

## **CABINET**

**2 October 2023**

Present: Mayor Taylor (Chair)  
Councillor Dychton (Deputy Mayor)  
Councillors J Pattinson, K Rodrigues, G Saffery, I Stotesbury,  
M Watkin and T Williams

Officers: Chief Executive  
Group Head of Democracy and Governance  
Head of Finance  
Director of Performance  
Spatial Planning Manager  
Democratic Services Manager

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the Cabinet meeting. He welcomed Councillor Rodrigues to his first Cabinet as a Portfolio Holder, which had come into effect from 1 October.

25 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bell, Opposition Group Leader, and Councillor Khan, Chair of Finance Scrutiny Committee.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

27 **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2023 were submitted and signed.

28 **Conduct of meeting**

The Mayor confirmed that Cabinet would consider the items in the order as published in the agenda.

## Annual Review of Fees and Charges

Cabinet received a report of the Head of Finance which set out the draft Charging Policy for 2024/25, which would be forwarded to Council for adoption, and the proposed changes to the council's schedule of fees and charges.

The Mayor commented on the challenging situation for all councils given the rates of inflation, increasing costs and rising wage bills; noting several councils had declared themselves bankrupt. He stressed that it was important that this subject was looked at carefully, including the council's income and expenditure.

Councillor Watkin reiterated the Mayor's comments on the difficulties many councils were facing, including Watford, which, like other councils, was facing a shortfall in its funding, rising inflation and increasing demand on services. During his time on the council, he had never witnessed the challenges the council was currently facing. For the current financial year, the council was facing an increase of £3 million in budget expenditure. The council had to respond to the situation as soon as and as effectively as possible. The council was therefore proposing a new schedule of fees and charges which would largely come into force from January 2024. Some fees and charges would be delegated to the Executive Director of Place and others incorporated into the upcoming budget proposals. The primary reason for the increase was due to the rise and state of inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index.

Councillor Watkin advised members that the charging policy included different categories that could be applied to fees and charges. The main three were:

- Recovery of some of the costs for the service, subsidised; usually applied to services the council felt were important to the local community.
- Full cost recovery, for example licensing and garden waste collection.
- Statutory charges, set by central government. The government had recently consulted on these and was expected to propose a 35% annual increase this year followed by an annual increase equivalent to the Consumer Price Index.

Councillor Watkin noted that the council was sympathetic to anyone struggling to pay the charges and within the report an explanation of concessions was provided and who would be eligible.

Councillor Watkin commended the recommendations to Cabinet for approval at Council.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Watkin and the officers for their work in preparing the information for the meeting. He noted that Councillor Khan, the Chair of Finance Scrutiny Committee, was unable to attend Cabinet to provide feedback from scrutiny. He asked the Head of Finance if she was able to provide some details of the discussions that had taken place.

The Head of Finance informed Cabinet that the scrutiny committee had discussed the principles of how the council set its charges and the timing of the current proposals. Members had also discussed the need to review the charges in light of inflation.

The Mayor thanked the officer for her overview of the scrutiny discussion. He added that it had been expected that inflation would fall more rapidly than it had. He was aware that officers had discussed in detail the fees and charges with their Portfolio Holder. He invited Cabinet to vote on the recommendations.

RESOLVED –

1. that the draft Charging Policy and proposed fees and charges be recommended to Council for approval on 17 October.
2. that, in respect of Market licence fees, delegated authority to set the fees, be granted to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

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### **SW Herts Joint Strategic Plan Vision Report**

Cabinet received a report of the Spatial Planning Manager which set out the draft consultation report, following the consultation which had been undertaken in autumn 2022.

The Mayor acknowledged the work of the five local authorities in South West Hertfordshire over a number of years. He invited Councillor Saffery to introduce the report.

Councillor Saffery stated that it was sensible to work with the neighbouring authorities regarding demands and growth in the wider sub-region. He advised that there were minor changes proposed to the Joint Strategic Plan. At this stage they were high level principles. Following this there would be a series of growth principles that would be discussed with colleagues in the neighbouring authorities. It made sense to work together to address the challenges that faced the whole area. He recommended the report for approval.

The Mayor noted the recommendations set out in the report. He asked the Spatial Planning Manager how the plan had evolved following the comments received.

The Spatial Planning Manager informed Cabinet that there had been positive engagement. There had been some move to digital engagement which had led to a younger demographic responding to the consultation. Moving forward, the Joint Strategic Plan was separate the Local Plans currently in development, but it did feed into them. He added that if the recommendations were approved, then the next steps would be to look at some key growth principles across Hertfordshire.

The Mayor noted that the work was done in a spirit of collaboration, but asked whether there were any difficulties in the discussions.

The Spatial Planning Manager responded that the difficulty was due to government guidance and changes in planning. There had been a move to sub-regional working and the South West Herts Plan put the local councils in a good place compared to many areas in England. With regards to risks, Watford was a brownfield authority, unlike many in Hertfordshire. There was limited land available, whereas the neighbouring authorities were primarily green belt. The Joint Strategic Plan allowed the councils to recognise the differences and work more strategically; a continuous collaboration.

Following the Mayor's comments, the Spatial Planning Manager explained that as Watford had published its Local Plan it was in a good position, whereas others were still progressing their Local Plans. The government had put forward more changes which led to uncertainty for those who had yet to adopt their Local Plans.

Councillor Watkin asked whether the lack of an adopted Local Plan would have an impact on progressing the Joint Strategic Plan.

The Spatial Planning Manager explained that if there were any cross boundary issues the local authority neighbours would need to address them, demonstrating if they could or could not meet them. However, the duty to cooperate was still relevant. For example, if any local authority could not meet their housing targets they would need to have a dialogue with their neighbours.

Councillor Watkin added that it was difficult at times to work together, but it was better to work together than separately.

Councillor Rodrigues noted that there had been a workshop with a local school and feedback received. He asked if the feedback had been taken into account and how representative officers felt the feedback was of young people generally.

The Spatial Planning Manager responded that it was important to engage with young people. They could be creative in their thinking. Their priorities were different; they were forward thinking. For example, about sustainability approach, climate change or where they would live in the future due to homes not being built. Many were proactive. It was a different approach to an older demographic. The issues filtered in to the Joint Strategic Plan as they should for a Local Plan. One of the challenges councils faced was being able to engage with younger people. The issue was finding a balance between everyone's opinion. It was necessary to consider "the town we would want it to be and not just the town we currently had". This applied to all the authorities.

The Mayor thanked the officer. He commented that he often visited schools and there was fantastic input from young people. A range of views were important. The Mayor invited Cabinet to vote on the officer's recommendations.

RESOLVED –

1. That the feedback received on the South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan Regulation 18 consultation (as summarised in Appendices 1 and 2) be noted.
2. That the revised vision and objectives for the South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan Regulation 18, incorporating changes recommended as a result of the consultation responses (Appendix 5) be endorsed.
3. That the recommended changes to the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (Appendix 6) be agreed.
4. That minor changes can be made to the South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan Regulation 18 Consultation Feedback report and Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report by the Associate Director of Planning, Infrastructure and Economy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, prior to publication.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 7.20 pm