



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Thursday, 28 January 2021

REPORT TITLE:	WORKING GROUP UPDATE: THE PROVISION OF FOOD & ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN IN SCHOOL HOLIDAYS DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

A report, presented to the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 1 December 2020, provided an update following the proposal agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee in respect to the provision of free school meals (FSM) in school holidays during the COVID 19 pandemic. The report explained that the Policy and Resources Committee agreed a proposal for a project co-ordinated on behalf of the Council by local charity Neo Community, 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.

A recommendation arising from the report, considered at the previous Committee Meeting, was to establish a Working Group with key partners to explore options in relation to supporting children with free school meals in the medium to longer term. The purpose of this report is to update the Children, Young People and Education Committee on progress made to date.

RECOMMENDATION - The Children, Young People and Education note the progress of the Working Group for the Provision of Food and Activities in School Holidays during the COVID- 19 Pandemic.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 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 on 11 November 2020 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 the provision of meals to eligible children (those identified as able to access Free School Meal provision under the current Government scheme) between Christmas and the end of 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 these children in the medium and longer term. The Children, Young People and Education Committee was tasked with progressing this.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the progress of the working group established by the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 1 December 2020.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The option to not provide any provision 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 had 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 Policy and Resources Committee agreed a proposal for a project co-ordinated by local charity Neo Community (on behalf of Wirral Council) 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 Holidays 2021. 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.
- 3.2 As noted at the Policy and Resources Committee on 11 November 2020 and reported by the Government after the report had been drafted, the Department for Work and Pensions announced on 8 November 2020 a significant package of extra targeted financial support for those in need over the winter period. This included:
- £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.

3.3 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.

4.0 **PROGRESS ON THE PROVISION OF FOOD & ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOL AND NURSERY AGE CHILDREN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

4.1 The scope of the project was developed in discussion with partners and presented to Children, Families and Education Committee on 1 December 2020. The scope was also extended from school age children eligible for Free School Meals to include nursery age children (eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium/2 Year Funding) and an enhanced food offer including breakfast.

4.2 The Working Group met on 21 December 2020 and 18 January 2021 to be informed of progress and to agree next steps. The group is scheduled to meet monthly for the remainder of the municipal year.

4.3 During the Christmas holiday period, 23 organisations were involved in the distribution of 8071 hampers and 9961 activity packs that were delivered to those eligible children in the cohorts outlined above whose parents/carers requested support. The hampers delivered to families were per household. The activity packs were distributed per individual eligible child.

4.4 The overall budget consisting of the DWP Covid Winter Grant Scheme (£385,790) and the Budget Tranche 4 (£200,000) is £585,790. The actual spend for Christmas 2020 was £439,621 with an additional projected spend of £243,205 for February half term. The total projected spend is £682,827. The estimated contingency for the project is up to £97,037.

4.5 The way in which the budget was allocated is detailed in the table below:

COVID Winter Grant (Hampers)	£331,566.27
Tranche 4 (Activity Packs)	£87,540.79
Project management (Neo Community)	£14,601.04
Military Style Education & Development CIC (logistics) (Tranche 4)	£5,913.00
Total Spend	£439,621.10

- 4.6 Individual hampers were costed at £20 each per week with an enhancement for larger families. The budget attributed to the programme was aimed at a 56% take up rate, based upon delivery of the programme in the summer, but with additional contingency set aside anticipating increased demand over Christmas. In practice, there has been a 66% take up rate from eligible children, and 45% take up rate from early years settings and additionally two colleges requested support. Contingency had been built into the projects costing in order to support this.
- 4.7 The group were informed of ongoing work to identify gaps across the Borough. It was reported to the Working Group that Wirral West was the Constituency area with the most gaps in support. Work is currently being undertaken with organisations and schools with the view to schools having a single point of contact with individual community group or organisation, providing an ongoing and sustainable link for community-based support to families.
- 4.8 In order to support community groups and organisations a collective Governance Board has been established so that officers can share knowledge and offer professional advice. The board consists of representatives from Wirral Council, Community Action Wirral, Wirral Development Trust, Edsential, Feeding Birkenhead – Supporting Wirral and Neo Community.
- 4.9 The next steps will be to continue working alongside organisations to deliver hampers and activity packs during the February half-term and for the Working Group to continue to meet on a monthly basis.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The overall cost of the project is estimated to be up to £682,827. The project management, activity pack costs and additional logistical costs elements (£200,000); which was allocated from Tranche 4 of the Government's COVID -19 emergency funding by the Policy and Resources Committee (minute 18 of 11 November 2020 refers). The cost of the food element of the project will be funded by the COVID Winter Grant Scheme). There was some contingency for the take up rate being above 56% built in to both funding streams. The overspend will be funded by utilising all of the Tranche 4 allocation and the remainder provided from the COVID Winter Grant Scheme.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 7.1 Oversight of the project is with the temporary lead for food and welfare support (COVID-19) within the structure of the Humanitarian Cell and a representative on the Governance Board

8.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 8.1 Risks associated with the project include gaps in provision in delivery of the project. This has been identified and ongoing work is being undertaken to address this.
- 8.2 It is anticipated that additional logistical support with deliveries will be required over the February half-term due to the national lockdown, which means that collection of food hampers from schools by parents/carers is not a preferable option.
- 8.3 Calculations had been based on a take up rate of 56%. Contingency funding had been built into the project's costings to support the actual take up rate so far of 66% (Free School Meal eligible children).

8 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

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

9 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.

This report has no impact on equalities.

11.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 Food has been sourced locally where it has been practical and cost effective to do so.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Provision of Food & Activities for Children in School Holidays During the Covid-19 Pandemic, Policy and 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
Children, Young People and Education Committee	1 December 2020
Policy & Resources Committee	11 November 2020