

**Committee: Cabinet**

**Date of meeting: 15 December 2022**

**Title of Report: No Child Goes Hungry Scrutiny Task and Finish Group**

**Report by: Mark Wilson, Chair - Scrutiny Task and Finish Group**

**Cabinet Member: Deborah Earl – Cabinet Member for Public Health and Community Services**

### **What is the Report About? (Executive Summary)**

1. This report sets out the findings and recommendations of a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group which was established in September 2022 to explore options for extending access to adequate nutritious food, to ensure that no child goes hungry at any point, building on the work of the Council's Cost of Living Crisis fund and work undertaken during the pandemic.
2. The establishment of this Task and Finish Group was in response to a motion agreed by the Council on 7 September 2022.
3. The Scrutiny Task and Finish Group's report is attached as Appendix 1 and includes the evidence Scrutiny Members received during the review, their findings based on the evidence received, and their recommendations to Cabinet.
4. The report was debated by Council on 3 November 2022. Members supported the recommendations in the report and referred the report to Cabinet to consider the outcomes and allocate funding as part of the Quarter 2 budget monitoring report. Members asked that the decision be taken as soon as possible.

### **Recommendation of Executive Director**

5. To consider the findings and recommendations of the No Child Goes Hungry Scrutiny Task Group Review as set out in paragraphs 11 - 20 below and in Appendix 1.

### **Background to the proposals**

6. The review was established in response to a motion passed at full Council on 7 September 2022. The motion agreed was:

“To call upon Scrutiny to convene a task and finish group as soon as possible to build on the work of our Cost of Living Crisis fund and continue the work undertaken during the covid pandemic – to work in collaboration with our schools and community groups, to explore all options for extending access to adequate nutritious food, to ensure that no child goes hungry at any point – term time or holiday periods.”

7. The motion concluded that Council was to receive a report at the next Council meeting on 3 November.
8. Scrutiny Management Board (SMB) agreed to form a Task Group with the following aims and objectives:
  - To understand the effectiveness of current programmes established during COVID and continuing support schemes in meeting children's needs (including DWP Household Support Fund (HSF), DfE Holiday Activity and Food Programme HAF));
  - To obtain an understanding of levels of support for addressing child hunger based on past, current and projected future levels of Free School Meal (FSM) provision, including impact of an inflationary uplift to the current entitlement;
  - To review the accessibility to the FSM application process and whether there are barriers to particular groups applying;
  - To hear from community food providers about the issues they face in tackling community food hunger and the impact on children and families; and,
  - To identify all options for extending access to adequate nutritious food that ensures no child goes hungry. Among others this will include options for a net-Zero approach to food that maximises food sovereignty and local sustainable access to cheap nutritious food (i.e. food growing projects, seed banks etc.).
9. Scrutiny Members have completed this review at pace, receiving a wide range of witness testimony and reports.
10. The report setting out the findings and recommendations from the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group is attached as Appendix 1. In the report, Scrutiny Members make 5 recommendations to Cabinet. These are:
11. **Recommendation 1:** That Cabinet considers what it can do practically to support breakfast clubs, i.e., enable schools to set up breakfast clubs or help schools currently running breakfast clubs to have access to good food and resource additional staff/volunteer capacity. The Council to also consider supporting schools to establish hubs where Breakfast is available to children during holiday periods, if and where this is logistically feasible.
12. *Rationale for Recommendation 1:* The importance of Breakfast clubs was emphasised by all the witnesses, however it is clear that provision is uneven. While many schools are participating in the National School Breakfast Club programme, many are not eligible for funding and many schools have set up their own schemes, often funding them directly from the school budget. Members also heard about barriers schools are facing in running clubs. This recommendation would enable all schools in Cumbria to have the opportunity to provide Breakfast Clubs over the winter period. Some witnesses suggested establishing hubs similar to those during COVID for the winter period to enable children to access breakfast in the holiday periods, though Members have not taken further evidence from officers to see if this proposal is logistically feasible.

13. **Recommendation 2:** That Cabinet uses its existing contract to purchase food vouchers during school holiday periods to purchase one-off food vouchers for children during term time where they are looking to provide immediate support (and that the Council produces guidance with schools that set out criteria to ensure fair decisions are made).
14. *Rationale for Recommendation 2:* Schools are often dealing with children who arrive at school underfed or where the family cannot afford to cook (or has no food in the house). This would provide schools with a swift flexible solution that a family could use to put food on the table. Members felt that though technically easy to implement, the Council would need to produce guidelines so schools were not left with the risk of 'playing God' in deciding who would benefit.
15. **Recommendation 3:** That Cabinet considers funding Local Committees to provide homework clubs where children can access food and to explore, where possible, whether this could part of the activity to access warm spaces.
16. *Rationale for Recommendation 3:* While recommendation 1 would ensure no child starts the school day hungry, this option would help ensure no child goes home in hungry in the evening, or is unfed after the school day.
17. **Recommendation 4:** That Cabinet agrees to work with schools and catering providers to ensure that all children can access a hot meal at lunchtime, and that portions and quality is not compromised due to inflationary pressures.
18. *Rationale for Recommendation 4:* While the cost of food, energy and staffing has increased due to inflation, the value of a free school meal is the same as it was ten years ago. This has been reflected in the Council's decision to increase school uniform grants in line with inflation, and its use of the Household Support Fund to increase the value of food school meal vouchers in the holidays by 15%, but it has not been reflected during the school day due to the government's decision to freeze free school meals. The impact is that some children appear to have been priced out of being able to access a hot meal during lunchtime.
19. **Recommendation 5:** That Cabinet agrees to enter into a commercial arrangement for a provider of Free School Meal vouchers to be in place before 31 March when the current contract with WONDE runs out and the Easter Holidays begin.
20. *Rationale for Recommendation 5:* While responsibility for welfare support will pass from Cumbria County Council to the new Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness authorities from 1 April, the sovereign Council (Cumbria County Council) will still be required to ensure that there is a mechanism in place to purchase FSM vouchers if the Government goes ahead with extending the Household Support Fund. Given that the Easter Holidays begin on 31 March there is a risk that provision will not be in place in time. Members noted that a new contract would not commit the Council or the two new authorities to any expenditure if the Government did not extend any grant support, but the mechanism would be in place.

21. The report was debated by Council on 3 November 2022. Members supported the recommendations in the report, and referred the report to Cabinet to consider the outcomes and allocate funding as part of the Quarter 2 budget monitoring report. Members asked that the decision be taken as soon as possible.

### Reasons for the recommendation/Key benefits

22. The rationale for the recommendations is set out on pages 5-6 of the No Child Goes Hungry Report (Appendix 1). Scrutiny Members came to the recommendations based on the evidence they received within the scope of the Task and Finish Group.

### Council Plan Priority – How do the Proposals Contribute to the Delivery of the Council’s Stated Outcomes?

23. The recommendations contribute to the Council Plan outcome that people in Cumbria are healthy and safe.

### Appendices

Appendix 1 – No Child Goes Hungry Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Report

### Key Facts

Electoral Division(s): All

Executive Decision	Key Decision Included in Forward Plan	Exempt from call-in	Exemption agreed by scrutiny chair	Considered by scrutiny, if so detail below	Environmental or sustainability assessment undertaken?	Equality impact assessment undertaken?
Y	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

### Previous relevant Council or Executive decisions

Motion passed at Cumbria County Council - 7 September 2022

Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Report considered and recommendations supported - Cumbria County Council 3 November 2022

### Consideration by Overview & Scrutiny

Considered at the meeting of Scrutiny Management Board on 28 November 2022.

### Background Papers

None

### Report Author

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