

# NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## EXECUTIVE

9<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2021

### COVID WINTER GRANT SCHEME

#### Report of the Corporate Director for Children & Young People's Service

#### 1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To set out, and seek approval for, the final deployment of the Covid Winter Grant allocation to support vulnerable households and families with children affected by the pandemic.

#### 2.0 Background

- 2.1 On 8 November 2020, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced £170m ring-fenced funding for targeted financial support for vulnerable households and families with children affected by the pandemic and in need over the winter period. This includes families who normally have access to Free School Meals during term time. Local authorities received further details, including individual LA allocations, on 11 November 2020. DWP issued specific scheme guidance on 19 November 2020.
- 2.2 North Yorkshire County Council will receive an allocation of £1,435,400.85. The late announcement meant that prompt action was necessary to deliver the scheme by early December 2020.
- 2.3 On 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020, the Chief Executive approved a local eligibility framework. The objective of the scheme was delivered through a range of grant payments to schools and academies, early years' providers and post-16 schools and colleges. Funding allocations were also made to support eligible Care Leavers and through the North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF).
- 2.4 Financial modelling included the period from early December 2020 through to end-March 2021, as follows:
- 2 non-term time weeks at Christmas
  - 1 non-term time week at February half-term
  - 3 days of the Easter holidays
- 2.5 Schools and academies, early years providers and post-16 schools and colleges were provided with an allocation based on free school meal or pupil premium data with **up to 20%** additional grant payments enabling them to use discretion to support more families based on an understanding of pupils and their families. Payments were also made to care leavers living independently or semi-independently, care leavers living in supported lodgings and those living in independent emergency accommodation. Payments were made through supermarket vouchers (£20 per week). In total, up to an estimated 17,800 individuals could stand to benefit from the scheme.
- 2.6 Initial payments for the two-week Christmas period were made in early December to enable partner organisations to distribute the vouchers before the end of term. The local eligibility

framework was slightly amended to provide supermarket vouchers at £15 per week to cover the equivalent of 1 week at February half-term. The local eligibility framework retained the 'up to 20% discretionary element' so that those families identified over Christmas can continue to benefit over February half-term.

- 2.7 The original decision for the local eligibility framework, primarily dealing with the Christmas 2020 period, was made by the Chief Executive who, in cases of emergency, has delegated decision-making power in the Officers' Delegation Scheme in the Council's Constitution, to take any decision that could be taken by the Council, the Executive or a committee. The decision was treated under the blanket consent notice covering the Special Urgency Procedure and being exempt from call in where timescales do not permit observance of the usual access to information timescales. These consents were published in the blanket exemptions notice dated 27 April 2020. Following review of the scheme following the Christmas period, a change to the amount allocated per week in relation to February half-term was made by the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service in conjunction with the Assistant Director – Strategic Resources under delegated decision-making powers from the Chief Executive. This final deployment of the Covid Winter Grant Scheme is brought to Executive for consideration and approval.

### **3.0 Proposed Approach to Easter**

- 3.1 The local authority has clarified statements from the Department for Work and Pensions, and has a better understanding of the proposed Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme (a successor scheme operated by the Department for Education) due to start from 1 April 2021 which have informed these proposals.
- 3.2 The Covid Winter Grant Scheme ceases on 31 March 2021 (3 days into the Easter holidays) although DWP has helpfully indicated that as long as the funding is spent by the LA, recipients will have until end-April to use the voucher. In addition, the DfE are strongly discouraging the use of food vouchers in relation to the Holiday Food and Activities (HAF) programme.
- 3.3 In order to provide a coherent offer for recipients/ residents, it is proposed to provide supermarket vouchers at £15 per week to cover two weeks at Easter. It is intended that all vouchers will be distributed prior to 31 March 2021 (before the school terms ends for the Easter break). It is intended to retain the 'up to 20% discretionary element' so that those families identified over Christmas can continue to benefit over February half-term and Easter.

### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The financial modelling shows that by adopting this approach, the LA will potentially exceed the dedicated DfE grant funding by £147.8k (with no transfer to NYLAF) although the LA also has additional available grant for vulnerable people that is able to be deployed against this sum. The cost of the scheme has been included in the Q3 directorate forecast. The approach provides clarity for recipients. It also means that the HAF programme over Easter can be arranged knowing that families are already supported with food vouchers.
- 4.2 Based on the revised financial modelling, indicative allocations are:

<b>Description</b>	<b>Total Christmas Allocation</b>	<b>February Half-term (1 week)</b>	<b>Estimated Cost for Easter (2weeks)</b>	<b>Potential Number of Recipients</b>	<b>Total</b>

Schools and Academies (Reception – Y11)	£597,420	£223,630	£447,300	14,900	£1,268,350
Early Years Providers	£75,240	£24,860	£65,280	1,780	£165,380
Schools and Academies (Post-16)	£36,760	£13,755	£27,510	920	£78,025
Care Leavers	£9,480	£3,315	£6,630	220	£19,425
Admin Fees for parts (a),(b),(c)	£16,890	£17,410	£17,780	-	£52,080
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£735,790</b>	<b>£282,970</b>	<b>£564,500</b>	<b>17,820</b>	<b>£1,583,260</b>

4.3 The financial modelling includes allocations up to an additional 20% for schools, academies, colleges and early years' providers to use discretion to deploy vouchers to vulnerable households and families with children.

4.4 Payments will be made in mid-March prior to the end of Spring term. Following on from the scheme over Christmas and February half-term, it is anticipated that schools, academies, colleges and early years' providers will have experience of organising, purchasing and deploying vouchers.

## 5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 The legal implications have been mentioned earlier in this report.

## 6.0 Equalities Implications

6.1 The Department for Work and Pensions has undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment on the national scheme. For the local implementation of the scheme in North Yorkshire, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) form has been undertaken and can be found at **Appendix 1**. There has been no change in the proposed eligibility for the scheme – the financial modelling has changed the duration and rate but overall, recipients of the scheme will receive a higher level of support.

## 7.0 Communication Implications

7.1 Information on the scheme, conditions of grant and monitoring forms will be provided to schools and academies through the normal communication channels. Early Years providers will be contacted directly by letter.

7.2 In addition to press releases, details of the scheme will be communicated through social media including: LinkedIn, twitter.

## 8.0 Risk Management Implications

8.1 As only the rate and duration of the financial modelling is proposed to change, the risk management implications remain unchanged from those identified in the 26 November 2020 report.

## **9.0 Recommendation**

9.1 It is recommended that Executive:

(i) approve the deployment of funding to schools, academies, colleges and early years' providers to provide supermarket vouchers totalling £15 per week for 2 weeks prior to the start of the Easter break.

(ii) approve the allocation of supermarket vouchers totalling £15 per week for 2 weeks for eligible care leavers prior to the start of the Easter break.

**STUART CARLTON**

**Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Services**

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### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1 – Equalities Impact Assessment