

LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON

REPORT:	EXECUTIVE MAYOR DECISION	
DATE OF DECISION	18 October 2024	
REPORT TITLE:	Mayor of London Free School Meals Offer 2024/25 academic year	
CORPORATE DIRECTOR / DIRECTOR:	Debbie Jones – Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education and Shelley Davies – Director of Education	
LEAD OFFICER:	Luke Nunn, Holiday Activities and Food Programme Lead Email: luke.nunn@croydon.gov.uk Telephone: 07716092513	
AUTHORITY TO TAKE DECISION:	Executive Mayor	
KEY DECISION? [Insert Ref. Number if a Key Decision]	Yes 2222EM	
CONTAINS EXEMPT INFORMATION?	NO	
WARDS AFFECTED:	All	REASON: Key Decision – Decision significantly impacts on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more Wards
		Public

1 SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report to the Executive Mayor provides an updated report of the current situation with regard to the Mayor of London's project to provide a free school meal for every primary school pupil for the academic year 2024-25. The programme is known by the title Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) Programme.
- 1.2 This paper seeks a decision on the funding methodology for UFSM to be applied in Croydon – as per the options and recommendations in Section 3.
- 1.3 A decision by 1st September 2024 is appreciated as this will allow us to inform schools of their funding allocation before term starts, and to arrange transfer of the first payment tranche as early as possible in the new academic year.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

For the reasons set out in the report, the Executive Mayor, is recommended:

- 2.1 to agree that the Universal Free School Meal allowance for pupils in Year's 3-6 be funded at the rates as set out by the Greater London Authority, at a cost of £3.00 per pupil covering 190 days with a take up of 90%.
- 2.2 to agree that whilst this marks a slight change in funding from the previous year, budget constraints set out the parameters for this alteration, and no other methodology would be suitable.

to note:

- 2.3 that Croydon Council have petitioned the Greater London Authority that future funding allocations should be sought covering spring census data for years 2-5, rather than years 3-6 as is currently the case, to more closely reflect the number of children per year where this funding is targeted.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Mayor of London has extended funding for the Universal Free School Meals scheme from 2023-24 for a second year to cover 2024-2025.
- 3.2 The recommendation for funding to alter from 2023/24 into 2024/25 is required due to limited funds for the academic year compared to previously.
- 3.3 The recommended option gives the best possible funding allocation to schools with the available money, and in line with the GLA's published information.
- 3.4 The recommended option will also allow for the extension of the 0.6 FTE G7 post currently employed to look after this funding and other related queries.

4 BACKGROUND AND DETAILS

4.1 Background

- 4.1.1 In February 2023 the Mayor of London announced an emergency plan to provide a free school meal to every primary pupil in London for the academic year beginning in September 2023. In February 2024, a one-year extension to the programme was announced, for the academic year beginning in September 2024.
- 4.1.2 This is in addition to the Universal Free School Meal (UFSM) currently provided for children in years R, 1 and 2, and is intended to support families who are struggling with increases in cost-of-living expenses.
- 4.1.3 Eligible pupils will therefore be those in years 3, 4, 5 and 6 in the 2024/25 academic year who are not currently on record as being entitled to a free meal due to their families' income status (i.e. are entitled to benefits-related FSM).
- 4.1.4 Funding is for the 2024/25 academic year only.
- 4.1.5 Funding of £140 million has been allocated for this project covering all London boroughs, up by £10 million from 2023/24.
- 4.1.6 In Croydon, arrangements and responsibilities for FSM administration was moved to schools in May 2021.
- 4.1.7 Croydon schools make their own catering arrangements. This differs across London, with some boroughs delivering or contracting the catering for all, most or some of their schools.
- 4.1.8 We continue to have an increasing workload in relation to the provision of food in schools and to support families during school holidays. This includes administrative and financial functions for the Household Support Fund (school holiday provision), FOIs, members and media enquiries, general queries from families and schools, and now the administration of the GLA UFSM programme.
- 4.1.9 Since the FSM Team was deleted, this work has been absorbed within existing roles in the Education Service (unfunded), and due to a surplus in funding for 23/24 supported by a 0.6 FTE G7 post. additional capacity is continued to be needed to fulfil these tasks into 24/25.

4.2 Funding Allocation and Methodology

- 4.2.1 Our funding allocation for this programme has now been confirmed as £6,253,470 in the Greater London Authority (GLA) Grant Allocation letter dated 16 July 2024 – an increase of £488,218.
- 4.2.2 Funding levels have been set, and widely publicised, by the GLA at a rate of £3.00 per meal, an amount that is a single standardised offer across

London, and 13% higher than last year. The amount is also higher than updated funding for Universal Infant Free School Meals of £2.53 per meal.

- 4.2.3 The GLA is funding local authorities on the assumption that 90% of pupils will take up the offer of the free school meal.
- 4.2.4 Funding is for the 2024/25 academic year only, covering 190 school days from Sept-24 to July-25.
- 4.2.5 Payment is to be made termly in advance to local authorities upon receipt of the signed grant funding agreement – 50% in September 2024, 25% in December 2024 and 25% in April 2025. The expectation is that LAs will forward this funding to schools swiftly.
- 4.2.6 In response to feedback from local authorities and schools, there will not be a clawback of funding if pupil take-up of the free school meals is less than 90%. The Greater London Authority offered schools the opportunity to apply for additional funding if pupil take-up exceeded 90% during the school year, through two census dates in January and March 2024. The same methodology is expected to be applied through 2024/2025
- 4.2.7 Payment will be made to Local Authorities for both maintained schools and non-maintained schools, so we will be responsible for calculating funding allocations and passing on payments to all schools, including academies. Independent schools are not included in this programme.
- 4.2.8 During 2023/2024, Croydon Schools were funded based on the numbers of pupils within years 2-5 at the Spring Census date. However, the GLA calculated the grant value based on children in years 3-6. This methodology has been questioned, as it does not offer a true representation for children in years 3-6 during the 2024/25 school year.
- 4.2.9 Whilst last year, this led to an underspend, as pupil numbers were lower than the calculated rate, for 2024/25 the opposite is true, where pupil numbers are higher than the calculated rate. It is hoped the increase from £2.65 to £3.00 per meal will negate this issue.
- 4.2.10 During 2023/2024, Croydon were able to fund schools based on a 92% uptake. Due to a higher pupil rate than calculated as listed in point 4.2.9, this will not be possible for 2024/2025, and it is intended schools are funded at the rate given by the GLA of 90% for children in years 3-6 at the time of the 2024 Spring Census.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1.1 The following options were considered in light of the 2024/2025 UFSM funding from the GLA, to closer follow the methodology that Croydon implemented during 2023/2024.

- 5.1.2 However, it is felt that due to the overall grant value, and the number of children this funding looks to cover, the recommended option is to align funding based on the GLA amounts set.
- 5.1.3 In July 2023, the number of pupils at each school in years 2, 3, 4, & 5 in the Spring 2023 census was used in the modelling. Repeating this methodology with updated figures from the Spring 2024 census would not be viable.
- 5.1.4 In July 2023, Schools were funded for 92% take up, an additional 2% on the suggestion from the GLA. Funding Schools at this amount based on Spring Census data for 2024 for school year 2-5 and school years 3-6 would also not be possible.
- 5.1.5 The Local authority could fund schools at an amount less than the £3.00 per meal, but as this figure has been widely published by the GLA, and out of kilter with other Local Authorities, it is expected there would be a considerable knock back from schools, and parents if this option were to be taken.

5.2 Options have been laid out in the table below.

Census Range (Spring 2024)	Number of eligible pupils at spring census 2024	Funding at £3.00 per meal from grant of £6,253,470 based on 90% uptake	Funding at £3.00 per meal from grant of £6,253,470 based on 92% uptake	Funding at £2.91 per meal from grant of £6,253,470 based on 90% uptake	Funding at £2.93 per meal from grant of £6,253,470 based on 92% uptake
Sch. Yrs 3-6	12160	£15,390.00 (Recommended)	-£123,234.00	£202,532.40	£25,555.76
Sch. Yrs 2-5	12539	-£179,037.00	-£321,981.60 (Last Years Methodology)	£13,938.21	-£168,554.40

- 5.2.1 We are recommending the methodology used by the Greater London Authority should be Adopted, in line with other Local Authorities.
- 5.2.2 The 0.6 FTE G7 role will remain funded through a small underspend in 2023/2024 and the £15,390.00 remaining funds.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO THE MAYOR'S BUSINESS PLAN

- 6.1** The Executive Mayor for Croydon has laid out in his Business Plan for Croydon covering 2022-2026 with a priority ensuring that children and young people have opportunities to learn, develop and fulfil their potential. Whilst the UFSM scheme does not directly correlate with the priority, the issue of food hunger, which could result in not approving this funding, has a knock on impact for children and young people in their ability to learn, develop and fulfil their potential and has been widely studied.
- 6.2** The UFSM scheme aligns with other support offered to families across Croydon including the holiday Activity and Food Programme and the Household Support Fund

7. IMPLICATIONS

Implications, on the whole, as a result of this funding will be Schools based, rather than with the Local authority. Schools will have an altered amount of funding to cover meals for pupils not in receipt of benefits related free school meal. The recommended decision allows for the greatest amount of funding to be given to schools as effectively as possible.

As a result of this decision there is not thought to be any further implication upon the education or wider council departments.

7.1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1.1** As this is grant funding for schools within Croydon, and the Local Authority take the role of Allocating funds, there are no financial implications to the council, except for the 0.6 FTE G7 role, which will be covered by the £15,390 underspend in the recommended option.

7.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.2.1** The Council has the power to do anything that individuals generally may do pursuant to section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, including receiving and allocating funding.
- 7.2.2** The Council should follow guidance issued by the Department for Education in relation to the allocation of free school meals allowances and comply with the terms of the funding agreement. Schools will also be responsible for following such guidance and compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 in relation to commissioning school meals.
- 7.2.3** Comments approved by the Head of Commercial, Housing & Litigation Law on behalf of the Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer.

8. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 8.1 This report refers to the letter dated 16th July 2024 to the council Chief Executive setting out the funding allocation for Croydon Council. This is included in appendix A.
- 8.2 No further background documents have been used in the compilation of this report. Further information in regard to the Mayor of London's Universal Free School Meals can be found at <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-mayor-does/priorities-london/free-school-meals>

9. URGENCY

- 9.1 This Report requires sign off at the earliest convenience to allow schools to receive funding as early as possible into the School term 2024-2025.

Appendix A



24-25 UFSM Funding
Allocation letter - CRC