

Question by members of the public under Council Procedure Rule 11.0

- 1) Sara Jane Trebar asked the following question –

“Now Watford Council is more politically balanced after the recent local elections should councillors consider debating the retention of an elected mayor past 2018 and to give Watford residents a yes/no vote alongside the full local council elections in 2016?”

The following answer was provided by Councillor Watkin –

“We think it is better for the council to focus on how best to provide services to the public and keep Watford as a successful town rather than looking inwards to our own constitutional arrangements. In our experience the issues that the public wish the council to debate are the services it provides that affect their daily lives, such as refuse collection or parks and playgrounds, and how it can work to ensure our town retains a thriving local economy and is a good place to live in.

The mayoral system is designed to cope with all potential compositions of the council chamber. There are examples in other authorities of the mayor’s party having an overwhelming majority of councillors, of an independent mayor who is not backed by any political group, and almost all situations in between. Therefore I don’t believe the make-up of the council has any direct bearing on the mayoral system.

There are provisions in the 2007 Local Government Act for instigating a referendum. Whether or not one is held and whatever its outcome, constitutionally the mayoral system would remain at least until the end of the current Mayor’s term of office. If the mayoral system continues, the people of Watford will in 2018 be able to choose who they consider the best person for the job, which may be a representative of any political party or none – that is the great thing about democracy.”

Sara Jane Trebar asked a supplementary question to which Councillor Watkin replied.

2) Andrew Moore asked the following question –

“In response to a recent question raised by Councillor Bell at the full council meeting in March 2015 in relation to allotment applications, Paul Rabbitt’s stated “that there had not been a steady decline in allotment applications year on year since 2009”. As Mr Rabbitt’s did not produce any information to substantiate this statement, please can he provide the total number of allotment applications by calendar year from the beginning 2009 to the end of 2014.

The following answer was provided by Councillor Scudder –

“The number of applications received for allotments since 2008 is

Year	No. of applications
2008	213
2009	340
2010	199
2011	136
2012	150
2013	155
2014	128
2015 to date	112

These figures show a significant rise from 2008 to 2009, a decline in 2010 and 2011 followed by increases in 2012 and 2013. A subsequent decrease in 2014 was expected as the council focused on delivery of the £810k allotment investment programme. However, we are already seeing a significant increase in applications in 2015, already outstripping this time last year and these applications are generating a significant number of new allotment holders.

However the main measure of how well Watford’s allotments are performing is through occupancy rates – that is how many people have taken up an allotment tenancy. Occupancy rates have consistently increased over the years. These were 66% in 2002, 89% in 2006, 91% in 2011 and 93% at present. As Mr Rabbitts said the number of applications fluctuates annually and is not a good reflection of actual uptake – while people might apply this does not necessarily follow through to taking up a tenancy.”

Andrew Moore asked a supplementary question to which Councillor Scudder replied.