

## CABINET

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| <b>Date of Meeting</b> | Tuesday, 25 <sup>th</sup> April 2023  |
| <b>Report Subject</b>  | Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM)   |
| <b>Cabinet Member</b>  | Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure |
| <b>Report Author</b>   | Chief Officer (Education and Youth)   |
| <b>Type of Report</b>  | Operational   |

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

Implementation of universal primary free school meals (UPFSM) will be phased, the first rollout in Flintshire commenced in September 2022 to Reception aged children, the second phase of roll out commencing in April 2023 to Year 1 and 2 aged children.

A significant amount of work has been completed and will continue into 2023 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

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| 1 | Cabinet notes the progress made to date on implementation of UPFSM.                   |
| 2 | Cabinet consider the resource implications and risks identified in relation to UPFSM. |

## REPORT DETAILS

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| <b>1.00</b> | <b>EXPLAINING THE LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY FREE SCHOOL MEALS (UPFSM)</b>   |
| 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 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"><li>• September 2022 – Reception aged children offered UPFSM – rollout has been completed</li><li>• April 2023 – Years 1 and Year 2 aged children offered UPFSM – preparations have been completed and rollout for Year 1 and Year 2 on target for April 2023 implementation date</li><li>• September 2023 – Year 3 and Year 4 aged children offered UPFSM</li><li>• April 2024 – all primary aged children offered UPFSM</li></ul> |
| 1.05        | A significant amount of work has already been completed and continues to be required to ensure that in Flintshire we have the infrastructure, equipment, resource and processes in place to support full implementation of this national 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 sufficient lunchtime supervisors for an extended period to enable all children to have a lunch sitting and that data is captured on eligibility and meal uptake.      |
| 1.06        | To oversee implementation of UPFSM in Flintshire, a small cross-portfolio Project Team continues to work on the rollout with representatives from Education and Youth; Finance; Housing and Assets (Benefits); and Capital Programme and Assets. NEWydd Catering and Cleaning Ltd are also part of this Project Team as the Council's main school catering supplier.  |
| 1.07        | 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 and data capture; and finance.   |

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| 1.07 | <p>The priorities for the Project Team, and supporting task and finish groups, have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting kitchen and dining room audits to identify the additional kitchen and dining equipment and works required to deliver full implementation. This has now been completed.</li> <li>• Managing and disseminating information to stakeholders - this has been undertaken regularly and will be ongoing throughout the roll-out.</li> <li>• Procurement of light and heavy equipment to enable delivery of the first phase of implementation in September 2022 and for April 2023. This first stage of procurement has been completed; and</li> <li>• Procurement of any remaining equipment and furniture to enable delivery for the next phase of rollout.</li> </ul> |
| 1.08 | <p>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. This ensures Flintshire's views are well represented and important information disseminated quickly to the local project team.</p>  |

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| <b>2.00</b> | <b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>  |
| 2.01        | <p>Welsh Government have committed to fully funding UPFSM Policy with a number of grant funding streams being made available.</p>   |
| 2.02        | <p><b>Revenue Grant 2022</b><br/> The first grant funding stream was a revenue grant to support councils' preparatory work for the eligibility changes to free school meals, up to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022.</p> <p>More specifically, the revenue grant of £69k was to provided support to the Council in three areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Early engagement with stakeholders to understand behaviours that might impact on the delivery of UPFSM and level of uptake;</li> <li>2. Kitchen and dining room facility audits and workforce and contractual arrangements review to understand existing capacity and where investment is needed; and</li> <li>3. Consideration of the practical implications of changing free school meal eligibility.</li> </ol> |
| 2.03        | <p>In Flintshire, some of the revenue grant was utilised to fund a fixed-term Free School Meal Project Officer, to assist the Council with its preparatory work, in accordance with the grant criteria as outlined in point 2.02 above.</p>   |
| 2.04        | <p><b>Capital Grant</b><br/> The Council has been allocated capital grant funding, totalling £3,029,201 to support the procurement of equipment and works to enable UPFSM rollout. The Council has realised a total spend of £1,567,976.00 in the rollout of this project to date.</p>  |

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| 2.05 | <p><b>Local Authority Education Grant – UPFSM Delivery</b></p> <p>The Local Authority Education Grant for 2022-23 has confirmed that Flintshire County Council's allocation for UPFSM for 2022-23 is £648,626. This allocation uses pupil census data (PLASC) from 2021 data and is based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion numbers (all pupils minus eligible eFSM and transitional pupils);</li> <li>• 190 school days per year;</li> <li>• £2.90 meal unit rate; and</li> <li>• 86% uptake.</li> </ul>  |
| 2.06 | <p>Whilst the Council received confirmation of the grant allocation, Welsh Government have been accepting claims on actual numbers of UPFSM delivered in this period. From September 2022 to February 2023 circa 95,000 meals have been delivered to reception aged pupils and grant totalling £279,000 has been claimed. This is less than the initial allocation which included funding for Years 1 and 2 rolling out in January. The Council will continue to need to record this information and be able to return data to Welsh Government on actual uptake on specific weeks throughout the year.</p> |
| 2.07 | <p>The 2022-23 Local Authority Education Grant funding allocation includes an administration fee of 6% (£36,715). This payment is to cover staffing time to process additional meal request forms, record data, negotiate contracts, marketing and communications, etc. This funding will be replicated in future years but with a declining scale percentage. However, the Council envisages that this will still attract higher grant funding in future years given that more children will be eligible for and take up UPFSM and this is used to calculate the grant.</p>                                |
| 2.08 | <p>The administrative fee for 2022-23 has in part been used to fund the extension of the Free School Meal Project Officer post to December 2022. This role ended in December 2022 when the post holder secured permanent employment elsewhere in Council. Officers in the School Modernisation Team and Finance Teams have now picked up various elements of this project work which is starting to scale down as the project rolls out.</p>  |

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| <b>3.00</b> | <b>IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT</b>   |
| 3.01        | <p><b>Procurement</b></p> <p>The equipment and works required in kitchens and dining rooms to enable UPFSM delivery in 2022-23 has been identified and totals circa £1.6m.</p> <p>The impact of macro environmental factors on the market, combined with the increased demand of 22 Local Authorities in Wales seeking to place orders for the same additional kitchen and dining room equipment at the same time, means suppliers are struggling to meet demand. Lead times for some equipment is up to 26 weeks from point of order and further time needs to be allowed for installation in some cases.</p> |

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|      | This did have a significant impact on procurement, which was further compounded by the fact that the Council does not have established supplier relationships with many suppliers given that school catering is not delivered by the Council in-house.  |
| 3.02 | Initial procurement for light equipment to enable delivery to Reception aged children from September 2022 and also for Year 1 and Year 2 from April 2023 has been made through means of an exception report.  |
| 3.03 | <b>Applying for eFSM</b><br>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, but this is limited.   |
| 3.04 | 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, broken down as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• £6.1m in the Education element of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG);</li> <li>• £3.1m in the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) Schools grant; and</li> <li>• £619.5k for the PDG Access grant.</li> </ul>  |
| 3.05 | There are concerns that the universal eligibility of UPFSM will see 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.   |
| 3.06 | Local communications have continued to reiterate the need for parents to apply for eFSM and this will need to be an ongoing to ensure those who are eligible for eFSM continue to apply in future years.  |
| 3.07 | <b>Meal Unit Rate</b><br>Despite Welsh Government committing to fully fund the UPFSM Policy they have set a meal unit price of £2.90, which some Councils have already reported will not cover the cost of delivery.<br><br>Early indications show that this figure does not cover all local service delivery costs, i.e. catering supplier costs, utilities, etc. and work to ensure a fair and accountable split of this funding element is being developed.<br><br>The meal unit rate is now under review by Welsh Government following feedback from all Councils – Flintshire County Council is represented on this working group. |

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| <b>4.00</b> | <b>CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT</b>   |
| 4.01        | <b>Parent and Child Survey</b><br>To help with preparations for UPFSM, to ascertain likely meal uptake, a parent and child survey was undertaken between June and July 2022. This was advertised on the Council's website and primary schools were asked to circulate the link to parents of children attending their school. The |

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|      | information from the surveys was useful to the project team to gauge potential take-up of the UPFSM offer.  |
| 4.02 | Further surveying work with parents/carers and pupils will be undertaken to assess the impact of the rollout in the summer term.  |
| 4.03 | <b>School Survey</b><br>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. The information from the surveys was useful to the project team to gauge the schools' own challenges in relation to delivery of the UPFSM project. |
| 4.04 | Further surveying work with schools will be undertaken to assess the impact of the rollout in the summer term.  |
| 4.05 | <b>Uptake Rates</b><br><br>The current uptake rates for Reception aged children across Flintshire schools has been 75.9%, a positive result. There is no comparative uptake data available from other Council's at present.   |

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| <b>5.00</b> | <b>APPENDICES</b> |
| 5.01        | Not applicable.   |

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

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| <b>7.00</b> | <b>CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS</b>  |
| 7.01        | <p><b>Contact Officer:</b> Jennie Williams<br/> <b>Telephone:</b> 01352 704015<br/> <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:jennie.williams@flintshire.gov.uk">jennie.williams@flintshire.gov.uk</a></p> |

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| 8.00 | <b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>   |
| 8.01 | <p><b>Free School Meals (eFSM):</b> 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.</p> <p><b>Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM):</b> 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.</p> <p><b>Uptake:</b> the percentage of children who are eligible for a meal who take a meal when offered.</p> |