

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE****Tuesday, 1 December 2020**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>THE PROVISION OF FOOD &amp; ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN IN SCHOOL HOLIDAYS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES &amp; EDUCATION</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

This report provides an update further to the proposal agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee regarding the provision of free school meals (FSM) in school holidays during the COVID-19 pandemic since March. The report also includes next steps to develop a sustainable approach to the provision of FSM and support to eligible children and those on the cusp in the medium and longer term.

This matter affects all wards in the borough.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The Children, Young People & Education Committee are recommended to:-**

- **note the approach set out for supporting school and nursery age children over Christmas 2020 and February half-term 2021.**
- **agree to the creation of a Working Group, consisting of key partners and nominated elected members, to explore options in relation to supporting children with food in the medium to longer term. All recommendations to be reported back to the Policy & Resources Committee in the New Year.**
- **nominate a small number of elected members to participate in the Working Group.**

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need for children to be able to access food and support activities during school holidays. A specific request was made by the Leader of the Council for a report to be taken to the Policy and Resources Committee to address two issues. Firstly, an urgent decision to agree the use of the Tranche 4 COVID-19 emergency fund (£200,000) to provide funding for Free School Meal eligible children between Christmas and the end of the Easter term 2021; this was agreed. Secondly, as the full impact of COVID-19 becomes clearer, for the Policy and Resources Committee to consider how best to meet the needs of children eligible for Free School Meals in the medium and longer term. The Children, Young People & Education Committee was tasked with progressing this.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the development of the approach for supporting children over the forthcoming school holidays and recommends next steps.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 The option to not provide any free school meals to children over the school holidays was considered and discounted. 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.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The background to the approach and Council support provided so far, is set out in the report to Policy & Resources Committee of 11 November 2020.
- 3.2 The Policy & Resources Committee agreed a proposal for a project co-ordinated by local charity Neo Community (Feeding Birkenhead), working in partnership with schools and local community-based feeding groups and organisations, to provide food and activities to children eligible for Free School Meals over the Christmas 2020, February half-term 2021 and Easter 2021 holidays. This built upon learning from the operation of the Edsential Holiday Activity Fund over the summer, providing for adaptation of a successful model of delivery.
- 3.3 As noted at the Policy & Resources Committee and reported by the government after the report had been drafted, the Department for Work & Pensions announced on 8 November 2020 a significant package of extra targeted financial support for those in need over the winter period. This includes:
  - £170m COVID Winter Grant Scheme to support children, families and the most vulnerable over winter.
  - Holiday Activities and Food programme to be expanded, covering Easter, Summer and Christmas in 2021.
  - Healthy Start payments set to rise from £3.10 to £4.25 a week from April 2021.

The Government has also pledged additional funding of £16m for food distribution charities, with conversations with FareShare and others ongoing as to how this is allocated.

- 3.4 Wirral's proposed allocation of the £170m COVID Winter Grant Scheme is £1,224,617; this is for the period 1 December 2020 – 31 March 2021. Through the Humanitarian Cell (Food Sub-Group), partners - agencies, local organisations and groups - have been engaged in the development of proposals for spend of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme. This engagement and additional funding (provided by both the Holiday Activities Fund and COVID Winter Grant) has seen the agreed approach built upon and extended.

#### **4.0 PROVISION OF FOOD & ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOL AND NURSERY AGE CHILDREN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC – CHRISTMAS 2020 & FEBRUARY HALF-TERM 2021**

- 4.1 As outlined, local charity, Neo Community, will co-ordinate the project; the organisation led the work to deliver the Edsential Holiday Activities Fund over the summer. Delivery will be focused upon Christmas 2020 (two weeks) and February half-term 2021 (one week). There will be two strands to the delivery; firstly, providing food and activities to children eligible for Free School Meals and secondly, providing food and activities for nursery age children eligible for 2 Year funding and Early Years Pupil Premium.
- 4.2. Local schools, nurseries and Council Children's Centres will be supported to engage with eligible families. Based on learning from the Holiday Activities Fund, which saw 56% of eligible children (Free School Meals) engaged, calculations have been based on this percentage of provision for children in both categories. This means 4,895 children (school age) and 1,120 (nursery age).
- 4.3 Local community-based feeding groups and organisations across the borough are invited to bid for funding from Monday 23 November to provide the food and activities to children within their locality; groups are aware of the forthcoming launch. They are required to be either a constituted group, CIC or charity (provision is also made in limited circumstances for a private catering company with an existing contract with a local school). Briefing sessions are scheduled to take place on 24 November 2020, with 29 November 2020 (noon) being the deadline for applications. An update will be provided to the Committee on the night as to the number of applications received. Following assessment, which includes being satisfied that each organisation has the respective safeguarding, insurance/s and health & safety policies in place (risk assessment/s to include COVID-safe practices), successful applicants will be notified on 4 December 2020 and funding released to them w/c 7 December 2020. This Council will pay the grants directly to groups and organisations identified.
- 4.4 Neo Community will work with all successful groups to align them with a local school/s, nursery and/or Children's Centre (where applicable); many groups have strong, well-established relationships in place already. Neo will support smaller groups or those with less experience of delivery and also create 'buddying' arrangements between groups to provide additional support and/or to plug provision where any gaps in delivery are identified across the borough.

- 4.5 Whilst the schools, nurseries and Children's Centres will engage with the identified families, parents/carers have dignity and choice in the process. Some will not require or want support and it is their decision as to whether to access the support available.
- 4.6 The proposal reported to the Policy & Resources Committee has been enhanced, not only through the inclusion of support for nursery age children, but also by extending the food offer. The lunch provision for children is now funded to provide a greater quantity and quality offer and will serve as a 'main' meal for the day. Breakfast is also now included.
- 4.7 Support will be primarily focused up the provision of hampers and home-based activity packs, although some groups may opt to provide one or more hot meals. Hampers and packs will be delivered directly to families in cases where they are self-isolating due to COVID-19. Local arrangements will also include collection from schools or community-based locations.
- 4.8 The first round of delivery is from 21 December 2020 to 1 January 2021 (Christmas). The second round of delivery for all groups is w/c 15 February 2021 (half-term). A further round of funding will be released on 8 January 2021, closing for bids on 15 January 2021 (9am). This is specifically to bring on board any additional groups who may be able to add capacity in locations with limited coverage. Successful groups will be notified on 22 January 2021, with grants payable (by the Council) on 25 January 2021. The second round of delivery for all group is w/c 15 February 2021 (half-term). After each delivery period, groups are required to provide data to Neo Community.
- 4.9 A governance board has been established to oversee delivery of the project. This consists of representatives from Wirral Council (Children's Services, Humanitarian Cell), Community Action Wirral, Wirral Development Trust (Fed Up Wallasey), Esdential, Feeding Birkenhead and Neo Community. Neo Community will provide the project management - overall co-ordination; grant management; publicity; school, nursery and Children's Centre engagement and support delivery where gaps are identified.

## **5.0 NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 Following discussion at Policy & Resources Committee on 11 November 2020 (minute 18 refers), it was agreed that the Children, Young People and Education Committee be asked to develop proposals for consideration by the Policy and Resources Committee on a sustainable approach for the provision of Free School Meals, and support to eligible children in the medium and long term, including children who are not necessarily in receipt of Free School Meals.
- 5.2 It is proposed that a small Working Group consisting of key partners and nominated elected members is composed to explore options. The first meeting will take place in December 2020 and will report back to the Policy & Resources Committee with recommendations in the New Year.

## **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The costs for the project are set out in Appendix 1. The overall cost of the project is £531,140. The administration and activities elements (£145,350) will be allocated from Tranche 4 of the government's COVID-19 emergency funding; up to £200,000 was agreed by Policy & Resources Committee (minute 18 of 11 November 2020 refers). The remainder of this will be retained as a contingency measure. The cost of the food element of the project is proposed to be funded from the COVID Winter Grant Scheme (£385,790); at the time of writing this report this was agreed in principle by the Council's Tactical Co-ordination Group on 19 November 2020, for further consideration by the Council's Strategic Co-ordination Group on 20 November 2020.

## **7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The spend proposed is consistent with the terms of each grant.

## **8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

- 8.1 Oversight of the project will be undertaken by the Temporary Lead for Food & Welfare Support (COVID-19), within the structure of the Humanitarian Cell. Administrative support with the grant programmes and wider delivery being managed within the Cell is currently being identified.

## **9.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 9.1 There is a risk of gaps in provision in localities in delivery of the project. Where possible, Neo Community as the project co-ordinator, will seek to fill any gaps working with groups. The second release of funding (January 2021) provides the opportunity to extend provision where gaps have been identified.
- 9.2 As noted, calculations are based upon a take up rate of 56%; there is a risk that this will be exceeded. Contingency is built into the project's costings and additional contingency catered for through the Tranche 4 funding should demand be considerably greater than anticipated. Local groups have demonstrated resilience in the past in responding to and managing increasing demand.

## **10.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 10.1 The design of the project reflects learning from previous delivery (including feedback from groups and organisations engaged) and recent engagement with those partners engaged in the Humanitarian Cell Food Sub-Group.

## **11.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 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.

## 12.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 Deliveries and collections are a part of the project's operating model. Due to some families self-isolating and the need to minimise contact between households, even within a COVID-safe environment, it is not appropriate for food and activities to be hosted within local community facilities. This would be the preferred method of delivery in ordinary circumstances.
- 12.2 Food will be sourced locally where practical and cost-effective to do so.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Holiday food & activities for school and nursery age children – costings.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

*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 – Draft Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities*, Department for Work & Pensions.

## SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Policy & Resources Committee	11 November 2020