

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Officer - Resources****Council Meeting: 22nd December 2021**

Subject: School Clothing Grants – Motion from Council 26th August 2021**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information of the qualifying criteria and thresholds for entitlement to school clothing grants (CG)

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the comments within the report.

3. Background

- 3.1 At the Council meeting held on 26 August 2021, a motion was agreed approving the alignment of primary and secondary age values for clothing grants and asked officers to bring a report to a future Council meeting to provide information on the differences between the financial qualifying thresholds for parents on Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1 The Scottish Government (SG) is responsible for setting the criteria for free school meal (FSM) entitlement and each Council is responsible for setting its own criteria for entitlement to CG's.
- 4.2 All Council's in Scotland use the criteria provided by SG for FSM as a starting point for entitlement to CG's, and this allows Council's to vary such thresholds or introduce new and/or different qualifying criteria. The Council has taken the decision in previous years to increase various thresholds to expand the entitlement to CG's.
- 4.3 The qualifying criteria for a CG for pupils in West Dunbartonshire schools is to be in receipt of one or more of the following:
- Income Support;
 - Universal Credit with an annual earned income of up to £8,500;
 - Jobseekers Allowance (income based);
 - Pension Credit;
 - Employment and Support Allowance (income related);
 - Support under Part VI of the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999;
 - Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction; and/or
 - Working Tax Credit with a gross annual income of £16,860.

- 4.4** The Council previously introduced housing benefit and/or council tax reduction as a qualifying criterion to allow parents that would not have qualified based on the criteria set for FSM. This provided parents in receipt of non-passported legacy benefits, such as jobseekers allowance (contribution based), and also those in receipt of universal credit with an income over the SG's threshold of £7,500 to be entitled to the CG, when this was introduced in November 2018.
- 4.5** The different thresholds applied to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits are due to the Universal Credit threshold relating to only earned income whilst the Working Tax Credit threshold is gross income. Therefore the Working Tax Credit income can include unearned income such as contribution based benefits whereas the Universal Credit award and any additional top ups are not included in the threshold figure. It is also linked to the different conditions of entitlement applied by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC). The HRMC were responsible for administering the Working and Child Tax Credit scheme before the introduction of Universal Credit moved this role to the DWP. Therefore applying housing benefit and/or council tax reduction as a route to entitlement was considered an appropriate route to mitigate any issues with this.
- 4.6** It should also be noted that a discretionary award can be made depending on the particular nature of the circumstances, which would allow for any specific issues to be managed.

5. Options Appraisal

- 5.1** None

6. People Implications

- 6.1** There are no people implications.

7. Financial & Procurement Implications

- 7.1** None

8. Risk Analysis

- 8.1** None

9. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 9.1** None

10. Consultation

10.1 The views Finance and Legal Services have been requested on this report and have advised there are neither any issues nor concerns with the proposal.

11. Strategic Assessment

11.1 Sound financial practice and budgetary control are imperative to assist with the governance of the Council and supports officers of the Council in achieving the five strategic priorities of the Council's Strategic Plan. This report forms part of the financial governance of the Council.

Stephen West

Chief Officer - Resources

Date: 25th November 2021

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All Council wards.

