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| Grants Determination Sub-Committee |  TOWER HAMLETS |
| 1 May 2019 | |
| Report of: Neville Murton, Corporate Director for Resources | Classification: Unrestricted |
| School uniform grants academic year 2019/20 | |

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| Lead Member | Councillor Candida Ronald, Cabinet Member for Resources and the Voluntary Sector |
| Originating Officer(s) | Ellie Kershaw, Tackling Poverty Programme Delivery Officer |
| Wards affected | All wards |
| Key Decision? | No |
| Forward Plan Notice Published | |
| Reason for Key Decision | N/A |
| Community Plan Theme | Priority one |

Reasons for Urgency

One way in which the Council supports low income families is through offering a school uniform grant, to ensure that children have the right clothing to start at secondary school whilst relieving the pressure on the household to find the money with which to purchase it.

Last year the grants were agreed through the delegated authority of the Corporate Director for Resources. The current post holder has requested that authority be sought again from the Committee for continuation of this delegation as the previous arrangement was unclear on the position going forward.

In order for grants to be paid in a timely fashion and to relieve stress on households it is important that the distribution is agreed at the May meeting; delaying the decision would cause undue stress to households in not knowing whether they will be assisted in their purchase.

Executive Summary

This report seeks approval for the continuation of the school uniform grant. The policy and award was agreed by the commissioners for 2016/17, the Committee for 2017/18 and the Corporate Director for Resources in 2018/19. This report seeks permission to distribute grants for the 2019/20 academic year.

Recommendations:

The Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the provision of school clothing grants in 2019/20 within the budget specified in this report
2. Authorise the Corporate Director for Resources to approve future grants, subject to budget restrictions

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The amount of £210,000 has been allocated for the purpose of school clothing grants in this year's budget. This allows for funding to be allocated to households in line with the council's policy and is the recommended option.
- 1.2 The Grants Committee is asked to review and renew this scheme. The policy has been amended to reflect the introduction of Universal Credit and is at Appendix A.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The policy to distribute these grants was first approved by the Commissioners in May 2015. The grant could be ended. However, this would have a negative impact on households who are unable to afford a new uniform when their child starts at secondary school. Going to school in the wrong items of clothing could also lead to bullying and isolation for the child involved, having a detrimental impact on their school experience and achievement.

3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The council has the power under Section 518 of the Education Act 1996 and the Local Education Authority (Payment of expenses) Regulations 1999 to pay expenses to a child attending a maintained school to take part in any school activity. The Council may make such a payment where satisfied that it would relieve financial hardship, but the payment must be related to the means of the child's household. Funding of £210k has been allocated for the purpose of School Clothing Grants for this year.
- 3.2 The School Clothing Grants Policy is attached at **Appendix A**.
- 3.3 Whilst funded by Children and Culture, the grant is considered to be part of the work undertaken as part of the council's tackling poverty programme, and

households accessing the grant will be offered an appointment with the Council's Resident Support Outreach Team to discuss their circumstances and offer assistance in maximising their income.

3.4 Payments that have been made in previous years are shown below.

| 2018 School Clothing Grants | Claims | Paid | Not Paid | Total Spent |
|--|--------|------|-------------|-------------|
| | 1795 | 1788 | 7 | £197,120.00 |

| 2017 School Clothing Grants | Claims | Paid | Not Paid | Total Spent |
|--|--------|------|-------------|-------------|
| | 1922 | 1813 | 109 | £199,430.00 |

| 2016 School Clothing Grants | Claims | Paid | Not Paid | Total Spent |
|--|--------|------|-------------|-------------|
| | 1883 | 1829 | 54 | £201,300.00 |

4.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

4.1 In previous years equalities assessments have been carried out on the provision of discretionary awards and were found to have a positive impact in breaking down barriers to participation and on the protected groups concerned. There are no changes proposed to the scheme and therefore the previous impact assessment is considered to still be relevant.

5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Risk management

In previous years the funding amount has been sufficient. Should the requirement for grants outweigh the budget, it could be added to from the tackling poverty budget.

5.2 Safeguarding

Whilst there are no specific safeguarding implications to this report, provision of the grants does help to ensure that households can afford a basic school uniform, which would otherwise potentially entail the family going without other essentials.

5.3 Tackling poverty

As well as helping financially, the Council will be offering recipients the chance to meet to discuss their financial circumstances with a view to ensuring that their income is maximised

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 The funding for this grant is allocated from the central support services area of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), the budget provision for the School Clothing Grant is £210,000 for the academic year 2019/20. There are no new financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 The Council has the legal power to make the grants of this nature.
- 7.2 The Council is also obliged to ensure compliance with its Best Value Duty This means that it will have to ensure that any grant is made under terms that enable the proper monitoring of outcomes and to demonstrate that the money achieves the intended result.
- 7.3 To this end the Council must also ensure that it has proper resourcing in place to monitor the use of the grant payments. The Council could consider requiring repayment of the grant in the event that the funds are used for a purpose for which they were not originally intended.
- 7.4 The Council must operate a fair and open application procedure to process a request to obtain funding. Requests for grant funding must be measured against the predetermined criteria shown in the policy and applied in the same way to all applicants.
- 7.5 When making decisions, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (the public sector equality duty). The policy itself appears to comply with this duty.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Appendix A School uniform grant policy

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- None

Officer contact details for documents:

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1 School Clothing Grant

- 1.1 The School Clothing Grant is a single payment of £110 made on one occasion where a pupil transfers from primary to secondary school for pupils from low income families. The grant is made for the academic year in which the pupil reaches the age of 12.
- 1.2 Grants will be made wherever possible in advance of the start of the autumn term so that parents have access to the money when most needed.

2. Conditions of eligibility

2.1 Applicants **must** satisfy the following requirements of the policy to be eligible for a School Clothing Grant:

- age;
- residence;
- school;
- income.

2.1 Age limits

2.1.1 Pupils can be considered for a School Clothing Grant for the academic year in which they become 12 years old. Overage and underage pupils may also qualify where their secondary transfer has been approved by the Educational Psychologist and School Development Adviser.

2.1.2 The start of the academic year is defined as 1st September.

2.2 Residence requirements

2.2.1 The Authority will consider applications from parents and carers living within its area.

2.3 Approved institutions

2.3.1 School Clothing Grants will be made to pupils attending courses of secondary education at maintained and private sector secondary schools.

2.4 Benefit requirement

2.4.1 To be eligible for a School Clothing Grant the parents or carer must receive one of the following:

- income based Job Seekers Allowance;
- Income Support;
- Income related Employment Support Allowance
- Guaranteed Pension Credit
- Universal Credit with assessable earnings of less than £16,190 per annum

or

- Have a total income of less than £16,190 (excluding child tax credit and child

benefit, but including any Working Tax Credit you may receive).

2.4.2 Pupils whose parents or carers are asylum seekers will be eligible to be considered for a School Clothing Grant where their parents or carers receive NASS (National Asylum Support Service) support under part IV of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

2.4.3 The applicant, their parents or guardians must receive a qualifying benefit at the time of applying.

3. Administration of the payment

3.1 The School Clothing Grant is paid as a single cheque of £110 or bank transfer to the parent or carer of the pupil.

4. Closing dates

4.1 The School Clothing Grant application forms for the academic year can only be applied for between 30 June and 30 September.

5 Exceptional circumstances

5.1 Applications for School Clothing Grants received after the closing date will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances where the pupil and family meet all the criteria of this policy other than having made an application on time.

5.2 Parents applying on exceptional grounds will be asked to provide supporting evidence from a relevant professional, for example an Attendance and Welfare Adviser or Lead Professional.

6 Appeals

6.1 Appeals must be made in writing and will be considered by a panel comprised of at least two senior officers from Pupil and Student Services. Appeals must be accompanied by evidence that the parent or guardian was in receipt of an appropriate benefit as described on paragraph 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 at the time of applying.