

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	<b>Children, Adults, Health &amp; Wellbeing Policy Development &amp; Scrutiny Panel</b>	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	<b>13th November 2023</b>	
TITLE:	<b>Free School Meals</b>	
WARD:	All	
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>		
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b> <b>Advertising materials for FSM</b> <b>Holiday Activities Fund Brochure</b>		

### 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 This report highlights the current provision in Bath and North East Somerset with regard the numbers of pupils who are in receipt of Free School Meals and the provision they can expect to receive, and also explains the statutory requirements of schools food standards that apply to meals provided in schools.

### 2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to;

- 2.1 Note the information in the report**

### 3 THE REPORT

#### 3.1 Eligibility for Free School Meals.

- (1) School meals are free for all state school pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 of primary school. These are known as 'universal infant free school meals'.

(2) However, if a family is living on a low income and claiming certain benefits, a child may be able to get a free lunch until at least 2025 (known as 'benefit-related free school meals').

(3) The benefits that provide support are:-

- Universal Credit (if your annual net earned income is £7,400 or less, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)
- Income Support
- Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income Related Employment and Support Allowance
- Child Tax Credit, **without any Working Tax Credit**, and an annual household income of £16,190 or less (as assessed by HMRC - Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs)
- **Four-week run-on** Working Tax Credit (paid for four weeks after you **STOP** qualifying for Working Tax Credit)
- Guaranteed Element of State Pension Credit
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

These rules and regulations are provided by the DFE as statutory guidance.

### 3.2 Numbers of FSM in B&NES Schools

The Number of FSM pupils by Sector in B&NES

SECTOR	PUPIL NO.S May 23	FSM MAY 2020	FSM MAY 2023	Inc./ Dec.	% CHANGE	FSM OCT 2023	Inc./ Dec.	% Change
<b>PRIMARY</b>	13,726	2,077	2,475	398	19%	2,277	-198	-8%
<b>SECONDARY</b>	13,350	1,453	1,974	521	36%	2,114	140	7%
<b>SPECIAL</b>	548	194	266	72	37%	280	14	5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	27,624	3,724	4,715	991	27%	4,671	-44	-1%

3.3 The table above shows the number of FSM eligible pupils from May 2020 (just after the first lockdown of the pandemic) and the equivalent date in 2023. This shows the significant increase in eligibility over the 3 years.

3.4 Also shown is the October 23 data (most up to date) which shows a fall in primary aged children being eligible. On further analysis this trend occurs each year (except 2020) with drop in the primary eligible pupil numbers in the autumn term.

- 3.5 The fall in eligibility is due to the new intake of parents who have not made an application for Free School Meals at the beginning of term.
- 3.6 It is noted there are many reasons for this lack of application, but it is likely that a large impact is due to the Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) where all key stage 1 pupils are provided with a free meal whether they are eligible by benefit or not.
- 3.7 To overcome this dip in applications we actively promote the entitlements and the added benefits that could occur for the schools' other budgets to parents. We do this in the following places, B&NES Livewell Facebook page, the main B&NES Facebook page, B&NES Community Well Being Hub, and the B&NES Libraries digital screens. The Libraries also create a window display for us around BRFSM and healthy eating as well as placing A4 posters and leaflets around the buildings.
- 3.8 Schools are also sent letters for parents emphasising the additional benefits the school could receive if a parent was eligible for FSM due to the benefits they receive.
- 3.9 Copies of some of our promotional information is shown in the appendix
- 3.10 We run a promotion with the above 3 times a year in the lead up to the Benefit Related Free School Meal Census dates (the census leads to the schools additional pupil premium funding) the census dates are in October, January and May.

I have added a link below to our B&NES BRFSM web page which gives you more information and various links

<https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>

We have always understood the importance to approve as many children as possible for a benefit related free school meal both from the children/parent/guardian side as well as the schools. Because of this we think it is important to have various avenues to apply for a BRFSM. We have the following routes to apply:

- Paper Form which can be downloaded, completed and sent to us direct or via the school or handed in to B&NES one stop shops.
- Online form – this is our most popular way to apply. It is also the quickest and we have designed this form to cover all the information we need and also have a notes/comments section if the applicant wants to add some extra details.
- Telephone application – we always receive positive comments via this avenue as the public are so pleased (and surprised) to be able to speak to a human.

- 3.11 As well as the above, if a school finds it difficult to get someone to apply for BRFSM but they think they may qualify, then the school can obtain the relevant details along with permission to use parent/guardian's data (re GDPR) to check their eligibility. Sometimes depending on what a parent/guardian tells us in an email we also use that email as an application.

### **3.12 Free School Meals – Holiday Periods**

3.13 During holiday periods the Free School Meals Voucher scheme, provides funding for parents entitled to benefit related free school meals to obtain a voucher that can be used at supermarkets.

3.14 The funding is part of the Housing Support Fund

3.15 The total funding allocated in 2023-24 is estimated at £800k

3.16 This means we can issue approximately 4,100 FSMV's for each school holiday in 2023 up to and including Easter 2024.

3.17 During the summer 2023 school holidays we issued 4,130 vouchers to 2,593 families in the B&NES area. This is up from 2,433 families in May, a 6.5% increase. We have found demand is increasing year on year from when this was first started during Christmas 2020.

3.18 The fund is guaranteed until Easter holidays 2024 but will need further grant funding for it to continue.

### **3.19 Holiday Activities Funding (HAF Programme)**

3.20 The HAF programme provides additional opportunities for pupils entitled to FSM to take part in holiday activities. The events also ensure the children are provided with meals throughout the activity.

3.21 The brochure of the summer activities and information about the programme is shown in the appendix to this report.

### **3.22 Responsibility for Free School Meals**

3.23 It is the statutory responsibility of the governing body and trustees to ensure the School Food Standards are being met. The governing board are responsible for the provision of school food and play a crucial role in creating and embedding a great school food culture. Guidance has been produced by the DfE: The role of Governing bodies in relation to school food .

3.24 In recent years Ofsted have put a greater focus on how schools are creating a culture and ethos of healthy eating

### **3.25 School Food Standards**

3.26 The most recent School Food Standards were launched in 2015, replacing previous nutritional standards whereby menus were required to be nutritionally analysed through software. This prohibited in-house catering services who did not have access to such software to check if menus were compliant against the standards.

3.27 The new standards are designed to help children develop healthy eating habits and ensure that they have the energy and nutrition they need to get the most from their whole school day. As a general principle, the standards consider the provision of food provided across the school's week.

3.28 There are two sets of standards one being Standards for School lunches and Standards for School Food other than Lunch. The second set of standards includes food and drink provision served at breakfast club, mid-morning break, lunchtime and during after school clubs.

3.29 The food-based standards specify which types of food should be served at school and how often. They allow catering managers to quickly identify if menus are compliant against each food group. To be compliant against the standards, it is essential that food and drink provision served across the day is considered as some food items are restricted in this way.

### **3.30 Increasing the take up of school meals:**

3.31 Increasing the take up of school meals requires a cultural change and commitment within schools. Key aspects include:

- (1) senior leadership commitment
- (2) providing tasty food that looks good and is nutritious
- (3) creating a positive dining experience
- (4) considering the marketing and pricing of school meals
- (5) instilling a love of cooking and growing across the school

3.32 The School Food Plan was published by the Department for Education in 2013 and set out 17 actions to transform what children eat in schools and how they learn about food.

3.33 The checklist for Headteachers and the checklist for Governors provide guidance around creating change in schools and implementing the 17 actions.

### **3.34 Previous work funded through Public Health Grant:**

#### **Food in Schools Officer post**

3.35 The Food in Schools Officer post had dedicated time to provide leadership around the School Food Plan in B&NES, supporting schools in working towards the 17 actions.

3.36 In 2015, when the new School Food Standards were published the post delivered training and worked with catering teams to ensure menus were compliant. The role also promoted the Food for Life Partnership and delivered training to Governing Bodies informing them of their responsibility for School Food.

### **3.37 Current work funded through the Public Health Grant:**

3.38 Following the disbanding of the Director of Public Health Award Public Health, the Public Health in Schools Programme was launched and enables schools to complete self-assessment audits including a Healthy Weight Audit which focuses on food alongside physical activity elements. The audit

encompasses the following areas: National and local guidance, sources of support for children and young people, teaching and learning resources, working with parent and carers, continuing professional development

3.39 The audits are self-assessments which enable school leaders to benchmark themselves against best practice in each area and create an action plan where required. The programme uses The Hub as a platform to host each area of the programme and its accompanying resources. The Public Health team ensure the programme is promoted among schools and professionals working alongside schools and that resources and audits are based on evidence and best practice.

3.40 The programme is voluntary for schools to take part in and the Public Health Team do not verify completed self-assessments.

#### **4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 Not applicable.

#### **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

5.1 The resources for some of these activities related to Free School Meals pupils rely on government grants and decisions on what the future programme may look like will need assurance from government about the continuation of these grants.

#### **6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

#### **7 EQUALITIES**

7.1 No Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed in relation to completing this report as the report only sets out the current position in relation to FSM provision and does not suggest any changes.

#### **8 CLIMATE CHANGE**

8.1 No climate change assessment has been made as no changes to current provision are suggested

#### **9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

9.1 Not applicable

#### **10 CONSULTATION**

10.1

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<b>Background papers</b>	
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	