

CABINET

13 March 2023

Present: Mayor Taylor (Chair)
Councillors A Dychton, I Stotesbury, M Watkin, T Williams

Also present: Councillors N Bell and M Hofman

Officers: Chief Executive
Group Head of Democracy and Governance
(Shared Services) Director of Finance
Executive Director of Place
Director of Partnerships
Associate Director of Property and Asset Management
Programme Manager
Business Intelligence Manager
Sustainability Officer
Principal Planner
Planning Policy Officer
Head of Legal
Mayor's Political Assistant
Democratic Services Manager

45 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Pattinson and G Saffery.

46 Disclosure of interests (if any)

There were no disclosures of interest.

47 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 16 January 2023 were submitted and signed.

48 Conduct of meeting

The Mayor reported that he intended to move items 5 and 6 in the agenda to the end of the meeting (minute numbers 56 and 57 respectively), in case Councillor Saffery was able to make it to the meeting later.

Focusing on Delivery: Performance and Progress

Cabinet received a report setting out the quarterly updates of the Council Plan 2022-26 and its Delivery Plan 2022-24; the Organisational Strategy 2020-24 and the key performance indicators.

The Mayor introduced the report and thanked the officers for the work that had gone into it. He highlighted some of the achievements over the last quarter, including:

- Levels of litter, detritus and fly-posting had improved.
- Housing benefit application processing had improved.
- The Customer Service Centre statistics were better than the previous quarter, although it was still an extremely busy time.
- The 'Tales of the River' project was progressing.
- A Supplementary Planning document had been produced to inform developers how they could contribute to enhancing biodiversity.

The Mayor invited Councillor Watkin to provide further details.

Councillor Watkin stated that the results shown in the report and appendices underpinned the work set out in the Mayor's manifesto. He said it was important to recognise the staff for all the work they had done. He advised that the council had just received an award which recognised the staff went above and beyond the requirements of a committed team.

Councillor Watkin commented that the Mayor had mentioned some of the key successes. However, he did want to mention that there was one red indicator in the Delivery Plan. This was related to the completion of a new crematorium, which the council was working in partnership with other local councils. He noted that the issue with the Environment Agency had been resolved and the development could continue.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the works on the new crematorium had been slightly behind, but it was now rapidly moving towards completion.

Councillor Stotesbury wanted to highlight the creation of the cost of living forum which had been responsive to need. It showed how the council could bring together local groups.

RESOLVED –

1. that Cabinet notes the progress updates within this report relating to:

- the Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022 -24 (Appendix A)
 - the Organisational Development Strategy 2020-24 (Appendix B)
 - the key performance indicator results for Quarter 3 of 2022/23 (Appendix C).
2. That Cabinet notes the key performance indicators and measures will continue to be reviewed as part of the council-wide service planning process and the ongoing work on the Business Intelligence Strategy, and that these will be discussed with Portfolio Holders over the next period for their views.
 3. that Cabinet notes the report will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 March 2023.

50 **Energy Recommendation**

Cabinet received a report of the Corporate Procurement Manager which sought approval for entry into a new contract for energy procurement.

The Mayor invited Councillor Watkin to explain the report in more detail.

Councillor Watkin explained that the council had been part of a buying consortium for its energy. It was important to prepare for the period after the current contract expired. He thanked the council's Corporate Procurement Manager for his work on reviewing the options available. The current arrangement had shown substantial savings for the council. Having reviewed the options, the continuation with the Laser Buying Group remained the best option.

RESOLVED –

That the energy contract be awarded to Laser Buying Group from 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2028.

51 **Appointment to Hart Homes (Watford) Limited Operations Board**

Cabinet received a report of the Group Head of Democracy and Governance which set out the Shareholder Board's recommendation for the appointments to the Operations Board.

The Mayor informed Cabinet that the Shareholders Board had received the report about the creation of an Operations Board related to Hart Homes (Watford) Limited and Hart Homes (Watford) Development LLP. The Board

would formalise discussions at an operational level with Watford Community Housing. Cabinet was being asked to appoint the council's two representatives.

RESOLVED –

That Julian Hart and Andrew Harris-Sanjivi be appointed to the Companies Operation Board.

52 **Sustainability Strategy Task Group - final report**

Cabinet received a report of the Sustainability Strategy Task Group, which set out its recommendations following its review.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Hofman, who chaired the task group, and the scrutiny members for their work on this important subject. He invited Councillor Hofman to present the report and recommendations.

Councillor Hofman commented that he had had the pleasure of chairing the Task Group and working along side Councillor Stotesbury and officers. He explained the background to the climate crisis and the impact on global warming. In response to the climate crisis Watford Borough Council declared a climate emergency. The current Sustainability Strategy was due to expire in March 2023. It had been decided to create a new strategy and include the input of non-executive members through a scrutiny task group.

Councillor Hofman advised that the Task Group met on three occasions, with the final meeting reviewing the high level outcomes of the consultation that had been carried out. The Task Group was able to provide input into this vital strategy. There would be challenges to meet the targets but it required everyone to work together.

Councillor Stotesbury thanked Councillor Hofman and the Task Group for their work. It had been well chaired and had been a useful forum for frank debate. Some of the Task Group's recommendations had already been included in the new strategy. He looked forward in continuing to work with Overview and Scrutiny in reviewing the strategy's delivery plan.

RESOLVED –

That Cabinet approves the task group's recommendations as set out below.

1. To increase the target for the number of households who commit to making one change to live more sustainably to be more challenging; potentially to 50% of households.

2. Any off-setting required to meet the targets should be within Watford as much as possible.
3. The delivery plan for the Sustainability Strategy should be brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review and discussion.
4. The Sustainability Strategy's delivery plan and accompanying documentation should include a risk register.
5. The updates on progress against net zero carbon targets should be published with and without the impacts of aviation and shipping.
6. To strengthen the consideration of the sustainability impacts in council decision-making processes, including having regard to the targets in the strategy.
7. A communications plan and behavioural change campaign will be required to ensure residents and businesses engage with the targets and feel part of the solution.

53

Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Strategy

Cabinet received a report of the Sustainability Officer which included the proposed Environmental Strategy and Delivery Plan.

The Mayor invited Councillor Stotesbury to introduce the report.

Councillor Stotesbury informed Cabinet that the new strategy built on the work started in 2019 and 2021. The current strategy expired this month and a new one was needed. Much had changed since the last strategy had been adopted and many more changes were expected in the future due to climate change.

Councillor Stotesbury thanked the officers, particularly the Sustainability Officer, Director of Partnerships and the Assistant Sustainability Officer for all their work. The document had not been developed solely by the council but with the input of the public through surveys and consultation. Residents had generally been supportive of the new strategy. There were two over-arching themes –

- Leading by example
- People power

The Delivery Plan would enable officers and members to review the key performance indicators in real time.

The Mayor also thanked the team for their work. There had been a lot of discussions between members and officers.

Councillor Bell commented that overall this was a good report. However, this was a small district council. The County Council's Cabinet would be considering their strategy next month. He said it was necessary to work with the County Council and the Government. He asked for details of the main factors that would be put in place to make Watford's air cleaner. He referred to the Ultra Low Emission Zone in London.

The Mayor responded that the council was working with the County Council and that Councillor Stotesbury was actively involved in a number of county-wide groups.

Councillor Stotesbury confirmed he participated in the county-wide body, Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership, with members working together on numerous projects. Better transport links was a way to tackle traffic, managing travel and having active travel plans. This would have the main effect of reducing pollutants. The strategy strongly focussed on re-wilding, re-planting and the biodiversity of the town which also supported the absorption of pollutants. These two areas, working in tandem would help the council address the matter.

The Mayor added that there was work ongoing about transport and he chaired a group that worked on this area.

The Sustainability Officer referred to the new Environmental Strategy and that it referenced the Transforming Travel in Watford Strategy and that this was the way forward to reducing and improving how people moved around Watford.

RESOLVED –

1. That Watford's Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency 2023-2030 full document and summary document attached as appendices 1 and 2 be approved.
2. That Watford's Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency – Delivery Plan 2023-2025 attached as appendix 3 be approved.
3. That authority for the allocation of the Sustainability Reserve be delegated to the Director for Partnerships in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Sustainability.

Croxley Park Business Plan 2023/24

Cabinet received a report of the Associate Director of Property and Asset Management, including the Croxley Park Business Plan 2023/24 which was exempt from publication as it contained commercially sensitive information.

The Mayor invited Councillor Watkin to present the report.

Councillor Watkin thanked Sean Brew and the team from LSHIM for their work in overseeing and managing the Park. The Annual Business Plan had already been reviewed at Property Investment Board and had recommended it to Cabinet for approval. He outlined some of the key elements of the report. The newest building to the Park had been completed and was of the highest quality, one floor was occupied but the others remained vacant. It was important to get the right tenant.

The Mayor agreed that the governance through the Property Investment Board worked well and was ably supported by LSHIM.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Business Plan for 2023/2024 as produced by LSHIM, and more particularly as attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.
2. that the delegations to the Associate Director of Property & Asset Management as outlined in paragraph 4.5 of the report and also set out in the Appendix be agreed.

Town Hall and Colosseum Refurbishment - Award of Contract

Cabinet received a report of the Town Hall Quarter Programme Manager which included a full business case for the refurbishment of Watford Colosseum and an update on the progress of the Town Hall refurbishment.

The Mayor referred to the visit earlier in the day which enabled those present to see the progress being made on the decarbonisation works in the Town Hall, which included the windows, lighting and later the installation of solar panels. These works would have the impact of a big financial saving for the council and ultimately residents.

During the covid pandemic many residents had visited the Town Hall to receive their vaccination. The Mayor wanted to maintain the place as a community hub and part of this would be having a successful Colosseum. The report

recommended that AEG was appointed as the operator for the Colosseum when it was due to re-open in 2024. This would follow an extensive period of improvement and renovation. AEG managed over 120 venues including the O2 Arena and other arenas and clubs across the country. It would bring many jobs to the town, not just in the Colosseum but also to other venues across the town, including shops, bars and restaurants. Due to the company's experience it would support the council's vision to put the Colosseum on the map as a modern, live entertainment venue. The company would be bringing high calibre performers. It would also be able to hold business events and there would be reduced rates for local community groups.

The Mayor advised that the report also covered the refurbishment of the Town Hall with a modern, interactive museum being located in the building. It would have space for the Watford community hub, improved open space and an innovation and incubation to support businesses.

Councillor Williams said it was great to get a renowned company to operate the Colosseum on a long-term contract. This clearly demonstrated the popularity and vibrancy of Watford. The contract to AEG was great for the community and businesses. The Town Hall Quarter programme was proceeding at pace and AEG would be involved as part of the refurbishment of the Colosseum. The early appointment also enabled them to book their programme ready for the re-opening next year. The town had missed the Colosseum and was looking forward to it re-opening. The economic benefits for the town should not be under-estimated. He advised that a full procurement process had been carried out before identifying AEG as the preferred bidder. Parkwood would be held in reserve, as set out in the report. Since the report in the Watford Observer, residents had been commenting to him about the plans.

Councillor Bell commented that he welcomed the exciting news. The Colosseum was one of the jewels in Watford's crown. Its acoustics were well-renowned. He hoped that the town's diverse community would be part of the venue, much more than before.

Councillor Dychton said that she was looking forward to the new Colosseum. Residents and local community groups had all missed the venue and were looking forward to it re-opening. The community was an essential part of the venue. All parties understood the importance of the local community.

Councillor Stotesbury added that the community was embedded in the Colosseum and the Town Hall works. He expected the Town Hall to be more engaged with the community, not only access.

RESOLVED –

1. that AEG be selected as preferred bidder for the Colosseum Operator re-tender and the Director of Partnerships be authorised, in consultation with the Group Head of Democracy and Governance and the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, to enter into negotiations and contract with the preferred bidder, keeping the Elected Mayor and Town Hall Quarter Member Steering Group updated on the progress of negotiations.
2. that Parkwood be held in reserve should the council be unable to reach contractual agreement with AEG pending financial viability.
3. that the Elected Mayor be authorised, in consultation with the Chief Executive and Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services, to appoint the contractor for the Colosseum refurbishment works, subject to the final contract sum being within the overall programme budget envelope as outlined in section 5.1 of the report.
4. that the Elected Mayor be authorised, in consultation with the Chief Executive and Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services, to appoint the contractor for the Town Hall refurbishment works subject to the final contract sum being within the overall programme budget envelope as outlined in section 5.1 of the report.
5. that the sum of £1,184k be authorised to be taken from the Strategic CIL fund to contribute towards the maintenance and operation of the Colosseum.

56

Watford Town Centre Strategic Framework

Cabinet received a report of the Principal Planner which set out the Watford Town Centre Strategic Framework.

The Mayor thanked officers for the amount of work that had gone into developing the framework. The report built on the Local Plan agreed last year. It set out the council's plan for the town centre as a major retail and leisure destination for the region. The council had consulted widely; a range of views to develop the framework. It was great to see the number of young people who got involved. The engagement made it clear how important the public realm was for people. Many had identified St Mary's Churchyard as a town centre asset, which would benefit from improvement. It could become a peaceful contrast to the adjacent High Street and a major public green space. Other issues raised included affordable work space, space for creative industries and

that traffic and congestion was tackled. If approved formal guidance would be developed.

The Principal Planner informed members that there would be ongoing projects, including public artwork. The framework also linked into the Travel in Watford plan. An annual report on progress would be produced and a more detailed planning guide would follow.

RESOLVED –

That the Town Centre Strategic Framework be adopted.

57 **Authority Monitoring Report 2021/22**

Cabinet received a report of the Associate Director of Planning, Infrastructure and Economy which included the Annual Monitoring report for 2021/22.

The Mayor introduced the report and advised members that this was the first Annual Monitoring report since the Local Plan had been adopted. He highlighted some of the key data in the report including –

- 251 net affordable homes built. This was the highest ever achieved.
- 10% of new builds had three or more bedrooms. This was lower than the 20% target in the Local Plan and therefore would need to be improved.
- 95% of new residential builds were on previously developed land or brownfield.

The Mayor commented that the report had provided some interesting information and showed some positive work and what the council needed to build on.

In response to Councillor Bell's question about increasing the affordable homes to 20%, the Mayor responded that affordable units had already achieved 33% target. The Local Plan indicated 20% of units to be three or more bedrooms. The Local Plan provided the council with more powers and developers could be referred to it in developing their proposals.

Councillor Stotesbury noted this annual report overlapped the adoption of the Local Plan. He said it would be interesting to look at it next year when the Local Plan had been in place for the full year.

RESOLVED –

That the contents of the Annual Monitoring Report be noted and for it to be published.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.50 pm