

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker	Executive Lead Member for Children's Services
Date:	25 November 2021
Title:	Department for Work and Pensions Household Support Grants
Report From:	Steve Crocker, 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 for allocation of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Household Support Fund across Hampshire. This report seeks approval from the Executive Lead Member for spend and grant funding to organisations in support of vulnerable households this winter via the connect4communities programme.

Recommendation(s)

2. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves the grant of £1,673,010 funding to schools, colleges and early years settings for them to purchase and provide food vouchers of up to £15 per child, per week for the Christmas and February half term. Vouchers will be available for all children eligible for benefits related free school meals (FSM), all children with a social worker, all children open to early help, all 16–18-year-olds previously eligible for FSM and all 2–4-year-olds accessing childcare and eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium.
3. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member approves the purchase of one £50 food voucher and, where appropriate, one £50 fuel voucher for each care leaver not forming part of the extended FSM cohort identified in paragraph 20, to a total value of up to £38,200.
4. It is recommended that a grant of £223,000 is made available to the Citizens Advice Service to provide emergency financial support to vulnerable 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 14.
5. It is recommended that food vouchers, fuel vouchers and slow cookers are issued to community pantries and early help hubs for distribution to vulnerable households, up to the value of £100,000.

6. It is recommended that funding of up to £525,000 is provided in grants to expand existing community pantry provision and to organisations seeking to establish additional community pantries in areas of need. Community pantries will ensure a sustainable source of support for food poverty is in place beyond the period of the grant. 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 14.
7. It is recommended that a total of £1,000,000 is allocated to district and borough councils for exceptional housing support which meets the DWP grant criteria described in paragraph 42. Such grant will be provided on terms to be agreed by the Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the DWP grant criteria set out in paragraphs 14 and 42.
8. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services to approve community grants to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant (as set out in paragraph 14) for targeted financial support for those in need in consultation with the Executive Lead Member up to the total value of £1,750,000.
9. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member delegates approval to the Director of Children's Services to approve the reallocation of any Household Support Grant remaining or underspent funds from initiatives set out in paragraphs 2-8 to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant set out in paragraph 14 in consultation with the Executive Lead Member.

Executive Summary

10. This report seeks to detail the proposed approach and offer for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Household Support fund across Hampshire. A key aim for the connect4communities programme will be to support sustainable and environmentally beneficial food poverty support. This will be achieved by diverting families from supermarket food vouchers to the community pantries where they will get an increased voucher value.

Background

11. On 30 September 2021, the Government announced a significant package of extra targeted financial support for those in need over the winter period. Guidance and grant determinations were confirmed on 5 November 2021.
12. The £421 million Household Support Fund is being distributed through county and unitary councils and is to be used primarily 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. Additionally, in exceptional cases of genuine

emergency, it can be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.

13. 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. Rather than focus on one specific vulnerable group, authorities should use the wide range of data and sources of information at their disposal to identify and provide support to a broad cross section of vulnerable households in their area. Support is not restricted to vulnerable households in receipt of benefits. Therefore, authorities should also use other sources of information to identify vulnerable households, including advice from professionals who come into contact with vulnerable households such as social workers and Supporting Families advisors.
14. The conditions of the Household Support Fund are that at least 50% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support households with children, with up to 50% of the total funding to other households genuinely in need of support this winter. This may include households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits.
15. Hampshire's share of the Household Support Fund is £7,124,127.25, to be spent between 06 October 2021 and 31 March 2022.
16. The Household Support Fund is similar to previous DWP funding from the Covid Winter Grant and the Covid Local Support Grant, administered by Hampshire County Council and known as the connect4communities programme.

Consultation

17. Stakeholders were provided with a briefing describing the intentions of the Household Support Fund on 7 October 2021 and were asked to provide feedback about how best to utilise the funding. This was followed up with a stakeholder meeting on 4 November comprising representatives of partner organisations including representatives of the voluntary and charitable sector, Adults Health and Care, Public Health, district and borough councils, Schools, Children's Social Care, Early Years and Wraparound Childcare, and Communications.
18. A variety of other stakeholders have been consulted so that existing local provision and 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 headteachers groups, Citizens Advice Service, housing associations, and family hubs/early help hubs.
19. The Executive Lead Member for Children's Services took a decision relating to the Household Support Fund on 18 October 2021 to approve the

distribution of £591,810 funding to schools, colleges and early years providers across Hampshire. This funding was provided so that schools could purchase and distribute vouchers prior to the October half term holiday.

20. Funding for free school meal vouchers was made available to:
- All children who are eligible for benefits related 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.

The Proposed Hampshire Offer

Free School Meal Vouchers – Christmas Holidays and February Half-Term

21. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member approves the grant of £1,673,010 funding to schools, colleges and early years setting for them to purchase and provide:
- a) One food voucher of up to £15 per child per week for the two-week Christmas holiday;
 - b) and one food voucher of up to £15 per child per week for the one-week February half term holiday.
22. Vouchers will be available for all children eligible for benefits related free school meals (FSM) and additionally all children with a social worker, all children open to early help, 16–18-year-olds previously eligible for FSM, and all 2–4-year-olds accessing childcare and eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium. Over 37,000 children will be able to access vouchers as a result of this initiative.
23. During the Christmas holidays, in addition to households having open access to the existing community pantries in each district, holiday activity and food (HAF) schemes will be in place, offering both fun and engaging activities as well as a hot meal to free school meal eligible children. The HAF provision will reach an estimated 8,000 free school meal families.
24. It is therefore proposed that families eligible to receive vouchers will be given the option of either a community pantry voucher, which can be exchanged for £45 worth of food or a £15 voucher for use in supermarkets.
25. As part of the connect4communities programme, grant funding will be provided to expand existing pantry provision as well as creating new community pantries in areas of need. These pantries provide a sustainable alternative to vouchers, through which additional wraparound services can

be offered, such as budgeting and cooking support. Furthermore, as described in paragraph 47, funding will be made available to deliver further HAF schemes in the February half term. As a result of the increase in sustainable support available to eligible families by February 2022, the value of any future vouchers issued through schools may be reduced to less than £15 per week - such value to be agreed in consultation with the Executive Lead Member.

Care Leavers

26. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services approves the purchase of one £50 food and, where appropriate, one £50 fuel voucher for each care leaver, to the value of £38,200. An estimated 380 care leavers will receive these vouchers, with the aim of supporting young people in the new year. Care Leavers will also be given the option of an alternative community pantry voucher, where food of more than three times the value of the supermarket food voucher will be provided.

Support for individuals

27. It is recommended that a grant of £200,000 is made available to the Citizens Advice Service to support the most vulnerable households in Hampshire this winter with their fuel costs. During engagement with stakeholders, it was felt that, when the initial connect4communities programme was set up, targeting this funding at fuel bills will reduce the potential for double funding with other grants available and asking Citizens Advice to administer the 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 potential risks of fraudulent claims.
28. Citizens Advice will require an additional £23,000 administration fee to implement the support. It is anticipated that over 1,600 households will benefit from this funding.
29. Individuals will also be able to access food and fuel vouchers through our community pantries and Early Help hubs. Each pantry and hub will be issued 50 x £20 food vouchers and 50 x £50 fuel vouchers to issue to vulnerable households who have not received support through schools. This could be the 'working poor', households without children and/or older people. Each pantry and Early Help hub will be provided with a supply of at least 20 slow cookers for households in need of cooking appliances, and wherever possible, the issue of slow cookers will be accompanied with cooking advice and support.

Community Pantries

30. It is proposed that funding is provided to expand existing community pantries to provide sustainable alternatives to free school meal vouchers.

31. Furthermore, it is proposed that funding is made available for community and voluntary organisations to develop new community pantries where there is need.
32. Approval is sought from the Executive Lead Member for Children’s Services to delegate authority to the Director of Children’s Services to approve grant awards to organisations for the delivery of such schemes up to the value of £525,000.
33. 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 than if purchased in local shops or the supermarket. 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.
34. Under the Winter Grant Scheme which ran from December 2020 to March 2021, £240,000 was distributed to establish and support 16 community pantries across Hampshire.
35. The map below shows where the community pantries are located across the Hampshire:



36. The existing community pantry provision will need to increase capacity in order to meet demand from diverting households away from food vouchers to the pantries. This will be supported through increasing existing provision, by opening pantries more frequently and also, for some pantries, extending the floor and storage space. The aim is to double the existing provision from supporting approximately 860 households per week (based on June 2021

data) to over 1,700 households accessing the 16 existing pantries each week.

37. In addition to expanding current pantries, the connect4communities programme will work with schools, the Citizen's Advice Service, Local Children's Partnerships and other community and voluntary organisations to identify further areas of need which would benefit from a new pantry. This will be informed by data analysis showing locations of Free School Meal eligible children, as well as benefits claimants. The connect4communities programme aims to establish at least five further community pantries in Hampshire by March 2022.
38. The aim of this funding would be to provide an alternative to food vouchers which diverts families to more sustainable solutions for addressing food poverty beyond the life of the grant. Furthermore, through coordination and use of surplus food that may otherwise be disposed of by supermarkets, there significant environmental and climate benefits to be gained.
39. Governance is in place to allow the programme to work effectively with the network of pantries. An operational group of pantry managers provides support and best practice and a strategic group with members from the County Council, food providers, the voluntary sector and other groups aims to ensure the future sustainability of the pantries and develop joint solutions to shared problems.
40. Furthermore, the network of Hampshire pantries will provide a network through which further support can be offered, and the intention is to work with the community pantries over the coming months to develop a broader support offer including health services, employment support and financial support and advisory services, funded by means other than the DWP Household Support Grant.

District Council Grants for Exceptional Housing Support

41. Following engagement with stakeholders, including Local Children's Partnerships, community and voluntary sector organisations and representative groups, the Citizens Advice Service, schools, social care (Children's and Adult Services Public Health and early help services, it is proposed to grant £1,000,000 of funding to district and borough councils to support households with exceptional housing costs, as identified within the DWP grant guidance.
42. The Household Support Grant criteria includes provision for support of housing costs, in exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need. The grant cannot be used:
 - For ongoing support for rent or mortgage payments
 - When eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) must be considered first, and

- Where there is a statutory risk of homelessness and therefore a duty of support is owed through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG).
43. Should further funding be required to support households with exceptional housing costs, additional grants can be made available to district and borough councils, subject to management information being provided as to the number of households benefitting from their original allocation.
 44. Additionally, should district and borough councils have local initiatives that they feel meet the criteria of the grant, and which do not duplicate other components of the connect4communities programme, they will be able to apply to the community grant fund for funding, as described in paragraph 45.

Community Grants

45. There is a significant number of agencies, notably voluntary and charitable sector providers and after school clubs, supporting vulnerable families, households, and individuals. There is 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 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 and use of such a grant fund will enable a flexible and responsive approach to addressing local needs as and when they are identified.
46. As well as being responsive to applications received from local communities, the connect4communities programme will be targeting organisations to deliver support to meet agreed aims which include:
 47. A holiday activity and food (HAF) programme during the February 2022 half term. The February programme will provide not only a hot meal for vulnerable children, but also fun and educational activities too and will be accessible to children eligible for FSM. This programme will build upon the connect4communities Holiday Activities and Food programme that has run successfully across Hampshire during the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays in 2021.
 48. An extended HAF offer over the Christmas 2021 holidays and the February 2022 half-term, to provide extended family cookery sessions, following which participants will be able to take home the food and recipes. This will not only encourage family interaction by learning to cook together, but also inspire affordable, healthy eating for current and future generations.
 49. Additional funding for education settings for families in need of extra support who either did not meet the criteria for food vouchers or are in need of additional food or fuel support over the winter.

50. An opportunity for schools, voluntary and community organisations to apply for food related resources such as mobile kitchens and 'edible gardens' to help support health food education.
51. Opportunities for Community Pantries to extend their provision and deliver specific food related activities such as Christmas meal boxes and food deliveries to those who struggle to access the pantries and cooking lessons.

Specific initiatives to support the 'working poor'

52. Funding for early years and other providers that are implementing intergenerational projects with a focus on food, such as cooking lessons.
53. Working with charities that provide people who have no other means, with white goods such as fridge freezers, cookers or washing machines.
54. Working with charitable organisations to provide 'warm weather boxes' containing blankets, hot water bottles, heaters and/or flasks to vulnerable households.
55. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Executive Lead Member, to approve grant awards to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant (as set out in paragraph 14) for targeted financial support for those in need over winter up to the value of £1,750,000.

Administration, Marketing and Communication Costs

56. The DWP Household Support Fund guidance allows for reasonable administration costs to be funded from the grant allocation such that enable local authorities, and their partners can deliver the programme.
57. The County Council intends to use up to £712,413 (10%) of the funding to cover reasonable administration costs for all partners which will include relevant staff costs, web page design, communications and marketing support and administration costs of partner organisations.
58. This funding will also support coordination and development of the community pantries and alignment with food waste programmes and warm homes schemes.
59. The DWP is keen that a telephone helpline is provided to help signpost households to support funded through the Household Support Fund. It is proposed that the existing Hampshire County Council COVID Helpline is used for this purpose and funding will be allocated to provide additional capacity to meet the increased scope of the helpline.

60. Extensive communications are planned to ensure that a range of professional agencies and partner organisations are aware of the connect4communities programme and can signpost vulnerable households to the support being offered.
61. Furthermore, the existing connect4communities directory will be further developed so that organisations and community groups can publish details of any local opportunities or support they wish to share. This is hosted on the Hampshire Family Information and Services Hub:
(FISH: <https://fish.hants.gov.uk/kb5/hampshire/directory/home.page>)
62. This directory enables residents of Hampshire to search by postcode to identify where they may be able to access financial and other support including 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.

Finance

63. A summary of the proposed allocation of funding across the initiatives to be delivered through the connect4communities scheme, funded by the Household Support Fund is set out in table 1.

Table 1:

connect4communities – Hampshire County Council Household Support Fund	
Component	Funding allocation (£)
Meal Vouchers £15 per child per week for Christmas and February Half term - 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, Early Years pupil premium children	1,673,010
Care Leaver food and fuel vouchers	38,200
Support for individuals – Grant to Citizens Advice, Food and Fuel Vouchers and slow cookers in	300,000

Community Pantries and Early Help Hubs	
District Council Exceptional Housing support	1,000,000
Targeted Community Grant Fund	1,750,000
Community Pantries	525,000
Administration costs	712,413
Sub total	5,998,623
October half term spend	557,670
Contingency	567,835
Total plan	7,124,127

Performance

64. All funding granted to third party organisations (including schools, colleges, early years providers and district and borough councils) will be supported by a grant agreement setting out the conditions of the funding as well as reporting requirements.
65. 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 14.
66. Allocation of funding across the grant criteria set out in paragraph 14 will be monitored to ensure spend remains compliant with the terms of the grant.

Consultation and Equalities

67. Consultation and engagement have been undertaken as part of developing and delivering the connect4communities programme.
68. School and colleges have previously been consulted regarding their preferred method of supporting children with food by way of a questionnaire.
69. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

Climate Change Impact Assessment

70. 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.

Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

The carbon mitigation tool and climate change adaptation tools were not applicable on this occasion because the decision relates to a programme that is strategic/administrative in nature.

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.)

<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
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:

See guidance at <https://hants.sharepoint.com/sites/ID/SitePages/Equality-Impact-Assessments.aspx?web=1>

Insert in full your **Equality Statement** which will either state:

- why you consider that the project/proposal will have a low or no impact on groups with protected characteristics or*
- will give details of the identified impacts and potential mitigating actions*

Appendix 1 – Copy of the Equalities Impact Assessment

Title: DWP Household Support Grant expansion of the Connect4Communities programme

Description of the service/policy/project/project phase: The DWP Household Support Grant will provide a further £7.1m funding to HCC to support vulnerable households with costs of food, energy, water bills and housing costs. The grant conditions state that at least 50% must be spent on households with children and up to 50% can be spent on other types of households. A variety of initiatives have been identified working with our local community partners.

New/changed service/policy/project: The Household Support Grant is aimed at vulnerable families impacted by COVID, the reduction in universal credit and increased energy costs this winter to provide financial support for food and energy bills. 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 between September and March 2022. Through the grant funding, the programme will also support the development and delivery of a range of community led projects and holiday activity and food schemes to meet local needs across Hampshire.

Engagement: Stakeholder engagement we sought via email and through meetings from major stakeholders including the voluntary and charitable sector, Adult Health & Care, Local Children's Partnerships, Supporting Families, Children's Social Care, Early Years, County Supplies & HC3S, Community Pantry operators 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.

Equalities considerations - Impact Assessment

Age

Impact on public Positive

Rationale

Children, families and individuals who are vulnerable or find themselves in financial hardship, this programme, with support from signposting agencies, will help to identify and support those people to ensure they have access to food and heating this winter, as well as other basics such as cooking facilities, bedding or other essentials to keep warm this winter.

Disability

Impact on public Positive

Rationale

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, 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.

Geographical Impact: All Hampshire