

Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies

On 10 June 2020, The Prime Minister announced a grant of £63 million for local authorities in England to help those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials due to COVID-19. The funding is a one-off contribution for the 2020-21 financial year and is made under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

Surrey County Council has been granted an allocation of £788,015.67, on the basis of population, weighted by a proxy measure of need, the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for the authority area.

This additional funding is intended to help local authorities to continue to support those struggling to afford food and other essentials over the coming months due to COVID-19. The government anticipates that most of the funding will be spent within 12 weeks of receipt of the funding (expected at the end of July).

In accordance with the grant conditions, in utilising the funding the Council should:

- use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need
- use the funding from July onwards to meet immediate need and help those who are struggling to afford food and essentials due to COVID-19
- use the funding for existing schemes and other support which deliver the outcomes and where the need is greatest
- work together with other local authorities to provide support and ensure the funding meets objectives

Proposal

Discussions held within the Welfare Cell, unanimously concluded that the most vulnerable residents would benefit most from a partnership approach to the distribution of these funds, building on the existing relationships across the County Council, Borough & District Councils and VCFS which have been utilised in the joint approach to the response to the pandemic.

Conversations included a desire to target the following areas to ensure the biggest impact is achieved for those experiencing financial hardship:

- Food banks
- Shopping vouchers/slots for those coming out of the National shielding programme, other vulnerable residents still adhering to social distancing guidance and/or those isolating residents (as a result of track and trace)
- Purchase of non-food items such as medicines, sanitary items, toiletries, clothes. (e.g. specifically school uniform as September approaches).

The areas outlined below were considered likely to generate the largest positive impact on the most vulnerable in the County, providing additional funding to support those residents experiencing significant financial hardship as a result of the COVID pandemic.

1. It is proposed that the majority of the allocations (£648k) is distributed to the **Boroughs and Districts Councils** to use to target those in need and provide additional grant funding **to local food banks and VCFS** organisations supporting the purchase and distribution of food, medical supplies and other essential items. The approach to utilisation will be determined at a local level based on need and delivery mechanisms. .

It is proposed that the allocation of these remaining funds across the 11 Boroughs and Districts replicate the DEFRA assessment of need (so based on population data weighted for IMD).

The above proposals would result in the following distribution of the SCC grant allocation:

Organisation/Activity	Allocation
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Surrey Crisis Fund	£60,000.00
Bookham Food Distribution	£80,000.00
Elmbridge	£63,282.67
Epsom and Ewell	£38,598.65
Guildford	£78,789.58
Mole Valley	£44,122.96
Reigate and Banstead	£88,548.94
Runnymede	£55,447.46
Spelthorne	£71,067.86
Surrey Heath	£40,922.23
Tandridge	£54,305.98
Waverley	£56,243.83
Woking	£56,685.51
	£788,015.67

2. **Surrey Crisis Fund** – this is an existing fund, run by Surrey County Council, supporting vulnerable people across the County experiencing hardship. Successful applicants are provided with pre-paid debit cards loaded with awarded sums for food/toiletries and utilities. The scheme also supplies white goods and beds for children. Budget pressures have resulted in a reduction in the scope of the offer over recent years.

This fund is already administered and has established processes in place to check DWP databases and eligibility. Historic spend on food and utilities averaged between £10k-£15k per month. This is expected to increase (by between 20%-50%) as a result of the COVID -19 pandemic, particularly over the next few months as furlough scheme support ends, withdrawal of community/voluntary support and unemployment is expected to increase. It is proposed that £60k of this funding allocation is contributed to the Surrey Crisis Fund to enable the fund to assist those in the County with financial hardship and manage the expected increase in demand over the next 3 months. They will also keep under review their eligibility criteria to ensure that those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic are supported in the most appropriate ways.

3. **Bookham food distribution centre** – the welfare cell has successfully run food distribution to shielding residents during the lockdown period. Recently the central hub for this distribution was moved from The Spectrum in Guildford, to Bookham Youth Centre. Future demand for food provision is difficult to predict, but as test and trace continues and a risk of local lockdowns occurring is a consideration, there is an expectation that demand for food box distribution will remain for those falling into these categories who are also experiencing significant financial hardship. It is proposed that £80k is contributed to the continuing operation of the central food distributions centre reaching across the County and covering demand where government food banks are due to cease operation. This additional funding will enable opportunities to expand the offer to include toiletries, sanitary items, and other essential items.

Monitoring information on how these allocations are spent will need be returned to SCC Finance (Nikki O'Connor, Senior Finance Business Partner) on a monthly basis, to ensure that the funding is being utilised in the most effective way and to ensure the ability to respond to DEFRA monitoring and evaluation surveys as and when required. If allocations are not utilised in the ways proposed, then surplus funds will be re-distributed as appropriate, according to the areas experiencing the most demand.

Consultation:

This proposal has been put together by the Welfare Cell and discussed and endorsed by the Cell leads meeting. Approval for the proposal will be sought from the LRR SCG group.

The proposed use of this grant by other County Councils ranges from those retaining the full amount within the County to those distributing entirely to Boroughs and Districts and/or the voluntary sector supporting the provision of food, prescriptions and other essential items.

Next Steps:

Once agreement to this proposal has been granted by the Cell leads meeting and the LRF, we will seek the approval for the Executive Director for Resources and Cabinet Member for Finance of Surrey County Council as those with the necessary authority to accept and allocate the grant award.