

Urgent Item

General Meeting of the Council: 8 December 2020.

Allocation of Funding to support Individuals at Financial Risk.

Report by Chief Executive.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the award of a top up payment of £100 to the families of children who are eligible for free school meals on the grounds of low family income.

2. Recommendations

The Council is invited to note:

2.1.

That, on 30 November 2020, the Scottish Government announced a national scheme to make a payment of £100 to each child eligible for free school meals on the grounds of low family income.

2.2.

That the Council has been offered a discretionary grant of £46,000 that can be used as support to tackle food insecurity, or alternate provision where this is more appropriate or is the preference of individuals themselves, including for households whose children are registered for free school meals.

2.3.

That there are currently 250 children in Orkney eligible for free school meals on the grounds of low family income.

2.4.

The proposal that the Council provides a top-up payment of £100 to all children eligible for free school meals on the grounds of low family income, making a total combined payment of £200.

It is recommended:

2.5.

That a Council top-up payment of £100 be paid to all children determined as eligible for free school meals on the grounds of low family income on 30 November 2020 or registered as eligible before 31 January 2021, to be met from the discretionary grant referred to at paragraph 2.2 above.

3. Introduction

3.1.

The Council has been awarded a discretionary grant of £46,000 payable over the period 1 October 2020 to 31 March 2021 as a flexible fund to support individuals at financial risk.

3.2.

The Government's intention for the funding award is that Local Authorities will use the grant to support individuals at financial risk. Activities that could be supported are noted in the grant offer and include:

- Supplementing local budgets for the Scottish Welfare Fund to ensure demand is met in full.
- Provision of cash-based support to tackle food insecurity, or alternate provision where this is more appropriate or is the preference of individuals themselves, including for households whose children are registered for free school meals.
- Providing support to meet fuel costs, for example through existing schemes such as fuel cards or a locally targeted fuel grant.
- Further boosting local funding for Discretionary Housing Payments as needed.
- Other activities and services, as necessary, to support individuals to overcome financial crisis and support wellbeing.

3.3.

The Council has received additional funding specifically to supplement the Scottish Welfare Fund budget and that area of Council expenditure appears to be contained within budget at the present time.

4. £100 for Children Eligible for Free School Meals

4.1.

On 30 November 2020, the Scottish Government announced a £100 COVID Hardship Payment for each child in receipt of free school meals, eligible as a result of low income. This is in addition to continued free school meal provision over forthcoming holidays and should be paid to families in advance of the Winter break where possible. A cash payment, by bank transfer, is the preferred method of payment.

4.2.

Eligibility for the payment has been defined as 'in receipt of free school meals, based on low income criteria'. This will capture a wide range of low-income households, including those with no recourse to public funds, and excludes those children who receive the universal free school meal provision for P1-P3 who are not from a family with a low income.

4.3.

Eligibility for free school meals is set out below.

4.3.1.

A child is eligible to receive free school meals, where the household is in receipt of one of the following:

- Universal Credit (where monthly earned income is not more than £610).
- Income Support.
- Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance.
- Income-based Employment and Support Allowance.
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

4.3.2.

A child is also eligible to receive Free School Meals, where the household is in receipt of:

- Child Tax Credit, but not Working Tax Credit, and household income is less than £16,105.
- Both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit and have an income of up to £7,330.

4.3.3.

A child might still get a free lunch in school if their household experiences financial hardship. This could be because:

- Their immigration status means they cannot get help from the government.
- They are still waiting on their first Universal Credit notice.

5. Top up Payment from Discretionary Fund

5.1.

The Government's national payment scheme is intended to provide immediate financial assistance to families and help with child poverty. A Council top up payment of £100 per eligible child, utilising the Discretionary Grant referred to at section 3.1 above, would provide further support to a vulnerable section of the Orkney community at a time when there is additional pressure on families.

5.2.

There are currently 250 children eligible for free school meals in Orkney so that a £100 top up would cost £25,000. This would leave £21,000 of the grant award for other initiatives or to cover payments to additional eligible children who qualify for free school meals after the 30 November 2020.

5.3.

It is believed that there may be more eligible children for whom free school meals are not being claimed and that publicity from the Government Scheme and Council top-up may encourage more families to apply.

5.4.

The eligibility criteria for free school meals is set out at section 4.3 above and the application process can be carried out online on the Council website from the following link:

<https://www.orkney.gov.uk/Service-Directory/S/School-Meals-and-Clothing-Allowances.htm>

6. Equalities Impact

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

7. Corporate Governance

This report relates to governance and procedural issues and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

8. Financial Implications

8.1.

The Scottish Government has committed to funding, in full, the Government policy to provide a £100 hardship payment to the recipients of free school meals.

8.2.

The Council has been offered a discretionary grant of up to £46,000, payable over the period 1 October 2020 to 31 March 2021 as a flexible fund to support individuals at financial risk.

8.3.

This report recommends allocation of £100 from this discretionary grant to every child who is eligible for free school meals. There are currently 250 eligible children so that £25,000 of the grant will be expended if approved. If more children are registered for free school meals, there would be an increased spend.

9. Legal Aspects

9.1.

In terms of Section 20 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 the Council has the power to do anything that it considers is likely to promote or improve the well-being of its area and persons within that area, or either of those. This includes power to give financial assistance.

9.2.

If grant funding is to be provided to the Council, a legally binding agreement will require to be entered into between the Council and the Scottish Government setting out the terms on which the funding is being provided and with which the Council will be required to comply.

10. Contact Officers

John W Mundell, Interim Chief Executive, extension 2101, Email chief.executive@orkney.gov.uk

Gareth Waterson, Head of Finance, extension 2103, Email gareth.waterson@orkney.gov.uk

11. Appendix

Appendix 1: Equality Impact Assessment.



Equality Impact Assessment

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is to improve the work of Orkney Islands Council by making sure it promotes equality and does not discriminate. This assessment records the likely impact of any changes to a function, policy or plan by anticipating the consequences, and making sure that any negative impacts are eliminated or minimised and positive impacts are maximised.

1. Identification of Function, Policy or Plan	
Name of function / policy / plan to be assessed.	Allocation of funding to support individuals at financial risk.
Service / service area responsible.	Chief Executive's Service.
Name of person carrying out the assessment and contact details.	Gareth Waterson.
Date of assessment.	7 December 2020.
Is the function / policy / plan new or existing? (Please indicate also if the service is to be deleted, reduced or changed significantly).	New.

2. Initial Screening	
What are the intended outcomes of the function / policy / plan?	To provide additional funding to families in receipt of free school meals on the grounds of low-income. This funding will utilise the Discretionary Grant as a top up to the Scottish Government £100 COVID-19 Hardship payment.
Is the function / policy / plan strategically important?	(Strategic plans include major investment plans, new strategic frameworks or plans such as annual budgets, locality plans or corporate plans).
State who is, or may be affected by this function / policy / plan, and how.	Families eligible for free school meals on the grounds of low-income. The £100m Winter Plan for Social Protection from the Scottish Government has been developed to mitigate social harms posed by the concurrent

	<p>risks of COVID-19, winter cost of living increases and EU exit, as well as to promote equality and human rights.</p> <p>This fund includes a cash grant of £100 for every family with children in receipt of free school meals.</p>
How have stakeholders been involved in the development of this function / policy / plan?	N/A.
<p>Is there any existing data and / or research relating to equalities issues in this policy area? Please summarise.</p> <p>E.g. consultations, national surveys, performance data, complaints, service user feedback, academic / consultants' reports, benchmarking (see equalities resources on OIC information portal).</p>	See below.
<p>Is there any existing evidence relating to socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome in this policy area? Please summarise.</p> <p>E.g. For people living in poverty or for people of low income. See The Fairer Scotland Duty Interim Guidance for Public Bodies for further information.</p>	<p>Orkney research was undertaken in 2018 resulting in a report on Poverty and Disadvantage factors that affect children and young people in Orkney.</p> <p>Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children research relating to impacts of COVID-19 and debt.</p>
Could the function / policy have a differential impact on any of the following equality areas?	(Please provide any evidence – positive impacts / benefits, negative impacts and reasons).
1. Race: this includes ethnic or national groups, colour and nationality.	The additional funds are available consistently to all eligible families. Whilst there is no significant evidence relating to differential impact relating to race in Orkney at this stage, national data shows that certain ethnic groups have a greater likelihood for being in lower-income households and are therefore more likely to benefit from this proposal.
2. Sex: a man or a woman.	The additional funds are available consistently to all eligible families. The risk of a child living in low-income households is linked to parent's net earnings and benefits received. Data on children's poverty is not sex-disaggregated and so we don't

	<p>know whether there are any significant differences between the number of girls and boys living in poverty. The impact of child poverty is more keenly felt in households with a single carer. National evidence suggests that in-work poverty impacts child poverty; for single parents who are predominately women, many are unable to work. Gender and the role of women as primary care providers can have a significant impact on child poverty. In couple families, many families in poverty have mothers who are constrained in their labour market activity. This proposal will have a likely positive impact for single carer households, particularly for single parents who are women.</p>
3. Sexual Orientation: whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.	No differential impact identified.
4. Gender Reassignment: the process of transitioning from one gender to another.	No differential impact identified.
5. Pregnancy and maternity.	No differential impact identified.
6. Age: people of different ages.	The additional funds are available consistently to all eligible families. As many factors contributing to a low income household are intrinsically linked to family type, there is likely to be differential positive impacts for adults specifically as parents and carers who are eligible under this proposal.
7. Religion or beliefs or none (atheists).	The additional funds are available consistently to all eligible families. Data shows that certain religions groups have a greater likelihood of experiencing poverty and are therefore more likely to benefit from this proposal.
8. Caring responsibilities.	The additional funds are available consistently to all eligible families and are likely to have a positive impact for those with caring responsibilities.
9. Care experienced.	The additional funds are available consistently to all eligible families and are likely to have a positive impact for those who are care experienced.
10. Marriage and Civil Partnerships.	No differential impact identified.
11. Disability: people with disabilities (whether registered or not).	<p>(Includes physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, mental health)</p> <p>The additional funds are available consistently to all eligible families. Data shows that pupils with a special educational need or disability have a greater likelihood of experiencing poverty and so</p>

	are more likely to benefit from this proposal.
12. Socio-economic disadvantage.	This proposal aims to have a positive, differential impact for those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. Evidence suggests that child poverty in Orkney is variable and the Isles locality has the greatest level of housing deprivation. Whilst Orkney does not have data zones within the greatest areas of deprivation across Scotland within the SIMD analysis, it is acknowledged that in remote and rural settings SIMD may be a less useful marker of deprivation.
13. Isles-proofing.	Evidence suggests that child poverty in Orkney is variable and the Isles locality has the greatest level of housing deprivation which can have a knock-on impact to accessing available income for food. This proposal will likely have a positive impact for those families eligible for the payment and living on one of the outer isles.

3. Impact Assessment

Does the analysis above identify any differential impacts which need to be addressed?	No.
How could you minimise or remove any potential negative impacts?	Providing direct payment for those eligible for the additional funding is the most dignified and non-stigmatising approach to encouraging as much uptake as possible.
Do you have enough information to make a judgement? If no, what information do you require?	Yes.

4. Conclusions and Planned Action

Is further work required?	No.
What action is to be taken?	N/A.
Who will undertake it?	N/A.
When will it be done?	N/A.
How will it be monitored? (e.g. through service plans).	N/A.

Signature:



Date: 7 December 2020

Name: GARETH WATERSON

(BLOCK CAPITALS).

Please sign and date this form, keep one copy and send a copy to HR and Performance. A Word version should also be emailed to HR and Performance at hrsupport@orkney.gov.uk