

POLICY AND FUNDING FRAMEWORK FOR THE COVID WINTER GRANT SCHEME

1. Introduction

This funding framework has been developed in relation to decision 20/00110, which is to accept the COVID Winter Grant Scheme of £4.5m for use in line with the guidance published by the Department of Work and Pensions and to implement the relevant funding arrangements.

The following governance arrangements will facilitate management and implementation of the grant funding via officer delegated decision-making. The key decision includes providing delegated authority to the Corporate Director for Finance, after consultation with the Leader and Corporate Directors for CYPE and Adult Social Care, to update, review and amend the proposed distribution of the funding in response to changing need and the emergency assistance landscape, as evidenced by the monitoring of grant expenditure.

Because the scheme was announced by Government on Sunday 8 November, with an expectation that spend would begin in early December, and Government guidance only being finalised at the end of November, it has been necessary to move very quickly on some elements of expenditure, before all the details around how the scheme will work in Kent have been worked through. This Framework sets out how decisions to flex or redirect funding will be made during the four months (1 December 2020 to 31 March 2021) that the Scheme will run.

2. Decision-making Process

An officer group chaired by the Corporate Director of Finance, the Winter Grant Monitoring Group (WGMG), is being established to oversee the spending of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme. This includes representatives covering education, adult social care, strategic commissioning, District partnership working, finance and project support.

The guidance stipulates that we identify and provide support to a broad cross-section of vulnerable households. Support is not restricted to households in receipt of benefits, and we have discretion as to how to identify and support those most in need. This Framework provides the rationale for eligibility and how households access the scheme.

A key principle is that KCC staff will, with our statutory and voluntary sector partners, and other organisations including utility companies, collectively identify families, households and individuals in financial hardship and target funds at them, rather than encouraging people to apply, other than via existing routes. This is because application processes are expensive to run, require effort on the part of those applying at a time when they are struggling, and a proportion of people will apply and be turned down because they don't meet the eligibility criteria. Also, because this fund is time-limited and will only last for four months, it does not make sense to put in place significant new infrastructure to distribute the resources. As far as possible we want to build on existing networks and support, which has the added virtue of providing some sustainability moving forwards. The Kent Support & Assistance Service (KSAS) is already in place and forms a key plank of our proposed response.

One of the challenges we face is how to avoid supporting the same household via different funding streams. We have concluded that it may be entirely appropriate for some families to be in receipt of, for example, fuel hardship payments, food bank support and supermarket vouchers. Indeed, the most vulnerable households may well be in this position. Those who are using the Winter Fund to provide support will ask people whether they are in receipt of other forms of support and make a judgement as to whether their circumstances are such that it is reasonable for them to receive the support. Similarly, while we will emphasise to households that the support they are receiving is a one-off, if households in financial hardship return for further help and their circumstances warrant it, further support will be considered.

The table below shows how we intend to target vulnerable households.

Provision of support, and rationale	How it is targeted and accessed	Comments
<p>Supermarket vouchers during the Christmas and February school holidays, to support low income families whose children would be receiving a daily meal when at school, but need to be fed at home during the school holidays.</p>	<p>All families in receipt of benefits-related Free School Meals (FSM) will automatically receive vouchers, without having to apply.</p> <p>Children who currently do not have a school place but are known to meet the criteria will automatically receive vouchers.</p> <p>Processes are being put in place to identify vulnerable children who meet the benefits-related FSM criteria but who are not in school (either elective home education or children missing education)</p> <p>Children receiving Early Years Pupil Premium and Free for Two services will also receive vouchers – parents will be contacted directly by.</p>	<p>There may be families with children in Yr 2 or below who have not registered for benefits-related FSM because all young children automatically receive FSM. These families will be encouraged to apply so that they can receive the vouchers (and also schools will then receive Pupil Premium for those children).</p>
<p>Funding to District and Borough Councils to support vulnerable households, distributed on the same population/deprivation formula used by DWP to allocate the Fund.</p>	<p>This will be locally targeted at families known to District Council staff or the voluntary organisations they are working with.</p> <p>To include families in temporary accommodation</p> <p>To include vulnerable adults without children</p>	<p>Some of this funding will be used to enhance Food Bank provision, alongside the Government’s additional support to Food Banks.</p> <p>Districts will work with particular groups, for example those with very high levels of deprivation or other characteristics that make them</p>

	To be targeted at those local communities facing particularly severe deprivation.	more vulnerable during Covid.
Funding for vulnerable households via KCC services	<p>Kent Support and Assistance Service will be the key vehicle for distributing support from KCC. The following groups should also be targeted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early years – from pregnancy to age 2, as they will not be getting Free School Meal vouchers. • Care Leavers • Disabled young adults (18-24) • Young Carers • People with No Recourse to Public Funds • Families with multiple challenges • Adults with Disabilities 	<p>Adult Social Care will identify vulnerable adults they are supporting in the community</p> <p>Health Visitors and Maternity services will identify vulnerable families with young children and expectant parents who may not otherwise be known to CYPE.</p> <p>Early Help will continue to use their existing signposting - they already identify vulnerable families and help them get the support they need.</p>
Funding to utility companies to reduce fuel and water bills for those in financial hardship.	Criteria will be developed with the utilities companies to focus support on those facing greatest financial hardship.	We will develop a trusted partner status arrangement whereby we agree criteria and the company can then confirm how many households meet that criteria for us to pass the funding to them to deduct from their bills.

3. Monitoring and Reporting Spend and Financial Variance

One of the conditions of this grant is that it has to be spent by 31 March, and the final instalment will be paid upon receipt of monitoring information evidencing spend. It is therefore important that expenditure is closely monitored so that we do not face a situation where there is underspend in some areas whilst other areas have run out of money. This could also mean that resources are moved from one area to another.

The allocations will therefore be reviewed regularly by the WGMG, and the Corporate Director of Finance will agree any variance. If these are in excess of 30% of the total allocation they will be highlighted to the Leader of the Council.

Reporting to Government

The Department for Work and Pensions requires the Council to make two Statement of Grant Usage and management information (MI) returns. There is an interim statement and return that covers the months of December 2020 and January 2021 and a final statement and return that covers the full period of the scheme from December 2020 to 31 March 2021. These will be signed off by the Corporate Director of Finance.

Members and Senior Officers

The Corporate Director of Finance will provide regular updates to the Leader, Cabinet Members for Integrated Children's Services and Public Health and Adult Social Care, and Corporate Management Team.

Internal reporting and monitoring

Monitoring of grant allocations will take place monthly against the criteria included in the DWP returns¹ and will be shared with the WGMG.

¹ i.e. spend, divided between total amount provided to vulnerable households, and administration costs; total value of awards split by households with and without children; total value of awards split by food and utility bills or other essentials; grant allocated to Third Party Organisations and what it covers