

COVID WINTER GRANT SCHEME – BACKGROUND REPORT

Delivery Policy and Framework



INTRODUCTION

The Government has created a COVID Winter Grant Scheme (WGS) to support families with children, other vulnerable households and individuals. The scheme will run from December 2020 to 31 March 2021.

The WGS is not designed to replicate Free School Meals (FSM) in its entirety, but this is a key factor. WGS is wider than children with FSM entitlement. Not all families who qualify for FSM will need this support. However, it is proposed we use the FSM register, together with other registers, to capture and target our most vulnerable families and children.

It is clear that this support will need to cover children at risk of going hungry, but also support other vulnerable groups.

LAs have some flexibility around how they administer the funding – which may include cash, the provision of food, vouchers, or funding through third party organisations. However there are set categories of spend - one relates to household composition and one relates to the type of support being provided e.g. food, energy, water and other. LAs will be asked to report and manage spend in relation to both these areas.

PCC has discretion about how we choose to deliver packages of support and which of our services we involve. We are working with neighbouring LAs, as well as other organisations, to ensure the most effective support is delivered to as many families as possible. For example, we have agreed with neighbouring LAs that students attending schools in our respective areas, but living outside of the LA area will be catered for based on the school locality, not their place of residence.

LINKS WITH OTHER INITIATIVES IN THE CITY

Within the city we will also link up WGS with various initiatives that are supporting the residents who need help most this winter. They include The Box food parcels providing ingredients for cooking a meal and presents for children and the Emergency Food Grant which we have used to fund a range of organisations that have got plans to deliver food this Christmas and ongoing.

Emergency Food Grant

On 11 June DEFRA announced an additional £63 million to be distributed to local authorities in England to help those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials due to coronavirus. Plymouth's allocation of the local authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies is £343,179.73.

The City Council agreed that the aims of the grant would be to:

- To build the capacity of the food sector in the city to ensure that people who are struggling to afford food and other essentials because of the impact of COVID are able to access it.
- In the event of future lockdowns, the sector would be able to respond and provide food to those who were referred by the City Council and partners as part of Caring for Plymouth.

- To provide advice and information to people to ensure they can move away from relying on short term food aid, for example: debt advice and benefit claims.

The following has been funded and put in place:

1. A contract with Food Plymouth to co-ordinate a collaborative alliance for the food aid sector to ensure that they work collectively to reach everyone in need.
2. Working with Fare Share to develop a Warehouse operation to provide an efficient pipeline of food into food aid charities in Plymouth. Food Plymouth and our Economy, Partnerships and Regeneration team are working to develop 3 main supermarket surplus food distribution hubs in the city, with Fare Shares and the Co-op.
3. Awards of 18 grants worth £69,269.59 to a range of smaller and grassroots organisations who distribute food to particularly vulnerable groups of people. A map of all of the food aid organisations and the areas that they cover is being produced.

The next phase is for PCC to invest in the development of food co-ops as a way to combat food poverty more sustainably.

The Box

The WGS and the Box are providing very different types of support, and we will work together to ensure that these are both targeted to the people who can most benefit.

Other Organisations

There are a wide range of organisations that are proposing to provide food this winter and particularly at Christmas. This is being mapped by Food Plymouth and we will ensure that POD is updated with the information

WGS FUNDING BREAKDOWN

WGS funding for Plymouth amounts to £926,040.55. 50% was awarded in early December, with the remainder of funds distributed 25% in February and 25% in March 2021 on return of Management Information to the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP).

80% of funding (PCC = £740,832.44) ring-fenced to support families with children. 20% (PCC = £185,208.11) to other types of households, including individuals.

At least 80% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to provide support with food, energy and water bills for household purposes (including drinking, washing, cooking, central heating, and sanitary purposes) and sewerage. Within this condition there is flexibility about the proportion of support allocated to food and to bills.

Up to 20% of the total funding can be used to provide support with other essentials clearly linked to the scheme conditions (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets; boiler service/repair; purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE

Main cohorts identified are (not exhaustive):

- Children that are eligible for free education and childcare at the age of 2 year olds.
- Children entitled Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)

- Children and Young People (CYP) entitled to (FSM)
- Entitled young people aged between 19 – 24 and have a current Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- Entitled Guaranteed Bursary/ Discretionary Bursary learners/Care Leavers
- Young Carers not captured by the FSM register
- Children in Need (CiN) not captured on the FSM register
- Those in Fuel Poverty

Of note, the 5000 recipients of the October half term food assistance were FSM entitled Plymouth residents; all these students will still be entitled to FSM now (due to the government transitional FSM protection until 31 March 2023), so they will receive the support either from ourselves if they are attending a Plymouth School or Devon and Cornwall LAs if they are attending schools in their areas (we have agreed with neighbouring LAs that we will each support every FSM student at schools in our areas regardless of where the student is resident to ensure all families are supported).

We also have discretion to support those who fall just outside the threshold for benefits and allowances, who find themselves in hardship. For example, if a child who may now be eligible for free school meals due to a recent change in their family's circumstances, but has yet to be formally registered. Refugees and asylum seekers may fall also in to this category.

We have asked schools to use their discretion and inform us by 9th December of the number of extra vouchers that they would require.

Support is not restricted to vulnerable households in receipt of benefits, and we will try and use the wide range of data and sources of information at our disposal to further identify and provide support to a broad cross section of vulnerable households.

Families in hardship should also contact our [crisis support system](#).

DISTRIBUTION – FOOD SUPPORT

PCC have now put in place arrangements to provide supermarket vouchers to over 10,000 children and young people in Plymouth who currently receive free school meals, to help their families buy groceries over the Christmas holidays.

Over recent weeks, we have been running a campaign, encouraging those entitled to register for FSM by 9th December 2020. The register currently stands at circa 9,000 children.

We are working hard to achieve a target date of Thursday 10th December to start distribution of unique food eVoucher codes to schools and Early Years settings. In turn, schools and settings will distribute codes to all families on their respective FSM registers.

Each code can be used once on a [website called 'Hawk Select'](#) to redeem vouchers to the value of £30 per child (£15 per week for the two weeks of school holidays) for Sainsbury's, Tesco, Morrison's, Asda, M&S Food and Waitrose.

The website requires families to provide an email address for the vouchers to be sent to once they have chosen their preferred supermarket. When received, they can save the vouchers to their phone or tablet to use online (depending on the supermarket) or show at the checkout in store. Alternatively, they can print the vouchers off to give to the cashier.

We are conscious that a few parents may not have access to the internet or a mobile device to receive and store the vouchers on and so we are hoping that, in these exceptional cases, schools and nursery settings will be prepared to complete the process for the parents on the [Hawk Select website](#) and print off the vouchers for them. Parents will need to provide the school with their unique code in order for you to redeem the voucher on the [Hawk Select website](#) on their behalf.

There are also some [useful FAQs on the Hawk Select website](#) along with [contact details for any technical support](#) about using the codes and vouchers.

These details and links will be published on the Plymouth City Council website Plymouth Online Directory (POD) and in other corporate communications.

ENERGY AND UTILITY

we awarding a grant of £250k to [Plymouth Energy Community](#)

The following model is recommended:

- **Grants for fuel bills** for families and single person households which can be split between gas and electric. To cover all residents, these would be issued in two ways:
 - Prepayment meter vouchers through PEC provider Auriga, the voucher administrator
 - Direct payments made by PEC/PCC administration to the energy supplier accounts of people on a credit meter
- **Winter warmth/gas safety/energy efficient essentials**
 - Boiler repairs/gas safety checks through PEC existing local framework contractors
 - Winter warmth packs - blankets, oil filled radiators etc. for PEC distribution and for partners like the Red Cross, Covid volunteers, Children's Centres
 - White goods – high energy efficiency fridges, freezers, washing machines and their connection using a local supplier.

Homeless families

We will also use some of the fuel poverty element to support homeless people/families to move on from Bed and Breakfast and other forms of temporary accommodation. Community Connections will work with PEC to support people with fuel debt and white goods, both of which can be barriers to people moving into permanent accommodation.

FEBRUARY 2021 HALF TERM

Plans are in development for support during February half term. Current options include:

- Plymouth Energy Community to continue with support using grant issued in December
- Food vouchers
- Working with CATERed to provide food parcels
- Deliver Fit and Fed programmes
- Resurgam - CATERed and local cafes/ restaurants to provide packed lunches on a daily basis and promote to the FSM families.

FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS

WGS is entirely funded by DWP. A small amount of the funding is being used to support the administration of the scheme and this will be recorded in Management Information returns. A high level breakdown is given below and we have built in flexibility to order more vouchers or increase grants as required.

We need to hold in reserve some funding to cover support for the February half term. Plans for which are being developed.

We have also made arrangements whereby we can purchase more vouchers and increase grants, as required.

Our aim is to spend 100% of allocated funding. To this aim, we will take stock, once the initial distributions have been made and then consider how best to allocate remaining funds, within the constraints and definitions listed above.

FUNDING PROVIDED		
£ Food & Utilities	£ Total	Details of costs
300,000.00	300,000.00	Committed to provide food vouchers provided during 2 weeks school holidays in December 2020
150,000.00	150,000.00	Reserved for February Half Term
250,000.00	250,000.00	PEC Grant - Utility support
Total Committed to date	700,000.00	
Balance	224,753	

RECOMMENDATION AND DECISION

In order to support the health and well-being of the most disadvantaged children and continued engagement in their education, this report recommends that a delegated decision is taken to support the application of WGS.

Appendix A – Eligibility Criteria

To ensure transparency of access to these funds the Local Authority are going to apply the following eligibility framework.

Please see estimated voucher distribution table at the Appendix.

Eligible Group	Eligibility Criteria
Children that are eligible for free education and childcare at the age of 2 year olds.	<p>Based upon the last 3 years of the early year's census the number of 2-year old children benefiting from funded early education places is circa 2758 children may be eligible.</p> <p>Families will be eligible if they get one of the following benefits:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Income Support •income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) •income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) •Universal Credit, and your household income is £15,400 a year or less after tax, not including benefit payments •tax credits, and your household income is £16,190 a year or less before tax •the guaranteed element of Pension Credit •the Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)
Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)	<p>Children may be eligible if parents have an income under £16,190 and are in receipt of one or more of the following benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Income Support •income-based Jobseeker's Allowance •income-related Employment and Support Allowance •support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 •the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit •Child Tax Credit (provided they're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190) •Working Tax Credit run-on, which is paid for 4 weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit •Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods).
Free School Meals (FSM)	<p>Parents/guardians who receive any of the following benefits are entitled to FSM. Children who receive these benefits in their own right are also entitled:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods) ☑ Income Support ☑ Employment and Support Allowance ☑ Jobseeker's Allowance ☑ The guaranteed element of state Pension Credit ☑ Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 ☑ Child Tax Credit without Working Tax Credit and with an annual taxable income (as assessed by HMRC) of less than £16,190

Free College Meals for young people aged between 19 – 24 and have a current Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP)	<p>You could also be entitled if you are aged between 19-24 and have a current Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and meet any of the criteria below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In receipt of Income Support • In receipt of Universal Credit (with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 per annum) • Job Seekers Allowance • Employment Support Allowance (ESA) • The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit • Child Tax Credit (provided you are not entitled to Working Tax Credit) and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190 as assessed by HMRC • Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.
Guaranteed Bursary/ Discretionary Bursary learners/Care Leavers not picked up by school distribution	<p>There are currently 237 Care Leavers in Plymouth.</p> <p>You could also be entitled if you are in receipt of Guaranteed Bursary, Discretionary Bursary or are a Care Leaver and meet any of the criteria below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In receipt of Income Support • In receipt of Universal Credit (with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 per annum) • Job Seekers Allowance • Employment Support Allowance (ESA) • The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit • Child Tax Credit (provided you are not entitled to Working Tax Credit) and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190 as assessed by HMRC • Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.
Young Carers not picked up by school distribution	<p>To improve outcomes for Young Carers who are at high risk of social exclusion and underachieving or experiencing difficulties at school because of their role as a young carer.</p> <p>To reduce caring demands and meet needs of high level young carers.</p> <p>The delivery of holistic targeted support to young carers in Plymouth is through the partnership of the following Time4U members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community Youth Service - over 90 young people. 2. Barnardo's Young Carers Service - over 30 young people. 3. Hamoaze House Affected Others - over 10 young people.
Children in Need (CiN) not picked up by school distribution	<p>There are currently 952 (02/12/2020) identified CiN in Plymouth.</p> <p>Under Section 17 Children Act 1989, a child will be considered in need if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they are unlikely to achieve or maintain or to have the opportunity to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without provision of services from the Local Authority • their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of services from the Local Authority; • They have a disability.
Those in Fuel Poverty	<p>PEC Grant of £250k to cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants for fuel bills (through PEC) • Prepayment meter vouchers (through PEC) • Boiler repairs/gas safety checks (through PEC existing local framework contractors) • Winter warmth packs - blankets, oil filled radiators etc. for PEC distribution and for partners like the Red Cross, Covid volunteers, Children's Centres

Those just outside the threshold for Benefits & Allowances	<p>For example, if a child who may now be eligible for free school meals due to a recent change in their family's circumstances, but has yet to be formally registered. Refugees and asylum seekers may fall also in to this category.</p> <p>Families in hardship should also contact our crisis support system.</p> <p>A reserve of vouchers and funds (TBC) to be used at the discretion of the LA</p>
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