

Wimborne Town Council - Supporting a Sustainable Future

1. PURPOSE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Report Type:	Public Report for Decision
Purpose of Report:	To consider a request for funding from Wimborne Town Council linked to their potentially increased workload and future sustainability following Local Government Reorganisation.
Recommendations:	It is RECOMMENDED that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Members consider the request from Wimborne Town Council in full and make a recommendation to Cabinet with regard to funding the following projects up to a maximum of £75,000:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Upgrading Council Chamber, including décor, furniture, IT and additional accessibility - £25,000 approx.• Upgrade ICT, including hardware for Members - £23,000 approx.• New 'Mower' – larger scale to make working more efficient, especially in relation to larger scale areas - £25,000 approx.b) The request for funding of the following projects is rejected:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compensation payment to tenant to surrender lease of offices (provides space for up to 4 additional staff) – including legal costs - ££15,500• Additional office furniture and decoration of above offices on release (1st February 2019) - £2,000• Legal costs in relation to community asset transfers - £9,000
Portfolio holder:	Cllr S Tong (Change and Transformation)
Wards:	Wimborne Minster;
Contact Officer:	Judith Plumley Matti Raudsepp

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. At its meeting in May 2018 EDDC agreed to proceed with a number of transfers of community assets and at that time agreed a number of principles

- for Community Asset Transfer including the need for the receiving Town or Parish Council to demonstrate that they have the capacity, knowledge and skills to take on any assets.
- 2.2. During discussions with representatives of Wimborne Town Council about the possibility of Community Asset Transfer, a proposal was put to District Officers and the Chair of Cabinet Committee (One Year Strategy) which sought to secure a more sustainable future for Wimborne Town Council post Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
 - 2.3. The Town Council also highlighted recent press coverage of grants made to community groups and organisations in North Dorset District Council area which amounted to £500,000 as follows:
 - (a) Blandford – £70k town centre / market place enhancements (paving etc)
 - (b) Stalbridge – £70k contribution to extending a town council/community hub building
 - (c) Gillingham – £70k ‘gateway enhancements’ on the roads into the town
 - (d) Shaftesbury – £70k contribution to the conversion of a redundant supermarket into a community hub with business and leisure facilities
 - (e) Sturfit - £70k refurbishment of leisure facilities
 - (f) Sturminster Newton Trailway - £70k improvements
 - (g) Marnhull Parish Council - £30k village hall, Men’s Shed project,
 - 2.4. In addition, Officers have been made aware that the following grants totalling £350k will shortly be recommended to West Dorset District Council (WDDC):
 - (a) Grant and loan (totalling about £98k) to a parish council to help with a new village hall.
 - (b) Grant of £70k to Beaminster Town Council to help with a new skate park
 - (c) Grant to Beaminster Town Council to help with new toilet provision
 - (d) Grants to Bridport Museum Trust – to help with conservation work and a building survey
 - (e) Grant to Dorchester Town Council for town centre environmental enhancements.
 - 2.5. EDDC has made capital grants amounting to £159,000 during the current financial year (2018/19) to the following groups:
 - (a) West Moors Youth Club - £48k
 - (b) Sixpenny Handley Village Hall - £32.5k
 - (c) Hinton Martell Village Hall - £5k
 - (d) St Ives Primary School Pool - £20k
 - (e) Citizen’s Advice Bureau, Phone system - £6k
 - (f) Tivoli Theatre Canopy - £20k
 - (g) Wayfarers Cricket Club - £28k
 - 2.6. The proposal from Wimborne Town Council is brought before the Cabinet Committee (One Year Strategy) for further consideration.

3. PROPOSAL FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR WIMBORNE TOWN COUNCIL

- 3.1. Wimborne Town Council has requested that EDDC consider a proposal for funding a number of projects which they are implementing in order to be prepared for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and to make their operations sustainable in the future.
- 3.2. Their report is attached at Appendix 1 and sets out why they believe the Town Council to be in a unique situation compared with other town and parish councils and should therefore be considered for additional support from the District Council.
- 3.3. The case rests on the position of Wimborne Minster as a 'hub' town with a very restricted tax base (and a particularly small percentage of Band D properties). This particular situation may apply to other towns within Dorset and indeed special consideration may be being given to them as a result hence the reported grants in North Dorset and West Dorset (see above). WMTC would like to make the case that grants to Wimborne Minster should be considered due to the nature of the town and the dependency on its facilities from the wider rural area.
- 3.4. The request is for funding amounting to £99,500 across a number of projects as shown in Appendix 1:
- 3.5. Following the receipt of the report from WTC, and in discussion with the Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Change, the Town Council were asked to provide quotes for their projects but focusing, in the time available, on those areas where there was felt to be a potential case to be considered. These included the provision of improved ICT resources for Town Council Officers and Members and the provision of IT infrastructure which would improve the accessibility for the public to Town Council meetings.
- 3.6. A more detailed quote for the purchase of the tractor and mower has been provided by WTC at Appendix 2 but other quotes are not yet available as the Town Council will need to go through a full procurement process under the terms of their constitution. Figures shown are therefore based on best estimates.
- 3.7. A number of proposals are included in the report which were felt by officers and the Portfolio Holder to be less likely to be supported because they relate to projects where decisions have already been made by the Town Council (in the case of the relinquishing of the sub-lease) or where the precept could realistically be increased to cover the cost.
- 3.8. It is proposed that the request for funding of legal costs in relation to community asset transfers is rejected as the Cabinet Committee of 9th August resolved that "VAT, the acquiring Council's legal and other costs, Land Registry Fees, Stamp Duty and all other taxes are to be borne by the acquiring Council".
- 3.9. Members are asked to consider the request in full and propose a way forward.

4. IMPLICATIONS

2018-2019 Strategic Priorities

4.1. The matter under consideration impacts upon the key priorities of the Council's One Year Strategy in the following areas:-

- **Asset management**
 - Policy formulation for assets post-Local Government Reorganisation
 - Town & Parish Council liaison
- **Change & Transformation**
 - One Year Strategy
 - Sustainable local governance post-Local Government Reorganisation
- **Financial Oversight**
 - Maintaining financial viability and stability
 - Pre-transition capital expenditure policy

Legal

4.2. The following legal implications should be considered:-

- While there is no legal prohibition in the Council agreeing to another party's costs in a transaction, any such agreement to pay costs is likely to be secured by way of a legal undertaking. Such an undertaking may potentially make the Council liable whether or not the transfers proceed to completion.
- The Council is under a general obligation to act reasonably in the discharge of its functions. Unless it is convinced of the unique circumstances raised by Wimborne Town Council it should adopt a consistent approach in its dealings with the various town and parish councils to which it is in the course of transferring assets.

Environmental

4.3. There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

Financial and Risk

4.4. There are financial implications as detailed in the report if it is decided to support the proposal.

Equalities

4.5. Wimborne Town Council is proposing that their circumstances make them unique and that their case should be considered on that basis. It is likely, however, that this runs the risk of other Towns and Parishes challenging the uniqueness of their situation and other similar requests could be forthcoming. Some of the proposals in the Town Council's report support improvement in access to democracy through improved ICT provision.

Consultation and Engagement

4.6. None planned

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1. A request for grant funding has been received from Wimborne Town Council to facilitate their future sustainability post LGR.
- 5.2. Members are asked to make a recommendation to Cabinet arising from their debate.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Report by Wimborne Town Council

Appendix 2: Additional quotes for specific elements of the report as obtained by Wimborne Town Council

Background Papers: