

Record of decision taken under delegated powers by a council officer



Title:	Surrey County Council Response to Covid: Household Support Grant
Divisions Affected:	All
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

On 1 October 2021, the government (DWP) announced additional funding to target financial support for vulnerable households over the winter months, to be known as the Household Support Grant. This new grant will run from 06 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 and totals £500m. Surrey County Council's allocation of the funding is £5,290,829.72, based on the population of each authority weighted by a function of the English Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The grant is provided to enable the Council to support vulnerable households with the cost of food, energy, water and other essentials. In exceptional circumstances of genuine emergency, the grant can also be used to support with housing costs, where existing household support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, but the main focus of support should support households in the most need for immediate and emergency assistance with food and bills.

At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children, beyond this, local authorities have discretion to determine the appropriate schemes for their area, based on their understanding of local needs.

Payment of the grant allocation is on an arrears basis and is subject to the submission of two Management Information (MI) returns to DWP outlining the authority's grant spend and the volume of awards for period 6 October – 31 December (due January '22) and for the period 1 January - 31 March (due April '22).

Proposals:

The County Council has taken a partnership approach to developing the following proposals. Working in consultation with district and borough councils and representatives from the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCF) to discuss the best routes to ensure that funding is allocated to those people most in need, as expediently as possible. The proposals pull together the contribution of a number

of organisations across the County that are in contact with residents known to be experiencing financial hardship.

The primary aims of this joint approach was to:

- ensure that the funding is targeted in a way that is as far reaching as possible, to identify those most in need of support across a broad demographic
- minimise administrative burdens and associated costs by utilising existing processes and established groups and support networks who already have a good local understanding of where those who are struggling with the cost of food and bills are and optimise existing knowledge and strengths in these areas.

The proposals are:

1. Continue to support the issue of food vouchers for those eligible for benefit related free school meals, during the upcoming school holidays (October half term, Christmas, February half term and Easter). This will include 2, 3 and 4 year old children with Funded Early Education Provision (FEEP) and EY Pupil Premium.
2. Support to care leavers over the Christmas period to assist with the costs of food and bills.
3. To ensure the Crisis Fund is equipped to meet the demand until the end of the financial year, taking in to account inflation and anticipated demand related pressures and to enable the extension of the level of support offered.
4. Distribute funding to specialist countywide organisations, that actively reach households in need of support with the cost of food and essential bills.
5. To provide some funding to foodbank/community fridges/food clubs to ensure they have enough stock of food/fuel vouchers to meet any increase in demand until the end of the financial year.
6. Distribute the majority (£2.8m) to Boroughs and Districts to utilise existing schemes, local knowledge and local VCF networks to target specific local need in their respective areas. We will allocate based on population adjusted for deprivation factor, which mirrors the DWP formula for the initial allocation.

Allocations given to VCF organisation and the boroughs and districts, will be accompanied by a copy of the grant determination letter for the DWP. It will be the responsibility of the boroughs, districts and VCF organisations to ensure the expenditure funded by their allocation is in line with the guidance that it is spent on emergency support for food and essential costs and that appropriate controls are in place to ensure eligibility of applicants/recipients and to protect against fraud.

In addition, these organisations will be required to return the necessary management information on how their proportion of the allocation has been spent. There will be an interim return due to the Council in January 2022 to meet the requirement of the DWP but also to enable a review of expenditure to date. The grants to boroughs and districts will be paid in two instalments, the second following satisfactory completion of the interim return to the Council in January 2022. Surrey County Council will reserve the right to reduce allocations given to boroughs and districts and re-distribute to other areas if spend is not occurring and the grant funding is not reaching the most vulnerable.

The grant to care leavers will stipulate that expectation that it is spent on food and essential bills such as heating and utilities over the Christmas period.

Given the timing of this grant allocation and the upcoming October half term, a previous delegated decision was made to allocate c£300k of this funding to enable the provision of £15 per child per week for each child entitled to benefit related free school meals for the October half term holidays, including provision of food vouchers to 2,3 and 4 year old children with Funded Early Education Provision (FEEP) and EY Pupil Premium. This decision enabled us to make the commitment and ensure communication to schools was made in a timely manner.

Decision made

Decision made:

It was AGREED that:

The following allocations would be made, to be funded by Surrey County Council's allocation of the Household Support Grant:

Food vouchers for children entitled to Free School Meals, including Early Years through school holidays (includes support for care leavers over Christmas period)	£1.96m
Care Leaver support over Christmas	£0.02m
Support to food banks	£0.20m
Support to VCF sector	£0.15m
Enable enhanced offer of Crisis Fund	£0.15m
Distribute to Borough and District Councils to enable local solutions to meet local requirements	£2.8m
	£5.3m

Reasons for Decision:

To assist those most in need of assistance with the cost of food, utilities and other essentials 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 Rachael Wardell – Executive Director for Children, Families & Lifelong Learning. Michael Coughlin – Executive Director of Partnership, prosperity & Growth Becky Rush – Cabinet Member for Resources & Deputy Leader Denise Turner-Stewart - Cabinet Member for Education & Learning
Decision taken on:	25 October 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 £5,290,829.72. The funding is due to be received by the Council in 2 tranches based on the submission of accurate allocation management information to the DWP in Jan and April 2022.

Declarations of conflicts of interest

None

Consultation/Process Followed

Proposals were developed jointly in consultation with borough and district councils and representatives from VCF organisations.

Background Documents

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

Exempt:

NA