
To: ENVIRONMENT POLICY BOARD

On: 18 MAY 2016

Report by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

**Heading: IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL MEALS FOR P1-P3
YEAR ONE UPDATE**

1. Summary

- 1.1 Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Legislation was extended by the Scottish Government in January 2015 to provide a free school lunch for every P1-3 child in Scotland. This was described by the Government as “an investment in our nation’s future” in order to make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of our children and our communities as a whole.
 - 1.2 The Scottish Government provided additional revenue funding of £1.8m, supported by capital funding of £450k in order to make significant changes to kitchens and dining areas and purchase additional equipment in order to deliver this enhanced service.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Environment Policy Board notes the progress made in the implementation of Universal Free School Meals since January 2015 and the ongoing work in promoting uptake, particularly in schools with lower uptake figures.
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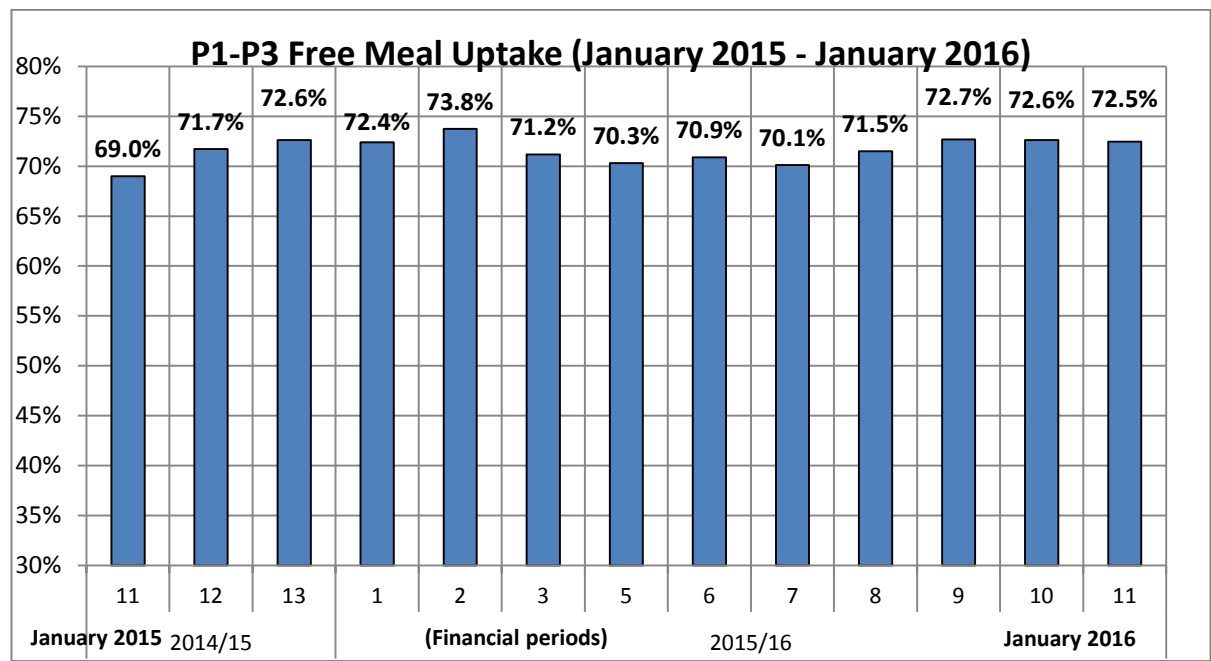
3. Background

- 3.1 During the first year of implementation of Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) for P1-3, the Council completed the roll out of the new 'Grab and Go' style menu across all primary schools. This menu is offered three days per week and allows the child to collect their lunch bag and have the option of eating in the school dining room or playing outside in the playground. On the other two days per week a traditional 'Dine in Day' menu is provided.
- 3.2 All school meals comply with the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 and the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drinks in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2008 to ensure that local authorities provide children and young people with a healthy, nutritional meal.
- 3.3 The change in style of menu and the introduction of UFSM for P1-3 has resulted in the following:
- Significant capital investment (£450k) in school kitchen and dining facilities including refurbishment works, additional space and new equipment;
 - Increased staff numbers to deliver the increased uptake in free school meals;
 - Consultation with pupils regarding modernising the school meals service, where the majority of pupils reported back that they wanted the opportunity to be able to socialise with their friends in or outside the school and have time to play;
 - Pupils were involved in the design of the menus and choices available and taster sessions held and continue to be held at parents nights;
 - P1 induction includes school lunch with parent and pupil participation;
 - Grab & Go has reduced the service time in all primary schools, accommodating multipurpose dining halls, providing a more efficient service and allowing the children more time to play;
 - Increased uptake of healthier side dishes through pupil choice;
 - Grab & Go is packaged with fully recyclable products; and
 - Recycle bins have been provided to schools with support from the waste strategy team.
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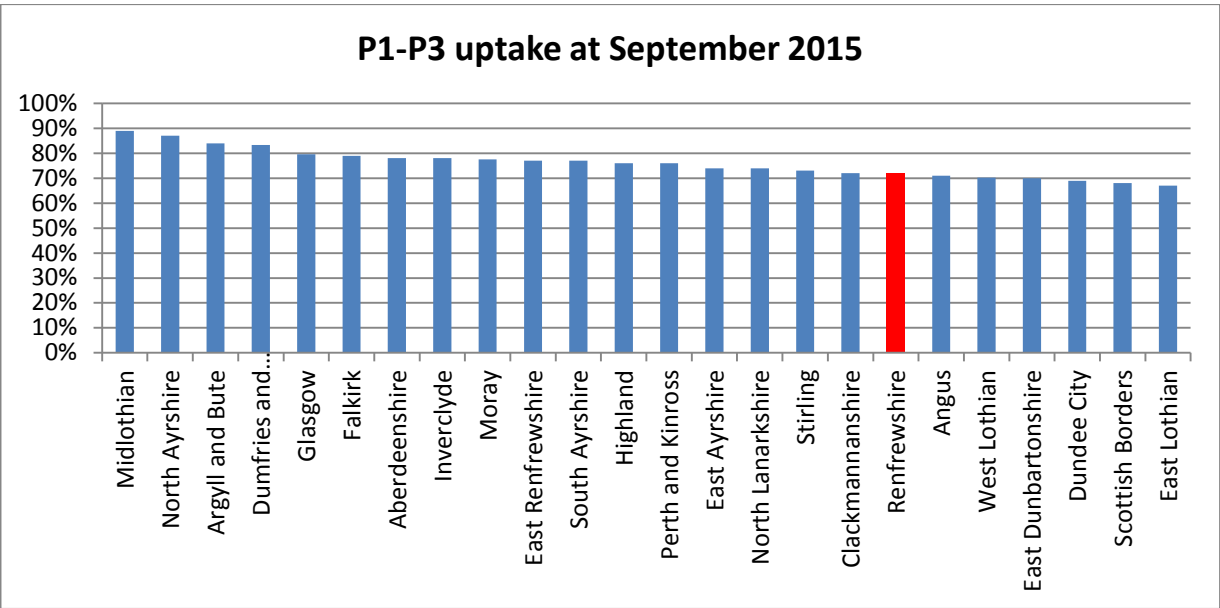
4. Uptake of P1-P3 Free School Meals

- 4.1 In the months prior to commencement of the P1-3 free schools meals policy, uptake in Renfrewshire Council in primary schools (P1-P7) was recorded as 73% on average across the primary school estate. Separate data as specific to P1 to P3 uptake was not available at that time. However, the chart below shows the average P1-P3

uptake of the policy over the first full year of implementation (January 2015 to January 2016) as 72%. This increase in uptake of free school meals in P1-P3 equates to an additional 2,100 school meals served every day. The overall free school meal uptake for primary schools (P1-P7) reflecting in 2015/16 and average of 73%.



4.2 During September 2015, Scottish Councils’ carried out an informal data collection exercise to determine uptake of the policy to date. Twenty four Councils’ participated and the chart below shows uptake at that point in time with the average around 75% and a high of 89% in Midlothian and a low of 67% in East Lothian. Renfrewshire Council's average uptake was 72%.



5. **Process Evaluation of Implementation – NHS Health Scotland**

5.1 In March 2016, NHS Health Scotland published a process evaluation of the implementation of Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) for P1 to P3. The evaluation involved research with parents, pupils and local authorities and aimed to identify barriers and facilitators to implementation of the policy, the impact of implementation and areas to promote and sustain uptake. The findings can be summarised as follows:

5.2 Implementation of UFSM

- Local authorities and schools reported that implementation has been successful and relatively straightforward. Factors that helped implementation included: planning time, an individual schools approach and collaboration between education and catering staff;
- However, one year after implementation some challenges remain. Having enough kitchen and dining hall staff to meet the increased demand for school meals continues to challenge many local authorities;
- Parents and staff also expressed concern that dining halls could be crowded, noisy and particularly intimidating for young people and the policy may have exacerbated these problems. All parties hoped the lunchtime experience would be a positive, supportive and social experience and further action is required to ensure that was the case;
- Local authorities were now turning their attention to increasing the uptake of the policy, however the research highlighted a lack of evidence of routine monitoring of uptake or investigation of the barriers to increasing uptake.

5.3 Factors that influence uptake of UFSM

- Knowledge of UFSM policy among parents was found to be an important factor in increasing uptake. Increasing parental knowledge, including providing information in other languages has been shown to gradually increase uptake;
- Parents' perceptions of the school meal service can also influence decisions on taking UFSM both positively and negatively. Schools and parents both reported that taster sessions had had a positive impact on parents' views of school meals and had also helped to encourage children to try school meals;

- Variation of the school meal menu over the course of the week was also found to vary uptake of UFSM due to the popularity or otherwise of particular items.

5.4 Impact of UFSM

- Research participants from both schools and local authorities reported that UFSM had led to increased uptake of free school meals among P1 – P3 children. However these varied between school and tended to be lower in urban schools with large rolls dining capacity issues;
- All of the parents welcomed the financial benefits that UFSM provided them, particularly those who weren't previously entitled to free school meals. Many of the parents interviewed were worried about the impact on low income families who are no longer entitled to free school meals when their children move to P4;
- All of those interviewed recognised that school meals were often healthier than home packed lunches and felt that UFSM meant that children benefitted nutritionally;
- Further positive and negative unintended impacts:
 - Dining rooms often noisy and crowded
 - Children having sufficient time to eat and play at lunchtime
 - Investment had improved the dining and catering facilities

5.5 Actions to improve implementation and uptake of UFSM

The research identified nine action areas to further promote and sustain uptake of UFSM. Set out below is a summary of the nine action areas, with Renfrewshire actions and progress to date.

1. Communication – Communicate the rationale for the policy to staff and parents, including the reason for targeting P1-3s and the expected benefits;
 - *Leaflets providing information to parents on UFSM have been distributed to P1-P3 parents in Renfrewshire*
2. Improving the dining environment – review the dining hall experience in each school to address any concerns around the impact of increased uptake of meals;
 - *Capital works to improve the dining room environment and purchase of new furniture, tableware and crockery have improved the aesthetics within the dining rooms*

3. Engaging parents and children – taster sessions for parents and children have been shown to increase UFSM uptake;
 - *Parents have been invited to trial a school meal along with their children at induction days and taster sessions have been undertaken at parents' evenings*
4. Staffing – ensure sufficient, trained supervisory staff are available to encourage children to make healthy choices and try new foods;
 - *Staff have been fully trained and spend time encouraging the children to try new foods*
5. Targeted support – local authorities and the Scottish Government could offer support for schools to raise awareness of the policy among parents with English as a second language;
 - *Demonstrations have taken place at parents' nights where an interpreter was involved to provide parents with English as a second language with all necessary details*
6. Menu development – local authorities should consider establishing or enhancing systems for parents and children to feed back on menu choices and to encourage more reflective approaches to menu development:
 - *Workshops have taken place involving parents and children to establish meal preferences for inclusion in the menus*
7. Partnership working – local authorities should facilitate partnership working between education and catering staff to encourage greater integration of catering and food choices into wider school life;
 - *Strong links have been established between facilities management staff and staff within schools. Regular liaison also takes place with management in Children's Services*
8. Monitoring long term uptake of UFSM – the Scottish Government should consider better ways of monitoring and evaluating the impact of UFSM in the longer term;
 - *Procedures are now in place to monitor uptake and understand trends and preferences within the menus*
9. Monitoring uptake data – routine analysis of UFSM at a local level would encourage exploration of barriers to increasing uptake and help identify schools that may require support.
 - *Regular monitoring takes place in terms of both qualitative and quantitative data from children and parents*

- 5.6 As set out above, the Council has already progressed the uptake of Universal Free School Meals (P1-P3) within the areas identified by NHS Health Scotland for future action, but will continue this work to further improve the experience for the children and young people, whilst continuing to increase uptake. The work will also impact on free school meal uptake across the primary school estate, particularly as the Universal Free School Meals P1-P3 progress into the later primary years.
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6. Strategic Priorities

- 6.1 Renfrewshire's Community Plan and the Renfrewshire Council Plan *A Better Future, A Better Council*, outlines our commitment to improving health and well being, reducing the level and impact of poverty and raising educational attainment and our approach to food and healthy eating is a common thread across these priorities.
- 6.2 The Council has made a significant investment in the Families First programme and the Tackling Poverty initiative. Healthy, hot lunches continue to be provided during school holiday periods as part of this programme. In addition, breakfast clubs are being piloted in a number of primary schools to ensure children have access to a healthy breakfast, as well as healthy eating advice. Research has shown that a healthy breakfast can improve concentration and behaviour in children and initial feedback on the pilot from children, staff and parents has been positive in this regard.
- 6.3 Hot food and healthy eating advice is also being provided as part of the expanded StreetStuff programme of activities delivering a youth engagement programme and interacting with children and young people in their own communities.
- 6.4 To meet the Council's strategic priorities healthy, hot food as well as advice on healthy eating is now provided to those that need it all year round and beyond the lunch time service into breakfast and evening provision.

7. UFSM, Continued Development

- 7.1 Since implementation of the policy in January 2015, uptake data has been collated at a school level to provide analysis of performance across all primary schools. This has enabled us to target schools where uptake is lower than expected and share ideas and suggestions for improvement.
- 7.2 Whilst the overall free school meal uptake (P1-P3) is being sustained at an average of 73%, the data analysis of UFSM P1-P3 is reflecting an increase within this average, with P4-P7 slightly decreased. This was anticipated as a potential impact of UFSM P1-P3 due to the increase in numbers using the dining facilities.

However, it is envisaged that by changing the habits and culture of P1-3 pupils at an early stage, we will start to see a change in uptake as pupils move from P3 into P4

and beyond.

- 7.3 The Renfrewshire Council experience is very similar to that presented in the Health Scotland process evaluation. The biggest challenge in uptake of UFSM is in those schools with large rolls and limited dining room capacity, which makes delivery of the policy logistically difficult.
 - 7.4 Dedicated resource has been committed to the development of UFSM and taking forward the Tackling Poverty initiatives within the service. This will include work to increase the uptake of school meals, expanding the pilot breakfast club programme and the further promotion of healthy eating and healthy lifestyles.
 - 7.5 The Scottish Government *Better Eating Better Learning* guidance is also being implemented to make further improvements in school food and food education, as well as the NHS *Setting the Table* guidance to improve nursery food provision.
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Implications of the Report

- 1. **Financial** – As detailed in section 1.2 of this report.
- 2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None.
- 3. **Community Planning**
 - Children and Young People** – The delivery of our healthy school meal service helps children have the best start in life and supports the link between nutrition and educational attainment.
 - Greener** – The catering service minimises food waste to help reduce the environmental impact of food waste disposal.
 - Jobs and the Economy** – the service actively participates in Invest in Renfrewshire and Project Search.
 - Safer and Stronger** - safe working practices are in place for the delivery of our services. The catering service food safety management system within our secondary schools is ISO 22000:2005 registered.
- 4. **Legal** – None.
- 5. **Property/Assets** – None.
- 6. **Information Technology** – None.
- 7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals'

human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

- 8. **Health & Safety** – None
- 9. **Procurement** – None
- 10. **Risk** – None
- 11. **Privacy Impact** – None

List of Background Papers:

Process evaluation of the implementation of universal free school meals (UFSM) for P1 to P3: Research with schools and local authorities, Health Scotland, March 2016

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