

CORPORATE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Corporate Policy and Performance Board on Tuesday, 11 December 2012 in the The Board Room - Municipal Building, Widnes

Present: Councillors Gilligan (Chairman), Roberts (Vice-Chairman), Dennett, S. Hill, C. Loftus, A. Lowe and G. Stockton

Apologies for Absence: Councillors E. Cargill and N.Plumpton Walsh

Absence declared on Council business: Councillor A McInerney

Officers present: A. Jones, I. Leivesley, E. Dawson and P. McCann

Also in attendance: None

ITEM DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

CS27 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Board was advised that no public questions had been received.

CS28 ABOLITION OF THE DISCRETIONARY SOCIAL FUND

The Board received a report from the Strategic Director Policy and Resources which sought their views in relation to the abolition of the Discretionary Social Fund and asked them to make recommendations to the Executive Board in relation to this.

The Board was advised that at its meeting on 18 October 2012, the Executive Board considered a report which outlined that the Government had abolished Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants through the Welfare Reform Act 2012, and suggested that local schemes be developed by each local authority. Local authorities were to be provided with a grant from Government to do this but had discretion as to whether they used the grant for this purpose. Following consideration of this report the Executive Board resolved that this item be deferred and referred to the Corporate Policy and Performance Board, who were asked to consider the issue and make recommendations to the Executive Board.

Following this decision, Members and officers had worked together and consulted the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) who were the current provider, and had liaised with other local authorities about their approach to the issue. It was evident that given the importance these schemes gave to the most vulnerable individuals, all local authorities appeared to be developing their own schemes.

The Board was advised that a draft scheme for both Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants had been produced for their consideration and comments. Appendices 1 and 2 were attached to the report. Appendix 1 showed a comparison between the current DWP scheme and the proposed new scheme. Appendix 2 showed the proposed criteria for the new scheme without the comparison.

Following the officers' presentation Members considered the matters and issues relating to the proposed schemes before them. It was the consensus of the Board that a grant rather than loan system should be adopted. It was also recommended that the Council should avoid cash payments wherever possible, and develop voucher and prepaid card systems, which would help with the prevention of abuse of the system. Furthermore, it was agreed that the maximum number of claims per claimant, per year would be set at two.

Members suggested that as this scheme would be introduced for the first time in April 2013, that it would be beneficial to set up a working group, until such time as the scheme had been fully developed. This was agreed and invitations to participate would be sent to all Members of the Corporate Policy and Performance Board.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Board recommends to the Executive Board that the Council develops its own scheme to replace the current Crisis Loan and Community Care grant schemes, utilising the grant provided by Government for this purpose;
2. The draft scheme criteria outlined in Appendix 2 to the report be used as the basis for developing a 'Community Care Grant Scheme' as opposed to a 'Crisis Loan' scheme which would incorporate:
 - a) The limiting of cash payments through the

- introduction of voucher/prepaid card systems;
and
b) A limit of two claims per claimant per year.
3. Given the tight timescales available to get the scheme in place by 1 April 2013, that delegated authority be granted to the Strategic Director Policy and Resources, in consultation with the Resources Portfolio Holder, to make minor adjustments to the scheme in the light of experience or further information;
 4. The Corporate Policy and Performance Board review the scheme after the first 3 months of its operation;
and
 5. The Corporate Policy and Performance Board sets up a working party group until such time as the adopted scheme has been fully developed.

Meeting ended at 7.32 p.m.