

## 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 Christmas holiday period, February Half-Term and Easter Holiday period.
<b>Date of decision:</b>	21 <sup>st</sup> November 2024
<b>Decision maker:</b>	Head of Communities
<b>Authority for delegated decision:</b>	Cabinet member decision on 7 November 2024 delegated operational matters in relation to the Household Support Fund to the Talk Community Lead Link: <a href="#">Decision - Household Support Fund 6 - Herefordshire Council</a>
<b>Ward:</b>	Countywide
<b>Consultation:</b>	Cabinet member for finance, corporate services and planning and Director of Finance have been consulted about the approach to support children and families as part of the Household Support Fund framework.
<b>Decision made:</b>	To provide a food voucher of up to £75 (£15 per school holiday week) per child that are eligible for free school meals. The £15 food voucher will cover two weeks during the Christmas Holiday period, one week during February Half-Term and two weeks during the Easter Holiday period. The total cost is estimated to be £360,000.00
<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 around 4,600 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 per week during the holiday period up until the end of the Easter Holiday 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>	<p>The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.</p> <p>Due to the scope of this project and its potential impact on certain protected characteristics, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is attached as an appendix to the cabinet report.</p> <p>In summary, this project impacts on protected characteristics as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Age - Pensioners who are just above the pension credit threshold will be eligible for support for their heating over the winter months. Working with Age UK will enable us to identify those pensioners most in need.</li> <li>b. Disability - Services within the council that work with disabled people in receipt of adult social care services will be asked to identify households in need of support financially to help reduce the impact of increasing energy</li> </ul>

	<p>costs.</p> <p>c. Pregnancy &amp; Maternity - Parents identified by professional colleagues, who need financial support to pay for essentials related to children, for example, nappies, formula milk, clothing, or food. d. Other: Carers, care leavers, homeless, economic deprivation - Services within the council that support unpaid carers will be consulted with to consider how financial support can be offered to households most in need.</p> <p>The EIA did not identify any negative impacts at this time. Any future negative impacts will be reviewed and mitigated accordingly.</p>
<b>Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:</b>	<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 £10,500 within the total cost of £360,000.00.</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>
<b>Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:</b>	<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>
<b>Details of any declarations of interest made:</b>	<p>None</p>

Signed:  
Head of Communities

Date: 21/11/24