

CABINET

16 January 2023

Present: Mayor P Taylor (Chair)
Councillors A Dychton, J Pattinson, G Saffery, I Stotesbury,
M Watkin and T Williams

Also present: Councillor N Bell, Leader of the Labour Group

Officers: Chief Executive
Group Head of Democracy and Governance
(Shared Services) Director of Finance
Director of Partnerships
Director of Performance
Senior Project Manager
Democratic Services Manager

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the Cabinet meeting.

37 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Turmaine, Chair of Finance Scrutiny Committee.

38 Disclosure of interests (if any)

There were no disclosures of interest.

39 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2022 were submitted and signed.

40 Conduct of meeting

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

41 Local Lottery

Cabinet received a report of the Strategic Initiatives Officer which sought the Executive's decision on whether to proceed with a local lottery scheme.

The Mayor introduced the report. He stated that this had been one of his manifesto commitments. He was keen for the council to support the voluntary sector and this was a way to raise further funds to assist them. Local lottery schemes were already in place in the neighbouring authorities of Hertsmere and St Albans.

The Mayor invited Councillor Dychton to provide further information.

Councillor Dychton explained that the proposed lottery scheme would raise additional funds in an exciting and engaging way. The lottery would operate weekly and 60p in every £1 spent would go directly to good causes. The remaining funds would go into the prize pot and cover the cost of administration. The proposed operator, Gatherwell, had launched over 100 similar schemes with local authorities. The scheme would provide a new source of funds for the voluntary and community sector. It would enable them to become more sustainable and to continue to help Watford residents. Research into the scheme included carrying out an equalities impact analysis in order to understand and mitigate any potential impacts. Conversations had been held with the neighbouring authorities to understand the risks, benefits and learning from their schemes. If approved by Cabinet it would be launched later in the year.

Councillor Bell commented that it was important to help the local voluntary sector. However, there was some concern from residents that their council tax was being used for gambling. Some residents would not be happy with the scheme based on moral and religious grounds. It was important that the proper safeguarding measures were in place. In addition, the lottery should not be relied on for funding.

The Mayor responded that individuals did not have to play the lottery. There were a number of funding streams to support to the local voluntary sector. The local lottery was extra. With regard to the comment about the lottery being funded by council tax, he advised that a separate organisation would be running the administration of the lottery and was funded by the entry fee.

Councillor Dychton added that Gatherwell had very good safeguarding procedures in place. Overall, there would be a benefit for the organisations and it would support them in becoming independent. The right safeguarding procedures in place would support those who wanted to participate and stop those who should not.

Councillor Bell noted the responses and commented that he understood safeguarding would be in place and he would see how the scheme progressed.

The Mayor added that he had spoken with the current lottery provider, who was located in the town and the new one. He had asked them about gambling issues and had been advised that it was not usually relevant to local lotteries, but other forms of gambling.

RESOLVED –

1. That the council enters into a contract with Gatherwell Ltd, to deliver a local lottery scheme for Watford.
2. That an officer is allocated to manage the lottery and engagement with the voluntary sector to promote the scheme as a part of their full time role.
3. That a process is implemented to allocate funding from the local lottery's general fund. The recommendation is that a new approach is tested whereby a representative group of residents/community organisation representatives is established to review and support the decision making process, voting on options to allocate the funding. Appropriate governance should be implemented in order to monitor total monies raised on an ongoing basis. In addition to this, the council can ask funding beneficiaries to report back how the monies are spent, providing valuable insight into the tangible benefits of the scheme.
4. That a comprehensive engagement strategy is established for the lottery, to ensure both initial and ongoing momentum to sign up and engage community groups/charities to take part in the scheme and make it a successful, ongoing funding stream for their services.
5. That clear rules and eligibility criteria are established as part of the launch project, in order to mitigate risks around access to funding and problem gambling.

42

Procurement Strategy 2022-2026

Cabinet received a report of the Corporate Procurement Manager which included a new Procurement Strategy.

The Mayor commented that a lot of work had been done to get to this stage. He invited Councillor Watkin to provide further details about the report.

Councillor Watkin thanked the council's Procurement Manager for his work on the new strategy. The new Procurement Strategy would support the Council Plan and its key themes. There were six key objectives to be adopted across the organisation. These included achieving best value, ensuring contractors paid

above the national living wage and treated employees fairly, mitigating against any negative environmental impacts, supporting local businesses where possible, transparent procedures and finally looking for added social value at little or no additional cost to the council. The strategy set out how these would be delivered. The strategy would be monitored by the Procurement Manager but all procurement across the authority had to abide by it.

The Mayor welcomed the support for local small and medium enterprises.

Councillor Stotesbury commented that the document was critical as it set out the areas referred to by the Portfolio Holder. It also was reflected across all strategies. It was important that it highlighted the climate and social value.

Councillor Bell said he agreed with much of what had been said, especially the reference to social value and national living wage. He asked for clarification on the national living wage and contractors.

The Mayor confirmed that prospective contractors would be required to pay their employees the national living wage as a minimum.

RESOLVED –

That the Procurement Strategy, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

43

Woodside Masterplan Update

Cabinet received a report of the Senior Project Manager which set out the development and appraisal options for Woodside.

The Mayor stated that this was an important piece of work. He invited Councillor Williams to introduce the report.

Councillor Williams informed Cabinet that the proposals provided for the upgrade and expansion of the sporting and community facilities at Woodside. The options, having been evaluated, were extensively reviewed with the local stakeholders, including Watford Cricket Club, Watford Amateur Boxing Club, other sporting clubs and sporting governing bodies. Everyone welcomed the proposals and agreed they would meet the needs of the site. Whilst assessing the options it had been agreed that the facilities should be affordable for the clubs to operate. Extensive dialogue had taken place with the clubs. The design concept proposed to re-use and refurbish as much as possible. Space within the premises would be more practical and user-friendly. The premises would be substantially carbon neutral due to the proposed improvements. This was a very

exciting project and was highly anticipated by the clubs and teams. He recommended the programme through to the design stage.

The Mayor welcomed the sustainable aspects of the programme. He noted there had been significant engagement with the local clubs.

Councillor Dychton agreed this was an exciting project and the residents of Woodside were looking forward to the new facilities. She mentioned that the initial development plans had been started by her former colleague Karen Collett.

Councillor Williams thanked the project team, particularly the Senior Project Manager and Director of Partnerships. If agreed, the project team would now work on meeting the time frame set out in the report.

RESOLVED –

1. To proceed to the next stage of design development of the selected schemes, including the replacement of the cricket pavilion event hall with a slightly larger hall, and to progress with detailed spatial and technical design, firming up the cost estimates, applying for planning consent and to undertake a competitive tendering exercise to procure construction works.
2. That the Director of Partnerships be granted delegated authority to award the construction contract in consultation with the Portfolio Holder (Neighbourhood Services) on the proviso that the overall cost to deliver the project remains within the approved budget.

44

Financial Planning

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Finance which asked members to consider the service level expenditure, funding and council tax levels for the medium term 2023/24 to 2025/26, including the use of reserves. It was noted the minutes from Finance Scrutiny Committee had been circulated to Cabinet and were available on the council's website.

The Mayor introduced the report. He set out the current financial context for local authorities and how many were struggling to balance their budgets. In the last 10 years the government funding received by Watford Borough Council had decreased by over 50% in real terms. Despite that the council still aimed to deliver high quality services for its residents. He referred to the current inflation and cost of living crisis. The proposed increases in council tax (3%) and fees and

charges (6%) were a real terms cut. The council also faced rising costs for material and labour.

The Mayor advised that the budget underpinned the council's commitment to supporting its residents through the cost of living emergency. It supported important services including Housing and local organisations who were helping residents through this crisis, for example the Citizens Advice. The council would ensure it protected front line services. An important aspect included in the budget was the ambitious green agenda which included the work to support the environment.

The Mayor invited Councillor Watkin to provide further context.

Councillor Watkin said that at last year's budget meeting he had reflected on how inflation had begun to rise and had reached 5.4%. The RPI was now over 11%, although it was predicted to fall in the next year. The New Homes Bonus had been increased but it was necessary to envisage this as a one off. However there had been reductions elsewhere which had meant the council had an overall increase of government funding of £258,000. This would be added to the contingency fund to reduce the use of reserves. He advised that the government was committed to reviewing the funding to lower tier authorities, which included Watford. He referred to the financial impact of borrowing for the capital programme.

Councillor Watkin explained the make-up of the council's predicted funding income for the following year and its expenditure as set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The council would consider more commercial opportunities to offset costs and more shared services with neighbouring authorities to ensure sustainable services for residents and enhanced career opportunities for staff. The property portfolio was the largest source of income. Croxley Park remained a popular location. He informed members that with regard to fees and charges, some had increased by 6% whereas others had not increased, some were set by the government or other organisations, for example SLM. The estimated overall increase for fees and charges was £252,000. The Economic Impact Reserve would drop slightly. The Capital Programme set out the council's investment including in its parks and green infrastructure, the Town Hall, Colosseum, Watford Business Park, Riverwell and Hart Homes.

Finally, Councillor Watkin referred to Finance Scrutiny Committee. He advised that the scrutiny members had asked searching questions but there had been no formal recommendations for Cabinet or Council to consider. The scrutiny committee's comments were appreciated.

Councillor Bell acknowledged that this was a difficult time for all councils. He clarified the proposed costs for the Colosseum and Town Hall. It was confirmed the funding for the Colosseum was £6 million and the Town Hall was £7.7 million.

The Mayor responded that the proposals for the Town Hall would result in an annual saving of £300,000 and would improve the building's efficiency. Councillor Stotesbury added that there would be a significant improvement to workspace for the council's staff, improving the building's green credentials and leveraging government funds. The Mayor said that it was hoped the council would hear about the government funds by the end of January. He also agreed that the Town Hall scheme would support community facilities, the Museum and local businesses. Councillor Watkin stated that the Town Hall would also become a centre for the community, transforming this part of the town.

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

Those in favour

Mayor Taylor, Councillors Dychton, Pattinson, G Saffery, Stotesbury, Watkin and Williams.

The recommendations, as set out in the report, were CARRIED by 7 votes to 0.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet:

1. Delegates to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources the ability to amend the budget figures in accordance with decisions taken at the Cabinet meeting on 16 January 2023 and any minor variations that may occur before the Council meeting on 31 January 2023.

Recommends to Council that:

2. Council 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 2023/24 is 35,532.1 as outlined in the report.
3. Approves the continuation of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2023/24.

4. Approves the budget (Attachment 1) as laid out in the report, including:
 - the budget for 2023/24
 - the Capital Investment Programme 2022/23 to 2025/26
5. Approves the income charging policy and schedule of fees and charges effective from 1 April 2023 with the exception of charges for building control which are effective from 1 February 2023 (Attachment 2a and Attachment 2b).
6. Approves the Capital Strategy for 2023/24, and delegates to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder Resources responsibility for agreeing and maintaining the Treasury Management Strategy Statement. (Attachment 3)
7. Agrees to increase the annual Council Tax for a Band D property 2023/24 by 2.99%. 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 2024/25 and 2025/26.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.40 pm