

COUNCIL

18 July 2023

Present: Councillor S Feldman (Chairman)
Councillor D Allen-Williamson (Vice-Chair)
Councillors P Taylor, S Ahmed, N Bell, K Clarke-Taylor,
M Devonish, J Dhindsa, A Dychton, F Ezeifedi, A Grimston,
P Hannon, P Hill, M Hofman, P Jeffree, S Johnson, A Khan,
R Martins, L Nembhard, C Newstead, T Osborn, J Pattinson,
A Saffery, G Saffery, C Saunders, N Shah, R Smith, I Stotesbury,
S Trebar, M Turmaine, D Walford, M Watkin, D Watling and
R Wenham

Also present: Mavis Tyrwhitt and Norman Tyrwhitt

Officers: Chief Executive
(Shared Services) Director of Finance
Group Head of Democracy and Governance
Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer (IS)

17 Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Councillors Kloss, Rodrigues and Williams.

18 Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures of interest.

19 Minutes

The minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 23 May 2023 were submitted and signed.

20 Official Announcements

Councillor Lenny Nembhard

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman congratulated Councillor Nembhard on being awarded an MBE in the King's Birthday Honours.

He also congratulated the other Watford residents who were recognised in the Honours lists.

Member Briefing

The Chairman reminded members that Watford Citizens Advice would be giving a briefing to members on the evening of Thursday 20 July, about their services available to Watford residents. He asked that if any members had not yet responded to the invitation from the Democratic Services Manager, to please do so as soon as possible.

Mental Health Business Awareness workshop

The Chairman mentioned that his chosen charity, Hertfordshire Mind, would be hosting a mental health awareness workshop for businesses at the Town Hall Annexe on the afternoon of Monday 24 July. The Chairman asked that if any members knew of businesses that might be interested, to make them aware.

Watford's Big Events

The Chairman pointed out that all members had a leaflet setting out the forthcoming free and low-cost events in Watford, and he asked them to share this information with their residents. The Big Screen would start on Monday 24 July, in the Town Centre before it moved on to Woodside Playing Fields. On the same day, the free swim and gym would start at the Central and Woodside Leisure Centres for residents aged 19 and under. Plus, many more events were planned.

Chairman's engagements

The Chairman gave a brief overview of his activities, since taking up the role which included:

- Flag raising
- Pride month
- Armed Forces Day flag raising (at County Hall and Town Hall)
- Windrush Day flag raising
- Inauguration of the Watford Malayali Cultural Association
- Armed Forces Day lunch
- Jazz and Funk Gig at the Palace Theatre

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Mayor's Report

The Chairman invited members to indicate whether they wished to ask a question of the Mayor. Councillors Trebar, Bell, Dhindsa and Ezeifedi indicated that they wished to ask questions.

The Mayor opened his report by adding his congratulations to Councillor Nembhard for his recent MBE award.

He also informed Council that Councillor Rodrigues would be taking over Councillor Williams' portfolio work for approximately six months from 1 October, whilst Councillor Williams received medical treatment. He wished Councillor Williams all the best for a swift recovery.

The Chairman agreed with the comments regarding Councillor Williams and advised that he would be sending a letter to Councillor Williams on behalf of the Council.

1. Councillor Trebar asked about the problem of fly tipping and anti-social behaviour in Chester Road, as there had been numerous complaints. She asked if the mobile CCTV could be sited there and suggested the Watford magazine could be used as a platform to educate, as she felt that some residents did not understand it was an offence to fly tip.

The Mayor responded that the CCTV had been deployed for a trial period and the impact would be assessed. He pointed out that it was not possible to site the CCTV in every road, primarily due to the need for a power source. He encouraged residents to report every instance of illegal fly tipping and assured Council that dumped rubbish was always removed very promptly. Cases were investigated and any evidence coming to light that would support a prosecution, would result in court action.

2. Councillor Bell asked if the Mayor had been involved in any consultation with the local MP or Home Office about the new Watford Police Station.

The Mayor replied that he had discussed the police station many times with the Chief Inspector, the Chief Constable and David Lloyd, the Police and Crime Commissioner. He commented that this move had been planned for a long time as the building in Shady Lane was very old and in need of renewal. The new site was planned to be opened in November 2023.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Bell about the suitability of the new location and potential effect on response times, the Mayor replied that he was pleased, particularly as it was in the town centre, with a likely positive effect on the anti-social behaviour around Church Car Park. He added that the Police were in consultation with the County Council about ensuring ready access and egress to and from the site and that this council worked closely with the Police.

3. Councillor Dhindsa asked about on-street electric vehicle charging, commenting that in his ward, parking was a major issue. He asked who it was that decided where the charging points would be sited and if there was any consultation with ward councillors.

The Mayor stated that Councillor Stotesbury was the relevant portfolio holder and the officers, led by the Executive Director of Place, Tom Dobrashian, were working on this issue. He advised that if Councillor Dhindsa had concerns about a particular issue, then to liaise with Councillor Stotesbury and officers as this would be given proper consideration. He stressed that the important concern here was that there were enough chargers to cope with the surge in supply of electric vehicles. He added that he was very pleased that funding had been secured from central government for 79 new electric vehicle charging points.

In response to a follow up question, the Mayor said that the planned locations of the electric vehicle charging points would be shared with all members.

4. Councillor Ezeifedi asked for an update on the motion on vaping and its effect on children, that had been agreed in March.

The Mayor explained that the Local Government Association, of which Watford was a member, had very recently put out a statement calling on the government to ban the sale of disposable vapes. This was fully supported.

Regarding the specifics of the cross-party motion, the Mayor directed Councillor Ezeifedi to speak further with the portfolio holder, Councillor Dychton.

22 **Questions by Members of the Council under Council Procedure Rule 10.0**

A question had been received from Councillor Trebar. The question and answer had been circulated and published on the internet.

23 **Questions by Members of the Public under Council Procedure Rule 11.0**

No questions from the public had been received.

24 **Petitions presented under Council Procedure Rule 12.0**

No petitions had been received.

25 **Business especially brought forward by the Chairman or the Head of Paid Service which in the opinion of the Chairman should be considered as a**

matter of urgency.

There was no urgent business.

26 Financial Monitoring Report - Year End 2022/23

Council received the report of the Head of Finance which described the year end position and the changes to the Council's Capital Investment Programme, as set out in the report. It was noted that the report had been considered by Finance Scrutiny Committee on 27 June 2023.

RESOLVED –

1. Council agrees to rephase capital budgets of £10.526m into 2023/24 onwards and approves the revised capital investment programme of £58.441m for 2023/24, £15.452m for 2024/25 and £8.054m for 2025/26
2. that the use of £2.400m funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy to fund the delivery of the Colosseum project within the Town Hall Quarter Programme be agreed.

27 Constitution Update - Virement Rules

Council received the report of the Head of Finance, detailing the Budget and Policy Procedure Rules, including the agreed Scheme of Virement which existed to enable the Mayor, Executive/ Cabinet, Chief Officers, and their staff to manage budgets with a degree of flexibility within the overall policy framework determined by Council. The scheme of virement had been updated to provide a simplified approach which would enable budgets to be realigned to meet the requirements of budget managers, which would strengthen financial control and accountability at officer level.

RESOLVED-

that the updated Budget and Policy Procedure rules at appendix 1 to the report be approved.

28 Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23

Council received the report of the Senior Democratic Services Officer, which described the work and process of the council's scrutiny committees and task groups during 2022/23.

RESOLVED –

that the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2022/23 be noted.

29 **Neighbourhood Locality Fund Annual Report 2022/23**

Council received the report of the Democratic Services Officer (LM) which provided the annual report for the Neighbourhood Locality Funds in accordance with the fund's protocol. This included information about the overall budget and types of projects the wards had supported during 2022/23.

RESOLVED –

that the annual neighbourhood locality fund report for 2022/23 be noted.

30 **Motion - More resources to combat crime and anti-social behaviour**

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Bell, seconded by Councillor Trebar:

“This Council resolves that the Mayor writes to the Home Secretary and Hertfordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner to urgently call for more resources to combat the increasing crime and antisocial behaviour which we and our residents have seen not only in the Town Centre in recent months but across Watford.”

Members debated the motion.

On being put to Council the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED –

That this Council resolves that the Mayor writes to the Home Secretary and Hertfordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner to urgently call for more resources to combat the increasing crime and antisocial behaviour which we and our residents have seen not only in the Town Centre in recent months but across Watford.

31 **Motion - A Diverse Council**

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Turmaine and seconded by Councillor Khan.

“This council notes:

Councillors represent their community, and it is important that they reflect the diversity within their communities, particularly those with protected characteristics (such as age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, gender, and sexual orientation).

The work of political parties, including the Co-operative Party and the Local Government Association (LGA) in developing a declaration for councils aimed at increasing diversity in local government.

The council has already made much progress, which should be acknowledged and celebrated and has undertaken several aspects of the proposals on its journey towards best practice.

This council believes:

Diversity in representation makes for good decision making.

Political engagement is precarious and turnout figures in the recent local elections demonstrates that there is some way to go in offering a representative voice to all in our town’s demography.

This council resolves:

To adopt the Diverse Councils Declaration to increase diversity in our local government, including the nine objectives within it:

1. Provide a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy.
2. Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all, promoting the highest standards of behaviour and conduct.
3. Set out a local Diverse Council action plan, ahead of the next local elections.
4. Work towards the standards for member support and development as set out in the LGA Councillor Development Charter and/or Charter Plus.
5. Demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for councillors.
6. Provide flexibility in council business by regularly reviewing and staggering meeting times.
7. Ensure that all members take up the allowances and salaries to which they are entitled, particularly any reimbursement for costs of care.
8. Ensure the council adopts a parental leave policy, setting out members’ entitlement to maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave and relevant allowances.
9. Ensure that councillors from under-represented groups are represented whenever possible in high profile high influence roles.”

Councillor Dychton then moved an amendment to the motion, which was seconded by Councillor Pattinson.

“This Council celebrates the diversity of our community across Watford Borough and affirms its belief that equality, diversity and inclusion play a critical role in all societies and should be factored into all local decision making.

This council notes:

Councillors represent their community, and it is important that they reflect the diversity within their communities, particularly those with protected characteristics (such as age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, gender, and sexual orientation).

The work of political parties and the Local Government Association (LGA) in developing a declaration for councils aimed at increasing diversity in local government.

The council has already made much progress, which should be acknowledged and celebrated and has undertaken several aspects of the proposals on its journey towards best practice.

This council believes:

Diversity in representation makes for good decision making. Strong focus must be made by all political parties both locally and nationally to encourage underrepresented groups to stand for political office.

This council resolves:

To support the Diverse Councils Declaration to increase diversity in our local government with amends to reflect the progress this council has made already towards achieving the objectives within it, these are:

1. Provide a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy.
2. Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all, promoting the highest standards of behaviour and conduct.
3. Continue the excellent work on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies and plans being implemented and embedded ahead of the next local elections.

4. To continue to work towards the standards for member support and development as set out in the LGA Councillor Development Charter.
5. To continue to develop the commitment to a duty of care for councillors.
6. Provide flexibility in council business by regularly reviewing and staggering meeting times where possible, whilst ensuring the need for council business to be quorate.
7. Ensure that all members take up the allowances and salaries to which they are entitled when they choose to do so, particularly any reimbursement for costs associated with their role.
8. Now adopted, ensure the council embeds and reviews the Councillor Leave policy which includes sickness leave, parental leave, setting out members' entitlement to sick, maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave and relevant allowances.
9. Ensure that opportunities for councillors from under-represented groups to be appointed/elected to high profile or more senior roles are equally available and the support and development is available to all to support a diverse, skilled, and locally representative leadership of the Council."

After debating the motion and the amendment, Councillor Turmaine accepted the amendment. This then became the substantive motion.

On being put to Council the motion as amended was agreed.

RESOLVED –

That this council notes:

This Council celebrates the diversity of our community across Watford Borough and affirms its belief that equality, diversity and inclusion play a critical role in all societies and should be factored into all local decision making.

This council notes:

Councillors represent their community, and it is important that they reflect the diversity within their communities, particularly those with protected characteristics (such as age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, gender, and sexual orientation).

The work of political parties and the Local Government Association (LGA) in developing a declaration for councils aimed at increasing diversity in local government.

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entitlement to sick, maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave and relevant allowances.

9. Ensure that opportunities for councillors from under-represented groups to be appointed/elected to high profile or more senior roles are equally available and the support and development is available to all to support a diverse, skilled, and locally representative leadership of the Council.

32 **Motion - Ticket Office Closures**

The Chairman explained that there was an agreed substantive motion, which replaced motions 3 and 4, and he called upon Councillor Turmaine to withdraw his motion that was on the agenda. Councillor Turmaine formally withdrew his motion.

33 **Motion - Protecting Train Services**

The Chairman then invited Councillor Stotesbury to propose the agreed substantive motion which replaced motion 4 on the agenda, which was seconded by Councillor Watling.

“This council notes:

With dismay the news that the Department for Transport and the 13 train operating companies it manages have announced plans to close almost all staffed ticket offices in England over the next three years, totalling nearly 1000, following changes to the Government’s guidance relating to ticket office opening hours and operation.

Statutory Consultations began on 5th July and will close on 26th July.

This council believes:

That ticket offices provide a vital service to residents in Watford and support passenger safety, security, and accessibility. Having a central place in the station for people requiring advice and assistance provides certainty and confidence for customers who may struggle to otherwise locate station staff and also acts as a point of safety for passengers.

At many stations, access to facilities such as toilets and waiting rooms is reliant on ticket office staff. Many travellers trying to get to Watford Junction will find themselves without help and support finding their way, and this could have a detrimental effect on the local economy – for example, tourists visiting the Harry Potter studios.

Not all residents are able to use ticket vending machines or online ticketing

platforms. Council believes that the current ticket regime in England is needlessly complicated. Many journeys require human assistance to ensure customers purchase the most appropriate and cheapest tickets, and do not incur penalties from mis-booked tickets. Ticket office staff have a wealth of knowledge which ensures that customers get appropriate advice for their whole journey.

This council is concerned the closure of ticket offices will disproportionately affect disabled, deaf and residents over 65 in our town who may require extra support when buying tickets, – as well as those with poor literacy and IT skills or on lower incomes. Council also notes the possible implications for current station staff and believes that the closure of ticket offices could lead to a de-staffing of rail stations.

That there will be a complete closure of the ticket office at Euston and that the replacement ticketing support will cover fewer hours.

Acknowledges that Watford Junction has been designated as a “hub” station and will therefore have some ticket office provision. However, council is concerned that this is not yet defined and could lead to a significant reduction in service and jobs.

Is concerned that in the long term, ticketing provision will also be removed from these hub locations, having negative consequences for those who are not able to order online or require extra assistance.

This council resolves to:

- • Request the Mayor to write to the Secretary of State for Transport, expressing Council’s opposition to the possible closure of staffed rail ticket offices – and in particular the office/s at Watford High Street and Bushey.
- • Request the Mayor to write to London North Western Railway, expressing the Council’s opposition to any plans to close the staffed ticket office/s at stations within Watford.
- • Request that all councillors respond to the consultations before 26th July to confirm their support for ticket offices remaining open and for properly staffed rail stations.

<https://www.londonnorthwesternrailway.co.uk/travel-information/at-the-station/proposed-changes-ticket-offices>"

Members debated the motion.

On being put to Council the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED –

This council notes:

With dismay the news that the Department for Transport and the 13 train operating companies it manages have announced plans to close almost all staffed ticket offices in England over the next three years, totalling nearly 1000, following changes to the Government's guidance relating to ticket office opening hours and operation.

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At many stations, access to facilities such as toilets and waiting rooms is reliant on ticket office staff. Many travellers trying to get to Watford Junction will find themselves without help and support finding their way, and this could have a detrimental effect on the local economy – for example, tourists visiting the Harry Potter studios.

Not all residents are able to use ticket vending machines or online ticketing platforms. Council believes that the current ticket regime in England is needlessly complicated. Many journeys require human assistance to ensure customers purchase the most appropriate and cheapest tickets, and do not incur penalties from mis-booked tickets. Ticket office staff have a wealth of knowledge which ensures that customers get appropriate advice for their whole journey.

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Chair

The Meeting started at 7.35 pm
and finished at 9.25 pm