

Cambridgeshire Holiday Voucher Scheme – 2023-24

To: Children and Young People's Committee

Meeting Date: 8 March 2023

From: Executive Director: Children's Services

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: 2023/049

Outcome: The Children and Young People Committee are being asked to agree the funding and allocation basis for the new Cambridgeshire Holiday Voucher Scheme (CHVS).

Recommendation:

The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Agree the scope and operation of the Cambridgeshire Holiday Voucher Scheme (CHVS)
- b) Agree to utilise up to £4m earmarked for this purpose by Full Council in order to fund the CHVS during 2023/24.
- c) Delegate responsibility for awarding and executing a contract for the provision of the holiday vouchers starting from the 1st April 2023 and extension periods to the Service Director Education.

Voting arrangements: Co-opted members of the Committee are eligible to vote on these items.

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Member contacts:

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1. Background

- 1.1 The Government announced in November 2021, an extension to its support to families and the wider community through the establishment of the Household Support Fund. This replaced previous schemes (Winter Support and LA Covid-19 Support Grant). To date there have been 3 rounds of the Household Support Fund.
- 1.2 The November 2022 autumn statement saw the Government announcement of a further £1 billion of funding, enabling a twelve-month extension of the scheme to help Local Authorities assist households that are financially vulnerable, and which might otherwise fall through the cracks. Government guidance and grant determination was received on the 17th February to cover the period from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. Cambridgeshire will receive an allocation of £7,162,849. The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people. The Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee will consider the scheme for adults (including pensions and vulnerable households) within the funding available.
- 1.3 As part of the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy, the County Council voted to earmark funding to continue the current level of support to eligible families for free school meals during school holidays in 2023-24. This paper seeks to outline how a voucher scheme would be delivered for the 2023/24 financial year.
- 1.4 This report provides information on the proposed allocation of the next round of Household Support Fund Round 4 (HSF 4). Committee members are asked to provide views on the proposed plan for spend and focus of the fund, and to endorse the continued development of the delivery model of household support fund.
- 1.5 The report also provides councillors with an overview of the Holiday Activity and Food Scheme (HAF) and the offer for 2023/24 which has recently launched.

2. Delivering a Voucher Scheme

- 2.1 We have successfully operated a direct voucher scheme for parents for the holiday periods from December 2020 up until the most recent round (October 22-March 2023). We have used an online system called Wonde to allocate vouchers with parents receiving vouchers by text and email.
- 2.2 In the previous round of the Household Support Grant, the following number of vouchers have been claimed or allocated –

	Number of Vouchers Claimed During October Half Term (£15 per eligible child)	Number of Vouchers Claimed During Christmas Holidays (£30 per eligible child)	Number of Vouchers Purchased During February Half Term (£15 per eligible child) *
Schools	17,687	18,235	20,116
Early Years	1,542	1,766	2,216
College Students	549	604	606

Other – children not on a school roll, EHE or independent school	198	207	252
Total	19,976	20,812	23,190

(* - these figures are based upon orders placed and we expect around 5% to not be claimed but this will still mean around 22,000 vouchers will be claimed in this round).

- 2.3 For college students, we provide funding and the money is allocated to students directly in line with other bursary / free school meal schemes they operate.

Eligibility

- 2.4 For the Cambridgeshire Holiday Voucher Scheme (CHVS), it is proposed we will continue to use the same eligibility criteria we used for the Household Support Grant. A supermarket voucher will be allocated to parents/carers whose child/ren meet the following criteria –
- Funded Childcare and Education for 2-year-olds under the income-based criteria (children aged 2)
 - Early Years Pupil Premium under the income-based criteria (children aged 3 and 4)
 - Free School Meals (children and young people aged 4 to 16)
 - Students in Sixth Forms eligible for Free School meals or for the 16+ bursary (young people aged 16 to 19).
- 2.5 In previous rounds, we funded all children in our schools regardless of where they live. This scheme will still allocate to all children in Cambridgeshire schools and early years settings. In each round, and in line with the national scheme, we set an upper age limit of up to 19 on the day the vouchers are set. We allow claims from eligible students up to 25 if they have an education, health and care plan and are accessing education. The new guidance is more flexible but we proposed to keep this criteria in place. We also don't fund voucher for children and young people in foster care as allowances support the holiday period.
- 2.6 The scheme will run alongside our Holiday Activity and Food Scheme (operating at Easter, Summer and Christmas) and parents can access both schemes. Details on our scheme for the next financial year are included later in this report.

Procurement of the Voucher Scheme Provider

- 2.7 The rules governing use of the framework agreement are being followed, with submissions from providers being assessed currently. The service area is receiving full support from the Procurement and Commercial Team. The vouchers will be bought at below face value, typically 99p in the £1.

Cost of Providing the Scheme

- 2.8 We are proposing that we fund vouchers at the same rates as we did for the 2022/23 scheme. The daily rate covers weekdays only (as parents would normally be expected to meet food needs at weekends). This gives a total rate of funding of £180 during the financial year per eligible child. The value of the voucher and the estimated costs are below.

Holiday	Funding Value of Voucher per eligible child (£)	Estimated cost (£)
Easter	30	641,790
May	15	324,075
Summer (split over two vouchers)	75	1,636,275
October	15	330,435
Christmas	30	667,230
February	15	336,780
Total	180	3,936,585

- 2.9 We expect the cost of providing financial support via college will be around £110k using the same allocations as above. We will receive a rebate on the vouchers of around £40k and we expect administration costs to be around £25k. This means a total estimated cost of £4,033,819.
- 2.10 We have assumed a level of growth in number and will retain a small contingency to deal with changes in numbers (early years take up is challenging to predict). Any residual funding from the Household Support Grant round 3 which will be applied to the vouchers purchased in March 2023 for the Easter break.
- 2.11 Any unclaimed vouchers will be refunded back to the council with a reconciliation taking place after each holiday ensuring that we can redistribute funding back into the system.
- 2.12 For each round (holiday period) vouchers will be sent on the last day of the term prior to the holiday. The council has direct access to schools' data so there is little administrative burden on schools.

Publicising the Scheme

- 2.11 We are planning to use the extended voucher scheme to encourage parents to apply for Free School Meals. This will mean ongoing support to the family but also additional funding for the school via the Pupil premium (for between £1,000 and £1300 a year) and via the national far funding formula (up to £700 a year). It is our intention to run a media campaign with each round of vouchers.

3. Holiday Activities and Food Scheme (HAF)

- 3.1 On 27 October 2021 the government announced a further investment of over £200 million per year over the next 3 financial years for the holiday activities and food programme (HAF), which follows the successful roll out of the programme across England in 2021. The government set up the scheme to support the pressure points placed on some families during the school holidays. For some children this can lead to a holiday experience gap, with children from low-income households being:
- less likely to access organised out-of-school activities
 - more likely to experience 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health
 - more likely to experience social isolation

- 3.2 The HAF programme is a response to this issue, with evidence showing that free holiday clubs can have a positive impact on children and young people, and that they work best when they:
- provide consistent and easily accessible enrichment activities
 - cover more than just breakfast or lunch
 - involve children (and parents) in food preparation
 - use local partnerships and connections, particularly with the voluntary and community organisation sector.

Additionally, in Cambridgeshire there is a focus within HAF on play provision to support cognition, creativity, physical development, and the social and emotional wellbeing of participants. Additional eligibility criteria include newly arrived refugees, families 'just about managing' but ineligible for free school meals (FSM) and families currently open to Social Care or Early Help Services.

- 3.3 The government scheme for holiday provision is for school aged children from reception to year 11 (inclusive) who receive benefits-related free school meals. Benefits-related free school meals (FSM) are available to pupils if their parents are in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits, and have a claim verified by their school or local authority.
- 3.4 Local authorities are expected to offer the equivalent of 6 weeks' holiday provision to eligible children over the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays.
- 3.5 Local authorities are asked to ensure that the offer of free holiday club provision is available for all children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals in their area, though it is not an expectation for all to attend as the provision is voluntary. Local authorities have discretion to use up to 15% of their funding to provide free or subsidised holiday club places for children who are not in receipt of benefits-related free school meals but who the local authority believe could benefit from HAF provision.
- 3.6 Providers must provide at least one meal a day (breakfast, lunch or tea) and all food provided at the holiday club (including snacks) must meet [school food standards](#). The government expect the majority of food served by providers should be hot.
- 3.7 We have undertaken a review of the 2022/23 scheme and appendix 1 provides this overview including feedback we have received. Our scheme has been hugely success with the Department for Education asking us to share our approach to how we approach regulation and safeguarding in HAF settings. We had over 3,300 attending HAF provision during the summer holidays.
- 3.8 For the 2023/24 financial year, Cambridgeshire has been allocated £1,874,650. The purpose of the grant is for local authorities to make free places at holiday clubs available in the Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays in 2023.
- 3.9 We have just launched our Easter scheme, with a letter being sent out to parents at the end of February. Details of our scheme are available [on our website](#). Our HAF provider directory [can be found here](#).

4. Alignment with corporate priorities

4.1 Environment and Sustainability

There are no significant implications for this priority.

4.2 Health and Care

There are no significant implications for this priority. Information is shared with parents on each letter about healthy eating and whether further advice can be found.

4.3 Places and Communities

- The funding will support the most vulnerable families on low income to support feeding their children during the school holidays.
- The process is means tested so we are targeting funding at the areas of greatest need.
- Through working through communities, we will create a sustainable model to support vulnerable families.

4.4 Children and Young People

- The funding will support the most vulnerable families on low income to support feeding their children during the school holidays.

4.5 Transport

There are no significant implications for this priority.

5. Significant Implications

5.1 Resource Implications

At its meeting on 7th February 2023, the County Council agreed to continue to provide the Cambridgeshire Holiday Voucher Scheme. This will mean that the County Council uses £1m of local reserves adding this to the nationally allocated Household Support Fund, a grant supplied by the Department for Work and Pensions in order to fund the costs of the scheme. Through the medium term financial strategy agreed by Full Council in 2022 £1m of reserve funds were allocated to post-pandemic support to children and young people. Through Full Council in 2023 these funds will effectively be deployed to this holiday voucher scheme.

The Children and Young People's Committee is invited to decide the terms of the scheme, utilising the funds voted by Full Council, through this report.

5.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

The procurement is fully compliant with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

5.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

Appropriate council processes will be followed to seek the exemption from Council procurement regulations for the voucher scheme.

5.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

Not applicable.

5.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

The scheme has been well communicated to parents and across the media. An email helpline has been operating since schools closed to ensure all eligible families are supported.

5.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

Not applicable.

5.7 Public Health Implications

Enabling families to have sufficient, nutritious food is essential to enable the Best Start in life for children and helps to support Public Health priorities. Our publicity materials and information for parents will promote healthy eating

[Change4Life | Campaign Resource Centre \(phe.gov.uk\)](https://www.phe.gov.uk/campaign/change4life)

5.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas (See further guidance in Appendix 2):

5.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

Explanation: Neutral

5.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

Explanation: Neutral

5.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats and land management.

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

Explanation: Neutral

5.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

Explanation: Neutral

5.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

Explanation: Neutral

5.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

Explanation: Neutral

5.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure, and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

Explanation: Neutral

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement and Commercial? Yes
Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal? Yes
Name of Legal Officer: Linda Walker

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User?
N/A
Name of Officer:

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?
YES
Name of Officer: Simon Cobby

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Jonathan Lewis
Name of Officer: YES

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?
Yes
Name of Officer: Raj Lakshman

If a Key decision, have any Environment and Climate Change implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?
No (28TH February 2023)
Name of Officer:

6. Source documents guidance

6.1 Source documents

HSF guidance:

[1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024: Household Support Fund guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024-household-support-fund-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england)