

## Record of operational decision

<b>Decision title:</b>	Decision to support families with children entitled to free school meals by providing a food vouchers during the October Half Term period.
<b>Date of decision:</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> October 2024
<b>Decision maker:</b>	Director of Finance
<b>Authority for delegated decision:</b>	Cabinet member decision on 10 October 2024 delegated operational matters in relation to the Household Support Fund to the Director of Resources and Assurance Link: <a href="#">Household Support Fund 5 - Herefordshire Council</a>
<b>Ward:</b>	Countywide
<b>Consultation:</b>	Cabinet member for finance, corporate services and planning and cabinet member for children and families were consulted on this decision.
<b>Decision made:</b>	To provide a food voucher of £15 per child eligible for free school meals for the October Half Term period, at a total cost estimated to be £72,000
<b>Reasons for decision:</b>	<p>The free school meal system is an important component of the support that is provided to low-income families. Providing vouchers in the school holidays for children entitled to free school meals is an extension to this support and will benefit over 4,738 children. Through this proposal, primary and secondary aged school pupils who are eligible for benefits related free school meals will receive a food voucher of £15 for the October Half Term period.</p> <p>Herefordshire Council has received an allocation of £1,329,601.78 from the Department of Works and Pensions under the Household Support Fund. The expectation is that the funding should be used primarily to support households in the most need, particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy, food and water bills as well as other essential costs.</p> <p>By utilising the funding from government, this will have a positive impact on low income families and child poverty by minimising the debt burden on those that struggle to pay essential bills.</p>
<b>Equality Considerations:</b>	Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows; a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Local authorities have discretion on exactly how the Housing Support Fund is used within the scope set out in the guidance for April 2023 to March 2024 issued by the Department of Work and Pensions and the local eligibility framework which is set out in paragraph 5 of this report. In prioritising low income households, there is likely to be a positive impact for people who are financially disadvantaged (although this

	<p>is not in itself a protected characteristic within the Equality Act 2010). If there are households in urgent need due to rising living costs, they October access support through the Local Welfare Provision service of the Council. The scheme specifically targets families on low incomes with children who are eligible for free school meals. It will also aim to target disabled households, especially those that have high utility bills. The Household Support Fund will provide additional support to other financially disadvantaged households in Herefordshire, many of these households will include those who share a protected characteristic e.g. age, so by utilising the scheme this will support the council in discharging its Equality duty by supporting many of these households to access these funds through third party agencies. All agencies involved in the distribution of the funding will be made aware of their equality responsibilities in regards to the Equality Act.</p>
<p><b>Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:</b></p>	<p>The cost of the scheme will be funded through the Household Support Fund allocation of £1,329,601.78.</p> <p>The exact level of spend depends on the number of children entitled to free school meals, which will be closely monitored. Schools are reimbursed 3% administration costs for the processing of free school meal vouchers. This is estimated as £72,000 within the total cost of £2,100.</p> <p>The council recognises that the pandemic has exacerbated the inequalities in our society, and this is being further compounded by the increased cost of living. Supporting low income families with vouchers to purchase food over the half-term allows the council to continue to address local inequalities.</p>
<p><b>Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:</b></p>	<p>Not to approve spend to support families entitled to free school meals during school holidays families. This is not recommended. The Household Support Fund is expected to support households in most need, with at least one third of the funding for vulnerable households with children. Funding families entitled to free school meals during school holidays will reach those households on the lowest incomes, which are disproportionately adversely affected by increased household bills.</p>
<p><b>Details of any declarations of interest made:</b></p>	<p>None</p>

Signed:

Date: 10/10/2024

Director of Finance