

Name of meeting: Cabinet

Date: 15 December 2020

Title of report: Local authority COVID Winter Grant scheme

Purpose of report: To set out Council proposals to provide assistance with food utilities and other essential supplies in accordance with the guidance issued by Government.

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	Yes If yes give the reason why – Government funded assistance package Borough wide, totalling £1.487m
Key Decision - Is it in the <u>Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports)</u> ?	Key Decision – yes Private Report/Private Appendix – No
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	Yes
Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director</u> & name Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance? Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning?	Rachel Spencer-Henshall 7/12/2020 Mel Meggs Eamonn Croston 4/12/2020 Julie Muscroft 7/12/2020
Cabinet member portfolio	Cllr Graham Turner Cllr Carol Pattison Cllr Viv Kendrick

Electoral wards affected: All Ward councillors consulted: None

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? Yes

1. Summary

Since the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic, Kirklees Council has been working in close collaboration with our schools and education settings, as well as other partners, to wrap support around our children and their families, particularly the most vulnerable.

Regular engagement by the Lead Member for Learning, Aspiration and Communities, the Director for Children's Services and the Service Director for Learning and Early Support has been taking place with School Headteachers representing the system from the Education and Learning Partnership Board (Secondary/Special/Primary) and our CEOs of Multi Academy Trusts.

This has been particularly key in terms of supporting Free School Meals entitlement alongside the Government schemes which, together with our schools has seen support for children and families over the holiday periods, and through periods of self-isolation.

Together we have been committed to ensuring that children have access to a range of support and especially that they do not experience hunger.

On 8 November 2020, the government announced a package of financial support for those in need over the winter period.

The Winter Grant Scheme will enable Local Authorities to provide support to families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals from early December 2020, and covers the period until the end of March 2021.

Whilst the funding is not targeted at supporting families entitled to Free School Meals during holiday periods, there is nothing in the grant conditions that would prevent any of the funding being used for that purpose.

2. Information required to take a decision

- 2.1 The Grant is provided to upper tier authorities with the guidance including suggestions that authorities might look to other authorities to deliver if they are better placed to do so. This does not apply to this Council.
- 2.2 The Grant can be used for existing Council schemes e.g. Local Welfare Provision Schemes, and other support that delivers the same outcomes and where the need is greatest.
- 2.3 Payment to those entitled can be via cash, BACS payment, vouchers or in kind.
- 2.4 Support can be delivered directly by the council or in conjunction with third party organisations. Third party organisations can be Schools, Charities or other voluntary organisations.
- 2.5 Guidance issued states in relation to Free School Meal support:

"The COVID Winter Grant Scheme is not intended to replicate or replace Free School Meals and Authorities should avoid duplicating provision where possible.

However, Authorities have discretion over how they use the funding within the grant framework and within the stipulated time period.

Therefore, Authorities may choose to offer COVID Winter Grant Scheme support to those families in receipt of Free School Meals, if they consider this to be appropriate in their area."

- 2.6 It is important to note that at least 80% must be targeted at households with children with the remainder available for households without children.
- 2.7 Within those two totals at least 80% must be directed at Food and Utilities (including water rates) with the remainder available for other expenditure related to food, heating, lighting, cooking, water and sewerage needs, but excluding rent or other housing costs.
- 2.8 The Council has a Local Welfare Provision scheme that provides financial support and advice to those struggling to afford food and essentials due to COVID-19. That scheme is embedded in the overall Community Response offer.
- 2.9 On 1st May 2020 Cabinet noted and endorsed the decisions taken by the Chief Executive under Emergency Powers for the period from 16 March 2020 which included a decision in respect of Covid-19 Government Hardship Fund 2020/2021. In summary that decision was to allocate £3.9m of £4.9m to Council tax Hardship support with the remaining £1m to be allocated to Local welfare provision.
- 2.10 On 1 September 2020 , as part of the Quarter 1 financial monitoring report 2020/21, Cabinet took a decision to manage a grant of £551,350.34 from the Department for Food and Rural affairs through that same scheme providing support with Food and Essential Supplies in accordance with the Minister's Grant determination.
- 2.11 Following a Parliamentary vote on 22 October 2020, the Chief Executive exercising her emergency powers, with the Director for Children's Services, the 151 Officer and in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Learning, Aspiration and Communities and Kirklees Council Cabinet, took a decision on the 23rd October 2020. to support the Borough's more vulnerable families. Support was based on a voucher scheme that mirrored the previous Summer 2020 national Government voucher scheme. It was based on a calculation equivalent to the October half-term period i.e. £15 per child, and the eligibility criteria was based on children eligible for free school meals.
- 2.12 The above decision was subsequently reported back to Cabinet on 18 November. The report included a further recommendation to come back to Cabinet in December with future proposals following the Government announcement on Winter Grant funding.
- 2.13 The intention is to extend the approach set out in paragraph 2.11 above to the Christmas and February 2021 holiday periods, with an anticipated coverage of 15,500 eligible school children, including eligible 16-18 year olds across all state schools, alternative provision, 6th form colleges and Kirklees College.
- 2.14 The funding to which this report refers includes elements that can be seen as an extension of the additional funding received in respect of hardship, subject to the guidance and conditions specific to this fund.
- 2.15 It is intended that that officers will work with services and partners to identify recipients through the Local Welfare Provision scheme. This approach will take advantage of the existing administration and delivery mechanisms that meets the needs of any resident before that resident finds that they are without the food and essential supplies they need, because they have insufficient means to meet all of their liabilities.

2.16 This will ensure the most appropriate and timely interventions with services and partners, including but not limited to:

- a) provision of food parcels through our partners in the food network in addition to and alongside any financial support;
- b) provision of essential supplies which might extend to a limited number of cookers and heating equipment in cases where particular households are without.;
- c) provision of food or cash vouchers to assist with difficult debt cases especially where a lack of intervention might result in homelessness or other legal action (including debt for Rent, Fuel, Council Tax);
- d) augmenting weekly income for some individuals/families that have had their benefit entitlement reduced through sanction or debt recovery or to enhance the level of support they receive by way of assistance through whatever scheme they entitled to including those with No Recourse to Public Funds;
- e) the bulk purchase of religious or culturally appropriate food where Foodbank supplies are in low/no supply;
- f) provision of winter clothing where necessary including but not limited to coats, hats, scarves, gloves; and
- g) provision of blankets and duvets where need is identified.

2.17 As part of the headline Spending Review 2020 announcement on 25 November 2020, Government confirmed it will also provide £220 million for the Holiday Activities and Food programme to provide enriching activities and a healthy meal for disadvantaged children in the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays in 2021. This provides funding up to the end of 2021-22 and the intention is to bring further proposals to Cabinet early in the new year setting out proposals for this scheme.

3. Implications for the Council

3.1 Working with People

The proposals set out in this report increase available household income so potentially reducing poverty.

Individuals and Families are experiencing a whole host of new challenges as Covid-19 reduces opportunities and means that many people are having to stay at home with associated increased costs.

Fewer employment opportunities and increased costs mean many more Households are experiencing more general Hardship. The increase in funding available for discretionary support around food and essentials allows us to meet the individual needs of families that are experiencing unprecedented change, many having lost employment and waiting for financial support to arrive.

3.2 Working with Partners

The Council is actively engaged in discussions with Third Sector leaders about how the Local Welfare Provision Scheme might help them and therefore us support those most in need through the wider Community Response.

We are engaging through the Food Networks, Community Response, Third Sector, Council Services and Kirklees Advice providers.

3.3 Place Based Working

As part of our working with partners we have been supporting a response that is being delivered at community level.

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

Not Applicable

3.5 Improving outcomes for children

Increases available household income so potentially reducing poverty and providing the equivalent value of Free School Meals during holiday periods.

3.6 Other (e.g. Legal/Financial or Human Resources)

Financial

3.7 Government has provided Grant Funding of £ £1.487m which it is expected is spent in its entirety in the period 1 December 2020 to 31 March 2021.

3.8 Providing the equivalent of Free School Meal support for approximately 15,500 children over the 2 weeks at Christmas and the 1 week at February Half term at the equivalent £15 per eligible child per week, is equivalent to £697,500. That would leave £790,270 to support families and individuals more generally, and it is intended that this funding will be allocated to the Council's existing Local Welfare Provision Fund which supports our most vulnerable families and individuals across the Borough.

3.9 Actual spend will be monitored by Government, noting that 50% of the funding will be provided up front with the remainder being contingent upon returns to government in February 2021 and April 2021.

Legal

3.10 The funding is a one-off contribution for the 2020-21 financial year and is made under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

3.11 It is important to note that any payments made out of this grant fund do not amount to payments made under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. Ordinarily Local welfare provision payments are made under that section and then count as "public funds" for the purposes of immigration and would not therefore be available to those with no recourse to public funds. Payments made here will be made in accordance with the Grant Determination and are subject to the conditions set out by the Secretary of State in that determination.

Human Resources

3.12 The grant can be used to pay for reasonable administration costs but it is not envisaged that the council will use any of the fund to cover its own costs. Additional

resource over establishment is being directed at local welfare provision but it is not being met from this fund. Third party organisations can direct some of the funding they receive to their reasonable costs.

4 Consultees and their opinions

- 4.1 Officers have established dialogue with a number of colleagues across services and disciplines including Housing Solutions, Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing, Council Tax, Education Safeguarding, Migration and Refugees, Public Health.
- 4.2 Partners including Citizens Advice and Law Centre, The Welcome Centre, Fusion Housing, Batley Food Bank, Third Sector Leaders, Uniform Exchange, Methodist Mission (as providers of advice and food support under existing arrangements.)
- 4.3 All those consulted welcome the opportunity to increase household incomes to create greater resilience meeting either short term need or creating opportunities to reduce debt or access services and or goods that might otherwise have been unachievable.

5 Next steps and timelines

To continue those discussions with services and partners so that we can immediately identify those that can receive payments from the scheme and to establish ways in which we can use that money to achieve better outcomes for each individual or family.

6 Officer recommendations and reasons

Cabinet are asked to recommend the following :

- 6.1 that a sum equivalent to £30 per Free School Meal child be provided to Schools and colleges in order that they can provide a voucher for the Christmas period.
- 6.2 that a sum equivalent to £15 per Free School Meal child be provided to Schools and colleges in order that they can provide a voucher for the February half term period.
- 6.3 that the balance of funding available, estimated to be £697,500, be allocated to the Local welfare Provision budget to support the meeting of additional support for food, fuel and other essentials in accordance with the grant determination and guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 6.4 that a further report will be brought to Cabinet in early 2021 to consider proposals for Holiday Activities and Food Programme for 2021 following confirmation of Government funding support through the Spending Review 2020 announcement on 25 November 2020.

Portfolio Holder Comments:

“On the 18th November Cabinet supported the decision taken to enable support to be offered to our children eligible for Free School Meals. This Report recognises the support that the Government is providing , and means that we can now provide the certainty for the next school holiday periods. We also welcome the additional

targeted support we can provide with food and winter warmth to our most vulnerable residents. “

7 Contact officer

Natalie Mcsheffrey -Head of Education Relationships and Business
Steven Bird - Head of Welfare and Exchequer Services
Julian Hobson - Senior Manager Welfare and Exchequer Services

8 Background Papers and History of Decisions

Cabinet report 1 May 2020 – decisions taken during the COVID-19 pandemic to date. Council web link below :

[Agenda for Cabinet on Friday 1st May 2020, 3.00 pm | Kirklees Council](#) (Item 6)

Cabinet report 1 September 2020 - Quarter 1 financial monitoring report 2020/21. Council web link below :

[Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday 1st September 2020, 2.00 pm | Kirklees Council](#) (Item 13)

Cabinet report 18 November 2020 – Request to support children eligible for free school meals with vouchers during school holiday periods. Web link below :

[Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday 18th November 2020, 3.00 pm | Kirklees Council](#) (Item 12)

COVID Winter grant scheme. Government web link below :

[New winter package to provide further support for children and families - GOV.UK](#)

Service Director responsible

Jo-anne Sanders – Service Director
Eamonn Croston – Service Director- Finance