

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

Date of meeting: 26 April 2022

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Household Support Fund

Purpose: Approval to use some of the Household Support Fund to provide food vouchers over the May half-term and Summer school holidays to pupils eligible for free school meals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lead Member is recommended to approve the proposed use of approximately £1,106,700 of the Household Support Fund to provide food vouchers over the May half-term and Summer school holidays to pupils eligible for free school meals between May 2022 and September 2022.

1 Background

1.1 On 23 March the government announced the Household Support Fund (HSF) to support those most in need. The grant runs from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 and East Sussex County Council (the Council) has been allocated £3,896,783.88. The grant commenced just as the previous HSF finished on 31 March 2022. Due to the late notice of the grant on 23 March 2022 it was not possible to provide 28 days notice of this report through the forward plan. A decision is needed by the Lead Member at the April meeting to ensure that, if agreed, food vouchers can be provided for the May half-term.

1.2 The new round of HSF grant funding was announced in the Spring Statement at a time when energy prices and the cost of living are increasing. The Department for Work and Pensions have set out how the scheme should be allocated. The criteria has changed slightly from previous funds, with a new focus on pensioners.

'At least one third of the total funding must be spent on families with children and at least one third must be spent on pensioners. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the HSF extension should be used in a similar way as the original HSF scheme, with a greater emphasis on supporting households with energy bills. Food and water bills also remain priorities.'

1.3 The HSF follows previous similar schemes which commenced in December 2020 including: the Winter Covid Fund Support Grant, the Covid Local Support Fund Grant and the Household Support Fund (1 October – 31 March 2022). However, the eligibility criteria for spend of this grant has changed with a new focus on pensioners and more emphasis on energy bills.

2 Supporting information

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

- administration via District and Borough Councils and Voluntary Community and Social Enterprises, this will deliver the required targeting of support to pensioners and on energy bills
- 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 for the school holidays between May 2022–September 2022.

2.2 This report seeks approval for the third element of food vouchers, above.

2.3 The HSF grant conditions permit local authorities to agree to offer vouchers to families in receipt of free school meals over school holidays.

2.4 There are currently approximately 18,445 eligible pupils 2-19 year olds in East Sussex schools, settings and colleges that are eligible for free (school) meals. Under the previous scheme 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:

- May half term holiday - £15 per eligible pupil
- Summer holiday - £45 per eligible pupil

2.5 The cost for these food vouchers is a total of £1,106,700 (28% of the total grant funding). The proposal for the summer holidays equates to less than £15 per week. Other options were considered for the spend of the grant, including one which would have provided vouchers of £15 per week for the whole summer holidays. However, the proposed option is recommended because it provides more flexibility to target the grant funding in line with the updated HSF criteria including the increased focus on pensioners and energy bills.

2.6 In addition to the food voucher that eligible pupils will receive for the summer holidays under this proposal, they will also be able to access the Holidays Activity and Food programme. This programme will be running in the summer holidays and provides access to fully funded holiday provision and lunch for all young people in receipt of benefit-related free school meals.

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 HSF provides an opportunity to provide support to 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 approximately £1,106,700 of the fund to provide food vouchers over the May half-term and Summer school holidays to eligible free school meal pupils between May 2022 and September 2022.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None