



**Report of: Corporate Director for Children, Employment and Skills**

Meeting of:	Date	Ward(s)
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee	10 January 2019	All

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## **SUBJECT: The effectiveness of Islington's Free School Meals policy**

### **1. Synopsis**

- 1.1 It has been 8 years since the council implemented Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) for all primary-aged pupils. This report focuses on how the original aims of the policy have been met which were to:
- to support children's diet;
  - to support children's learning; and
  - to ease the pressure on hard working families.
- 1.2 At the heart of the Council's Corporate Plan is the promotion of fairness for our residents. It is a clear vision to make Islington fairer and create a place where everyone, whatever their background, has the same opportunity to reach their potential and enjoy a good quality of life. Islington's UFSM policy sits at the heart of this aim.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 To consider how Islington's Universal Free School Meals policy can contribute to supporting children and families further and mitigate the emerging reality of food poverty.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 Food poverty and insecurity has become an increasingly urgent reality for many residents and their children. The proportion of children living in challenging financial circumstances is currently estimated to be 38% in Islington. Applied to the population aged 0-15 years, this indicates that Islington has over 14,000 children in Islington living in these circumstances and therefore at high risk of food poverty. The recent Food Poverty Needs Assessment found that financial problems were by far the most common

reason given for food poverty, exacerbated by rises by high non-food bills, particularly energy bills and transport costs.

- 3.2 UFSM is an important service to decrease the risk of food poverty. Therefore, it is important to view Islington's UFSM offer as part of a package of policies designed to support children and families and to deliver on the Council's commitment to our residents with the cost of living (Corporate Plan Priority: Jobs and Money). It has to work in tandem with other local policies designed to reduce or mitigate the impact of these challenges and ensure that all children have the best start in life.

## 4. Islington's Universal Free School Meals Policy

### School meal take-up

- 4.1 Islington's UFSM offer is different to the nationally funded offer. Islington fund UFSM for all nursery classes and Key Stage 2 primary school pupils. Approximately 90% of pupils live and attend a state-funded primary school in Islington. Under the Government's criteria for UFSM implemented in 2014, only children in reception and year 1 and 2 of primary school are entitled to free school meals. This is known as Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM).

As outlined below, Islington currently has positive results for the percentage of children enjoying a healthy free school meal at lunchtime.



**94%** of **infant school children** in Islington enjoy healthy free school meals at lunchtime compared to the London and national averages (89% and 86% respectively).

In September 2018, the average take up of a healthy free school meal at lunchtime for **all primary-aged children** across all primary schools was **84%**.



- 4.2 National research on the pilots for extending free school meals in England and Scotland found that there were significant increases in take-up amongst primary-aged children. This included take-up among those who were previously eligible and also for those who were entitled but not eligible. It could be suggested that by making FSM a universal offer removed the stigma often associated with free school meals which has affected increased take-up.
- 4.3 The percentage of parents registered for free school meals ensures that Islington schools also receive the maximum of funding to support their pupils. Islington's UFSM and resulting high registration rates has enabled additional funding to support pupils in school. By asking every parent to register for Islington's UFSM offer, children were identified who might not have registered but who were eligible for FSM. As a result, the borough has benefitted from an additional £500k pupil premium funding.
- 4.4 The 2018 Camden and Islington Food Poverty Needs Assessment found that some vulnerable groups of children are hidden and at high risk of food poverty such as those with no recourse to public funds. This is described as one of the benefits of Islington's UFSM offer. UFSM means that the children of

asylum seekers can now enjoy a healthy free school meal at lunchtime where previously, because the family had no recourse to public funding, it meant they were not eligible for free school meals.

#### 4.5 **Universal Credit and eligibility for free school meals**

The roll-out of Universal Credit (UC) is expected to be completed by 2022. Before the introduction of UC, children could receive free school meals if their family received benefits such as income support, jobseeker's allowance, employment and support allowance, and child tax credit.

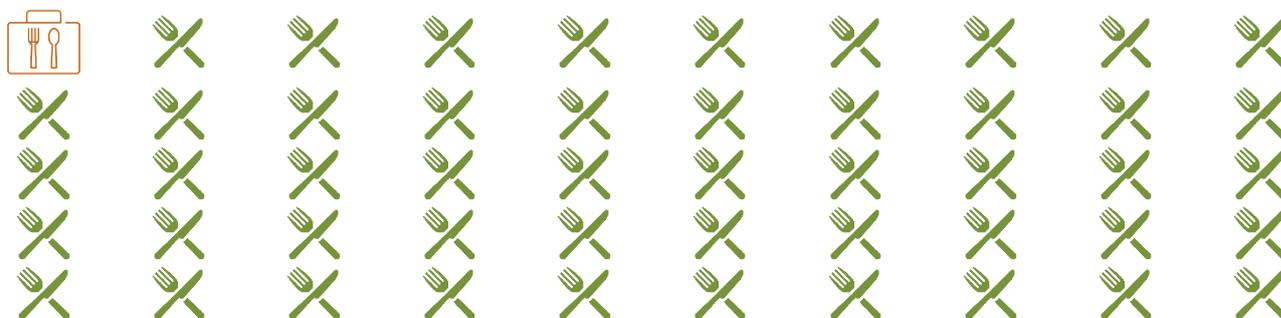
From April, pupils in Year 3 or above and in households receiving Universal Credit will be eligible for free school meals if their family earns below £7,400 per year, before benefits are taken into account. All infant school children will continue to receive free school meals in England. After the roll-out is complete, children who received free school meals during the roll-out will continue to receive them until they move to a new stage of school, such as from primary into secondary school.

#### **Diet and nutrition**

4.6 Good nutrition from an early age is important. As children grow, muscles and bones are being built and the brain is developing. This requires good nutritious food every day.

4.7 Findings from the 2017 Health Related Behaviours Questionnaire in Islington identified that 38% of Year 6 pupils ate at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables on the day before the survey compared with 29% nationally. 6% of primary school pupils said they didn't eat any portions of fruit or vegetables on the day before the survey, compared with 9% nationally.

4.8 As supported by external research, it can be suggested that UFSM has been a catalyst for efforts to improve healthy eating in school. In Islington, a school meal is supposed to provide a third of the nutrient requirement of the day. This means that school meals only make up 17% of the overall diet of a child across the whole school year which makes it challenging to reflect health outcomes related to FSM. However, there is strong evidence that increasing the take up of school meals improves the nutritional balance of food eaten during the day.



**1%** of home prepared food packed lunches meet food based standards compared to **99%** of school meals

4.9 Caterlink is contracted by Camden and Islington Councils to provide school meals. A small number of schools are outside of the contract and have their own arrangements. Appendix 1 details the enhanced food standards for the Camden and Islington schools catering contract. This is higher than the expectations set by the Department for Education. There are notable successes from embedding evidence-based standards for healthy meals provided through the contract. This includes:

- a significant reduction in sugar served in Caterlink school meals
- protein foods that contain good sources of iron. Iron is a common deficiency in children and can impact on brain development, tiredness and willingness to be physically active.

- the inclusion of two cooked vegetable options and 5 vegetable salads and 'nudging' children to select these by, for example, ensuring the salad bar is located before the servery so children help themselves to salad while queuing.

## Learning and attainment

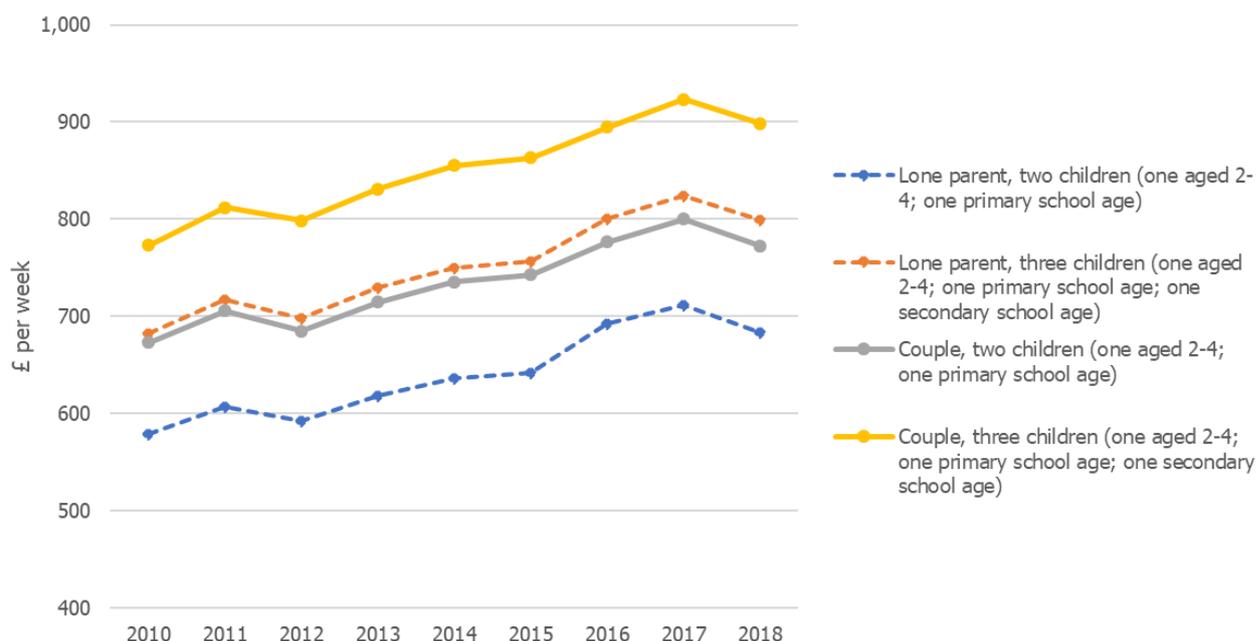
4.10 Food insecurity has major adverse impacts on schoolchildren such as concentration, social participation and aspirations. Public Health England conclude that there are promising associations between diet and academic attainment. However, it is difficult to attribute a causal link between diet and attainment because of the range of other factors in the school environment that also affect academic attainment. It also points to evidence that a whole-school approach to healthy school meals, universally implemented for all pupils, has shown improvements in academic attainment at Key Stages 1 and 2, especially for pupils with lower prior attainment. Between 2009 and 2012, pupils in the UFSM pilots in Newham and Durham were found to be up to two months ahead in maths and English.

## Easing the financial pressure for parents and carers

4.11 For families, supporting children to grow up has never been cheap. However, awareness of today's cost of bringing up children has increased in importance because of the influence it has on parental abilities to meet children's needs.

4.12 Since 2008, Loughborough University have regularly reported on how much income households in the UK need to afford an acceptable standard of living. The Minimum Income Standards calculator shows how much households need for a weekly budget and how much they need to earn in order to achieve this disposable income. Figure 1 shows the minimum weekly income required to raise children in several scenarios where at least one child attends primary school.

**Figure 1: Minimum budget required (includes rent and childcare), £ per week, 2010-2018**



4.13 The Fair Futures Commission found that that the challenges of raising children are affecting both low and middle-income families in London. These families are hit by their wages not growing at the same pace as high and rising living costs and reduced support from the state. The number of children with parents who work, earn a decent amount of money and are still struggling is growing. Some families will foot the entire financial cost of bringing up their children, with no direct help from the state. Because of the high cost of living, families who earn a decent wage sometimes have to move out of Islington. House prices are beyond the reach of the average family. In Islington, the average house

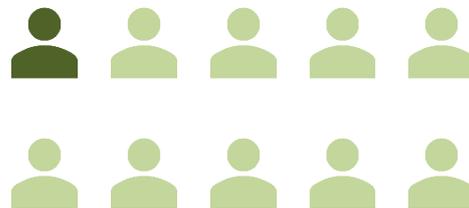
price in 2014 was £530k and the average private sector rent in Islington for 3 bedroom home was £2,383.

4.14 Where children are at risk of food poverty, especially those who live in low income families, parents will frequently cut back on fruit and vegetable intake, cut back on food shopping, and reducing the amount they eat to protect their children. In 2013, Ipsos MORI conducted a survey of child hunger for the Greater London Authority. The findings showed that 55% of parents across income groups reported their ability to afford food has got a lot or a little worse over the past year; 49% of parents in full-time work also reported this experience. This highlights potential future vulnerability. Similarly, the 2018 Child Poverty Action Group report, *Cost of A Child*, highlights that most parents would do everything in their power to avoid their children having to grow up below a minimum acceptable standard of living.

4.15 There are several benefits for parents related to easing the pressure on supporting their children. The 2018 national evaluation of UIFSM reported that parents who no longer had to make packed lunches reported a median weekly saving of £10, removed the stigma in claiming free meals, assisted with household budgets and allowed parents more time to support and spend with their children.

4.16

**1** in **10** children in London stated that their biggest meal of the day was their school lunch



Children at risk of food poverty are particularly vulnerable during the school holidays when school meals are not available. During Summer 2018, the council lightly tested the provision of at least one healthy meal per day for children whose parents may struggle to provide meals during the holiday. Across 4 venues including one library, Lunch Bunch offered a healthy meal for children aged 6–12 years living in Islington with parents earning £16,190 or less (based on national FSM criteria). The Lunch Bunch pilot project was generally viewed as a great initiative and one that most parents would allow their children to participate in again. Officers are currently reviewing how to shape the scheme further in time for the 2019 Easter holidays.

## 5. Implications

### 5.1 Financial implications:

The annual budget for UIFSM is £2,254k in primary schools.

### 5.2 Legal implications:

Local Authority maintained schools are subject to a variety of statutory obligations in relation to the provision (subject to prevailing eligibility requirements) of free school meals, and the standard and nutritional quality of those meals, under (inter alia) the Education Act 1996, Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998, Children and Families Act 2014 and the Requirements for School Foods Regulations 2014, to which regard has been had in the formulation and review of this policy.

### 5.4 Resident Impact Assessment:

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled

persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

A resident impact assessment was completed as part of the contract award for the School Meals Catering Contract. There are no negative impacts identified in the assessment and there are opportunities identified for advancing equality of opportunities and fostering good community relations. In addition the contract can help address inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage by ensuring all school children can receive a healthy nutritious meal every school day.

## 6. Reason for recommendations

- 6.1 The 2014 Cripplegate/NEF report, *Distant Neighbours*, stressed that the gap in Islington between the wealthiest and the rest is growing as the cost of living and slow wage growth negatively impact families. It predicts that Islington will become a starkly polarised and unequal borough. Through its corporate plan, Islington council is working to mitigate this both within the council and with external partners.
- 6.2 The national evaluation of UIFSM concluded that the policy's effectiveness "rests on policymakers attaching a high value to improving the living standards of households with infants who were not already eligible for FSM, and on potentially generating health and social benefits". This will become increasingly important in a local authority like Islington where low and middle income families with children continue to come under pressure and may do so for some time.

## Appendices

- Appendix 1: Enhanced food standards for school catering services

**Background papers:** None

Final report clearance:

### Signed by:

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**Appendix 1: Food-based standards for school lunches and Camden and Islington enhanced school food standards**

<b>Food group</b>	<b>Food-based standards for school lunches and Camden and Islington enhanced school food standards</b>
<b>Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates</b>	One or more portion of food from this group every day
	Three or more different starchy foods each week
	One or more wholegrain varieties of starchy food, other than bread, served with the main meal and the vegetarian option each week
	Starchy food cooked in fat or oil should not be provided more than twice a week in primary schools and secondary schools
	For every day that a starchy food cooked in fat or oil is provided, a starchy food not cooked in fat or oil should also be provided as an alternative choice with the main meal
	Bread with no added fat or oil must be available every day
	Wholemeal bread should be provided at least once a week
<b>Fruit and vegetables</b>	Two portions of vegetables and five different salads as an accompaniment available every day
	At least five different vegetables served each week
	Low sugar and salt baked beans served as a vegetable once a week only
	One or more portions of fruit available every day
	A dessert containing at least 50% of fruit two to three times each week
	At least five different fruits served each week
<b>Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins</b>	A portion of food from this group every day
	A portion of red meat and poultry three times a week
	A portion of red meat once or twice a week
	A portion of poultry at least once or twice a week
	A portion of fish at least once a week
	A portion of oily fish at least once every three weeks
	Tuna to be served no more than twice a week (this includes tuna pasta, tuna salad, tuna mayonnaise on jacket potato or in sandwiches)
	For vegetarians, a portion of non-dairy protein to be part of the meal four days a week. On the fifth day the protein may come from cheese

Food group	Food-based standards for school lunches and Camden and Islington enhanced school food standards
	For vegetarians, beans, lentils, pulses, and products made of these, should be served at least three times a week
	Baked beans are served
	Quorn as the protein source should not be served more than once a week
	Eggs as the protein source should not be served more than once a week
	Cheese as the protein source should not be served more than once a week
	A meat or poultry product (manufactured or homemade and meeting the legal requirements*) to be served no more than once each week in early years settings and primary schools, and twice each week in secondary schools  * The Products Containing Meat etc. (England) Regulations 2014
	Fish products (manufactured or homemade) no more than once each week in early year settings and primary schools, <i>across the day</i>  Meat alternative products (manufacture or homemade) no more than once each week in early years settings or primary schools, <i>across the day</i>
<b>Dairy and dairy alternatives</b>	A portion of food from this group every day: cheese, yoghurt, fromage frais, milk
	Lower fat milk and lactose reduced milk to be served as part of the school meal
	Skimmed milk will not be served or used as an ingredient in food for children under 5.
	Yoghurt: initially can contain a maximum of 4g of sugar per portion. By April 2019, yoghurt will be plain low fat yoghurt (no sugar) which may be served with fresh, tinned (in juice) or unsweetened stewed fruit (compote)
<b>Foods high in fat, sugar and/or salt</b>	No more than two portions of food that have been deep-fried, batter-coated, breadcrumb-coated, each week
	No more than one portions of food which include pastry, each week. This includes savoury and fruit flans, quiches, pasties. Use of wholemeal or half wholemeal /half white preferred in the making of the pastry
	No snacks are served, except nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruit with no added salt, sugar or fat
	Savoury crackers, oatcakes or breadsticks (less than 5g sugar / 100g and less than 1.5g salt / 100g) can be served at lunch with a fruit or vegetable and dairy food
	No confectionery, chocolate and chocolate-coated products

Food group	Food-based standards for school lunches and Camden and Islington enhanced school food standards
	Desserts, cakes and biscuits are allowed at lunchtime. They must not contain any confectionery
	Salt must not be available to add to food after it has been cooked
	Condiments must be limited to sachets or portions of no more than 10 grams or one teaspoonful
	Condiments must be lower fat, saturated fat, sugar, and salt varieties.
<b>Healthier drinks</b>	<p>Free, fresh drinking water is available at all times</p> <p>The only drinks permitted in primary schools are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plain water (still or carbonated)</li> <li>• Lower fat milk or lactose-reduced milk</li> </ul> <p>The only drinks permitted in secondary schools are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plain water (still or carbonated)</li> <li>• Lower fat milk or lactose-reduced milk</li> <li>• Fruit or vegetable juice (max 150mls)</li> <li>• Plain soya, rice or oat drinks enriched with calcium; plain fermented milk (such as yoghurt) drinks</li> <li>• No added sugar combinations of fruit or vegetable juice with plain water (still or carbonated)</li> <li>• Combinations of fruit juice and lower fat milk or plain low-fat yoghurt, plain soya, rice or oat drinks enriched with calcium, cocoa and lower fat milk, flavoured lower fat milk</li> <li>• Tea, coffee, hot chocolate with a maximum of 5% sugar added and no artificial sweeteners</li> </ul> <p>Combination drinks are limited to a portion size of 330mls. They may contain added vitamins or minerals, but no more than 5% added sugars or honey or 150ml of fruit or vegetable juice. Fruit or vegetable juice combination drinks must be at least 45% fruit or vegetable juice</p>