

## **URGENT REPORT TO THE LEADER**

**27 NOVEMBER 2020**

### **COVID-19 WINTER GRANT SCHEME**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Alan Jarrett, Leader  
Councillor David Brake, Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services

Report from: James Williams, Director of Public Health

Author: Scott Elliott, Head of Health and Wellbeing Services

#### **Summary**

This report sets out the proposals to use the Covid-19 Winter Grant Scheme allocation for Medway Council to support families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals from December 2020 to end of March 2021.

#### **1. Budget and policy framework**

- 1.1 Matters relating to grant funding to support Medway's population are a matter for Cabinet. The Leader has urgency powers to make decisions which would ordinarily be made by the Cabinet. These provisions are set out in the Constitution (paragraph 3.2 of Part 3 (Responsibility for Cabinet functions) of Chapter 3 (Responsibility for Functions) of the Constitution.
- 1.2 The Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that the taking of these decisions are urgent and cannot be reasonably deferred until the next Cabinet meeting on 15 December 2020, in accordance with Section 11 (Cases of special urgency) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Meetings and Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012 and Rule 17 (Special Urgency) of the Access to Information Rules (Part 2 of Chapter 4 in the Constitution). This is because it is imperative that the Council takes urgent action to support individuals and families in Medway in line with the Government's announcement to implement the Winter Grant Scheme from early December 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.3 Additionally, and in line with rule 15.11 of Chapter 4, Part 5 of the Constitution, call-in can be waived where any delay likely to be caused by the call-in process would seriously prejudice the Council's or the Public's interests. The Chairman of the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that the decisions proposed are reasonable in all the

circumstances and to them being treated as a matter of urgency and to waive call-in.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 On 8 November the Department for Work and Pensions announced £170million Covid Winter Grant Scheme to support children, families and the most vulnerable over winter. The funding is ring-fenced and covers the period to the end of March 2021. The aim of the scheme is “to give vulnerable households peace of mind in the run up to Christmas and over the Winter months during the pandemic by helping those who need it to have food on the table and other essentials, so every child will be warm and well-fed this winter.”
- 2.2 The scheme guidance sets out that local authorities have flexibility within the scheme to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility, however they should target their support according to the following outline eligibility framework:
- At least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support families with children, and 20% to support other types of households, including individuals, and
  - At least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills, and 20% on other items.
- The grant is expected to include supporting free school meal eligible children during December and February half terms. It is permissible for reasonable local authority administration costs to be met from this funding, according to the grant conditions.
- 2.3 Medway Council’s initial allocation is £908,596, with 50% of the allocation to be paid up front at the start of the scheme in early December. However, payment of the remainder is subject to the completion of management information returns to the Government confirming the grant is being spent. On that basis, 25% will be paid at the end of February 2021 and the remaining 25% following the end of the scheme in April/May 2021. Where a local authority spends less than 20% of their overall allocation during December and January, the second payment will be withheld and the remaining balance paid as the final payment at the end of the scheme in April/May 2021.
- 2.4 On 23 November 2020, the Chief Executive, using urgency powers, agreed that £908,596 be added to the Council’s revenue budget in respect of the winter Grant Scheme.

## 3. Proposed Winter Grant Scheme Delivery

- 3.1 It is proposed that the following five workstreams will be delivered from the Winter Grant funding, to maximise the reach and impact of the available grant to the most vulnerable groups in Medway.

### **Holiday hampers from school - £270,000 allocation**

- 3.2 Weekly hampers will be provided to Free School Meals (FSM) eligible children during the half term or on last day of term. Hampers are projected to cost £15 each week, with 6,000 FSM eligible children needing hampers for three weeks (two weeks in the Christmas holidays, and the February half term week) costing of £270,000.
- 3.3 Hampers will include family and enrichment activities, recipes, links to cookery videos, health and wellbeing service signpost, relevant signposting information, where to access support during and outside of half terms and promotion of Citizens Advice (who are delivering the Emergency Assistance Grant on behalf of Medway) for white goods. Families who cannot attend school site for collection have hamper delivered by Citizens Advice or other willing agency.
- 3.4 Schools will be offered additional logistic resource if they do not have sufficient staff to notify and disseminate food hampers. Discussions are underway to provide an additional 10% allocation of hampers, on an optional basis, for schools to distribute to families that have recently found themselves in need but do not meet FSM eligibility criteria.

### **Emergency Assistance Grant extension – £220,000 allocation**

- 3.5 The Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Supplies of £336,715 received by Medway Council is being distributed by the Citizens Advice Bureau to support vulnerable adults and families in Medway with housing related costs including fuel, water and food.
- 3.6 A £200,000 top up to the existing scheme is proposed, to enable support to be offered through vouchers and food hampers (that also include enrichment activities) to low income adults and families who don't meet FSM eligibility criteria, families and adults in need of support with fuel and water payments and new applicants of universal credit.
- 3.7 A budget of £20,000 to ensure an effective marketing and communications plan is in place to let vulnerable residents and key stakeholders know how to access the service.

### **Early help hub and social care direct support packages - £143,000 allocation**

- 3.8 A budget of £143,300 is proposed to provide support to vulnerable families and individuals known to our services, on a needs basis, as follows:
- £27,900 for Children's Services to provide support with accommodation and subsistence to families with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and provide financial support to families that have been assessed by housing as Intentionally Homeless by other local authorities who have placed them in Medway. Support of £300 per month, per NRPF family

will be provided to 5 families in December, 8 families in January, 11 families in February and 13 families in March.

- £34,000 for Early Help to support the families they work with for utility bills, white goods, clothing, and food. The service is working with 340 families in Medway, and project that the provision of £100 per family would potentially prevent additional stress, family breakdown or escalation into statutory services. The allocation includes an allowance for growth in the number of contacts to early help/front door for assistance over the next four months for an additional 90 families.
- £30,000 to support the approximately 600 children in families subject to Child Protection Plans for utilities, white goods, clothing, and food. The service predicts that the provision of £50 per child would potentially prevent additional stress, family breakdown or escalation.
- £40,000 to help support our 16+ care leavers with £200 each to enable them to continue to have virtual contact with their families, friends and social workers, to be warm both with clothing and utility costs, to be supported financially with food and toiletries when needed and support them to enjoy the festive season.

#### **Donation to food charities and BAME support charities - £50,000 allocation**

- 3.9 A donation of £5,000-£10,000 will be made to key charities that are actively supporting vulnerable families and residents to access food and other basic household items, such as cleaning and sanitary products.
- 3.10 These charities are already reporting an increase in demand for their services from residents, as charities are often residents' first port of call for support. Providing these organisations with a grant will provide some support in the short term and allow them to support residents who are not supported by statutory services. These grants will also support Medway Council's relationship with the third sector and increase the likelihood that some key organisations will keep functioning longer term to help vulnerable Medway residents.

#### **Medway Council discretionary winter support grant scheme - £100,000 allocation**

- 3.11 Medway Council Revenues and Benefits are delivering the mandatory and discretionary elements of the Test and Trace Isolation Payments Scheme, paying grants to families and individuals on low incomes who cannot work and lose income because they must isolate. The cash limited discretionary element of the fund has almost all been distributed and the scheme will be closed. This funding would enable a discretionary scheme to continue and support vulnerable families and individuals with food, utilities and other costs in line with the Winter Grant Scheme.
- 3.12 The new scheme would support families who have been told by the NHS Test and Trace Service to isolate, to meet essential costs such as food, energy and water. The scheme will support the current Standard and Discretionary Test

and Trace Support payments administered by Medway council. Applicants have to certify on the application form that they are:

- Unable to work from home
- Will lose income as a result **and**
- Will be unable to cover the cost of food, energy and water as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.

Eligible customers will receive a payment of £100 for each household member to support essential costs during a period of isolation. The outline of the proposed scheme is set out at Appendix 1 to this report.

**The total funding allocated to the five workstreams is £783,000 with the balance of £125,296 covering the reasonable administration costs of the Council.**

#### 4. Evaluation and reporting

4.1 Where grant funding is distributed by Medway Council services, the Finance Strategy Team will support services to ensure appropriate records are retained to enable the management information returns to be submitted and certified by the Chief Finance Officer, to ensure the second and third payments are received.

4.2 Following the first month of the programme and immediately after the Christmas half term break, a lessons learned exercise will be carried out to inform the arrangements to be put in place for the February half term FSM delivery.

#### 5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
<b>Grant is not used in full to support vulnerable residents</b>	Vulnerable families and individuals may not be able to access the grant, meaning the grant is not as effective as the government intends.	The proposal spreads the grant across a range of workstreams to maximise the reach of this support.	DIII
<b>Expenditure is not recovered through the Grant claim process</b>	Expenditure made may be on activities that are not within the grant conditions, and therefore the Government does not fund these through the	The proposal has been designed to ensure expenditure is claimable. Arrangements will be in place to record and monitor expenditure and	CII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	second and third payments.	submit claims in due course.	

## 6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The scheme and activity outlined is fully funded by the government, with Medway's allocation confirmed as £908,596. 50% of the funding will be paid up front, however the remainder of the funding will be paid on submission of management information that confirms expenditure has been made in line with the scheme guidance.

## 7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The Covid-19 pandemic is an unprecedented national and global event requiring urgent intervention by State and Local Authorities. The use of urgency powers will enable a fast and effective response by the Council and is in entirely line with the Constitutional provisions for urgent decision making.

## 8. Recommendations

- 8.1 The Leader is asked, using urgency powers, to agree the proposals set out in section 3 of this report as the Council's approach to delivering the Covid Winter Grant and to delegate authority to the Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services, to finalise and implement these proposals.
- 8.2 The Leader is asked, using urgency powers, to agree to delegate authority to the Director of Public Health in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Adults' Services, to make minor amendments to the proposals to enable them to continue to support vulnerable households in Medway, including establishing any discretionary eligibility criteria where discussions remain ongoing and where further Government advice is provided.
- 8.3 The Leader is asked to agree that recommendations 8.1 and 8.2 are considered urgent and therefore should not be subject to call in.

## 9. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 9.1 Given the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of cost to the local taxpayer it is appropriate for the Council to introduce these measures.

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**Appendices**

Appendix 1: Outline of proposed Medway Council discretionary winter support grant scheme

**Background papers**

None

.....(signed) .....27 November 2020 (date)

Councillor Alan Jarrett, Leader of the Council

## **Outline of proposed Medway Council discretionary winter support grant scheme**

### **Purpose of the scheme**

To support families who have been told by the NHS Test and Trace Service to isolate meet essential costs such as food, energy and water. The scheme will support the current Standard and Discretionary Test and Trace Support payments administered by Medway council. Applicants have to certify on the application form that they are:

- Unable to work from home,
- Will lose income as a result, **and**
- Will be unable to cover the cost of food, energy and water as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.

Eligible customers will receive a payment of £100 for each household member to support essential costs during a period of isolation.

### **Conditions – families with children**

- Must be a Medway resident.
- Have housing costs that are payable to a social landlord, a private landlord or a mortgage company.
- Must have at least one eligible child in the household:
  - For the purpose of this scheme, the definition of a child is any person:
  - who will be under the age of 19 as at 31 March 2021; or
  - a person aged 19 or over in respect of whom a child-related benefit (for example, Child Benefit) is paid or free school meals are provided; or
  - Where an eligible child is living on his or her own, they should be treated as a ‘household’.
- The applicant or partner cannot be eligible for a Test and Trace Support Payment under Medway’s standard scheme.
- The applicant will have to provide evidence that they have been told to self-isolate by the NHS Test and Trace Service.
- Applicant’s household in receipt of child benefit.
- Applicant’s (and partner’s) capital must be less than £2,000.
- Families who are excluded from qualifying benefits by the “Persons from Abroad” can apply under this scheme if they meet the other criteria.
- Once the fund of £80,000 has been awarded no further applications will be considered.

The minimum level of evidence required for a claim to be paid is as follows:

- Housing costs by bank statement, tenancy agreement, mortgage statement.
- Proof of child benefit.
- Bank statement for capital and bank details for payment.
- Proof of isolation.

### **Conditions – families without children**

- Must be a Medway resident.
- Have housing costs that are payable to a social landlord, a private landlord or a mortgage company.



- The applicant cannot be eligible for a Test and Trace Support Payment under Medway's standard scheme.
- The applicant will have to provide evidence that they have been told to self-isolate by the NHS Test and Trace Service.
- Applicant's normal household income cannot exceed £25,000. (This figure is double the maximum individual income to qualify for the discretionary Test and Trace Isolation Payment).
- Applicant's (and partner's) capital must be less than £2,000.
- Once the fund of £20,000 has been awarded no further applications will be considered.

The minimum level of evidence required for a claim to be paid is as follows:

- Housing costs by bank statement, tenancy agreement, mortgage statement.
- Proof of household.
- Bank statement for capital and bank details for payment.
- Proof of isolation.