

**Children, Education and Communities Policy and
Scrutiny Committee Task Group**

28th February 2022

Report of the Director, Customer &
Communities/Assistant Director Education & Skills

Scoping Report: School Holiday Food Scrutiny Review

Summary

1. The report sets out a draft scope for a related scrutiny review to respond to a request from the Executive made on 30th September 2021 for Children, Education & Communities (CEC) Policy & Scrutiny Committee to consider: **the effectiveness, impact and funding of the free school meal voucher scheme alongside other grassroots community based provision and other schemes to address food poverty impacts.**
2. This report sets the context around the solutions to address school holiday hunger that have been available throughout the pandemic which are due to come to an end and the work planned to address food poverty impacts in the city in the longer term.
3. Recommendations arising from the outcome of this work will be reported to Executive Members and could also inform further formal responses back to the Department for Education.

Recommendations

4. The Committee Task Group Members are asked to:
 - a) Consider and comment on the draft scope and objectives of the Review;
 - b) Agree next steps.

Reason: To inform developing council plans to support residents struggling to provide food for children during school holidays.

Background

5. The financial impacts of the pandemic on residents have been recognised locally and nationally, along with the provision of a number of financial support schemes available with grants and support distributed over the past two years.
6. The total value of financial support to families last year (government and council funding) was £1.9m and in the current financial year is estimated to be £2m. Summary reports on associated financial inclusion activities and welfare support activities for 2020/21 and 2021/22 (mid year) respectively can be found at:

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=875&MId=12651&Ver=4>

and

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=875&MId=12656&Ver=4>

7. Further support to financially vulnerable residents has been provided by established and voluntary community based food banks, and networks supported by the virtual community hubs in operation run by the council.
8. The impact of debt and poverty not only has a financial impact on children and families but also has an impact on nutrition. As recently reported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) in their UK Poverty 2022 Report 'Food security is not only about being able to afford enough food, but also being able to afford food that is nutritious'. This report is available here:

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2022>

9. The National Food Strategy Report (a Government commissioned independent report) that came out last year and available here:
<https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/the-report/>

identified that: 'This pre-existing divide in diet-related health is one reason why people in the most deprived areas have been twice as likely to die from COVID-19, compared to those in the least deprived areas..... Studies in this country have shown that, as poorer families' income goes up, they spend more on fruit, vegetables, fibre, oily fish and other foods rich in vitamins and minerals. And families actually cut their spending on alcohol and tobacco as their income rises.'

Ending of Covid Welfare Support schemes

10. By the end of March 2022 there will be a significant reduction in existing nationally provided covid welfare support for the financially vulnerable that creates a financial 'cliff edge' with the ending of:

- Household Support Grant which has:
 - supported families with extra funding for food and fuel costs;
 - funded school holiday free school meal vouchers.
- Test & Trace payments - £500 for those with low or unstable income levels to cover Covid isolation periods.

This followed the ending of the following in September 2021:

- Furlough support for those unable to work.
 - £20 per week Universal Credit supplement.
11. The financial and linked social issues arising from the covid pandemic are broad and complex in some cases exacerbating existing issues around debt, food and fuel poverty whilst also creating associated problems such as mental health pressures and social inclusion (isolation and loneliness). The numbers of residents on Universal Credit (in work and out of work) remain around twice as high as prior to the pandemic with January 2022 figures standing at 11349. The National Food Strategy Report states:

'Data collected in 2019 by the Department of Work and Pensions found that, even before the pandemic, 4% of families experienced disrupted eating patterns or were forced to reduce their food consumption due to a lack of resources.(This is known as "very low food security".) Among those on Universal Credit, this proportion rose to 26%.'

Free School Meal (FSM) School holiday Voucher Provision

12. Pre-pandemic there was no additional funding to support families during school holidays for children eligible for benefits related free school meals. Schools do receive funding to provide free school meals during term time.

13. During the pandemic there has been an increase in the number of children eligible for benefits related free school meals. School census data shows that in between January 2020 and January 2021 there was an increase in the numbers of eligible children across all phases (except in the Pupil Referral Unit), and again to October 2021- further figures will become available up to January 2022 during this scrutiny review. This is shown in the table below with the biggest rise in secondary school children claiming free school meals at 30% :

Phase/type of school	January 2020	January 2021	October 2021	Increase
Primary	1586	1917	1998	21%
Secondary	980	1268	1407	30%
Pupil Referral Unit	81	77	70	-16%
Special School	74	85	89	17%
Total eligible for FSM	2721	3347	3564	

*January 2022 Figures available from week commencing 7th March 2022

School Holiday Food Vouchers

14. During the period of national lockdown between March 2020, and August 2020, the government introduced the national voucher scheme to fund food vouchers for children eligible for benefits related FSM. This was to provide food for those children who were unable to attend school and was extended to cover the summer holidays in 2020. Schools received funding directly from the Department for Education to provide food during the period of the first national lockdown and to provide food assistance during the lockdown between January 2021, and March 2021.
15. This direct funding to schools did not cover the school holidays and as previously described the government provided funding through the various grant schemes for food and fuel (currently Household Support

Grant). Along with other local authorities the council chose to extend support for FSM vouchers during the school holidays from October 2020 onwards.

16. £50.5k was provided from the council emergency budget for free school meal vouchers of £15 per week per child for October 2020 half-term holidays and from that date the government's Winter Support Grant funding and Local Covid Support Grant (which superseded the Winter Support Grant) was top sliced for school holidays up to and including two weeks in summer 2021. Further council funded decisions have ensured food vouchers have been secured up to February 2022 half term.

Holiday	Weeks	Amount	Source
October Half Term 2020	1	£47k	Council Covid Emergency YFAS Fund
Christmas 2020	2	£100k	Government (Winter Grant)
February Half Term 2021	1	£50k	Government (Winter Grant)
Easter 2021	2	£50k £50k	Government (Winter Grant) Council CYC Supplement to the Winter Grant from the Emergency YFAS Fund
June Half Term 2021	1	£50k	Government (Local Covid Support Grant)
Summer 2021	2*	£100k	Government (Extended Local Covid Support Grant)
October Half Term 2021	1	£50k	Council Covid Emergency YFAS Fund
Christmas 2021	1**	£50k	Council Covid Emergency YFAS Fund

Further approved Funding:			
February Half Term 2022	1	£50k	Council Covid Emergency YFAS Fund
Total Government		£350k	
Total Council (including approved)		247k (of which £50k is approved/not yet spent)	
Grand Total		£597k	

17. Guidance for schools was updated last year and from September 2021 there was and is no requirement for schools to provide free school meals during school holidays. Where pupils eligible for benefits related free school meals are self-isolating at home during term time, schools should work with their school catering team or food provider to provide good quality lunch parcels. As rules are due to change again shortly, these arrangements are likely to revert back to pre-pandemic arrangements.

Holiday Activities and Food Programme

18. In November 2020, the government announced the extension of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF). The programme offers eligible children free healthy meals and enriching activities over the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays 2021. The council received £383k funding to coordinate the delivery of the programme. The funding has been based on the projected participation rates of eligible children in the local area and cannot be used to provide food for children who do not attend the activities. The information from the Easter and summer programme then was used to develop the offer for the Christmas holiday period. The full report on the HAF to the CEC Policy & Scrutiny Committee on 4th January 2022 can be found at Annex A.
19. At that meeting the officers updated members of the Committee with regard to the Christmas activities as recorded by the minutes:

Minutes:

Members considered a report that updated them on the delivery of the new Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme in 2021 and the future delivery plans in 2022.

The Head of Education Support Services and the Community and Partnerships Officer were in attendance to present the report and answer questions from Members. They noted the following:

- Where possible, the holiday activity should include a hot meal. Providing a hot meal had proved difficult, especially for smaller activity providers. Food provision had been mainly in the form of packed lunches and hampers for families.
- Covid had made delivery of the programme difficult, particularly at Christmas with the Omicron variant. Families had tended to be more insular over the Christmas period.
- During the summer approximately 20% of eligible families benefitted from the scheme, with 25% benefitting at Christmas. This contrasts with approximately 10% in other local areas.

Officers responded to a variety of questions from Members covering a range of topics that included the differences in take up between the summer and Christmas provision, the level of take up compared to the funding available and the feedback received from families. They noted the following:

- The budget for HAF hot meals was £2.63 per head, this had been set on the basis that school canteens was to have been providing the meals. Community kitchens and smaller providers had not been able to match that budget requirement and could not be expected to do so. The food provision must align with school food standards.
- It had been difficult to find outreach projects for older children.
- Food vouchers had not been provided during HAF weeks.

20. As outlined at that meeting the government have confirmed the provision of three further years of HAF funding allowing for staffing costs which will fund a HAF officer role within the Council's Communities Team.

Grass roots/foodbank support

21. At a local level each community will have its own informal and formal organisations who provide or distribute food to residents in need, these can flex in line with the nature of an event such a flood or the pandemic and may provide one off support or something more regular. This could range from formal foodbank provision, to pay as you feel cafes to concerned neighbours or volunteers assisting with very local food distribution activities. More formal organised activities are advertised on the livewellyork.co.uk website and a number of advice agencies may

refer residents to the York Foodbank. The foodbank do provide usage figures and an example of a quarterly report for October to December 2021 is shown in Annex B.

Community Hubs

22. The course of the pandemic has required the continuation of the emergency response, this response has adapted to emerging needs with a person centred approach as a core value, offering direct support where needed and seeking to connect people into local sustainable solutions. The support offered has included emergency food provision, shopping and prescription collection, support to access financial support and advice, wellbeing and combating social isolation and support to connect and access practical measures such lateral flow tests and booking vaccination appointments. Support has been offered over the phone and in person as appropriate, taking a holistic approach to issues to maximise individual and community resilience beyond an emergency response. Also supporting community initiatives to reshape or restart activities impacted by the pandemic based on local intelligence and demand.

Council Motion on Residents Right to Food - Update

23. On 21st October 2021 and within the context of a pandemic in which access to food had been identified as a critical challenge for many York residents, families and communities, full Council approved a motion supporting York Residents' Right to Food. This included actions around setting up a food network, understanding the level of informal food bank use in the city, and using the Community Hub strategy to establish further opportunities to provide further sources of nutritional food provision and activity where need is identified.
24. Linked to this on 14th February 2022 approval with given by the Executive Member for Financial & Performance to fund a further Community Involvement Officer (Food) within the Communities Team who will work alongside the HAF officer as outlined earlier in this report to assist in delivering the key actions set out in the motion.
25. The worked planned as part of the Food Council Motion work will also help in mapping all known resources across the city and align this to need

The Objective of the Scrutiny Review

26. In September 2021 Executive Members asked CEC Policy & Scrutiny Committee to consider **the effectiveness, impact and funding of the free school meal voucher scheme alongside other grassroots community based provision and other schemes to address food poverty impacts and bring back any recommendations.**

Suggested way forward: Scope for discussion

27. Scrutiny members to consider the following as part of the review in addition to the background information contained in this report and resources needed to support agreed work:
 - a. Existing need across the city including wider determinants of health and related deprivation data;
 - b. Mapping of FSMs including mapping of take up of other food related grants including Covid Winter Grant, Household Support Grant, York Financial Assistance Scheme;
 - c. Ongoing foodbank usage figures (during school holidays if known) and any other known sources of information around schools and grass roots community based provision to assess levels of sufficiency;
 - d. Advice & Information provision in relation to accessing food support including available information on the livewellyork.co.uk website;
 - e. A review of the effectiveness and impact of the holiday free school vouchers scheme by conducting a survey of beneficiary families undertaken via schools (or a subset);
 - f. Analysis of the impact of education initiatives e.g. Poverty Proofing Schools;
 - g. Analysis of available national and local funding of initiatives;
 - h. Best practice elsewhere;
 - i. Draw together final recommendations.

Scrutiny Review Delivery Timescales for discussion:

28. It is acknowledged that the timescales are tight for this review given the following:
 - a. Current funding of free school meals holiday vouchers ends after February 2022 half-term.

- b. There is £100k in the draft council budget for Holiday Hunger which could cover school voucher funding for the Easter Holidays.

29. As such and with the hope that recommendations could be made back to Executive before remaining 2021/22 school holidays and going into the 2022/23 school year the following reporting timeline is proposed for the task group to consider:

- Meeting of the task group on 28th February to agree scope
- Another meeting in March to consider early information scope goes to next CEC scrutiny on 13/04/22 when the Committee could also receive an interim update
- A draft final report would then need to be presented to CEC to endorse it before it goes to the Executive. This means that another CEC meeting would need to be scheduled, before the Executive meeting on 19 May 2022.

Options

30. There are no options for the Scrutiny Committee to consider as this is a scoping paper for discussion.

Analysis

31. There are no options for the Scrutiny Committee to consider, therefore this section is not applicable to complete.

Council Plan

32. This report relates to the following Corporate Priority within the Council Plan: 'A better Start for Children and Young People' and the outcomes may contribute to the key Council Plan priority focussed on delivering 'Well-paid jobs and inclusive economy' where they relate to financial inclusion.

Implications

33. There are none of the following implications outlined below until the scrutiny review makes its further recommendations to Executive:
- Financial – There are no financial implications.
 - Human Resources (HR) – There are no HR implications
 - Equalities – There are no Equalities Implications
 - Legal – There are no Legal Implications
 - Crime and Disorder – There are no Crime and Disorder Implications
 - Information Technology (IT) – There are no IT implications
 - Property – There are no Property Implications

Risk Management

34. There are no risks for the Scrutiny Committee to consider except regarding the tight timescale for this review.

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Report Approved Date

17th February 2022

Specialist Implications Officer(s) Chief Finance Officer and
Director of Governance & Monitoring Officer

Wards Affected:

✓ All

Annexes:

Annex A: Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme Report to CEC
Policy & Scrutiny Committee 4th January 2022

Annex B: Foodbank Statistics October to December 2021

Background Papers:

Links are provided in the report or attached as an Annex
14th February 2022 Executive Member for Financial & Performance
Decision Session:

<https://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=875&MId=12659&Ver=4>

List of Abbreviations

DfE	Department for Education
FSM	Free School Meals
HAF	Holiday Activities & Food Programme
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
k	Thousand
m	Million
UC	Universal Credit