

## **EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 17 JULY 2014**

### **Government Policy to introduce free school meals**

#### **Background**

1. The Children and Families Bill, when passed, will place a legal duty on state-funded schools in England, including academies and free schools, to introduce free school meals for all Reception, year 1 and year 2 children from September 2014.
2. The Department of Education has issued non-statutory advice for schools and local authorities to help them understand their obligations regarding the introduction of Universal Infant Free School Meals in September 2014.

#### **Key Points**

3. There is an expectation, but not an obligation, that the provided meal (or at least one option) would be hot food. The legal requirement on schools will be to provide a lunchtime meal that meets the school food standards.
4. Schools will not be expected to force pupils to take a free meal. Pupils may bring a packed lunch from home.
5. The government is anticipating that the take-up rate of children taking free meals will be 87%.
6. Adjustments will be made to the summer term allocation of funding to take account of actual numbers of reception, year 1 & year 2 pupils and the percentage take-up of free meals.

#### **Current Progress**

7. Project sponsors for this programme are Mark Kemp, Deputy Director, Commercial, E&E and Frances Craven, CEF Deputy Director.
8. A project principles document (attached as appendix 1) has been agreed between Deputy Directors in CEF and E&E. This sets out governance arrangements and identifies members of the project team. A full time Project Manager has been recruited and the Technical



Officer with responsibility for school meals is working on this project on a full time basis.

9. A letter was sent to Head Teachers of all primary schools in April providing general information and requesting nominations for lead personnel for each school and gave timelines for actions. The letter is attached as appendix 2.
10. A Project Programme has been established with a Steering Group chaired by Trevor Askew (E&E). John Mitchell and/or Roy Leach are representing CEF and Jon Briggs (Carillion Director) representing Food with Thought/Carillion our service provider.
11. Key project timelines are in place (within the Project Principles appendix 1) and a detailed plan has been developed. The team is resourced with a full time project manager and the Technical Officer with responsibility for school meals is also working on this project on a full time basis. Surveys of school kitchens have been carried out and costs for kitchen infrastructure identified.
12. The latest progress on the project and actions are set out in appendix 3
13. Achieving the deadline of 2 September is challenging but the delivery of free school meals will be achieved. If construction works reveal significant infrastructure issues making installation of relevant equipment difficult, a temporary contingency of delivering cold meals will be implemented, pending completion of building works. Equally, should construction projects at any schools need to run beyond 2 September due to the scale of works required, temporary arrangements will be put in place to ensure delivery of free school meals.
14. 127 schools have been identified (excluding academies) where it is believed work is needed. This figure includes schools that do not have any facilities at present. All of these schools have been surveyed by a team of kitchen design experts. The results of the surveys have enabled funding to be allocated to provide the best value solution for September.
15. 47 of the 127 schools are Voluntary Aided and, for those, we are only able to propose solutions, 27 of these have been surveyed at their request. Decisions on works will need to be made by the appropriate dioceses.
16. It is believed that the increased uptake across the county (excluding Academies) is likely to be between 8,000 and 10,200 meals per day.



17. A point to note is that Carillion has strengthened their service delivery team to the schools' portfolios. They have split the Facilities Management function into 2 teams; 1 focussed on schools and 1 focussed on the corporate estate. Brian Kiers, an education services specialist, has been appointed to lead this team. This has been shared with school Head Teachers at school partnership meetings and is very much welcomed.
18. Several issues relating to free school meals need input from Head Teachers, particularly as there may be a need to introduce more than one sitting. Every opportunity is being taken to utilise schools with good existing kitchen facilities to offer meals to other schools that do not have a kitchen and/or insufficient capacity. School partnership meetings were attended in April and May. Head Teachers were updated on progress and advised that responsibility for the layout of the dining areas and management of throughput of children is theirs.
19. There are several issues and questions arising from the introduction of free school meals. These include:

Does OCC only need to provide to LA schools - not academies / free schools?

*The responsibility of OCC is in relation to Community and Voluntary Controlled schools not Voluntary Aided , Academies or Free Schools*

Is the requirement to provide hot meals?

*The legal position is explained in paragraph 3 above. Our position is that we aspire to provide all infants with a hot meal but recognise that, at least initially, in some schools this may not be possible. In which case a cold meal will be served in the first instance pending a longer term solution.*

What is the current position in relation to the provision and suitability of school kitchens?

*This has been assessed by conducting site visits to schools and capturing relevant data. Estimates of cost are now known and budgets are being allocated and relevant works are being planned*

Should the County Council have a policy on how the free school meals are to be provided for schools that are still with OCC?

*There will be a mixed model – what is important that the system is efficient and effective – there is not one solution that fits all.*

Who decides how schools fulfil the obligation, is it down to the Heads or does OCC have a say in it?

*It is up to Head teachers to organise this, it is not an OCC role. This has been discussed with Head Teachers at recent Chairs of Partnership meetings*



Should every school have kitchen facilities to deliver hot school meals (eventually)?

*No – not every school will need a kitchen*

Are there are potential management issues for Heads in relation to delivering the new requirements

*There are issues relating to how they organise the school day; timetabling, all of which may have staffing implications (e.g. supervision at lunch-time) and these will be for schools to manage.*

20. All schools have been corresponded with and a lead member of staff has been nominated. Visits were made to several schools during the Easter holidays to obtain data. Following this, on site assessments have been carried out and works assessed and budgets allocated. To achieve the deadline significant work will be carried out during the summer holidays.

### **Financial Implications**

21. For the first tranche of funding (for autumn and spring terms) the calculation will be made on the basis of the schools census regarding how many reception, year 1 & 2 pupils is expected to be in each school. Each pupil who takes free meals will have 190 meals across the academic year. A flat rate of £2.30 per pupil will be paid per meal. This means that the funding per pupil will be  $190 \times £2.30 = £437$ . The autumn and spring terms will be calculated at the expected 87% uptake with a balancing exercise conducted in the summer term to reflect actual take up.
22. Funding is not guaranteed beyond 2015/16. Any subsequent funding will be considered as part of the next spending review.
23. Capital funding of £150 million is being made available. Oxfordshire has received £1,120m for Community & Controlled schools with an additional £354,213 being made available for Voluntary Aided schools. Academies have to bid for funding through the academies capital maintenance fund. The guidance encourages local authorities to consider using their school maintenance and improvement budgets to support the delivery of free school meals, and academies should consider their approach to future capital maintenance funding.
24. Small schools (total roll under 150 pupils) will receive additional transitional funding to assist with improving kitchen or dining equipment.
25. Although challenging we are on track to deliver the government's pledge, at an estimated cost of between £1.5 and £2 million, This is



above the £1.1m received in funding and does not take account of any major works, should asbestos be found and remedied during works. If works are required this could exceed the upper figure of £ 2million. It should be noted that the solutions being found are those needed to allow schools to comply with the new requirements; they are not optimum solutions for the delivery of school meals.

26. Costs have reduced from original estimates by focusing simply on food provision - we are expecting schools to deliver on space issues, e.g. through 'two or more sittings'.

27. We are working closely with Voluntary Aided schools / Diocesan representatives, and have offered support to academies.

### **Equalities Implications**

The new requirements will be of benefit to those families which are, currently, just below the threshold for entitlement to free school meals and is 'worth', in financial terms, just over £400 per child per annum. Pilot FSM programmes suggested that provision of FSM would: place children, in attainment terms, as much as 2 months ahead of where they might otherwise be; children would be 26% more likely to eat vegetables and 26 % more likely to drink water; and 13% less likely to eat a bag of crisps each day. The improvement in attainment was more likely to be observed in less affluent families.

### **Communications and Key Dates**

28. The project principles document (appendix 1) sets out key proposed project timelines and communication channels.

### **Communications with Department of Education**

29. The DfE has written to all Directors of Children's Services.

30. There is a requirement for the County Council to feedback information to the DfE regarding the progress of the project and to assist in ensuring that the right help is available to both the schools and local authorities who most need it. This feedback will take the form of two surveys to ensure that progress within the Local Authorities is tracked.

31. These surveys will be completed by Gail Witchell (OCC Technical Officer) and forwarded to the DfE following consultation with the Steering group.

### **Risk Management**



32. Given that implementation is scheduled for September 2014, timelines are tight. The project deadlines are detailed in appendix 1.

33. To ensure that the policy is implemented successfully, it is important that schools engage effectively. Regular communication is being maintained with schools' nominated leads. The project timelines include actions to mitigate these risks.

### **Conclusion**

34. E & E and CEF are working closely together to support the delivery of free school meals for Key Stage 1 by September. Work is underway to develop the programme and identify any funding gaps which will need to be considered by Capital and Asset Programme Board should they arise.



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18th June 2014

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Appendix 1 – Universal Infant Free School Meals Project Principles including  
Project details and timelines

Appendix 2 - Letter dated 25/3/14 to all Head teachers of Primary Schools re:  
Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)