

Notice of Non-key Executive Decision

Subject Heading:	Funding of Free School Meals during School Holidays
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Damian White, Leader of the Council
SLT Lead:	Robert South, Director Children's Services
Report Author and contact details:	Trevor Cook, trevor.cook@havering.gov.uk
Policy context:	Support to families during Coronavirus pandemic
Financial summary:	Financial commitment of £105k for the October half-term holiday and £210k for Christmas holidays, total of £315k for c7,000 eligible children.
Relevant OSC:	Children & Learning
Is this decision exempt from being called-in?	Yes – special urgent decision

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Communities making Havering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Places making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connections making Havering	<input type="checkbox"/>

Place an X in the [] as appropriate

Non-key Executive Decision

Part A – Report seeking decision

DETAIL OF THE DECISION REQUESTED AND RECOMMENDED ACTION

Approval to fund direct payments to families eligible for benefit related FSM of £15 per child per week.

AUTHORITY UNDER WHICH DECISION IS MADE

As set out in the Council Constitution, Part 3, section 2.2 – to take decisions on all matters relating to the Council's finances.

STATEMENT OF THE REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The Council is seeking to ensure that children eligible for benefit related free school meals do not miss out on meals during the October half-term school holiday.

This has been identified as being more important than ever with Havering moving into a Tier 2 - high alert area.

This decision is being taken to ensure that children do not go hungry over half term, and support is in place for those most in need during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Officers from across the Council have developed a process to ensure that those who qualify for free school meals, continue to get the financial support they need.

Parents will be able to apply for support from Monday 26th October by either completing a short on-line form, or telephoning a dedicated phone line. Once checked for eligibility, the application will be approved, and payment will be made direct into the applicants bank account. The Council anticipate c7,000 children will be eligible to receive the £15 per week to pay for food.

The Council will seek to put the same process in place at the Christmas holiday period if needed as part of our ongoing support to residents throughout the crisis.

This support will be funded through efficient management of our finances and through the recent additional funding from government to support councils during the crisis.

The Council are making parents aware of the application process through a range of communication channels, and will be ensuring the borough's food banks are on hand to support those families who don't qualify for free school meals, but still need help.

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OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Provide meal packs – this was discounted due to issues regarding availability of suitable food stock and resources to prepare packs at short notice.

Provide vouchers for local supermarkets – this was discounted due to availability of vouchers, and concerns regarding the process of making vouchers available to parents, as the Council does not hold the addresses of the parents.

Use existing financial hardship process supported by DABD – this was discounted as DABD would not have capacity to deal with the potential volume of applications at this time, as they are preparing to administer the self-isolating grants.

PRE-DECISION CONSULTATION

None, other than with the Leader of the Council, and Deputy Leader of the Council.

NAME AND JOB TITLE OF STAFF MEMBER ADVISING THE DECISION-MAKER

Name: Trevor Cook

Designation: AD Education Services

Signature:



Date: 26^h October 2020

Part B - Assessment of implications and risks

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Whilst there are no legal requirements to provide free school meals to children during school holidays, during the lockdown period and summer holidays, the Government made available support, either in the form of electronic vouchers, or funding to provide food packs. Recently, the Government would not continue to provide this support through the October half-term break.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The Council estimate that c7,000 children will be eligible for Free School Meals provision during the holiday periods. Providing support of £15 per child, per week, will require maximum funding of £105,000 during the October Half Term holidays and a further estimated £210,000 during the Christmas Holiday period. The total anticipated maximum expenditure will therefore be £315,000. The actual costs incurred will be dependent upon the take-up of this offer by eligible families.

The costs incurred by the Council will be met from the Council's Business Risk Reserve. This is possible due to the recent announcement of an additional unringfenced grant of £3.7 million which the government allocated to the Council on 22 October 2020 which has reduced pressure on the Council's General Reserves. .

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS (AND ACCOMMODATION IMPLICATIONS WHERE RELEVANT)

There are no direct HR implications through this decision. However, officers from the Children's Services business support team will be redeployed from their current duties for the next 1-2 weeks to carry out the checking and processing roles. This will mean their planned work will not be completed.

EQUALITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

It is not considered that an EA is required, as this decision will have a positive impact on those families most in need of support.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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Part C – Record of decision

I have made this executive decision in accordance with authority delegated to me by the Leader of the Council and in compliance with the requirements of the Constitution.

Decision

Proposal agreed

Delete as applicable

Proposal NOT agreed because

Details of decision maker

Signed

Name:

Cabinet Portfolio held:

CMT Member title:

Head of Service title

Other manager title:

Date:

Lodging this notice

The signed decision notice must be delivered to the proper officer, Debra Marlow, Principal Democratic Services Officer in Democratic Services, in the Town Hall.

For use by Committee Administration

This notice was lodged with me on _____

Signed _____