

COUNCIL

26 January 2021

Present: Councillor A Dychton (Chairman)
Councillor B Mauthoor (Vice-Chair)
Councillors P Taylor, D Allen-Williamson, S Bashir, N Bell,
S Bolton, K Collett, K Crout, J Dhindsa, F Ezeifedi, A Grimston,
I Hamid, K Hastrick, M Hofman, P Jeffree, J Johnson, S Johnson,
A Khan, P Kloss, R Martins, M Parker, J Pattinson, G Saffery,
D Scudder, N Shah, I Sharpe, R Smith, B Stanton, J Stiff,
I Stotesbury, M Turmaine, D Walford, M Watkin, R Wenham and
T Williams

Officers: Managing Director
Group Head of Democracy and Governance
Director of Finance (Shared Service) (for minute items 47-56)
Executive Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications
Group Head of Community and Environmental Services
Group Head of Place Shaping
Interim Senior Regeneration Manager
Mayor's Political Assistant
Democratic Services Manager
Senior Democratic Services Officer

47 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mills.

48 Disclosure of Interests

Council was informed that, under the Council's Code of Conduct, all councillors had been given a dispensation by the Monitoring Officer to consider and vote on minute number 56 as all members had a pecuniary interest in that item.

49 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2020 were submitted and signed.

50 Official Announcements

Civic death

The death of ex-Mayor and councillor John Watts was announced. He had been a Labour councillor from May 1976 until his resignation in 1990 and Mayor from 1989 to 1990. The Chairman had sent a letter of condolence to his wife, Sheila Watts and the Borough flag had been flown at half-mast on the day of his funeral.

The Chairman invited the meeting to observe a minute's silence in memory of John Watts as well as those who had died of Covid 19. She further asked people to reflect on the vital role played by key workers during the current pandemic.

Sponsored walk

The Chairman thanked all those who had sponsored her on her walk to the town's green flag parks earlier in January. She had been accompanied by the Mayor. £2,000 had been raised for her chosen charities, Watford Women's Centre and Electric Umbrella.

Neighbourhood Locality Funds

All councillors were reminded to submit their Neighbourhood Locality Fund applications by the end of February to ensure they would be completed by purdah in March. All funding applications should be submitted and signed off through the members' portal.

FortiClient

Members who had not yet had FortiClient installed on their Surface Pros were asked to contact the ICT helpdesk to advise their daytime availability this week. IT would arrange installation and talk through FortiClient's functionality.

Council Vice- Chairman

The Chairman would be announcing nominations for the 2021/22 Vice Chairman at the next Council meeting on 16 March. All nominations required a proposer and seconder. Further details would be provided by the Democratic Services Manager in February.

Queen's New Year's Honours List

The Chairman congratulated all those Watford residents and those contributing to Watford who had received an award in the Queen's New Year's Honours list.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Wednesday 27 January 2021 was Holocaust Memorial Day and the Chairman advised that the Town Hall would be lit up in purple. She would also be holding an online event on 11 February at 6.30pm. Invitations would be sent out shortly.

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 Bell, Bashir, Smith and Dhindsa indicated that they wished to ask questions.

- 1) Welcoming the constructive cross party working during the Covid 19 pandemic, Councillor Bell questioned the appropriateness of party leafleting during the current lockdown and whether this was contrary to government rules.

The Mayor explained that it was vital for councillors to keep in touch with residents in order to inform them about the help and support available. Leafleting provided an opportunity to disseminate information. There were no epidemiological arguments to support the suggestion that leaflets were unsafe in the face of on-going postal and delivery services to households.

- 2) In a supplementary question, Councillor Bell argued that the leaflet in question contained only party political information. This was neither necessary nor welcomed by residents. He also raised concerns about those delivering leaflets not wearing face coverings.

In response, the Mayor argued that it was important for democracy to continue. The government had stated that local elections would take place in May and it was necessary to inform residents about local issues. He reiterated the need to focus on the science which did not support Councillor Bell's concerns about the spread of Covid 19 as a result of leaflet distribution.

- 3) Councillor Bashir also welcomed the Mayor's engagement with the opposition group during the pandemic. Addressing the current Covid 19 mass vaccination programme, Councillor Bashir asked whether the Mayor could update the meeting about the possible provision of a mass vaccination centre in Watford and whether the Mayor had offered any council or community facility for this purpose.

The Mayor underlined the importance of encouraging the uptake of the Covid 19 vaccines. Local leadership from councillors was crucial in this endeavour. He noted that local vaccination levels were high. The Mayor confirmed that the council had been working with the NHS to make council facilities and land available. It was hoped that a mass vaccination site would be opened in the town in the coming weeks.

- 4) Referring to the real living wage, Councillor Smith asked the Mayor whether the council required their contractors to pay their employees at least a real living wage.

The Mayor agreed that it was important that people were paid a decent wage for the work they did. The issue was taken seriously by the council. He noted that the new contract agreed with SLM had extended the real living wage to younger employees who were not legally entitled to it. Ensuring that everyone received a decent wage would continue to be a key consideration as council contracts came up for renewal.

- 5) Councillor Dhindsa focussed on the issue of free school meals which had been highlighted both nationally and at a local level. He asked the Mayor what had been done with the £230k which had been allocated to the council for this purpose.

The Mayor concurred that it was important all children, and particularly those from low income families, received the food they needed. The government's management of this issue had been outrageous. The Mayor explained that Hertfordshire County Council was the responsible authority for education and held information on those children in receipt of free school meals. Watford Borough Council had received £10k towards food more generally about six months previously. This had been distributed to local groups including the Watford Foodbank, Watford Women's Centre and One Vision. Additional support had been afforded by the Watford Covid Appeal which had raised over £160k to support local groups.

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

A question had been submitted by Councillor Turmaine. The question and response had been sent to all members and published on the council's website.

53 Petitions presented under Council Procedure Rule 12.0

A petition with the requisite number of signatures from Watford residents had been received in the following terms:

"Increased CCTV/safety measures in Oxhey Park

Recent events involving threats to my personal safety have made it clear the inadequacy of safety measures surrounding Oxhey Park/Riverside Recreation Ground/Ebury Way. The park needs adequate CCTV to help trace criminals, as well as increased lighting to ensure public safety. I hope to raise enough support

for the council to consider installing CCTV in the park as an initiative to increase the safety of families and deter the minority.”

The petitioner, Ms Beth Rosewall, was invited to present the petition. Ms Rosewell argued that the safety measures in place around Oxhey Park, Riverside Recreation Ground and Ebury Way were inadequate. In May 2020, she had been attacked and sexually assaulted in Oxhey Park and continued to suffer from her experiences. The lack of CCTV footage had hampered the police’s investigation and the perpetrator was still at large. Existing CCTV cameras in the park provided insufficient surveillance coverage.

Ms Rosewall’s petition had attracted some 350 signatures. A number had added comments which underlined the depth of feeling about public safety in the local community. This had prompted a self-help group of joggers to patrol Oxhey Park. Ms Rosewall acknowledged contrary arguments about low crime levels and the potential loss of privacy as a result of CCTV, but argued that safety should override these considerations. She urged the council to take action and enable residents to feel safe in their local parks.

The Chairman invited councillors and the Mayor to debate the petition. Ms Rosewell’s decision to discuss her own experiences in order to draw attention to this issue was welcomed by members. Councillors maintained a keen interest in safety issues across the town and CCTV played an important role in tackling crime. The Mayor advised that he had met previously with Ms Rosewall to discuss her concerns. People needed to feel safe using Watford’s open spaces and he suggested that Overview and Scrutiny Committee should establish a cross party group to review Watford’s CCTV coverage and the council’s approach to its use. The review would need to consider a range of issues including the balance of privacy, freedom and safety considerations. Any recommendations should be made to the Mayor and Cabinet.

Following the debate the Chairman thanked Ms Rosewall for attending the meeting and advised that a written response would be sent from the council.

- 54 **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.

- 55 **Council Pay Policy Statement 2021**

Council received a report of the Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development which set out the Council's Pay Policy Statement for 2021.

RESOLVED –

that Council approves the Council Pay Policy Statement.

56

Financial Planning

Council received the report of the Director of Finance including:

- Budget Gap, as recommended by Cabinet on 18 January 2021
- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020-24 as recommended by Cabinet on 18 January 2021
- Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/22 to 2023/24
- Income Charging Policy 2020-23
- Capital Strategy 2021/22
- Report of Finance Scrutiny Committee on 12 January 2021
- Report of Licensing Committee on 14 January 2021
- Report of Cabinet on 18 01 21

The Mayor moved the budget report which was seconded by Councillor Watkin.

No amendments had been received and Councillor Turmaine, as Labour Group representative, was invited to speak. Councillor Turmaine set out the activities of Finance Scrutiny Committee, of which he was chair, and the proposals and feedback which had arisen from discussions. Members then debated the budget report.

The motion was then put to Council.

Those members voting in favour of the original motion:

Chairman, Councillor Dychton, Mayor Taylor, Councillors Allen-Williamson, Bolton, Collett, Crout, Grimston, Hamid, Hastrick, Hofman, Jeffree, J Johnson, S Johnson, Kloss, Martins, Parker, Pattinson, Saffery, Scudder, Sharpe, Stanton, Stiff, Stotesbury, Walford, Watkin, Wenham and Williams.

No members voted against the original motion.

Those members abstaining:

Councillors Bashir, Bell, Dhindsa, Ezeifedi, Khan, Mauthoor, Shah, Smith and Turmaine.

The original motion was CARRIED by 27 votes. There were 9 abstentions.

RESOLVED –

1. **To agree proposals recommended by Cabinet on 18 January 2021 that Council:**
 - a) Resolves in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the amount calculated by Watford Borough Council as its Council Tax Base for the year 2021/22 is 32,786.1 as outlined in the report.
 - b) Approves the continuation of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2021/22.
 - c) Approves the budget (Attachment 1) as laid out in the report, including:
 - o the budget for 2021/22
 - o the Capital Investment Programme 2020-24.
 - d) Approves the schedule of fees and charges & income charging policy (Attachment 2).
 - e) Approves the Capital Strategy for 2021/22, amended as necessary for the decisions of Cabinet on 18 January 2021, and delegates to the Director of Finance and Portfolio Holder Resources responsibility for agreeing and maintaining the Treasury Management policy. (Attachment 3)
 - f) Agrees to increase the annual Council Tax for a Band D property 2021/22 by 1.7%. This will apply to all other bands.
 - g) Notes the key risks identified and approves their proposed mitigations.
 - h) Notes the advice provided by the Director of Finance on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves.
 - i) Notes the indicative budgets for 2022/23 and 2023/24.

Setting the amount of Council Tax for Watford Borough Council

2. That the Council's net General Fund expenditure for 2021/22 shall be **£13.684 million.**

3. That the 2021/22 band D precept is set at **£278.24** and other bands and amounts are set in accordance with the table at paragraph 2.5 (E).
4. That Watford Borough Council's Council Tax Base for 2021/22 has been calculated at 32,786.1 in accordance with Regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012 made under Section 31B (1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended.
5. That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2021/22 in accordance with Sections 31A to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:
 - (A) *Being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act. (Effectively the gross expenditure and transfers to reserves)* **£76,371,951**
 - (B) *Being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act. (Effectively the gross income and transfers from reserves)* **£67,249,547**
 - (C) *Being the amount by which the aggregate at 2.5 (A) above exceeds the aggregate at 2.5 (B) above calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act as its Council Tax Requirement for the year* **£9,122,404**
 - (D) *Being the amount at paragraph 2.5 (C) divided by amount at 2.4 above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 33 (1) of the Act as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (at Band D)* **£278.24**

(E)

Council Tax Valuation Band	Conversion Factor to Band D	Watford's Share £
A	6 / 9	185.49
B	7 / 9	216.41
C	8 / 9	247.32
D	1	278.24
E	11 / 9	340.07
F	13 / 9	401.90
G	15 / 9	463.73
H	2	556.48

Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at paragraph 2.5 (D) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5 (1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in Valuation Band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36 (1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year 2021/22 in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

6. That a report including precepts of both Hertfordshire County Council and the Police Authority be presented to the Functions Committee on 23 February 2021 to set the total Council Tax.

57

Motions submitted under Council Procedure Rule 13.0

Council was informed that two motions had been received.

Motion 1

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor Stotesbury:

"Supporting the Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) Bill

Council notes that:

1. The CEE Bill Alliance, made up of scientists, lawyers and activists, tabled a Private Members Bill in Parliament on 2nd September 2020 ;
 - a) The bill has the potential to become the most significant move forward since the Climate Change Act 2008;
 - b) 88 MPs have so far supported the bill, with co-sponsors from across the political spectrum including Labour, Liberal Democrat and Greens;
 - c) The bill sets an emergency path for the UK to follow, including the creation of a Citizens' Assembly, ensuring the UK plays its fair and proper role in limiting global temperatures to 1.5°C and actively conserving the natural world.
2. Watford Borough Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019 and committed to becoming a climate neutral council by 2030, since taking actions including:
 - a) Establishing a sustainability forum to work with key communities and businesses in the borough;

- b) Working to provide alternative and sustainable modes of transport for residents;
- c) Leading by example to reduce waste in the council and the borough more generally;
- d) Creating biodiversity in council-owned assets.

Council believes that:

1. All governments (national, regional and local) have a duty to limit the negative impacts of climate and ecological breakdown;
2. Local governments should not wait for their national governments to change their policies;
3. Towns, cities and local authorities are uniquely placed to lead in tackling the climate and ecological emergency due to the close links with their residents;
4. The Climate and Ecological Bill deserves the support of the government as it reassesses the urgency of the twin climate and ecological emergencies.

Council therefore resolves to:

1. Declare an ‘Ecological Emergency’ alongside the Climate Emergency it has already declared;
2. Work with partners locally and regionally to drive coordinated leadership and collaborative action to aid the recovery of nature and natural environments and identify areas for habitat restoration;
3. Lead by example and promote the good work the Council is currently and will in future be doing;
4. Publicly support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill;
5. Ask the Mayor to write to our MP to urge him to sign up to support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill.”

RESOLVED –

Council notes that:

1. The CEE Bill Alliance, made up of scientists, lawyers and activists, tabled a Private Members Bill in Parliament on 2nd September 2020 ;
 - a) The bill has the potential to become the most significant move forward since the Climate Change Act 2008;
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3. Lead by example and promote the good work the Council is currently and will in future be doing;
4. Publicly support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill;
5. Ask the Mayor to write to our MP to urge him to sign up to support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill.

Motion 2

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Collett and seconded by Councillor Stiff:

"Tracking Stalkers and Domestic Abusers

Council notes that:

- Stalking and domestic abuse are crimes which are insidious and terrifying, the majority committed by men against women. Offenders go from victim to victim, yet many remain undetected and unconvicted.
- The evidence shows that domestic abuse has become more prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. Some stalkers and domestic abusers go on to commit murder, and tragically the domestic homicide rate, mostly of women, continues to increase.
- Despite clear warning signs that such crimes are often repeated and follow a pattern, much offending behaviour remains undetected by the Police, probation and other agencies, and offenders are left at large.
- Although the provisions of the Domestic Abuse Bill now before Parliament are welcome, the Bill is manifestly deficient in not addressing the importance of robustly tracking and apprehending these offenders.

Council further notes that:

- Whilst the Domestic Abuse Bill would place Clare's Law (the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme) on a statutory footing, this will place the onus upon victims to come forward to seek information about their partner or a family member and this can sometimes place the victim in danger.
- There is no duty on police services to identify, track and manage stalkers and domestic abusers.

Council believes that:

- It is imperative that serial stalkers and domestic abusers are prioritised and proactively identified, assessed and managed by Police, probation and other relevant agencies, so that intelligence can be shared about their offending behaviour to hold them to account and close down their behaviour.
- The details of stalkers and domestic abusers should be included on the Violent and Sexual Offender's Register and managed via the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements.

Council resolves to ask the Mayor to write to the Home Secretary asking her to make these changes to more effectively track and apprehend stalkers and domestic abusers, and to copy in our local Member of Parliament asking him to

make representations to the Home Secretary in support of the Council's position."

RESOLVED –

Council notes that:

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Council resolves to ask the Mayor to write to the Home Secretary asking her to make these changes to more effectively track and apprehend stalkers and domestic abusers, and to copy in our local Member of Parliament asking him to make representations to the Home Secretary in support of the Council's position.

58 **Town Hall Quarter**

Council received the report of the Managing Director setting out the transformation programme for the Town Hall Quarter.

RESOLVED –

that Council approves Cabinet's recommendation that a budget of £2.1m be agreed to progress the transformation programme.

59 **Exclusion of Press and 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 the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during consideration of the items there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Section 100(1) of the Act for the reasons stated below in terms of Schedule 12A.

The Chair moved that Council Procedure Rule 8.0 be waived to allow the meeting to finish at 10.45 pm.

On being put to the meeting the motion was declared to be CARRIED.

60 **Watford Colosseum Management Arrangements**

Council received the report of the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services setting out future management arrangements for Watford Colosseum.

RESOLVED –

that Council approves a draft budget for operating the Colosseum until April 2022.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm
and finished at 10.30 pm