

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>COVID Winter Grant</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>3 December 2020</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Interim Executive Director Families, Children &amp; Learning</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Richard Barker</b>	<b>Tel: 01273 290732</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 The report outlines the allocation of Covid Winter Grant to Brighton & Hove City Council and its purpose.
- 1.2 The report seeks approval to agree for the partial use of the grant to ensure the provision of meals during school holiday times for pupils entitled to free school meals and others identified as possibly in need including those under 5 years old.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the Committee agrees to allocate approximately £0.320m of grant funding to ensure the provision of a £15 supermarket food voucher per week over the winter 2020 and February 2021 half term holiday periods for families whose children are entitled to free school meals or similar circumstances.
- 2.2 That the Committee agrees to allocate approximately £0.060m of grant funding to ensure the provision of a £15 supermarket food voucher per week over the winter 2020 and February 2021 half term holiday periods for families whose children qualify for free childcare places for two year olds, Early Years Pupil Premium and using the children centres' food bank.
- 2.3 That the Committee note the proposal to explore how families who do not meet the above eligibility criteria but need support can be supported via existing mechanisms and the use of targeted services in the city such as Amaze, Allsorts and Voices in Exile.
- 2.4 That the Committee note the proposal to explore how the grant can support specific initiatives over the 2020 festive period such as gifts.

**3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Council will be receiving a Winter Covid Grant allocation of £0.865m to cover the period until 31 March 2021. Local Authorities will receive the funding at the beginning of December 2020.

- 3.2 The funding is expected to be split 80:20 to support families with children and others. This is approximately £0.692m to support families. Of that allocation it is expected that the funding would be split 80:20 to support families with food/bills and other items. Therefore approximately £0.554m is available to support the provision of meals and bills for families with children.
- 3.3 The government announced the grant and linked it to the campaign for the extension of free school meals over the holiday period. There is therefore an expectation that free school meals families will receive a direct offer for support during the 2020 festive holidays and February 2021 half term. Funding will need to be distributed to ensure support is in place until the end of the financial year.
- 3.4 Whilst it is only children from Reception to Year 11 and those young people under 18 in school sixth form provision who receive the entitlement to free school meals the intention is to expand the offer of support during those school holidays periods to relevant children in early years settings and sixth form provision.
- 3.5 It is expected that the grant will be overseen by the Revenues & Benefits service with close liaison with Families, Children & Learning and the city's food 'cell'. Through earlier initiatives, the Government confirmed its commitment to support children whose families have no recourse to public funds. These families will also be supported by the provision of this grant in relation to food.
- 3.6 To provide a £15 per week supermarket food vouchers for all school aged children entitled to free school meals during this period would cost approximately £0.300m which equates to 35% of the city's whole grant allocation.
- 3.7 In addition, it is estimated that there are another 400 children and young people who could be expected to be supported through the grant whether these be young people in sixth form settings and children who are now being electively home educated. Whilst the number of children is hard to quantify, planning to support more children than currently qualify for free school meals will act as a buffer to mitigate against the impact of rising numbers of families becoming entitled to free school meals over the coming weeks.
- 3.8 Providing a £15 voucher per week for each of those children for 3 weeks (Christmas and February half term) equates to £0.320m.
- 3.9 The council is committed to also supporting families with under 5s over the same period.
- 3.10 Children attending early years settings are not eligible for free school meals apart from a very small number attending school nursery classes. Families on benefits with children under 4 can get Healthy Start Vouchers worth £3.10 every week to spend on milk, fresh, frozen, and tinned fruit and vegetables, fresh, dried, and tinned pulses, and infant formula milk.
- 3.11 The Children's Centre food bank provides emergency food for families with children under 5 who need this and supports around 130 families a week. The Food Bank was allocated £20,000 for the year as part of the city's Covid response to food poverty. There is around £9,000 remaining which will cover costs to the end of the financial year at current levels plus additional items at

Christmas. They also have funding of £10,000 from DEFRA funding for emergency items. This is being used to purchase bedding, cooking utensils, toiletries, nappies, and to stock the food bank with ambient long-life goods in preparation for Brexit impact.

3.12 Early years children whose families are accessing out of work benefits are eligible for:

- free childcare places for two-year olds. Some two year olds with working parents on low incomes and with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are also eligible.
- the Early Years Pupil Premium – additional funding for early years settings to improve the education they provide for eligible 3 and 4 year olds attending free early years places.

3.13 The following table shows the funding needed to provide children qualifying for free childcare places for two year olds, EYPP and using the children centres' food bank with food vouchers for the 2020 festive holiday period and the February 2021 half term. This table includes all two year-olds eligible for free childcare places including those who have not taken up a childcare place.

	Number	Cost/ week	Weeks	Total
EYPP 3 & 4s (95 attend school nurseries)	411	15	3	18,495
2 year olds (FSM benefits)	622	15	3	27,990
2 year olds other (working UC and DLA)	86	15	3	3,870
Food bank (may be some duplication - to be checked)	130	15	3	5,850
Contingency for additional children becoming eligible in January	200	15	1	3,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,249</b>			<b>59,205</b>

3.14 In total these two approaches would commit approximately £0.380m of funding to the provision of food. It is expected that the vouchers will be administered by schools for school age children and the Council's early years finance team for early years children. A small amount of administration funding will be needed by services to cover additional costs.

3.15 When this approach was discussed with the food 'cell' there was wide support for this approach and a recognition that if this is to be delivered before the start of the school holidays (18 December) then there is a need to act at pace.

- 3.16 The group also noted concerns about the impact on the existing infrastructure to support residents if the expectation was to use this to distribute support and large levels of funding, especially over the festive period.
- 3.17 Whilst working at pace to deliver this initiative, the council is keen to avoid the difficulties encountered with the nationwide voucher scheme for schools, run by Edenred.
- 3.18 Following a positive demonstration of a different voucher scheme, authority has been granted to proceed with its use in delivering the allocation of approximately £0.380m of food vouchers, subject to agreement of the recommendations put forward in this report.
- 3.19 A wide range of supermarkets participate in the scheme and families choose which to use when the voucher is received. Under the scheme unspent vouchers will be reimbursed to the council. It is understood that there is no performance-based remuneration from the suppliers to the scheme provider.
- 3.20 It is acknowledged by education settings and ourselves that support should stretch to those families who do not meet eligibility criteria but are in need of support. The remainder of the funding can be used to support these families via existing groups and mechanisms such as the Local Discretionary Social Fund (LDSF). This would include support for families with early years children who are not eligible for free school meals during term time.
- 3.21 Consideration will need to be made about how these existing groups / mechanisms could manage additional funding and the logistics of developing new grant payments.
- 3.22 One option is to explore using a grant system to also target support through some of the targeted services in the city such as Amaze, Allsorts and the youth providers – to ensure eligible families are reached who may not be linked into other systems / services.
- 3.23 Another option is to consider specific grants to BAME food banks including Voices in Exile for refugees and migrants which would be advisable to ensure reach into BAME families not known to or engaged with services.
- 3.24 There has also been interest in exploring how the grant can support specific initiatives over the holiday period such as gifts.
- 3.25 This funding could sit alongside the DEFRA LDSF winter fund. This DEFRA fund was already in addition to the established LDSF budget. If the remainder of the winter covid grant was put alongside it, the funds could be managed together, alongside other discretionary funds. This would enable a system to be put in place that would ensure the 80:20 criteria is adhered to.
- 3.26 Clarification is needed on whether the LDSF could administer any proposed grant offerings as detailed in the section above.

## **4 ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1 The Winter Grant Scheme enables Local Authorities to provide support to families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals from early December 2020 and covers the period until the end of March 2021.
- 4.2 There are few criteria attached to its use and the government heavily linked its announcement to the campaign of Marcus Rashford and others to ensure the provision of food to families in receipt of free school meals during the school holidays.
- 4.3 Whilst the provision for families in provision of free school meals seems heavily promoted there remains in the region of £485k to distribute in other ways and to other groups and this will be subject to further consideration involving stakeholders.
- 4.4 A number of providers offering food vouchers exist but the timeframe to engage with these to understand the process of distribution before the end of the school term is very short. Having had a demonstration of one scheme and the belief that we are achieving value for money officers will proceed with that provider should the recommendations in this report be agreed.

## **5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 The food 'cell' supported the approach proposed for the initial distribution of £0.380m of grant funding via supermarket food vouchers.
- 5.2 Further discussions will take place regarding the distribution of the remainder of the grant funding in due course.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 That the Council uses £0.380m of grant funding to quickly ensure the provision of food vouchers to families over the festive holiday period and February half term.
- 6.2 The council utilises the services of a third party provider to deliver the vouchers with the support of schools where applicable.
- 6.3 Recommendations on the use of the remaining grant allocation will take place to consider how this can be used alongside existing mechanisms such as the Local Discretionary Social Fund (LDSF) as well as targeted services in the city such as Amaze, Allsorts, youth providers and Voices in Exile.
- 6.4 Consideration will also be given to how the grant can support specific initiatives over the Christmas period such as gifts.

## **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The Department of Work & Pensions Covid Winter Grant Scheme determination provides an allocation of funding of £0.865m to Brighton & Hove City Council.

- 7.2 The conditions of the grant are set out in the report above and provide for some flexibility in the use of remaining funding after allocating £0.380m as set out in recommendations 2.1 and 2.2 above, which is consistent with the grant conditions. However, the grant must be fully utilised in 2020/21.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Nigel Manvell*

*Date: 25/11/2020*

Legal Implications:

- 7.3 The Council will need to ensure that the grant funding is allocated in accordance with the terms of the Covid Winter Grant funding agreement and – subject to that agreement – is able to organise the distribution as set out in this report.

*Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert*

*Date: 25/11/20*

Equalities Implications:

- 7.4 No EIA has been carried out, the grant has been introduced with broad explanation from government as to its purpose and the council is working to consider how it can provide discretionary funding beyond the provision of food vouchers to families as explained in the report.
- 7.5 Additional recommendations will be made in due course and may be subject to an EIA.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.6 The wide range of supermarkets participating in the voucher scheme should ensure families travel is minimised and avoid the potential of excessive food waste.

Brexit Implications:

- 7.7 There are no Brexit implications in relation to the recommendations in this report.

Public Health Implications:

- 7.7 The recommendations seek to ensure families who are entitled to free school meals are supported to provide food during the Christmas and February half term school holidays.