

## SERVICE UPDATE

<b><u>Name of Function:</u></b>	Operations
<b><u>Date:</u></b>	24 March 2023
<b><u>Title of Update:</u></b>	Online School Payments, Cashless Catering and Kitchen Management Systems
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### **UPDATE:**

This Service Update is given to provide detail on the replacement of the Cashless Catering systems used to manage the delivery of school meals in all Aberdeen City's schools.

### **Background:**

Since the decline of paper-based systems, our school catering service has relied on cashless catering systems which were developed in-house by the former Accord Team to manage transactions for school meal purchasing.

The system relied on the 'CHIPS' operating system, for which an annual licence fee has to be paid to a third party. The cashless catering systems require network connectivity at site level and rely on end-of life hardware to operate correctly.

Since their inception, the system suffered from a lack of development, which left the functionality of the system inadequate compared to dedicated third party offerings. The age and reliability of the system meant that the data being generated around meal uptakes and customer account status was unreliable.

The licence for the CHIPS system was due to expire on 31 October 2022 but was extended to the end of April 2023, to allow the system to operate until a replacement system procurement and implementation was complete.

In CHIPS, much of the income from school meals was made in person, by cash paid to either the school office or kitchen office in Primary Schools, or in revaluation machines in Secondary Schools. In both instances, cash required to be handled and counted by staff, then stored on site in safes. This cash was then collected by a Cash in Transit service contractor, to be taken to bank.

There were differences in process for collection of monies for other activity in schools which required parent or carer payment e.g. school uniforms, trips, etc. All money collected for these activities again required cash handling, counting and storage on site before being collected by the Cash in Transit service contractor and taken to bank.

### **Replacement System:**

Local Authorities, Schools and Catering service providers across the UK require modern and reliable digital systems to manage transactions for school meals (both paid and free) and other transactions in schools where parents and carers need to make payments.

School meals in Scotland need to conform to the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations (2020), analysing menu composition to ensure that the required nutritional standards are being met.

Local Authorities also have a responsibility to ensure that our customers are safeguarded from harm from the food and drink products we produce and serve to them, by managing allergens effectively.

Scotland Excel developed a new framework (ref. 05/20) for public sector organisations needs which was separated into four lots, these being:

Lot 1: Online School Payments

Lot 2: Cashless Catering Services and Equipment

Lot 3: Kitchen Management Systems

Lot 4: Nutritional Analysis Systems

A business case was brought forward by the Catering Service and taken firstly through the Demand Management Control Board (13 December 2021) and then to the Strategic Commissioning Committee (SCC) seeking to hold a mini competition within the terms of this Framework. The business case was approved by SCC on 24 February 2022. The mini competition was then held, with all suppliers who had been successfully appointed on the Scotland Excel framework invited to submit bids for Aberdeen City Council's requirements. The bids were evaluated by colleagues from CPSS, Digital & Technology, Facilities Management and Finance, with the [Parentpay Group](#) identified as the preferred supplier. The contract was awarded to the Parentpay Group on 13 September 2022.

Following contract award, a Project team which comprises of representatives from the Parentpay Group, Digital & Technology, Education, Facilities Management and Finance teams met on a weekly basis to plan the implementation of the new systems.

Benefits which will be realised with the new systems installations are as follows:

- Consistency with how school payment transactions will be made by customers at schools across the Education estate, with no cash

physically held in school or catering service offices, removing cash handling and cash storage risks from schools.

- Payments will be made online by all customers who can
- For customers who can't make online payments, payments can be made in local shops using the [Paypoint](#) service.
- Cash in Transit service contract will no longer be required.
- Systems are cloud based, so there will be no programmes hosted on Council servers.
  - Primary school catering system will use tablet devices at the point of service which communicate via mobile data
  - Secondary school catering system will use Electronic Points of Sale (EPOS) at the point of service which requires on-site network connectivity for communications
- Minimal hardware is required to operate systems. Tablet devices (Primary Schools) and EPOS (Secondary Schools) are provided by the supplier as part of the contract, removing the current maintenance burden from Digital & Technology colleagues.
- Data which can be relied upon will be collected and reports can be generated by the service in live time. Data will be used by the service for performance reporting and analysed to identify areas for improvement and meal uptake increases.
- New systems will be more customer friendly and will allow parents and carers to
  - Use any smart device to access their Parentpay account
  - Choose how they wish to pay for items, using debit/credit cards or setting up of a regular direct debit.
  - Monitor their account position for all types of school payment in one place via their Parentpay account.
  - Confidently pre-order meals in advance from the comfort of their home, with their children, safe in the knowledge that meals containing ingredients their child is allergic to cannot be selected.
  - Check their Parentpay account to see that the meals they had pre-ordered were the meals their children actually had in school.
  - Know that where meals haven't been pre-ordered in advance, that they can still be ordered on the day in school, and they can check what their child has had for lunch via their Parentpay account
  - Provide feedback to the school and catering service via their Parentpay account
- Debt management processes will be simplified, with debt notification letters automatically generated within the Parentpay system and emailed to parents and/or carers for rectification

### **Replacement System Implementation:**

Customer, Education, External Communications and Facilities Management colleagues discussed the customer journey from the old system to the new system and agreed a communications plan prior to system installations and go-live. An initial Groupcall message was issued to parents and/or carers of pupils

to advise them of the systems imminent implementation. Activation letters which gave customers detail on the process for the setting up of accounts were issued shortly after the initial Groupcall message. In these letters, further detail was provided which linked parents to a dedicated [webpage](#) on the City Council's website, which contains 'How to' guides and Frequently Asked Questions to assist parents in the transition to the new system and to minimise burden on School Administrative and Customer Contact Centre colleagues.

An implementation plan was agreed between Education, Facilities Management and ParentPay which would commence on Monday 23 January 2023 and would see the new system go live in Primary Schools in three separate tranches, and for Secondary Schools, implementation on a rolling programme. The dates when the system went live were as follows:

### **Monday 23 January (Primary Schools Tranche 1)**

- Abbotswell School
- Airyhall School
- Braehead School
- Countesswells School
- Cults School
- Fernielea School
- Glashieburn School
- Hazlehead School
- Holy Family School
- Kaimhill School
- Kingswells School
- Kittybrewster School
- Middleton Park School
- Seaton School
- St Joseph's RC School

### **Wednesday 25 January**

- Bridge of Don Academy

### **Thursday 26 January**

- Lochside Academy

### **Thursday 2 February**

- Cults Academy

### **Wednesday 8 February**

- Bucksburn Academy

### **Thursday 9 February**

- Harlaw Academy

### **Thursday 16 February (Primary Schools Tranche 2)**

- Ashley Road School

- Cornhill School
- Mile End School
- Woodlands School
- Skene Square School
- Loirston School
- Bramble Brae School
- Brimmond School
- Broomhill School
- Culter School
- Danestone School
- Ferryhill School
- Gilcomstoun School
- Greenbrae School
- Tullos School
- Walker Road School
- Westpark School

**Wednesday 22 February**

- Hazlehead Academy

**Thursday 23 February**

- Dyce Academy

**Friday 24 February**

- Aberdeen Grammar School

**Wednesday 1 March**

- Northfield Academy

**Thursday 2 March**

- Oldmachar Academy

**Friday 3 March**

- St Machar Academy

**Monday 6 March (Primary Schools Tranche 3)**

- Charleston School
- Dyce Primary School
- Hanover Street School
- Heathryburn School
- Kingsford School
- Kirkhill School
- Manor Park School
- Milltimber School
- Muirfield School
- Forehill School
- Quarryhill School
- Riverbank School

- Scotstown School
- St Peters RC School
- Sunnybank School
- Stoneywood School
- Woodside School

### **Monday 13 March**

- Orchard Brae School

### **What next:**

The implementation of the system has gone very smoothly. While there have been inevitable teething troubles with the system and its operation, colleagues have worked through all issues that have arisen to date and will continue to do so as any future issues arise. Dedicated support from the ParentPay Project team both prior to and during implementation has been invaluable. The support from ParentPay will continue as we move from system implementation to business as usual, moving across to ParentPay's dedicated Support team. A Microsoft Teams channel has also been created where colleagues share their experiences and detail any issues they have experienced, using peer to peer learning to help colleagues overcome any issues they come across.

A short-life working group which will consist of Head Teacher, School Administrative, Education Central team, Facilities Management, Customer and Finance colleagues has been established. The group will meet on a frequency as yet to be determined, commencing from as soon as possible after the schools return from the spring holidays, through to the end of August 2023. The group's remit will be to:

- map out the processes which will be required to be undertaken particularly at the end of/beginning of each Academic year.
- establish robust and consistent debt management and recovery processes.
- understand the administrative burden of processes required to effectively administer the system.
- discuss and channel other payment items (school trips, school uniform, etc.) through the ParentPay system.