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**Learning and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee    12 June 2013**

**Briefing Paper - School Meals**

**School Meal Take-up**

The majority (47) of City of York schools are in the Local Authority's school meals contract with ISS (Education). The Local Authority manages the contract on behalf of the schools. The remaining schools have their own contracts with other school meal providers.

School meal take up across all schools (approx 38%) has remained fairly static over the last few years with a small percentage increase since ISS became the main school meal provider across the city's schools. There are variations to this picture in individual schools.

The local authority currently provides a 17p subsidy for each meal provided for those schools within the contract which allows the current school meal price to be £2.25.

ISS were chosen as the local authority's preferred school meal supplier based on price and the quality of food they serve. They continue to work closely with the local authority and schools to try and increase school meal take-up.

**Free School Meals**

A recent national report indicated that approximately 400 pupils in York schools (source: HMRC) who were eligible for free school meals but their parents/carers had not registered/claimed for assistance. This means that not only are those pupils not having a free meal they are entitled to but the schools where those pupils are attending are not accessing the additional pupil premium funding.

The local authority School Services team working with a number of key schools have put a number of strategies in place to increase free school meal eligibility take-up. This has involved making the application process

simpler, increasing communication with parents both via the LA and through schools. Further plans are in place to improve publicity during the summer to target families when schools return after the summer holidays.

The LA is has also been contacting those LA's where free school meal eligibility take-up is high. Early indications seem to suggest that close working relationships between the LA and local job centre increases take-up.

### **Free School Meal – Take up**

The final piece of the jigsaw is then making sure that those pupils who are eligible for free school meals choose to eat a meal. In York our latest figures suggest that there are many pupils whose parents have registered and claimed for free school meals but are choosing not to eat a school meal. These figures vary day to day but some days can be as high as 400. The reasons for non take up will vary but will include parents choosing to give their children pack-ups as well as pupils not being at school because of illness, exclusions etc.

Schools and school meal caterers have worked hard over the last few years to reduce the stigma attached to free school meals. The introduction of cashless school meals particularly at secondary schools has assisted in allowing all pupils to be treated the same. A number of schools in York have moved towards using cashless school meals and pilots have taken place across others. Cashless payment systems not only benefit school meals but these systems allow parents/carers to pay for other school costs including uniform, photographs and trips. Although there are significant benefits for schools to use cashless payment systems including parental satisfaction, reduction in administration and less cash handling the cost of installing and running these systems stills deters most schools from purchasing such systems.

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