

POLICY COMMITTEE
(On-line)

16 June 2020

Present – The Chairman (Foster) and Councillors Barrett, Brockbank, Ireton, Lis, Morrell, Mulligan, Myers, Noland, Place, Rose, Solloway (substitute for Heseltine), Welch and Wheeler.

Officers – Chief Executive, Director of Services, Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer), Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Democratic Services Manager, CIO and Assets and Commercial Services Manager, Revenue and Benefits Manager, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Heseltine and Madeley.

Start: 2pm

Finish: 2.59pm

The minutes of the Policy Committee meeting held on 3rd March 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

Minutes for Report

POL.1061

DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS GRANT SCHEME

The Chief Finance Officer (S151 Officer) submitted a report setting out the Council's proposed Discretionary Business Grant Scheme following the recent introduction of the Government measures to support businesses in response to Covid-19 by way of a local scheme.

The Government had introduced a range of measures to support businesses and some of the support packages had been delivered by local government, namely rate relief grant for certain businesses. That first batch of support was aimed at small and rural businesses and businesses in the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors. This had resulted in the Council granting additional rate reliefs worth approximately £9m compared to levels when the Council's budget was set in February and paid 1,936 business grants totalling £22.64m. Members noted that the Council had now paid around 95% of the grants that were deemed to be eligible under the initial grant scheme.

On the 1st May 2020, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) announced a local scheme whereby a grant may be made by councils to businesses suffering a fall in income due to Covid-19, that had not qualified for a direct business grant under the initial scheme.

The grant allocation to Craven District Council was a fixed amount of £1.215m determined by Government. In contrast to the initial business grant support scheme, that essentially determined eligibility through the business rates system, the Scheme as now submitted had a wider scope, more variables and allowed an element of local discretion. Guidance required a local scheme to be established which determined how each council would deliver the grant support. Councils had discretion to support businesses beyond the categories defined by BEIS provided mandatory criteria were met.

The range of applicants was not known with certainty and in order to try and provide support as quickly as possible, a fixed two- week application process was opened on 4th June 2020 via the Council's website.

The Council's Scheme set out the proposed levels of award and Government had stipulated a cap on grants of £25k per business and that the next level of grant should be £10k or amounts up to £10k. All applications would be validated against the criteria and only paid if the supporting information provided was acceptable. Applicants were also required to self-declare in respect of

any state aid implications and that they had understood the warnings in respect of deliberate manipulation of the Scheme and fraud. A number of post payment checks would be carried out by the Council's internal audit function (provided by Harrogate BC), matching data from various sources in order to identify potential fraudulent or incorrect payments.

The Chairman and Members of the Committee thanked the Chief Finance Officer as well as the Revenue and Benefits Manager and her team for all their hard work and efforts in identifying eligible businesses and ensuring payments under the other scheme were paid as quickly as possible.

Resolved – (1) That, the Craven District Council Discretionary Grant Scheme is approved.

(2) That, delegated authority is given to the Chief Finance Officer, having consulted with the Lead Member for Finance and Leader of the Council, to make further amendments to the Scheme, if required.

Chairman