

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

15 April 2021

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services

**URGENT DECISION TAKEN BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Children Services**

COVID Winter Grant Scheme - Extension

1. Purpose of Report

Cabinet is asked to note the urgent decision taken by the Executive Director of Children's Services on 11 March 2021 to approve spending plans for the extension of the COVID Winter Grants Scheme. The proposed extension to the scheme was announced on 26 February 2021 and clarifying guidance was not received until 2 March 2021 and therefore time for the normal decision-making protocols has not been possible.

2. Information and Analysis

On 26 February 2021, the Government announced an extension to the COVID Winter Grant Scheme with an additional £59.1 million funding which will be available nationally from April 2021. This has increased the overall scheme funding to £229.1 million. This funding will ensure that County Councils and Unitary Authorities can support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs. Derbyshire County Council's additional allocation is £758,277.

The Executive Director of Children's Services has taken the urgent decision that the extension of the scheme continues in the same manner as that contained within the Cabinet Report dated 14 January 2021 at Enclosure 2, with the continued distribution of a shopping voucher scheme to eligible cohorts. Further details of plans to distribute the funding to vulnerable adults are set out in the attached report and enclosures.

3. Financial Considerations

The Children & Families revenue budget will be adjusted to reflect this new ring-fenced grant and it will be monitored through the usual financial monitoring process and in line with the grant conditions. A summary of the grant allocation is set out in Table 1.

Table 1:

	Food & Utilities	Other	Total
	£m	£m	£m
Vulnerable families with children (including FSM)	0.546	0	0.546
Vulnerable Adults	0.109	0.028	0.137
Administration			0.075
Total	80%	20%	0.758

It must be noted, as per the Cabinet report 14 January 2021, that it is the intention of Derbyshire County Council to ensure that all of the grant directly reaches vulnerable members of the community. Consequently, the Council will not take administrative costs from the grant unless there is remaining unused grant at the close of the scheme to prevent unused funds having to be returned or become unclaimed.

4. **Legal Considerations**

The Council’s Constitution provides that “notwithstanding any other provision of the Constitution Strategic Directors shall have the power, after discussion, if practicable, with the Leader of the Council or the relevant Cabinet Member or Chair, to take such actions deemed to be necessary and expedient in matters requiring urgent consideration and which, because of the timescale involved, or the need to safeguard the interests of the County Council, cannot be dealt with by submission to the next following meeting of the Council, Cabinet, Cabinet Member or Committee.”

5. **Other Considerations**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: Human Rights, equality of opportunity, health, environmental, transport, property and crime and disorder considerations.

6. **Background Papers**

See attached Executive Director of Children’s Services Urgent Decision.

7. **Key Decision**

Yes.

8. Officer's Recommendation

That Cabinet notes the Urgent Decision taken by the Executive Director.

**Jane Parfremment
Executive Director for Children's Services**


Enclosure:

1. Executive Director's Urgent Decision – COVID Winter Grant Scheme – Extension -dated 11 March 2021.



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR URGENT DECISION
COVID Winter Grant Scheme - Extension

Head of Service Submitting request	Isobel Fleming (Service Director – Commissioning and Transformation, Childrens Services)
Date of Submission	11 th March 2021
Date submitted to Executive Director	11 th March 2021
Executive Director Decision	Approved
Executive Director Approval	Signed:  JANE PARFREMENT
Date of Executive Director Decision	12 th March 2021

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

11 March 2021

Report to the Strategic Director for Children's Services

The COVID Winter Grant Scheme - Extension

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to ask the Executive Director for an urgent decision to approve additional spending plans for the Derbyshire County Council allocation of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme.
2. The scheme was originally planned to run from 1 December 2020 until 31 March 2021. However, the national scheme has been extended to 16 April 2021 (DWP letter dated 26 February 21) with additional funding. The Extension Delivery report attached with Enclosures at end of this paper, must be submitted to DWP no later than 15 March 2021, and therefore time for the normal decision-making protocols has not been possible.

Information

3. On 26 February 2021, the Government announced an extension to the COVID Winter Grant Scheme with an additional £59.1 million funding which will be available nationally from April. This has increased the overall scheme funding to £229.1 million. This funding will ensure that County Councils and Unitary Authorities can support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs. Derbyshire County Council's allocation is £758,277.
4. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will provide funding to County Councils and Unitary Authorities, under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, who will administer the scheme and provide direct assistance to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic. This will include some families who normally have access to Free School Meals during term time. County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England will have the ability to deliver the scheme through vouchers or grants. The end of the Scheme is extended from 31 March 2021 to 16 April 2021.
5. The Local Authority can determine eligibility in their area and target their support within the scope of the conditions set out below:
 - 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.
6. In Derbyshire it is proposed that the scheme continues in accordance with the Executive Directors Urgent Decision dated 2 December 2020 attached with the Enclosures.

- approximately £0.546m of additional money would be spent on the provision to families meeting local criteria of vulnerabilities and those families where children are in receipt of free school meals due to low income of the household across the Easter holidays.
- approximately £137k of additional money would be spent on vulnerable adults partially through voucher scheme for care-leavers and via Derbyshire Discretionary Fund to cover the Easter Holidays but also on application using the existing grant scheme to Derbyshire Carers Association and Age UK.
- approximately £0.075m would be set aside for administrative costs but would be reallocated as the scheme matured should this figure prove to be excessive.

Families with Children

7. It is recommended that the scheme continues in same manner as that contained within the Cabinet Report dated 14 January 2021 at Enclosure 2, with the continued distribution of a voucher to the eligible cohort.

Vulnerable Adults Scheme

8. The remaining grant, as per the original scheme duration, is to be spent on vulnerable adults via a voucher issue for care-leavers or via a combination of other means of support. These will include an increase in Local Welfare Assistance utilising the Derbyshire Discretionary Fund and an uplift to the Derbyshire Healthy Homes Programme which will address, via referral, domestic infrastructure issues including boiler repair and heating system maintenance. Furthermore, grants will be provided to Third Party Organisations to target those less likely to access local welfare support. Specifically: an older adult hardship fund targeting over sixty five year olds via a grant through Age UK; and a grant to Derbyshire Carers Association ensuring that funding reaches a wide range of vulnerable adults and families who are dealing with the additional pressures of caring for those with long term health conditions, chronic illness, disabilities and learning difficulties.

Additional Information

9. It has been agreed that surrounding local authorities will continue to support eligible children schooled in their area regardless of their home address; it is recommended this remains the same for Derbyshire County Council. Therefore, children who go to school in Derbyshire but live outside the County are included in this calculation in keeping with other Local Authority plans.

10. The Derbyshire scheme will be supporting individual children (eg.one voucher per child) within the family group as opposed to awarding the same grant to each family regardless of size.

Other Options Considered

11. To not extend the scheme. This is not recommended as children, families and vulnerable adults would not receive the benefits from the scheme. No other options were considered.

Reason for Recommendations

12. The recommendations support the conditions and purpose of the grant as set by government whilst meeting local priorities and have proved to be successful to date.

Statutory and Policy Implications

13. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

14. The Children & Families revenue budget will be adjusted to reflect this new ring-fenced grant and it will be monitored through the usual financial monitoring process and in line with the grant conditions. A summary of the grant allocation is set out in Table 2.

Table 2:

	Food & Utilities	Other	Total
	£m	£m	£m
Vulnerable families with children (including FSM)	0.546	0	0.546
Vulnerable Adults	0.109	0.028	0.137
Administration			0.075
Total	80%	20%	0.758

It must be noted, as per the Cabinet report 14 January, it is the intention of Derbyshire County Council to ensure that all of the grant directly reaches vulnerable members of the community, consequently the Council will not take administrative costs from the grant unless there is remaining unused grant at the close of the scheme to prevent unused funds having to be returned or become unclaimed.

Legal Considerations

15. The Council's Constitution provides that "notwithstanding any other provision of the Constitution Strategic Directors shall have the power, after discussion, if practicable, with the Leader of the Council or the relevant Cabinet Member or Chair, to take such actions deemed to be necessary and expedient in matters requiring urgent consideration and which, because of the timescale involved, or the need to safeguard the interests of the County Council, cannot be dealt with by submission to the next following meeting of the Council, Cabinet, Cabinet Member or Committee."

16. The Improvement and Scrutiny Procedure Rules State: "13(6) The call-in procedure set out

above shall not apply where the decision being taken by Cabinet is urgent. A decision will be urgent if any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council's public interest. All reports recommending that decision to be taken should say whether or not it is proposed that call-in be waived. The record of the decision, and notice by which it was made public, shall state whether in the opinion of the decision-making person or body, the decision is an urgent one, and therefore not subject to call-in. The Chairman of the appropriate Improvement and Scrutiny Committee should agree both the decision proposed is reasonable in all circumstances and to it being treated as a matter of urgency. Decisions taken as a matter of urgency should be reported to the next available meeting of the Council, together with the reason for urgency.

17. Councillor Musson, Chair of the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee – People has approved the waiver of call-in due to the urgent nature of the decision required; has agreed special urgency applies and the notice of key decision is not required; and supports the action being taken.

Background Papers and Published Documents

18. The following background papers and published documents are included to aid decision making:

- Executive Directors Urgent Decision – COVID Winter Grant Scheme dated 2 December 2020.
- Cabinet Report - Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services – Urgent Decision taken by the Executive Director of Children's Services COVID Winter Grant – dated 14 January 2021.
- COVID Winter Grant Scheme Update – dated 26 February 2021

Key Decision

19. Yes.

Officer's Recommendation(s)

20. That the Executive Director:

- Approves the overarching extension spending plan Covid Winter Grant Scheme for Derbyshire County Council as detailed above

Dr Isobel Fleming
Service Director - Commissioning and Transformation
Childrens Services