

Record of decision taken under delegated powers by a council officer



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

Summary

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On 21 June 2021, the government announced a further extension of the COVID Local Support Grant (CLSG) to support vulnerable families. The extension covers the period 21 June to 30 September 2021, with a further £160m of support announced. 2. The COVID Winter Grant Scheme (CWGS), 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, in February this was extended to the 16 April 2021, with further funding of £59m announced. 3. In April 2021 there was a second extension, providing a further £40m of support to 20 June 2021, reflecting the timing of planned further easing of lockdown restrictions as outlined in the Government's roadmap in February. The grant was renamed the COVID Local Support Grant but maintained the same eligibility criteria and utilises the same reporting frameworks as the previous Winter Support Grant. This recent further extension continues this trend. 4. The £160m CLSG extension will be allocated to local authorities on the same basis as the previous CWGS, using the population of each authority weighted by a function of the English Index of Multiple Deprivation. Surrey County Council are due to receive £2,001,309.65. This is in addition to the £3.4m allocated in previous announcements. Funding is paid in instalments and is dependent on the Council returning reporting on how the funding is being spent, in line with specific grant conditions. 5. DWP guidance on the grant is summarised below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 6. Local authorities may determine the groups they consider most vulnerable and the
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thresholds for support, however feeding children is a key aim of the grant. The funding is not means tested.

7. Previous tranches have been used to provide support to the following:
 - Food vouchers to those eligible for Free School Meals over the Christmas, Easter, February half term and May half term holidays.
 - Food vouchers to 2, 3 and 4 year olds from low income families
 - Support to care leavers over the Christmas and Easter periods
 - Funding to meet increased demand experienced by the Council's Crisis Fund and to continue with the widened criteria implemented at the outset of the pandemic.
 - Financial contributions to a number of foodbanks experiencing increased demand as a result of the pandemic
 - Utility costs associated with Winter Cabins for the homeless
 - Financial contribution to VCF organisation providing equipment and clothes to babies, infants and school children.

8. This paper seeks approval for the allocation of the further extension funding of £2,001,309.65

Proposals:

9. There continues to be 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.
10. 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.
11. The previous support offered have provided vouchers to in excess of 20,000 children during the holiday periods. It is proposed that this additional funding is used to continue to offer this support over the upcoming summer holidays, with food vouchers of £90 per eligible child provided to cover the summer holiday period.
12. Recognising that there are other families who will not benefit from extra targeted support for children on FSM and that the Council continues to see increased demand and calls to the Crisis Fund. It is proposed that additional funding is provided to the Crisis Fund to manage this increased demand and continue with the widened criteria implemented at the outset of the pandemic.

Decision made

Decision made:

It was AGREED that the following allocations would be made from the extension to the COVID Local Support Grant announced in June 2021:

Children entitled to Free School Meals	£1.7m
Low income families with children in early years settings	£0.2m
Surrey Crisis Fund	£0.1m
	£2.0m

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 Rachel Wardell – Executive Director for Children, Families & Lifelong Learning. Becky Rush – Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources Denise Turner-Stewart - Cabinet Member for Education & Learning
Decision taken on:	2 July 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, of assistance with the purchase of food and other essentials, particularly families with children.

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 £5.36m, including all extensions. This is due to be received by the Council in a number of tranches, dependent on the submission of accurate allocation management information. Allocations were made to organisation/individuals from December 2020 to June 2021, with further allocations due by 30 September in line with the grant extension conditions.

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 31 st March 2020 setting out the council's response to Covid-19 and regular COVID update reports to Cabinet throughout 2020 and into 2021.
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