



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

MONDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2021

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

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 2020.

This matter affects all wards in the borough. This is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S -

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to:

- (1) note the progress of the Provision of Food and Activities Working Group for Children in School Holidays during the Covid-19 Pandemic; and**
- (2) ask that a report be presented to Policy and Resources Committee in the new year.**

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 school holidays. This includes activity undertaken up to and including May half-term 2021, ongoing activity for the summer of 2021 and recommends next steps.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The option to not provide any targeted support to children eligible for Free School Meals 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 and updates have been provided to the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 1 December 2020 and 28 January 2021.
- 3.2 Further to the last report provided on 28 January 2021 (minute 33 refers) outlining the approach for Christmas 2020 and February half-term 2021, the DWP extended the Covid Winter Grant Scheme from 30 March 2021 to 16 April 2021, with a further allocation of £425,734 to Wirral. A portion of this grant was allocated to fund further activity to support Free School Meal eligible children over the Easter holidays (2021).
- 3.3 The project to support children over the three holiday periods noted above was evaluated and presented to the Provision of Food and Activities during the School Holidays Working Group. Co-ordinated by local charity Neo Community, on behalf of the Council, and working in partnership with over twenty local community-based organisations, 26,956 food hampers were provided to children and young people in total at Christmas (2020), February half-term (2021) and Easter (2021). These were school-age children eligible for Free School Meals and nursery age children and college age young people subject to certain criteria. In addition hampers were

supplemented with 20,175 activity packs at Christmas and Easter. A total of £685,291 was spent from the Covid Winter Grant Scheme/Covid Local Support Grant, supplemented with just under £200,000 from Covid Tranche funding for the activity packs and project management costs.

- 3.4 The Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) is funded by the Department for Education; Wirral has partnered with Edsential for the delivery of this programme and Neo Community Group is coordinating the project on behalf of the Council. The programme is focused upon providing enriching activities and food to children through face-to-face delivery. The aim of the HAF programme is to make free places available to children eligible for free school meals for the equivalent of at least 4 hours a day, 4 days a week, 6 weeks a year.

4.0 PROVISION OF FOOD & ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOL AND NURSERY AGE CHILDREN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC – MAY HALF-TERM AND SUMMER HOLIDAYS

- 4.1 The DWP extended the Covid Winter Grant Scheme, renamed the Covid Local Support Grant, from 17 April 2021 to 20 June 2021, to align with the Government's Roadmap out of lockdown. This saw a further £288,145 allocated to Wirral. An Officer Decision was published on 20 April 2021 agreeing indicative spend for the further grant. This included a provisional allocation of £56,500 for a project co-ordinated by Neo Community on behalf of the Council to provide food to children in need of additional support during May half-term, plus £13,000 of project management costs for the various partner groups and organisations involved in delivery.
- 4.2 Whilst the previous approach adopted referenced in 3.3 above provided the required support to families, needed in part due to issues compounded by the pandemic, both the Council and its partners were mindful that further support must reflect the country's Roadmap moving forward out of the pandemic and avoid creating reliance on a temporary system that is not sustainable in the longer-term. It was noted that there was no corresponding provision through the Holiday Activity Programme (HAF) during the May half-term.
- 4.3 All schools were invited to 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). Additionally, ten 'hubs'/pick up points were created in community-based venues across the borough to provide 50 lunches per day for four days of the May half-term to support circa 2,000 children. This provision was consistent with that to be provided through HAF. This provision was accessible to nursery, school and college age children. 9,308 Hampers or lunches were provided throughout the May half-term at the cost outlined in 4.1 above.
- 4.4 The DWP Covid Local Support Grant has again been extended for a further period from 20 June 2021 to 30 September 2021, with a further £1,152,580.64 allocated to Wirral. An Officer Decision published on 8 July 2021 outlined proposed indicative spend of the grant, which is available to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy (heating, cooking, lighting), water bills (including sewerage) and other

essentials. The spend includes a range of projects to support children in need over the summer.

- 4.5 £300,000 has been allocated to support families in need with food hampers. Neo Community is co-ordinating the food provision element of the project on behalf of the Council. Building upon previous support provided through the school holidays and in order to mitigate the risk of reliance on temporary holiday support, a new project is running from 9 August 2021 for up to six weeks. Branded as the 'Summer Great Family Cook Off', this sees families in need of additional support (not just those who may have children eligible for Free School Meals) learn new cooking skills in an interesting and entertaining way, while also showed how to stretch the food budget to provide interesting meals; as well as helped with immediate welfare needs through the provision of nutritious food. This is supported with interactive step-by-step videos and a social media campaign.
- 4.6 £200,000 has been allocated to the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) to supplement the food element of the programme, which is expected to support up to 6,000 Free School Meal eligible children over the summer. This has enabled the release of HAF funding to be utilised later in the year enabling either a greater number of children and young people to be engaged and/or enhance the programme available.
- 4.6 £123,750 has been allocated to Welcome Back to School Food Support Packs, providing for food pantries for up to 75 schools to help children most in need at the start of the new school terms.
- 4.7 This targeted support is in addition to a total of over £300,000 of small grants allocated to community-based groups and organisations to provide food and essential supplies to households in need over the summer, also funded through the Covid Local Support Grant. Further support with food is available to households in need through a plethora of community-based providers across the borough, in addition to emergency support available through the Council 24/7.

5. LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY RESEARCH

- 5.1 In November 2020, Wirral Council worked in collaboration with LJMU public health academics to submit an application to the Research England Strategic Policy Fund. The Original submission focused on food poverty and the development of a short-term policy for School Meals in Wirral, to help shape a clear stance moving forward. In December 2020, we were informed that we had been successful in our application and had secured £9,010 to fund the research and policy development. The research has been refocused to explore how the Humanitarian Cell has developed and implemented food responses and food strategies, and how this could be further shaped for the future. A related piece of research is also looking at Free School Meals.
- 5.2 The current research focus is as follows:
 - Focus Groups and Interviews – led by LJMU academics with our input;
 - Engagement with Elected Members and Officers; Humanitarian and Food Sub-group; Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) steering group; Children & YP Partnership;
 - CYP partners and Schools;

- Survey with users of Free School Meals

5.3 This research will be amalgamated into a summary of initial findings in late August, with a full report in September. A further update will be brought to Committee as the research results are produced.

6.0 NEXT STEPS

5.1 Following discussions at the provision of food and activities during the school holidays working group on 19 July 2021, it was agreed that due to the extension of funding the group continue to meet and a report be brought back to Policy & Resources in the new year detailing recommendations going forward.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The funding allocated to the various projects has been outlined above.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

8.1 Oversight of the various projects outlined is undertaken by the Temporary Lead for Food & Welfare Support (COVID-19), within the structure of the Humanitarian Cell, reporting to the Assistant Director for Neighbourhoods, Safety & Transport. Administrative support with the grant programmes and wider delivery has been sourced from within the Neighbourhoods team.

9.0 RELEVANT RISKS

9.1 The activity to support Free School Meal eligible children over the holidays, has been funded primarily through Grant as outlined. Whilst the Covid Local Support Grant (formerly the Covid Winter Grant Scheme) has been extended a number of times, at some point (currently 30 September 2021) this additional financial support will cease.

10.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

10.1 The design of the projects reflect learning from previous delivery (including feedback from groups and organisations engaged) and ongoing engagement with those partners engaged in the Humanitarian Cell.

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 some of the projects' various operating models. Due to some families self-isolating and the need to minimise contact between households, even within a COVID-safe environment, it has not always been possible for food and activities to be hosted within local community facilities. This would have been the preferred method of delivery throughout in ordinary circumstances. As lockdown restrictions have eased there has been a move back to community-based provision, reducing the need for transportation.
- 12.2 Food is sourced locally where practical and cost-effective to do so.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Officer decision - COVID Local Support Grant - extension No.2 – Published 8/7/21

Section 31 Grant Determination For The Holiday Activities And Food Programme 2021: No 31/5325' guidance from the Department for Education

Wirral and Edsential SLA funding agreement

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
Children Young People and Education Committee	1 December 2020
Children, Young People and Education Committee	28 Jan 2021