

The Highland Council
Education, Children and Adult Services Committee
11 February 2015

Agenda Item	10.
Report No	ECAS 25/15

Free School Meals

Report by Director of Care and Learning

Summary

This report provides an update on the successful project delivery and implementation of the provision of Universal Free School Meals for Primary 1 to 3 pupils from January 2015.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Scottish Government policy for introducing Universal Free School Meals (FSM) for Primary 1 to 3 pupils came into effect from 5th January 2015.
- 1.2 Previous reports to Committee have set out the forward planning being undertaken to allow successful rollout of this project. In those previous reports, it was highlighted that in the vast majority of the Council's schools, the policy could be implemented in a relatively straightforward way, with additional resources to support staff and service delivery. An impact assessment was completed based on current school rolls and projected meal uptake.
- 1.3 There were 50 schools where the consequences of the policy were more significant, in terms of uptake of meals and capacity within the kitchen and dining space. Revenue and capital investment has taken place within these schools to support implementation. Further longer-term investment will be required in some sites as explained later within this paper.
- 1.4 Where necessary cross service working with colleagues in Community Services and Development and Infrastructure took place and ensured the timeous completion of works:
 - In 20 schools, minor works were carried out: installation of additional electric sockets, removal of shelving and units to provide additional space for equipment - spend approx. £20,000
 - 10 Schools with new dining room furniture - £60,690
 - 11 Schools provided with new serving and clearing equipment - £16,672
 - 24 Schools provided with additional refrigeration and / or freezers - £20,530
 - 5 Schools installation of heavy kitchen equipment cookers and combination ovens - £21,251
 - 6 Schools planned installation of heavy kitchen equipment - approximately £50,000
 - 50 Schools provided with additional light equipment: kitchen utensils; croquery; cutlery etc. - £22,291.
 - Additional stock held in Operational areas to supply as and when needed by low impact catering outlets.
- 1.5 In addition, 53 new posts (583 hours) are in place to assist with food preparation and serving, and 247 additional hours have also been added for existing catering

staff.

- 1.6 As previously reported to Committee, the Council has received additional revenue funding from the Scottish Government to support implementation: £0.793m in 2014/15, rising to £2.595m in 2015/16. The Council has also been provided with an additional £5m in relation to capital expenditure.
- 1.7 In relation to capital, work has progressed with colleagues in Development and Infrastructure to take forward projects and feasibility options for improvements in primary schools:
- Servery upgrades for 6 schools , monitoring of uptake will determine outcomes.
 - Portree and Newtonmore – additional storage areas.
 - Avoch, Lochardil, Glenurquhart and Balloch –small extensions.
 - Dingwall, Merkinch, Dalneigh and Grantown - medium / large extensions
 - Options for improvement in Rosebank and Crown.

2. Implementation

- 2.1 Implementation on January 5th involved significant change in service delivery, involving routines, uptake of meals and pupil participation. The feedback so far has been positive, albeit it is still early days. It has become very obvious that meal uptake is very dependent on ‘what’s on the menu’. Packed lunches are visible where the child is not familiar with the menu, or has a presumed dislike to the choices that are available.
- 2.2 The service had predicted an average of up to 90% uptake following the impact assessment. As previously stated, we are only in the first month of implementation and the figures below are based on Week 1 (5th - 9th January).
- 2.3 The table below shows a sample of schools across the authority; the average uptake of free and paying pupils in primary 1 to 3 pre January 2015 and the lowest and highest uptake in the 1st week of service delivery week commencing 5th January 2015 :

School	Pre-launch free and paying P1-3	Post-launch FSM P1-3
Aldourie Primary School	56%	77 - 89%
Applecross Primary School	40%	40 - 100%
Cauldeen Primary School	33%	75 - 92%
Crossroads Primary School	63%	75 - 88%
Crown Primary School	57%	76 - 82%
Lochardil Primary School	44%	64 - 83%
Merkinch Primary School	45%	68 - 75%
Pennyland Primary School	36%	54 - 90%
Portree Primary School	47%	63 - 80%

- 2.4 It is clear that uptake was variable in the first week. Many parents/carers were not aware of the new initiative, as a number of pupils arrived on day one with money to pay for lunch, or with a packed lunch. This was disappointing, considering the amount of publicity that took place in December (i.e. press articles and information; council website; advertising posters and leaflets; school bag drop; school websites and newsletters; Twitter and Facebook).

- 2.5 The rest of January has witnessed severe weather conditions with considerable school closures, which further impacts on school meal uptake.
- 2.6 However, uptake increased during the month of January. Feedback from Officers indicates increases in week 2, albeit this remained dependant on menu choices. Further advertising took place, and information by word of mouth was also beneficial. This was also assisted by media coverage, including because of the Deputy First Minister's visit to Central Primary School in Inverness.
- 2.7 Where additional assistance has been put in place in the dining room for Primary 1-3 (i.e. setting of tables; drinks at specific pick up point; helping to cut up food - eating more and quicker) this has proved valuable to pupils and assisted the time challenges in some schools.
- 2.8 Tastings at lunch time takes place in a number of schools. It is the intention where practical, to offer tastings to Primary 1-3 pupils where they are unfamiliar with the choices on the day, or when they choose to take along a packed lunch. This may encourage uptake with pupils becoming more familiar with different food choices, encouraging them to try new experiences and expand their palate.
- 2.9 The next Primary 1-3 working group meets at the end of January, providing an opportunity to hear feedback and discuss the way forward with Head Teachers and other stakeholders.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resources:** Additional revenue funding has been made available from Scottish Government. At this time, it is expected this will be sufficient to meet the revenue and capital costs of implementation. This position will be kept under review and uptake monitored on a monthly basis, including any knock on effect in primary 4-7 uptake. Food costs continue to rise with frequent increases from current suppliers, and this remains a budget pressure for the catering service.
- 3.2 **Climate Change/Carbon Clever:** Increased uptake may have a negative impact, due to increased cooking and refrigeration which may result in increased energy usage. However, new cooking and chilling equipment, and any capital building/alterations, have provided scope to improve energy efficiencies.
- 3.3 **Risk:** Ongoing risk and budget pressure related to food cost.
- 3.4 **Gaelic:** The policy is implemented across Highland primary schools, including those that are Gaelic medium.
- 3.5 **Legal/Equalities/Rural:** There are no additional implications arising from this report.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 Members are asked to note the successful implementation of Universal Provision of Free School Meals for Primary 1 to 3 pupils from January 2015, that further communication and promotion will be undertaken to raise awareness and increase uptake, and that there will be ongoing monitoring of progress and a future report once the service has bedded in and further uptake data is available.

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

Date: 2 February 2015

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