

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 8
4 OCTOBER 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.</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 was presented to Cabinet on 20 September 2022 seeking 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 can 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 (except for 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 (HSF 3). PCC received guidance and criteria for HSF 3 on 26 August 2022 and on 22 September 2022 received notification of a draft allocation of £1,824,636.
- 4.5 The updated guidance on HSF 3 makes changes to the previous scheme, HSF 2, which was primarily 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 and essential supplies. In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, it could additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need.

Guidance for HSF 3 continues the focus on those most in need but adds those who may not be eligible for the other support from government which has recently been made available as follows:-

1. £650 - Cost of Living Payment for those on UC, JSA, ESA, Income Support.
2. £400 - Energy Bills Support Scheme for all households with domestic electricity connection.
3. £150 - Council Tax Rebate for households in bands A to D

In addition, the guidance asks us to consider those who are eligible but not claiming qualifying benefits and those claiming housing benefit only as they are not eligible for £400 Energy Bill Support Scheme and stresses that we should consider a wide range of low-income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and people with disabilities.

The inclusion of the need to capture Management Information in respect of Households with a disabled person in addition to those with children and pensioners should be noted.

- 4.6 Based on the guidance, criteria and draft allocation, we propose the following allocations:

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.

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 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.

Details of the voucher allocation by education establishment can be found in Appendix 2.

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 Voucher Scheme** – It is proposed to retain a focus on pensioners by continuing to run an application based scheme but at a lower proportion of the fund than previously mandated, we will set our scheme spend at 15% of the total fund. We have learnt through other iterations of the scheme that it takes a great deal for pensioners to reach out, but recently we have started to see our referrals increase and the opportunity that brings to support our pensioners through our partnership with Age UK. Age UK Cambridgeshire and Peterborough would continue to act as an initial point of contact for pensioners to access the HSF, supporting them to fill out the online form or completing this on their behalf (as well as facilitating Age UK's wraparound support offer) the online form will then go to the County Hub who will administer the Peterborough element according to the criteria set out below.

Peterborough would contribute £30k to Cambridgeshire to host this in the county hub and also fund Age UK an administration fee – this fee is likely to be circa £18k. The proposed total allocation to the pensioner scheme would be £273,695k with £218,495 available for vouchers supplying 1456 awards.

Consideration has been given to bringing the processing of the pensioner element in house to PCC, however there are distinct advantages of funding this through the CCC Hub due to economies of scale and already set up management information systems which support our reporting to government and analysis of data.

Proposed guiding eligibility criteria for pensioners voucher scheme:-

- Born on or before 30 September 1956
- Applicant resides in Peterborough.
- Experiencing financial hardship (as determined by our staff or trusted partner)
- On or below Joseph Roundtree Foundation minimum income standard.
- 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.

Individual award amounts would continue to be between £100 and £200 depending on assessment of need.

4.9 **Vulnerable Households Voucher Scheme** – An expansion of this area of the scheme gives

the most scope for supporting a wide range of households as described in the guidance, a total of £504,641 will be available to deliver the scheme. In recognition that this is the most flexible element of the fund we have increased the proportion of this element and taken away its restraints in order to support larger families with multiple age ranges who are not eligible for other cost of living support including households with disabled person. It is proposed that the voucher element of the scheme continue to be administered by Citizens Advice Peterborough for a management fee of approximately £50K, including communication, interpretation and staffing.

Once fees have been covered, this would leave approx. £454,167, to provide vouchers between £100 and £200, taking £150 as average spend this would supply 3027 households.

Proposed guiding eligibility criteria for vulnerable household voucher scheme:-

- Applicant resides in Peterborough.
- On or below Joseph Roundtree Foundation minimum income standard.
- Experiencing financial hardship. (as determined by our staff or trusted partner)
- No one Born on or before 30 September 1956 resides in the household.

Vulnerable Households Support Fund – A total of £300,000 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 2022. All schemes will be publicised across the City.

4.11 The overall proposed allocation of HSF 3 can be seen in the table below.

As in previous rounds the guidance states that appropriate admin and resource costs should be charged against the grant. It must be noted that although we wish as much funding be spent on support for those that need it ensuring we have enough staffing and management to mobilise the full funding available is critical to success.

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 Holiday Voucher Scheme	Vulnerable Households Voucher Scheme	Vulnerable Households Support Fund	Pensioners Scheme	Total
Direct cost of scheme	£745,300 *	£454,167	£270,000	£218,495	1,687,962
Administration costs	£1,000	£50,464	£30,000	£55,200	136,664
Total Spend	£746,300	£504,631	£300,000	£273,695	£1,824,626
% Spend of grant	41%	27.6%	16.4%	15%	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

- £133,000 has been spent through this scheme from 20/6/2022 – 21/9/2022 with over 2,400 applications processed. As with the pensioner element of the fund, we have seen 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 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