

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education Operational Delivery
DATE	6 November 2018
REPORT TITLE	Impact of Free School Meals Workstreams
REPORT NUMBER	RES/18/180
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR	Lynn Scanlon and Catriona Walker
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To outline the actual and likely impact of current and future workstreams for ensuring maximum registration and uptake of free school meals.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee:

- 2.1 Note the impact of current work which have focussed on raising awareness;
- 2.2 Approve the proposed work streams for ensuring maximum registration and uptake of free school meals through continued raising awareness and collaboration and use of digital; and
- 2.3 Instruct the Chief Operating Officer to ensure that functions across the Council collaborate to deliver and monitor planned work in order to maximise the number of families registering for free school meals.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1. A report was brought to the Education Operational Delivery Committee in April 2018 outlining how the council could increase the registration and subsequent uptake of free school meals. It was requested that a further Committee report would be presented to keep Elected Members sighted on progress.
- 3.2. **Promotional Campaign in Schools**
During 2017/2018 a PEF promotional campaign was delivered to schools through the production of posters, leaflets and letters to parents encouraging the registration for free school meals.

3.2.1 This promotion realised a slight increase in registration (from 2257 to 2336) which subsequently realised an increase in Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) from £2,708,400 in 2017/18 to £2,803,200 in 2018/2019.

3.2.2 The allocation of PEF funding for Aberdeen City is shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: PEF 2017/18 – Allocated funding and number of registered pupils, Primary, Secondary and Special

School Sector	Funds allocated	Total number of registered pupils
Primary	£2,120,400	1,767
Secondary	£556,800	464
Special	£31,200	26
Total	£2,708,400	2,257

Table 2: PEF 2018/19 - Allocated funding and number of registered pupils, Primary, Secondary and Special

School Sector	Funds allocated	Total number of pupils	Total Allocation including Top-up
Primary	£2,209,200	1,841	£2,245,800
Secondary	£554,400	462	£557,520
Special	£39,600	33	£41,760
Total	£2,803,200	2,336	£2,845,080

3.2.3 This suggests the Pupil Equity Fund promotional campaign has started to raise awareness of the benefits of registration and has encouraged families to register although there is still more to be done.

3.3 Awareness Raising Initiatives for 2018/2019

There will be a need for on-going awareness raising and a range of initiatives are proposed to continue to encourage the uptake of free school meals over session 2018/2019. These include:

- Education and Catering Services providing a free schools meals leaflet and poster to all schools advertising Free School meals and the PEF so that the benefits of registration can continue to be promoted in schools.
- Education and Communications have updated the School Meals page on the council's website. This update includes guidance on how to register for Free School Meals and additional information on the PEF and will be an important source of information to link other channels of communication to.

- Education and Communications have scheduled posts on Social Media throughout 2018 and into school year 2018/2019. This approach takes account of how many parents choose to utilise social media to engage with the work of the school and council services. Posts on Twitter and Facebook highlight registering for Free School Meals and the subsequent benefits of registering and uptake. The posts contain links to the council's website Free School Meals registration page.
- Schools have been contacted to create short videos highlighting Free School Meals and promoting on individual school websites. Parents and carers consistently engage positively with media developed by and featuring pupils and it is thought that this approach will reach a high number of parents and carers.
- Free School Meals registration is now also advertised on the School Menu that is provided via hard copy to all Primary School pupils.

3.3.1 It is clear that although awareness raising will continue to be important, solely raising awareness will not realise the increase in registration we would aspire for and that further avenues are required.

3.4. Partnership Collaboration – Torry Free School Meal initiative

It will be important to fully capitalise on the knowledge and skills of a range of partners to both understand barriers to registration and consider how best to remove them. An increase in the uptake of free school meals is one of the priorities in the Torry Locality Plan and a partnership project team has been established to address the issue of low registration.

3.4.1 The project team consists of head teachers, facilities staff, catering staff, education, community teams and local charity, One Seed Forward and most recently CFine. This collaborative approach is enabling knowledge to be shared more effectively and skill sets to be pooled.

3.4.2 Data collected for the Torry Locality Plan 2017–18 shows that 75% of Torry school children are living in the most deprived quintile (20%) which could be an indicator that many are eligible for free school meals. Less than 25% of P4–7 pupils are claiming free school meals. This is a lower rate than comparable areas of the city.

3.4.3 The multi-disciplinary team of council staff and partners has been collaborating to test approaches to increase registration. Work to date has included:

- Awareness and sign up sessions with pupils and parents at both primary schools.
- Tutor time sessions with Academy pupils to complete free school meals application forms to take home for signing from parents.

- Taster sessions and theme days with the children to encourage them to have more school lunches which includes working with community growing spaces.

3.4.4 Over the period October 2017 – April 2018 there were 21 additional registrations in Torry with a PEF value of £25,200. Importantly this is proportionately higher increase than in other communities suggesting that there is added value by working in partnership.

3.4.5 Phase two of the initiative will focus on increasing the uptake of free school meals for those registered through testing the use of rewards, monitoring the uptake of media campaigns and tasting sessions. The group also plan to engage with pupils and parents to identify the barriers to uptake. An unintended consequence of the project has been closer collaboration and partnership working and the multi-disciplinary team look forward to continuing to work with families on this and a range of initiatives to support the health and wellbeing of the community and address food poverty.

3.4.6 It is thought that successful approaches could be scaled up across the wider council.

3.5 Application/Registration Improvements

With modest success resulting from awareness raising, there is a need to explore other means of increasing the uptake of free school meals.

3.5.1 Currently customers complete a paper form to apply for Free School Meals providing proof of qualifying income level for this benefit. From data gathered across the City, there are families living in poverty who are not in receipt of Free School Meals which they are entitled to. There is a need to modernise and improve the application process to make it easier to access Free School Meals.

3.5.2 A review has been carried out to identify the appropriate touch points that could be used to register those who are eligible, this would make registration seem automatic and not rely on an additional process.

3.5.3 This has identified an opportunity for increased uptake through adding Free School Meals to the existing paper claim form for council tax reduction and housing benefit. As a result, progress is being made to add the additional information required to the council tax reduction and housing benefit paper claim forms, specifically pupil name(s), pupil date of birth and pupil school. It is likely this will be in place by 1st December 2018.

3.5.4 Those who qualify will have the entitlement backdated in line with the entitlement/claim date. Currently, it isn't possible to quantify the expected increase in uptake but Officers will monitor progress carefully over the period 1st December 2018 to 5th July 2019 to determine next steps.

3.5.5 There are other entitlements that could be applied through this touch point, such as Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs), School Clothing Grants (SCG) and Access to Leisure. These are currently being evaluated to establish the feasibility of including them to simplify the application process for families. This

streamlining will ensure that this approach is fully in keeping with the Councils 'Towards a Fairer Aberdeen' strategy.

- 3.5.6 An additional touch point is when parent and carers apply for a school place, be that in primary one or any other year group (primary or secondary). Analysis is being carried out on the potential to add Free School Meals registration to the digitised application for a school place process that will be launched in January 2019. This presents a further opportunity to increase uptake.
- 3.6. The digitisation of the Free School Meals application process is being progressed through the Digital First programme and is expected to be delivered by March 2019. This will contribute to removing barriers to uptake by making it quicker and easier for those who are applying. If deemed to be feasible, Officers will monitoring the impact on the update of free school meals through this route to inform next steps.
- 3.7 Officers across various functions are confident that digitisation will increase the uptake of free school meals and will collectively evaluate the impact of changes from December 2018.

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. PEF is allocated on the basis of £1,200 per child registered. All local authorities are currently planning to maximise their free school registration and uptake and if we do not take similar action our allocation could be reduced.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct 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	Increase uptake through registration at the appropriate touch points. Identify budget for potential additional costs
	Increased uptake has the potential need to	H	

	purchase additional catering equipment		
Legal	None	L	None
Employee	<p>Reduced allocation of PEF limits the targeted interventions that can be provided to support children.</p> <p>Increased uptake has the potential for the need to increase catering staffing levels.</p>	<p>M</p> <p>M-H</p>	<p>Increase uptake through registration at the appropriate touch points.</p> <p>Identify budget for potential additional costs</p>
Customer	Children are disadvantaged and not offered target supports required in order to close attainment gap.	H	Increase uptake through registration at the appropriate touch points.
Environment	Increased uptake puts further pressure on already congested dining areas	M-H	Identify budget for potential additional costs
Technology	Data Protection	H	Ensuring GDPR regulations are fully adhered to.
Reputational	<p>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.</p> <p>Effectively close monitoring of impact will enable the Council to positively report on progress made in closing the poverty related attainment gap.</p>	H	Increase uptake through registration at the appropriate touch points.

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 Pupil Equity Fund
Organisational Design	Increased registration of free school meals will increase allocation of PEF and 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	<i>Full EHRIA required</i>
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<i>Required</i>
Duty of Due Regard / Fairer Scotland Duty	<i>Applicable</i>

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

10. APPENDICES

None

11. REPORT AUTHORS CONTACT DETAILS

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