

## DECISION BOOK

**Issue: 637      Date: 29 JULY 2021**

Decisions set out in the book have been made under delegated powers by the Chief Executive, Executive Directors or the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, in consultation either with the relevant committee or Lead Councillor.

The Decision Book process has been altered to suspend the current Councillors' call-in arrangements within the 10-day period after its publication and replace it with the ability during that period for three Councillors to request a retrospective review of the decision in writing to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

The decision book can be accessed on the Council's website - <https://democracy.reading.gov.uk/mgListOfficerDecisions.aspx?bcr=1&BAM=0>

The officer reports accompanying the decisions are attached.

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## DECISION BOOK - ISSUE 637 - 29 JULY 2021

### 1. COVID LOCAL SUPPORT GRANT - PHASE 5 PROPOSAL

<u>DECISION</u>	<u>LEAD</u> <u>COUNCILLOR(S)</u>	<u>WARDS</u> <u>AFFECTED</u>	<u>PAGE</u> <u>NO.</u>
1. COVID LOCAL SUPPORT GRANT - PHASE 5 PROPOSAL	COUNCILLOR BROCK	BOROUGHWIDE	1

This report sets out the decision to use additional Covid Local Support Grant (previously named Covid Winter Grant Scheme) of £437,174, received from the Department for Work and Pensions.

It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council that the £437,174 Covid Local Support Grant funding is used to provide the following:

- (a) A targeted food voucher scheme for families with school age children eligible for Pupil Premium Free School Meals, vulnerable 2 year olds and care leavers (1 x £15 voucher per child) for each of the 6 weeks of Summer Holiday 2021;
- (b) Additional grant support to local community organisations to support other vulnerable families with food.

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**REPORT BY DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

<b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b>	<b>COUNCILLOR BROCK - LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>29 JULY 2021</b>		
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>COVID LOCAL SUPPORT GRANT - PHASE 5 PROPOSAL</b>		
<b>SERVICE:</b>	<b>CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT AND CUSTOMER SERVICES</b>	<b>WARDS:</b>	<b>BOROUGHWIDE</b>
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**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report sets out the decision to use additional Covid Local Support Grant (previously named Covid Winter Grant Scheme) of £437,174, received from the Department for Work and Pensions, as set out in 2.1 (a) and (b) below, and provide an update on the scheme.
- 1.2 The following four Decision Books have been completed relating to this funding stream:
- January (issue 620, dated 7 January 2021)
  - March (issue 624, dated 12 March)
  - April (issue 631, dated 27 April)
  - June (issue 634, dated 17 June)

**2.0 DECISION**

- 2.1 It is the decision of the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council that the £437,174 Covid Local Support Grant funding is used to provide the following:
- (a) A targeted food voucher scheme for families with school age children eligible for Pupil Premium Free School Meals, vulnerable 2 year olds and care leavers (1 x £15 voucher per child) for each of the 6 weeks of Summer Holiday 2021.
- (b) Additional grant support to local community organisations to support other vulnerable families with food.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

#### **COVID WINTER GRANT SCHEME PHASE 1, 2 AND 3 AGREED BY RBC**

- 3.1 A total of £625,996 of Winter Grants Scheme Funding has been awarded to RBC. The funding was to provide targeted support for vulnerable children and families at risk of food or fuel (utilities) poverty over the winter months.

- 3.2 The Council agreed to utilise the grant as follows:

##### **Phase 1**

- December 2020
- A targeted food voucher scheme for families with school age children eligible for Pupil Premium Free School Meals to cover Christmas holiday 2020
- Grant funding to local community food banks to extend existing capacity for food support

##### **Phase 2**

- January/February 2021
- A targeted food voucher scheme for families with school age children eligible for Pupil Premium Free School Meals to cover February half term holiday
- Launch of targeted fuel voucher scheme for families with school age children eligible for Pupil Premium Free School Meals

##### **Phase 3**

- April 2021
- A targeted fuel and food voucher scheme for households with vulnerable 2 year olds and care leavers to cover the 2 week Easter Holiday
- Funding for Citizens Advice Reading to provide emergency fuel payments and guidance/support to vulnerable families and individuals to alleviate immediate and long-term fuel poverty/crisis issues
- Funding for food parcels/hot meals for children attending the Easter holidays playschemes funded by the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF)

### **4. COVID LOCAL SUPPORT GRANT - PHASE 4 AGREED BY RBC**

- 4.1 RBC were awarded £109,294 Covid Local Support Grant Funding from the Department for Work and Pensions. Whilst a new funding scheme, the grant conditions are the same as those for the Covid Winter Grant Scheme.

- 4.2 The Council agreed to utilise the grant as follows:

##### **Phase 4**

- May 2021
- A targeted food voucher scheme for households with vulnerable 2 year olds and care leavers to cover the May Half Term (1 x £25 voucher per child)

### **5. COVID LOCAL SUPPORT GRANT - PHASE 5 PROPOSALS**

- 5.1 RBC have been awarded a further £437,174 Covid Local Support Grant Funding from the Department for Work and Pensions.

5.2 We propose that the funding be used to:

- Provide food vouchers to families with school age children eligible for Pupil Premium Free School Meals, vulnerable 2 year olds and care leavers to cover the 6 weeks of the Summer Holidays. Approximately 3900 children will be eligible for the funding (TOTAL = £354k)
- Additional grant support to local community organisations to support other vulnerable families with food (TOTAL = £78k), broken down as follows:
  - Readifood - £30k (to include cookery classes/demo's and recipe packs)
  - Whitley Community Development Association - £12k
  - Weller - £12k
  - New Beginnings - £12k
  - Wycliffe - £12k

5.3 The infrastructure remains in place for BFfC to deliver this scheme. An admin charge of £5k is proposed for the food voucher scheme (approx. 1.5%).

## **6. APPEALS**

6.1 Discretionary Support Schemes are not subject to any formal statutory appeals process and therefore there are no appeal rights.

## **7. FRAUD**

7.1 The Council will not accept deliberate manipulation and fraud - and any resident caught falsifying their records to gain support will face prosecution and any payment issued will be subject to claw back, as will any payments paid in error.

7.2 One of the biggest risks for this scheme is impersonation fraud, where fraudsters work through a residential area and falsely claim under the names of eligible recipients. Risk has been reduced by a targeted scheme to eligible families.

7.3 The DWP advise that Authorities wishing to work with Third Party Organisations to deliver the scheme must carry out suitable due diligence checks to ensure they are viable and able to deliver the support. So, for example, ensuring all charities are registered and taking extra caution if they are new organisations.

7.4 Authorities are also encouraged to ensure checks are in place to verify the identity of those eligible.

## **8. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

8.1 This proposal will contribute to the following key priority set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-21:

- Protecting and enhancing the lives of vulnerable adults and children: To ensure every vulnerable person is safe and can achieve their potential and aspirations. Our priorities for vulnerable adults are to promote independent living, manage the rising demand for services, and strengthen our working relationships with partners in the health, education and voluntary sectors.

## **9. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None to note.

## **10. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 10.1 Communications appropriate to a targeted scheme will be promoted on respective websites. There will be minimal social media promotion to mitigate any potential risks of fraudulent claims.

## **11. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 11.1 A Full Equality Impact Assessment was completed for the original Decision Book report.

## **12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 None to note.

## **13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 The cost of these payments will be met by Central Government, the Covid Local Support Grant Scheme is ring-fenced.
- 13.2 To simplify the allocation of funding against the criteria outline by DWP, the Council has focused on delivering 80% or more of the funding to vulnerable families for food and fuel only. The remaining 20% is being allocated to other individual and/or family for food and fuel also.
- 13.3 The COVID Local Support Grant funding allocation includes reasonable administration costs to enable Authorities to deliver the scheme. Authorities should deduct their estimated administration costs from the total allocation to determine the amount remaining. In all cases, Authorities should keep administrative costs to a reasonable level. Administration costs for each Authority will be published on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) alongside detail of all spend related to this scheme.

## **14. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 14.1 New Grant Determinations.