

Report to Cabinet

3 November 2021

Subject:	Action Taken on a Matter of Urgency – Provision of Free School Meals – October 2021 half term holiday
Cabinet Member:	Leader of the Council Councillor Rajbir Singh
Director:	Acting Operational Director of Children and Education – Melanie Barnett Director of Finance – Simone Hines
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	School Place Planning and Capital Manager Martyn Roberts martyn_roberts@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendation

- 1.1 That details of the urgent action taken by the Leader of the Council, in relation to giving approval to Acting Operational Director of Children and Education to allocate £90,000 of the Extended Local Support Grant and £180,000 from the Emergency Covid Funding to provide food vouchers to families with children who are eligible for a free school meal for the October 2021 school half term period, be received.

2 Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 The matter was urgent and could not be delayed until the next Cabinet meeting as otherwise the opportunity to fund meal vouchers for the October half term week would have been missed.
- 2.2 Under Part 4 of the Council's Constitution, the Scrutiny Procedure Rules provide that matters may not be called in for scrutiny when they are considered urgent. A matter is considered urgent where a delay would prejudice the Council's or the public interest.



- 2.3 The Rules also stipulate that decisions taken in this manner must be reported to the next available meeting of the Cabinet and Council, together with the reasons for the urgency.
- 2.4 This report indicates an action taken as a matter of urgency by the Leader of the Council since the last meeting of the Council.
- 2.5 The action taken was in accordance with the scope of authority of the Leader of the Council.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People</p> <p>Vouchers purchased will continue to support the most vulnerable families in our community as restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic continue to impact on income levels requiring welfare support.</p>
---	--

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 It was proposed to continue to support vulnerable families in receipt of Free School Meals with food vouchers for the upcoming school half term holiday.
- 4.2 The proposal was possible with the recent announcement by the Government that a new grant allocation, the Household Support Grant, in the sum of £3,471,442, would shortly be allocated to the Local Authority, 50% of which should be made available to support households with children.
- 4.3 Following the Free School Meals summer holiday scheme it was not expected that the council would be in a position to fund meal vouchers for future school holiday periods. The Household Support Grant was announced on 30 September 2021; however, no funding had been released yet to enable for an item to had been included on the Forward Plan for consideration at Cabinet on 20 October 2021.
- 4.4 As the total value of the vouchers was estimated to be in the region of £267,000, executive approval was required to allocate grant funding and approve spend above £250,000.



- 4.5 An urgent decision is requested to avoid losing the opportunity to fund meal vouchers for the October half term week.
- 4.6 Unfortunately there was insufficient time before the current school term closed on 22 October to allow sufficient time to allocate funds via BACs transfers to school accounts. Schools in turn require time to raise orders for the issue of vouchers to parents / carers.
- 4.7 For children on a school roll, Schools would receive a payment from the Council to purchase vouchers directly from Wonde, continuing with their existing procurement arrangements.
- 4.8 For children not on a school roll, vouchers would be purchased and issued to parents / carers using Black Hawk, a specialist company previously engaged by the Authority.
- 4.9 An urgent decision by the Leader of the Council was requested to proceed with allocation of the grant funding identified to purchase meal vouchers for children, either in receipt of Free School Meals, or not on a school roll but who would be eligible to receive Free School Meals.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Do nothing was not a realistic option as to date the council's food voucher scheme has supported some of our most vulnerable families.
- 5.2 Use of alternative voucher suppliers:
Children on roll: schools have the option to use Wonde, who they have primarily used for previous schemes, or to approach alternative voucher providers.
Children not on roll: research undertaken prior to extending the original Black Hawk contract to issue food vouchers found that either, not all major food retailers based in our local communities were available through the voucher supplier, or that for those that were listed, limited food options were available to families.
- 5.3 Increased vouchers value: The current value is in line with the Free School Meal daily price per meal.
- 5.4 Development of a Council Voucher Scheme: the requirement is time limited, requiring extensive negotiations with major food retailers based in our communities. The cost benefit analysis of continuing with recent



providers, namely Wonde and Black Hawk with a tailor-made package far outweighs the work and cost required to negotiate a small package for the expected procurement value, and short contract period.

6 Implications

Resources:	Estimate of costs for pupils in school	£267,000
	Estimate of costs for children not on school roll	£3,000
	Total estimated costs	£270,000
	To be funded from:	
	Extended Local Support Grant	£90,000
	Household Support Grant*	£180,000
	Total funding	£270,000
	<p>* This funding is underwritten from Emergency Covid Funding should Household Support Grant not be received by the Council.</p> <p>Staffing: no direct impact. Existing staffing resources used for previous voucher allocations can be redeployed within the Education Support Services service area.</p>	
Legal and Governance:	<p>The Council's agreed Constitution provides that the Leader of the Council can take an individual decision using urgency provisions, and the Chair of the relevant Scrutiny Board is also advised.</p> <p>A copy of this report has been forwarded to the Chair of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board.</p> <p>Purchase and distribution of food vouchers will be arranged in accordance with the council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules 2018-2019.</p>	
Risk:	<p>Implications: Children and young people are at risk of not receiving a free school meal during the school holiday period.</p>	



	Mitigation: Schools will arrange distribution of vouchers to pupils in receipt of FSM, and the council's scheme will replicate provision for Electively Home Educated and Children Missing Education.
Equality:	Implications: Without the scheme an inequality will exist between those children on school rolls receiving FSM vouchers, and those not attending school.
Health and Wellbeing:	Implications: The Council scheme is to ensure that children eligible to receive a voucher are afforded access to a minimum of a meal a day.
Social Value	Implications: Children not on a school roll will receive equitable support to those attending school. Vouchers are only redeemable at local major food retailers ensuring investment in the local economy.

7. Appendices

None

8. Background Papers

None

