

From: Zena Cooke, Corporate Director Finance
Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director Children, Young People and Education

To: Leader

Subject: **COVID Local Support Grant Scheme extension**
Decision number: 21/00062

Key Decision: *Affects more than 2 Electoral Divisions and involves expenditure of over £1m*

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: **Cabinet member decision**

Future Pathway of Paper: **implementation of the decision**

Electoral Division: All

Summary: This report summaries the decisions taken over the last 6 months regarding the Local Support Grant Scheme and asks the Leader to accept the further grant extension that the government has provided to support FSM provision over the school holidays.

Recommendations: The Leader is asked 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.

1. Introduction

1.1 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.

1.2 On 2 March 2021, the County Council received a communication from the Department of Works & Pensions to say that it was extending the period in which the COVID Grant should be spent from 31 March to 16 April and was awarding KCC a further £1.5m. The Department asked us to let it know by 15th March how we intended to spend this further £1.5m.

1.3 On 14 April 2021, the County Council received further communication from the Department of Works and Pensions to say it was renaming the grant to the Covid Local Support grant and extending the period in which the Grant should be spent from 16th April to 20 June 2021 and awarding KCC a further £1,059,788.

1.4 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.

2. COVID Winter Grant Scheme

2.1 The purpose of the original grant was “to give vulnerable households peace of mind in the run up to Christmas and over the Winter months during the pandemic by helping those who need it to have food on the table and other essentials, so every child will be warm and well-fed this winter.”

2.2 It has proved challenging to identify and get the resources to those most in need, and all partners have worked very hard collectively and individually to achieve this. Whilst we have discretion to determine how to allocate this further tranche of funding, the arguments in favour of using it to provide supermarket vouchers for those families entitled to benefits-related free school meals and families in need of KSAS support are very strong:

- After providing such vouchers in the October, Christmas, February, Easter and May holidays there is an expectation amongst schools and families that similar support will be offered in the Summer holidays.
- It takes time to organise and implement schemes, and whilst we are confident of delivering the COVID Support Grant in full, the logistics of getting resources to the right people at the right time takes planning and organisation, and there is insufficient time to do this to ensure it is all allocated by the Summer holidays.

Monitoring impact, and adjusting allocations

2.3 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

2.4 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

Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council's Strategic Statement (2015-2020)

2.5 This contributes to the strategic outcome of "Children & Young People in Kent get the best start in life", by helping to keep vulnerable families out of crisis.

Options considered but 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.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The decision is to accept the Covid Local Support Grant in full, will mean there should be no direct impact on the council's budget. There is a risk, however, that the costs slightly exceed the amount given, for example if the number of families entitled to free school meals and families in need has increased since May. In this event, the County Council may have to allocate some of its underspend to fill the gap. If this is required it will be funded from other covid related grant funding.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 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.

5. Equality Implications

- 5.1 Funding will be allocated to pupils eligible for FSM, or who prior to becoming home educated or without a school place received FSMs, for which there is clear, unambiguous eligibility criteria. KSAS will allocate funds following referrals made by practitioners, working with families, who have assessed that family finances negatively impact on their ability to regularly and consistently provide nutritious meals for their children.

6. Governance

- 6.1 By approving the acceptance of the grant and the recommended deployment of the funds, the Corporate Director Finance confirms that the responsibility and accountability for management of the funds will sit with Kent County Council.
- 6.2 The delegations put in place confirm that authority for ongoing management of the grant funding will be vested in the Corporate Director of Finance, in accordance with the agreed funding framework, spend areas and eligibility criteria. This delegation includes reviewing the spend arrangements and approving changes in consultation with the Leader and Corporate Directors for Children Young People Education and Adult Social Care.
- 6.3 All spend will be monitored as part of compliance checks to ensure adherence to the DWP terms and conditions associated with the grant.

7. Recommendations

7.1 The Leader is asked to:

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- 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.

8. Background Documents

COVID Winter Grant Scheme Extension Letters issued by Department for Work & Pensions

COVID Winter Grant Scheme: - Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities (issued by Department for Work & Pensions)

COVID Winter Grant Scheme monitoring form

9. Report Author

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