

COUNCIL CABINET

13 January 2021

Minute Extract

Key Decision

105/20 Financial Support for Families During School Holidays

The Council Cabinet considered a report which set out details of the programmes of support currently in place to help support children and families in poverty across Derby, utilising the community assets that had been put in place in the last nine months.

The report proposed a short and medium term approach that detailed a co-ordinated short and medium response to children at risk of food poverty in the city which would be taken forward by the newly established Poverty Commission.

In doing so, outlined options for financial support to families during school holidays in direct response to the Free School Meals motion passed at the Council meeting on 25 November 2020. The approach outlined in the paper responds to the Council's motion but was designed around wider desired outcomes for disadvantaged children in receipt of free school meals and developing family resilience.

The Executive Scrutiny Board recommended to Council Cabinet

1. that it implements in full the motion agreed at full council to provide children and families with support, via vouchers, for all school holidays in 2021 and beyond.
2. that the poverty commission consider the outputs of the work of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Review Board 2018/19 topic review on child poverty in the city as part of its deliberations.
3. that these items on additional financial support for families during the School holidays to be included in the Medium Term Financial Plan presented to Council in February.

Options Considered

1. To provide assistance only through the existing Council's Single Discretionary Award Framework and through the Holiday Activity and Food Programme. This option though affordable would not be expected to meet the needs.
2. For the Council to fund the full costs of Free School Meals from 1 April for all holiday periods. This would be in addition to eligible children taking part in the Holiday Activity and Food Programme in 2021. The costs of this based on the current numbers of children receiving Free School Meals was approximately

£2m and likely to increase throughout 2021.

3. There was currently no additional government funding identified to fund this and if agreed the cost would be a significant draw down on Council reserves. The Medium Term Financial Plan out for consultation assumed no recurrent use of reserves and any decision to utilise additional reserves would impact on future financial sustainability. This option would fail to provide a sustainable and resilient solution for families.

Decision

1. To note the successful implementation of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme implemented in Derby in December 2020 and the design principles underpinning the Derby scheme.
2. To implement a support package to the 31st December 2021 to ensure access to food support for children at risk of food poverty.
3. To provide a free school meal voucher scheme for the half term holidays in the spring and autumn 2021.
4. To commission a review through the newly established Poverty Commission to consider and recommend options for a sustainable model from the 31st December 2021 utilising the strengths of community assets within Derby alongside partnerships with schools, academies and community groups.
5. To identify an approach that balanced the desire to address child poverty in Derby with the legal obligation the Council must prepare a balanced budget.
6. To accept recommendation 2 from the Executive Scrutiny Board that the poverty commission consider the outputs of the work of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Review Board 2018/19 topic review on child poverty in the city as part of its deliberations.
7. To reject the recommendations 1 and 3 from Executive Scrutiny Board.

Reasons

1. The design of the COVID Winter Grant Scheme combined short term interventions, with a programme of longer-term support for the most vulnerable families and individuals in Derby, through a partnership of Derby organisations and Council services focused on developing household and community resilience. It should be noted that funding for this programme ends on 31 March 2021.
2. The size of the funding required to meet the scope of the motion would be a significant draw on Council funding, in the event government funding was not provided or was insufficient. The impact of COVID on the economy of the city, may increase the cost to provide support as more families become eligible for financial assistance. Based on the current numbers of children

and young people eligible in Derby for Free School Meals this would be in the region of £2.0m per year for which the Council receives no government funding since the costs of free school meals is a function administered by the Department for Work and Pensions.

3. The combination of short-term support such as food provision with a programme of personalised household support designed to maximise benefit take-up, develop practical skills such as preparing healthy meals on a budget, access to activity programmes and use of government grants, would help to create a more sustainable programme that builds resilience.
4. The targeted approach outlined and recommended in the report was also firmly in line with Derby's Recovery Plan as the city emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021. This was very much the ethos and approach of the city's community recovery work with the Council working alongside and with our NHS, cultural and voluntary and community sector partners in supporting and developing community and family assets and resilience.