

CABINET

18 January 2021

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

Also present: Councillors N Bell

Officers: Managing Director
(Shared Services) Director of Finance
Group Head of Democracy and Governance
Group Head of Transformation
Group Head of Place Shaping
Executive Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications
Head of Planning and Development
Head of Programme Management Office
Interim Senior Regeneration Manager
Mayor's Political Assistant
Democratic Services Manager

59 **Apologies for absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

60 **Disclosure of interests (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

61 **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2020 were agreed. It was noted that the minutes would be signed once officers and members were able to return to the Town Hall.

62 **Conduct of meeting**

The Mayor reported that he intended to change the order in case Cabinet needed to move the exclusion of the press and public; this would enable

members to discuss or make reference to the exempt documents attached to the Town Hall Quarter report.

63

Ombudsman's Decision

Cabinet received a report of the Group Head of Democracy and Governance reporting a decision of the Ombudsman relating to a housing complaint.

Councillor Johnson, Portfolio Holder for Housing, was invited to introduce the report. He referred members to the Head of Housing's comments within the report at paragraph 4.7. The housing service had accepted all of the Ombudsman's recommendations. The Ombudsman's report had provided some clarity on some areas that were ambiguous.

Councillor Johnson added that the service was reviewing the Nominations Policy and it was hoped the new version would be ready by September 2021. The application process had changed in 2018 and each individual in a couple completed their own online application, but were then treated as a couple through the process.

Councillor Johnson noted that between April 2018 and 2020 there had been 17 complaints to the Ombudsman about housing matters and only one of these had been upheld. The service apologised for what had happened and the complainant was happy with the outcome.

Councillor Bell was pleased to note that the service had accepted responsibility and were reviewing the Nominations Policy. He commented that housing was a common issue in his casework. It was important that the service acted correctly. Many residents did not understand the housing process. He was concerned that there would be many more people approaching the council for housing support once the pandemic was over.

Councillor Johnson acknowledged the councillor's comments and said the service wanted to be as accessible as possible. The Nominations Policy would be discussed and developed over the next nine months at Housing Policy Advisory Group and encouraged members to get involved and help to make the process as simple as possible for residents.

RESOLVED –

that the Ombudsman's decision be noted.

Watford 2020 Programme Closure

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office including a closure report of the Watford 2020 Programme. Councillor Watkin, Portfolio Holder for Resources, was invited to introduce the report.

Councillor Watkin introduced the report. He said that this amazing piece of work had largely achieved its objectives. He congratulated the Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office on his work throughout the project along with the Group Head of Transformation. The remote working used by officers since the start of the pandemic had in part been a result of the Watford 2020 work. The officer's report included lessons that could be learnt for similar future projects. The results of the work had attained an annual savings of £1 million in revenue costs by 2021/22.

Councillor Watkin referred to the objectives in the closure report and noted that the majority had been fully achieved and two had been partly achieved. The programme had shown how this type of work could be carried out without damaging the core values of the organisation. Watford was a shining example.

The Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office informed members that it was good practice to do a closure report. It provided a retrospective look back at the work carried out. There was an opportunity to review the objectives and highlight the benefits that had been achieved. Many of the recommendations in the report had already been incorporated into the Council Plan and some in the Town Hall Quarter programme. There had been continual engagement throughout the programme with members and officers. The officer engagement would continue through the Staff Ambassadors group. It had been recognised that it was important to identify the resources required whilst involving other officers who were also trying to keep the day to day running of services going.

Members welcomed the report and were grateful for the member involvement throughout and regular updates to scrutiny. It had been an interesting report.

In response to a question about how, based on the lessons learnt, the council could do better, the Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office advised that the council's response to the covid-19 pandemic had shown how officers were able to do additional tasks as well as their usual work. The programme's work had received input from services and had been led by services. It was essential to recognise the resources required to deliver this type of programme without impacting services.

The Group Head of Transformation added that the enhanced service planning that had recently been introduced provided a focus to ensure that all services could be delivered.

Councillor Bell questioned whether the changes resulting from the programme would link in with the changes the Managing Director wanted to introduce.

In response the Managing Director commented that she had joined the council as the Watford 2020 programme was ending. She had been able to develop her thoughts for the future of the council from the learning acquired through the programme.

RESOLVED –

1. that Cabinet notes the lessons learnt and the recommendations (as detailed within section 3 of Appendix 1 to the report).
2. that Cabinet notes the formal closure of the programme.

65

Proposed Permitted Development Rights - Consultation response

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Planning and Development and a draft response to the permitted development rights consultation.

The Mayor noted that the subject was a highly contentious area in planning. He invited Councillor Sharpe, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration, to introduce the report.

Councillor Sharpe stated that the government was continually changing the planning system and making it easier for developers to carry out developments with less control for the local authority. The current consultation followed Use Classes Order changes. Previously schemes allowed under permitted development rights were minor changes and had little impact on the environment. The new proposals were significant changes. It would be a lot easier for land owners to change commercial uses into residential uses.

Councillor Sharpe said that the council was in favour of more residential properties into the Town Centre, but it needed to be carried out in a planned way. It should not undermine the local economy. Any article 4 directions for employment and business districts would need to be re-done. This would enable a gap when owners could create poor quality residential environments and no financial contributions to offset impacts of the development. In his opinion, this proposal by the government undermined the planning system.

The Mayor commented that this was an important issue and had an impact on the vibrancy of the Town Centre and an impact on office availability.

The Head of Planning and Development added that the final draft of the Local Plan had just been launched. The proposal undermined the approach in the draft Local Plan.

Councillor Bell advised that he was concerned about unplanned changes in the Town Centre and then Clarendon Road. He agreed with the majority of the report and the draft response.

RESOLVED –

1. that Cabinet approves the draft consultation report, set out in Appendix A to the report, for issue to the Secretary of State.
2. that Cabinet delegates authority to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development to approve any minor amendments that may be required.

66

Financial Planning

Cabinet received a report of the Section Head – Financial Planning and Analysis providing service level expenditure, funding and council tax levels for the medium term 2021/22 to 2023/24.

The Mayor invited Councillor Watkin, Portfolio Holder responsible for Finance, to introduce the report.

Councillor Watkin advised that in current times it was difficult to predict the future. He highlighted some of the key points in the report. The administration had kept to its commitment to residents and there was a small change in fees and charges. He noted that there had been changes to the base budget and it was not expected that the council would achieve the same level of collection. It was also felt that there would be an increase in the number of households requesting Council Tax relief. It was recommended that council tax would be increased by 1.7%, equivalent to 9p per week on a Band D property. Councillor Watkin felt the council was prudently using its resources.

The Mayor invited Councillor Turmaine, Chair of Finance Scrutiny Committee to present the committee's views.

Councillor Turmaine reported that Finance Scrutiny Committee met on 12 January and reviewed the report before Cabinet. Members had noted the

impact of Covid-19 on the council's budget and its unpredictability. The commercial income from the business parks appeared to be steady. Members raised questions about Covid-19 grants, SLM, parking in the town and the Council Tax recommendation. The scrutiny committee would monitor the fees and charges over the coming year.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the votes were recorded as follows –

Those in favour

Mayor Taylor, Councillors Collett, Johnson, Sharpe, Watkin and Williams

The resolutions as set out in the report were **CARRIED** by 6 votes to 0.

RESOLVED –

1. that Cabinet delegates to the Director of Finance and Portfolio Holder the ability to amend the budget figures in accordance with decisions taken at the Cabinet meeting on 18 January 2021 and any minor variations that may occur before the Council meeting.

That Cabinet recommends to Council that it

2. 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.
3. approves the continuation of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2021/22.
4. approves the budget (**Attachment 1 to the report**) as laid out in the report, including:
 - the budget for 2021/22
 - the Capital Investment Programme 2020-24
5. approves the schedule of fees and charges & income charging policy (**Attachment 2 to the report**).
6. 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 to the report**).

7. agrees to increase the annual Council Tax for a Band D property 2021/22 by 1.7%. This will apply to all other bands.
8. notes the key risks identified and approves their proposed mitigations.
9. notes the advice provided by the Director of Finance on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves.
10. notes the indicative budgets for 2022/23 and 2023/24.

67

Cultural Strategy 2018-2025 - Updated Implementation Plan

Cabinet received a report of the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services and a report from AEA Consulting who had reviewed the implementation of the Council's 2018 Cultural Strategy.

The Mayor invited Councillor Collett, Portfolio Holder for Community, to introduce the report.

Councillor Collett said that in 2018 the Cultural Strategy expressed the council's vision for the future of culture within the town. There were four key parts to the action plan. The Covid-19 pandemic had highlighted the need to reflect on the work carried out with Watford Together. AEA Consulting's recommendations supported the Council Plan and two of its themes. Progress was dependent on the collaboration of key stakeholders. The updated plan provided an ambitious and creative work programme for the council and its partners.

The Mayor felt the report highlighted the strength of the cultural sector in Watford, as shown in Watford Together. Arts Council England spoke positively of the cultural situation in Watford.

The Managing Director added that the updated action plan provided a clear pathway for the future. The council had worked with 39 key stakeholders across the town to develop the plan. It linked to the Town Hall Quarter project.

Councillor Bell asked that the ethnic and diverse community was considered as the action plan moved forward.

Councillor Collett noted the councillor's comments. She agreed that the town's diverse community needed to be considered. As an example she highlighted

some of the recent and current work of the Museum. Covid-19 had brought groups together from across the town.

RESOLVED –

1. that Cabinet notes the AEA Consulting report at Appendix A to the report.
2. that Cabinet approves the consolidated Action Plan 2021 – 2022 at pages 84 – 88 of the AEA Consulting report.
3. that Cabinet authorises the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services, in consultation with the Mayor and Managing Director, to make amendments to the Action Plan 2021-2022.
4. that Cabinet notes the progress on the delivery of the Action Plan 2021-2022 will form part of the quarterly Road to Renewal update.

68

Town Hall Quarter

Cabinet received a report of the Managing Director setting out the transformation programme for the Town Hall Quarter. It was noted that if members were minded to discuss any of the exempt documents it would be necessary to agree to exclude any press and public and to stop the live stream.

The Mayor stated that it was important for the rejuvenation of the Town Hall and Colosseum; enabling them to better serve the town. It was proposed to rejuvenate the Museum and deliver the council's cultural strategy. It included an incubator space for new businesses. It would provide value for money for residents. The area would become a vibrant environment. There were various strands and they had all been brought together under one overall project. Clear governance was essential and a member steering group had been proposed.

The Managing Director advised that this was a complex but exciting programme for Watford. The council was proposing to revitalise this part of the town. It had built on the work carried out during 2019. Significant work had been carried out on the viability of the scheme to ensure the council could be confident the programme was achievable. Development partners were keen to work with the council on the project. She added that there was still a lot of work to be done. If agreed at this meeting and budget approved at Council the Member Steering Group would receive regular updates and at key points reports would be presented to Cabinet for approval.

Members welcomed the proposal. It would provide more cultural opportunities to the community. The Museum would be able to broaden its offer; currently it

was too small to accommodate and share the town's diverse history. The programme was located in a conservation area including listed buildings and locally significant buildings. The area also included the modern building of the leisure centre and West Herts College. The space between the Town Hall and Library was not usable; this provided an opportunity to shape the area. It was an opportunity to provide an area that people wanted to visit. It was an ambitious, bold and exciting project.

Councillor Bell noted the changes from the original scheme. He welcomed the preservation of the Colosseum with its good acoustics. He hoped that the building could be used by more diverse groups.

The Mayor thanked members for their comments and noted that this was the start of the process.

RESOLVED –

1. that Cabinet agrees the overall vision for the THQ (section 9 of the report).
2. that Cabinet agrees the terms of reference for the Members Steering Group to oversee the THQ programme as set out in appendix A to the report.
3. that Cabinet confirms that the preferred commercial delivery structure for the Town Hall Quarter regeneration project would be to enter into a joint venture limited liability partnership with a private sector development partner (section 11.2 of the report).
4. that Cabinet authorises officers to proceed with the procurement for the appointment of a development partner for the Regeneration project via a procurement process under the Public Contract Regulations using the competitive dialogue procedure delegating authority to the Mayor in consultation with the Member Steering Group and the Group Head of Place Shaping to approve the following elements of the procurement process namely: the project objectives, the selection criteria, the evaluation criteria and the short-list of tenderers selected to proceed to invitation to participate in the dialogue and following the procurement to seek Cabinet approval of the appointment of a joint venture partner (section 11.2 of the report).
5. that Cabinet agrees to the Head of Property and Regeneration undertaking commercial negotiations with the landowners across the site to acquire their land interests and integrate those buildings and land into

the proposals to undertake comprehensive development of the Town Hall Quarter site, and if terms are agreed to either enter option agreements or subject to Council approving expenditure of the necessary funding undertake those acquisitions (section 11.3 of the report).

6. that Cabinet authorises officers to proceed with the development of an Outline Business case and supporting design work for the redevelopment of the Town Hall and bring this back to Cabinet in Autumn 2021 or earlier if possible (section 12 of the report).
7. that Cabinet authorises officers to proceed with the development of an Outline Business case and supporting design work for the comprehensive refurbishment of the Colosseum and bring this back to Cabinet Autumn 2021 (section 13 of the report).
8. that Cabinet authorises officers to proceed with the development of a Strategic Business case for the development of an Innovation and Incubation Hub project and bring this back to Cabinet in Summer 2021 (section 14 of the report).
9. that Cabinet notes the appointment of the Museum and Heritage Service Review Consultants and authorises officers to proceed with the development of an Outline Service Plan for the redevelopment of the Museum and Heritage service and bring this back to a future Cabinet (section 15 of the report).
10. that Cabinet authorises officers to work with Watford cultural organisations' to understand their requirements to inform the future redevelopment of the Colosseum (section 16 of the report).
11. that Cabinet authorises officers to proceed on developing Transformational Change organisation strategy for how the Council staff operate and develop Communications plans to integrate with and complement the other projects in the THQ programme (section 17 of the report).
12. that Cabinet recommends to Council a budget of £2.1m for officers to progress the programme (section 18 of the report).

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 8.05 pm