

Report to Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Wellbeing

Subject: Nottinghamshire / DWP Covid Winter Grant Scheme – Proposed Implementation

Date: 19th January 2021

Author: Community Investment Manager

Wards Affected: All

Purpose

To seek approval of the proposed management and distribution arrangements for the Government's package of extra-targeted financial support for those in need over the winter period

Key Decision:

This is not a key decision.

Recommendation(s)

THAT the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Wellbeing:

- 1) Approves the distribution plan for Gedling Borough Council's proportion of the DWP Winter Grant Scheme as detailed in this report.
- 2) Delegates authority to the Director responsible for Communities to apportion the funding between supermarket vouchers and community groups as detailed in this report.
- 3)

1 Background

- 1.1 On the 8th November 2020, the Government announced a package of £170 million to provide financial support to those in need, with the DWP grant

scheme available from December 2020. The funding will support households and individuals that have been impacted financially due to Covid, with the cost of food, energy and water bills, and any other associated costs.

Appendices A and B outline the general overview and eligibility of the scheme

- 1.2 The total allocation for Nottinghamshire County Council is £2,316,000. The County Council can determine eligibility in their area and target their support within the scope of the conditions set out below:
 - 80% of the total funding is 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 is ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills (including sewerage), with up to 20% on other items.
- 1.3 District and Borough Councils are responsible for the distribution of financial support for 20% of the total funding, focusing only on households with **no children but vulnerable individuals**. The total amount ring-fenced for this group within Nottinghamshire is £0.45 million, with £40,800 allocated to Gedling Borough Council. The amount allocated to each District/Borough Council is to be used to fund supermarket vouchers and/or provide financial support to food banks or community groups to purchase essential supplies for residents in need. The Countywide scheme includes an allocation to the Nottingham Energy Partnership (NEP), who will deliver the winter warmth and utilities support element of the support package under the same eligibility criteria. Districts and their community partners will be expected to refer clients into that service alongside any food/essentials support provided and this is subject to separate Portfolio Holder approval.
- 1.4 The management and distribution of financial support by District and Borough Councils is flexible, with varying approaches taken by neighbouring authorities' dependant on the local needs of residents. These range from in-house management to outsourcing to private voucher distribution platforms. The majority of Districts have engaged local community response groups such as Food Banks, Parish Councils and other Covid -19 Community Food response Hubs as partners in delivering the scheme, recognising that their client base is most likely to meet the eligibility criteria.

2 Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed that the total amount allocated to Gedling Borough Council to support vulnerable individuals **without children** (£40,800) is distributed in-house, rather than through an external provider. This is due to countywide recognised GDPR challenges related to data sharing, and other associated

procurement and financial matters.

2.2

It is further proposed that the Council adopts a phased approach to the distribution of funding, through 3 tranches of £13,340. This will enable expenditure to be reviewed on a regular basis, and allocated in line with local needs. Likewise, a phased approach will ensure that as many individuals in need are supported via the scheme, including hard to reach communities. The suggested portioning and spend of the funding by Gedling BC is as follows, with precise amounts not yet proposed:

- **Purchase supermarket vouchers to be distributed by internal teams** – To allocate a number of purchased supermarket vouchers to relevant internal teams i.e. Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits, Housing and Complex Needs. The vouchers can be awarded to residents who meet the criteria, with support from Customer Services with the administering of vouchers.
- **Provide financial support to local community groups** – To allocate funding to Community food providers such as Food Banks, Churches, Parish Councils and Community Hubs (examples of the latter include Netherfield St Georges Centre, Emmanuel Church, Bestwood, Bestwood Miners Welfare, Calverton Core Centre, Eagles Nest Community Centre, Arnold). This will enable them to either directly purchase supermarket vouchers or additional food supplies, to meet increased demand.
- It is advised that this funding is used by groups to purchase food/essentials or supermarket vouchers, to support local residents in need that meet the scheme eligibility criteria. The makeup of our local delivery partnership will be determined by engagement meetings with key referral and delivery partners taking place in the first half of January. It is proposed that on allocation of any funding, community groups sign an agreement to ensure monies are spent in accordance with the grant criteria.

It is expected that all parties involved in the distribution of the grant scheme, both internally and externally, will provide monthly monitoring form returns to evidence and track correct spend of the funding, with such monitoring forming the basis of the District Council's co-ordinated response to the County Council.

3 Alternative Options

3.1 Not to deliver the DWP Winter Assistance Grant Scheme.

This option is not recommended, as it would result in vulnerable residents in Gedling being disadvantaged in relation to support being provided by the scheme in other Districts across Nottinghamshire.

3.2 To deliver the scheme under a different model, i.e. contracting out to an external provider.

This and all other models have been reviewed by a cross- departmental officer group comprising of the Head of Service for Leisure and Community Relations, Customer Services, Public Protection (inc. Safeguarding, Disabled Facilities support services), Revenues and Benefits, Housing Needs and Economic Development.

Additionally, benchmarking with our neighbouring District's approaches has been undertaken via an NCC led DWP Winter Grant Scheme coproduction group, which reports into the LRF Humanitarian Assistance Group.

The approach proposed in this report is considered to be the most appropriate and effective method of reaching the most vulnerable clients with the added value support provided by the scheme over the short timescale of January to March 2021.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 The total cost of operating this scheme is £40,800 which is fully funded by a Government Grant.

Any administration costs incurred in the delivery of this scheme will be met by the DEFRA COVID19 response funds, which are allocated to the Council by Nottinghamshire County Council. Therefore, the only cost to the Council to deliver this scheme will be in-kind staff time.

A revenue budget of £40,800 was included in the Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring Report, which was approved at Cabinet on 28 January 2021.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 The Council has entered into a grant agreement with Nottinghamshire County Council under the advice of the Council's Legal Services, and we will require any delivery partners to do the same as a condition of participation in the local partnership delivery plan.

6 Equalities Implications

6.1 This report seeks to extend an existing relationship and has no anticipated negative equalities impact in respect of the various protected characteristic groups. The Covid Winter Grant Scheme aims to provide financial support to those in need, with the proposed approach to distributing the funding

ensuring best practice for maintaining equality throughout the scheme

7 Carbon Reduction/Environmental Sustainability Implications

- 7.1 No negative Carbon Reduction/Environmental Sustainability implications. Proposed supermarket vouchers are fully recyclable and are returned to Supermarkets by clients.

8 Appendices

8.1 **Appendix A:** Covid Winter Grant Scheme Briefing Document

8.2 **Appendix B:** Covid Winter Grant Scheme Eligibility Criteria

9 Background Papers

9.1 None

10 Reasons for Recommendations

- 10.1 To enable the Council to deliver the DWP Winter Assistance Scheme to vulnerable residents in Gedling in a timeous and equitable manner between January and March 2021.

Statutory Officer approval

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Appendix A- Covid Winter Grant Scheme briefing document

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 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has provided funding to County Councils and Unitary Authorities, under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, who will administer the scheme and provide assistance to vulnerable families with children and other vulnerable households, particularly affected by the pandemic.

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. Targeting this money effectively will ease the burden faced by a wide range of vulnerable households across the country worrying about paying the next utility bill or the next food shop due to the pandemic.

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. The local authority can determine eligibility in their area and target their support within the scope of the conditions set out below:

- 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.

Nottinghamshire County Council has worked with key partners on the Local Resilience Forum and will be progressing the following work:

Children and Families

At least 80% of the Grant will be allocated to households with children. Approximately £1.2m would be spent on the provision of food to those families where children are in receipt of free school meals due to the low income of the household across the Christmas and February half-term breaks. This includes school aged pupils and those in 6th forms and Further Education (FE) Colleges. Vouchers will be distributed by Schools and FE Colleges.

Households with 2 year olds from low income households and 3 and 4 year olds eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium will receive supermarket vouchers or food parcels through their early years setting. Households with children who need assistance with an allocated lead professional such as a Social Worker, Family Service or Children's Centre Service key worker will receive a supermarket voucher and can access the Nottingham Energy Partnership to assist with fuel and water bills. This will target households struggling with the provision of food, paying winter energy costs and water bills during the period up until March and based on an assessment of need by the relevant professional. Their priority will be focused in the main on children not eligible for Free School Meals but whose household is struggling financially because of Covid.

If you are working with a household with children who need support, please refer them to the Covid Community Support Hub 0300 500 8080 or contact the Family Service or Children's Centre Service team
Households with no children and vulnerable individuals

£0.45m (20% of the grant) will be focused on households with no children and vulnerable individuals who have been identified by professionals as being in urgent need. This will include care leavers, those at risk of homelessness, those at risk from domestic violence but without children and those with no recourse to public funds.

Care Leavers aged 19-24 and young people with an Education Healthcare Plan aged 19-24 who are eligible for Free School Meals will receive supermarket vouchers through Children's Social Care or their FE College.

Each District and Borough Council will be funded to provide supermarket vouchers to adults and households with no children who are struggling financially because of Covid. They will also use funds to support local food banks who are able to assist with food and other essentials.

**To refer to this service please contact the Covid Community Support Hub
0300 500 8080**

When you contact the Covid Community Support Hub, they submit a support request to the relevant District Council.

Support with Fuel payments and other utilities

Nottinghamshire County Council is working with the Nottingham Energy Partnership (NEP) who will provide fuel vouchers and support for households who require assistance to pay for their utility bills – namely energy/fuel vouchers and water bills (but not rent or other housing costs). Workers can refer people to the service to access this support.

To refer to this service please contact the NEP directly on 0300 6880808 or send an online enquiry at <https://nottenergy.com/covid-19-winter-grant-scheme/>

(see attached FAQ for workers)

Nottingham Energy Partnership telephone lines are open from Monday to Friday, 9am – 5.30pm.

Nottingham Energy Partnership will be closed from the 25th December to the 4th January. If requests are made during this period, please use the online enquiry form and enquiries will be processed the week of the 4th January.

Professionals can also contact covidwintergrant@nottsc.gov.uk for more information

Appendix B - Covid Winter Grant Scheme eligibility criteria

The aim of the Covid Winter Grant 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. Targeting this money effectively will ease the burden faced by a wide range of vulnerable households across the country worrying about paying the next utility bill or the next food shop due to the pandemic.

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 you are preparing parcels of food & essentials parcels, 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 BBC 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.

For more information for professionals: covidwintergrant@nottsc.gov.uk

The Nottinghamshire Coronavirus Community Support Hub brings together the many local volunteer groups offering help with those who are staying at home because of Coronavirus. Please use this service if you are unsure where to go to access the scheme or other schools