



**Report of Chief Officer Customer Access and Welfare**

**Report to Director of Children and Families**

**Date: 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

**Subject: Department for Work and Pensions COVID Winter Grant Scheme Extension**

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Has consultation been carried out?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Will the decision be open for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary**

**1. Main issues**

- The Department for Work and Pensions has announced an extension to the COVID Winter Grants Scheme until 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021 (previous end date 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021). Funding has been allocated to local authorities across England.
- The initial COVID Winter Grants Scheme was first announced in November 2020 with Leeds City Council receiving £2,837,556.77. The funding has enabled Local Authorities to provide support to families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals with the cost of food, energy (heating, cooking and lighting), water bills (including sewerage) and other essentials from early December 2020 and covers the period until the end of March 2021.
- A key decision was taken in December 2020 to allocate £1.6 million of the original funding for the provision of free school meals to children living in poverty in the city for the Christmas 2020 and February 2021 half-term holidays. This approach has proved successful reaching approximately 33,000 children at Christmas and February. The additional allocation of £986,468 up until 16<sup>th</sup> April would enable the Council to provide schools with the support for the provision of free school meals for the Easter school holidays.

**2. Best Council Plan implications** (see the [latest version of the Best Council Plan](#))

- The Department for Work and Pensions COVID Winter Grants Scheme contributes to the Best Council Plan focus of tackling poverty and reducing inequalities, and achieving the council's ambition for a strong economy and compassionate city. The funding supports the Best City Priorities of Child Friendly City, Safe, Strong Communities, Inclusive Growth, and Health & Wellbeing.

### **3. Resource implications**

- Leeds City Council has been allocated an additional £986,468 from the Department for Work and Pensions COVID Winter Grants Scheme. The funding is to enable Local Authorities to provide support to families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals until 16<sup>th</sup> April, with the cost of food, energy (heating, cooking and lighting), water bills (including sewerage) and other essentials.

### **Recommendations**

The Director of Children and Families is requested to;

- a) Accept the £986,468 COVID Winter Grant Extension funding from the Department for Work and Pensions for 2021.
- b) Exempt this decision from call-in, in order for the funding to be used for provision of free school meals to children living in poverty in the city for the Easter 2021 school holidays.
- c) Agree to accept any further future funding allocated from Government for the provision of free school meals for school holiday periods for children eligible for free school meals and/ or living in poverty.

### **1. Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to accept an additional £986,468 of COVID Winter Grants Scheme funding from the Department for Work and Pensions.
- 1.2 In addition to agree any further future funding allocated to Leeds City Council by government for the provision of free school meals for school holiday periods for children eligible for free school meals and/ or living in poverty.

### **2. Background information**

- 2.1 On the 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2020, the government announced a £170 million COVID Winter Grant Scheme (CWGS). This funding enables local authorities to provide support to families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals from early December 2020 and covers the period until the end of March 2021.
- 2.2 The CWGS funding is to enable local authorities to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy (heating, cooking and lighting), water bills (including sewerage) and other essentials.
- 2.3 Leeds was initially allocated £2,837,556.77. The funding was ring-fenced and time limited (01/12/2020 – 31/03/2021), with any funds not spent, sent back to Government.
- 2.4 The national guidance stipulated that:

- At least 80% must be allocated to households with children, the remainder to individuals or households without children.
- Of those allocations, 80% must be in relation to food, fuel, water and other household bills (not rent/housing costs), with the remainder on other essentials clearly linked to the scheme's conditions.
- Local Authorities can provide funding to partners to support the delivery of the scheme. Food banks, charities and schools are among those who are classified as partners.
- Local Authorities must provide management information to demonstrate the number and value of allocations for all cases where the payments are made to individuals as Cash, Voucher or Bank Transfer. Each must be counted separately and classified against each spend centre (Food, Fuel, Water OR other)
- Local Authorities can attribute reasonable administration costs to this fund but are asked to keep it to a minimum. All expenditure (including costs allocated to administration) will be published on GOV.UK

2.5 Of the original COVID Winter Grants funding received in December 2020, £1.6 million of the funding was approved to be allocated to for the provision of free school meals to children living in poverty in the city for the Christmas 2020 and February 2021 half-term holidays. This included schools being able to access support for an additional 10% more children who aren't eligible for FSM but are in need of assistance. In total approximately 33,000 children and young people have been supported each holiday period.

2.6 The remain funding has been used to provide;

- Food, fuel and essential items directly to low income families with children under the age of 4 and care leavers.
- Assistance towards the cost of fuel to families and individuals claiming Council Tax Support.
- Support to third sector organisations and charities who support vulnerable families and individuals for food and essential items.

### **3. Main issues**

3.1 In March 2021 the Department for Work and Pensions announced that the COVID Winter Grant Scheme will be extended to the 16 April 2021, providing an additional £59.1 million nationally of extra targeted financial support for those in need during the pandemic. Leeds has been allocated £986,468 of national funding.

3.2 The objectives and criteria of the COVID Winter Grants Scheme is the same as outlined above at point 2.4 with the only changes made being to the end point (16<sup>th</sup> April). All allocations of funding have been based on the same criteria as determined in November 2020.

3.3 It is proposed that all of this additional funding received by Leeds City Council is allocated to work with schools in the city to continue the provision of free school meals to the approximately 33,000 children living in poverty in the city for Easter 2021 school holiday. This would involve replicating the approach undertaken over February 2021 half term.

- 3.4 For February half term schools using Catering Leeds as their meal provider were asked if they wanted to opt in to a hamper scheme for the week or receive funding per pupil to provide a scheme (hamper or voucher) of their own. All other schools were funded directly to administer their own scheme. The funding received was based on the number of children on Free School Meal, in families who have no recourse to public funds or are on a low income. Approximately 33,000 children and young people were supported.
- 3.5 Schools are familiar with the system and processes in place to support families. Adopting this approach for Easter School holidays will ensure that children and young people in families most in need receive support.
- 3.6 To date there is no indication that the government will be allocating any further funding for free school meals for future school holiday periods. However, given the continued high profile debate nationally it would be prudent to ensure the Leeds City Council is able to accept future funding and build on the successful approach adopted to date.

## **4. Corporate considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and engagement**

- 4.1.1 All relevant Executive Members have been briefed on the guidance and remit of the funding and the proposed approach for Easter 2021.
- 4.1.2 Schools, Catering Leeds and relevant Chief Officers have also been consulted on this approach.

### **4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration**

- 4.2.1 The focus of the COVID Winter Grants Scheme is to support vulnerable families and individual suffering hardship, poverty and inequality, and therefore issues of equality, diversity, cohesion and integration are key aspects of this work.
- 4.2.2 In addition to whole Free School Meal cohort being supported, schools are able to access support for children and young people who they feel would also benefit.

### **4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan**

- 4.3.1 The Department for Work and Pensions COVID Winter Grants Scheme contributes to the Best Council Plan focus of tackling poverty and reducing inequalities, and achieving the council's ambition for a strong economy and compassionate city. The funding supports the Best City Priorities of Child Friendly City, Safe, Strong Communities, Inclusive Growth, and Health & Wellbeing.

#### Climate Emergency

- 4.3.2 As the climate continues to change, extreme weather patterns across the globe will become increasingly common. The knock on effects of these changes will be profound, however it is hard to determine what specifically they will look like. What is certain is that there will be scarcity of various resources, such as food and energy, which could lead to a price increase, which will have a disproportionate impact on people who live in poverty. We should seek to mitigate the impact of poverty and reduce insecurity and inequality around these basic needs to build strengthened communities for the future.

#### **4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money**

- 4.4.1 Leeds City Council has been allocated an additional £986,468 from the Department for Work and Pensions COVID Winter Grants Scheme. The funding is to enable Local Authorities to provide support to families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals until 16<sup>th</sup> April, with the cost of food, energy (heating, cooking and lighting), water bills (including sewerage) and other essentials.
- 4.4.2 The additional funding will be dispersed by April 2021 using the same formula as the original grant. Local Authorities will receive 75% of their additional allocation in April 2021 and the remaining 25% will be paid on the completion of the final management information (MI) report. This aligns with the existing payment arrangements where 25% of grant funding was retained and will be paid in accordance with each authority's actual reported spend at the end of each scheme.

#### **4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in**

- 4.5.1 Call-in is being waived in this instance in order that the Council is able provide support to children and young people over the Easter 2021 school holidays.

#### **4.6 Risk management**

- 4.6.1 Leeds City Council will ensure that the provision of support undertaken meets the objectives and criteria set out by the DWP for the COVID Winter Grants Extension funding.

### **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 The expansion of the COVID Winter Grants Scheme until 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021 by the Department for Work and Pensions, will ensure that children eligible for Free School Meals, in families who have no recourse to public funds or are on a low income across the city to receive free school meals over the Easter School holidays.
- 5.2 Having undertaken this exercise for Christmas and February school holidays, there is an established and trusted process in place between Leeds City Council and schools in the city. If any additional funding were to be allocated by Government for the provision of free school meals for future schools holidays, a similar approach would be adopted.

### **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 The Director of Children and Families is requested to;
- a) Accept the £986,468 COVID Winter Grant Extension funding from the Department for Work and Pensions for 2021.
  - b) Exempt this decision from call-in, in order for the funding to be used for provision of free school meals to children living in poverty in the city for the Easter 2021 school holidays.
  - c) Agree to accept any further future funding allocated from Government for the provision of free school meals for school holiday periods for children eligible for free school meals and/ or living in poverty.

## **7. Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

### **7.1**

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.