

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Education Officer****Educational Services Committee:****22 September 2021**

Subject: Alternative to Free School Meals Payment in Holidays.**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to update members on Free School Meal payments and to seek approval for administering Holiday Hunger payments based on entitlement as a result of low income.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** The Educational Services Committee is asked:
- (a) To note the progress of National and Local plans to support Holiday Hunger payments and
 - (b) To approve how the Holiday Hunger funds will be administered

3. Background

- 3.1** In Scotland all children in Early Years and P.1-3 are entitled to free school meals. This universal offer is due to be extended in academic session 2021-22 to include all children in Primary 4 in August and then all Primary 5 children in January 2022.
- 3.2** In 2019 Council agreed the provision of a Holiday Hunger Fund. This increased the provision of meals and social activities for school children during holiday periods throughout West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC) and enabled a range of activities including food provision to be established across the council, with the support of a range of community partners. It has proved very popular and successful. The Council's commitment of £100,000 per annum is due to be reviewed in 2023. In response to the pandemic, Scottish Government provided additional funding for 2021 to extend the summer programme with criteria to support particular cohorts of children, young people and families.
- 3.3** Scottish Government committed funding to provide an alternative to Free School Meals (FSM) for those eligible as a result of deprivation, until Easter 2022.

- 3.4** Currently in WDC a FSM alternative holiday payment is provided to parents of all children in Early Years establishments and as a universal offer to parents of all children in P.1-3. This results in additional costs to the Council as funding from Scottish Government is only provided for those eligible as a result of deprivation. At present two-thirds of the P.1-3 payments and all Early Years payments are to parents who do not qualify under the current SG deprivation criteria.
- 3.5** Weekly payments per child are currently £24.50 for those in Early Learning and Childcare and £25.00 for school aged children. These payments are issued at October, Christmas, February , Easter and Summer holiday periods.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** Expansion of FME in August 2021 to all pupils in Primary 4 and to all pupils in Primary 5 in January 2022 ,will result by the end of the year, in 44% of the payments allocated being to families who do not live in deprivation. This would be a direct cost to the Council as it is not covered by the funding from Scottish Government for those in need.
- 4.2** A funding gap will arise which will increase year on year as the roll out of FSM to all primary pupils continues.
- 4.3** It is proposed that FSM holiday payments are amended to reflect the eligibility criteria laid out by Scottish Government and that payments are made only to those eligible due to deprivation .

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no people implications as a result of this report.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** In 2020/21 the Scottish Government provided funding of £680k to cover FSM payments from October to March. Our expenditure was £757k with the excess effectively covered by an underspend in the food purchases budget within Catering Services which arose primarily as a direct consequence of prolonged school closures.
- 6.2** For 2021/22 our projected expenditure on FSM holiday payments to Easter 2022 will be approximately £1.201m. WDC has SG funding for 2021/22 of £606k which includes £120k received in March 2021 but carried forward to cover Easter 2021. There will therefore be net expenditure of £595k given our current policy towards free school meal payments and its extension to P4 and P5.

Expenditure to date

£0.698m

Forecast expenditure to Easter 2022 £0.503m

Total projected expenditure	£1.201m
Total Scottish Government Funding	<u>£0.606m</u>
Net expenditure	<u>£0.595m</u>

6.3 This total expenditure of £1.201m includes £526k paid to those who are not eligible under SG criteria and is not covered by Scottish Government funding with some £165k of this attributable to payments to Early Years.

6.4 Restricting payments to those children living in deprivation would cost about £675k against total funding of £606k.

7. Risk Analysis

7.1 If the Council is unable to ensure positive outcomes for children, we will not be meeting their needs (Children and Young People Act 2014) (Equalities Act 2010).

7.2 As stated earlier in paragraph 6.1 although our FSM payments in 2020/21 were greater than the level of assistance provided by the Scottish Government the excess expenditure could be covered by the underspend in the Council's food purchases budget within Catering Services (as a result of school closures). It is unlikely that such an underspend will reoccur in 2021/22 to cover the shortfall highlighted in 6.2 above. A tighter approach towards the Council's FSM payments over the holiday periods is therefore required to avoid an overspend. The council must work within the principles of Best Value with these additional funds.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 This fund and governance enhances the quality of the service provided to the children and young people who receive it and therefore can be seen to have a positive impact on them. However there would be a negative impact on the cohort of families who previously received payments and would no longer do so as they are not eligible. (App.1 Equalities Impact Assessment)

9. Environmental Sustainability

9.1 There are no environmental implications with this report.

10 Consultation

10.1 Legal Services and the Section 95 Officer have been consulted in relation to the content of this report.

11. Strategic Assessment

11.1 This report reflects the Council's aspiration to reduce inequalities for

the people of West Dunbartonshire.

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Background papers: Holiday Hunger Report Education Committee 5th June 2019

Appendices: App.1 Equalities Impact Assessment

Wards Affected: All wards