



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

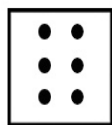
**October 2016**

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## **Chairman's Foreword**



According to the Child Health Profile for 2013, 22.5% of the children living in County Durham are living in poverty which equates to 19,815 children. It is essential we all help these children by doing what we can to improve their lives, reduce stigma and to help them achieve in spite of their circumstances.

For some children from families facing poverty their free school dinner is the only well balanced meal they get that day, and for this reason it is important that all eligible children receive their free school meal. There are also concerns that when the school closes at the weekend or for holidays that children do not get a healthy meal. We want to promote what is being done in our communities to address this growing issue and raise awareness of holiday provision provided.

School dinners have come a long way from the notorious turkey twizzlers and chips of the 1990s. The quality of food served in schools is excellent with lots being locally sourced and sustainable. All maintained schools must now produce a well-balanced nutritious meal in accordance with national standards.

These standards have increased the quality of food the schools provide and they help children and young people to focus on their studies which in turn leads to increased educational standards.

The stigma of being on free school meals has changed too. The different coloured dinner tickets of the past have been replaced and most secondary schools use a biometric system which allows cashless transactions. This allows those in receipt of free school meals to get their dinner without the knowledge of the rest of those in the dining hall.

I would urge parents to check to see if they are eligible to claim free school meals for their child, all that is needed is the parent or carer's name, date of birth and national insurance number for DCC staff to check eligibility. Pupils who are eligible for free school meals are also eligible for pupil premium grant which is paid to the school to help address the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers.

The highlight of the review for me was meeting some wonderful young people who shared with us their experiences and emphasised issues that we had not contemplated.

I would like to thank all those who took part in the review for their time and support and I would like to thank my fellow Councillors who volunteered to sit on the review group, especially my Vice Chair Councillor Morris Nicholls for his guidance and support throughout.

**Councillor Christine Potts**

**Chair of Children and Young People's  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

1. Members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided to undertake a review to focus on an aspect of child poverty that would complement any work of Durham County Council's Poverty Action Group.
2. At a meeting held on 3 February 2016, members agreed to review the take up of free school meals and holiday hunger provision (Holiday Provision). Members specifically requested that the review should consider evidence from school nurses and children's social care in relation to child malnutrition.
3. In 2008 Durham County Council was selected, along with another local authority Newham, to take part in a pilot exercise to provide universal free school meals in primary schools. The pilot exercise ran from the beginning of autumn term in 2009 through until the end of the summer term in 2011. The exercise was deemed a success and a national evaluation concluded that free school meals 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.
4. In 2011 the pupil premium was introduced to provide additional funding for local authority maintained schools in England to increase the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers. Children eligible for free school meals also attract pupil premium for their school. The funding is paid directly to the school as they are best placed to determine what additional provision is needed.
5. From September 2014 Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) was introduced for all children in reception class through to the end of year two to receive free school meals.

### **Terms of Reference**

6. The purpose of the review is to raise awareness of the need to claim free school meals (FSM) for those parents who are eligible, ensuring their children receive a midday meal and the school receives pupil premium funding, and to increase awareness of holiday hunger activities taking place in County Durham communities.
7. Five key lines of enquiry were considered:
  - What are the benefits to schools of using DCC eligibility checking service?
  - How can this service better help schools?
  - 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?
  - What is available to help families feed and entertain their children during school holidays?
8. The working group composed of ten members with its membership taken from the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Evidence was gathered over a period of six meetings and a visit to a school canteen. Thank you to all who presented:
- School Meals Team
  - Head of Policy and Communications
  - Lead Health & Wellbeing
  - Principal Area Action Partnership Co-ordinator for East Durham
  - School Nurse Representative
  - Head Teachers from Belmont Community School and Seaham School of Technology
  - Young People from Seaham School of Technology
  - Development Officer, Communities Together Durham
9. The review group considered the national context which included government policy and research information and reviews carried out by other local authorities: a summary is appended to this report at appendix one.

## **Key Findings & Conclusions**

10. There is still a stigma associated with free school meals and therefore consideration is needed to the use of language to describe groups of people who are experiencing poverty to avoid increasing stigma. Young people indicated that holiday provision should focus on the activity and not the free food otherwise it is just another hand out and young people will not engage.
11. Overall take up of free school meals in County Durham is good. We know this because the authority receives information on the number of eligible pupils and this is compared to the actual numbers who take a free school meal in County Durham. Most schools use the DCC FSM eligibility checking service and find it a quick and efficient service; it is also used by 21 schools outside of County Durham.
12. At Key Stage 1 children benefit from universal infant free school meals from reception class through to year two. However it is important to both the child and the school that parents still provide information to check their eligibility for free school meals and make a claim to ensure that no eligible child is missing out on pupil premium grant funding.
13. Head Teacher representatives indicated that they found engagement of parents to be the biggest barrier to increasing the take up of free school meals as some

had negative preconceptions of the FSM system, believing that school staff would have access to their financial information. Suggestions to address this included making changes to school admission forms to include an option for parents to give their National Insurance number which would reduce the amount of duplicated information and form filling/checking for both parents and schools.

14. Access to the daily FSM allowance is time restricted which can impact on pupils taking part in lunchtime activities and may result in the student being stigmatised because of FSM. Secondary school pupils in receipt of FSM receive a daily allowance of £2.00 which is only available to them on that day after 11am and cannot roll over to the next day, although they can add to the balance using their own funds. They do not have chance to budget their allowance over the week whereas non FSM pupils are encouraged to budget their lunch allowance.
15. The cashless system used in schools is intended to allow pupils to purchase food without stigma. These systems are used in most secondary schools in County Durham and are reported to be user friendly. They can provide information on purchases that can be analysed to adapt menus and to monitor healthy choices of the pupils. However, evidence indicates there is a need for the system to be more secure at terminals and points of sale. Evidence from young people indicates that where a student is using a PIN code at the terminal this information can be clearly observed without the student's knowledge. Also, at point of sale student's lunch account information is displayed on screen and is clearly visible to other student's in the queue, with a £2 daily balance indicating to others that they receive FSM.
16. All school kitchens and dining halls should be achieving no less than a level four hygiene certificate from the Food Standards Agency and all catering staff should be trained to a high level of customer service. Evidence highlighted a training need for some catering staff, all schools should ensure that dining and kitchen staff provides a high level of customer service.
17. Young people indicated that they didn't take their FSM because they wanted to eat with their friends who went off site for their lunch or they didn't take their FSM because they didn't like the menu choices on offer. Head teachers suggested that take up could be improved by introducing new foods by way of taster days to help pupils to try new flavours and foods before they become a menu choice.
18. 91% of primary schools in the North East have a breakfast club that provides children with a healthy start to the day. In County Durham breakfast clubs are run independently of the County Council but are found in most primary schools or communities with some using charitable donations from providers such as Kelloggs, Greggs or Magic Breakfast.

19. Evidence indicates that holiday provision is more proactive in the east of the county largely due to the work of East Durham Area Action Partnership and third sector agencies in the area, but members of the review group have indicated that they are aware of activities and need in their divisions. A mapping exercise of all holiday provision available in County Durham would indicate levels of need in various parts of County Durham and provide information on provision to parents/carers.
20. East Durham Area Action Partnership has devised plans to help communities in their area access funding to deliver holiday provision projects. They and third sector organisations have used community based approaches such as using community buildings and food co-operatives to provide food and activities to all members of the community.

## **Recommendations**

The review group having considered the findings and conclusions of the review have made the following recommendations:

### **Recommendation one**

Durham County Council uses considerate and positive language in all its communications so as not to stigmatise or disadvantage any person experiencing poverty and encourage partners to do the same.

### **Recommendation two**

The Corporate Director of Children & Young People's Services explore school admissions procedures and give consideration to the inclusion of an option for parents' National Insurance number on admission forms to enable Free School Meals eligibility checks on all children with the aim of

- reducing the need for eligible parents to complete additional forms or from eligible parents missing out on claims
- Improving funding for schools.

### **Recommendation three**

The Corporate Director of Children & Young People's Services encourage schools to check all their biometric terminals to ensure PIN code details are kept secure and that information cannot be seen by others when carrying out transactions and to take measures to remove a pupils lunch money balance from the customer screen and to consider alternative options for pupils to keep a check of their balance such as a receipt system.

### **Recommendation four**

The Corporate Director of Children & Young People's Services and the Director of Transformation and Partnerships ensure all information on community projects providing holiday provision to communities is recorded and mapped centrally to ensure joined up working of all services and partners. Following the

mapping exercise that a short electronic guide is produced and shared with schools, AAPs and Councillors to show where activities are located, types of activities offered, if food is included and cost.

**Recommendation five**

The Director of Transformation and Partnerships explore additional external funding opportunities for areas that experience levels of child poverty and holiday provision issues similar to those in East Durham and ensure that the model of best practice used by East Durham Area Action Partnership to help communities deliver holiday provision is promoted with other Area Action Partnerships.

**Recommendation six**

That a systematic review of the above recommendations is carried out and reported back to the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee six months following the report being considered by Cabinet.

## **MAIN REPORT**

### **Background**

#### **FSM Eligibility**

21. Free school meals are available to children attending school up to the age of 19 years; they are not available for children attending further education establishments. To be eligible parents/carers must receive any of the following:

- Income Support
- Income based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The Guarantee element of the State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income less than £16,190 or less as assessed by HMRC.
- Where a parent is entitled to Working Tax Credit run-on (the payment someone receives for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit).
- Universal Credit

22. Where a family is eligible the child will receive a two course nutritious meal when they attend school. The average cost of a free school meal is £2.00 which works out to be a benefit of approximately £390 per year, but the value of this benefit is worth much more to families knowing their child is receiving a good meal. At times when there is no school during holidays and weekends families eligible for FSM may struggle to provide a nutritious meal for their child.

23. At the time of the review Frank Field MP introduced a private members bill, 'Free School Meals Automatic Registration of Eligible Children' to provide local authorities with the duties and powers required to identify and automatically register all children eligible for free school meals; to provide for an opt-out where the family wishes; and for connected purposes. The review group wrote to Mr Field to advise of this review and offer their support of the bill. The bill was introduced to Parliament on 15 December 2015 under the ten minute rule. The 2015-16 session of Parliament ended and this bill will make no further progress.

#### **Holiday Provision**

24. Children attend school for approximately 39-40 weeks a year and if they are eligible they will receive a free school meal when they are at school. Schools are closed 12-13 weeks of the year but parents eligible for their children to receive FSM do not get additional benefit during this time to help feed their children.

25. In April 2014 an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Hunger and Food Poverty was set up to investigate and understand the rise in the use of food

banks and associated provision of emergency food assistance in recent times, more information can be found at <https://feedingbritain.com/> . The APPG has produced several reports with recommendations to the government to address food poverty in the UK with the most recent being published in 2016 - *Britain's not so hidden hunger* <sup>1</sup>, which considers amongst other related areas if hunger is emerging as part of a wider pattern of neglect and as such children who are coming to school hungry should be brought to the attention of the local authority. The APPG report goes on to explain that this is not because parents should be penalised for being poor, but to take measures to safeguard children's wellbeing and prevent them going hungry.

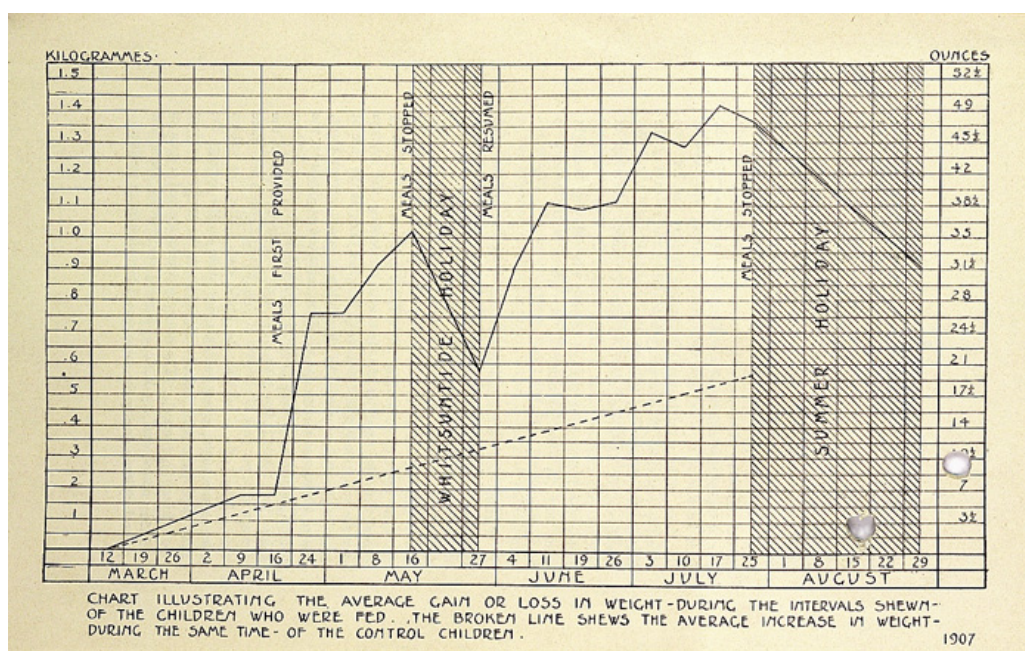
26. Another APPG looking at School Food with a remit of matters relating to school food, child hunger and food education has also carried out specific pieces of work including Filing the Holiday Hunger Gap<sup>2</sup>, which makes several recommendations to government, including research into how families cope with holiday hunger.
27. Research carried out by Healthy Living UK based at Northumbria University indicates that one in twenty families with household incomes of £25,000 or less struggle to feed their families during school holiday periods, and many parents go without or have very little food to make sure their children are fed. Within households with incomes of less than £15,000 that figure rose to 73% of families who struggle to afford food during the school holidays.<sup>3</sup>
28. Although children who are eligible for free school meals receive a free midday during term time there is not a guarantee they will receive a nutritious meal when they are away from school during weekends and holidays. This has been an issue for many years, and the chart below from a City of Bradford Education Committee Report from 1906 records the weights of children during term time when they receive a school meal and during the holiday period when they don't. The slide indicates that the impact of not receiving a free school meal has led to a rapid reduction in weight. The impact we are seeing today is not necessarily that of dramatic weight loss but of weight gain due to the consumption of cheap high calorie processed foods and relative inactivity.

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<sup>1</sup> All Party Parliamentary Group - Britain's not so hidden hunger, 2016

<sup>2</sup> All Party Parliamentary Group –School Food- March 2014

<sup>3</sup> Kellogg's Isolation and Hunger Report 2015



Source: [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/lesson29.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/lesson29.htm)

29. Over the last couple of years there has been a significant increase in the use of food banks and the number of children's holiday activities that include a meal of some sort for low or no cost. Evidence indicates that there is an increase in the use of foodbank during the school summer holidays and in January.
30. Although foodbanks are not included within the remit of this review they impact on families who struggle to feed themselves due to benefit delays, benefit changes or low income. The food banks not only provide food but also provide advice on issues such as money worries, benefits etc.

### Use of Foodbanks

31. The Trussell Trust has indicated that there has been an increase in the numbers using foodbanks. The latest information shows that 1,084,604 adults and children across the country received three days emergency food supplies during 2014/2015 compared to 128,697 adults and children received three days emergency food supplies in 2011/2012.<sup>4</sup> The increase is more pronounced when the statistics are broken down into regions.

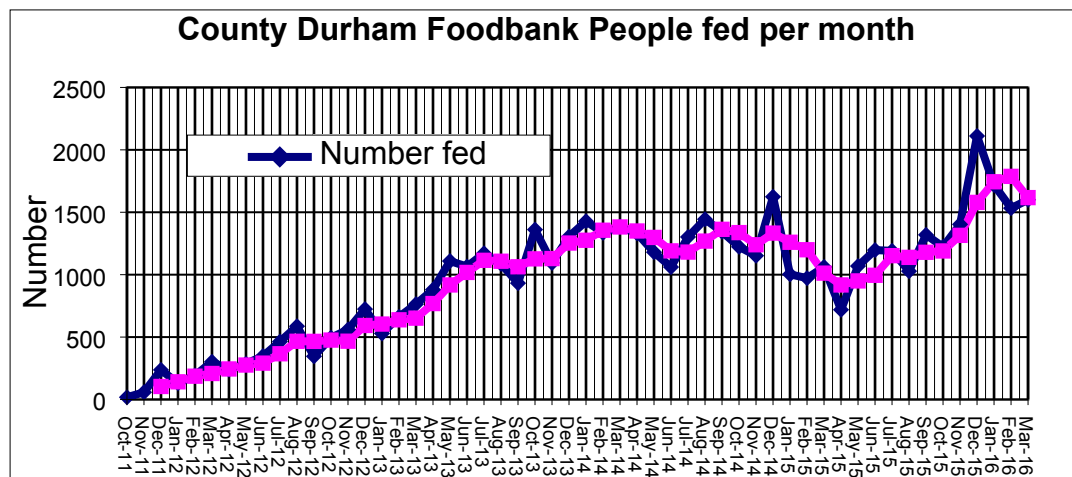
### Trussell Trust Figures for three days emergency food supplies given out in North East Region

	2011- 2012	2014- 2015
Adults	519	52447
Children	222	35246
Total number	741	87693

Source: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/> as viewed 12/04/2016

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/12/statistics-1024x683.jpg>

32. The chart below indicates the increase in the use of food banks in County Durham since 2011. Foodbanks currently provide a three day supply of food to approximately 1300 people per month in County Durham and distribute over eight tonnes of food to over 27 locations. Peaks on the chart indicate an increase in numbers fed and it is evident that more people use the foodbank during the summer months and in January, which corresponds to school holiday periods. More information on foodbanks can be found at appendix one.



Source: <http://durham.foodbank.org.uk/> as accessed 11 May 2016

## Policy Framework

### Key Finding

- Considerate use of language and appropriate school administration procedures can avoid potential stigma
- Young people stressed that holiday provision should be about the activities and not the food.

There is a clear local policy framework which the review group considered:

- Sustainable Community Strategy 2014-2030
- Council Plan 2016-2019
- Children & Adult Services Service Plan 2016-2019
- County Durham Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2019
- Early Help and Neglect Strategy 2015
- Poverty Action Plan for County Durham, October 2015

33. The Council Plan 2016-2019 which underpins the Sustainable Community Strategy sets out the Council's aims for the people of County Durham over the next three years. The 'Altogether Better for Children and Young People' priority theme has three policy objectives, two of which relate to the work of this review:

- Children and Young People make healthy choices and have the best start in life ; and

- Children and young people realise and maximise their potential.
34. Both of these objectives are shared with the Children, Young People and Families Plan 2016 and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and relate directly to this review.
  35. The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Hunger report 'Britain's not so hidden hunger' suggests that children who experience hunger may be brought to the attention of social services if hunger is emerging as part of a wider pattern of neglect as the legal criteria for neglect covers lack of sufficient food. County Durham's Local Safeguarding Children's Board's Early Help and Neglect Strategy identifies that neglect is the greatest single cause of children needing child protection in County Durham.
  36. County Durham's Local Safeguarding Children Board's Early Help and Neglect Strategy states: *"County Durham experiences higher levels of deprivation than the national average. Almost 50% of the population live in relatively deprived areas. The impact of welfare reforms adds further anxiety and stress to these vulnerable families. In turn, the Council's approach to financial inclusion has evolved with the main aims of the work to assist residents in maximizing their income – through sustainable employment, as well as reducing household outgoings. Other key elements of this approach include the principles of education, access to advice along with access to financial products."*
  37. Evidence from School Nurse representative advised that children can be malnourished no matter if they are under, over or of a healthy weight. Good nutrition is found in eating a well-balanced diet.
  38. Local conferences have taken place on child poverty over the course of the review and have highlighted the need for data collection to ensure services and partners to work together so we know what is available within the county and how we can work together to reduce child poverty. The Bishop of Durham at one of these local Child Poverty conferences emphasised that language should be used correctly and in a positive way to avoid stigma. Unemployment was often referred to as worklessness and in many cases; people wanted to work but were facing difficulties which prevented them. Social Security was referred to as 'benefits' when in fact in most cases, people had paid into a system which was there to help financially should they ever need it. Television programmes such as 'Benefits Street' were creating a stigma and people felt degraded by them.
  39. The North East Child Poverty Commission held an event focusing on food poverty and holiday provision and highlighted the need for holiday provision to include activities as well as free food. Young people at the event stressed the importance of *"making it a day out not a hand out."* The event highlighted how

families on low incomes have to take into account not just the price of the food but the cost of the energy used to cook it.

40. Poverty Proofing the School Day was developed from a project run by a local charity, Children North East in 2011. Children living in poverty said that what they most wanted was an end to discrimination at school. An evaluation of this work was carried out by Newcastle University which highlights that there are concerns in schools about the rising costs of the school day. There is a wide variety of issues that are stigmatising children and families living poverty. The report identifies that poverty proofing the school day would have an impact on greater take up of free school meals and considers the stigmatisation of free school meals administration procedures in some participating schools.

### Recommendation One

Durham County Council uses considerate and positive language in all its communications so as not to stigmatise or disadvantage any person experiencing poverty and encourage partners to do the same.

### Take up of free school meals

### Key Findings

- **Durham County Council's Schools Meals Service provides a valuable FSM eligibility checking service to families**
- **Most schools in County Durham use DCC FSM eligibility checking service**

41. The take up of free school meals in County Durham is good. We know this because the school meals service receives information in relation to eligibility to claim for free school meals and have actual numbers of take up and there is little difference. The table below illustrates the number of pupils eligible for free school meals in both primary and secondary schools; including the number of pupils known to be eligible to get a FSM, the total number of pupils both eligible for FSM and paid school meal and FSM, and the actual number of pupils who have taken a school meal. The information suggests there has been a little fluctuation in pupils known to be eligible for FSM. Total actual numbers for primary schools increased significantly in 2014 this coincides with the introduction of universal infant free school meals.

Autumn Tern	School Type	All pupils known to be eligible for FSM taking a meal	Total Nos. of pupils on roll taking a school meal (paid & FSM)
2015	Primary	82.71% (6816)	71% (38979)
	Secondary	76.12% (2643)	71% (20405)
2014	Primary	83.89% (7071)	69% (38955)

2013	Secondary	76.33% (2422)	65% (19900)
	Primary	83.52% (7188)	60% (38495)
	Secondary	74.74% (2651)	60% (23673)

Source: DCC CAS School Meals Service

42. Evidence from the focus group sessions with Head Teacher representatives also confirms that take up of free school meals among those pupils eligible is good. At Seaham School of Technology the actual take up was approximately 84% and Belmont Community School was slightly lower at 77% both are above the national figure of 75%.
43. Durham County Council's School Meals Service sits within the Education Development service of Children and Young People's Services it provides support to schools on all aspects of school meals and since 2011 the service has provided a free school meals eligibility checking facility for schools. This service is linked up to a national government database that can check on eligibility using the name, date of birth and national insurance number of a parent/carers – the service is confidential and efficient, and is offered to schools at a cost of £10 for an eligible claim per family per site. There is no charge for those claims that are found not to be eligible for FSM.
44. The service has a direct telephone link to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) tax credits and email contact with the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) benefits to obtain further information appertaining to a claim. As part of the checking service the team communicate with parents when additional information is required and acts as a link between the school and parents for advice and support.
45. The eligibility criteria can be complex and circumstances of claimants can change on a weekly and sometimes daily basis which can make it extremely difficult for non-specialist staff to understand. Other methods of checking eligibility can be used such as the school carrying out their own checks or using a private company but, both of these have additional implications such as time taken to complete the necessary paper work and associated costs.
46. If a school wishes to check eligibility of parents/carers claims themselves the parent would have to complete the paper work and provide paper evidence of their entitlement, which could make the relationship between the school and the parent/carers difficult due to the financial information being contained on the paperwork. Alternatively the school may wish to use a private company to carry out checks. However any company offering this service must be linked to a local authority. Research by DCC FSM service indicates that most companies also levy a charge for this service and do not carry out any follow up information or checks with parents/carers. Schools using DCC eligibility checking system have the results of the claims reported to them usually within 24 hours and all follow ups with parents are carried out by the service. Using DCC FSM service

allows school administrators more time to spend on other tasks and helps with relationships with parents.

47. Evidence from the School Meals Service indicates that only ten schools from a total of 263 in county Durham do not use the FSM eligibility checking service and this could be for a variety of reasons including low pupil numbers. However, the importance of schools carrying out the checks was stressed as pupils and schools may be missing out on pupil premium funding because of this. Among schools that use the system there are variations as to how many checks are carried out per year and checks aren't made on every pupil. However if every pupil was checked for their eligibility this would ensure that the pupil does not miss out on pupil premium funding.
48. The service provided by DCC is used by 21 schools outside of the local authority area. The system has a variety of other uses such as to carry out checks for childcare places for two year olds; other early years settings and colleges.
49. Evidence from the secondary school head teachers at Belmont Community School and Seaham School of Technology indicates that the service is valued. Both schools use the DCC eligibility checking service and have found the system to be fast, efficient and effective and described the service as *"brilliant"*, *"staff are very helpful and provide excellent service."* Both head teachers advised of difficulties they had engaging with some parents in relation to free school meals claims and other school activities.

## **Barriers Preventing Take up of FSM**

### **Key Findings**

- **Considerate communication with parents is important in avoiding a potential for stigma**
- **Changes in the details collected on admission forms would allow eligibility checks to be carried out without the need for additional forms to be completed**
- **Pupils can be encouraged to try new foods and flavours via taster days in school as unfamiliar food choices can be a barrier to taking meals.**

50. In August 2016 the Department for Education (DfE) released data collected from the school census taken in January 2016. This data indicates that nationally 14.3% of pupils were eligible for and claiming free school meals and this is the lowest proportion for any year since 2001 when collecting this data began. The DfE suggests that the fall which has been more pronounced over recent years is due to the decrease in benefit claimants, but in 2014 universal infant free school meals were introduced to children in reception class through to year two. Therefore there is a possibility that a decline in eligibility and take

up of free school meals could be partly attributed to parents not applying because their child is getting a free school meal anyway. This may be the case but if no application is made then the child will not be attracting pupil premium funding for the school. It is important for both the child and the school that parents claim for FSM if eligible.

51. Evidence indicates that careful consideration should be given as to how to communicate with parents as FSM claiming literature could get caught up with other school literature being sent home and may be discarded. Parents could feel they are being singled out by the school and may feel stigmatised and some parents may have literacy problems or have difficulty completing forms. Head teachers suggested that the best time to communicate with parents is during parents meetings to discuss the child starting school and at the time of transition of pupils from year six primary to year seven secondary but the head teachers stressed that this could be very time consuming and there is no guarantee that the parents will attend the meeting.
52. Head teachers advised that there will always be a small cohort of parents that do not want to engage with the school and suggested that changes to school admission forms could be a way forward to viable eligibility checking for free school meals which would ensure that an eligible child does not lose out. This would also address the issue of children who are eligible for FSM and receive universal infant free school meals so their parents do not claim so the child and school lose out on pupil premium funding.
53. It was suggested that it would be possible to get all the necessary information from parents when they apply for admission to a school. Currently this information does not include the parents/carers National Insurance (NI) number and this could be included on the forms as an option for parents. Head teacher representatives indicated they found engaging with parents to be the greatest barrier to pupils not taking up FSM. As discussed above some parents do not want contact with the school on any level. Some parents have a negative perception of the FSM system, believing the school staff will have access to their financial information and situation, and that their children will be subject to stigmatisation if they receive FSM.
54. The review group were advised by head teacher representatives that some pupils are fussy eaters and are reluctant to try different foods which can also be a barrier to pupils from accessing a free school meal. For pupils with special dietary requirements the school meals service works with caterers and school staff on a suitable menu. One head teacher representative advised they had held a taster day last year during the centenary commemorations of World War One for pupils to taste and experience food that was eaten at that time. It was suggested that taster days/weeks could be used for pupils to try new foods and flavours that could rotate around schools within the county.

55. In primary schools the system of collection of school dinner money is quite separate from the serving of food therefore there is little stigma associated with free school dinners in primary schools. However in secondary schools collection of dinner money is usually at point of sale whether using a biometric system or cash. In County Durham there are 32 secondary schools and 21 of them use a biometric system for payment of school meals including free school meals.

## **Recommendation Two**

The Corporate Director of Children & Young People's Services explore school admissions procedures and give consideration to the inclusion of an option of parent's National Insurance number on admission forms to enable Free School Meals eligibility checks on all children thus reducing the need for eligible parents to complete additional forms or from eligible parents missing out on claims and schools from pupil premium grant funding.

## **Cashless Systems in Secondary Schools**

### **Key Findings**

- **The cashless system is user friendly and allows monitoring of food choices**
- **Free school meals pupils cannot access their FSM allowance before 11am to buy food at break time which impacts on their taking part in lunchtime activities.**
- **Some parents do not allow their child to use the finger screening and use a PIN instead, but there are security issues with the PIN use.**
- **All schools should achieve at least level four hygiene certificates/ratings**

56. Biometric systems enable cashless transactions to be used in school dining halls which has the advantage of reducing stigma to those pupils in receipt of free school meals. All pupils have an account which is unique to them and is accessed through biometrics (usually a finger scan). Parents are required to provide a signature to opt into the system which allows them to put funds into their child's account via an online system or for a cash payment to be added via a terminal at the school, and allows for a partial print of their child's thumb or a finger to be taken. Pupils whose parents' do not allow finger or thumb print to be taken can still access the system by using a Personal Identification Number (PIN) code that is unique to them.

57. Head teachers attending an evidence gathering session advised that they use a biometric system in their schools and have found the system to be user friendly and thought that the use of such systems reduces stigma associated with FSM.

58. The system will indicate the balance of the student's account. Free school meal recipients have a FSM payment made to their account automatically

which is shown on a daily basis. However, any under spend or missed dinner will be identified by the system and will not be added to the next day's balance. The student can add extra cash on to his/ her balance in the system by using the terminal, to enable a greater daily spend on the school dinner or to purchase a snack at break time in addition to their free meal allowance. The money added to the account by the student will be available the following day but if there is any remainder from the FSM allowance this will not be carried over.

59. Non FSM pupils are encouraged to budget their lunch allowance over the period of a week. However pupils who receive FSM cannot do this as their FSM balance is calculated daily and does not carry over. They may top up their FSM allowance by adding their own funds which will carry over.
60. Pupils who receive FSM have a daily allowance of £1.95 in primary schools and £2.00 in secondary schools however the catering team will be advising secondary schools to increase their meal deals to £2.10 from September 2016. This allowance can be used to purchase a school lunch or a snack after 11am. Some secondary schools provide FSM pupils with £1.00 to purchase food at break time leaving them their full FSM allowance for lunchtime.
61. However, one of the head teachers who took part in the review suggested that FSM pupils should be allowed to access food at break times (before 11am) as this allows them to take part in lunchtime activities. Representatives from DCC's school meals service advised that the lunchtime restriction was in place to ensure FSM pupils accessed a healthy meal and where pupils have a mid-morning break before 11am there is a possibility of the pupil using their full allowance. This could result in them having nothing to eat for the rest of the day until they go home and it is thought to be too long a period to wait. In response the head teachers suggested that because the biometric system is in use FSM pupils food choices could be monitored and if found to be wanting this could be stopped.
62. Young people attending an evidence gathering session explained that they felt there was a stigma about FSM. They explained that the balance of pupils' lunch accounts are clearly visible on point of sale customer screens can be seen by other pupils behind them in the lunch queue, and FSM pupils were conscious of this and feel they are clearly identifiable by the daily £2.00 balance being shown on the screen. Pupils also pointed out that they had experienced problems using a PIN code. The key pad at the terminal can be seen by others behind them in the queue. Members who visited Seaham School of Technology witnessed that PIN codes can be clearly seen at the terminal.
63. Seaham School of Technology catering staff provide excellent customer service to pupils. Members viewed this for themselves when they held one of the review group meetings at the school and stayed for lunch with the pupils.

However members learned that in some schools catering staff needed more training in customer service. The working group was advised that many schools use the long summer break for a 'deep clean' of the kitchen equipment and kitchen and dining areas. Members agreed that all school restaurants should achieve at least a level four hygiene certificate from the food standards agency and the service confirmed that all schools have at least a level four certificate.

### **Recommendation Three**

The Corporate Director of Children & Young People's Services encourage schools to check all their biometric terminals to ensure PIN code details are kept secure and that information cannot be seen by others when carrying out transactions and to take measures to remove a pupils lunch money balance from the customer screen and to consider alternative options for pupils to keep a check of their balance such as a receipt system.

### **Breakfast Clubs**

#### **Key findings**

- **91% of schools in the North East of England have a breakfast club**
- **Most County Durham primary schools have a breakfast club**
- **Academic studies have linked eating breakfast with improved educational attainment**

64. Although the remit of the review does not include breakfast clubs it must be noted that they are in operation in schools and community settings in County Durham. Some are provided free or at a low cost with sponsors such as Greggs, Kelloggs or Magic Breakfasts.

65. While the provision of school breakfast clubs is predominantly in primary schools, some secondary schools do offer a breakfast catering service and the majority of them provide a break time service offering a range of healthy breakfast type foods at a reasonable cost. It should be noted however that children in receipt of FSM cannot use their daily FSM allowance before 11am.

66. The local authority has no involvement with breakfast clubs. They are the responsibility of the individual school or childcare service. Pupil premium funding can be used to supplement breakfast clubs in schools but schools would need to explore financing models to achieve self-sustainability. Breakfast club fees in County Durham are wide ranging from 70p per session at Bearpark Primary School to £4.00 per session at Neville's Cross School with most breakfast clubs charging approximately £2.00 per session. Breakfast clubs should be aware that charging for attendance at breakfast clubs can create a barrier to families on lower incomes.

67. A national survey carried out by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) indicates that nationally 85% of schools in the UK have a breakfast club and in the North East region that figure rises to 91% of schools.
68. The Greggs Foundation set up the Greggs Breakfast Programme in 1999 to help primary school children get a nutritious start to their school day. The programme was set up in response to concerns that children were attending school without having breakfast. The programme now oversees 380 breakfast clubs nationally providing a nutritious breakfast to over 22,000 children each school day. The Greggs Foundation receives funding from partners including many private sector companies and uses this funding for initial start-up grants for equipment and toys for the club.
69. Kelloggs launched its breakfast clubs in 1998 when the idea of a school breakfast club was relatively new. Today almost 85% of schools run breakfast clubs with Kelloggs supporting 2500 school breakfast clubs in the UK. This has increased by 45% since 2008. Data from a survey by Kelloggs to find out where breakfast clubs are located revealed that the North East and Wales had the highest percentage of breakfast clubs in operation. Kelloggs provide cash grants, training, free bowls and cereal.<sup>5</sup>
70. Magic Breakfast is a charity which supports more than 480 schools in England to provide a breakfast to children; this includes 50 schools in the North East of England. Schools are checked to see if they have at least 35% of pupils receiving FSM or at least 50% of pupils ever recorded as pupils having qualified for FSM in the last six years. Those that qualify are placed on a waiting list and once Magic Breakfast has sufficient funding a visit is arranged from a regional school change leader to discuss what Magic Breakfast can offer.
71. In a study by Public Health experts at Cardiff University<sup>6</sup> it was found that there were direct and positive links between pupils' breakfast consumption and quality of their educational attainment. The research found that the odds of achieving an above average educational performance were up to twice as high for pupils who ate breakfast, compared with those who did not. Eating unhealthy items like sweets and crisps for breakfast, which was reported by 1 in 5 children, had no positive impact on educational attainment and surprisingly was no better than no breakfast at all.

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[http://www.kelloggs.co.uk/en\\_GB/whatwebelieve/breakfastsforbetterdays/supportforbreakfastclubs.html](http://www.kelloggs.co.uk/en_GB/whatwebelieve/breakfastsforbetterdays/supportforbreakfastclubs.html) as accessed on 31 May 2016.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/view/162112-good-breakfast,-good-grades> as accessed on 9 August 2016

## Holiday Provision in County Durham

### Key Findings

- **Holiday provision should focus on the activities rather than on the food to avoid stigmatisation.**
- **To enable greater awareness of where holiday provision is located and to understand the scale of holiday provision in County Durham communities should make use DCC One Point and AAP Facebook pages and Durham County Council should map where provision is available.**
- **Consideration is needed as to how to engage over 12s and the types of activities offered.**

72. Teaching staff at Seaham School of Technology told the review group they had experienced young people coming to school following school holidays particularly the summer break who appeared to be noticeably slimmer than when they had left school before the break. Pupils from the school advised members of the review group of holiday activities they had attended that provided food. Many of the schemes were for low cost and some were aimed at teenagers and involved activities such as showing films, sports activities and educational activities.

73. Most families who are eligible for free school meals cannot afford treats usually associated with school holidays such as family trips to the cinema or the leisure centre. For some families the cost of childcare alone during the school holidays is a heavy financial burden. It is important that information on where holiday provision is taking place and associated costs are widely communicated to help families in need using already established avenues of communication such as the One Point Service or local AAPs.

74. Evidence indicates that a malnourished child may not appear to be underweight; in fact malnutrition can be present no matter what the size including those of a healthy weight, overweight or obese. Research from Kellogg's 'Hard to Swallow' report indicates that the UK's poorest households are not able to maintain a healthy balanced diet and are being forced to cut back on fruit by 20% and vegetables by 12%. The report suggests that the poorest 10% of households in the UK will spend 25% of their income on food and beverages compared to the richest 10% who will spend 4.2% of their income on food and beverages.<sup>7</sup>

75. The APPG on school food indicated that there is a lack of evidence on holiday provision in England. The review group found that a lot of holiday provision is provided on an ad hoc basis in communities with little communication about the sessions/events. More work is needed to understand the scale of holiday provision in County Durham and to map where provision is, and what type of

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<sup>7</sup> Kellogg's Hard to Swallow, The Centre for Economic and Business, 2013

provision is available e.g., messy play for under 8s, arts and crafts for under 12s. Some members of the County Council have provided funding via their neighbourhood budgets to fund holiday activity programmes in their divisions.

### Communities Together

76. Evidence from Durham Diocese provided feedback on their projects carried out during the summer 2015. The aim of this provision was for children to have fun, food and friendship. Seventeen sessions were held in churches, church halls and community buildings covering the Durham Diocese area, three of which were in Durham County Council areas. The evaluation indicated that at the three venues in County Durham approximately 1150 children had attended sessions where activities included messy play and art and crafts. The children attending the sessions were usually under the age of 12 years, there is difficulty attracting the adolescent age groups and additional thought is needed on how best to engage with them and to provide activities for them.
77. The evaluation of the holiday provision for 2015 suggested that general leafleting had not been as successful as hoped and for future sessions work would be done with local schools and key community members. A major consideration was how accessible the location is to the community and to consider all options and partnerships. To avoid stigma it is important that all are welcome to take part in activities not just those from low income families and to look to the talents and skills of the volunteers and build upon this using an asset based approach.
78. The evaluation indicated that many parents were involved and where there was a lack of volunteers churches had worked together or partners had been approached to fill the gap. The food provided at the sessions varied considerably, from hot meals to packed lunches and barbeques. Funding was accessed from different sources and churches waived hire fees for their buildings. The summer activities developed new relationships and changed mind sets of communities which resulted in other activities being held during the October holidays.
79. For summer 2016 more sessions are planned with activities being held in other communities empowering them to come together and work together to find out what is best for them. This indicates the growing need for such provision in the North East region.
80. There are five recommendations from the evaluation covering the use of an asset based approach; to secure funding on a diocesan scale to enable training such as food hygiene and first aid for community volunteers; produce easy to cook recipes which can be shared; recruit volunteers using a diocesan approach and change terminology to become more holistic by moving away from holiday hunger to holiday provision.

81. At the time of conducting the review Child Poverty North East circulated a letter from the Chair of the Holiday Hunger Task Force advising that they and a range of interested parties were urging organisations to take part in a survey to help map 'Holiday Provision' projects or programmes in the UK. It would help if a mapping exercise of holiday provision could be carried out locally in County Durham to signpost families of holiday activities.

82. Members of the review group advised of activities they knew had taken place in their communities and of communities that would benefit from holiday provision which would suggest that all activities should be mapped in order to know the range of provision available and where it is.

#### **Recommendation Four**

That the Corporate Director of Children & Young People's Services and the Director of Transformation and Partnership ensure all information appertaining to community projects providing holiday provision in County Durham communities are recorded and mapped centrally to ensure joined up working of all services and partners and following the mapping exercise that an electronic guide is produced and shared with schools, AAPs and Councillors.

#### **Area Action Partnership Holiday Schemes**

- **Best practice used by the East Durham Area Action Partnership should be promoted and shared throughout all County Durham Area Action Partnerships.**

83. The rationale for a Holiday Hunger Programme was evidence based and shaped from research carried out for the East Durham Food Strategy (2014).

84. The Evidence from East Durham Area Action Partnership (AAP) provided details of projects which have received funding from the AAP in 2015-2016 and how many children from the area had benefitted from the sessions. The table below indicates how funding was distributed to community groups within the East Durham AAP area to deliver holiday provision. The AAP held two rounds of funding; one in advance of the summer holiday and one in September. The AAP is not prescriptive in relation to activities and invited applicants to detail how they would address holiday hunger in their area, therefore there is a very wide range of activities at very different levels.

Applicant	Name of project	Round	Grant	Total Value	Children	Completing
Blackhall Community Centre	Holiday Hunger	1	£2,580	£3,020	23	Summer 15
Dawdon Youth and	Families R Fun	1	£2,990	£3,190	150	July 16

Community Centre						
Deneside Action Group	Holidays at Home	1	£2,245	£6,505	168	June 16
Glebe Centre	The Glebe Centre Activities Programme	1	£2,500	£4,500	59	Summer 15
Groundwork NE	Reconnect Summer Programme	1	£750	£3,000	169	Summer 15
Macrae House	Spring and Summer	1	£1,960	£2,260	236	June 16
Peterlee One Point	Summer Activities	1	£1,347	£1,347	95	Summer 15
Robin Todd Centre	6 week holidays	1	£2,500	£3,500	190	Summer 15
Roseby Road Wellbeing Centre	Holiday Provision	1	£2,055	£6,105	50	Easter 16
Shotton Community Centre	Holiday Hunger Activities	1	£3,000	£3,977	75	Easter 16
Thornley Village Hall	Summer Holiday Multi Sports Scheme	1	£1,330	£1,330	28	Summer 15
Wingate Family Centre	Holiday Play Rangers	1	£788	£1,790	68	Easter 16
Easington Regeneration Partnership	Easington Activity Programme	2	£490	£670	98	June 16
Parkside Community Centre	Healthy Challenge	2	£2,288	£2,288	78	June 16
Horden YCC	Bitesize Fun	2	£2,970	£2,970	30	June 16
Wingate CA	Half term Activities	2	£750	£750	36	October 15
Groundwork	Active Play	2	£2,250	£5,887.50		Easter 16
Eastlea	Halloween Holistic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Xmas Extra</li> <li>• FAB Feb</li> <li>• Easter Extravaganza</li> <li>• Whit, where, when and why</li> <li>• Summertime Summative</li> </ul>	2	£2,530	£3,000	513	June 16
St. Saviour's Church	Half Term Fun Day	2	£250	£300	34	October 15
Robin Todd Centre	Holiday Provision	2	£500	£500	72	June 16

Totals		£36073	£56,889.50	2172	
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Source: **East Durham AAP Children and Young People's Holiday Activity Fund Addressing Holiday Hunger Evaluation Report, July 2016**

85. The Holiday Programme had received funding via Public Health and Area Budget to ensure nutritious food was available to children using the Holiday Programme schemes. Applicants were required to confirm their commitment to delivering healthy, nutritious meals in the application process. The meals provided were dependant on the facilities available; most of the centre based activities programmes had access to kitchens and provided hot meals, off site activities offered picnics and cold food selections. Some organisations were able to provide a programme of activities for the full summer holiday period while others offered activity programmes to reflect their volunteer capacity.



Programme of Free Summer Activities Summer 2016 in Wheatley Hill area within East Durham AAP more information can be found at

<https://www.facebook.com/114170131990391/photos/a.157246721016065.40365.114170131990391/1131624576911603/?type=3&theater>

86. East Durham AAP provided funding of £36,073 (Area Budget and Public Health) which supported community organisations and enabled delivery of a programme worth £56,889.50. In Peterlee area there were no third sector facilities available to provide holiday provision so permission was obtained to work with the One Point Service (OPS). This was beneficial to both parties as holiday provision was made available to those who needed it and the OPS were able engage with families who had previously proven hard to engage. The numbers of children and parents were greater than first anticipated and the venue was changed to accommodate the increased participants.

87. The Principal Coordinator for East Durham AAP advised that a pilot exercise to use a school during the holiday period with Seascope Primary School at Peterlee had been carried out over the Spring Half Term. This had been a success and had been well attended. It is hoped that it will be extended to all Peterlee primary schools during the summer.

88. The programme delivered a wide range of activities available for all ages. For example children attending a holiday provision in Seaham and Blackhall had been utilising the Durham coast as a resource for leisure, activities and learning. The Seaham and Blackhall groups were involved in collecting sea

glass with a local artist who created an installation that was exhibited at Lumiere in November 2015. 'The Wave' is a sculpture made entirely from the sea glass washed ashore on the Durham Coast and featured on the One Show and local TV news stations. The children who were involved in collecting the sea glass were taken to Lumiere to see the exhibit and were very proud of their involvement.

89. The AAP Principal Co-ordinator advised that the evaluations of earlier projects were brought together into a final report with recommendations. These draft recommendations have helped to shape the delivery of the summer 2016 programme. The recommendations include:

- that delivery should be targeted to the summer holiday period,
- that grant criteria and guidelines include nutritional healthy food and drink,
- in considering value for money the recommendations suggest that the two cost areas for activities and food should be separated when monitoring and evaluating future projects,
- changing the name from Addressing Holiday Hunger to Summer Activity Programme in order to remove stigma.

In addressing the impact on food poverty during the school holidays the report suggests considering longer delivery periods such as more days of activities in a week or operating in more weeks of the summer break to ensure those in most need have access to food throughout the summer period.



Children in East Durham AAP area enjoying kite making and flying activities. Source: East Durham AAP Facebook page

90. Evidence indicates that more food parcels are given out by foodbanks to families over the summer and during January than other times of year. This supports the information from the AAP Priority Group that parents face the greatest need during these times. The East Durham AAP also helps community organisations to acquire funding from various sources; delivery is planned on a multiagency basis which is tailored to the community and driven by the community.

91. Mid Durham AAP will introduce sessions during summers 2016/2017 which will include environmental and sports activities. Every child attending the sessions will receive a bottle of water and a piece of fruit and it is expected that approximately 800 children will attend in each year.

## **Recommendation Five**

The Director of Transformation and Partnerships explore additional external funding opportunities for areas that experience levels of child poverty and holiday provision issues similar to those in East Durham and ensure that the model of best practice used by East Durham Area Action Partnership to help communities deliver holiday provision is promoted with other Area Action Partnerships.

## APPENDIX ONE

### National Context

The following government policy and research information was considered as part of the national context of the review.

- Pupil Premium Funding <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings>
- Universal Free School Meals [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/408015/Archived-Universal\\_infant\\_free\\_school\\_meals\\_departmental\\_advice\\_30092014.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/408015/Archived-Universal_infant_free_school_meals_departmental_advice_30092014.pdf)
- State of the Nation 2015 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/485926/State\\_of\\_the\\_nation\\_2015\\_social\\_mobility\\_and\\_child\\_poverty\\_in\\_Great\\_Britain.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/485926/State_of_the_nation_2015_social_mobility_and_child_poverty_in_Great_Britain.pdf)
- Feeding Britain <https://feedingbritain.com/>
- A Route Map to Ending Hunger <http://www.frankfield.co.uk/upload/docs/A%20routemap%20to%20ending%20hunger%20as%20we%20know%20it%20in%20the%20United%20Kingdom%20-%20Feeding%20Britain%20in%202015-16.pdf>
- Britain's not so Hidden Hunger <http://www.frankfield.com/upload/docs/Britain's%20not-so-hidden%20hunger.pdf>
- Isolation and Hunger [https://www.makelunch.org.uk/downloads/Isolation\\_and\\_Hunger.pdf](https://www.makelunch.org.uk/downloads/Isolation_and_Hunger.pdf)
- School Food Standards [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/537625/20141209-School\\_food\\_in\\_England-July2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/537625/20141209-School_food_in_England-July2016.pdf)
- Children's Food Trust <http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/>
- School Meals – Healthy Eating Standards <https://www.gov.uk/school-meals-healthy-eating-standards>
- School Lunch Take Up Survey 2014 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/395189/RR405\\_-\\_School\\_Lunch\\_Take-up\\_Survey\\_2013\\_to\\_2014.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/395189/RR405_-_School_Lunch_Take-up_Survey_2013_to_2014.pdf)
- Child Poverty Action <http://www.cpag.org.uk/>
- Holiday Hunger Report <http://apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/members-area/briefings/2015/15-41-holiday-hunger/>
- Filling the Holiday Gap [http://www.fillingtheholidaygap.org/APPG\\_Holiday\\_Hunger\\_Report\\_2015.pdf](http://www.fillingtheholidaygap.org/APPG_Holiday_Hunger_Report_2015.pdf)

### National policy drivers

1. There is a plethora of legislation, policy, guidance and research that addresses aspects of this review. Over the last ten years there has been a significant change in policy that has led to vast improvements in the quality of food provided in schools that arguably increase educational attainment levels and improve health and wellbeing. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission state clearly in their State of the Nation 2015 report that 'a country that is the fifth richest in the world should not have 2.3 million children officially classified as poor and argues that a more rounded way of measuring poverty is sensible. The life chances of children, the poorest especially, depend on many things including good parenting, childcare, education and employment. For that reason it is right to want to measure worklessness and educational attainment as part of its new focus on improving life chances. But it is not credible to try to improve the life chances of

the poor without acknowledging the most obvious symptom of poverty, lack of money'.<sup>8</sup>

2. The School Meals – Healthy Eating Standards, the School Food Standards and the Children's Food Trust have helped to raise standards of what children eat at school. In 2006 following a campaign by Chef Jamie Oliver the then government introduced strict standards for school food which did much to improve the food provided in state maintained schools. In 2010 the coalition government agreed that academies did not have to comply with these standards and asked for a new set of school food standards to be introduced to make it easier for school cooks to create imaginative, flexible and nutritious school meals. These standards were introduced in 2014. While academies created between 2010 and 2014 do not have to comply with these standards some of the larger academy chains have signed up to them.
3. In July 2013 the School Food Plan was published which provided a wide range of steps for schools to increase the take up of school meals by providing a nutritious and well balanced meal at a reasonable cost. The School Food Plan also makes other suggestions such as teaching cookery as part of the curriculum in schools; making the experience of staying at school for lunch an enjoyable one; involving parents and making school food more sustainable.
4. Pupil Premium Grant<sup>9</sup> (PPG) has enabled schools to raise educational attainment levels from reception class to year eleven. From April 2012 PPG was extended to children eligible for free school meals or who had been eligible at any point in the last six years. PPG is paid directly to schools as they are best places to assess what additional provision is needed by their pupils. Schools are obliged to publish how they have used their PPG.
5. A report<sup>10</sup> produced by the Department for Education indicates that there is a wide variation in entitlement and registration between regions. The South East has the highest under-registration rate, with nearly one quarter of those entitled not claiming. This compares to only 2% in the North East.
6. A survey<sup>11</sup> conducted in 2013/14 prior to the start of universal infant free school meals policy was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to inform policy. Previous surveys had been carried out by the School Food Trust (now the Children's Food Trust) and the Local Authority Catering Association with the last survey carried out in 2010/11. The survey indicated that take up of school meals was highest in the North West (51.7%), North East (51.6%) and London (47.9%) in

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[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/485926/State\\_of\\_the\\_nation\\_2015\\_social\\_mobility\\_and\\_child\\_poverty\\_in\\_Great\\_Britain.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/485926/State_of_the_nation_2015_social_mobility_and_child_poverty_in_Great_Britain.pdf) as accessed May 2016.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-2015-to-2016-allocations/pupil-premium-2015-to-2016-conditions-of-grant>

<sup>10</sup> Pupils Not Taking Free School Meals, Iniesta-Martinez & Evans, 2012, DfE

<sup>11</sup> School Lunch Take up Survey 2013 to 2014, Department for Education 2015

relation to the take up of free school meals the highest was North West (81.5%), East Midlands (79.3%) and London (78.1%) the North East was fourth with a take up of 75.4%. The survey indicated that take up of free school meals was higher than the take up of paid lunches. Data from the survey indicates that nationally 75.1 per cent of eligible pupils took free school meals compared to 35.5 per cent of paid lunches.

7. The department for Education has released information relating to national take up figures of free school meals that indicates that the number of pupils eligible and taking a free school meal has continued to fall.

### **Reviews by other local authorities**

8. There have been several reviews carried out by other local authorities that focus on free school meals.
  - York City Council carried out a review of school meals in 2013 and recommended that the school meal service and benefits service teams work closely to identify eligible families; explore if the authority can act as broker/facilitator of innovative arrangements between those schools not in York's local authority contract; and to encourage schools to be more flexible in when and how parents can pay for school meals.
  - In April 2014 St. Helens Council carried out a review of school breakfast provision which touched on children who are hungry and poor but are not eligible for free school meals. One of the review's recommendations requested that vulnerable pupils should be identified by schools including those on FSM as a priority to ensure they do not start the day hungry. It should be noted that most schools in the St Helens area do provide some kind of breakfast provision.
  - Sunderland City Council did a review – Tackling Child Poverty in Sunderland in 2015. The aim of the review was to raise awareness of child poverty and investigate the robustness of the local approach to the reduction of child poverty. The review focused on early years and made five recommendations that included the continuation of the Child Poverty Needs Assessment; maximise the take up of entitlements of free nursery provision; options for disadvantaged children to access nutritious meals over school holiday periods; key worker approach to ensure families have one key worker to give a consistent approach and locally based services are available to parents.

### **Foodbanks – national picture**

9. The Northern Housing Consortium's Food Poverty briefing highlights, 'research states that children living in poverty dropped further behind their better-off peers when schools closed and they had no access to free school meals, and they were often physically and mentally unprepared for learning when they returned.'<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Northern Housing Consortium, Food Poverty School Holidays and the Wider Impact, Feb 2015

10. The use of foodbanks in County Durham has increased from relatively low use in October 2011 and has rapidly increased in the numbers using them and the geographical areas covered. Foodbanks currently provide three days of food to approximately 1300 people per month in County Durham. They distribute over eight tonnes of food each month to over 27 locations all of which is kindly donated by people of County Durham and businesses.
11. Volunteers at Durham Foodbank don't just help to fill a bag with food they listen to the person's story and offer help where they can or signpost to an organisation that can give assistance to help resolve a crisis.