

SERVICE UPDATE

<u>Name of Cluster:</u>	Corporate Landlord
<u>Date:</u>	11 April 2024
<u>Title of Update:</u>	Expansion of Universal Free School Meals for Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils (Scottish Child Payment and Full Rollout)
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UPDATE:

Universal entitlement to free school meals was introduced across Scotland in 2015, for all pupils in Primary 1 to Primary 3 year groups. This universal entitlement was extended to all pupils in P4 in August 2021, and then to all pupils in P5 in January 2022.

The further expansion of universal free school meals to Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils (phase four of the programme) was due to be implemented nationally from August 2022. In October 2021, Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) undertook cost collection work on behalf of the Scottish Government, seeking estimated capital, one-off revenue and ongoing revenue costs from all Scottish local authorities for the successful delivery of phase four of the rollout.

The capital and revenue costs submitted by Local Authorities across Scotland in October 2021 had identified funding requirements which far exceeded Scottish Government's expectations and as such, the delivery of phase four was postponed to allow further work to be carried out.

Rollout to pupils eligible for Scottish Child Payment

The Scottish Government then proposed a staged rollout of the expansion of free school meals to P6 and P7 pupils, starting with those pupils who are eligible for the Scottish Child Payment (SCP), as an interim measure ahead of the full implementation of universal free meals for all P6 and P7 pupils. It was proposed that this interim rollout would require to be implemented from February 2025.

A second cost collection exercise was undertaken with all local authorities in Summer 2023, to gather estimated costs for the implementation of the rollout to SCP eligible P6 and P7 pupils, and separately, updated cost estimates for the work required to support the eventual full rollout to all pupils.

Implications for Aberdeen City schools

Detailed data on the numbers of children in each school who are eligible for SCP is not currently available. A new data sharing agreement between councils and Social Security Scotland is required to be put in place, to allow councils to identify which children are eligible for this payment. Meantime, an estimate of the number of P6 and P7 pupils likely to be eligible for the SCP and who would as a result become eligible for free school meals was provided to each local authority. It was estimated that there are 1050 such children across all Aberdeen City schools.

Officers concluded that as the number of additional children in each school who are expected to become eligible for free school meals upon implementation of this interim policy is likely to be relatively low, there would be sufficient capacity within our schools' kitchens, serveries and dining rooms to meet this additional demand. Officers' submission for the cost collection exercise therefore indicated that there would be no additional costs associated with the rollout to SCP eligible P6 and P7 pupils. Consequently, no funding has been awarded to ACC to support the rollout of free school meals to SCP eligible pupils.

Cost Implications for Full Rollout

The submission from ACC for the most recent cost collection exercise did indicate that for the eventual full rollout of universal free school meals to all P6 and P7 pupils in Aberdeen, the following additional funding would be required, to support the extension of school kitchens and dining spaces, along with the required additional equipment and staffing resource:

Capital: **£27,956,579**

One-off Revenue: **£884,558**

Ongoing Annual Revenue: **£1,528,864**

Scottish Government has yet to confirm when the level of funding to Councils for the full rollout will be announced, or when the full rollout will require to be implemented.

Following a decision taken by the Free School Meals Expansion Project Board, design work on the required extensions to Aberdeen's school kitchens and dining spaces was put on hold in October 2023, in light of the lack of information available about the likely funding or the timing of implementation for the full rollout.