

School Meals Scrutiny Review - Scoping Report

Purpose of Report

1. This report presents information in support of the agreed scrutiny review of school meals, and asks members to set up a Task Group to carry out the review, and agree review remit and timeframe for its completion.

Background

2. At a meeting in June 2013, the Committee considered an introductory briefing provided by the Head of School Services & Directorate Support on the take up of school meals in general and the take up of free school meals. The committee agreed the topic was suitable for scrutiny review and tasked officers with providing a scoping report for the review, for this meeting.

Introduction to the Provision of School Meals in York

Terminology:

Entitled to free school meals – Pupils are entitled to receive fsm if they live in households claiming qualifying benefits

Registered and claiming fsm – This relates to those who meet the entitlement criteria and register with the LA to claim fsm. This is what is reported by the School Census and described in publications as “known to be eligible for and claiming fsm”

Taking fsm – This relates to how many of the pupils registered to claim fsm actually take the meal on any given day.

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

4. 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.
5. The Local Authority currently provides a 17p subsidy for each meal provided for those schools within the contract. This allows the current school meal price to be set at £2.25. Compared to neighbouring Local Authority areas the price of a school meal in York remains high.
6. There are currently 2503 pupils in York schools whose parents/carers have registered and claimed for free school meals. 919 of these pupils attend secondary school whilst 1584 attend primary school.
7. A recent national Department for Education report (Data source: DWP December 2011) indicated that a further 400 pupils in York could be entitled for free school meals but whose parents had not registered and claimed for this benefit. This not only means that these pupils are missing out on a free meal but York schools are not receiving the additional funding that free school meals pupils attract currently £653 per pupil per year.
8. Recent data collected by the Local Authority's School Services team also suggests that on average a further 400 pupils per day whose parents/carers have registered and claimed for free school meals are not taking up the offer of a free meal. Further research is required to determine the reasons for none take-up but early indications suggest stigma of being on free school meals, quality, type and variety of food being served, many parents preferring to provide a packed lunch as well as pupils being absent from school and not taking a meal.
9. A number of schools within York, particularly in secondary schools have introduced cashless payment systems. Cashless systems allow parents to pay for school meals as well as other school costs (uniform, photograph, trips) on-line without having to bring cash into schools. Other benefits for schools include reduction in administration and less cash handling. These systems do allow all pupils to be dealt with the same and helps to take away the stigma of taking free school meals. The cost of installing and running these systems are expensive and do deter some schools from purchasing them.

Timetable for Review

- 10 Please see annex A which sets out a proposed timeframe for the review and a breakdown of the proposed work to be covered.

Implications

11. **Financial** – The report does refer to the following areas which may have implications on resources:
 - the current cost of subsidising the price of school meals
 - the potential increase in funding to schools by increasing the number of parents/carers applying for free school meals
 - The cost of installing and running costs for cashless school meals systems
 - **Human Resources (HR)** – There are no HR implications
 - **Equalities** - There are no equalities implications
 - **Legal** – There are no legal implications

Council Plan 2011-15

12. Protect vulnerable people – by increasing free school meal take up will enable more low income families children to access a daily healthy meal.

Risk Management

13. The risks in not carrying out a review are:
 - Schools could lose out on additional funding which is provided to them for every child on their roll who qualifies for free school meals;
 - Pupils entitled to free school meals miss out on eating a free meal every school day.

Recommendations

14. Having considered the information provided within this report the Committee are recommended to agree:
 - i. A remit for the review with a number of objectives
 - ii. A timeframe for completing the work on the review
15. The Committee are also recommended to set up a Task Group to carry out the review on their behalf.

Reason: To ensure compliance with scrutiny procedures, protocols and workplans.

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Approved

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes

Annex A – timetable for review