

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE

CORPORATE DIRECTOR DECISION

29TH APRIL 2021

COVID LOCAL SUPPORT GRANT

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To set out, and seek approval for, the deployment of the Covid Local Support 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 Covid Winter Grant funding for targeted financial support for vulnerable households and families with children affected by the pandemic and in need over the winter period to 31st March 2021. This included 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. On the 4th March 2021, a further notification was received from DWP announcing an extension of the Covid Winter Grant to provide support for the full two week Easter 2021 school holiday period rather just the initial 3 days of the holiday period to the 31st March 2021.
- 2.2 North Yorkshire County Council received an allocation of £1,435,400.85 through the original Grant and a further £499,013 through the Grant extension.
- 2.3 On 26th 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). The final deployment of the Covid Winter Grant was reported to the Executive on the 9th March 2021.
- 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 local understanding of the needs 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. In total, up to an estimated 17,800 individuals have benefited from the scheme over the three school holiday periods.

2.6 Covid Winter Grant payment allocations have been made for each school holiday period on the following basis:

- Christmas 2020 (2 weeks) - £20 per week per eligible child
- February 2021 half term (1 week) - £15 per week per eligible child
- Easter 2021 (2 weeks) - £15 per week per eligible child + £20 one off allocation per eligible child.

The Local Authority did not make any initial provision to retain funds for the administration of the Covid Winter Grant. However, any unspent funds, after all allocations have been made, will be requested to be retained by the Local Authority as a contribution towards the cost of administering the Grant.

3.0 Covid Local Support Grant

3.1 On the 14th April 2021, the DWP announced a further extension of the Covid grant support for vulnerable families through the Covid Local Support Grant (CLSG). The funding will continue until 20 June 2021, with a further £40 million of support provided nationally. North Yorkshire County Council will receive a funding allocation of £337,741.

3.2 The CLSG has the same eligibility criteria as the previous Covid Winter Grant Scheme.

3.3 It is proposed that the CLSG support is continued on the same basis as the Covid Winter Grant and supermarket vouchers at £15 per week per eligible child are provided to cover the one week of the Summer 2021 half term school holiday. It is intended that all vouchers will be distributed prior to 28th May 2021 (before the end of school half term prior to the school holiday period). It is intended to retain the 'up to 20% discretionary element' so that those families identified over the previous holiday periods can continue to benefit over the Summer 2021 half term. The estimated cost of the funding support is £293,235.

3.4 The funding balance remaining after making provision for the support detailed in section 3.3 above equates to £44.5k. It is proposed to allocate £25k of the remaining balance to the North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF) for the provision of support to vulnerable families and individuals who fall outside of the main distribution of the Grant. The remainder (approx. £19.5k), will be retained by the Local Authority as a contribution towards the Grant administration costs.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 Financial modelling has been undertaken; indicative funding allocations are as follows:

| Description | Estimated Cost for Summer Half Term (1 week) | Potential Number of Recipients |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| Schools and Academies (Reception – Y11) | £229,140 | 15,300 |
| Early Years Providers | £32,640 | 2,180 |
| Schools and Academies (Post-16) | £10,260 | 680 |

| | | |
|---|-----------------|---------------|
| Care Leavers | £3,315 | 220 |
| Admin Fees for Third Party Distributors | £17,880 | - |
| North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF) | £25,000 | |
| NYCC Administration Cost | £19,506 | |
| TOTAL | £337,741 | 18,380 |

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-May prior to the end of the Summer half term. Following the Covid Winter Grant process, 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 There are no legal implications identified for 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 Covid support scheme in North Yorkshire, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) form has been completed. There has been no change in the proposed eligibility for the scheme – the financial modelling has changed the duration and rate in response to the CLSG funding allocation.

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 The local authority will transfer cash funding to schools, academies and early years providers as a grant. This will be accompanied by conditions of grant which stipulate how the grant scheme should be administered. To reduce the risk of fraud, schools will be required to buy and distribute supermarket vouchers rather than cash or hampers. Schools, academies and early years' providers will be required to complete and return a monitoring form to the local authority. In addition, they will be required to maintain an audit log of recipients for audit purposes. It will be made clear in the conditions of grant that the local authority reserves the right to inspect records on the distribution of grant funding.

- 8.2 The local authority seeks to receive monitoring forms from schools, academies and early years' providers very quickly following the half term holiday period in order to evaluate the grant scheme. Given that there are up to 1,000 organisations that range from 1,500 pupil secondary schools to 20 pupil primary schools and from multi-setting day nurseries through to individual childminders, there may be some non-response or late returns. The local authority will put in place arrangements to chase up on returns prior to, and following, the Summer half term holiday period.

9.0 Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Director - Children and Young People's Services:

(i) approves the deployment of funding to schools, academies, colleges and early years' providers to provide supermarket vouchers totalling £15 per week for 1 week prior to the start of the Summer half term break.

(ii) approves the allocation of supermarket vouchers totalling £15 per week for 1 weeks for eligible care leavers prior to the start of the Summer half term break.

(iii) approves the allocation of £25,000 to NYLAF for the provision of support to vulnerable families and individuals who fall outside of the main distribution of the Grant

(iv) approves the retention of any remaining funding balance on the Grant, after the distribution of voucher support, by NYCC as a contribution towards Grant administration costs. The remaining funding balance is currently estimated to be £19.5k (approx. 5% of Grant funding).

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