

Winter Fund and Arrangements to tackle Food and Fuel Poverty

To: Children and Young People's Committee

Meeting Date: 1ST December 2020

From: Executive Director People and Communities

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: n/a

Key decision: No

Outcome: To consider how best to use the £1.4m for Cambridgeshire, recently announced by Government to support the vulnerable including those on free school meals, pending the full guidance being released.

The £1.4m can be deployed to deliver additional support, across a range of issues including but not limited to food fuel and advice to those that most need it through the winter months and beyond, and to a wider number of vulnerable families and individuals than any scheme based solely on eligibility free school meals.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

a) Note the arrangements being put in place to support vulnerable families, children and young people at risk of food poverty in Cambridgeshire.

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1. Background

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals for ensuring that the £1.4M of additional funding allocated to Cambridgeshire County Council by central Government to provide additional support to vulnerable families and individuals this winter reaches those in greatest need.

1.2 At the time of writing this report, the full guidance relating to the use of this grant was yet to be published. Final guidance is expected on 23rd November. The proposals within the report are therefore subject to receipt of that guidance.

2. Main Issues

2.1. The campaign led by Marcus Rashford has without doubt caught the imagination of the public in its determination to tackle food poverty among some of our most vulnerable families.

2.2. The campaign has led to a series of donations to organisations tackling food poverty including by football supporters and private companies. Separately, local authorities have, meanwhile, needed to prioritise what action they could take, depending on whether there would or would not be funding and support from Central Government. Any actions would be complimented by the additional payment to families in receipt of Universal Credit that Government had already put in place.

2.3. Previously, additional support to families in receipt of free school meals was put in place by the Government for the summer school holidays. Government has recently decided to adopt a new more flexible funding approach for the Christmas holidays and beyond. A package of funding to support heating and food costs for vulnerable families and individuals has been announced as an alternative approach to one focused solely on recipients of free school meals.

2.4. This central government support is most welcome. Many local authorities would have struggled to prioritise additional funding to support the most vulnerable in the face of all the other pressures faced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.5. Local discretion means that we can ensure that families and others facing particular challenges can access support even if they are not in receipt of free school meals, which is a welcome flexibility. It is worth noting here that the level of funding provided by the grant is around twice the cost of providing free school meals for the period covered.

Winter Fund: Scheme Details

2.6. Final Government guidance will not be issued until 23rd November, which is after this report was prepared. Final proposals for operating the fund will clearly need to await final guidance before they can be confirmed.

2.7. We do already know, however, that Cambridgeshire County Council will receive total funding of £1.4M, with 50% being made available in the first tranche, a further 25% after the return of some management information in February 2021, with the final 25% being payable after return of further management information after April 2021. The information that will be required from Government has yet to be defined but is expected to be quite high level.

2.8. Funds are expected to be allocated with 80% going to families and 20% to other groups or individuals, and with 80% funding food and utility bills and the remaining 20% for other essentials. It is not yet clear whether there will be any flexibility in these allocations should actual levels of need be different from these assumptions. The expectation is that the scheme should be operational from 1st December.

2.9. Further guidance on the management information to be collected and definition of vulnerable groups is expected in final week of November. Returns will be required and the grant provided

will also need to cover the administration costs of delivering the scheme and providing the information required by central Government. The Council's s.151 or chief financial officer will need to confirm due diligence in terms of the information provided and appropriate use of the funds.

- 2.10. The scheme is expected to provide support to families in need who are also eligible to free school meals, and is also clearly intended to offer support more widely and flexibly.
- 2.11. Although further guidance on the definition of vulnerability is likely, it is clear that there is scope for local authorities to act in ways that will enable local needs to be best met. There is an expectation that local authorities will adopt a mixture of proactive identification of vulnerable families and individuals and advertising including through social media to encourage applications.
- 2.12. Government has already asked Job Centres to help signpost those they consider to be particularly vulnerable.
- 2.13. The Department for Education has said that further announcements about support beyond Easter 2021 will be made at a later date.

Proposed local operation of the winter fund

- 2.14. Utilising our cross-cutting Think Communities approach, we propose to manage the winter fund through the County Hub, which will work closely with the district hubs in ensuring delivery of financial and practical support. This approach has the benefit of using infrastructure that is already operational and resourced.
- 2.15. All schools will be asked to advise all families who have children eligible to free school meals that they are able to receive a weekly food voucher to the value of £15 as well as support with heating and other essential bills should they require this. The application will be through the Community Hub, by completing a simple form on line or paper based, this will provide the Hub with confirmation of their identity and consent to contact them and make the necessary arrangements. Schools will assist in completing the forms if needed. Food vouchers will be issued for the two week Christmas holiday period and the hubs will explore with families whether there are other areas of support they require.
- 2.16. We will also identify children eligible for early years' pupil premium and Post 16 students who are eligible for bursaries and families who have been impacted by Covid-19 and just managing. They will be signposted to the County hub to be triaged for appropriate support from the District hubs.
- 2.17. As noted above, this scheme is intended to provide a more flexible approach to support than simply focusing on families where children are eligible for free school meals. Many families who are just above the threshold for free school meals eligibility are also experiencing hardship. Others, including some single people, may also have vulnerabilities and so benefit from being able to apply for additional support.
- 2.18. We are therefore proposing to launch a campaign across the County to invite the following to also apply for additional help:
 - Care leavers;
 - Carers and young carers;

- Those who have no recourse to public funds.

2.19. In addition, our children's services will be able to refer families in need for support from the scheme.

2.20. Food support is likely to be provided by the district food outlets including food banks, and the district hubs will be provided with support to ensure that food parcels and fuel vouchers can be made available.

2.21. Hub staff will also ensure that families and individuals applying for food and utilities support are signposted to other forms of support including from Citizen's Advice Bureau. This might include advice around income maximisation, fuel tariffs and debt management, for example. The aim here is to take the opportunity to ensure that families and individuals who are struggling are accessing all available forms of support.

2.22. In developing these proposals we are making the assumption that the City and District hubs continue to invite anyone who is struggling due to the pandemic to contact them for support, as they have been doing, and to signpost them to appropriate agencies in their network.

2.23. While the level of grant is generous compared with the cost of funding free school meals, we will clearly need to monitor indications of demand in order to ensure that we have sufficient funds available to cover the intended duration of the scheme. We expect to operate the scheme in a similar way over the half-term holiday but will of course review arrangements based on the experience over the Christmas holiday period.

2.24. Depending on actual levels and nature of need, we may need to provide funding to particular groups in addition to the areas of funding identified above, providing this is in line with the grant criteria, which will be confirmed within Government guidance to be issued on 23rd November.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 A good quality of life for everyone

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic continues to cause additional stress to many families and vulnerable individuals. The ability to provide financial and practical support to those in greatest need will have a positive direct impact on quality of life for those affected most by the pandemic.

3.2 Thriving places for people to live

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

Providing support in this way to vulnerable families and individual's increases community resilience and so delivers improved outcomes for the community in general

3.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's children

- Children and young people living within families and families most affected by the impact of the pandemic will benefit directly from the Winter Fund.

3.4 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2050

There are no significant implications within this category.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- This is a government grant and any monies not spent in accordance with the guidance will need to be returned. Expenditure against the grant will be closely monitored in order to ensure that there is no overspend. The grant cannot be used to substitute current areas of spending. As noted in the report; Government will require the authority to provide certified details of how the grant has been used.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- A communications strategy is being developed to ensure that we raise awareness of the availability of support to those eligible to access the Winter Fund. This will include social media as well as more traditional methods of communication.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.7 Public Health Implications

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Providing financial and practical support to vulnerable families and individuals most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic will promote positive public health outcomes, particularly for vulnerable children and young people.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Roger Brett

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

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

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?
N/A

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?
Yes

Name of Officer: Christine Birchall

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Lou Williams

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health? Yes

Name of Officer: Dr Liz Robin.

5. Source documents

5.1 Source documents

None.