

Record of operational decision

Decision title:	Decision to support families with children entitled to free school meals by providing a food vouchers during the Christmas Holiday period
Date of decision:	15 November 2022
Decision maker:	Director of Resources and Assurance
Authority for delegated decision:	Chief Executive's Scheme of Delegation dated 29/09/2020 SA 92 – Financial services
Ward:	Countywide
Consultation:	Cabinet member for finance, corporate services and planning and cabinet member for children and families were consulted on this decision.
Decision made:	To provide a food voucher of £20 per child per week eligible for benefit related free school meals for the Christmas Holiday period, at a total cost estimated to be £194,500.
Reasons for decision:	<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 4,700 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 £20 per week throughout the Christmas Holiday period.</p> <p>Consumer prices, as measured by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI), were 8.6% higher in August 2022 than a year before. The CPI is also forecast to remain above 8.6% for the remainder of 2022 into 2023, peaking at 14% in Quarter 4 2022. Low-income households spend a larger proportion than average on energy and food so will be more affected by price increases.</p> <p>Herefordshire Council has received an allocation of £1,329,601.78 from the Department of Works and Pensions under the next phase of the Household Support Fund which was confirmed on 1st October 2022. 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. This is part of wider offer that is being developed as part of the allocation of the Household Support Fund.</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>
Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:	<p>The cost of the scheme will be funded through the Household Support Fund allocation of £1,329,602.</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 £5,840 within the total cost of £194,500.</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>

Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:	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.
Details of any declarations of interest made:	None

Signed:

Date: