

Report for: Urgent Decision – Cabinet Member Signing (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families)

Title: **COVID Winter Grant Scheme in Haringey**

Report

Authorised by: Charlotte Pomery, Assistant Director Commissioning

Lead Officer: Florence Guppy, Strategic Lead Community Enablement

Ward(s) affected: All

Report for Key/

Non Key Decision: Key Decision

## **1. Describe the issue under consideration**

- 1.1 The Government, through the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP), has established the COVID Winter Grant Scheme. The objective of the 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. Local authorities are responsible for administering the Scheme and funding has been allocated to each authority. The Council was initially allocated £986,329.83. The spend for this was decided by Cabinet Member Decision in December 2020. The Council has subsequently been awarded a further £342,895. This funding is referred to as the 'Additional Winter Grant.'
- 1.2 The funding will enable the Council to provide support to families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals from early December 2020 and covers the period until 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021. The 'Additional Winter Grant' will allow the Council to extend and expand its support to households in food or fuel poverty from the original Winter Grant allocation. This report is seeking Cabinet member approval for the proposed arrangement for the delivery of additional funding as set out in the policy document (attached) and which is within the conditions stipulated by DWP.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member:
  - 2.1.1 Approves the additional funding allocation from the Government
  - 2.1.2 Approves the COVID Additional Winter Grant Scheme Policy which sets out the Council's arrangement for administering the additional funding and is attached at Appendix 1
  - 2.1.3 Delegates authority to the Assistant Director Commissioning, in consultation with the Director of Children Services and the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families, to amend this policy to give effect to changes in legislation, statutory or non statutory guidance, or directives or instructions of a similar character issued by Government

2.1.4 Agrees that this policy is subject to the availability of government funding and will terminate on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021 unless terminated earlier or extended beyond this date by Cabinet or Cabinet Member decision.

### **3. Reasons for decision**

3.1 The Government through the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) has provided funding to local authorities to provide and administer the COVID Winter Grant Scheme. It is acknowledged that local authorities have the local ties and knowledge and are best placed to allocate funding according to local need.

3.2 The Scheme provides for local authorities to determine eligibility in their area and target support to those most in need but within the scope of conditions set by DWP. The proposed decision on the COVID Additional Winter Grant Scheme Policy sets out how the Council will target and deliver support to residents in addition to the support agreed in the original Winter Grant policy (December 2020). This spend is targeted to those that are most in need and in accordance with the Scheme.

3.3 The Winter Covid Grant payments are expected to support households over the grant period and for funding to be spent by 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021. Therefore, there is a need for an urgent decision to be taken on the recommendation in order to ensure that payments are made to support vulnerable people within the allotted time.

### **4 Alternative options considered**

4.1 The alternative option considered was not to develop an Additional Winter Grant Scheme Policy. This was discounted as it would not have made use of potential support to Haringey residents and would have necessitated a return of the funds to central government.

### **5 Background**

5.1 The objective of the Covid Winter Grant Scheme is to provide support to those vulnerable households and families with children particularly affected by the pandemic throughout the winter period, where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable. Despite the speed at which the Additional Grant announced by the DWP at the beginning of March must be spent, the Council is taking steps to ensure that it reaches those most in need and who have experienced particular hardship during the pandemic. The Council is mindful that the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities in the borough, including those of income and financial security.

5.2 When administering the scheme, Local Authorities are encouraged to apply the following principles:

- Use discretion on how to identify and support those in need
- Use the funding from December 2020 up to 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021 to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford food and utility bills. This includes payments made, or committed to from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020 to 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021. This allows for food vouchers issued before the end of the funding period to be redeemed in April 2021

5.3 In this guidance, local authorities are permitted to allocate funding to support vulnerable households within the scope of:

- At least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support families with children, with up to 20% of the total funding to other types of households, including individuals
- At least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills (including sewerage), with up to 20% on other items

5.4 Authorities have the flexibility within the Covid Winter Grant scheme to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and to apply their own discretion when identifying eligible households. Authorities can request applications for support or can proactively identify households who may benefit, or can take a mixture of the two approaches. There is no requirement for Authorities to undertake a means test. On this basis, the proposals for spend of the Covid Additional Winter Grant Scheme expand the number of households who will receive support from the Council.

5.5 The proposed COVID Additional Winter Grant Scheme Policy attached at Appendix 1 sets out the details of the additions to the scheme to be applied in Haringey which will cover the period 21<sup>st</sup> December 2020 through to 16<sup>th</sup> April in line with national funding guidance and to address local need. Using local Council data which identifies households on low incomes who are struggling financially, application of the Policy will mean direct payments being made to hundreds of households in financial need in the borough. In addition, payments will provide additional support to families over the Easter holidays who might otherwise struggle to afford basic supplies. As part of the Council's overarching approach to supporting those in need, we continue to adopt a strengths based methodology which seeks to build routes out of poverty for local residents where possible.

5.6 In Haringey, the Covid Additional Winter Grant Scheme Policy will allow for:

- Additional holiday support for family households in receipt of Free School Meals
- Additional support to households with No Recourse To Public Funds (NRPF)
- Support to residents who are in food, fuel or water poverty including those with specific needs known to the Council and those known to other services and VCS organisations

Support will be available to households with No Recourse To Public Funds in line with relevant guidance.

## **6 Contribution to strategic outcomes**

6.1 This Winter Grants policy helps meet the priorities and outcomes of Haringey's Borough Plan 2019-2023 and supports efforts to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 in the local community.

## **7 Statutory Officer Comments**

### **7.1 Finance**

7.1.1 Finance comments are contained throughout this report: the Council is proposing to put in place measures to spend funds obtained from the Winter Grant top up funding in line with the grant conditions.

7.1.2 The increase in income and expenditure budgets will be addressed in the cabinet quarterly budget monitoring reports.

## **7.2 Legal**

7.2.1 The grant funding to local authorities for the COVID Winter Grant Scheme is made pursuant to Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 which permits the Government to pay grant to local authorities towards expenditure incurred or to be incurred by it. The grant may be paid on such conditions as the Government may determine. The DWP letters to local authorities Chief Executives dated 10th November 2020 and 26<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and COVID Winter Grant Scheme: Guidance for County Councils and Unitary Authorities include the conditions for the grant funding. While the Council can determine the arrangement for administering the Scheme (including identifying those most in need and eligible for support), it must ensure that the funding conditions are met.

## **7.3 Procurement**

7.3.1 No comments

## **7.4 Equalities**

7.4.1 The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.
- 

7.4.2 The three parts of the duty applies to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.

7.4.3 The proposed decision is to approve the funding allocation regarding the COVID Winter Grant Scheme Policy from December 21st until 31st March 2021, unless terminated earlier or extended; and to delegate authority to the Assistant Director Commissioning, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adults & Health, to amend this policy to give effect to changes in legislation. The COVID Winter Grant Scheme policy will provide support to families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals through the provision of voucher-based holiday support for households eligible for Free School Meals; increase access to 'Healthy Start Vouchers', grant support to organisations supporting households with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and short-term vouchers and debt relief for households experiencing fuel insecurity, and support to ensure all residents can self-isolate when required. This support will be administered by Haringey Council in partnership with support organisations, schools, and children's centres.

7.4.4 The objective of this decision is to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on Haringey residents, through the provision of grants to some of the most vulnerable members of the community. The decision will affect individuals and households who have been identified as vulnerable through Council-held datasets. We know that vulnerable households and families with young children, among whom Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, and older people, including those on a low income are overrepresented, are likely to be particularly affected by the pandemic throughout the winter period, and where alternative sources of assistance may be unavailable, will benefit from support to pay for food and fuel in the coming months. With the funding ring-fenced to support with food and essential utility costs, it will allow the council to directly help the hardest-hit families and individuals over the winter period.

7.4.5 It is recognised that this grant is subject to the availability of government funding and could potentially terminate earlier than March 31st 2021 which will affect those protected groups, including those on a low income. Therefore no negative consequences are identified and the proposed decision represents a measure to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics, including those on a low income, and therefore mitigate any new inequalities arising as a result of the impact of Covid-19.

## **8 Use of appendices**

Appendix 1: Additional Winter Grant Discretion Policy

Appendix 2: Winter Grant Policy (December 2020)

## **9 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

None