



Subject: SCHOOL FOOD GRANT FUNDING PROPOSAL

Date: 27th February 2023

Prepared by: Charlotte Pickles, Public Health Specialist
Hugo Smith, Public Health Analyst
Cath Taylor, Public Health Consultant

Purpose: To outline a proposal to ensure that children in Blackburn with Darwen with the greatest need are able to access free school meals for the remainder of the 2023 academic year.

Background

With the significant increase in food prices and most notably the rise in energy bills, households in the UK are increasingly unable to cover the costs of essentials. Many families are struggling to afford food because of the increased cost of living and other factors beyond their control. As a result, many children are going hungry every day. Research by The Food Foundation found that in September 2022 four million children were living in households experiencing food poverty or at least food insecurity in the UK.

The Food Foundation's latest data indicates an estimated 2.6 million children live in households that missed meals or struggled to access healthy food during April 2022. Additionally, [the Institute of Health Equity](#) has estimated that by January 2023, 66% or 18 million households, in the UK will be in fuel poverty, thus adding to the crisis.

The lack of nutritious food during childhood and adolescence has devastating effects on children's physical, mental and social wellbeing. Moreover, the lack of food can have a negative impact on their educational attainment with lasting life-time consequences.

The intensifying cost-of-living crisis means many more are now struggling to afford school lunches. Anecdotal evidence from local schools suggests that children are falling into school meal debt, and there is a serious threat to take-up of school meals and the viability of the catering service, alongside the risk to the health and wellbeing of pupils. We hear from school leaders about the devastating reality of children coming to school unable to afford to buy lunch, because their family circumstances mean they fall outside the restrictive free school meal eligibility criteria. To qualify for free school meals families must be in receipt of benefits and have an annual net income (after tax but not including benefit income) of less than £7,400 a year (see Appendix A).

Local need

In Blackburn with Darwen, 34% of our children live in [relative low-income families](#) (2020/21), this is the second highest rate in the Northwest and is nearly double the average rate across England (18.5%).

There is significant deprivation across the borough, with 56.4% of Lower Super Output Areas falling within the 20% most deprived areas in England.

During 2019, Blackburn Foodbank supported just over 11,000 people with crisis food provision of which 42% were children and young people. In 2022, there were 26,331 pupils in the borough of which 6,628 were eligible for free schools meals (FSM) across 75 schools in BwD. This makes up 25.17% of all BwD pupils, with 19,703 pupils currently ineligible for FSM.

In addition to income deprivation, the borough also experiences other poor child health outcomes including in relation to obesity and dental caries. Provision of healthy and nutritious food within schools will contribute to improving these outcomes.

Earlier this academic year, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council passed a motion to write to the Secretary of State for Education, Kit Malthouse, to call for an urgent extension of free school meals to ensure universal provision for all school age groups, for a time limited period to match the cost-of-living crisis. There was also a call for a review of the eligibility criteria and realistic threshold that would increase the number of children entitled to free school meals and for food provision for children on free school meals to be provided during the school holidays as standard.

The mayor of London, alongside some other local authorities, have recently announced that meals will be made free for all primary school children in the capital for the [2023/24 academic year](#).

Proposal

As we await national action, BwD Borough Council propose that we implement a local urgent intervention to ensure that children in the greatest need do not go hungry whilst at school.

We propose to provide grant funding direct to schools within the borough to extend the free school meal offer where possible or to support families who are experiencing food poverty or insecurity in other ways, as deemed appropriate.

Modelled need:

A model has been developed to best identify how to distribute funding equitably to pupils in the greatest need within the borough.

Several data sets have been considered within this process including FSM data and Indices of Deprivation (IMD) data. Whilst FSM data is a useful proxy measure of need within a school, it does not indicate those who may fall just outside the FSM offer. IMD provides a useful measure of need based on geography, however, it does not take into account that many pupils, particularly at secondary school, travel a significant distance to school.

The agreed model has therefore been developed based on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) which identifies children living in deprivation by postcode. This data is currently used within school budget calculations and allocation of other resources for schools. It is proposed that the funding amounts are allocated to schools based on **the proportion of pupils who live in the 25% most deprived postcodes (IDACI)**, regardless of whether or not they are on FSMs. The size of school has also been taken into account within the model, ensuring that funding is proportionate to the numbers of pupils from deprived households from each school.

Based on this rationale, three funding brackets have been proposed and schools will be able to apply for funding within their identified bracket via a simple Expression of Interest form.

Brackets of available funding are as below:

- 1) Up to £2,000 (around 25% of schools will be eligible to apply for this funding bracket)
- 2) Up to £5,000 (around 45% of schools will be eligible to apply for this funding bracket)
- 3) Up to £10,000 (just over 30% of schools will be eligible to apply for this funding bracket)

Schools eligible to receive the largest amounts of funding will be those with a greater proportion of pupils from deprived households and those with the largest pupil numbers, for example, the majority of secondary schools and larger primary schools.

Proposed interventions:

Schools know their pupils well and are in the best place to respond to the unique needs of the families within the communities that they serve. Following consultation with Education colleagues, it is proposed that grant funding is awarded directly to schools to enable them to use the funding in a way which would best meet the needs of the most vulnerable pupils and families quickly and efficiently.

The grant funding can be used for a range of appropriate food related activity. This includes but will not be limited to the following:

- Supporting vulnerable families who do not qualify for FSM but struggle to pay for school meals/appropriate packed lunches. This could include increasing access to FSM where appropriate or providing daily a subsidised option.
- Improving content of packed lunches (with wrap-around support and education to families in order to support healthier and affordable changes).
- Contributing to school 'food larders' to provide direct support to parents/carers (with signposting to Food Banks and wrap-around support where appropriate).
- Topping up lunch pre-payment cards for secondary pupils.
- Providing a nutritional breakfast for all or identified pupils/families.
- Provision of free ingredients for food technology pupils.

Expected outputs and outcomes:

Schools who wish to apply for the funding will need to provide details of the support/activity they intend to use the money for and the number of pupils who they expect will benefit via a simple Expression of Interest (EOI). This is intended to act as a checking mechanism for grant conditions and will form the basis of an agreement between the school and the local authority with regards to spend. Schools do not need to apply for any or all of the allocated funding within their identified bracket if they do not wish to. Funding will be awarded via a panel decision and will be awarded before the end of March for use during the 2022-23 academic year.

Outputs from the funding will vary depending on what activity each school proposes to support. If schools proposed to use the funding for additional FSMs, this would provide 171,428 meals (at £2.45 per meal) or feed 2,678 additional children throughout the summer term at no cost (64 days, 17th April to 21st July).

Where schools feel their need for funding extends beyond the bracket allocated to them, and they are able to evidence greater potential impact, they will be able to request additional funding via the EOI and this will be considered if there is any unallocated funding following the panel review.

As a condition of receiving the funding, schools will be expected to provide the following:

- Description of activity funded including plans for sustainability (if applicable)
- Number of meals provided
- Number of children supported
- Number of onward referrals to other support/services.

In addition, the following grant funding conditions will apply:

- Schools will need to comply with School Food Standards.
- Grant funding will be awarded for schools to use up until the end of academic year 2022-23.
- Schools will be asked to encourage any families not currently accessing FSM, who are eligible, to apply for this.
- Details of wrap-around support and links to Food Banks, Help Hub and mental health and wellbeing support will be provided to parents and families via the school.
- A sample of schools will be audited to ensure spend has been appropriately distributed. Schools will need to be prepared to provide information as requested by the awarding body.

Funding:

The total funding required for this programme is £420,000.

The funding will be distributed by the end of March 2023, however, schools would be able to utilise the monies up to the end of the 2023 academic year.

The proposed funding pot would consist of the following monies:

- ICB Population Health funding - £25,000*
- Public Health Grant allocation - £25,000
- Household Support Scheme (round 3) – £370,000

*A requirement of ICB funding is that it is spent in 11 of the borough's wards which have been identified as Priority Wards.

Public Health Outcomes:

The project will contribute to the following public health outcomes for Blackburn with Darwen.

- B. Improving the wider determinants of health:
 - B01 Children in low income families
 - B17 Fuel poverty
- C. Health improvement:
 - C09 Child excess weight in 4-5 and 10-11 year olds
 - C15 Diet

Sustainability:

Schools will be required to provide details of how they plan to sustain the grant funded activity into future years. They will be encouraged to work with the BwD Food Alliance and other local organisations engaged in local sustainable food programmes on their plans.

In addition, BwD Council will consider whether funding for this activity can be sustained via the Household Support Scheme (round 4) or any other available funding streams.

Appendix A:

Free School Meals eligibility

Children in state-funded schools in England are entitled to receive free school meals (FSM) if a parent or carer are in receipt of any of the following benefits:

- Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guarantee element of 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 four weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

Children in nursery schools are eligible if they meet the criteria and attend for full days. Pupils are still eligible for free school meals in school in sixth form, but not sixth form college or further education.