

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – URGENT RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Roger Gough – Leader of the Council

DECISION NO:

21/00062

For publication**Key decision: YES****Subject Matter / Title of Decision**

COVID Local Support Grant – Summer extension

Decision:

As Leader of the Council, I agree to:

- 1) Accept the grant extension from the COVID Local Support Grant for use in line with the guidance published by Department of Work and Pensions and relevant terms and conditions
- 2) Confirm the arrangements used to deploy previous grant funding administered under the delegated authority from Key Decision 21/00038
- 2) Approve use of the grant to support the provision of vouchers to families with children in receipt of benefits-related Free School Meals or families in need of support through KSAS during the Summer 2021 school holidays.
- 3) Authorise the Corporate Director Finance to take any other actions needed to ensure that the grant is spent in full by the date stipulated by the Department for Work and Pensions.
- 4) Authorise the Corporate Director Finance to take other necessary actions, including but not limited to entering into contracts or other legal agreements, as required to implement this decision.
- 5) Authorise the Corporate Director Finance to accept and administer any further grant monies providing they are given by government on very similar terms of reference and that they can be appropriately managed under the funding / governance framework put in place by this decision.

Reason(s) for decision:

Government confirmed in late June that the COVID Local Support Grant would be extended over the Summer Break. While previous acceptance and management of related grants was possible via delegated authority arising from previous decisions, it is appropriate and necessary for these previous arrangements to be noted and the ongoing acceptance of the Grant to be subject to Executive Member decision-making.

Government confirmed on 6 July 2021 that the extension would make £4.239m available for use over the Summer break.

Reason for urgency

Confirmation from Govt of the latest extension and associated arrangements prevents compliance with normal Executive decision-making timeframe while allowing for implementation in advance of the School Summer break.

Background

Urgent Decision 20/00110 was taken in November to accept the £4.5m Government's Covid Winter Grant and allocate it as follows:

- £2.5m on providing vouchers during the Christmas and February school holidays to families with children in receipt of benefits-related Free School meals, and other low income families as set out in paragraph 2.4
- £900k to be allocated to Districts, on the same funding formula used by DWP, to target vulnerable households in their areas
- £800k to be used by KCC services to distribute to families in financial hardship
- £500k to be earmarked for low income families who need help with food and utilities bills

The grant had to be spent between early December 2020 and 31 March 2021.

Subsequent to this initial COVID grant, various extensions and additional grants have been provided by Govt. These have been processed by KCC through a mixture of existing Officer delegation (where permitted under the previous decisions) and additional Executive Member decisions.

The DWP advised LAs that "for the summer break it is unlikely that we will be in a position to notify LAs of any funding extension until early/mid-June 2021 and appreciate that this is not ideal as LAs would prefer much more notice in order to plan and prepare for a grant extension." The DWP issued a draft letter to LAs on 21 June 2021 informing them that the Covid Local Support grant will be extended over the summer break, with funding to be spent by 30 September 2021. Therefore, it is certain that the usual democratic processes cannot be adhered to, and an urgent decision will need to be taken by the Leader.

Monitoring impact, and adjusting allocations

The monitoring of this expenditure will take place as set out in the decision report for the first tranche of Winter Grant Fund. It should also be noted that the final grant funding is still to be paid in arrears based on evidence of spend via the monitoring returns. Monitoring and compliance checks will be applied to all areas of spend, to allow for informed Officer decision-making as part of the ongoing implementation of this Key Decision.

Eligibility

The fundamental eligibility requirement is current financial hardship. For the supermarket vouchers to families, the eligibility will be:

- children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals
- low income families whose children currently do not have a school place
- low income families whose children are home-educated
- low income families whose children are under five, but are known to the council via Early Help, Free for Two, or via Health Visitors and approved via KSAS

Financial Implications

£4.239m available for use over the Summer break.

Legal Implications

Funding must be used in accordance with the guidance set by government, and the terms and conditions of the grant. KCC will apply appropriate legal mechanisms as part of issuing or deploying any grant monies to ensure any partners or third parties in receipt of grant funding remain compliant.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

CYPE Cabinet Committee was updated on the previous decision at their meeting in November 2020.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee:

Agreed to the urgency process.

The Group Spokespeople of the Scrutiny Committee providing the following comments:

Dr Sullivan stated:

I find it very difficult to see how this can be an urgent decision and not subject to Call-in. As set out in the paper the letter arrived from Government on Monday 21st June, there was a Cabinet meeting on Thursday 24th June, this could have been an late or urgent item on this agenda, allowing for the mechanism of scrutiny and right of the scrutiny Committee to examine and discuss the ramifications of the choices the Administration planned to do with this money if Scrutiny Members chose to Call-in. Even without going to Cabinet meeting the Leader has facility to take this decision, thereby making it eligible to be called-in

This choice and right of Scrutiny members to call in has been denied because the Executive and their officers have chosen to run the clock down, thereby not allowing the scrutiny of the decision. Urgent Items where there is limited time is available is a sometimes a necessity but in this case it has been used as an excuse for lack of scrutiny. There is a worrying trend of lack of scrutiny in this Council, where members of the same party can simply mark their own homework with no regard to the spirit of openness, transparency and accountability to ensures we get the best service to our Kent residents. There is not transparency of how the money will be spent issue here which Kent residents deserve to know.

Also given this letter was sent on 21st June, and this email for our response was sent late Monday 5th July and expect a response under 24h, I don't appreciate the disrespectful tokenism.

The Chair and Group Spokespeople of the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee provided the following comments:

Mrs Dean stated she had no objections to the decision and recommended that all relevant vouchers should be available for redemption at the maximum number of supermarkets to minimise any disadvantage to those families with limited transport.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

The option of turning down the grant was not given serious consideration, as there are many Kent families in need who will benefit from receiving this support.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer: None



6 July 2021

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signed

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date