

EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Monday, 10 th October 2022
Report Subject	Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM)
Cabinet Member	Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education and Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru have made a commitment to ensure all primary school aged children in Wales can access a free school meal by 2024.

Implementation of universal primary free school meals (UPFSM) will be phased, with first rollout in Flintshire commencing in September 2022 to Reception aged children.

There is a significant amount of work to do to ensure the infrastructure, equipment, resource and processes are in place to enable full implementation of UPFSM.

This report provides a progress update on local implementation of UPFSM.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To note the progress made to date on implementation of UPFSM.
2	To consider the resource implications and risks identified in relation to UPFSM.
3	To support the UPFSM Policy and local implementation.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY FREE SCHOOL MEALS (UPFSM)
1.01	As part of a Co-operation Agreement, Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru have announced plans and funding for all primary school children to be able to have a free school meal by 2024.
1.02	Welsh Government's commitment to Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) is in response to the escalating costs of living and aimed to help tackle child poverty, whilst ensuring no child goes hungry in school.
1.03	Some families who meet certain criteria, such as those on lower incomes or in receipt of certain benefits, are entitled to receive a free school meal – eligibility tested free school meals (eFSM). The UPFSM Policy does not affect eFSM and families who are eligible for eFSM are being encouraged to continue to use the eFSM application process. This will ensure these families can continue to access other grants and benefits, such as the PDG Access grant (School uniform grant).
1.04	Implementation of UPFSM will be phased. Locally, in Flintshire, rollout will mirror the national timetable, as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• September 2022 – Reception age children offered UPFSM• April 2023 – children in Reception and years 1 and 2 offered UPFSM• 2024 – all primary aged children to be able to take up UPFSM.
1.05	A significant amount of work is required to ensure that in Flintshire we have the infrastructure, equipment, resource and processes in place to support full implementation of this Policy. It is not just about ensuring a meal can be provided but that eligible children have access to cutlery to eat it with, a place to sit whilst eating, that schools have adequate staff to act as lunchtime supervisors for an extended period to enable all children to have a lunch sitting, that data is captured on eligibility and meal uptake, etc.
1.06	<p>To oversee implementation of UPFSM in Flintshire, a small, cross organisation Project Team has been formed within the Local Authority, with the involvement/support of key stakeholders.</p> <p>The UPFSM Project Team is supported by a number of task and finish groups, focusing on specific matters such as: implementation in schools; communications and engagement; kitchen and dining room audits; application process; data capture and finance.</p>
1.07	<p>The first priorities for the Project Team, and supporting task and finish groups, have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conducting kitchen and dining room audits to identify the additional kitchen and dining equipment and works required to fulfil full implementation;• Managing and disseminating information to stakeholders; and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement of light equipment to enable delivery of the first phase of implementation in September 2022.
1.08	In addition to the local Project Team, the Council has officer representatives on a number of national groups and forums involved in the development, implementation, delivery and rollout of UPFSM.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Welsh Government have committed to fully funding UPFSM Policy with a number of grant funding streams being made available.
2.02	<p>Revenue Grant 2022</p> <p>The first grant funding stream available was a revenue grant, which was made available for councils' preparatory work for the eligibility changes to free school meals.</p> <p>More specifically, the revenue grant received by Flintshire County Council was to provide support to the Council in three areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Early engagement with stakeholders to understand behaviours that might impact on the delivery of UPFSM and level of uptake; 2. Kitchen and dining room facility audits and workforce and contractual arrangements review to understand existing capacity and where investment is needed; and 3. Consideration of the practical implications of changing free school meal eligibility.
2.03	<p>Capital Grant Funding</p> <p>The Council has, and will continue to, receive capital grant funding to support the investment required to enable UPFSM delivery. In accordance with the grant conditions this includes the procurement of equipment and works to enable UPFSM rollout.</p> <p>Capital funding will be available in tranches broadly reflecting the UPFSM phased rollout.</p>
2.04	<p>Local Authority Education Revenue Grant – UPFSM Delivery</p> <p>The Local Authority Education Grant will include the Council's allocation for UPFSM delivery. This allocation is calculated at a set unit rate per meal served. The number of meals served will be estimated for each month, using a set week per month to calculate the daily average number of pupils taking up the offer which is adjusted for school days per year, etc. to arrive at a monthly allocation from Welsh Government based on actual numbers of UPFSM delivered. As such, the Council will need to record actual uptake and be able to return data to Welsh Government on this throughout the academic year.</p>
2.05	The Local Authority Education Grant funding allocation includes an administration fee. This payment is to cover staffing time to process additional meal request forms, record data, negotiate contracts, marketing and communications, etc.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	Applying for eFSM Whilst UPFSM will be available to all primary aged children from 2024, those who remain eligible for eFSM (eligibility tested) still need to apply. Application does enable parents to access other grant funding.
3.02	eFSM application is also used for funding allocations to the Council and schools. For 2022/23 eFSM application data has been roughly calculated as providing a total of circa £10m grant funding.
3.03	There are concerns that the universal entitlement of UPFSM will result in a marked reduction in the number of parents applying for eFSM, which could potentially have a significant financial impact on both schools and the Council. It could also undermine the eFSM statistic across Wales which is a key indicator of poverty and deprivation and used in many other ways nationally.
3.04	Local communications have continued to reiterate the need for parents to apply for eFSM and this will need to be an ongoing annual reminder effort to ensure those who are eligible for eFSM continue to apply in future years.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	Parent and Child Survey To help with preparations for UPFSM, including to ascertain likely meal uptake, a parent and child survey was developed and launched in June 2022, with a closing date of 31 st July 2022. This was advertised on the Council's website and council maintained primary schools were asked to circulate the link to parents of children attending their school.
4.02	A total of 2,122 survey responses were received, representing the views and opinions of parents of children attending 58 of the 67 local primary schools. NB: 16 respondents skipped the question on which school the child attended. As such, more schools may be represented than stated above.
4.03	The vast majority of responders to the parent and child survey expressed enthusiasm for UPFSM, noting the huge (positive) difference it will make given the cost of living increases. However, some respondents felt that the phased rollout is discriminatory and unfair.
4.04	Early indications are that uptake will be fairly consistent across age groups and the days of the week, with slightly higher demand on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

4.05	School Survey To enable effective planning and to inform procurement requirements, especially to enable delivery to reception aged children from September 2022, a further survey was developed and launched in July 2022 for completion by schools.
4.06	61 of the 67 Flintshire County Council maintained schools responded to the survey. Of those that responded 93.5% reported an increase in projected meal uptake from September, with 50% anticipating uptake to double on 2021/22.
4.07	One of the most frequent concerns raised by schools was the additional time required to ensure young children eat their meals in the allocated time for lunch. Concerns were also expressed around the need for additional lunch sittings and the impact this may have on outdoor play time and the school day more broadly.
4.08	Schools were also asked about the need for additional lunchtime supervisors, with 23 schools describing the need for additional staff from either September 2022 or April 2023.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Not applicable.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Welsh Government (2022) <i>Universal Primary Free School Meals</i> , available online: https://gov.wales/universal-primary-free-school-meals-upfsm#:~:text=Registering-Overview,child%20goes%20hungry%20in%20school
6.02	Flintshire County Council (2022) <i>Universal Primary Free School Meals FAQs</i> , available online: https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Schools/Free-School-Meals.aspx

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Kelly Oldham-Jones – Strategic Executive Officer Telephone: 01352 702143 E-mail: kelly.oldham-jones@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	Free School Meals (eFSM): eligibility tested free school meals that are available to families who meet certain criteria, such as being on lower

incomes or in receipt of certain benefits, making them entitled to receive a free school meal regardless of the UPFSM Policy.

Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM): Welsh Government Policy to ensure every primary school aged child will be universally eligible for a free school meal by 2024, regardless of household income.

Uptake: the percentage of children who are eligible for a meal who take a meal when offered.

PDG: The Welsh Government funded Pupil Development Grant is available to help towards the costs of a child's school uniform and equipment, for those on a low income.