

Supporting Vulnerable Families during the 2021 Summer Holidays

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 29th June 2021

From: Service Director - Education

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref:

Outcome: To agree the allocation of funds to provide FSM for Summer 2021 in recognition of ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our most vulnerable families. Post Summer 2021 we will be developing an anti-poverty strategy that will consider how we ensure those families entitled to free school meals and other vulnerable families and groups have access to food and other basic needs, as well as support with debt management, employment and training opportunities.

Recommendation: The Children and Young People Committee is asked to:

a) Debates whether to refer the request for circa £1.61m of funding to the Strategy and Resource committee to fund supermarket vouchers during the summer holidays.

b) If this is agreed, the committee is asked to authorise the use of the RM6255 framework for procurement of vouchers and for the Service Director Education to consider the appropriate route for ensuring vouchers are distributed in time for the summer holidays.

Officer contact:

Name: Jonathan Lewis
Post: Service Director Education
Email: Jonathan.lewis@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel:

Names: Councillors Bryony Goodliffe / Councillor Maria King
Post: Chair/Vice-Chair

Email: Bryony.Goodliffe@cambridgeshire.gov.uk / Maria.King@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01223 706398

1. Background

- 1.1 Following significant public pressure, the Government allocated in the late autumn a new grant (the Winter Support Grant) to provide support to vulnerable families for food during the Christmas and February half term holidays. Cambridgeshire received £1.459m and the authority was required to spend a minimum of 80% on food, energy and water bills for household purposes (ring-fenced) and up to 20% for other essentials. It was agreed with the CYP Committee Chair that we were operate two schemes which were:
- Support with food – Direct Voucher Scheme. A voucher for a choice of 8 supermarkets was sent to eligible families automatically via an automated system called Wonde which was used by the majority of schools in Cambridgeshire. Each eligible child received a £15 voucher for each week of the school holidays (£3 per day). Those eligible for the voucher will be those pupils who met the following criteria:
 - Early Years Pupil Premium,
 - Children that access funded two-year-old education,
 - Eligible for Free School Meals ,
 - Students eligible for 16+ bursary.
 - County Hub – for all other families, an offer was made from the hub arrangements. We worked with the Districts councils and the voluntary sector to provide the right support for those that need it. Grants were made to support local organisations to make the right support offer. Over 3000 applications were made during the Christmas and half term and support requests include food, household energy bills, clothing, blankets, shoes, and white goods.
- 1.2 The Winter Support Grant was extended for the two weeks of the Easter holiday at a lower level of funding (£703,715). We agreed locally to continue our focus on the voucher scheme with smaller amounts being funded via the County hub. In May, a new grant was allocated to Local Authorities – the LA Covid Support Grant – for continuing the support to vulnerable families during the summer half term. Cambridgeshire’s allocation was £343,509. Again, a voucher offer was made to all eligible parents.
- 1.3 Currently there is no Government announcement on funding for the summer holidays and this is unlikely given the end of roadmap out of Covid-19 recovery in June. The Holiday and Activity Fund will provide some support (outlined later in this report) but there will be no direct funding for families and the reach of this scheme will not cover all this group. Around £1.646m has been spent in Cambridgeshire supporting families for these six weeks with around 110,000 vouchers allocated to date.
- 1.4 As part of the Joint Administration agreement, a commitment was made to maintain free school meals for eligible children during school holidays. This is in recognition of ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our most vulnerable families and a growing number of families who are newly eligible for accessing support. Post summer 2021, we will be

developing an anti-poverty strategy that will consider how we ensure those families entitled to free school meals and other vulnerable families and groups have access to food and other basic needs, as well as support with debt management, employment and training opportunities.

- 1.5 This paper outlines the financial implications of meeting this summer holiday requirement and the timescales for delivery.

2. Providing Support to Vulnerable Families during the 2021 Summer Holidays

Increasing Free School Meal Numbers during Covid-19

- 2.1 Since the start of the pandemic, we have seen a significant increase in the number of children becoming eligible for support through free school meals and voucher schemes. The table below outlines the changes in eligible pupils -

	March 2020	May 2021	Change during Covid-19	Pupils on Roll (October Census) Age 4 to 16
East Cambs	1697	2168	27.8%	13057
Fenland	2926	3722	27.2%	13716
Huntingdonshire	3546	4492	26.7%	24754
South Cambs	1821	2461	35.1%	23578
Cambridge City	2880	3655	26.9%	14224
Cambridgeshire	12870	16498	28.2%	89329

- 2.2 The number of children in early years setting accessing supermarket vouchers increased from 1,904 at Christmas to 2,321 by summer half term. We have also provided vouchers for those children who are not on a school roll or are electively home educated. We do not intend changing the definition of who receives these vouchers from that outlined in 1.1 of this report.

Costs of Providing Supermarket Vouchers

- 2.3 In previous rounds, we have funded eligible children at £3 per day over week days (i.e. £15 a week). The summer holidays vary from school to school but the published Cambridgeshire term dates which many schools follow have 28 'week' days (including the August Bank holiday for funding). Therefore, parents will be allocated £84 for the summer holiday.
- 2.4 Based upon the current take up of meals, it costs around £56,520 a day and this will mean an estimated total cost of £1.58m. In addition, there are post 16 students who attend colleges in Cambridgeshire which qualify under the post 16 bursary scheme. We estimate this to cost around £25k.

- 2.5 All figures will be reviewed and updated and it is likely the final cost may be higher due to new parents becoming eligible. Early years also has the potential for significant variability as the criteria for 2 year old funding is different from the Early years pupils premium (covering 3 and 4 year olds) and children will move up to the older category during these months. A cut off will be established to allow the vouchers to be allocated. The overall costs also allow for a small number of vouchers that are either unwanted or are not claimed. It is our intention to withdrawn unclaimed vouchers in October. Any refund would be made to the Council. There is an additional cost of administering these schemes and this will be around £6k for this period.

Procurement Arrangements

- 2.6 With the Winter Support Grant and LA Covid support grant, the Council has used emergency provision under Covid-19 situation to directly award to a voucher supplier (Wonde). We are unable to follow this route due to the current context. It is our intention to access a new procurement framework put in place by the Crown Commercial Service (CCS). Local Authorities can access a list of thirteen suppliers, including current providers of vouchers, but may find this scheme to be more flexible. Using this [RM6255 Voucher Scheme](#) will allow the Council to either direct award or undertake a further competition. The framework means the Council is not required to undertake a full OJEU procurement. The agreement is fully legal, compliant and in line with procurement regulations. This reduces procurement risk for and reduces bureaucracy in the procurement process. The framework could be used to provide vouchers other parts of the council including clothing, electricals and energy vouchers e.g. care leavers.

Holiday Activities and Food Fund

- 2.7 On 8 November 2020, the Government announced that the holiday activities and food pilot programme will be expanded across the whole of England in 2021. The programme has provided healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children since 2018. The programme will cover the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays in 2021 and Cambridgeshire was awarded £1.8m for this period.
- 2.8 School holidays can be particular pressure points for some families because of increased costs (such as food and childcare) and reduced incomes. For some children that can lead to a holiday experience gap, with children from disadvantaged families:
- Less likely to access organised out-of-school activities;
 - More likely to experience 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health; and;
 - More likely to experience social isolation.
- 2.9 This HAF programme seeks to address some of this shortfall. During the summer, we will be delivering in Cambridgeshire our second round of the HAF programme. Over the Easter Holidays, we worked with 30 Holiday Scheme providers and childminders and offered 584 places, 340 of which were taken up. The feedback from parents and providers was positive overall and we have used this learning to pull together an expanded summer offer. We

currently have 81 providers registered to offer places, with 1981 places currently available to book during the summer holidays. We have mapped provision against need to ensure delivery is where it is most needed.

- 2.10 Through schools, we have sent letters to all eligible families, explaining what the programme is and how they can access places. Parents can use the Provider Directory on the Council website to locate their nearest/chosen provider and book places directly with them. The grant we have received has enabled us to pay providers £112 per 16 hours booked per child. Under the Summer HAF programme, children are entitled to access up to 64 hours of funded provision across multiple providers.
- 2.11 For providers to register to offer places, they had to express an interest and then complete a registration form, clearly demonstrating how they were able to meet the criteria of the HAF Programme set by the DfE. We have run several Provider Network sessions and funded and run training sessions on food hygiene, play work, safeguarding and Ofsted registration. In order to support providers further, we are also offering support with food provision and the transportation of children to venues where we can, utilising Think Communities' knowledge and network of local food charities and community transport groups. Providers are expected to offer food to children as part of the HAF programme – the rule of thumb is meal should be provided for every four hours of provision accessed. All meals provided are expected to meet school foods standards. Support will be offered to providers where possible.

Timescales and Further Considerations

- 2.9 It is a hugely complex operation to allocate vouchers. Cambridgeshire term ends on the 22nd July and it takes around two weeks to allocate the vouchers which includes schools checking the allocations made. The procurement will take up to two weeks, so the decision-making process is essential. If a decision is not made at the Strategy and Resources Committee on the 6th July, we will not be able to allocate in time for the end of term.
- 2.10 There are a number of challenges that will require resolving prior to allocating vouchers and a further briefing note will be sent to Member of the Committee and wider Councillors once agreed. These include consideration of the current year 11 pupils that will leave their secondary school on the 25th June (where statutory education ends) and how to fund those pupils accessing education outside of Cambridgeshire including those in Peterborough schools.
- 2.11 At this stage, it is proposed to allocate two vouchers during the holidays – one at the start of and the other in the middle of the holidays. Each voucher would be for £42.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Communities at the heart of everything we do

- The funding will support the most challenging 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.

3.2 A good quality of life for everyone

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

3.3 Helping our children learn, develop and live life to the full

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

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

The report above sets out details of significant implications in 2.3 to 2.5. The recommendation from this report will form part of the key decision paper on finance presented at the Strategy and Resources Committee on the 6th July.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

The report above sets out details of significant implications in 2.6.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

The offer will be able all eligible families so there are no significant implications within this category.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

We will communicate to parents with letters, support documents and a media campaign to ensure parents are aware of their eligibility and how the supermarket voucher systems works.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

The proposal will provide a supermarket voucher across all constituencies across the county. Information will be shared with all Councils – both County and District / City if agreement to proceed is reached.

4.7 Public Health Implications

We will be including our letter advice to parents on health eating. We will also promote the Health Start Programme for children age 0 to 4 that allow parents to access a government voucher scheme for milk, vegetables and vitamins.

4.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas:

There are no significant implications within this category.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?

Name of Financial Officer: Tom Kelly

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

Procurement using the stated framework will be compliant, but to achieve value for money and to negate the risk of challenge, using the further competition route rather than direct award is recommended.

Name of Officer: Henry Swan HoP CCC

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 MacMillian

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

Yes

Name of Officer: Wendi Ogle-Welbourn

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? Yes

Name of Officer: Jonathan Lewis

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 response

5. Source documents guidance

5.1 Source documents

None