

Children's Food Programmes

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This paper sets out recent publications and recommendations on food poverty and nutrition for disadvantaged children.

Action/s

CYP Board members to review recent recommendations and discuss the LGA's position on children's food programmes.

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Children's Food Programmes

1. Background

1.1 In 2019 the Environment Secretary Michael Gove appointed Henry Dimbleby to conduct a year-long review of the UK's food system and to then set out recommendations within six months of its completion. The intention is that the Government will then publish a multi-disciplinary National Food Strategy (NFS), the first of its kind for 75 years, in the form of a White Paper.

1.2 [Part One of the National Food Strategy](#) (NFS) was published in July. It places a particular emphasis on disadvantaged children.

1.3 Access to affordable, healthy food has been a key issue throughout the pandemic, as has an emphasis on the vital link between diet and health inequalities. The LGA and councils have liaised with the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), The Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Department for Education (DfE) to inform the Government's response, and have been at the forefront of efforts to assist families at risk of food poverty, including through our work on 'reshaping financial support' and support for families entitled to Free School Meals (FSM). We also have a significant programme of work highlighting the key role of councils in reducing health inequalities.

1.4 The Environment Food and Rural Affairs committee conducted an [inquiry into food supply](#) in the context of Covid-19. They published their findings on 30th July. They highlighted the importance of cross-government working on food supply, nutrition and welfare.

1.5 A coalition of organisations, led by The Food Foundation, have come together to campaign for funding for Children's Food Programmes, building on the recommendations in Part One of the NFS, in advance of the Spending Review and Autumn Budget, and beyond.

1.6 The **recommendations** in Part One of the NFS are:

- Expand eligibility for the Free School Meal scheme to include every child (up to the age of 16) from a household where a parent or guardian is in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) or equivalent benefits. Under this recommendation, we estimate an additional 1.5 million 7-16 year olds would benefit from free school meals, taking the total number of children to 2.6 million. This is estimated to cost an additional £670 million a year.

- Extend the Holiday Activity and Food Programme to all areas in England, so that summer holiday support is available to all children in receipt of free school meals. In 2019, this programme reached 50,000 children. Under this recommendation, we estimate an additional 1.1 million children will participate in the programme. This is estimated to cost an additional £200 million a year.
- Increase the value of Healthy Start vouchers to £4.25 per week, and expand the scheme to every pregnant woman and to all households with children under 4 where a parent or guardian is in receipt of UC or equivalent benefits. Under this recommendation, we estimate an additional 290,000 pregnant women and children under the age of 4 will benefit, taking the total number of beneficiaries to 540,000. This is estimated to cost an additional £100 million a year, with a supporting communications campaign costing £5 million.
- Extend the work of the Food to the Vulnerable Ministerial Task Force for a further 12 months up until July 2021. It should collect, assess and monitor data on the number of people suffering from food insecurity at any time, and agree cross-departmental actions, where necessary, to support those who cannot access or afford food.

2. LGA position and key considerations

2.1 The Food Foundation have invited the LGA to join the coalition to support aspects of the campaign that align with LGA asks and priorities. Other organisations include Trussell Trust, FareShare, School Food Matters, Sustain and The Children's Society.

2.2 The LGA's existing position on welfare spending and passported benefits means we are unlikely to support the recommendations in full. However, we may wish to develop our position on children's food in the context of the pandemic, and there are some aspects of the NFS recommendations – for example the extension of the Task Force – which we could potentially support.

2.3 It is an opportunity to highlight the excellent work that councils already do, for example through existing holiday schemes and local welfare support, and to make the case for sustainable funding.

2.4 Some further **key considerations** are set out below:

2.4.1 DfE are transitioning towards a means-test for FSM to address the fact that UC now incorporates a number of in-work benefits, and these may be being received as small top-up on employment income. A means-test is therefore felt to be fairer. DfE have said that more households will be entitled to FSM following the transition to the mean- test than were entitled under the legacy benefits system (although they have declined to share the methodology upon which this assertion is based).

2.4.2 The UC caseload has grown significantly in the context of the pandemic.

- 2.4.3 Pupil Premium is currently linked to FSM. An expansion of FSM entitlement (to all UC claimants) may therefore require a review / de-coupling of Pupil Premium, which would have funding and administrative consequences for schools.
- 2.4.4 Marcus Rashford is continuing to campaign on food poverty with the launch of a 'taskforce', following his public letter to the Prime Minister on holiday school meal vouchers.
- 2.4.5 Many councils have stepped-up their partnership work with food and poverty-prevention charities in the wake of the pandemic and are keen to continue providing support to low income families.
- 2.4.6 There is a clear link with our work on health inequalities and children's health.
- 2.4.7 We are currently delivering a programme of work on 'reshaping financial support' (overseen by the Resources Board) which encompasses work on food poverty. We can therefore align with our existing position on the need to recognise and resource local welfare schemes.
- 2.4.8 The Task Force was a key factor in securing the additional £63m for 'food and other essentials' that was disbursed to councils from Defra in July

3. Implications for Wales

- 3.1. The Welsh Government has a devolved approach to FSM and local welfare funding

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications for the LGA

5. Next steps

- 5.1 We would welcome the views of CYP Board members on children's food programmes and the NFS recommendations, and how the LGA should develop its position.**