

# Children & Young People's Overview & Scrutiny Committee



3 February 2016

## Scoping Report: Take up of Free School Meals and Holiday Hunger in County Durham

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### Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive

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#### Purpose

1. To provide Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a scoping report in advance of a scrutiny review looking at the take up of free school meals and holiday hunger in County Durham. The take up of free school meals provision not only ensures that the child receives a healthy two course midday meal but also provides the school with additional funding by way of pupil premium.

#### Background

2. Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee have indicated their intention to carry out a focused piece of work on the impact of child poverty on children and young people in County Durham at their meeting held on 25 June.
3. Performance information indicates that the number of children in poverty in County Durham is 22.7 percent of under 16 year olds. (annual national measure). This is an average of the whole county which indicates there are higher and lower levels within certain localities.
4. Durham County Council was selected as part of a pilot exercise to offer Free School Meals (FSM) in all primary schools over a two year period between the beginning of Autumn Term 2009 and the end of Summer Term 2011. Two other local authority areas were also selected as part of the national pilot Newham and Wolverhampton. The pilot included substantial investment in catering facilities and activities to encourage take up of school meals by schools and local authorities, supported by the School Food Trust. An evaluation of the pilot concluded that it had a positive impact on children's diet and educational attainment and there had been an increased take up of free school meals among children who were already eligible.
5. Take up of free school meals in primary schools remains consistently high and there is universal free school meals in key stage one (reception, year one and year two). Evidence indicates that the take up of free school meals in secondary schools is also consistent as shown in the table below. However in secondary schools there has been a decreasing roll number over the three years shown and academies are not required to report their meal figures to

the local authority. The information in the table below indicates the percentage of take up of free school meals against those that are eligible on the school roll and the daily average of meals. The information suggests that there is a lower take up of free school meals by secondary school pupils.

Academic year	FSM Take up against FSM eligible on roll		Meals daily average	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
2012 - 2013	82.11%	72.17%	7379	3328
2013 - 2014	81.76%	72.15%	7164	3072
2014 - 2015	81.44%	72.80%	7087	2935

## What is Poverty?

6. Before work commences on a review it is important that poverty is defined. The definitions below are from European Union and Professor Peter Townsend as quoted by Child Poverty Action.

“People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live. Because of their poverty they may experience multiple disadvantages through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate health care and barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport and recreation.”<sup>1</sup>

“Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies in which they belong”<sup>2</sup>

## What is Holiday Hunger?

7. The issue of holiday hunger was highlighted by an All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom. The report makes 77 recommendations one of which is to ‘pilot and implement schemes to maximise the take up of free school meals and tackle school holiday hunger.’<sup>3</sup>
8. Surveys by the Trussell Trust and Kellogs indicate that families who are eligible for their children to receive free school meals struggle during school holiday periods especially during the long summer break. The Trussell Trust states in their research that ‘one in eight pupils is not getting enough to eat in the school holidays.’<sup>4</sup>
9. Kellogs Isolation and Hunger report indicates in its key findings that a third of parents have skipped a meal so their kids can eat during the school holidays.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Joint Report by the Commission and the Council on Social Inclusion, European Union 2004

<sup>2</sup> Professor Peter Townsend, Poverty in the United Kingdom, 1979

<sup>3</sup> Feeding Britain, All Party Parliamentary Group, pg 47, June 2014

<sup>4</sup> School Holidays Leave Kids Hungry for Three Meals a Day, Trussell Trust, August 2015

<sup>5</sup> Isolation and Hunger, Kellogs, 2015

The research for the report was carried out by Yougov and provides information on the impact of the school holidays on struggling families.

10. East Durham Area Action Partnership (AAP) has been involved in a Holiday Hunger Project following information being received from children and young people's holiday activity programmes that children and young people were presenting as hungry and asked to spend part of the funding on snacks for the children and young people. Therefore a project has been developed to focus on providing food during activities.
11. Several holiday hunger projects are in operation in County Durham run through community projects. The review will raise awareness of these projects and give examples of the activities they run during school holiday periods.

### **National Policy and Research**

12. The Child Poverty Act 2010, placed a duty on the Government to work towards eradicating child poverty in the UK by 2020 and to create a framework to monitor progress at a national and local level.
13. The Act defines poverty in terms of income using a tiered approach of relative low income, combined low income and material deprivation, absolute low income and persistent poverty. These four measures are used to assess progress by the government to achieving their targets of eradicating child poverty by 2020 in the UK. It requires governments to publish a strategy every three years to meet targets and to report annually to measure progress. Duties are also placed on local authorities and other delivery partners in England to work together to tackle child poverty, conduct a local needs assessment, produce a child poverty strategy and take child poverty into account in the production and revision of their Sustainable Communities Strategies.
14. Since the publication of the Child Poverty Act 2010, the government has published two child poverty strategies. A new approach to child poverty was published in 2011 and confirms its commitment to eradicating child poverty and states that the root causes of poverty will be addressed not just the symptoms. To enable them to do this the government also said that they would measure the success through a new set of indicators. The 2014 Child poverty strategy focuses on tackling child poverty through supporting families, improving living standards and raising educational attainment.
15. The Children and Families Act placed a legal duty on all state funded schools in England including academies and free schools to offer a free school lunch to all pupils in reception, year 1 and year 2 from September 2014.
16. Following the general election in 2015 the Conservative government prepared the welfare reform and work bill. Clauses 5 - 6 of the Bill change the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission to the Social Mobility Commission and repeal the bulk of the Child Poverty Act 2010.

17. Beyond the three years where school meals are free to all pupils, the government has strict eligibility criteria for claiming free school meals based on household income. Claimants can apply to the school or the local authority.

## **Local Policy**

18. The Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) 2014-2030 is an overarching plan for County Durham and underpins all other plans and strategies. The SCS identifies that through partnership working it will seek to support the most vulnerable members of our community, reduce deprivation and child poverty and address inequalities.
19. The Council Plan 2015-2017 indicates that Durham is the most deprived authority in the North East Region in terms of income deprivation; quoting that nearly half of its population (42%) living in the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally. Data indicates that 22% of County Durham's children live in low income families compared to 17.5% nationally. The Council Plan goes on to stress that one of the most important, single contributions the local authority can make to people's lives is to work with our schools to ensure our children get the best start in life and are achieving their potential. It indicates that educational attainment in County Durham exceeds regional and national averages and the attainment gap of those pupils eligible for free school meals has reduced over the last five years.
20. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment has been developed to highlight key messages in relation to the health and wellbeing needs of the people of County Durham. The assessment is refreshed and updated annually to ensure that the information it contains is relevant and accurate. The JSNA provides a headline on child poverty and indicates the impact this has on child development.
21. The Welfare Reform and Poverty Issues report (Cabinet Oct 2015) indicates that the number of families claiming tax credits has reduced from one in four to one in five but the gap between the number of children living poverty nationally and in County Durham has grown by 2.7 percentage points. The report highlights the changes to the Child Tax Credit and the child element of Universal Credit.

## **Reviews by Other Authorities**

22. Many local authorities have carried out scrutiny reviews on school meals looking at its content which links into childhood obesity and reviews on universal free school meals at key stage one. York City Council has carried out a review of school meals which included investigating why parents who are eligible to claim free school meals do not do it and why significant numbers of pupils entitled to receive free school meals do not take up the offer.

## **Terms of Reference**

### **23. Rationale**

The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny committee agreed at its meeting on 25 June to undertake a review concerning child poverty. The take up of free school meals ensures that those children who are entitled receive a nutritious midday meal and by being eligible to claim for free school meals the school is also entitled to claim pupil premium for that child too.

### **24. Scope**

The review would investigate the level of free school meals take up in County Durham and look to increase current take up levels by encouraging all schools to use the DCC free school meals checking system by highlighting the benefits of this system for them. Feedback on the checking system would be sought from schools using the system to highlight benefits and where improvements may be needed.

The review would investigate take up of free school meals in both primary and secondary school specifically looking to identify barriers and how these can be overcome. The school year lasts on average 39/40 weeks a year therefore what happens during the 12/13 weeks children who receive free school meals are not at school. The review will explore what is available to help families during school holiday periods.

### **25. Objectives**

- What are the benefits to schools of using DCC eligibility checking service?
- How can the use of this service be increased?
- How can take up of free school meals be increased in secondary schools?
- What barriers/challenges are preventing take up in secondary schools?
- How can these barriers/challenges be overcome?
- Explore what is available to help families feed their children during school holidays?

### **26. Expected Outcomes**

- Increase awareness among schools of DCC eligibility checking service and the benefits of the service to them.
- If more schools use the service there is a potential to increase their pupil premium
- More eligible claimants found through using DCC eligibility checking service enables the service to be provided.
- Awareness of the barriers preventing take up of free school meals in secondary schools and encourage schools to address how the barriers can be overcome.
- Greater awareness of help available to families to feed children eligible for free school meals during school holiday periods.

### **27. Membership**

The review group will take its membership from Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a maximum of 12 members including the Chair and or Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

## **28. Reporting**

On completion of the evidence gathering a report will be drafted and sent to Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Corporate Management Team, Cabinet and the Children and Families Partnership.

## **29. Timescale**

The review will commence in March 2016 with the aim of a report being presented to Cabinet September 2016.

## **Recommendation**

30. Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are requested to:

- a. Provide comment and approve the draft terms of reference for the review of the take up of free school meals and holiday hunger in County Durham.
- b. Agree the project plan attached at appendix 2.
- c. Receive periodic verbal updates on the review as it progresses.

## **Background Papers**

- Welfare Reform and Poverty Issues – Cabinet 21 October 2015

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance** – None

**Staffing** - None

**Risk** - None

**Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty** – Evidence suggests there is a stigma attached to receiving free school meals. A review would explore this assumption as a barrier to take up of free school meals.

**Accommodation** - None

**Crime and Disorder** – None

**Human Rights** - None

**Consultation** – None

**Procurement** - None

**Disability Issues** – None

**Legal Implications** – None