

WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL

STATEMENT OF DECISION

SUBJECT: EXTENSION OF SCHOOL MEAL FUNDING IN WESTMINSTER FOR 24-25 ACADEMIC YEAR

Notice is hereby given that Cabinet Member for Children and Public Protection has made the following executive decision on the above mentioned subject for the reasons set out below.

Summary of Decision

The Cabinet Member for Children & Public Protection has approved:

- £870,646 to be allocated to nurseries in Westminster City Council to develop a universal meal offer based on £2.55 per meal to nurseries for academic year 2024-25 and as set out in this report.
- £694,260 to be allocated to state funded secondary schools in Westminster City Council to enable them to provide a Free Lunch Offer to resident pupils in KS3 (Years 7-9) for the academic year 2024-25 and as set out in this report.
- That the Nursery and KS3 offers are made permanent on condition that the GLA continues to fund the universal Primary Free School Meal Offer.

The Cabinet Member for Children & Public Protection will accept the GLA's allocation which is still to be confirmed. The Council will transfer this to primary schools based on a £3 per pupil per day for non-FSM pupils so that schools are able to implement a free lunch offer for all school pupils.

Reasons for Decision

Cost-of-Living

When the universal Free School Meal offer for children attending state funded Primary Schools was originally conceived, the Cost-of-Living crisis was one of the greatest challenges facing residents and it continues to be a high priority. In Westminster, around a quarter of households across the city (approximately 32,000 households) are particularly vulnerable to rises in living costs, with some people facing extreme hardship. At a meeting of Full Council on 21 September 2022, Councillors approved a motion to declare a Cost-of-Living Emergency, stating that the scale of the challenge needs "urgent and substantial action" from the Council, Government, and others with the ability to help.

The impact on children and young people is a real concern, and there is evidence of families in Westminster finding themselves unable to cover the costs of necessities. Schools tell us that they are seeing significantly more families struggling, including those not eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), which is manifesting in what they can afford to put into a child's lunchbox. FSM play a crucial role in ensuring that all eligible children can eat a healthy and nutritious meal, which in turn supports their ability to learn and improves their mental health.

While the rate of inflation has fallen in recent months to 3.4% in March 2024, costs for necessities are high and we still hear that families are struggling with the cost of living.

According to a recent survey conducted by YouGov and commissioned by City Hall, around one in six parents (16%) of children between five and 11 years are going without essentials, including food, electricity or gas, with more than one in three (36%) buying less food and essentials. Food insecurity, deprivation and the isolation and uncertainty that this can cause can lead to poor mental health and wellbeing.

The guarantee that children will have access to at least one meal a day is expected to improve the health and wellbeing for those currently experiencing food insecurity – bringing benefits for children’s growth and development and educational attainment, as well as mental health benefits for their families due to reducing concerns about food insecurity.

Mayor of London Free School Meal Offer in Primary School Pupils

In January 2023, Westminster City Council took the decision to fund free school meals for all primary aged pupils in Westminster Schools. Following this, the Mayor of London/ GLA took the decision to fund a free meal offer to all primary aged pupils in London attending state schools, this funding was originally for one academic year, from September 2023, and is now being extended for a further year from September 2024 until July 2025. Whilst GLA funding beyond July 2025 has not been confirmed, the Mayor of London has stated that he is looking to extend this offer for subsequent years. The GLA have yet to confirm allocations for Westminster schools for the 24/25 academic year, however they have confirmed that they will base the allocation on £3 per pupil per day and will be based on 190 days a year and at a take up of 90% of meals being taken, this is the same methodology which was used in 23/24 year. The only change to methodology is that the price of £3 per pupil per day represents a price increase of £0.35 from £2.65 per pupil per day in the 23/24 academic year. In 23/24, WCC had been topping up meal costs for schools from £2.65 to £3 per pupil per day. This had cost WCC c. £190k. Benchmarking and school engagement has shown that £3 per pupil per day is an appropriate amount for schools to be able to deliver the meal offer.

Health, Wellbeing and Educational attainment

Currently, one in five children start school overweight. Offering free nutritional meals from an early age, will enable children and their families to develop good habits in relation to healthy eating and nutritional meals. This in return, will enable children to access the early years curriculum more consistently as poor nutrition and development impacts not only children’s health, but also their readiness to learn. This will enable our most vulnerable two-year-old children and all of our three and four-year-old children to have the best possible start in life by developing good habits around their diet and nutrition, increasing their attendance and accessing education and learning more effectively. This additional offer to early years children could potentially have a huge impact on children’s future attainment and in essence, improve their life chances.

**Stuart Love, Chief Executive,
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Implementation Date: 15 July 2024

Reference: