

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Education Skills and Wellbeing Cabinet Board**

**28<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

### **REPORT OF HEAD OF EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES AND TRANSFORMATION RHIANNON CROWHURST**

#### **MATTER FOR INFORMATION**

**WARDS AFFECTED: All**

#### **UPDATE ON THE ROLLOUT OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY FREE SCHOOL MEALS**

##### **Purpose of report**

1. To provide information on the further progress to date of the implementation of the universal primary free school meal (UPFSM) rollout in Neath Port Talbot.

##### **Executive summary**

2. In July 2022 Welsh Government announced its intention that all primary school children in Wales will get free school meals by September 2024.
3. In Neath Port Talbot, catering staff have worked extremely hard, in collaboration with the primary and special school leaders, to ensure that the rollout has been as prompt as possible, resulting in learners being able to access UPFSM well ahead of the proposed schedule.
4. Neath Port Talbot Catering Services offered all reception age pupils UPFSM at the start of the autumn term, 5th September 2022 and were 1 of 8 Authorities in Wales to implement the rollout of UPFSM to all Foundation Phase pupils in the autumn term, rolling out to Year 1 and Year 2 on 7th November 2022.
5. As the roll out proved to be successfully implemented, Neath Port Talbot catering staff progressed the roll out further, with year 3 and 4

pupils accessing the offer following the Easter holidays this year on 17th April 2023,

6. From September 4<sup>th</sup> 2023 the offer was extended to pupils in Years 5 and 6. Neath Port Talbot are now rolling out Universal Free School Meals to all Primary School Pupils.

## **Background**

7. In July 2022 Welsh Government announced its intention that all primary school children in Wales will get free school meals by 2024. This commitment was in response to the rising cost-of-living pressures on families and the government's ambitions of tackling child poverty and ensuring no child goes hungry in school. The Welsh Government has stated it is committed to implementing the scheme as quickly as possible.
8. The Welsh Government recognise that there are also wider benefits of free school meals, including promoting healthy eating across the school, increasing the variety of food learners can eat, improving social skills at mealtimes, as well as improving behaviour and attainment.
9. The policy is part of the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, which will see free school meals extended to all primary school pupils over the next three years.
10. The proposed Welsh Government timetable is as follows
  - September 2022 - learners offered universal free school meals in reception
  - April 2023 - learners offered free school meals in reception, year 1 and year 2
  - Schools that are able to deliver free school meals to learners in years 1 and 2 (in addition to reception) can do so from September 2022
11. The scheme is funded at a rate of £2.90 per pupil; this fully covers the cost of producing a school meal. With the recent increase in food prices and staff salaries WG are reviewing this unit rate to ensure it is still sufficient.

12. In addition, funding has been provided for both the preparation of the scheme rollout and capital works to ensure kitchens are equipped and capable of producing the required level of meals.

### **Implementing the roll out**

13. During the summer 2022 Neath Port Talbot catering staff worked to ensure that this scheme became a possibility. Early engagement was established with local stakeholders, including pupils, families and delivery partners to better understand behaviours that could impact on the delivery of an offer of a free school meal and the level of take up.

14. Actions included -

- Undertaking an exercise to look at the uptake of meals (2019/2020 pre Covid) and pupil numbers on roll. Looked at each school's free school meal and paying uptake to forecast the number of potential additional meals.
- Liaised with head teachers individually to discuss the impact on the school day/duration of the lunchtime service/lunchtime supervision/curriculum/hall availability as some schools had reduced their lunchtime.
- Liaised with food suppliers to establish if they would be able to deliver additional food volume. Reviewed the food chain/ supply, their structure and staff availability. Identified the possibility of additional delivery days and cost implications.
- Established availability of foods for specialist diets and sourced. Undertook additional requests for special diets tailor made to pupils
- Arranged face to face cooks meetings informing cooks of the changes and the rollout schedule.
- Reviewed the menu in line with the Current Welsh Government Regulations and or any future changes. Nutritionally analysed the menu for the Certificate of Compliance.
- Liaised with suppliers of kitchen equipment and light equipment and uniform to secure supply and ordered additional equipment and uniforms.

15. Additionally the catering manager carried out audits of school infrastructure (including kitchen and dining facilities) workforce and contractual arrangements to better understand the existing capacity

and identify where there would be need for future development/investment. This involved -

- Looking at the kitchen infrastructure across the 60 sites and analysing current meal uptake and potential uptake. Carried out site visits.
- Set up a project working group with all partners and internal partners.
- Expedited two schemes already identified for new build and refurbishment - Coedffranc Primary School and Baglan Primary School – which would be critical to the delivery of the service and increased uptake.
- Looked at the potential of a kitchen at Central Primary School, Foundation Phase site, as they currently transport a meal in from Baglan Kitchen.
- Requested all maintenance reports from the maintenance contractor, currently Lorne Stewart, so an up to date inventory of all the kitchen equipment, serial and model numbers was received and produced an AMS inventory as a base for planning.
- Engaged and met with our mechanical and electrical team to ascertain electrical capacity at each kitchen and set up a project group.
- Completed an Inventory of Dining Furniture and identified further requirements for full capacity in the dining halls.
- Established where any facility is unable to produce the increase in meals and looked at alternative solutions - regen ovens, kitchen pods, extensions, new builds, refurbishments and service provision.
- Looked at the staffing rationale of all lunch time staff 200 + and engaged with staff to inform them of any changes.
- Reviewed risk assessments in line with current Covid restrictions/guidelines.
- Provided the mandatory training for newly recruited catering staff.
- Looked at posts in relation to numbers cooking and carried out an exercise to identify if additional staff/staffing hours were required.
- Engaged with stakeholders and HR to ensure the increase in staffing requirements would be met to run the service efficiently.
- Liaised with HR on additional workload due to the safe recruitment of staff and HR processes involved.

- Advertised posts, interviewed and appointed in line with the Safe Recruitment Policy and Procedure.
  - Looked at Inventories of kitchen light equipment and supplied additional items that were required which included saucepans, trays, plates, bowls, beakers, and cutlery.
  - Liaised with our internal Trade Waste Services to identify any additional pickups in relation to waste food. Ordered any additional bins and caddies that were required.
16. In line with Welsh Government's announcement, Neath Port Talbot started providing free school meals to all reception aged children in September 2022. Initially take up was slightly lower than anticipated, however this soon increased.
17. Prior to UPFSM the daily average meals July 2022 were 4469. With the introduction of reception UPFSM Sept meals increased to 4953.
18. The rollout of all Year groups has resulted in a daily average of over 7,235 primary school pupil meals being served. This is expected to increase as the term progresses.

### **Financial Impacts**

19. Revenue grant Funding allocation for 2023/24 of £2,597,132 has been allocated to Neath Port Talbot, with monthly claims being submitted to WG in arrears for meals provided.
20. Additionally we have received a capital grant of £1,554,885 intended for work to kitchens, additional equipment etc. The intended purpose of the grant funding is to ensure that all primary children have access to free healthy and nutritious meals at school.
21. Welsh Government are currently reviewing the rate received per meal to ensure the funding is sufficient due to increases in both food costs and staff wages. The agreed rate of £2.90 per meal previously provided us with a surplus over costs, but the increases in food costs and staff wages will now mean that we will cover our costs; any further increases will require additional funding from WG, however there is no immediate cause for concern to our budget at present.

## **Capital Works**

22. As the programme has been gradually rolled out across the primary schools it has become apparent that some school kitchens do not have the necessary equipment or space available to be able to cater for a significantly greater number of children now eligible to receive free school meals. As a result, a number of small and larger scale schemes for kitchen replacement, remodelling and refurbishment have been identified and are planned for within the schools capital maintenance programme.
23. To date work has been carried out to refurbish kitchens including upgrading electrics, new equipment, additional storage etc.
24. Purchase of heavy equipment including ovens, refrigerators, freezers, electric hot plates, mobile serving counters, food preparation tables, trollies. Installation of these products and input and/or adaption/upgrade of electricity supplies/additional electrical sockets has also taken place.
25. The refurbishment of Baglan Primary kitchen new build is currently underway, with a completion date of 17<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Coedffranc Primary new kitchen build is expected to go out to tender in October 2023.
26. Upgrades to cooking capacity undertaken in the Summer holidays included Alderman Davies Church in Wales School, Cwmafan Primary School, and YGG Rhosafan, with a part refurbishment scheme at Glyncorrwg Primary School.

## **Integrated Impact Assessment**

27. There is no requirement for an integrated impact assessment as this report is for information purposes only.

## **Valley Communities Impacts**

28. There is no specific impact on valley communities as result of this report.

## **Workforce impacts**

29. There has been a positive impact on the workforce as a result of the UPFSM rollout, as more staff have been required to enable the programme to be carried out successfully.
30. To date 55 additional staff have been recruited and 79 staff have had an increase to their weekly hours.
31. As meal numbers increase in coming months we will be recruiting additional staff and awarding current staff with additional hours assessed on the needs of the service.

## **Legal impacts**

32. There are no direct legal impacts associated with this report.
33. The Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure 2009 requires local authorities and governing bodies to take action to promote healthy eating and drinking by pupils in maintained schools. Within the Measure is the requirement that local authorities and governing bodies that provide school meals or milk to encourage take-up, and take reasonable steps to ensure every pupil entitled to receive school meals and milk free of charge does receive them.

## **Risk management**

34. There are a number of risks associated with the UPFSM rollout. These include –
  - Withdrawal of funding
  - Staff recruitment and retention
  - Noncompliance of regulations in kitchens
  - Food supplies to comply with regulations
  - Parent/Guardian expectations
  - Capacity to manage and deliver construction projects
35. Recruitment and retention is a particular risk in the current climate, as there have been significant difficulties in recruiting new staff. A number of steps have been taken to try and improve recruitment and mitigate the risk, including
  - Attending job fairs

- Visiting local catering college
- Letterbox drop
- Social media campaign
- Regular information on Council webpage
- School text messaging service
- Weekly staff letter identifying areas where we have difficulty recruiting.
- Job centre advertising.
- School vacancy bulletins

36. Meeting the appropriate regulations around food and kitchens is a constant risk, however the following actions are regularly undertaken

- AMS train and induct all new staff and refresh all catering staff in line with Food Safety Regulations.
- Cooks meetings and regular engagement.
- Safe Catering Documentation.
- HACCP (hazard analysis and critical control points) documentation is completed daily.
- Risk Assessments.
- Risk perception training
- COSHH (control of substances hazardous for health) assessments.
- Cooks undertake allergen training. Individual menus are compiled for the pupil in conjunction with parents/carers and care plans.
- Only approved food suppliers are used.
- Yearly kitchen equipment maintenance.
- Gas testing.
- Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) and electrical testing.
- Yearly maintenance of dining furniture.
- Bi annual deep cleaning of all kitchens.
- Segregated kitchen areas and equipment for the preparation of allergen meals.
- Separate preparation area and equipment for raw food to prevent cross contamination.
- Continual supervision and monitoring and Inspections by management.
- Visits and inspections from Environmental Health Officers and Trading Standard officers.

37. The catering manager and her team continue to work with schools and parents/guardians to ensure that there is clear communication and that any queries or concerns are swiftly dealt with. This helps to



manage expectations and ultimately provides a better service for schools and pupils.

38. The additional construction work required for some of the larger projects is already presenting challenges due to difficulties in workforce supply, and delays or shortages of building materials. This creates a risk to the council of potentially not being able to spend grant funding within the required timeframe, and is a common concern across all local authorities at this time. The capacity for managing larger projects is also a risk to the roll out.

39. The programme would not be possible without Welsh Government funding; currently there is no indication that this will not be continued at least for the immediate future.

### **Consultation**

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

### **Recommendation**

41. It is recommended that members note the content of the report on the roll out of the UPFSM programme.

### **Implementation of the decision**

N/A

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