

Record of operational decision

Decision title:	Decision to support families with children entitled to free school meals by providing a food vouchers during the May half term period.
Date of decision:	15 th May 2023
Decision maker:	Director of Resources and Assurance
Authority for delegated decision:	Chief executive scheme of delegation – updated 22 November 2022 SA92
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 £15 per child eligible for free school meals for the February half-term, at a total cost estimated to be £67,700.00
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 4350 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 week of the May half-term period.</p> <p>Consumer prices, as measured by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI), were 10.10% higher in March 2023 than a year before. 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 £2,659,203.57 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>
Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:	<p>The cost of the scheme will be funded through the Household Support Fund allocation of £2,659,203.57.</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 £1,970.00 within the total cost of £67,700.00</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. Whilst the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme also supports children entitled to free school meals by providing food support in a way that also promotes wider health and wellbeing outcomes, it does not provide support during half-term holidays.
Details of any declarations of interest made:	None

Signed:

Date: