



Agenda Item

FOR PUBLICATION

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

17 June 2021

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services

**Urgent Decision taken by the Executive Director
Children's Services**

COVID Local Support Grant

(Children's Services and Safeguarding)

1. Divisions Affected

1.1 Countywide

2. Key Decision

2.1 This is a key decision as it concerns expenditure in excess of £500,000 and will impact of communities living in more than two electoral districts.

3. Purpose

3.1 Cabinet is asked to note the urgent decision taken by the Executive Director of Children's Services on 10 May 2021 to approve additional spending plans for the Derbyshire County Council allocation of the COVID Local Support Grant (CLSG). This scheme is a successor to the Covid Winter Grant Scheme (CWGS) for vulnerable families which ran from 1 December 2020 until 16 April 2021 and will continue until 20 June 2021. The CLSG Delivery Plan attached with Enclosures at end of this paper, had to be submitted to DWP no later than 14 May 2021, and

therefore time for the normal decision-making protocols was not possible.

4. Information and Analysis

- 4.1 On 14 April 2021, the Government announced a successor to the COVID Winter Grant Scheme with an additional £40 million funding which will be available nationally from 17 April 2021. CLSG will be allocated to local authorities on the same basis as the previous CWGS, using the population of each authority weighted by a function of the English Index of Multiple Deprivation. The allocation for the Council was £513m.
- 4.2 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 Appendix 1. 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.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation was undertaken with Age UK Derby and Derbyshire to establish the need and ongoing opportunity to support vulnerable older people, and this is a client group that is under-represented in the applicant profile for Derbyshire Discretionary Fund. Given the short time frame available, they indicated that a grant fund of £35,000 would be a manageable allocation for Age UK Derby and Derbyshire to disperse and ASCH colleagues have offered to work to extend existing CWGS arrangements to monitor this.

6. Alternative Options Considered

- 6.1 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.

7. Implications

- 7.1 Appendix 1 sets out the relevant implications considered in the preparation of the report.

8. Background Papers

8.1 The following background papers and published documents are available 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
- 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 Extension– dated. 15 April 2021
- DWP COVID Local Support Grant 3 guidance: 17 April 2021 to 20 June 2021 (Updated 21 May 2021)

9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1- Implications.

9.2 Appendix 2 – Executive Director Urgent Decision, COVID Local Grant Scheme Report – 10 May 2021

10. Recommendation(s)

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

11. Reasons for Recommendation(s)

11.1 It was essential that the Executive Director took an urgent decision in order to ensure that plans could progress to meet the DWP grant requirements to commit all CLSG expenditure before the 20 June 2021.

12. Is it necessary to waive the call in period?

12.1 *Yes, it is necessary to waive the call-in period as the decision is urgent and any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council's or the public interest.*

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Implications**Financial**

- 1.1 The Children's Services 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.
- 1.2 It must be noted, as per the Cabinet Report dated 14 January 2021, it is the intention of the 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.

Table 1:

	Food & Utilities	Other	Total
	£m	£m	£m
Vouchers for vulnerable families with children (including FSM) and care leavers	478,182	0	0
Vulnerable Adults	0	35,000	0
Administration	0	0	0
Total	93%	7%	513,182

Legal

- 2.1 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."

Human Resources

- 3.1 None.

Information Technology

4.1 None.

Equalities Impact

5.1 Equality of opportunity has been considered in preparing this report.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

6.1

Other

7.1 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.

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR URGENT DECISION
COVID Local Grant Scheme**

Head of Service Submitting request	Sarah Edwards, Head of Service – Programmes, Commissioning and Transformation, Childrens Services)
Date of Submission	10 May 2021
Date submitted to Executive Director	10 May 2021
Executive Director Decision	Approved
Executive Director Approval	Signed:  JANE PARFREMENT
Date of Executive Director Decision	10 May 2021

RESTRICTED

Urgent Decision Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

10 May 2021

Report to the Strategic Director for Children's Services

The COVID Local Support Grant

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 Local Support Grant (CLSG). This scheme is a successor to the Covid Winter Support Scheme (CWGS) for vulnerable families which ran from 1 December 2020 until 16 April 2021 and will continue until 20 June 2021. The CLSG Delivery Plan attached with Enclosures at end of this paper, must be submitted to DWP no later than 14 May 2021, and therefore time for the normal decision-making protocols has not been possible.

Information

2. On 14 April 2021, the Government announced a successor to the COVID Winter Grant Scheme with an additional £40 million funding which will be available nationally from 17 April. CLSG will be allocated to local authorities on the same basis as the previous CWGS, using the population of each authority weighted by a function of the English Index of Multiple Deprivation.
3. CLSG funding reflects the easing of lockdown restrictions as we move through the roadmap outlined by the Government in February. 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 £513,182.
4. The CLSG has the same eligibility criteria as CWGS and uses the same reporting template (incorporating the Statement of Grant Usage Management Information (MI) Return), as the previous Covid Winter Grant Scheme. A new summary report setting out how the authority intends to

spend the additional grant is attached in Appendix 3 at end of this paper and this must be submitted to DWP by 14 May 2021.

5. Apart from the change in name the grant conditions remain the same with the exception of a new rule that no underspends from the previous tranches of grant funding can be brought forward.
6. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will continue to 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 newly named CLSG will run from 17 April to 20 June 2021.
7. The Local Authority can determine eligibility in their area and target their support within the scope of the grant conditions:
8. Given the smaller amount of grant that Derbyshire is eligible to receive for this next tranche and the short timescale for spending the grant it is proposed that a the majority of the grant is spent on the provision of food vouchers for families meeting local criteria of vulnerabilities, those families where children are in receipt of free school meals due to low income of the household and to care leavers across the May half term holidays. In addition to this a grant fund of £35,000 will be given to Age UK Derby and Derbyshire to support vulnerable older people. No allowance would be set aside for administrative costs but it should be noted that up 10% could be claimed if there is an underspend in the budget when the final account is prepared in June 2021. For reference, the administrative costs incurred in facilitating distribution of the Covid Winter Grant Scheme across the three previous tranches of support are estimated to be approximately £100,000. Most of this cost is internal staff time.

Families with Children

9. 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. However, in line with the reduction in size of the grant the voucher per eligible child will be £20 based on issue of vouchers to 27,000 eligible children. The rationale for the different voucher values is set out in paragraph 11.

Vulnerable Adults Scheme

10. Discussions with Adult Social Care and Health colleagues, who in turn have discussed with third party providers, confirm that the support measures under the Covid Winter Grant scheme have been well received and effective in offering support to vulnerable households impacted over the winter. Alternative extended provision is being made available through the Derbyshire Discretionary Fund (one of the channels for the CWGS vulnerable households support) for the next six months at least, using Public Health CONTAIN funding.

Age UK Derby and Derbyshire have indicated a potential need and ongoing opportunity to support vulnerable older people, and this is a client group that is under-represented in the applicant profile for Derbyshire Discretionary Fund. Given the short time frame available, a grant fund of £35,000 would be a manageable allocation for Age UK Derby and Derbyshire to disperse and ASCH colleagues have offered to work to extend existing CWGS arrangements to monitor this.

In addition, it is proposed to replicate the CWGS provision to Care Leavers aged 18 – 25 and these are included in the voucher costs figures in this report.

Options for the value of the vouchers

11. It should be noted that on each of the three previous rounds of allocation of vouchers at Christmas, February half terms and Easter an average of 20% of vouchers have not been redeemed. Despite considerable effort to contact parents/carers sending out reminders to recipients by email and text and extending the expiry date of the vouchers not all recipients have chosen to redeem their vouchers. A piece of work is ongoing to establish any reasons for this. This has resulted in an underspend in all three voucher issues at Christmas, half term and Easter. Each time any available funding has been released to allocated to vulnerable families. To avoid the risk of this situation occurring again and the Council potentially having to underclaim against the full potential grant allocation one option would be to issued vouchers of a higher value on the assumption that there will only be an 80% take up of vouchers. Vouchers can only be issued in multiples of £5 so we have considered two options to issue vouchers valued at £15 or £20 and the implication of each is set out in Table 1 below for consideration by SMT.

Table1: Implication of the proposed different voucher values

Number of vouchers to be issued		27000		Total budget available		£478,182	
Voucher value £	Total spend	Assumptions based on 80% redemption rate			Potential over-spend		Risks
		Actual cost	No of vouchers redeemed	Potential under-spend	85% voucher redeemed	100% voucher redeemed	
£15	£405,000	£324,000	21,600	£154,182	Nil	Nil	There is a risk that there will be an underspend based on pattern of voucher redemption (80% in all previous rounds)
£20	£540,000	£432,000	21,600	£46,182	Nil Under-spend reduced to £19,182	£61,818	There is a risk of a small budget underspend based on 80% take up or an overspend of £61k if there is 100% take-up

The implications of the different voucher values are set out in the table above and members of SMT are asked to consider the risks and benefits of issuing vouchers valued at £15 or £20 per child /care leaver. It is recommended that the vouchers are valued at £20.

Please note in either scenario no administration time is accounted for and this is a cost to the Council.

Additional Information

- 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.

13. 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

14. 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

15. 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

16. 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

17. 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.

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

18. 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."
19. 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."
20. Councillor Musson, Chair of the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee has been consulted about the waiver of call-in due to the urgent nature of the decision required; to get his agreement that special urgency applies and the notice of key decision is not required; and to seek support for the action being taken.

Background Papers and Published Documents

21. The following background papers and published documents are available 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
- 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 Extension– dated. 15 April 2021

Key Decision

22. Yes.

Officer's Recommendation(s)

23. That the Executive Director:

- Approves the overarching succession Covid Local Support Grant spending plan for Derbyshire County Council as detailed above
- Approves the recommendation to issue vouchers with a value of £20 taking into account the risks and benefits set out in table 1 in paragraph 11.

Sarah Edwards,
Head of Service - Programmes,
Commissioning and Transformation
Childrens Services

APPENDIX 3

COVID Local Support Grant 17 April – 20 June 2021 Delivery Plan	
Name of Authority	
How are you planning to spend your allocation	
Supporting children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) (£s)	
Supporting children not currently eligible for FSMs (£s)	
Support for utilities (£s)	
Other Essentials (£s) (Please provide examples)	
Scheme Administration (£s)	
Not allocated yet (£s)	
Total of above (£s)	
If the above does not total your allocation is the balance likely to be unspent at the end of the scheme? Y/N. Please explain.	
If you are planning to provide support to vulnerable children during the half term school holidays please advise:	
How are you providing support (Vouchers; food parcels; delivering support through schools; delivering support through other third party organisations)?	
How much have you allocated per child per week (£s)	
How many vulnerable children will you be supporting	
Are you providing support to all children that would receive FSM in term time (Y/N)	
If No, how are you selecting which families to support?	
If you are <u>not</u> targeting provision to cover FSM during the half term school holiday with the additional funding	
Are you using other funds to provide support during half term school holiday? Y/N or N/A	
If Y or N to previous question, please	

explain including where funding is coming from e.g. previous periods of the scheme, own LA funds, HAF etc.	
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