

30th JANUARY 2012

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

COMMUNITY ACTION: REVIEWING PROGRESS AND AGREEING NEXT STEPS

FREE SCHOOL MEALS – MAXIMISING TAKE-UP

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The report provides an update of progress against agreed actions in the current year's (2011/12) Work Plan, see annex 1. The action is outlined in the Committee work plan priority 'Youth and Teenagers', issue 9.

2. Introduction / Background

- 2.1 The East Area Committee has considered for some time the difference in numbers between the children who are entitled to free school meals and those who are actually registered. It has long been felt that the current process which involves requiring parents to register their entitlement, presents an unnecessary barrier for families.
- 2.2 The recent review of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) has identified that there are between 535 and 1418 children entitled to free school meals who are not registered across the City. This clearly places an added expense to the budget of families living in poverty.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 In September 2011, the Child and Family Poverty Board approved the setting up of a Task and Finish Group to explore the options to maximise the take-up of free school meals by developing the principle of parents / carers 'opting out' rather than 'opting in' to their entitlement through the improved use of information.
- 3.2 In December 2011, the Benefits Service agreed to write to families who are eligible but currently not registered for free school meals, to inform them of the benefits that a hot and nutritious meal can have on their child's health, education and social experiences at school. The letter will also advise them that unless they object, their details will be passed to Children's Services so that free school meals can be provided for their children.
- 3.3 This campaign is designed to ensure that families can easily access their entitlement to free school meals.
- 3.4 Figures show that families in Sunderland are missing out on meals for their children worth more than half-a-million pounds a year. A family could save £1.80 a day per primary school pupil or £342 a year and even more for secondary school aged children.
- 3.5 As well as helping families, the campaign could also boost school budgets. Under the Government's new Pupil Premium model, schools get additional funds based on the number

of pupils on free school meals. Schools could be set to benefit from thousands of pounds in additional income.

4.0 Recommendation

Committee is requested to:

- i) Note the action taken towards increasing the uptake of free school meals and agree to receive an update report on the success of the campaign.

Lead Agent: Andrew Carton, Locality Manager (East)
Tel: 0191 4432861 Email: andrew.carton@sunderland.gov.uk

Contact Officer: Nicol Trueman, Area Officer (East)
Tel: 0191 561 1162 Email: Nicol.trueman@sunderland.gov.uk

Annex 1: Sunderland East Area Committee: Work Plan 2011-2012