

REVIEW OF THE CHARGE FOR MILK IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

1.0 HEADLINES

- 1.1 The Catering and Cleaning Service has applied a 10p charge for a portion of milk to pupils in Primary schools for a number of years, in line with previous budget setting decisions to offset the higher than average purchase costs of milk for pupils.
- 1.2 With the roll out of free school meals commencing in Primary schools from August 2021 and the adoption of new Healthy Food in Schools Guidance in April 2021, the Catering and Cleaning Service has re-examined this approach, along with the income generated for Education, and has identified this as an area that will no longer deliver significant income for the Council with the change in service delivery model being adopted.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- a. Agree that the current 10p fee per 189ml portion of milk be removed from August 2021;
 - b. Note that this will incur a cost pressure in the region of £21,700 per annum;
 - c. Note the wider benefits to children and young people of consuming milk.

3.0 DETAIL

3.1 BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 At the Council's budget setting meeting in 2015, the Catering and Cleaning service proposed the introduction of a 10p charge per portion of milk to all pupils who paid for a school meal but who also wished to have milk with it. The purpose of this charge was to offset the higher than average purchase costs that the Council paid for milk provision, with the expectation that it could generate in the region of £30K per annum.
- 3.1.2 In 2017, the Council took a further decision to extend this 10p charge to all pupils in Primary schools, whether those pupils were in receipt of a free or paid meal.

This measure was mitigated by the inclusion of milk based desserts (for example, custard, ice cream) to ensure that pupils were able to receive their required calcium intake from school meals. This extension was expected to generate an additional £10K per annum.

3.1.3 In real terms, due to a decline in uptake of milk arising from the charge, the additional income generated for milk in 2019/20 was £21,700.

3.1.4 During the course of 2021, a number of significant policy changes have been introduced by the Scottish Government which will impact on how school meals are provided in future years. These changes are:

a. The implementation of Healthy Eating in Schools Regulations in April 2021. These updated food and drink in schools standards set rigorous standards including a reduction in the amount of sugar that can be provided in school meals. As part of these changes, the Catering and Cleaning Service has had to significantly reduce its provision of desserts, including those containing milk.

The guidance also limits the amount of red and red processed meat that can be provided to pupils, and officers understand that this is causing concern for farming communities across Argyll and Bute.

b. The roll out of free school meals for all Primary school pupils commences in August 2021 on a phased basis, with full roll out achieved by August 2022. At that point, there will be no cash transactions for the provision of school meals, with the exception of the 10p charge for milk.

In order to comply with the spirit of the law around providing a school meal free of charge, retaining a charge for one element of the meal may no longer fit with Scottish Government policy.

3.1.5 In addition to these formal policy changes made by the Scottish Government, officers have also been involved in work with the Child Poverty Action Group and in light of the pandemic, some children may benefit from increased access to drinking milk, yet a charge of any value may mean that those children may be unable to afford to purchase milk at school.

3.2 PROPOSAL

3.2.1 With approval, officers propose removing the 10p charge for the provision of milk for pupils in Primary schools. Enabling milk to be provided free of charge will help to provide some of the nutritional benefits to children and young people that can no longer be provided through desserts.

3.2.2 This change would also mean that both Education staff and Catering staff would no longer be required to count, cash, bank and record 10p payments from parents, which can be a time consuming process.

3.2.3 Parents would be able to ensure that their children can access milk for free, without having to find 10p to pay for its provision, improving equity for all

regardless of financial situation.

3.2.4 This proposal could increase uptake of milk, which could have a positive impact on local milk contractors who supply the Catering and Cleaning Services, and would also benefit farming communities should milk volumes increase.

3.2.5 This would result in lost income to the Council, in the region of £21,700 per annum, but would be outweighed by the benefits outlined in 3.2.1 – 3.2.4.

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 Removing the previously applied charge of 10p per portion of milk would derive benefits for pupils, parents, catering and education staff and for the supply chain, and in light of recent Scottish Government policy changes it is anticipated that the removal of this charge would provide wider benefits to stakeholders.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS

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| 7.1 Policy | Agreement from Council would be required to remove a previously agreed charge |
| 7.2 Financial | The estimated cost would be in the region of £21,700 per annum. This will be absorbed by the service within the current year 2021-22 with a cost pressure built into the budget outlook for future years. |
| 7.3 Legal | None identified, though removing the charge would be in keeping with the spirit of the proposed free school meals agreement between COSLA and Scottish Government |
| 7.4 HR | None identified |
| 7.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: | This approach will enable improved equity of provision for children who may not be able to afford to purchase milk at present. |
| 7.6 Risk | None identified |
| 7.7 Customer Service | This proposal could have a positive impact on a range of key stakeholders as identified at 3.2.1 – 3.2.4 |

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