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WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Record of decisions taken at the meeting of the **Cabinet** held
on **Wednesday, 16 June 2021** at 2.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillors: Councillor Michele Mead (Leader), Councillor David Harvey (Deputy Leader), Councillor Suzi Coul, Councillor Merilyn Davies, Councillor Jane Doughty, Councillor Jeff Haine, Councillor David Harvey, Councillor Norman MacRae MBE and Councillor Michele Mead

Also in Attendance: Councillor Julian Cooper, Councillor Harry Eaglestone, Councillor Andy Graham and Councillor Mark Johnson.

Officers: Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Senior Strategic Support Officer), Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer), Giles Hughes (Chief Executive) and Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica), Suzanne Barton (Senior Estates Officer), Andrew Smith (Communication Officer) and Michelle Ouzman (Strategic Support Officer).

10 Notice of Decisions

The decisions taken at the meeting on 26 May 2021 were approved.

11 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Carl Rylett.

12 Declarations of Interest

Declarations of Interest were received as follows:

Item 8 – Commercial Tenancy Arrears Review

Councillor Harvey declared an interest as a business tenant of West Oxfordshire District Council.

13 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

14 Receipt of Announcements

Regulatory Excellence Awards 2021

Following his announcement at the last Cabinet meeting, Councillor MacRae addressed Members and was delighted to announce that The Oxfordshire Coronavirus Regulatory Partnership had won the Local Government Awards, Regulatory Excellence Awards 2021 Coronavirus Category. He passed his congratulations to all staff involved.

Additional Restriction Grants

Councillor Coul advised that the above grants had been supplied to local businesses in the most recent round of awards.

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Covid-19 Local Update

Councillor Mead reminded Members that although hospitalisations and deaths from Covid-19 were low, the virus was still spreading throughout the District. She reminded the meeting of the need for the Council and elected members to continue to support local residents and encourage individuals to have the vaccine. Ultimately, the Leader's message was to urge caution and continue to support the vulnerable residents.

15 Service Performance Report 2020-21 Quarter Four

Members received a report which provided details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2020-21 Quarter four (Q4), and enabled Councillors to assess operational performance and gain assurance on progress towards achieving the Council's priorities.

A new Council Plan 2020-2024 was approved by Council in January 2020. Due to the impact of Covid-19 on the economy, community, climate change, service delivery and finances, a Local Recovery Plan was approved by Council in October 2020 to complement the delivery of the Council Plan 2020-24. A new performance management framework had been developed with a much broader framework than previous frameworks. It set out six key strands of information on which assurance needed to be provided and these were listed at 2.3 of the report.

The report also included benchmarking data on a trial basis and further information was detailed at 2.5 of the report.

Members noted the Council Priorities section of the report and the West Oxfordshire Council Plan Annual Statement which was attached at Annex A to the report. The Council's Service Performance was covered in a full report attached at Annex B to the report, and provided an overview of the customer facing and support services that had been impacted by Covid-19.

There were no alternative options provided as the report was for noting.

The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report and stated that the impact of the pandemic was unsurprising. She highlighted that the performance indicators were being reviewed to include key KPI's (Key Performance Indicators) which aligned with the Council's Plan. Councillor Coul proposed that the report be noted. This was seconded by Councillor Davies.

In response to a question from Councillor Cooper, the Cabinet Member highlighted that the wording on page 11 had been used cautiously, as it had been known that the proposed 21 June date could be amended if necessary.

Councillor Cooper also requested an update on Electric Vehicle Charging Points and Councillor Harvey advised that the contractual details were still being discussed and WODC's project was dependant on the County Council's Park & Charge project moving ahead.

Councillor Cooper asked about the latest situation regarding a backlog of planning applications being processed. Councillor Coul advised that Cabinet had taken note of the concerns raised and additional resources were being brought in to reduce the waiting time.

Councillor Haine confirmed that additional staff had been employed and the backlog of applications was being worked through.

Having read the report, Cabinet

Resolved that the 2020-21 Q4 service performance be noted.

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16 Community Facility Grants - 1st Round 2021/2022

Members received a report from the Business Manager – Contracts, which asked them to consider applications for grant aid from the first two rounds of funding for the Community Facilities Grant Scheme.

Two applications had been received from Great Rollright Parish Council for £10,000 and Stonesfield Cricket Club for £1562.50 and the full breakdown and description of funding was outlined in Annex A to the report.

Great Rollright Parish Council had requested funding to assist with the replacement of playground equipment and bases, following a recent ROSPA inspection. The project's aim was to deliver a modern, well equipped playground that met the requirements of the children in the village and the total cost of the scheme was £50,000.

Stonesfield Cricket Club had requested funding to provide a new electronic scoreboard because the current board was no longer useable and had been deemed a health and safety risk. In addition, the report noted that the replacement scoreboard was required in order to fulfil fixtures at both adult and junior levels, as it was a compulsory requirement for participation in league cricket. The total cost of the scheme was £6,250.

Members noted that the total grant allocation in this report was £11,562.50 and would increase the total investment made to date to £56,250, into local schemes.

An alternative option was that Cabinet could choose to offer differing levels of grant aid although this could result in the projects not being viable due to insufficient funding.

The Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery, Councillor Doughty introduced the report and was pleased to be recommending the proposals for two positive and worthwhile community projects. Both of which would help to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents.

This was seconded by Councillor MacRae who reiterated the need to support local, good causes.

Having read the report, Cabinet

Resolved to award the grants in accordance with the recommendations set out in Annex A to the report.

17 Commercial Tenancy Arrears Review

Members received a report which asked Cabinet to consider the commercial tenancy arrears position in light of the statutory limitation on recovery action against tenants.

In response to the Covid-19 crisis, in March 2020, the Council issued Business Support Terms to its commercial tenants. The Terms, attached at Annex A to the report, allowed all commercial tenants (except those able to continue to trade, headlessees and Government organisations) a three month rent deferral. In August 2020 the Council decided to extend the rent deferral for a further three months for only those tenants still unable to trade. The decision included the offer to tenants to enter into a monthly payment plan for the deferred rent, with the aim being to bring their rent accounts up to date by the end of March 2022, or the end of lease, whichever occurred first.

The CIPFA Asset Management Team had monitored English and Welsh authority responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in respect of their commercial tenants and the team's advice was listed at 1.3 of the report.

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Annex B to the report detailed the Criteria for Further Commercial Tenant Support and was intended to provide a policy for both the November 2020 trading restrictions and the further trading restrictions implemented by the Government at the end of December 2020, as a result of the response to Covid-19. The Financial Implications section of the report explained the average performance of the Council's property portfolio and outlined the processes for rent deferrals, 'Lease Re-gear' and rent free periods.

An alternative options was that the Council could choose not to provide further support however, the risk was that this could increase the potential for reduced future income if the rent payments could not be met.

Councillor Coul introduced the report and explained that this report was proposing a policy to clarify how the Council would process any requests received. This was seconded by Councillor Mead.

Councillor Graham commented on the level of support already provided to local businesses and thanked the staff involved. He asked for clarification as to how and when the policy would be reviewed and queried if officers would be reporting back.

The Chief Finance Officer and Deputy Chief Executive, Mrs Griffiths, advised that these figures would be included in any variances detailed in the Budget report. She added that each case would be reviewed on a commercial basis.

Councillor Coul did not feel it was appropriate to put a time limit on the process because the business sector could continue to be impacted by Covid for sometime to come. She assured Councillor Graham that the policy would be reviewed if officers felt it was not working adequately in the future.

Having read the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

Resolved that

- a) the arrears position on the commercial portfolio is noted; and
- b) authority is delegated to the Cabinet Member for Finance to utilise the tools set out in section 3 of the report, on a case by case basis, to protect the commercial interests of the Council.

The Meeting closed at 2.15 pm

Leader of the Council