

**Learning & Culture Policy &  
Scrutiny Committee**

**11 January 2017**

Report of the Assistant Director, Education and Skills

**School Meals Scrutiny Review - Update**

**Purpose of Report**

1. This final report presents an update on the impact on schools in York of the introduction of universal infant free school meals.

**Background**

2. In June 2013, the Committee began its review of school meals; their agreed remit was to consider the take up of both school meals and free school meals across York schools. In March 2016 a final report was presented to the Committee providing an update on the implementation of the recommendations that they had highlighted during their investigation.
3. During the period of the Committee's review of school meal take-up, the then coalition government introduced in September 2014 universal infant free school meals across the country. Although the committee signed off their final report in March 2016, they asked for one final report to be brought back to them in January 2017. This report would enable them to consider the impact on schools of the introduction of universal infant free school meals in key stage 1 (5 – 7 year olds).

**Position Prior to September 2014**

4. Prior to September 2014 statistics were not collected either locally or nationally on school meal take up in primary schools on a regular basis. However in the City of York, because we managed a central catering contract used by 40 primary schools we have been able to provide some comparisons of school meal take up both prior and post September 2014.

5. During the 2013/14 school year 36% of pupils across those 40 were on average taking a school meal each day. That equates to an estimated 3500 meals being served per day. These figures include both key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils, as separate figures for each of the two key stages were not collected.

### **Introduction of Universal Infant Free School Meals**

6. Prior to the commencement of the introduction of free school meals in September 2014 each Local Authority received financial assistance from central government to support schools through the changes required. The City of York Council received £325k. This grant allowed the Local Authority to where required, to improve kitchen facilities, provide additional equipment and improve and modernise dining area facilities. All this was required in anticipation of the estimated increase in school meal take up particularly in key stage 1.
7. Because of the anticipated increase in school meal take up it also allowed for the potential for schools and Local Authorities to re-negotiate existing school meal catering contracts. The impact in York was that for those schools in the central contract the cost of key stage 2 meals were reduced from £2.25 to £2.00 per day.

### **Take-up of Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)**

8. Prior to the commencement of UIFSM working with the School meals catering provider the Local Authority had set a target of 85% take up across key stage 1. This 85% target has been met across a number of schools particularly the smaller primary schools.
9. During the 2014/15 school year, the first year of UIFSM 79% of pupils on average in key stage 1 had a school meal each day. In key stage 2 during the same period 43% of key stage 2 pupils took a school meal each day. Across those primary schools in the central contract that meant on average each day across both key stage 1 and 2, 59% of pupils were taking a meal, equating to 5420 each day.
10. In the 2015/16 school year that figure went up to 60% (5451 meals). Key stage 1 take up dropped by 1% to 78% whilst key stage 2 rose by 2% to 45%.

## Overall Conclusions

11. The introduction of universal infant free school meals in key stage 1 has inevitably seen an increase in the number of pupils eating a school meal each day. All City of York primary schools are able to provide the number of paid and free meals they currently require following a £325k grant and an additional £175k of capital funding to upgrade equipment and premises where feasible.
12. Schools have had to adapt to accommodate increased school meal numbers. Although we are not aware of any school staggering their lunch breaks, some schools have increased numbers of midday supervisors to manage queues and flow through the dining room.
13. Take-up across the city's primary schools of UIFSM has remained consistent at around 78%-79% since its introduction in 2014. Whilst in key stage 2 there has been a small increase in pupil take-up. It was anticipated that growth in take-up across key stage 2 may occur because of free meals in key stage 1. There are some positive signs across some York schools that this may be happening.
14. Meal price will inevitably impact on school meal take-up. Meal prices across York schools remain competitive compared to other Local Authority areas in Yorkshire and Humberside. Like York many Local Authorities are moving away from central school meal catering contracts, as schools move from local authority control to join Multi-Academy Trusts (MAT's). The current central catering contract in York expires in July 2017 and it will not be re-procured. As MAT's and schools begin to consider future school meal catering options it will lead to an increase in the number of school meal catering providers and variation in school meals prices across key stage 2. As they procure and negotiate their own arrangements or bring their school meals service in-house, they will continue to review what best meets their requirements and those of their pupils and families.
15. UIFSM had been piloted in two local authority areas prior to its introduction nationally in September 2014. From those early pilots research had indicated that there maybe some positive impacts of children eating a well balanced, good nutritional meal each day on both health and educational achievement. The following two paragraphs

provide some statistical evidence on primary school performance around attainment/progress and attendance which may be linked to increase in school meal take-up

16. In York key Stage 1 performance data showed an improvement in both attainment and progression from 2013/14 to 2014/15. However changes to the assessment process do not allow comparisons to be made between 14/15 and 15/16 data. School attendance data showed a 0.2% deduction in primary school absence between the 13/14 and 14/15 school year and a further 0.1 reduction between 14/15 and 15/16.

### **Implications**

17. Financial – Paragraph 11 provides details of expenditure to support UIFSM introduction in York.
18. There are no Human Resources, Equalities, Legal or other implications associated with the introduction of UIFSM in York.

### **Recommendations**

19. The Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.

Reason: To provide an update on the introduction of universal infant free school meals across York Primary schools.

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**Report Approved**  **Date** 12 December 2016

**Specialist Implications Officer(s)** N/A

**Wards Affected:**

All

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers:** None

**Annexes:** None

**Abbreviations:**

MAT - Multi-Academy Trust

UIFSM - Universal Infant Free School Meals