

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

CABINET EXECUTIVE

18th July 2023

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Matthew Dorrance
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for a Fairer Powys

County Councillor Jake Berriman
Cabinet Member for a Connected Powys

County Councillor David Thomas
Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate
Transformation

SUBJECT: Cessation of e-FSM Vouchers during School Holiday
Periods

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Welsh Government announcement regarding holiday provision for learners that are eligible for e-FSM, and to seek a decision from Cabinet as to whether the support should be considered at the cost of Powys County Council during the summer holiday period 2023.

1.2 On 28 June 2023, all Local Authorities (LAs) in Wales received a letter from the Welsh Government regarding 'holiday provision for learners that are eligible for a free school meal'. The letter informs that 'there will be no further extension to cover the summer holiday period or beyond' (see Appendix A). The Welsh Government have requested that LAs inform families that this provision will no longer be in place.

1.3 The Welsh Government scheme provided £3.90 per weekday in respect of each learner who was entitled to e-FSM throughout the holiday period. The majority of the allocations were provided to families via a voucher scheme, with some families receiving a BACs payment direct to their bank account.

2. Proposal

2.1 To consider how to proceed in light of the Welsh Government announcement.

3. Options Considered / Available

3.1 The costed option set out below is indicative and will be dependent upon the number of learners eligible for e-FSM.

Option 1: Proceed in line with Welsh Government announcement regarding the cessation of the scheme.

Option 2: Provide the scheme in line with the previous Welsh Government provision during the summer holiday period 2023 only, but noting that there is currently no funding allocated for this activity:

£3.90 x 30 days = £117.00
 £117.00 x 2,400 (approx.) eligible learners = £280k

Option 1	Option 2
Proceed in line with Welsh Government announcement regarding the cessation of the scheme.	Provide the scheme in line with the previous Welsh Government provision during the summer holiday period 2023.
£0.00	£280k

4. Preferred Choice and Reasons

4.1 The option that the Council faces is either to proceed in line with the Welsh Government announcement or to provide vouchers to eligible families in Powys for the 2023 summer holiday period.

4.2 The voucher scheme was put in place by the Welsh Government during the Covid-19 pandemic and has been extended numerous times up until the May 2023 bank holidays. The scheme was extended to help alleviate ‘holiday hunger’ and to help families struggling with the cost of living crisis that has followed the pandemic..

4.3 If we extend the support for eligible families this would provide immediate support for vulnerable families, whilst also taking the opportunity to alert those families to the fact that that no further vouchers will be provided.

4.4 The summer holiday period in Powys commences as of 24 July 2023, therefore if vouchers are to be issued this would take place from this week until the end of the 2023 summer holiday period.

4.5 It is considered that the late confirmed notice of the cessation of the voucher scheme will have a particularly detrimental impact on low income families as they will not only lose out on the voucher scheme but will also have very limited time to adjust their finances to overcome their withdrawal.

4.6 This is a very fast moving situation and we are aware that a number of authorities have already committed to continuing the scheme or developing alternative arrangements to support low income families for this summer.

4.7 We will continue to promote the participation of our schools in the SHEP (School Holiday Enrichment Programme) which can play an important role in assisting low income families in particular, during the summer holidays. Noting that any expansion of the programme will be subject to available budget.

4.8 It should be noted that cost provided above is based on current free school meal entitlement and will be subject to fluctuation based on changing personal circumstances.

4.9 The extension of this provision would be for one year only and will provide for greater time for our eligible families to make the necessary adjustments to their budgets to accommodate the removal of this scheme.

5. Impact Assessment

5.1 Is an impact assessment required? No

6. Corporate Improvement Plan

6.1 Option 2 if supported would follow Objective 3 of the Corporate and Strategic Equality Plan – We will work to tackle poverty and inequality to support the well-being of the people of Powys.

7. Communications

7.1 Have Communications seen a copy of this report? Yes

8. Support Services

8.1 Legal – The Recommendations can be supported from a legal point of view.

8.2 Finance – There is no existing budget allocated for this activity and the Catering department do not have any capacity to accommodate this level of additional cost. Therefore, it is proposed that the central Risk Budget (£ 3 million) is drawn down against to fund this one-off proposal ie £280k, noting that this amount may vary slightly depending on the level of e-FSM learner eligibility. The Risk Budget is there to support unbudgeted service pressures of which there were more than £5 million identified through budget setting. The draw down of this budget does create further budgetary risk as it reduces our ability to support service pressures that may materialise through the year. This may in turn have an impact on the forecast outturn for 23/24.

8.3 If option 2 is implemented a virement will be actioned, for a one off in-year budget movement, transferring the budget to Catering who will continue to administer the voucher scheme through the summer. Other internal costs associated with distributing the vouchers such as administration and processing can be met from within existing resources.

9. Scrutiny

Has this report been scrutinised? Yes on 17th July 2023 - See separate scrutiny comments

Pursuant to Rule 7.36 of the Constitution, the Chair of the Economy, residents and Communities Scrutiny Committee has confirmed in writing that the decision being taken is urgent and as any delay would seriously prejudice the public interest that the ability for a call in of the decision has been waived.

10. Data Protection

The processing of personal data has already been considered and managed via the current process of delivering vouchers. As such, the Data Protection Officer has nothing further to add.

11. Statutory Officers

11.1 The Deputy Head of Finance acknowledges that the Catering service does not have sufficient funding to support this proposal and that one off funding from the centrally held Risk Budget is an alternative that could be utilised this budget is set aside to support such service pressures that arise during the year or are held at risk during the budget setting process The draw down of this budget does create further pressure because it reduces the ability to support service pressures that may materialise through the year and have a detrimental effect on the outturn position.

11.2 The Head of Legal Services and the Monitoring Officer has commented as follows:” I note the legal comment and support the recommendations”

12. Recommendation

Recommendation:	Reason for Recommendation:
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the Cabinet accepts Option 2 and continues to provide the Scheme previously provided by Welsh Government during the school Summer holiday period in 2023 only2. The sum of £280k is vired from the central Risk Budget to the catering budget	To support the continued payment of the Free School Meals vouchers through the summer holidays and mitigate the impact that the late notification could have on vulnerable families

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Background Papers used to prepare Report:

Letter re. Holiday Free School Meal Provision (see Appendix A)

Appendix A: Letter re. Holiday Free School Meal Provision

Letter to Local Authority Directors of Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

28 June 2023

Holiday Free School Meal Provision

Dear Colleagues,

As you are aware, holiday provision for learners that are eligible for a free school meal was introduced in response to the COVID pandemic as a form of time-limited support to help families. While we have been able to support several temporary continuations of the scheme, we confirmed in March 2023 that the most recent extension would be up to the end of the May half term only. I can now confirm that this remains the case and that there will be no further extension to cover the summer holiday period or beyond.

Options for funding a further extension of the scheme have been fully explored, but due to budgetary constraints this isn't possible and I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your patience. We appreciate that the provision offered to those eligible throughout holiday periods has proven popular and understand that not extending the offer further will likely lead to additional enquiries from those families affected.

We would therefore be grateful for your ongoing support in ensuring those families previously in receipt of the offer are made aware it will not be extended further. In doing so, you may wish to consider signposting families to these two useful resources, as you see appropriate:

[Get help with the cost of living | GOV.WALES](#)

This page is regularly updated and provides information on possible sources of financial support, including our Discretionary Assistance Fund for people experiencing extreme financial pressures.

[Here to help with the cost of living | GOV.WALES](#)

This campaign seeks to encourage people to contact [Advicelink Cymru](#) for free impartial advice on maximising their incomes, including accessing any financial support.

The School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) is a school-based scheme that provides healthy meals, food and nutrition education, physical activity and enrichment sessions to children in areas of socio-economic disadvantage during the school holidays.

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Crown Buildings, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ
Adeiladau'r Goron, Parc Cathays, Caerdydd CF10 3NQ

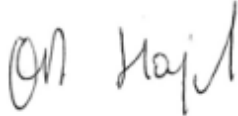
Canolfan Cyswilt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre
0300 0604400

The programme is managed by WLGA and is promoted to children and families under the 'Food and Fun' brand identity. For further information, please visit ['Food and Fun' School Holiday Enrichment Programme – WLGA](#).

Finally, I would like to thank you and colleagues for your commitment in rapidly establishing and delivering this provision during the height of the pandemic and in the period that has followed.

Should you have any queries on this matter, please address these to:
FoodInSchools@gov.wales or BwydMewnYsgolion@llyw.cymru

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Owain Lloyd'.

Owain Lloyd
Director of Education and the Welsh Language
Welsh Government