



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

24TH JANUARY 2024

CONTINUATION OF FREE BREAKFAST CLUB PROVISION IN PRIMARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF A CHARGE FOR THE ADDITIONAL CHILDCARE ELEMENT

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND WELSH LANGUAGE (COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS)

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to advise Cabinet on the outcome of the recent consultation in respect of a proposal to introduce a charge for the additional childcare element, which is available prior to the commencement of free breakfast club provision in primary and special schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf, noting eligible Free School Meal (eFSM) pupils would be exempt from any charge.
- 1.2 To note the proposal would generate additional income, which would be ring fenced and reinvested back into school budgets.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the information contained within the attached Consultation Report (Appendix 1 & 1i), which includes feedback received from the online surveys, emails and letters, the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13th December 2023 (Appendix 2) and the frequently asked questions posted on the Council's website (Appendix 3);
- 2.2 Consider and agree the preferred fee of £1 per day, rounded down to £60 per term, for the additional childcare element, which is available prior to the commencement of free breakfast club provision, to be implemented from the start of the spring term 2024 or as soon as is practicable thereafter;

- 2.3 Agree that eFSM pupils should be exempt from the proposed charge and agree a further category of concession whereby parents/carers would only pay for the first two children of primary age, living in the same household, accessing the provision;
- 2.4 Agree that the additional income to be generated is ring fenced and reinvested back into school budgets as part of the Council's proposed 2024/25 Revenue Budget Strategy; and
- 2.5 Delegates authority to the Director of Education and Inclusion Services to undertake and conclude the necessary actions to implement the decision of Cabinet.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council is facing significant financial challenges into the medium term and is considering a range of options to contribute to addressing the shortfall in funding.
- 3.2 To set out a charging proposal for the additional provision currently in place, which includes a period of free enhanced childcare for pupils currently attending free breakfast clubs.
- 3.3 To ensure that the process for progressing any proposal is undertaken efficiently and effectively and in accordance with the Council's policies and procedures.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 At the meeting of the Cabinet held on 20th November 2023, Members considered a report from officers on a proposal to introduce a charge for the additional childcare element, which is available prior to the commencement of free breakfast club provision in primary and special schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 4.2 The report set out a proposal to charge based on the following:-
 - To commence from the start of the spring term 2024.
 - Pupils who have applied for and are entitled to Free School Meal provision (note this relates to the underlying eligibility for Free School Meals and not those pupils receiving the Universal Primary Free School Meal provision) would be exempt.
 - A termly charge, payable at the start of each term, which would not be pro-rata'd and no refunds would be payable.
 - £1 per day, rounded down to £60 per term, amounting to an annual charge for parents/carers of £180.
 - Consideration to be given to providing concessions, for example, a cap applied to parents/carers with more than one child making use of the provision.

4.3 Following consideration, approval was given to initiate a consultation on the proposal to introduce a charge and whether consideration should be given to any further categories of concession, over and above that agreed for eFSM pupils.

5. RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION

5.1 The consultation report, prepared in respect of this proposal, is attached in Appendix 1. It contains a summary of the online survey responses, emails and letters received during the consultation period and, where required, the appropriate clarification to any issues raised.

5.2 The consultation process resulted in 1351 responses being received via the online survey, which was available for the duration of the consultation period on the Council's website, and paper questionnaires. A total of 10 emails and letters were also received regarding the consultation.

5.3 In addition, 3 public engagement events were held at Rhondda Sports Centre, Llantrisant Leisure Centre and Michael Sobell Sports Centre, where officers were available to answer any questions on the proposal.

5.4 Of the 1351 responses, the majority of 1085 were from service users or relatives/friends of service users (80.3%). 163 were members of the public (12.1%), 92 were members of school staff (6.8%), 48 were members of a Governing Body (3.6%), 39 were breakfast club staff (2.9%) and 35 were classified as other (2.6%), i.e. potential future service user, Councillor, other family member, neighbouring local authority.

5.5 For respondents who were service users, the majority of 589 said that on average they use the provision 5 times a week (54%). 108 four times a week (10%), 146 three times a week (14%), 78 twice a week (7%), 33 once a week (3%) and 131 use it on an ad-hoc basis, as and when it is needed (12%).

5.6 For respondents who were service users, the majority of 573 said they use the breakfast club provision for the free healthy breakfast and the free childcare (53%). 278 use it just for the free childcare (26%), 127 for the free healthy breakfast (12%) and 218 for other reasons (20%) as summarised below:-

- Work related, i.e. being able to get to work early/on time.
- Social skills/interaction for the pupil(s).
- Working single parents.
- Managing multiple school attendance.

5.7 Overall, 985 respondents (73%) disagreed with the proposal to introduce a charge for the additional childcare element of breakfast club. 254 said they did agree (19%) and 106 said they didn't know (8%).

Emerging themes included:

- A general disagreement with the proposal due to reasons such as financial strain, impact on working parents, concerns about implementation and mixed opinions on service use.
 - Some respondents emphasised the importance of free meals for children, expressing worries that introducing charges may hinder access to nutritious breakfasts.
 - For those 254 respondents (18.9%) who agreed with the proposal, there was a willingness to pay for the childcare element, understanding the need for financial contributions, especially if it would help maintain the service. Some had concerns over the misuse of the provision and the need for a small charge to deter those using it solely as free childcare.
 - Earlier start times for breakfast clubs was requested to accommodate working parents.
 - 49 members of the public are more likely to agree with the proposal (30.2%), when compared to 168 service users themselves (15.5%).
- 5.8 For the 254 respondents who agreed with the introduction of a charge (19%), 82% of them agreed with the proposed charge of £1 per day, rounded down to £60 per term, and implemented from the start of the spring term in April 2024.
- 5.9 In addition, for those who agreed with the overall proposal, 87 suggested they would be willing to pay a termly fee of £60 (36%).
- 5.10 763 of all respondents (57%) agreed that there should be a cap on any charge for parents/carers. Of the 57%, the majority said that it should be at more than one child (72%). 23% said more than 2 children and 6% said more than 3 children.
- 5.11 684 respondents (52%) said that they would continue to use the free breakfast club provision, if charging is introduced and they decided not to make use of the additional childcare element of the provision. 288 stated that they would not use the childcare provision (22%) and 349 stated they did not know what they would do (26%).
- 5.12 Other issues raised during consultation included:-
- Means testing as an alternative to a universal charge, ensuring those who can afford it contribute while those in need received support.
 - Ability to pay for the provision on an ad-hoc basis or if the charge is reasonable.
- 5.13 With reference to the second bullet point in 5.12 there are a number of operational challenges to consider if parents/carers want to pay on an ad-hoc basis and pupils attend as and when required:-
- Administration burden – processing payments and reconciliation attendance registers. Delays to admission due to the need to check payment details.
 - Dietary requirements – pupils with medically prescribed dietary requirements cannot attend breakfast club until appropriate medical evidence is submitted and a special dietary plan put in place.

- Digital constraints – the registration process would need to remain ‘live’ and would result in manual intervention if parents/carers requirements changed.
- Staffing levels – appropriate staffing ratios need to be in place for the supervision of pupils, this includes appropriate risk assessments in order to comply with safeguarding and Health and Safety legislation. For learners with ALN, enhanced staffing will potentially be required which should be planned for.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS/SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 6.1. An Equality Impact Assessment was prepared and has been reviewed and updated to include further mitigated risks following the consultation. This is attached in Appendix 4 (and an accompanying action plan in Appendix 4i). This document outlines the proposal in further detail in accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 and Socio-economic Duty – Sections 1 to 3 of the Equality Act 2010.

7. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 A Welsh Language Impact Assessment was prepared and has been reviewed and updated to include further mitigated risks following the consultation. This is attached in Appendix 5. This document outlines the proposal in further detail and in accordance with the requirements of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The consultation was conducted in-house and the consultation period commenced on 27th November 2023 and ended on 8th January 2024.
- 8.2 The Headteacher, Chair of Governors and Breakfast Club Staff members in all Primary and Special schools in RCT were emailed a letter to share with parents/carers on the proposal.
- 8.3 An email was also sent to key stakeholders to promote the consultation and encourage participation in the online survey.
- 8.4 The online survey was available on the Council’s website for anyone to complete for the duration of the consultation period. Frequently asked questions were also available and can be viewed in Appendix 3. A consultation email address and telephone number were also available for enquiries.
- 8.5 Public engagement events were held at Rhondda Sports Centre, Llantrisant Leisure Centre and Michael Sobell Sports Centre, where officers were available to answer any questions on the proposal.

9. SCRUTINY ENGAGEMENT

- 9.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was provided with an opportunity on 13th December 2023 to consider the proposal and provide feedback and comments. The feedback can be viewed in Appendix 2.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The financial implications of the proposal would be assessed as the scheme is progressed and concessions approved.
- 10.2 The annual charge to parents/carers is proposed at £180.
- 10.3 The income generated from this proposal would be ring-fenced and reinvested back into school budgets enabling the Council to support their cost pressures next year over and above funding for pay increases.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 11.1 Section 88 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 places a duty on a local authority to provide free breakfast on each school day for learners at a primary school it maintains. Local authorities must also comply with regulation 4 of, and Schedule 1 to, the Healthy Eating in Schools (Nutritional Standards and Requirements) (Wales) Regulations 2013 when deciding on the form of the breakfast content.

12. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN, NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015

- 12.1 There are links to Making a Difference, the Council's Corporate Plan for the years between 2020 and 2024, specifically:
- **People:**
 - Improving services for children and young people and ensuring the needs of children are considered in everything we do:
 - Improving the social, emotional, and mental health and wellbeing of children and young people by increasing the range of specialist services available.
 - **Places:**
 - Ensuring RCT is one of the safest places in Wales, with high levels of community cohesion where residents feel safe:
 - Supporting the voluntary, community and faith sectors to help build active communities, creating the capacity for meeting the needs of residents within their communities.
 - **Prosperity:**
 - Ensuring we have good schools, so all children have access to a great education:
 - Improving outcomes for all children and young people.
- 12.2 There are links to the Council's Directorate of Education and Inclusion Services Strategic Plan for the years between 2021 and 2024, specifically:

- **Strategic Priority 3:**
 - Ensuring equity and support for vulnerable pupils and their families.
- 12.3 Due regard has been made to all seven well-being goals and the five ways of working, as contained within the [Wellbeing of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#), which requires the Council to take into account the long term impact of decisions, on communities and to take steps to address and prevent issues such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.
- 12.4 The charging proposals could contribute towards achieving some of the seven well-being goals by:
- **A Prosperous Wales** - Should the proposal proceed, the continuation of the childcare element of breakfast clubs will allow working parents/carers to be economically active.
 - **A Healthier Wales** – the proposal will be a fully accessible service, providing good nutrition and a social context for young people to socialise with their friendship groups and an opportunity to play before the start of the school day.
 - **A Wales of More Cohesive Communities** – Fully accessible breakfast clubs, integrated into our local community schools with a dedicated area to play and eat breakfast before the start of the school day.
 - **A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language** – the provision of breakfast clubs will allow a daily opportunity for staff and pupils to develop their Welsh language skills.
 - **A Globally Responsive Wales** – The proposals could build upon the good working breakfast club practices and initiatives already in place to further develop extra-curricular activities to encourage healthy lifestyles for the school community.
- 12.5 The proposal could contribute towards achieving some of the five ways of working by:
- **Long Term** – The proposal allows parents/carers to continue to be economically active, contributing to the long-term aim of a viable economy for Wales.
 - **Prevention** – The Council believes that the proposal continues to support pupils with a free healthy breakfast, improving the health and concentration of children, assisting in raising standards of learning and attainment and to get the best possible start to the school day.
 - **Integrations** – The proposal will provide a fully accessible and integrated service providing dedicated support for children with additional learning needs to participate in everyday school life.

- **Collaboration** – The Council will continue to work effectively with the governing body and parents/carers to meet the needs to the wider community.
- **Involvement** – The proposed changes will seek the views of stakeholders including pupils, parents/carers, staff and the wider community.

12.6 As stated in 6.1, an Equality Impact Assessment which further details the contribution of the proposal to the [Wellbeing of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) has been prepared.

13. STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS

13.1 This proposal applies to all electoral wards.

14. CONCLUSION

14.1 Members are asked to consider the contents of the attached consultation report and give officers approval to progress with their agreed preferred option, as outlined in section 2 of this report.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee-

Education and Inclusion Scrutiny Committee

Contact Officer:

Lisa Kidner, Business Manager Catering Services

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Item:

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Background Papers

Continuation of Free Breakfast Club Provision in Primary and Special Schools with the Introduction of a Charge for the Additional Childcare Element Report to Cabinet on 20th November 2023.

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