



Notice of a public

Decision Session - Executive Member for Finance and Performance Meeting to be held in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods (for agenda item 4 Interim Financial Inclusion/Welfare Benefits Update Report)

To: Councillor Ayre (Executive Member for Finance and Performance) and Cllr Craghill (Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods)

Date: Monday, 13 December 2021

Time: 11.00 am

Venue: The George Hudson Board Room - 1st Floor West Offices (F045)

AGENDA

Notice to Members – Post Decision Calling In:

Members are reminded that, should they wish to call in any item* on this agenda, notice must be given to Democratic Services by **4:00 pm on Wednesday 15 December 2021**.

*With the exception of matters that have been the subject of a previous call in, require Full Council approval or are urgent which are not subject to the call-in provisions. Any items that are called in will be considered by the Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee.

Written representations in respect of items on this agenda should be submitted to Democratic Services by **5:00pm on Thursday 9 December 2021**.

1. **Declarations of Interest**

At this point in the meeting, the Executive Member is asked to declare:

- any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests
- any prejudicial interests or
- any disclosable pecuniary interests

which they may have in respect of business on this agenda.

2. **Minutes** (Pages 3 - 6)

To approve and sign the minutes of the Decision Session held on 8 November 2021.

3. **Public Participation**

At this point in the meeting members of the public who have registered to speak can do so. Members of the public may speak on agenda items or on matters within the remit of the committee. The deadline for registering at this meeting is at **5:00pm on Thursday 9 December 2021.**

To register to speak please visit www.york.gov.uk/AttendCouncilMeetings to fill out an online registration form. If you have any questions about the registration form or the meeting please contact the Democracy Officer for the meeting whose details can be found at the foot of the agenda.

Webcasting of Remote Public Meetings

Please note that, subject to available resources, this remote public meeting will be webcast including any registered public speakers who have given their permission. The remote public meeting can be viewed live and on demand at www.york.gov.uk/webcasts.

During coronavirus, we've made some changes to how we're running council meetings. See our coronavirus updates (www.york.gov.uk/COVIDDemocracy) for more information on meetings and decisions.

4. Interim Financial Inclusion/Welfare Benefits (Pages 7 - 26) Update Report

This report provides the Executive Member for Finance & Performance in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods with the Financial Inclusion/Welfare Benefits 2021/22 mid-term update including:

- the ongoing impact of Coronavirus as well recent welfare benefits changes in York, including Universal Credit, and importantly the support available for residents in dealing with these challenges;
- an update on benefits statistics and performance administered by the council including the York Financial Assistance Scheme;
- other financial inclusion (FI) activity during 2021/22 including delivery of FISG grant schemes.

5. Approval of ICT procurements with a whole life contract value of over £250k: HR & Payroll System (Pages 27 - 32)

The report presents details of a procurement to renew or replace a core ICT system in the council with a whole life contract value of over £250k. This is defined as a non-key routine procurement as per the council's contract procedure rules and expenditure will fall within existing capital and revenue budget provisions. The details of the procurement of the council's HR and Payroll system is contained at the annex to this report.

Exceptionally this is a retrospective report to meet the requirement for transparency regarding procurements of this nature. In this case due to contract renewal timescales and the critical nature of the system involved it has not been possible to present details of this procurement at a scheduled Executive member Decision Session in advance (approved instead by published officer decision in line with the council's Constitution).

6. Urgent Business

Any other business which the Executive Member considers urgent under the Local Government Act 1972.

Democracy Officer:

Name: Angela Bielby

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Email: a.bielby@york.gov.uk

For more information about any of the following, please contact the Democracy Officer responsible for servicing this meeting:

- Registering to speak
- Business of the meeting
- Any special arrangements
- Copies of reports and
- For receiving reports in other formats

Contact details are set out above.

This information can be provided in your own language.

我們也用您們的語言提供這個信息 (Cantonese)

এই তথ্য আপনার নিজের ভাষায় দেয়া যেতে পারে। (Bengali)

Ta informacja może być dostarczona w twoim własnym języku. (Polish)

Bu bilgiyi kendi dilinizde almanız mümkündür. (Turkish)

یہ معلومات آپ کی اپنی زبان (بولی) میں بھی مہیا کی جاسکتی ہیں۔ (Urdu)

 **(01904) 551550**

Coronavirus protocols for attending Committee Meetings at West Offices

If you are attending a meeting in West Offices, you must observe the following protocols.

Good ventilation is a key control point, therefore, all windows must remain open within the meeting room.

If you're displaying possible coronavirus symptoms (or anyone in your household is displaying symptoms), you should follow government guidance. You are advised not to attend your meeting at West Offices.

Testing

The Council encourages regular testing of all Officers and Members and also any members of the public in attendance at a Committee Meeting. Any members of the public attending a meeting are advised to take a test within 24 hours of attending a meeting, the result of the test should be negative, in order to attend. Test kits can be obtained by clicking on either link: [Find where to get rapid lateral flow tests - NHS \(test-and-trace.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus/covid-19/testing/rapid-lateral-flow-tests/), or, [Order coronavirus \(COVID-19\) rapid lateral flow tests - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests). Alternatively, if you call 119 between the hours of 7am and 11pm, you can order a testing kit over the telephone.

Guidelines for attending Meetings at West Offices

- Please do not arrive more than 10 minutes before the meeting is due to start.
- You may wish to wear a face covering to help protect those also attending.
- You should wear a face covering when entering West Offices.
- Visitors to enter West Offices by the customer entrance and Officers/Councillors to enter using the staff entrance only.
- Ensure your ID / visitors pass is clearly visible at all time.
- Regular handwashing is recommended.
- Use the touchless hand sanitiser units on entry and exit to the building and hand sanitiser within the Meeting room.
- Bring your own drink if required.
- Only use the designated toilets next to the Meeting room.

Developing symptoms whilst in West Offices

If you develop coronavirus symptoms during a Meeting, you should:

- Make your way home immediately
- Avoid the use of public transport where possible
- Follow government guidance in relation to self-isolation.

You should also:

- Advise the Meeting organiser so they can arrange to assess and carry out additional cleaning
- Do not remain in the building any longer than necessary
- Do not visit any other areas of the building before you leave

If you receive a positive test result, or if you develop any symptoms before the meeting is due to take place, **you should not attend the meeting.**

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City of York Council

Committee Minutes

| | |
|---------|---|
| Meeting | Decision Session - Executive Member for Finance and Performance in Consultation with The Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods (for Agenda Item 4 – Household Support Fund) |
| Date | 8 November 2021 |
| Present | Councillors Ayre (Executive Member for Finance and Performance and Craghill (Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods) |

36. 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.

37. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the Decision Session held on 13 September 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Executive Member.

38. Public Participation

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

39. Household Support Fund

The Executive Members considered a report that presented the Household Support Fund (HSF) scheme to the Executive Member for Finance & Performance in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods for approval.

The Head of Customer & Exchequer Services explained the HSF scheme provided support payments directly to all qualifying families experiencing

financial difficulties (as detailed at Annex A) and that residents could also apply. He also noted that a fuel voucher scheme formed part of the package of support that could be used for fuel bills and would be operated through third sector partners. The online claim form for the HSF scheme would be available on 15 November.

The Executive Member for Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods welcomed the scheme and funding from the government and was pleased that the funds would be given out as soon as possible, focussing on people in need. She was pleased that the funds could be used to respond to the increase in energy costs via fuel vouchers and she welcomed the evaluation and feedback on the scheme. The Executive Member for Finance & Performance thanked officers for their work and welcomed the scheme.

It was then:

Resolved: That;

- a) The council's Household Support Fund (as detailed at Annex A) be approved.
- b) That the allocation of £20k in funding to fuel vouchers (as detailed at Paragraph 9 and Annex A) be approved.
- c) The discretion to pay claims made within the broader scope of the scheme guidance as set out by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (as detailed at Annex B) be delegated to the Head of Customer & Exchequer Services.

Reason: To provide financial support to the city's most financially vulnerable residents through the winter 21/22 during the ongoing covid-19 pandemic.

[Cllr Craghill (Executive Member for Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods) left the meeting at 10.21]

40. Corporate Procurement Strategy and Social Value Strategy

The Executive Member considered a report outlining a number of minor changes and updates to both the Procurement Strategy (Annex 1) and the Social Value Policy (Annex 2). The Chief Finance Officer detailed the amendments to the strategy and policy. She advised that the Government had issued a Procurement Green Paper following the departure of the UK from the EU and the strategy would be updated following this.

The Executive Member then:

Resolved: That;

- a) The updated Procurement Strategy attached at annex 1 be noted and approved.
- b) The updated Social Value Policy attached at annex 2 be noted and approved.

Reason: To ensure procurement is based on sound principles and continues to deliver value for money outcomes, as well as ensuring the procurement process is robust and effective.

Cllr Ayre, Executive Member

[The meeting started at 10.11 am and finished at 10.20 am].

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**Executive Member for Finance &
Performance Decision Session**

13 December 2021

Financial Inclusion/Welfare Benefits Update Report

Summary

1. This report provides the Executive Member for Finance & Performance in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods with the Financial Inclusion/Welfare Benefits 2021/22 mid-term update including:
 - the ongoing impact of Coronavirus as well recent welfare benefits changes in York, including Universal Credit, and importantly the support available for residents in dealing with these challenges;
 - an update on benefits statistics and performance administered by the council including the York Financial Assistance Scheme;
 - other financial inclusion (FI) activity during 2021/22 including delivery of FISG grant schemes.

Recommendations

2. The Executive Member for Finance & Performance is asked to note the report and the progress made in supporting residents who are financially vulnerable.

Reason: to ensure councillors, residents and stakeholder groups are aware of the ongoing financial inclusion activity across the city and use of associated funding including covid-19 support.

Welfare Benefits Update

3. The council provides a broad range of support to residents in need of assistance through the York Financial Assistance Scheme (YFAS), Council Tax Support (CTS) and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). The breadth of this support was increased across 20/21 and 21/22 to help residents during the Covid-19 pandemic the additional schemes are picked up in the following paragraphs.

York Financial Assistance Scheme (YFAS)

4. The YFAS scheme was established in April 2013, following the transfer of responsibility (and initially funding) from central government. The former national scheme, delivered by the DWP, was part of the Social Fund. YFAS is now fully funded and delivered locally by the council and can assist residents to stay or move into the community or with emergencies including food and fuel.
5. The figures for the first 6 months of 2021/22 (April – Sept) are set out in Table 1 below. There have been 533 applications, of which 83% were awarded assistance.

Table 1: YFAS Payment Summary 2021-22 Week 26

| Overall Spend Totals | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------------|------------|---------------------------|------------|
| Category | Current Spend £ | Budget £ | % | Extrapolation full year £ | % |
| Emergency | 11,452 | 32,190 | 36% | 22,904 | 71% |
| Community | 115,932 | 127,400 | 91% | 231,864 | 182% |
| Council Tax Support | 3,197 | 110,000 | 3% | 6,395 | 6% |
| Total Spend | 130,582 | 269,590 | 48% | 266,186 | 99% |

6. To assist with the financial impact on York residents arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, emergency decisions were taken in April 2020 to allocate additional support through enhancements to the YFAS scheme. This has included support for mobile phones and internet connectivity as well as taking the restrictions off the number of claims that can be made. These changes will continue through 2021/22.

Table 2: Hardship fund spending April - September 2021

| OVERALL SPEND - YFAS & COVID-19 Emergency Fund | | |
|---|----------------------|--|
| Area | 2021/22 £ | Notes |
| Community hubs - prepaid cards | 3,660 | |
| Mobile phones & internet | 2,650 | |
| Discretionary free school meals - Pupils confirmed | 150,000 | DWP funding |
| COVID-19 Hardship Grant for CTS 2021-22 | 451,130 | £75 per CTS claim now applied |
| Winter Grants additional spend 31st March - 16th April | 171,647 | Expenditure split across years |
| Covid Local Support Grant | 390,023 | 340K DWP funding plus topped up by Public Health money - |
| YFAS scheme | 130,582 | £219,590+£50k additional agreed at Budget |
| DHP Spend (paid+comitted) | 111,832 | £27k Councils own contingency not included in budget |
| Total | 1,411,524 | |

Covid support

7. Following the 2020/21 Covid Winter Grant Scheme the government announced a package of extra targeted financial support for those in need over the summer period (Local Covid Support Grant). This extended the funding available to councils to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs.
8. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provided funding to the council to administer the scheme and provide direct assistance to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic. Criteria for the use of the funding prescribed 80% must be spent on food and utilities and 80% on families with children.
9. In York approximately £150,000 of the funding was used to fund free school meals during part of Easter and summer holidays. The remaining funding was used for the Local Covid Support Grants scheme which ran until to 30th September 2021. Support offered to residents through this funding was channelled through two routes.
10. The Covid Local Support Grant scheme provided a one-off grant to support families receiving Council Tax Support (CTS) with dependent children under 18. Payments were a standard amount based on the number of children in the family. Eligible families were invited to apply by 26th September 2021.
11. The Local Covid Support Grant was extended to all other York residents requiring urgent financial assistance as a result of the pandemic who had

savings of less than £2,000. The application process was made easy to access allowing residents facing financial difficulties to apply on-line or via Customer Services.

12. The scheme was publicised widely throughout the council, external networks and social media. Some 1,775 one-off grants of between £100 and £200, were made to families receiving CTS and 801 direct applications were received of which 556 were successful.

Table 3: Local Covid Support Grant spend 2021/21

| Household type | No of awards | £ | split |
|------------------------|--------------|------------------|-------|
| Families with children | 2,711 | £ 376,506 | 97% |
| Other | 135 | £ 13,516 | 3% |
| Total | 2,846 | £ 390,022 | |

13. The DWP have subsequently announced further funding to be allocated from November 2021 to support residents in need of assistance with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs over the winter. The new scheme is called the Household Support Fund (HSF).
14. The HSF scheme was approved by the Executive Member of Finance & Performance on 8th November 2021 and the council will distribute the £1m of Government funding provided for York residents through three routes.
- i. HSF will provide two one-off grants to eligible households who will be invited to apply. Where the resident is receiving CTS (with dependent children under 18) and has previously received funding through the Local Covid Support Grant payments will be made automatically. New CTS customers will be invited to apply. Eligibility will also be extended to those customers on Enhanced Personal Independence Payment, with dependent children under 18.
 - ii. All other York residents requiring urgent financial assistance as a result of the pandemic and have savings of less than £2,000 will be able to apply based on their circumstances. Once again, the application process was made easy to access allowing residents facing financial difficulties to apply on-line or via Customer Services.
 - iii. In addition further support is being made available via fuel voucher grants which will be delivered in partnership with local advice and support services (up to £20,000 in total).

Isolation Grants

15. The Government have provided funding (£500 per claimant) across the pandemic to support those on low income who would lose pay through self-isolating. The most recent position of the grants at the end September is set out in the table below:

16. *Table 4: Isolation Grants 2021/22*

| Summary Totals at 1/10/21 | | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Scheme | No Paid | Budget | Spend | % spent |
| Standard Scheme | 813 | £ 452,500 | £ 406,500 | 90% |
| Discretionary | 990 | £ 909,216 | £ 495,000 | 54% |
| Total | 1,803 | £ 1,361,716 | £ 901,500 | 66% |

Council Tax Support (CTS)

17. Covid has had a significant impact on CTS claims and on collection and recovery.
18. CTS awards amongst working age residents increased by 949 between March 2020 and September 2020 as shown in Table 5 below. The number of working age claimants has remained at this level. However, there continues to be a slow decline in the number of people over pension age receiving CTS.

Table 5: CTS caseload data

| Council Tax Support caseload | Working age | Pensioners |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| March 20 | 4,682 | 4,034 |
| September 20 | 5,535 | 3,997 |
| September 21 | 5,523 | 3,842 |

19. The council has continued to raise the decline in CTS claimants over pension age with partners working with older people and promote take up where possible. Since the start of the pandemic there have been reduced opportunities to do this and partner agencies/services have also seen their capacity to do this reduce over this period.
20. The Government provided a Hardship Fund Grant as part of its Covid support in 2021/22. The council has used this to provide existing and new claimants of CTS with £75 towards their bill during 2021/22. To date £451,130 has been paid to those receiving CTS. The council

agreed to fund the scheme for the rest of the financial year to 31st March 2022 for all new claimants.

21. Whilst the additional support has helped many residents the number of people receiving reminders letters for non-payment of council tax has increased significantly in November 2021 compared to October 2020 as set out at Table 6 below.

Table 6: Council Tax reminder letters

| | 30/10/20 | 04/11/21 | % increase |
|--------------------------|----------|----------|------------|
| People receiving CTS | 249 | 476 | 48 |
| People not receiving CTS | 1,805 | 2,174 | 17 |

22. The Welfare Benefits and Strategic Partnership Manager is continuing to review work across Customer Services, and revenues and benefits teams to ensure best practice around CTS and Council Tax recovery working with networks within the council and external advice providers to explore how the council can best identify and support people who cannot pay.
23. In addition, tools and training have been provided to Customer Service staff to improve signposting to Council Tax discounts, Council Tax Support, the discretionary Council Tax Reduction Scheme and to other support services for those who are in financial difficulties.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

24. The council received £210k in government funding for DHPs for 2020/21 in order to help with housing costs and has an additional amount of £27k of its own funding in reserve. The full government allocation was spent and a small part of the reserve. Total funding and expenditure is shown in the table below:

Table 7: DHP spend 2020/21

| | | |
|--------------------------|----------|------|
| Total DHP Fund available | £237,097 | 100% |
| Amount spent | £211,835 | 89% |
| Amount remaining | £25,262 | 11% |

25. The council received £231k in government funding for DHPs for 2021/22 in order to help with housing costs and CYC has additional budget of £27k in reserve. The figures at the end of September 2021 are shown in the table below.

Table 8: DHP spend 21/22 (at 30/9/21)

| | | |
|--------------------------|----------|------|
| Total DHP Fund available | £231,377 | 100% |
| Amount spent | £123,041 | 53% |
| Amount remaining | £108,336 | 47% |

Universal Credit (UC)

26. The impact of the pandemic on jobs and those in work on UC is clear with the numbers increasing by 57% from March to April 2020 and numbers almost doubling by the end of September 2020.
27. The number of customers on UC last year is summarised in table 9 below with numbers increasing steadily over the 12 month period.

Table 9: York UC Claimants 2020/21

| Month20/21 | Not in employment | In employment | Total |
|------------|-------------------|---------------|--------|
| Apr-20 | 6,040 | 4,265 | 10,305 |
| Sep-20 | 7,080 | 5,761 | 12,841 |

28. The numbers continued to rise until May 2021, when there was a sharp reduction. Since then the numbers of people claiming UC has gone down steadily, as shown in Table 10

Table 10: York UC Claimants 2021/22

| Month 21/22 | Not in employment | In employment | Total |
|-------------|-------------------|---------------|--------|
| Apr-21 | 9,048 | 6,963 | 16,006 |
| May-21 | 8,687 | 7,159 | 15,848 |
| Jun-21 | 6,858 | 5,923 | 12,779 |
| Jul-21 | 6,691 | 5,871 | 12,566 |
| Aug-21 | 6,597 | 5,809 | 12,405 |
| Sep-21 | .. | .. | 12,335 |

This information is collated from the DWP official published data at <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk>.

Work of Welfare Benefits Officers

29. The Income Services Team through its Welfare Benefit Advisors and Adult Social Care financial assessment officers generated welfare benefit gains of £3,145,553 in 2020/21. For the period 01/04/2021 to 30/06/2021 a further £811,937 was generated in successful claims for residents.

Digital Inclusion

30. The pandemic has continued to highlight the importance of digital inclusion and the inequalities face by those without digital access. For those residents without IT equipment and/or internet access the following is now more difficult:
- making new or managing benefits claims for vital support
 - accessing online discounts for essential household costs, fuel, insurance, phones, for example
 - shopping online to avoid contact and adhere to social distancing
 - connecting with family and friends
 - accessing education, training and employment
 - accessing other help and support from organisations who have moved services online
 - children are unable to do undertake school work and other learning.
31. Working with the council's Digital City team the council agreed a package of support for mobile phones and personal Wi-Fi hotspots with 3 months call/data, through an existing relationship with a local provider. This was funded through the YFAS hardship fund as shown in table 2 above, this support is available to those who:
- do not have a landline or mobile phone or access to the internet in their home
 - have health conditions or other additional factors which mean they are unable to access the support they need at this time without access to the internet.
32. The scheme has provided 14 mobile phone with 3 months inclusive data and 14 wi-fi hot spots with 3 months unlimited data during 21/22. The scheme was paused until further funding was agreed and this was agreed as part of the Winter Plan. The council is currently reviewing the scheme to put in place a new delivery mechanism to best use the funding and meet the needs of residents.
33. The York IT Reuse Scheme was developed as a result of the joint work of organisations and services in the city working across a wide spectrum of areas, all identifying a lack of digital access as a barrier to people with complex needs during the pandemic. See www.itreuse.org.uk for more information.
34. The scheme is led and managed by York Community Furniture Store along with the Changing Lives digital inclusion project. The scheme has been extremely successful in acquiring computer equipment donations and distributing them to people who are digitally excluded; as well as

developing partnerships with businesses and support providers. An evaluation of the scheme is currently underway and the findings will be available in early 2022. This will help support the development and sustainability of the service.

35. The work of Explore York (library and archives service) in leading Digital Inclusion (DI) partnership, with the council will be key in taking this work forward. A joint action plan is being developed to help identify and tackle areas of digital and social exclusion. Funding of £23,220 was approved by Executive in October for resources to support the work of the network and the use of this funding will be reported in the annual version of this report in mid-2022.

Housing Update

36. Rent arrears in 2020/21 increased mainly due to the ongoing cumulative impact of austerity, personal debt, financial insecurity and the slow roll out of Universal Credit which is paid in arrears on an ongoing basis. There were also continuing delays in the Trusted Landlord portal being set up where information can be exchanged with the DWP. Continued staff changes at the DWP exacerbated this along with not accepting bulk rent increase information from the Council instead of from tenants themselves. Arrears at April 2020 stood at £975,943.
37. In April 2021 arrears were £1,130,421. From April to September 2021 council tenant rent arrears increased further overall by 10.18%. Currently rent arrears stand at £1,295,945. Monthly increases in arrears have not been as dramatic compared to last year during the start of the pandemic and there were monthly arrears reductions in June and September, which has been accomplished in very difficult times along with furlough payments and £20 Universal Credit uplift being removed by Government, along with costs of living including utility bills increasing.
38. The Housing Management team have worked in partnership with other departments and agencies across the city to manage arrears levels and support people with their bill payments and debts, despite not being able to pursue missed rent payments and arrears. On 1st October 2021 the court system resumed previous arrangements prior to the pandemic, however there is an ongoing backlog in the court system.
39. By December 2020 for those on UC there was a total arrears balance of £759,016. There has been a further of 338 new UC cases and an increase in UC related arrears of £104,020 since April 2021. This is an approximate £307.75 increase in arrears per household. This is due mainly to the increase in tenants claiming UC during lockdown as a result of lack of employment and income. Direct payments to the council

were stopped by DWP during the initial part of the pandemic to ensure basic UC claims were processed and only a minority have restarted. To add to the challenges around this DWP also pay households one month in arrears and tenants have other priority deductions taken from their overall UC income such as advanced payments and other priority debt such as DWP overpayments.

40. The profile of the council's tenants is that of increasing vulnerabilities; UC can be complicated for people to navigate and relies on them managing their own claims and having to access digital systems which is compounded if they do not have digital skills or access to data and/or equipment.
41. Housing officers have supported tenants and their families/communities through some very difficult times so far this year and in partnership with other agencies are helping tenants to claim Discretionary Housing Payments, YFAS payments for white goods/food and food bank assistance, while trying to find alternative accommodation to help with their financial distress and encouraging payment by Direct Debit (DD).
42. The balance of £30k remaining from a Housing Hardship Fund (help with rent arrears only) is being used to contribute to a wider Council Early Support Fund, which council tenants will benefit from.

Other activities funded by Financial Inclusion budgets.

43. This section of the report covers other activities funded by the council that supported and promoted financial inclusion during 2021/22. Information about activity in 2020/21 was contained in the last report to the Executive Member on 12/7/21.
44. The Council's Financial Inclusion Steering Group (FISG) is responsible for overseeing the delivery of financial inclusion initiatives and also has strategic oversight of the council's DHP, YFAS and CTS schemes. Membership has expanded over the last 18 months¹.
45. The group's purpose is:

'To ensure that local people have the knowledge of and access to appropriate services, allowing them to make more informed choices to achieve and maintain financial stability'.

¹ Now includes: Welfare Benefits Unit, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York CVS, Explore York, Citizens Advice York, the York Food Justice Alliance, Community First Credit Union and a number of CYC directorate representatives. The Executive Members for Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods, for Finance & Performance and for Adult Social Care & Health are members of the group. There is a standing invitation to a representative of the Parish Councils.

46. Grants are awarded to local organisations to deliver projects that meet the group's objectives. It has an agreed base budget of £100k per financial year for approved schemes. Delivery of the schemes is regularly monitored.

Funding of projects for 2021/22

47. The bidding round for funding projects for 2021/22 (completed in March 2021) saw nine bids from eight organisations for grants totalling £144,270, exceeding the £120,360 available. Grants totalling £113,276 to fund seven projects were approved. Four of the bids build on projects previously funded in 2020/21. All projects are for a twelve month duration.
48. As with projects funded in 2020/21 all providers have been able to continue to deliver high levels of support to residents by developing alternative methods of working in the face of Covid-19 constraints. All partners are working collaboratively and innovatively to continue to support vulnerable residents in the city. The table in the Annex A is a high level summary of what the projects aim to achieve along with some of the key outcomes to date.

Other related activities

Community Hubs

49. In October 2020 a report entitled *Community Hubs – Post Covid Recovery* was considered by the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Communities to assess how CYC could best support York's recovery from the impact of the pandemic. The report outlined how a dual focus would be used to support those self-isolating and needing emergency support and alongside this developing capacity within communities to build community resilience.
50. The course of the pandemic has required the continuation of the emergency response, this response has adapted to emerging needs with a person centred approach as a core value, offering direct support where needed and seeking to connect people into local sustainable solutions. The support offered has included emergency food provision, shopping and prescription collection, support to access financial support and advice, wellbeing and combating social isolation and support to connect

and access practical measures such lateral flow tests and booking vaccination appointments. Support has been offered over the phone and in person as appropriate, taking a holistic approach to issues to maximise individual and community resilience beyond an emergency response. Also supporting community initiatives to reshape or restart activities impacted by the pandemic based on local intelligence and demand.

51. In tandem, identifying opportunities in communities to develop capacity and mapping gaps in provision in order to focus activities to support the roll out of the community hub approach e.g. holding networking events in Clifton Ward as part of strengthening connectivity and developing interest and support in an evolving local community hub offer.

Resident Experience

52. The council is looking to use contact by residents for support arising from Covid-19, arrears of council tax and rent as trigger points for an initial indication of longer term challenges and intervention. The council is looking to use an integrated assessment allowing applicants to tell their story once and then be considered for support e.g. to pay rent, Council Tax or receive support to meet other needs. Using this approach should provide a much improved resident journey from first point of contact, improving the relationship between the Council and communities.
53. Those whose crisis requires immediate attention would potentially be provided with emergency support from York Financial Assistance Scheme, Community Hubs or other crisis services.

Council Plan

54. The outcomes in this report contribute to the key Council Plan priority focussed on delivering 'Well-paid jobs and inclusive economy' and the related focus on financial inclusion. The associated Financial Inclusion Policy review will be progressed in 2021 as current activity continues to be prioritised around the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis in terms of meeting immediate needs and planning for recovery impacts.

Implications

55.
 - (a) **Financial** – The direct financial implications relate to the funding of both FISG bids and the YFAS scheme which are funded within approved budget allocations/reserves.
 - (b) **Human Resources (HR)** - There are no implications

(c) **Equalities** – There are no direct implications

(d) **Legal** – There are no implications

(e) **Crime and Disorder** - There are no implications

(f) **Information Technology (IT)** - There are no implications

(g) **Property** - There are no implications

Risk Management

56. The key risks are in relation to YFAS, DHP, and other available hardship funds and include:

- The covid-19 pandemic is still ongoing and whilst there is still available government and council funded support for residents, forward planning of ongoing support through future budget processes will be key as the expected impacts will exist into the long term.
- Managing the budget to ensure that customers get the same service and support irrespective of when they apply in the financial year.
- The pandemic has impacted on the funding of the council and of partners in the voluntary and charity sector, so service resilience across all partners needs to be a key consideration for decision makers in the short and medium term to secure ongoing service delivery.
- Any failure to provide an appropriate service will have a negative impact on the wellbeing of vulnerable people.
- There remains anecdotal evidence from third sector organisations and the growing HRA debt that indicates there could be a growing challenge around managing the impacts of UC.

57. These risks are managed through constant monitoring and review. The actual figures for UC, YFAS, DHP and rent arrears are reported to each FISG meeting to allow early intervention.

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Report Approved

✓

Date

01/12/2021

Specialist Implications Officer(s) *None*

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

✓ **All**

Background Papers:

Approval of grant scheme awards, 2020/21

[Agenda for Decision Session - Executive Member for Finance and Performance 16 March 2020](#)

2021/22

[Agenda for Decision Session - Executive Member for Finance and Performance 15 February 2021](#)

Annexes:

Annex A: Outcomes to date for FISG funded projects for 2021/21

List of Abbreviations

CTS Council Tax Support
DD Direct Debits

| | |
|------|------------------------------------|
| DI | Digital Inclusion |
| DHP | Discretionary Housing Payment |
| DWP | Department for Work and Pensions |
| EET | Employment, Education and Training |
| FISG | Financial Inclusion Steering Group |
| HB | Housing Benefit |
| HSF | Household Support Fund |
| IAG | Information, Advice & Guidance |
| k | Thousand |
| UC | Universal Credit |
| YFAS | York Financial Assistance Scheme |

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Annex A: Outcomes (to 31/7/21) for Financial Inclusion projects funded for 2021/21

| Organisation / Project Title/Funding amount | Aim/Key Outcomes to 31/7/21 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Older Citizens Advocacy York (OCA Y)</i></p> <p><i>'Benefits advocacy'</i></p> <p>£5,818</p> | <p>Aim - Deliver comprehensive advocacy (emotional/practical) support to residents aged 50+ to ensure they receive proper entitlement to benefits and prevent falling into poverty. Help to manage the difficulties experienced by making claims, which can aggravate existing health difficulties e.g. assist with form filling and supporting at appointments.</p> <p>Covid response - provided a telephone service and found innovative ways of completing paper-based forms with clients. Used socially distanced 'garden' visits and worked over the phone with the 'sample' PIP form and then transferring information to the actual form.</p> <p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 25 clients supported. Includes 11 (PIP), 5 (Council Tax) and 4 UC. |
| <p><i>Changing Lives</i></p> <p><i>'Financial and Social Inclusion Worker'</i></p> <p>£30,625</p> | <p>Aim: Support people with experience of homelessness to improve their financial wellbeing and achieve financial stability. Utilising an asset-based, individualised approach to give people the skills, knowledge, motivation and means to improve their lives. Work with clients across the Changing Lives service to improve their ability and understanding of their financial situation and their access to financial products and services. Delivered through 1:1 appointments and drop ins for clients</p> <p>Covid response - Covid-19 continues to present challenges, most significantly where EET activities and opportunities have either been cancelled or now online reducing accessibility for clients.</p> <p>Outcomes:</p> <p>10 new referrals during the period, caseload currently 11.</p> <p>The following include ad hoc / spontaneous support outside of referral process: 4 found employment; 4 volunteering; 6 IAG provided re benefits maximisation; 6 new bank account/standing orders set up; 4 new identities established; 25 IAG provided for education, employment & training; 4 started employment training;</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p>3 completed Bush Craft course; 3 doing programme of meaningful activity; 1 referral to counselling.</p> |
| <p><i>Peasholme Charity</i> <i>'My Money, My Life'</i> £25,057</p> | <p>Aim: For the continued delivery of Peasholme Charity's financial capability service, including activities to move individuals from a point of crisis through a stabilisation period towards a longer change period.</p> <p>The 'Financial Capability pathway' will include a range of service options, including: drop-in support within a variety of community venues; Benefits Advice; Crisis interventions; Referral and support to access existing community resources</p> <p>Covid response - continue to provide support activities for those already engaged with the service working flexibly to meet the challenges. Community based drop-in activities being re-established.</p> <p>Outcomes: Restarted drop-in activities in Kyra.</p> <p>Worked with 129 people; of the 36 new starts 8 are those who disengaged during the initial pandemic and have returned; 14 waiting initial assessment (either new referrals or people who were hard to contact).</p> <p>48 people needed help to manage the impact of the pandemic on their financial situation and housing security. Of these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 24 needed help to prepare for the removal of the £20 p.w. UC uplift ○ 13 struggling with being furloughed and getting back to full pay ○ 8 have lost jobs and needed help to manage income changes and are struggling to find other work ○ 3 are struggling with their mental health and the ability to manage their finances. |
| <p><i>Citizens Advice York</i> <i>'GP Surgeries Advice Service'</i> £13,229</p> | <p>Aim: The project delivers advice to clients and continues to develop co-ordinated advice services delivered within GP surgeries in York. Clients will be referred by GPs in the practises or via the CVS-run 'Ways to Wellbeing' project.</p> <p>Covid response - All face-to-face services have switched to a remote / telephone advice format. New processes were put in place by both CAY and the GP surgeries allowing clients to access the service remotely (mostly via telephone).</p> <p>Outcomes: Referrals primarily through GP's and practice nurses with a weekly schedule of telephone appointments on Tuesdays & Wednesdays for YMG and PMG patients.</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <p>Supported 52 people, exceeding expectations with 72% of those that disclosed their health status identified as having a disability or long-term health condition.</p> <p>The largest enquiry area has been welfare benefits, followed by housing and debt. Of the benefits issues, Personal Independence Payment (PIP) remains the largest area.</p> <p>The total recorded Income Gain to clients in this period is just over £30k, spread across 6 direct beneficiaries.</p> |
| <p><i>Experience Counts</i></p> <p><i>'50 plus project'</i></p> <p>£19,262</p> | <p>Aim: Deliver 4 skills and training programmes (of up to ten people) for over 50s each consisting of 6 half day weekly workshops with wrap around support. .</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1/6 – 6/7/21 2. 12/10 – 23/11/21 3. tbc 4. tbc <p>Many are vulnerable and first goal is to build confidence. All get 1-2-1 input from trainers before programmes start. Sessions include positivity/confidence building exercises, problem solving, writing CVs and personal profiles, assertiveness support, mock interviews, skills assessment.</p> <p>Outcomes: After programme 1 - very +ve experience for all attendees. Range of activities and techniques used to meet needs of participants. 10 engaged, 7 attended, 2 had 1-2-1s outside of the programme, 1 no-show. 4 found employment, 1 volunteering (to date).</p> |
| <p><i>Welfare Benefits Unit</i></p> <p><i>'Advice Extra'</i></p> <p>£13,900</p> | <p>Aim: Advice Extra offers key enhancements to the WBU service, providing responsive follow-up, in-depth support and building knowledge of the benefit system.</p> <p>Covid response - adapted to remote working and different service delivery model. Remote training delivered. Good case studies supplied. Positive feedback.</p> <p>Outcomes: Followed up 40/161 cases received in this period. Targeted cases involving potentially problematic UC and other benefit issues where the front-line worker is likely to need further advice and support to get the best outcomes. The follow-ups led to further advice in 9 cases. In-depth support In-depth support was provided in an additional 5 cases (+ 2 UC from pre-April 21). Further activities to start in the next reporting period: 'Bitesize' training; Advice clinics.</p> |

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13 December 2021

Executive Member for Finance & Performance

Director of Customer & Communities

Approval of ICT procurements with a whole life contract value of over £250k

Summary

- 1) The report presents details of a procurement to renew or replace a core ICT system in the council with a whole life contract value of over £250k. This is defined as a non-key routine procurement as per the council's contract procedure rules and expenditure will fall within existing capital and revenue budget provisions. The details of the reprocurement of the council's HR and Payroll system is contained at the annex to this report.
- 2) Exceptionally this is a retrospective report to meet the requirement for transparency regarding procurements of this nature. In this case due to contract renewal timescales and the critical nature of the system involved it has not been possible to present details of this procurement at a scheduled Executive member Decision Session in advance (approved instead by published officer decision in line with the council's Constitution).

Recommendation

- 3) The Executive Member is asked to note the reprocurement of a HR & Payroll system for the council at a total three year cost of £343k as laid out in the attached Annex A.

Reason: To ensure the that councillors consider routine procurement decisions over £250k in value in line with procurement regulations and the public have the opportunity to see transparent decision-making in operation relating to major procurements.

Background

- 4) The council's contract procedure rules state:

“7.7 - Where the aggregate contract value (including any extension) is between £250,000 and less than £500,000 then the decision to enter the contract requires the approval of an Executive Member or the Executive unless the procurement is treated as Routine as defined in clause 7.9.

7.8 - Where the aggregate contract value (including any extension) is £500,000 or more the decision will be regarded as a Key Decision unless the Chief Finance Officer acting in consultation with the Monitoring Officer has approved the procurement as Routine.

7.9 - A Routine procurement is any arrangement that represents a low commercial and legal risk to the Council and relates to procurement of goods, services or works with a clearly defined specification and that clearly relate to the routine day to day operation of the Council. Routine procurements will be limited to items such as utilities, insurance or stationery. Where Officers consider a procurement process may be Routine, they are required to liaise with Commercial Procurement who will advise on the relevant paperwork to be submitted to the Chief Finance Officer. Authorisation to treat a procurement as Routine must be sought before the procurement process commences. A Director may enter a Contract where the procurement has been treated as Routine. An updated register of routine procurement must be presented regularly to the Executive Member for Finance and Performance.”

- 5) It has been agreed for transparency that that whilst the procurement in the annex have been agreed as routine by the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Finance Officer and relevant Chief Officer each decision will be scrutinised by the Executive Member for Finance and Performance rather than presented in a register. In this case due to contract renewal timescales this has not been possible and so further scrutiny will be provided in this public Executive Member Decision Session following the publication of the officer decision. The officer decision was published on the council's website on 28th October 2021 and can be found here:
<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=6318>
- 6) Whilst in some cases the procurement route will be indicated in the annex, as a general rule the most appropriate procurement route will be used in line with professional procurement advice, as determined at the time the council is ready to issue the related specification.

Consultations

- 7) The council's officer ICT Board and statutory officers have been consulted in the formation of the recommended decisions in this report.

Options/Analysis

- 8) Any options and analysis considered will be contained within Annex A.

Council Plan

- 9) Outcomes achieved by the activities covered in this report help to deliver all services across the council, but particularly support the Council Plan 2019 - 23 priority of An Open and Effective Council in supporting the delivery of digital services.

Implications

- 10)
- a. **Financial:** The procurement will fall within existing capital and revenue budget provisions.
 - b. **Human Resources (HR):** Non approval of this procurement will have serious implications in respect of essential HR and payroll processes and could impact on the delivery of all services delivered by the schools and those organisations who contract with the council to deliver their payrolls.
 - c. **Equalities:** None
 - d. **Legal:** The procurement exercise was undertaken in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Council's Financial Standing Orders.
 - e. **Crime and Disorder:** None
 - f. **Information Technology (ICT):** As covered in the Annexes
 - g. **Property:** None
 - h. **Other:** None

Risk Management

11) The controls and evidence in this report mitigate/minimise risks associated with:

- the impacts of availability of core systems that the council relies upon and without which day to day services would be impacted;
- future-proofing of core platforms that digital services rely upon.

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Chief Officers Responsible for the report:

Pauline Stuchfield
Director Customer & Communities

Report Approved



Date 30/11/2021

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Financial: Debbie Mitchell, Chief Finance Officer
Legal: Janie Berry Director of Governance

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

Annexes:

Annex A – HR & Payroll System Procurement

List of abbreviations used in this report:

| | |
|-----|---|
| CYC | City of York Council |
| HR | Human Resources |
| ICT | Information & Communications Technology |
| k | Thousand |

HR & Payroll System Procurement

Introduction / Background:

The council has a corporate HR & Payroll software system in place that allows the council to manage critical Payroll and HR administration activities for its employees. The system is currently supplied by Midland HR (MHR), the original contract with MHR was initiated in 2011 and the existing 3 year contract was due for renewal on 30th October 2021.

The council prior to renewal paid an annual charge of £88.5k and at the start of the contract there was an initial charge of £66k for software rental, maintenance and support services. The price to recommence the contract from the 31st October 2021 is £93.5K per annum and the initial capital charge is £63k. **The total cost is £343k** for a proposed 3 year contract. The costs will be funded from existing budgets.

The proposed annual cost is £5k higher than the current contract however this price includes a more detailed pension data service required to meet mandatory pension reports in line with recently updated legislation.

By renewing with the same provider it will allow the council to continue to consolidate and develop the Payroll and HR System which will help to reduce process costs in the future and avoid significant development and project set up costs resulting from a move to a new supplier. New system options have previously been considered and rejected due to high costs exceeding £1m.

The contract is being procured through an Insight public sector procurement framework and delivered by Midland HR (MHR),

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