



# Northumberland

County Council

## **Families and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

Date: 17<sup>th</sup> June 2021

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### **Winter Support Grant Update**

Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Children's Services, Cath McEvoy-Carr

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson

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#### **Purpose of report**

To provide members with updated information regarding delivery of the Winter Support Grant during Spring Term 2021, including the provision of Free School Meals (FSM) over the February half-term and Easter school holidays and the roll-out of the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) at Easter.

#### **Recommendations**

##### **It is recommended that FACS**

- 1) Note the content of the report and the successful implementation of the initiatives undertaken with the funding from the Winter Support Grant.
- 2) Note the strategy, roll-out and benefits of the activities for children and young people organised through the Holiday Activity Fund across Northumberland during the Easter holiday.

#### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-2021, in particular in relation to the value "We want you to feel safe, healthy, and cared for".

#### **Key Issues**

1. FACS was informed in February 2021 regarding the Winter Support Fund of £992k issued directly to the Council by Government in November 2020 in order to support families and individuals in Northumberland. The grant was issued to cover the period to 31 March 2021 in order to support eligible families who access FSM and also to support residents and communities more widely in the county.
  2. Since February, a great deal of additional work has been undertaken to
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ensure that the grant has been disseminated effectively.

### Free School Meals at February half-term and Easter holidays

3. FACS are reminded that in February the FSM element of the Winter grant was disseminated via:
  - a. A centrally funded voucher scheme (HUGGG) set up and managed by the Council and used by schools to disseminate vouchers to parents electronically or in paper format where requested;
  - b. Schools funded directly by the Council where they already had a system in place to disseminate the FSM element of the grant themselves, e.g. alternative voucher system, hot meals or food parcels/delivery.
  - c. Gift cards for CO-OP for families living in more rural area who were unable to access larger supermarkets easily.
4. The above systems were utilised again for the dissemination of the proportion of Winter grant funding allocated to FSM for the February half-term and Easter school holiday periods. This was in particular due to the success of the HUGGG voucher system for the dissemination of the grant for the Christmas holidays 2020, as reported to FACS in early February.
5. The following tables show the amount of funding for FSM issued via the HUGGG system for the February half-term and Easter holidays; the tables also indicate the number and value of vouchers redeemed by parents and young people (latter in relation to care-leavers):

#### February half term holiday vouchers data

	Number produced	Number redeemed	Redemption rate	Total amount issued	Total amount redeemed
Schools	6410	5970	93%	£192,300.00	£179,100.00
Adult Services	10	10	100%	£300.00	£300.00
Alternative Providers	57	52	91%	£1,710.00	£1,560.00
Post 16 learners (Ashington College)	121	49	40%	£3,630.00	£1,470.00
Care leavers	1	1	100%	£30.00	£30.00
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6599</b>	<b>6082</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>£197,970.00</b>	<b>£182,460.00</b>
<b>Total % redeemed</b>					<b>92%</b>

#### Easter holidays vouchers data

	Number produced	Number redeemed	Redemption rate	Total amount issued	Total amount redeemed
Schools	6322	5665	90%	£284,490.00	£254,925.00
Adult Services	9	9	100%	£405.00	£405.00
Alternative Providers	58	51	88%	£2,610.00	£2,295.00
Post 16 learners (Ashington College)	127	45	35%	£5,715.00	£2,025.00
Care leavers	132	81	61%	£5,940.00	£3,645.00
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6648</b>	<b>5851</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>£299,160.00</b>	<b>£263,295.00</b>

Total percentage redeemed		88%
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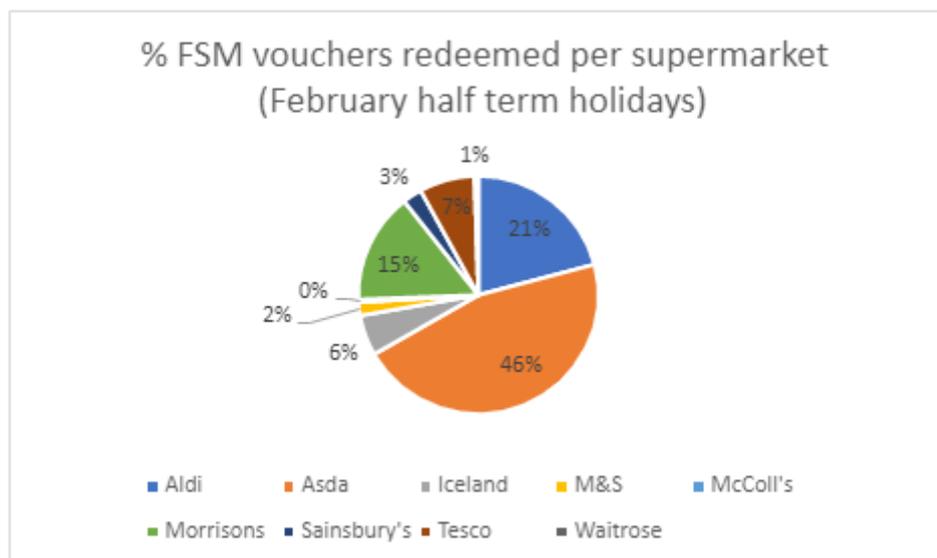
6. With regard to FSM funding disseminated via local arrangements, this could be an alternative voucher or food parcel the number of children and young people receiving support directly from their local school is shown below together with the total value issued to schools.

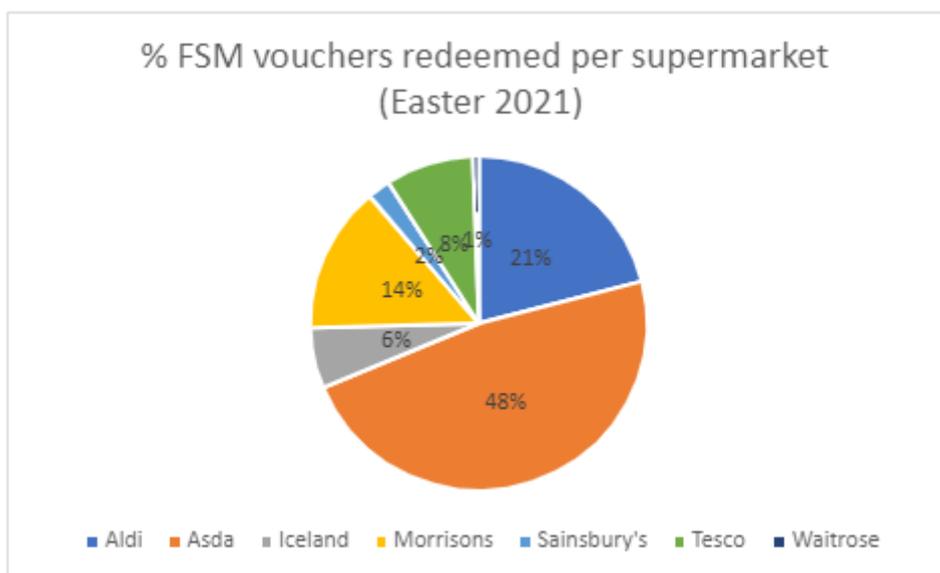
- February half-term: number of vouchers issued - 2,969; Value - £89,070
- Easter holidays: number of vouchers issued – 3,017; Value - £135,765

7. FACS should also note that the amount of funding issued for FSM from the Winter Grant for the Easter holidays included an additional element for parents/carers to put towards the cost of utility bills, the amounts being as follows:

- Utility bill element disseminated via HUGGG system - £99,720
- Utility bill element disseminated via local arrangements - £45,255

8. In relation to vouchers issued via the HUGGG system, it has again been possible to identify at which supermarkets parents/carers were redeeming FSM vouchers, as demonstrated by the following charts:





9. With the introduction of the COVID Local Support Grant, the Council has been advised that payments to parents/carers for Free school meals for the Summer half term may be made from this grant allocation. The plan would be to offer a similar scheme to qualifying families and young people for this week.

### **Holiday Activity Fund 2021**

10. The Strategic Holiday Activities Fund Group made up of Northumberland Communities Together, Early Help, Community, Education and Inclusion Teams have been managing and co-ordinating the Holiday Activities Fund 2021 on behalf of the Council. The programme covers the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays in 2021 and is available to children in Northumberland who receive benefit-related free school meals.
11. The funding covers the provision of free holiday places and the coordination of the programme locally. Evidence suggests that free holiday clubs can have a positive impact on children and young people and that they work best when they provide consistent and easily accessible enrichment activities, for more than just breakfast or lunch, and when they involve children and parents in food preparations. The grant funding in Northumberland is being informed by the numbers of children eligible for free school meals and the overall levels of participation experienced in our previous programmes from 2018 to 2020. Through the funding, the aim is to make free places available to children eligible for free school meals for the equivalent of at least four hours a day, four days a week, six weeks a year. This would cover four weeks in the summer and a week's worth of provision in each of the Easter and Christmas holidays. This is an extension on the four summer weeks offered in our 2018 to 2020 holiday programmes.
12. The Strategic Group oversees the programme and ensures policies and procedures are in place, while the activities programme itself is community led, delivered by schools and local voluntary organisations. 'Host' delivery teams have been developed in the North, Castle Morpeth, Central, South East and West localities and delivers consistent relationships with children, young

people and their families. Members of the strategic team liaise with the delivery teams to offer solutions and support.

13. The programme offered across the County over the Easter holidays 2021 was as follows:

Locality	Name of school/organisation	Sessions run	Total Number of children attended	Total Number of FSM children
North	St Marys C of E, Berwick	29th-1st April	122	115
	Spittal First School	3 days	48	48
	Music Workshop	4 days	45	45
	NE66 Youth Provision	6 sessions	49	49
	Red Row First School	29th-1st April	108	108
Central-Ashington	Central Primary School	4 days	68	68
Ashington	Family Gateway	1 session	22	22
Cramlington	Cramlington Village Primary	4 days	163	163
Blyth	St Wilfrid's Primary School, Blyth	4 days	148	148
Blyth	Newsham Primary School	4 days	48	48
Bedlington	St Benet Biscops	2 days	44	40
West	Hexham Youth Project	4 days	32	32
Choppington	Choppington First School	4 days	118	101
Newbiggin	Community Organisation & sports development Partnership	4 days	80	80
Linton	Leading Link	1 session	20	20
Ellington	Leading Link	1 session	80	80
Lynemouth	Leading Link	1 session	40	40
		<b>Total</b>	<b>1235</b>	<b>1207</b>

14. Provision was also offered for children and young people with SEND as follows:

Locality	Name of school/organisation	Sessions run	Total number of children attended	Total number of FSM children
North	The Grove school	4 sessions	6	6
West	Tanga Club	3 sessions	75	75
Central	The Dales-Ashington	4 sessions	27	27
South East	The Dales-Blyth	4 sessions	29	29
		<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>137</b>

15. A total of 1,372 children participated in the activities programmed this year's HAF Easter Holiday scheme, which has provided 1482 places for children and young people in Northumberland, which equates to 5704 hours of fun across 22 provisions.
16. In addition to the organised activities, Community Pop Up Provisions were organised across Ashington and Choppington where 420 Easter eggs were distributed. In addition, food is an important part of the holiday scheme and groups offered a variety of options including, breakfast, hot lunch, often utilising surplus food donated by supermarkets.

17. The provisions offered over Easter have been publicised using the We are Northumberland Facebook page. A great deal of positive feedback has also been received from parents, e.g.

*“So pleased that the kids can get out and enjoy themselves!”*

*“This is fab – exactly what the school holidays should be about”*

18. A ‘Young Leaders’ scheme is being planned to run in parallel with the next round of holiday schemes to encourage young people of secondary school age to become involved, including a residential course to equip them with the skills needed to support the schemes.
19. Planning for the summer schemes is now underway, with some activities being trialled at the May half-term to inform the summer offer.

## BACKGROUND

20. Northumberland's allocation of the Winter COVID support grant was over £992k to cover the 3 school holidays - Christmas, February half term and Easter Holidays up to 31 March 2021.

The grant had two criteria that NCC need to prepare for and deliver against:

- Household - 80% of the funding is targeted at Children and Young People and their families,
- 20% to other i.e. individuals

21. In relation to provision, the 80% criterion is targeted for Food, Fuel, Water and Utilities, while the 20% criterion is intended for other emergency assistance. In addition, the local authority will be required to monitor and report the spend and repay any underspend.

22. The winter support grant needed to be able to satisfy the government's commitment to FSM entitlement over the Christmas and February (spring half term) and March/April (Easter) school holidays - 5 weeks in total. Officers are in the process of preparing a report to DfE setting out the details of the costs and numbers involved in the programme.

## IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

<b>Policy:</b>	The actions set out in this report support the vision and values set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2020/21, particularly in relation to the value of "We want you to feel safe, healthy, and cared for"
<b>Finance and value for money:</b>	The cost of the provision of FSM over the February half-term and Easter Holidays has been funded from the Government's Winter Grant as set out in para. 1 of this report
<b>Legal:</b>	N/A
<b>Procurement:</b>	N/A
<b>Human Resources:</b>	N/A
<b>Property:</b>	N/A
<b>Equalities:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	An Equalities Assessment was carried out in relation to the consent of parents/carers to approve the uploading of their contact details to the HUGGG system.
<b>Risk Assessment:</b>	N/A
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder:</b>	This report has considered Section 1 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
<b>Customer Considerations:</b>	The actions set out in this report are based upon a desire to meet the needs of children in receipt of FSM and their families fairly and effectively in response to the Government's allocation of Winter Grant to Northumberland.
<b>Carbon Reduction:</b>	It is not envisaged that the processes set out within this report will have any impact on positive or negative on carbon reduction.
<b>Wards:</b>	All

## CONSULTATION

The actions set out in this report have been undertaken in consultation with the Executive Director for Adult Social Care and Children's Services and the Member for Children's Services.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

FACS Scrutiny 17<sup>th</sup> June 2021

## **Report sign off.**

Finance Officer	AE
Monitoring Officer/Legal	N/A
Human Resources	N/A
Procurement	N/A
I.T.	N/A
Executive Director of Children's Services	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Portfolio Holder(s)	GRT

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