
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

19 March 2024

Cabinet

Title: Food Provision in Schools

Purpose: To propose an interim expansion of the current food provision in school settings based on the funding available in 2024/25.

Recommendation: It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Approves the use of existing funding on an interim basis to expand food provision to primary school children in 2024/25; and
- b) Approves the use of existing funding on an interim basis to offer breakfast provision at secondary schools in 2024/25.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Facilities Management provides the catering function for school meals across all of the school settings in North Ayrshire. The service is free for those with an assessed eligibility for free school meals based on low income and for those children currently in primary 1 to primary 5. The universal free school meal provision is expected to continue to be rolled out to the remaining primary year groups in 2 phases from 2025 through additional Scottish Government funding.
- 1.2 Funding was made available by Scottish Government in 2023/24 and again for 2024/25 to improve to the current provision in schools to support children and young people with access to free food, including those in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment. This report proposes using this funding to introduce a temporary enhancement to existing provision until March 2025, by which time it is expected that the timing of the next phase of statutory universal provision for children in P6/7 will have been communicated and additional funding provided by Scottish Government.

2. Background

- 2.1 School catering is provided by Facilities Management and covers 49 primary schools, 9 secondary schools and 1 ASN Campus on the mainland and islands of North Ayrshire. This statutory provision also includes associated regulations regarding the food on offer. The Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020 set out the requirements for food in primary and secondary school settings and strengthened the existing regulations regarding healthy eating in schools.

- 2.2 In January 2015 the Scottish Government policy for universal free school meals (UFSMs) was introduced across Scotland for all primary 1 to primary 3 children. In August 2021 this universal provision expanded to primary 4 pupils and then to primary 5 pupils in January 2022.
- 2.3 The Scottish Government has committed to rolling out the free provision of meals to all primary school children and this will be completed in two phases. The first phase will be an expansion of the eligibility criteria for free school meals for primary school children by incorporating those who are eligible for the Scottish Child Payment. It is anticipated that this will be implemented around February 2025. The second phase of the roll out will then be for all remaining primary school children to be included in this provision. It is anticipated that full roll out will be around February 2026.
- 2.4 As part of the Council's budget settlement for 2024/25, funding has been allocated for the expansion of universal free school meals in relation to phase 1 as noted in 2.3 above. The anticipated "go live" date for this expansion is February 2025, and at this time we do not have the details of which children this expansion will include. To maximise the impact of the existing funding, and forthcoming funding for 2024/25 therefore, it is proposed that this is used to expand food provision on a temporary basis for primary school children. This funding would support the provision of a healthy mid-morning snack for all children and the availability of ambient food in primary schools as required and the purchase of additional equipment to support the expansion of food provision in schools. The food would be compliant with the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020. As a universal provision this would ensure anonymity and a dignified food service to all children regardless of eligibility status.
- 2.5 These proposals are for a temporary provision until the expansion of universal free school meals rolls out to those eligible for the Scottish Child Payment. Once this phase is implemented, all funding will be utilised for the provision of a primary school meal to those eligible under the expanded service.
- 2.6 It is also proposed to expand the Winter Warmer Breakfast initiative in secondary schools for 2024/25. This is a service which has been offered over the last two winter periods and is free to all secondary school pupils. Uptake for this service ranged from 8%-22% across secondary schools. It is proposed that this initiative runs again for Winter 2024/25 from November 2024 until the end of March 2025. This provision will be kept under review in relation to Child Poverty and Cost of Living priorities for North Ayrshire Council.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- a) Approves the use of existing funding on an interim basis to expand food provision to primary school children in 2024/25; and
 - b) Approves the use of existing funding on an interim basis to offer breakfast provision at secondary schools in 2024/25.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

4.1 The funding allocation for 2024/25 is £718k and has been earmarked for an expansion of food provision in schools.

Human Resources

4.2 None

Legal

4.3 None

Equality/Socio-economic

4.4 The provision of free food in a universal way reaches children and young people in a dignified way. Access to food helps address food insecurity and supports the health and well-being of the children and young people. It contributes to the Council's commitment to addressing child poverty and to reducing the cost of the school day.

Climate Change and Carbon

4.5 None

Key Priorities

4.6 The content of this report aligns to the Council key priority of Well-being:

- Providing free access to food in a dignified way which helps to address food insecurity and supports the wellbeing of our children and young people.

Community Wealth Building

4.7 The Catering service buys locally where possible therefore increasing demand for supplies will inevitably also increase orders from local supply chains and help to support local businesses and employment.

5. Consultation

5.1 Consultation has taken place within the service to determine possible models of delivery and required resources.

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For further information please contact **Carolyn Hope, Senior Manager Facilities Management**, on [Click here to enter text..](#)

Background Papers

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