

**THE CABINET
10th December, 2020**

Present:- Councillor Read (in the Chair); Councillors Alam, Allen, Beck, Hoddinott, Lelliott, Roche and Watson.

Also in attendance Councillor Steele (Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors .

79. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

80. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

- (1) Mr. Felstead said he had been denied the previously requested information relating to the Wilmot Dixon schemes by the Cabinet Member and felt this was illegal under the rules of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

The Leader understood that a response had been provided to the questions raised, however, he was not clear of the exact nature of that response. He explained the Council had to adhere to rules regarding disclosure of commercially sensitive information which included FOI requests. The Leader indicated he would consider the response provided to see if further information could be provided within the regulations.

Mr. Felstead believed that Wilmot Dixon had not competitively tendered for the schemes and had been given preferred contractor status through the 'Your Build' Framework in 2018, with the drawings not being produced until 2019. The response during the previous Cabinet meeting to his question had indicated that a Social Value Policy had been introduced to keep local money within the local community. However, the response received in writing from the responsible Cabinet Member did not mention the Social Value Policy. Mr. Felstead asked for clarification on whose response was correct.

The Leader explained that Framework contracts were in place for works of this nature. The Framework contracts were created using a competitive appointment process, which did not detract from the requirements of the Social Value Policy. The Leader reiterated that the Council wanted to see more money spent within the local economy, along with companies employing more local people, however, there would be instances when the use of a regional contractor was needed.

The Cabinet Member for Housing explained there had been no unlawful activity regarding the provision of information. The Council had attempted to provide the requested information in response to the FOI request, which was an independently managed process. He clarified that the procurement process undertaken for the town centre sites had been a competitive process with Wilmot Dixon being the successful bidder out of five, having been scored on many different measures. He understood that many of the supply companies working with Wilmot Dixon were local companies. The Council was making a significant investment in the area, not to make a profit but to provide needed redevelopment.

Mr. Felstead went on to query why he had not been provided with the financial information requested when it had been discussed elsewhere.

The Leader indicated he would review the correspondence between Mr. Felstead and the Cabinet Member for Housing and ensure any financial information that could be shared would be provided clarifying that the Council was bound by commercial confidentiality rules so a complete breakdown could not be provided.

- (2) Mr. Harron sought clarification regarding the Council's FOI process. He had been informed that a complaint he had submitted could not be processed due to an ongoing FOI request and queried why that had happened, given that FOI's were requests for information rather than seeking an action/outcome.

The Leader explained his understanding was that where an issue was being considered under one of those formal processes, either complaints or FOI, that the complaint would be held until the information had been provided under the FOI process. This was to avoid issues running concurrently within multiple Council systems. The Leader would clarify the position with Legal Services and respond in due course.

Mr. Harron did not agree that a complaint should be held whilst information was sought to address an FOI request, given that a complaint was usually made to address a behaviour rather than to seek information.

81. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair advised that there were no items of business on the agenda that would require the exclusion of the press and public from the meeting.

82. COVID WINTER GRANT SCHEME

Consideration was given to the report which outlined proposals for the Covid Winter Grant providing valuable support to many vulnerable households and families. At least 80% of the grant was ringfenced to support those households with children particularly affected by the pandemic throughout the winter period where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable.

This would be used in conjunction with other Covid related responses including tackling hardship, working across the Council and VCS partners. The recommendations would ensure that all eligible children in the Borough would receive vouchers to the value of free school meals for the Christmas and February half term holidays. Along with additional support for the Rotherham Food in Crisis Partnership Christmas appeal, extending eligibility for support with the purchase of school uniforms and £250,000 is committed to support households in financial need who are facing unexpected or unaffordable bills, to prevent them from falling into financial crisis, subject to engagement and support from the Council's Advocacy and Appeals Service or partners.

The grant was just over £1m and the grant conditions had been met.

The Leader and Cabinet Members noted the Council was working hard to ensure the grant funding was disseminated to those in need as soon as possible. It was felt that child poverty was in further decline, therefore, this funding and the additional support it provided was welcomed. They felt that the Government could be offering more support during this time.

This report had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board as part of the pre-scrutiny process who were in support of the recommendations subject to consideration being given to the creation of a single point of contact in order to enable all residents that were eligible for support to be able to access that support easily and that Members were kept updated and informed on how they could support the Council's efforts to ensure that all residents eligible for support were able to access that support.

The Cabinet accepted the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board explaining that it was likely that the single point of contact would be within the Community Hub.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition, agreed to waive the right to a call-in process for this decision to enable it to be implemented as soon as possible.

Resolved: - That Cabinet agreed:

1. provisional allocations of the grant subject to final adjustments for the purposes of:
 - a. Holiday Programme & Food - £492,395.16
 - b. Struggling with utility costs / debt - £285,000
 - c. Christmas food - £30,000
 - d. Help with school uniforms - £200,000
2. to the creation of a single point of contact to enable all residents that were eligible for support to be able to access that support easily.
3. that Members were kept updated and informed on how they could support the Council's efforts to ensure that all residents eligible for support were able to access that support.

83. BUSINESS SUPPORT GRANTS FUNDED VIA ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS GRANT (ARG)

Consideration was given to the report which detailed the progress made on delivering the Local Restrictions Support Grants (LRSG's) and how the discretionary Additional Resources Grant (ARG) was being used to support businesses within Rotherham. The second phase of the support grant would be used to support licensed taxi drivers within South Yorkshire with a fixed one-off payment. £6Million had been allocated to support supply chain businesses who were forced to close due to national lockdown or those within the hospitality, accommodation and leisure sectors that were restricted in Tier 2 and 3.

The grant also allows for a discretionary scheme to be available to businesses suffering from a loss of trade and that had been unable to access any of the existing Business Grant Schemes. These were expected to be primarily small and microenterprises, including businesses registered too recently to qualify for Central Government support.

The Scheme would be promoted on the Council's website and would be inviting businesses to submit an online application. The application form had been designed in an accessible way to enable businesses to submit one application that would be considered against any of the available Business Grants. Applications would be accepted until 31st January, 2021, however, resources would be allocated on a first come first served basis. If resources remained available after that time the Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services, in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, would have delegated authority to process top up payments in order to utilise the resource.

The Head of Corporate Finance explained that the Business Support Grants were detailed on the Council's website along with the application form. Where possible, automatic payments had been made utilising information from previous grant applications which would limit the number of businesses who needed to apply for funding.

The Leader and Cabinet Members welcomed the proposals and that support for very small businesses and sole traders was being made available. The simplified application process was commended.

This report had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board as part of the pre-scrutiny process who were in support of the recommendations.

Resolved: That Cabinet:

1. Noted the progress to date on the administration of the Local Restrictions Support Grants (LRSG's).
2. Noted the progress to date on utilising the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG).
3. Approved the Council's proposed discretionary Business Support Grant, total funding of £664k.
4. Delegated to the Strategic Director Finance and Customer Services in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, the application of any surplus grant to top up the grant values paid to eligible small businesses.

84. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Consideration was given to the circulated report, the contents of which were included as part of the relevant items and the details included accordingly.

85. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:

That the next meeting of the Cabinet be held on Monday, 21st December, 2020, commencing at 10.00 a.m.