

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 21 st November 2023
Report Subject	Alleviating food poverty over the school holidays
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Finance, Inclusion, Resilient Communities including Social Value and Procurement Cabinet Member for Education and Youth, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure
Report Author	Chief Executive Corporate Finance Manager (People and Resources)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the pandemic Welsh Government committed to provide additional funding to support free school meals during the holiday and half term period. The scheme was intended to address 'holiday hunger' and help families struggling during the cost-of-living crisis and the mechanism for delivering this initiative was either a direct payment to families of eligible children, vouchers or the provision of a lunch.

At the end of June Welsh Government confirmed that it was ending its support for free school meal provision for children during holidays and half terms.

At the Council meeting of the 26th September 2023 a notice of motion relating to Free School Meals was adopted, the key points of which are included below

- *Cabinet will give a commitment to work to find resources during the Christmas holidays for families on free school meals and will bring a report to Cabinet in November with proposals for how this can be achieved*
- *Cabinet will set up a working group to report back to Cabinet. The working group will be chaired by a back-bench Member of the Council but will contain Councillor Paul Johnson and Councillor Mared Eastwood with representatives from across the Chamber*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Cabinet approves the payment of £25.00 per eligible pupil to address the period covering the Christmas holiday period, to be taken from the hardship fund (total estimated amount £129,825).
2	That Cabinet set up the member working group and that the group report back its findings before the 2024/25 budget is concluded. The principle aim of the working group will be to consider and recommend sustainable options for future school holidays.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING ALLEVIATING FOOD POVERTY OVER THE SCHOOL HOLIDAY
1.01	During the pandemic Welsh Government committed to provide additional funding to support free school meals during the holiday and half term period. The scheme was intended to address 'holiday hunger' and help families struggling during the cost-of-living crisis and the mechanism for delivering this initiative was either a direct payment to families of eligible children, vouchers or the provision of a lunch.
1.02	At the end of June Welsh Government confirmed that it was ending its support for free school meal provision for children during holidays and half terms.
1.03	<p>During the intervening period Flintshire County Council provided support through direct payments to families. When Welsh Government ceased funding Cabinet determined that it would not be in a position to support further payments and instead relied upon a number of other initiatives which for the summer holidays; are set out below:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Food and Fun programme (previously SHEP), a targeted programme delivered by schools who meet certain FSM eligibility criteria and runs for 4 weeks during the holidays. It involves the provision of breakfast, snack and lunch and also provides opportunities for families to join once a week for lunch.• The Aura Fit, Fed and Read programme provided a food offer which was widely promoted across the county. The programme was a resounding success.• Whilst our summer playschemes do not have a formal food offer as it is not permitted within the funding terms and conditions, there has been provision for some healthy snacks that the play leaders can distribute if children indicate they are hungry• Social media promotion of the above.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The FCC Cost of Living Online Hub has a prominent place on the council website as a source of places to find support during the Cost of Living Crisis.
1.04	<p>As background, at the Council meeting of the 26th September 2023 Councillor David Coggins Cogan submitted a notice of motion relating to free school meals. During the debate the Leader of the Council put forward the following resolution which was subsequently supported at Council.</p> <p><i>The ongoing Cost of Living crisis forces more and more families throughout Flintshire into food poverty. In June Welsh Government announced it was ending the holiday provision of free school meals, removing a safety net from those who needed it, the most vulnerable children trapped in poverty through no fault of their own.</i></p> <p><i>Several Councils across Wales urgently approved funding to continue free school meals during the summer break. Those Cabinets decided alleviating food poverty for children was a priority. The full burden of the halted free school meals policy fell on those least able to bear children living in poverty.</i></p> <p><i>This policy decision not to fund free school meals was not communicated to Members. This hampered Members' efforts in proactively informing their residents of this new pressure on family finances. Choosing not to inform Members about the discontinuation of holiday free school meals is regrettable and I apologise to the Chamber for that. I move</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Therefore this Council notes with disappointment Welsh Government's decision not to fund free school meals during the holidays and not to provide any part funding to eligible children.</i> • <i>This Council will work with Welsh Government in asking it to reinstate provision of resources for free school meals.</i> • <i>Cabinet will give a commitment to work to find resources during the Christmas holidays for families on free school meals and will bring a report to Cabinet in November with proposals for how this can be achieved.</i> • <i>Cabinet will set up a working group to report back to Cabinet. The working group will be chaired by a back-bench Member of the Council but will contain Councillor Paul Johnson and Councillor Mared Eastwood with representatives from across the Chamber.</i> • <i>The working group will look at the issue of free school meals and will report before the budget.</i> • <i>Cabinet notes with disappointment Welsh Government's decision not to fund free school meals during the holidays and not to provide any funding to eligible children.</i>

1.05	In terms of taking forward the above two work streams have been developed: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with the encroaching Christmas school holiday period • The establishment of a member working group
1.06	In relation to solutions to address the Christmas school period it is proposed that a direct payment is made of £25.00 per child at an estimated cost, based on an estimated 5,193 eligible pupils covering the 10 day period. Funding will be provided from the amount remaining within the Councils hardship fund.
1.07	In relation to the working group, the terms of reference and proposed membership of that group is included in the terms of reference included at appendix A. In this context it the intention that the group also widen out their area of their work to focus on the wider poverty agenda, to encompass a wider family approach.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	As noted in the report at 1.06, the proposal will have an estimated cost, for this period of £129,825. The member working group may conclude that financial support should be provided for other holiday and half term periods, however, as these discussions have not yet commenced it would be premature to determine an outcome, however, should the working group determine to support future holiday periods then this will have financial implications for the Council and as yet no provision has been made in future budgets.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	Any future year's decisions will need to consider the funding implications of such decision of the Councils overall budget and risks this may present.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	The issue was raised at County Council and course of action determined following that meeting. The setting up a member working group to explore future provision and implications will feed back outcomes to Cabinet for consideration.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix A – Terms of Reference for the member working group.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Chief Executive Telephone: 01352 702101 E-mail: chief.executive@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	NA