

CABINET

7 June 2021

Present: Mayor Taylor (Chair)

Councillors A Dychton, S Johnson, J Pattinson, I Stotesbury
and T Williams

Also present: Councillors N Bell

Officers: Managing Director
Group Head of Democracy and Governance
(Shared Services) Director of Finance
Group Head of Place Shaping
Group Head of Community and Environmental Services
Executive Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications
Mayor's Political Assistant
Democratic Services Manager

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the first Cabinet meeting in the Town Hall for over a year. He welcomed the new Portfolio Holders and introduced the councillors present.

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Watkin.

2 Disclosure of interests (if any)

There were no disclosures of interest.

3 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2021 were submitted and signed.

4 Conduct of meeting

The Mayor reported that he intended to go through the agenda as published.

5 **Contract Exemption Hertfordshire Growth Hub**

Cabinet received a report of the Economic Development Consultant setting out details of a procurement exemption for a Watford Business Growth Grant to Exemplas. Details of the exemption request were set out in the appendix to the report.

The Mayor briefly introduced the report and then invited the Group Head of Place Shaping to provide further information.

The Group Head of Place Shaping explained that the report provided transparency of the decision. The Hertfordshire Growth Hub would provide support to businesses in Watford.

In response to a question from Councillor Bell, the Group Head of Place Shaping advised that the Growth Hub would support businesses with between five and 10 employees. Other support was available to businesses with more employees.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet notes the report.

6 **Strategic Framework 2020-21 Q4 Update**

Cabinet received a report of the Executive Head of Strategy and Communications and Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office which provided an update on the council's strategic framework, comprising

- The Council Plan 2020-2024 and Delivery Plan 2020-22
- The Organisational Development Strategy 2020-24; and
- Covid-19 Road to Renewal Plan

The Mayor thanked the officers for the update and noted the huge amount of work that had been undertaken across the council. He invited the Managing Director to provide further details.

The Managing Director advised that this was the third update to Cabinet. During the last quarter the council had continued to face the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic whilst continuing to provide services to its community. The delivery of the framework had continued at pace. When the framework had initially been adopted it had not been expected that the council and the country would be having to deal with a lengthy pandemic. The whole framework was currently under review and an update would be provided to Cabinet in the summer.

The Managing Director then outlined some of the key highlights from the last quarter.

- Watford Borough Council had been assigned as district lead on 'Staying Connected', a Hertfordshire-wide project, aiming to support people with accessing information technology devices and training to get them digitally connected and reduce social isolation.
- £3.5 million awarded to the council towards the decarbonisation of the Town Hall and Colosseum.
- £1.85 million awarded to the council to roll out external wall insulation.
- Excellent careers festival held in March 2021; the council having been very involved in the event.
- Watford Business Park development – planning permission had been granted and demolition had commenced.
- Very high percentage of managers had undertaken the mental health awareness training.
- Time to talk initiative, second sessions held.

In response to a question from the Mayor the Managing Director explained that the completed items would be migrated from the delivery plan following the relevant quarter the action had been completed.

Councillor Bell commented that it was good to see that many of the actions had either been completed or were on track. He asked about the proposal for six apprentices and if this was still on track for September.

The Mayor responded that there had been many discussions about the apprentices and he was keen for this to happen. The council was working with Watford Chamber of Commerce. The Managing Director confirmed that September continued to be the target date.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet notes:

1. The progress updates within this report relating to:
 - the Council Plan 2020-24 and Delivery Plan 2020 -22 (Appendix A);
 - the Organisational Development Strategy 2020-24 (Appendix B); and
 - the Road to Renewal Plan (Appendix C).

2. As outlined in the original report to Cabinet in July 2020, that the progress to date will be communicated publically to our residents, with the proposal to do this in September 2021.
3. The significant corporate effort over the last three months that has resulted in a substantial level of progress made against all three plans.
4. The impact of external factors on some of the areas of delivery. Where this is the case, the area have been reviewed to reflect the current environment during Quarter 4. The focus on delivery within the life of the plans remains a corporate commitment.
5. The Road to Renewal plan will adapt to best serve residents and businesses as the Covid-19 incident continues and develops. As confirmed as part of the last update to Cabinet, a review and refresh of the existing plan has been undertaken to ensure that it is responding to the impact of the pandemic and the arising needs of residents and businesses. This will be presented to Cabinet in July 2021.

7 Update of the Council's Domestic Abuse and Joint Safeguarding Policies

Cabinet received a report of the Environmental Health Officer (Community) which provided updates of the Domestic Abuse and Joint Safeguarding policies.

The Mayor noted the statistics related to domestic abuse in a year. He invited Councillor Dychton to introduce the report.

Councillor Dychton stated that the updated policies reflected changes in legislation and risks. The policies would ensure the council met its statutory responsibility. The Domestic Abuse policy explained how the council would respond to any suspicions of abuse. A number of agencies, including the council, played a part in supporting work to reduce incidences of domestic abuse and to support victims. The policies set out clear responsibilities and an action plan ensured priorities were met. The intention was to monitor the policies over the next six months.

In response to a comment from Councillor Johnson about the inclusion of local data, the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services advised that national data was used to understand the longer-term impacts. However as part of the review the local data would be noted. The strategic high-level data provided by national statistics helped inform the policies.

Councillor Pattinson urged that training was put in place for both members and officers, particularly safeguarding. The Group Head of Community and Environmental Services confirmed the councillor's comments would be taken on board.

RESOLVED –

That the Joint Safeguarding Policy and Domestic Abuse Policy, attached as appendices 1 and 2 to the report, be approved.

8 Balmoral Road Garage Site - proposed use for interim move-on homes for Watford's Single Homeless Pathway

This report was withdrawn prior to the meeting.

9 Economic Growth Strategy

Cabinet received a report of the Economic Development Officer and Group Head of Place Shaping, including the draft Economic Growth Strategy 2021-2025.

The Mayor thanked the officers for developing the strategy. Following the recession in 2008 Watford was one of the most successful economies in the UK. In March 2020 Watford was home to more than 5,400 enterprises, an increase of 28% since 2015. He noted that Watford had seen the greatest productivity growth in Hertfordshire over the last decade. There was a strong diverse business base. There was a strong supply of jobs and attracted private sector investment. However the claimant count had nearly doubled since January 2020 due to Covid-19; a significant number had lost their jobs. The town had yet to see the impact of Brexit. Although Watford did not have significant deprivation there were pockets of deprivation within the town.

The Mayor stated that he was positive about the economic future of Watford and South West Hertfordshire. Watford always dared to be different and looked beyond the usual solutions. Watford was an outstanding location for business and was the base for regional and national headquarters.

The Mayor referred to the report and advised that it set out five priorities:

- Developing a thriving and productive economy
- Supporting our key sectors
- Supporting our communities to access opportunities
- Creating a new economic future for Watford town centre
- Creating the right environment for sustainable growth

The strategy also contained a detailed action plan. The Mayor highlighted some of the aspects and the action plan. He said the council wanted to be investors, developers, ambitious, enterprising and benefitting all of the community.

Councillor Bell commented on reference to the film industry and whether the town was in competition with Hertsmere and Elstree. He also questioned if the council was pushing other industries, for example IT and incubator businesses, particularly now with Watford Business Park and Croxley Park.

The Mayor responded that there had been collaboration in South West Hertfordshire in connection with the film industry. He had recently visited Warner Brothers filming site and noted how busy it was currently.

The Group Head of Place Shaping advised that the council wanted to drive the film and creative sectors in South West Hertfordshire. Watford was the largest and best connected town within the area. The strategy referred to supporting four key sectors – professional services, creative sector, health care and town centre services including retail and hospitality. Some of these had the biggest challenges but also the best prospects. IT was an enabling service, behind many other sectors. An action within the strategy looked at how an innovation hub could be embedded. The council wanted to support lots of businesses to grow in Watford and would look at any potential government grants that could help support the growth.

In response to a question from Councillor Bell about Atria and the John Lewis site, the Mayor and Managing Director both advised that they were aware of ongoing discussions and there was interest in the site.

Councillor Williams noted that sustainability and tackling climate change had been included throughout the strategy.

In response to a question from Councillor Stotesbury regarding updates, the Mayor advised that he understood they would be included as part of the quarterly updates considered at the beginning of the meeting.

RESOLVED –

1. That Cabinet approves the draft Economic Growth Strategy, High Level Action Plan and detailed Project Plan.
2. That Cabinet agrees to the development of a Watford Skills and Employment Plan, led by West Herts College.
3. That Cabinet notes that the strategy will be monitored through quarterly updates to Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to the business partnership, One Watford for Business.

10 **Exclusion of press & 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 item 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 item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Section 100(1) of the Act for the reasons stated in terms of Schedule 12A.

11 **Riverwell Joint Venture - Deed of Variation to Members Agreement**

Cabinet received a report of the (Shared Services) Director of Finance, who introduced the report.

Members considered the officer's recommendation.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet approves the officer's recommendation.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.35 pm