

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education Operational Delivery
DATE	19 April 2018
REPORT TITLE	Uptake of Free School Meals
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/18/010
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Bernadette Oxley
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TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1, 1.3 and 5

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek endorsement for the Council's proposed approach to ensure the substantial increase of the registration and subsequent uptake of free school meals (FSM) throughout the City.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 2.1 note the current work streams for ensuring maximum registration and uptake of free school meals; and
- 2.2 endorse the future proposed work streams for ensuring maximum registration and uptake of free school meals.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Current Initiatives 2017/2018

- 3.1.1 Council on 6/3/18 agreed to instruct the Chief Operating Officer to bring a report to the next Education Operational Delivery Committee on how the council can substantially increase the registration and subsequent uptake of free school meals throughout the city.
- 3.1.2 Currently there are a range of initiatives which have been developed to encourage the uptake of free school meals. In session 2017 /2018 the Catering Service carried out the following initiatives:
- A free school meals leaflet was sent out at the start of the new school term in August 2017 inviting parents, carers and grandparents to the

Primary 1 induction and taster session. This allowed them to visit the school and become familiar with the canteen. They were also encouraged to take along younger siblings and make a relaxed family day tasting and asking any questions whilst in the school.

- A new spring / summer menu for 2018 was produced which detailed information on Free School Meals and the Pupil Equity Fund. Each primary school pupil was also provided with a hard copy of the menu and this was also available on the council website.
- Marketing designed a specific A3 poster to be displayed in all school sites advertising Free School Meals and the Pupil Equity Fund.
- The Catering Service worked closely with all relevant parties on an on-going basis such as head teachers, HMIE, Food Standards Scotland, pupils, parents and communities. They also attended parents' nights, pupil forum meetings and developed service specific questionnaires. Cooks also worked onsite with teachers, pupils and parents carrying out cook skills activities, master classes and promotion of healthy eating.
- The Catering Service also provided freshly prepared, local, healthy, organic, MSC, sustainable and seasonal food which supported the local economy and enabled community wealth building. This was achieved by working closely with CPS and Scotland Excel ensuring the procurement of such goods met the agreed criteria set by council. The Catering Service presently hold the Silver Food For Life accreditation for all school sites which was awarded by the Soil Association and this ensures that we produce quality meals using produce which helps deliver on health and wellbeing within the community, supporting better attainment whilst increasing uptake.
- The partnership approach the Catering Service adopted was extensive and complex across the city and provided the free school meals which were fully analysed to meet the nutritional requirement for healthy eating set by the Scottish Government. They worked with CPS, Cfine, SFCPA, NHS, ASSIST, APSE, BSI, FSS, HMIE, schools and communities in an effort to reach as many pupils as possible and in doing so were committed to reducing food poverty for families in the city by increasing uptake of free school meals.

Tables 1 to 3

Table 1: Percentage of Aberdeen City Primary school pupils registered and taking free school meals, 2014/15 to 2016/7

Year	P1-P3 pupils only ¹			P4-P7 pupils only			All Primary (P1-P7)		
	% School roll reg'd for free meals	% Reg'd and taking free meals	% Present and reg'd and took free meals	% School roll reg'd for free meals	% Reg'd and taking free meals	% Present and reg'd and took free meals	% School roll reg'd for free meals	% Regd. and taking free meals	% Present and reg'd and took free meals
2015/16	100.0	70.9	76.1	12.3	82.8	88.5	53.1	72.4	77.6
2014/15	100.0	68.8	72.2	13.7	86.0	92.4	54.8	71.0	74.8
2016/17	100.0	71.3	74.9	12.8	83.2	90.1	52.7	72.8	76.9

Table 2: Percentage of Aberdeen City Secondary school pupils registered and taking free school meals, 2014/15 to 2016/17

Year	S1-S6 pupils		
	% School roll reg'd for free meals	% Reg'd and taking free meals	% Present and reg'd and took free meals
2015/16	9.2	44.9	55.2
2014/15	9.7	47.9	61.2
2016/17	9.0	56.4	68.1

Table 3: Percentage of Aberdeen City Special school pupils registered and taking free school meals, 2014/15 to 2016/17

Year	Special School pupils		
	% School roll reg'd for free meals	% Reg'd and taking free meals	% Present and reg'd and took free meals
2016/17	30.8	90.9	100.0
2015/16	37.3	88.1	96.3
2014/15	41.4	83.6	96.6

¹ On 5 January 2015, the Scottish Government launched the extension of free school meals eligibility to include all children in Primary 1-3.

²Source: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-ducation/MealsSD/mealsped>

3.2 Pupil Equity Fund

- 3.2.1 As part of a recent Scottish Government Campaign £120 million has been provided to help raise attainment with a focus on supporting those children and young people who face barriers to their learning due to the impact of poverty, this funding is called Pupil Equity Funding.
- 3.2.2 The Scottish Government has committed to this funding as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge programme and is expected to be available each year for the lifetime of the current parliament. The funding will reach schools in every local authority area in Scotland and will be distributed based on the numbers of pupils in P1-S3 known to be eligible and registered for free school meals.
- 3.2.3 Pupil Equity Funding is provided on top of the existing £50m Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) funding and will continue to provide targeted support for those authorities and schools supporting children and young people in greatest need.
- 3.2.4 The overall aim of the Pupil Equity Funding campaign is to provide money to schools to help fund a wide range of resources and initiatives to support targeted pupils in achieving and close the poverty-related attainment gap.
- 3.2.5 The Pupil Equity Fund aims to improve the outcomes of some of the most vulnerable who are eligible for free school meals. Schools are guided to look at the needs of individuals and identify any barriers to their achievement.

The allocation of PEF funding for Aberdeen City for 2017/2018 is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: PEF 2017-18 – Allocated Funding and number of registered pupils, Primary, Secondary and Special

	Funds allocated	Total number of registered pupils
Primary	£2,120,400	1767
Secondary	£556,800	464
Special	£31,200	26
Total	£2,708,400	2257

- 3.2.6 During 2017/2018 a Pupil Equity Fund promotional campaign was delivered to schools through the production of posters, leaflets and letters to parents encouraging the registration for free school meals. Scottish Government provided additional top-up funding in 2018-19 to support closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Table 5: Allocated PEF 2018-19

	Funds allocated	Total number of pupils	Total Allocation including Top-up
Primary	£2,209,200	1841	£2,245,800
Secondary	£554,400	462	£557,520
Special	£39,600	33	£41,760
Total	£2,803,200	2336	£2,845,080

3.3 Additional Project Work 2017/2018 – Torry Free School Meal Initiative

3.3.1 The Torry Free School Meal Initiative aims to increase the registration and uptake of free school meals in Torry. Representatives in the initiative include head teachers, facilities staff, catering staff, education and communities teams and local charity, One Seed Forward.

3.3.2 Data collected for the Torry Locality Plan 2017–27 shows that 75% of Torry school children are in the most deprived quintile (20%) but less than 25% of P4–7 pupils are claiming free school meals, which is lower than comparable areas of the city. Evidence indicates a gap between the numbers of families living in poverty and those claiming free school meals. An increase in the uptake of free school meals is one of the priorities in the Torry Locality Plan and the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) makes clear ‘investing shared resources to target prevention and early intervention for children and young people is central to tackling inequality and improving life chances’. Staff in the community’s team has spoken with parents at parents’ evenings, parent council meetings and pupils during school meals as part of ongoing activities.

3.3.3 School staff and parents have identified the registration process as a potential barrier in parents signing up for free school meals. Parents of P4 – P7 pupils can build up arrears, at a significant cost to Aberdeen City Council because they are not bringing in their proof of entitlement as part of the registration process. Secondly, with parents failing to submit the necessary paperwork and register, schools are also losing out on Pupil Equity Funding (£1,200 per pupil) which is a valuable resource which could be used for addressing inequalities. There is a need for the current system to be updated and improved.

3.3.4 Future work for the Torry Free School Meals Initiative includes activities at Walker Road, Tullos Primary and Lochside Academy to increase the uptake of free school meals. Along with One Seed Forward at Tullos Primary we aim to run taster sessions with the pupils and parents. We aim to increase and broaden the scope of the initiative to include more partnership working with CFINE, Big Noise, and NHS to encompass the health, well-being and food

poverty aspects of the project. In order to progress with the uptake, it is necessary to make the free school meal registration process as easy and customer centric as possible.

3.4 Proposed Future Work - Children and Education Benefits Digital Initiative

- 3.4.1 The purpose of the Children and Education Benefits Digital Initiative Project is to increase the registration of free school meals, school and clothing grants and educational maintenance allowance (EMA) across Aberdeen City through digitalising and automating the registration process. The project is necessary to ensure that people are receiving the benefits that they are entitled to. Currently customers complete separate paper forms to apply for these benefits from Aberdeen City Council and subsequently provide proof of qualifying income level for each benefit. From data gathered across the city we know there are families living in poverty who are not in receipt of benefits of which they are entitled. This project aims to address inequalities and poverty that has a strategic fit with Aberdeen City Council's core purpose and values. There is a need to modernise and improve the current system that is outdated and arguably not fit for purpose.
- 3.4.2 There are many ways that automation and digitisation could achieve the specified outcomes. Being able to automatically award entitlement would be a way to increase uptake and the intention would be to investigate how this could be done. This would remove the need, for those customers that we already know are entitled, to apply and award the qualifying benefits automatically. Before this could be done analysis would be required to understand the specific data that is available and the restrictions on what it can be used for to ensure data-sharing and usage regulations are being met.
- 3.4.3 In addition, digitisation of the registration process could contribute to removing barriers to uptake by making it quicker and easier for those who are not automatically entitled and have to apply.
- 3.4.5 Some options are described below however further work would be required to understand what would be possible and how they could be achieved.
1. A first step to achieving this could look at combining the application process for school clothing grants and free school meals. Given the criteria for eligibility and the information gathered is similar this would reduce the number of forms that customers would need to complete and not having to provide supporting evidence multiple times.
 2. For school clothing grants there is potential to look at extending to re-award entitlement in subsequent years based on a prior application without the need to complete a new form.
 3. Look at the possibility of using existing data (Council data and DWP data) to identify those who are entitled but not receiving the benefits. At present there is some access to the data but there are restrictions on what it can be used for. Clarity would need to be given on what is stated in the declaration around the specific purpose of use.

4. In addition, if a person qualifies for housing benefit they qualify for a school clothing grant and further work would be required to understand whether the data can be used in this way to identify those entitled who are not in receipt of that benefit. An automated process could be implemented advising customers of entitlement and sending a Pay Point voucher. Alternatively, using the housing benefit data to send out completed forms for customers to sign and send back so that payments can be made.
 5. If a person claims housing benefit, the application should capture sufficient information to determine a school meal entitlement. A system of automation could be put in place to advise the applicant of their right to free school meals and give them the option to accept the benefit. A step further could be looking at the possibility to automatically credit a child's card with the value of free school meals meaning they wouldn't have to do anything.
 6. Digitising the housing benefit application form and adding consent asking customers to agree to receive free school meals, school clothing grants and education maintenance allowance.
- 3.4.6 By looking at the potential options above, other potential options and digitising and automating where possible, could remove the stigma and reluctance to the take up of these benefits.
- 3.4.7 The Children and Education Benefits Digital Initiative project has a strategic fit with Aberdeen City Council's commitment to ensuring all of its customers receive all services/ entitlements to which they are entitled and contributes to the Council's aspiration to tackle poverty, inequalities and reducing the attainment gap in the city.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are positive financial implications resulting from increasing the number of parents and carers registering their child for free school meals. Pupil equity funding is allocated on the basis of £1,200 per child registered. All local authorities are currently planning to maximise their free school uptake and if we do not take similar action our allocation could be reduced.
- 4.2 Some parents are building up considerable arrears, at a significant cost to Aberdeen City Council. If the parents of P4 – P7 pupils do not provide their children with a packed lunch or money for school dinners, the school catering staff will still give the child a school meal. This is because they have a duty to ensure that no child goes hungry at school. Whilst parents are then asked to pay for this, many can't and the arrears are met from school funds.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

	Risk	Low (L), Medium (M), High (H)	Mitigation
Financial	Loss of Scottish Government available income to schools	H	Implementation of an automated digital service which leads to automatic registration of all eligible children.
Legal	None	L	None
Employee	Reduced allocation of PEF limits the targeted interventions that can be provided to support children.	M	Implementation of an automated digital service which leads to automatic registration of all eligible children.
Customer	Children are disadvantaged and not offered target supports required in order to close attainment gap.	H	Implementation of an automated digital service which leads to automatic registration of all eligible children.
Environment	None	L	None
Technology	Data protection.	H	Ensuring GDPR regulations are fully adhered to.
Reputational	Not effectively addressing the Pupil Equity Funding agenda could present a reputational risk to the Council in terms of how effectively it works to close the poverty related attainment gap. Effectively close monitoring of impact will enable the Council to positively report on progress made in closing the poverty related attainment gap.	H	Implementation of an automated digital service which leads to automatic registration of all eligible children.

7. OUTCOMES

Local Outcome Improvement Plan Themes	
	Impact of Report
Prosperous Economy	Securing the total funds available from the Scottish Government Pupil Equity Fund. Implementing improvement in attainment will help break the cycle of deprivation and support developing the young workforce. These changes will positively impact on our economy and support the theme of Aberdeen Prospers.
Prosperous People	Allowing interventions to be sourced and implemented to secure closing the poverty attainment related gap. This approach has potential to significantly and positively impact on a number of individuals as support will be tailored to their very individual needs.
Prosperous Place	The plans take account of local need and will have a positive impact on individual communities across Aberdeen City.
Enabling Technology	The digitisation of a service.

Design Principles of Target Operating Model	
	Impact of Report
Customer Service Design	Allows schools to access all available funds from the pupil equity fund.
Organisational Design	Increased allocation of PEF will allow partners to collaborate in planning targeted interventions for children and young people.
Governance	Quality assurance processes ensure that PEF spending is linked directly to improving outcomes for children.
Workforce	The workforce will have increased access to resource to support vulnerable learners.
Process Design	Digitisation of the service will bring significant efficiencies to current process.
Technology	Digitisation of the service.
Partnerships and Alliances	Partners help shape interventions provided through PEF.

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Equality & Human Rights Impact Assessment	Full EHRIA required

Privacy Impact Assessment	Required
<u>Children's Rights Impact Assessment/Duty of Due Regard</u>	Applicable

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

10. APPENDICES

None.

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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