

Food support for families in need this Christmas

A £1million support package is in place to support Somerset families in need with food this winter.

Somerset County Council, the District Councils and Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group have been busy working with partners to ensure a robust system is in place so that help can be directed where it is needed.

Through partnership working, a wide network of community food support has already been established in Somerset during the pandemic and the Government's Winter Covid Grant Scheme has bolstered this by providing additional funding to support families.

All schools in Somerset will be provided with £30 for every child who receives free school meals for the Christmas Holidays and £15 for February half term. Schools will use this funding to provide vouchers or food and will contact their families accordingly.

Somerset County Council leader David Fothergill said: "This funding means we can ensure thousands of children and their families in Somerset will be able to get the food they need, when they need it.

"I am determined that this council will do all it can to prevent children going hungry through this very challenging Christmas and winter period."

As well as this, a fund has been established so that schools can bid for money to set up new breakfast and after-school clubs or expand their existing ones. There is also an option to bid for funds towards new community food projects, such as setting up a community larder or an allotment scheme.

In line with national policy, from Easter 2021 the Free School Meals vouchers programme will be replaced with the new Holiday Activities and Food programme. Before Christmas, Somerset County Council will be writing to schools to ask if they would like to bid for funding to host or run holiday activities with food for children eligible for free school meals.

Families with children under 4 on low income may be able to claim Healthy Start Vouchers <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/> which gives parents £3.10 per week to help buy healthy food, vitamins and milk.

Families with children 16-18 not in education, employment or training can also have help over Christmas by emailing somersetworks@somerset.gov.uk

The Winter Covid Grant Scheme complements the ongoing partnership working to support all residents with food and underlying issues that has been going on throughout the pandemic between Somerset's Local Authorities, Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group and organisations such as Mindline, Citizens Advice Bureau, Spark Somerset, Somerset Community Foundation and the Community Council for Somerset.

Anyone who needs support over Christmas can call the Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline number on 0300 790 6275. It is open seven days a week from 8am to 6pm, offering a range of support – from help accessing food or medicines, to emotional and financial support, and employment, housing and business advice.