



Tuesday, 12 January 2021

Leisure and Health Committee
Wednesday, 20 January 2021

Please find attached the noting reports which relate to Item 8 on the main agenda pack for the Committee.

AGENDA

8. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS ON NOTING REPORTS

8.1 Noting Reports (Pages 1 - 12)

The Committee is asked to note the following reports:

- **COVID WINTER GRANT**
- **HELP FOR FAMILIES DURING COVID PANDEMIC**

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Report of the Chief Executive**COVID WINTER GRANT**1. Purpose of report

To advise the committee of the extra financial support which has been provided for families and individuals by way of the Covid Winter Grant Scheme.

2. Detail

On 8 November 2020, the government announced a package of extra targeted financial support for those in need over the winter period. The £170 million COVID Winter Grant Scheme, available from December 2020, will see new funding issued to County Councils and Unitary Authorities to support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs. Nottinghamshire County Council's allocation is £2,316,000.

The objective of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme is to provide support to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic throughout the winter period where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable

At least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support households with children, with up to 20% of the total funding to other households experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, poverty during the pandemic. This may include households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits but can also include those not claiming benefits but are struggling financially because of Covid-19.

In Nottinghamshire, the support to families is to be administered by the County Council. The support for utility bills is to be administered by the Nottingham Energy Partnership. Distribution of the 20% for individuals in need is to be administered by the lower tier authorities, with Broxtowe's share being £37,400.

Families without children who qualify will be entitled to supermarket vouchers of £30. In Broxtowe, the issue of vouchers will be undertaken by the foodbanks and CAB. Some vouchers will be retained in case needed by asylum seekers and / or homeless individuals.

Further details of the scheme and the criteria set by Nottinghamshire County Council are included in the appendix.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to NOTE the report

Background papers

Nil

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APPENDIX

The objective of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme is to provide support to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic throughout the winter period where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable.

This support will be provided through organisations known to the households and the grant will not be opened out to all members of the public to apply for.

What can the grant be used for?

Supermarket vouchers, contributions to food banks and food clubs, fuel vouchers and support with water bills. Supermarket vouchers can also be used for essential items such as a winter coat, sanitary products etc.

Who is the grant for?

The Grant will be used solely for residents who are struggling financially due to Covid.

The Grant will be used for families with children up to the age of 18.

The Grant will be used for vulnerable households without children (including individuals) so that no vulnerable household is excluded.

Households without children and vulnerable individuals who are struggling to purchase food, utility bills and other essentials between December and the end of March 2021 can access support.

Households with children

The Grant will be used solely for residents of Nottinghamshire County, excluding the City, unless they attend a county early years setting, school or college where they meet one of the following:

- There are children/young people within the household who are eligible for free school meals due to low household income (to cover term time periods). This will be managed by schools and FE Colleges.
- There are children within the household who are eligible for a funded 2-year-old childcare place or the Early Years Pupil Premium (to cover term time periods). This will be managed by early years settings.
- The household is in receipt of or has made an application for Universal Credit or other Income Related Employment or Support Allowance (ESA), Income or Jobseekers Allowance income based.
- The household has no recourse to public funds.
- There is considerable in-work poverty (which may be temporary).
- The household has been assessed by a professional as in urgent need as they do not have the means for essential food, energy or water

Vulnerable households without children/Vulnerable individuals

The Grant will be used solely for residents of Nottinghamshire County, excluding the City, where households without children and vulnerable individuals who are struggling to purchase food, utility bills and other essentials between December and the end of March 2021

- Care Leavers aged 19-24 (to receive support through their Social Worker or Personal Advisor).
- Young People aged 19-24 years old with an Education Healthcare Plan who are eligible for Free School Meals. This will be managed by Further Education Colleges.
- The household is in receipt of or has made an application for Universal Credit, or other Income Related Employment or Support Allowance (ESA), Income or Jobseekers Allowance income based.
- The household has no recourse to public funds
- Referred by a Foodbank or Citizens Advice Bureau after seeking debt advice.
- Verified as Rough Sleeping or Homeless
- There is considerable in-work poverty (which may be temporary)
- The household has been assessed by a professional as in urgent need as they do not have the means for essential food, energy or water

The following considerations and restrictions must be applied

The value of each voucher should not exceed the following allocations:

- No more than £30 per household member. If there are more than 3 members of the household, we can only issue a voucher up to £90. The same applies if preparing parcels of food and essentials, they should be worth no more than £30 for one person and no more than £90 for households with more than 3 people.
- Households can claim vouchers / parcels through this scheme no more than 3 times between now and the end of March 2021.
- Not more than £178 total per household in respect of utilities (up to two fuel payments at £49, one water payment of £80).
- Repeat requests should be monitored in order to signpost to effective long-term support and advice.
- Supporting evidence of need and eligibility should be seen and recorded for audit purposes.

Exclusions:

- Those who live outside of the Nottinghamshire County Council borders will be excluded from this scheme and will need to approach their own Local Authority.
- Housing costs are expressly excluded. The scheme is not intended to cover payment of rent or other housing costs because these are not directly related to food or utility bills and other benefits and support is available to cover these costs.
- The grant will not be used for white goods. If requests are made for the purchase of white goods e.g. cookers, fridges, boiler repair etc, workers will be asked to assist individuals to find alternative support e.g. workers can apply to the Children in Need Emergency Essentials Programme on behalf of households with children, or through Nottingham Energy Partnership for white goods and heating/energy efficiency/home improvement requests.

Assistance with utility payments (administered by Nottingham Energy Partnership (NEP))

Each household can receive up to a total of £178 from the Covid Winter Grant Scheme. This comprises a maximum of two fuel payments at £49 each and a water bill payment of £80. This is dependent on verification by NEP and utility partners.

Clients will be asked to provide proof of a change in their circumstances due to COVID-19, and acceptable documents include any of the below:

- Recent bank statement
- Benefits confirmation letter
- GP letter
- Termination / redundancy letter
- Utility supplier debt notice or disconnection letter
- Energy bill showing arrears

NEP will aim to respond to phone/website enquiries within 2 working days to complete an assessment of the client's circumstances.

Clients will receive their utility payment within 5 working days depending on receipt of their documentation.

A client may claim a utility payment from NEP regardless of their outstanding debts to suppliers.

Referrals have to come *via* frontline members of staff

NEP will also assess whether the client could benefit from additional grant schemes for first time central heating or air source heat pumps as a long-term solution (e.g. Warm Homes Hub, Green Homes Grant).

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Report of the Chief Executive

HELP FOR FAMILIES DURING COVID PANDEMIC1. Purpose of report

To advise the committee of the extra financial support which has been provided for families during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Detail

Throughout the pandemic, the Government has made a number of financial assistance packages available. These provide for support across a wide range of situations, including help for individuals, families, businesses, voluntary and charitable groups, etc.

Some of these financial assistance grants are administered by Broxtowe Borough Council as a second tier authority, some are administered by the County Council, and some by other agencies.

It should also be noted that there are many other services available locally which are provided by charities and voluntary groups which can offer assistance to families, for example the food banks within the borough.

The major schemes which are available to offer financial assistance to families are shown in the appendix.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to NOTE the report

Background papers

Nil

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APPENDIX**Healthy Start**

This scheme supports pregnant women or those with children under four who have a low income and are in receipt of benefits to buy fresh fruit and vegetables. Payments are set to rise from £3.10 to £4.25 a week from April 2021

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Rates

LHA rates are used to calculate the level of housing benefit tenants renting from private landlords should receive to help with housing costs. In January 2020, the Government announced that LHA would increase from 1st April in line with Consumer Price Index, but this was changed by the regulations released following the outbreak of coronavirus.

The return of LHA to the 30th percentile rent in each Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA) means that, in theory, 30% of rented homes in most areas are affordable to a housing benefit reliant household. There are nationwide caps which vary by number of bedrooms, which means that in some locations LHA is lower than the 30th percentile.

Increasing Universal Credit and Tax Credits

On 6 April, 2020, the Government raised the standard rate of Universal Credit and Tax Credits by £20 per week for one year, meaning those claimants will be up to £1040 a year better off.

COVID-19 Adoption Support Fund

The Department for Education has made £8 million available to provide emergency support for adoptive families affected by the coronavirus. Through the COVID-19 Adoption Support Fund local authorities and regional adoption agencies have been able to pay for therapy for families whose adopted children may have already suffered trauma, and be made more anxious due to social distancing and the uncertainty of the effects of the virus.

Children and Young People “Catch-Up” Funding

The government has announced £1 billion of funding to support children and young people to “catch up”. This includes a one-off universal £650 million catch-up premium for the 2020 to 2021 academic year to ensure that schools have the support they need to help all pupils make up for lost teaching time. The Government has also launched a £350 million National Tutoring Programme to provide additional, targeted support for those children and young people who need the most help. The £650 million of universal catch-up premium funding will be available for all state-funded mainstream and special schools, and alternative provision. The £350 million National Tutoring Programme will comprise of at least 3 parts in the 2020 to 2021 academic year, including a 5-16 programme; a 16-19 fund for school sixth forms, colleges and all other 16 to 19 providers; and a reception year early language programme.

Wellbeing for Education Return Programme

The UK Government has put new funding in place to help teachers cope with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's mental health. Support from the new £8 million Wellbeing for Education Return programme was made available in schools and colleges in England from September to provide them with access to resources and the knowledge they need to improve how they respond to the emotional impact of the pandemic on their students and staff. This might include the additional pressures some students may be feeling, as well as any emotional response they or their teachers may still be experiencing from bereavement, stress, trauma or anxiety over the past months. The programme will be delivered to nominated staff in schools and colleges by mental health experts via interactive webinars through to March 2021.

Covid Winter Grant Scheme

The £170 million COVID Winter Grant Scheme, available from December 2020, will see new funding issued to County Councils and Unitary Authorities to support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy and water bills and other associated costs. Nottinghamshire County Council's allocation is £2,316,000.

The objective of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme is to provide support to vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic throughout the winter period where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable.

At least 80% of the Grant will be allocated to households with children. This is being administered by Nottinghamshire County Council. £0.45m (20% of the grant) will be focused on households with no children and vulnerable individuals, and this will be passed to the second-tier authorities to administer.

Broxtowe's allocation of £37,400 is the subject of a separate report to this committee.

Covid Summer Fund

The Covid Summer Food Fund enabled children who were eligible for benefits-related free school meals to be supported over the summer holiday period.

The Holiday Activities and Food programme

The Holiday Activities and Food programme, which has provided healthy food and activities to disadvantaged children since 2018, will be expanded across England next year. The programme has been at its pilot phase since 2018. This summer, 10 projects working in 17 local authority areas split £9 million in funding to provide holiday activities and free meals.

It will cover Easter, Summer and Christmas in 2021, and cost up to £220m. It will be available to children in every local authority in England, building on previous programmes – including this summer's, which supported around 50,000 children across 17 local authorities.

Council Tax Hardship Fund

As part of its response to COVID-19, the Government announced in the Budget on 11 March that it would provide local authorities in England with £500m of new grant funding to support economically vulnerable people and households in their local area.

The expectation was that local authorities would pay an additional amount of £150 to all households receiving Council Tax Support. Due to the current Council Tax Support scheme at Broxtowe we were able to make this a payment of up to £300 per household, depending on the amount of Council Tax applicable.

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