

**CABINET**  
**30 October 2023**

Present: Mayor Taylor (Chair)  
Councillors A Dychton, J Pattinson, K Rodrigues, I Stotesbury  
and M Watkin

Officers: Chief Executive  
Group Head of Democracy and Governance  
Director of Performance  
Head of Finance  
Associate Director of Environment  
Community Commissioning Lead  
Strategic Initiatives Officer  
Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead  
Democratic Services Manager

The Mayor welcomed everyone to the Cabinet meeting.

31 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Saffery and Williams.

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

The Mayor reported that Councillors Dychton, Pattison and Rodrigues had a pecuniary interest in minute number 35 as they were on the Board of various organisations included in the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework. He advised that the Group Head of Democracy and Governance, in her role as Monitoring Officer, was asked to grant a dispensation for the councillors, enabling them to participate in the decision. The Group Head of Democracy and Governance had considered the request and agreed to the dispensation.

33 **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2023 were submitted and signed.

34 **Conduct of meeting**

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

## **Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework**

Cabinet received a report of the Community Commissioning Lead which sought Cabinet's approval of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework 2024-2028 and its budget profile.

The Mayor invited Councillor Dychton to introduce the report.

Councillor Dychton welcomed the report and informed Cabinet that there had been an extensive amount of work with stakeholders and voluntary groups in the review of the framework. She paid tribute to individuals and organisations that supported Watford's residents. They aided the council in supporting the most vulnerable in the community. She commented that the council was facing challenging times in the current economic situation, with a 50% real term cut in funding from central government. The council therefore had difficult decisions to be made in how taxpayers' money was spent. However, it had been clear that front line services had to be protected. Officers had worked with the voluntary sector to identify the crucial services for residents. The organisations' opportunity to draw in independent income had also been taken into account. The work had enabled the council to find a fair funding balance. The council had engaged with the CVS to get a better understanding to the sector's resilience.

Councillor Dychton continued to explain that the research carried out had found that the organisations included in the 2019-2023 framework aligned with the current and future needs of the community, as well as the commitments in the current Council Plan. The council had decided not to enter a new commissioning exercise. She outlined the organisations that were included in the framework and the roles they would carry out. It was important that the framework met the council's ambitions. She stressed that the framework did not sit in isolation and should be read alongside the current Council Plan, the Community Engagement and Participation Strategy and many others.

Councillor Dychton finished by stating that she was confident that the framework would enable the community and voluntary sector to continue to deliver essential support for local people and ensuring the council was still able to provide community, social and economic benefits in the future.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Dychton, plus Councillors Watkin, Saffery and officers for their work. He was aware there had been a great deal of discussion about the framework and consultation with relevant groups. He had met with representatives of YMCA and Citizens Advice and both organisations had spoken positively about the level of engagement that had taken place.

The Mayor invited the Associate Director of Environment to add any further comments.

The Associate Director commented that Councillor Dychton had provided a very thorough summary. He did confirm that there had been extensive consultation and there had been collaborative work carried out between the council and the sector.

Councillor Watkin said that this reflected the council's commitment to work with all community organisations, whether it was about the right facilities, financial support or environment for them to work successfully. It provided clarity about how the council engaged with the organisation and why.

Councillor Dychton added that it would not have been possible to get to this position without the hard work of the officers and she wished to thank them for their work on this difficult and complex subject. She was proud that the council was still able to deliver the service, whereas many councils were no longer able to provide the support.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework 2024-2028 priorities and principles identified in section 5.13 and 5.15 and Appendix 1 of the report be approved.
2. that the budget profile 2024-2026 as set out in section 5.28 of the report be approved.
3. that the responsibility to implement the next steps, key milestones and actions identified in sections 5.11 and 7.0 of the report are in place from the 1 April 2024 be delegated to the Community Commissioning Lead in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Community.

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### **Community Engagement and Participation Strategy**

Cabinet received a report of the Strategic Initiatives Officer which asked members to approve the Community Engagement and Participation Strategy.

The Mayor invited Councillor Dychton to introduce the report.

Councillor Dychton explained that the strategy had been developed through the council's understanding of the priorities and needs of the voluntary and community sector. It was seeking to celebrate their contribution across the town on a daily basis, recognising their strengths, passion and vibrancy. The council's

goal was to empower the voluntary and community sector and to facilitate a long-term relationship inclusive of all. The council wanted to encourage emerging communities to access support. During the summer a consultation was held, and 49 organisations had participated, representing charities, not for profit sports clubs and community interest companies delivering a wide range of services. There had been a very positive response to the strategy, indicating it was clearly aligned to their objectives. They had commented that there was an excellent relationship with the council, which had a clear role in facilitating dialogue. The council would continue to ensure it heard and took feedback from the organisations.

The Mayor thanked officers, particularly the Strategic Initiatives Officer and Director of Performance, for their work.

The Director of Performance said it was important to note the amount of work the Strategic Initiatives Officer had put into the strategy's development. The network event in the summer had been well received. At the event it had been possible to speak to the groups about the strategy, but also other work the council was doing. They had enjoyed the networking opportunity. The strategy gave the council a good foundation and to build on the continuing engagement with the voluntary and community sector in Watford.

The Mayor added that the Community Network and People Panel were tangible improvements arising from the strategy.

Councillor Pattinson commented that she had been impressed by the diverse range of groups that had participated and had been able to influence the strategy.

The Mayor finished by thanking all the groups who had been involved and provided feedback.

RESOLVED –

1. that Cabinet has reviewed the feedback, learnings and outcomes of the consultation activity undertaken within development of this strategy.
2. that the Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-2027 be adopted.

## **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy**

Cabinet received a report of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead which was seeking approval for the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and its Delivery Plan.

The Mayor invited Councillor Dychton to introduce the report.

Councillor Dychton stated that it was important there was an unwavering commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. This was undeniable. Although there were some who wanted to divide communities this was not the way in Watford. In Watford the strength of the community's diversity was recognised. Equality, diversity and Inclusion was not just about compliance but also recognising the richness that different people gave to the community. The council was committed to ensuring equality, diversity and inclusion was part of everything it did, from its role as an employer to being a community leader. The policy set the standard in how we treat each other, the council's partners and the community the council served. It enabled all to thrive and feel valued. It would have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics by recognising the different needs of the community.

Councillor Watkin was invited to add further details, as it related to his portfolio covering Human Resources. He thanked Councillor Dychton for her superb introduction to the policy. He then thanked Human Resources and other officers for developing the policy which looked outwards to the community and inwards to the council's staff. Regarding the workforce, this policy was beyond the council's legal duty. The council's aim was to create a workforce that was closer to the demographic the council served. The council wanted to be recognised as the leading authority in equality, diversity and inclusion for the community and council workforce. He highlighted some of the aspects within the policy that were relevant to the workforce.

The Mayor invited the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead to address Cabinet. The officer informed members that when developing the policy, it had been decided to have a policy fit for Watford rather than adopting a standard approach. The policy was part of a wider conversation established by the council. It was linked to other council policies. Consultation had taken place and good feedback had been received.

The Mayor thanked the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead for her work on the policy. He noted the Delivery Plan and asked how members would be aware of the output of the policy. The officer explained that this was set out in the delivery plan and there were clear reporting timeframes. It would be possible to monitor progress through updates.

Councillor Rodrigues thanked those involved in developing the policy which was very detailed and thorough. He asked how the council would ensure its strategic partners shared the council's views.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead explained that as part of the procurement arrangement, mechanisms were built into it to ensure they met the council's equality duty and were in line with the council's vision.

The Director of Performance added that the council was unable to outsource its equality duty to contracted organisations. The council collected information from the organisations. It was still the council's responsibility to ensure the equality duty was embedded in their work.

Councillor Pattinson commented that Community Engagement and Participation Strategy had been presented alongside this policy. They gave the council a powerful mechanism to communicate with all the community. She congratulated officers on the policies.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and the Equality Objectives (Appendix A to the report) that are established in the policy be approved.
2. that the Delivery Plan (Appendix B to the report), that underpins the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy, be approved.

## 38 **Continuous Improvement Framework**

Cabinet received a report of the Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead which provided details of the Continuous Improvement Framework for approval.

The Mayor invited Councillor Watkin to introduce the report.

Councillor Watkin stated that during his time as a councillor he had seen the council transformed. The council was more reactive and higher performing than previously. However, it was facing some of the greatest challenges than it had on the past. The journey of improvement needed to continue. He explained how the Council Plan set out the council's ambitions. The Office of Local Government required councils to set out a continuous improvement approach. This framework ensured the council was in line with that requirement. Through workshops, engagement had been carried out with officers during the summer.

Portfolio Holders had also been involved. The Continuous Improvement Framework encouraged collective learning. A simple definition had been included in the framework. It would be closely linked to the Information and Insight Strategy. A new performance app would be developed which would enable improved analysis of the key performance indicator results. There would be an expansion of customer feedback. Sharing sessions would be arranged to share experiences related to improvement.

The Mayor thanked the Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead for her work on the framework and invited her to add any further information.

The Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead informed Cabinet that three workshops had been held over the summer. At the time she had been unsure how the subject would be perceived. However, all those involved had been enthusiastic and keen to learn from each other. The framework would point people in the right direction and provide information about the tools available.

In response to the Mayor's question about any significant change, the officer advised that part of it was about raising awareness and tools available to enable continuous improvement. The opportunity was available to share internally, externally, with partners and other councils.

The Mayor enquired whether members would also have access. The Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead responded that certain reports would be available to Portfolio Holders. Information would also be included on the intranet. Officer sharing sessions would be arranged, although she was unsure if they would be open to members. Members feedback would be appreciated.

Councillor Watkin added that everyone lived in a fast-changing world and it was important to be able to react. Portfolio Holders needed to be able to see live information rather than historical data. It would enable officers to react quicker.

Councillor Stotesbury felt the framework would reduce overhead in officer time and the data would be more relevant.

RESOLVED –

that the Continuous Improvement Framework be adopted.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 7.35 pm