

09-20



# Delegated decision report

## DECISION UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

DECISION CANNOT BE TAKEN BEFORE 9 DECEMBER 2020

Title **COVID WINTER GRANTS**

Report to **CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION  
AND SKILLS**

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the proposed approach and offer for the COVID Winter Grant across the Isle of Wight. This report seeks approval from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills for spend and grant funding to organisations in support of vulnerable households this winter.

### URGENT DECISION

2. The Council's decision-making process normally requires 28 days' notice where the Council intends to make a key decision. However, the decision-making process does provide for urgency provisions which can be used where a key decision is so urgent that the decision cannot appear on the Forward Plan for 28 days. The views of the chairman of the corporate scrutiny committee must be sought and form part of the report together with an explanation as to why the matter is so urgent.

The constitution also allows, in exceptional circumstances, for the call-in arrangement to be dis-applied if to do so is necessary to safeguard the interests of the council or of the public. In such a case the reasons for the disapplication will be discussed with the chairman of the relevant scrutiny committee and the reasons for disapplying the call in will be explained in the body of the report. Whilst the actual decision cannot be called in, the relevant scrutiny committee may ask to consider the circumstances.

The government announced funding for the Winter Grant programme on 8 November 2020. In order for provision to be in place for vulnerable children and families across the Christmas and winter period an urgent decision is required to ensure that the funding can reach those in need and fulfil the grant requirements.

## **OWING TO THE URGENCY OF THIS DECISION BOTH THE PRE-DECISION NOTIFICATION TIME AND CALL IN HAVE BEEN DISAPPLIED**

The Chair of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee has been consulted and has noted the reasons for the decision not being published on the council's forward plan and agreed to waive the 28 days' notice due to the limited time circumstances. The Chair of the Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services, Education and Skills has been consulted and agreed the request and rationale for the disapplication of call in procedures with regard to this decision and will be instructing committee officers to include review of the decision as part of the committee forward work programme at the earliest opportunity.

### **BACKGROUND**

3. On Sunday 8 November 2020, the government announced a significant package of extra targeted financial support for those in need over the winter period.
4. The £170 million COVID Winter Grant Scheme is being distributed through County and Unitary Councils and aims to support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs.
5. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the government department that is providing the funding, expects top tier local authorities to administer the scheme and provide direct assistance to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic. This is expected to include families whose children are eligible for Free School Meals (FMS) as well as those who qualify by age for the universal free school meal offer.
6. The conditions of the COVID Winter Grant are that:
  - at least 80 per cent of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support families with children, with up to 20 per cent of the total funding allocated to other types of households, including individuals.
  - at least 80 per cent of the total funding will be ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills (including sewerage), with up to 20 per cent being made available for other essential items.
7. This scheme is part of a wider winter support package for families and children, including:
  - from April 2021, significant expansion of the Department for Education's (DfE's) Holiday Activities and Food programme, which has provided healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children since 2018, across England next year.
  - increasing the value of the Department for Health and Social Care's Healthy Start vouchers from £3.10 to £4.25 from April 2021. Healthy Start supports lower-income pregnant women and families with children under four to buy fruit, vegetables, pulses, milk and infant formula, providing an important nutritional safety net.

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- £16M in further funding for local charities through well-established networks to provide immediate support to front-line food aid charities, including food banks, who are supporting those most vulnerable due to the economic impacts of COVID-19.
8. The Isle of Wight's share of the COVID Winter Grant is £456,845, to be spent between December 2020 and 31 March 2021.

### **CONSULTATION**

9. Following notification of the financial allocation for Isle of Wight (IOW) on 10 November, a Hampshire and IOW task and finish group was pulled together on 11 November comprising representatives of major stakeholder groups including representatives of the voluntary and charitable sector, Connect4Summer leads, Adults Health & Care, Supporting Families, Schools, Children's Social Care, Early Years and Wraparound Childcare, and Communications.
10. In addition to weekly task and finish group meetings, a variety of other stakeholders have been consulted such that existing local provision and local need can be identified, risks in respect of duplication of funding can be addressed and emerging ideas validated or challenged. This additional engagement has included headteachers groups, faith groups, and local resilience centres hubs. A quick turnaround survey was also carried out with all IOW schools and college.
11. This engagement has resulted in an offer, under the programme name Connect4Communities, proposed across IOW.
12. An Officer Delegated Decision was taken, in consultation with the Cabinet member, on 30 November 2020 to approve the distribution of £222 480 funding to schools, colleges and early years providers across IOW such that funding could reach schools in sufficient time for them to purchase vouchers and distribute vouchers and funding before the children break up for Christmas.
13. Meal vouchers are being made available to:
- All children who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)
  - All children with a social worker
  - All children open to early help services
  - 16-18 year olds previously eligible for FSM
  - All 2-4 year olds accessing childcare and eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium.

### **THE IOW OFFER**

14. **Care Leavers**
15. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills through delegated decision on 9 December 2020, approves the purchase of a £20 food or fuel voucher for each care leaver, to the value of £3,140. An estimated 157 care leavers will receive these vouchers with the

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intention that they form part of the established care leavers gift scheme delivered by the Children's Services Department.

**16. Young Carers**

17. Many young carers and their families will be experiencing hardship as a result of the pandemic. There are an estimated 280 young carers who may not be picked up within this offer, and it is therefore recommended that a grant of up to £4,200 is made to the YMCA who deliver the Young carers support programme such that vouchers and/or gifts and/or food can be provided to these families.

**18. Support for individuals**

19. It is recommended that a grant of £21,000 is made available to Citizens Advice for them to use to financially support households with fuel bills over the winter period.
20. Following engagement with key stakeholders, it is felt that targeting this funding at fuel bills will reduce the potential for double funding with other grants available, and asking Citizens Advice to administer this fund will ensure that any financial support can be provided alongside broader support and advice. Citizens Advice are also well placed to undertake ID and benefits checks to mitigate the potential risks of fraudulent claims. IOW Council may require Citizens Advice to target specific communities where there is specific local need.

**21. Holiday activities and food**

22. During the February 2021 half term, it is proposed that, working with schools, voluntary and charitable organisations and early years providers, a holiday activity and food programme is organised. Consideration was given to such a scheme for the Christmas holidays but feedback from provider and schools indicated that it was unlikely to be practical given restrictions on bubbles in schools and other Covid related considerations. However, should providers have existing holiday activity and food schemes operating over the Christmas period which they would like to offer to vulnerable families, they may apply for financial support through the community grants scheme outlined in paragraph 23. The February programme will provide not only a hot meal for vulnerable children, but also fun and educational activities too. These schemes will be accessible by children eligible for FSM, over 3,300 children on the Isle of Wight. This programme will build upon the success of the Connect4Summer scheme that has run successfully across Hampshire over the last two years, and on the Isle of Wight this summer. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills delegates approval to the Director of Children's Services to approve grant awards to organisations for the delivery of such schemes in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills up to the value of £25,000.

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**23. Community grants**

24. There are a significant number of agencies, notably voluntary and charitable sector providers, supporting vulnerable families, households, and individuals. There are also a number of organisations who wish to support their local community with food and fuel poverty, particularly in rural areas. It is proposed that a grant fund is established where such organisations can apply for funding to expand or deliver support and services. Any funded support must meet the DWP grant criteria but use of such a grant fund will enable a flexible and responsive approach to addressing local needs as and when they are identified.
25. One of the opportunities for funding from this grant will be for the development of 'Community Pantries'. Community pantries work on the principle of giving those in need the opportunity to have a 'helping hand' by getting food at a lesser rate on a weekly basis. Items found in the pantry will be a range of fresh, frozen and general foods which will change on a weekly basis. Access to the community pantry is by way of membership, and for a small weekly contribution, members receive food to a significantly higher value. For example, members are charged a nominal sum of £5.00 per shop and receive £15 plus worth of goods. Community pantries will be encouraged to provide a delivery service for those who are not able to come and shop for whatever reason.
26. Any grants will be time limited in nature and organisations seeking grant funding under this component of the Connect4Communities programme will be required to set out how they will ensure services are sustainable without financial support from the Council beyond 31 March 2021.
27. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member delegates approval to the Director of Children's Services to approve grant awards to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant (as set out in paragraph 7) for targeted financial support for those in need over winter in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills up to the value of £145,000.

**28. Administration Costs**

29. The COVID Winter Grant funding allocation includes reasonable administration costs to enable local authorities to deliver the scheme and it is therefore permitted for IOW Council (and partners) to deduct estimated administration costs from the total allocation to determine the amount remaining. Administration costs for each local authority will be published on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) alongside detail of all spend related to this scheme.
30. IOW Council are seeking to minimise administration costs and approval is therefore sought for funding of up to £14,580 (3.19%) to cover reasonable administration costs which will include limited staff costs, web page design and communications and marketing support.

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31. **Connect4Communities Directory**
32. In addition to the range of support outlined in paragraphs 12 to 42, the Isle of Wight Council will work with Community Action IW and the Citizens Advice Bureau to ensure a Connect4Communities directory is established where organisations and community groups can publish details of any local opportunities or support, they wish to share.
33. This will enable residents of the Isle of Wight to search by postcode to identify where they may be able to access financial and other support and subsidised food. For the Isle of Wight Council and partners, this will provide a way to capture offers of support beyond those coordinated directly by the Connect4Communities programme, and an effective way of signposting residents to available support.
34. This directory can be established utilising existing technology and will utilise some of the administrative costs outlined above.

### FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

35. A summary of the proposed funding across the initiatives to be delivered through the Connect4Communities scheme is set out in table 1:

Table 1:

<b>Connect4Communities – IOW’s Winter Grant Scheme</b>	
<b>Component</b>	<b>Funding Allocation (£)</b>
<b>Meal Vouchers</b> £15 per child per week - all FSM eligible children; plus All children open to a social worker; plus All children open to early help plus all post 16 students previously eligible for FSM Plus Early ears pupil premium children	222 480
Care Leavers Vouchers	3 140
Young Carers Grant	4 200
Discretionary Schools Fund	19 600
Grant to Citizens Advice for Open Access to Individuals	21 000
Community Grants	145 000
Connect4Community Holiday Activities & Meals Scheme – February half term	25 000
Administration costs	14 580
Sub-Total	455 000
Contingency	1 845
<b>Total Plan</b>	<b>£456 845</b>

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**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 36. The council are limited to the use of the funds within the restrictions of the DWP.
- 37. All funding granted to third party organisations (including schools, colleges and early years providers) will be supported by a grant agreement setting out the conditions of the funding as well as reporting requirements.
- 38. Third party organisations will be required to report to the Council on how they have spent the funding provided, in line with the DWP grant criteria set out in paragraph 5.
- 39. Allocation of funding across the grant criteria set out in paragraph 5 should be monitored to ensure spend remains compliant with the terms of the grant.

**EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

- 40. Consultation has been undertaken through the task and finish group and by way of presentations to a range of interested and representative groups including Local Children's Partnerships, Local Support Hubs and Headteacher groups.
- 41. School and colleges have been consulted regarding their preferred method of supporting children with food by way of a questionnaire.
- 42. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills following receipt of the Connect4Communities report on 9 December 2020, approves the following by delegated decision;

- 43. The purchase of a £20 food or fuel voucher for each care leaver, to the value of £3,140 such that vouchers and/or gifts and/or food can be provided to care leavers not in receipt of vouchers through the free school meal voucher offer. Such grant will be provided on terms to be agreed by the Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 5.
- 44. A grant of up to £4,200 be made to the YMCA Young Carers support service such that vouchers and/or gifts and/or food can be provided to young carers not in receipt of vouchers through the free school meal voucher offer. Such grant will be provided on terms to be agreed by the Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 5.

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45. A grant of £21,000 is made available to Citizens Advice for them to use to financially support households with fuel bills over the winter period. Such grant will be provided on terms to be agreed by the Director of Children's Services and in accordance with the grant criteria set out in paragraph 5.
46. Approves £25,000 of the funding to be allocated for the delivery of Holiday Activity and Food Schemes and for grant applications to be invited to identify organisations able to provide such schemes. Approval of individual grant awards to organisations from this £25,000 allocation will be brought to a future Cabinet Lead Member decision date.
47. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills delegates approval to the Director of Children's Services to approve community grant awards to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant (as set out in paragraph 5) for targeted financial support for those in need over winter in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills up to the value of £145 000.
48. That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills delegates approval to the Director of Children's Services to approve the reallocation of any winter grants scheme remaining funds to organisations delivering services that meet the criteria of the grant in consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member. This will ensure that where spend does not meet the approvals set out in this report, the Isle of Wight Council can rapidly adapt the approach to ensure needs are met.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

49. DWP Grant Guidance can be found on their website:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/938204/covid-winter-grant-scheme-guide.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/938204/covid-winter-grant-scheme-guide.pdf)

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**APPENDICES ATTACHED**

50. Appendix 1 - Equality Impact Assessment