

**12 February 2015**

**Delivery of Universal Key Stage 1 Free School Meals**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Community, Leisure & Culture, Cllr Khizar Hussain

**Executive Summary:**

In October 2013 the Deputy Prime Minister announced that the Government would introduce a Universal Free School Meals scheme for all Key Stage 1 pupils, historically referred to as Infants, and that this would commence in September 2014.

The Council's in-house provider, Catering Services, currently provides meals to 39 schools within the borough, of which 33 will be providing the Universal Free School Meals service to all Infant pupils. Planning and preparation had been undertaken since the announcement in October 2013. The service commenced on 1 September 2014.

**Reason for scrutiny:**

Scrutiny identified this topic as one of interest at their meeting in June 2014 and requested an update on progress.

**Recommendations:****That Scrutiny note that:**

1. Walsall Council fully embraces the Key Stage 1 Universal Free School Meal policy,
2. All new equipment has been ordered and fitted into schools. This has been funded by Education Finance via the grant from Central Government,
3. The introduction of the Universal Free School Meal scheme for Key Stage 1 children in the thirty-two Walsall schools managed by the in-house Catering Service has gone very well,
4. Catering Services also provide a nutritionally balanced packed lunch offer to one further school; who do not have the facility to prime cook a hot meal,
5. Advice will continue to be offered to schools outside of Catering's contract if they request it, and
6. Plans are already being prepared for the September 2015 Reception admissions.

**Background papers:**

Guidance letters from the Department for Education

**Resource and legal considerations:**

An additional twenty-seven members of staff have been recruited to ensure the delivery of the scheme, the costs of this are built in within the business plan. Overall, it is anticipated that the scheme will be cost-neutral to the Council.

The Key Stage 1 Universal Free School Meal scheme is a national initiative led through the Department for Education and is a mandatory obligation on all schools.

**Citizen impact:**

All pupils in Key Stage 1 will receive a nutritional, healthy meal (preferably hot prime cooked) each day of the school year. There is anecdotal evidence of improved pupil performance, attentiveness and educational attainment.

Parents will receive this service free of charge. The initiative also offers the potential to make a positive impact on addressing food poverty in Walsall.

**Environmental impact:**

There is no recognised environmental impact arising from this scheme.

**Performance management:**

The initiative is to provide nutritional, healthy meals to all children at Key Stage 1. A meal is made available for all key stage one pupils and current take-up is 80%. This varies between schools, some showing 100% take up and the lowest at 66%. Reasons for low take-up are currently being investigated by Catering Services and assistance offered to schools if required.

There appears to be no single reason for low take-up but it does generally appear to rely upon the acceptance of the parents to encourage their children to have the free meal and also how positive a school might be to the initiative. Some parents still prefer their children to have food from home. Sometimes the pressure to use a new Peppa Pig (for example) lunch box has been given as a reason too.

In addition, there still appears to be some queries around funding of the scheme. Heads are dealing with this on an individual basis through Children's Services. Catering Services invoice for actual meals provided.

Despite the current 80% take up, it is anticipated that this will continue to increase during the spring months. Nationally, there is a current expectation that take-up will peak at c.87%. On a positive note, Walsall's schools provided by Catering Services are currently showing a similar take-up to other authorities nationally.

Walsall Catering are liaising with Local Authority Caterers Association (LACA), the School Food Trust and the Soil Association to look at ways of increasing take-up. The service is able to access a support package, in conjunction with recommendations of the School Food Plan, that has been funded by the Department for Education to schools with below average school meal take up.

This project is being delivered by national school food experts The Food For Life Partnership and is worth up to £2,000 of training and consultancy advice for eligible schools.

This project covers whole school take-up, not just KS1 and is available to junior and special schools. The eligibility criteria are as follows:-

- Overall school meal take-up is lower than 43%
- Free School Meal take-up is lower than 76%
- Paid meal take-up is lower than 35%

Walsall does fall into the latter category.

The aims of the project are to ***kick start*** the school meal take-up through a wider school approach to increase by at least 5% and maintain this growth encouraging future successes.

### **Equality Implications:**

The introduction of the Key Stage 1 Universal Free School Meals initiative is completely inclusive as it encompasses all Infant children without exception.

### **Consultation:**

Head teachers continue to be involved in the process.

No problems of delivery have been identified and there has been minimal disruption to schools' lunchtimes or the school curriculum.

The necessary equipment was ordered by Catering service and installed in time for the service to be delivered.

Catering Services will arrange for flyers go out to Head teachers to include in their new Reception children all Key Stage 1 children for the spring term and with the "new starter" packs sent out by the individual schools in July. Catering staff attend as many open evenings as possible, informing new parents of the menus in KS1 as well as the ordering procedures.

Regular consultation continues to take place with the Department for Education (DfE), other Local Authorities and professional bodies; the Association for Public Sector Excellence (APSE) and also LACA.

Officers continue to liaise with officials from the Department for Education to discuss whether further funding to schools without production kitchens may be

entitled to funding.

**Contact Officers:**

Chris Holliday  
Head of Leisure & Community Health  
 01922 650339  
[hollidayc@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:hollidayc@walsall.gov.uk)

Jackie Groves  
Catering Services Manager  
 01922 654257  
[grovesj@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:grovesj@walsall.gov.uk)

## **1. Report**

- 1.1 In October 2013 the Deputy Prime Minister announced that the Government would introduce a Universal Free School Meals scheme for all Key Stage 1 pupils (Infants) and that this would commence in September 2014.
- 1.2 The initiative is to provide nutritional, healthy meals to all children at Key Stage 1 (Infants). As a meal is to be provided for all infants children, it is anticipated that there will be a 100% take up. This is currently 80% take-up.
- 1.3 There is strong anecdotal evidence that where children eat a nutritional, healthy, and preferably hot meal at lunchtime, there is a marked improvement in pupil performance, attentiveness and educational attainment.
- 1.4 Parents will receive this service free of charge. Schools will be charged for the meals supplied to deliver the service and it is understood that the budget to pay for this has been included within their formula funding.
- 1.5 The benefit to parents, from not having to pay for a meal, is expected to be £437 per annum (£2.30 per meal x 190 days) per child. The initiative therefore also offers the potential to make a positive impact on addressing food poverty in Walsall.
- 1.6 In the thirty-three schools that Catering Services provide an Infants service, the initiative will cater for approximately 1,400 children in Key Stage 1.
- 1.7 To assist the implementation of the scheme the Department for Education provided a capital allocation to Walsall of £591,000 plus a further £107,000 to the voluntary aided schools. This funding was to buy any new equipment (fridges, mixers), crockery, cutlery and small kitchen alterations required to undertake the scheme. All equipment required was ordered in consultation with the Catering Service and fitted timely
- 1.8 The Council's in-house provider, Catering Services, currently provides meals to thirty-nine schools within the borough. Thirty-three of these schools have an Infants section and will be providing the Universal Free School Meals service to all Infant pupils. Arrangements are in place for the commencement of the scheme from 1 September 2014.