

Finance Urgent Key Decision



Decision of: Head of Paid Services/Chief Executive

**In consultation with: Councillor Tony Dyer,
Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee**

Directorate: Resources

Decision no: 037

Subject: Household Support Fund 6 (2024 school holidays free school meals vouchers)

Key decision: Yes

Reason

To approve the spend of £1,021,500, in respect of 22,700 Free School Meals food vouchers for the October and Christmas school holidays, following the recent announcement and extension of the Household Support Fund. The allocation by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Hardship Support Fund, is a total of £4,039,965, but a decision is needed 11 October 2024 on this element, and before the next Committee to allow distribution of any vouchers to low-income households before the first school holiday at the end of October.

Background

On 2 September 2024 the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announced that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended for a further six months, from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025, with a further £421m of funding. As has been done for previous schemes, the fund is released to councils, to support those most in need with the cost of food, energy and water bills, phone, broadband and clothing and in exceptional cases, housing costs.

Due to lack of notice given by government and the impending October half term, the Council will use a proportion of the £4m grant, to assist 22,700 Free School Meal/Pupil Premium children during the school holidays in October half term and Christmas holiday. This will be done by awarding a £15 per week, per child, food voucher in respect of all those entitled. The spend accounts for £1,021,500 of the allocation for the 3 weeks in total of school holidays in this period. This commitment is in line with previous support provided to these children for most school holidays since October 2020, by Bristol City Council.

The contract supplier (Hawk Incentives) has been chosen using the CSS framework and is a continuation of an existing and well-established good quality, procurement compliant route.

It is not reasonably practicable to await the next Strategy and Resources Committee meeting as arrangements need to be put in place beforehand, to enable distribution to be in place by the start of the holidays. There is a clear and pressing urgent need for this decision to be taken to enable the Free School Meal vouchers to be available for the October half term school holiday.

This emergency decision to spend £1,021,500 of the forthcoming Council's allocation from the Household Support Fund for October 2024 to March 2025 was made by the Head of Paid Services/Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee.

Decision

To approve the spend of £1,021,500 from the extended Hardship Support Fund in respect of Free School Meals food vouchers for the relevant school holidays, in advance of the full policy being presented to Strategy and Resources Committee

Financial implications

Bristol City Council will be awarded a further £4m under the Household Support Fund Grant. The awarding of a £15 per week, per child voucher amounts to an expenditure amount of £1,021,500. This spend is fully met from the grant received and places no additional financial burden on the council.

The utilisation of the remainder of the grant is yet to be determined and will be subject to a separate decision and report to be taken to Strategy and Resources Committee.

Legal powers and implications

This funding to councils on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is made under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. Legal support has been provided and the procurement process followed is compliant with both the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the council's own procurement rules.

Climate change and environmental implications

None

Consultation

Consultation has taken place with colleagues in Education and schools, plus wider services where there is an impact with regards to food and fuel poverty on Bristol residents.

Risk management.

NA.

Equality implications

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? Yes – historically, with an updated one for the new policy, in progress.

Corporate implications

The proposed spend and allocation of the Hardship Support Fund aligns to the corporate strategy in which the vision is for Bristol to be a City.

1. In which everyone benefits from the city's success, and no-one is left behind.
2. Where people have access to decent jobs and to affordable homes.
3. In which services and opportunities are accessible.
4. Where life chances and health are not determined by wealth and background.

This is through providing support to households who are on a low income, so that levels of poverty are reduced with the benefits to health and opportunities that this brings.

Signatories

Decision maker

Title: Head of Paid Services/Chief Executive

Signed: 

Date: 4/10/2024

Note: if an electronic signature is used, an email from the Director confirming a decision and allowing the use of an electronic signature must be attached

Consultees

Title: Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee/Leader of Bristol City Council

Signed: 

Date: 26/09/24

Note: if an electronic signature is used, an email from the relevant certifier confirming consultation and allowing use of electronic signature must be attached. If a consultation is undertaken verbally the Director must record date and time of the conversation and any agreement/concerns raised by the consultee.