

Report to :	EXECUTIVE CABINET
Date :	24 March 2020
Executive Member/ Reporting Officers:	Cllr Brenda Warrington – Executive Leader Sarah Dobson – Assistant Director Policy, Performance and Communications (Governance and Pensions)
Subject :	COVID WINTER GRANT
Report Summary :	The report sets out proposals for spending the extended ‘Covid Winter Grant’ before the 31 March 2021 to support families who are struggling to access food and warmth. The council is committed to ensuring that all of the available Winter Covid Grant goes to effectively supporting our most vulnerable families and households to access food and warmth during a challenging time. This proposal enables us to target those who are likely to experience difficulty accessing food and warmth. The report also provides an update on the organisations which have been funded to support those struggling to access food and essentials through the Winter Covid Grant (original grant)
Recommendations :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) The Covid Winter grant be spent on supporting vulnerable families and individuals as set out at appendix 1. (ii) A voucher scheme for children eligible for free school meals is established. This scheme will enable children eligible for free school meals to receive two £15 a week food vouchers for the Easter Holiday period. (iii) Any families who are not eligible for FSM but are in need to support online contact the Early Help Access Point for help, support and advice. (iv) That this voucher scheme is extended out to Care Leavers for the Christmas period (to a value of £30). (v) That this scheme is further extended to low income sixth form and college students (to a value to £30). Administration of grants to students via the colleges will be formalised by letter to the colleges containing any appropriate conditions in relation to the administration of the grants on behalf of the Council (vi) That an amount of money is invested in welfare rights and Willow Wood to provide food vouchers to those who are in financial need (120 vouchers in total) (vii) To work with the following supermarkets to distribute vouchers, Tesco, Sainsbury’s, Morrisons and Asda, we will have written terms and conditions attached to the purchase order.
Finance Implications: (Authorised by Section 151 Officer)	<p>The terms of the grant are that it should be used to support vulnerable families who are struggling to access food and warmth. Under the terms of the scheme, the grant is permitted to be used to provide free school meals to those children who are currently eligible for Free School Meals. Further additional support can be provided to other vulnerable individuals under the terms of the grant.</p> <p>The Tameside Council proposal is to use the majority of the grant to fund the issuing of supermarket vouchers via the schools prior</p>

to the end of term to those children currently in receipt of free school meals. The procurement of the vouchers will be through a direct award to an appropriate supermarket with proximity to the school which the eligible child attends. An exemption from procurement regulations will therefore be required for transparency purposes.

Legal Comments:

(Authorised by Borough Solicitor)

The Covid Winter Grant Scheme is intended to support most vulnerable and be run by councils in England. The funding is ring-fenced, with at least 80% earmarked to support with food and bills. It is intended to enable councils to directly help the hardest-hit families and individuals, as well as provide food for children who need it over the holidays. It has been provided to Local councils on the basis they *'understand which groups need support, and are best placed to ensure appropriate holiday support is provided – which is why they will distribute the funds, rather than schools, who will continue providing meals for disadvantaged children during term-time.'* Moreover, by giving to Councils it can easily be recovered if not spend or targeted properly. There is a balance to be achieved by coming up with a perfect scheme which may risk losing the funding as too late or complex as against a simple expedient scheme that runs the risk of there being insufficient funding or some duplication of payment as individuals meet the criteria in more than one category. This risk is mitigated by the use of food vouchers with low values.

Links to Corporate Plan:

Supporting low income households, particularly low income families with children links to all of the priorities within the Corporate Plan which are impacted upon by Covid.

Policy Implications :

The proposed spending framework fits with the Council's key policies around supporting the most vulnerable in our communities.

Risk Management :

There is a risk that if the spending framework proposed is not rolled out effectively MHCLG will claw back some or all of the grant funding.

Access to Information :

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Sarah Threlfall.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 The government has announced an extension to the COVID Winter Grant Scheme, which will be made available at the beginning of December, will see new funding to County Councils and Unitary Authorities (including Metropolitan Council's and London Boroughs), to support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs.
- 1.2 The Winter Grant Scheme will enable us to provide support to families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals up to the period 17 April.
- 1.3 Tameside has been allocated **£311,000** Funding will be ring fenced and cover period until 17 April 2021 COVID Winter Grant Scheme payments will be made to Tameside into the same bank account as Housing Benefit Subsidy payments.

2. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION (MI) RETURN

- 2.1 There will be a requirement to provide DWP with MI to help them understand which groups have benefited from grants, the administrative costs and payment assurance.
- 2.2 Authorities are required to make two management information (MI) returns. There is an interim return that covers the months of December 2020 and January 2021 which has been returned and a final return that covers the full period of the scheme from December 2020 to 17 April 2021.

3. ELIGIBILITY FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 It is for each individual LA to determine eligibility in their area and target support within the scope of the following conditions:
 - At least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support families with children, with up to 20% of the total funding to other types of households, including individuals.
 - At least 80% of the total funding will be ring fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills (including sewerage), with up to 20% on other items.
 - Where an eligible child lives on his or her own, they are a household that includes a child covered in the 80% allocation for households with children.
 - Vulnerable households which include a person aged 19 to 25 with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and/or care leavers in accordance with the Children and Families Act 2014 may still be eligible for grant support however that support falls within the 20% allocation to households without children.

4. CATEGORIES OF SPEND

- 4.1 The eligibility criteria sets out separate categories of spend:
 - One relates to household composition
 - One relates to the type of support being provided, in other words, food, energy, water and other.
- 4.2 LAs will be asked to report and manage spend in relation to both these areas. For example, if a £100 award is made to a family with children for food, you would allocate £100 to the 'family and children' pot and £100 to the 'food' pot.

5. CONSIDERATIONS FOR TAMESIDE'S SCHEME

- 5.1 Given the short amount of time to have a scheme in place and the MI requirements by the DWP careful consideration has been given to what is put into place keeping any schemes as clear and simple as possible for both administration and spend.
- 5.2 The DWP have made it clear that the grant funding is not intended to replace the FSM scheme during the holidays.

6. PROPOSED SCHEME

- 6.1 Local Authorities are taking various approaches across Greater Manchester and England in how they plan to support vulnerable households throughout the winter months.
- 6.2 In Tameside we have a wealth of data that identifies families who are on a low income and in receipt of Free School Meals, we also work with a number of partners and organisations which support families and individuals on low incomes.
- 6.3 We propose to continue to allocate funding to the provision of food vouchers for major supermarkets to pay for food for key cohorts including, all children attending schools in Tameside who are eligible for FSM, all college students eligible for FSM or bursaries, all 2, 3 and 4 year olds entitled to free child care, all Care Leavers and low income families receiving treatment from Willow Wood Hospice.
- 6.4 This approach allows us to deliver an enhanced offer that will reach a large number of families in a short time frame and provides targeted support in time for Christmas, and will allow us to easily report outcome requirements to the DWP.
- 6.5 Going forward the identified families will receive support for the 2 scheduled school holiday weeks to 17 April 2021 (The Easter Break):
- 6.6 It should be noted that not all LAs have been allocated sufficient funding to cover FSM's through the winter school holidays, this was raised with the DWP during the dial-in call as public expectation is high that funding is being provided to LAs for this purpose, however the DWP are clear that the funding allocation is not intended to replace the FSM offer.
- 6.7 For the purposes of distribution of funding we are proposing to allocate on the basis of children attending Tameside schools. All other GM authorities agree this in principle (potentially with the exception of Wigan).

7. UPDATE ON FUNDING TO COMMUNITY GROUPS

- 7.1 The following groups have received funding through the Covid Winter Grant or Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Funding to provide food and basic essentials to the most vulnerable.
- 7.2 Organisations are identified through the food group established by Action Together.

Organisation	Amount	Fund
Smallshaw Hurst Foodbank. Food for vulnerable families	9500	Winter Covid Grant
Newlife. To provide a breakfast club, emergency food packs, emergency heat packs.	5000	Winter Covid Grant
Rueben's retreat- food packages for families supported by Rueben's retreat	4320	Winter Covid Grant
Our Kids Eyes. Food parcels and health and wellbeing packages for parents/families with children with disabilities	5000	Winter Covid Grant
Friends of Waterloo Park. To provide emergency meals, bedding, clothing and winter essentials.	7350	Winter Covid Grant
Arc of Hope. To deliver a hot meal service for people living in poverty	4260	Winter Covid Grant
Tameside Women's Centre. Support packages for families. Winter packages. Gas/Elec and winter clothes to support vulnerable families	5000	Winter Covid Grant
Tameside South and Longdendale Food Bank. Food supplies	5,500	Winter Covid Grant
Citizens Advice Bureau. Energy support	6132	Winter Covid Grant
Barty's Food Pantry. Food and supplies	2000	Winter Covid Grant
St Barnabus Hattersley Community Cooking Project.	5000	Winter Covid Grant
St Georges Soup Kitchen. Ridgehill. Community Lunches	5000	Winter Covid Grant
Indian Community Association- culturally appropriate food bank	750	Winter Covid Grant
Willow Wood. Food for clinically extremely vulnerable individuals receiving treatment at Willow Wood.	10,000	Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Funding
Covid Emergency Food Group (supported by Syria Relief)	10,000	Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Funding

8. RISKS

8.1 A number of risks sit around the distribution of this grant, exacerbated by the timescales given to allocate the spend and the restrictions around categories of spend.

- That individuals could be eligible for more than one grant, if they meet the criteria in more than one cohort. It is felt that should this be the case, for example should a care leaver be attending college and eligible for FSM at college it would be appropriate that they receive both payments reflecting the level of potential need. Some families will also receive support through the holiday activities scheme (HAS) and the Winter Covid Scheme (Supermarket Vouchers)
- That there may be individuals who do not fall into one of the identified cohorts but are in significant need. Should this be the case these individuals may be eligible for discretionary allocation either through identification by schools and the early help team or through welfare rights.

9. RECOMMENDATION

9.1 As set out at the front of the report.