

Extract from Executive Report 30th September 2021Holiday Hunger and Free School Meal (FSM) Voucher Provision

16. 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.
17. 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. This is shown in the table below:

Phase/type of school	January 2020	January 2021
Primary	1586	1917
Secondary	980	1268
Pupil Referral Unit	81	77
Special School	74	85
Total eligible for FSM	2721	3347

18. 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. This direct

funding to schools did not cover the school holidays and as previously described the government provided funding through the Winter Grant Scheme to extend support for FSM vouchers during the Christmas 2020 holidays, February 2021 half-term and Easter 2021.

19. In November 2020, the government announced the extension of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAFP). 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 is being used to develop the offer for the Christmas holiday period. There is currently no information from central government about whether the HAFP will continue to be funded in 2022.
20. Guidance for schools has recently been updated and from September 2021 there 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.
21. This leaves the question as to whether the council now withdraws from subsidising FSM vouchers during the holiday periods. Continuing to fund creates a significant unfunded budget pressure.
22. Executive Members are requested to consider the policy direction and funding for provision of food vouchers during the 2021/22 academic year. The estimated cost for the full academic year (excluding 1 week HAFP funded at Christmas) at £50k per week is £300k. If local authorities are to inherit this budget pressure given the lack of direct funding from Government this is something Executive may wish to refer to Children Education & Communities Policy & Scrutiny Committee. Through consultation scrutiny can assess this issue alongside grassroots community based provision and other schemes to address food poverty impacts. This work could also inform further formal responses back to the Department for Education.

23. In the meantime Executive is asked to consider whether it wishes to fund FSM holiday vouchers in relation to the imminent October half term holidays at a cost of £50k to be funded from remaining emergency funds. Alternatively given winter pressures on families, associated support up to and including February Half-Term would cost £150k and could also be funded from within existing emergency reserves. Vouchers for the full academic year would cost £300k however this would put reserves at risk as outlined in the financial implications section of this report unless other funding could be identified.