

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 8
8 SEPTEMBER 2022	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Jonathan Lewis, Service Director Education	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Cllr Lynne Ayres - Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, Skills and the University	
Contact Officer(s):	Jonathan Lewis – Service Director (Education)	Tel. 01223 507165

HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Jonathan Lewis – Service Director (Education)	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee consider the report and make recommendations / comments on the operation of the holiday voucher scheme for the October to March round of the Household Support Fund. This will help to inform the final decision for Cabinet.</p>	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report has been written by the Service Director (Education) at the request of the committee.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 This report provides information on the proposed allocation of the next round of Household Support Fund (HSF). Whilst the grant is subject to the corporate leadership team views, a paper will be taken to Cabinet to seek final approval for the scheme. Any feedback from this meeting will be considered in the recommended final scheme.

2.2 This report is for the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference No. Part 3, Section 4 - Overview and Scrutiny Functions, paragraph No. 2.1 Functions determined by Council:

Children's Services including

- a) Social Care of Children;
- b) Safeguarding; and

2. Education, including

- a) University and Higher Education;
- b) Careers; and
- c) Special Needs and Inclusion;

2.3 This report links to –

- Corporate priority:
 - Improve educational attainment and skills
 - To drive growth, regeneration and economic development
- Children in Care Pledge: Support children in care to have a good education.

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 In November 2020, the Government announced funding for Local Authorities to support families and communities through the challenges of Covid-19. Since this time, there has been a succession of schemes which have extended this support including the Winter Support, LA Covid-19 Support Grants and wider support with the cost-of-living crisis.

4.2 Each of the schemes have offered local discretion (to an extent) around the allocation of the grant and we have used the funding to target groups within the City that we consider to be vulnerable. The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food and water bills. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, it can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need

4.3 Authorities have the ability to deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including providing vouchers to households, making direct provision of food or goods, or issuing grants to third parties (with the exception of grants for advice provision).

4.4 In May 2022, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a further extension to the Household Support Fund to run from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. At the point of writing this report, no guidance has been received in terms of criteria or confirmed amount, although we would hope the objective will remain the same - *to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs* – and PCC will receive a similar level of funding as the previous round of funding which was £1,824,636.

4.5 We also expect the guidance to remain the same or be similar to the previous round - a third of the funding to be used to support families with children, one third to be used to support pensioners and a third to be used to support other vulnerable residents. As in previous rounds, appropriate admin and resource costs will be charged against the grant. This report is focused upon supporting children from low-income families, but the report also includes details of the wider scheme for adults and pensioners. Details of the voucher allocation by education establishment can be found in Appendix 2.

4.6 If the guidance, criteria and level of funding remains the same, we propose the following allocations:

Peterborough Holiday Voucher Scheme – we are proposing to fund £10 at October half term (reduced from £15 previously but in line with the May Half term which was £10), £30 for the Christmas holiday (reduced from £60 in 2021) and a final £10 at February half term. The total cost of the three voucher schemes will be £746k.

The reduction in voucher values is due to there being less holidays in this half of the year – we had the summer holidays in the previous period plus a half term and easter (9 weeks rounded) and this period only has 4 weeks. We are funding higher at Christmas.

The criteria for the scheme would remain the same and it would cover children eligible for 2-year-old free entitlement, 3 and 4 year olds eligible for the Early Years Pupils Premium, children eligible for free school meals and those pupils eligible for the post-16 bursary fund (including those with SEND who meet the criteria). The scheme covers those from ages 2 to 19. A letter will be sent to parents prior to each round of the scheme once the details are agreed.

Any unclaimed vouchers will be refunded and we would undertake this process after each holiday round. For each of the rounds, we will send the voucher on the last day of the term prior to the holiday. We have direct access to schools data so there is little administrative burden on schools.

4.7 This proposal for allocation takes into account the grant criteria and affordability of the scheme whilst allocating the HSF grant.

4.8 Pensioner Scheme - the proposed process for the Pensioner element would be that Age UK continue to act as an initial point of contact for older people to access the HSF and support them to fill out the online form (as well as facilitating Age UK's wraparound support offer) which will then go to the County Hub who will administer the Peterborough element according to the criteria set out below. To support accessibility, we would like to offer pensioners the option of a one-off £100 postal voucher for them to cash at a local Post Office. We will have the option to flex the voucher amount depending on presenting need.

The proposed total allocation to the pensioner scheme would be £602k.

Eligibility Criteria (to be reviewed as required):

- Born on or before 30 September 1956
- Live in Peterborough
- Experiencing financial hardship
- No one under the age of 19 (after the 30 September 2022) resides in the same household
- In exceptional circumstances, these criteria may be waived.

4.9 Other Vulnerable Households Voucher Scheme – A total of £276,206 will be available to support the voucher scheme. In recognition that this is the most flexible element of the fund we have increased the proportion of this element as we have had some complaints about the restrictive criteria for example larger families with multiple age ranges. It is proposed that the voucher element of the scheme will continue to be co-ordinated by Citizens Advice Peterborough for a management fee of approximately £20K plus administration, communication fees and resource fees.

Once fees have been covered, this would leave approx. £241,206 to provide vouchers to the value of £50 for food (an increase of £25 from the previous scheme) and £75 for fuel (an increase of £50 from the previous scheme) in recognition of the level of cost-of-living rise.

Eligibility criteria for vulnerable adults:

- On Universal Credit, Income Support OR in receipt of Personal Independent Payment / Disability Living Allowance
- Over 18 to pensionable age
- Liability for power supply at property [tenant or mortgage holder]
- No previous assistance under this scheme

Other Vulnerable Households Third Party Fund – A total of £200,000 will be made available to support direct grants to local voluntary and community organisations who either are already delivering or would like to deliver food and essential supplies support directly to residents. This could be issued to foodbanks, lunch clubs, community cafes or other charities that issue essentials to those in need. During Covid significant work was done to support the “don't go hungry this summer” campaign which aimed to support residents to access food supplies and debt management. We feel that through the winter period we will need to support our VCS organisations to recreate something similar around access to food, warm spaces alongside debt advice and access to skills and employment support.

4.10 We intend the scheme for pensioners and vulnerable adults to go live in October. All schemes will be publicised across the City.

4.11 The overall proposed allocation of the HSF can be seen in the table below. Officers will continually monitor demand changes within these schemes and re-allocate funding if

appropriate. Officers will also monitor administration costs and adjust as appropriate to ensure best use of public funds, in line with the grant guidance.

	Children and Young People Voucher Scheme	Other Vulnerable Households Voucher Scheme	Other Vulnerable Households Support Fund	Pensioners Scheme	Total
Direct cost of scheme	£745,300 *	£241,206	£180,000	£536,930	1,703,436
Administration costs	£1,000	£35,000	£20,000	£55,200	111,200
Total Spend	£746,300	£276,206	£200,000	£602,130	£1,824,636
% Spend of grant	41%	15%	11%	33%	100%

(*) A reconciliation of previous scheme spend will be undertaken in September and should any unclaimed voucher money be identified, this will be used to increase the CYP voucher amount during Christmas. We would also like to consider offering a one-off payment to care leavers at Christmas, dependent upon monies available.

4.12 Key statistics from previous rounds of funding:

Children and Young People Voucher Scheme

- For the summer term 2022, we purchased 27,652 vouchers covering 13,887 eligible children received £45 across two vouchers. Appendix 2 outlines how these were allocated by education establishment.
- This was a 1.3% increase in the number of eligible children since the May half term scheme and reflects the growing number of children on free school meals. Reviewing further back, the numbers allocated through reflect a 26% increase in eligible pupils from the voucher round run in February 2021.

Pensioner element

- Between 28 June and 23 August, a total of £15,800 has been granted to pensioners, with 167 applications processed. Targeted comms to this group is just starting to have an impact and applications have started to rise over the last few weeks as a result of 4000 letters to those on Pension Credit. Continued work is needed to find other ways to engage with this cohort. Nationally Local Authorities have struggled to spend the full allocation of this fund.

Other Vulnerable Adult element

- £61,000 has been spent through this scheme from 20/6/2022 – 23/8/2022 with 1,648 applications processed. As with the pensioner element of the fund, we are starting to see applications pick up again, as national and local communications around the cost of living continue. As well as this we have relaxed the application criteria in recognition of the need to support families with multiples of children who may have one child eligible for FSM but who still need further support. We have also increased the voucher amounts as above and will monitor the fund to see if we can trial our third-party grants scheme.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 This decision does not require any public consultation in line with grant guidance. However, we have worked with organisations across Peterborough to develop the proposed schemes, including (Age UK, Citizens Advice, Local Food Banks, Cross Keys Homes, Local Community Voluntary Sector Forum and Safer Peterborough Partnership).

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 6.1 The immediate hardship facing many Peterborough Families due to the pandemic and current cost of living crisis will be alleviated through the provision of food vouchers and support with utility bills and other household support.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 The grant is flexible, and we have targeted it at the areas that we consider to be the greatest need.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 Consideration was given to allocating all the grant towards families and pensioners but following feedback this was reviewed and agreed a proportion of the fund should go towards supporting other vulnerable adults.

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 9.1 The current voucher provider does not charge an administrative fee or other oncosts for free school meal vouchers. Additional costs will therefore be a factor in assessing the overall contractual award. We estimate spending approx £850,00 on children and young people vouchers and vulnerable adults vouchers. We have modelled the financial demands from parents / eligible children, spent in line with the recommended pensioners level and ensured there is sufficient allocated resources to support vulnerable adults in the city.

Legal Implications

- 9.2 The award of contracts for support the HSF will be considered as part of the final Cabinet report in October. Legal will be fully consulted on any procurement arrangements so they meet the requirement of the grant arrangements.

Equalities Implications

- 9.3 The limitation of the grant has meant we have had to restrict the scheme from previous rounds including the funding of those in further education. Our proposal outlined fits within the requirements of the grant conditions. All documentation will be shared with councillors so they can support their ward constituent.

Translation of communications to parents regarding the CWGS will be made available through schools and provisions for those who are digitally excluded will also be made to ensure everyone can access the support if they need it.

Rural Implications

- 9.4 None

Carbon Impact Assessment

- 9.5 There are no carbon implications arising from this decision.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 10.1 None

11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – review of HSF schemes from other Local Authorities
Appendix 2 - Allocation of Vouchers from the Summer Holiday Scheme

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