
To: The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 9th December 2021

Subject: Free School Meals Holiday Activities Fund Update

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 The purpose of this note is to give an update on the previous report re: free school meals (FSM) and the Holiday and Activities Fund (HAF) considering dependency and funding and the future position.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board are recommended to:
- 1) Note the information in this report in relation to FSM support for pupils over holiday periods and the progress of the Coventry HAF programme
 - 2) Identify any areas the Board may want to consider in more detail at a future meeting
 - 3) Identify any future recommendations for the Cabinet Member (Education and Skills).

3 Background and Information

- 3.1 FSM numbers in the city have increased 11,683 (21.6% of pupil population) at the start of the pandemic to 12,683 (23.4% of pupil population) in January 21 and 13,272 (24.3% of pupil population) currently. This compares with 20.8% of pupils nationally.
- 3.2 By the end of April 2020 100% of eligible children were recorded as accessing free school meals (FSMs), and with the help of schools during the first lockdown, food vouchers/parcels for benefits eligible FSM children were delivered (including holiday periods).

4 FSM Holiday Schemes

- 4.1 The DfE scheme funding FSMs in the holidays ended in August 20 with the start of the Autumn term and expectation that all pupils were back in school. Schools still provided vouchers or food parcels for eligible pupils that could not attend (e.g. self-isolation) during term-time.
- 4.2 Pressure mounted on the government throughout Autumn 20 to continue to fund FSMs during holiday periods. The Covid winter grant scheme was announced in

November, with some clear expectation that it could be used to fund FSM in holiday periods. This meant that there was not funding available to fund FSMs during the October half term holidays. A number of Local Authorities across the country agreed to fund food parcels/vouchers for eligible families, and Coventry City Council worked with the food network to provide an offer for eligible pupils. This amounted to 300 referrals on top of the normal level of demand.

- 4.3 The Covid winter grant (WGS) and Covid local grant schemes (LGS) were in place between December 20 and September 21, and amongst a wider package of support these funded FSM vouchers / parcels for holiday periods. The grants were also used to fund FSM vouchers for eligible children in Early Years provision. The total funding received for these schemes was £3.2M of which £2.5M was used for FSM schemes.
- 4.4 On the 6th October 2021 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced a new grant, the Household Support Fund (HSF) to provide support to those most in need this winter. Whilst DWP are clear this is not intended to be an extension of the previous grants it is clear from the grant guidance that it is, in effect, a continuation (and slight expansion) of what we have already been delivering.
- 4.5 Coventry has been indicatively allocated £3.2M for the HSF which runs from the 6th October to 31st March 2022 (6 months). This is the same level of funding as was provided to cover the 10 month period of the WGS and LSG. It is likely that the increase in funding is due to consideration of the recent reduction to Universal Credit and the significant price inflation currently affecting the energy market.
- 4.6 It is intended that alongside the wider offer of support this grant will continue to fund FSM voucher/parcels in holiday periods and support for eligible children in the early years over the holiday periods up until 31st March 22.
- 4.7 Currently no further funding has been announced for beyond 31st March 22. By this point eligible pupils will have received food parcels / vouchers in holiday periods for almost 2 years.

5 Holiday Activities and Food Pilot Programme

- 5.1 Alongside this the Government's Holiday Activities and Food Pilot Programme was extended nationwide. The national programme launched for Easter, Summer and Christmas 2021 for children and young people (5-16 year olds, reception to year 11 & accessing benefits-related Free School Meals)
- 5.2 Holiday clubs/experiences needed to include enriching activities, hot or cold meal, food nutrition awareness, and signposting families to support & services. This is not a like-for-like replacement of the FSM vouchers approach as the meal was linked to attendance at the activity. In addition, the allocation of £1.5m would allow us to reach approximately a quarter of eligible children (at full attendance). As the other grant schemes remained in place eligible pupils will have had access to this as well as parcels / vouchers.
- 5.3 During the school Easter Holidays, Coventry provided a remote offer since planning was in the context of uncertainty around lockdown restrictions offering up to 25% of eligible children Home Activity and Healthy Breakfast packs. The pack included ambient, healthy breakfast items providing approximately 16 meals alongside a chocolate egg and a 40 page bespoke activity pack exploring Coventry as a City, it's community and legacy.

- 5.4 Over the summer, Coventry grant funded 36 organisations to provide 58 Holiday Clubs, ensuring provision across the City proportionally reflected the spread of eligible children in different wards of the City. The clubs engaged 2009 children and young people, who booked to attend on average 50 hours each. Of these, 29% of children had an EHCP or received SEN support at school. The numbers who booked to attend represent 16% of our eligible cohort of 12,683, as indicated in the Jan 2021 school census figures used to map demand and provision and reflects the proportion of children who engaged in provision in the 2019 pilot programme.
- 5.5 As of 1st Dec, 1,255 children have booked to attend 3,406 sessions across 54 clubs and activity providers for the Christmas programme, Festive Fun 2021. Building on the success of the Easter programme, which engaged exactly 25% of the eligible cohort, we are also offering Cook at Home Packs for all families of eligible children, which include substantial food provision (each is worth approximately £40) and a recipe book with winter recipes and links to videos to demonstrate the recipes.
- 5.6 In the spending review further funding was announced for the Holiday activities and food programme over the next 3 years at £200M per annum. The national level is at roughly the same amount as the current year.
- 5.7 Promotional information for the Christmas programme Festive Fun 21 has been shared with SB2 members for further information and promotion.

6 Coventry Food Network

- 6.1 Over the last few months, the Coventry Food Network has been working to develop a city-wide Sustainable Food Strategy which focuses on the links between the long-term sustainable prevention of food poverty, the promotion of public health and the reduction of growing health inequalities. They are also currently going through the process of applying for charitable status.
- 6.2 Following a successful 2-years funding bid to Feeding Britain, Coventry Independent Advice Service is offering a wrap-around advice service, to 3 social supermarkets in the city; Foleshill Social Supermarket, Henley Green Food Hub and Canley Food Hub. An advisor will be based for 1 day per week at each social supermarket, to offer residents a range of advice and support. The aim is to help residents address and resolve underlying issues that made them vulnerable to hunger or food insecurity; to increase household income or reduce expenditure, thereby contributing to greater financial resilience; reduce their reliance on community food provision; receive support to improve their wellbeing and independence.
- 6.3 Coventry Food Network is supporting the procurement of food and delivery of the HAF 'Festive Fun 2021' Programme. A number of social supermarkets are providers for the HAF programme and are delivering activity programmes and meals to children and young people eligible for FSM. An additional number are supporting the co-ordination and distribution of the 'Cook at Home Packs'.
- 6.4 Coventry Food Network supports the delivery of the HSF by issuing food parcels to residents who have made requests for food via the CCC Community Support Team.
- 6.5 Feeding Coventry secured £10,000 to bulk order and distribute food to the social supermarkets during October 2021. This ensured that the social supermarket were able to stock-up on essential food items for their members.

- 6.6 Between 1 September 21 and 30 November 21 nearly 7,000 food parcels were distributed to members, and a further 1,500 distributed to non-members.
- 6.7 A Christmas campaign has been launched by the Community Resilience Team to raise money and secure food donations for the social supermarkets and vulnerable families in the city to address the shortage of lorry drivers and increased demand for help from the social supermarkets during the holiday period and into January 2022.

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