

# Education, Children and Families Committee

10am, Tuesday, 19 May 2015

## Free School Meals P1-P3 – Progress Report

Item number	7.10
Report number	
Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	All

### Executive summary

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On [9 December 2014](#) Committee requested that a progress report be provided in two cycles on the impact of the delivery of the free schools meals policy on primary schools across the City of Edinburgh Council Estate. The purpose of this report is to respond to that request.

### Links

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Coalition pledges

Council outcomes [CO1](#), [CO4](#) and [CO6](#)

Single Outcome Agreement [SO3](#)

## Free School Meals

### Recommendations

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- 1.1 Note the content of this report and the successful implementation of the extended entitlement to free school meals to all P1 to P3 pupils from January 2015.

### Background

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- 2.1 On 7 January 2014 the Scottish Government announced its intention, and gave its commitment, to give all children in primary 1 to 3 the option of a free school meal from January 2015. On 17 July 2014 the Scottish Government wrote to all Local Authorities to confirm its expectation that this policy would be delivered.
- 2.2 An initial report to Committee on [11 September 2014](#) provided details regarding a number of practical and financial issues which arose as a consequence of the introduction of this policy and the latest position regarding their resolution. Committee noted the immediate requirement for capital expenditure of £1,414,944 to address issues of capacity and production in the school estate to allow the extended free school meal policy to be implemented with effect from January 2015 which was then remitted to, and approved by, Council on [25 September 2014](#).
- 2.3 A subsequent report to Committee on [9 December 2014](#) provided a further update on progress and the outcome of the detailed assessment of costs, and sources of funding, relating to the more substantive works identified as being necessary at Cramond, East Craigs, Sciennes and Towerbank Primary Schools. The report also outlined the interim measures for these schools. Committee approved the remaining capital expenditure of £3,085,056 towards the implementation of the extended entitlement to free school meals at these four schools, primarily to address issues of capacity.
- 2.4 On [9 December 2014](#) Committee requested that a progress report be provided in two cycles on the impact of the delivery of the free schools meals policy on primary schools across the City of Edinburgh Council Estate. The purpose of this report is to respond to that request.

### Main report

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- 3.1 With effect from January 2015 all children in primary 1 to 3 have had the option of a free school meal. This has resulted in a significant increase in the volume of school meals delivered. In the three month period to 31 March 2015 the number

of school meals delivered in City primary schools was 805,000 representing a 42% increase on the same period in 2014.

- 3.2 The requirement to deliver this significant volume of additional school meals presented a number of issues in both producing and then accommodating the delivery of the extra volume of meals arising. However, the comprehensive planning which preceded the introduction of the extended entitlement has ensured that the implementation of the new policy has been very successful.

### School Meal Uptake

- 3.3 Information regarding uptake continues to be collected through a monthly return from each school. Whilst in previous years only aggregate data was collected, with effect from January 2015 information has been requested from primary schools regarding the number of meals delivered at each year stage. This is particularly important to monitor the level of uptake at P1-P3 on an ongoing basis to ensure that the additional funding provided by the Scottish Government is sufficient to meet the additional costs arising.
- 3.4 The levels of uptake of school meals in Primary Schools in the three month period to 31 March 2015 is shown in the table below; in each case uptake is shown as a percentage of the school roll, not of pupils who attended.

Month	P1 Uptake %	P2 Uptake %	P3 Uptake %	P1-P3 Total Uptake %	P4-P7 Total Uptake %	Total Uptake %
January 2015	69.5%	67.2%	66.3%	<b>67.7%</b>	34.2%	<b>50.2%</b>
February 2015	72.9%	71.0%	69.4%	<b>71.1%</b>	34.9%	<b>52.2%</b>
March 2015	73.1%	72.3%	70.6%	<b>72.0%</b>	34.5%	<b>52.5%</b>
Three month average	71.8%	70.2%	68.8%	<b>70.3%</b>	34.5%	<b>51.7%</b>

- 3.5 The data suggests there might have been a slight delay in the full impact of the extended P1 to P3 entitlement coming through when it was introduced in January 2015. Whilst the average uptake over the three month period was 70.3%, uptake levels across all year stages increased over the period suggesting that the ongoing sustained uptake levels will be closer to 75%.
- 3.6 The Council operates an asymmetric week, the consequence being that uptake levels on a Friday are lower than during a Monday to Thursday which reduces the overall average uptake levels. The impact is exemplified in the provisional data from our most recent annual school meals census return which was taken on a weekday and showed uptake levels as a percentage of the school roll of 76.3% for P1-P3; 40.2% for P4-P7 and 57.5% overall.
- 3.7 It had been suggested that the extended eligibility for free school meals in P1 to P3 would increase uptake in higher year stages. Information was not previously

recorded regarding uptake in schools by year stage therefore no data is available against which to make a detailed comparison.

- 3.8 However, a one-off survey of uptake by year stage was undertaken in the week commencing 4 March 2014 to inform the capacity planning for the introduction of the new policy. During that week the average uptake in P4-P7 was 34.2% which is slightly lower than the average uptake experienced in the three month period to 31 March 2015. This would suggest that the extended entitlement to free school meals may have resulted in a slight increase in the uptake in other year stages albeit it is too early to say with certainty if this will be an ongoing trend.

### **Works to Kitchens**

- 3.9 Within the estate there was a requirement to increase cooking capacity to produce the projected uptake of school meals following the implementation of free school meals for P1-P3. In order to achieve this, upgrades were carried out at 29 kitchens and two new production kitchens were installed at Craiglockhart and St Cuthbert's Primary Schools. These works were completed during December 2015 and provided the capacity required to accommodate the increase in meal numbers.

### **Catering Staffing**

- 3.10 Increased staffing requirements were assessed based on the projected uptake levels with recruitment taking place during December 2015. There were some delays with recruitment and PVG checks however most positions are now filled. To ensure sufficient staff are in place to deliver the service, this process is ongoing and staffing levels are being monitored and adjusted in line with uptake.

### **Schools Awaiting Extensions**

- 3.11 There are four schools at which significant additional physical space is required and will be provided to enable the successful implementation of the extended entitlement to free school meals: Cramond, East Craig's, Sciennes and Towerbank Primary Schools. Visits have been carried out to assess how these schools are managing in advance of the additional space being delivered.
- 3.12 Both school staff and catering staff are working hard in these schools to ensure the lunch service is provided as efficiently as possible. While they are managing well they have identified recurring problems with some, or all, of the following; noise, space, queuing times and time to eat. The volume of noise and hectic dining spaces are a particular problem for some pupils with this being identified as a reason for some pupils choosing not to continue coming for lunch. There are occasional problems with lunch time running over which has a consequential impact on learning and teaching time.
- 3.13 It is not unexpected that these issues are being experienced with the interim arrangements at these schools as this is what led to the conclusion that significant additional physical space was required.

- 3.14 Hub South East Scotland Ltd has been engaged through strategic services to progress the two new halls at East Craigs Primary School and Crammond Primary School and the dining hall extensions at Sciennes Primary School and Towerbank Primary School. Site investigations at all schools have been commissioned and, once completed, the detailed design for the new facilities will be progressed.
- 3.15 Working groups with each of the schools involving school management, parents, Children and Families representatives and the design team will be established before the summer holidays to finalise requirements. Planning and building warrant applications will then be progressed with the target of securing the necessary approvals before the end of 2015. It is estimated that all of the new facilities will be available for August 2016.

### **School Staff – School Meals Survey**

- 3.16 A questionnaire was created and recently issued to school staff, primarily head teachers and business managers, to gather feedback via survey monkey regarding the school meals service. A total of 82 responses were received from 60 primary schools.

### Free School Meals P1-3 Implementation

- 3.17 With the exception of the four schools which have yet to receive significant additional physical space, the majority of schools felt that there was no additional physical building work required to support the increase in numbers as a result of the introduction of the extended free school meals policy. There were a few schools which identified additional light equipment and staffing requirements which are each being followed up directly.
- 3.18 However schools did feel that this initiative has increased the workload of both school and catering staff. One area where schools have found an increase in workload is the pre-ordering of lunches. However it is acknowledged that this has helped to ensure pupils receive their first choice of main meal and helps speed up service during lunch times. 82% of respondents felt the pre-ordering worked quite well or very well while 16% did not have a system in place.

### Food Quality

- 3.19 Respondents were asked to rate the food quality on taste, temperature and appearance with the following results:
- 53% of those who replied regarded the food taste as excellent or good with a further 40% scoring average.
  - 80% found the food temperature to be excellent or good with 13% scoring average.
  - 59% found the appearance of the food to be excellent or good with 24% scoring average.

- Any schools where respondents scored either not good or poor for either taste and/or temperature will be followed up individually.
- Those schools finding the appearance of the food to be either not good (13%) or poor (5%) will also be followed up directly with further information, support and training being delivered to catering staff in these schools.

### Portion Size

- 3.20 Portion size is an area identified by the survey where additional information and training is required by some staff. Portion sizes are set by the Scottish Governments nutritional guidelines for schools <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2008/09/12090355/0>. Comments made suggested that portion sizes can be sufficient, or occasionally too much, for the lower year groups while some of the upper year groups find the portions small.
- 3.21 There are many factors which can contribute to this; one being pupils do not always choose, or eat, all components of the meal e.g. soup, chicken, rice and vegetables. 85% of respondents indicated that they always or mostly receive appropriate portions. However, 11% indicated that pupils sometimes receive an appropriate portion size with a further 4% indicating that this rarely happens. Direct follow up will be undertaken with those schools where particular issues were identified.

### Dining Experience

- 3.22 The survey also gathered information about the dining experience based on noise levels, space, queuing time/ length, speed of service, friendliness of staff, food waste and time available to eat. Overall most schools experience either no, or only occasional, problems in these areas however some experience constant problems with noise (22%) and space (20%). It should be noted that this includes the four schools awaiting extensions but does also identify other potential problem areas where follow up visits are required and will be undertaken.

### Priority Areas for Improvement

- 3.23 Respondents were asked to identify their top four priority areas for improvement and a range of options were provided.
- 3.24 The provision of an online payments and ordering system was the first priority for 52% of respondents as it was thought that this would speed up the ordering and payments process, reducing the amount of time school staff allocate to the administration of this. Online payments and ordering is also something which is popular with parents.
- 3.25 Improving the service and dining areas in order to create a space where pupils can have a good dining experience is the second priority area identified; 80% identify this in their top two. Again, this includes the four schools which are awaiting extensions however addressing these areas would undoubtedly improve the noise and space issues they highlighted.

## Food for Life Feedback

- 3.26 Achieving the bronze food for life catering mark in all schools has generally been well received by parents, catering and school staff with some positive feedback provided through the [foodinschools@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:foodinschools@edinburgh.gov.uk) e-mail account. While some schools have noticed an improvement in food quality (29%), menu choices (31%) and pupils' enjoyment of the meals (18%); most feel this has remained the same at 67%, 69% and 75% respectively.

## **Measures of success**

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- 4.1 The successful implementation of the revised policy with all children in primary 1 to 3 who wish to take up the option of a free school meal from January 2015 being able to do so with no additional cost to the Council as a consequence.

## **Financial impact**

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### **Capital Expenditure**

- 5.1 The Council's Capital Investment Programme is funded through a combination of General Capital Grant from the Scottish Government, developers and third party contributions, capital receipts and borrowing. The borrowing required is carried out in line with the Council's approved Treasury Management Strategy and is provided for on an overall programme basis rather than for individual capital projects.
- 5.2 However, the capital expenditure of £4.5m which has been previously approved to address issues of capacity and production in the school estate to allow the extended free school meal policy to be implemented will be funded fully from the additional capital funding which has been provided by the Scottish Government for this purpose therefore this expenditure will entail no borrowing requirement or associated loans charges.

### **Revenue Costs**

- 5.3 The Scottish Government has made a commitment to fully fund the revenue costs arising from the commitment to provide a free school meal to children in primary 1 to 3.
- 5.4 An overall allocation of additional funding was made of £16.5m in 2014/15 and £54m in 2015/16 which was added to the relevant year's General Revenue Grant figures and paid as part of the block grant. The distribution of this funding was based on the overall number of primary school children not registered for free school meals which was taken from the 2014 Healthy Living Survey data. The proportion allocated to the Council was 7.3% resulting in additional funding of £1,202,000 in 2014/15 and £3,933,000 in 2015/16. The Scottish Government advised that, once the 2016 Healthy Living Survey data can be incorporated into the GAE distribution, the distribution mechanism will be revisited.

- 5.5 The costings undertaken by the Scottish Government assumed that the rate of take-up of free school meals would be 75% of relevant pupils. This assumption was based on the results of a pilot exercise undertaken in five Council areas in 2007/08. The Scottish Government has agreed to review funding for additional costs and actual take-up rates for free school meals will be monitored from the start of the implementation of the extended entitlement in January 2015 to compare against the existing assumptions made.
- 5.6 In the report to Committee on [11 September 2014](#) an assessment was undertaken of the adequacy of the additional revenue funding which was allocated to the Council. This original analysis, which was based on an assumed uptake level of 75%, suggested that a surplus of £75,000 would arise in 2014/15 which would be offset by a deficit of £126,000 in 2015/16 leaving a slight deficit of £51,000 over the period.
- 5.7 The average uptake level for P1 to P3 pupils in the three month period to 31 March 2015 was 70.3% which is within the 75% uptake level assumed by the Scottish Government when calculating the additional funding required to implement the extended entitlement to free school meals. The additional funding received from the Scottish Government was sufficient to cover the additional costs arising during this period. The position will be closely monitored on an ongoing basis.

## **Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact**

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- 6.1 The recommendations in this report do not impact on an existing policy of the Council and there are no health and safety, governance, compliance or regulatory implications that elected members need to take into account when reaching their decision.

## **Equalities impact**

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- 7.1 There are no negative equality or human rights impacts arising from this report.

## **Sustainability impact**

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- 8.1 There are no impacts on carbon, adaptation to climate change or sustainable development arising directly from this report.

## **Consultation and engagement**

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- 9.1 A survey questionnaire was created for school staff, primarily head teachers and business managers, to gather feedback on the school meals service the results of which are reflected in this report.

## **Background reading/external references**

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- Report to the Education, Children and Families Committee on [11 September 2014](#).



- Report to the City of Edinburgh Council on [25 September 2014](#).
- Report to the Education, Children and Families Committee on [9 December 2014](#).

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## Links

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### Coalition pledges

**Council outcomes**

C01 - Our children have the best start in life, are able to make and sustain relationships and are ready to succeed.

CO4 - Our children and young people are physically and emotionally healthy.

CO6 - Our children and young people's outcomes are not undermined by poverty and inequality.

**Single Outcome Agreement**

S03 - Edinburgh's children and young people enjoy their childhood and fulfil their potential.

**Appendices**

None