

## HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Decision Report

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Executive Lead Member for Children's Services
<b>Date:</b>	1 April 2022
<b>Title:</b>	Department for Work and Pensions Household Support Fund – Vouchers for Easter 2022 School Holiday
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Children's Services

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#### Purpose of this Report

1. In the Spring Statement delivered on the 23 March 2022, the Chancellor announced that the funding for the Household Support Fund will continue to help households with the cost of essentials such as food, clothing and utilities.
2. As this is an extension of the previous grant, it is assumed that the current grant guidance remains unchanged. The grant should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. As per the previous grant agreement, it is expected that it can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs and that 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 not yet been notified of the amount it is has been awarded, however the overall Household Support Fund from April 2022 was confirmed as £421m, so should the DWP use the same funding allocation as the previous award, the Council would expect an allocation of £7.1m.
4. The Hampshire Easter school holidays commence on 11 April 2022, 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 for this school holiday period.

## **Recommendation(s)**

5. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services approves the grant of £733,560 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 Easter holiday. Funding will be provided to all settings who are more than two miles from a conect4communities Community Pantry and vouchers will be provided for all children at those settings 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 12.

## **Contextual Information**

6. In the Spring Statement delivered on the 23 March 2022, the Chancellor announced that the funding for the Household Support Fund will continue to help households with the cost of essentials such as food, clothing and utilities. The DWP will be distributing a further £421m to Local Authorities in England, meaning the total funding has doubled from the original announcement last year.
7. Draft guidance and confirmation of the award amount has not yet been shared with local authorities. However, the Council can assume that the grant conditions remain unchanged due to the reference to extension of the previous grant. Should the funding allocation remain the same as the previous awards, the Council could expect to be awarded £7,124,127.25, to be spent by 30 September 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. As per previous grant rounds, it can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs and 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 will be expected to continue to engage with District Councils and can choose to work with third party organisations including schools, food banks and care organisations.
9. Authorities are expected to retain 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. A condition of the grant is that 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 and the

Household 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 February 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 two week Easter holiday commencing 11 April 2022.
14. Based on February data, approval is sought to grant £733,560 of funding to schools, colleges and early year education providers who are more than two miles from a connect4communities Community Pantry such that they can provide vouchers to eligible families. 24,452 children should benefit from vouchers through this grant.
15. For schools who are less than two miles away from a connect4communities Community Pantry, £479,639 from the 21/22 Household Support Fund has been allocated to connect4communities Community Pantries to provide vouchers to eligible families. These vouchers can be used in supermarkets or the community pantry. Up to 15,083 children can benefit from vouchers through this route.
16. Settings within two miles of a Community Pantry can access vouchers or additional funding for any families whose exceptional circumstances prevent them from accessing the vouchers held by the Community Pantries. The process by which schools can access exceptional funding will be communicated directly with schools.
17. Distributing funding rapidly for the Easter holidays in this way will provide essential financial support whilst allowing further time for the Council 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**

18. The cost of providing one £15 voucher per child per week to all settings who are more than two miles from a connect4communities Community Pantry for the wider vulnerable cohort outlined in paragraph 10 is £733,560.

19. This funding will provide vouchers for up to 24,452 children.
20. The cost of providing one £15 voucher per child per week to connect4communities Community Pantries who are within two miles of a school for the wider vulnerable cohort outlined in paragraph 12 is £476,639. These vouchers have been purchased from the 2021/22 Household Support Fund allocation and will provide vouchers for up to 15,083 children.

### **Performance**

21. 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**

22. 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.
23. 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.
24. 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.
25. Given time constraints, a small number of schools were consulted on the approach for Easter for issuing vouchers to Community Pantries instead of via schools for those within two miles of their nearest connect4communities Community Pantry. There was agreement that on a practical level the process would work. Schools did anticipate some resistance from families to the change - families are used to receiving the vouchers directly and may be anxious about going somewhere they have not been before. For families that are unable to travel to their local community pantry, schools will be able to email the connect4communities team who will issue a voucher directly to that family.
26. Further consultation is underway with partners, including education settings, about the approach to allocating the remaining Household Support Fund.
27. An Equalities Impact Assessment has previously been completed for allocating funding in this way, with a positive impact on protected

characteristics.

### **Climate Change**

28. 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.
29. This decision is essentially strategic/administrative in nature and does not have any climate change considerations.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

30. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services approves the grant of £733,560 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 Easter holiday. Funding will be provided to all settings who are more than two miles from a conect4communities Community Pantry and vouchers will be provided for all children at those settings 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 12.

**REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:**

**Links to the Strategic Plan**

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

**Other Significant Links**

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