

	Officer Key Decision
	Report to the Chief Executive
AUTHORITY FOR EMERGENCY ALLOCATION OF FUNDING FOR THE COVID WINTER GRANT SCHEME	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key Decision
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
No. of Appendices:	0
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Sadie East Head of Transformation Customer and Digital Services Tel: 0208 937 1507 Email: sadie.east@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for emergency allocation and distribution of the COVID Winter Grant.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

That the Chief Executive exercising urgency powers pursuant to paragraph 9.3.2 of Part 3 of the Constitution:

- 2.1 Notes that Brent is to receive a total allocation of £1,142,416.48 under the COVID Winter Grant Scheme (the “Grant”)
- 2.2 Approves the allocation from the Grant of £204,900 to support vulnerable families with pre-school children with the cost of food and utilities

- 2.3. Approves the allocation from the Grant of £590,000 to support families eligible for Free School Meals the cost of food and utilities
- 2.4 Approves the allocation from the Grant of £133,000 to support vulnerable families not in receipt of Free School Meals the cost of food and utilities
- 2.5 Approves the allocation from the Grant of £1,560 to support Looked After Children in semi-independent provision the cost of food and utilities
- 2.6 Approves the allocation from the Grant of £4,200 to support care leavers who have children the cost of food and utilities
- 2.7 Approves the allocation from the Grant of £18,000 to support care leavers who don't have children the cost of food and utilities
- 2.8 Approves the allocation from the Grant of £185,756 to support vulnerable households which do not have children under the age of 19 the cost of food and utilities
- 2.9 Delegates to the Strategic Director of Customer and Digital Services authority to establish such detailed criteria as may be necessary to enable appropriate allocation of funding in accordance with Recommendations 2.2 to 2.8 above.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 The Government has announced a £170 million COVID Winter Grant Scheme will be made available in early December 2020 to support those most in need across England with the cost of food, energy (heating, cooking, lighting), water bills (including sewerage) and other essentials.
- 3.2 The aim 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.
- 3.3 Local authorities have been given flexibility to consider how best to allocate this funding based on local knowledge about those children, families and individuals most in need. The guidance stresses that this funding covers a wide range of vulnerable households, including children of pre-school age, so is not limited to be used for families with children eligible for free school meals. Councils are encouraged to utilise the wide range of data and sources of information at their

disposal to identify and provide support to a broad cross section of vulnerable households.

- 3.4 Funding must be used between December 2020 and the end of March 2021 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food and utility bills (heating, cooking, lighting) and water for household purposes (including drinking, washing, cooking, central heating, sewerage and sanitary purposes), or other related essentials. Payments can be in any form including cash, vouchers and payments direct to bank accounts.
- 3.5 Councils are able to work with and fund local organisations, e.g. VCS groups, to provide support. They are also encouraged to work with neighbouring councils to ensure that the needs of vulnerable families are being met and to avoid potential duplication.
- 3.6 There is no requirement to undertake a means test or conduct a benefit check of recipient households unless this specifically forms part of the Authority's local eligibility criteria. In accordance with their general legal duties, Councils must have a clear rationale or documented policy/framework outlining their approach, including how they are defining eligibility and how households access the scheme. Awards must be based on the following framework:
 - 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.
 - at least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills for household purposes (including drinking, washing, cooking, central heating, and sanitary purposes) and sewerage. Within this condition there is flexibility about the proportion of support allocated to food and to bills.
 - up to 20% of the total funding can be used to provide support with other essentials clearly linked to the scheme conditions (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water.
 - 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. Nor is it

intended to be used for the provision of general advice on managing debt and/or financial hardship.

4.0 Detail

- 4.1 Based on the government criteria, £938,660 of Brent's total allocation of £1,142,416.48 will be allocated to families and £203,756 to households without children.
- 4.2 The fund for families will be allocated to children eligible for free school meals, families with pre-school children eligible for benefits and families identified as vulnerable who are not in receipt of free school meals, as set out in Table 1 below. This approach is broadly in line with other London boroughs, many of which are planning to use children eligible for free school meals as a main criterion for allocating funding to families, while also recognising other vulnerable families that this might preclude. This would mean Brent supporting some families who live outside of the borough.
- 4.3 Each family would receive a £15 food voucher per child per week of school holidays to ensure access to food and £50 per household for utilities as a one-off payment for the winter period (which is based on Ofgem guidance and the similar amount offered through other voucher schemes). Payments will be made in three instalments, one in advance of the Christmas school holidays (for food), one in advance of the February half term holiday (for food) and one in February (for utilities). A food voucher of £30 will be provided to Looked After Children who are aged 16/17 years old and live in semi-independent accommodation.

Table 1: Families Fund

Household	Allocation	Estimated Cohort	Funding
Vulnerable families with pre-school children	Food vouchers of £15 per child per week of the Christmas and February half-term holiday	2,500 (estimate based on Council benefits data of 1,848 families).	£112,500
	One payment of £50 per family towards utilities and water	1,848 families	£92,400
Families eligible for Free School Meals	Food vouchers of £15 per child per week of the Christmas and February half-term holiday	7,000 children (October census)	£315,000
	One payment of £50 per family towards utilities and	5,500 families (October census)	£275,000

	water		
Vulnerable families not in receipt of FSM (eg. NRPF, children in need)	Food vouchers of £15 per child per week of the Christmas and February half-term holiday	1,400 (estimate calculated as 20% of FSM population. Families to be identified by professionals/schools)	£63,000
	One payment of £50 per family towards utilities and water	1,400	£70,000
Looked After Children in semi-independent provision	Christmas period food voucher of £30	52	£1,560
Care leavers who have children	Food vouchers of £15 per child per week of the Christmas and February half-term holiday	30 parents / 40 children	£1,800
	Christmas period food voucher of £30		£900
	One payment of £50 per family towards utilities and water		£1,500
TOTAL allocated to Food			£494,760 (53%)
TOTAL allocated to bills (utilities and water)			£438,900 (47%)
Contingency			£5,000 (<1%)
TOTAL			£938,660

- 4.4 As a result of using both schools and benefits data and as families will have children in different age groups and at different schools there is a small risk of duplication of payments. This will be mitigated by cross referencing data sets and maintaining a record of families in receipt of payments.
- 4.5 The fund for other households will be allocated to care leavers and to other vulnerable households, who self-refer for support (Table 2). This will allow some flexibility in the allocation of this funding.

Table 2: Other Households Fund

Household	Allocation	Estimated Cohort	Funding
Care Leavers (who do not have children)	Christmas period food voucher of £30	350	£10,500
	One payment of £50 towards utilities and water for those living independently	150	£7,500
Vulnerable households	Utilities vouchers/ food vouchers	By demand (verified by benefits data)	£185,756
TOTAL			£203,756

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 The council has been granted £1.142m Winter Grant to be used up until March 2021 to support households particularly affected by Covid.
- 5.2 This report recommends that a scheme is set up to allocate this resource to provide food, energy and water support to households affected by Covid 19 for a period until March 2021.
- 5.3 The rationale for defining eligibility and funding streams has been set out above with £0.938m allocated to families and £0.203m to households without children.
- 5.4 An online platform will be used to distribute food vouchers within the scheme whilst direct payment will be made through the council's CYP and CDS departments.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 The funding provided under the COVID Winter Grant Scheme is for the period December 2020 to the end of March 2021 to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy, water bills and other essentials. The Grant Scheme funding must only be used to provide support as defined within the eligibility criteria set out in the guidance document entitled "COVID Winter Grant Scheme; Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities". To this end, the Council is required to develop a "local eligibility framework and approach". Officers have set out a proposed approach in Section 4 and seek delegated authority to establish such detailed criteria as may be necessary to enable appropriate allocation of funding.

- 6.2 The decisions, which are the subject of this report, are consistent with the Council's duties as a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. Subject to Gold agreeing Recommendations, the Chief Executive approval to the proposed allocation and distribution set out in the report will be sought. The Chief Executive is authorised pursuant to Paragraph 9.3.2 of Part 3 of the Constitution to exercise either executive or non-executive functions where the matter is urgent unless this is prohibited by law. The decisions, which are the subject of this report, are not prohibited by law and she may therefore exercise such powers if she is of the view that proposals are urgent.
- 6.3 Officers will need to have regard to State Aid in relation to any arrangements entered into for the distribution of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme.

7.0 Equality Implications

- 7.1 The public sector equality duty, as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who have a "protected characteristic" and those who do not share that protected characteristic. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 7.2 Having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.
- 7.3 There is a requirement to consider how the COVID Winter Grant Scheme impacts those with characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010. There is no prescribed manner in which the council must exercise its public sector equality duty but having an adequate evidence base for its decision is necessary.
- 7.4 Due to the urgency of the situation, formal assessments have not been undertaken in respect of the decisions which are the subject of this report. Such formal assessments are not a requirement of the duty. An underlying purpose of the recommended decisions is to have regard to the protection of those with protected characteristics e.g. children eligible for free school meals and families with pre-school children

eligible for benefits. The criteria recommended for adoption however, seeks to provide funding to a wide range of vulnerable households. In the circumstances, Officers do not consider that there are any adverse equalities impacts but Officers will keep the equalities impact of the decisions under review.

8.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

8.1 It is not considered in the circumstances that non-statutory public consultation is a viable or reasonable option for the Council in taking the decisions which are the subject of this report, even if at other times it would have considered consultation with the public and / or stakeholders affected by the decision.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

9.1 It is not considered at this time that there are any Human Resources/Property/Environmental Sustainability Implications arising from decisions which are the subject of this report.

Report sign off:

PETER GADSDON
Strategic Director of Customer &
Digital Services