



FOR PUBLICATION

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – HEALTH

11 December 2023

Report of the Director of Legal Services

School Meals and Children’s Health – Scoping Report

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of a proposed review of the importance of school meals for children’s health. To seek agreement to the review being undertaken and establish a review working group.

2. Information and Analysis

The health and wellbeing of Derbyshire people is a crucial part of the Council Plan and the development of children in a safe and healthy environment is a prime component in ensuring they grow into healthy adults.

The Committee, at its meeting on 25 September, following a request from Cllrs. Allen, Fordham and Ramsay, discussed the impact on children’s health of a recent Cabinet Member decision to increase school meal prices.

The Committee agreed to undertake a review which would further explore the issues discussed to ensure that Derbyshire children are encouraged to eat healthily. A review proposal form was submitted to the Improvement and Scrutiny Officer which has formed the basis of this report.

The review will explore the relevant sections of the National Food Strategy which was published in 2021. The Strategy was commissioned by the Government and a review was conducted by Henry Dimbleby, who had been appointed lead non-executive board member of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in March 2018. Mr Dimbleby also co-

authored the School Food Plan in 2013 which set out actions to transform what children eat in schools and how they learn about food.

During the discussion at the Committee meeting on 25 September, the numbers of children eligible for free school meals was raised and it was noted that some eligible children were not taking up the free school meals opportunity.

Members agreed that this was an important factor in ensuring children had healthy food options and that this was an issue the Committee should explore further.

Therefore, a key element of the review will be to examine the level of take-up of free school meals by Derbyshire children who are eligible, with a view to increasing the number of children who access free school meals.

The review may also consider;

- the Council's procurement procedure and portion control in respect of the delivery of school meals,
- how to best raise awareness of healthy eating and encourage less reliance on ultra-processed foods.
- The Government's policy on free meals eligibility.

To facilitate the review, a working group of Committee Members will be established. Members will be invited to nominate themselves to the working group, subject to the political balance of the Committee.

The working group will seek information from a number of sources and expert witnesses including the Council's Director of Public Health, officers of the Children's Services Department and the School Meals Service. The review process may also involve contributions from service users and the Council's Cabinet Member for Education and the Cabinet Member for Public Health.

As the review continues, reports will be submitted to meetings of the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee – Health to update Members on the progress and direction of the review. Once completed, the review outcomes will be reported to Cabinet with recommendations that any actions to facilitate improvements be agreed by Cabinet.

The implementation of any recommendations accepted by Cabinet will be monitored by an action plan which will identify those who will be responsible for any changes and will set out a timeline for implementation.

After an appropriate time, the Committee may wish to revisit any areas where changes have been recommended, to ascertain the success – or otherwise - of any new arrangements.

An estimated timeframe for the completion of the review is within 6 months, subject to change should additional research and investigation be required.

3. Alternative Options Considered

3.1 None

4. Implications

4.1 Appendix 1 sets out the relevant implications considered in the preparation of the report.

5. Consultation

5.1 Throughout the review process, the working group will engage with service commissioners, providers and users to enable all stakeholders to contribute.

6. Background Papers

6.1 None identified

7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1 – Implications.

8. Recommendation(s)

That the Committee:

- a) Agrees to a review of school meals and children's health, as set out in the report
- b) Establish a review working group of 4 Members from the Majority Group and 1 Member from the Minority Groups to recognise the political balance of the Committee.

9. Reasons for Recommendation(s)

9.1 The Committee is required to agree to the review being undertaken.

9.2 The establishment of a review working group will enable Members to conduct the review within the proposed time frame.

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Implications

Financial

1.1 The review will work to ensure that the take up of free school meals is maximised for eligible children across the county.

Legal

2.1 None

Human Resources

3.1 None

Information Technology

4.1 None

Equalities Impact

5.1 None.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

6.1 n/a

Other (for example, Health and Safety, Environmental Sustainability, Property and Asset Management, Risk Management and Safeguarding)

7.1 n/a