

## **COUNCIL**

**15 March 2022**

Present: Councillor B Mauthoor (Chairman)  
Councillor A Grimston (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors P Taylor, D Allen-Williamson, N Bell, K Clarke-Taylor,  
M Devonish, J Dhindsa, A Dychton, F Ezeifedi, M Hofman,  
P Jeffree, S Johnson, A Khan, R Martins, T Osborn, M Parker,  
J Pattinson, A Saffery, G Saffery, N Shah, R Smith, B Stanton,  
J Stiff, I Stotesbury, S Trebar, M Turmaine, D Walford, M Watkin,  
D Watling and T Williams

Officers: Managing Director  
Group Head of Democracy and Governance  
Director of Finance Shared Services  
Executive Head of Communications and Engagement  
Mayor's Political Assistant  
Democratic Services Manager  
Democratic Services Officer (OE)

### **59 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Crout, Feldman, Hamid, Hannon, Kloss and Wenham.

### **60 Disclosure of Interests**

Council was informed that Councillor Karen Clarke-Taylor had a non-registrable interest in the third motion as her employer provided legal advice to the Department for Transport regarding rail matters. Councillor Clarke –Taylor therefore left the meeting when the motion was debated and took no part in the debate or vote.

There were no other disclosure of interests.

### **61 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2022 were submitted and signed.

### **62 Official Announcements**

### **Audentior Awards**

The Chairman informed Council about the successful Audentior Awards ceremony which took place on 4 March 2022. A total of £1,762 was raised for the Chairman's charities.

### **Chairman's events**

The Chairman informed the council of events she had attended since the last Council meeting. These events included a Holocaust memorial event where she joined the Mayor and Liz Maykels to lay flowers at the Anne Frank tree near the Peace memorial; a visit by Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Gloucester at the Bobath Centre; the Mayor of Stevenage's Charity Ball, and the High Sheriff Awards. The Chairman also spoke about Watford Borough Council's first schools debate which took place on 14 March 2022 with representatives from the Watford Girls and Watford Boys Grammar Schools. She commended the winners from Watford Grammar School for Girls, Zainab Kassam and Evelyn McGuigan and said that she hoped the event would continue in future years as it was important for young people to engage with local government and wider politics.

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### **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 Bell, Turmaine and Watling indicated that they wished to ask questions.

Before responding to members' questions, Mayor Taylor mentioned that there was ongoing work in the town to support Ukrainians and thanked the Chairman for her contributions and hard work during her year as chairman.

- 1) Councillor Bell also thanked the Chairman for her work over the last year. He noted that there had been an investigation published in the Watford Observer that detailed the presence of Class A drugs such as cocaine in Watford's pubs and bars. Councillor Bell asked what the Mayor had to say to families who were concerned about the outcome of the investigation.

The Mayor told Councillor Bell that he had been in contact with the Police regarding the issue. It was said that cocaine residue can remain detectable for a number of years and as a result of this, it was important for there not to be an overestimation of the scale of the problem. This being said, the Mayor said that there was work being done with the police and other partners to ensure the safety of residents and visitors to the town.

- 2) In a supplementary question, Councillor Bell advised that he was reassured by this confirmation but still wanted to know whether the Mayor had been involved with Watford's Chief Inspector and relevant staff members at the council.

In response, the Mayor said that he regularly spoke with Chief Inspector Ian Grout about a range of issues and had spoken with local businesses. The Mayor commented that the close working relationships that had been formed between partners meant that there was often collaborative work to tackle issues in the town, and that this was one of Watford's strengths.

- 3) Councillor Watling asked whether there were any plans to expand the Beryl Bike scheme as there was often a low supply of bikes in the North Watford area. Councillor Watling also said that bikes were sometimes left unrepaired.

The Mayor disagreed that Beryl Bikes were left unrepaired stating that Councillor Stotesbury in particular had worked hard to ensure the success of the scheme. With regards to supply, the Mayor said that the bikes were often moved around to ensure that supply was provided where it was most needed, and said that he would be happy to look into expanding the scheme in the future. Watford was the first place in the county to have electric bikes.

- 4) Councillor Turmaine asked why the council had published the Local Plan in 2021, failing to appropriately challenge the housing targets set by the government. Councillor Turmaine then asked whether the Mayor would see this as an inadequate fulfilment of his duty seeing as the targets were being met by erecting taller buildings.

The Mayor responded saying that Councillor Turmaine did not vote against the Local Plan when presented with the opportunity. He then went on to state that the only way to challenge the national governments housing targets was if the town had areas of outstanding beauty, green belt areas or areas of special scientific interest. The town had none of these and to date there had not been a council similar to Watford that had successfully challenged the housing targets. The Mayor also stated that there were many Labour led councils that were building upwards across the country and said that it would be better for Labour councillors to challenge the Conservative central government, who were responsible for the tripling of housing targets as opposed to challenging Liberal Democrats.

64 **Questions by Members of the Council under Council Procedure Rule 10.0**

No questions had been received.

65 **Questions by Members of the Public under Council Procedure Rule 11.0**

No questions had been received.

66 **Petitions presented under Council Procedure Rule 12.0**

No petitions had been received.

- 67      **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.

- 68      **Council Pay Policy Statement 2022**

Council received a report of the Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development containing the Council Pay Policy Statement for 2022.

RESOLVED –

that Council approves the Council Pay Policy Statement.

- 69      **Member Attendance Rule - Waiver and Extension of Time Limit**

Council received a report of the Democratic Services Manager asking for Council approval to waive the rule that Councillor Crout be disqualified for non-attendance at any council meetings for six months and an extension to the time limit to be approved until 9 May 2022.

RESOLVED –

that Councillor Crout be granted a waiver of the six-month attendance rule, in accordance with Section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972, and an extension of the time limit to 9 May 2022 be approved.

- 70      **Vice Chairman 2022/23 Nominations**

Council received a report of the Democratic Services Manager which set out the procedure and nominations for the election of the Vice Chairman for 2022/23. It was noted that Councillors Feldman and Watling had been nominated and duly seconded.

The Chairman announced that following members' votes, Councillor Simon Feldman had been elected as Vice Chairman for 2022/23.

RESOLVED –

that Council approves the election of Councillor Simon Feldman as Vice Chairman for 2022-2023.

- 71      **Motions submitted under Council Procedure Rule 13.0**

Council was informed that four motions had been received.

## Motion 1

Following the publication of the agenda, an amendment to the published motion had been agreed and the revised motion was proposed by Councillor Khan and seconded by Councillor Dychton.

This council notes:

- The Russian army was ordered to attack Ukraine by Vladimir Putin. This was unjust and without any cause. Watford Council joins all residents across the town in opposing Vladimir Putin's barbaric war on Ukraine.
- The ongoing horrendous loss of civilian life in Ukraine is a human tragedy.
- The people of Ukraine have fought bravely and with courage defending their freedoms and democracy.
- Russia's attack on Ukraine is an attack on democracy itself.

This Council recognises that we must play our part in supporting Ukrainian people and communities affected by this terrible conflict.

The council resolves:

- Write to the Home Secretary to offer to do what we can to support displaced Ukrainian families – making clear that residents of Watford will welcome those affected and displaced by conflict.
- To stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine against Russian aggression and fully support their inalienable right to self-determination and freedom from occupation.
- Support, promote and work in partnership with local charitable, community and religious organisations who are working to provide resources and assistance for those affected and displaced by the conflict and by encouraging Watfordians to donate to appeals for humanitarian support in Ukraine.
- Work with the County Council and our local schools to urgently find placements for any school-age children seeking refuge in Watford.
- Ask our Members of Parliament to raise with the Home Office the issues children, who don't have a passport, who are currently experiencing problems at the UK border.
- To call on Russian troops to be withdrawn from Ukraine immediately and for the Ukrainian people to be allowed to peacefully return to their lives and homes.
- To fully support serious punitive sanctions against Russia and Putin's supporters in the UK.

We call on the council to write:

This Council also resolves to ask all Hertfordshire Council leaders and elected Mayors to sign a joint letter to the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary calling on the UK

Government to match words with action and offer support to Ukrainian people in their hour of need without having to go through the prolonged visa application process.

End our dependence on Russian energy and fast-track the transition to renewable energy sources.

Impose the severest economic, financial, technical and cultural sanctions on the Russian state.

- To write to the Prime Minister to take serious action on Russian money laundering and Russian influence inside the UK.

We call on the Mayor to write to the Russian Ambassador to the UK on our behalf:

- Condemning the attack and war on Ukraine
- That the attack is an attack on a democracy
- To withdraw her troops from Ukraine immediately

Members debated the revised motion.

On being put to Council, the motion was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

This Council notes:

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## **Motion 2**

The second motion had been proposed by Councillor Turmaine and seconded by Councillor Shah. Following the publication of the agenda a revised motion was proposed by Councillor Turmaine and seconded by Councillor Shah.

"This Council welcomes the recent decision by cabinet to go ahead and introduce a pilot project for mobile CCTV in our town. If this pilot proves successful, the council should make sure that mobile CCTV cameras can be used across the borough to tackle fly-tipping and other crimes."

Members debated the motion.

On being put to Council, the motion was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

This Council welcomes the recent decision by cabinet to go ahead and introduce a pilot project for mobile CCTV in our town.

If this pilot proves successful, the council should make sure that mobile CCTV cameras can be used across the borough to tackle fly-tipping and other crimes.

### **Motion 3**

The following motion was proposed by Mayor Taylor and seconded by Councillor Stotesbury.

This council notes:

- Watford Council has made a commitment to reach carbon neutrality by 2030;
- According to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, transport accounted for 33.1% of all territorial carbon dioxide emissions in 2019, with “the large majority of emissions” from transport being from road transport;
- According to the Williams-Shapps review, “for every mile a person travels, passenger trains produce a third of the emissions of the average petrol car”
- Public transport offers greener, more sustainable methods of travel than cars;
- The government have committed the country to a policy of ‘living with Covid’ by removing all legal restrictions placed on the public over the last 2 years, essentially asking people to return to pre-pandemic ‘normal’;
- At the onset of the pandemic, train services were significantly reduced due to a lack of passenger demand. As Covid restrictions have gradually been lifted, passenger numbers have continued to recover but investment in restoring passenger services has not;
- Local people want to use public transport to travel to and from Watford, but are unable to do so in an efficient way due to lack of appropriate services;
- Outcome five of the Williams-Shapps review stated that new rail measures would grant greater control for local people and places, that “[r]ailways will be more responsive to the needs of local communities and customers”, and “locally-led teams will [...] be accountable to the people and places they serve”, whereas Watford residents have found post-pandemic rail services are not responsive to their needs.
- On 1st March 2022, rail fares rose by the biggest increase in a decade (fares on national rail services increased by 3.8%).

This council believes:

- The government needs to increase investment in train services and work with (and, where necessary, require) operators to return timetabling to pre-pandemic levels;
- The government needs to review existing local service levels and routes, and whether they meet demand, specifically with a view to increasing services between Bushey and London Euston, and introducing a direct service from Bushey to Shepherd’s Bush, West Brompton and Clapham Junction;



- The government needs to fulfil its pledge that railways will be more responsive to the needs of local communities and customers;
- The government should freeze rail fares for 5 years.

This council resolves to:

- Ask the Mayor of Watford to write to the Secretary of State for Transport calling for him to address the concerns raised in this motion.

Members debated the motion.

On being put to Council, the motion was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

Council notes:

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- The government needs to fulfil its pledge that railways will be more responsive to the needs of local communities and customers;
- The government should freeze rail fares for 5 years.

Council resolves to:

- Ask the Mayor of Watford to write to the Secretary of State for Transport calling for him to address the concerns raised in this motion.

#### **Motion 4**

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Pattinson and seconded by Councillor Glen Saffery.

"Created in the 1800s, when the electoral choice was between the aristocratic Tories and Whigs and women were denied the right to vote, First Past the Post is structurally undemocratic. It means millions of votes do not matter, millions of votes are wasted, both "safe seats" and tactical voting are commonplace, and seats won in Westminster often bear little relationship to votes cast. In short, it is an archaic rigged system. How can Britain of the 2020s move forward when, in some constituencies, the same party has won in every election since those constituencies were created in 1832?"

This council notes

- The UK is the only country in Europe to still use First Past the Post for general elections aside from Belarus;
- Watford's elections for borough and county councillors use a First Past the Post system of election, whereas the election for Watford's Mayor uses a form of Proportional Representation;
- More than 80 nations around the world currently elect their legislatures through a system of Proportional Representation, including in Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland;
- The Conservative Government is currently undergoing legislative procedures to remove all elections by Proportional Representation in the UK, which are used to elect Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners, to replace them with First Past the Post systems.

This council believes

- Proportional Representation voting systems are objectively fairer and lead to a more representative legislature in which everyone can be confident that their vote counts;
- The Conservative Government's attempt to overturn local uses of Proportional Representation systems in the UK is a detrimental step backwards for democracy.

This council therefore resolves to:

- Reject First Past the Post, end minority rule, and support the introduction of a form of Proportional Representation for all elections in the UK in which all votes count equally and seats match votes;
- Ask the Mayor to write to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities calling for a review of the Elections Bill and proposals to scrap all proportional voting systems in the UK.

Members debated the motion.

On being put to Council, the motion was AGREED.

RESOLVED –

Council notes

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Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm  
and finished at 9.20 pm