
Report To:	Education and Communities Committee	Date:	8 May 2018
Report By:	Head of Education	Report No:	EDUCOM/66/18/RB
Contact Officer:	Louise McVey	Contact No:	01475 715714
Subject:	School Clothing Grants 2018/19		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Education and Communities Committee for the proposed arrangements to be put in place for School Clothing Grants (SCG) for academic year 2018/19.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 As part of the recent Budget process, Members agreed to increase the core clothing grant to £90 in addition to reinvesting any funding which was expected to be received from the Scottish Government. At the same time officers were asked to examine how uptake of Clothing Grants and Free School Meals could be increased.
- 2.2 Education and Finance Services have had initial discussions about ways of increasing the take up of SCG including whether the automation of claims is possible. Discussions on automation concluded that it is too soon to provide an automated payment system in 2018/19, especially given the challenges and questions raised around family bank account details and the sharing of information. Further work will be undertaken over coming months in consultation with other Councils to try and overcome these obstacles for the 2019/20 academic year.
- 2.3 At the time of writing the report officers do not know the quantum of the extra funding it will receive from the Scottish Government nor is the level of uptake of SCG known. It is therefore proposed that an initial SCG payment is made of £100/pupil and that a second payment is made around Christmas time once the overall funding is known. From a policy perspective officers believe a second payment around this time will be welcome by families.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to approve the following procedures for the administration of School Clothing Grants and Free School Meals for the academic year 18/19.
- That the process for claiming clothing grants and free school meals will operate the same as previous years but that officers will use available data to contact eligible families who have not applied.
 - That there will be two payments made to eligible families for the SCG for the academic year 2018/19 the first over the summer for £100/pupil and the second around Christmas time to fully utilise the available budget.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Education Services currently provide application forms directly to families who have previously received SCG/FSM, the application forms are also sent to schools to encourage families who may be eligible to complete and return the application forms. There is also a full communication exercise using social and local media to encourage an increase in the take up of the benefits. Inverclyde uses the same form for applications for free school meals and clothing grants.
- 4.2 Families receive their entitled SCG once Education Service ensure that they meet the agreed criteria and the relevant household income evidence for the current year; the payment is then made directly into their bank account
- 4.3 Although every effort is made to ensure that families have information about grants, currently the onus to apply for the SCG is with the householder and their understanding of their entitlements.
- 4.4 As part of the Inverclyde Council budget process the decision was made to increase the recurring Clothing Grant payment to £90 per pupil from academic year 2018/19 to which will be added extra funding recently announced by the Scottish Government.

5.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 Officers have been discussing methods of using automation payments to ensure families receive the benefits without completing additional application forms. Initial work undertaken on the provision of benefit payments through automation systems has raised some questions and challenges about the process. The challenges include having up to date information about relevant bank account details, the preferred payment methods for families and the sharing of data. Whilst work will be undertaken to address these issues, it will be impossible to do so for the 2018/19 academic year.
- 5.2 Work has already begun between Education Services and Finance Services to maximise uptake of SCG/FSM. This work has identified a data sharing agreement between the two services to match the data between those who are eligible to apply for grants and those who have not yet applied. The proposal is to undertake this data match for the academic year 2018/19 and to proactively contact those who are eligible to apply to encourage them to do so. Over 2018/19, further work will be taken forward in consultation with other Councils to examine how the process can become more automated.
- 5.3 To enable SCG payments to be paid prior to the summer holidays it is proposed that SCG will be paid in two instalments for the academic year 2018/19. An initial payment of £100 will be paid prior to the summer break with a further payment made during December when the full available SCG budget is known.
- 5.4 This approach will ensure that there will be no delay in getting the initial payment out to households who rely on this grant to buy school clothing for children ahead of the new school term.
- 5.5 There is also strong rationale for making a further payment prior to the Christmas holidays as this is a time of financial hardship and strain for many families and Education Services are often contacted by parents about the availability of a top up fund, usually around about Christmas time. This is because pupils may have outgrown or outworn their uniforms and parents/carers are sometimes struggling to buy replacements. A second payment gives the advantage that the council can effectively top up the initial grant to ensure that parents/carers can afford to replace school clothing mid-year without having to second guess the growth rate of their child or anticipate the rate at which clothes will wear out.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

Finance

6.1 Financial Implications:

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report £000	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact £000	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
Education	Clothing Grants	2018/19	225		Current core budget

Legal

6.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Human Resources

6.3 There are no HR implications arising from this report.

Equalities

6.4 Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

Whilst no EIA is required the proposed phasing of the payment is expected to have a positive impact on some of those families which require to replace aspects of School uniforms during the year.

Yes See attached appendix

No This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Repopulation

6.5 There are no repopulation issues arising from this report.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 N/A