

The Highland Council

Education , Children and Adult Services Committee 28th August 2014

Agenda Item	15.
Report No	ECAS/32/14

Introduction of Universal Free School Meals for Primary 1-3 Pupils

Report by Director of Care and Learning

Summary

This report updates members on the progress to date in relation to the Universal Introduction of Free School Meals for all Primary 1-3 pupils from January 2015.

1. Background

- 1.1 Following the last report to Adult and Children Services Committee, 19th February 2014 (item 15) informing members of the introduction of free school meals for Primary 1-3 pupils, and the related implications, consultation has taken place with COSLA and Scottish Government and all Highland Primary Schools
- 1.2 Communications have been ongoing with COSLA and Scottish Government in gathering and providing information related to estimated impending revenue costs and capital requirements for the introduction of free school meals.
- 1.3 During the last weeks of the school term, an electronic survey was carried out, to gather information for Primary 1-3 in relation to each year group: pupil numbers; school uptake; free school meal uptake and related questions in regards to the impact of the introduction of free school meals that each individual primary school would have. Results have now enabled estimates of impact to be more precise, allowing further work on financial impact to take place; providing more detail on staffing requirements; accommodation and teaching and learning implications.
- 1.4 On the return of schools after the summer break, works will now progress on site by site options and feasibility, in discussion with Head Teachers and other relevant stakeholders.

2. Funding

- 2.1 Additional revenue funding from Scottish Government has been confirmed as £0.793m 2014/15 rising to £2.595m in 2015/16. Based on the survey work to date, the service anticipates that this funding will be sufficient to cover the addition revenue costs associated with initial implementation. This position will be kept under review as detailed site by site implementation plans are developed, and the longer-term implications can be assessed.

- 2.2 Capital funding is in the final stages of discussions with COSLA and Scottish Government, and it is understood that the Council may receive notification of the expected capital funding in the next few weeks. Representatives from both COSLA and Scottish Government visited 2 Inverness primary schools at the end of July. This visit was welcomed and provided visual evidence and productive dialogue with all parties, and reference to impact on accommodation and service delivery matters associated with the free school meals provision.

3. Survey Results and Impact

- 3.1 In the vast majority of the Council's 169 primary schools, the implementation of free school meals can be achieved through additional sittings; provision of additional furniture; the feasibility of lunch time experience being part of teaching and learning; finding adequate areas within other parts of the school for packed lunches. Additional resources would be put in place to support these changes i.e. additional supervision and cleaning arrangements; additional serving points; additional catering equipment.
- 3.2 The survey confirmed that around 30 schools are most significant in terms of the consequences of increased uptake, particularly in relation to capacity within dining and kitchen space. Some level of capital investment will be necessary within these 30 schools, ranging from additional equipment and minor building alterations, through to potential building extensions to provide extra capacity. At the upper end of desktop estimates, a limited number of sites may require capital investment of up to £0.750m per site.
- 3.3 In considering options, the Council will of course wish to ensure it explores the most cost effective solutions available. Consideration will be given to the currently used model of production kitchens preparing meals for more than one school, and whether extension of that model may be an option for consideration.
- 3.4 Capital investment solutions of course will take time to progress, and may not be appropriate in all locations. Therefore all parties will have to agree local solutions that may have to be put in place. There are around 15 schools which could face a 50%+ increase in the number of meals to be served in each day. There will be a need for flexibility and pragmatism on the part of all stakeholders, in relation to these solutions which may need to be considered, both in the short and long-term. The short term solutions may include; additional sittings, extension of the lunch time, use of other rooms for packed lunches.
- 3.5 The Council has 11 schools with no current school meals provision. Seven of these have a total 43 primary 1-3 pupils (as at May 2014) with 7 pupils with existing free school meal entitlements. Historically, arrangements at these locations for entitled families are that they are paid the economic daily rate for when the pupils were in attendance. Discussions are ongoing with Scottish Government and Cosla officials to understand what flexibility in the new policy

may exist in such locations, where there will be significant practical and financial constraints in providing meals.

- 3.6 While the focus of activity remains the direct impact arising from P1-3 pupils, there may be wider and longer-term implications which will be considered as part of the implementation and subsequent monitoring of uptake e.g. potential increased uptake from P4-7 pupils and secondary sector as a result of younger family members in P1-3 now receiving free school meals. Also the longer-term effect for future P4s and upwards who will have benefitted from school meals being the norm at the start of their education.

3.7 Next steps:

- 3.7.1 A project co-ordinator has been appointed and will take up post on 18th August. One of the main tasks will be to assist the management team in the implementation of this initiative.
- 3.7.2 Discussions will take place initially with head teachers where they have most impact on service delivery and teaching and learning issues, within their school. Communications and visits where appropriate will take place at the commencement of the new term later this month.

4. Timetable

- 4.1 At the time of writing there are 16 weeks of school days to the initiation of the project. Key tasks are summarised as follows:
- Site by site options and feasibility – August to October following which short and longer term arrangements will be agreed.
 - New staffing ratios have been considered and will be put in place during the months of November and December with new appointments and /or additional hours commencing in January 2015. This will be closely monitored and reviewed as the implementation progresses.
 - New heavy and light equipment, furniture and contract arrangements will be put in place by end of 2014.
 - Families and carers will be informed of new arrangements. Although they will be entitled to free school meals for children in primary 1-3, if they are entitled under the benefits scheme they will still have to apply in the normal process by completing the free school meals and clothing grant application. This will ensure all other benefits including the clothing grant are paid out to all entitled. A communication strategy will be put in place to ensure all stakeholders are informed of the new arrangements and entitlements well before January 2015.
- 4.2 An update will be provided to the November Committee on progress with implementation, by which time the outcome of the site by site options and implementation arrangements will be known.

5. Implications

- 5.1 **Resources** - additional revenue funding as set out in paragraph 2.1 will be utilised to provide FSM for P1-3. Capital implications are still being assessed with confirmation of the level of funding available expected within the next few weeks. Further details on financial implications will be provided to the November Committee.
- 5.2 **Legal** – No legal implications to highlight at this time. Further discussion with Scottish Government and COSLA officials ongoing to ensure the Council's proposals meet policy and legislative intentions.
- 5.3 **Equalities** – The implementation will introduce FSM across all primary 1-3 pupils
- 5.4 **Climate Change/Carbon Clever** - service delivery procedures and practises support climate change and Carbon Clever
- 5.5 **Risk** – the main risk relates to the challenge of the January 2015 implementation. As highlighted within the report, short term solutions will be progressed where longer term solutions, particularly those requiring capital investments will take longer to progress. At the time of writing the report the capital costs and potential funding available from Scottish Government are not finalised.
- 5.6 **Gaelic and Rural implications** – Gaelic menus are provided, bringing more employment to local schools where required.

<h2>6. Recommendation</h2>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">6.1 Members are asked to note the progress in relation to the implementation of free school meals to all Primary 1-3 pupils from January 2015 |
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Designation: Director of Care and Learning

Date: 18 August 2014

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Background Papers:

Adult and Children Services Committee Report, 19th February 2014, item 15