

Report

Report to:	Executive Committee
Date of Meeting:	26 September 2018
Report by:	Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

Subject:	Free School Meals and Clothing Grants
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- advise on progress with implementation of the budget initiative for automated entitlement to free school meals and clothing grants

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the content of the report is noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Council meeting of 28 February 2018 agreed an initiative to automate entitlement to free school meals and clothing grants, meaning that eligible families in receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction would be registered for both services without the need for an application to be made.
- 3.2. From analysis of the Council's council tax and benefit system, it has been identified that there are 1,200 families where children entitled to a free school meal are not registered to access that service. In addition, the analysis has identified 1,700 children entitled to a grant for clothing and footwear who do not currently access the grant.
- 3.3. This initiative, and the requirement to use benefit data to automate entitlement, is in accordance with the Council's duty under the Education Scotland Act to provide free school meals and clothing assistance to those families meeting the qualifying criteria.
- 3.4. The Executive Committee on the 27 June 2018 increased the level of the clothing grant award to £100. This is funded from Council budgets augmented by a contribution from the Scottish Government.

4. Current position

- 4.1. The table below confirms the increase in free school meals and clothing grants from August 2017 to August 2018:

Free School Meals	
Increase in Awards	755
Increase (%)	11.9%

Clothing Grants		
Increase in Awards	1,707	£624,950
Increase (%)	18.8%	

- 4.2. An automated process to identify new eligible cases from the council's benefits system will continue to be run weekly to identify new recipients throughout the academic year. Schools are automatically advised of any new eligible pupils.
- 4.3. Clothing grants for the academic year 2018/2019 have been awarded from the beginning of July 2018. As with free school meals, an automated process to identify new eligible cases from the Council's benefits system will continue to be run weekly to identify new recipients. This process is scheduled to run until April 2019.
- 4.4. The new automated process involves notification letters being issued to customers to advise them of their entitlement and provide them with an opt-out option. To date, opt out cases have been minimal with 6 in total.

5. 2018/2019 Projection

- 5.1. The previous year actual awards compared with current year projections are detailed in the table below and show an increase compared to the levels previously anticipated.
- 5.2. The number of awards for 2017/18 is as at May 2018. Due to the uptake increasing throughout the year the figures reported for each category are higher than those reported in the above table at 4.1 that represent the position at the start of the school term in August in each year.

	2017/2018	2018/2019 Projection		
	No of Awards	No of Awards	Increase (No's)	Increase (%)
Free School Meals	6,935	8,300	1,365	19.7
Clothing Grants	9,840	12,100	2,260	22.9

- 5.3. The projected increases for free school meals (1,365) and clothing grants (2,260) and are in excess of the original estimates of 1,200 and 1,700 respectively.
- 5.4. The projection for 2018/2019 has been revised up from the original estimate of 8,100 free school meals and 11,540 clothing grants due to the effectiveness of the weekly automated process in identifying new eligible cases.

6. Customer information

- 6.1. Web content has been updated to advise customers of the new arrangements for automated entitlement.

6.2. The online application form has also been updated to advise customers of the new arrangements prior to completing a form. The online application form is available for customers who are not in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction but who meet the qualifying criteria based on their income levels.

7. Employee Implications

7.1. None.

8. Financial Implications

8.1. At this point in the year, there are no overspends across the budget lines affected, however this will continue to be monitored throughout the year, and any budget variances will be reported to committee.

9. Other Implications

9.1. There is a risk that the award of free school meals and clothing grants and subsequent uptake are in excess of the available funding. This risk will be managed through the effective monitoring of the budget position.

10. Equalities Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

10.1. There is no requirement to carry out an impact assessment in terms of the proposals within this report.

Paul Manning

Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

30 August 2018

Link(s) to Council Values/Improvement Themes/Objectives

- ◆ Accountable, effective, efficient and transparent
- ◆ Ambitious, self aware and improving
- ◆ Focused on people and their needs

Previous References

- ◆ Executive Committee Report 27 June 2018 – School Clothing Grants

List of Background Papers

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Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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