



Cabinet – 16 November 2016

**Children & Young People's
Overview and Scrutiny Review
Take up of Free School Meals &
Holiday Provision**

Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of Transformation and Partnerships

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to present the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee working group review report on Take up of Free School Meals and Holiday Provision attached at appendix 2.

Background

2. The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided they wanted to look at child poverty which would complement the work of the Poverty Action Plan for County Durham.
3. The terms of reference for the review were agreed by the Committee at its meeting held on 3 February 2016. The objective of the review is to raise awareness of the take up of free school meals and of holiday provision in County Durham.
 - What are the benefits to schools of using DCC eligibility checking service?
 - How can this service be increased?
 - How can take up of free school meals be increased in secondary schools?
 - What challenges/barriers are preventing take up in secondary schools and how can they be overcome?
 - Explore what is available to help families feed and entertain their children during school holidays?
4. The committee set up a working group of 8 members and gathered evidence over six meetings from key parties including: School Meals Service, School Nurses, Head Teachers; Young People; Area Action Partnerships; Churches Together and from the Head of Policy and Corporate Communications.
5. The review makes six recommendations which can be found on page five of the appended report. They relate to: considerate use of language to avoid stigma;

universal checking of free school meal eligibility; greater security of biometric systems; promotion of community holiday provision activities and promotion of best practice used by East Durham Area Action Partnership to assist communities in delivering holiday provision.

Service Response

6. The Scrutiny Review report on Free School Meals and Holiday Hunger was presented to the Children and Young People's Services management team on 7th October 2016. The members of the team acknowledged the important work undertaken in compiling the report, and the key messages it carried.
7. Recognition was given to the stigma that still remains around free school meals, and the service is revisiting work already done in relation to the eligibility checking service; the action highlighted in the report in which the application form for school places could include a box for a parent's National Insurance number to expedite eligibility checking will be taken forward. This will assist in identifying those who would qualify for free school meals and hopefully reduce the numbers of parents who opt out through perceptions relating to stigma.
8. Recognition was given to the evidence in the report that some children would prefer to go off site with friends rather than stay in school for meals, and the concerns around poverty hunger especially during school holiday periods.

Recommendation

9. Cabinet is asked to note the recommendations in the report attached (appendix 2, pages 5-6) and to formulate a response within the six month period identified in the report for systematic review of the recommendations.
10. That the scrutiny review report on take up of free school meals and holiday provision is shared with the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Children and Families Partnership.

Contact: Tom Gorman, Corporate Scrutiny & Performance Manager, Tel: 03000 268027

Author: Ann Whitton, Overview and Scrutiny Officer,

Tel: 03000 268143

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance - None

Staffing - None

Risk - None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – The review report takes into consideration Equality and Diversity; an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out.

Accommodation - None

Crime and Disorder – None

Human Rights – None

Consultation – None

Procurement - None

Disability Issues – None

Legal Implications – None