

CABINET

27 November 2023

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

Officers: Chief Executive
Group Head of Democracy and Governance
Chief Finance Officer
Director of Performance
Associate Director of Property and Asset Management
Associate Director of Environment
Customer Services Operations Manager
Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead
Community Protection Lead
Planning Policy Officer
Community Safety Co-ordinator
Mayor's Political Assistant
Democratic Services Manager

39 **Apologies for absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

41 **Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2023 were submitted and signed.

42 **Conduct of meeting**

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

Annual Complaints Report

Cabinet received a report of the Customer Services Operations Manager which provided members with the latest annual complaints report for noting.

The Mayor invited Councillor Watkin to introduce the report.

Councillor Watkin introduced the report. He referred to recent policies that had been introduced and the establishment of the Customer Experience Project board. He commented that real time information was available about the number of complaints and response times. He explained the council's complaints process. A new process had been established on the council's website and the team did discuss service improvements at team meetings. Regular training about complaint handling was regularly offered to Customer Liaison Officers.

Councillor Watkin informed members that the overall number of complaints had decreased by 20% compared to the previous year. With regards to Stage 2 complaints, these had also decreased by 20%; a total of 12 had been received. The statistics were the lowest of any Hertfordshire authority. There had been 9 Local Government Ombudsman complaints, which was fewer than the previous year.

The Mayor thanked the Customer Services Operations Manager for the report and the good work being carried out. He was encouraged by the decreasing statistics and showed how it linked into the council continuously working on improving its services.

RESOLVED –

that the Annual Complaints report and the proposed next steps be noted.

Performance and Progress Report: Q2 2023/24

Cabinet received a report of the Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services, Delivery Support Lead, Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead that set out the updates for:

- The Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022-24
- The external key performance indicators for Quarter 2 of 2023/24
- Key corporate strategies

The Mayor stated that the report set out details of the progress on the Council Plan and Delivery Plan. He highlighted some of the key points in the update including:

- Sustainability – new EV charging points with installation progressing
- Tree planting
- Rediscovering the River Colne project
- Cassiobury Park Wetlands
- Watford Business Park redevelopment completion
- 120 new social rented homes on target
- Opening of new crematorium at Hemel Hempstead
- Good progress on the Watford business charter

The Mayor invited Councillor Watkin to further introduce the report.

Councillor Watkin explained that the Council Plan provided the strategic framework for the council over four years. The Delivery Plan covered a two-year period. The overall results had been positive. He noted the reference to the number of telephone calls answered being outside the target. However, there were a number of solutions in place to support the service, including a ring back facility. As a result, there had been fewer calls abandoned. He added that there were fewer complaints during the quarter.

The Mayor invited the Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead to add any further information.

The Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead informed members that the updated included details of the new key performance indicators, which had more than doubled from previous years. A new dashboard had been developed that enabled reports to be produced. There were 12 indicators that were under target and explanations had been provided.

The Mayor thanked the officer for her work. He noted that there were a lot of demands on councils' services and financial pressures.

Councillor Watkin added his thanks to the Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead for her work.

Councillor Rodrigues commended the officer for the excellent document which gave a strong indication of the council's position. In his role as Portfolio Holder, he had spoken to officers within neighbourhood services where targets were slightly behind on performance. He thanked the officer for quickly responding to his questions.

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 external key performance indicator results for Quarter 2 of 2023/24 (Appendix B).
 - the council's key corporate strategies (Appendix C)
2. that Cabinet notes the report will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13 December 2023.

45

Public Space Protection Notices for Renewal and Variation

Cabinet received a report of the Community Protection Lead setting out proposals for the renewal and variation of two Public Space Protection Orders.

The Mayor invited Councillor Dychton to introduce the report.

Councillor Dychton said that members were aware of how important it was to keep residents safe. The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 supported the reduction of crime across the community and the protection of the vulnerable and individuals from anti-social behaviour, crime and disorder. It allowed councils to make orders in public spaces to deal with anti-social behaviour and its negative impact on the community.

Councillor Dychton explained the role of the Public Space Protection Order. The orders were required to be renewed after three years. The report requested the renewal of the two current orders with minor changes. She set out the changes proposed in the report. In finishing Councillor Dychton stated that the existing orders helped residents and visitors to feel safe and a reduction in the fear and perception of crime.

The Mayor thanked and Councillor Dychton. He noted that the extension of one of the orders would cover the Watford Fields area. He was aware of comments from residents in the area who questioned whether the consumption of alcohol was banned in the area. He understood that it only applied if someone was asked to stop drinking by a Police officer.

Councillor Rodrigues commented that a resident had responded and was concerned about the displacement to the problem elsewhere.

The Community Safety Manager responded that the original order, with a designated area, had been in place for 20 years. The only material change was the extension into Watford Fields which was due to a previous displacement that

had moved into sensitive areas, for example near schools. Another reason had been that the proposed area included the walking route from Watford High Street Station to the Vicarage Road Stadium. Officers had considered the impact on neighbouring areas and the feedback councillors had received from residents. It was felt the recommendation was well-balanced and would be reviewed after three years. He gave an example where a previous order had been retracted following a review.

The Mayor thanked the officer for his response. He added that consultation had taken place with the ward councillors and himself about the proposal. In addition, CCTV improvements had been proposed for the Watford Fields area.

RESOLVED –

that the proposed renewal of the two Public Space Protection Orders, each with a variation to the Order be approved.

46

Authority Monitoring Report 2022/2023

Cabinet received a report of the Planning Policy Officer which provided the Authority Monitoring report covering the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

The Mayor invited Councillor Saffery to introduce the report.

Councillor Saffery thanked the Planning Policy Officer for his work in producing the report. He informed members that this was the second year that the monitoring report had been able to be measured against the Local Plan. He highlighted some of the key points in the report. He noted that some were under target and hoped these would improve in the future. He referenced the retail vacancy rate which was below the national average and showed a confidence in Watford. Carbon emissions were down significantly since 2019. There had been a loss of employment floorspace, but this had been due to sites being demolished. However, there were a number of permissions for office floorspace that had been granted.

The Mayor noted the progress that had been made in a number of areas including environment, retail, residences and business.

RESOLVED –

that Cabinet agrees to publish the Authority Monitoring Report 2022/2023, as included in Appendix 1 of the report, on the website.

Community Asset Strategy

Cabinet received a report of the Interim Lead Asset Manager that asked members to approve the proposed Community Asset Strategy and Community Lettings Policy.

The Mayor commented that a lot of work had been carried out to get to this stage. He invited Councillor Watkin to introduce the report.

Councillor Watkin thanked the Associate Director of Property and Asset Management who had overseen the development of the strategy and policy and the Interim Lead Asset Manager for his hard work in getting it to this stage. He provided members with the background to the development of the two documents, which would provide a more considered and managed way forward for the council's community assets and in return the council would get the best financial and commercial benefit.

Councillor Watkin explained that these assets were separate from the council's commercial portfolio. He advised that the 47 sites that formed part of the council's community assets were there for the benefit of the community rather than the council's own operations. However, he stressed there was currently very little vacant space available. They supported the needs of the local voluntary community sector. The council would inspect premises and ensure they were fit for purpose.

Councillor Dychton commented that the members understood the importance of the relationship with the local community. The strategy set out how the council would work together with its partners. She referred to the community centres which supported the residents surrounding them. She stressed the importance of linking to the Community Engagement Strategy that had been approved by Cabinet. The new documents would support the council in delivering the best for the community.

The Mayor referred to the Community Facilities Review Board which had been formed a few years ago and was part of the process. A rational and objective process had been needed. The strategy and policy provided details of sites available and a clear decision-making process had been set out. The Mayor asked how the strategy and policy would be overseen and ensure they had been successfully implemented.

The Associate Director of Property and Asset Management advised that the Community Facilities Review Board would be the relevant body to oversee the success of the strategy's implementation. The Asset Management Plan would also be considered by that Board.

The Mayor thanked the team for their work.

RESOLVED –

that the Community Asset Strategy in Appendix A and the Community Lettings Policy in Appendix B be approved.

48 **Biodiversity Duty – First Consideration**

Cabinet received a report of the Planning Policy Officer which outlined the Biodiversity Duty for local authorities.

The Mayor invited Councillor Stotesbury to introduce the report.

Councillor Stotesbury informed members that the government had finally published guidance for local authorities on their Biodiversity Duty. The report included evidence of how the council was already complying with the Biodiversity Duty. He highlighted some of the activities set out in the report. The council was reviewing how it could do further works in order to comply with the duty. He was proud the council was ahead of the government. He thanked the officers for their work.

The Mayor invited the Associate Director of Environment to expand on the report.

The Associate Director of Environment added that the amount of work in progress was impressive. However, a key document, the Statutory Nature Recovery Strategy, needed to be produced at county level that would inform the council of the next steps. It would be a framework that would inform a lot more decisions on how the council could support and improve biodiversity across the borough. It would become a key factor in all decisions moving forward.

In response to a question from the Mayor about the timeline for the county strategy, the Associate Director explained that county officers were working on the approach but there was no agreed timeline.

Councillor Stotesbury added that it had been raised with the county council and it was understood that drafts were in progress.

Following a further question from the Mayor, the Associate Director responded that there was a lot of work required and the officers had been partly hampered by the government's delay in publishing the guidance.

Councillor Stotesbury stressed he was confident Watford would meet its statutory requirements and was supporting the county council with information.

The Mayor thanked officers and Councillor Stotesbury for all their work on this matter.

RESOLVED –

that the report and summary table, which will help ensure Watford is compliant with the Biodiversity Duty, first consideration, be noted.

49 **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 was likely, in view of the nature of the discussion, 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 the agenda in terms of Schedule 12A.

There was a short adjournment whilst the webcasting was stopped.

50 **Extension of Bike Share Contract**

Cabinet received a report of the Associate Director of Environment which requested members consider an extension to the existing bike share contract.

RESOLVED –

1. that Cabinet recommends to Council additional budget for 2024/25 and 2025/26 to extend the bike share contract in Watford as part of the budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy.
2. That delegated authority be granted to the Associate Director of Environment in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Sustainability to agree the final commercial terms of the contract extension on a 1 year + 1 year basis subject to approval of the budget.

51 **Report to Cabinet as Member of Watford Health Campus Partnership LLP**

Cabinet received an urgent exempt report from the Chief Finance Officer asking members to review a request for a loan.

Cabinet discussed the report.

RESOLVED –

that Cabinet agrees to advance a loan of £250,000 to Watford Health Campus Partnership LLP on 28 November 2023.

Mayor

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.50 pm