

UKIP WATFORD

LOCAL ELECTION MANIFESTO 2014

OVERVIEW

What sort of Council do you want?

We in UKIP believe the local Watford Borough Council could run more efficiently and more effectively. This will make it **cheaper** to run and therefore council taxes can reflect that efficiency saving.

In particular, we would like to see an **end to secrecy and misinformation** at the council. We intend to **make Watford Borough Council the most open and transparent council in the UK**. We believe that by being completely open and transparent you will get a better council because there will be nowhere to hide mistakes and so those who are responsible for running Watford will be forced to learn from any mistakes they make rather than just burying them.

We also believe that under the Liberal Democrats, the Council has at times displayed an unwelcome **arrogance**. We believe the council should remember that it is there to serve you, the people and businesses of Watford, not to rule you.

Council Customer Service in some areas leaves room for **improvement**. To make this improvement happen we intend to empower staff to be able to make decisions so that problems can be dealt with as and when they arise.

The Council should be focused on making the town fit for people to live in, for people to work in, easy for people to drive in, park their cars cheaply, and fit for businesses to operate in. **Parking in certain parts of Watford is becoming impossible and insensitive overdevelopment is making it worse**. We will take a realistic and practical approach to car ownership. We will provide adequate affordable or free parking whilst encouraging the use of public transport.

We want Watford General Hospital to be replaced with a state of the art new hospital. Only our policies will allow that to happen.

There are three issues with the Health Campus.

1. We in Watford want and need a new Hospital. **The Liberal Democrats and NHS trust have NO PLANS FOR A NEW HOSPITAL as part of the Health Campus site**. The so-called "Health Campus" is little more than a new housing estate.
2. The Allotments are protected by law and should be preserved from development.
3. Watford needs new housing and associated infrastructure.

The Liberal Democrats intend to lose the allotments, overdevelop the site and not leave enough room for a new hospital. We disagree with this unprofessional approach.

We would do things differently.

1. We would pause the development and put all the facts into the public domain.
2. We would leave Farm Terrace allotments alone.
3. We would await the Hospital Trust's decision, due next year, on what space a new hospital would require. We could then either leave the site alone until after a new hospital has been built, or alternatively we could leave plenty of room for a new hospital and build around it. A new hospital for Watford, which is desperately needed, would be able to be built on the site at a later date as and when the NHS Trust is ready and funds become available from government.
4. Only then would we look at developing responsible housing around the remainder of the site, where appropriate. The new plans may well result in a reduced amount of housing.

We do not believe the Mayor and Council should build a housing estate now that brings in money but could derail the future hospital plans. The needs of the Town should come first. Watford desperately needs a new hospital and we have the perfect site for it as it stands. We do not want to lose that site by building houses all over it.

We have a commitment to **maintaining and improving Watford's parks and open spaces**, including allotments. We can't keep selling off pieces of Watford to developers unless we want to turn Watford into a town resembling a dense inner-city area. We must have more responsible development and more parking because, no matter what the planners and politicians say about getting people out of their cars, it often leads to frustration for those who need cars, but cannot park near their work or their homes.

Finally, **we want to see Watford Council operate in a more democratic way**. Under a UKIP Mayor and Council, we will ask you about important schemes affecting the lives of the people and businesses of Watford, and using democratic referenda, you will be able to have your say and influence the council actions. To save on costs, local referenda will be held at the same time and place as local elections on an annual basis where appropriate.

As part of being a more democratic council, the UKIP Mayor will be available to the people of Watford in various ways. For instance, we will visit each ward of Watford for a public meeting as often as required. We can have a frank exchange of views in a public place and you will be able to help keep the Council on track with what you, the people, want. Private surgeries will also be available.

Our full policy manifesto follows on in this document. Thank you for reading and I hope you will vote UKIP for both Mayor and local councillors. Together we will improve this town for all the people of Watford.

Contents

- 1. The Office of Common Sense
(Complaints, Suggestions and
Improvements)**
- 2. An Open and transparent council**
- 3. Meet The Mayor – Public Meetings**
- 4. Review of Services**
- 5. Democracy**
- 6. Review of “The Health Campus”**
- 7. Review of Council wages, Allowances
and Expenses**
- 8. Review of Council Financial reserves**
- 9. Planning Review.**
- 10. Safer Streets and Crime Reduction**
- 11. Treating Motorists fairly**
- 12. Parks, allotments and open spaces
Improvements and Protection**
- 13. Enhancement of services for the elderly
and vulnerable.**
- 14. Local Authority apprenticeships**
- 15. Review of Ceremonial Mayor role.**

UKIP Manifesto 2014

1. Office of Common Sense (Complaints, Suggestions and Improvements)

- a. This office will deal with complaints and suggestions for improvements to council about the services we provide. It will be expected to take a common sense view of complaints or suggestions and to offer common sense solutions. It may investigate complaints and suggest solutions to the department concerned or refer the matter to council for resolution if required. It may suggest changes to working practices and empowerment for members of staff to make decisions. Council staff on the whole do a great job of keeping Watford running, however some rules and regulations that they have to work to are not always in the best interests of the public they serve. We believe that a more pragmatic, common sense view needs to be taken to provide the sort of services that really meet the needs of our customers. YOU!
- b. It is envisaged this new office will not need new staff, just a re-organisation of existing staff, resulting in an improved service at no extra cost to taxpayers.

2. An Open and Transparent Council

- a. Spending review
 - i. The Taxpayers Alliance is a campaigning group who look for inappropriate spending in council.
 - ii. We will Invite the Taxpayers Alliance or similar to scrutinize council spending. This is not an audit, the accounts and spending are already audited. This will be investigative auditing, looking for areas where the council has wasted money.
 - iii. Whilst this introduces further intitial costs to council, it is important that the council runs efficiently and effectively and does not waste money. Savings are likely to be found from this additional audit.
- b. Freedom of Information.
 - i. We would make as much information as legally and operationally possible available to the public.
 - ii. We will welcome public scrutiny of council dealings by the public and the press. We want to make sure nothing is hidden, either good or bad. Mistakes past present and future should be exposed to the glare of scrutiny in an open and honest way. The public should be made aware of how their council has been run and is running.
 - iii. There are legal articles commonly known as "Gagging Orders". These are legal agreements between government organisations, like the NHS or Councils, that prohibit an employee or ex-employee from disclosing information, normally in return for a payment. These are used primarily in cover-ups. UKIP will ban gagging orders at WBC. There will be no future gagging orders at WBC. Existing ones will be rescinded.

- c. Council spending
 - i. We will publish the costs of each of the services we provide in an understandable format. This information will be available to the public and press for scrutiny.
 - ii. We will publish costs of each backroom service.
- d. Online publishing
 - i. We will publish our open information online. This will include
 - 1. Financial information
 - a. Expenditure
 - b. Collection of taxes and backlogs
 - c. Other monies received
- e. Staff who have been involved with or trained by the organization named “Common Purpose” will be asked to register their involvement. Common Purpose is an organization that has raised suspicions of having an agenda of its own to promote certain policies in government. The policies of council must come from the government and councillors on behalf of the people of Watford. Common Purpose must not be allowed to set any agendas or run any parallel operation within council.
- f. Councillors are to be encouraged to sign an undertaking to only comment on news stories under the name Cllr (name). We want to stamp out the practice of councillors trying to push their own agendas by masquerading under false names as supportive or hostile members of the public in local newspapers or on websites.

3. Meet the Mayor – Public Meetings

- a. We will hold regular public meetings open to all so that the Mayor and people of Watford can communicate in a productive environment. Frequency will depend on availability and demand.

4. Review of Services

- a. We will review all services we are obliged to provide and ensure we are providing them as efficiently and customer-orientated as is practicable. Costings will be made and published so the public can see how much is spent to deliver each service.
- b. We will promote the ethos of the customer being at the heart of all that we do. Our customers pay our wages and are the reason the council exists.
- c. We will review all the services we currently provide that are optional. We will cost these services so that the public can see how much each service costs.
- d. We will review services that council might provide in the future but does not currently provide. We will estimate the likely costs for running these services so that any decisions taken on offering new services have this information before any decisions are taken. There are no plans for new services.
- e. The electorate in Watford will have the opportunity to vote to introduce new services or stop existing services that are not required by law. UKIP has a policy on referenda that

gives this opportunity to the people to decide. If 5% of voters ask for a referendum on an issue, we will offer one.

- f. UKIP will review where services can be improved
 - i. Bins will be collected weekly – a commitment for 4 years – the whole Mayoral term.
 - ii. Free pick up of additional rubbish bags from council, subject to a maximum number of extra bags to be agreed per household.
 - iii. Reconsideration of bin inspections. If we are not obliged to spy on bins then we will scrap these inspections. UKIP will roll back any big brother notions.
- g. To review Union representation at the council and any costs to the council of such. All such costs to be published annually.

5. Democracy

- a. A UKIP Mayor pledges to work with all Parties and All Residents without prejudice.
- b. A UKIP Mayor and Councillors pledge to put Town and Residents ahead of Party.

6. Review of the Health Campus

- a. The Health Campus is....a glorified housing estate. It has been sold as a new hospital with infill around it of 350 houses and has morphed into no hospital but 750 houses. The only thing that appears clear is that we have been told many different stories over the years and someone needs to get a handle on what it is, what has happened and what needs doing now.
- b. UKIP will push for a new hospital on this site and for housing infill to wait until the hospital requirements are fully completed.
- c. UKIP will push to save Farm Terrace allotments on this site as allotments for current and future allotments users in West Watford.
- d. A UKIP Council will commission a full, open and honest report to be prepared and published as to the whole situation surrounding the “Health Campus” and the likelihood of a new Hospital. This report will cover the impact and benefits of the proposed developments.
- e. UKIP will work with the Hospital to ensure some land is reserved for parking that is plentiful and affordable. Current hospital parking costs are too high and hit the sick and their relatives when parking charges are the last thing they should be worrying about.

7. Review of Council Wages, Allowances and Expenses

- a. UKIP, as part of the policy of openness, will publish details of all Council roles earning more than 6 times the minimum wage (approx. £69,000). These roles will have their wages, pension contribution and expenses published.
- b. We will review the wages of the top earners in council. Future wages are to be capped at an agreed amount and then index linked with NO pauses in the index-linking. (No

skipping a rise for a while and then having a bumper rise later on as compensation as has happened elsewhere).

- c. All expenses will be published on the website. UKIP will make this information completely transparent so the public knows what the council does with their money on expenses.

8. Review of Council Reserves

- a. UKIP will publish the amount held in Council Reserves and look into whether taxes may be cut or held by using excess reserves. UKIP wants to cut taxes for hard-pressed taxpayers.

9. Planning Review

- a. UKIP will conduct a review to consider what extra support could be given to bring more business to Watford and keep that which we already have without ruining the character of the town.
- b. We will reconsider current planning guidelines to allow more scope to homeowners trying to improve their homes.
- c. UKIP will press for housing schemes to be encouraged to provide adequate parking, even in town centre areas. One car space per dwelling should be the minimum to stop overcrowding of parking on our already hard-pressed streets.
- d. UKIP will press for dedicated bin areas to be provided in new developments.

10. Safer Streets and Crime Reduction

- a. UKIP will make efforts to make Watford safer at pub and club closing time by pushing for the establishment of a safe, manned taxi rank sanctuary in or near Watford Parade to assist people with safe transport home.
- b. UKIP will crack down on street drinking and anti-social behavior.
- c. UKIP will conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the Purple Flag scheme – an award we pay for. It recognizes a well-run evening and night-time economy in town centres. It has been suggested it is just a gimmick which can be abandoned and the money saved.
- d. UKIP will ensure that Housing Benefit administration and the fight against benefit fraud, including overpayments, is fully funded at the council and well managed. We do not want a repeat of the mess the current administration at the Town Hall allowed to arise last year where a large backlog arose of over £1 million.

11. Treating Motorists Fairly

- a. We want to ensure the emphasis is on safe driving in Watford and adequate facilities for motorists in our town. As part of this we will

- i. Review parking restrictions across the town. We will ask the questions and take the appropriate action
 - 1. Are they needed?
 - 2. If needed what is their purpose?
 - 3. Do they meet the purpose? For instance, many people are affected by night-time parking issues and are only offered daytime parking solutions. That helps no-one.
 - 4. Can beaurocracy and therefore excessive cost be reduced or removed from street parking?
- ii. Parking charges
 - 1. These will be reviewed and where possible reduced or removed.
 - 2. If financially viable, we will offer short-term parking for free in our shopping areas.
 - 3. We will review the provision of parking meters. Where their usage is simply to collect revenue we will remove them.
 - 4. We will look at opening up council car parking to the public at weekends to offer more free parking in the town.
- iii. Woodmere Avenue width restriction.
 - 1. There is a width restriction on Woodmere Avenue. It gets more accidents than any other, some serious. Common sense dictates it should be replaced. We will press hard for this to happen with HCC.
- iv. 20's Plenty.
 - 1. There is a scheme called 20's Plenty that is lobbying for the speed limits to be restricted to 20mph on side roads in Watford. The current council backs this scheme. The costs of such a scheme could run into millions of pounds according to sources at Hertfordshire County Council and it may not be worthwhile for the perceived benefits it may or may not deliver. The science is not clear on the benefits accruing from such a scheme. From the comments made by some councilors, it is clear the scheme is not fully understood by at least some of the people who have voted for it. The fear is that the council is simply jumping on a bandwagon regarding a policy it does not control. It falls to County Council to implement such a scheme, yet Watford Borough Council are spending our taxes on pursuing this questionable scheme.
 - 2. A UKIP council would seek to suspend this councils support for 20's Plenty. If the council still wishes to pursue this matter then we will have the scheme professionally and scientifically evaluated and the findings made public. We will then ask for another presentation to councillors.
 - 3. We do accept that there may be some areas that may benefit from a lower speed limit. Although not a local council issue, we would lend our support to schemes that can be shown to make a positive difference and are overwhelmingly supported by the local residents affected.

12. Parks, Allotments and Open Spaces Improvements and Protection

- a. We will Continue the program of Park upgrades and maintenance, ensuring our parks are always fit for purpose.
- b. We will evaluate the current upgrade scheme and equipment objectively for value for money, i.e. are the open air gyms being sufficiently used versus their cost?
- c. We will try to save Farm Terrace Allotments.
 - i. If it is not already sold off, we will reverse the disposal of Farm Terrace allotments.
 - ii. We will Strengthen the protection of allotment land – we will work to give a council commitment NOT to build on allotments at all.
 - iii. We will provide adequate facilities to be provided at all WBC allotments. Currently facilities are not well provided.
- d. UKIP will Commit to save Watford Allotments, Parks and Open space from development and we will protect the Green Belt from development.

13. Enhancement of Services for the Elderly and Vulnerable

- a. We will investigate whether we can improve the services for the elderly or vulnerable within current budget constraints. We will encourage other providers to provide more services if possible by working with them closely. In particular we would like to see more provision for day services within the town for our elderly residents.

14. Local Authority Apprenticeships

- a. Where possible, UKIP will establish apprenticeships in local council to help young residents onto the work ladder.

15. Review of the Ceremonial Mayor Role

- a. We will investigate whether we still need a Ceremonial Mayor now we have an elected Mayor.
- b. We will identify and itemise all costs associated with the Ceremonial Mayor and publish them on our website.