

COUNCIL

17 March 2020

Present: The Chairman (Councillor A Khan (Chairman))
The Mayor (Peter Taylor)
Councillors D Allen-Williamson, S Bashir, N Bell, S Bolton,
K Collett, J Dhindsa, A Grimston, I Hamid, M Hofman, P Kloss,
R Martins, J Pattinson, G Saffery, N Shah, I Sharpe, I Stotesbury,
M Turmaine and T Williams

Officers: Managing Director (ML)
Managing Director (DN)
Group Head of Democracy and Governance
Democratic Services Manager

57 Chairman's Statement

The Chairman commented how the whole country was going through unprecedented times. He said that all councillors were pivotal leaders in the community. He encouraged everyone to support people in the Watford community, particularly the vulnerable and to all work together for the betterment of the town.

58 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Crout, Dychton, Ezeifedi, Hastrick, Jeffree, J Johnson, S Johnson, Mauthoor, Mills, Parker, Scudder, Smith, Stanton, Stiff, Walford, Watkin and Wenham.

Apologies were also received from Norman and Mavis Tyrwhitt, Freeman of the Borough.

59 Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures of interest.

60 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January were submitted and signed.

Official Announcements

Neighbourhood Locality Fund

Members were asked to ensure that all 2019/20 applications had been submitted to Democratic Services by Monday to ensure the financial work could be completed before the close of accounts. New applications could be submitted from 1 April.

The Chairman informed members that any funds that were not spent this year would be carried forward to the 2020/21 budget due to the current extraordinary situation the country was in. He felt members' priorities would be different at the moment and the funds could be used more effectively in the community.

Manny Lewis

The Chairman stated that this would be the last meeting for Manny Lewis as he was due to retire at the end of the month. On behalf of the council he wished him well for the future. He invited Councillor Collett, leader of the Liberal Democrat group, and Nigel Bell, leader of the Labour group, to speak.

Councillor Collett said that Manny Lewis had been an excellent Managing Director for Watford Borough Council. The Liberal Democrat group wished him all the best and thanked him for everything he had done.

Councillor Bell echoed Councillor Collett's comments. Manny had overseen many changes at the council. He had always been fair and briefed the Labour group. He had been an honourable and honest chief officer which were the qualities that all Managing Directors should have. He wished Manny well for his future retirement and sent best wishes to Manny's wife and family. He presented Manny with a card.

Donna Nolan

The Chairman welcomed Donna Nolan, the new Managing Director to her first Council meeting.

Chairman's events

The Chairman thanked all those that had attended and supported his recent events. The bingo and curry evening held in aid of the Starfish Ward at Watford General Hospital had raised £800. He also thanked those who had attended the civic service held at North Watford Mosque.

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 Dhindsa, Martins, Turmaine, Bell, Hofman and Bashir indicated that they wished to ask questions.

Before councillors put their questions to the Mayor he advised that he wanted to provide members with an update on the activities the council was taking in response to the coronavirus. He wished to pay tribute to the hard working officers across the council who were working above and beyond, with long hours, including the weekend, to ensure the council could respond properly to this crisis. He highlighted five priorities.

Rough sleepers – a lot of work was going on to ensure there was adequate accommodation for rough sleepers or those experiencing homelessness. The council was working with New Hope, the YMCA and Watford Community Housing. In addition ensuring space was available for people to self-isolate.

Volunteers – it had been amazing the number of people who wanted to volunteer and help in the current situation. This needed to be co-ordinated and the necessary safeguarding was in place. The council was playing a crucial role. Alan Gough, the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services, and others were working on how this would be co-ordinated. They were bringing together voluntary groups, including Watford and Three Rivers Trust and others.

Information – he had spoken to many residents and many were uncertain. In the following week all households would receive a leaflet from the council advising them where to get up to date and accurate information.

Business support – he noted the government's announcement earlier in the day of £330 billion business support. There was lots of funding available, including business rates reductions. The finance team was working proactively to ensure businesses had that support.

Resilience of the council – it was necessary to ensure the core activities continued. Donna Nolan had been leading the work to ensure the council's activities could continue under these trying circumstances.

The Mayor echoed the Chairman's earlier comments and that all members were community leaders and had a role in providing support to the most vulnerable. Earlier in the day he had spoken to older residents, he had been struck how

unfazed they were and the support they were receiving from their friends, families and neighbours. Members needed to provide support to the most vulnerable, businesses and ensure that all were provided with accurate information.

- a) Councillor Dhindsa commented that he hoped those staff who were having to self-isolate would not trigger any sickness absence alerts or receive sickness warning letters.

He asked the Mayor about those residents who were in private accommodation and had council tax arrears. He hoped they would not be pursued for outstanding payments and the council would be sympathetic, allowing them time to pay.

The Mayor advised that there would be no sickness absence penalties for those staff who were self-isolating. From Wednesday most officers would be working remotely. There would be very few based in the Town Hall. Systems had been put in place over the last year to allow that remote working, causing less disruption to council business.

In response to the second point, the Mayor said the council would want to show flexibility. There were hardship funds available. Those residents on the lowest income had had their council tax reduced to zero. The council would work closely with families to mitigate the impact.

- b) Councillor Martins commented that there had been a football club in Watford since 1881 and at Vicarage Road since 1922. He had been sad to read that there was a danger the club may move from Vicarage Road to another site. There would be an economic impact on the town. There would also be a social impact and the football club and town were entwined. He asked if there was something the council could do to make the club rethink.

The Mayor advised that the club was keen to expand and had looked at various sites. It was a serious proposal. The council did not want the club to leave the borough. They had been told the club was valued; it was at the heart of the town centre and the council wanted to work with them to ensure it continued to thrive in their current location. At the moment it was not definite the club would move to the site in Bushey; it was on green belt land. The council would continue to work with the club. For many it was the emotion and history of the club.

- c) Councillor Turmaine referred to the information about the changes to waste collection. Residents had contacted him and were confused whether

garden and food waste could go in the black bin. Possibly the information could be included in the frequently asked questions (FAQs).

The Mayor responded that he thought the information had been included on the website and FAQs on www.watfordrecycles.com. A letter had been delivered to 40,000 households with his email address included. He had received a handful of enquiries but none had referred to garden waste in black bins. Under the new arrangements food waste would be collected every week alongside dry recycling. However, he would ensure a detailed answer was provided to the councillor.

- d) Councillor Bell said that he wished to reply to the Mayor's announcements. He was pleased that reference had been made to Alan Gough and that organisations were being contacted and brought together. He asked if a list could be sent out to all members. The county council had provided information to all county councillors, for example about Herts Help.

Councillor Bell mentioned that for some residents English was not their first language and they were not exactly sure what was happening. He asked that the council tried to get the information across to all residents.

Finally, he stated that his original question was going to be about the recent news regarding Intu.

The Mayor commented that he had discussed with the Chairman about the matter of English not being the first language for some residents. He needed to ask officers whether there needed to be a bilingual leaflet provided next week to ensure all residents understood.

With regards to Intu, he had discussed the matter with the Managing Directors. Intu Watford was one of the company's most successful sites. He reminded members that the council was the freeholder of the site and would continue to have influence over it. There would still be a shopping centre on site.

- e) Councillor Hofman referred to the Chairman and Mayor's earlier comments about local leadership. He said there was a lot of confusion and unease about things, for example opening hours of GP surgeries, restricted opening hours of supermarkets and supplies around the town. There appeared to be disinformation about local services and government advice. He appreciated these were not the responsibility of the local authority. He asked if it would be possible for a helpline to be set up to answer some of the residents' questions.

The Mayor noted the comments about supplies in supermarkets. Councillors should recommend sensible behaviour. There should be continued support for the foodbank. He referred to the Iceland supermarket which had agreed to open up initially for older and vulnerable people and hoped that other supermarkets would follow. The helpline had been mentioned during discussion about the mail out; and a telephone number was to be included as well as details of the website. He suggested that councillors contact the older and vulnerable people in their local communities.

- f) Councillor Bashir said that he was originally going to ask about financial support but this had already been answered. Instead he wanted to ask about the Metropolitan Line Extension (MLX) project. He commended the Mayor's efforts to resurrect the project and wondered if he had received any response from the Prime Minister.

The Mayor advised that he had not received any response from the Prime Minister. As London Mayor, the Prime Minister had been very supportive. The project was 'spade-ready'. Other partners, including the county council and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), needed to lobby for the project to continue. The benefits of the project would not only be seen in Watford, but in the whole region.

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

No members' questions had been received.

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

A question has been received from Dennis Watling which was set out in the agenda. The question related to the Berkeley Homes planning application which had been considered at Development Control Committee on 16 December 2019.

The Chairman noted that Mr Watling was not present. He advised that a written response would be sent to him and attached to the minutes.

The Mayor noted Mr Watling's question and advised that residents of the Berkeley Homes scheme would be given credits towards sustainable transport. The council wanted to encourage residents to use such transport. He referred to the Beryl bikes scheme and in the first two weeks of operation over 2,000 rides had taken place.

65

Petitions presented under Council Procedure Rule 12.0

A petition in the following terms has been received. At the time of agenda publication the petition contained 115 signatures of Watford residents.

“Since Watford Market was moved to the top end of the town, the majority of market units / stalls have significantly declined bringing the market almost to extinction. Stall holders and residents feel rents are too high, location is poor, market area is uninviting as well as difficult to find (out of sight and tucked [sic] away indoors at top end of town in shipping containers).

We, the undersigned, petition Watford Council as concerned citizens who urge Watford Council to acknowledge that the market is failing in its present form and we are requesting a full ‘rethink’ / ‘review’ about what type of market we want for the future. We demand the following be re-considered a) better location of stalls to enhance visibility and presence (along high street) b) affordable rents c) consider introducing variety of stalls e.g. Traditional Market stalls, Farmers Market, Christmas Market, Speciality Markets e.g. French, similar to St Albans market.”

The Chairman noted the Mr Wharton was not present at the meeting. A written response would be sent to him and attached to the minutes.

The Mayor informed members that he had met Mr Wharton about the petition. He would be happy to meet him again to discuss the matter further. He recognised Mr Wharton’s support and enthusiasm for the market.

66

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.

The Chairman announced that he had agreed to the following two items to be submitted as a matter of urgency in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

67

Suspension of Disqualification from Office under S85 Local Government Act 1972

Council received a report of the Group Head of Democracy and Governance, which sought approval to waive the requirement for councillors to attend a relevant meeting of the council for a period of six months from the date of their last attendance. This had been proposed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the likelihood that meetings may be cancelled or members were unable to attend due to personal circumstances.

RESOLVED –

1. That council approves, in relation to each and every member of the council, as a reason for a failure to attend any meeting of the council, cabinet, committee or sub-committee (a relevant meeting), by any member of the council during the relevant period in the circumstances set out below, as a reason for non-attendance for the of Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.
2. The circumstances referred to in 1 above are that a member fails to attend a relevant meeting because the member:
 - has contracted or been infected by COVID-19
 - has tested positive for COVID- 19
 - is suspected of having or suspects that he/she has contracted or been infected by COVID-19
 - has concerns that they may contract or become infected with COVID-19
 - is in quarantine or self-isolating (whether or not on the instruction or advice of any public authority or medical professional) in relation to COVID-19
 - is unable to attend the relevant meeting because the meeting is cancelled or postponed for a reason relating to COVID-19
3. The relevant period for the purposes of 1 and 2 above is the period from the passing of the resolution until the end of the Annual Meeting of the Council in 2021.

68

Management of Council Business During the COVID-19 pandemic

Council received a report of the Group Head of Democracy and Governance which sought Council approval to cancel all committees and sub-committees until such time as legislation is passed to allow virtual meetings.

Councillor Sharpe moved an amendment, which was seconded by Councillor Collett –

“Delete Items 3.2 and 3.3 replace with

- 3.2 That in relation to the functions normally exercised by the Development Management Committee these be delegated to the Group Head of Place / Head of Development Management / Development Management Team Leader (with preference given to the Group Head and Head) with the members of Development Management Committee with the requirement for their views to be provided via a virtual meeting before the officer formally takes the delegated decision having due regard to the views of

members as shown by the outcome of the virtual meeting and that the normal rules of Development Management allowing one person in favour and one objector to speak be continued.

- 3.3 That in relation to any of the functions normally exercised by the Licensing Sub Committee that these be delegated to the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services / Head of Community Protection / Environmental Health Managers with members of the sub-committee being required to provide their views via a virtual meeting before the officer formally takes the delegated decision having due regard to the views of members as shown by the outcome of the virtual meeting. That applicants and those making representations be advised that only written submissions will be accepted.”

The Chairman asked that the proposals be reviewed and reversed when the current government restrictions were lifted.

On being put to Council the amendment was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

1. that all meetings of council committees and sub-committees be cancelled until such time as legislation is put in place to allow meetings to be held virtually.
2. that in relation to the functions normally exercised by the Development Management Committee these be delegated to the Group Head of Place / Head of Development Management / Development Management Team Leader (with preference given to the Group Head and Head) with the members of Development Management Committee with the requirement for their views to be provided via a virtual meeting before the officer formally takes the delegated decision having due regard to the views of members as shown by the outcome of the virtual meeting and that the normal rules of Development Management allowing one person in favour and one objector to speak be continued.
3. that in relation to any of the functions normally exercised by the Licensing Sub Committee that these be delegated to the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services / Head of Community Protection / Environmental Health Managers with members of the sub-committee being required to provide their views via a virtual meeting before the officer formally takes the delegated decision having due regard to the views of members as shown by the outcome of the virtual meeting. That applicants

and those making representations be advised that only written submissions will be accepted.

4. that any working group be conducted virtually if possible.

69

Report by Committee for Standards in Public Life on Review Of Standards in Local Government

Council received a report of the Group Head of Democracy and Governance which informed members about the recommendations made by the Committee for Standards in Public Life following its review of standards in local government.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Committee on the Standards in Public Life’s recommendations set out below be adopted.

Recommendation 3: Local authorities should review their code each year and regularly seek the views of the public, community organisations and neighbouring authorities – that the code be reviewed annually by the Monitoring Officer and Standards Committee.

Recommendation 6: Local authorities should publish a clear and straightforward public interest test against which complaints should be filtered

– that the procedure be updated to include a clear and straightforward public interest test against which complaints should be filtered.

Recommendation 7: Local authorities should have access to at least two independent persons – **that the council advertises for a second Independent Person.**

Recommendation 8: The Independent Person should be consulted as to whether to undertake a formal investigation into an allegation, and given the option to comment on any allegations that the responsible officer is minded to dismiss as being without merit, trivial or vexatious.

– that the Monitoring Officer seeks the view of the Independent Person when minded to dismiss any complaint as without merit, trivial or vexatious.

2. that the Committee on the Standards in Public Life’s recommendation 2: Local authorities should provide in their codes for councillors to comply

with formal standards investigations, and prohibit trivial or malicious allegations by councillors, not be adopted.

3. that Council notes that the recommendations 1, 4, 5, 9, 10 and 15 of the Committee for Standards in Public Life's review were already being followed and recommendations 12 and 13 were not applicable as there were no parish or town councils in the borough.

70 **Watford BC Corporate Plan 2020**

Council received a report from Cabinet held on 2 March 2020, which included the draft Watford Borough Council Corporate Plan for 2020.

RESOLVED –

that the Corporate Plan 2020 be approved.

71 **Council Pay Policy Statement**

Council received a report of the Group Head of HR which set out the Council's Pay Policy Statement for 2020. The Localism Act 2011 required the council to publish its position on 1 April 2020.

RESOLVED –

that the Council Pay Policy Statement 2020 be approved.

72 **Vice Chairman 2020/21 nominations**

Council received a report of the Democratic Services Manager. The Chairman moved the nominated councillors as set out in the report, which were seconded by Councillor Martins.

Council was advised that the current Chairman and Vice Chairman would continue until the next Annual Council. As a significant number of councillors were not present, the voting would be carried out separately. The Democratic Services Manager would email each councillor with details of the nominations and ask them to inform her of their vote. The councillor with the most votes would become the Vice Chairman at the next Annual Council. If there was a tie the Chairman would have the casting vote.

RESOLVED –

that Councillors Allen-Williamson, Ezeifedi and Mauthoor be put forward to all members as Vice Chairman. The result of the vote to be announced at Annual Council.

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

It was agreed by the Liberal Democrat Group and Labour Group that the motions would be deferred to the next available Council meeting, once meetings could be reconvened.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm
and finished at 8.35 pm