

deficit is putting the service in serious jeopardy. As well as income losses, the service has funded an additional £92,000 pay rise in this financial year. The service continues to support the commitment to award The Living Wage in line with the council.

- 1.5 The outcome of the meeting was to support the original proposal that academies should transfer their funding over to the School Meals Service at the start of the academic year to support the service to operate. It was felt to be unfair and inequitable that maintained schools were providing the majority of financial support to the service as all their FSM funding goes direct to the service. Feedback was that maintained schools were not prepared to continue to provide the bulk of the funding for the service for the benefit of all schools and that academies should show their commitment to the 'family of schools' by transferring their funding.
- 1.6 The School Meals Headteacher Group wanted it to be noted that the central school meals management team have made savings this academic year by not replacing an Area Account Manager who retired in October. This has led to additional workloads for the rest of the team. The service has already reduced school kitchen staff and will have to do this again towards the end of this academic year (based on the service efficiency calculation approved by trade unions).
- 1.7 As a result of the meeting, academy CEOs were again contacted to request the transfer of their free school meals funding from the start of the first lockdown until July 2020 to help to offset the service's ongoing losses due to Covid-19 (see Appendix 1 for email to CEOs). This contained a breakdown of free school meal funding we believe had been awarded to each academy within the trust for this period based on:

- The October 2019 and January 2020 census figures divided by 2 which is used by the DfE to calculate the FSM funding.
- The amount of term time days from lockdown on 23rd March until school closed in July.

The following formula was then applied:

- Amount of children funded from census figures x days school open x £2.30 (the amount schools receive per child per school day for FSM)
- This was calculated for both FSM and UIFSM.

- 1.8 The figures were aimed as a starting point for discussion and were calculated using the method to determine free school meals funding:

Free School Meals are funded at £2.30 for each meal on the basis of 190 school meals over an academic year, providing £437 per eligible pupil. The amounts drawn down are based on the numbers of children who are eligible and take a meal. The funding allocations are determined from the school census in October and January.

- 1.9 All academy trusts responded positively and requested further information relating to how the calculations had been made. Work is ongoing to ensure that the School Meals Service has used the correct figures in the calculations (e.g. at the time of writing this report, we are working with TCAT to double check our calculations to ensure that lagged funding has been taken into account).
- 1.10 All of the trusts have committed to supporting the service and discussions are ongoing. To date, TCAT are the only academy trust to state an amount to be transferred to the service.
- 1.11 All schools and academies were instructed by the DfE during the lockdown to make sure that they paid all suppliers as they would have budgeted for this and already received government funding.
- 1.12 The additional Covid-19 funding has now been awarded to schools so all schools should have been reimbursed for providing food vouchers prior to the introduction of Edenred.
- 1.13 Additionally, as agreed at the start of lockdown, the service did not charge for paid meals that were taken by children in school or any meals taken during school holidays when many schools stayed open. The service have not asked for this to be reimbursed from any schools or academies.
- 1.14 The service has continued to operate throughout lockdown. This has not been the case in all local authority areas where some private sector catering services have not been able to provide the same commitment as local authority services, for instance:

“X furloughed all catering employees and the majority of their management team from the onset of lockdown, consequently leaving schools with no ongoing provision. Food parcels were introduced however, these were reportedly poor. Additionally, X charged schools for lost FSM/UIFSM sales from April-July (whilst staff remained on furlough) which one school refused to pay – it seemed clear they were trying to duplicate claim benefit which was contradictory to both pieces of guidance.”

“Y appear to have followed a similar process of furlough, charging for FSM/UIFSM and reducing hours... their communication with schools and their staff has been shocking. In June Y furloughed all their staff... and ... didn't provide any meals to some schools, Head Teachers had to tell all parents that pupils should take in a packed lunch. Y have asked staff to have a pay cut in order to keep their jobs – they also haven't asked all staff to isolate where there is a positive case which is worrying.”

“Z abandoned their schools and didn't contact them at all during the first lockdown.”

- 1.15 This illustrates the value that should be placed on the School Meals Service as it has kept children in schools fed throughout the pandemic and has

provided food parcels during the autumn term to children entitled to FSM who have been unable to attend school.

- 1.16 Given the current financial situation, the local authority could be faced with making tough decisions about the future of the service. We have already seen that Manchester City Council's own school meals service has made the decision to cease to be a provider of school meals by 1 September 2021. This could be the outcome for Warrington's service if the financial position is not strengthened by the contribution from academy schools.

2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The proposal being put to Schools Forum remains to seek agreement from academies to transfer all of their free school meal funding allocations (benefits-related and UIFSM) to the School Meals Service each academic year from 1st September 2020.
- 2.2 Based on the numbers of children eligible for free school meals in academies (UIFSM and benefits-related FSM from Yr 3), this would be circa £811,916.00 for the School Meals Service to help to offset the increases in staffing and food costs.
- 2.3 Additionally, all academies transfer their FSM funding for the period from the start of the first lockdown to the end of the academic year (July 2020) using the calculation outlined in point 1.7 (once this has been refined and checked for accuracy).
- 2.4 Based on initial calculations, this could be additional income of circa £390,000.00 for the School Meals Service to help to offset Covid-19 losses.
- 2.5 The service has always been run on a 'family of schools model' and has been as fair and transparent as possible to ensure that all schools – no matter their status – are supported equally.
- 2.6 Additionally, FSM funding is given to schools for the sole purpose of providing meals for children and it would be morally wrong for this to be used in any other way.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Schools Forum is asked to:
- a. Note the proposal outlined in section 2.
 - b. Support the proposal for academies to transfer all of their free school meal funding allocations to the School Meals Service each academic year from 1st September 2020.
 - c. Support the proposal for the transfer of academy FSM funding from the start of the first lockdown until the end of the academic year (July 2020).

Appendix 1 – Email to Academy CEOs, December 2020

Subject: School Meals Service

As an action from the last Schools Forum, we were asked to bring together a meeting of the School Meals Service Headteacher Group and to invite additional colleagues including representatives from our academies. We did this, but unfortunately academy colleagues did not attend. As a result of this meeting, I have again been asked to request support from academies for the service's lost income due to the national lockdown. As mentioned in my previous email, we lost £300,000 income from academies, plus additional income from paid meals from all schools. The service is currently carrying a deficit of £543,000 for this financial year due mainly to lost income.

I had been provided with an approximate amount of funding received by academies for benefits-related FSM and UIFSM in 2019/20 and we worked out the amount of funding that academies received for the number of school days during lockdown. This was shared with the School Meals Service Headteacher Group and they have requested that I share this with you for your Trust as a starting point to discussions.

FSM funding table for each academy trust

Headteachers also stated that additional funding due to Covid has now been awarded to schools so academies should not be out of pocket due to funding food vouchers prior to the introduction of Edenred. Additionally, all schools and academies were instructed by the DfE during the lockdown to make sure that they paid all suppliers as they would have budgeted for this and already received the funding.

The outcome of this request will be included in the next paper due to go to Schools Forum in January, along with the request again for academies to passport all of their FSM funding to the School Meals Service every September, in line with their colleagues in maintained schools. I cannot stress to you how vital it is that we receive your support now. We cannot continue to offer the School Meals Service in its current form without this financial contribution from academies and I urge you to give this commitment. For transparency, I have already started to draft out alternatives to the current service offer which may in time need to be seriously considered by the council.