

CYNGOR GWYNEDD CABINET



Report to a meeting of the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

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| Date of meeting: | 20 July 2023 |
| Cabinet Member: | Cllr Beca Brown |
| Contact Officer: | Garem Jackson - Head of Education Department |
| Title of Item: | Payments for families that are eligible for free school meals over the 2023 Summer holidays |

1 THE DECISION SOUGHT

Following the Welsh Government's announcement in a letter dated 28 June 2023 that the 'Free School Meal Holiday Provision' will not be extended to the 2023 Summer holidays, that Cyngor Gwynedd is funding the cost of providing the scheme for families that are eligible for free school meals over the 2023 Summer holidays. It should be emphasised that the decision sought is relevant to this holiday only, and therefore in response to the fact that the decision of the Welsh Government was late in the day and that it is not possible for families to forward plan appropriately as a result.

2 THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

The relevant families in Gwynedd, and indeed across the whole of Wales, are used to budgeting for meals for their children as it has been funded for a while by the Welsh Government. Therefore, the Education Department feels that it would not be appropriate for them to suffer financially without a fair notice and with it being so close to the start of the summer holidays.

3 INTRODUCTION

A holiday provision was introduced to learners who are eligible to receive free school meals during the pandemic as an emergency intervention from the Welsh Government. This plan has continued until the half term of May 2023. Although the Government mentioned in March 2023 that the extension would only continue until the May half term, the final decision was not announced until 29 June 2023 when we received a letter, via e-mail, from the Government's Director of Welsh Language and Education, dated 28 June 2023.

The Education Department has informed parents of the Welsh Government's decision in accordance with the request noted in the letter.

4 THE RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION FOR RECOMMENDING THE DECISION

- Providing free school meals for the primary sector is a priority in the Strategic Plan by the Education Department and we are working to ensure that every primary-aged child is offered a free lunch in our schools by September 2023.
- The scheme to provide payments over the school holidays for families who are eligible for free school meals has been provided by the Education Department since it came into force at the beginning of the pandemic.
- Since April 2020, approximately £3.32m of payments have been made to parents/guardians, and it has been funded by the Welsh Government. This is equivalent to approximately 852,000 days, which include school holiday periods, periods where schools have been closed because of Covid, periods where specific years of the school have been closed because of Covid, and periods where pupils were required to self-isolate.
- By today, approximately 84% of parents/guardians who are eligible to receive free school meals have registered to receive a payment during school holidays.
- The numbers change regularly, but based on the latest figures we have, namely the Whitsun 2023 holidays, a payment of £3.90 per day was made to parents/guardians of approximately 2,700 pupils.
- Therefore, based on the official Summer holidays, as noted on the Council website, namely 21 July - 31 August (30 days), the total cost for the whole period will be approximately £316,000.

6 NEXT STEPS AND TIMETABLE

Subject to the decision of the Cabinet, the Department will proceed to process these payments. With the fact that we are so close to the summer holidays, and that a number of staff who would work on administering this have already arranged their holidays, it should be noted that it cannot be guaranteed that payments can be processed by the early period of the holidays. However, when the administration work has been completed it can be arranged to make any payments that are due retrospectively to the beginning of the holidays.

7 VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

Chief Finance Officer

Officers from the Finance Department have assisted the author of the report with the financial information contained therein and I can confirm its accuracy. I am satisfied it would be possible to fund this arrangement through the use of an earmarked reserve and appropriate arrangements will be made to realise the scheme if that is the decision of Cabinet. Of course, as with any such use, these funds will not then be available for other uses in the future.

Monitoring Officer

Nothing to add from a propriety perspective

