

Report to: Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

Date of meeting: 15 November 2021

By: Director of Children’s Services

Title: Household Support Fund

Purpose: Approval to use some of the Household Support Fund (“the Fund”) to provide food vouchers over the Christmas, February and Easter school holidays to eligible free school meal pupils between December 2021 and March 2022.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lead Member is recommended to approve the proposed use of some of the Household Support Fund to provide food vouchers over the Christmas, February and Easter school holidays to eligible free school meal pupils between December 2021 and March 2022.

1 Background

1.1 On 6 October the government announced the Fund to support those most in need this winter. The scheme runs from 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. East Sussex County Council (“the Council”) has been allocated **£3,896,783** grant funding from the Fund.

1.2 The government have set out how the scheme should be allocated according to the following criteria: *at least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the Household Support Fund should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, it can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.*

1.3 The grant is similar to the Winter Covid Fund Support Grant and the Covid Local Support Fund Grant that were provided to local authorities between December 2020 and the end of September 2021. However, the eligibility criteria for spend of this grant are more flexible: with more of the funding being available for individual adults in households (as opposed to families with children) and funding for ‘wider essentials’ now included.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The Council is proposing that the Fund is distributed to households in need in a number of ways including:

- administration via District and Borough Councils and Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise organisations (“VCSE organisations”). A decision will be taken on this element of the Council’s proposals at the meeting of the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health on 9 November 2021.
- Distribution directly to vulnerable families and children via Children’s Services teams that work with this cohort. This includes young people who are care leavers, families supported by social care teams, and those with no recourse to public funds.
- To provide food vouchers to eligible free school meal pupils between December 2021 – March 2022.

2.2 This report seeks approval of the third element of the Council’s proposed use of the Fund relating to food vouchers, above.

2.3 The grant conditions permit local authorities to agree to offer awards to families in receipt of free school meals over the entirety of the school holidays. Vouchers can be issued by the end of March for the Easter holidays that fall at the start of April 2022.

2.4 There are approximately 17,300 eligible pupils aged 2-19 years old in East Sussex schools, settings and colleges that are eligible for free (school) meals. Under the previous schemes (Winter Covid Fund Support Grant and the Covid Local Support Fund Grant) the Council provided a food voucher of £15 per week per eligible child. The proposal is to allocate food vouchers of the following amounts for each holiday:

- two week Christmas holiday - **£50** per eligible pupil in recognition of the increased costs of providing food over Christmas
- February half-term - **£15** per eligible pupil
- two week Easter holiday - **£30** per pupil

2.5 This is in addition to the spend of £260,000 on food vouchers to eligible pupils of £15 a week for the October 2021 half term. This decision had to be taken earlier in October to allow for the distribution of vouchers for the half term. Allocation at these amounts will mean an approximate total overall cost of £1,900,000 (just over 48% of the total grant funding).

2.6 As in the previous schemes the Council proposes to use Huggg, the online voucher system for the distribution of the vouchers. This system allows schools, settings and colleges to send the vouchers electronically to the eligible families, or to print off a paper copy of the voucher. Feedback from settings, schools and colleges and parents about the Huggg system have been very positive. Huggg does not charge any fee to the Council for the use of their voucher system.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The Fund provides an opportunity to support East Sussex families and individuals who are experiencing financial challenges, including the provision of food vouchers to eligible children and families.

3.2 The Lead Member is recommended to approve the proposed use of some of the fund to provide food vouchers over the Christmas, February and Easter school holidays to eligible free school meal pupils between December 2021 and March 2022.

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