

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Lead Member for Children's Services and Young People
Date:	9 December 2020
Title:	COVID Winter Grants
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

Contact name: Suzanne Smith, Assistant Director, Children's Services

Tel: 07793 759047

Email: Suzanne.smith2@hants.gov.uk

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 for spend and grant funding to organisations in support of vulnerable households this winter.

Recommendation(s)

2. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves the purchase of a £20 food or fuel voucher for each care leaver not forming part of the extended FSM cohort identified in paragraph 20, to the total value of £30,000.
3. It is recommended that a grant of up to £6,000 to be made to the Hampshire Young Carers Alliance such that vouchers and/or gifts and/or food can be provided to young carers not in receipt of vouchers through the free school meal voucher offer. Such grant will be provided on terms to be agreed by the Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 13.
4. It is recommended that a grant of £100,000 is made available to Citizens Advice for them to use to financially support households with fuel bills over the winter period. Such grant will be provided on terms to be agreed by the

Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 13.

5. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves the purchase and/or granting of funds for the purchase of food and fuel vouchers to a value of £75,000. These vouchers will be made available to partner organisations including the Family Support Service, Domestic Abuse Services, and other agencies working directly with vulnerable households. It is further recommended that authority is delegated to the Director of Children's Services to determine the recipients and individual value of funds and/or vouchers distributed to organisations, in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 13.
6. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves £320,000 of the funding to be allocated for the delivery of Holiday Activity and Food Schemes and for grant applications to be invited to identify organisations able to provide such schemes. Approval of individual grants awards to organisations from this £320,000 allocation will be brought to a future Executive Lead Member decision day.
7. It is proposed that funding is provided to establish and support community pantries across Hampshire and approval is sought from the Executive Lead Member to delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to approve grant awards to organisations for the delivery of such schemes, in accordance with the criteria set out in paragraphs 28 and 29, and in consultation with the Executive Lead Member up to the total value of £312,000.
8. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services to approve community grant awards to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant (as set out in paragraph 13) for targeted financial support for those in need over winter in consultation with the Executive Lead Member up to the total value of £100,000.
9. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member delegates approval to the Director of Children's Services to approve the reallocation of any COVID Winter Grants remaining or underspent funds to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant set out in paragraph 13 in consultation with the Executive Lead Member.

Contextual Information

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

11. 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.
12. 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.
13. The conditions of the COVID Winter Grant 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.
14. 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.
15. Hampshire's share of the COVID Winter Grant is £2.898M, to be spent between December 2020 and 31 March 2021.

Hampshire's Approach

16. 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.
17. 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.
18. This engagement has resulted in a multi-faceted offer, under the programme name of 'Connect4Communities', proposed across Hampshire.
19. At an urgent decision day on 30 November 2020, the Executive Lead Member approved the distribution of £1.85M funding to schools, colleges and early years providers across Hampshire such that funding could reach schools in sufficient time for them to purchase vouchers and distribute them before the children break up for Christmas.
20. Meal vouchers are being made available to:
 - All children who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) 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.

Care Leavers

21. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves the purchase of a £20 food or fuel voucher for each care leaver not forming part of the extended FSM cohort identified in paragraph 20, to the value of £30,000. An estimated 1,490 care leavers will receive these vouchers with the intention that they will form part of the well-established care leavers gift scheme run by the Children's Services Department every year.

Young Carers

22. Many young carers and their families will receive a voucher under the extended FSM criteria outlined in paragraph 20. However, there are an estimated 389 young carers who may not be picked up within this offer. It is therefore recommended that a grant of up to £6,000 is made to the Hampshire Young Carers Alliance such that vouchers and/or gifts and/or food can be provided to these families.

Support for individuals

23. It is recommended that a grant of £100,000 is made available to Citizens Advice for them to use to financially support households with fuel bills over the winter period.

24. Following engagement with district councils and other key stakeholders, it is felt that targeting this funding at fuel bills will reduce the potential for double funding with other grants available, and asking Citizens Advice to administer this fund will ensure that any financial support can be provided alongside broader support and advice. Citizens Advice are also well placed to undertake ID and benefits checks to mitigate the potential risks of fraudulent claims. Hampshire County Council, working with district councils, may require Citizens Advice to target specific communities where there is specific local need.

Additional Fuel/Food Vouchers

25. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves the purchase and/or grant of funds for the purchase of food and fuel vouchers to a value of £75,000. These vouchers will be made available to partner organisations including the Family Support Service, Domestic Abuse Services, and other agencies working directly with vulnerable households.

Holiday activities and food

26. During the February half term, it is proposed that, working with schools, voluntary and charitable organisations and early years providers, a holiday activity and food programme is organised. Consideration was given to such a scheme for the Christmas holidays but feedback from provider and schools indicated that it was unlikely to be practical given restrictions on bubbles in schools and other Covid related considerations. However, should providers have existing holiday activity and food schemes operating over the Christmas period which they would like to offer to vulnerable families, they may apply for financial support through the community grants scheme outlined in paragraph

30. The February programme will provide not only a hot meal for vulnerable children, but also fun and educational activities too. These schemes will be accessible by children eligible for FSM (over 20,000 children in Hampshire) and, where possible, the wider eligible cohort identified for meal vouchers in this programme. This programme will build on the Connect4Summer scheme that has run successfully across Hampshire over the last two years. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves £320,000 of the funding to be allocated for the delivery of Holiday Activity and Food Schemes and for grant applications to be invited to identify organisations able to provide such schemes. Approval of individual grants awards to organisations from this £320,000 allocation will be brought to a future Executive Lead Member decision day.

Community Pantries

27. Subject to confirmation from DWP, it is proposed that funding is provided to establish and support community pantries across Hampshire and approval is sought from the Executive Lead Member to delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to approve grant awards to organisations for the delivery of such schemes in consultation with the Executive Lead Member up to the value of £312,000.
28. Community pantries work on the principle of giving those in need the opportunity to have a 'helping hand' by getting food at a lower rate on a weekly basis. Items found in the pantry will be a range of fresh, frozen and general foods which will change on a weekly basis. Access to the community pantry is by way of membership, and for a small weekly contribution, members receive food to a significantly higher value. For example, members are charged a nominal sum of £5.00 per shop and receive £15 plus worth of goods. Community pantries will be encouraged to provide a delivery service for those who are not able to come and shop for whatever reason.
29. The aim of this funding would be to ensure at least one community pantry exists in each district of Hampshire, and that, as a result, the experience and expertise to establish further pantries is available in each district. Where there are currently no pantries in a district, or clear need for additional pantries, seed funding will be provided by way of a grant to establish the infrastructure, equipment, volunteers and food supplies for set up. Where there are existing pantries that would benefit from additional food supplies or complementary services or supplies that meet the criteria for the winter grants scheme (prepaid fuel vouchers for distribution to vulnerable families, for example), grants will be provided to secure such supplies. Any grants will be time limited in nature and organisations seeking grant funding under this component of the Connect4Communities programme will be required to set out how they will ensure services are sustainable without financial support from the County Council beyond 31 March 2021.

Community grants

30. There are a significant number of agencies, notably voluntary and charitable sector providers and after school clubs, supporting vulnerable families, households, and individuals. There are also a number of organisations who wish to support their local community with food and fuel poverty, particularly in rural areas. It is proposed that a small, countywide grant fund is established where such organisations can apply for funding to expand or deliver support and services. Any funded support must meet the DWP grant criteria but use of such a grant fund will enable a flexible and responsive approach to addressing local needs as and when they are identified.
31. Subject to confirmation from DWP, it is recommended that the Executive Lead Member delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services to approve grant awards to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant (as set out in paragraph 13) for targeted financial support for those in need over winter in consultation with the Executive Lead Member up to the value of £100,000.

Slow Cookers

32. Some stakeholders have expressed concerns for those households who do not have basic cooking facilities and in response to this, 100 slow cookers will be purchased at a total cost of up to £2,500 which can be distributed in response to requests from schools, colleges, early years providers, social workers and other agencies.

Administration Costs

33. The COVID Winter Grant funding allocation includes reasonable administration costs to enable local authorities to deliver the scheme and it is therefore permitted for Hampshire County Council (and partners) to deduct estimated administration costs from the total allocation to determine the amount remaining. Administration costs for each local authority will be published on www.gov.uk alongside detail of all spend related to this scheme.
34. Hampshire County Council is seeking to minimise administration costs and approval is therefore sought for funding of up to £100,000 (3.45%) to cover reasonable administration costs for all partners which will include limited staff costs, web page design and communications and marketing support.

Connect4Communities Directory

35. In addition to the range of support outlined in paragraphs 19 to 32, Hampshire County Council intends to establish a Connect4Communities directory where

organisations and community groups can publish details of any local opportunities or support, they wish to share. This will be hosted on the existing Hampshire Family Information and Services Hub:

(FISH: <https://fish.hants.gov.uk/kb5/hampshire/directory/home.page>)

36. This will enable residents of Hampshire to search by postcode to identify where they may be able to access financial and other support and subsidised food. For Hampshire County Council and partners, this will provide a way to capture offers of support beyond those coordinated directly by the Connect4Communities programme, and an effective way of signposting residents to available support.

37. This directory can be established utilising existing technology and will not require funding from the Covid Winter Grant.

Finance

38. A summary of the proposed funding across the initiatives to be delivered through the Connect4Communities scheme is set out in table 1:

Table 1

Connect4Communities – Hampshire’s Winter Grant Scheme	
Component	Funding Allocation
Meal Vouchers £15 per child per week for: All FSM eligible children; plus All children open to a social worker; plus All children open to early help; plus All post 16 students previously eligible for FSM; plus All 2-4 year olds accessing childcare and eligible for Early Years pupil premium children.	£1,560,000
Care Leavers Vouchers	£30,000
Young Carers Grant	£6,000
Discretionary Schools Fund	£290,000
Grant to Citizens Advice for Open Access to Individuals	£100,000
Funding for Community Pantries to include provision for 100 fuel vouchers per district pantry @ £20 each	£312,000
Food and Fuel Vouchers for partner agencies	£75,000
Community Grants	£100,000
Connect4Community Holiday Activities & Meals Scheme – February half term	£320,000
Purchase of slow cookers	£2,500

Administration costs	£100,000
Total	£2,895,500
Grant available	£2,898,702

Performance

39. All funding granted to third party organisations (including 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.
40. Third party organisations 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 13.
41. 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

42. 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.
43. School and colleges have been consulted regarding their preferred method of supporting children with food by way of a questionnaire.
44. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

Conclusions and Recommendations

45. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves the purchase of a £20 food or fuel voucher for each care leaver not forming part of the extended FSM cohort identified in paragraph 20, to the total value of £30,000.
46. It is recommended that a grant of up to £6,000 to be made to the Hampshire Young Carers Alliance such that vouchers and/or gifts and/or food can be provided to young carers not in receipt of vouchers through the free school meal voucher offer. Such grant will be provided on terms to be agreed by the Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 13.

47. It is recommended that a grant of £100,000 is made available to Citizens Advice for them to use to financially support households with fuel bills over the winter period. Such grant will be provided on terms to be agreed by the Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 13.
48. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves the purchase and/or granting of funds for the purchase of food and fuel vouchers to a value of £75,000. These vouchers will be made available to partner organisations including the Family Support Service, Domestic Abuse Services, and other agencies working directly with vulnerable households. It is further recommended that authority is delegated to the Director of Children's Services to determine the recipients and individual value of funds and/or vouchers distributed to organisations, in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 13.
49. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves £320,000 of the funding to be allocated for the delivery of Holiday Activity and Food Schemes and for grant applications to be invited to identify organisations able to provide such schemes. Approval of individual grants awards to organisations from this £320,000 allocation will be brought to a future Executive Lead Member decision day.
50. It is proposed that funding is provided to establish and support community pantries across Hampshire and approval is sought from the Executive Lead Member to delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to approve grant awards to organisations for the delivery of such schemes, in accordance with the criteria set out in paragraphs 28 and 29, and in consultation with the Executive Lead Member up to the total value of £312,000.
51. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services to approve community grant awards to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant (as set out in paragraph 13) for targeted financial support for those in need over winter in consultation with the Executive Lead Member up to the total value of £100,000.
52. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member delegates approval to the Director of Children's Services to approve the reallocation of any COVID Winter Grants remaining or underspent funds to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant set out in paragraph 13 in consultation with the Executive Lead Member.

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
OR	

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

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

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

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

Name of accountable officer (required): Suzanne Smith

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

Department (required): Children's Services

Date of assessment (required): 27/11/2020

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

Describe the current service or policy:

The DWP COVID Winter Grant will provide £2.89M of funding to HCC to support those most in need, with costs of food, energy, water bills and essentials. The grant 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. A variety of initiatives have been identified working with education establishments and local community partners to ensure households who are most vulnerable have access to food and fuel this winter.

Geographical impact (required): All Hampshire

Describe the proposed change:

The COVID Winter Grant is aimed at vulnerable families, particularly those with children and will offer financial support with food and energy bills this winter. Working with schools, colleges and early years providers, the proposed programme will deliver food vouchers and other financial support to a wide range of vulnerable families for school holiday periods between Christmas and the end of the financial year. We will provide direct financial support to households through Citizens Advice and other voluntary sector organisations working directly with vulnerable families and will establish a holiday activities scheme for February half term. Through grant funding, the programme will also support the development of community pantries and a range of other community led projects to meet local needs across Hampshire.

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:

After notification, a task group formed with representatives from major stakeholder groups including the voluntary and charitable sector, Connect4Summer leads, Adult Health & Care, Local Children's Partnerships, Supporting Families, Children's Social Care, Early Years and Wraparound Childcare, County Supplies & HC3S and Communications. A variety of other stakeholders have been consulted so existing local provision and need could be identified and minimise risks in respect of funding duplication. Other consulted groups include head teacher groups, faith groups and local resilience centres/hubs. The engagement created the offers under a programme name of 'Connect4Communities'.

Age (required): Positive

Impact (required): Children, families and individuals who are vulnerable (eligible for benefits, allocated a social worker or in a low income setting) or find themselves in hardship due to the impact of COVID 19, this programme, with signposting from agencies, will help to identify and help those people to ensure they have access to food and heating this winter, as well as other basics which may be identified such as cooking facilities, bedding or other essentials.

Disability (required): Positive

Impact (required):

Children, families and individuals with disabilities and who are vulnerable (eligible for benefits, allocated a social worker or in a low income setting) or find themselves in hardship due to the impact of COVID 19, this programme, with signposting from agencies, will help to identify and help those people to ensure they have access to food and heating this winter, as well as other basics which may be identified such as cooking facilities, bedding 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, families and individuals who live in poverty or are in need of food, energy and other basic items, should have more access to help.

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 2 – COVID Winter Grant DWP Guidance

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