



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

**Watford and Three Rivers Trust
Task Group**

October 2020

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Task group members

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Councillor Dawn Allen-Williamson
Councillor Amanda Grimston
Councillor Jennifer Pattinson
Councillor Jagtar Singh Dhindsa

Chair, Councillor for Woodside Ward
Councillor for Callowland Ward
Councillor for Meriden Ward
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Witnesses

Watford and Three Rivers Trust

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Chief Executive Officer
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Chair of Trustees

Three Rivers District Council

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Acting Head of Community Partnerships

Watford Borough Council

Liam Hornsby

Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office, (seconded to coordinate the volunteer response to the pandemic)

Chris Fennell
Natalie Frost

Head of Leisure and Environmental Services Contract and Relationship Manager – Sustainable Transport, (seconded to support the volunteer response to the pandemic)

Julietta Federico

Contract and Partnership Manager – Leisure & Community

Watford Chamber of Commerce

Chris Luff, MBE

Chief Executive Officer

Hertfordshire County Council

Kristy Thakur

Operation Sustain Programme Lead (VPAC)
Deputy Head (Community Wellbeing)
Integrated Community Support Commissioning Team

Representatives of the local voluntary sector who responded to the survey.

Proposed recommendations to present to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. W3RT should take steps to improve understanding of its activities in the local community.
2. There is a need for W3RT to build more and better partnership working across the local community.
3. W3RT and the wider local voluntary sector would benefit from a dedicated fundraiser at Watford and Three Rivers Trust.
4. The Community Fund should be established as a lasting pillar of support for Watford's voluntary sector.
5. W3RT needs to clarify its long-term strategy for recruiting and sustaining local volunteering activities
6. W3RT should ensure that connections with local partners and statutory bodies are maintained in order to maximise the number of volunteers locally.
7. W3RT and the business community should strengthen their links.
8. W3RT and WBC should maintain a strong and collaborative working relationship.

Background to the task group

Under a service level agreement, Watford Borough Council (WBC) commissions Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT, also referred to as ‘the Trust’ elsewhere in this report) to provide infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector. The council funds W3RT £79,173 per year to support the community and voluntary sector, and has worked closely with the Trust to respond to COVID-19.

W3RT has a focus on service delivery to strengthen the voluntary sector in Watford and enable it to thrive, ensuring that it has the best possible opportunity of delivering high-quality, effective and value for money services to residents and service users.

Whilst WBC’s response to the challenges posed by COVID-19 has been impressive, it was thought helpful to review how well the community and voluntary sector were supported during the council’s response to the pandemic and to establish whether there were areas for improvement.

Seven key themes were identified to guide the task group’s work:

1. What is the long-term plan for volunteers and volunteering – sustaining what we have, recruiting and retaining new volunteers?
2. What is the impact of volunteers currently and how could this be improved?
3. How do we sustain the current effort and support community organisations?
4. How successfully did the trust collaborate with businesses, statutory and public sector organisations in responding to COVID-19?
5. Based on data and evidence, what was the delivered response to COVID-19?
6. What is the overall strategy, vision and business plan for W3RT, including harnessing the positive outcomes from the crisis, and how does this support the CVS (council for voluntary services) role commissioned by WBC?
7. How do we turn the Community Fund into a legacy of COVID-19, including:
 - Governance and the role of WBC
 - Links to existing Watford based charities e.g., New Hope, Peace Hospice etc, and how we involve them in promoting and supporting the Community Fund
 - The need for a dedicated fundraiser at W3RT
 - How to link the Community Fund to the Mayor and his business links.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish the task group at its meeting on 23 July 2020 and confirmed the membership and chair, as set out above.

Response to the pandemic

On 23 March 2020, the Prime Minister announced measures to slow down the spread of the virus. The public was told only to leave their homes for very limited purposes and certain businesses, including all shops providing non-essential goods, were closed. Those who were considered most vulnerable to severe disease as a result of COVID-19 were asked to shield,

initially for a 12 week period. This had wide-ranging impacts on the whole community and in particular on those who were shielding.

In response, the council set up a number of work-streams including one on coordinating the community resource which:

- Set up a local hub to co-ordinate all voluntary activity in Watford
- Ensured that the most vulnerable in all areas of Watford had the required support from volunteers
- Supported volunteers in responding to emerging needs in a safe and meaningful way.

W3RT was a key partner in a number of these areas. The Trust coordinated the volunteer response assigning support tasks to volunteers and allocating volunteers to membership organisations who needed additional support as well as ensuring safeguarding needs were met. W3RT provided a valuable service in triaging the needs of many residents who were shielding and signposting them to the most appropriate services.

The results of this partnership working had significant outputs including:

- Recruitment of nearly 1,700 volunteers working with over 1,300 people
- 7,700 'keeping in touch' calls made by volunteers
- 400 prescriptions collected and delivered
- 330 personal shops or other actions completed
- Over 600 emergency food packs delivered
- Over 7 tonnes of food and PPE collected and distributed
- The Community Fund raised more than £155,000, approximately £125,000 of which has been allocated
- 7,700 triage calls to assess needs undertaken by W3RT staff
- Through Hertfordshire Community Navigators Service, resolved around 10,000 support needs.¹

Community Fund

The Community Fund has been in existence for a number of years but had been dormant with no active appeals. It was decided that it could be used as a vehicle to raise money for local voluntary and community groups who were responding to additional and changing needs during the pandemic. A significant donation of £100,000 was received from Camelot, whose headquarters are located in the area. This donation was split equally with Three Rivers. Other fundraising activities for the Community Fund included:

- A weekly online quiz with Watford's Elected Mayor and Luther Blissett
- A unique 'ride to donate' initiative with Beryl Bikes, which saw money generated for the fund for every ride taken on a Beryl Bike during a two week period. This was

¹ Data provided by W3RT's Chair of Trustees, correct as of mid-September 2020.

supported by Watford FC goalkeeper Ben Foster and generously sponsored by PLM Limited, a local business

- A 'walk for Watford' challenge in partnership with Everyone Active, which encouraged residents to walk one mile and donate £5 to the fund during lockdown, challenging five friends to do the same on social media
- A raffle with prizes donated by local businesses. Tickets sold raised over £3,500
- An auction of prizes donated by a number of former Watford FC players among others, raising over £4,000
- The creation of a dedicated website with appeal videos from famous faces linked to Watford, including Kelly Smith, Limahl, Maro Itoje and Tommy Smith
- Creation of text to donate numbers and an online portal.

To date, the fund has raised more than £155,000 and supported approximately 50 groups who are active in Watford. W3RT oversaw the allocation of the fund; receiving and reviewing applications in line with the guidelines and making the payments to the recipients.

Commissioning Framework

WBC has an ongoing relationship with W3RT under its commissioning framework. As part of this framework, W3RT delivers the CVS function for Watford. The focus of this service delivery is to strengthen the voluntary sector in Watford and enable it to thrive, ensuring that it has the best possible opportunity of delivering high quality, effective and value for money services to residents and service users.

The outcomes as set out in the service specification are:

- Voluntary and community sector organisations are better equipped to run their organisations and build resilience and sustainability.
- The voluntary and community sector interests and concerns are represented to achieve a better outcome.

WBC officers undertake regular monitoring of this work through key performance indicators (KPIs) and end of year reports as well as meetings which often include WBC portfolio holders. The end of year reports are regularly reviewed by WBC's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The current framework commenced on 1 April 2019 and will end on 31 March 2023.

Overview of the task group's programme of work

The task group held an initial meeting in August 2020 to review the terms of reference and to identify the key issues for consideration. It was agreed that a series of witness sessions would be held in September. The task group agreed to seek the views of:

- Key representatives from W3RT

- Officers from WBC and TRDC involved in the councils' regular engagement with W3RT, as well as those seconded to help with the work of coordinating the local response to COVID-19
- Voluntary sector organisations, including recipients of the Community Fund
- Watford Chamber of Commerce
- Hertfordshire County Council.

In parallel to these witness sessions, a survey of all those who had applied to the Community Fund, and other local voluntary groups, was undertaken to understand the experience of the application process and to ascertain if and where improvements might be made. The task group focussed both on the immediate term – in anticipation of a second wave of COVID-19 impacting the local community, and on the future – to harness the positive lessons learnt during lockdown in order to optimise the community and voluntary service for local residents.

The task group worked alongside Nicola Marven, Voluntary Sector Specialist, who was undertaking a review of how the council interfaces with W3RT and the voluntary sector more widely. Some areas included in the initial terms of reference, such as the investigation of how the outcomes delivered by W3RT compare to other similar umbrella organisations, will be captured in her review.

Additional research work was carried out by Democratic Services to inform the task group's work and to produce this report

A list of the witnesses who provided evidence to the task group is listed on page 3 and a bibliography is provided at the end of this report.

Recommendations and comments

W3RT reach and profile in the community

1. W3RT should take steps to improve understanding of its activities in the local community.

W3RT's role, responsibilities and long-term objectives should be better understood in the local community. W3RT offers wide-ranging support and it is important that all of the voluntary and community sector can make the most of its resources, services and guidance. The task group heard evidence on a number of occasions that the trust's expertise in governance issues was widely regarded as excellent.

It would be useful for the Trust to capture information about successful activities and innovations, possibly in the form of real-life case studies. This would enable good and best practices to become embedded within and shared between community and voluntary sector organisations and could be used as part of the marketing activities related to the Community Fund.

2. There is a need for W3RT to build more and better partnership working across the local community.

The task group identified the fact that isolated groups, which included those representing Watford's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), religious and other non-English speaking minority groups, may not have come forward to volunteer or to apply for Community Fund grants. It is recommended that outreach work is undertaken to address this and to ensure the needs of all groups are embedded into the organisation's culture.

In this regard, W3RT's current work with the Hertfordshire Equalities Council to identify isolated and under-represented groups in Watford is welcomed by the task group.

As community leaders, councillors have a key role to play engaging with the different communities within their wards to ensure that all groups benefit fully from W3RT's support and expertise. The elected members should also encourage groups to pursue an active ongoing relationship with the Trust. These relationships will particularly benefit the smaller groups who are less likely to benefit currently from local support and networks.

Fundraising

3. W3RT and the wider local voluntary sector would benefit from a dedicated fundraiser at Watford and Three Rivers Trust.

This post would provide support for local groups applying for local and national funding. Additionally, the role could be responsible for drawing in funding for Watford's Community Fund.

Fundraising is crucial. The ability to identify funding sources and raise money is empowering for charity and voluntary groups – it is feared that some of the fledgling organisations will not survive unless they are equipped with these skills and supported to develop their fundraising work. At the same time many established charities face a major loss of income and will need to fundraise successfully to keep their vital services running in the tough times that are anticipated ahead. This was clearly reflected in the survey where 83% of respondents stated that one of the main challenges facing their organisations in the next 12 months was sustainability of income and funding.

The Community Fund has been a valuable resource for the voluntary sector during the pandemic. At the time of writing, the Three Rivers portion of the funds has been exhausted and there is approximately £20,000 remaining for Watford-based activities. The task group feels that it is important that this lifeline for the voluntary sector is extended through further fundraising.

W3RT should take a lead in equipping CVS members with the skills they need to raise funds and use its position to lead in developing and marketing the Community Fund resource. The task group noted 62% of respondents to the survey had not applied for funding from the Community Fund.

4. The Task Group considers that the Community Fund should be established as a lasting pillar of support for Watford's voluntary sector

Fundraising needs to be at the heart of the sector's recovery strategy and cannot be considered as a secondary function. Across the country, COVID 19 has significantly impacted the charity and voluntary sector's ability to fundraise and charities have real concerns about their financial security. These concerns were confirmed by respondents to the survey. When asked about the main challenges facing organisations in the next 12 months, 83% stated sustainability of income / funding. 40% of respondents also highlighted an anticipated increase in the number of local residents needing support.

The Community Fund will be crucial to supporting local charities with meeting this challenge. There is immense goodwill towards the fund and an opportunity exists to capitalise on the sense of place and loyalty to the Watford community that has seen the fundraising operate so successfully in recent months.

The fund is considered to have been administered efficiently – 68% of those who responded to the survey question around the speed with which they received funding stated that they had received it very quickly. However, it is important to ensure high standards of transparency in grant awards, and to ensure that constructive feedback is available to applicants who are either unsuccessful or received less than the amount they applied for.

It is suggested that a strategic discussion with WBC, the Watford Chamber of Commerce and other key local partners and stakeholders should take place to set

the long-term aims of the Community Fund as well as the means of developing, growing and marketing the fund.

Watford's CVS provider has a crucial role to play not only as custodian of this fund but as a champion of it – ensuring money is raised by local people for local people.

Volunteering

5. W3RT needs to clarify its long-term strategy for recruiting and sustaining local volunteering activities

W3RT's vision is to create a pro-volunteering culture in the town as a whole. W3RT's role is to inspire and galvanise volunteers. The challenge for the future is to provide a tiered volunteering structure to allow people to commit to an appropriate level. W3RT would provide a system to check and validate volunteers and facilitate online training. This structure is welcomed, but needs to be embedded in the CVS.

The task group accepts that volunteer numbers are likely to fall as people return to work. However, with unemployment expected to increase the benefits of volunteering should not be underestimated for those seeking useful employment, nor in its capacity to maintain social fabric in the town.

As part of this, WBC should consider reviewing the service level agreement with W3RT to ensure that the council's aspirations for the town's volunteering culture is fully reflected in this document and gives the Trust the foundation on which they can develop this work further.

Working relationships

6. W3RT should work to ensure that connections with local partners and statutory bodies are maintained in order to maximise the number of volunteers locally.

Excellent working relationships have been formed with many local partners and statutory bodies including the NHS and the community navigation service. Maintaining regular contact and liaison with these partners will ensure the joint working undertaken during the pandemic has a long-lasting impact.

The Mayor's Office can be a facilitator of partnership working, fundraising, community support and cohesion. Engagement with businesses from across the town can also boost outreach into BAME communities, by helping to reach the customers they serve. The task group would encourage this facilitating role to continue in this regard.

7. W3RT and the business community should strengthen their links.

The voluntary sector and the business community would benefit from closer collaboration with each other. Business provides a commercial perspective on the challenges facing the voluntary sector and W3RT has valuable insight into the local community and voluntary sector. This insight can be used by business looking to

develop their corporate social responsibility agendas, invest in the local community and understand their customers better.

Collaboration with the business community could be strengthened at W3RT. It is suggested that W3RT invite a representative of the Watford Chamber of Commerce to sit as a trustee on the board to provide an ongoing link with the local business sector.

Interface with Watford Borough Council

8. W3RT and WBC should maintain a strong and collaborative working relationship.

Maintaining and strengthening the good collaborative working relationship between the council and W3RT is essential in order to maximise the benefit to Watford's community and voluntary sector.

During the Covid crisis, the task group noted that central leadership from the Mayor's office proved beneficial to W3RT, business partners and other groups, by bringing stakeholders together and providing a crucial channel of communication. These links should be solidified to enable issues to be identified and addressed through a more collaborative and symbiotic working relationship, rather than simply a commissioning approach. This approach to working should operate at all levels of engagement between the council and W3RT.

It is suggested that WBC officers working on economic development should promote W3RT and the Community Fund as part of businesses' local corporate social responsibility programmes. Collaborative work should be undertaken between the Trust, Chamber of Commerce and council to encourage businesses locating to Watford to direct their corporate social responsibility efforts towards local causes via W3RT.

The task group learnt that there were different arrangements between other authorities and their CVS organisations. It is suggested that WBC officers develop networks to share and learn best practice in other districts in order to strengthen the community and voluntary sectors across Hertfordshire.

The task group would like to thank all their witnesses who generously gave time to assist with this review as well as respondents to the survey.

Bibliography/background papers

Report to Cabinet – [Watford Borough Council response to Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) - 4 May 2020

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee – [New Scrutiny task group: WBC's relationship with W3RT during the COVID 19 pandemic](#) – 23 July 2020

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee – [Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework year 1 report](#) – 24 September 2020

[Impact on the Charity Sector during Coronavirus](#) – research report June 2020, Institute of Fundraising, NCVO, and Charity Finance Group supported by PwC

Watford Community Survey – October 2020

**Watford Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Scrutiny proposal form**

Scrutiny review title	Watford Borough Council's relationship with the Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT)
Scrutiny proposer	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Details of specific area for review	<p>The council provides funding to W3RT to support the voluntary and community sector, and has worked closely with the trust to respond to COVID 19.</p> <p>Under a service level agreement, the council commissions W3RT to provide infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector. W3RT has a focus on service delivery to strengthen the voluntary sector in Watford and enable it to thrive, ensuring that it has the best possible opportunity to deliver high quality, effective and value for money services to residents and service users.</p> <p>Scrutiny is asked to review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how well the community and voluntary sector were supported during the council's response to COVID 19 and whether there are areas for improvement • the council's relationship with W3RT and the lessons learnt from the COVID 19 response.
Which council priorities it supports	The scrutiny suggestion supports the council's priority to celebrate and support our local communities.
Desired outcomes / indicators of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A detailed overview of W3RT's COVID 19 activities and expenditure in Watford. • Lessons learnt during the community sector response to COVID 19 which can be taken forward in policies and other relevant documentation. • Clear recommendations that contribute to a strengthened service for the community sector in Watford.
Timescale and key dates	<p>23 July: Task Group outline, membership and chair to O&S</p> <p>July-Aug: Preparation with Chair to agree witnesses, draw up and arrange a schedule of meetings and meeting formats</p> <p>Aug-Sept: Meetings with witnesses</p> <p>22 Oct: Final report and recommendations to O&S</p> <p>9 Nov: Final report and recommendations to Cabinet</p>