

Children's Food and Wellbeing in the Context of the Social and Economic Recovery

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This paper sets out recent updates on food poverty and nutrition for disadvantaged children, including recent government measures and the nationwide roll out of the Holiday Activity and Food programme.

Action/s

CYP Board members to discuss the LGA's current position on children's food and wellbeing programmes and to agree whether this direction remains suitable.

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Background

1. Access to affordable, nutritious food has become a particular priority issue during the course of the pandemic. This has led government to introduce a range of measures including the £63m from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) for councils to help households who were struggling to afford 'food and other essentials', and the Department for Education (DfE) contract to provide vouchers for Free School Meals during the 2020 summer holiday.
2. In November 2020 the government announced that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) would provide councils with £170m Winter Grant.
3. [Part One of the National Food Strategy](#) (NFS), published in July 2020, places a particular emphasis on disadvantaged children.
4. The NFS recommended the government extend the Holiday Activity and Food programme (HAF) to all areas in England, so summer support is available to all children in receipt of Free School Meals. Under this recommendation, it is estimated an additional 1.1 million children will participate in the programme at an estimated cost of £200 million a year.
5. In November 2020 the government announced that DfE would expand HAF across the whole of England for 2021, covering the Easter, summer, and Christmas holidays.
6. Up to £220 million is being made available throughout the year for local authorities to coordinate free holiday provision, including healthy food and enriching activities.
7. The National Food Strategy Part 2 is due to be published in July 2021.

Position of outside organisations

8. A coalition of organisations, led by The Food Foundation, have been frequently meeting to campaign for funding for Children's Food Programmes, building on the recommendations in Part One of the NFS.
9. The LGA was invited and has been consistently participating in these meetings over recent months.
10. Current focus for many authorities is on ensuring a strong HAF over the summer holidays. Due to Covid-19 and the roadmap out of lockdown being announced at the end of February, many are focusing on effective summer provision as Easter activities are being delivered virtually with food hampers or vouchers being provided.

11. There are a minority of councils who are organising some face to face provision for the Easter holidays, and equally there are a minority of councils who are not running HAF at all over Easter, instead focusing on a summer roll out.
12. Following intervention from the LGA, DfE and DWP have now confirmed that the provision of hampers is not mandatory for remote provision during the Easter holidays, and councils can use the arrangements that best suit their local circumstances.
13. DWP have confirmed that there will be an extension and additional £59.1 million provided through a similar mechanism to the Winter Grant, to enable councils to continue providing support to households at risk of food poverty and financial hardship. Many councils will put this towards voucher provision or similar during the Easter holidays, using a similar approach to that used at Christmas and the February half term.

LGA Position and Key considerations.

14. With recent announcements from DfE on summer catch-up programmes, we need to ensure that councils have the freedom and flexibility to ensure that HAF-funded programmes reflect local need and provide the most effective targeted support to children facing the greatest need.
15. A Knowledge Hub group for those working on HAF has been created and is moderated by the LGA, ensuring council officers have a safe space to discuss any concerns about the programme and provide shared support to one another.
16. The LGA's work on child food poverty overlaps with a range of other LGA work and priorities including:
 - 16.1 Children's health and wellbeing including Healthy Start and work on nutrition, health inequalities and childhood obesity
 - 16.2 Support for low-income households at risk of financial hardship and economic vulnerability – reshaping financial support, the benefits system and local welfare schemes
 - 16.3 A focus on preventative services and early intervention in our work on child poverty and vulnerable children
 - 16.4 Climate change, sustainable development and a green recovery
 - 16.5 Community cohesion and community engagement – food as a way of engaging and bringing people together
17. On the 9th February we briefed the LGA Chairman to give evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry on Covid-19 and food supply. The committee's questions centred around food provision for those facing financial hardship and poverty with specific lines of questioning on FSM, food vouchers and food parcels. The Chairman highlighted the need to address the underlying causes of food poverty and the importance of local welfare support.

18. This remains 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.
19. To coincide with the re-launch of the Healthy Start Vouchers in April, Marcus Rashford and his taskforce are to release weekly recipe videos with famous faces promoting uptake of the vouchers. Many supermarkets are also in support of this and have committed to increasing the value of HSV and promoting the recipe cards.
20. Working with the University of Oxford and Sustain, we are planning to hold a roundtable discussion with councils on building resilient food systems and sustainable food places in the early summer.
21. 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.
22. We are currently delivering a programme of work on 'reshaping financial support' (overseen by the Resources Board) which encompasses work on food poverty. The LGA continues to ask for sustainable local welfare funding of at least £250 per annum to enable councils to provide timely preventative and crisis support to low income households alongside the mainstream benefits system.

Implications for Wales

23. The Welsh Government has a devolved approach to HAF and local welfare funding.

Financial Implications

24. There are no financial implications for the LGA.

Next steps

25. We would welcome the views of CYP board members on the updates given in this paper, and to review whether the current LGA direction remains suitable.