

**Report to:** Communities Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 14<sup>th</sup> March 2019

**Lead Members/Officers:** Lead Member for Finance, Performance & Strategic Assets and Lead Member for Education, Children & Young People/Principal Manager Modernising Education & Lead Officer: Facilities, Assets & Housing

**Report Authors:** Principal Manager Modernising Education & Lead Officer: Facilities, Assets & Housing

**Title:** School Meal Debt Policy

**1. What is the report about?**

A re-drafted Corporate School Meal Debt Policy.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

To seek Scrutiny to examine the revised School Meal Debt Policy, which has been re-drafted in light of the recent high profile/national press coverage, and to incorporate tighter Safeguarding measures.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

That the Committee:

- 3.1 examines the revised School Meal Debt Policy and comments on it accordingly; and
- 3.2 subject to the above, recommends to the decision maker that the policy be approved and adopted.

**4. Report details**

- 4.1 The School Meal Debt Policy has been re-drafted in light of the recent high profile Press coverage, both nationally and locally. Particular reference has been made to Corporate Safeguarding procedures which have been incorporated into the attached policy (Appendix 1), as well as tighter procedures regarding non-payment of School Meal debts, and the support which can be provided by the Authority in relation to School Meal debts, across all Schools within the Authority.
- 4.2 The main changes that have been incorporated into this Policy are:
  - the overarching Safeguarding requirement for all staff, (at all levels) to consider when any potential Safeguarding issue arises;
  - the importance of claiming Free School Meal allowance (for those that are entitled);

- the support that is provided for those families/guardians, to ensure that no child is deprived of their school meal; and
- the requirement for all School Staff and Pupils to pay in advance for school meals consumed, thus avoiding any level of school meal debt to both families/guardians and School Staff.

**5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

The Policy will help to support those families who may be struggling financially with the Payment of School meals, but also with regards to extra Safeguarding measures for potential vulnerable children, in line with the Young People and Resilient Communities corporate priorities, in so much that both the Schools' Administration and the School Catering Service have a workable School Meal Debt policy to help deliver a sustainable School Meal service, and support those families/guardians who require support accordingly.

**6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

No extra costs to the authority are envisaged.

**7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

Not applicable.

**8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

Extensive consultation with Head Teachers, Children's & Educational Services have been completed in preparing the policy.

**9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

It is clear that finance should not be the primary driver behind the change in policy, with a correct emphasis on safeguarding and fairness. However it needs to be noted that the financial implications in this area are complicated. An increase in Free School Meals take up has a direct pressure on the Free School Meals budget, however it also used as a driver behind a number of grant allocations from the Pupil Development Grant to elements of the Revenue Support Grant. It is also welcomed that there is a requirement for all School Staff and Pupils to pay in advance for school meals consumed, thus avoiding any level of school meal debt to both families/guardians and School Staff

**10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

The existing risks are centred around potential Safeguarding issues, and the potential increase of the School Meal Debt, currently at £20K. This policy will assist in the overall management of the School Meal Debt, and assist both the School Catering Service and Schools alike in the administration of this ongoing debt to the authority.

## **11. Power to make the Decision**

Scrutiny's powers in relation to policy making and review is outlined in Section 7.4.2 of the Council's Constitution.

### **Contact Officer(s):**

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