



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	<b>Council – Wednesday 24 February 2021</b>
Report Number	<b>Agenda Item No. 10</b>
Subject	<b>Emergency/Urgency Delegations Decisions</b>
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Michele Mead, Leader of the Council Email: <a href="mailto:michele.mead@westoxon.gov.uk">michele.mead@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Keith Butler Head of Democratic Services Tel: 01993 861521 Email: <a href="mailto:keith.butler@westoxon.gov.uk">keith.butler@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To note decisions taken under the emergency and urgency delegation arrangements approved by Council on 13 May 2020.
Appendices	<a href="#">Appendix A</a> – Covid winter grant scheme overview paper
Recommendation	That the report be noted.
Corporate priorities	N/A
Key Decision	N/A
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	None

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1. At its meeting on 13 May 2020, the Council approved Emergency and Urgency delegations to the Chief Executive to enable decisions to be taken which were either an emergency, or where there was urgency such that the matter could not reasonably await the next meeting of whichever body would otherwise take that decision.
- 1.2. The report on the matter included the statement that: *“Any decision under the above provisions shall be recorded and published, and reported to Council, Cabinet or the appropriate Committee or Sub-Committee, such report to include the reasons that the powers needed to be used”*.
- 1.3. This report specifies two decisions taken under those powers.

## **2. COVID WINTER GRANT SCHEME**

- 2.1. The Government announced the Covid winter grant scheme in November. The overview paper reproduced in [Appendix A](#) gives the relevant information and outlines the approach which was approved.

## **3. RE-OPENING HIGH STREETS SAFELY FUND (RHSS)**

- 3.1. The Government awarded the Council £97,972 under this fund, and required the agreement of a contract to agree the terms and conditions, in the absence of which the Council would not be able to reclaim relevant expenditure.
- 3.2. Because of the associated timescales, the Chief Executive used the urgency powers to (i) agree the contract; and (ii) clarify that he or the Chief Finance Officer were authorised to make decisions as to the use/allocation of the fund monies, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources.

## **4. REASONS FOR USE OF URGENCY POWERS**

- 4.1. If the required decision in relation to the winter grant scheme had awaited a meeting of the Cabinet, there would have been delay in implementation, to the detriment of those the grants are intended to support.
- 4.2. In the case of the RHSS fund, awaiting a cabinet meeting would have meant that the contract could not be completed by the due date, thereby preventing the Council from reclaiming expenditure already incurred.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. This report has no financial implications.

## **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. This report has no financial implications.

## **7. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS**

- 7.1. Not applicable.

## **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 8.1. None

<p><b>Covid Winter grant scheme</b> <b>@30/12/20</b></p>
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**Background**

The £170 million [Covid Winter Grant Scheme](#) announced on 8 November will be run by local authorities in England. The funding will be ring-fenced, with at least 80% earmarked to support with food and essential utility costs, and will cover the period to the end of March 2021. It will allow local authorities to directly help the hardest-hit families and individuals over the winter period.

**The National scheme – Key points**

Draft guidance was issued on 20 November and confirmed on 24 November:

- Oxfordshire will receive £1.368m, to be spent by the end of March 2021
- At least 80% is to be spent on families with children
- Other households made vulnerable directly or indirectly due to the impact of COVID-19 can also be assisted with the remaining 20%
- At least 80% is to be spent on supporting with the costs of food, energy or water bills
- The remaining 20% can fund other items “clearly linked” to the scheme conditions, eg. warm clothing or purchase of equipment such as fridges or ovens. Funding for advisory services or housing costs are not eligible nor are mobile phone top up costs.
- Oxfordshire County Council is the accountable body
- Related support announced in parallel includes:
  - An expansion of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme from Easter 2021 (details to be published in January)
  - An increase in the value of the DHSC Healthy Start voucher scheme from April 2021
  - A £16m DEFRA grant scheme to provide supplies of food directly to food banks and other community providers

**How will the scheme be applied in Oxfordshire**

1. Food vouchers for vulnerable families – estimated £900,000

The families of all those children with benefits related entitlement to free school meals will receive a supermarket voucher or other equivalent support, for £15 per child to cover each week of the Christmas, February half term and Easter holidays. A family with two children will therefore receive £150, or other equivalent support, over the period. Vouchers will be paid out in advance of each holiday period. We know that some families in need have not registered or are not eligible for free school meals and so we are working in partnership with schools to meet these needs and ensure as wide a reach as possible. In addition, vouchers or equivalent payments will be available to the most economically vulnerable families with children in childcare settings. Equivalent support is also being arranged for the most in-need care-leavers. Finally plans are being developed with services such as midwifery and health-visiting to ensure that the families of the youngest children and those not in formal settings can be supported.

2. Local welfare support to be distributed by Districts and City council – estimated £460,000

The city and district councils have developed a local scheme to support the families and individuals we know are in most need, working closely with Citizens Advice and other

voluntary sector partners. This will include additional support to homeless people and people in temporary accommodation.

- In West Oxfordshire the total budget available is £60,596. The majority of funding will be distributed by Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire along the lines of the existing Emergency funding for food and essential support scheme. Fuel and food support will be available to individuals in need. There will also be funding for the purchase of white goods where deemed necessary.
- WODC Housing team will have a crisis fund to support people in urgent need
- WODC Housing team will also oversee a fund to assist people in temporary accommodation – single adults in emergency accommodation, help for people accommodated through the Everyone-In initiative and those with no recourse to public funds
- There will be an emergency fund held by the Locality support team to assist local neighbourhood groups as needs emerge
- The scheme will be fully operational from 4th Jan and reviewed monthly to judge efficacy.

Total available budget - £60,596	Dec 2020	Feb 2021	April 2021
	50% of funds	25% of funds	25% of funds
Individual support via Citizens Advice including fuel and white goods support	£23,000	£11,000	£11,000
Emergency fund for local groups support	£5,000	£2,500	£2,500
Housing crisis fund	£1,000	£850	£1000
Cohorts 1-3 in temporary accommodation (cohorts 1-3 as defined by OCC)	£1,250	£750	£650
	£30,250	£15,150	£15,150

Funding will be released from government to OCC as follows:

- First payment - 50% of the allocation at the start of the scheme (in December 2020)
- Second payment – [up to] 25% at the end of February 2021
- Final payment – [up to] 25% following the end of the scheme in April/May 2021

The administrative cost incurred by Citizens Advice in overseeing this scheme will be met from a different Covid support fund held by OCC. A memorandum of understanding between CA and each Council has been drafted and is being reviewed, awaiting signature.

### **DEFRA support**

Provision from the voluntary sector remains vital to supporting those in need. During the autumn, Oxfordshire councils funded community food providers, including food banks, through the Emergency Assistance scheme, to the value of £250,000. A new government scheme from DEFRA will be providing food directly to food banks during the winter months and councils are working with their local VCS to establish what additional funding from the Winter Support Grant or other sources will be needed to ensure community food providers retain sufficient capacity during the winter period.

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