

Name of meeting: Cabinet

Date: 18th November 2020

Title of report: Report on a decision regarding support for children eligible Free School Meals taken during the COVID-19 Pandemic on 23rd October to note, and, arrangements for future school holiday periods.

Purpose of report: To set out a Decision about support for children eligible for Free School Meals during the October half-term taken on 23rd October by the Chief Executive (and others) using Emergency Powers, and, consider arrangements for future school holiday periods should this be required.

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	Yes, but see below
Key Decision - Is it in the <u>Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports)</u>?	This report was not anticipated in the forward Plan. The decision for October half term was taken using Emergency Powers which were required to be used arising from the immediate impact of the Covid 19 pandemic
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	Yes
Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director</u> & name Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance? Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning?	Mel Meggs 09/11/2020 Eamonn Croston 09/11/2020 Julie Muscroft 09/11/2020
Cabinet member portfolio	Give name of Portfolio Holder/s Cllr Carole Pattison – Learning, Aspiration and Communities Cllr Viv Kendrick – Children's Services Cllr Graham Turner - Corporate

Electoral wards affected: All wards

Ward councillors consulted: None

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? Yes

1. Context

During the Covid 19 pandemic in the previous academic year the Government supported the provision of support over school holidays via a national voucher scheme for children eligible for Free School meals.

The Government launched a national scheme through EdenRed that allowed schools to order vouchers to the value of £15 per child per week (in some instances schools were able to use local arrangements and subsequently able to claim back the costs). These vouchers were then issued to families.

Schools were required to be fully open from September 2020, and Government guidance that was published stated that the voucher scheme would cease.

Following a national debate, a Parliamentary vote on whether the government would fund vouchers for children eligible for Free School Meals (as in previous school holidays) for October half term took place on Thursday 22nd October, this was the day before most Kirklees Schools were to break up for the half term holiday.

The outcome was that the Government would not fund vouchers for October half term.

However, it became clear that the need to support our most vulnerable families still existed given the current situation with the pandemic. Officers modelled the cost to the Council of making a commitment to local children and their families to replicate the previous system ie. making a voucher available for £15 for October half term.

In order to ensure support was available for the October half-term period, the Chief Executive exercising her emergency powers, with the Director for Children's Services, the 151 Officer and in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Learning, Aspiration and Communities and Kirklees Council Cabinet took a decision to support each eligible child with £15 via a voucher scheme on the 23rd October 2020.

The decision meant that around 15,500 eligible children in Kirklees were able to be supported for the October half-term holiday.

This decision is being reported at this, the next possible meeting of Cabinet which is the 18th November 2020.

2. Future School Holidays

Members are asked to consider supporting eligible children during future school holidays with a similar commitment.

Over the weekend, the Government has announced that it will be providing a targeted support package over the next four months to families in the greatest need. Details are yet to be published.

In light of the Government announcement for targeted support to the end of March 2021, and dependent upon the detail, officers request a decision for delegated authority to the Cabinet Portfolio lead for Learning, Aspiration and Communities, Child, and Corporate in conjunction with the Director for Children's Services and the Section 151 Officer to be prepared to support children eligible for Free School Meals and related activity through upcoming school future holiday periods if they are not covered in the Government Support.

Future holidays that would require support depending on the local and national picture are;

Christmas – 2 weeks
February Half-term – 1 Week
Easter – 2 weeks

Any support decided upon would be reported back to Kirklees Council Cabinet at the earliest opportunity.

3. Implications for the Council

- **Working with People**
Supporting free school meals during school holidays means that over 15500 children should not be affected by food poverty and that by doing so the most disadvantaged families will have access to food to ensure children are not going hungry during this very difficult time.
- **Working with Partners**
We continue to work with all partners, schools, communities, food banks and local businesses to ensure we support vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families.
- **Place Based Working**
Community response hubs were created to work directly within the community. Schools are also essential in knowing their children and families, identifying those that are most vulnerable and in need and can work closely with families.
- **Climate Change and Air Quality**
N/A
- **Improving outcomes for children**
By ensuring children and families who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable have access to food throughout school holidays as well as in term time, supports children being ready to learn and being safe and well. Having access to food and other essentials will contribute to overall, health, wellbeing and improving outcomes.
- **Other (eg Legal/Financial or Human Resources)**

The financial implication for Kirklees to support a week of free school meals for 15500 children at £15 per week equates to approximately £232,500. This will be funded from earmarked COVID risk reserves. It is requested that Cabinet note the funding decision.

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4. Consultees and their opinions

The decision for October half-term was made in consultation with Strategic Director, Service Director, Heads of Service, Portfolio holder, Strategic finance, Customer and Exchequer Service and previously through Business Continuity processes.

5. Next steps and timelines

- To secure a process and system with our schools, to be implemented 2 weeks prior to the Christmas holiday period to give certainty and reassurance to families. This will take into account any details that emerge from the Government programme.
- Prior to future holiday periods review the local and national situation

6. Officer recommendations and reasons

- Cabinet are asked to note the officer decision which has supported Free School Meal eligible children attending Kirklees schools for October half-term.
- In light of the Government announcement for targeted support to the end of March 2021, and dependent upon the detail, officers request a decision for delegated authority to the Director for Children's Services and the Section 151 Officer to support children eligible for Free School Meals and related activity through the future school holiday periods set out above. This would be reviewed in line with the local and national context and Government guidance.

7. Cabinet Portfolio Holder's recommendations

We are supportive of the Decision taken to enable support to be offered to our children eligible for Free School Meals. We are committed to giving children the best start in life and nutrition is vital to this. We welcome the support for the future that the Government have indicated they will provide, but until the detail about that is understood we would support the Officer recommendation so that we can work with officers to ensure that a system is in place to give certainty for the next school holiday period.

8. Contact officer

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9. Background Papers and History of Decisions

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools?priority-taxonomy=b350e61d-1db9-4cc2-bb44-fab02882ac25>

10. Service Director responsible

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