

**OFFICER DELEGATION SCHEME
RECORD OF DECISION**



TO BE UPLOADED TO THE INTERNET BY DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Date: 26/02/2021	Ref No:
Responsible Officer: Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive (Corporate Core)	
Type of Decision (please refer to MO Guidance):	
Key <input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Freedom of Information Status: Yes	
Title/Subject matter: Member discretionary grants	
Budget/Strategy/Policy/Compliance:	
(i) Is the decision within an Approved Budget?	No
(ii) Is the decision in conflict with the council's policies, strategies or relevant service plans?	No
(iii) Does the decision amend existing or raise new policy issues?	
(iv) Is the decision significant and/or does it meet the £100,000 threshold for recording?	No
Equality Impact Assessment [Does this decision change policy, procedure or working practice or negatively impact on a group of people? If yes – complete EIA and summarise issues identified and recommendations – forward EIA to Corporate HR]	This proposal will be positive in driving the inclusion agenda in Bury through the targeted engagement of community groups

Background

In October 2017 Cabinet agreed a new approach to community grants as part of the implementation of the Borough's Neighbourhood Engagement Framework. The Neighbourhood Grant Investment Framework allocated a three-year programme of funding which covered Elected Member Discretionary Budgets, this ended in September 2020.

In the context of a new emerging neighbourhood model for the Borough as part of Coronavirus recovery, a hardship support proposal for individuals and businesses was agreed through the Emergency Powers Group [Thursday 16th April 2020]. This included an agreement to reallocate the Elected Member Discretionary Budgets underspend from previous financial years to create an 'In Work Poverty Hardship Fund'. The process of removing balances from cards was difficult therefore, any members with a balance at the end of March 2020, received a cash 'top up' equivalent to the difference between £1k and the balance available, ensuring that all members had £1k available for the current financial year.

Members were encouraged to consider ways in which their spend could support the 10 point recovery plan for the Borough as outlined at Cabinet on 29th July 2020. These priorities cover tackling poverty, developing a Bury Opportunity guarantee, promoting community voice and supporting community wellbeing.

Following the extension of the discretionary grants in September 2020, Members were advised that no additional funds had been allocated beyond March 2021, it is therefore appropriate to review in order to determine the most suitable approach going forward.

Issues:

- The Discretionary Grant Scheme was designed to be fluid with little oversight or accountability. The system is based on trust, Councillors are not required to provide receipts, spend is not audited and information in relation to what Members have spent, is not published. Please see Appendix one for details of recipients.
- Oversight of the Member Discretionary Grant Scheme was transferred from the social development team to democratic services team in September 2020.
- Allpay was procured to provide the Councillors electronic top up cards, this contract is due to expire in November 2021. This scheme would need to be reviewed if the contract is to continue beyond February 2021.
- In October 2020 Internal Audit commenced a review of the scheme and although democratic services are still awaiting the review's findings, we expect the report to highlight concerns in relation to the lack of audit and transparency.
- Members were advised that all monies must be spent by the 28th February 2021, thus avoiding any potential conflicts of interest in respect of spend during the election purdah period. From September to 19.02.2021, only 1 Radcliffe West Councillor has not

Wards affected: All

Consultations:

Members were engaged in dialogue over the summer of 2020 regarding the discretionary grant system. The majority of Members reported that they valued the facility as they felt it enabled them to sponsor small-scale local needs quickly and responsively.

Arrangements in neighbouring authorities have been researched. It was concluded that most authorities operate a grant system for Councillors but systems vary between an individual grant system and ward-based arrangements.

The cost of the scheme £53,000 will be funded from Council reserves. (confirmed by S151 Officer LK).

Scrutiny & Review Committee Interest: None directly, though the Overview and Scrutiny Committee oversee budget setting and delivery.

The discretionary grant scheme and the contract with Allpay is extended for 12 months only. Arrangements to be strengthened to ensure more rigour to reporting and transparency of decision making through support from the new Community Hub network. Hub teams will support Councillors with:

- a. data to evidence where funds might best be directed to meet local need
- b. Recording and reporting of spend which will also be published on the Council's website.

The scheme will end at the end of the 2021/22 municipal year where it will be subject to a further review.

Newly Elected Members will be provided with information in respect of the scheme as part of the induction process.

Reasons for the Decision

The *Let's do it!* Strategy sets out an ambition for greater engagement of residents and community groups with the work of the council, in the spirit of social participation. It is anticipated that maintaining a small amount of funding for local investment by ward councillors will support this aspiration. Such arrangements may now be supported by Community Hub teams who will develop the data and relationships to support councillors in directing and utilising their spend

The current system requires a full review however the challenges of the last year have not allowed capacity to do so. The fact that most neighbouring councils operate a similar system and the positive views of councillors suggest it is not appropriate to withdraw arrangements, but to maintain the provision pending a review

On the basis of the relatively small financial value of current arrangements and feedback from councillors, it is proposed that current arrangements are maintained for another year.

Decision made by:	Signature:	Date:
Director or Chief/Senior Officer		
Members Consulted		
Group Leaders (DAF) March 2021 Councillor E O'Brien	Councillor T Pickstone  Councillor N Jones Councillor M Powell Councillor J Mason	2.3.2021

Notes

1. Where, in accordance with the requirements of the Officer Delegation Scheme, a Chief Officer consults with the appropriate Cabinet Member they must sign the form so as to confirm that they have been consulted and that they agree with the proposed action. The signature of the Opposition Spokesperson should be obtained if required, to confirm that he/she has been consulted. Please refer to the MO Guidance.
2. **This form must not be used for urgent decisions.**
3. Where there is any doubt, Corporate Directors should err on the side of caution and seek advice from the Council's Monitoring Officer.

NB Other Options considered and rejected:

- The discretionary grants scheme is dis-continued from March 2021.
- The discretionary grant scheme is fundamentally reviewed.