

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Committee
DATE	4 July 2023
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Free School Meals Annual Update
REPORT NUMBER	CUS/23/172
DIRECTOR	Andy MacDonald
CHIEF OFFICER	Jacqui McKenzie
REPORT AUTHOR	Paul Tytler
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To bring a report to Committee prior to the close of each school year (a) detailing the numbers registered for and taking free school meals by school and (b) assessing the progress made by implementing the new workstreams and detailing any required adjustments for the following school year.

2. RECOMMENDATION

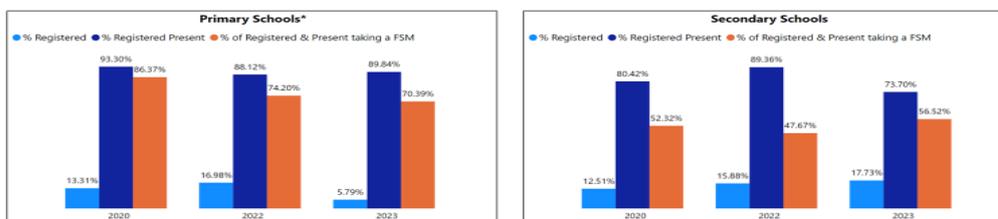
That the Committee -

- 2.1 Notes the progress in Free School Meal provision and actions to continue developing uptake.

3. Free School Meals 2022/23

- 3.1 The number of children registered for free school meals is 3617 based on low income and 9569 based on P1-5 entitlement (the figures for 2022/23 are still to be verified). The overall position in primary and secondary schools is as follows:

PLEASE NOTE: Figures for 2023 have not yet been validated.



Information on the uptake by school is attached at appendices 1 and 2.

- 3.2 Scottish Government have committed to completing the roll out of universal free school meals to all Primary School pupils within the current parliamentary term. Expansion of entitlement to free school meals to P6-7 is planned for 2025/26, but no date has yet been confirmed. It is expected that those families in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment will be phased in first. Enabling works in school kitchens and dining spaces are required to ensure schools are suitably equipped to deliver the expected increase in meal numbers. Some capital funding was allocated by Scottish Government in 2022/23 with further funding to follow in 2023/24.
- 3.3 Schools encouraged families to register for free school meals and the number of registrations has increased. The universal roll out of free school meals has made close tracking of uptake for direct comparison challenging.
- 3.4 The increase in entitlement of primary school children up to P5 makes annual comparison of progress difficult. While there have been increases at schools in priority neighbourhoods, increases have been seen across schools in the city, including those in areas out with priority neighbourhoods.
- 3.5 Improvement in registrations has been realised through changes to benefits awarding systems. Claimants of housing benefit and council tax reduction are now automatically awarded the free school meal benefit.
- 3.6 Uptake of free school meals varies considerably from school to school and the school catering service are working with local schools to better understand the factors guiding children and young people to not take up their entitlement. According to the most recent data from the Healthy Living Survey, the percentage uptake in Primary schools currently sits at 69.6% and only 47.7% in secondary schools.
- 3.7 Further work required in 2023/24:
 - 3.7.1 Continued work with parents to ensure registrations and uptake continues to increase in light of the ongoing cost of living crisis.
 - 3.7.2 Continued work across services to ensure our benefit and claim systems continue to ease the process of taking up entitlement, with the auto award of Free School Meals (and School Clothing Grants).
 - 3.7.3 Testing the approach to support uptake of free school meals through the provision of a food pod at St Machar Academy. Design work is underway and this project will now link with wider developments in the playground, with installation of the food pod planned for the Easter holiday in 2024.
 - 3.7.4 Cashless catering has been introduced which enables parents with their children to pre-book meals up to three weeks in advance and the impact on uptake of free school meals will be monitored.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no new financial implications arising from this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no new legal implications arising from this report.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	N/A			
Compliance	N/A			
Operational	There is a risk that families will experience food poverty	We will continue to monitor effectiveness of systems and processes to maximise registrations and uptake of free school meals	L	Yes
Financial	There is a risk of reduced income due to fewer school meals being paid for	Scottish Government Grant funding and monitoring of impact on budgets	L	Yes
Reputational	N/A			
Environment / Climate	N/A			

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	The uptake of free school meals will impact on stretch outcome 1 – No one will suffer from poverty by 2026
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	Maximising uptake of free school meal entitlement will contribute to stretch outcome 6 - By meeting the health and emotional wellbeing needs of our care experienced children and young people they will have the same levels of attainment in education and positive destinations as their peers by 2026.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1

[Free School Meals Annual Update 2021/22 CUS/22/87 EODC 14 June 2022](#)

11. Appendices

- 11.1 Appendix 1 – Free School Meals Primary Schools
Appendix 2 – Free School Meals Secondary Schools

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