

Meeting	Decision Session - Executive Member for Finance and Performance in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods (for agenda item 4 - Approval of Financial Inclusion Grant Scheme Awards 2021/22, 5 - Council Tax Hardship Fund 2021/22 and 6 – Extension of Winter Grants Scheme)
Date	15 March 2021
Present	Councillors Ayre (Executive Member for Finance and Performance) and Craghill (Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods)

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## **11. Declarations of Interest**

The Executive Members were asked to declare, at this point in the meeting, any personal interests, not included on the Register of Interests, or any prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interests that he might have had in respect of business on the agenda. They confirmed they had none.

## **12. Minutes**

Resolved: That the minutes of the Decision Session held on 15 February 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Executive Member at a later date.

## **13. Public Participation**

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

## **14. Approval of Financial Inclusion Grant Scheme Awards 2021/22**

The Executive Members considered a report recommending the approval of grants under 2021/22 Financial Inclusion Grant Scheme following a round of competitive bids and a selection panel process.

The Assistant Director Customer and Digital Services outlined the grants noting that this year, the council had been able to fund seven schemes as opposed to six schemes the previous year and she highlighted the importance of this in context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods supported the grant allocations noting the importance of the organisations involved in supporting communities. She welcomed the schemes, in particular to the Traveller Community project. The Executive Member for Finance and Performance also welcomed schemes, noting that it was good to see new funding bids coming in. It was:

Resolved: That approval be given to the award of £113,276 of grants to fund the following seven projects to deliver financial inclusion activities in the city:

1. £5,818 to the Older Citizens Advocacy York (OCAY) Benefits Advocacy project to provide advocacy support to help with applications, assessments and appeals
2. £13,229 to the Citizens' Advice York Financial Inclusion at GP surgeries project to continue to develop co-ordinated advice work located in GP practices.
3. £5,385 to the Citizens' Advice York Financial Inclusion in the Traveller Community project to work with the Travellers Trust to deliver and co-ordinate advice services to the Gypsy & Traveller community.
4. £25,057 to the Peasholme Charity My Money, My Life project to continue the delivery of its financial capability pathway service
5. £13,900 to the Welfare Benefits Unit advice Extra project to extend the reach of services to underpin first tier advisors in responding to more complex cases.
6. £19,262 to the Experience Counts 50+ Project to deliver four employment related programmes to residents aged 50+
7. £30,625 to Changing Lives for a Financial & Social Inclusion Worker to support vulnerable and hard to reach residents to gain financial independence

Reason: To ensure that funds set aside to support the delivery of financial inclusion activity are allocated appropriately.

## **15. Council Tax Hardship Fund 2021/22**

The Executive Members considered a report detailing options to provide a further Council Tax Support (CTS) Hardship Scheme in 2021/22 in the light of Government funding and the ongoing financial impacts on residents of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Head of Customer & Exchequer Services outlined the report noting that there may be increased numbers of residents accessing the hardship fund as a result of the pandemic and its economic impact on residents. He detailed the three options available to the Executive Members:

Option 1 - £75 per CTS customer approx. cost £625K

Option 2 - £50 per CTS customer approx. cost £350K

Option 3 – Provide no direct support to CTS customers

The Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods was pleased that the council was able to provide the £150 hardship fund top up the previous year and she recognised the need to take a prudent approach, taking into account the supported that may be needed by residents with the ending of furlough. The Executive Member for Finance and Performance then expressed concern that the costs for social care had been passed onto council.

It was then:

Resolved: That approval be given to option 1 to award £75 per Council Tax Support Customer for 2021-22 as set out in paragraph 12 of the report.

Reason: To provide financial support to the councils most financially vulnerable residents in managing the ongoing impacts of the covid-19 pandemic.

## **16. Extension of Winter Grants Scheme**

The Executive Members considered a report recommending the extension of the winter grants scheme in line with the Governments additional funding to 16 April 2021.

The Head of Customer & Exchequer Services outlined the extension of the scheme noting that whilst the council did not have the funding to continue

the scheme beyond April 2021, any remaining budget in the York Financial Assistance (YFAS) scheme would be rolled forward. The Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods expressed concern regarding the lack of funding from the government. The Executive Member for Finance and Performance noting that the local authority had done as much as it could and he welcomed the extension of the scheme. It was then:

Resolved: That approval be given to:

- a) Extending the Winter Grants scheme through to 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021 with an estimated additional cost to the council of approx. £5k above the £200k set out in Februarys report and as set out at Table 2.
- b) Limit the April Winter Support Grant payments to 16<sup>th</sup> April rather than a full monthly payment as set out at paragraph 11.
- c) Delegate any decision to spend above the revised £205k to the councils section 151 officer in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance & Performance as set out at paragraph 13.

Reason: To provide financial support to the city's most financially vulnerable residents through the ongoing covid-19 pandemic.

Cllr N Ayre, Chair

[The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 10.19 am].