

Record of decision taken under delegated powers by a council officer



Title:	Surrey County Council Response to Covid: COVID Winter Support Grant Extension
Divisions Affected:	All divisions
Key Decision:	Yes
Reason Key:	Affects two or more Divisions
Decision taken under delegation by virtue of:	Cabinet decision 31 March 2020 Min ref: 41/20

Summary

1. On Monday 22 February 2021, the government announced that as part of its COVID roadmap, the COVID Winter Grant (CWG) Scheme will be extended to the 16 April 2021, providing an additional £59.1 million of extra targeted financial support for those in need during the pandemic.
2. The CWG Scheme, originally announced in November 2020, provided £170 million to councils to support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs during the Coronavirus pandemic. The original scheme was due to end on the 31 March 2021 and this has now been extended to the 16 April 2021.
3. Surrey County Council was awarded £2.1m in the first announcement and was notified of a further allocation of £739k from the extension in early March. Funding is paid in instalments and dependent on the Council returning reporting on how the funding is being spent, in line with specific grant conditions.
4. DWP guidance on the grant is summarised below:
 - At least 80% of the grant must be allocated to households with children; up to 20% may be allocated to households without children or individuals. Care leavers up to the age of 25 are not classified as children for the purposes of this grant.
 - At least 80% of the grant must be allocated for food or utility bills; up to 20% of the grant can be allocated for other financial needs.
 - Local authorities may determine the groups they consider most vulnerable and the thresholds for support, however feeding children is a key aim of the grant. The funding is not means tested.
5. Proposals were developed and approved in November/December 2020 for tranche 1 funding, through consultation throughout the Council, with the LRF, the Welfare Cell and Headteachers.
6. Allocations for tranches 2 & 3 were agreed in early March based on further consultation and the positive impact made by the initial allocations.

7. This paper seeks approval for the allocation of the extension funding of £739,234.

Proposals:

8. There was strong support from school leaders and welfare rights leads for food vouchers for children in receipt of benefit related free school meals. They considered these a very effective means of targeting and distributing food support for children in very financially vulnerable households during the school holidays.
9. In addition, for low income families with children in early years (2 years old receiving Funded Early Education Provision and 3 & 4 year olds on EY Pupil Premium) SCC holds data on these children and can target support via Early Years providers.
10. The Council made a commitment to continue to support vulnerable households during the school holidays, including 1 week in February half term and the distribution of vouchers in March in advance of the 2 week Easter holidays in April. This was funded from the initial grant allocation.
11. It is proposed that the support offered to these families over Easter is increased, to enable additional food vouchers to be provided to support the purchase of additional meals, such as a healthy breakfast and/or a hot evening meal, providing extra support over and above the commitment to support families with lunches during the Easter holidays.
12. In addition, as was done over Christmas, it is proposed that we further support our Care Leavers with similar amounts by providing £30 per week per care leaver (so £60 for the Easter period).

Decision made

Decision made:

It was AGREED that:

The following allocations would be made from the COVID Winter Support Grant extension:

Children entitled to Free School Meals	£0.55m
Low income families with children in early years settings	£0.06m
Care Leavers	£0.04m
Available for food banks &/or VCFS	£0.09
	£0.74m

Reasons for Decision:

To assist those most in need of assistance with the purchase of food and other essential items during the winter months, with a particular focus on families with children, in line with the DWP grant conditions.

Decision taken by:

Leigh Whitehouse – Executive Director for Resources
Liz Mills – Director for Education, Learning & Culture
Becky Rush – Cabinet Member for Resources
Julie Iles – Cabinet Member for All Age Learning
Mary Lewis – Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families

Decision taken on:	17 March 2021
To be implemented on:	One-off payments to be made to the organisations/individuals, as set out above.

Alternative options considered

The alternative is to not accept the funding allocation from DWP which would reduce the ability of the Council to support those in the County most in need, particularly families with Children, of assistance with the purchase of food and other essentials.

A number of allocation mechanisms were considered, but the proposal above was deemed to provide the most impact and coverage across the County.

Summary of any financial implications

The DWP grant allocation amounts to £2,865,625.50. This is due to be received by the Council in 3 tranches, dependent on the submission of accurate allocation management information. Allocations were made to organisation/individuals in December and February with further allocations due by the end of March/early April.

Declarations of conflicts of interest

None

Consultation/Process Followed

Decisions taken in consultation with colleagues in the LRF Welfare Cell, the Education Cell of school phase council headteachers, the Surrey Crisis Fund, Twelve15 (SCC school catering), Surrey Welfare Rights Unit, SCC finance, children’s services, the virtual school, adult social care, schools relationships service and EMT, and are based on the grant guidance issued by from DWP.

Background Documents

Exempt:

Cabinet report 31st March 2020 setting out the council’s response to Covid-19.