

## **NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL**

<p><b>CHILDREN AND FAMILIES CABINET MEMBER</b></p>
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### **COVID-19 LOCAL SUPPORT GRANT**

#### **1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 This report sets out options for the local delivery of the recently extended Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) COVID-19 Local Support Grant.
- 1.2 The report recommends and seeks approval to further extend the COVID-19 food voucher provision, through the DWP COVID-19 Local Support Grant, to include the summer holiday period, and to deliver a welfare assistance scheme alongside this for vulnerable households across North Lincolnshire.
- 1.3 These proposals will be funded by the recently extended DWP COVID19 Local Support Grant, with an additional contribution by the Council.

#### **2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The Council recognises the impact that COVID-19 has had on families and households in many different ways and has in place a range of financial support mechanisms for those on low incomes.
- 2.2 During the period of the pandemic, decisions have been made to support children and families by offering supermarket vouchers to a number of vulnerable groups over school holiday periods, including children entitled to Free School Meals (FSM). This has been funded primarily through the DWP COVID-19 Winter Grant and local support schemes.
- 2.3 In order to provide support for a broader range of vulnerable households, the approach taken in North Lincolnshire has been a targeted one, including those on the lowest incomes with children between the ages of 0-18 and care leavers. When implementing the DWP COVID-19 Winter Support Grant in December 2020, a welfare assistance process was

established in addition to the voucher scheme, in order to provide immediate support with food, fuel, and warmth for any eligible household.

- 2.4 On 21 June 2021 the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) announced details of a further extension to the DWP COVID-19 Local Support Grant, allocating North Lincolnshire a total of £501,239.46 for the period up to and including 30 September 2021.

### **3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

#### **Option 1**

- 3.1 The first option being proposed is to use the DWP COVID-19 Local Support Grant solely for the provision of food vouchers for the vulnerable groups previously targeted, identified above. Providing £70 per child would cost approximately £490,000.

#### **Option 2**

- 3.2 The second option available is to provide food vouchers as above, but for the council to supplement the DWP COVID-19 Local Support Grant in order to fund a time-limited welfare assistance scheme over summer up to the end of September 2021. This would ensure provision for families and households that may be facing financial difficulties but who are not in the vulnerable groups, e.g. those coming out of the furlough scheme, or new benefit claimants. The funding requested would be £100,000.

#### **Option 3**

- 3.3. The third option presented here is to provide food vouchers as above at a reduced rate, so as to fund a small welfare assistance scheme from the DWP COVID-19 Local Support Grant without using additional council funding. A payment of £50 per child would cost approximately £420,000, leaving £70,000 (deducting postage and administration costs) to fund a welfare assistance scheme.

### **4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

- 4.1 The provision of vouchers to the groups identified provides policy continuity in terms of the local response to using COVID-specific government grants. Over recent school holidays, eligible families have received £15 per child per week, reflecting the value of free school meals, therefore a £70 voucher for summer is more in line with the levels of previous voucher payments. It is proposed that alongside the vouchers, arrangements will be made to provide information about 'Fuelled', the North Lincolnshire Holiday Activities and Food (HAF)

scheme which includes information about cooking, healthy eating, and local activities.

4.2 Although the offer of vouchers will provide crucial food support to many local families with the lowest incomes, during the timeframe of the DWP COVID-19 Local Support Grant there are likely to be additional families experiencing hardship outside of the groups identified. The provision of a welfare assistance support scheme would extend the offer of help to the most vulnerable during the summer as the country continues to progress along the government's roadmap to the ceasing of restrictions. Although it is expected that demand is lower than during the winter scheme, a budget of £100,000 represents a best-guess for such provision.

4.3 This report is therefore recommending Option 2 as the preferred option.

**5. FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)**

5.1 The proposals above all make full use of the £501,239.46 through the DWP COVID-19 Local Support Grant. If option 2 is the preferred option, it will require approximately £100,000 of additional council funding.

**6. OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)**

6.1 The proposals offer continuity to the DWP COVID-19 Winter and Local Support Grant schemes and will be delivered in the context of the Council Plan, providing enabling help to the most vulnerable.

**7. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

7.1 None

**8. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

8.1 None

**9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 That the DWP COVID-19 Local Support Grant is used to provide help to the most vulnerable with food, warmth, and fuel, as outlined in this report. Option 2 is the recommended model for the delivery of the scheme.

DIRECTOR: LEARNING SKILLS AND CULTURE AND  
DIRECTOR: CHILDREN AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Church Square House

SCUNTHORPE

North Lincolnshire

DN15 6NL

Author: Tom Hewis, Head of Early Help and Protection

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**Background Papers used in the preparation of this report – None**