

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

COVID-19 WINTER GRANT SCHEME

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 This report updates the Health and Wellbeing Board on the local implementation of the government's recently announced COVID Winter Grant Scheme.
- 1.2 A decision on implementing the Winter Grant Scheme was taken by the Children and Families Cabinet Member on 9 December 2020.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 On Sunday 8 November 2020, the government announced the introduction of the £170 million COVID Winter Grant Scheme - a package of extra targeted financial support for those in need over the winter period. The funding allocation for North Lincolnshire is £532,566, which is due to be released in the first week of December 2020 and will run until the end of March 2021.
- 2.2 Government guidance issued by the DWP states that 'the objective of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme is to provide support to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic throughout the winter period where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable'. The clear focus of the Scheme is to help those in most need with the cost of food, energy, water bills (including sewerage) and other essentials.
- 2.3 This Scheme is part of a wider winter support package for families and children, including:
- expansion of the Department for Education's (DfE's) Holiday Activities and Food programme, across England next year. This investment of up to £220 million will be delivered through grants to local authorities to ensure provision of the scheme for Easter, summer and Christmas in 2021.
 - increasing the value of the Department for Health and Social Care's Healthy Start vouchers from £3.10 to £4.25 from April 2021.
 - DEFRA will provide further funding for local charities through well-established networks to provide immediate support to front-line food aid charities, including food banks, who are supporting those most vulnerable due to the economic impacts of COVID-19.
- 2.4 Considerable flexibilities have been given to Local Authorities in determining their own local eligibility framework and approach, with the ability to deliver the scheme through vouchers or grants, or other mechanisms. The main requirements are that at least 80% must be spent on families with children, with up to 20% for households without children, which includes care leavers and under 25's with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND). The

guidance supports Local Authorities in working with other local organisations to deliver the Scheme, and to use local knowledge and data to identify and prioritise support for specific vulnerable groups.

2.5 Following initial scoping activity and informal consultation across the council, with schools and with the local voluntary sector, proposals to deliver the Scheme in North Lincolnshire have been developed as follows:

2.6 Local Eligibility Framework and Approach

a) Free School Meal (FSM) Scheme

2.6.1 Although there is no requirement to fund FSM over school holidays, doing so is in line with the policy intent behind the Scheme, and reflects the focus given to 'holiday hunger' and the impact of COVID 19 on poorer families in the national press and across social media. There is recent precedent in North Lincolnshire for funding FSM during holiday periods, and an established system for the purchase and distribution of vouchers to eligible families. Informal consultation has taken place with a number of schools who have expressed support for taking the same approach over the Christmas break.

2.6.2 Alongside this group, it was agreed that families with children eligible for 2-year old funding are also issued food vouchers at the same rate, to increase coverage for all children 2-16 with equal eligibility.

b) Welfare Assistance Support

2.6.3 It was agreed that this element of the scheme should build on the processes developed in July to deliver the Defra emergency assistance grant scheme, which is administered under a commissioned contract by North Lincolnshire CAB. Bringing the two schemes together provides a range of benefits including:

- Utilising the existing emergency assistance grant application process and data capture systems already deployed enables rapid roll-out. The systems are tested which will harness business process efficiencies through the creation of a streamlined single application process for residents
- Drawing on CAB's considerable expertise and trusted reputation in providing advice and guidance for residents and the opportunity to 'make every contact count' supporting our outcomes of safe, well, prosperous, and connected. This includes, for example, providing applicants with help with debt and money worries together with broader needs such as information about skills, training, or employment.
- Enabling CAB to work with their extensive collaborative network of voluntary and community organisations in North Lincolnshire to access partner capacity for delivery

2.7 Taking a targeted approach

2.7.1 There will be equality of opportunity to apply for grants within the Scheme, however the experience of similar schemes suggests that a targeted approach will be needed to ensure those who are most in need find out about and are enabled to apply for grants. To this end, the Scheme will be promoted across relevant teams, services, schools, and agencies, including the voluntary sector, with specific communications going directly to a small number of highest priority groups.

2.7.2 For example, to maximise applications from families with infants aged 0 – 2 who may need support with food and bills, information about the Scheme will be sent to the parents of all

children in this age range. Health visitors, nursery nurses, and children's centre staff will then specifically target families known to be experiencing, or at risk of experiencing hardship.

2.7.3 This approach will be taken for all of the vulnerable groups listed below, who have been identified following consultation across council service areas. These are:

- Care leavers and young parents receiving additional support
- New or recent universal credit applicants
- Families with babies eligible for healthy start vouchers
- 16-18 year-olds eligible for FSM, or eligible for a college bursary
- Home educated children who would normally be entitled to FSM
- Families and adults with no recourse to public funds
- Those receiving council tax support who are struggling to keep up payments (have paid 50% or less of debt)
- Vulnerable adults identified by adult social care services
- Young people up to the age of 25 with special educational needs or a disability (SEND)

2.8 Eligibility Criteria

2.8.1 It was agreed that the following criteria must be met before welfare assistance grants are made:

- The applicant must be a resident of North Lincolnshire and consent to appropriate identity checks.
- The applicant must be experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, food and/or fuel poverty due to a change in circumstances related to, directly or indirectly, the impact of the pandemic.
- The applicant must not have any other means to meet their need for food and/or energy (including water/sewerage bills).
- The applicant must be willing to accept food or fuel vouchers if the grant is awarded, unless exceptional circumstances apply.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 There are no options to consider as this report is for information only.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 As above, there are no options to analyse as this report is for information only.

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

5.1 The grant allocation for the Scheme is £532,566 and is intended for the period 1 December 2020 to 31 March 2021.

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

6.1 There are no other relevant implications.

7. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

7.1 An IIA has been completed, which did not identify any negative impacts.

8. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

8.1 No formal consultations are required, however the details agreed by the Children & Families Cabinet Member and which are set out in this report have been developed in conjunction with representatives from a range of council service areas, following informal consultation with representatives from the local voluntary sector and local schools.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That the Board note the local implementation of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme.

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report – COVID Winter Grant Scheme Guidance