CITY OF YORK COUNCIL

Notice of a public meeting of

Children, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Committee

To: Councillors Nicholls (Chair), Clarke (Vice-Chair), Crawshaw, Cullwick, Cuthbertson, Knight, Nelson, K Taylor, Waller, and Wilson

Date: Tuesday, 5 November 2024

Time: 5.30 pm

Venue: West Offices - Station Rise, York YO1 6GA

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence**
   To receive and note apologies for absence.

2. **Declarations of Interest** (Pages 1 - 2)
   At this point in the meeting, Members are asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interest or other registerable interest they might have in respect of business on this agenda, if they have not already done so in advance on the Register of Interests. The disclosure must include the nature of the interest.

   An interest must also be disclosed in the meeting when it becomes apparent to the member during the meeting.

   [Please see attached sheet for further guidance for Members]

3. **Minutes** (Pages 3 - 10)
   To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2024.

4. **Public Participation**
    At this point in the meeting members of the public who have registered to speak can do so. Members of the public may speak on agenda items or on matters within the remit of the committee.

    Please note that our registration deadlines are set as 2 working days before the meeting, in order to facilitate the management of public participation at our meetings. The deadline for registering at this meeting is **5:00pm on Friday, 1 November 2024.**

    To register to speak please visit www.york.gov.uk/AttendCouncilMeetings to fill in an online registration form. If you have any questions about the registration form or the meeting, please contact Democratic Services. Contact details can be found at the foot of this agenda.

    Webcasting of Public Meetings

    Please note that, subject to available resources, this meeting will be webcast including any registered public speakers who have given their permission. The meeting can be viewed live and on demand at www.york.gov.uk/webcasts.

    During coronavirus, we made some changes to how we ran council meetings, including facilitating remote participation by public speakers. See our updates (www.york.gov.uk/COVIDDemocracy) for more information on meetings and decisions.

5. **Free School Meals Pilot Year Review**   (Pages 11 - 72)
    This report updates members on the implementation of the York Hungry Minds project.

6. **Locality Model - York Neighbourhood Model**   (Pages 73 - 92)
    This report informs members on work taking place to develop a neighbourhood working or 'Integrated Neighbourhood Team' Model, as a way of delivering improved outcomes for individuals, for communities, and for the wider system of services in the city.

7.   Work Plan   (Pages 93 - 96)

Members are asked to consider the Committee's work plan for the 2024/25 municipal year.

8.   Urgent Business

Any other business which the Chair considers urgent under the Local Government Act 1972.

Democratic Services Officer

Reece Williams
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For more information about any of the following please contact the Democratic Services Officer responsible for servicing this meeting:

- Registering to speak
- Business of the meeting
- Any special arrangements
- Copies of reports and
- For receiving reports in other formats

Contact details are set out above.

This information can be provided in your own language.

我們也用您們的語言提供這個信息 (Cantonese)

এই তথ্য আপনার নিজের ভাষায় দেয়া যেতে পারে। (Bengali)

Ta informacja może być dostarczona w twoim własnym języku. (Polish)

Bu bilgiyi kendi dilinizde almanız mümkündür. (Turkish)

(Urdu) یہ معلومات آپ کی اپنی زبان (بولی) میں بھی مہیا کی جاسکتی ہیں۔

☎ (01904) 551550

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Agenda Item 2

Declarations of Interest – guidance for Members

(1)   Members must consider their interests, and act according to the following:

Type of Interest	You must
Disclosable Pecuniary Interests	Disclose the interest, not participate in the discussion or vote, and leave the meeting <u>unless</u> you have a dispensation.
Other Registrable Interests (Directly Related) **OR** Non-Registrable Interests (Directly Related)	Disclose the interest; speak on the item <u>only if</u> the public are also allowed to speak, but otherwise not participate in the discussion or vote, and leave the meeting <u>unless</u> you have a dispensation.
Other Registrable Interests (Affects) **OR** Non-Registrable Interests (Affects)	Disclose the interest; remain in the meeting, participate and vote <u>unless</u> the matter affects the financial interest or well-being: (a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interest or well-being of a majority of inhabitants of the affected ward; and (b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest. In which case, speak on the item <u>only if</u> the public are also allowed to speak, but otherwise do not participate in the discussion or vote, and leave the meeting <u>unless</u> you have a dispensation.

(2)   Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to the Member concerned or their spouse/partner.

(3)   Members in arrears of Council Tax by more than two months must not vote in decisions on, or which might affect, budget calculations, and must disclose at the meeting that this restriction applies to them. A failure to comply with these requirements is a criminal offence under section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

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City of York Council	Committee Minutes

Meeting	Children, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date	1 October 2024
Present	Councillors Nicholls (Chair), Cullwick [until 6:54pm], Cuthbertson, K Taylor, Waller, Mason (Substitute for Cllr Knight) [from 5:56pm-7:05pm], Melly (Substitute for Cllr Wilson), Rose (Substitute for Cllr Crawshaw), and Whitcroft (Substitute for Cllr Clarke)
Apologies	Councillors Clarke, Crawshaw, Knight, Nelson, and Wilson
In attendance	Councillor Webb [from 6:42pm] – Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
Officers in attendance	Martin Kelly – Director of Children and Education Richard Hartle – Head of Children and Education Finance Dan Bodey – School Inclusion Advisor Barbara Mands – Head of Education Support Service Kerry Lee – Wraparound Project Officer Dawn Wood – Early Years and Childcare Programme Reforms Lead Karron Young – Virtual School Headteacher

15.   Declarations of Interest (5:32pm)

Members were asked to declare at this point in the meeting any disclosable pecuniary interest or other registerable interest they might have in respect of business on the agenda if they had not already done so in advance on the Register of Interests. Councillor Cuthbertson declared an interest in that he was in the process of being appointed to the role of director at a charity for SEND. Councillor Mason declared an interest in relation to item 6, Early Year and Childcare Reforms, regarding his employment and noted that he would not participate in discussion for this item.

16.   Minutes (5:33pm)

Resolved: That the minutes of the meetings of the committee held on 5 September 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

- That minute no. 9 be amended to read: "Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 2 July 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record."

17.   Public Participation (5:33pm)

It was reported that there had been one registration to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

Flick Williams spoke on item 5, School Attendance, and stated that an obsession over attendance statistics damaged children's opportunities for attainment, she continued to say that health and illness can prevent children from attending school, and that long-covid was a big contributor to this. As schools were a big contributor to illness, many children could catch illness several times a year, effecting their attendance. Due to policies in place, Flick mentioned that absences were also resulting in the sourcing of a high number of supply teachers.

18.   Finance and Performance Q1 (5:37pm)

The Head of Children and Education Finance presented the report and in response to questions from members, the Head of Children and Education Finance, and the Director of Children and Education confirmed that:

- City of York Council (CYC) had more difficulty than larger Local Authorities (LAs) to react quickly to loss of staff and therefore was required to rely on agency workers short-term to help fill gaps in the workforce. Reliance on agency workers was under control and number of agency workers at CYC had decreased significantly.
- Over years, expenditure for Children Looked After (CLA) had increased over the budget that had been set, and an extra £1.6m of funding, resulted from growth, had been invested to address this issue, along with the issue of inflationary costs. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) were funded via Government funds, and thus when deducted from the statistics for CLA, expenditure was much closer to the budgeted cost.

- Growth had been invested into the Home to School Transport budget as this had been reduced over years and had therefore demonstrated overspends. Investigations were ongoing into more appropriate, cost effective means of transport to address this. A high amount of investment into this budget was eaten up by inflation.
- The projected overspend for the Home to School Transport budget was £620k, to address this an extra £730k of growth had been invested for 2024-2025.
- A lack of professional child psychologists put pressure on LAs as every Education, Health and Care Plan (ECHP) needed an educational psychology assessment.

Resolved: That the committee:

i. Noted the finance and performance information.
ii. Noted that work would continue on identifying the savings needed to fully mitigate the forecast overspend.

Reason: To ensure expenditure was kept within the approved budget.

19.   School Attendance (6:16pm)

The School Inclusion Advisor presented the report and noted that CYC had an established, permanent attendance team which helped York to have a more improved persistent absence rate than the national average. He acknowledged that there were several barriers to school attendance, and that individual schools had responsibility for understanding this. It was noted that work was ongoing with external partners such as Raise York and the Safeguarding Partnership in building neuro-diverse inclusive schools.

In response to questions from members, the School Inclusion Advisor, and the Director of Children and Education confirmed that:

- Schools were continuing to work with national guidance on attendance and illness. This involved guidance from health professionals and NHS advice regarding illness such as long-covid.
- CYC had seen an increase in elective home education, but CYC's figures were still below the national average.

- From August 2024 CYC were able to draw live comparative data on school figures in order to obtain a clearer view of attendance across the city.
- There was an emphasis of focussing on the individual child, and moving away from the focus on numbers and figures.
- It was at the discretion of individual headteacher to authorise absence.
- Members would receive an invite when a date is confirmed for the launch of the Early Help Strategy, increasing access to early help mental health support.
- There was a need to investigate the metrics for calculating absence to find solutions to account for health and illness.
- Children entering elective home education usually did so due to SEN, mental health burnout, and health and anxiety reasons.
- Due to CYC's small size, percentages were not always a good way of understanding education figures as percentages could distort the real story.

Resolved: That the committee noted the content of this report and would receive further updates about progress on local implementation.

Reason: For members to understand the progress being made so far to prepare for successful local implementation so that families can benefit from the new early education entitlements and extended wraparound care.

20. Early Years and Childcare Reforms (6:56pm)

The Head of Education Support Service, Wraparound Project Officer, and Early Years and Childcare Programme Reforms Lead presented the report. It was noted that the reform national deadlines were tight and that delivery plans had been agreed with the Department for Education (DfE) to receive funding by the end of the summer term 2025. The DfE also had an ambition to open 3000 nursery places and to have a free school meals offer in every primary school.

In response to questions from members, the Head of Education Support Service, Wraparound Project Officer, and Early Years and Childcare Programme Reforms Lead confirmed that:

- The childcare market in York had been very responsive so far, and any capping of places resulted from to struggles to recruit. Investigations were ongoing into barriers for offering places with individual childcare providers, and the team were in the process of RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating providers to demonstrate where efforts of improvement and support could be focused.
- Mapping was ongoing to understand migration into, and out of wards in relation to childcare places.
- A national campaign, 'Do something big', had been setup in order to tackle national issues of staff recruitment and retention in childcare.
- CYC had made a request to the DfE to use funding for training, and CYC were looking to offer SEN training to workforces. CYC were working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and other partners to improve recruitment to the childcare sector.
- Up to £3k was available per place to be unlocked from the DfE funding, on top of an already secured funding amount of £10k to support the commissioning of specialist after school provision for children with complex needs.

A correction to the report was noted, in that "Hempland Without Ward", on page 46 of the agenda, should have read "Heworth Without Ward".

Resolved: That the committee noted the content of this report and received further updates about progress on local implementation.

Reason: For members to understand the progress being made so far to prepare for successful local implementation so that families can benefit from the new early education entitlements and extended wraparound care.

21. Virtual School Annual Report (7:33pm)

The Virtual School Headteacher presented the report and noted that the number of statutory school age children who were on the roll of the Virtual School had decreased from 187 last year to 165 this year.

The Virtual School Headteacher then highlighted that the Virtual School was seeing children stay more locally with stronger support networks and stable relationships. It was reported that most of York's children were in mainstream education where evidence demonstrated children were better supported, as a result of this more alternative provision was required to promote children staying in mainstream schools.

The Virtual School Headteacher then reported a success in that every school had reported Year 2 data to the Virtual School, of which schools were not obligated to do, and that Key Stage (KS) 4 outcomes were the best seen in recent years.

The Virtual School Headteacher then issued an update to the report, in that 8 young people had now achieved 5 GCSEs or more including English and Maths, an increase from 7 as indicated within the report.

In response to questions from members, the Virtual School Headteacher confirmed that:

- The Virtual School could only award the electronic PEP (Personal Education Plan) contract for three years and it is necessary for a new contract to be retendered during the 2024/25 academic year, the current provider could be re-awarded the contract.
- There were statutory inclusions for a PEP, and then bespoke amendments are then included following feedback.
- No children under the age of 16 were on a complete curriculum of alternate provision, but 29 children were receiving a blended curriculum offer.
- The offer of Skills Based Learning varied from school to school, most schools had access to a day of skills based learning alongside mainstream education, in the form of a BTEC course (Business and Technology Education Council) to take into post-16 education.

Resolved: That the committee received the Virtual School Annual report with view of a further update in the next academic year.

Reason: So that members were updated on the work of the Virtual School and exercising their duties as corporate parents.

22.   Work Plan (8:02pm)

Members discussed the committee's workplan and it was;

Resolved:

i. That the report on Digital Inclusion, originally scheduled for 5 November 2024, be deferred to the meeting scheduled for 14 January 2024.
ii. That Members considered the committee's work plan for the 2024/25 municipal year.

Reason: To have kept the committee's work plan for the 2024/25 municipal year updated.

Cllr Nicholls, Chair
[The meeting started at 5.32 pm and finished at 8.15 pm].

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CITY OF **YORK** COUNCIL

Children, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Committee   5 November 2024

Report of the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education

York Hungry Minds Project Update

Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to update the members of scrutiny on the implementation of the York Hungry Minds project. The members of scrutiny are asked to note the positive benefits of the pilot project, support the York Hungry Minds Project and to ask the Executive member to explore extending the project to two additional primary schools during 2025.

Background

2. In November 2023 the council's Executive agreed to implement a pilot project to extend Universal Free School Meals ("UFSM") to Key Stage 2 children. The project is designed to deliver on the Executive's election manifesto commitment to create a cross city alliance to address disadvantage and the cost-of-living crisis.

3. The pilot project has involved the implementation of an offer of universal free school lunches for KS2 children at Westfield Primary School and a whole school offer of free breakfasts at Burton Green Primary Academy. Both pilot projects began in January 2024.

4. The pilot projects have been supported by £100K of council funding and funding raised through the York Community Fund for the York Hungry Minds Project. This has included donations from The Persimmon Trust and The Sylvia and Colin Shepherd Charitable Trust.

5. The pilot project has focused on testing the delivery of UFSM in two contrasting schools. Westfield Primary is a large local authority maintained school and Burton Green Primary Academy is a smaller than average academy school. Both serve areas of the city with high percentages of children eligible for free school meals. At the outset the project has been designed as a test and learn project and this has been

achieved by choosing to focus on two methods of delivery and to look at two schools at different states of readiness with regards to their catering arrangements. The learning from the evaluations of the pilot projects is being used to inform the next stage of the implementation plan being developed by the York Hungry Minds Steering Group.

6. Both schools have reported positive benefits from being involved in the pilot projects and the evaluation reports provide quantitative and qualitative evidence about the impact of the pilot schemes. It is important to recognise that the interim evaluations have been completed at a relatively early stage in the project, however, a range of benefits are being identified even at this early stage.

7. The introduction of universal free school lunches to KS2 at Westfield has seen the take up of KS2 school lunches increase by 68.7% in the first two terms of the pilot (January to July). Over the first two terms of the pilot Burton Green has averaged 37 breakfast per day and served 3792 breakfasts between January and July.

8. At Westfield the costs of serving the additional meals over the period January to July has been £43,517.81. With a total cost of £4,090 for the breakfast offer at Burton Green over the same period of time. It is important to reflect on the scale of delivery in both schools as this accounts for the difference in costs. In both schools additional equipment has been needed and at Westfield additional catering staff have been needed. The circumstances of each school in the city varies in terms of number of pupils, costs of the delivery of school meals and the readiness of school kitchens and staffing to support the delivery of universal lunches or breakfasts. This has to be considered when scoping the scale up of the project to additional schools. An average cost of delivering the meals is difficult to generate as a result and will vary school by school.

9. The interim evaluation reports completed by researchers from the Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York (Annex A and B) provide rich data to evidence the impact of the pilots in both schools and both reports identify a range benefits from adopting a universal approach to school meals. There has been evidence of improved attendance and punctuality due to the school breakfast offer at Burton Green and both schools have seen evidence of improved behaviour as a result of children feeling less hungry.

10. Both projects are making an important contribution to tackling the impact of the cost-of-living crisis for families and the evidence from parent voice shows that the main concern is about the sustainability of the offer in the longer term.

11. Both interim evaluation reports conclude that the pilot is having a positive impact. The evidence from the report highlights the important role that the universal offer of free school meals makes towards supporting families on low incomes. The key concern highlighted in both reports is not about the rightness of the approach but about the longer-term sustainability of the offer. The pilot schools will continue to be supported until 2027 as this will provide security to the current project and will provide the opportunity to study and capture the impact of the project on educational outcomes over a longer period of time.

12. Further work is now taking place to extend the breakfast offer to two additional schools. This is being done in advance of the national pilot for primary school breakfast clubs. The rationale for this is that York has demonstrated the difference that a universal breakfast offer can make to children across a range of outcomes. The York Hungry Minds approach shows a commitment to a placed based initiative which has the potential to inform the development of future national policy.

Council Plan

13. The York Hungry Minds pilot project is delivering the Council's corporate priorities listed below:

   a. **Health** – the delivery of the pilot project is ensuring that primary age children receive a healthy breakfast or school meal, contributing to public health priorities to reduce childhood obesity and improve dental health;

   b. **Environment** – the delivery of the pilot project is being used to monitor the impact of food choices on reducing food waste and the assessment of school kitchens is being used to improve energy efficiency;

   c. **Affordability** – the provision of universal free school meals has ensured that children have access to a good quality meal regardless of their ability to pay, and;

d. **Human Rights and Equalities** – the pilot project has supported the human right to education and is addressing health inequalities through the provision of access to universal free school meals.

Recommendations

14. Members are asked to support the work of the York Hungry Minds Project and to ask that the Executive member for Children and Education continues to work with the steering group to expand to project to deliver breakfast at two additional schools during 2025.

    Reason: The expansion of the universal breakfast offer will provide valuable support to low income families and ensure that more children are able to gain the benefits achieved in the pilot schools.

Contact Details

Author:	**Chief Officer Responsible for the report:**
Maxine Squire	Martin Kelly
Assistant Director, Education and Skills	Corporate Director, Children and Education
01904 553007	**Report Approved** ✓ **Date** *24 October 2024*

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background papers

None.

Annexes

Annex A – FSM Pilot Interim Report, Eloise Tann, University of Leeds

Annex B - Interim Report UFSM Qualitative Findings, Aniela Wenham, Rebecca Kerr, Katherine Smith & John Hudson, University of York

Presentation: Documents to follow.

Abbreviations

UFSM – Universal Free School Meals.

Evaluation of the City of York Councils' Universal Free School Meal Pilot: Interim Report

1. Background

In the United Kingdom, 17% of all children live in food-insecure households (Francis-Devine, Danechi and Malik, 2023). Living with food insecurity during childhood has wide reaching impacts including reduced diet quality, poorer emotional wellbeing and worsened long-term physical health outcomes, including an increased risk of obesity (Food Foundation, 2023, Dean et al., 2023 and Yang et al., 2022). Additionally, hunger during the school day critically affects a child's readiness to learn, with lowered ability to concentrate often resulting in poorer behaviour and academic outcomes (Adolphus, Lawton and Dye, 2013 and Child Poverty Action Group, 2023). School food, both lunches and breakfasts, offer a practicable opportunity to reduce income-related diet inequalities and promote life-long wellbeing in children (The Food Foundation, 2021).

In England, school lunches are available free of charge to all key stage one (KS1) pupils, and to eligible pupils in key stage two (KS2) (GOV.UK, 2024). Pupils are generally eligible for free school meals (FSMs) if they come from a household that receives income-related benefits and has an annual income below £7,400 (GOV.UK, 2024). For ineligible pupils, the cost of a school meal can vary; in 2022 the average cost was £2.40 per day, however this is estimated to have risen to around £2.65 in 2023 (LACA, 2024).

A survey by Kellogg's in 2016 found that 85% of schools have a breakfast clubs (BC), or some form of breakfast provision (Kellogg's, 2016). A more recent survey in Leeds conducted in 2024 found that, 90% of primary schools had breakfast provision of some kind. Currently, support for school breakfast provision is largely provided by the National School Breakfast Programme (NSBP) - a government-led scheme to which schools with at least 40% of pupils from income-deprived areas can apply to receive a 75% subsidy for food and delivery costs - , or Magic Breakfast, a charity offering delivery of breakfast foods to eligible schools, in return for a membership fee (Magic Breakfast, 2023a). Many schools are unaware of these schemes, ineligible, or may choose not to make use of them. Some opt to run their own BC or use an external third-party, however for these, there is usually a cost to attend (Food, a fact of life, 2024). In 2024 the incoming government announced that funding would be provided to all schools to run free BCs (GOV.UK 2024e). This is a marked improvement to previous schemes where only eligible schools could receive assistance, and even then, the schools were still required to contribute towards costs. The logistics and practicality of how this scheme will be implemented are unknown, but likely to be moulded by the outcomes of pilot programmes around the country, and findings from the early adopter scheme (GOV.UK, 2024e).

To investigate the impact of providing universal school food, the City of York Council (CYC) is piloting two universal free school meal (UFSM) programmes at two primary schools in York. The first, looking at universal free school lunches is taking place at Westfield Primary Community School, and the second, looking at a universal free school BC at Burton Green Primary School. Both pilots began in January 2024 and are supported by funding from both the CYC and the York Community Funds' Hungry Minds Appeal. The aim of this interim report is to evaluate the first two terms of the pilot programmes using quantitative data from the two schools.

2. Methods

    i. Pilot Design

The BC at Burton Green was introduced to provide all pupils at the school with access to a free healthy breakfast each day. The introduction of this BC was designed so as not to compete with the schools existing before-school club, which costs £2 per day. The pilot BC starts later, beginning 20-minutes before the school day starts. The pilot BC does not aim to provide wrap-around childcare, but a healthy breakfast and soft-start to the school day. A weekly menu for the pilot is provided by the schools' caterers and runs on a fortnightly rotation. The offering is substantial and varied, including choices like baked beans on wholemeal toast, fruit-topped porridge and toasted bagels, each accompanied by fresh fruit, or juice. Persistent absentees, those who were often late, or other pupils who the school felt could benefit from the BC were encouraged to attend, however it is open to all pupils and attendance is optional.

The school lunch pilot provided universal access to free daily school lunches for all pupils at Westfield Primary School. Prior to the pilot, 177 pupils in KS2, or 36% of the school were required to pay £2.50 per day for a school meal, totalling £475 for a full year. Each day pupils had the choice of bringing a packed lunch from home, or choosing between a main meal, vegetarian main meal, filled jacket potato or cheese panini, all served with a daily side dish, vegetables, and dessert. The choices run on a 3-week termly rotation. The menus and food are provided by NYES Catering, who assure the foods compliance with Government School Food Standards.

    ii. Data collection & analysis

To reduce the burden on the schools, the impacts of the two pilots were evaluated using data routinely collected by the two schools. The two schools made this data accessible to researchers in an anonymous format. For the Burton Green BC pilot, available data comprised of each pupil's termly attendance and lateness, end-of-year academic attainment from years 2 and 6, termly behavioural data and number of pupils attending the breakfast club each day, as well as which pupils were regular attendees. Data from the Westfield school lunch pilot, consisted of each pupil's daily lunch choice, termly academic attainment data for all year groups and termly attendance as a percentage for each pupil. In addition, each school provided the gender, year group and FSMs eligibility status of each pupil. Comparisons between the pupils who are eligible for FSMs, and those who are not eligible are used to demonstrate any specific impacts that the pilot programmes may have on children from more socioeconomically deprived backgrounds. During the first two terms of the pilot, Burton Green had 121 pupils (54% girls, 46% boys) and Westfield had 470 pupils (50% boys, 50% girls). At both schools, approximately 36% of pupils were eligible for a free school meal in the 23/24 academic year which is above the national average of 24.6% (GOV.UK, 2024c).

Before data collection commenced, information sheets and consent forms were provided to all parents and guardians at each school, detailing the purpose of the evaluation, and how to opt-out. Opt-out consent was employed in this study to maximise the sample size and avoid the exclusion of pupils from lower socioeconomic groups who may be underrepresented when opt-in consent is used.

Ethical approval for this evaluation was granted by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) for Business, Environment and Social Sciences at The University of Leeds (Ethics Ref: 1388, awarded 26/06/2024).

3. Breakfast Club Pilot Findings (Burton Green Primary School)

i. Breakfast Uptake

Since the pilot began, the number of pupils attending the BC has increased, with an average of 32 (27% of all pupils at the school) attending each day in the spring term, and 40 (34%) in the summer. Figure 1 displays the daily number of pupils attending, as a percentage of all pupils on roll at the time. A total of 73 pupils (60% of the school) were identified by the school as BC attendees across the two terms the pilot has run so far, although not all attended every day. Pupils of all ages make use of the BC, however chi-squared analysis (Appendix 1) demonstrates a significant association between KS and FSM eligibility status, and likelihood of attending the BC (p=0.013). Significantly more KS2 pupils not eligible for FSMs attend the breakfast club than would be expected by chance (p=0.003).

Figure 2 shows the average BC attendance on each day of the week. Attendance is generally lowest on Mondays, with an average of 27% of all pupils attending, and rises steadily through the week to around 32% attendance on Thursdays and Fridays. This trend is consistent regardless of which of the food menus is on offer; attendance when week 1's menu is on offer was, on average, 30% of the school, and 31% with week 2's menu suggesting a similar trend in uptake regardless of the food on offer.
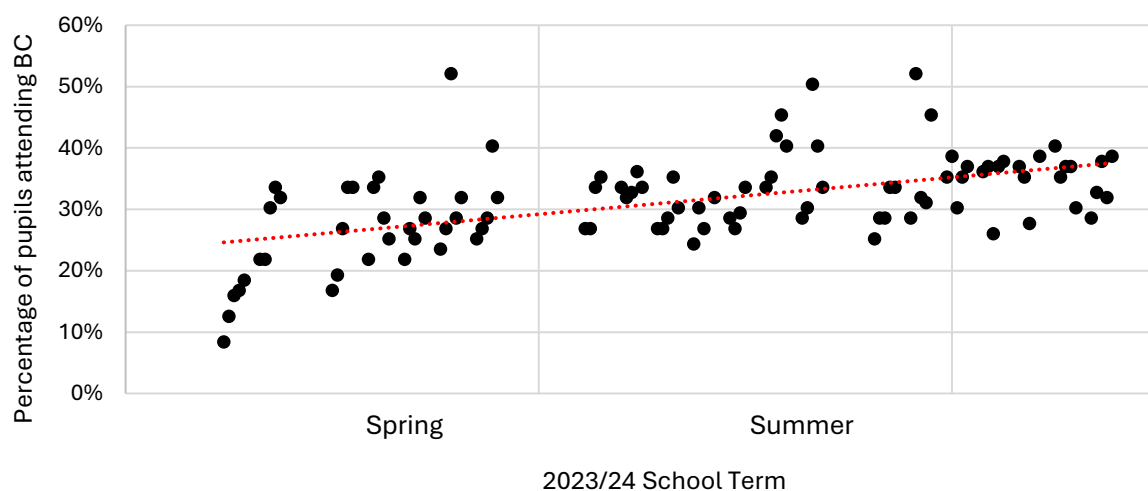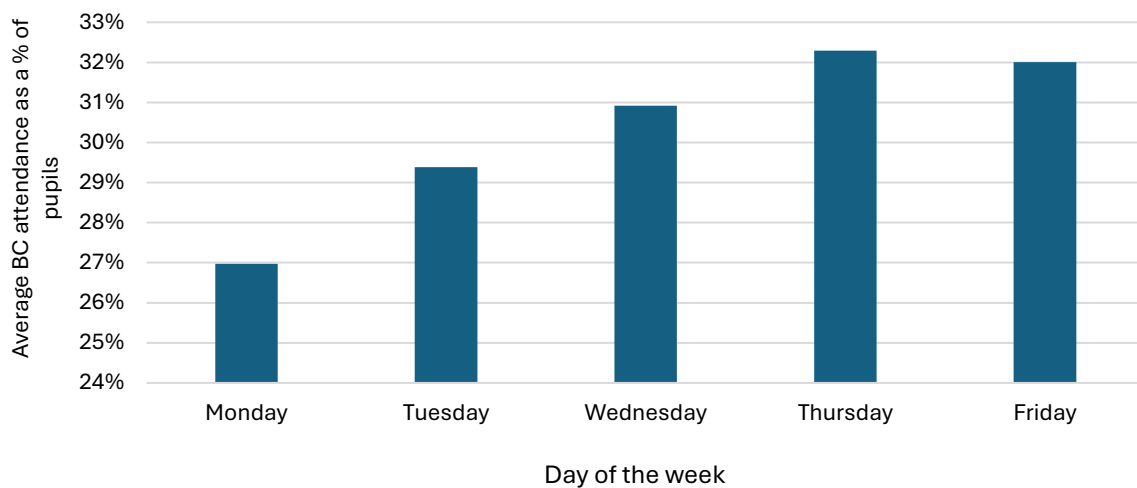

Figure 1. Daily breakfast club attendance as a percentage of students on roll (Burton Green)

Figure 2. Average breakfast club attendance shown per day of the week (Burton Green).

ii.   Lateness & Attendance

Overall school attendance rose slightly between the autumn and spring term, from 93.3% to 93.4%, before dropping in the summer to 91.2%, a trend similar to nationwide data (GOV.UK , 2024b). Figure 3 shows the change in attendance over the course of the year between four distinct groups of pupils: those who are eligible for FSMs that attend the BC (n=52); those who are eligible for FSMs that do not attend the BC (n=10); those who are not eligible for FSMs that do attend the BC (n=21); and those who are not eligible for FSMs that do not attend the BC (n=30). The FSMs eligible pupils who attend the BC, and the FSMs ineligible pupils who do not attend, both demonstrated an overall increase in attendance between the autumn and spring terms, whereas the other two groups demonstrated an overall decrease in attendance between these terms. Between the spring and summer terms, when the pilot was running, it was the pupils that did not attend the BC, both who are and aren't eligible for FSMs, that demonstrated the steepest decline in attendance, with those who did attend the BC demonstrating less overall decline during this period.
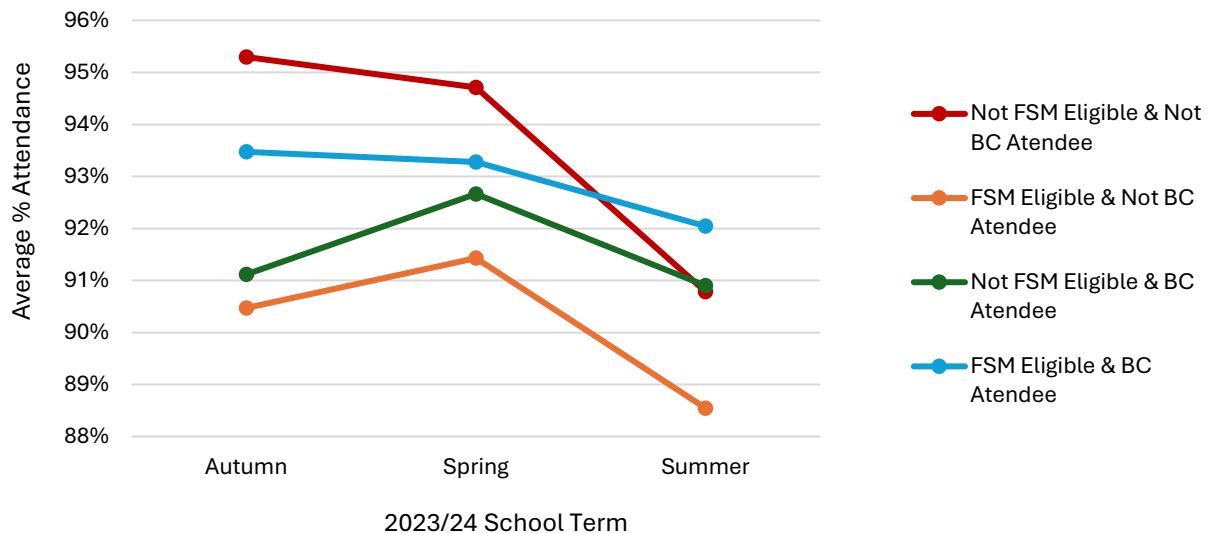
Figure 3. Average attendance per term, split for FSM eligibility status and BC attendance (Burton Green).

During the first two terms of the pilot, pupil lateness at the school decreased to the point where improving punctuality was no longer a component of the school's development plan (a document used to set out how the school will reach its key objectives for improvement). In the autumn, before the pilot began, lateness occurred an average 2.81% of the time, this reduced to 1.95% and 1.42% in the spring and summer terms. Although average overall attendance for pupils eligible for FSMs remains lower than the attendance of pupils not eligible, attendance for those pupils who attended the breakfast club was brought in-line with the non-FSMs eligible pupils by the second term of the pilot. Figure 4 demonstrates the change in incidences of lateness over the course of the pilot between the same four groups of pupils, split by FSM eligibility status and BC attendance. For pupils that are eligible for FSMs that attend the BC, incidences of lateness decreased throughout the pilot. Contrastingly, incidences of lateness in FSMs eligible pupils that did not attend the BC have risen. A similar pattern according to BC attendance is also seen in pupils not eligible for FSMs, however here the variation is smaller. Regardless, in both groups it is the pupils who attend the BC that demonstrate a decrease in incidences of lateness.
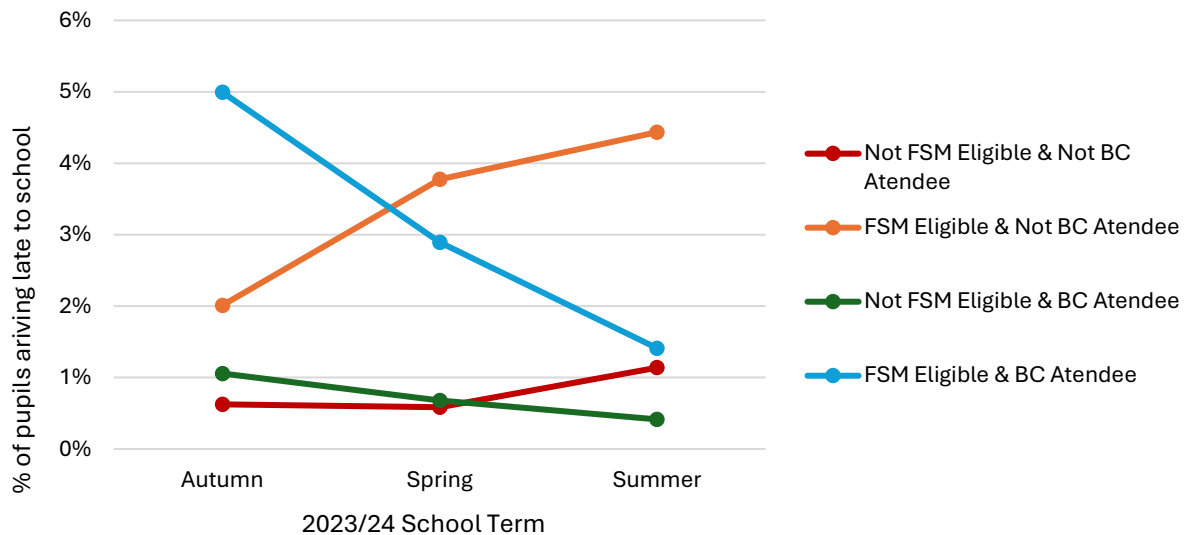
Figure 4. Average lateness per term, split for FSM eligibility status and BC attendance (Burton Green).

iii. Behaviour & academic outcomes

The number of poor behaviour marks received by pupils in at the school reduced from 19 in the autumn term before the pilot began, to 8 in the spring and 11 in the summer term, however no statistical association was observed between breakfast club attendance and the likelihood of receiving a poor behaviour mark.

Additionally, no associations were observed between breakfast club attendance and the likelihood of reaching or exceeding the expected standard in end-of-year academic assessments in reading, writing and maths for years 2 and 6 (n=40).

4. School Lunch Pilot Findings- (Westfield Primary Community School)

i. Lunch Uptake

Figure 5 displays how school lunch uptake has increased since the pilot began at Westfield. In the Autumn term before the pilot started, an average of 63% of pupils were having a school lunch each day. This increased to 79% in the spring term, when the pilot began, and remained similar throughout the summer term, with an average of 80% of pupils choosing a school lunch each day.

As pupils could select each day whether they had a school lunch, or a packed lunch, many chose a combination of the two. In the Autumn term, 40 pupils at the school never had a packed lunch, in the spring term and summer terms, 18 and 20 pupils never made use of the free school lunches. In comparison by the summer term, 155 pupils were making use of school lunches 100% of the time, an increase of more than double from 77 pupils in the Autumn term.
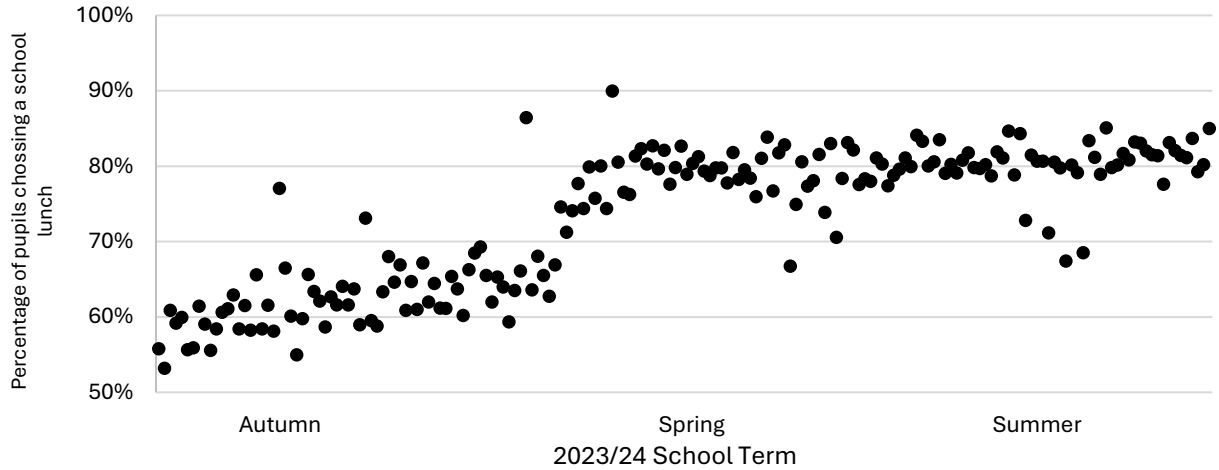
Figure 5. Daily school lunch uptake, shown as % of pupils having lunch each day (Westfield).

Figure 6 shows the differences in uptake between different groups of pupils, split according to KS and FSMs eligibility status: KS1 pupils eligible for FSMs (n=56); KS2 pupils eligible for FSMs (n=111); KS1 pupils not eligible for FSMs (n=126); and KS2 pupils not eligible for FSMs (n=177). School lunch uptake has considerably increased in KS2 pupils who do not fit the eligibility criteria for FSMs. Rising from less than 40% to just under 80% of pupils having a school lunch each day, uptake in this groups is brought in-line with the other groups at the school, at around 80%. Although less change is seen in the three groups of pupils who were already eligible to access free lunches, figure 6 does demonstrate that there has been an overall increase in the average uptake for these groups during the pilot.
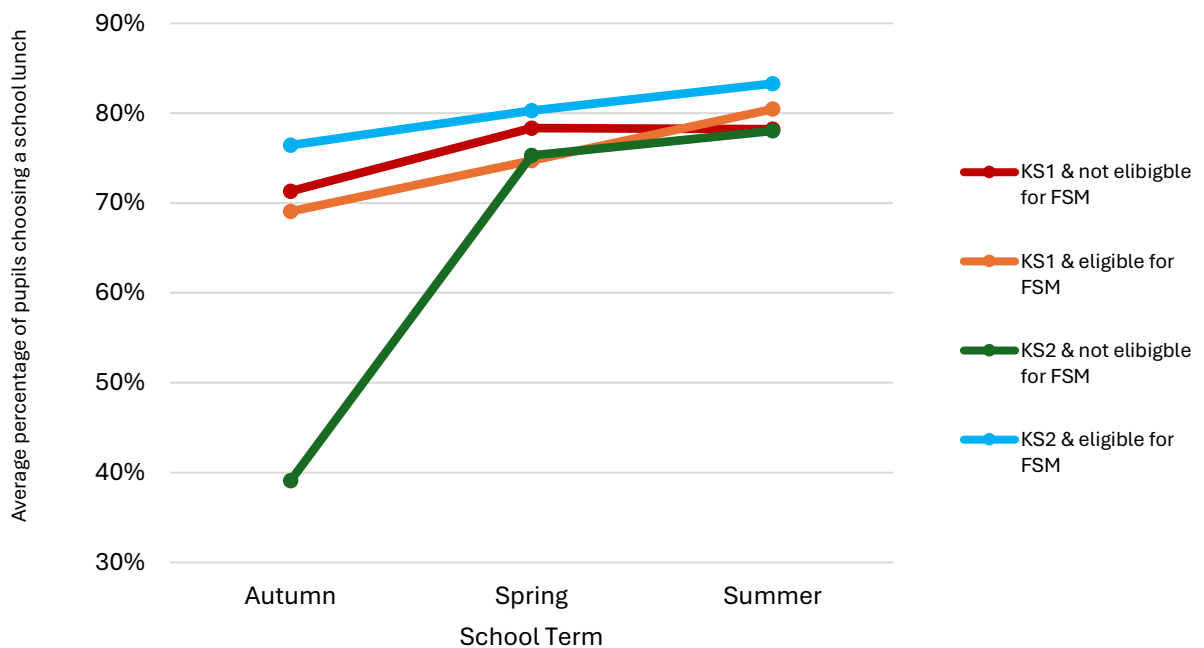

Figure 6. Average school Lunch uptake per term, split by key stage and FSM eligibility status (Westfield).

ii.   Attendance

Figure 7 shows the school's average attendance for years 1-5 (n= 295). In the year prior to the pilot, overall attendance dropped in the summer term, before rising again in the autumn. Contrastingly, in the spring term when the pilot began, an increase in attendance was observed, followed by a further increase into the summer term. Figure 8 shows the differences in average attendance over time for the same four groups of pupils: KS1 pupils eligible for FSMs (n=35); KS2 pupils eligible for FSMs (n=74); KS1 pupils not eligible for FSMs (n=61); and KS2 pupils not eligible for FSMs (n=125).). Figure 8 shows that pupils eligible for FSMs drove the overall decrease in attendance during the 2023 spring term. Figure 8 also shows that the overall increase seen during the first two terms of the pilot is driven by the improved attendance of KS1 pupils eligible for FSMs.
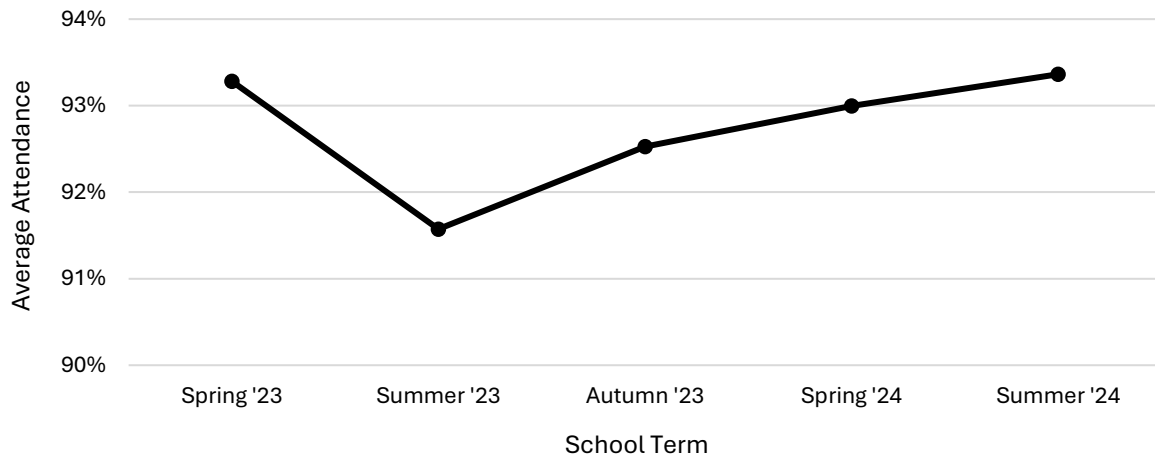

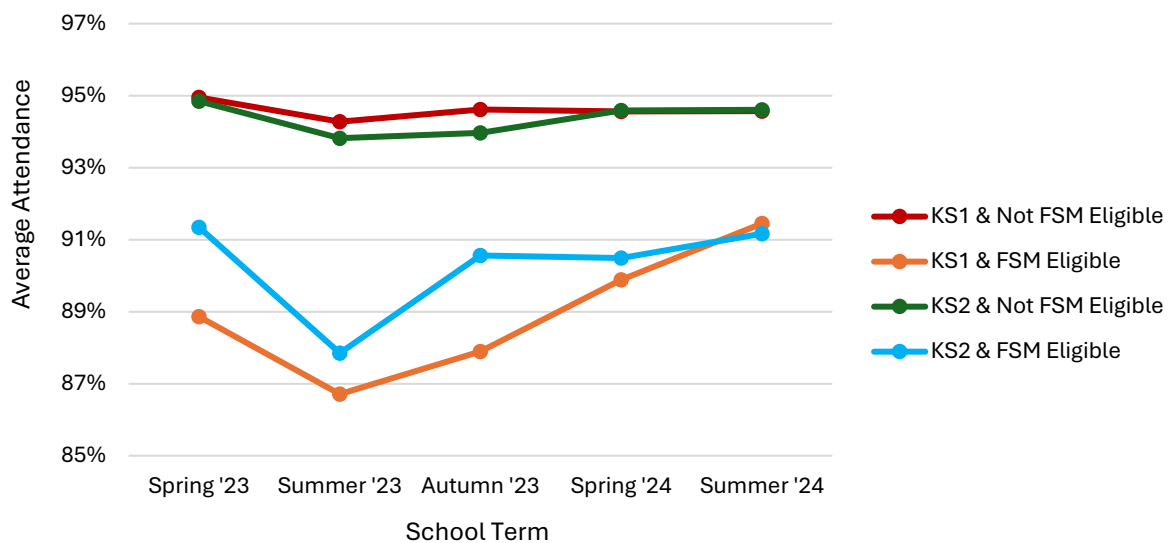Figure 7. Average attendance for years 1-5 (Westfield).

Figure 8. Average attendance for years 1-5 split by key stage and FSm eligibility status (Westfield).

iii.   Academic Outcomes

No statistical associations were observed between school meal uptake and termly academic attainment in reading, writing or maths for years 1-6 (n=399).

iv.   Meal Choices

Each day at Westfield School, all pupils have the choice of bringing in a packed lunch or selecting one of four school lunch options: a main meal or vegetarian main meal, (both of which followed a 3-week termly rotation), a filled jacket potato, or a cheese panini. Figure 9 shows how popularity for all four school-lunch options increased during the pilot, with hot dinners the most popular, followed by cheese paninis. Selection of the main school lunch option rose by 26% during the first two terms of the pilot. Vegetarian meals selection increased 50%, jacket potatoes increased 25%, and cheese paninis increased 33%. The popularity of bringing in a packed lunch on the other hand, dropped 46% between the autumn and summer terms.
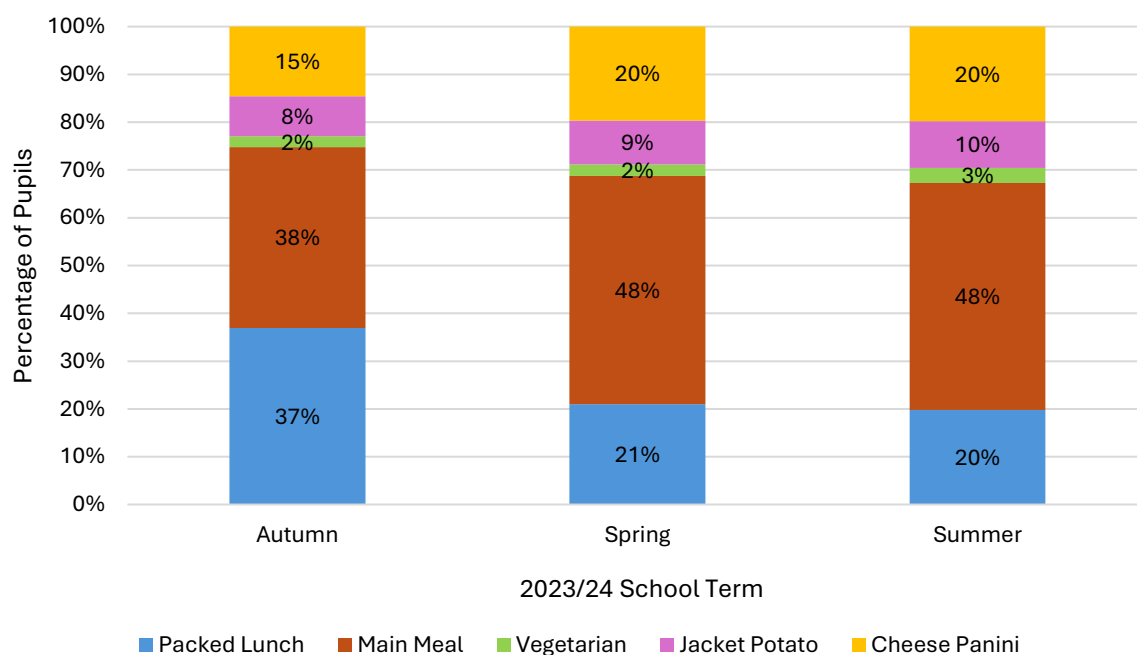
Figure 9. Proportion of each lunch choice per term (Westfield).

Figure 10 illustrates the proportion of each type of lunch chosen, according to the menu choices available on Monday each term. Mondays are used here as an example of the trend, showing that the lunch options on offer impact the choices that the pupils make. Each rotation includes pizza as the main option on one Monday every three weeks. In the autumn and summer terms this is in week 1, and in spring week 2. Figure 10 shows that the main lunch option is chosen by more pupils when it consists of pizza. Figure 10 also shows that regardless of the main lunch option on offer, the proportion of pupils having a packed lunch remains consistent.

Figure 10. Lunch choices on Mondays (Westfield).

5. Discussion of Findings & Conclusions

i. Impact of adopting universalism in school meals

The results of the lunch pilot at Westfield primary demonstrate that adopting universalism in school lunches increases uptake, consistent with other findings (Holford, 2015, Schwartz and Rothbart, 2019, Kitchen et al., 2010). Alt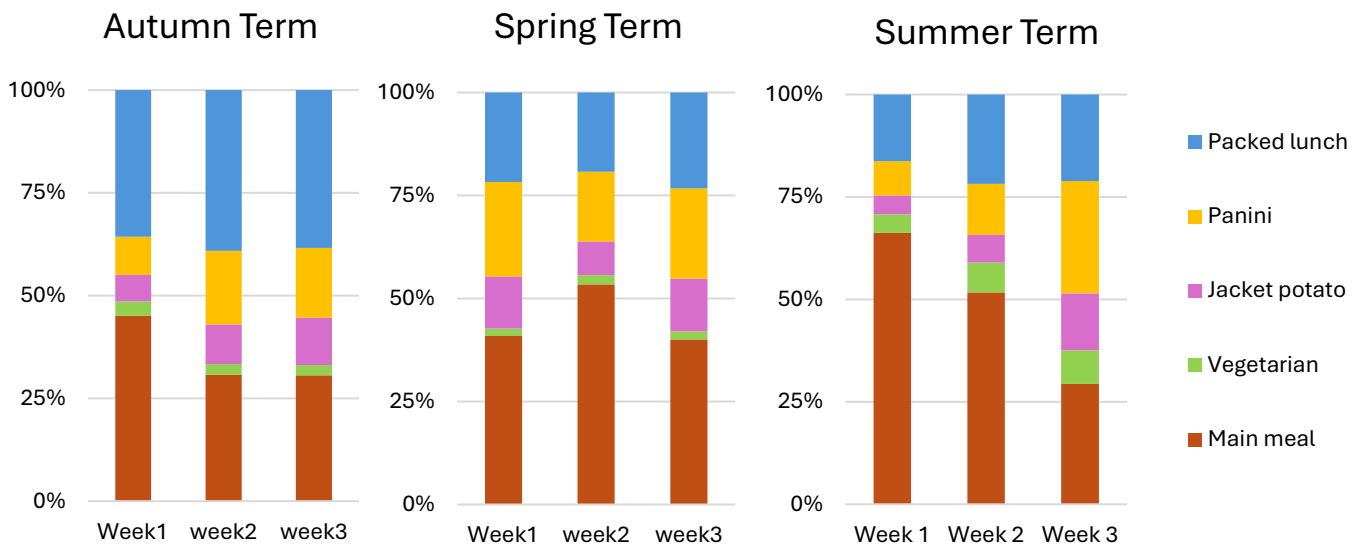hough there is no baseline comparator for the breakfast pilot, as the healthy BC is a new addition to the school, the average number of pupils attending the club each day during the summer term, 40, exceeds the national average of 35 (Kellogg's, 2016), despite Burton Green being a relatively small school.

Data from both pilots demonstrate clear impacts on KS2 pupils who are not eligible for FSMs. These are the pupils that without the pilot programmes in place, would have no access to free school food. An almost 100% increase in school lunch uptake within this group at Westfield points towards a clear desire to access school lunches, but also indicates that cost may have been a primary barrier. At Burton Green, significantly more of these pupils than would be expected attend the BC, again signifying a desire to access school meals within this group. The Food Foundation (2024) report that around 70,000 school-age children from Yorkshire and the Humber who are living in poverty are not eligible for FSMs under current criteria. The UFSM pilots have granted these pupils, who may live in food-insecure households but are above the threshold for FSMs, access to a meal at school each day. In addition to this, some pupils who prior to the pilot had access to FSMs, also demonstrated an increase in school lunch uptake at Westfield. This may be due to an alleviation of the stigma that surrounds FSMs when they are offered on a means-tested basis (Holford, 2015 and Schwartz and Rothbart, 2019).

The data from Burton Green demonstrates a clear association between BC attendance and punctuality; those who attend the BC are already at school by the time the school day begins., and are, therefore maximising time spent learning each week and may show greater readiness to learn because they are already there and settled. Although the preliminary data collected from the two schools so far does not demonstrate any associations between having a school lunch or attending the breakfast club and academic attainment or behaviour, samples are small and research from the IFS has found that all pupils in a school with a universal breakfast club may benefit from the improved learning environment that is generated, regardless of if they attend or not (Crawson, Farquharson and Greaves, 2016). This highlights the potential scope for UFSMs to produce whole-school improvements, rather than improvements for just for some pupils.

ii.   Nutritional aspects of school meals.

Strict school food standards dictate what can and must be served for school lunches. However, no standards exist for packed lunches, which have been found to contain less fruits and vegetables, and more sweetened drinks, crisps and confectionary than school meals. Only 1% of packed lunches are estimated to meet the same standards expected of school food (Evans et al., 2010). The rise in uptake of school meals at Westfield, as a result of adopting UFSMs, will have a considerable impact on the whole-diet nutritional adequacy of the pupils at the school, contributing to improved long term health outcomes (Evans et al., 2016). School food standards also extend to breakfast foods, encouraging healthy, fibre-rich and low sugar options that sustain pupils throughout the morning (GOV.UK, 2024d.). The contribution of a healthy breakfast to improved diet quality, including consumption of fibre, calcium and many other critical nutrients is widely reported (British Nutrition Foundation, 2023). This demonstrates the potential to generate long-lasting benefits for the children who attend the BC at Burton Green.

iii.   Factors impacting school meal uptake.

At Westfield School, the main lunch option on offer does not seem to considerably impact the number of pupils opting for a packed lunch over a school lunch. Therefore, it is likely that the food on offer is not a key factor in the decision to have a packed lunch or not. Similarly at Burton Green, BC attendance follows the same weekly trend, regardless of menu, demonstrating again the food on offer is not a key determinant of uptake. Rather, that the decision to attend the breakfast club, or have a school lunch, is made independently of this. It is, however, not clear if the same trends would be seen at Westfield if the cheese panini and jacket potato options were not readily available alongside the main options each day, as popularity for these items does rise and fall in relation to the main option. These foods provide a consistent, and widely liked 'back-up' choice, that may be used by pupils when they would prefer not to have the main option. Additionally, the BC at Burton Green provides a far more substantial and varied offering than is seen at many other schools, which could be a factor in its popularity.

iv.   Pilot design

The organisation of lunch at Westfield School, where pupils can decide each day what to have, offers the benefit of maximising pupils' opportunity to try school lunches; those who begin a term with a packed lunch are not required to wait until the next opportunity to change, as is customary in most schools. There are however trade-offs to this design. School meal standards consider a full weeks' worth of food in their guidelines and regulations; for example, one or more different starchy foods must be served each day, with at least one wholegrain variety each week, and at least three different fruits and three different vegetables must be served each week (GOV.UK, 2024d). The idea being that although each day will provide different foods and nutrients, over the course of the week pupils will have had access to the variety of nutrients needed to best support their health. The pilot design at Westfield allows pupils to swap some school lunches for packed lunches, if they wish, potentially limiting their exposure to many nutrients. This could also be an outcome if the pupil repeatedly opted for of the cheese panini or jacket potato option, as opposed to the varied main meal. A further consequence of the lunches being organised in this way is the difficulty limiting food waste as the caterers must allow for any variability in orders that could occur each day.

Despite promising uptake at Burton Green, attending the pilot BC does require input from parents or guardians, outside of the usual school routine. Due to this, some pupils may have missed out on accessing this healthy breakfast. Offering breakfast during the school day, generally in the form of a 'grab-and-go' option that pupils can eat on their way into school, or during class is becoming increasingly popular, both as a replacement for the traditional before-school BC and as an addition to maximise access (Magic Breakfast, 2023b). Despite reaching more pupils, this design may not offer the additional benefits that the before-school BC at Burton Green provides; a soft start to the day, a variety of healthy breakfast foods and an opportunity to engage and build relationships with peers and teachers outside of the classroom (Greggs Foundation, 2024). Simultaneous running of these two designs may offer the most benefit to a school, however it would require considerably more resources.

v. Interim conclusions

Current policy surrounding school food limits school meal uptake by excluding numerous children from accessing free meals, and the subsequent benefits they provide (The Food Foundation, 2021). UFSM programmes, like these piloted in York offer wide-reaching and long-lasting benefits to primary-school aged pupils with few trade-offs at pupil-level. Whilst the design of the pilots at Westfield and Burton Green may not be directly applicable to all primary schools, the results demonstrate clearly that universal access to school meals does improve uptake. Further data will be gathered from the two schools as the third term of the pilot continues to provide a full year overview of impact, which will allow for a more comprehensive evaluation, that accounts for the seasonal variations that occur in school data.

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7. Appendices:

Appendix 1.

KS&FSM * BC regular Crosstabulation

| | | | BC regular | | |
			No	Yes	Total
Key stage and FSM eligibility	KS1 & not eligible	Count	19	18	37
		Expected Count	13.5	23.5	37.0
		Adjusted Residual	2.3	-2.3	
	KS1 & eligible	Count	6	8	14
		Expected Count	5.1	8.9	14.0
		Adjusted Residual	.5	-.5	
	KS2 & not eligible	Count	15	25	40
		Expected Count	14.5	25.5	40.0
		Adjusted Residual	.2	-.2	
	KS2 & eligible	Count	4	26	30
		Expected Count	10.9	19.1	30.0
		Adjusted Residual	-3.0	3.0	
Total		Count	44	77	121
		Expected Count	44.0	77.0	121.0

Chi-Square Test.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.745[a]	3	.013
Likelihood Ratio	11.754	3	.008
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.332	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	121		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.09.

Interim Report:
Qualitative Evaluation of "York Hungry Minds" Universal Free School Meals Pilot

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University of York

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Acronyms/Abbreviation

BMI   - Body Mass Index
CPAG   - Child Poverty Action Group
CYC   - City of York Council
DLA   - Disability Living Allowance
EAL   - English as an Additional Language
YCF   - York Community Fund
FSM   - Free School Meals
PIP   - Personal Independence Payment
USFM   - Universal Free School Meals

Schools referred to as:

Burton Green Primary School - Burton Green
Westfield Community Primary School - Westfield

4

Executive Summary

This interim report provides an update on findings to date from our evaluation of the Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) pilot at two primary schools in York, Westfield Primary for lunches and Burton Green for breakfasts, launched by the City of York Council (CYC) in 2024. The UFSM pilot places universality at its core, aiming to reach all children in poverty while reducing stigma and barriers to accessing free school meals (FSM). This model of universality and its impact is evaluated throughout the report. Our evaluation follows the Council's four core commitments: affordability, human rights and equalities, health and the environment.

Key findings

Affordability:

Rising insecurity, due to multiple challenges, such as the cost-of-living crisis and economic insecurity, place financial constraints on families. Both pilot schools were chosen because they are located in the two of the most deprived wards in the City of York. The UFSM has reached children who are affected by food insecurity. Staff at both schools highlighted how children could arrive at school hungry, and/or lack adequate pack-ups. The UFSM pilot has alleviated some financial pressures, namely in enabling families to reorganise their family budgets and allocate their finances differently.

Human Rights and Equalities:

Social inequality and poverty significantly impact pupils' experiences, with staff expressing concerns about hunger among pupils. Universalism is a route to ensuring all children have access to adequate meals, with both parents and staff acknowledging the need for sufficient food for every child. While some parents willingly pay for meals, universalism helps eliminate stigma related to FSM, preventing children from feeling different and alleviating the pressure on parents seeking support.

Overall, there are improved educational outcomes, particularly through enhanced school readiness (in the sense of readiness to begin school on a daily basis), wellbeing and attendance and punctuality. This is particularly notable in Burton Green with the breakfast offering being shown to ease the morning routine for families. Although the pilot has been short thus far in duration, staff note improvements in the pupils' focus and energy levels. Hunger-related distractions have been minimised, also making their play and socialising calmer and more enjoyable.

Health:

Parents and staff observed that children enjoyed a variety of healthy meals, and parents valued the regular menus, which assisted them in meal planning and ensured their children would like the options available. Although it is still early in the pilot to assess physical health impacts, both schools are optimistic about the long-term benefits. Pupils are exposed to different types of food and engage in social interactions during mealtimes, happily entering the dining halls to eat with their classmates. Additionally, the dining environment offers a safe space for children to converse with adults outside of the usual school routine.

Environment:

The pilot has shown that pupils often finish their meals, with schools actively engaging in community efforts to minimise waste; however, some children may still waste foods like vegetables.

Other Findings:

The UFSM implementation was challenged by limited planning time. Press announcements prior to communications from schools led to confusion among some parents. Staff generally reported positive perceptions about the pilot, although negative online commentary existed. The pilot's success depended on staff commitment and collaboration with catering providers to meet increased demand. Interviewees expressed concerns about the scheme's sustainability and funding, particularly in light of food insecurity for children. This prompted calls for long-term viability and support.

Introduction

In 2024, the City of York Council (CYC) is piloting Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) at two York primary schools: Westfield Primary Community School (Westfield), offering lunches, and Burton Green Primary School (Burton Green), offering breakfasts. The key purpose of this interim report is to provide an overview of findings to date in our evaluation of the USFM pilot at both schools.

The Council's ultimate goal is to provide all primary school children with one free school meal per day. This universality is central to the UFSM pilot, aiming to deliver added value compared to other meal provision approaches by reducing the stigma associated with accessing free school meals and tackling educational inequalities arising from food insecurity. The UFSM pilot is supported by c. £100,000 of Council funding, with further support aimed to be secured through donations to the York Community Fund (YCF) to extend the pilot's duration.

Our evaluation focuses on key aspects of the universal offer: reaching children in poverty, reducing stigma and tackling educational inequalities. It also focuses on pilot design, roll-out and processes to inform both longevity of the pilot, and lessons to expand the UFSM pilot beyond the two schools. This evaluation is guided by the Council's four core commitments around health, environment, affordability and human rights and equalities.

The pilot commenced in January 2024. Fieldwork for evaluation research began in June 2024, 6 months after its start. We completed interviews with 11 members of staff at Westfield, 10 members of staff at Burton Green, 6 parents or guardians of pupils attending Westfield and 7 parents or guardians of pupils attending Burton Green. We completed our interviews with staff and parents (n34) in August 2024. Following our interviews, we created a coding framework by which to analyse the interview transcripts (see appendix). This enabled a thematic analysis and a clear evaluation of the pilot based on the key indicators identified by the Council. We also highlighted key themes that staff and parents or guardians identified throughout the interviews. Ethical approval to complete this research was granted by the University of York.

In addition to the interviews conducted, initial plans to conduct participatory research with the pupils was planned. However, difficulties completing this component within the timeframe curtailed this. Our intention is to complete this component at a later date, meaning the current report offers an interim report on our findings to date.

Overall, our evaluation highlights the pilot's effectiveness in both reaching children in poverty and in fulfilling many of the Council's core commitments. While it may be too early to comment on educational attainment as a result of USFM, school staff and parents reflect on pupils' happiness to go to school, improved attendance and the wider impact the UFSM pilot has on family life. Interviews conducted provide valuable insights into the pilot's impact, inform future decisions and can guide potential expansion efforts.

The report continues as follows: We begin by examining the policy background of UFSM within the local context, followed by a brief review of key studies that have informed our research design and evaluation. Our findings are then presented through the Council's four core commitments. We first reflect on affordability, including analysis of rising insecurity and pressure on parents. Next, we consider human rights and equalities, reflecting on universalism and educational rights. We then address health—both physical and mental—before evaluating the environmental aspects. Finally, we complete our analysis reflecting on the practicalities of the pilot and offer key recommendations.

Policy Background

The City of York Council launched the UFSM pilot in the two schools of Westfield and Burton Green, Westfield receiving lunches, Burton Green receiving breakfast. The pilot, also known as "York Hungry Minds" has the key aim to provide all children of primary school age with one free school meal a day. The two schools in the pilot are part of a 1-year pilot phase of the initiative.

Nationally, all children are eligible to receive free school meals in reception, year 1 and 2 through the Universal Infant Free School Meals scheme. Children in year 3 and above are only eligible for FSMs if their parents or guardians meet the eligibility criteria, generally dependent on family income thresholds and/or the household being in receipt of key means-tested social security benefits. In contrast, the York pilot adopts a universal model, making all children in the pilot schools eligible. Nationally, the new government elected in July 2024 has promised free breakfast clubs in all primary schools. This provides impetus for not only proceeding with the pilot but in reflecting on the evaluation as an opportunity to examine key learnings that could facilitate a broader implementation of UFSM across York.

The Pilot Schools

Westfield is local authority maintained and is the largest primary school in the city. It is in the ward with the highest level of children living in low-income households, with lowest level of life expectancy and has high levels of childhood obesity. The educational outcomes and school attendance are considerably lower in Westfield than the York and national averages. Burton Green is an academy school, part of the Hope Sentamu Learning Trust, and has a higher percentage of pupils with means tested FSM than Westfield.

The two pilot sites were also chosen on the basis differences in the two schools would allow for comparison and valuable learnings for any future city-wide scale up of the UFSM pilot. Following review of potential pilot sites, the Council view was that Westfield was the school most prepared and equipped to be included within the pilot. The school has meals provided by the North Yorkshire Council Catering Service and would need minimal adjustments to deliver the pilot. The school already has a dedicated dining hall but would need some additional staffing and equipment. Overall, it was expected that the school would require minimum adjustments. In contrast, Burton Green was judged less prepared for the pilot and was the smallest potential pilot school. Their meals are provided by an external catering company.

Beyond the differences between the pilot schools, lessons can also be learned from evaluating the breakfast offering compared to the lunchtime offering. The Council anticipated similar benefits from both healthy breakfasts and lunches in schools. Both meals were expected to enhance cognitive function (memory, attention, reaction time, and executive function), improve academic performance and school achievement, boost attendance, and support better weight management. Additionally, the Council hoped that a balanced lunchtime meal could help prevent negative health effects.

Wider Programme Design Issues

While the Council funded the initial delivery of the UFSM pilot with c. £100,000, additional funding would be raised through the York Community Fund (YCF). The YCF was set up as a new vehicle to raise funding for priority city work including UFSM pilot, and in partnership with a community foundation. It aims to raise money via donations, including businesses in the city with Corporate Social Responsibility commitments.

The Council identified several potential risks related to the UFSM pilot funding model. These included concerns about the risks of there being insufficient funds to sustain the pilot in the short and medium term, limited flexibility if donors specify how funds must be used, the costs of reverting to traditional payment systems if the pilot fails, and the possibility that the UFSM funding campaign could grow too quickly for the York Community Fund (YCF) to manage. A potential challenge for the UFSM pilot is that CYC lacks an in-house school catering service. Catering is managed directly by schools and multi-academy trusts through contracts. To advance the pilot, consultation

with these catering providers was essential. Of the city's primary schools, 46 use contracted services, while 6 have in-house provision, with most trusts relying on a single supplier for their meals.

Key Target Policy Outcomes

The UFSM pilot aims to achieve six key policy outcomes. Universality is a key aspect of the pilot for several important reasons. First, it is intended to **reduce the stigma** associated with receiving free school meals. In means-tested programmes, some parents may be discouraged from applying due to stigma. Universality also ensures that **children currently excluded** from the national free school meals scheme—particularly those with the immigration condition 'no recourse to public funds'—can access meals. The broader aim is to **reach all children living in poverty**. The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) estimates that 900,000 children in poverty do not qualify for free meals due to the narrow eligibility criteria (CPAG, 2024). While this research lacks quantitative data on each pupil's poverty status or legal situation, universality remains central to addressing these gaps.

In addition, there is an expectation that the pilot will **improve educational outcomes** by improving children's nutritional intake, potentially reducing socio-economic gaps in attainment by increasing the nutrition of lower-income pupils' meals. Additionally, it aims to **improve children's health** by addressing poor nutrition, which can lead to obesity, respiratory diseases, and mental health issues, with UFSM providing healthier meals for all. Finally, it was hoped that UFSM might **create local jobs and promote community wealth** by supporting local, sustainable food production and employment in meal preparation, benefiting from the scale and stability of a universal scheme.

Looking across these key target policy outcomes, the Council felt a successful UFSM scheme would achieve gains in relation to each of the Council's four core commitments:

a. *Health* – contributing to improved diets for school children;

b. *Environment* –reducing food waste;

c. *Affordability* –ensuring access to a good quality meal regardless of income;

d. *Human Rights and Equalities* –supporting right to education and reducing inequalities

These key target policy outcomes will structure findings presented in this report.

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Previous studies of Free School Meals (FSM) initiatives

The pilot has been informed by previous studies on the introduction of free school meals (FSMs) from across the UK. These studies vary from pilots of universal free school meals initiatives (UFSMs), pilots whereby FSM eligibility is expanded to include families on a wider range of lower incomes, research on school meal provision more generally, and evaluative studies of the impact of infant UFSM policies in different locations. These studies, most frequently relating to primary educational settings, address the common theme of FSM provision and its implications for a number of factors including impacts upon children's education, food, financial implications for families, take up, stigma and adjustments made by schools, among many other factors.

Existing research provides a strong foundation of evidence for the positive impact of FSMs upon children's education. Cribb et al's (2023) study of policy options for FSMs cites a strong body of existing evidence as to the benefits of FSMs to educational attainment. Similarly, a Department for Education report (Kitchen et al, 2012) compares a UFSM pilot in primary schools with another that widened the range of eligibility criteria for FSMs in primary and secondary schools; a key finding from this report included a significant positive impact upon educational attainment in the UFSM primary school pilot, which was not observed in the pilot whereby eligibility for FSMs was only widened, suggesting a role for universality in enabling improved attainment. Other studies highlight broader indicators of educational impact of UFSM, such as teachers' observations of improved concentration among pupils (Sellen and Huda et al, 2018).

The quality of food is addressed by a number of existing reports, as well as assessments of the introduction of FSM pilots upon food and health outcomes. Day et al (2015) cite the introduction of food meal standards as having a significant impact upon improving the quality of school meals, and also note a high variability in perceptions of school meals among different schools. This may suggest different pupils in different schools have varying perceptions on the healthiness and quality of food, which may be influenced by what children eat at home and their age, on food preferences. One study cites a perception that food quality is better in primary schools than secondary schools (Sahota et al, 2013) and an NHS Health Scotland report on the implementation of UFSMs for Primary 1 to 3 children in Scotland found that parents held positive views on the nutritional content of meals (Ford et al, 2015). While some reports found little evidence of the (U)FSM pilots upon diets, such as improved Body Mass Index (BMI) or children eating a wider variety of foods (see Kitchen et al, 2012), other studies have found evidence to the contrary. Sellen and Huda et al's (2018) research found improvements in the quality of food offered as a result of the introduction of the UFSM policy, as well as more balanced meals and greater healthy eating awareness among pupils. Furthermore, Spence et al (2020) assessed the dietary impact of UFSMs among pupils using repeated surveys, finding that children have a reduced sugar intake as a result of this policy.

The financial implications of (U)FSM policies upon families are less explored within existing research. However, some studies do address such factors including the impacts of FSM policies upon household budgets. Restrictive eligibility criteria of FSMs is highlighted by Patrick et al (2021), whereby families considered as low-income did not qualify for FSMs under the present system of means-testing. Ford et al's (2015) report for NHS Health Scotland points to a similar observation, noticing the welcome financial benefit of the infant UFSM policy among families who had been previously ineligible for FSMs. Cribb et al (2023) note that access to FSMs has the impact of reducing families' grocery bills, usually by less than the value of the meals themselves, therefore indicating that the policy enables families to increase either the quality or quantity of food purchases in their usual household grocery shopping. In response to a contrasting concern of the perception that higher income families would benefit from UFSM policies, Jessiman et al's (2023) study of UFSMs in London secondary schools found that such concerns were not as prevalent as the

perception that UFSMs were effective in addressing the issue of food insecurity more widely.

The universal nature of UFSMs, unlike targeted FSM schemes, has been key in analysing take-up and addressing stigma. While recent efforts, such as electronic payment systems in secondary schools, have aimed to reduce the visibility of students receiving FSMs, research indicates that forms of stigmatisation can still persist. Patrick et al (2021) highlight how children notice who receives payment letters for school meals, contributing to the stigma for those who do not. Sahota et al's (2013) study also highlights the impact of stigma - amongst other issues such as bureaucracy, having English as an additional language (EAL) and low literacy rates - as a barrier to encouraging eligible parents to sign up for FSM in a means-tested system. Additionally Ford et al (2015) and Sellen and Huda et al (2018) demonstrate that parents reported a removal of stigma under UFSM initiatives. Sellen and Huda et al (2018) and Kitchen et al (2012) report that UFSM initiatives lead to higher take-up of FSMs, both among those previously ineligible and, crucially, also among those previously eligible, suggesting a role for UFSM policies in reducing stigma of claiming FSMs.

There is a significantly lesser-developed literature surrounding the role of universal school breakfast club initiatives, in comparison to the range of studies on universal free school lunches. Harvey-Golding et al (2015) note that research examining free school breakfasts is relatively underdeveloped. Despite this, Kleinman et al's (2002) study indicates improved academic performance in children accessing a universal free school breakfast programme. Furthermore, Mauer et al's (2022) research in Norway highlighted the popularity among children of eating breakfast with friends. Gibson-Moore et al's (2023) review of existing literature highlights the role of breakfasts in addressing morning hunger, indicating broadly positive impacts upon diet quality, weight and school outcomes. They nevertheless also note some inconsistencies in the literature, and some methodological limitations of studies, suggesting the need for further research.

Studies drawing upon previous pilots also point to crucial processes of adjustment adopted by schools as well as some of the challenges faced in the interim while UFSM policies were introduced. Concerns from parents over pupils' waiting times, long queues and having sufficient time to play outside during their lunch breaks (Ford et al, 2015), appear alongside concerns for the need for many schools to upgrade kitchen facilities and dining environments in order to cope with the capacity implications of UFSM policies. Importantly, other studies address practical implications for schools receiving crucial pupil premium funding (Sellen and Huda et al, 2018) which are presently tied to the means-tested approach to claiming FSMs.

In short, existing studies have highlighted a range of impacts of (U)FSM policies, with largely positive impacts despite some challenges for children, families and schools. There is strong evidence of UFSM's positive impact upon educational outcomes, albeit with a more underdeveloped literature in relation to universal free school breakfasts. Previous research also shows that the persistence of stigma associated with accessing FSMs targeted by family income means universality has advantages in ensuring access to school meals. Furthermore, previous studies indicate the positive impact of UFSM initiatives on families' budgets, in addition to many examples of positive health impacts of UFSM provision, albeit alongside variable assessments of the quality of school meals nationally. Studies suggest factors such as ensuring schools are prepared for the delivery of UFSM policies also play an important role and are crucial to the effective implementation of these policies.

Qualitative Research Findings: Key Themes

The qualitative research findings are structured around the CYC's four core commitments: affordability, human rights and equalities, health and environment. Later, we discuss the preparedness of the pilot schools and their communities, drawing insights for future implementation. However, to begin, we focus on affordability, examining rising financial insecurity, pressures on parents, and efforts to reach children impacted by poverty.

Findings: Affordability

"You know, there is a lot of children here as well [and] that it's possibly their only meal a day. And so you've got to try and make it as … as much as you possibly can, what they want"
(Westfield School Staff 4)

One of CYC's core commitments is affordability and it was hoped the UFSM pilot would contribute to this by "ensuring access to a good quality meal regardless of income". High and rising levels of child poverty nationally were presented as a key contextual factor in the pilot's case for support – 4.2 million children (29% of all children) in poverty according to latest data when the policy was proposed – and the pilot schools were chosen on the basis they were in in the two most deprived wards in the City of York based on the most recently available data from the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) at that time (2015 & 2019 data).

This backdrop of social and economic insecurity, the pressure families face because of this and the impact of food insecurity on children were key themes identified in our interviews with school staff and with parents and guardians. Many interviewees also highlighted the role the pilots, and schools more generally, had played in helping to address these pressures.

Rising insecurity as a key context

Staff from both schools acknowledged the scale of cost of living pressures and the economic insecurity affecting many families in the community.

"I would say the biggest challenges for our families and children are cost of living. There's quite a lot of poverty around here […] the children are, in my opinion, more aware of it than they should be."
(Burton Green School Staff 6)

Staff reflected that pupils are aware of financial difficulties in their family, putting emotional strain on top of material need.

"The cost of living crisis is huge, particularly given the area in which we serve".
(Westfield School Staff 1)

The increasing strain is felt by all, including families with dual incomes who still struggle to make ends meet.

"That cost of living crisis. It's huge. You know, even for people who do, you know, like myself and my husband, we both work full time. But it's still a struggle, so some parents who might be single parents or only one person's working, I can't imagine how difficult it must be for them, you know".
(Westfield School Staff 11)

Likewise, many parents acknowledged this context too:

"I know it's like, it's not even people who are not working. It doesn't matter, you can be working. Yeah. But then it's, you know, you've still got the, the bills to pay. And then when you've got a large family, obviously a lot of food to buy and it is, it's really, you know, It's a lot of pressure on finances"
(Burton Green School Parent 2)

"As I say, the area especially, um, you know, there's a lot that are struggling financially, so the, I think everyone's feeling the pinch, aren't they, with, especially with food prices"
(Westfield School Parent 6)

Some staff even highlighted the financial pressures for some families arising from

reforms to wider social security support over the past decade. Transition to Universal Credit has exacerbated financial strain for some families who did not have support for extended periods:

"They struggle […] a lot of our families have moved across now to Universal Credit. That's not been as smooth as it has promised to be. You know, some families I know that I've helped with it have been without money for eight weeks, you know." (Westfield School Staff 5)

Reflecting the above, staff in the two schools acknowledged cost of living challenges were driving food insecurity faced by families and some highlighted the key role schools could play in addressing this, including working with other organisations:

"Everything's gone up. We know that, you know, the children continue to need, and the amount of uniform and food that we do give out, there has definitely been an increase in demand and need for it as well" (Westfield School Staff 1)

"We do deliver food and things. I work with [local charity, national charity], so we get food in. So, on an instant, [when families say] we need something, I've got nothing, we can sort of provide a food parcel. But I also work as part of [food bank provider], so I've got, um, authority to authorise food parcels through them to needy families" (Burton Green School Staff 9)

This underscores the roles of school in not only educating but in supporting pupils and their families who face material insecurity broadly.

Taking pressure off parents

Importantly given this context, a key theme to emerge from the interviews was that the provision of UFSMs had helped take some pressure off parents and guardians. Some of those describing the role it had played in helping their own household budget underscored the significant financial constraints they face and the importance of the meals in directly alleviating some of this pressure:

"I think a lot of people are definitely feeling the same, like, a food shop, it's a big chunk of money, you know, and when you haven't got money to do it, I mean, thank goodness for food banks and for stuff like this, really, because when we have had a hard time and we have struggled financially, school has been absolutely amazing, and then the breakfast club's just been … a godsend" (Burton Green School Parent 2)

"[It] would be a struggle if food goes up anymore or, you know. So, in terms of the school dinners pilot, that has been, it's been really helpful [….] It's a lot of, it's a lot of weight off your mind when you know that you're not having to pay for your child's school dinners and then that money can go towards food for the evening. Yeah" (Westfield School Parent 2)

Beyond budgetary constraints, it has also helped take pressure off parents in their preparations for school in the morning.

"It's made a big difference on finances. I mean, we do still buy cereal, obviously […] but um, you know, not having to sort of panic, thinking of what they're going to have in the morning" (Burton Green School Parent 2)

Many staff in the schools shared these perceptions, saying the pilots had been well received and had taken pressure off parents:

"Certainly, from the parent perspective, it has been really positive. We haven't had any kind of negativity whatsoever from the parent perspective. Um, there have been really appreciative" (Westfield School Staff 1)

Staff also link this positive reception to the broader challenges in the area arising from financial insecurity and cost of living pressures. This was demonstrated when they reflected on the broader holistic support role that the schools play in their communities, staff being aware of the competing financial demands that parents have when it comes to providing for their children.

"[We] can really see the difference in this cost of living. […] And I've, for quite a few it's, well, what do we do? Do we have heat? Do we have food? Do we have clothes? Um. So I think there's a massive impact, especially for the area that we're in."
(Westfield School Staff 8)

Reaching children affected by food insecurity

There was a widespread feeling amongst staff at the schools that the pilots were playing an important role in supporting children affected by food insecurity.

It was not uncommon for staff to highlight the food insecurity faced by some children:

"we noticed children are more hungry […] We were noticing children were just hungry at break times and they weren't bringing anything from home."
(Westfield School Staff 2)

"we have children coming in saying that they're hungry, they've not had breakfast"
(Westfield School Staff 8)

In this context, the provision of UFSMs were often reported to have played an important role in helping to address food insecurity. Indeed, this is the case for pupils who were not having sufficient food at home either side of the school day.

"children who weren't having any breakfast are coming in and they're having a, a full meal"
(Burton Green School Staff 4)

"There's a few that, um, I've said in the past that they've not had tea. Um, so when they've come in for breakfast, they are hungry. Um, you know, a particular child comes in the other week and said, "Oh, I'm so ready for this". Yeah. I said, oh, what did you have for tea? "Oh, we didn't have anything""
(Burton Green School Staff 7)

School staff interviewed also reflected on parents' requests for help with food and in providing meals, a finding also later analysed when reflecting on the school and wider community. There is a trust built between the school staff and families. There is a clear need for hot meals for pupils and the UFSM pilot addresses food insecurity and ensures equitable access to meals.

"I think it's benefited us [...] I would have had lots of parents coming to me saying, you know, I ain't got any food in, at home. I need to, they want a pack up or they want this, but I can't afford it...we've got so many children who have always wanted to have the hot dinners, but [we've] never had the opportunity [to offer this]."
(Westfield School Staff 5)

Staff also reflect on the cost of food and in providing universal free school meals, the pilot levels the playing field in facilitating children from all backgrounds to participate equally in school meals. This helps to reduce food insecurity of children and in reducing stigma that may be associated with receiving FSM.

"it just puts them on a level playing field and it's there and open for them. Because school dinners are expensive. If you have got three children, and every child wants a dinner, and you can do the maths" (Westfield School Staff 1)

Some staff reported that the schools had been looking for ways to address food insecurity before the roll-out of the pilots and reported ways in which they were looking to address it beyond the scope of the UFSM offers:

"with the breakfast club coming in and having breakfast we did have quite a few that would come in and say they were hungry so we've always got bagels and fruit in the classroom so the lady who runs our breakfast club does bagels for all the classes as well"
(Burton Green School Staff 6)

"You know, we do a breakfast provision now where we give any child that needs it for breakfast. […] We provide fruit"
(Westfield School Staff 2)

The increase in participation in receiving meals, as noted by staff, shows the immediate effect of removing barriers to accessing free school meals. The uptake demonstrates a need for

universal free school meals and emphasises how effectively the pilot reduces obstacles—whether financial, social, or logistical—that previously limited access for pupils.

"It definitely benefits from it, yeah. 100%. I mean we know that meal uptake straight away is about 60 more a day. So it's still 60 more children that are taking meals. So it's a massive benefit."
(Westfield School Staff 2)

Findings: Rights and Equalities

Another of CYC's core commitments is 'human rights and equalities' and it was hoped the UFSM pilot would contribute to this by "supporting the right to education and reducing inequalities". In this section we consider the pilot's role in addressing wider social inequalities before turning to education related rights and inequalities in the next section.

Poverty

As noted in the previous section, many interviewees acknowledged the context of social inequalities the two schools operate in. Poverty was often mentioned directly by staff in the two schools:

"In this area? ...Yeah. I think poverty. Yeah, there's a lot of poverty. I think a lot of our children [are] living [in] homes where they're going hungry."
(Burton Green School Staff 2)

"It's poverty and that, that's been a big issue. That is the root of everything that leads on to any of the other issues that we have."
(Burton Green School Staff 4)

"I think for our children, it's poverty."
(Westfield School Staff 6)

"Poverty [is] massive in the community"
(Burton Green School Staff 9)

"I think all schools are struggling to make sure that they meet all children's needs. [It] has become more challenging. Definitely more challenging. And then here, you know, more specifically, you know, our localised challenges here, um, are around our families living in poverty and the knock on effect that that has on, you know, our adult mental health and everything that trickles down to our, you know, to our children and impacts them on a daily basis."
(Burton Green School Staff 1)

Instead of mentioning poverty directly, parents were more likely to refer to the financial pressures they were facing, or mention the financial struggles others were facing:

"I have noticed from parents and things that I do speak to when I drop her off in the morning that there is a lot more worry about the cost of everything."
(Westfield School Parent 3)

"Um, and I've seen so many people that just don't eat. Yeah. And it really does affect schooling."
(Westfield School Parent 5)

"everybody's, everybody's struggled with, uh, you know, with the pandemic and as things are going up, but, uh, rising in price"
(Westfield School Parent 4)

These differences in language aside, it was not uncommon for both staff and parents to acknowledge the UFSM schemes helped with some of these pressures:

"Like, obviously having a large family and a low income, it's, you know, it's expensive to feed everybody. Yeah. So, having that pressure taken away, um, sort of having to feed them every morning and the rush and the mayhem that that entails was just brilliant."
(Burton Green School Parent 2)

"For children that are disadvantaged, you're giving them the best start to the day, but the best start to life, aren't you? Because they're not worried about food." (Burton Green School Staff 8)

Universalism and Need

The universal principle is central to the UFSM pilot. A small number of interviewees expressed a doubt about the value of a universal approach or said they understood questions raised about the relative value of investing in a universal free school meals scheme rather than a scheme more targeted at those in greatest need. Mainly this concerned the question of whether some parents/guardians might be happy and/or able to pay for the meals their children were receiving:

"I think sometimes having a universal offer isn't necessarily the right way of doing something because if people can afford certain things, I don't think some parents would want, they're quite happy to pay still (Westfield School Staff 7)

"it's meant that, that we have saved, you know, over 10 a week. [Name of one child] was already getting free school meals. Um, so it has made a difference. But, we wouldn't have an issue with going back to paying it. So, yeah, so it's not, for us it's not a sizable difference. We're, we're lucky that we're comfortable with our budgeting and things."
(Westfield School Parent 1)

There was the very occasional view that went further than this and queried the underlying values of a redistributive model. There had been some critical views expressed online following announcement of the pilots and, reflecting on this, one staff member commented:

"I sort of understand where they're coming from because at the end of the day it's taxpayers money and I think my personal challenge sometimes is watching families play the system and to get, um, Disability Living Allowance, DLA, PIP, all of this funding, all of this money that's available by saying and wanting their child to have a diagnosis of something".
(Westfield School Staff 7)

It is important to note that the above view stands out as an outlier in the broader context of the interviews. More commonly, interviewees expressed confidence and an importance in the UFSM pilot in effectively addressing food insecurity by ensuring that all pupils had access to meals and in minimising the risk of excluding those children with a need.

"It's comforting knowing that they're getting the free school meals because it's awful thinking that kids go to school hungry and then come home hungry".
(Westfield School Parent 6)

Moreover, some interviewees expressed concern about the pilot not being universal enough, i.e. children outside of the two schools were not benefiting from the provision of UFSM. While there was a recognition that this is a pilot, some of those interviewed also raised concerns about the need for all children to eat in order to be able to concentrate in class, irrespective of their age. This demonstrates a need for a more comprehensive approach to the UFSM pilot that is far-reaching:

"This [UFSM's] should be given for all kids. It don't matter how old they are...They need to eat."
(Burton Green School Staff 9)

"I feel really strongly that if it's going to be universal, I think it should be universal across all the way up to sort of 16. Because I feel there's, there's teenagers going into school who are also starving."
(Westfield School Parent 1)

Universalism and Stigma

Another theme that came through clearly in the interviews is that the UFSM model added value by having the potential to reduce or eliminate stigma.

Staff reflected on a change in pupil's behaviour in the dining hall and noted that pupils were likely to feel more comfortable to sit with their food knowing that they are receiving the same food and portion size as their peers. Parents had a similar reflection, particularly if their child brings in a packed lunch that is perceived as different, which can lead to exclusion or teasing. Indeed, UFSM can help to mitigate stigma by offering the same meals to every pupil.

"They're sitting in the dining hall longer, because I guess some children maybe felt a little bit uncomfortable that they just had a really small pack up against somebody that's paying for a meal and getting a nice meal."
(Westfield School Staff 5)

"**And sometimes people get teased for the stuff they get put in packs. I remember. [Really?] Yeah. I remember, for example, was it one day in November last year, she's got a thermos and I sent her in with soup and the bread roll. And a couple of her classmates teased her for bringing in soup.**"
(Westfield School Parent 3)

The UFSM pilot also reduces stigma for parents and guardians in obtaining free school meals for their children:

"**It's great that it's universal because a lot of people, um, they don't have to perhaps feel the stigma that's around having to claim free school meals...in terms of making a level playing field, I think it takes a lot of stigma away from people. Yeah. I mean, that's a positive.**"
(Burton Green School Parent 4)

"**It's great.. nobody's penalised, nobody's sort of, there's, there's, it's everybody across the board, so you're not segregating anybody and saying, oh, they're free school meals, and I think that helps, I really do think that helps as well**"
(Westfield School Parent 5)

"**I think it's really difficult to quantify the impact of something like this. Not just on our, on our children, but on our kind of wider community [...] I think for some of our parents, that kind of takes away some worry and concern and maybe a little bit of shame that you know we're struggling to feed our children but this is on offer so I actually don't have to go to school and they've not had breakfast because I don't have any food [...] it's really difficult to actually find parents who are willing to say that but we know that that's there. We know that that's the case for lots of our families**".
(Burton Green School Staff 1)

Despite a strong feeling amongst all interviewees that the concept of universalism had great value in reducing or eliminating stigma, there was an awareness that only two schools who reside in the most deprived areas of the city had been chosen for the pilot and that this in of itself may have stigmatising impacts. Rolling out the pilot more widely in the city will go some way in reducing the stigma that the schools felt the community faced in being 'put under the spotlight'.

"**And this pilot is, you know, predominantly there to help children. Not just in our school, but eventually across the city…I think for other people reading those [negative online comments on press articles], I think, you know, the bias of that I was quite surprised at because I don't think many of our families would read or necessarily comment on the press in the same way … and there will be many, who will read it and who will see it on social media and stuff as well**"
(Westfield School Staff 1)

"**It's always difficult, isn't it, that kind of media, um, commentary about the place that you work in. And the community that you really care about…Do you want to advertise that actually we're a needy community and, you know, we want this support and we want this help. But you also, um, you want to celebrate what's positive about the area as well. And I think it's always making sure that, [being] mindful of having a balance**"
(Burton Green School Staff 1)

Relating to the above, careful media communication is needed to ensure the provision does not inadvertently stigmatise families and communities further. School staff described occasions in which this did occur and the need for this to be carefully managed.

As discussed later on in the report, there were also some concerns that the funding model could be perceived as a 'charity model', and this may inadvertently increase stigma attached to receiving the USFM and willingness to engage. As mentioned above, it also creates a difference between those schools who are selected to be a part of the pilot and those who are not.

Findings: Educational Rights

"Improve educational outcomes" was a sub-section of the broader theme of human rights that the UFSM policy aims to address, and this formed a central theme of the interviews with parents and staff. We divide this section into four key parts: Attendance, Behaviour, Pupil School Readiness and Attainment. As this report explores, while each sub-theme addresses a distinct benefit of the UFSM policy, these themes are intrinsically linked to each other under the broader theme of educational rights. This can be viewed in the accounts of staff whose understandings of these concepts show strong overlaps between attendance and attainment, between school readiness and attainment, between attainment and behaviour, among many examples.

Overall, this section explores how the UFSM initiatives have positive implications for educational rights, and the different ways that this is observed across the universal free school breakfasts and universal free school lunches. This is particularly important where it is expected that in the post-Covid context, there are increased inequalities and educational gaps (Gready et al, 2021). The COVID19 pandemic dramatically impacted on the experiences of education for children with pre-existing inequalities being critical to understanding the short, medium and long term impacts, including suggestions of significant variations according to factors such as socio-economic background and SEND (see Blundell, R et al. 2021) which are particularly important to the context of the schools taking part in the UFSM pilot.

Attendance and Punctuality

The view that access to a UFSM provision has a positive impact on overall attendance of children at school, as well as their punctuality in the morning, was found in both schools, and interviewees made reference to children feeling a greater sense of looking forward to going to school. However, staff and parents at the pilot breakfast club at Burton Green highlighted this to a greater extent:

"It's making a massive difference...The children are wanting to get out of bed and come to school, which historically hasn't been the case. So yeah, I do, I do think it's really beneficial"
(Burton Green School Staff 7)

As referred to in the above quotation, it is notable that the time of day where the UFSM initiative takes place at Burton Green School seems to play a distinctive role in encouraging improved attendance at the school. This is observed in two ways at the school (1) improved overall attendance and (2) reduced lateness.

"It's had an enormous positive effect on attendance. Yeah, the families that, you know, we struggle to get the children in on time or in regularly enough. It's had a massive impact."
(Burton Green School Staff 1)

This positive assessment of the impact of the UFSM breakfast club upon children's attendance was one shared by staff and parents alike at Burton Green School. Parents' experiences explored not only the children's greater enthusiasm for getting into school on a morning, but also an overlap with it simplifying family morning routines which are often described as stressful, which is also addressed in a later section of this report in relation to other impacts on families.

"They're never late now, do you know what I mean? So whereas before it might have been that we got held up at home doing breakfast, doing this, doing that. They're there early anyway now, so it's just, it's nice for them to be there early and it's like, they don't have that stress of being late either."
(Burton Green School Parent 2)

Any policy impacts upon attendance are of particular importance in a context whereby school attendance is observed to have fallen significantly since the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent school lockdowns over this period. This is viewed by many to have had impacts upon lower school attendance.

"The things that we've really found from COVID are attendance. So, I know that's national. So attendance rates have really dropped. I think through COVID it became more of an option to come and attendance is harder for us... we have our pastoral lead, she starts phone calls from eight o'clock, phoning families, are you up, are you ready"
(Burton Green School Staff 8)

In addition to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on attendance, Gready et al. (2021) highlighted that the achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils in York (those eligible for FSM in the past six years) was not only above the national average but also widening. This gap is likely exacerbated by challenges related to homeschooling and remote learning, particularly for students with limited access to study space or IT resources, leading to lower levels of engagement.

Challenges of remote learning and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are contrasted with different accounts of parents and staff at Burton Green of stories of individual children and families of multiple siblings whose overall attendance has increased dramatically since the introduction of the UFSM breakfast club. These accounts point to clear evidence of improvements to attendance across the school:

"It's just amazing. We did the attendance awards in class in assembly this morning and it goes on forever […] postcards out for 100 percent, 98 percent, and assembly went on forever. I've got jobs to do coming, but it just kept going and going and going. So that proves how, how good it is."
(Burton Green School Staff 1)

As many parents and staff that we spoke to at Burton Green explored and celebrated the positive impact of the universal free breakfast initiative on attendance, many participants in this research began to make links between the impact of improved attendance and children's education more broadly. While parents' focus was upon impacts on the morning routines, school staff that we spoke to explored the links between improved attendance and attainment, both via ensuring that children do not miss crucial lesson time at the start of the day, and also through a reduction in lateness upon pupils' school readiness/readiness to learn as

they experience an improved learning experience when they are not rushing for being late to school.

"It's been amazing. Like my attendance has gone up massively...it wasn't sort of that the children weren't coming to school, but I had quite a big cohort in my class that were late all the time, um, and that means that they've missed their learning at the start of the day"
(Burton Green School Staff 6)

"It's massive. I think for attendance it's massively improved. I mean there's a girl now that comes in every day on time, which before it was phone calls... She almost skips in."
(Burton Green School Staff 5)

At the other UFSM initiative, staff at Westfield School also expressed that attendance had improved as a result of the universal free school lunches initiative. One parent also expressed how their child seemed more willing to attend school since the pilot began, linking also to the theme of reduction in stigma, in this case arising from the embarrassment of not being able to provide a meal for their children:

"If we take that away now, those children that would look forward to coming to school because they know they're going to get a meal, you know, the attendance, our attendance has gone up. [It has] vastly improved since every child has been able to have a hot meal. Previously, some families just wouldn't send the children because they would be embarrassed by not being able to provide a meal for them. So I think it's that. I think it's look at the bigger picture and the impact it has on the whole family, not just the individual child."
(Westfield School Staff 5)

"I don't know whether it's a coincidence, but since the beginning of the year when it started, he seems to be less upset about going to school because we did have tears nearly every morning going to school at one point."
(Westfield School Parent 6)

Staff suggested that increased attendance is also likely due to the scheme reaching children in poverty, reflecting that there are multifaceted challenges in the areas, but ensuring that pupils'

basic needs are met helps bolster pupil attendance.

"But definitely this area is deprived, but I think a lot of schools do struggle with funding and making sure that the children have everything that they need and attendance as well at the same time. That's a big thing and we can only do so much to get them into school, so having things like that breakfast club....It's so amazing to see so many of them in on a morning. It's really good".
(Burton Green School Staff 3)

While we should not underestimate the impact of the pilot at Westfield School upon attendance, it is notable that the theme of improved attendance and punctuality was clearer at Burton Green's UFSM breakfast club initiative. As improving attendance is an expectation of the local authority at both pilot schools, it is notable that this is observed to a much larger degree at Burton Green school breakfast club. The time of day where the initiative took place seems to go some way to explaining this, with teachers' accounts at Burton Green indicating that the breakfast club served as a way to prevent lateness to school, as well as a motivator to be there in the morning. We next explore the impact of the UFSM policy on the behaviour of children across both initiatives.

Behaviour

Staff at both schools described the impact of the policy upon behaviour, in both cases noticing strong improvements overall. Linking strongly to the theme of wellbeing and mental health, which is addressed in a later section of this report, we see how the free provision of meals, either at breakfast or lunch, promotes behaviour improvements across different contexts.

Some staff at Westfield School describe a context where behaviour had been a challenge in the school, with one staff responding when asked about the biggest challenges in their role:

"Probably behaviour…I've really enjoyed it, but I think a lot of it is around the challenges I've found is with behaviour and how to deal with children's behaviour"
(Westfield School Staff 9)

The improvements noticed in children's behaviour since the introduction of the UFSM pilot cite the impact of school lunches replacing packed lunches for many children. In many cases, staff state that these packed lunches had been inadequate, high in sugar content and/or generally unhealthy. Staff state that the move towards school lunches has led to behavioural improvements as a result:

"Because they're not bringing pack ups, it's that sugar is a huge difference. So you're seeing children having their lunch, coming outside, playing lovely, enjoying the afternoons. Whereas before you can really see those who had quite a lot of sugar in their pack ups would come out, they'd be wild, come into class, they'd drop. And you know, it's really surprising. I didn't notice it until we did it"
(Westfield School Staff 11)

As this member of staff makes reference to, eating healthier food not only assists positive behaviour via lower sugar consumption, but also via the benefits of healthy lunches to play in the playground. As they reflect further, this is observed through fewer arguments amongst the children and a calmer classroom environment:

"Because they're playing nice on the playground so they're not bringing bicker and fall outs into the classroom. Therefore we're able to come into the classroom quite calmly and just crack on. And they're not still upset or angry or fussing too much in the afternoons. Sometimes those arguments might have gone on for the whole afternoon."
(Westfield School Staff 11)

Furthermore, staff at Westfield School make clear references to the reduction in afternoon hunger following the introduction of the UFSM pilot.

"I do think it's been a positive impact I think sometimes the children in an afternoon before they're a bit… you know, restless and I think now they've got full tummies."
(Westfield School Staff 6)

"They [were] still hungry by half past one, two o'clock. So that's when their behaviours are starting to do the peaks and troughs. We don't see an awful lot of that anymore, which is really nice. And the kids are coming out, you know, after eating, you can tell."
(Westfield School Staff 5)

Similarly, the prevention of morning hunger was clear in the accounts of Burton Green School staff, in relation to children's behaviour and the impact of the UFSM breakfast club.

"Because a lot of it wasn't like chosen behaviour. Some of it was pure frustration. Or not knowing what to say or who to go to. Or they're hungry but they don't want to say anything in front of their friends."
(Burton Green School Staff 9)

In a similar way to how the provision of food overlapped with facilitating play at Westfield School, there were wider behavioural effects at Burton Green School, beyond the prevention of hunger. Staff at Burton Green School discussed the improvements to behaviour enabled via the broader social environment of the breakfast club, much like is discussed in this report in relation to mental health and wellbeing:

"But I think behaviour is massively improving just the way they enter the classroom. It's so calm and positive…I don't want to say just from a breakfast because it is amazing. But from something as small as what I think, as small as having breakfast with your friends. How the impact of the behaviour can be so massive…I wouldn't have thought that would massively correlate, but it has."
(Burton Green School Staff 5)

Overall, references to the benefits of UFSMs on children's behaviour, across both schools indicate a clear association between food and improved behaviour, either via the direct impacts of eating more (or improved quality) food, or via the social impacts of the UFSM initiatives on playtime or socialising before the beginning of the school day. As the Burton Green School teachers quoted above indicate, improved behaviour also has strong overlaps with the idea of children's readiness for the school day, a theme this report will next explore.

Pupil School Readiness/Readiness to Learn

Children's school readiness, referring to a readiness to start school on a daily basis, is a strong theme emerging from our interviews at Burton Green School with parents, and especially with members of staff. That this was observed only at the UFSM breakfast club initiative speaks to the time of day that the initiative takes place, and the ways in which the initiative helps in setting up children for the school day.

"School readiness, that's what we see. I think that's what I would say is the biggest [impact], that school readiness"
(Burton Green School Staff 4)

"Instead of rocking up late for school because, X, Y, and Z's happened, or they haven't had a good breakfast, they are actually, they're 100 percent ready to face the day alongside their peers."
(Burton Green School Parent 2)

In a similar way to what is described in this report in relation to improved health and wellbeing, and also in relation to behaviour, staff describe how children benefit in terms of their readiness for the school day via benefiting from the social space of the breakfast club. This includes spending time with their peers, and having the opportunity to socialise and play, as well as the interactions with adults. Greater opportunities for adults to learn about what is happening in children's home lives also enables staff to support them better if needed. Staff highlight the importance of providing this informal space to talk with the pupils about any concerns they have. This social space provides a different opportunity for communication beyond the formal and routine structure of the day. This underscores the function of the school in providing a social and secure environment. This contributes towards their preparedness for the day.

"The daily routine in school can be so bang, bang, bang. You come in, you do this, you do this, you do this, that they don't actually have a second to say to you, this happened at my house last night. And if, you know, often the police will let you know about something like that. But if it was their neighbours [and they] haven't been directly involved, we won't know and it's an opportunity to just talk about those things and then get them the support that they need"
(Burton Green School Staff 2)

Furthermore, and with overlap with the theme of improved attendance, teaching staff at Burton Green School indicate that children being ready for the school day has strong implications for their learning and attainment:

"What it also means is that our children are already in school.. for the start of the day. So actually that, it has a really big impact on their learning… on the start of the day and how the rest of the day flows because they're, they're calm, they're in the right mindset, they're kind of, you know, into school ethos, um, and they're into their classes for their morning activities and they're, and they work, you know, they're engaged and they're working straight away."
(Burton Green School Staff 1)

"Seeing them ready for the day. Um, in terms of attainment, definitely for those who were struggling to be in school… they've definitely made progress, I would say, in their learning because they're in school."
(Burton Green School Staff 3)

These themes, linking the UFSM breakfast club initiative with improved school readiness and subsequently broader themes such as wellbeing and attainment demonstrate multiple overlaps in themes between the UFSM initiatives and educational rights. The final sub-theme of attainment draws upon the links we have begun to address between UFSM initiatives and the educational attainment of pupils.

Attainment

Echoing previous studies on UFSM initiatives, our interviews pointed to a link between UFSM initiatives and improved educational outcomes.

While this has been partially addressed through exploration of themes of school readiness, wellbeing and attendance, the impacts of UFSM policies upon children's educational attainment merits further exploration. While some parents and staff we spoke to noted the relatively short amount of time since the introduction of the UFSM pilots, it is nevertheless notable that both staff and parents across both UFSM sites indicated improvements to children's educational attainment since the beginning of the initiative.

"It is improving their education. We're getting good educational results. Um, I'd hate it to end for them."
(Burton Green School Staff 8)

"I've seen so many people that just don't eat. Yeah. And it really does affect schooling...And it has helped us. You can have packed lunches at some point, but I just think it's better at least, you know, everybody's got a hot meal in their tummy."
(Westfield School Parent 5)

Beyond statements that UFSM initiatives improve attainment, accounts of parents and staff point to many of the processes by which they observe this, including via improving concentration, energy and alertness of pupils, and the removal of any distractions that hunger might have caused prior to the pilot.

"It isn't just the being fed, it is the being fed because that obviously, then you can concentrate and learn"
(Burton Green School Staff 8)

"Well, if we know that the children can have a hot meal and that they can access a well balanced nutritional meal… you can see that the children are engaged in an afternoon."
(Westfield School Staff 6)

"When you're halfway through a phonics lesson and they say, I'm hungry, when is it at lunch? It just ruins the flow of the learning, but there's none of that, so they're all completely focused on what, what they're doing, what they're being taught."
(Burton Green School Staff 4)

While some parents of children at Burton Green School and Westfield School were unable to

reflect upon the impact of the UFSM initiatives upon their children's attainment, with many commenting that they were unable to see the results upon learning within the classroom, there were a number of parents who had noticed improvements in their children's learning and outcomes:

"It keeps [my child] focused especially, we've noticed a, quite a big difference. Because sometimes they drop in the afternoon, and they're sort of a bit, a bit of a lull really.... I really do think it's helped...I do think it's, there has been a change with him, definitely"
(Westfield School Parent 5)

In one case, a parent of a child at Burton Green School indicated that their child had struggled with focus in particular, explaining that this had improved since the beginning of the UFSM initiative:

"[name of child] especially because she struggles a bit more with them kind of things... I think her focus, their attitude has improved towards school massively. "
(Burton Green School Parent 4)

As this report has outlined, there is significant overlap between UFSM initiatives promoting calmness, as well as readiness for the school day, via the social environment of the UFSM initiative, with consequences for children's learning and attainment. While there is evidence of benefits to the social environment at Westfield School (as outlined in relation to health and wellbeing), observations directly linking calmness and pupils' school readiness with academic outcomes were predominantly at Burton Green School.

"There were a few children... that were struggling. I think it's a transition from not going from chaos [of a morning routine] to the classroom. I think they're coming in and they've got probably half an hour before in the classroom and behaviour has improved hugely, and academically."
(Burton Green School Staff 8)

Similarly, it was only at Burton Green School that links were made among accounts of the interviewees about the link between UFSM and children's attainment via improved attendance and reduced lateness. This was especially crucial for children who were not meeting educational attainment targets, or for children 'on the cusp' of meeting them:

"we have the one little boy who goes every single day, ...now that he's in early enough to do kind of all of those morning jobs and has a prolonged amount of time in the classroom after he's been there…so he's not quite where he needs to be but he's so close you can see the improvements and he will be where he needs to be um so that's made a massive massive impact with him um there's a lot of those kind of cuspy children kind of just on the border of not where they need to be and where they need to be, you know".
(Burton Green School Staff 4)

Our interviews with parents and staff at both schools indicate strong links between UFSMs and educational attainment, which reinforces existing studies of previous pilots which make similar observations. At Westfield School, accounts explored the link between UFSMs and concentration, energy or focus, whereas at Burton Green School breakfast club, accounts of parents and staff indicated not only improved concentration, energy and focus, but also broader links to attainment via improved pupil school readiness, the social environment of the UFSM intervention and via improved school attendance.

Data from interviews with parents and teachers at both UFSM initiatives indicated strongly that the educational rights of pupils had been strengthened as a result of the pilots. How this varied was in part due to the time of day that the initiatives took place; it was notable that Burton Green School's intervention taking place at the start of the school day meant there appeared to be greater effects upon pupils' school readiness and attendance, as well as richer accounts of how these different factors impacted upon improved attainment for children at this school.

Findings: Health and Well-being

The impact of UFSM upon the health of children involved in the pilot is wide-ranging, including impacts upon healthy eating, subsequent effects on physical health, as well as broader consequences for improved school and community knowledge-building surrounding food. Furthermore, we see accounts of the UFSM pilot upon mental health and wellbeing, as well as the broader happiness of pupils in the educational context. These health impacts are situated in a context described by school staff and parents alike of poor health among children and the communities that the schools serve, both in reference to physical and mental health. These link strongly with the policy aim of reaching all children in poverty, an added value of the universal approach:

"We've had so many children who for years have not had a hot meal. there would probably go home to a bag of crisps and a sausage roll. But we know now confidently that every child can have at least a hot meal when they're with us."
(Westfield School Staff 5)

Healthiness, Choice and Quality of Food

Parents and school staff alike had overwhelmingly positive comments on the healthy food options available in both UFSM pilot schemes which they reported to be well-received by children. They commented on the wide range of food available, as well as how most children finished their food.

"I think...the availability of the options of food and the menu, the quality of the food they get is absolutely superb"
(Westfield School Staff 1)

"They have a two week rotation of what the breakfast on offer is, and it seemed like they had a good selection"
(Burton Green School Parent 3)

"They do get the veg and they've got the choice of getting little bits of salad and things. And all the meals are really nice, to be fair, they all seem...there's not many children that don't have a clean plate at the end of lunch, so that's good"
(Westfield School Staff 9)

It is notable that a small number of staff commented that variety could yet be further improved, noting that autonomy for schools (rather than catering providers) in setting menus would be a potential way for those working closest with the children to adapt healthy meals to their tastes as they observe them, with a view to reducing the number of packed lunches as well as food waste, as addressed in a later stage of this report.

"I'm surprised how many children still have a pack up... I believe a lot of that is down to the meal choices and the children not eating."
(Westfield School Staff 4)

Similarly, some parents noted occasionally that some children disliked certain foods, yet this would be expected to some degree and was overwhelmingly outweighed by positive comments:

"They're not always appreciative of some of the meals. Um, my eldest daughter will avoid the fish on a Friday"
(Westfield School Parent 2)

In the universal free school lunches pilot at Westfield Primary School, the overwhelmingly positive comments in relation to the quality of free school lunches were often contrasted with examples of unhealthy and/or insufficient packed lunches which some children in the school bring, many of which were more common prior to the pilot scheme. This led to concerns about what would happen should the UFSM pilot end.

"I know there's one or two in, or [in my daughter's class] who always have a packed lunch, and she's always commenting the fact that it's always chocolate spread sandwiches"
(Westfield School Parent 2)

"I think if it was taken away we'd see a massive difference. I think parents would be back to, you know, sending the children to school with a multi bag of crisps"
(Westfield School Staff 5)

In both pilot schemes, parents commented positively about their experiences of receiving a regular menu from the school. This assisted them with planning what the children would eat in advance, supporting with the variety of their children's diet outside of school. This also helped them to decide whether to access the free school meal on that particular day, or whether to provide an alternative breakfast or packed lunch.

"They sent out the meal, they have a two week rotation of what the breakfast on offer is, and it seemed like they had a good selection"
(Burton Green School Parent 3)

"It just means that I know what she's having for lunch, because she likes to look through the menu, she picks what she wants before, so she knows what she's having before she goes into school, so then I don't have to worry about...is she gonna like the food that's on offer, but she's very good, she'll eat absolutely anything"
(Westfield School Parent 3)

Physical Health Impacts and Relationship with Food

While observable physical health impacts may be more likely observed across a longer period of time than those involved in the pilot to date, as well as through quantitative analysis of health data outside the scope of this study, staff across both schools reflected on the likely positive impact of the UFSM pilot upon the physical health of children in their schools. Both schools reflected a broader strategic approach to improve the physical health of students in the long term. Burton Green Primary School outlined how the UFSM pilot was part of a series of measures the school has taken to reduce obesity. Furthermore, having observed children eating a range of healthy options, staff at Westfield School reflected on the potential for embedding long term behavioural change having established healthy

eating habits among many of the children at the schools.

"It's a lot of different things, but when I started, there was a huge obesity problem here... The nurse would come and do the weights of the year sixes and it was quite scary, really ... we've invested in sports as well. So we've got a full time PE teacher and we're part of the healthy schools award"
(Burton Green School Staff 8)

"Looking at the bigger picture, if you start a child's diet off well in school... that puts them into a good pattern and a good education, a healthy relationship with food. And I think that, um, doing that early in primary school, it really does set the tone."
(Westfield School Staff 7)

Despite the relatively short length of the pilot to date, in some cases, parent accounts surrounding the provision of healthy food did indicate observable impacts upon the physical health of their children. For one parent of a child at Westfield Primary School, the benefit of having access to a healthy free school lunch went as far as helping her child develop a healthy weight.

"I honestly think it's made some impacts, a positive impact to his learning, and his health.... he looks like he's put a little bit of weight on, he wasn't skinny, but he looks like he's put a bit of healthy weight on."
(Westfield School Parent 6)

Similar accounts whereby parents indicate that their children are eating well all point to a crucial factor of having the 'right' food in terms of types and variety in combination with the right social environment to counter what is observed as 'fussy' or 'picky' eaters. Some parents and staff observe children's overall relationship with food as improved overall. As one staff member summarised:

"I think as well, they're trying different things as well... because you know, like they're having chicken korma, and you know other foods that they probably necessarily wouldn't try at home. And if they're really fussy, we get these jacket potatoes as well, and there's paninis as well, so they can, they can choose them as well, so they've got the choice."
(Westfield School Staff 9)

Social Environment of Children's Engagement with Food

Some parents and staff described how their children also seemed to be more willing to try new foods at school than at home.

"He won't really like trying them, but he seems to be at school, so. I think it's something that other people have said to me... Maybe they see other children having it. That might encourage them a bit."
(Westfield School Parent 6)

"I've spoken to some parents, they're like, my child would never eat it, they're such a fussy eater, but they see their friends eating it, they are going to eat it."
(Westfield School Staff 3)

Higher levels of exposure to different types of foods and the building of knowledge both among children and the broader community is another consequence of the UFSM pilot which was explored in our interviews with staff and parents. Parents described this as giving them new 'experiences' and in a positive light:

"I feel like it's put [my child] up for more experiences, like doing a breakfast club. Because she's never done anything like that before...Trying different foods for breakfast."
(Burton Green School Parent 5)

"It exposes them to food that they might not try at home because there's certain things on the menu that I certainly would not cook at home because I wouldn't eat it personally. So it gives her that opportunity to try new food"
(Westfield School Parent 3)

Beyond the exploration of new foods, interviewees believe the UFSM pilots contributed to broader knowledge and skills in the community. In one example teachers expressed how more children having a hot school lunch enabled exploration of social interactions surrounding meals, as has been explored in a previous Department for Education report (Kitchen et al, 2012):

"I think the community, that's where we've seen more of a communication with our children, the dining hall. Because we really teach them that sitting down and eating is a social thing [...] the older children sometimes will come and say, I made mum and dad, we sat down last night, you know, knives and forks."
(Westfield School Staff 5)

In other cases, staff expressed how greater exposure of children to different foods encouraged parents to build knowledge surrounding food, for example through asking catering staff to share recipes.

Wellbeing, Happiness and Mental Health

Beyond explorations of themes of healthy food and physical health in our interviews, many parents and staff made reference to the impacts of the UFSM pilots upon the happiness, wellbeing and mental health of their children. These themes ranged from notions of excitement, particularly surrounding the Breakfast Club at Burton Green Primary school, to very clear expressions of how the UFSM pilots had altered the moods and psychological regulation of the children in the school.

Staff reported a broader context within the communities they serve, as well as in wider society, of poor mental health and the challenges that schools face in supporting families with this. This context also links to the theme of affordability and the cost of living crisis, addressed earlier in this report:

"The cost of living crisis is huge, particularly given the area in which we serve, and that has hit a number of our families really hard, and I think it's changed not only people's, kind of, physical resources they've got, but kind of the way they feel and their kind of their mental health continues to be a real, um, a real challenge for us supporting the families and the children together."
(Westfield School Staff 1)

Children are aware of the constraints at home and need additional support for their family well-being.

"We've had children that have come and said, I'm a bit worried because I know Mummy hasn't had breakfast so they want to get things for their parents as well because they know that parents are sacrificing things for them."
(Westfield School Staff 6)

A feature of both initiatives, although most clearly the Burton Green School breakfast club, was the benefit of an increased amount of social interaction between children and staff as well as among children. These took place as children were served and sat down for a structured lunch or attended the breakfast club.

"It's not just the preparation of the meal, but also the service of. It's meant that the children are still moving through at speed. But also still benefiting from the adult interactions."
(Westfield School Staff 1)

Adult interactions were also a factor mentioned at Burton Green School breakfast club. In this context, and as has also been outlined in its link to school readiness and educational rights, staff noted the benefits not only in terms of social interactions, but of children having the time to speak with staff about any events which might have affected their wellbeing at home. Staff mentioned that they had found out via the breakfast club of bereavements within the children's families, as well as expressing the much increased potential for safeguarding disclosures in the social environment of the breakfast club, where children feel comfortable. This reflects previous analysis of how the UFSM pilot facilitates pupil's readiness for school in a calm and social environment.

"It's a chance for teachers as well to check in with children again. And see how things are at home and, you know, it's that chance where they feel like they're open and they can talk to you about things that are going on and we can hear about things that maybe they need a bit more support with"
(Burton Green School Staff 3)

"There's a real social element of it... so we're in the hall, so the children come in, you've got 20 minutes of chatting to them. It also then leads to sometimes disclosures of things they're worried about because it's a comfortable situation"
(Burton Green School Staff 8)

"I think initially you, when you hear about it (UFSM), you think it's just about food and that, and that is really important here for our families, for our children. But actually what we've gained from it has been so much greater than just feeding our children breakfast in the morning."
(Burton Green School Staff 1)

Beyond the benefits of checking in with children and becoming aware of concerns that may impact upon their education, staff at the school made particular reference to the idea that the social environment of the breakfast club enabled children to relax at the start of the school day, creating the conditions for young people to 'decompress', reflected in their pupils' mindset at school. Staff at Burton Green discuss the calmness of the breakfast environment and the positive impact this has in setting up the pupils for a day of learning after receiving nutritious food.

"They love it, so they're getting up and coming in earlier because they want to sit with their mates and they have like a decompress."
(Burton Green School Staff 6)

This contributes to a broader idea, that the breakfast club prepares children improving their readiness for the school day. Staff expressed how attending the breakfast club enabled children to start the school day in a calm way.

"What it also means is that our children are already in school… for the start of the day… It has a really big impact on their learning… and how the rest of the day flows because they're calm, they're in the right mindset... they're into their classes for their morning activities, and they work, you know, they're engaged and they're working straight away."
(Burton Green School Staff 1)

In a similar vein, staff and parents alike at Westfield School made reference to the psychological benefits of children having the opportunity to eat a healthy meal. These understandings of psychological benefits point especially to the role of food in mood regulation, as well as the role of food in enabling children to play better, with overall improvements for their mood.

"But food, and often the first thing that I will deal with is if a child is dysregulated or they're upset. The first thing I say, do you need a piece of fruit or do you want something to eat? And sometimes with a couple of them it's sensory, they like the texture, they don't really need it, but others, it is hunger."
(Westfield School Staff 7)

"So I think the whole being able to have a well-rounded wellbeing with the diet and the exercise and that time where they can just be children outside has had a really positive impact."
(Westfield School Staff 6)

"If their bellies are full, they're not thinking about something else and um, and you know they go out and they eat and they have that down time of play which is extremely important for them mentally as well."
(Westfield School Parent 2)

The impacts of the pilots upon the health of children in both schools accessing UFSM is wide-ranging and addresses issues from obesity-reduction to the better regulation of children's moods in the school environment. Furthermore, impacts are spread beyond impacts of the food itself, to the health and wellbeing benefits of the social interactions that accompany accessing the UFSM, either with adults or with other children, with staff at both

schools noticing that socialising and play has strong benefits for the reduction of stress.

A notable difference in the way that the psychological and mental health benefits are observed occurs across the two UFSM pilots, most likely reflecting the time of day at which the children receive their meal. At Burton Green School, there are particular conceptions about the benefit of the breakfast club to children's wellbeing and the benefit of this to the beginning of the school day. At Westfield School, we note that staff reflect upon the wellbeing benefits of free school lunches upon children's play at break/lunch time. Nevertheless, both interventions share common reflections upon the psychological and mental health benefits of UFSM provision.

While health effects of policy can often be observed over longer periods, it is notable that staff and parents alike at both schools make reference to a wide range of positive physical and mental health impacts, which in combination with longer-term health strategies, indicate promising outcomes for children's health.

Findings: Environment and Communities

The environment is a key commitment for CYC, with a particular focus on reducing food waste. In this context, our analysis examines the relationship between food waste and the UFSM pilot, exploring how each influences the other. We also reflect on the schools and their preparedness for the UFSM pilot. This takes into account the material readiness of schools and their staff before providing a broader reflection of other impacts of the pilot on families. We also see a strong theme emerge on the importance of schools in their communities.

Environment

Efforts to reduce food waste were often connected to levels of need. This is evidenced through the uptake of UFSM in the schools and the fact that pupils often do not leave any food offered behind or go to waste, also demonstrated through other programmes such as the free fruit programme. We also see the schools take an active role in their communities in reducing food waste through their connections with local grocers, demonstrating the broader environment that the children's families live in.

"we never have any wastage, it tells you that the children are hungry … And I don't think children would take more than one piece [of fruit] if they weren't hungry."
(Westfield School Staff 7)

Any food that is leftover is shared with other children in the school.

"Anything that's um, ever left over, say we've got left over bagels or crumpets. I take it into nursery, because nursery aren't invited … I go in and they, they wolf it"
(Burton Green School Staff 7)

In the instance where there may be food waste, this is often 'healthy food' like vegetables. Schools are required to provide balanced meals, including vegetables, to promote healthy eating habits. Despite parents previously reflecting on the diversity of food in school and their children(s) willingness to eat food at school, some school staff reflect that if children are not familiar with foods, they are less likely to eat them, leading to food waste. This not only reflects a missed opportunity to improve children's diets but also highlights a disconnect between the nutritional standards set and the reality of what children are accustomed to at home.

"a lot of children that won't eat the meal that we provide for them because I think that it's possibly something that they don't eat at home so that they won't try it here … food goes to waste because … we've got to provide them with that vegetables … but they're not necessarily eating it"
(Westfield School Staff 4)

School preparedness

Initially, schools did not have a lot of time to respond to the UFSM pilots. This meant that planning needed to happen quickly to ensure that there would be the appropriate provisions and communications in place to deliver the pilot. The rapid implementation placed significant pressure on school administrators to develop and execute a communication strategy at short notice. As indicated by a Westfield staff member, the announcement of the UFSM pilots in the press before final details were finalised forced schools to expedite their processes:

"it's in the press before it had been finalised or anything really. So that was a bit difficult. So we were almost forced to do it probably a bit quicker"
(Westfield School Staff 2)

While these efforts aimed to ensure parents and pupils were well-informed, the limited time available for planning meant that not all parents fully understood the details of the UFSM initiative.

"We did a letter, I think, so a letter went out, text, newsletter, to really make sure that they were aware it was happening, and then assembly speaking to the children"
(Burton Green School Staff 3)

With the use of social media, word spread about the UFSM pilots amongst the parents prior to any communications received from the school. This created a gap in understanding and expectations. Interviewees show that greater or

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more coordinated communication with the schools may be beneficial as they are best placed to manage communications with the parents and pupils.

"at first I kind of thought it was only for people who were on free school meals. I didn't realise it was for everybody."
(Burton Green School Parent 4)

"it was announced in the York Press that Westfield was going to be the school actually before the school had been told … so there was quite a lot on Facebook of oh this is great we're going to get free school meals and I think people thought immediately they weren't going to have to pay … that wasn't ideal … yeah that was how we found out."
(Westfield School Parent 1)

On the whole, staff feel that there has been generally positive public perception around the UFSM pilot in their schools.

"So, yeah, it's all been positive, there's no negativity about it at all."
(Burton Green School Staff 6)

However, others are aware of some of the negative press the pilot has received. This is mainly in online comment sections. This has been difficult for the schools to manage and engage with. Press and online comments have also contributed towards the politicisation of the two pilot schools, with political debates featured in The York Press and similar publications.

"When we felt that it was unfairly reported in the press because it was taken out of context. I think that's been a bit difficult that the press had released quite a few things before we've even been told about them."
(Westfield school staff 2)

Furthermore, the discrepancies between what parents were told during political canvassing—such as the possibility of contributing to a fund to support the program—and what actually materialised, as mentioned by a Westfield parent, illustrates the potential for confusion and dissatisfaction when expectations are not met. This suggests a need for clearer communication and management of public

expectations to ensure sustained support for UFSM.

"on the doorstep [when canvassed prior to local council elections] when I said 'We don't need the free school meals, I don't mind paying for my children to have the free school meals', they said, oh no, there'll be a way that you can put into a pot to help fund ...which doesn't appear to have been."
(Westfield School Parent 1)

School preparedness and staff

The rapid implementation of the UFSM program was made possible by the active involvement and dedication of the staff at both schools, who willingly contributed extra time to support the pilot.

The schools needed additional kitchen resources to handle the increased demand. This required effective communication and collaboration between the schools and their catering providers. The strong working relationship between the schools and the catering teams played a key role in the successful roll-out of the UFSM pilot. This experience highlights the importance of having sufficient staff and resources in place and clearly shows that ensuring adequate staffing and coordination is crucial for the success of such programmes.

"So we had the kitchen staff, so through [catering provider], who provide our lunches, they needed to be on board, because they're having to do breakfast too ... They've been absolutely amazing as well."
(Burton Green School Staff 8)

"I think they did have to employ a couple more people in the kitchen actually to cope with it."
(Westfield School Staff 10)

Beyond the catering staff, the existing teaching and leadership teams in the schools also played an important role in the UFSM pilot. They were actively present in the morning at Burton Green to help run the pilot.

"There's certain members of staff that will help in the morning and take it in turns to run it. So it just seems to have flown, like, worked really nicely with us as a team. I think that's massively helped, I think, because we all work together."
(Burton Green School Staff 3)

At Westfield, there is the same buy-in from the staff at the school. This is contextualised in the ongoing feeling that the pilot is a positive thing that can have a genuine impact on their pupils. Teaching staff also take time to talk through the different types of food that the pupils will have.

"And I think because the staff know that this is a positive thing, everyone's bought into it and just adapted where we can to make things work if we need to."
(Westfield School Staff 6)

"in the classroom in the morning we put pictures of all the foods up. So classic was that enchiladas, that chicken enchiladas, and none of them had a clue what they were ordering. So we've started now putting pictures up every morning so the children can see what they're getting."
(Westfield School Staff 1)

This does raise some questions around the sustainability of the pilot and in staff providing extra time to participate within the pilot.

Other impacts on families

Beyond parents' reflections on their child's change in attitude towards going to school and in being on time, parents also reflected on the pressure lifted from them as parents as a result of the UFSM pilot. The timing of the breakfasts in the morning is helpful for parents who have other commitments in the mornings such as dropping off different children, other child care and work.

"because our eldest goes to a secondary school in a completely different part of York, it's helpful that way"
(Burton Green School Parent 1)

At Westfield, where there are free school lunches, there is evidence of some routine changes for parents where there is no longer the task of buying and preparing pre-packed lunches for their children.

"So I didn't have to think about, oh, I need to make her a pack lunch the night before as well as sorting myself out and then sorting him out to go to nursery and things. It was just like a weight off my mind."
(Westfield School Parent 3)

The quotation below highlights the importance of considering both the direct and indirect impacts of the UFSM pilot on the community. While the primary goal is to ensure children have access to meals, the pilot also provides significant relief to financially stressed families, easing emotional and psychological burdens. This broader impact on family and community well-being is crucial to the pilot's overall success.

"I think it's really difficult to quantify the impact of something like this. Not just on our, on our children, but on our kind of wider community. Um, as I said before, for, for us and for our community, you know, there's a lot of pressure and there's a lot of stresses … on our parents … but to know that that's one less thing that they've got to worry about."
(Burton Green School Staff 1)

The school reflecting the community

The schools play a large role in their communities beyond providing education. The roles of the schools reflect community needs and respond to local issues. Staff at the schools meaningfully engage with their local community and this is reflected in the training and work that they do. For example, staff at Burton Green work alongside the food banks with the knowledge of financial constraints in their pupils' family homes, while staff at Westfield support families through difficult challenges such as domestic violence and purposefully provide support for their pupils.

"I did a mental health first aid course, so I could help parents with that as well, and work with the food banks and the local area coordinators, so we've got a sort of overall picture."
(Burton Green School Staff 9)

"A lot of my work is supporting children and families, domestic violence, alcohol, drug abuse. So it's just supporting them and knowing that they've got a safe space and a safe adult within school."
(Westfield School Staff 5)

This holistic approach helps ensure that families receive the support they need, which in turn positively impacts the well-being of the children.

"we're really fortunate that they [parents] have got that open relationship with school … we've had requests for things like beds and for carpets for the houses too, because they'll know that that'll make a difference as well, but equally … if they're at a point where it's just a minor dip and there's been a change in family circumstances at home, the families are really good at kind of saying to us … this is where I'm at, this is what I need."
(Westfield School Staff 1)

Parents have close relationships with the schools, which deepens trust between them and the schools. This relationship enables the school to respond effectively to the communities' evolving needs, providing targeted support where it is most needed. Parents also point to the food banks that are available for families within the school.

"there's always a box in reception of foodie bits that parents are welcome to take if they need so."
(Burton Green School Parent 3)

The role of the schools in these communities far outweigh their role solely as an education provider. They have a holistic approach to supporting children. Beyond demonstrating the extra support that is needed, it solidifies the concrete need for the pilot within the schools. This provides stability of mealtime to the children and a safe space for them to eat and be in a trusted and calm environment with adults.

Findings: Other Policy Design Issues

We also asked interviewees to reflect on the sustainability of the pilot as well as what they felt worked well and what less so. Overall, interviewees were positive, however there are some concerns around the longevity of the pilot and how it would be funded.

Concerns moving forward

Both school staff and parents highlight concerns that they have for the pilot moving forward, which centred primarily upon the funding model of the pilot and its sustainability.

School staff also highlight food insecurity when children are not in school. While children are in school, they have access to UFSM but when they are not, given the context of economic insecurity and community needs, staff are concerned that their pupils may not have nutritious meals.

"And they know. that they shouldn't have to fight for a breakfast and they can go to school and they will get fed but then we need to look at the longer term they're off school 16 weeks of the year what happens then?" (Burton Green School Staff 9)

Funding and sustainability

The pilot was initially funded with c. £100,000 of Council funding with further plans to raise additional funds through the YCF via donations. The Council previously identified a number of risks that are associated with this model, including insufficient funding.

There are shared concerns amongst school staff and parents in the two schools around the potential discontinuation of the pilot. In previous sections analysing poverty, universalism and need, parent interviewees particularly noted the financial pressures that they are under while school staff reflected on how UFSM alleviated some of these financial pressures on parents to pay for breakfast and/or lunches.

Concerns about the longevity of the UFSM pilot, including its potential discontinuation, led to a number of worries that this may leave family planned budgets stretched.

**"Once you've offered that to those families, they're going to get used to not spending their money on school dinners...If you take that away a year later, you're potentially going to end up with, you know, less children having them than they were in the beginning."
(Westfield School Staff 2).**

"And then my biggest fear, like I said, was they're not going to fund it other than for the one year. Yeah. And therefore we're right back to square one again. And, but in a worse position because the parents would have got used to the fact that they didn't have to pay the bill. It's allocating the money elsewhere, isn't it? Yeah, yeah. Be that to food, fuel or lifestyle or whatever, but yeah" (Westfield School Staff 7)

This concern over the discontinuity of the UFSM pilot is already felt by some parents who talk about feeling anxious about having to find the extra money again for packed lunches for their children. This again reflects difficulties around the affordability of food and tight family budgets. However, it also points to emotional stress at home that puts a burden on family well-being.

"because I thought it was coming to an end in September … I wasn't looking forward to having to put packed lunches together again and I wasn't looking forward to having to, I was worried about the extra money that it was gonna … cost just for the pack ups." (Westfield School Parent 4)

The funding model and its sustainability is a top concern for all interviewed. This is a source of concern when businesses are contributing to the funding model, but they themselves can face economic downturn, undermining their ability to contribute consistently. This is further echoed in concerns that while the model is working for now, it needs greater structural support from the government to increase sustainability.

"It's quite difficult that, as a kind of a succession model, isn't it? Because, um, if, unless you've got businesses that are, you know, signing up to X number of years to support … [businesses] come across difficult times and can't give in the way that they would like to."
(Burton Green School Staff 1)

"the worry that they wouldn't be able to continue because if, if they just stop for whatever reason, then the funding's I mean I know it's, budgets are tight for everybody … it would be a benefit … [if it were] .. properly funded by the government."
(Westfield School Staff 10)

A parent interview shows a different perspective on the importance of a government-backed, sustainable funding model that ensures long-term support. They highlight how a government-supported model could encourage universalism and play a role in reducing the stigma of receiving free school meals, whilst protecting vulnerable people. Where the funding model is set up and potentially perceived as a 'charity model', this may increase stigma attached to receiving the USFM and willingness to engage. Furthermore, it creates a difference between those schools who are selected to be a part of the pilot and those who are not.

"I can also see that for some people it might feel a little bit … Like, they wouldn't want that charity level if they knew that's how it was working, that it should be more of a system. And I feel that ideally we would have the systems in place that as a country would be supporting our most vulnerable and allowing them to have that, that wiggle room to be able to then."
(Westfield School Parent 1)

Interim Conclusions

In 2024, the City of York Council piloted a UFSM offer at two primary schools in York - the ultimate aim being that this provision would reach **children in poverty**, **reduce stigma** and **tackle educational inequalities**. This qualitative evaluation capturing experiences within the two schools has demonstrated strong evidence of positive impacts across a number of key areas:

Educational Outcomes

Staff at both schools provided accounts of **improved attendance and punctuality**. The Council expected both initiatives to improve attendance, and while this is the case across both schools, our interviews suggest it was experienced more clearly by staff and parents at Burton Green.

Staff at both schools described **improvements in behaviour** as a result of the UFSM pilot. Accounts note that replacing packed lunches at Westfield has reduced high sugar intakes and/or unhealthy food. There has also been a reduction in afternoon hunger at Westfield and morning hunger at Burton Green. Overall, the social environment of lunches and breakfasts was perceived to have a positive impact on behaviour.

The council hoped to develop evidence on the pilots' impact on **readiness to learn**. We note that pupils' readiness to learn in the mornings was much improved at Burton Green. This wasn't noticed to the same extent at Westfield School raising questions around the importance of the time of day that the initiative takes place. Further work could be undertaken to understand the importance of these distinctions and its relationship to improved learning and attainment outcomes.

In line with existing studies, the experiences of staff at both schools indicate **improved cognitive functioning** and **improved educational outcomes**. Concentration was reported to have improved in both schools, but the mechanism may differ, with attainment reported to have improved via increased attendance, reduced lateness and improved school readiness at Burton Green.

Children's Health

The Council hoped to collect evidence on **improved diets**. There are overwhelmingly positive assessments of the healthiness, choice and quality of food provided at both schools. There was also evidence of children's overall relationship and engagement with food improving as a result of the initiatives. Importantly, this also included some early indications of **improvements to physical health** as part of wider strategies to obesity reduction.

There are strong indicators of the UFSM pilot's **positive impact on wellbeing, happiness and mental health** of pupils via improved mood regulation, but also the social interactions associated with both the breakfast club and school lunches.

Both staff and parents described how the initiatives had provided **greater opportunities to socialise and play**, as well as providing important opportunities to interact with staff in a way that enabled more **holistic forms of support**. Staff referenced the importance of placing such informal interactions within the wider context of the communities that the schools serve, especially considering the additional challenges that some children and families were experiencing.

The impacts are spread beyond the role of the food itself, to the **health and wellbeing benefits** of the social interactions that accompany accessing the UFSM, with staff and parents at both schools noticing that socialising and play has strong benefits for the reduction of stress.

Across both schools, there were notable concerns raised by staff and parents regarding the positive impacts of the pilot being reversed if the provision was to end.

Environment

Both schools believed that through the introduction of the UFSM, they had noticed a **reduction in food waste**. Staff drew attention to the relationship between poverty and food waste, and that if children are hungry, they will eat food. This also included reference to the success of wider initiatives such as the

provision of free fruit at break times. In cases where there may be food waste, this tends to be healthy foods (such as vegetables) and points to the fact that children need greater education on food.

Reducing Stigma

There was a strong feeling amongst interviewees that the **concept of universalism** had great value in **reducing or eliminating stigma.** Furthermore, there was evidence that removing the stigma of FSM's associated with means testing had a **positive impact on school attendance** for some children.

Despite strong agreement in the concept of universalism having the potential to reduce or eliminate stigma, an awareness that only two schools who reside in the most deprived wards in the city had been chosen for the pilot may have had unintentional stigmatising impacts. Rolling out the pilot more widely in the city will go some way in reducing the stigma that the schools felt the community faced in being 'put under the spotlight'.

Relating to the above, **careful media communication** is needed to ensure the provision does not inadvertently stigmatise families further. School leaders described occasions in which this did occur and the need for this to be carefully managed.

There were also some concerns that the funding model could be perceived as a 'charity model', and this may inadvertently increase stigma attached to receiving the USFM and willingness to engage. As mentioned above, it also creates a difference between those schools who are selected to be a part of the pilot and those who are not.

Impacts on Families

There was evidence from interviews with staff and parents that some pressures had been lifted off families. For example, interviewees described how a greater number of **children were happier** to go to school in the morning because of the provision of breakfast, how parents had more time in the morning to do other things (e.g., get to work) and there are fewer tasks such as preparing pre-packed lunches and shopping for lunch foods/breakfast foods. This helps with **alleviating the 'time pressures'** faced by many families as well as the **financial burdens** of buying food too.

Sustainability of the Pilot

When reflecting on feeling prepared for the launch of the pilot, schools discussed the need for greater collaboration with the Council on a **robust communication strategy** before a school is announced as taking part in the pilot. Schools struggled with the short time they were given to prepare for the launch of the pilot, including developing a communication strategy and addressing practical concerns, while media coverage was circulating at a fast pace. This meant confusion and lack of consistent communication between the school and parents on expectations of the pilot.

The pilot also highlighted the importance of having sufficient catering staff and resources in place and that adequate staffing and coordination is crucial for the success of such programmes. Interviewees described how school staff provided an additional amount of their time to be able to successfully bring the pilot to fruition and that catering staff needed to take on additional hours. Other school staff have been present in the halls with the pupils to enable effective supervision. Despite the resource implications, it is important to note how staff believed this enabled a safe space in which pupils' connections with trusted adults (beyond their parents/guardians) were strengthened.

When considering the success of initiatives such as UFSM's, it is important to note that **schools often extend beyond their role as solely an education provider**. Schools reflect the needs of the community and are central to providing key services beyond that of education. The findings from this research provided strong evidence of how schools engage with the wider provision in the community, including food banks and local charities, to provide holistic support to children and families.

There are key concerns moving forward around the longevity of the funding model and its sustainability. While additional funds should be secured through YCF, there are concerns that a charity-type model is vulnerable to changes in what businesses or other funders are willing to provide. This causes some **uncertainty**. This is

particularly challenging for more economically vulnerable families who may be used to USFM and will need to adjust their family budgets if things change.

Concluding Comments

Against the backdrop of social and economic insecurity, including the impact of food insecurity, the evaluation has shown strong evidence of the UFSM pilot reaching children impacted by poverty. Across both schools, staff and parents voiced serious concerns about the scale of the cost of living pressures and the impacts this is having on children and families.

Relating to the above, interviewees raised concerns on how the pilot provision was unable to address food insecurity for children and families as they transition from primary school to secondary school. There were also concerns surrounding food insecurity when children are not in school for longer periods of time, with particular attention drawn to the impact of school holidays.

It is within this context that we need to acknowledge the timeliness of the policy intervention due to rising cost of living pressures, but also its role in a post covid context and related evidence that this has exacerbated educational inequalities, especially those relating to socio-economic background. Findings from this evaluation strongly demonstrate how the provision of universal free school meals can play a critical role in helping to address these pressures, especially for families on a low income who are more likely to reside in some of the most deprived wards in the city.

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Appendix

Transcription of the qualitative data collected was completed using Descript – an AI software that creates a transcript using voice recognition software. Using this approach, recordings were uploaded into the transcription service. They were then transcribed and using voice recognition, the researcher creates 'nametags' throughout the transcripts.

Following transcription, we reviewed the core literature and the key purpose of the research to inform a coding framework. First, we used the City of York Council's four core commitments of health, environment, affordability and human rights and equalities as codes and thereafter, indicators of the relative success of the pilot scheme. In addition, we also reflected on the purpose of the research and developed codes on community knowledge building, change and school readiness.

Key themes/categories	Subthemes/codes
Human Rights & Equalities	• Improved education attainment • Benefits into adulthood • Narrowing educational attainment gap • Reduce stigma • Reaching children in poverty
Affordability	• COL • Reducing pressure on families
Health	• Obesity • Mental health
Environment	• Waste reduction
Community knowledge building	• Knowledge on food
Change	• Perception of change from the school staff, this may include attendance, educational attainment, interest in food • Impact on community wealth (using local suppliers)
School readiness	• Staff involvement • Preparations • Services, e.g., caterers

In addition to the coding framework developed, we adopt an abductive approach to coding the transcripts. This is most suitable as it grounds the key objective of this research to evaluate the pilot whilst allowing for the development of other (possibly unintended) consequences that the pilot may have on school staff, parents and pupils.

When analysing the transcripts, we inductively developed key themes of the school reflecting the community, other impacts of UFSM on pupils, concerns moving forward, the food and other impacts on families. These codes were generated through a thematic analytical approach. We also generated some additional subthemes for our previously developed key themes in our initial coding framework following analysis of the transcripts.

Final coding framework

Key themes/categories	Subthemes/codes
Human Rights & Equalities	• Improved education attainment • Benefits into adulthood • Narrowing educational attainment gap • Reduce stigma • Reaching children in poverty • A clear need
Affordability	• COL • Reducing pressure on families
Health	• Obesity • Mental health
Environment	• Waste reduction
Community knowledge building	• Knowledge on food
Change	• Perception of change from the school staff, this may include attendance, educational attainment, interest in food • Impact on community wealth (using local suppliers) • General statements about improvements
School readiness	• Staff involvement • Preparations • Services, e.g., caterers • Pupils' school readiness
The school reflecting the community	• Combating anti-social behaviour • Poverty proofing opportunities • Schools and holistic responses • Schools building strong relationships with parents
Other impacts of UFSM on pupils	• Attendance • Behaviour • Happiness
Concerns moving forward	• Healthy food • Having the right food • Other comments on food • Children's relationship with food
Other impacts on families	• Morning routines • Evening routines

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Children, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Committee   5 November 2024

Report of the Director of Housing and Communities

Design Principles of a 'Neighbourhood Model' for York

Summary

1. This report informs the committee on work taking place to develop a neighbourhood working or 'Integrated Neighbourhood Team' Model, as a way of delivering improved outcomes for individuals, for communities, and for the wider system of services in the city. If approved this model will cover multiple services provided by several organisations, including NHS bodies, the council, for-profit and not-for-profit providers and community groups and individuals.

2. This work intends to engender significant, positive impacts for the city, but is also a complex piece of work for many parts of the council, to deliver in co-production with partners, residents, and staff teams. The first stage of this work is to agree a set of design principles, set to deliver a system focused on person-centred, strength-based community development and effective Early Intervention and Prevention (EI&P) throughout York's communities.

3. Views of this committee will feed into a report which will be considered by Executive in December 2024.

Background

4. As part of budget setting discussions that took place in early 2024, a rapid review was undertaken of the Council's 'Early Intervention and Prevention' services, which spanned several council directorates and included discussions with health partners.

5. The aim of Phase 1 of this review was to find savings through a reduction in duplication of services and contracts across directorates and ensuring teams were providing best value for money. This however, facilitated positive discussions about how CYC services and
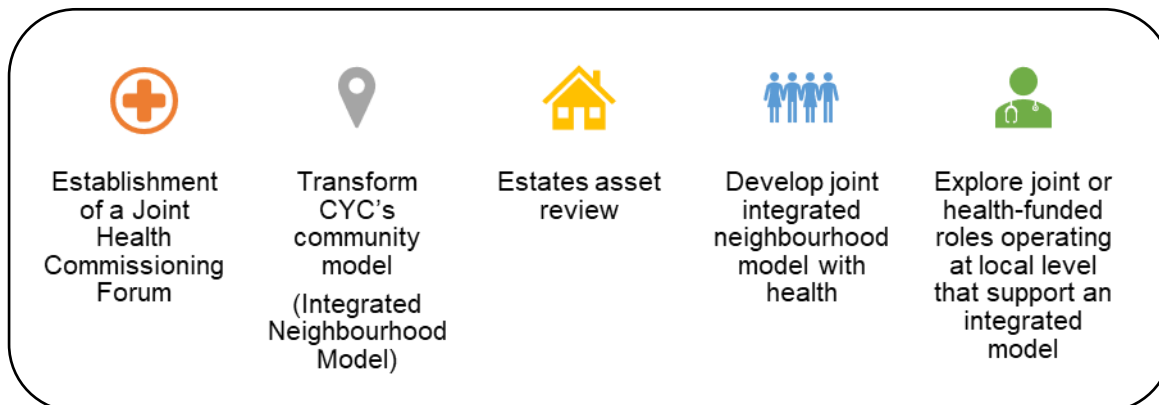
Health could work together, at a community level, in a more integrated way.

6. Phase 2 of this work was established jointly as a collaboration with Council and Health partners to redesign community services, exploring an integrated neighbourhood model to achieve shared outcomes. The proposed design principles for the model are outlined in Appendix A. The aim behind the model '*is to ensure the organisational wiring is there but it is hidden – it just works'.* This is a consistent message across all partners in this work.

7. The shared proposed outcomes for this model are:

- **People live for longer in good health** – through taking opportunities for prevention at every point.

- **People's need for statutory services is delayed or averted** – community assets are built around the individual and only after this point does more intense care step in (preferably through specialisms who 'come out' to localities).

- **Health inequalities are reduced** – through focusing universal services on need based on evidence.

The defined population that this model will apply to:

- Those who are identified through needs analysis and professional judgement as having **rising levels of need** which may necessitate statutory services in the future.

- Those who have a combination of **moderate social and health / clinical risk factors** amenable to prevention.

- Those whose need can only be met with **a team-based response**, when efforts to meet need though simpler models have been exhausted.

8. The proposed next steps sit within a series of proposed changes which are outlined below some of which are subject to separate CYC Executive and York Health & Care Partnership decisions for example the establishment of Joint Commissioning governance arrangements:

Establishment of a Joint Health Commissioning Forum	Transform CYC's community model (Integrated Neighbourhood Model)	Estates asset review	Develop joint integrated neighbourhood model with health	Explore joint or health-funded roles operating at local level that support an integrated model

Transform City of York Council's community model

9. Learning from Community, Mental Health, Frailty and Family hub models, alongside the success of Local Area Coordination (see **Background papers**), work will take place internally as to how the Council could redesign its community based resources.

10. This will include all services working in early intervention and prevention and other roles within communities working to build community capacity around parks, communal and open spaces, housing and public health.

11. Consultation across health and social care has already been undertaken on a model which would see work and teams split across four areas, or neighbourhoods.

12. This builds on work that previously took place in 2016 and produced a three area model which has been used by a range of services such as Housing to organise delivery their services. This has been updated in light of the impact on population that York Central development will have in the future and the practice of health to focus planning on areas with a population of approximately 50,000. There is a fifth area within York Place covered by the East Primary Care Network but, as this sits in East Riding, for the purposes of this report is outside the York Neighbourhood Model.

13. There is a significant evidence base sitting behind the four area model around a wide range of measurable indicators relating to:

- Adults

- Children

- Crime/Anti-Social Behaviour

- Economy

- Health, and

- Population.

14. The data mapping exercise showed the distinct nature of the 4 neighbourhoods summarised as follows in terms of need supporting a localised neighbourhood response tailored to the unique features of the areas:

RANKING BY DOMAIN (1-21 WHERE 1 = HIGH NEED)

4 Models Split Post York Central	Domain					
	Adults	Children	Crime/ASB	Health	Economics	Population
Central	3	1	1	2	1	4
East	4	3	3	4	3	3
North	1	4	4	1	4	2
West	2	2	2	3	2	1

15. This has been mapped to support the four neighbourhoods shown within the Design Principles document at Annex A.

16. Planned work following the approval of this model will also consider how to integrate a Neighbourhood Caretaker Model with a focus on targeting and improving public spaces, building pride in place alongside growing community capacity and strength.

17. A business case will be drawn up looking at the opportunity to use a mobile outreach service through, for example a 'Community Bus' type of provision. As the proposed Neighbourhood areas are large, services need to consider how those who are further away from traditional hubs and networks can be reached.

18. A 'benefits bus' has been trialled using Ward Funding in Hull Road Ward and others, with a focus on increasing uptake of pension credit with clear financial benefits for residents, and this could be rolled out to cover a range of partner services, advice and support.

19. If the business case allows, in the evenings the bus could also be used for detached youth work, to tie in with the city's developing Youth Strategy. Alternatively, it could be hired by community groups for similar purposes.

Estates asset review

20. Work will be undertaken to review the various community venues/hubs/CYC buildings being used for work across CYC Early Intervention and Prevention Services, Housing and Public Health and any other services as required, to establish the best and most cost effective way to co-locate teams and make access more equitable across the city.

21. This will dovetail into City Development work and thinking around accelerating healthy communities – the aim of this work will be to create and integrate healthy, sustainable and inclusive micro-neighbourhoods into the fabric of the city with future-fit health and community assets, including affordable or social homes for life at sites across the city alongside investment plans and solutions.

Develop joint integrated neighbourhood model with health partners

22. A major theme in health care policy over the last decade has been the development of integrated care and a more place-based approach to how services are delivered.

23. In May 2022 the 'Fuller Stocktake' (see **Background papers**) proposed the development of 'Integrated Neighbourhood Teams', and their implementation is underway, in a variety of ways, across the country.

24. These teams are intended to help by focusing on:

  • Meeting need that can *only* be met with a team based response, when efforts to meet need though simpler models have been exhausted;

  • Providing more proactive, personalised, and multi-disciplinary care for people with more complex needs;

  • Helping people to stay well for longer, through a joined-up approach to prevention.

25. Most fundamentally, context and environment are one of the main determinants for the person's current needs. The aim of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams is to focus on those who are 'under pressure' in their social context and have multiple, complex needs which cannot be managed by a single service.

26. The Integrated Care Board and York Health & Care Partnership are aligning all their plans alongside CYC to deliver integration at pace alongside the Council's proposals.

Considerations for the next phase

27. For any version of this model to be implemented effectively the work on phase 2 will need to explore the following questions:

    - Why? A confirmation of the final agreed outcomes and benefits.

    - How would the model be funded to create and maintain resilience of the model?

    - What services are included (both as the cire team in each area and then as required)?

    - Where would they be based?

    - When? A full implementation programme plan.

Consultation Analysis

28. As part of the Early Intervention and Prevention review phase 1, consultation took place across all CYC services and health partners.

29. As preparation for the development of this model, the Assistant Director Customer, Communities and Inclusion and a specialist from the Public Health Team are taking part in a six month programme called '*Realising the Potential of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams*' led by the Primary Care Network in collaboration with the University of York.

30. This is a targeted support and development programme for systems and networks looking to implement integrated ways of working. As part of this programme CYC are collaborating and consulting with a range of Primary Care Networks and GP practices across the city. The group also includes the Deputy Chief Executive of York CVS.

31. The York Health & Care Board has been involved in discussions around this model since March 2024 and will be considering a report in tandem.

32. Wider consultation and work with the Voluntary and Community Sector and community groups will take place as part of the next phase of the work if approved by Executive.

Options

33. When formulating the attached design principles (Annex A) officers have considered local context and evidence and reviewed good practice from other areas. The options for the committee are:

   - **Option 1:** Support the proposed 'Neighbourhood Model' and the design principles at Annex A, as proposed, subject to incorporation of comments from the committee as appropriate.

   - **Option 2:** Formal recommendation by the committee of amendments to the proposed 'Neighbourhood Model' and the design principles at Annex A prior to presentation of the final report to Executive in December.

Council Plan

34. The Council Plan for 2023-27 'One City, for All' sets out the Council's vision for the next four years. To deliver this vision, four core commitments inform the decisions the council makes, and how services are delivered.

35. The successful development of this model would enable the Council to address the four key commitments in the following ways:

   - **Affordability** - Accessing information, support and care closer to home and being given holistic support which will include financial advice will positively impact those most affected by the cost of living crisis, and financial exclusion more generally.

   - **Environment** – The developing Neighbourhood Model (and 4 area map) will link in closely with York's emerging 'Movement and Place Plan' which reallocates road-space to create safe and connected networks for walking, wheeling, cycling, public transport, cars and freight for residents, businesses and visitors alike – helping deliver York's economic and environmental strategies and draft Local Plan by making walking, wheeling and cycling more attractive and buses more reliable. The Movement and Place Plan will also identify how

best to balance the needs of streets as travel corridors and as places where people live, shop, go to school and enjoy their leisure. The model will provide integrated solutions to developing community improvement and pride in places.

- **Equalities and Human Rights** - Every human being has the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The Council has a legal obligation to develop and implement legislation and policies that guarantee universal access to quality health services and to address the root causes of health inequalities, including financial exclusion, stigma and discrimination. The right to health is indivisible from other human rights - including the rights to education, participation, food, housing, work and information. This model is person centred and holistic and will help the council to ensure equity of access to services, particularly for those who have protected characteristics.

- **Health Inequalities** - The new government's proposed NHS reforms will shift healthcare from a late diagnosis and treatment model, to one where considerably more services will be delivered in local communities. There is also a clear signal that there will be a far greater focus on prevention throughout healthcare and within services focused on helping people in relation to the wider determinants of health – such as financial exclusion, housing and crime. The work proposed in this paper will put York ahead of the curve by setting out a truly collaborative model alongside health partners.

Implications

36. Implications are being assessed as part of the Executive decision process. There are no direct implication of this report for consultation.

Risk Management

Risks

37.   Risks of working across council, community and voluntary sector and health partners to develop this model include (Several of these were identified in the background paper by Lewis et al. [2021] – see **background papers**):

  - The challenge of defining a stable or shared understanding of what 'integrated care' means may resulting in different practices and priorities.
  - A change in national policy given the significant NHS reforms being developed by central government.
  - Financial constraints and high existing workforce pressure for both the council and health partners.
  - Governance and data sharing/information governance concerns limiting joint working.
  - Difficulty breaking down professional and organisational roles and culture. This also ties in with the perceived erosion in professional identity.
  - Leadership tensions between organisations.
  - This is not just about the process of designing and delivering complex service change, but about developing trusted relationships that will be key to successful implementation.
  - Managing expectations of senior managers and Elected Members in terms of immediate impact and cost saving. This is a long term piece of work and therefore there is a need to recognise evaluation will therefore be longitudinal in nature.

Mitigation

38.   As described previously officers from City of York Council, Public Health, Primary Care Networks across the city and the VCS are taking part in a six month programme called '*Realising the Potential of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams*' led by the Primary Care Network in collaboration with the University of York.

39.   Several of the risks addressed above are being tackled as part of this series of in-depth workshops and ensuring the work starts in a truly collaborative manner, to develop a shared vison.

40. The more successful integration pilots and forerunners have had the benefit of pre-existing relationships in the areas they are working in. That is why the key to the success of this model will be to build on the successes of York's Local Area Coordination model (an in depth evaluation of York's work in can be found in the paper '*Bridging the Gaps in Evidencing Prevention: Key Findings from a Multi-site Study of Local Area Coordination*' – see **Background papers**).

41. This study found that:

    '…the positioning of Local Area Coordination in 'the spaces in between' the system, individuals and communities, offers significant learning for creating effective prevention. Working with people often missed, stuck or lost from services and community support, reduces their risk of falling into crisis and requiring more extensive provision'.

42. A key recommendation of the research was that areas invest in preventive approaches that bridge individual, community and service systems, which this proposed model aims to do.

Recommendations

41 The committee is asked to consider the proposed design principles and to provide comments in response to the set of approaches that are outlined, with the two response options set out in paragraph 33.

    Reason: To enable the committee to contribute ahead of a report to Executive in December.

Contact Details

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Report Approved ✓   **Date** 25 October 2024

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Wards Affected: **All** | ✓ |

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background papers

- Decision Session – Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Communities, 22 November 2019, 'Connecting People and Places - A Community Hub Approach' https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s136045/Report.pdf

- Lewis, R.Q. et al. (2021) 'Integrated Care in England – what can we Learn from a Decade of National Pilot Programmes?' International Journal of Integrated Care, 21(4). https://doi.org/10.5334/ijic.5631.

- NHS England, 'Next Steps for Primary Care: Fuller Stocktake Report', May 2022 NHS England » Next steps for integrating primary care: Fuller stocktake report

- 'Bridging the Gaps In Evidencing Prevention: Key Findings from a Multi-site Study of Local Area Coordination', April 2024, https://www.communitycatalysts.co.uk/lacnetwork/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2024/05/Bridging-the-gaps-in-evidencing-prevention.pdf

- Children, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Committee, 2 July 2024 'Raise York - Family Hub Network Development Update' Family Hub Network Development Update 2024-07.pdf (york.gov.uk)

- Department of Health and Social Care (Independent Report), 'Summary letter from Lord Darzi to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care', September 2024, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-investigation-of-the-nhs-in-england/summary-letter-from-lord-darzi-to-the-secretary-of-state-for-health-and-social-care

- NHS Confederation, 'Working Better Together in Neighbourhoods', October 2024, https://www.nhsconfed.org/publications/working-better-together-neighbourhoods

Annexes

Annex A: Building Blocks of a Neighbourhood Model in York.

Building Blocks of a Neighbourhood Model in York

Design principles for our future community and health operating model

DRAFT

Purpose of this document

This simple and brief document sets out some of the design principles behind a Neighbourhood Model for York.

It has been written by City of York Council, but its aim is to contribute to a much wider conversation with our partners in the city, such as community groups, voluntary organisations, housing bodies and the NHS.

There are several organisations or sectors implementing neighbourhood models, or teams, in York, who want to ensure that the services we deliver for our residents are closer to home, more integrated across agencies, and to shift the care we deliver to focus on preventing issues and illness as well as treating them.
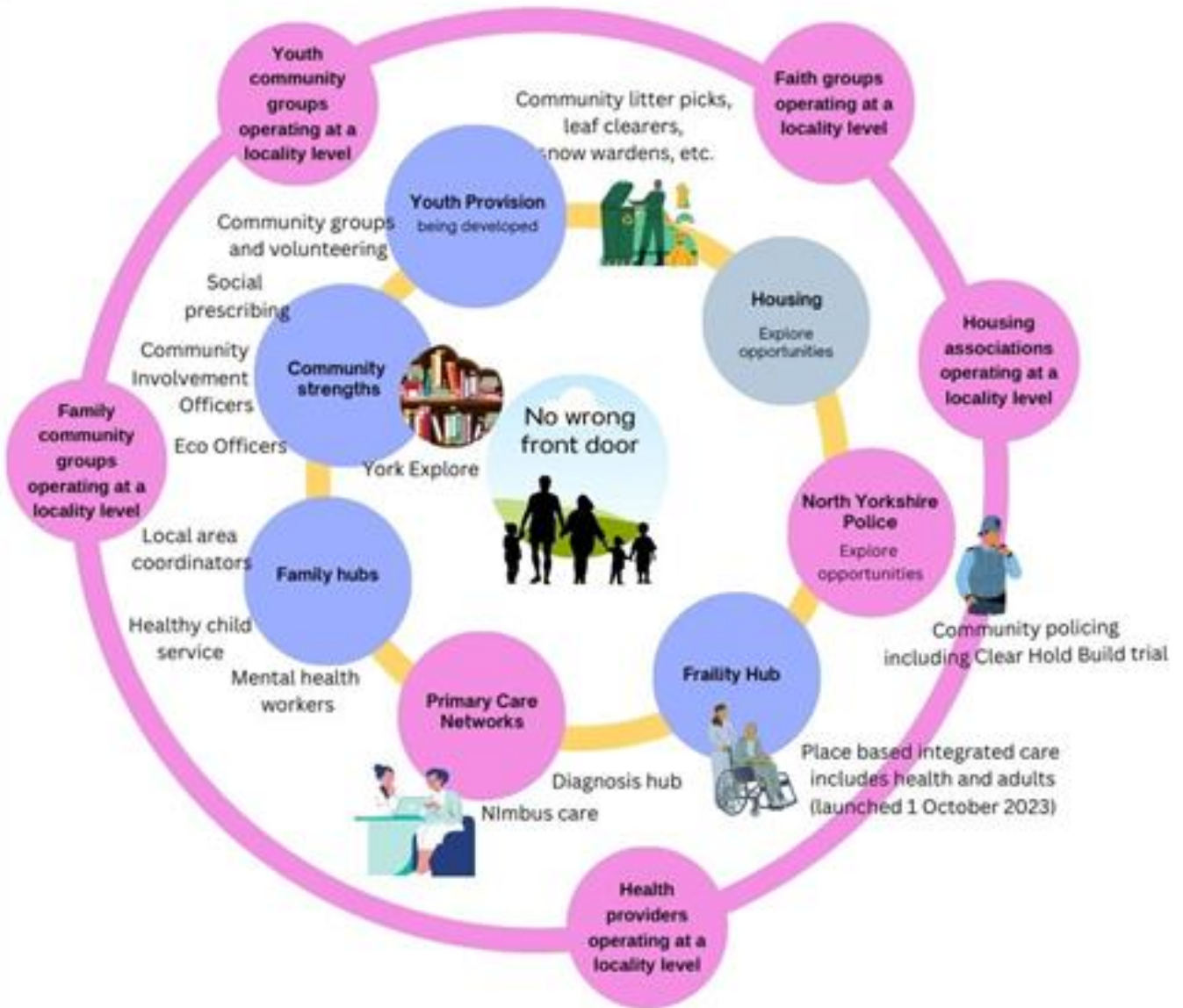
This document does not set out the detailed operational configurations of any new model, which we want to co-design with partners and co-produce with residents.

It does set out a set of 6 design principles:

1. **Geographies** – where are we defining the boundaries of our neighbourhoods in York

2. **Outcomes** – the things we want to improve, and those within our population we most want to improve things for

3. **Operating principles** – some of the key values-based ways we'd like anyone working in a 'locality way' to adopt

4. **Core offer** – what people can expect each neighbourhood team to contain

5. **'Working in' neighbourhoods** – a description of how some council services will start working in geographical places

6. **'Relating to' neighbourhoods** – a description of how some council services will continue city-wide, but still draw on the strengths of more area based working.

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Partner operating at a locality level

Council operating at locality level

Council universal service

Locality (enabling) model:
Building community capacity

Youth community groups operating at a locality level

Faith groups operating at a locality level

Community litter picks, leaf clearers, snow wardens, etc.

Youth Provision being developed

Community groups and volunteering

Social prescribing

Community Involvement Officers

Community strengths

Eco Officers

York Explore

Housing

Explore opportunities

Housing associations operating at a locality level

No wrong front door

Family community groups operating at a locality level

Local area coordinators

Family hubs

Healthy child service

Mental health workers

North Yorkshire Police

Explore opportunities

Community policing including Clear Hold Build trial

Primary Care Networks

Diagnosis hub

Nimbus care

Frailty Hub

Place based integrated care includes health and adults (launched 1 October 2023)

Health providers operating at a locality level

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1. Geographies

There has been a lot of work done over the years on what neighbourhoods or areas could look like in York – this is not the first time the model has been used.

Data has been analysed around our population, its needs and use of the public sector, as well as looking at the potential future population, which we know will see the city grow by around 20% through the local plan. Using this data, and based on three principles of a) trying to balance population need across the areas, 2) aiming for populations of around 50,000 people and c) align with existing council wards, these are the proposed four 'neighbourhoods' or areas for York:

CENTRAL
48,816 population
1x Family Hubs
1x Mental Health Hub
11 GP branches
2,538 CYC houses
3x LACs
2x LSAOs in bottom 20% nationally

NORTH
44,870 population
1x Family Hubs
8 GP branches
19 CYC houses
2x LACs
No LSAOs in bottom 20%
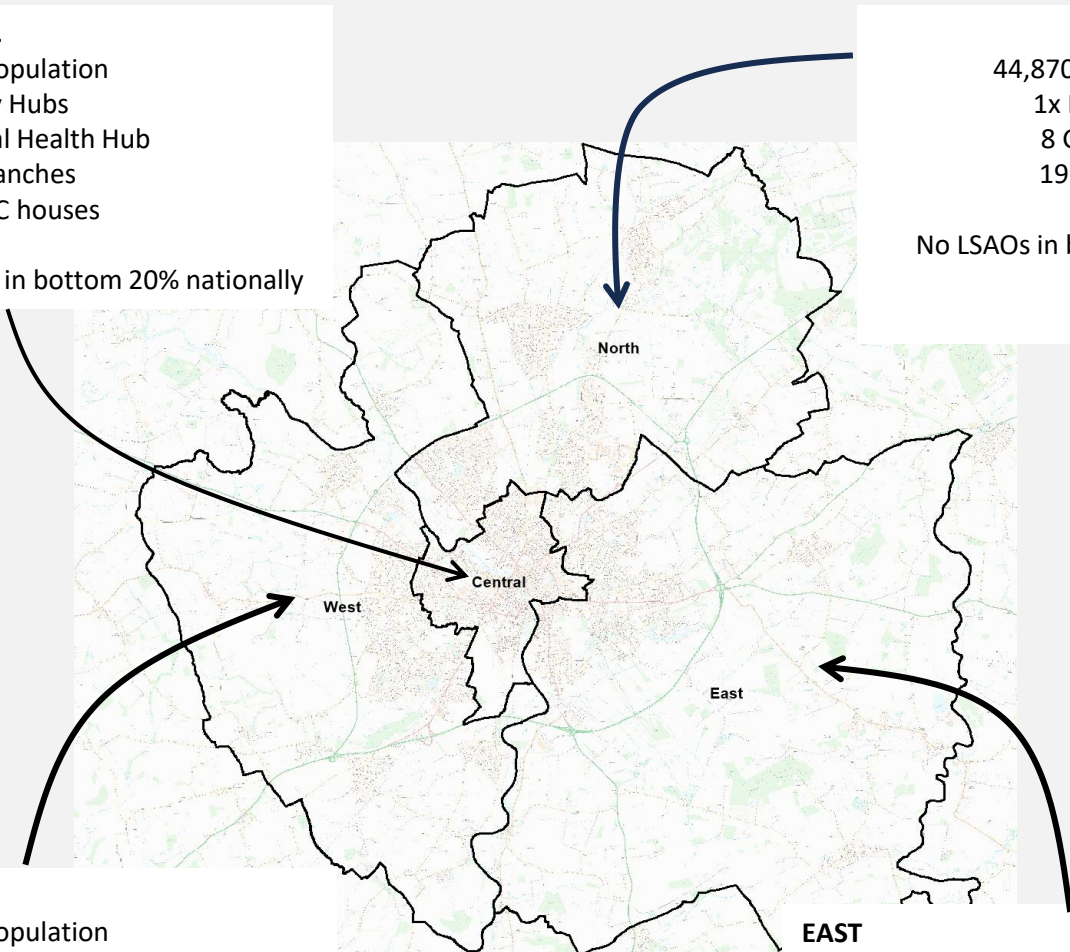
WEST
51,345 population
2x Family Hubs
1x Frailty Hub
1x Mental Health Hub (proposed)
9 GP branches
2,559 CYC houses
4x LACs
3x LSAOs in bottom 20%

EAST
59.520 population
2x Family Hubs
1x Mental Health Hub (proposed)
12 GP branches
2,040 CYC houses
3x LACs
1x LSAO in bottom 20% nationally

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2. Outcomes

At the heart of a neighbourhood model are set of clear outcomes for a defined population.

Clear Outcomes

- **People live for longer in good health** – through taking opportunities for prevention at every point
- **People's need for statutory services is delayed or averted** – community assets are built around the individual and only after this point does more intense care step in (preferably through specialisms who 'come out' to localities)
- **Health inequalities are reduced** – through focusing universal services on need based on evidence.

Defined population

- Those who are identified through needs analysis and professional judgement as having **rising levels of need** which may necessitate statutory services in the future
- Those who have a combination of **moderate social and health / clinical risk factors** amenable to prevention
- Those whose need can only be met with a **team-based response**, when efforts to meet need though simpler models have been exhausted.

Social need / Health need / risk
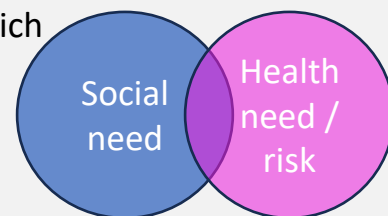
3. Operating Principles

The core principle at the health of localities is **Relationship-Based Practice.** This type of practice, when delivered well, looks like:

- Regular multi-disciplinary forums who share best practice
- Induction packs and holding networking events to build relationship
- A system which facilitates regular Multi-Disciplinary Teams or 'team around the person/issue'
- Co-location in one physical building *when useful* (networks can be virtual as well as physical)
- Having named local contacts to 'introduce' customers to, rather than a referral form
- Sharing a triage process to get people the right support at the right time
- Harmonised referral and standard operating procedures between teams
- Use of technology to facilitate networks and contacts in real time
- Sharing and understanding of local need, and data where appropriate
- Sharing a neighbourhood/area manager to facilitate the model

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4. Core offer

Each neighbourhood team will contain a mix of provision (voluntary, community and/or council services, and/or health) according to need:

- An integrated approach to staffing to support the area, coordinated by a Neighbourhood Manager role, who will work across all agencies and referral pathways.

- Consistent communications and website, building on the Family Hubs model, along with non-digital methods.

- Outreach solutions such as a multi-use mobile hub offer and online resources, for those furthest away from traditional offers.

- The right use of space, including community venues and drop ins.

5. Working in neighbourhoods

The CYC teams could work within each neighbourhood team are:

- Health Trainers
- Local Area Coordinators
- Housing Management Officers
- Communities Officers
- Environment and Community (ECO) officers
- Neighbourhood Caretakers (Public Realm and Housing Estate Officers)
- Welfare Benefits
- Neighbourhood Enforcement Officers
- Health Visiting
- Sport Development/ Health Champions

Discussions are ongoing with the ICB and Primary Care as to how they align their teams with this model

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6. 'Relating-to' neighbourhoods

There are a number of services the council deliver which will remain as city-wide services delivering specialist team-based interventions, but who will find, as they 'relate-to' neighbourhood teams, a more efficient front door and quicker, more integrated support:

These may include:

- Children's social services
- Youth Justice
- Adult social services
- Healthy Child service
- Waste Services
- Schools support
- Community Safety Hub
- Housing Repairs
- Housing Options/Allocations
- 'Our City' Hub (Migrant Support)

And a number from health:

- Specialist Mental Health support
- Speech and Language Therapists
- Other therapies

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Thank you for reading this document

For more information please email

Children, Culture & Communities Scrutiny Committee   **Updated October 2024**
Work Plan Template 2024/25

Date	Agenda Item
07 May 2024	*1. Work-planning for programme of work for 2024-2025*
04 June 2024	*- Meeting cancelled*
02 July 2024	1. York Pipeline of proposals to York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority 2. Family Hub Network Development Update 3. York Learning
03 September 2024	1. Finance & Performance Q4 *(for information) [Postponed from 2 July 2024]* 2. SEND Update 3. School Attendance 4. Youth Strategy Update
01 October 2024	1. Finance & Performance Q1 *(for information)* 2. School Attendance *[Postponed from 3 September 2024]* 3. Early Years and Childcare Reforms 4. Virtual School Annual Report
05 November 2024	1. Free School Meal Pilot Year Review 2. Locality Model – York Neighbourhood Model - York Explore Annual Update – ***deferred to a future meeting, date TBC***
03 December 2024	1. Finance & Performance Q2 *(for information)* 2. Placement Sufficiency (Update on Fostering Services, Together We Can, and Family Arrangements) 3. Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report
14 January 2025	1. Digital Inclusion Update 2. SACRE Annual Report 3. Attainment Gap
04 March 2025	1. Finance & Performance Q3 *(for information)* 2. Children Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 3. Safer York Partnership Report
01 April 2025	1. York Museums Trust Update 2. York Theatre Trust Update 3. REACH Progress Update

Agenda Item 7

Agenda items for consideration

- Updates from Task & Finish Groups (detailed below).
- Update from York Centre for Voluntary Services (CVS).
- Review of North Yorkshire Police's Pilot: "Clear, Hold, Build".
- Considering results of consultation with York Explore.
- York Explore Annual Update – New date for consideration TBC.

Task & Finish Groups

- Food Insecurity Task & Finish Group: Members = Cllrs Knight, Nelson.
- Education, Health, and Care Plan Task & Finish Group: Members = Cllrs Clarke, Cuthbertson, Wilson.

Committee Remit
• Develop & maintain close working with Corporate Parenting Board and York Schools & Academies Board and deliver complimentary agendas where appropriate
• Children's Social Care
• The Virtual School for children in care
• Early Years and childcare
• School effectiveness and achievement, including school attendance and school safeguarding
• School services: School place planning and capital maintenance; School transport; Admissions; The School governance service and SENDIASS; Behaviour and attendance; Elective home education; Children missing education
• SEND services & Educational Psychology
• Skills, including monitoring of York Skills Board; York Learning
• Local Area Teams, Neighbourhood Working, Community Centres
• People & Neighbourhoods Strategy & Policy
• Community Safety including Safer York Partnership, Substance Misuse, Anti-Social Behaviour
• Early intervention, prevention, and community development
• Youth Services
• Culture, including York Theatre Royal, Museums, Music Venues Network (& elements of MIY?)
• Voluntary Sector
• Libraries & Archives
• Digital inclusion strategy

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