

# New winter package to provide further support for children and families

- £170m Covid Winter Grant Scheme to support children, families and the most vulnerable over winter
- Holiday Activities and Food programme to be expanded, covering Easter, Summer and Christmas in 2021
- Healthy Start payments set to rise from £3.10 to £4.25 a week from April 2021
- Suite of measures represents long-term plan to help tackle poor health, hunger and education.

Building on the significant support given to the most vulnerable during the pandemic, a new £170m Covid Winter Grant Scheme will be run by councils in England.

The funding will be ring-fenced, with at least 80% earmarked to support with food and bills, and will cover the period to the end of March 2021. Local Authorities will receive the funding at the beginning of December 2020.

It will allow councils to directly help the hardest-hit families and individuals, as well as provide food for children who need it over the holidays. Local councils understand which groups need support, and are best placed to ensure appropriate holiday support is provided – which is why they will distribute the funds, rather than schools, who will continue providing meals for disadvantaged children during term-time.

The Holiday Activities and Food programme, which has provided healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children since 2018, will also be expanded across England next year.

It will cover Easter, Summer and Christmas in 2021, and cost up to £220m. It will be available to children in every local authority in England, building on previous programmes – including this summer, which supported around 50,000 children across 17 local authorities.

Healthy Start scheme payments are also set to increase from £3.10 to £4.25 a week from next April, 2021.

This scheme supports pregnant women or those with children under four who have a low income and are in receipt of benefits to buy fresh fruit and vegetables. This will help people boost the long-term health of their children.

The Government has also pledged additional funding of £16m for food distribution charities, with conversations with FareShare and others ongoing as to how this is allocated.

Work and Pensions Secretary, Thérèse Coffey, said:

We want to make sure vulnerable people feel cared for throughout this difficult time and, above all, no one should go hungry or be unable to pay their bills this winter.

We know this has been a challenging time for many, and we have consistently supported the lowest-paid families, protecting 9 million jobs with furlough and boosting welfare support by £9.3 billion.

This package builds on that support, and by extending our successful Holiday Activities and Food programme, as well as funding a £170 million Covid Winter Grant Scheme, we are making sure families get the help they need.

The government has acknowledged that school holidays can be difficult for some families, with children at risk of missing out on healthy meals, activities, and learning opportunities.

For example, learning loss over summer accounts for almost two-thirds of the attainment gap between the richest and the poorest children by age 14.

For this reason, up to £220m is being invested in the Holiday Activities and Food programme, with disadvantaged children able to get healthy food and take part in fun enriching activities over summer, Christmas and Easter in 2021.

Ministers have also taken unprecedented measures during the pandemic to protect the most vulnerable, and put in place a strong package of financial support to support families and children.

This includes:

- Protecting millions of jobs and livelihoods through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, which have been extended until March 2021
- Increasing Universal Credit and Tax Credits by up to £20 a week this year
- £63m for councils to provide emergency assistance to families, pensioners and the most vulnerable with food, essentials and meals
- Extending free school meals support to those eligible when schools closed during lockdown
- Increasing Local Housing Allowance rates for Universal Credit and housing benefit claimants, so it covers the lowest 30% of local rents – benefiting over 1 million households by on average £600 this year.

Local authorities understand which groups need support, and are best placed to ensure appropriate holiday support is provided – which is why the £170m Covid Winter Grant Scheme will be distributed by them, rather than schools, who will continue providing meals disadvantaged children during term-time.

## **Further information**

- To place the Covid Winter Grant Scheme in context, the cost of providing free school meals to eligible children for two weeks is around £40m based on government data.
- The government has consistently supported the lowest-paid families, including by raising the living wage, ending the benefit freeze and putting another £9.3bn into the welfare system.
- The government remains committed to developing a food strategy that will support the development of a food system that is sustainable, resilient and affordable, that will support people to live healthy lives, and that will protect animal health and welfare.
- The £170m is for Local Authorities in England only. Devolved Administrations have received equivalent funding through the upfront funding guarantee we have provided, which was recently increased to £16bn for the year to support their Covid-19 response.

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