

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Lead Member for Children's Services and Young People
Date:	30 November 2020
Title:	COVID Winter Grants - Funding for Schools, Colleges and Early Years Providers
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the proposed approach and offer for the COVID Winter Grant across Hampshire. This report seeks approval from the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services and Young People to distribute grant funding to Hampshire schools, colleges and early years providers in support of the aims of the COVID Winter Grant; to support vulnerable households this winter.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves the grant of £1.56M funding to schools, colleges and early years setting for them to purchase and provide one £15 voucher per child per week for the two-week Christmas holiday and the February half term week, in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 7. Vouchers will be available for all children eligible for free school meals and additionally all children with a social worker, all children open to early help, 16-18 year olds previously eligible for FSM, all 2-4 year olds accessing childcare and eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium, as described in paragraph 18 of the report. An estimated 34,620 children will be able to access vouchers as a result of this initiative.
3. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves funding of grants of up to £290,000 to be made to schools and colleges by way of a

discretionary grant that they can use to support vulnerable families, including those not currently eligible for free school meals and other benefits/financial support. The value of individual grants to schools and colleges will be dependent upon the number of children on roll and at the values set out in paragraph 21.

Contextual Information

4. On Sunday 8 November 2020, the government announced a significant package of extra targeted financial support for those in need over the winter period.
5. The £170 million COVID Winter Grant Scheme is being distributed through County and Unitary Councils and aims to support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs.
6. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the government department that is providing the funding, expects top tier local authorities to administer the scheme and provide direct assistance to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic. This is expected to include families whose children are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) as well as those who qualify by age for the universal free school meal offer.
7. The conditions of the COVID Winter Grant (see Appendix 2 for full guidance) are that:
 - at least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support families with children, with up to 20% of the total funding allocated for other types of households, including individuals.
 - at least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills (including sewerage), with up to 20% made available for other essential items.
8. This scheme is part of a wider winter support package for families and children, including:
 - from April 2021, significant expansion of the Department for Education's (DfE's) Holiday Activities and Food programme, which has provided healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children since 2018, across England.
 - increasing the value of the Department for Health and Social Care's Healthy Start vouchers from £3.10 to £4.25 from April 2021. Healthy Start

supports lower-income pregnant women and families with children under four to buy fruit, vegetables, pulses, milk and infant formula, providing an important nutritional safety net.

- £16M in further funding for local charities through well-established networks to provide immediate support to front-line food aid charities, including food banks, who are supporting those most vulnerable due to the economic impacts of COVID-19.

9. Hampshire's share of the COVID Winter Grant is £2.898M, to be spent between December 2020 and 31 March 2021.

Hampshire's Approach

10. Following notification of the financial allocation for Hampshire on 10 November, a task and finish group was convened on 11 November comprising representatives of major stakeholder groups including the voluntary and charitable sector, Connect4Summer leads, Adults Health & Care, Local Children's Partnerships, Supporting Families, Schools, Children's Social Care, Early Years and Wraparound Childcare, County Supplies & HC3S and Communications.

11. In addition to weekly task and finish group meetings, a variety of other stakeholders have been consulted such that existing local provision and local need can be identified, risks in respect of duplication of funding can be addressed and emerging ideas validated or challenged. This additional engagement has included headteacher groups, faith groups, and local resilience centres/hubs. A quick turnaround survey was also carried out with all Hampshire schools and colleges.

12. This engagement has resulted in a multi-faceted offer, under the programme name of 'Connect4Communities', proposed across Hampshire. Approval to distribute funding for two of the initiatives forming part of the Connect4Communities programme is sought in this report – funding for provision of meal vouchers to children and grants to schools and colleges enabling them to support vulnerable households with children.

13. The very short notice given, and the need to distribute funding very quickly, necessitates an urgent Executive Member Decision as set out in this report, such that funding can reach schools in sufficient time for them to purchase vouchers and distribute them before the children break up for Christmas.

14. A further decision day has been set for 9 December, allowing for the usual urgent publication dates, for the Executive Lead Member to decide on further

recommendations in respect of the distribution of the remaining COVID Winter Grant.

Free school meal vouchers

15. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves the grant of £1.56M funding to schools, colleges and early years settings for them to purchase and provide one £15 voucher per child per week, for the two-week Christmas holiday and the February half term week. An estimated 34,620 children will be able to access vouchers under this component of the Connect4Communities programme.
16. Schools and colleges were consulted on their preferred approach by way of a questionnaire, with 71% of the 332 establishments that responded indicating a preference for a voucher scheme. Head teachers told us that, while some had reservations about vouchers, they were undoubtedly a quick and effective way of ensuring that families in need could be supported in terms of their basic food needs.
17. DWP has indicated that the Covid Winter Grant is not specifically targeted at free school meals families. Therefore, local authorities are obligated to target a wide range of vulnerable households. However, utilising free school meal eligibility as an indicator of potential vulnerability, and providing schools with the means to supply vouchers, the County Council can ensure that timely financial support for food bills will be in place prior to Christmas for a large cohort of vulnerable families and the rest of the programme will dovetail with this to ensure a wider offer.
18. To ensure support is delivered to the wider range of vulnerable households, it is recommended that the cohort of children and families receiving vouchers is expanded to include:
 - All children with a social worker
 - All children open to early help services
 - 16-18 year olds previously eligible for FSM
 - All 2-4 year olds accessing childcare and eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium.
19. Schools, colleges and early years settings will be given flexibility to choose the voucher provider best suited to the need and systems within their establishment, with guidance and support offered from the County Council.
20. Funding allocations to schools have been calculated based on the school autumn census data and social care data dated 19 November 2020. It is acknowledged that there will be changes to the number of children open to early help and social workers, and potential changes to the number of children

with FSM eligibility from the time of the autumn census. A process will be established with schools whereby any increase in the number of children eligible for the vouchers under this programme can be accommodated and additional funding passed to schools, colleges and early years providers where required.

School and College Discretionary Grants

21. Stakeholders in the task and finish group have consistently identified concerns about 'working poor' households, or those who have only recently started to experience financial hardship, as a result of the pandemic. To address these concerns, it is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves funding of up to £290,000 to be granted to schools and colleges by way of a discretionary grant fund that they can use to support such families. The value of the fund provided to each establishment will vary according to the number of pupils on roll as set out below:

Pupils/Places	Allocation (£)
0-150	200
151-300	400
301-450	600
451-650	800
651-1000	1000
1001+	1200

22. Schools and colleges will be given discretion to distribute the funding to families so long as this is consistent with the grant criteria set by DWP. This could include support to pay fuel bills, clothing, blankets and cooking equipment (such as microwaves/slow cookers). Guidance, suggestions and support with sourcing will be provided to those establishments that need it.

23. Schools/colleges will be required to report to the County Council on the proportion of this funding they use for food and fuel financial support and the proportion they use for other costs. Furthermore, colleges will need to distinguish between funding passed on to students over the age of 19 on 31 March 2021 and those under 19 at this point in time such that the County Council can report back accurately to DWP.

Finance

24. The total funding required to support these two initiatives, is £1.85M. It is anticipated that over 22,000 households will be supported via the school and college discretionary grants and the meal voucher schemes.

25. Just over £1M remains available to support other types of household and the remainder of the Connect4Communities programme. Recommendations in respect of allocating this remaining grant funding will be presented to the Executive Lead Member at her decision day on 9 December 2020.

Performance

26. All funding granted to schools, colleges and early years providers will be supported by a grant agreement setting out the conditions of the funding as well as reporting requirements.

27. Schools, colleges and early years providers will be required to report to the County Council on how they have spent the funding provided, in line with the DWP grant criteria set out in paragraph 6.

28. Allocation of funding across the grant criteria set out in paragraph 7 will be monitored to ensure spend remains compliant with the terms of the grant.

Consultation and Equalities

29. Consultation has been undertaken through the task and finish group and by way of presentations to a range of interested and representative groups including Local Children's Partnerships, Local Support Hubs and Headteacher groups.

30. School and colleges have been consulted regarding their preferred method of supporting children with food by way of a questionnaire.

31. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

Recommendations

32. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves the grant of £1.56M funding to schools, colleges and early years setting for them to purchase and provide one £15 voucher per child per week for the two-week Christmas holiday and the February half term week, in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 7. Vouchers will be available for all children eligible for free school meals and additionally all children with a social worker, all children open to early help, 16-18 year olds previously eligible for FSM, all 2-4 year olds accessing childcare and eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium, as described in paragraph 18 of the report.

33. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves funding of grants of up to £290,000 to be made to schools and colleges by way of a discretionary grant that they can use to support vulnerable families, including

those not currently eligible for free school meals and other benefits/financial support. The value of individual grants to schools and colleges will be dependent upon the number of children on roll and at the values set out in paragraph 21.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	Yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	no
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	Yes

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

Equalities Impact Assessments have been completed for each project.

Appendix 1 – Copy of Equalities Impact Assessment

Reference number is EIA276974420.

Name of project or proposal (required): COVID Winter Grants Scheme to be known in Hampshire as the Connect4Communities Programme

Is this project a Transformation project? (required): Neither

Name of accountable officer (required): Suzanne Smith

Email (required): suzanne.smith2@hants.gov.uk

Department (required): Economy, Transport and Environment

Date of assessment (required): 26/11/2020

Is this a detailed or overview EIA? (required): Overview

Describe the current service or policy. This question has a limit of 700 characters; approximately 100 words (required): The DWP COVID Winter Grant scheme will provide £2.89M of funding to HCC to support those most in need, with costs of food, energy, water bills and essentials. The conditions state at least 80% must be used for food and fuel, and no more than 20% on other items. Also 80% of the fund must be spent on families with children and up to 20% on other households including individuals. Our Connect4Communities programme will grant funding to schools, colleges and early years to support vulnerable children and families. This is for food vouchers for those families in school holiday periods until March 2021 and discretionary grant funding to use to provide support to a wider range of vulnerable families

Geographical impact (required): All Hampshire

Describe the proposed change. This question has a limit of 700 characters; approximately 100 words (required): The Food Vouchers will be available to all families whose children are eligible for free school meals and to ensure support is delivered to the wider range of vulnerable households, we want to expand the cohort of children and families offered vouchers so these children are fed during the school holidays until March 2021. The Discretionary Grant will enable schools and colleges to be able to offer financial support to families they deem vulnerable. Funding will not be restricted to those with free school meal or families with other benefit eligibility as schools/colleges will be encouraged to use their knowledge of families and their individual circumstances to provide appropriate support.

Who does this impact assessment cover? (required): Service users

Has engagement or consultation been carried out? (required): Yes

Describe the consultation or engagement you have performed or are intending to perform. This question has a limit of 700 characters; approximately 100 words (required):

Engagement with schools/colleges via a survey and with Head Teachers to ensure that this proposal for free school meal vouchers and a discretionary fund is supported by them which it is. The outcome of schools engagement is to allocate funds to them so they can provide a food voucher to children eligible for free school meals and others identified in vulnerable and low income households. It was also apparent that there are other families/children within schools who would benefit from help with food/energy from a discretionary fund.

Age (required): Positive

Impact (required): Children who would normally receive a free school meal or have been identified as vulnerable by virtue of being open to early help services, previously having been eligible for FSM, allocated a social worker or in a low income setting will receive a food voucher to ensure they are fed over the school holidays until March 2021. Other children who do not fall into this category but are from needy households can also be identified to receive help from the school discretionary fund which could cover food, help with energy or other essentials.

Disability (required): Positive

Impact (required): Many disabled children, regardless of household income, are open to a social worker and so will be eligible for a food voucher under the Connect4Communities Programme. Furthermore, any disabled child who meets the extended criteria we have set will be provided with food vouchers for the school holiday periods until 31 March 2021. Other children who are not captured by the voucher eligible criteria but are from needy households can also be identified to receive help from the school discretionary grant which could cover food, help with energy or other essentials.

Sexual orientation (required): Neutral

Race (required): Neutral

Religion or belief (required): Neutral

Gender reassignment (required): Neutral

Gender (required): Neutral

Marriage or civil partnership (required): Neutral

Pregnancy and maternity (required): Neutral

Poverty (required): Positive

Impact (required): Additional funding will be distributed to help those children and families who live in poverty or are in need food, energy and other basic items. This funding also means that children who live in poverty and would most likely not be fed because they are on school holidays will receive food.

Rurality (required): Neutral

Any other brief information which you feel is pertinent to this assessment
(optional):

Please confirm that the accountable officer has agreed the contents of this form
(required): Yes

Appendix Two – COVID Winter Grant Guidance from DWP

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/938204/covid-winter-grant-scheme-guide.pdf