

Committee: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 15 December 2022

Title of Report: Response to Scrutiny Task Group Review – No Child Goes Hungry

Report by: John Readman – Executive Director – People

Cabinet Member: Councillor Sue Sanderson, Cabinet Member – Schools & Learning and Councillor Deborah Earl, Cabinet Member – Public Health & Community

What is the Report About? (Executive Summary)

1. This report proposes the Cabinet response to the recommendations identified within the Cost of Living and Children's Food Scrutiny.

Recommendation of the Executive Director

2. Cabinet is asked to approve the response to the Scrutiny Review as set out in paragraph's 9 to 22.

Background to the Proposals

3. In September 2022 Cumbria County Council requested that Scrutiny Management Board review the impact of the cost of living on children's access to food and all options to prevent any child going hungry during term time and holiday periods.
4. Members of a Task and Finish Group were tasked by Scrutiny Management Board 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; and
 - 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.).

5. The Task Group combined desktop research with witness sessions held via Microsoft Teams and submissions from schools, foodbanks and other community food projects.
6. On 3 November 2022 Council considered the Scrutiny Review report 'No Child Goes Hungry; Cost of Living and Children's Food Security'. Members supported the recommendations set out in the report and referred to Cabinet to consider the outcomes and allocate funding as part of the Quarter 2 monitoring.
7. This paper sets out the Cabinet response to the recommendations made by the Task Group Review.
8. The Task Group report proposes a number of excellent recommendations; having considered the recommendations it is suggested that recommendation 2 and 4 be brought together in terms of supporting the response. This will assist schools in identifying need and making proposals to support children, young people and families presenting with food and poverty related additional needs.

Proposed responses to the recommendations

Recommendation 1

9. *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.*
10. **Response:** Accept the recommendation with variation in delivery. The DfE National School Breakfast Programme offer is available to all schools that have 40% or more children in IDACI bands A-F. In Cumbria this is 104 schools including PRU'S and special schools. The Council can utilise the Household Support Fund to cover the 25% costs that eligible schools contribute to the National Breakfast Club Programme until March 2023.
Cost **£50,000**

Recommendation 2

11. *That the Council 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.*
12. **Response:** Accept the recommendation as part of the response to Recommendation 4 below.

Recommendation 3

13. *That the Council 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.*
14. **Response:** Accept the principle behind the recommendation, and support schools to know what existing warm space provision is available, so they can

support children to attend, where needed. Local Committees will still be free to utilise their 0-19 budgets to meet other needs of children relating to poverty over the winter period.

Recommendation 4

15. *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.*
16. **Response:** Accept the recommendation by introducing a Food Provision Grant to all Schools; and in recognition of an additional ask of the original motion to Cumbria County Council in September 2022, the Leader of the Council will write to the Government to lobby for a fair review of the funding of FSM.
17. Each School will receive a Food Provision Grant based on a formula that combines total pupil numbers and total numbers of FSM pupils. At the school's discretion, this could be used to cover the costs where a child's lunch account is in deficit, develop breakfast provision and homework clubs, support costs for food tech and any other measures the schools deem necessary to ensure that their pupils are able to access hot food as appropriate. Schools will be issued with guidance and advice on use of the grant. This funding **would not** be given directly to children and families.
18. Families would be offered a referral to Ways to Welfare, and other services where appropriate, to access further support – thus building on existing structures already in place.
19. This approach offers the flexibility for primary and secondary schools to respond appropriately, particularly in a secondary setting where the contact with families is once removed. The approach will also prevent schools utilising their budgets to address the cost of living for children, when inflation is impacting on energy and staffing costs.
Cost £1.5 Million

Recommendation 5

20. *That the Council enters 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.*
21. **Response:** Accept the recommendation. Work is underway to ensure that there is a mechanism in place to purchase FSM vouchers for the Easter holiday in 2023.
22. The Council will also provide funding for Free School Meal vouchers during the Easter Holidays by creating a ringfenced reserve for both Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council; and will look at the possibilities of covering the summer holidays. This will enable Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council to provide support while they find a longer-term solution to feeding children in the holiday periods.
Cost £500,000 for Easter.

Reasons for the recommendations/Key benefits

23. To put in place measures that will prevent any child going hungry over the winter period.

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

Options Considered and Risks Identified

Option (a)

- Cabinet can endorse the responses proposed.

Option (b)

- Cabinet can endorse some of the responses proposed.

Option (c)

- Cabinet can decide not to endorse any of the responses proposed.

Financial – What Resources will be needed and how will it be Funded?

24. Response to recommendation 1: The cost of supplementing the DfE National School Breakfast Programme to fund the 25% element not funded by DfE is £0.050m to 31 March 2023. This will be funded through use of COVID unringfenced earmarked reserves. The value of the COVID reserve being allocated to the overall response is £1.600m of which this £0.050m is one element and is being top sliced from the £1.500m identified in recommendation 4 below.
25. Response to recommendation 2: No additional resources required (see recommendation 4).
26. Response to recommendation 3: No additional resources required, though Local Committees may choose to utilise funds to provide food or other related support to children and families.
27. Response to recommendation 4: Food Provision Flat Rate Grant provided to all schools based on a combination of pupil numbers and Free School Meal uptake basis to enable schools to respond to need has a cost of £1.500m. £0.050m will be top sliced from this £1.500m for the resource requirement in recommendation 1. It is proposed that the forecast £0.400m of remaining unspent Contain Outbreak Management Funding (COMF) is reallocated to fund this ask. COMF Terms and Conditions allows “Spending to reduce health inequalities where it is clearly intended to reduce the impact of further outbreaks in the most vulnerable populations.” The remaining £1.100m is to funded through use of COVID unringfenced earmarked reserves. The value of the

COVID reserve being allocated to the overall response is £1.600m of which this £1.100m is one element.

28. Response to recommendation 5: No immediate additional resources are required to enter into the contract. Free School Meals in school holidays are currently funded from the Household Support Fund to 31 March 2023. Entering into a new contract for the provision of vouchers from 1 April 2023 will be a no minimum spend contract and therefore no resources are committed at this stage. However, if the Council was to implement the recommended response this would cost circa £0.500m for the Easter Holidays. It is proposed that the £0.500m is funded through use of COVID unringfenced earmarked reserves. The value of the COVID reserve being allocated to the overall response is £1.600m of which this £0.500m is one element. The £0.500m will be placed into an Earmarked Reserve and disaggregated appropriately between the two unitary authorities so that the Easter Holiday Free School Meal programme is fully funded.

Legal Aspects – What needs to be considered?

29. As per part 2C of the Constitution, paragraph 2.2 (d) Scrutiny Advisory Boards are able to make recommendations to the Cabinet arising from the outcome of the scrutiny process.
30. As per part 2B of the constitution, paragraph 2.1(o) Cabinet can receive and consider referrals from Scrutiny Advisory Boards.
31. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report as Cabinet is, at this stage, being asked to decide whether to endorse some/all of the recommendations.
32. Any legal aspects relating to service delivery or procurement will be considered and advised upon once the detail of the proposals is known.
33. Any changes to approved budgets as a result of the recommendations in this report will need to be agreed in accordance with the Financial Standing Orders.

Health and Safety Aspects – What needs to be considered?

34. The County Council has a responsibility under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that adequate health and safety management arrangements are in place to protect employees, members, customers, pupils, parents and visitors to County Council related school services.
35. The recommendations in the report include the option to utilise school based breakfast and homeworking clubs to assist children to access healthy meals in a warm environment. Therefore, any health and safety considerations of the club model will be managed through existing school arrangements and in line with the County Councils commitments outlined in the Annual Corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy Statement last agreed by Cabinet in July 2022.

Council Plan Priority – How do the Proposals Contribute to the Delivery of the Council’s Stated Outcomes? (Outcomes - People in Cumbria are Healthy and Safe, Places in Cumbria are well connected and thriving, the Economy in Cumbria is growing and benefits everyone)

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

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

Approved by the relevant Cabinet Members on 15 November 2022

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

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