

## **CABINET**

<b>DATE</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> November 2020
<b>REPORT OF</b>	Councillor Ian Lindley, Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People
<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER</b>	Joanne Hewson, Interim Director of Children and Family Services
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Free School Meals October 2020
<b>STATUS</b>	Open
<b>FORWARD PLAN REF NO.</b>	<b>SPECIAL URGENCY</b>  Not included on the Forward Plan therefore, to be considered as an urgent item under the Special Urgency provisions of the Constitution and with the permission of the Communities Scrutiny Chair.

### **CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS**

The fundamental purpose for Children and Family Services is to keep improving outcomes for children so that they thrive and are safe. The underlying principle behind the recommendations in this report is to help our vulnerable young people thrive.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report outlines the Council's pledge in respect of providing support to those vulnerable young people and families who have a current entitlement to Free School Meals (FSM), over the October half term period.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That Cabinet supports the pledge to families, which will provide all young people who have a current entitlement to Free School Meals, with financial support of a one-off financial commitment of £10.00 each over the October half term period.
2. That authority is given to the Director of Children and Family Services, in consultation with the Director of Resources and Governance, to ensure that the Council's commitment to our most vulnerable young people is progressed.
3. Cabinet further authorises the Director for Children and Family Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People and the Director of Resources and Governance to explore and implement any further support packages throughout the current academic year.

## **REASONS FOR DECISION**

- 1) We are in unprecedented times and so many families have been impacted by COVID-19. As a Local Authority we are seeking to collectively support our most vulnerable families, the recommendations in this report offer that support.
- 2) In the current climate, more families have fallen below the threshold which enables them to claim FSM. This is evident in the current School Census return, which shows an increase in cases of FSM, and subsequently the potential for hardship.

### **1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES**

- 1.1 North East Lincolnshire is identified as having some of the most deprived Wards in the Country, Grimsby, as an example, was identified recently as the 17<sup>th</sup> most deprived LA in the country.
- 1.2 North East Lincolnshire has a total school age population of 24,084. The July Schools Census identified a total of 5,703 young people who currently meet the criteria for FSM entitlement.
- 1.3 The majority of those young people who are currently eligible for FSM are located in some of our most deprived Wards.
- 1.4 It is anticipated, in November 2020, when the next School Census is undertaken, the FSM figure will increase, with more families potentially experiencing hardship, and especially those who are already vulnerable.
- 1.5 To fulfil the Councils Pledge and to help ease the hardship that families may suffer, a one-off £10.00 voucher will be made available to those who meet the relevant FSM criteria. The financial commitment required as part of the Pledge will be in the region of £58,000.
- 1.6 The voucher is a retrospective commitment to families to help towards some of the cost they have incurred over the October half term period. It should be noted that we are quite unique in North East Lincolnshire, as our Schools operate staggered half term dates over a prolonged period of time. These dates range between the 16<sup>th</sup> October and the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020. With some Schools taking only one week and others taking two-week break in that period.
- 1.7 The Vouchers have been purchased by the Local Authority from Aldi. This supermarket chain has been selected as it has large stores in Grimsby, Cleethorpes, and Immingham, and in that regard provides the best coverage for families to be able to purchase food. It should be noted that the vouchers have a restrictive clause and cannot be used for the purchase of alcohol or lottery tickets.
- 1.8 The Majority of schools have been fully supportive and wished to work in collaboration with the Local Authority, ensuring that help is made available to the most vulnerable young people. The Schools, upon their return from the October half term (see 1.6), will help us by distributing the vouchers directly to the those entitled. We will be directly posting the vouchers for those children at schools that are not able to support with distribution due to capacity.

- 1.9 This proposal will respond to the immediate need to support vulnerable young children across the Borough., However, further support may be needed throughout the remainder of the school year. Further options will be explored as to how we could respond, incorporating support from partners, businesses, and other sectors.

## **2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

- 2.1 Those families entitled to FSM are at risk of not having enough food to feed their children.
- 2.2 The opportunity presented by the Council's commitment to our most vulnerable, will help mitigate some of this risk.

## **3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

No other options have been identified.

## **4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS**

Not providing support to young people during school holidays could have significant reputational implications for the Council and criticism for not adhering to its duty to support families to the fullest extent reasonably achievable.

## **5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The Council has received funding from central Government to respond to and deal with the impact and consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic. It is proposed that funding for this short-term proposal is taken from that funding.

Further options will be considered, if needed, to deal with longer term requirements for FSM during the remainder of the school year.

## **6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

None

## **7. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY**

None

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 As outlined above, the one-off cost is estimated in the region of £58,000, which it is proposed be funded through covid-19 grant support provided from central government.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 As highlighted above, the Council has a statutory duty to improve the outcomes for children and families.
- 9.2 Constitutionally, all directors have the power to determine and exercise, having regard to prevailing Council policy, the operational requirements of their functions and to manage the human and material resources available for their functions.

9.3 The Council is in a state of response to the COVID-19 pandemic which is causing (inter alia) significant financial hardship. The recommendations sought are consistent with the prevailing response policy of the Council.

#### **10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no HR implications contained within this report.

#### **11. WARD IMPLICATIONS**

All wards effected

#### **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

#### **13. CONTACT OFFICER(S)**

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**COUNCILLOR IAN LINDLEY**  
**PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE**