



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

Date: 8 December 2022

Subject: Cost of the School Day Project and Support to and from Schools for Financial Hardship

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 The purpose of this note is to provide further information on the Cost of the School Day Project in Coventry, and on support available to / provided by schools for pupils in financial hardship.
- 1.2 The Cost of Living crisis is a national issue, and the scale of the challenges provide limited ability for schools to respond in isolation. Schools alongside the Local Authority, and in partnership with community, voluntary and statutory sector organisations and businesses contribute to the One Coventry response to the rising costs of living.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board is recommended to note the information in this report and identify any areas the Board may want to consider in more detail at a future meeting.

3 Cost of the School Day

- 3.1 The Cost of the School Day project is run by Child Poverty Action Group and has run in Coventry between December 2020 and July 2022. It is a child's voice and whole school community project that focuses on tackling financial barriers to learning and poverty stigma in schools.
- 3.2 It can help schools and local authorities to take action which will support children and young people's participation and wellbeing and support families on low incomes. The approach was adapted to enable the project to continue during the pandemic.
- 3.3 The work has included direct work with schools (albeit some of it virtually), advice, support and training, resources for schools, practice gathering and sharing best practice with other schools and a collaborative approach.
- 3.4 The reach for the project in Coventry was 4,042 pupils, 840 parents, 297 staff and 41 governors in 17 schools (13 primary and 4 secondary schools). The feedback from schools directly involved has been extremely positive, and feedback has

highlighted how it has brought new ideas and challenge to some of the most poverty-proofed schools. It has also helped schools to link their approach to whole school ethos and demonstrate high levels of respect and empathy. Throughout the child / young person's voice has been impactful, sometimes surprising, and greatly reinforced understanding of the challenges faced.

- 3.5 The work of the project, expertise of the practitioner, and interaction with Child Poverty Action Group, has led to input into a number of other school related projects including pre-loved school uniform, support and input into the Holiday Food and Activities steering group, the Remote Education Working Group, provision of FSM holiday vouchers and fleeces through COVID and post COVID DWP support grants, Cost of living work and support including linking with partners. Officers have also been invited to input into national discussions through the Child Poverty and Education Action group including raising awareness about the project, but also other areas such as FSM entitlement.
- 3.6 The Coventry evaluation is not yet published, but further information on the programme is available at <https://cpag.org.uk/cost-of-the-school-day>.

4 Free School Meals (FSMs) and entitlement

- 4.1 The following table shows the number of children and young people claiming free school meals (FSM) over the last 3 years

	January 20	January 21	January 22	Current (Oct 2022)
FSM numbers	11,683	12,683	13,839	15,180
% school age population	21.6%	23.4%	25.2%	26.7%

- 4.2 This compares with 22.5% of pupils nationally. FSMs is not the only measure of deprivation but is a good pupil level indicator. Recent media has indicated that FSM entitlement has not remained in line with inflation, meaning 110,000 children are missing out on FSMs in England.
- 4.3 FSM registration is not automatic. Where a customer applies for housing benefit / council tax support Coventry City Council will assess eligibility for FSM and award as part of the application. Ongoing work through the LIFT project has identified a further 1,000 households with potential eligibility (this is up to 3,000 children). CCC are using a targeted communications programme to reach households, as well as a more general campaign through schools.
- 4.4 Further work has been taking place in relation to no recourse to public funds (NRPF) to ensure schools are aware of the process they must follow for pupils who qualify through this criteria. CCC are also exploring further the opportunity to put an auto-award in place for housing benefit / council tax support customers.

5 Financial Support for FSMs during holiday periods

- 5.1 Funding to support pupils on FSMs during the holidays has mainly been in place since Easter 2020. This was originally through the DfE Scheme, and then the DWP Covid winter grant and DWP Covid local support grant schemes. More recently these have been funded from the DWP Household Support grant. All of the DWP grants funds a wider offer of support.

- 5.2 This has largely been in the form of vouchers of £15 per child per week during holiday periods, although may have been scaled at times based on the level of the grant.
- 5.3 This grant has also been used to make a food/support offer to non-statutory school age children in the early years sector.
- 5.4 The total funding received to date for these schemes is £12.9M of which £6.2M was used for FSM schemes.

6 Holiday Activities and Food Programme

- 6.1 The Government's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme has continued (started in Easter 2021). Coventry takes a partnership approach to use HAF funding to address holiday inequalities and holiday hunger in the context of the cost of living crisis. The initiative is funded by the Department of Education through to March 2025 for Christmas, Easter and Summer school holidays. Coventry receives approximately £1.5m annual funding. If all eligible children took up their full entitlement this would only cover about 25% of finances required.
- 6.2 HAF activities/clubs include positive activities, a nutritional meal/food (normally hot), nutritional education for pupils and families and signposting/information for families to wider services and support. Where face-to-face nutritional education or signposting is not possible, information is provided through leaflets and/or on-line information.
- 6.3 In the 2022 school summer holiday, Coventry directly grant-funded 54 organisations (and over 50 other organisations were involved in delivery) to provide 142 different club/activities, ensuring provision across the City proportionally reflected the spread of eligible children in different parts of the City. The clubs/activities benefitted approximately 4,000 eligible children and young people. The reach of the programme has increased from 2,000 eligible children and young people in Summer 2021. Approximately 17,000 meals were provided and 93% of participants who provided feedback would recommend HAF activities to others. (For attendance figures, other family members benefiting are in addition to these numbers). Of those who attended HAF activities, approximately 30% of children had an Education Health and Care Plan or received SEN support at school. The numbers attending represented approximately 27% of our eligible cohort.
- 6.4 As of 24th November 2022 (only 3 days since bookings opening), approximately 1,700 children have booked to attend Festive Fun 2022 (Christmas Holiday HAF) starting on 16th December 2022. This offer includes over 70 different activities/clubs delivered by 33 directly funded organisations. For further information visit <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/haf> (or google "Coventry HAF" and contact Adrian.Coles@coventry.gov.uk

7 Pre-loved Uniform

- 7.1 School uniform can be a significant area of cost for parents. Coventry has a school uniform bank in Canley, and also a number of schools operate schemes to distribute pre-loved uniform to children and young people. Conversations with Clothing Coventry earlier in the year have led to them delivering a pilot to roll out a city-wide school uniform offer funded by a number of partners and CCC in the short-term.

7.2 Early feedback shows that there has been wide usage of this and since July 439 pupils have received pre-loved uniform covering 47 schools. For a number of schools this will be direct referrals, but the project is also starting to work with and alongside schools. Some examples include:

- Weekly Swap shop
- Working with school pastoral teams to fulfil referrals
- Number of schools hosting rails
- Pop-up events
- Set up of uniform collection points
- Post 16 pupils volunteering at the warehouse

8 Coventry Building Society (CBS)

8.1 Coventry Building Society already work with schools across the city in a variety of ways. More recently, as part of a fund of £1M to help the residents of Coventry living in hardship, CBS have pledged £250K to be paid to schools for them to use to support children and young people in financial hardship. This will be distributed to schools on the basis of FSM and pupil numbers and there will be light touch reporting in place to enable schools to share with CBS the number of pupils supported and the types of support.

8.2 CBS have also pledged £100K to support the HAF programme in recognition that there is not enough resource to support all children and young people in receipt of FSMs through this programme.

9 Schools Offer

9.1 Schools have a unique opportunity to provide early support to families and signpost where appropriate. There is not a one-size fits all offer and it will vary from school to school dependent on funding, capacity and need. Below are some examples of what some schools in Coventry have in place:

- Breakfast and break time food clubs
- Uniform support (new and pre-loved)
- Bursary support for school equipment
- Free lunchtime and after school activities
- Utilising fund raising to support
- Empathetic approach to fund raising and charity days
- Ensuring no differentiation between FSM and non FSM pupils when purchasing food
- Appointment of poverty co-ordinator (support and awareness raising)
- Free / low cost leaver options
- Alternatives to dressing up on World Book day
- Reviewing uniform policy
- Food bank for the wider community (including staff and parents)
- Work with partners to support families (including housing)
- Subsidised / free trips
- Low cost before and after school club – free places

10 Integrated Services Community Prototypes and Locality Approaches

- 10.1 Working in a One Coventry way, integrated services community prototypes and other locality approaches are helping to ensure that we are well placed to make the best use of our collective capacity and resource across the city. Working with and in the heart of the community, cross-sector partners are working together to understand and collectively address priorities and to develop preventative and integrated approaches to improving resident outcomes.
- 10.2 The first community prototype has focused on the Bell Green, Wood End, Henley Green and Manor Farm area, with a second prototype underway in the Canley and Tile Hill locality. Other place-based partnership approaches have also started in St Michael's and in Spon End, both in collaboration with Citizen Housing.
- 10.3 Schools have been part of this work focusing on children and young people and their families. There is partnering with school leaders to better support them to help families and young people in need, developing the role of schools in supporting the wider community, and piloting a place-based approach to increasing attendance and improving support for vulnerable pupils. Some examples of work that is underway (impacting directly on schools) are:
- Supporting specialist advice services and mental health outreach into community and school settings
 - Support to access affordable food and essentials (including HAF)
 - Supporting access to early help and family hub services within the community
 - Working with schools to raise aspirations through assemblies and work experience
 - Violence reduction programmes

11 Coventry Food Network

- 11.1 Coventry Food Network CIC(CFN) is a network of 15 community supermarkets which were set-up at speed during the COVID-19 pandemic and is now an established provider of support to those residents most in need across the city.
- 11.2 CFN is currently working with Groundwork West Midlands on a Health Meals Healthy Choices project, which will be delivered in a few schools and Food Hubs across the city, aimed at parents who do not have the skills and knowledge to provide healthy, low-cost meals for their families. The aim is also to offer Community Food Champion training for interested volunteers, to give them the skills, knowledge and confidence to be able to deliver their own cooking clubs.

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