

**Open Report on behalf of Dr. Tony Hill, Executive Director of Public Health**

Report to:	<b>Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date:	<b>25 July 2014</b>
Subject:	<b>Introduction of Universal Infant Free School Meals - Update Report</b>

**Summary:**

The introduction of free school meals for all infant school children from September 2014 is a government policy sourced from the National School Food Plan. The roll out of the plan has been logistically challenging for all local authorities nationwide.

Whilst the Plan is proving challenging to deliver, we are confident that 100 per cent of primary schools in Lincolnshire will have meal provision in line with the national nutritional offer by September 2014. Whilst the primary objective is for hot meals, there is still some risk that a small number of schools may only be able to offer cold food at first.

Support is available to schools to deliver this new responsibility from a range of sources, including: transitional revenue funding; capital funding and practical support and services from nationally commissioned organisations.

The position in Lincolnshire remains challenging, particularly in rural areas where many smaller schools lack in-house food preparation areas. However, the situation is improving on a weekly basis. Once we have achieved 100 per cent coverage from September, further work will be required to develop a more sustainable delivery model within the county.

**Actions Required:**

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the challenging, but rapidly improving, situation around the implementation of free school meals for infant children in Lincolnshire's schools.

**1. Background**

School food is widely believed to hold the potential to positively influence the eating patterns of school children towards healthier diets, thereby reducing the risk of

obesity and overweight, and contributing to the achievement of better long-term health. Not only does good school food offer greater health benefits for children and young people, it also increases attention in class and attainment throughout the academic year. Socially, free food in school offers parents a potential financial saving of up to £400 per child per year. The Government's School Food Plan sets out a target of at least 70% school meal uptake against the current national uptake level of around 45%. This figure is approximately 30% in Lincolnshire.

To support the targets set out in the School Food Plan, the government has launched the Universal Infant Free School Meals Offer which will see all reception, year 1 and year 2 (infant school) children offered a free nutritious school meal with effect from September 2014. The Universal Infant Free School Meal Offer is seen as stage one of the implementation of 'fixing' our school meal system and making it 'solvent' again. £1.2 million capital has been allocated to Lincolnshire to support projects that prepare for this large increase in meal provision. Whilst schools will be allocated a flat rate of £2.30 per meal from September 2014, the current cost of a school meal in Lincolnshire is £2.43. Schools will be expected to make up any shortfall in revenue funding.

Nationally, the Universal Infant Free School Meal Offer has been met with scepticism because of the tight timeframe for implementation and the lack of detail provided from the national team. Locally in Lincolnshire, the challenge is exacerbated by the lack of one central catering team, a shortfall of school kitchens and the sparse geography of our county. All of the aforementioned have led to a system that is fragile, overcomplicated, expensive and overly susceptible to private sector suppliers' business decisions.

We currently have a hub and spoke delivery model encompassing 33 catering providers operating across the county. Our caterers offer differing quality of school meals out of a range of kitchens, often being transported for long distances, lowering the quality of the food on arrival with children and increasing unit price. Whilst this model can cope with the current low school meal uptake, it is not fit for purpose to implement the new National Food Plan levels of uptake.

The Food in Schools Team has carried out analysis on the current market and this has been simplified into a RAG analysis of the county's provision - hot spots in all districts have been identified. A school rated as 'red' currently finds itself without a hot meal supplier in place from September 2014. The number of schools which were initially at red has reduced from 55 to 4 schools which are located in - Lincoln (0), East Lindsey (2), Boston (2), Grantham (0), Sleaford (0) and South Holland (0). We remain confident that we will achieve one hundred percent coverage in September but, unfortunately, due to the fluidity of the current model this cannot be guaranteed.

In order to address the current situation, we have devised a two stage approach. Firstly, a number of actions that need to be addressed in the short term to 'fill the immediate gap' and then a number of actions to resolve the long-term sustainability of school meals within the county. This is described in the 'Plan on a Page' at Appendix A.

We are working closely with all schools, individually and on a cluster basis, to help them identify what they need to do to be ready for September. Our support will include sourcing food supply, advising on food hygiene, brokering of solutions available nationally and providing capital funding for improvement schemes that meet certain criteria.

## **2. Conclusion**

Despite the difficulties surrounding this programme of work, we are confident that 100 per cent of primary schools will be in a position to offer universal free school meals to the children of Lincolnshire in September 2014.

Feeding children a hot, nutritionally balanced meal during the school day is good for them across a number of key outcomes and moving forward we will work hard to ensure that a more sustainable delivery model is developed within the county.

## **3. Consultation**

### **a) Policy Proofing Actions Required**

Not applicable

## **4. Appendices**

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	The Plan on a Page

## **5. Background Papers**

The following background papers as defined in the Local Government Act 1972 were relied upon in the writing of this report.

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
National School Food Plan	<a href="http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/plan">www.schoolfoodplan.com/plan</a>

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**INTRODUCTION OF UNIVERSAL INFANT FREE SCHOOL MEALS**

**'THE PLAN ON A PAGE'**

<p><b>Objective One:</b> <b>All schools with adequate meal supply by September 2014</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Master supply and demand database established and maintained.</li> <li>2. Validate PKL and Cygnet 'off the shelf' solutions by Easter.</li> <li>3. Cluster meetings achieve consensus on local supply solutions by mid May 2014.</li> <li>4. Develop model agreements that are fit for different supply arrangements during July 2014.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Objective Two:</b> <b>All schools serving food to all eligible children in a quality environment by September 2014</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All schools aware of national sources of help and advice and how to access them by April 2014 via County conference.</li> <li>2. Updated school food hygiene and service toolkit and standards available from June 2014.</li> <li>3. EHO capacity in place from May 2014.</li> <li>4. Dip sample school site visits June to December 2014.</li> <li>5. Agree marketing strategy to increase uptake of free school meals from start point in September 2014 in line with national plan.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Objective Three:</b> <b>A revised sustainable food plan and target operating model agreed for the County</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engagement and expert groups established to produce a draft plan by January 2015.</li> <li>2. Final plan subject to scrutiny and decision in March 2015.</li> <li>3. Procurement Plan for implementation agreed by April 2015.</li> <li>4. Schools property strategy and capital plan revised April 2015.</li> <li>5. Kitchen co-production models to be developed for April 2015.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Objective Four:</b> <b>Maximise Pupil Premium income to address education and health inequalities from September 2014</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pupil registration for free school meals sustained in September 2014 and improved in line with national plan.</li> <li>2. New processes for increasing pupil premium registration piloted from September 2014 and implemented by May 2015.</li> </ol>