

Westminster City Council – Decisions taken by the Cabinet on Monday 11 December 2023

<p>A4</p>	<p>Oxford Street Programme - complementary schemes</p>	<p>Cabinet approved the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the activation of the final area of the programme and commencement of design for the three proposed OSP complementary schemes as set out in the report; and • Approve the funding approach for the three complementary schemes as set out in the report. <p>Reasons for decision</p> <p>The complementary schemes seek to extend the public realm benefits being achieved on Oxford Street into adjacent neighbourhoods through an improvement of pedestrian access and comfort, additional seating and greening, enhanced lighting and better-quality surfacing materials. Furthermore, they will create new or improved amenity areas for potential future activation. The decision was made to retain the three schemes from a larger number of possible schemes contained in the previous OSD programme based on their contribution to achieving the benefits noted above.</p> <p>The Davies Street scheme provides a vital gateway on Oxford Street to Mayfair and the recently opened Elizabeth Line station. The street is currently open to vehicular traffic and the proposed closure will secure an additional and safer space for pedestrians leading to Oxford Street. This will also create a new public amenity space and provide an opportunity for seating and greening resulting in a more comfortable and attractive experience.</p> <p>The Grosvenor Square scheme will provide safer pedestrian and cycling facilities, reducing the dominance of the carriageway around the square. This will be achieved through the delivery of wider footways and the improvement of pedestrian crossings.</p> <p>The James Street scheme is intended to provide a pedestrian and cycle friendly environment in James Street south along with operational changes to Barrett Street, Picton Place, James Street north. An improved public realm space is envisaged to the north of Bird Street and permanent footway build outs are proposed at the junction of Picton Place with James Street to convert a temporary measure introduced during the pandemic.</p>
<p>A5</p>	<p>Council Tax Discounts (including Council Tax Local Reduction Scheme) and Council Tax Base report</p>	<p>Cabinet approved the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the following recommendations for the financial year 2024/25:- (i) that the Council Tax discount for second homes remains at 0%

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(ii) that the Council Tax discounts for empty properties, including the discounts that replaced the previous Class A and C Council Tax exemptions, remain at 0%.

(iii) that a Long-Term Empty Property Premium continues at the maximum percentages allowed for by the current legislation for the 2024/25 financial year. which includes commencing the premium a year after a property has been empty, rather than the current 2 years.

(iv) that the Director of Revenues & Benefits be given delegated authority to determine any individual local discount applications received from Council Taxpayers during the 2024/25 financial year under section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

- Recommend that the Council approves the same Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/25 which has operated successfully since 2013/14. The scheme is based on the Default Scheme Regulations, updated to reflect changes made via the Prescribed Requirements Amendment Regulations and with War Disabled Pensions, War Widow, Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation scheme payments disregarded in full when calculating a claimant's income. The same disregards should also apply to Housing Benefit and claims for Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP).
- Recommend to the Council to resolve that the Council Tax Base for 2024/25 for the Whole City is 137,295.64 equivalent Band D properties, for Montpelier Square alone 96.96 equivalent Band D properties and for Queen's Park 3,700.40 equivalent Band D properties.
- Recommend to the Council to resolve that the figures set out in the above paragraph for the Council Tax Base for 2024/25 be used by the Council to make a determination pursuant to the requirements of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- Determine to implement a 100% Second Home Premium for the 2025/26 financial year, which is the earliest date allowed for under the new legislation.

Reasons for decision:

The taxbase decision is sought in order that the Council complies with the requirements of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

The retention of the same levels of Council Tax discount, for empty properties and second homes will continue to deliver additional Council Tax income for the Council without disadvantaging any vulnerable members of the community.

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		<p>The recommendation to allow the Director of Revenues and Benefits to continue to determine any individual local discount claims will enable assistance to be given to individual Council Taxpayers. This will provide the mechanism for granting the local Council Tax discount for Care Leavers, flood victims and other vulnerable Council Taxpayers in line with the Council’s Council Tax Ethical Recovery procedure.</p> <p>The Council’s proposed 100% Council Tax Reduction Scheme will mean that the level of Council Tax support provided to the borough’s working age claimants will effectively mirror that previously provided under the national Council Tax Benefit scheme.</p> <p>The recommendation to continue the Long-Term Empty Property Premium at the maximum allowed for within current legislation aligns with the Council’s Fairer Westminster agenda and the aim to bring empty properties back in to use.</p> <p>The recommendation to determine to implement a 100% Second Home premium for the 2025/26 financial year will deliver additional income for the council, without affecting vulnerable residents.</p>
<p>A6</p>	<p>“Care Leaver” to be considered alongside Protected Characteristics</p>	<p>Cabinet approved the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the inclusion of ‘Care Leaver’ to be taken into account alongside the nine protected characteristics already legislated for in the Equality Act 2010. • Note that Westminster City Council’s senior leaders will work together to providing enhanced work experience, apprenticeship, and employment opportunities as part of their corporate parenting responsibilities, including cognising their particular needs systematically as part of EQIAs and ensuring that they are considered across all strategies, responsible procurement and commissioned contracts. • Note the commencement of a programme of work which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reviewing our EQIA and Equalities programming (internal and corporate) to include care leavers ○ Adapting our EQIAs to include consideration of care leaver status ○ Reviewing and adapting recruitment policies and procedures in order to guarantee care leaver applicants an interview where when they meet the essential criteria for a role being advertised

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ That every Directorate commits to providing mentoring, work experience and apprenticeship opportunities to care leavers <p>Reasons for decision: As corporate parents, it is the Council’s collective responsibility to support children that have been in our care to ensure they receive the same opportunities that we would want for our own children. This support should include the promotion of good health and education, nurturing talent and providing stability, thus enabling successful adult lives.</p> <p>Services across the Council will commit to providing opportunities and support to young adults with care experience to improve their outcomes and show a genuine and demonstrable commitment to supporting them to develop skills in order to thrive. This will require some time and effort on the part of Westminster’s leaders and staff to ensure that those leaving our care are continually championed and supported to achieve in all areas.</p> <p>Westminster City Council will explicitly and systematically recognise ‘Care Leaver’ as a consideration, alongside the nine protected characteristics already legislated for in the Equality Act 2010. In doing so the Council can monitor and measure the impact that it is having to support those leaving our care in their life journey and make appropriate arrangements or adjustments to provide this support.</p>
<p>A7</p>	<p>Fees and Charges Review</p>	<p>Cabinet approved the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the changes to fees and charges as outlined in Appendix 2 of this report 2. • Approve that authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Finance and Resources to make minor or technical adjustments to any fees and charges in year, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member. • Approve the unchanged Fees and Charges Policy at Appendix 1. • Note the outcome of the call-in on the parking fee structure review which is being heard on 6 December 2023, the outcome of which will be reported to the Cabinet orally at the meeting. <p>Reasons for decision: To agree the Council’s fees and charges position and changes from 1 January 2024 at the earliest.</p>

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**Stuart Love
Chief Executive
Westminster City Hall
64 Victoria Street
SW1E 6QP**

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For those decisions not subject to call-in – 11 December 2023