

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Lead Member for Children's Services
Date:	18 October 2021
Title:	COVID Household Support Fund – Vouchers for October 2021 Half Term
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. On 6 October 2021, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) shared draft guidance and funding allocations for the Covid Household Support Fund with local authorities.
2. The expectation is that the grant should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, it can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.
3. Hampshire County Council (the Council) have been awarded £7,124,127.25 to spend by 31 March 2022.
4. The Hampshire October half term commences on 25 October 2021, and therefore an urgent decision is required to enable the granting of funding to schools, colleges, and early years education providers such that food vouchers can be provided to eligible families.

Recommendation(s)

5. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services approves the grant of £591,810 funding to schools, colleges and early years settings for them to purchase and provide one £15 voucher per child per week for the one week October half term holiday. Vouchers will be

provided for all children eligible for free school meals plus all children with a social worker, all children open to early help, all 2-4 year olds accessing Early Years Pupil Premium, as described in paragraph 13 of the report.

Contextual Information

6. On 30 September 2021, the Government announced £500m in new funding to support households most in need with food, energy and water bills, to be administered through local authorities via the Department for Work and Pensions.
7. Draft guidance was shared with local authorities on 6 October 2021. This guidance confirmed a funding allocation of £7,124,127.25 for Hampshire County Council, to be spent by 31 March 2022.
8. The expectation is that the grant should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, it can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need. Local authorities are expected to engage with District Councils and can choose to work with third party organisations including schools, food banks and care organisations.
9. Authorities have the flexibility within the scheme to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility and support is not restricted to vulnerable households in receipt of benefits.
10. At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children.
11. Since December 2020, the Council have received DWP funding through the Covid Winter Support Grant/Covid Local Support Grant to provide free school meal children (and a wider vulnerable cohort) with food vouchers during the school holidays. Vouchers of £15 per child per week were offered up to and including the May half term holiday.
12. The Council's wider vulnerable cohort includes:
 - All benefits related eligible free school meal children
 - All children open to early help services
 - All children with a social worker
 - All 2-4 year olds eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium
 - All 16-18 year olds previously eligible for free school meals
13. It is recommended that £15 per child per week vouchers are again offered to the wider vulnerable cohort for the one week October half term commencing 25 October 2021.

14. Based on data from July 2021, and allowing for 5% growth in eligible families, approval is sought to grant £591,810 of funding to schools, colleges and early year education providers to provide vouchers to eligible families.
15. Distributing funding rapidly for October half term in this way will provide essential financial support whilst allowing further time for HCC and partners to consider the most effective approach to utilising the remaining funding. A recommended approach for allocation of the remaining funding will be brought to the Executive Lead Member in due course.

Finance

16. The cost of providing one £15 voucher per child per week for the wider vulnerable cohort outlined in paragraph 13 is £591,810.
17. This funding will provide vouchers for up to 39,454 children.

Performance

18. 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.

Consultation and Equalities

19. In November 2020, schools were consulted on the approach to allocating the Covid Winter grant, and funding has been passported to vulnerable families through schools, colleges and early years settings for every school holiday between December 2020 and August 2021.
20. There are a number of independent meal voucher providers in addition to options to purchase vouchers from supermarkets directly, and the process for purchasing vouchers is not complex or time consuming.
21. Whilst some education settings may prefer the Council to allocate vouchers, they are invariably best placed to pass on vouchers to families they see frequently.
22. Further consultation is underway with partners, including education settings, about the approach to allocating the remaining Covid Household Support Fund.
23. An Equalities Impact Assessment has previously been completed for allocating funding in this way, with a positive impact on protected

characteristics.

Climate Change

24. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience impacts of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.
25. This decision is essentially strategic/administrative in nature and does not have any climate change considerations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

26. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services approves the grant of £591,810 funding to schools, colleges and early years settings for them to purchase and provide one £15 voucher per child per week for the one week October half term holiday. Vouchers will be provided for all children eligible for free school meals plus all children with a social worker, all children open to early help, all 2-4 year olds accessing Early Years Pupil Premium, as described in paragraph 13 of the report.

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

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
COVID Winter Grants	9 December 2020
COVID Winter Grants – Holiday Activities and Community Grants	2 February 2021
HAF Grant Recommendations	22 February 2021
HAF Grant Recommendations Summer 2021	8 June 2021
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