

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

SCHOOL CLOTHING GRANT UPDATE

REPORT BY HEAD OF FINANCE AND PROPERTY SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to inform the Council Executive of the Scottish Government's proposal to increase the national minimum award of School Clothing Grants to £120 for primary school pupils and £150 for secondary school pupils by August 2021 and to set out proposals for clothing grant rates for West Lothian for 2021/22.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council Executive:

1. Notes the intention of Scottish Government to increase the national minimum award for School Clothing Grants and notes the change to the funding arrangements.
2. Notes that West Lothian Council currently pays £125 for primary school pupils and £135 for secondary school pupils.
3. Notes that the funding and distribution in relation to the new national minimum grant was agreed at the COSLA Leaders Meeting on 25 June 2021; and
4. In light of the material change of circumstances outlined in this report since council agreed the current payments on 28 February 2021, agrees to increase the West Lothian School Clothing Grant to £150 for primary school pupils and £180 for secondary school pupils for 2021/22.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; providing equality of opportunities; making best use of our resources.
II	Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	The Education (Scotland) Act 1980. The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. Clothing Grant Policy.
III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None.
IV	Impact on performance and performance	Actions taken to increase access to school clothing grants will impact positively on a

	Indicators	number of performance indicators
V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed. We have tackled significant inequalities in West Lothian society. We take a pride in a strong, fair and inclusive society.
VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	Increase in funding from the Scottish Government will fully offset the proposed increase in the school clothing grant with no additional cost to the council.
VII	Consideration at PDSP	None.
VIII	Other consultations	Education Services; Governance Manager.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D1 Background

On 25 May 2018, COSLA and the Scottish Government announced a joint commitment to a £100 national minimum school clothing grant in Scotland, with 50% of the costs met by local authorities and 50% by Scottish Government. The commitment to a national minimum school clothing grant was effective from academic year 2018/19. This meant that each local authority provided a contribution to the costs of £50 per eligible pupil.

Currently, 22 local authorities provide the £100 school clothing grant. West Lothian Council has one of the highest school clothing grant allowances in Scotland with £125 for primary pupils and £135 for secondary pupils. The current spend on clothing grants for 2020/21 up to May 2021 is £1.041 million. To date, there have been 8,092 children in receipt of grants: comprising 5,094 primary pupils and 2,998 secondary pupils.

D2 Proposed Change

On 26 May 2021, the Scottish Government set out its priorities for government which included a commitment to increase the national minimum award of School Clothing Grants to £120 for primary school pupils and £150 for secondary school pupils by August 2021. It is also intended that funding for school clothing grants will rise with inflation each year in order that families are supported.

The Scottish Government has been in discussion with COSLA on the funding arrangements going forward for school clothing grants. COSLA's position is that for new policies of this nature the policy could place pressure on existing budgets and COSLA's view is that new commitments need to be fully funded by the Scottish Government given the current constraints on local government funding.

The Scottish Government is proposing to provide £70 for every eligible primary child and £100 for every eligible secondary child which will fully cover the additional cost of the introduction of the national minimum of £120 for primary children and £150 for secondary children. This means there will be no additional cost to local authorities and local authorities would continue to provide £50 per eligible pupil. It is proposed that the funding will be provided through a redetermination of the General Revenue Grant to local authorities in March 2022. The Scottish Government also proposes to increase the school clothing grant for primary and secondary pupils annually in line with inflation. To support delivery of this annual increase, the Scottish Government will

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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