

Cambridgeshire Holiday Voucher Scheme

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 1st March 2022

From: Jonathan Lewis, Director of Education

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: KD2022/020

Outcome: The Children and Young People Committee are being asked to agree the funding, procurement process 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 £3.6m earmarked for this purpose by Full Council in order to fund the CHVS during 2022/23.
- c) Agree that the Service Director for Education may, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People Committee and the Head of Procurement, award a contract for the voucher scheme using the RM6255 for the Household Support Grant.

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1. Background

- 1.1 The Government announced in September, 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). The Household Support fund covered the period from the 6th October 2021 to 31st March 2022. The government is expected to end the majority of Covid-19 processes and support on the 24th March and we do not expect further government funding to provide support to families.
- 1.2 In the May, the Joint Administration agreement outlined a commitment to ‘*..maintain free school meals for eligible children during school holidays...*’. As part of the budget for 2022/23, at its meeting on 8 February 2022, the County Council voted to earmark £3.6m of one-off funds for the purposes of extending a similar scheme locally in Cambridgeshire for a further year as part of the pandemic recovery. This paper seeks to outline how a voucher scheme would be delivered for the 2022/23 financial year.

2. Main Issues

Current Direct 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 in February 2021. We have used an online system called Wonde to allocate vouchers with parents receiving vouchers by text and email.
- 2.2 Since the inception of the Household Support Grant in October, the following number of vouchers have been claimed -

	Number of Vouchers Claimed During October Half Term (£15 per eligible child)	Number of Vouchers Claimed During Christmas Holidays (£30 per eligible child)
Schools	16,158	16,803
Early Years *	1,632	1,926
Other – Children not on a school roll yet, electively home education or accessing an independent school	86	197
Total	17,876	18,926

* There was a slightly higher of number of children becoming eligible at the age of 2 due to the timing of the new term.

- 2.3 In addition to this, we also funded post 16 colleges for their students during these periods (October - £10,759 and Christmas £22,629).

Eligibility

- 2.4 For the CHVS, it is proposed we will continue to use the same eligibility criteria we used for the Household Support Grant and 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. There is however a challenge of Cambridgeshire pupils who access education outside of the area. There is relatively little cross border movement overall with exception being the border between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough where particularly pupils from Yaxley have their catchment school in Peterborough. It is our intention to provide vouchers to these children direct and we will work with schools in Peterborough to identify these pupils. We will also look to establish a process for pupils moving elsewhere across borders and those with eligible pupils with SEND who have education placements outside of area. We do not expect neighbouring authorities to offer a scheme for this period. An allowance will be made in the funding arrangements for this.

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.

Procurement of the Voucher Scheme Provider

2.7 As with the Christmas and February half term scheme, we are intending using the Crown Commercial Service RM6255 (established for the purpose of Voucher Schemes) to deliver vouchers to eligible families. This procurement is currently underway, and we would seek approval by the committee to delegate this decision to the Director of Education and the Head of Procurement to allow the Easter scheme to continue in sufficient time. The framework allows direct award to a provider. Although a direct award means a competitive process does not take place, which is not normally the Council's preference, moving to another provider would take additional resources and may delay the distribution of vouchers. The vouchers will be bought at below face value.

Cost of Providing the Scheme

2.8 We are proposing that we fund at a set rate of £15 a week for the holidays. The daily rate covers weekdays only (as parents would normally be expected to meet food needs at weekends). We have also assumed that we will fund 5 weeks in the summer holidays and fund all the bank holidays including the Platinum Jubilee. This gives a total rate of funding of £180 during the financial year per eligible child

	Funding basis	Proposed Voucher Value
Easter	2 weeks	£30
May Half Term	1 week	£15
Summer	5 weeks	£75
October Half Term	1 week	£15
Christmas	2 weeks	£30
February Half Term	1 week	£15
Total	12 weeks	£180

2.9 Based on the eligibility criteria outlined above, the total cost of this is estimated to be –

Area	Number of Pupils / Rationale	Cost £'000
Schools	16,803	3,024
Early Years	1,926	347
Other	197	35
Estimated Children accessing education in other LA schools	450	81
Discount from voucher provider	We expect to pay below face value for the vouchers as in previous rounds.	(35)
FE Colleges	Based upon take up in December	130
Administration costs	Expected costs of administering the scheme	20
Residual funding from Household Support grant	Applied to Easter vouchers	(100)
Contingency	For growth in FSM numbers	98
Total Cost		3,600

2.10 We do not expect demand to increase significantly going forward but we will retain a small contingency to deal with changes in numbers (early years take up is challenging to predict). Demography suggests that we will have a lower intake into reception year in September 2022. There is expected to be around £100k residual funding from the Household Support Grant which will be applied to the vouchers purchased in March 2022 for the Easter break.

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). We will produce new translated materials for parents and videos explaining the scheme and how it works. We will also run a media campaign with each round of vouchers.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Communities at the heart of everything we do

- 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.

3.2 A good quality of life for everyone

- The funding will support the most vulnerable families on low income to support feeding their children during the school holidays.
- The new model of support will help those most challenged families in the community.

- 3.3 Helping our children learn, develop and live life to the full
- The funding will support the most vulnerable families on low income to support feeding their children during the school holidays.
- 3.4 Cambridgeshire: a well-connected, safe, clean, green environment
- There are no significant implications for this priority.
- 3.5 Protecting and caring for those who need us
- The funding will support the most vulnerable families on low income to support feeding their children during the school holidays.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

At its meeting on 8 February 2022, the County Council earmarked £3.6m for the purposes of extended a scheme of this kind locally after the end of the national programme.

This utilises one-off funds which were supplied to the County Council by the then Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government due to the pandemic but without a ringfence. The County Council has taken the strategic decision that an appropriate use of the funds would be extending this support, as part of the local pandemic recovery, for one year.

There is no funding identified beyond the 2022/23 financial year and the intention is that this will be a one-year extension of the national scheme only, as without further national funding it is not viable for the County to continue the scheme on a longer-term basis.

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.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

Whilst it is normally preferable to run a further competition to ensure best value, the specific situation here is that there is insufficient time to run a further competition and that moving providers at this stage would incur further delay and cost to the scheme. A direct award is a compliant process under the framework agreement and the Head of Procurement has therefore agreed that this is an appropriate procurement route.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

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

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

Not applicable.

4.5 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.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

Not applicable.

4.7 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 [Healthier Families - Home - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk); [Change4Life | Campaign Resource Centre \(phe.gov.uk\)](http://phe.gov.uk).

4.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas

Not applicable.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Tom Kelly

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement? Yes

Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or LGSS Law? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillian

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Jonathan Lewis

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? N/A

Name of Officer:

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?

Yes

Name of Officer: Emma Bolton

5. Source documents guidance

5.1 Source documents

None