

REPORT TITLE	COVID Local Support Grant (COVID Winter Grant Scheme – extension)
REPORT OF	Mark Camborne (Assistant Director – Neighbourhoods, Safety & Transport)

REPORT SUMMARY

This report outlines proposed indicative spend of a further extension to the government’s COVID Winter Grant Scheme, renamed the COVID Local Support Scheme (£288,145).

RECOMMENDATION

That the Director of Neighbourhoods agrees the indicative local allocation of the grant extension as outlined below:

Item	Proposed indicative spend
COVID Local Support Grant – small grants programme	100,000
Food for children in need of additional support (May half-term)	56,500
Financial support with energy (fuel) and water bills debt	50,000
Crisis support with emergency call-outs and boiler repairs/replacements	20,000
Crisis support with white goods	15,000
Contingency	20,000
Administration costs	26,645
	£288,145

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 The Grant will help the Council continue its intensive work, in partnership with local agencies, groups and organisations, to support those most vulnerable throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The option to reject the Grant extension has been discounted, as this would mean that funding available to the Council is not utilised to support vulnerable households.
- 2.2 Different financial allocations to the various projects would not have reflected actual capacity to deliver.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 This report is further to the Officer Decision taken on 24 November 2020 for the allocation of the £1,224,616.93 COVID Winter Grant Scheme to Wirral by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). This Grant covered the period 1 December 2020 – 31 March 2021. The Decision is set out here:
<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=4778>
- 3.2 A further Officer Decision was taken on 16 March 2021 regarding an extension to the Grant (£425,734), taking the end date of the Grant to 16 April 2021. The Decision is set out here:
<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=4824>
- 3.3 Management Information (MI) reporting is currently being collated for the above Grant, including extension, and the total allocation of £1,650,350.93 will be reported as fully spent.
- 3.4 On 14 April 2021, the DWP provided details of a further extension to the Grant; renamed the COVID Local Support Grant with a further £40million of support. A Grant allocation of £288,145 is to be made to Wirral for the period 17 April 2021 to 20 June 2021; this ties in with the government's Roadmap. The same terms and conditions apply as with the COVID Winter Grant Scheme and the further MI return to the DWP for the period is due on 9 July 2021.

4.0 PROPOSED INDICATIVE SPEND

- 4.1 The following items of spend are proposed. These figures are indicative and may vary as the various elements are progressed.
- 4.2 **COVID Local Support Fund – small grants programme (£100,000)**
A further small grants programme will enable community-based food and welfare support providers to ensure food and essential supplies are available to those most in need over the coming months. The Fund will be launched on Monday 26 April 2021 (awaiting the closure of the Social Sector Setting Road to Recovery Fund to avoid confusion). Bids will be invited for a maximum of £5,000 per project. Groups

will only be permitted to include administration costs of no more than £200 to ensure that spend remains consistent with the Grant criteria.

4.3 Groups engaged within the Humanitarian Cell have been given advance notice of the Fund in order that they can be prepared to bid. It will be administered by the Constituency Teams in Neighbourhood Services and successful applications awarded funding w/c 3 May 2021. Groups/organisations will have until 20 June 2021 to spend the funding and will be subject to the established audit requirements (submission of receipts, etc.), which is consistent with the monitoring of previous small grants programmes.

4.4 **Food for children in need of additional support during May half-term (£56,500)**
The COVID Winter Grant Scheme part-funded a successful project co-ordinated by Neo Community on behalf of the Council and working in partnership with over 20 local groups and organisations (*Food & activities holiday provision for school and nursery age children*). A total of 26,956 hampers were provided to children throughout the Christmas 2020 break, February 2021 half-term and Easter 2021 holiday at a cost of £685,291. 20,175 activity packs were also provided through other funding.

4.4.1 Whilst this approach provided the required support, needed in part to issues compounded by the pandemic, both the Council and its partners are mindful that further support must reflect the country's Roadmap moving forward from the pandemic and avoid creating reliance on a temporary system that is not sustainable in the longer-term. The Project funded by the COVID Winter Grant Scheme will be adapted as outlined below for May half-term. There is no corresponding provision through the Holiday Activities Programme (HAF) funded by the Department for Education and co-ordinated locally by Edsential during the May half-term.

4.4.2 Part 1:
All schools will identify their ten most in need Free School Meal eligible children to receive a hamper including fresh vegetables, fruit, meat, milk and bread (with recipe cards for parents/guardians and alternative options for specific dietary requirements); circa 1,260 hampers will be provided. Hampers for primary school age children will be delivered to all primary schools for collection by parents and all hampers for secondary age school children will be delivered to home addresses by Neo Community. This provision will not include nursery age or college age children.

4.4.3 Part 2:
Establish 10 Food Hubs/Pick up points across the borough as below.

- 3 Birkenhead (Rock Ferry, Birkenhead North, Central Birkenhead)
- 3 Wallasey (Liscard/Seacombe, New Brighton, Leasowe)
- 2 Wirral South (Eastham, New Ferry)
- 2 Wirral West (Woodchurch, Hoylake)

Each Hub will provide 50 lunches per day for four days of the May half-term to circa 2,000 children. This provision is consistent with that which will be provided through HAF for the remaining school holidays in 2021. This provision will be accessible to nursery, school and college age children.

4.4.4 The breakdown of anticipated costs for this project is outlined below:

1,260 hampers (£25 per hamper)	£31,500
2,000 lunches (£2.50 per child)	£25,000
Administration costs (Project management and logistics by Neo Community)	£8,000
Administration costs (£500 per Hub)	£5,000

4.4.5 The administration costs form part of the administration costs set aside for the whole Grant (in line with the Grant conditions).

4.5 Financial support with energy (fuel) and water bills debt (£50,000)

The COVID Winter Grant Scheme funded the reduction/clearance of £129,609 of utility debts from individuals engaged with Citizens Advice Wirral and Energy Projects Plus. In many cases this has enabled households to now switch energy suppliers and move to more affordable fuel tariffs; enabling them to use heating over the winter months that was often severely rationed due to financial pressures. The positive impact of this project on physical and mental health has been demonstrable. Debt amounts over £500, the cap for which was removed shortly after commencement of the project, will continue to be authorised for clearance by the Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods, Safety and Transport.

4.6 Crisis support with emergency call-outs and boiler replacements (£20,000)

Following the sudden cessation of another key external funding stream that paid for replacement boilers for households in financial hardship, this project funded by the COVID Winter Grant Scheme was extended to include not just emergency repairs but also emergency boiler replacements in specific circumstances. Whilst further funding is in the process of being identified, a further allocation of funding through the Grant will enable this vital work by Energy Projects Plus to continue in the interim.

4.7 Crisis support with essential white goods (£15,000)

Community-based partners, North Birkenhead Development Trust and St Vincent de Paul Society (Wirral), have provided white goods and other essential items to the value of £45,000, funded through the COVID Winter Grant Scheme, to vulnerable households who do not meet the threshold for Council support through its Financial Support with Welfare Needs Scheme. A further allocation will see this support continue over the coming months.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The COVID Local Support Grant allocation is £288,145. This is for the period of 17 April 2021 – 20 June 2021.

5.2 The table below outlines proposed indicative spend. Administration costs for the first project are factored in to the overall administration costs for the Grant.

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5.3 There is no financial risk to the Council if the full Grant is not expended, as the Grant payment by the Department for Work & Pensions will be based upon actual spend as detailed by Wirral's monitoring (MI) return.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The spend proposed is consistent with the terms of the Grant.

6.2 Any grant funding issued will continue to require adherence to GDPR, health and safety, including social distancing and other COVID-related requirements.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

7.1 Oversight of the project will continue to be undertaken by the Temporary Lead for Food & Welfare Support (COVID-19), within the structure of the Humanitarian Cell.

8.0 RELEVANT RISKS

8.1 The proposals have been considered with partners, taking into account factors such as risks, gaps in service, priorities, lead-in times and capacity.

8.2 Financial risks have been considered and measures put in place to mitigate against misuse and/or use that is inconsistent with the Grant conditions.

8.3 There will be frequent dialogue with project leads to limit the likelihood of any underspend (or overspend) at conclusion of the Grant period.

9.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

9.1 Through the Council's Humanitarian Cell, created in response to COVID-19, agencies and third sector partners have been engaged in determining both emergency and sustainable approaches to food and other poverty, the impacts of which on households have been compounded by the pandemic.

10.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is

a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

- 10.2 This report has no direct impact for equalities; however any associated actions may need an equality impact assessment.

11.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The production of carbon emissions has been limited wherever possible.
- 11.2 Projects involving the supply of food will seek to source that locally where practical and cost-effective to do so.
- 11.3 The work of Energy Projects Plus in alignment with the Grant (emergency call-outs) will continue to assist with greater energy efficiency and/or the reduction of carbon emissions for individual households.

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APPENDICES

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

COVID Local Support Grant: – Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England, Department for Work & Pensions.

Officer Decision Report – COVID Winter Grant Scheme, 16 March 2021.

Working Group Update: The Provision of Food & Activities for Children in School Holidays During the COVID 19 Pandemic, Children, Young People & Education Committee, 28 January 2021.

Holiday Food and Activities for School and Nursery Age Children During Holidays, Children, Young People & Education Committee, 1 December 2020.

Officer Decision Report – COVID Winter Grant Scheme, 24 November 2020.

The Provision of Food & Activities for Children in School Holidays During the Covid-19 Pandemic, Policy & Resources Committee, 11 November 2020.

COVID Winter Grant Scheme – Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities, Department for Work & Pensions.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Officer Decision Report – COVID Winter Grant Scheme	16 March 2021
Children, Young People & Education Committee	28 January 2021
Children, Young People & Education Committee	1 December 2020
Officer Decision Report – COVID Winter Grant Scheme	24 November 2020
Policy & Resources Committee	11 November 2020