

**No Child Goes Hungry: Cost of
Living and Children's Food
Security
Task Group Review
October 2022**

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Summary of findings and recommendations

In September 2022 Cumbria County Council agreed a motion asking Scrutiny to review the impact of the Cost of Living on children's access to food; to review all options to prevent any child going hungry and to report back to Council in November with recommendations for the Leader to consider.

In conducting the review Members received a wide range of witness testimony and reports which highlights real challenges schools and community organisations are facing to ensure no child goes hungry. Members also heard about a number of initiatives and activities, which, with additional resource could be used in combination with existing support (the Household Support Fund and the Holiday Activity and Food Programme) to ensure no child goes hungry.

Scope: Members were tasked by SMB 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))
- 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
- review the accessibility to the FSM application process and whether there are barriers to particular groups applying.
- hear from community food providers about the issues they face in tackling community food hunger and the impact on children and families
- 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.).

Method: Members combined desktop research with witness sessions and submissions from schools, foodbanks and other community food projects.

Given the pressures on schools and community organisations Members to agreed to hold a series of short witness session on Microsoft Teams.

Sessions were recorded with the Witnesses' consent and transcripts have been edited and included in the main body of the report.

Key findings

- Members received information on the benefits of feeding a child for health and for learning and the long-term harm of leaving a child undernourished.
- Members learnt about the benefits of breakfast clubs and other extra-curricular activities in ensuring that all children are fed during and around the school day. They heard about the logistical challenges of breakfast clubs in large schools, and where children are being transported a long distance; however, the benefits overall were clear to Members.

- Members also heard from Primary Schools about the ways they have included food as part of the learning process and set up events such as 'Food and Phonics' and 'Reading and Pizza' evenings which has attracted who families.
- Members heard about the inequity of provision in the national Free School Meals scheme which is not available for pre-school children (though the County Council's FSM voucher scheme is available to them in the holidays). On the other hand, they also learned how schools are paying out of their own budgets to extend the national universal access to milk offer to 5 year olds (it is currently available to under-5's).
- With the Cost of Living crisis, the number of children on free school meals has increased to 14,800 (from around 13,000 before COVID), but this number is easily matched by children whose families do not qualify for Free School Meals but are struggling to pay for household essentials. All witnesses testified to the challenges of supporting this group who do not qualify for a range of support currently available.
- Members heard about Fairshare Lancashire and Cumbria and how it can help with some aspects of food hunger but has drawbacks including a diminishing offer as supermarkets cut back on food stocks as part of their own measures to save money. Also donations are inconsistent both in quality and in what is supplied from day to day.
- Members received ideas from the Cumbria Sustainable Food Network, and Members acknowledged the importance of local food growing as part of the wider mix of support to prevent child hunger in the long term
- Members learnt that the Healthy Start Vouchers that are available for all babies, no longer covers the cost of Baby-Formula due to inflation.
- Members learnt about the effectiveness of using food voucher schemes such as the WONDE scheme for providing children on a free school meal with a voucher during the holiday periods, which supports 14,800 children. They also saw the benefits in households receiving text vouchers and that this was something for wider Community Resilience activity to consider
- Despite the advantages of using WONDE or other voucher providers Members were concerned that the Co-op is not included in the list of supermarkets where WONDE vouchers can be cashed, and that for some rural communities parents have to rely on longer distances or food deliveries to the home from one of the main retailers. WONDE are in discussions with the Co-op, but this may be something the Council should explore directly with the Co-op to understand the position (Members also heard of schools using their allocation of WONDE funding to purchase Co-op vouchers as an alternative).
- Members heard differing views about schools having discretion to access vouchers, with some schools in favour and others concerned about fairness and the need for good guidance if they were to have access to discretionary voucher purchasing via WONDE.
- Members heard about the impact of inflation on the cost of school meals and the challenges schools face in ensuring every child can afford a hot meal at lunchtime. They also heard from some schools that have ceased arrangements with their catering providers and taken the catering service back in-house to ensure all children have a nutritious hot meal (or established arrangements with other local catering services).

Recommendations

In line with the scope, Members have agreed the following five recommendations to Cabinet.

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.

Rationale: 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.

To be actioned: Assistant Director Education and Skills

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).

Rationale: 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.

To be actioned: Assistant Director Education and Skills

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.

Rationale: 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.

To be actioned: Assistant Director Customer and Communities

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.

Rationale: 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.

To be actioned: Assistant Director Education and Skills.

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.

Rationale: 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.

To be actions: Assistant Director Education and Skills

Scope of Review

At a meeting on 7 September Cumbria County Council agreed the following motion:

“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.”

The Council also tasked Scrutiny with providing a report with recommendations for Full Council for 3 November 2022.

Members agreed to:

The membership of the Task and Finish Group were:

- Cllr Mark Wilson (Chair)
- Cllr Andy Connell
- Cllr Shirley Evans
- Cllr Will Clark
- Cllr Paul Turner

Officer support was provided by:

- Joel Rasbash, Strategic Policy & Scrutiny Advisor

To take this work forward, the Task Group met with the following witnesses:

- Jonathan Bursnall, Headteacher, Brook Street School Carlisle
- Vicki Hepburn-Fish, Headteacher, Victoria Infants School Workington
- Helen Fisher, Botcherby Community Centre
- Lisa Brown, Carlisle Community Help
- Steph Humes Carlisle Foodbank
- Jackie Hayhow, Carlisle Community Development Officer (Cumbria County Council)

- Gillian Holmes, South Lakeland Community Development Officer (Cumbria County Council)
- Ez Wealleans, Post-16 Officer, Education and Skills (Cumbria County Council)
- Ellen Mothersdale, Head Teacher William Howard School, Brampton and Longtown.
- Cumbria Association of Secondary Heads Executive
- Evidence from 3 Schools from Appleby collected by Cllr. Andy Connell.
- Evidence from Castle Park Primary School Kendal collected by Cllr. Shirley Evans.

Table 1: Witness Focus Groups held October 2021

| Date | Activity and Witnesses¹ |
|-------------|--|
| 3/10 | Carlisle Food Network – Lisa Brown, Helen Fisher, Jackie Hayhow, Steph Humes |
| 7/10 | School food voucher schemes Ez Wealleans |
| 7/10 | Primary School experiences – Jonathan Burnsall, Vicky Hepburn-Fish |
| 7/10 | South Lakeland community food groups – Gillian Holmes |
| 13/10 | Cumbria Association of Secondary School Heads Executive |
| 17/10 | Secondary School experiences – Ellen Mothersdale |

Background and Context

National Picture

In the UK the Cost of Living crisis is having a significant impact on low to middle income households. With inflation rates exceeding 10% the cost of food, fuel, transport and other essentials is rising faster than wages, pensions and working age benefits. Increasingly the concept of affordable food is becoming an impossibility for many households, who are relying on emergency support from community groups or through Free School Meals to prevent themselves from going hungry.

While the government has put in place Energy Price Guarantee for six months, this still will result in record levels of fuel poverty and food insecurity while leaving many households unsure how they will manage after April next year.

Levels of need

Based on the most recent available figures 31% of children are in poverty in the UK² With the Cost of Living crisis this is predicted to rise creating levels of child poverty not seen since the 1990s.

² <https://www.irf.org.uk/data/overall-uk-poverty-rates>

According to the DWP's annual food security survey³ **36% of children experience some level of food insecurity**. This is broken down into the following three categories:

- **12% very food insecure**
- 10% with low food security
- 14% with marginal food security.

Food security is defined by the DWP as follows:

At a high level, household food security can be broken down into affordability, access, utilisation, and stability. Affordability, access, and utilisation provide three key links in the chain, or tests, for households to get food on their plates. Simply, these are whether they can fill shopping bags, pay for them, and prepare nutritious meals.⁴

While the DWP survey is annual, The Food Foundation carry out more regular surveys and their findings show that Food insecurity is greater for households with children than childless households (their findings also show that households with disabled people and ethnic minority households are also more likely to be food insecure).

Pre-COVID 11.5% of children lacked food security but by April 2022 this had increased to 20.6%.

The most recent survey was carried out 21-23 September 2022⁵. The results show:

- **4 million children in the UK are currently food insecure**
- The % of food insecure children has jumped from **17.2% in April 2022**, to **25.8% in September**
- **42.2% of children in households of 3 children or more are food insecure**
- **53% of universal credit claimants are currently food insecure.**

The survey reveals changing habits among those who are food insecure including:

- Eating cold meals 41.3% (as opposed to 6.3% of non-food insecure households)
- Washing dishes in cold water 18% (as opposed to 2.6% of non-food insecure households)
- Turning off the fridge or freezer 6.8% (as opposed to 0.7% of non-food insecure households)

³ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/food-security-status-different-people-poverty>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021-theme-4-food-security-at-household-level>

⁵ <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking>

According to the Food Foundation the impacts of Food insecurity include:

- Mental health – higher rates of stress and depression
- Poorer dietary quality, obesity and muscular problems, increased presentation at A&E

Free School Meals

In Key Stage 1 (Reception to Year 2), all children receive free school meals (FSM). After that, the eligibility threshold is set at an annual household income of less than £7,400 before benefits.⁶

Currently just under 1.9 million children in England meet this eligibility threshold⁷. This is 22.5 per cent of state school pupils.

Henry Dimbleby, who was commissioned by the Johnson Government to develop a National Food Strategy, recommended the FSM scheme be extended to all children under 16 living in households earning less than £20,000. This proposal would cost £544 million a year and could feed an additional 1.1 million children

“We found that increasing the earnings threshold to £20,000 before benefits would ensure that 82% of children in households with “very low food security” (as defined by the Government) – would be eligible for free school meals, and 70% of those with “low food security”.⁸

This proposal is also reflected in the witness evidence Members collected including Cumbria Association of Secondary Heads who would like to see consideration to funding currently non-eligible children for FSM to prevent them sliding into food insecurity.

The Food Foundation are lobbying on auto-enrolment of all children whose parents are on Universal Credit. This would maximise take up by removing the current system in which parents have to make an application to their local authority.

DWP Household Support Fund (HSF)

The HSF is based on the Winter COVID Grant that was introduced in October 2020 and has been renewed every six months since. In each 6-month tranche local authorities receive £500m.

Under the programme local authorities are tasked by the DWP with establishing schemes that provide emergency support to people who are struggling to afford household essentials (mainly food and utilities).

Most local authorities have used the HSF to purchase Free School Meal vouchers during holiday periods.

In the current financial year Cumbria is projected to have spent approximately £2.5m on Free School Meal vouchers under the HSF. It is likely that somewhere between

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools-and-local-authorities>

⁷ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

⁸ [file:///ccc-prdc-fp10/userhome\\$/Rasbashi/Downloads/National-Food-Strategy-Chapter-16.pdf](file:///ccc-prdc-fp10/userhome$/Rasbashi/Downloads/National-Food-Strategy-Chapter-16.pdf)

£100 and £200m is being spent by Local Authorities using the HSF to pay for children to have FSM vouchers in holidays.

DfE Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)⁹

The HAF is a programme that was introduced during the COVID pandemic to provide children eligible for a free school meal access to activities that included a healthy meal during the school holidays. The programme has been extended to 2024 and aims to ensure that children:

- eat healthily over the school holidays
- are active during the school holidays
- take part in engaging and enriching activities which support the development of resilience, character and wellbeing along with their wider educational attainment
- are safe and not to be socially isolated
- have a greater knowledge of health and nutrition
- are more engaged with school and other local services

Cumbria currently receives £1.25m per annum to co-ordinate the HAF programme.

Cumbrian Picture

Cumbria has seen a rise in Children on Free School Meals from 13,000 to 14,800 since January 2020.

Over the past 6 months over 7000 households with families have contacted the Council's Service Centre to seek support with household essentials, including support to buy food, clothing, energy and basic household goods.¹¹

Witness evidence from schools and community food groups has demonstrated the real pressures they are under to make sure children are being fed. In many cases schools are using their budget to feed children, and food groups are struggling to get the level of supplies they used to receive from donations before the onset of the Cost of Living Crisis.

While schemes such as HAF and the HSF are highly successful, they are not sufficient. The HAF is restricted to children on a free school meal and other vulnerable groups, but operates for 6 weeks during the holiday periods. The HSF voucher support is only available to those who qualify for Free School Meals.

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/holiday-activities-and-food-programme/holiday-activities-and-food-programme-2021#aims-of-the-programme>

¹⁰

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1042274/Grant_determination_letter_-_HAF_2022_Final.pdf

¹¹ This is based on email evidence supplied by the manager of the County Council's Service Centre.

Extrapolating from the national surveys by the Food Foundation, the total number of food insecure children is likely to be around 23-24,000 children out of 70,000 school age children (Cumbria School Census January 2021). This would mean that **around 30% of children in Cumbria may support to access food.**

Members have concentrated on the school day as this is the point where all children have an opportunity access nutritious food. Members found that schools are increasing their offer of breakfast clubs, but the offer varies from school to school. Also for some schools breakfast clubs puts more pressure on teaching staff and school capacity. Members also heard about opportunities for community organisations to play a bigger part in offering after school support and that this is something which could be explored as part of the work already taking place to establish warm spots in libraries, community centres and elsewhere.

Members also heard about the success of the Free School Meal vouchers scheme that administered via contract with WONDE. Members understand that under the terms of the contract the Council can utilise WONDE to spend up to £4m on food vouchers. So far up to £3m is likely to be spent using the Household Support Fund and the Council's Cost of Living Reserve, and that there is scope to spend up to £1m more within the terms of the contract – though the Council would have to find the money for anything that is additional to the Household Support Fund.

Members have also learned that currently the contract with WONDE runs out on 31 March 2023. Although local authorities are not clear of the government's intention to extend the Household Support Fund beyond April 2023, it would be prudent for the Council to enter into a new contract with a supplier of vouchers for the next financial year, so that schools will need to have a vehicle for voucher purchasing from 31 March 2023 (which is when the Easter Holidays start). Given that a solution will need to be in place in time for the Easter Holidays, Members agreed that it is the responsibility of the Sovereign council (Cumbria County Council) to address this. This is the reason why we have added this as an additional recommendation.

Finally, Members were interested in understanding the availability of food during the school day, both in lessons and in breaktimes. Members heard positive cases of milk, juice and fruit being used as part of the learning process, and in some cases with infants, pack lunches were banned, so infants not only receive a hot meal, but learn how to eat a meal around a table as a life-skill.

A repeated challenge for schools is the offer at lunchtime. The main Cumbrian catering service Orien is under significant pressure due to the impact of inflation on its supply chain. Schools reported concerns that is leading to reductions in the choice of foods, the volume available and in some cases the quality and nutritional value. Schools were also reporting that the cost of a hot meal is higher than the value of a Free School Meal (which is set at around £2.50, with variations for primary and secondary rates). This means that some children who are on a Free School Meal cannot afford a hot meal. In some instances, this has led to schools taking the catering service in-house, and in other cases schools using its pupil premium funding to top up the food offer. Increasingly as caterers are under financial pressure and have to break even, we are seeing these trade-offs. Members did not have time to

investigate this matter further but have recommended that the Council continues to engage with Orien and the schools to address any issues arising.

While there are many aspects to food poverty that Members did not have time to look at, this approach to focusing on and around the school day has enabled Members to come up with a set of recommendations that they hope can be implemented before Christmas.

Total value of financial support supplied

The table below sets out the funding available to support children to access food and other household essentials from the Household Support Fund and the £2m Cost of Living Reserve that the County Council agreed in June 2022.

The Council has agreed to uplift the school holiday FSM voucher rate from £3 per day to £3.45 to cover a 15% increase in the cost of food – this will apply from the October half term holiday and will include Christmas and the February Half Term holiday.

| | HSF | Reserve | Numbers helped |
|---|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| FSM vouchers | Easter £495,000.00 May half term – £215,000.00 Summer holidays- £1,500,000.00 Estimate for school holidays October 2022 to March 2023 - £1,035,000.00 Total expenditure for 2022/2023 (Estimate) - £3,245,000 | £500 from County Council Cost of Living reserve to top up shortfall in DWP funding for Summer holidays | 14,800 |
| Service Centre | £749k | £500k | 7744 households with children helped. |
| School Uniform Grants for FSM children | | Additional £500k to cover inflationary uplift. | |

Conclusions

The Task and Finish Group hopes that its recommendations will help the Council put in place immediate measures that will prevent any child going hungry over the winter period.

By concentrating on the school day, Members have had the opportunity to appraise a number of options in the hope of meeting the Council's original motion. With more time a deeper and more comprehensive review could have been completed, but with the pressure of the Cost of Living crisis as an emergency it was felt that speed and immediate action was required.

These measures will take us up to April 2023. Currently we do not know what the Government's plans around continuing with its current support packages will be. We would like to see the County Council working with the Cumberland and the Westmorland Shadow Authorities to ensure measures are in place to prevent children going hungry next year.

Breakfast Provision

Briefing Note: Lindsey Ormesher Children and Families Public Health Lead

Breakfast is often called ‘the most important meal of the day’ and for children, it is especially so. As the name suggests, breakfast breaks the overnight fasting period, replenishing the supply of glucose to boost energy levels and alertness, while also providing other essential nutrients required for good health.

A recent study ¹² led by King’s College London showed that children who ate breakfast every day were deemed to have overall superior nutritional profiles compared to those who didn’t. Those children who skip breakfast regularly may not be consuming the daily amounts of key nutrients for growth and development.

Breakfast not only impacts on growth and development but also concentration and learning. As part of the National School Breakfast Programme (NSBP) which is funded by the Department for Education national research was completed to understand the effect of breakfast on cognitive function, academic performance, and in-class behaviour in children and adolescents. In conclusions breakfast consumption in children has been found to:

- Improve cognitive function, particularly memory, attention, and executive function
- Improve academic performance, including school grades and achievement test scores
- Increase on-task behaviour in the class ¹³

The NSBP offer is available to all schools that have 40% or more children in IDACI bands A-F - in Cumbria this is 104 schools inc PRU’S and special schools and is delivered through Family Action (national). This scheme is available until July 2023. Schools which have 35% Pupil Premium are also able to apply for the Magic Breakfast scheme – however have to wait until funding is available to implement. Greggs Breakfast foundation also provide grants to schools in disadvantaged areas for breakfast clubs. We are currently awaiting a clearer picture of Cumbria involvement in the latter two schemes.

All schemes provide bagels and cereals (depending on model). Schools would need to provide toaster and spread. Potential staffing costs may also be incurred to prepare the food etc.

Models:

As many schools have a paid ‘breakfast club’ as part of a childcare offer, there needs to be a number of options for delivery as we don’t want for schools to be impacted on their income or to create greater inequality and stigma by funding some children and not others to attend.

¹² <https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2018/children-who-skip-breakfast-may-not-be-getting-recommended-nutrients>

¹³ <https://www.family-action.org.uk/our-voices/2019/10/04/the-impact-of-breakfast-on-learning-in-children/#:~:text=Breakfast%20consumption%20in%20children%20has,task%20behaviour%20in%20the%20classes>

It is recognised that the economic crisis will have a significant income on the majority of families, not only those in disadvantaged areas and particularly those who already experience fuel poverty. As such the model needs to be universal.

The NSBP supports school to deliver a variety of models according to their need – for those schools which offer a universal breakfast offer they use classroom delivery or arrival breakfasts or ‘Bagel Bars’.

Other options could be to offer at break times as opposed to breakfast to show a clear definition if schools already provide breakfast clubs (childcare).

Options: There are several options which could be implemented at speed to ensure children have a healthy food option in the morning.

- NSBP – of the 104 eligible schools and settings only 25 have actually signed up to the scheme. Eligible schools are required to cover 25% of the costs, which varies from school to school.
There is a huge opportunity for us to promote and support uptake of eligible schools and cover the 25% cost. This would be an ‘easy win’ and hit our most deprived areas first. It is hard to estimate a cost, but based on figures provided by FA, the average cost per pupil is 75p per week. For eligible schools they pay 25p and the 50p is subsidised by the NSBP.
We would pay the 25p per week per child for each eligible school. Other schools are NOT able to join the scheme as it is government funded according to deprivation. If we wanted to offer FA to all, a business case would need to be submitted to DoE which would be a lengthy process.
- For the remaining schools a ring-fenced grant with clear guidance and model suggestions would potentially be the better option. Based on the FA costings, the full cost would be 75p per child per week, schools would need to source their own products and delivery – this will depend on school size etc. For costings there could be a set amount based on school size i.e. 0-50 pupils, 50-100 pupils etc to consider the difference in school circumstance.
- Potentially there are other schools which are using the Greggs and Magic breakfast service, once we have a clearer understanding of this, we could also look to subsidising this if any costs are being incurred by the schools.

FSM for Nursery children in LA maintained nurseries and schools.

It has been raised that those children in LA school nurseries who are there full day should be getting, by law, FSM.

However they don’t in Cumbria and schools don’t get any funding to cover this and so it is not provided unless a school does so out of their Pupil Premium funding.

Again this is being further investigated to understand the numbers and related costs. This is a longer-term issue that needs addressing, but this may be the opportunity get it in place with additional funding.

School Milk Subsidiary Scheme

School milk is available for all children in Key Stage 1 (KS1) at a subsidised price which is paid for by the parent/carer. Potentially this could be made available for all children in KS1 free of charge.

School Fruit – Key Stage 2 (KS2)

All schools are provided with fruit for KS1 children as part of the government funded scheme. Another potential ‘easy win’ would be to increase this to cover KS2 children

(Juniors) schools. This would be through current providers and has been done in the past.

Witness Session Carlisle Community Food Organisations

3/10/22

Witnesses: Jackie Hayhow- (Community Development Officer – Carlisle CCC) - Chair of Carlisle Food Security Network and Fareshare lead for Petheril Bank Community Centre.

Cllr Lisa Brown (Carlisle Community Help, Affordable Food Hub and Brampton Community Food)

Helen Fisher (Manager Botcherby Community Centre, Pop Up Pantry),

Steph Humes (Manager of Carlisle Food Bank)

Question 1:

What's your experience of providing food to children and families? And what you think that works? What doesn't work, and are there peak times?

Summary of responses:

- Community based support provides a light touch, non-stigmatising and welcoming environment for children and families needing support. But it is difficult for small community organisations to know if they are getting to the people who most need support in accessing food, while not losing the community feel of the offer.
- Witnesses talked about the differences between the Foodbank and the affordable food hubs from the pop up pantries, in that the former receive referrals from people in need of emergency support and the latter are open to all people who use a facility (i.e., in this case the Botcherby Community Centre). Witnesses emphasised the benefits of combining these approaches, and the opportunity for emergency food providers to help organisations target support.
- Schools are referring to the foodbank and Carlisle has a good relationship with schools. School also referring families where the child does not qualify for a free school meal. The foodbank is so busy and this past week we have seen so many new families and so many new families that are really desperate.
- Schools also have good links with Fareshare. Some families are choosing from the affordable food tabs and schools will pay for them for a set period of time until the family is back on its feet. There are a few longer term users of the service, but it is designed to support people for a short period.
- While the schools do not know about Foodbank, they do not know about many of the other local projects that could help families such as Helen's – so better awareness among schools would help both.
- Opening times and availability is also a key factor as people do not always know what is available at what times.
- Social media posting works well.
- Carlisle Community Help and Affordable Food Hub are seeing more people in a sticky patch needing support, so when people sign up for an account, a volunteer or staff member gives them a ring to find out more about family

circumstances and they stay in touch with the customers to make sure they being supported and have a connection.

- Carlisle Community Help has taken over from Brampton Area Action Group outlet in Brampton and on the first day overseeing the project on Friday, there was around 60 people through the doors. First thing in the morning there was loads of like mums with kids, which is good because they go upstairs into the community cafe as well and sit down and have a coffee. So it's a really good opportunity there for like referral agencies of you know other things to come up and like the thing that and forward does through the County Council and do that.
- Carlisle Community Help opportunities increased during the holidays offering pack lunches to families, as they were unable to get the usual free school meal, this started during the COVID lockdowns which included both families with children on free school meals and families that do not qualify, because the threshold for free school meals is too low and discounts hundreds of children.
- Overall families are turning to all kinds of food support because of the Cost of Living crisis.
- Its important that while we are responding to immediate need, that we also have a target for when we will not need emergency support because local affordable food is available for everyone.
- There are different opportunities during the Christmas, summer and Easter, obviously including the Holiday Activity and Food programme, which children on free school meals can access for four hours, four days a week with a hot nutritional meal. But it doesn't again help situations where a siblings is not entitled, but the scheme could receive extra funding to take those children on.

Question 2:

What works and what the barriers to providing cheap, nutritious food for children?

Summary of responses:

- This is a difficult question for community and voluntary groups, because many of the barriers are about national policy and the economy (energy prices, wages, benefits) and there is an expectation that community groups can step in and fill the gap.
- A lot of the community projects are dependent on donations. Sometimes nutritional food is donated by a supermarket but in such a condition that its close to its sell-by date or the package is damaged, so it cannot be used. One supermarket said that this food can be given to 'pigs' to eat if it cannot be used by community groups!
- Aldi already provide food as cheaply as possible, but with so many people struggling it is becoming unaffordable. So without fixing these causes there will be an unbridgeable gap between the cheapest possible food and people's ability to pay. People like the NFU confirm that when the price is too low the food becomes impossible to produce which could create shortages.

- Other actions being undertaken include working with people to maximise the benefits they are entitled to through the 'Worrying about Money' leaflet, so people struggling have a better chance of being able to afford the cheapest available food.
- Dignity is also important, as some people will not access the available help if it is offered in a way that identifies them because they have to turn up or receive what is available. Food vouchers is a good way around this as it gives them privacy, choice and a chance to shop where everyone else shops.
- Stigma is made worse by attitudes which blame families for poverty rather than taking a community based view. We don't know how many people this puts off seeking help, but it could be as much as 7 people put off for every one who comes forward.
- Cash to families or vouchers gets around some of the barriers around choice that Fairshare encounters because of the way it is regionally set up. We see local donations in Carlisle being shipped to Preston and receiving back food from around the North West, so we don't always know what we can offer.
- There are lots of problems with relying on supermarket donations, but in Brampton the model works better because it is bringing people in and end of shelf-life supermarket produce is mixed in with other produce. Brampton has a good relationship with their local shops too
- Donations are also struggling to keep up with increasing demand, so the Foodbank ends up buying food to make sure it is stocked up.
- The Botcherby community centre saw an influx of healthy food from allotments which was included among the packages of food on offer. They were popular, but only available when the stock is in season. In the long term this is something to explore as it would create a local sustainable source of healthy food.
- This would require a strategy that brings all the groups together to buy food from Aldi and local growers and run it as a co-operative with an end date when foodbanks and models based on aid are no longer needed. Progress could then be measured to see if we are reaching that goal. But it needs resourcing and co-ordinating, because projects rely on volunteers if they are going to expand, like the new project in Brampton, where there is a local hub people can go to get a range of food some donated, some commercially for sale.
- The experience of working with supermarkets shows that they have different practices with some donating good quality food and others donating food they cannot use. Getting a level playing-field with all supermarkets adopting the same standards and practices would make a difference. But food waste and end-of-shelf-life produce is not really a goal for affordable food, but something to pursue alongside this, for instance through sustainability groups and the Net Zero agenda.
- Breakfast clubs at schools can play a big role in removing barriers to children accessing affordable and nutritious food. This is something the Council could look at, as the numbers of children coming into school hungry is increasing. They are a quick win and should not be too expensive to fund.

- Also holiday clubs and after school clubs are important. One club fed children toast which was very popular.
- Foodbanks offer cereal, milk and other breakfast products as well as butter, jam and sugar.
- The Council would need to look at how the school sources food from its caterers and whether catering companies are able to work in different ways to meet the need, but it is important the Breakfast clubs are not dependent on catering companies, with schools having funding to buy in food to extend the offer into the holidays. One option could be the Hub school model that worked during the pandemic – where schools are open for breakfast clubs.

Question 3: Is there anything with this coming winter period and with Christmas holidays on the horizon that you think we need to be looking at?

Summary of answers

- Its important to think about what kind of schemes the Council wants to set up, and engage with the community sector, give as much notice as possible and not to delay things with the Council's decision making process.
- Previously the Council has provided support directly to community groups which provides an easy and friendly access point, whereas recently it has put most of the funding through the Service Centre, which people struggle to access because of waiting times that uses their credit and having to answer specific questions. It is important to have both options. Also some people who work for the Council may not want to use the Service Centre in case they are identified as employees.
- The Council could look at its Ways to Welfare Team doing a community clinic in settings. The DWP families team did something similar at the Oasis Food Pantry.

Recommendations: Sustainable Food Places Meeting

4/10/22

The session was chaired by Mathew Saunders, Public Health Consultant, with partner organisations.

The session reviewed priorities for developing a sustainable food system. In relation to food poverty the group agreed the following priority:

Tackle food insecurity and diet-related ill-health by improving the accessibility, availability, and affordability of healthy, nutritious food, and ensuring that good food and holistic support is available at the point of crisis

To meet this priority they identify the following action areas.

- Use data and intelligence to estimate and monitor the size and extent of food poverty/ food insecurity across Cumbria
- Link community food growing initiatives into social prescribing where appropriate, and work with social prescribers to identify and address any issues with availability or access.
- Engage with stakeholders and people with lived experience of food insecurity to identify the causes and drivers of food insecurity in Cumbria, and the issues they face.
- Support local strategies for tackling poverty, including promoting the provision of fair wages (e.g., real living wage campaign), and maximising uptake of free school meals, breakfast clubs and holiday provision with food
- Strengthen the links between food banks/pantries and local growers/producers/retailers and support services for people experiencing poverty (e.g., advice services, Job Centre Plus, shared meal settings).
- Work with the two new unitary authorities to develop and implement planning policies and documents that support home growing/gardening, increased availability of healthy food and reduced density of fast-food premises across Cumbria
- Make it easier for people in Cumbria to improve their skills, confidence, and ability to cook healthy food from scratch through signposting to existing organisations providing this or addressing any gaps in provision.
- Support the development of a network of community food retail initiatives in which people at risk of or living in poverty can purchase food at a reduced price or through paid membership, such as social supermarkets, food co-operatives, community pantries and fruit and vegetable schemes
- Build upon existing work to increase the uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers and vitamins across Cumbria

Partnership Discussion: Access to Food Banks and Fareshare

06/10/2022

Attendees

Carol Stewart, Public Health Consultant, Louise Brennan, Trainee Public Health Registrar, Emily Thomas, Public Health Trainee Registrar, Matthew Saunders, Public Health Consultant, Carolyn Otley, Cumbria CVS Jackie Hayhow, Carlisle Community Development Officer, Joanne Coleman, Carlisle Public Health Locality Lead, Joel Rasbash, Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor.

Note taken by Joel Rasbash.

Update on Cumbria Community Foundation Community Grants Poverty Fund

The CCF Community Grants Poverty Fund has been set up from the County Council Public Health underspend, to enable community groups to bid in for between £500 and £10,000 to support projects to tackle the Cost of Living.

The total County Council contribution is £200k and CCF have raised an additional sum (around £48) that they will be putting some of that to support Warm Spaces activity.

Food banks can apply for funding through this route, especially if they require money for organisational costs, staffing, volunteer support etc. However the aim was not to use it for food purchasing as that is already being covered by the money they are getting from the Cumbria County Council poverty reserves fund and potentially from the DWP Household Support Fund.

CVS has offered to support smaller organisations that might be struggling to complete the bidding process.

Riverside Household Association Community Fund

Riverside has a community fund that can be used for tackling food poverty, but a condition of funding is that the project has match funding.

There is potential for existing food programmes that are being supported by the County Council to draw down additional resource from Riverside, particularly for things like Breakfast Clubs, afterschool clubs and help for families.

Purchasing Infant Formula for Food Groups

Mathew Saunders raised the issue of purchasing baby formula because of the inherent risks of the packaging being pierced. This creates a gap in provision for anyone who has a baby that uses formula.

There is some evidence of community organisations not giving out formula on principle because they are trying to encourage breastfeeding.

For women who have stopped breastfeeding it is not something that can be induced. Also women who are breastfeeding have a higher calorie requirement.

The group suggested the following recommendations:

- CCF consider funding for infant feeding even though primary the fund is to support food projects with their organisational overheads
- Review food bank practice and issue a Public Health Guidance Note

Feedback from meeting with Alistair Jackson – Fairshare Cumbria and Lancashire

Alistair Jackson manages Fairshare Cumbria and Lancashire, which is run by charity Recycling Lives.

He to a colleague the explained the structure of Fairshare which includes one or two large scale franchises that operate in different parts of the UK and more regional Fairshares like Cumbria and Lancashire that are run by charities.

Cumbria and Lancashire has a warehouse in Preston. This has raised questions from food groups in Cumbria around whether supermarket donations from Cumbria are being sent to Preston to be resent back to Cumbria, and whether Cumbria is receiving the full range of goods that are available to food organisations in Lancashire.

The warehouse is in Preston mainly takes food from national suppliers. So, for example, with Tesco, the food that comes to Preston comes from Tesco's main depots in Birmingham and elsewhere. This means that Carlisle Tesco's food generally does not go to Preston.

Once food is delivered to Preston it is distributed to all Fairshare customer organisations (including Foodbanks, Food Pantries and other Food groups in Cumbria).

There are 5 drop off points in Cumbria where people can pick up deliveries, though in some cases they deliver direct and give a full list of them.

The biggest issues for Cumbria to focus on are:

- There is no depot in Cumbria – though this could be looked at with the County Council or any other anchor organisation willing to donate/fund a space (they suggest that the obvious places for them would be Penrith or Carlisle)
- The cost is prohibitive for them to do this on their own - £500k in year 1 to meeting infrastructure and staffing costs, and Cumbria does not have the level of demand at present to justify the expense.
- This impacts on availability of frozen food in Cumbria as there are no storage facilities.

This is reflected in the experience from Carlisle where the van delivering Fairshare produce is not big enough to meet the needs of north Cumbria.

Another issue is that supermarkets are donating less, because they are discontinuing stock, or buying less in bulk, due to their own overheads going up because of inflation. This a national problem affecting all Fairshare projects, though it is also leading to a reduction in food waste.

This reflects intelligence coming through locally, including from Kirkby Lonsdale, where deliveries have gone down from 100 to 30 trays.

From the Fareshare perspective surplus food donations are not the answer to food insecurity and food poverty, because it is dependent on supermarket supply and quality of stock. But it can form part of a mixed economy approach.

A final issue reported from Carlisle is that supermarkets often donate food that is of low nutritional value, such as large stocks of burgers, or cream products with a short shelf-life. The model allows no way to regulate this and offer the end user a healthy meal.

Fairshare Cumbria and Lancashire are happy to host site visits at their Preston depot and to meet with the Council to discuss opportunities to work together.

Public Health will talk to County Council colleagues about the depot idea, based on work they did around the the logistical arrangements for Cumbria's response to COVID 19 in setting up testing centres.

Alternatives to Fairshare: Vouchers

Fairshare is based on setting up a system on top of an existing system that is available for people who can pay. The challenge is that with the Cost of Living crisis more people cannot afford Aldi prices.

Vouchers were discussed as an alternative based on the County Council's and school's experience of using WONDE to purchase vouchers for 14,800 children during school holiday periods.

The model works by the school using a portal to contact WONDE to say how many children need a voucher and how much. WONDE text the vouchers to the parents who redeem them in the supermarkets. So far almost all vouchers have been successfully redeemed.

For the schools it is easy to administer and for the families they have guaranteed support and choice and control. They do not have to present paper vouchers on the checkout so the system is free of stigma.

It is a system that any organisation could use.

It is something that would be good to research among those using the system to find out about their experience of vouchers.

Witness Session 7 October 2022 – FSM Food Vouchers in School Holidays

Present: Cllr. Paul Turner, Cllr. Andy Connell.

Witness: Ez Wealleans Post-16 Officer, School Learning Improvement Team

Ez Wealleans

The FSM voucher scheme is run by a contract the Council has with a firm called WONDE who issue vouchers to parents of children who qualify for a Free School meal to cover the school holiday periods.

Each week Cllr. Sue Sanderson and Dan Barton, Assistant Director Education and Skills meets with school leaders to receive qualitative feedback on any issues facing the school system. We know from that meeting the service with WONDE is valued highly by the education system and is something schools regularly ask for at that meeting. Especially when there is a new round of government funding from the Household Support Fund.

From schools we are hearing about schools that trying to support children who do not qualify for Free School Meals, but do not benefit from the food voucher scheme. It is difficult to estimate the number, but it is likely to be several thousand children – some of whom will benefit from child tax credits, but there is growing need.

This raises the question of what we can do to support them. The first step is to make sure that schools have good information on the local support services that exist to support them. During COVID there were examples of schools being contacted by families that had no food and where the school used its own budget to pay for food vouchers. This was especially the case with rural schools where there is no accessible food bank.

The WONDE Scheme

In November 2020 when the DWP Winter Grant was introduced the Council made a quick decision to use it to purchase food vouchers over Christmas.

Previously in Easter 2020, the Government contracted with an organisation called Edenred, to provide vouchers for Free School Meal eligible children during COVID lockdown during the Easter holidays. It was chaotic. Schools struggled to access a national portal and many of the vouchers were late.

So when the DWP announced its grant, the Council via the Policy Team worked with the School Improvement Team to work with schools. The Learning Improvement team relies on good connections with all schools and settings and were already working to address COVID related issues such as period poverty/food poverty and developing systems to ensure schools were supported during this difficult time. Dale Hill, the senior manager for LIS, asked me to scope out some options for a voucher based delivery system.

During this period Edenred were not taking on any new clients so we had to look at other options. We considered disaggregating the budget so that each school would

be given a budget to set up its own voucher scheme, but the feedback from schools was that they did not have capacity for extra activity especially with COVID and looked to the local authority to provide a solution.

I had read about other Local Authorities using a new voucher provider and duly contacted Sefton and Knowlesly who had used WONDE in the previous October. What we found is WONDE is a software developer who have a 'Parent App' which was already installed in 168 schools in Cumbria and enables direct contact with parents/carers. The software required to deliver food vouchers was already installed on over half of our schools' management information systems,

The WONDE process puts the school in charge of placing the order on behalf of the child, and they have included the school's management information system, so they can use the software to identify immediately all the eligible children, and contact details for their parents. So when we assign a value for the voucher, the software allows for an automatic text or email to be sent as soon as the school authorises it. Then it is uploaded onto a cloud and the parent receives a text stating that they are entitled to a voucher for £3 per day and what supermarkets they can use it at.

From a Local Authority perspective it is very effective and schools loved it as a system. They did not have to go into a third party and sit in a queue (with Edenred schools had to wait up to a day for register a child for a voucher). It puts the school in charge of procuring from WONDE and requires no administrative support from the Council.

Because of this the school can put on any family who needs a voucher – so if they wanted to put on someone who was not FSM they would have the technical ability to do so. Though schools would need to have criteria if it was funded by the local authority to ensure equity and to ensure schools are not in the difficult moral position of deciding who should receive support.

This year because the Government committed for a full year through the Household Support Fund, we were able to go to tender and award WONDE with a year's contract to provide vouchers.

So would schools be in control? Yes. Would schools be able to identify families in need of support? Yes. And could the voucher approach work? Yes. It is an option if that was something the Council wanted to support.

The Council could look at working with the CAB or organisations who have benefitted from Household Support Funding to identify families that have come to them, or the Service Centre that has supported households with children. It may be worth exploring the potential to identify families whose children are in school but not in receipt of FSM who may be targets for additional vouchers.

If you wanted to target other groups such as NEET via Inspira it would be entirely possible.

The only areas where WONDE and other voucher schemes do not work is those where the Co-op is the local supermarket as they are not registered with any of the Voucher schemes. In areas of Cumbria where this is the case some schools have

not used WONDE (and some have) and this is something we have lobbied both the government and the Co-op about. But they issue their own vouchers, so Dowdales school, for example, order Co-op vouchers directly from their local Co-op vouchers to the school, but it is more cumbersome. In rural areas Tesco and Asda will deliver online orders to people's houses, which mitigates the issue in some areas.

Witness Session Cumbria Association of Head Teachers Executive – 13/10/22

Present: CASH Executive Members, Joel Rasbash.

Summary of points raised:

- The ideal solution would be to increase the threshold of eligibility for Free School Meals so a wider group received them daily.
- Extending the WONDE scheme to purchase one off vouchers for children in hardship is technically feasible and has obvious benefits, though there would need to be clear eligibility guidance for schools to making such decisions. Some schools were more in favour and others less in favour.
- Extending support to Breakfast Clubs was generally supported though schools would need to understand what that support might look like.

Witness Session: Primary Schools 7/10/2022

Present: Cllr. Mark Wilson, Cllr. Shirley Evans, Cllr. Paul Turner, Cllr. Andy Connell, Joel Rasbash

Witnesses: Jonathan Bursnall, Head Teacher Brook Street School.

Purpose of the session: Hear from Head Teachers in a primary school in Carlisle and Workington in areas with high levels of deprivation about their experience of supporting children at risk of going hungry.

Jonathan Bursnall

My name's Jonathan Bursnall. I'm head teacher at Brook Street Primary School in Carlisle. We have 202 children on roll and some similar challenges to Vicki. In addition, 60% of our pupils have English as an additional language and about 18 or 19 different languages spoken by the pupils who attend our school and quite a high migrant population. About 25% of our pupils are eligible for free school meals, but many have parents who are migrant workers who are on low incomes, but earning just above the FSM threshold. About 75% of our people's come from the most deprived, 30% of postcodes in Britain, which is probably very similar to Vickies.

We have been dealing with deprivation and access to food for some time, not just in the current crisis. We have a free breakfast club supported by The Greggs Foundation. They provide plenty of food and we staff the breakfast club, which is open every morning to all children regardless of their status. We also buy free fruit for all child to have at playtime.

Partly that was put in place to avoid the kind of issue of what is and isn't a healthy snack and what some children can afford to bring in. Some children can't, so that's been run for a very long time, so there's always free fruits in every classroom. It normalises eating fruit and children can just pick up a piece as they go to play.

We are part of the Fairshare project, which is a charity that supplies surplus food with a short end of life date from supermarkets. We pay £25 a week and get 25 trays of food. We bag up the food and make it available to parents who pay a small charge so we cover our costs. For £1 parents get a bag that is equivalent to £10 or £15 in the supermarket. It can have anything from a big bag of pasta to bags of cereal, yogurt cartons and sometimes chicken fillets.

We also Poverty Proof the School Day, which is about more than food, but looks at other things we can fund out of our budget. It also means giving parents lots of notice when we are asking them to pay for something.

We also make really good use of things like CFM's Cash for Kids and Greggs Foundation, which has a hardship fund. So we've made applications for families to get cookers, microwaves, beds, things like that.

When it comes to supporting people to access food, we try not to treat it as something separate but link it to learning. We try to get parental engagement in learning which is always very, very difficult. If you try to run a workshop on how to teach a child to read, how to help with maths, and you'll four parents turn up, but once when we offered an evening meal badged as 'Reading Tips with Pizza and Chips' we had 200 people attend with parents bringing Nana, Grandad and Auntie Jo from down the road.

We have had problems with Orien too, especially because packed lunches are often not nutritious and we rely on being able to offer a nutritious meal, but with the Cost of Living we are seeing pressures on what we can offer children via our catering contract. What we see is the one guaranteed hot meal a day getting smaller and the choice more limited. We also have to spend £11,000 of our delegated budget on feeding Infant age children who all qualify for free meals.

Witness Session: Community Food in South Lakeland 7/10/2022

Present: Cllr. Mark Wilson, Cllr. Shirley Evans, Cllr. Paul Turner, Cllr. Andy Connell, Joel Rasbash

Witness: Gillian Holmes Community Development Officer South Lakeland.

Purpose of the session: Hear about the experience of community food projects in South Lakeland and how they are supporting children and families, particularly in the light of South Lakeland's Local Committee work to strengthen community resilience via establishing a community food network across the district.

Gillian Holmes

Prior to COVID there were five foodbanks in the whole South Lakeland district, which was challenging for many people in our smaller communities to access free food. Drawing on the connections we had with Parish Councils and other community organisations, we made new connections and contacted existing groups across the district during the pandemic to see how we could support the local communities. At the time it was mainly to prevent isolation during lockdown and support people who were shielding. The number of groups quickly grew to 93 though not all of these are still in place.

We currently have 24 food groups in South Lakeland which include FareShare groups, community cupboards, fridges and food clubs within residents' associations. These are sometimes based on an open offer to anyone who needs help and they are not always monitored.

The FareShare groups allow people to access food that is non-stigmatising. The groups operate in different ways. They can either link in with a local supermarket which has excess food at the end of the day which they get free of charge, to distribute among members, or they can become members of the FareShare Lancashire and Cumbria operation, based in Preston. That has been very successful because the scheme provides food to people who may not have needed financial help when they joined but were motivated by a desire to reduce food waste and address the environment issues. Some of those members are now struggling with the Cost of Living crisis and have the necessary access to very low priced food.

One of the challenges with the Cost of Living crisis is that more people are buying up discounted food in supermarkets at the end of the day. These are people who would not normally use a food bank or a food club, but it does mean that the amount that food banks and food clubs are getting is diminishing. Personal donations are also decreasing and the FareShare distributor in Preston has had to reduce the number of trays sent to each FareShare group. Some used to receive up to 80 trays per week but the maximum now available is 30 per group.

Through the County Council's Cost of Living Reserve Funding, South Lakeland Local Committee has been working with the local food groups to establish the need in each locality and depending on demand, grants have been allocated for the purpose of

purchasing food to replenish the decreasing supplies. This work began with COVID 19 grants and is continuing from different Central and Local Committee budgets.

We have also funded a hardship fund, hosted by Citizens Advice in South Lakeland. This is important for individuals and families because our Children's Services Focus Families Team can make referrals. They will be assessed and can receive financial help at this crucial time. Through this fund, Citizen's Advice have been able to help with items such as a child's bed, carpet or rent arrears. They even paid for a cooker to be connected for a member of the community who had been given the appliance but didn't have the money to connect it to a supply.

To many working parents, particularly those in the care sector, or those working shifts, Breakfast Clubs are an important part of childcare. In the current climate, funds are tight and some find that they cannot continue to pay for this type of childcare. Officers are looking at ways in which financial help might be given to allow those families to continue with this much needed provision.

Overall, we believe that there is the help available in South Lakeland so no child should go hungry but the challenge is in co-ordinating it and making sure everyone knows where help is available. We can do more work with local schools and the food groups to make sure they know where to signpost people.

Witness Session: Primary Schools 7/10/2022

Present: Cllr. Mark Wilson, Cllr. Shirley Evans, Cllr. Paul Turner, Cllr. Andy Connell, Joel Rasbash

Witnesses: Vicki Hepburn-Fish, Head Teacher Victoria School (also Head of Cumbria Primary Head's Association).

Purpose of the session: Hear from Head Teachers in a primary school in Carlisle and Workington in areas with high levels of deprivation about their experience of supporting children at risk of going hungry.

Vicki Hepburn

I am Vicki Hepburn Fish and I am head Victoria School in Workington and we are a federation with the junior school. We are we have two sites. We've got the infant nursery site and we've got the Junior School site. Within the schools there are nearly 600 pupils with 45% eligible for Free School Meals or from an areas with high levels of deprivation.

This year, I was voted to be chair of Cumbria Head Association, so I've also got that hat on as well.

Food has always been a huge issue for the pupils in the school and community we serve. Even before we were in this pandemic or before we were in this energy crisis it had always been an issue and it was important to carry out poverty proofing. We were continually reviewing what we could do to make sure pupils could learn and were discussing it with parents. Food was one of the huge barriers that came up.

If a child is cold or hungry when they come to school, they will not be ready for learning and will be disengaged. They may not have had not a good night's sleep. They may not have had anything to eat since the day before, so they are already at a disadvantage before they even stepped in the classroom.

We've tried so many different approaches over the years and we do run a breakfast club, but it's more of a childcare breakfast club, so parents can access it if they are working or if they need additional childcare in the morning. At the breakfast club the children are provided with a healthy snack within that provision.

We did try and target the pupils to attend breakfast club that are on free school meals, but this was not always successful because many of these children also have issue with lateness and attendance. A few years ago, before the pandemic, we introduced Magic Breakfast, which is a DF E funded scheme. We met the criteria to provide this service and it means that every child in the school can access a breakfast.

Every morning the children come in and the staff provide a book and a bagel. The younger children can have cereal. We decide on what food we order from Magic Breakfast and they deliver it.

It's absolutely brilliant and, it means that every single pupil in the school gets fed, and if they are absent, then we'll send a box of bagels home. So even if they're not in school, we can still account for them being fed for the breakfast.

The food comes from Middlesbrough I think, which obviously adds to fuel costs, but the principle of it is really effective and it means we can track every pupil being fed before they even start their learning.

We run provision from 2 year olds Nursery right up to year six. The expectation for our nursery children is that they have a meal, it's part of their learning and development. They can't bring a pack lunch or anything like that and that is also due to allergies within the school and we cannot monitor what is being bought in from home. We class it as part of their learning and part of having to use a knife and a fork and sit at a table and all the learning that goes with those early skills of eating together.

Every week we have an Asda order to ensure that the children have access to additional food and snacks through curriculum activities. So even if the children are coming in late and it tends to be a lot of the free school meal children, there is something there for them to eat.

Often, they let us know straight away if they are hungry and the staff can go to the kitchen and make them food before the learning begins. That is really important to us as a school as the pupils cannot learn effectively when they are hungry or tired.

We have tried to invite parents into session where they can learn along with their child about their child's curriculum, such as reading, phonics and maths. There was little uptake, so we announced a Phonics Breakfast Week where parents could come along and learn with their children while having a breakfast. Lots of parents turned up and were wanting to engage and free food was offered.

When a parent is struggling financially, but do not qualify for a free school meal, we invite them in to see what we can do to make sure their child does not lose out. Our admin can track if parent is not paying for something like a meal, a school uniform or a school trip, so we invite them and can pay for them out of the school budget to make sure the child doesn't lose out. It's done subtly so the parent can trust us. It always has to be what is right for the child as it is not the child's fault their parent are facing difficulties.

We find that a lot of parents of children on a free school meal struggle with internet, Wi-Fi and phones so do not always understand how important it is to apply for Free School Meals when there is a universal FSM offer for the first two years. So we have to do a lot of work with our parents, a lot of individual work. We bring them in, we do the forms with them. We ring up the Council to see if they can check if a parent is eligible, which takes a long time and a lot of manpower. I've got 80 children in reception at the moment. So, you can imagine trying to get through that number of parents. While some are articulate and can read and write, others can't and they are more likely to be eligible for free school meals. So it's really difficult to manage because you want to support the best you can.

Something that always amazes me is that children under 5 can access free school free milk but stops at reception. We make sure all reception year children have access to a free drink, it can be milk or juice. We also provide water bottles for every child every day, and milk for every pupil who wants it with hot chocolate on Fridays in the winter. We also make sure every child can access fruit in the classroom in the afternoon.

We have taken a stance again that every child should have a hot meal, so we don't allow any packed lunches. This also allows us to protect any children with allergies and allows us to monitor what they are eating so that we know they have had something hot and nutritious.

We decided to give notice to our catering provider Orien and from the 1 April 2022 this year took the catering service in-house. This allow us to control the portion sizes and quality of the food, and to ensure that every child can afford a hot meal (including free school meals). It also allows us to buy what we need so if we need 600 yogurts a week we can do so directly. It is all regulated and checked to ensure that the food on offer meets the regulations and national food standards.

There are times when staff who are struggling financially see the support we give to families who they judge as not doing everything they should. But we always explain that it is not the child's fault and it is the child who is going without.

The other challenge is around the lack of free school meal provision for nursesey children. The County Council provides Free School Meal vouchers for these children as part of the holiday offer if they are a funded two or an early years pupil premium, but the national scheme does not includes these children in term time so we need to look at that. We give them free milk and free meals, because they are still children at the end of the day.