

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EDUCATION SKILLS AND CULTURE CABINET BOARD

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF TRANSFORMATION – MR A THOMAS

28 April 2020

Matter for: Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Bank transfer payments to eligible free school meal families

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to seek Member approval to make bank transfer payments for all eligible free school meal families on roll in Neath Port Talbot Schools in the amount of £19.50 per week or alternative provision.

Background

A decision was taken to close all schools in Wales and re-purpose them as child care provision for key workers on Friday 20th March 2020.

Local authorities have a responsibility to provide pupils on roll in their schools with a meal if their families meet the free school meal criteria laid down by Welsh Government.

The immediate response by Neath Port Talbot was to make "grab and go" bags available to eligible families whereby parent/carers could attend specific locations and collect a packed lunch for their children.

When this was implemented approximately 1000 children were benefiting from a free "grab and go" lunch. This approach was neither sustainable, appropriate in the longer term nor in line with government advice around limiting travel from home and social distancing.

Arrangements are now in place to make bank transfer payments to all families of pupils eligible for free school meals. Parents/carers are required to register their details on a web page created by the Council's IT department and a payment of £19.50 is made each week for each eligible child. Due to the urgent need to facilitate these payments arrangements initial payments via the BACS system commenced during the week beginning 13 April 2020 and were backdated to the 6 April 2020.

As of Thursday 23rd April 2020, the Council is making weekly payments to 4580 eligible pupils.

This represents a significant increase on the number of pupils benefitting from the "grab and go" system which was first implemented.

The total number of eligible pupils is 5281 and this is likely to increase as additional people claim Universal Credit. Work is ongoing to identify the pupils who are eligible but not claiming the weekly payment to encourage them to claim. If parents do not have bank accounts alternative food deliveries via the NPT Safe and Well Scheme is being developed.

Financial Impact

Welsh Government have announced additional funding of some £40m to date to cover the cost of providing for children who are entitled to free school meals and have announced that this service continues through the schools summer holidays or until schools reopen.

As reported above Neath Port Talbot has currently 5281 eligible children each entitled to £19.50 per week.

The total maximum cost currently is therefore £102,980 per week. This cost could increase as more children become entitled to free school meals.

These additional costs will be reclaimed from Welsh Government.

Integrated Impact Assessment

A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010,

the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The first stage assessment has indicated that a more in-depth assessment is not required.

Valleys Communities Impacts

There is no impact on any valley community as a result of this proposal.

Workforce Impacts

There are workforce impacts associated with this report.

Legal Impacts

There are no legal impacts associated with this report.

Risk Management

Failure to make provision for pupils entitled to free school meals would mean the impact of poverty would be far greater than would have otherwise been the case. In addition the local authority would not be discharging its duty in respect of the vulnerable families.

Consultation

There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members approve:

1. A bank transfer payment in the amount of £19.50 per eligible child, per week for families who are entitled to free school means.
2. The Council provides alternative arrangements of food or service provision where parents do not have bank accounts.

These arrangements shall run for the duration that schools are closed due to the Covid-19 emergency period.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To ensure Neath Port Talbot discharges its duty to make provision for eligible free school meal pupils

Implementation of Decision

The decision will be implemented immediately

Appendices

None

List of Background Papers

None

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