

meet the additional costs associated with the increased levels for primary and secondary pupils.

COSLA Leaders, at their meeting on 25 June 2021, agreed the funding and distribution of the proposed move to the new minimum amount of School Clothing Grant of £120 for primary and £150 for secondary school pupils.

The West Lothian Anti-Poverty Strategy is focussed on how to maximise financial resources of households on low incomes. Feedback from focus groups with young people and our Experts by Experience panel, along with stakeholders, centred on costs around the school day and, in particular, school uniform. West Lothian Council already awards more than the minimum amount set by Scottish Government; primary school pupils receive £125 and secondary pupils £135. It is proposed to utilise all of the increase in Scottish Government funding, which had been set aside to pay for the school clothing grant contribution, to increase the amount West Lothian Council will award to £150 for primary school pupils and £180 for secondary school pupils.

The decision at this late stage to increase the national minimum School Clothing Grant to coincide with the start of the new academic year in August 2021 places a considerable administration burden on local authorities. Applications for the next academic year are normally opened in May of each year with the majority of parents completing their application by the beginning of the school summer holiday. Early application supports parents to make the most of retail offers on school clothing. This year, applications for School Clothing Grant will be opened at the beginning of July. Every effort will be made to process the school clothing grant as quickly as possible, however, there may be some households which will not receive their grant until the new term has started.

E. CONCLUSION

West Lothian Council has one of the highest rates of School Clothing Grant in Scotland. The recent changes in central funding mean that there has been a material change of circumstances since council set the current payments on 28 February 2021. The proposal in this report to increase the grant beyond the new national minimum will further support households on a low income at a time of economic uncertainty. The proposed increase will contribute to outcomes of the Community Planning Partnership's Anti-Poverty Strategy and will evidence action taken in response to the concerns raised by parents and carers about the cost of the school day and, in particular, the cost of school uniforms.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None.

Appendices/Attachments: None.

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