



## All Party Parliamentary Group on School Food

### Minutes of meeting of the School Food APPG

Tuesday 16 January 2018, 13.15pm – 14.45pm

Boothroyd Room, Portcullis House.

#### Present

Sharon Hodgson MP (SH) – Chair

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (RBW) - Vice Chair

Nigel	Argyle (NA)	Elygra Marketing
James	Bielby (JB)	FWD
Rebeca	Blackman-Woms RBW	
Tim	Blowers (TB)	LACA
Linda	Cregan (LC)	
Barbara	Crowther (BC)	Children's Food Campaign
Sophia	Dettmer (SD)	Magic Breakfast
Jessica	Faulkner (JF)	Office of Sharon Hodgson MP
Patricia	Fellows (PF)	Patricia Fellows Consulting
Stephen	Foster (SF)	Chartwells
Lindsay	Graham (LGr)	
Simon	Gray (SM)	Fun Kitchen
Dale	Guest (DG)	Birmingham City Council - City Serve
Laurence	Guinness (LG)	The Childhood Trust
Vickie	Hacking (VH)	APSE
Lorna	Hegenbaria (LH)	NFU
Helena	Houghton (HH)	Adopt a School
Sue	Leuty (SL)	School Food Plan Alliance Admin
Graham	Macey (GM)	Bidfood
Carmel	McConnell (CM)	Magic Breakfast
Vicki	McGowan (VM)	Newcastle University
Frances	Meek (FM)	British Nutrition Foundation
Julie	Messenger (JM)	The Food Teachers Centre
Vicky	Mogford (VM)	Bidfood
Barbara	Monks (BM)	The Cookery Teacher.co.uk
Jason	O'Rourke (JO)	Washingborough Academy
Jeanette	Orrey (JO)	Food for Life

*Letterhead designed by pupils at Harehills Primary School, Leeds*



Secretariat - APSE

Annabelle	O'Toole (AO)	Let's Get Cooking
Iain	Porter (IP)	The Children's Society
Alex	Reeves (AR)	Oakhill Communications
Courtney	Scott (CS)	Food Foundation
Samantha	Seisedos Murray (SSM)	University of Hertfordshire
Josie	Tuckes (JT)	Child Poverty Action Group
Daniel	Tye (DT)	Office of Sharon Hodgson MP
Stephanie	Wood (SW)	School Food Matters

## 1. Chair's Introduction

SH welcomed attendees to the meeting. In doing so, she advised the Group that DT was attending his last meeting and thanked him for the work and support that he had provided to the All Parliamentary Group over the past 4½ years.

SH confirmed if the Labour Party had included in their policy that Universal Infant Free School Meals would be maintained and the eligibility for free school meals would be extended to all families on Universal credit.

In addition, she provided details in relation to a question that she had raised in Parliament regarding the eligibility for free school meals under Universal Credit.

## 2. Minutes of the Last Meeting / Apologies

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed and apologies were noted from the following: -

Lord Currie

## 3. Update from the School Food Plan Alliance

SW provided an update of the work that had been undertaken by the School Food Plan Alliance and the key points raised were noted as follows: -

- (i) The last meeting had focused on Universal Credit.
- (ii) The Alliance had circulated details of the government consultation regarding the eligibility for free school meals and the associated campaign lead by the Children's Society.
- (iii) The Co-chairs had met with the Department for Education in relation to the Healthy Rating Scheme and the main point raised focused on the requirement to include secondary schools in the scheme.

SW concluded by advising that she would be happy to feed back any comments that the Group had to the Department for Education regarding the Healthy Rating Scheme.

#### **4. The Children's Society**

IP provided an overview of The Childrens Society and presented details to the Group in relation to the work that The Society had undertaken regarding the changes to free school meal eligibility under Universal Credit. The key points raised in his presentation were noted as follows: -

- (i) The roll out of Universal credit has been ongoing since 2013 and was now being accelerated.
- (ii) The criteria under the current system was complex and the threshold was hours based.
- (iii) Currently all claimant moved onto Universal Credit were eligible for a free school meal and legislation was required to change this.
- (iv) The new threshold would have a 'cliff edge' effect which means that for a family with three children who earn just above £7,400, they would have to earn an extra £3,600 to mitigate for the loss of the free school meals.
- (v) There was not the 'cliff edge' under the old system because when they hit a threshold, families would then become entitled to working family tax credits.
- (vi) There were also passported benefits such as uniform grants, home to school transport and discounted leisure facilities that free school meal entitlement opened up.
- (vii) By introducing the threshold, it was estimated that one million children would not be entitled to free school meals.

He concluded by advising that The Children's Society were calling for the Government to do nothing and not change the legislation which would allow Universal Credit claimants with children to be eligible for a free school meal.

#### **5. Child Poverty Action Group**

JT provided an overview of the work of the Child Poverty Action Group and presented details in relation to child poverty including the impact of Universal Credit. The key points raised in the presentation were noted as follows: -

- (i) The level of child poverty had seen a decline and the Government were on target to meet the child poverty targets set in 2010. However, recent figures show that the number of children in poverty had started to increase. On current projections if no action was taken, by the next decade, there would be more children in poverty than at any time since the 1960's.
- (ii) The rise in child poverty was due to a number of factors, including the cost of food, housing, the lack of growth in earnings and austerity cuts to benefits. In addition, child related benefits have not had the same protection as pensioners.

- (iii) The groups at highest risk of poverty were single parent families, families with a greater number of children, families with young children, families where someone in the household has a disability.
- (iv) Increasing child poverty was seen in families where there was a parent or parents working.
- (v) Low income households were more likely to have children with lower educational attainment.
- (vi) The initial aim of Universal Credit was to raise 350,000 children out of poverty. However, there has been significant cuts to the Universal Credit budget, therefore this aim was not being met.
- (vii) Single parent families and families with three plus children were impacted to a greater degree under Universal Credit.
- (viii) Under Universal credit, claimants could be mandated to increase their hours, which would impact on their earnings and push them over the eligibility threshold for free school meals.
- (ix) The Child Poverty Action Group had raised concerns about the complexity of the rules of Universal Credit

## **6. The Childhood Trust**

LG provided an overview of work of the Childhood Trust and presented details in relation to why free school meals matter. The key points raised in the presentation were noted as follows: -

- (i) The full impact of Universal Credit had not flowed through yet. However, there were schools already reporting issues with school meal debt.
- (ii) Children that did not experience food security demonstrated a significant deficit in IQ, had an increase level of behavioural and emotional problems at age 12 which was then carried forward into secondary school.
- (iii) Teenagers required a healthy diet as this was the age where they were developing. Therefore, it was important that the good work being done in early years was carried through to the teenage years.
- (iv) There were many families who were eligible for free school meals under the current system that were not claiming for free school meals. From conversations that the Trust had undertaken there were several barriers to eligible people claiming which included; digital accessibility; fear and lack of trust in authority; lack of understanding; availability of information; and stigma and bullying.
- (v) Children in low income families were in some cases surviving on half the calorific intake of their peers.
- (vi) There was a growing issue relating to dinner money debt. Many of the schools who have contracted school catering out to private companies were finding that parents were being taken to court for arrears and in London, anecdotal evidence suggests that in some schools there were

three cases a week of parents being taken to court. Data was required to monitor the scale of the issue.

## **7. Questions and Discussion**

Following the presentations, SH commented that one of headteachers at a school she had visited had contacted her to highlight the issue of dinner money debt being experienced. The mounting issue was leading to difficult conversations with parents and impact on the school, parent relationship. In addition, some of the families who were in debt were not the poorest, they were making a choice not to pay. SH expressed the view that Universal Free School Meals would remove this issue.

In the USA, they have a system of charitable giving to pay off dinner money debt, although this situation would not be a suitable alternative to Universal Free School Meals it could assist in alleviating the situation

CM commented that the case needs to be made for Government to fund school breakfasts due to the increase in child poverty. Children were coming to school hungry and then going hungry until lunchtime impacting on their learning. She asked everyone to support funded breakfasts, lunches and holiday hunger.

CM reported that the Government had invited organisations to submit tenders for £26 million of funding to support up to 1800 breakfast clubs. She confirmed that she would provide an update when an announcement had been made.

It was commented that someone from the private sector supply chain should be asked to contribute as they make considerable profits and could provide support. SH confirmed that a representative had been to the APPG previously and could be invited back.

RBW queried if there was anyone who had researched the impact of not feeding children a good diet in early years. The data could assist in providing support for the case of breakfast and universal free school meals.

She also raised concern in relation to the arrangement for the sugar tax and expressed the view that this could lead to a fragmented postcode lottery of provision.

TB raised the point that many of the staff working in school catering were impacted by the changes in Universal Credit.

JO commented that the new arrangements could split families, with a child receiving a free meal and their sibling not being entitled to one.

Meeting closed at 14.45pm.