Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire LEP for this process be noted.

70

Motions submitted under Council Procedure Rule 13.0

Council was informed that three motions had been received.

- 1) The following motion was proposed by Councillor Matt Turmaine and seconded by Councillor Ahsan Khan

“This council recognises that the benefits system in the UK needs reform to help people into work and to ensure that there is an appropriate safety net for those who are unable to work or meet the minimum cost of housing and feeding themselves.

The Universal Credit system was originally designed to help this process through rolling up a series of benefits into a single, simple to manage payment.

However, this council recognises that the rollout of Universal Credit so far has left many recipients in or at risk of debt, rent arrears, physical and mental health illness as a result of lower benefits payments than under the previous regime, the six-week waiting time for payment and until recently, the cost of telephoning the UC helpline.

This council notes that the rollout of UC to new claimants has been halted as of January 2018 and recognises that this presents a perfect opportunity to increase the volume of those calling for a re-think.

Therefore, we resolve that the elected mayor of the council will write, on behalf of members, to the secretary of state for work and pensions to request:

- An extension of the halt to new claimants to review the practice of UC rollout.

- A review of UC in order to fix the complications introduced by communication resources and delays in payment.
- A level of support for people currently on UC who are unable to meet their financial commitments that goes beyond the current modest loan payment scheme.”

Council debated the motion.

On being put to Council the motion was **CARRIED**.

RESOLVED –

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- A level of support for people currently on UC who are unable to meet their financial commitments that goes beyond the current modest loan payment scheme.

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

“This council recognises that the Met Line Extension is a vital development for Watford, Hertfordshire and London.

This council also recognises that negotiations between the Department for Transport and the Mayor of London are currently stalled and it is vital that they conclude with a positive outcome for the Met Line extension.

The council resolves to work with the Secretary of State for Transport and the Mayor of London to come to a workable agreement for the benefit of all parties involved.”

Councillor Sharpe moved the following amendment which was seconded by Councillor Watkin –

“To delete paragraph 2 of the Labour Group Motion:

‘This council also recognises that negotiations between the Department for Transport and the Mayor of London are currently stalled and it is vital that they conclude with a positive outcome for the Met Line extension.’ ”

Council debated the motion and the amendment.

On being put to Council the amendment was **CARRIED**.

On being put to Council the amended motion was **CARRIED**.

RESOLVED –

This council recognises that the Met Line Extension is a vital development for Watford, Hertfordshire and London.

The council resolves to work with the Secretary of State for Transport and the Mayor of London to come to a workable agreement for the benefit of all parties involved.

- 3) The following motion was proposed by Councillor Iain Sharpe and seconded by Councillor Mark Watkin

“This Council regrets the decision by the Mayor of London to withdraw his backing for the Metropolitan Line Extension unless ‘all additional potential cost overruns’ are underwritten.

Council notes that the project has secured a further £73m from the government to bridge the funding gap indicated by TfL in order to enable delivery. Council also notes the additional potential to develop land worth up to £40m.

Given the total funding from partners includes £45m contingency funding, Council is shocked that the Mayor of London is set to withdraw support for this essential infrastructure project that benefits both Hertfordshire and London, especially after his stated wish to run commuter services from outside the GLA area, and the desire to work with areas outside the capital, expressed in the London Plan.

Council therefore reaffirms its support for the MLX project and urges the London Mayor to rethink his stance and, continues to support the efforts of Hertfordshire County Council, the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and Watford Borough Council to secure the delivery of the MLX scheme.”

Council debated the motion.

On being put to Council the motion was **CARRIED**.

RESOLVED –

This Council regrets the decision by the Mayor of London to withdraw his backing for the Metropolitan Line Extension unless ‘all additional potential cost overruns’ are underwritten.

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Partnership and Watford Borough Council to secure the delivery of the MLX scheme.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm
and finished at 10.00 pm

Questions by Members of the Council under Procedure Rule 10.0

Council – 13 March 2018

**Question from Councillor Turmaine
Received on 20 February 2018**

Question “What number of planning applications for development have included the use of a viability assessment since March 2012? What proportion of developments with ten properties or more within them have had a viability assessment used as a reason to not meet the 35% affordable housing threshold each municipal year between 2012 and 2018?”

Answer

Year	Number of applications for more than 10 dwellings	Applications that have included viability assessments
2012	5	1
2013	6	0
2014	3	1
2015	16	2
2016	6	1
2017	18	9
Total	54	14

It is not possible to say that where the 35% affordable housing threshold has not been met that this is for one particular reason. Reasons vary as a result of negotiations with planning officers, tenure mix, viability and design.

**Questions from Councillor Asif Khan
Received on 08.03.18**

1. How much has the council spent on consultants in the year 2017/18, 2016/17, 2015/16, 2014/15, 2013/14.

2013/14: 253,775
 2014/15: 334,165
 2015/16: 406,608
 2016/17: 329,583
 2017/18: 475,493

Consultancy spend includes IT advice, property advice, service change advice (such as outsourcing the parks, refuse collection and street sweeping contract to Veolia), treasury advice, planning advice.

2. How much has the cost been for the Mayor's back-dated pension contribution?

The IMRP's recommendation to Budget Council which was agreed by Council was that 'In respect of the current Mayor there should be back pay of pension contributions from October 2015 to May 2018 at the prevailing pensions contribution rate during that period.'

The calculation is below. The employers' pension rate below is exactly the same for officers of the Council. October 2015 was when the Mayor's pension payments ceased pending this review

Pension costs for the Mayor			
Year	Pensionable pay	Rate in force	Pension
	£	%	£
2015/16 (Oct 15 to March 16)	32,869	15.9	5,226
2016/17	65,738	15.9	10,452
2017/18	65,738	18.2	11,964
2018/19(1 April to 3 May)	5,943	18.2	1,082
Total pension costs			28,725