

**Report to: Schools Forum**

**Date: 22nd June 2020**

**Report of: John Betts, Interim Business Partner (Education & Skills)**

**Title: Schools & Covid-19 Costs**

**Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of the report is to update Schools Forum members on the situation regarding Covid19 costs and to seek their perspective on a proposal to recharge free shool meal voucher costs from Easter back to schools.

**Background**

In late March, Birmingham City Council decided to implement a Free School Meal Voucher Scheme over the Easter break, which provided 2 week provision of vouchers to eligible pupils.

At that time, provisions around central Government funding for Covid-19 costs were uncertain, although at the start of the pandemic, local authorities were assured by Ministers that they would be reimbursed for the extra financial burden of the pandemic. Nonetheless, the Council thought it prudent to engage with the Chair of the Schools Forum, who indicated that costs incurred may be recoverable from School Forum.

To date, funding from central Government will be insufficient to cover Covid-19 costs incurred by the Local Authority. Although figures remain provisional, the shortfall will be in the tens of £millions.

There is no central budget within the Dedicated Schools Grant to fund the free school meal voucher scheme. Therefore, the Council is consulting the Forum, as representatives of schools, on the proposal to recharge the scheme costs to schools.

Schools can reclaim Covid19 costs from the Department for Education (DfE). The guidance for schools specifically mentions costs associated with “*support for free school meals (FSM) for eligible children who are not attending school, where those costs are not covered by the FSM national voucher scheme*”.

However, claims are subject to two caveats:

* DfE do not expect schools to make a claim against this funding if they are anticipating that they will be able to add to their reserves in the 2020 to 2021 financial year
* The maximum that can be claimed is subject to the following funding ceilings:

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| *Mainstream schools* |
| 250 pupils or fewer | £25,000 |
| 251 to 500 pupils | £30,000 |
| 501 to 1000 pupils | £50,000 |
| Over 1000 pupils | £75,000 |

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| *Special schools and alternative provision* |
| All schools  | £50,000 |

The decision to charge (or not charge) will be a decision for the Council to take. The views of the Forum will help shape that decision.