

CABINET

4 May 2020

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

Also present: Councillor Bell, Labour Group Leader

Officers: Managing Director
Acting Shared Director of Finance
Group Head of Community and Environmental Services
Group Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications
Group Head of Democracy and Governance
Group Head of Transformation
Head of Leisure and Environmental Services
Democratic Services Manager

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the council's first virtual Cabinet meeting. He introduced the councillors present. He advised at the end of each item he would ask each member of Cabinet how they wished to vote.

68 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Watkin.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

70 **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2020 were submitted. It was noted the minutes would be signed once officers and members were able to return to the Town Hall.

71 **Conduct of meeting**

The Mayor reported he would go through the agenda as published. He welcomed Councillor Bell, Labour Group Leader to the meeting.

Watford Borough Council Response to Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Cabinet received a report of the Group Head of Transformation which provided an update on the council's planning and response to Coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Mayor thanked the council's officers for carrying out a difficult job. Their response had been very impressive. Some officers had been redeployed to other roles to support the response to the pandemic.

The Managing Director presented the report. She advised that the council was at the forefront of support for the town's community. She had held regular meetings with Cabinet and the leader of the opposition. The council was starting to focus on the new 'normal'. She said that she was incredibly proud of the staff and their achievements, showing a diligence and commitment to hard work and supporting the local community during a challenging period.

The portfolio holders highlighted some of the work being carried out by the services under their responsibilities. The portfolio holders and Councillor Bell thanked the services and paid particular tributes to Veolia, Housing and the Head of Community Protection. It was noted that other services in the council, although not directly impacted by the response to Coronavirus, continued to progress their work.

Councillor Bell referred to the objectives that had been set out in paragraph 7.6 of the report. He asked whether these had changed or if any more would be added. In addition he enquired about the support provided to vulnerable people.

Members were advised that the objectives set out in the report had been established at the outset. As the council moved forward those objectives changed or were flexed. As the council continued more focus would move now to recovery. It was important to ensure they were flexible and responded to daily government advice and the community's needs.

The vulnerable members of the community were supported through two different cells. The county council predominantly supported those who had been shielded. District councils provided additional support and had contacted people on the list to discover if the individual needed support. Other vulnerable people were supported with a range of activities with the council working in partnership with the Watford and Three Rivers Trust. Over 1,000 people had volunteered to support the vulnerable. The council had developed an evidence base to ensure all those who needed support were given that support. The members had recently been sent a guide that provided information to enable them to signpost their constituents to the support available.

Councillor Bell was concerned about adverse community impacts, for example the impact on the BAME community, those over 70 or with underlying health issues.

The Mayor referred to the leaflet the council had distributed to every household in the borough. The Group Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications added that it was nationally recognised that the BAME community appeared to be suffering disproportionately. A breakdown was not available for those in Watford with the virus. The council had worked closely with the Muslim community, with help from Councillor Khan. Information had been distributed and materials translated.

RESOLVED –

that the contents of the report be noted.

73

Medium Term Financial Strategy - Impact of COVID-19

Cabinet received a report of the Acting Shared Director of Finance which set out a prudent view of the impact of COVID-19 on the council's finances. It was noted that an amendment had been circulated in a later edition of the agenda due to further emergency COVID-19 funding being received from the government.

The Acting Shared Director of Finance explained the various sections contained in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The first table showed a breakdown based on a 3-month lockdown. It was too early to predict some impacts. All government grants for businesses, the additional Council Tax Relief and the Retail and Hospitality sectors had been distributed. She advised that the impact on council services was based on three months, after this time it was envisaged that some services would move back to normal working.

Following a question about further government grants to the council, particularly in response to the way the council managed the response to the pandemic, the Acting Shared Director of Finance advised that the council had received a thank you letter about its management of COVID-19 response. If the lockdown continued for a longer period the government may agree to further grants, but it would not cover any loss of commercial income.

The final section of the strategy proposed a cautious approach towards expenditure. The flowchart asked budget managers to consider any proposed expenditure and if it could be delayed. It was not proposing to stop priorities.

In response to a question from Councillor Bell about the reserves and how they could be replenished, the Acting Shared Director of Finance advised that the Economic Impact Reserve had done what it had been set up for originally. The position should be clearer at the end of quarter one and officers would work on a way forward.

The country had been in an unusual position and it was rare for a government to stop the economy.

RESOLVED –

that the Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted and the proposed immediate actions to be taken be endorsed.

74

Waste and Recycling Contract Variations - revised implementation date as a result of the impacts of COVID-19

Cabinet received a report of the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services which sought approval to revise the implementation date of the service changes agreed on 6 January 2020. The proposal was to amend the implementation date to 7 September 2020 and the annual payment date to 1 September 2020.

Councillor Williams, as Portfolio Holder, highlighted the original report which required the introduction of the changes to service from 1 July 2020. The two month delay allowed Veolia to deal with relevant issues to do with the current crisis. He thanked the Veolia team for maintaining all services throughout the current crisis, which he asked officers to pass on to the company. He was aware that the public show of thanks for their work was appreciated by the teams.

Councillor Bell also wished to pass on his thanks to Veolia and praised them for not cutting services. He questioned whether September was the correct time to bring in the changes to the service.

Councillor Williams noted there was a risk of proposing September as a start date. He reminded members that the new charge was for a full year, September to August, and not to April.

RESOLVED –

1. that the contract with Veolia be varied with effect from 7 September 2020 in relation to waste and recycling services provided in Watford as set out below:

- a) The introduction of a weekly collection of food waste (with a new 23 litre kerbside brown bin provided to all households identified)
 - b) Retention of a weekly collection of fully commingled recycling (using a blue-lidded bin).
 - c) The introduction of a fortnightly collection of non-recyclable waste (using existing black bin)
 - d) The introduction of a chargeable fortnightly collection of garden waste (using existing green bins), which is accessed via a yearly subscription.
2. that the charges for the fortnightly collection of garden waste is as set out below, the same charges also apply to each additional green bin. The charges apply from 1st September 2020 to 31st August 2021 and are applied on these anniversary dates on an annual basis. Residents are able to have up to a maximum of seven green bins per household:
 - Standard annual charge of £45.00 (per bin)
 - Standard annual charge reduced to £40.00 (per bin) if paid by direct debit
 - Customers in receipt of certain income based benefits will be entitled to a concessionary rate of £35 (per bin) (no further reduction if paid by direct debit)
 3. that agreement of the detailed operational changes required and agreement to the final terms relating to the variation of the contract with Veolia and all other matters arising from this service change be delegated to the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services.

75

Change of Officer on Council Companies and Partnerships

Cabinet received a report of the Group Head of Democracy and Governance requesting a change to the council's appointed representative on Watford Commercial Services Limited and the Membership Board of the Watford Health Campus Partnership LLP.

It was confirmed that the role of Deputy Managing Director no longer existed. Members thanked Helen Fisher for all her work whilst at Watford Borough Council and welcomed Tom Dobrashian.

RESOLVED –

that Tom Dobrashian, Group Head of Place Shaping, be appointed as a Director on Watford Commercial Services Limited and on the Membership Board of the Watford Health Campus Partnership LLP.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.40 pm