

## SERVICE UPDATE

<b><u>Name of Cluster:</u></b>	Corporate Landlord
<b><u>Date:</u></b>	24th July 2024
<b><u>Title of Update:</u></b>	Costs and potential benefits of providing free school meals to Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils
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### **UPDATE:**

A 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 Primary 4 in August 2021, and then to all pupils in Primary 5 from January 2022.

In 2023 Scottish Futures Trust (SFT), on behalf of the Scottish Government, asked Local Authorities to estimate the costs of the further roll out across Primary 6 and 7. The costs below are the total costs submitted by Aberdeen City Council in 2023.

Capital: **£27,956,579**

One-off Revenue: **£884,558**

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

### **Rollout to pupils eligible for Scottish Child Payment**

The Scottish Government has announced a staged rollout of the expansion of free school meals to Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils, starting from February 2025 with those pupils who are eligible for the Scottish Child Payment (SCP), ahead of the full implementation of universal free meals for all Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils in 2026.

Detailed data on the numbers of children in each school who are eligible for the Scottish Child Payment 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. The estimated number of Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils likely to be eligible from February 2025 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 is likely to be relatively low, assuming a relatively even distribution of around 20

per school, there should be sufficient capacity within our schools' kitchens, serveries and dining rooms to meet this additional demand.

### **Implications of providing free school meals**

There is overwhelming evidence that children who are well fed, do better in school and secure better long term outcomes.

The Child Poverty Action Group published a report, Free School Meals: Third of Kids in Poverty Miss Out in July 2023. The report concludes that some Scottish children living in poverty are not yet eligible for free school meals and that this is most easily addressed through the universal rollout of free school meals.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) considered the costs and benefits of the universal roll out of free school meals, considering evidence from a range of countries but most predominantly from England. IFS found:

- mixed evidence around the impact of a free school meal on health and nutrition
- international evidence of improved attainment
- some evidence that benefits to health and attainment persist into adulthood
- that a universal approach can boost take up and reduce stigma, but directly benefits those from middle to higher income households most
- that a universal approach implies the strongest work incentives as there is no risk of losing the entitlement due to increased income

The Impact on Urban Health, part of Guy's and Thomas's Foundation, commissioned research from PwC in 2022 on the costs and benefits of expanding free school meal provision in England. Benefits were categorised as:

- Cost savings to families
- Lifetime earnings & contributions
- NHS savings (childhood obesity)
- Costs savings to schools (through reduced demand for "catch-up" programmes)

This estimated a significant positive cost benefit, with the vast majority of benefits attributed to savings to families and lifetime earnings & contributions. Less than 1% of the savings, using this methodology, were cost savings to schools.