

ANGUS COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE – 21 SEPTEMBER 2021

EXPANSION OF FREE SCHOOL MEAL SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to provide members of the committee with an update on the expansion of universal free school meals to all children in primary 4 to 7. The report will outline steps taken to date and outline plans for the next phases of the roll out.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Children and Learning Committee:

- (i) Notes the completion of the first two phases of the expansion, which has extended universal free school meal provision to all children in primary 4.
- (ii) Notes the outline plans for phases three and four of the expansion, which will extend provision to all children in primary 5 from January 2022 and all children in P6 and 7 by August 2022.
- (iii) Agrees that the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning will bring further reports during the current school year to update the committee regarding progress and any additional financial implications.

2. ALIGNMENT TO CORPORATE PLANS

This report contributes to the following outcomes in the:

Angus Community Plan, 2017-30:

- Reducing child poverty
- The best start in life for children

Angus Council Plan, 2019-24:

- We want to maximise inclusion and reduce inequalities

Tayside Plan for Children, Young People and Families, 2021-23

- Our children and young people growing up healthy, confident and resilient with improving physical and mental health and strengthened emotional wellbeing
- Our children, young people and families at risk, who face significant inequalities and disadvantage, having improved life chances

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Angus Council implemented universal free school meals (UFSM) for all children in P1-3 in 2015. In August 2020 provision extended to include children attending funded Early Learning and Childcare sessions in Angus. On 14 May 2021 Angus Council received confirmation of the national plans to expand term-time UFSM to all children in primary 4-7. Confirmation was also received of the intention to extend free school meal support to include school holiday periods to all eligible primary and secondary children and young people in 2021/22.

3.2 A phased implementation has been agreed nationally and is as follows:

- Phase One – July 2021 – Commencement of free school meal support during school holiday periods to all children and young people in primary and secondary school who are eligible for free school meals on the basis of low income.
- Phase Two – August 2021 – Expansion of UFSM to P4 children.
- Phase Three – January 2022 – Expansion of UFSM to P5 children.
- Phase Four – August 2022 – Expansion of UFSM to P6 and 7 children.

Section 4 below sets out actions taken to date to deliver phases one and two of the programme and outlines plans for delivery of phases three and four.

4. CURRENT POSITION

Phase One

- 4.1 As part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic Angus Council established processes to enable direct payments to be made to families eligible for free school meals on the basis of low income. These processes have also been utilised to provide free school meal support during school holiday periods to eligible children since April 2020.
- 4.2 Delivery of phase one of the above programme has been achieved by using these established processes. For the summer holiday period 2021 payments were made to families equivalent to £11 per week, per child. To reduce administrative requirements, two payments were made, each covering 50% of the holiday period. Families becoming eligible for free school meals have received backdated pro-rata payments based on the date of eligibility being confirmed.
- 4.3 Eligibility for free school meal support during school holiday periods is established using data from our education management information system (SEEMIS). This support is not available to all children who receive UFSM. Receipt of School Clothing Grant is used as a proxy measure to determine which children accessing UFSM are also eligible for support during school holidays.

Phase Two

- 4.4 All children in primary 4 now have the option of a free school meal. The Education Support Services Team has worked closely with colleagues in other council services and Tayside Contracts to ensure a smooth transition to these arrangements.
- 4.5 Information regarding the expanded provision has been shared using our social media channels and websites. This phase of the expansion has required limited changes to our existing school meal infrastructure. The recently opened Tayside Central Production Unit for school meals has sufficient capacity to meet the demands of UFSM expansion to primary 4s.
- 4.6 The following table details universal free school uptake levels over three years. Due to the way school meal data is recorded it is not possible to show uptake for individual year groups. Due to the pandemic, in weeks 21 and 22 of 2020-21 only a cold packed lunch was available in school. This had a significant impact on uptake.

Year	Week Uptake 21	Week Uptake 22	Notes
2019-20	53%	68%	P1-3
2020-21	33%	32%	P1-3
2021-22	53%	57%	P1-4

Phases Three and Four

- 4.7 In line with the programme, Angus Council will extend UFSM provision to primary 5s in January 2022 and to primary 6 and 7s in August 2022. Initial investigations are underway to determine any barriers to implementation.
- 4.8 A desk-top survey has been carried out by the Support Services Team looking at existing dining facilities in primary schools and an assessment made of how uptake at various levels would look. Further work will be required to look at schools where particular concerns are highlighted and identify solutions. This may include revised queuing systems, purchasing additional furniture or extending the use of staggered lunch services.
- 4.9 Tayside Contracts have reviewed the kitchen estate and made recommendations regarding the purchase of additional equipment for some schools. This equipment will replace items recently purchased and installed to support the introduction of the CPU. There is sufficient meal production capacity within the CPU to meet the demands of expansion.

- 4.10 Tayside Contracts will also be reviewing their staffing levels for August 2022. Information available at present suggests that staffing is manageable for the primary 4 and 5 expansion.
- 4.11 Firm plans will be developed over the course of session 2021/22 and further updates brought back to Children and Learning Committee in due course.

Universal Breakfasts

- 4.12 At the time of writing the Scottish Government has advised of interim plans to extend the programme to include universal free breakfasts for all children attending primary school. No further information is available as yet but the extension will be subject to consideration by a national Programme Operations Group. Updates will be provided to elected members in due course.

5. PROPOSALS

- 5.1 It is proposed that Children and Learning Committee notes the completion of the first two phases of the expansion, which has extended universal free school meal provision to all children in primary 4.
- 5.2 It is proposed that the Children and Learning Committee notes the outline plans for phases three and four of the expansion, which will extend provision to all children in primary 5 from January 2022 and all children in P6 and 7 by August 2022.
- 5.3 It is proposed that the Children and Learning Committee agrees that the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning will bring further reports during the current school year to update the committee regarding progress and any additional financial implications.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Initial one-year Scottish Government revenue funding for 2021-22 has been confirmed to meet the costs of phase one of the expansion of free school meal provision. Angus Council has been allocated £372,000 to meet the cost of free school meal support during school holiday periods up to and including Easter 2022. Longer term funding has not yet been confirmed and will be subject to discussions between Scottish Government and CoSLA Leaders.
- 6.2 £620,000 has been allocated to Angus to deliver phases two and three in 2021/22. This figure is based on an assumption of 100% uptake of UFSM. Uptake data will be closely monitored in relation to phases two and three. If required, surplus funding from the existing revenue allocation may be utilised to meet interim implementation costs. As above, longer term funding has not yet been confirmed.
- 6.3 At the time of writing no information has been received regarding additional funding for delivery of phase four. It is anticipated there will be some costs associated with this phase. The main cost at present relates to replacement of kitchen equipment. As part of the infrastructure works for the CPU, Angus Council invested £83,000 in new kitchen equipment. These arrangements were in place prior to any announcement regarding UFSM. In some schools the newly installed kitchen equipment will not be sufficient to meet the demand of UFSM and will need to be replaced. Initial investigations suggest this could be in the region of £279,900. We will explore whether re-sale of existing equipment is feasible to recover some of the costs. There may also be costs associated with the required staffing resource from Tayside Contracts. Further details regarding costs will be brought back to Children and Learning Committee at the earliest opportunity.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Director of Finance and the Director of Infrastructure have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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