

# Agenda Item 7



## REGULATORY AND OTHER COMMITTEE REPORT

<b>NAME OF COMMITTEE:</b>	Schools Forum
<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b>	15 January 2014
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Free School Meal Eligibility
<b>REPORT BY:</b>	Richard Cumbers (Specialist Children's Health Programme Manager – Public Health)
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<b>IS REPORT CONFIDENTIAL?</b>	No

### SUMMARY

National figures state that 4,300 pupils in Lincolnshire are eligible for free school meals but their parents are not claiming them. This equates to approx. £4.6m in lost revenue for Lincolnshire Schools (based on the average 2014/15 pupil premium - £1300 primary and £935 secondary pupil).

Currently within the County there is no direct mechanism to capture and notify those families with children who are entitled to free school meals. The current system is cumbersome and difficult to navigate. Claimants have to meet a number of different criteria and go through several stages or 'stops' in order to get access to what they and their children are entitled to.

It is proposed that a pilot is commissioned by Lincolnshire County Council which will see the district councils actively seek all housing benefit claimants eligible for free school meals and notify the relevant schools that they have eligible children. This will streamline the current system and share the responsibility of seeking those eligible, increase free school meal uptake and increase revenue for the County's schools. It is anticipated that the pilot will cost £30,000 to set up and run, a cross directorate working group is in the process of detailing the project and its exact costs.

## DISCUSSION

Currently in order to apply for housing benefit – this is obtained directly from the district in which the claimant lives and their eligibility is judged on the following:

- Work full or part-time and receive a low wage
- Receive *Employment and Support Allowance*, *Jobseekers Allowance* or any other state benefit
- Have savings less than £16,000 (this does not apply if you receive Pension Guarantee Credit)
- Pay rent to a private landlord, Housing Association or Local Authority
- Pay Council Tax on your home

A claimant's journey would therefore be:

1. To attend the Job Centre and then to their local district council to make a housing application
2. If the household is on a low income they may apply only to the district council for housing benefit
3. To claim Free School Meals a separate application is made by a variety of methods : on line, paper, telephone or by support from the child's school.

The criteria for free school meals is:

- Income Support
- Income-based *Jobseekers Allowance*
- Income-related *Employment and Support Allowance*
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit

There are obvious cross overs from these two lists; however parents that qualify for Housing Benefit are still not registering for Free School Meals for their children. The latest Government figures to be released (*Ref: Pupils Not Claiming Free School Meals – 2013 DfE Research Report*) indicates that 4,300 pupils in Lincolnshire are eligible but their parents are not claiming them. This equates to approx. £4.6m in lost revenue for Lincolnshire Schools (average 2014/15 pupil premium - £1300 primary and £935 secondary pupil)).

Benefits to the children and family in receipt of FSM are too numerous to list however some of the most obvious include:

- A saving of over £400 per year per child.
- Knowing a child has received a nutritious hot meal in the day, less can be spent on the family meal later in the day.
- Higher levels of concentration and academic attainment because the child is well nourished.
- Incidents of negative behaviour are reduced in children that eat a hot nutritious lunch and are therefore able to access the curriculum.
- FSM registration enables the child to receive additional financial support for school trips, music lessons, uniform, food vouchers and breakfast club, etc.
- The school the child attends will be eligible for Pupil Premium funding for those registered as FSM pupils (£1,300 for primary pupils and £935 at secondary school and if LAC for more than 1 day this rises to £1,900). The money must be used to the benefit of the most deprived and vulnerable pupils in the school although it is not ring-fenced.

- A monetary saving within the household budget reduces financial pressures on the family and may assist them meeting other household expenses.

Lincolnshire County Council and Lincoln District (incorporating North Kesteven claimants) will begin a pilot early in 2014. The pilot will test the discrepancies between those claiming housing benefit and eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) within the District Councils Database and the FSM list held by Lincolnshire County Council. This pilot will evidence where these missing children are and enable action to be taken. The intention is to replicate the Lincoln Pilot in all seven districts, working with schools in an effort to capture the revenue currently being lost from the county. If the pilot is a success then it is hoped a 'one stop shop' for claimants where their eligibility for all benefits is assessed, would be achievable.

Schools need to be supported to do more to increase their registered FSM numbers. If all the missing eligible children are registered by Jan 2015 – this will generate over £4.6m for Lincolnshire schools.

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
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The Schools Forum is asked to note the contents of the report and support the proposed pilot.

<b>APPENDICES -</b> <i>None</i>
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<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>			
<b>PAPER TYPE</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>ACCESSIBILITY</b>
Report to Schools Forum	Free School Meals Uptake	24 April 2013	County Offices, Newland, Lincolns, LN1 1YQ
Report to Schools Forum	Increasing the rate of pupils claiming free school meals	23 January 2013	County Offices, Newland, Lincolns, LN1 1YQ

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