



**REPORT TO: EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE ON 11 AUGUST 2021**

**SUBJECT: INFORMATION REPORT: EXPANSION OF UNIVERSAL FREE
SCHOOL MEALS TO P4-7**

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND
ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Committee with information relating to the phased approach to the expansion of universal free school meals to primary school pupils (P4-7).
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Education, Communities and Organisational Development Committee following a decision of Moray Council on 17 June 2020 to agree a simplified committee structure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of this Committee the combining of the delegated responsibilities of Children and Young People Services, Governance, Strategy and Performance (para 9 of the minute refers).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In May 2021 the Council were advised that the Scottish Government and COSLA had reached a joint agreement on the implementation of a phased approach to universal free schools meals (FSM) for all primary aged children, with the timetable for implementation as follows:
- August 2021 – expansion of Universal Free School Meals to P4 children
 - January 2022 – expansion of Universal Free School Meals to P5 children
 - August 2022 – expansion of Universal Free School Meals to P6-7 children
- 2.2 To support the initial implementation of the programme the Scottish Government is providing funding of £28 million to local authorities (£525,000 to Moray Council), through a redetermination of the General Revenue Grant in March 2022. Further work is required to establish the implementation costs nationally of the expansion to P6-7, and ongoing costs of the delivery of the programme from 2022/23 onwards.

- 2.3 The joint agreement also established the governance arrangements for the delivery of the programme. A jointly chaired national Governance Board will be established to monitor implementation and oversee financial monitoring. A Programme Operations Group (including local authority officer representation) will report to the Governance Board and will undertake survey work with local authorities to understand the capital and revenue implications of the universal FSM expansion.
- 2.4 A review of take up of FSM across Moray showed an average of 47-56% whole school pre-COVID, with a reduction to an average of 40-52% during the COVID pandemic. The current take up of P4-P7 ranges from 22% (Lossiemouth ASG) to 41% (Keith ASG) although within these averages a maximum of 75% and minimum of 18% are recorded. The potential take up of FSM across P4-7 is currently unknown, however current assumptions are that there will be a repeat of the initial increase in uptake during the P1-P3 FSM implementation. It is also assumed that where a family currently have children across the P1-P7 group and older children (P4-P7) are taking packed lunches their younger siblings (P1-P3) often follow suit. With universal provision across the primary year groups it is anticipated that a majority of families will shift to all children opting for FSMs resulting in an additional increase in FSM uptake within the P1-P3 cohort. A pupil/parent survey will be undertaken at the start of the new (2021-22) session to develop a more accurate picture of anticipated numbers.
- 2.5 Catering and Education have assessed that the current capacity/capability (kitchen outputs, staff support and dining spaces) can support the extension of FSM provision to P4 from August 2021 without significant impact.
- 2.6 The expansion to P5, 6 and 7 will have impacts to varying degrees across our primary schools as follows:
- Increased catering capacity and capability requirements (requirement to extend or reopen kitchens, extension to lunchtime hours*, provision of additional sittings*, introduction of rota systems);
 - Increased transport costs from kitchens to servery;
 - Increased food waste (environmental impact);
 - Additional equipment requirements : ovens, fridges/freezers, tables and chairs;
 - More frequent catering equipment maintenance;
 - Additional cutlery and crockery requirements;
 - Additional dining room supervision (staff and costs);
 - Extended break playground provision (+SFL staff hours);
 - Income loss from reduction in paid meals;
- (*) these options will require statutory consultation if considered for implementation.
- 2.7 A Working Group has been established to oversee the development and implementation of this programme. The group is chaired by the Head of Education Resources and Communities, with representation from Education, Property, Catering and Finance. The Working Group is currently developing a full assessment of the implications across all of our schools, including proposed delivery options and costs. The full scope of the programme will be

reported to, and progress monitored by, the Transforming Learning Board. Any infrastructure capital investment options will be considered alongside long term Learning Estate options.

3. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

This report supports the LOIP outcomes:

Building a better future for children and young people in Moray:

- Healthier Children: children get the healthiest start in life and are supported to achieve the best possible mental health and wellbeing and there is equity for vulnerable groups.

And the aims of the Corporate Plan to:

- Improve health and wellbeing for the people of Moray

(b) Policy and Legal

The timetable for the expansion of universal free school meals to P4-7 has been jointly agreed by the Scottish Government and Local Authority Leaders (COSLA).

(c) Financial implications

Moray Council will receive an initial grant from the Scottish Government of £525,000, provided through a redetermination of the General Revenue Grant in March 2022, to cover the costs of implementation for the expansion to P4 and P5. Further financial work will be undertaken nationally to recommend the distribution of funding for the P6-7 implementation, and for ongoing funding requirements in relation to the continuation of the programme from 2022/23 onwards.

Current estimates are that there would be a revenue loss to the Council of £522,000 per annum as a result of the expansion of FSM to include all primary year groups.

(d) Risk Implications

Any major infrastructure work can only be undertaken during the summer holidays in 2022. This is a risk to the delivery of the programme within the timeframe currently set out nationally. Initial feedback is that this is a risk across all local authority programmes, with further discussions ongoing at a national level to understand and communicate the challenges.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications arising directly from this report. The work is currently being undertaken within existing team resources.

There will be future staffing requirements within the Catering (Cooks and Catering Assistants) and Education (Lunchtime Supervisors, Pupil Support Assistants) services to accommodate an increase in school meal take up. Requirements for additional staffing will be established as delivery options are developed.

(f) Property

Detailed investigative work is ongoing to determine the property implications across all of our primary schools. Options for delivery of the expansion of universal FSM will include property related costs in some schools.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

There are no equality implications arising from this report. The programme will ensure all primary aged children in Moray have access to free school meals.

(h) Consultations

In preparing this report, consultations have been undertaken with the Senior Project Manager (Learning Estate) and the Catering Manager and their comments have been incorporated in the report.

4. CONCLUSION

5.1 Committee is asked to consider and note the information contained in this report regarding the expansion of the universal free school meal commitment to P4-7.

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Background Papers:
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