

Report of: The Director of Children's Services

Report to: Children and Families Scrutiny Board

Date: 24th April 2014

Subject: Free School Meals



Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

- 1 The Children and Families Bill 2014 will require a commitment from primary schools to offer a free school meal to all children in reception, year one and year two from 1 September 2014. This is known as the Universal Infant Free School Meal (UIFSM).
- 2 This and the wider implications of the government's School Food Plan are designed to have a positive knock-on impact on free school meal uptake more generally in primary schools and in secondary schools amongst pupils with a free school meal entitlement (FSME).
- 3 The policy may require schools to make a number of changes to their kitchen and catering arrangements and to do so within very tight timescales. Leeds City Council is working closely with schools to support them.
- 3 This is an important change and one where elected members can play a key role by working with local headteachers and governors to monitor and continue to encourage uptake of free school meal entitlement by FSME pupils across all key stages, including infants.

1.0 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report provides an update to members on free school meals in Leeds.

2 Background information

- 2.1 There is significant evidence of the relationship between a child's food habits and their readiness for learning in and out of school. Free school meals are an important means of increasing the probability of a child receiving a good quality meal during the school day. The uptake of free school meals is a priority in Leeds, captured within the Children and Young People's Plan, but this has been a challenging issue for a number of years.
- 2.2 Data on school meal take-up is collated from the School Meal Tracker, for which daily information is provided. Free school meal take-up in Leeds primary schools during the 2012/13 financial year was 73.1%. The previous financial year take up was 77.6%, having also risen for each of the previous two years. The take-up rate in secondary schools was 71.1%, in line with the previous year. 2013/14 financial year data will be available later in the summer.
- 2.3 Reasons for low free school meal take-up are complex and can be the same reasons why paying families do not buy school meals, including perceptions about quality and choice, as well as dining logistics and pupil supervision. Stigma is not necessarily a key barrier, particularly in schools with higher numbers of pupils with free school meal entitlement although it is observed by parents and pupils, together with cultural inappropriateness - especially in secondary schools.
- 2.4 The school funding model changed in April 2013. All funding for free school meals is now fully delegated to schools and is not ring-fenced within school budgets. This means that headteachers receive enough money to pay their catering provider for all the meals that their FSM eligible children on roll could take up, but that if an FSM eligible child chooses not to take up their entitlement, the headteacher retains the money that would otherwise be spent paying for the meal.
- 2.5 The Government pledged to look at extending free school meal entitlement, to ensure that the children from poorer backgrounds do not go hungry at lunch. **The School Food Plan** was launched in July 2013, and in September 2013, free school meals for all pupils in reception, years 1 and 2, were announced, operative from September 2014. This plan is the outcome of the review of school food commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education in July 2012 and is an action plan to further increase the quality and take-up of healthy school meals.
- 2.6 The School Food Plan is a joint public health and education policy. It supports whole school approaches to healthy eating and makes the case for improving school food and lunchtime culture and improving the school food economy through increased investment and school leadership commitment as well as through pupil voice and influence. Pilot authorities evidenced an improvement in educational outcomes, improved behaviour and school food culture.
- 2.7 This will be the last year that primary data will be valid for comparison with earlier years, as in autumn 2014 the Government policy of universal free school meals

for Reception and Key Stage 1 children comes into effect. Schools will be able to use the summer term to measure Reception and Key Stage 1 take-up separately from Key Stage 2, so that a benchmark exists to use for measuring the impact of universal meals for the younger age group.

- 2.8 The Government has provided funding to enable schools to offer a free lunch to every primary school child in Key Stage 1, equating to guaranteed free meals for reception, year one and year two aged pupils. The Children and Families Bill will be amended to place a legal duty on primary schools to deliver this commitment. In addition to making over £1billion in revenue funding available over the next two years, the Government has made capital funding of £150million available in 2014-15 to support schools in providing this increased provision. The allocation has been given to local authorities and to the Academies Capital Maintenance Fund to administer.
- 2.9 Revenue funding will be paid to schools based on £2.30 per meal taken by pupils not eligible to receive a free meal by benefit entitlement. The DfE intends to collect this information through the School Census return. Leeds Catering is to reduce the price per meal charged to schools for KS1 children from £2.65 per meal to £2.30 from September 2014 for KS1 and for KS2 children.
- 2.10 Schools will be expected to continue to fund meals for pupils eligible for FSMs under the existing criteria in the same way that they do currently. The DfE are introducing a new indicator on the Schools Census which will enable schools to state how many newly eligible infants (i.e. infants not eligible for free school meals under the existing criteria) are taking a FSM. This new indicator will be introduced from October 2014.
- 2.11 The DfE has advised local authorities to plan for 87% uptake amongst infants, and a possible linked increase amongst junior pupils.
- 2.12 The government is providing additional transitional funding for one year only to small schools (schools with a total roll of up to 150 pupils according to the January 2014 Schools Census). Funding will be provided as a lump sum in June 2014. This can be spent as schools choose in order to support their implementation of the policy, including for the purpose of improving kitchen or dining equipment, and will not be adjusted later to take account of take-up. All small schools with infant pupils who were not eligible for FSM in the 2014 census will receive at least £3,000 of additional funding.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 The uptake of free school meals for those who are entitled remains a focus for the city, and a priority in the Children and Young People Plan. Revenue funding is not ring-fenced in schools for these pupils, as such there is a key role for governors in monitoring the use of funding allocated for free school meals. Equally, there is a risk that pupils who would normally be entitled in KS1 may choose to not take their free school meal and this may go unnoticed. Governors could play a role in encouraging schools to monitor uptake of FSME pupils. The free school meal strategy group which meets termly, will continue to report on actions and progress, and monitor trends.

- 3.2 Work is underway to support to the implementation of new government UIFSM policy. The timescales for implementation are very challenging, and funding is limited, so the emphasis has to be on practical support to schools around increased numbers taking a free meal from September in the first instance, and supporting chefs, headteachers and pupils with the transition so that it is a successful, positive and exciting experience for all. The longer-term plan aims to support schools and caterers to review the quality of food on offer and encourage healthier eating behaviours through work with children and families using methods that are restorative and Child Friendly.
- 3.3 A UIFSM headteacher steering group has been established and a range of work strands are being overseen. This includes training for schools on the School Food Plan, and cooking in the curriculum as well as a communications strategy. An inaugural event to launch the new policy was held on February 27th. Elected members, headteachers and governors were invited, nearly 200 delegates attended – the majority of delegates were headteachers.
- 3.4 The UIFSM capital funding grant is £1,685,091. Following consultation with stakeholders the proposal is to allocate this according to need, top slicing at least 20% to support schools with the cost of additional large kitchen equipment. The rationale behind this was that although many schools would, if given the opportunity, prefer to expand their kitchen size, there are insufficient funds available to make this an operable solution. It has been identified – through consultation with schools and caterers, that assistance with purchase of additional large kitchen equipment would be the most valuable and cost efficient way to enable the policy to be implemented on schedule. This is a known additional significant cost to the majority of schools, estimated at £1m to maintained schools in Leeds as a whole. This approach was also advised by local authorities who ran pilot universal free school meal programmes. £342,741 is also available for VA schools.
- 3.5 Feedback from caterers suggest that schools with small kitchens have already found, or are exploring creative management solutions that avoid significant capital expenditure, as advised in The School Food Plan Toolkit. For example, serving sandwiches as an option in spaces where serving a hot meal poses a health and safety risk, extending the lunch period to include more sittings, or having additional serving points.
- 3.6 Leeds Catering, which has contracts with 187 out of 215 primary schools, has analysed schools' large equipment need. Other caterers and in-house providers have been asked to submit audit information to the local authority by 11th April. The audit information will be analysed to assess the greatest needs and associated costs. This detail will inform the detail behind the principles for spend of the capital funding grant.
- 3.7 Given the number of school kitchen expansions likely to be needed nationally, there may be implications for the timely supply of these. Kitchen equipment needs to be delivered *and* installed in schools before the end of term so caterers, who do not work during the school holidays, can familiarise themselves with the new equipment ready for the first day of delivery. If this equipment is not purchased in time, schools will not be ready to deliver additional meals on 1st

September 2014. Early delivery is vital, as many schools are closed during the summer vacation, and cooks who also only work during term time, need to familiarise themselves with new equipment in a timely way, in readiness for September so they are best supported to deal with additional pressures linked with additional numbers, new staff, new dining arrangements and additional special diets.

- 3.8 The requirement for schools to provide cooking in the curriculum will be in statute from September 2014, the emphasis will be on healthy menus.
- 3.9 Also in statute will be new, simpler mandatory school food standards, to replace the food and nutrient standards from January 2015.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 A multi-disciplinary school meals strategy group meets termly. A range of stakeholders have been consulted on implementation of UIFSM. This includes a headteacher UIFSM steering group which was established in February 2014; head teachers, governors and elected members were consulted on the UIFSM policy at an inaugural member led UIFSM event on the 27th February; two pilot authorities have been visited. The deputy lead member for Children's Services chairs the caterer network, and is regularly updated about progress. All schools and caterers have had an opportunity to provide information about their own kitchen equipment needs.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 N/A

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 A key objective within the Best Council Plan 2013-2017 is to build a child friendly city. The offer of the universal free school meal to infants contributes directly to key priorities and outcomes identified within the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2011-2015 to 'improve healthy lifestyles', 'encourage healthy eating' and 'increase uptake of free school meals'. Schools will have a statutory duty to offer UIFSM from September 1st 2014.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 The aim of the UIFSM policy is to enable all children to have access to a free school meal by September 1st 2014. The allocated UIFSM capital fund grant aims to achieve value for money by optimising pupil access to a free school meal across schools in response to current greatest need in schools – support with large kitchen equipment costs and related capital works in schools. The cost of equipment to schools will be prohibitive in many cases, and the cost will be minimised through offering matched funding, and bulk purchasing which will bring the cost down.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 NA

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 Timescales for implementation of the UIFSM policy present the greatest challenge. The implementation plan for capital monies has a risk log, and a governance panel, together with the headteacher will monitor progress and outcomes.

5 Conclusions

5.1 The implementation of UIFSM aims to be a success story in Leeds.

5.2 It may be appropriate to consider a revised recommendation for the price of a meal to parents in view of the new funding arrangements.

5.3 The uptake of free school meals for entitled pupils must remain a focus for the Children and Young People Plan as an integral block within the Child Poverty Strategy.

6 Background documents¹

6.1 NA

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.