

## Supporting Vulnerable Families during the 2021 Summer Holidays: Updated Report

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021

From: Service Director - Education

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref: n/a

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 committee debates whether to refer the request for up to £537k of funding to the Strategy and Resource committee to fund supermarket vouchers and wider support to families during the summer holidays.

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# 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 COVID Local 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. From the Christmas allocation to the summer half term, around £1.646m has been spent in Cambridgeshire supporting families with around 110,000 vouchers allocated to date.
- 1.3 On the 21<sup>st</sup> June, the Department for Work and Pensions write to all Local Authorities to outline an extension to the Covid Local Support Grant for the period from the 21<sup>st</sup> June to the 30<sup>th</sup> September. £160m has been allocated nationally and individual local authority allocations were made ‘using the population of each authority weighted by a function of the English Index of Multiple Deprivation’. Cambridgeshire has been allocated £1,373,637.89 and the grant terms remain the same as in previous rounds.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 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.

1.6 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
<b>East Cambs</b>	1697	2168	27.8%	13057
<b>Fenland</b>	2926	3722	27.2%	13716
<b>Huntingdonshire</b>	3546	4492	26.7%	24754
<b>South Cambs</b>	1821	2461	35.1%	23578
<b>Cambridge City</b>	2880	3655	26.9%	14224
<b>Cambridgeshire</b>	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, which exceeds the level of the grant. 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.

## **Wider Support Proposals**

2.6 In previous rounds of the scheme, the council recognised that many family's needs went beyond the need for food and not all were eligible through the opportunity above. Therefore, using the established hub network, a wider offer of support was made available with remaining funding for the grant. This ensured families were able to access a wide range of support through the existing networks. This included funding to:

- Cambridgeshire's Local Assistance Scheme
- An allocation of funding to each district/city council to support existing local activity
- Establishing a direct award scheme enabling trusted community groups and district/city council teams to award food/fuel/cash vouchers to families in need

2.7 An interim evaluation of the Winter Grant Scheme in January confirmed the value of this blended model of support as a way of ensuring we can reach as many people as possible and support beyond their immediate crisis. Given the current context for families, it is still felt essential that the blended model is still available to support families and individuals with other immediate needs, including (but not limited to) other essential supplies/food, household energy and water bills, white goods, and boiler servicing and repairs.

2.8 Therefore, investment into different elements of the system will enable this extended offer to continue:

- Providing funding to Cambridgeshire's Local Assistance Scheme – provides information, advice and one-off practical support and assistance to people in Cambridgeshire
- Maintaining the direct award scheme that enables trusted community groups, district-based teams and Children's Early Help to directly award food/fuel/cash grants
- Make funding available to district and city councils (via the hub network) to rapidly support existing local activity

2.9 Based on previous demand, we estimate that up to £300k is required to appropriately support families.

## **Holiday Activities and Food Fund**

2.10 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.

2.11 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
- more likely to experience social isolation

2.12 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.

2.13 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.

2.14 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 4 hours of provision accessed. All meals provided are expected to meet school foods standards. Support will be offered to providers where possible.

### **Timescales, Further Considerations and Funding Requirement**

2.15 It is a hugely complex operation to allocate vouchers. Cambridgeshire term ends on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July and it takes around 2 weeks to allocate the vouchers which includes schools checking the allocations made. The procurement will take up to 2 weeks so the decision-making process is essential. If a decision is not made at the Strategy and Resources Committee on the 6<sup>th</sup> July, we will not be able to allocate in time for the end of term.

2.16 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 25<sup>th</sup> June (where statutory education ends) and how to fund those pupils accessing education outside of Cambridgeshire including those in Peterborough

schools. We are working with Headteacher and Academy Trusts to resolve these issues.

- 2.17 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.
- 2.18 Taking account of the cost of providing vouchers for all eligible pupils and the need for wider community support, the requirement for additional funding is below -

	£'000
Grant Received	1,374
Cost of Providing Voucher Scheme	(1,611)
Wider Family / Community Support	(300)
Shortfall for consideration of council funding	537

### 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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

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 or No

Name of Officer: Jonathan Lewis

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

Yes or No

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

5.1 None