



## **Economy, Residents and Communities Scrutiny Committee**

### **Scrutiny Observations to Cabinet on: Tuesday 18 July 2023**

The Economy, Residents and Communities Scrutiny Committee met on Monday 17 July 2023 and considered the following document:

Cessation of e-Free School Meal Vouchers during school holiday periods.

[ADDITIONAL ITEM -Cessation of e-FSM Vouchers during School Holiday Periods.docx](#)

The Economy, Residents and Communities Scrutiny Committee thanked the Cabinet Members and Officers for attending scrutiny.

Scrutiny made the following observations:

The Committee were reassured that:

- Vouchers provided to families through the Catering Services are tracked.
- Families can only use the vouchers in specifically allocated locations.
- For those families without an email address direct bacs payments are made.
- The SHEP (School Holiday Enrichment Programme) scheme is available, but this is not universal and is only available in certain areas of Powys.

The Committee expressed concern that:

- The short notice from Welsh Government given to the Council regarding the withdrawal of the scheme.
- The disparity being created across Wales with some authorities continuing the scheme or providing alternatives.
- Families having to manage and adapt budgets accordingly at short notice due to the impending summer holidays.
- The potential additional demand on Council Services if the vouchers/payments are not provided to families.
- The Council intends making a single year extension to the scheme ie for this summer only.
- Direct payments are not capable of being tracked and we are unable to ensure that the payments are used for the correct purpose.
- Vouchers although issues are not fully utilised in all cases.
- Less financial reserves will be available within the authority for families with complex needs.

Correspondence to the Welsh Government will be drawn up by the Committee to express concerns around the position that the Council has been presented with and in particular the short notice period provided for the existing schemes withdrawal.

Scrutiny's Recommendation	Accept (plus Action and timescale)	Partially Accept (plus Rationale and Action and timescale)	Reject (plus Rationale)
1. That the Cabinet accepts Option 2 and continues to provide the Scheme previously provided by Welsh Government during the school summer holiday period in 2023 only	Noted and accepted. Cabinet 18.07.23		
2. The sum of £280k is vired from the central Risk Budget to the catering budget	Noted and accepted. Cabinet 18.07.23		

In accordance with Rule 7.27.2 the Cabinet is asked to provide a written response to the scrutiny report, including an action plan where appropriate, as soon as possible or at the latest within 2 months of the date of the Cabinet meeting i.e., by Monday 18 September 2023.

Membership of the Economy, Residents and Communities Scrutiny Committee on 17.07.2023 - County Councillors:

A Jones, A E Jones, B Davies, C Kenynon-Wade, G Mitchell, G Preston, K Lewis, L Rijnenberg, P James, S Williams,