

CABINET

4 July 2019

Present: Mayor (Chair)
Councillors K Collett, I Sharpe, M Watkin and T Williams

Also present: Councillors P Jeffree, N Bell

Officers: Managing Director
Group Head of Democracy and Governance
Group Head of Community and Environmental Services
Group Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications
Head of Regeneration and Property
Head of Finance
Sports Development Officer
Principal Planning Officer (PD)
Mayor's Political Assistant
Democratic Services Manager

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Councillor Stephen Johnson.

2 Disclosure of interests (if any)

There were no disclosures of interest.

3 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2019 were submitted and signed.

4 Conduct of meeting

Councillor Bell spoke on behalf of the Labour group.

There were no changes to the order of the agenda.

5 Sports and Physical Activity Development Framework 2019-2023

Councillor Collett introduced the report and explained that the Sports and Physical Activity Framework would bring the council in line with the new

framework for the Sports England Strategy. Watford had good relationships with partners and stakeholders for sports. The framework set out plans up to 2023 and Councillor Collett was proud of what the council had achieved so far and its ambitions for the future. Councillor Collett thanked the Sports Development Officer for her work on applying for and receiving grants and organising sporting events. The number of people participating in sport had increased in Watford and there were more volunteers involved than in any other part of the voluntary sector.

The Mayor thanked officers for their work but stated that some of the statistics in the report regarding obesity meant that there was still work to be done. Councillor Williams thanked Everyone Active for putting on free swimming lessons in the holidays and the improvements made recently to both leisure centres.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet approves the Sports and Physical Activity Framework 2019-2023.

6 Ombudsman Decisions

The Group Head of Democracy and Governance introduced the item and explained that in both cases set out in the report the Ombudsman had found fault. The Ombudsman decisions were published on their website.

Cabinet discussed the Ombudsman's findings and expressed disappointment that the decisions went against the council. It was noted that the council had been found to be right for much of the complaints made but that there had been a fault with procedure and timing. It was important that the council followed the procedures as advertised.

Following a question from Councillor Bell, the Group Head of Democracy and Governance explained that it was a legal requirement for the council to notify residents who were directly abutting any site applying for planning permission. The number of residents informed could depend on how big the development was and its impact on the wider area. The applications which had received the complaints were minor developments and the minimum requirement had been to notify the abutting neighbours but it was unfortunate that it had not happened on this occasion.

The Mayor commented that the number of letters sent out to notify residents about a development was usually more than the minimum required.

The Managing Director outlined that lessons learnt were reviewed at team meetings and Strategic Leadership Team. The Watford 2020 programme which the council was presently going through would result in better working practices that should reduce this type of error occurring.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet notes the Ombudsman's decisions as set out in the report.

7

Financial Outturn 2018/19

An extract of the Finance Scrutiny Committee meeting minutes on 25 June 2019 where this item was considered had been circulated to Cabinet.

Councillor Watkin introduced the report and explained that the council had been successful in keeping costs under control and there had been a slight underspend. Some projects had not been able to complete so £1.3million would be carried forward to the 2019/20 budget. Reserves had increased as funds had been repaid into the economic impact reserve, along with proceeds from the Riverwell development. Cabinet was asked write off £110,000 from the multiple millions which the council invoiced each year and the revenue team went to considerable lengths to ensure payment. Some of the capital budget had been rephased but there were large projects such as Oxhey Park Cycle Park coming soon.

It was noted by Cabinet that the write-offs were made as the council considered it was less likely to be able to recover the debt, however, if new evidence was submitted then further efforts to collect the debt would be made.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. Considered the 2018/19 revenue outturn as shown in Annex A to the report and noted the year end position which included requests to carry forward budgets into 2019/20.
2. Approved the 2018/19 budget carry forwards into 2019/20 as recommended by the Strategic Leadership Team totalling £1.302million.
3. Considered the capital outturn as shown in Annex A and approved the rephasing of £11.48 million into 2019/20 and later years.
4. Approved the write off sum of £110,026.71 in respect of irrecoverable debts.

Watford High Street (North) and Cultural Hub Masterplan

The Mayor welcomed Annette Kendall from Friends of Watford Museum who was observing the Cabinet meeting.

The Managing Director explained that the Masterplan before Cabinet underpinned the vision set out by the Mayor to create a welcoming and vibrant town centre. There had been substantial success from the intu shopping centre and restaurant quarter which meant there was a strong draw to the lower end of the High Street. There had been a vision created in the Cultural Strategy of a strong cultural hub at the top of the town. The college and leisure centre contributed to this along with the library and colosseum. The Masterplan co-located the museum with the library in a shared facility. This could enable some joint facilities but would also retain the independence of the museum as a strong cultural centre. Whilst the Heritage Lottery Fund bid for the museum had not been successful, the Mayor wanted to see a positive outcome for the museum so that it would be more accessible with the right setting for exhibitions, national tours of artwork and community events.

The Managing Director continued that due to pressures on financial resources it was tougher to maintain sustainable uses of heritage properties. These buildings required the right investment to ensure that they would not degrade. The council was working with Historic England who were supportive of the benefits that could be provided with a sympathetic conversion of the Town Hall site to a high quality hotel. Similarly Historic England had seen the potential of returning the current museum site to residential use.

The proposal before Cabinet was to go out to consultation across the town and would bring the outcome back to Cabinet in September or October. With regards to the Town Hall site, it would retain a civic use for the committee rooms and chamber so that residents and councillors could use the facilities. The council offices could be re-provided on the existing site or in an appropriate site in the town centre.

There were proposals to create a shared use arena around The Avenue roundabout and to concentrate parking in that area along with an appropriate mixed use development to encourage footfall located on the redesigned roundabout. The council needed to consult and engage with Highways and Hertfordshire County Council however in principle they were supportive of increased pedestrianisation and cycle paths.

Other proposals within the masterplan included the lower grade buildings at the top of the town which could be renewed. There was a bold idea of a pedestrian crossing over Rickmansworth Road, replacing the subway. The new owner of the

market site would have an opportunity to re-provide a new market with a combination of indoor and outdoor stalls with potentially a focus on food.

The Mayor commented that one of the key benefits from the masterplan would be to improve the link from the indoor to outdoor market. At the LGA conference this week the Mayor had heard that the main factor for millennials in choosing a place to live was the cultural offer so this was an important focus for the town.

The Group Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications had given a presentation to the Heritage Group at Watford Museum which had received a positive response. There would now be an eight week consultation period using different types of engagement such as an online survey and targeting specific groups, including those representing disabled people and young people. The consultation would be carried out by a provider who was independent from the council.

Cabinet discussed the potential for improving the market. They also commented on the possibility of a display of names of residents who had died during the First World War to be located in the cultural hub. Cabinet welcomed the proposed new museum as an opportunity to better display the large number of artefacts which the museum currently stored in the basement.

Following a question from Councillor Bell the Group Head of Communication and Engagement explained that the consultation would start following the Cabinet meeting and would run to the end of August. People had more free time in the summer and the council would be encouraging people to get involved. If there was concern about the number of responses received then the consultation period could be reviewed.

Councillor Bell commented on previous plans for the Town Hall site and the relocation of the police. The Mayor responded that the main reason for the masterplan was to seize an opportunity, there were still ongoing discussions with the police.

Cabinet further discussed the proposals and the need to set a bold vision for the top of the town.

Cabinet and the Managing Director thanked the Planning Policy Team for their work in producing the masterplan presented to Cabinet.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the draft Watford High Street (North) and Cultural Hub Masterplan (attached as Appendix A to the report) which provides a 20 year blueprint to regenerate and enhance the Town Centre area north of Exchange Road flyover through to The Avenue Car Park for consultation.
2. Agrees to proceed with public consultation on the draft Masterplan and further engagement with key stakeholders including the County Council, landowners, local businesses, Watford Chamber of Commerce and Watford BID.
3. Delegates to the Managing Director in consultation with the Mayor and the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development authority to make editorial changes to the document prior to external consultation.

9 **Watford Community Housing Pension Proposal**

Councillor Watkin introduced the report and explained that it was proposed to remove a risk from Watford Community Housing (WCH) by incorporating staff from WCH into the Watford Borough Council (WBC) pension scheme but still funded by the WCH.

The Head of Finance commented that pension fund actuaries took a long term view of the fund and when the number of people in the fund became very low the fund would close for the organisation and the actuaries would require a payment to meet the liabilities. The report before Cabinet asked for the agreement to transfer three members of staff to the WBC pension fund. The fund was presently in surplus and as WBC already guaranteed any deficit for WCH the risk to the council remained unchanged.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. Recommends to Council that the agreements with Hertfordshire Pension Fund and WCH are entered into.
2. Delegates minor amendments to the legal agreements to the Director of Finance.

10 **Exclusion of press & public**

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as it is

likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of proceedings, that if members of the public were present during consideration of the item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Section 100(1) Schedule 12A of the Act for the reasons stated in the reports.

11

Watford Riverwell

The Head of Regeneration and Property introduced the report and responded to questions.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the progress to date on the Riverwell project.
2. Approves the transfer of land, known as Block E to the LABV and as a member of the LABV to approve the onward sale of the land for the development of 144 residential units subject to satisfactory independent valuation and approves amendments to the existing legal documentation to allow this.
3. Delegates to the Managing Director and Finance Director authority to vary the agreed price set out in this report should negotiations require acceptable amendments subject to agreement with the LABV partnership board.
4. Agrees to amend the Membership Agreement and the Development Agreement of the LABV to allow future sales of development plots to third parties in accordance with the Business Plan approved by the Partnership Board of the LABV.
5. Notes and approves changes to the masterplan and draft business plan produced in April 2019.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.55 pm