

Watford Borough Council

Member Self- Assessment 2016/17

Oxhey Ward

Self-Assessment of: Councillor Iain Sharpe

1. Year elected:

1991

2. Reasons for becoming a councillor:

I wanted to make sure that Watford remains a good place to live in, and for people to visit and work in, especially to protect and enhance the build environment. I believe strongly in local democracy and the need for councillors to hold public bodies accountable to the public. In addition, I am a committed Liberal Democrat and believe the party has strong policies for open government, responding to the concerns of local residents, and providing quality services at a reasonable cost to taxpayers.

3. Roles in the Council:

Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Development, Member of Development Control Committee, Hertfordshire Chair of Highways Forum, Major Projects Board, Planning Policy Advisory Group (Chair),

4. Membership of outside bodies:

Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership (comprising planning portfolio holders for all Hertfordshire districts and Hertfordshire County Council.

5. Training & Development undertaken (Councillor's training record is listed):

Surface Pro all Member workshop (Nov 2016)
Development Management (June 2017)
Viability (for Development Management)
Watford vernacular training (July 2017)

I have also participated in various training and discussion events organised by the Local Government Association at the twice yearly Liberal Democrat conference, particularly in the fields of planning, housing and environmental issues.

6. Attendance Record:

92%

Your work with Constituents and in the Community**Please tell us about the work in your ward and for the council, you may wish to mention the following:**

- How you have helped with housing issues e.g., dealing with residents enquiries, taking up issues with a housing provider, attending Housing Policy Advisory Group etc.
- Any occasions where you have consulted local businesses and represented their views to council.
- Examples of supporting community arts and heritage projects, Big Events etc.
- How you have helped vulnerable or disadvantaged people in your communities
- How you communicate with your residents e.g., through e-mail, face to face, using social media etc.
- Where you have attended relevant training which has helped you in your role as a councillor
- How you have participated in the scrutiny process (either by being a member of a committee or on a task group, or answer questions at a scrutiny committee)
- How you have dealt with planning and development in your area e.g., attending Development Management Committee (as a member of the committee or to speak as a ward councillor), attended Planning Policy Advisory Group etc.

Housing matters

I have continued to play the lead member role on planning policy, helping to develop policies that will enable the council to meet its targets for housebuilding, including providing affordable homes. Despite the challenges of an ever-changing national planning environment, we have taken important steps forward, including agreeing a policy for accepting commuted payments for affordable housing, and our taller buildings policy, 'Skyline', produced in response to the increasing pressure for taller buildings in Watford.

Business and the local economy

Our town faces particular challenges with increasing housing need and obligation within the national planning regime to meet that need. I have been closely involved with the development of policy to regenerate two key areas of the town to provide new homes, Watford Junction and Watford Health campus.

My cabinet responsibilities for planning also involves bringing forward policies and projects that help to make Watford a more attractive town for businesses – for example the planned public realm improvements to Watford High Street to complement the regeneration of the Charter Place shopping centre.

Arts and Heritage

As a member of the cabinet I have strongly supported a wide-ranging arts programme in Watford, as well as supporting effective conservation policies.

I have attended performances at Watford Palace Theatre and at the Imagine Watford and Big Screen on the Beach events.

Vulnerable people and communities

This also relates to our approach to securing more affordable housing through the planning system.

In addition, much of the individual casework raised with us comes from residents who have in some way faced difficulties accessing services or getting their voice heard.

Communicating with residents

I communicate regularly with local residents in Oxhey ward in conjunction with my fellow ward councillors, the elected mayor and the county councillor for the area.

This includes producing a regular ward newsletter, *Oxhey Opinion* approximately eight times a year and a tabloid newspaper around three times a year. In addition we send out e-newsletters at around fortnightly intervals.

We also regularly carry out surveys to ask people's views on local issues, both by knocking on doors to ask people to complete questionnaires and by posting the questionnaires online.

In addition we participate in council-led consultation exercises, such as the one currently taking place regarding improvements to Oxhey Park North.

Training

The various training events I have attended on planning issues organised by the council have enabled me to keep up to date with recent developments in development management and policy-making, as well as providing an opportunity to see other possibilities for improving how the council can promote high quality development and resist inappropriate schemes.

Training I have attended at the Liberal Democrat conference, particularly on the debate on whether the priority in housing should be new settlements or further urban intensification have given me a sense of the wider political context for the debates we are having in Watford over planning issues.

Scrutiny

As a cabinet member, by definition, I am not a member of a scrutiny committee. While in previous years, I have attended various scrutiny committee meetings, this has been less so this year. However, I have been involved in briefing cabinet colleagues who have attended scrutiny meetings, including for call-in of cabinet decisions and overseeing officers' responses to scrutiny questions.

Development management

In my role as cabinet member for the planning service, and through being a member of the Development Management committee, I am closely involved with the planning process.

I am a vocal participant on the committee (perhaps overly so in the view of some colleagues), participating in the debate on most agenda items.

Planning is a very controversial area. There is a demonstrable need for new homes and regeneration to create jobs and ensure a strong local economy. Yet almost all housing schemes, even relatively small ones, are extremely controversial.

On occasion, I have successfully moved that the committee override an officer recommendation to approve a scheme, where I think the scheme is poor quality and/or has an unacceptable effect on its surroundings. In two cases in the past year, the refusal has been upheld by inspectors when the scheme went to appeal. Overall it is important that the committee does not just rubber stamp officer recommendations and that councillors bring to bear their own knowledge and judgement, even if this does sometimes mean losing appeals.

I am active in discussing planning issues and interpretation of planning policy with fellow councillors and residents groups who are concerned about interpretations of planning policy, including being in regular dialogue with my local residents' association. In addition I have met residents who are unhappy with council decisions to approve schemes to explain the reasoning behind our decision.

Development management is probably the most challenging and difficult aspect of being a councillor. It is sometimes necessary to approve schemes, which have considerable opposition, and where this is the case, I try to make clear to everyone attending the committee meeting why I am voting a particular way, so that there is at least transparency behind our decisions, even if people will still disagree with them.

Questions 7. and 8. for CABINET MEMBERS ONLY

For those councillors in a leadership role, how have you met these further objectives?

7. Providing vision

Key activities include:

- Contributing to the council's corporate plan through discussions with senior officers, the mayor, cabinet members and councillors.
- Contributing to development and delivery of council's key priorities, including work towards a family-friendly town centre and improvement of parks and green space
- Promoting via planning policy etc. work towards a strong local economy and sustainable neighbourhoods.

- Willingness to take difficult decisions (e.g. over major regeneration sites) for the greater good of the town, especially in trying to meet the need for new homes.
- Participation in regular meetings with senior management to further the council's policy goals.

8. Managing Performance

The key activities I undertake in these areas are

- Regular meetings with the head of service and quarterly reviews to monitor performance of services within my cabinet portfolio.
- Taking up complaints and concerns raised by local residents and being willing to challenge questionable performance by the council where necessary.
- As part of cabinet regular meetings with leadership team to monitor council's performance on key priorities.

Note; members can find their objectives from last year by looking at their profile page on the council's website. In addition, a link to your last self-assessment can be emailed to you upon request to paul.bateman@watford.gov.uk

New councillors will already have received a link to last year's Annual Council report. This demonstrates how the self-assessment information is collated and presented.

9.Objective for 2016/17	Update on progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continued progress on local plan and wider planning framework. - Further consultation to agree future of North side of Oxhey Park - Continue to campaign for improved rail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Changes in the national framework mean that we will now be moving towards a review of the whole district plan rather than completing Part 2 as previously. I have approved other key policy documents, including for conservation areas and commuted payments for affordable housing. This is well under way, with representatives of local groups participating in regular meetings with councillors and council officers to agree details of the scheme. With my Oxhey ward colleagues I carried out a

<p>services and station facilities at Bushey</p> <p>- Achieve progress on and timetable for town hall square improvements.</p> <p>- Ensure Property Investment Board achieves goals of increased return on council's investment portfolio</p>	<p>survey of the views of passengers about facilities and services at Bushey Station and we are pressing rail operators for improvements, especially more shelters on the heavily-used Platform 6.</p> <p>This scheme has been developed and consulted on, but we have agreed to prioritise a related scheme to improve the High Street</p> <p>Although this is no longer in my cabinet portfolio, I continued to attend meetings of the Board, properties have been purchases and the council is meeting its targets in terms of increased revenue.</p>
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Note; it is entirely an individual member's choice as to how many objectives they wish to set, there is no upper or lower limit.

10. Objective(s) for 2017/18

- Continued progress on development of planning policies for the town with sustainable solutions.
- Successful completion of improvements to High Street between Market Street and Clarendon Road
- Successful completion of improvements to North side of Oxhey Park
- Continue campaign for improved rail services and station facilities at Bushey Station.
- Carry out informal consultation with residents in Oxhey on parking issues.