**Bradford Council Education Settings – Free School Meals and Hungry Families Guidance**

The following document covers services which are being provided to Hungry Families in schools across Bradford. This document follows the updated DFE guidance relating to Free School Meals that was published on the 31st March 2020.

The document covers Bradford’s Offer for meals being provided during the Emergency Childcare Provision in schools and the key questions relating to service provisions during this period.

There is a mixed model offer being provided to children during this period. The below diagram sets out the mixed economy and differing options being provided within the district.

The school economy is currently providing: School Meals, Take Home Meals and Grab Bags, Voucher Systems, Shopping Support, Food Boxes, Free School Meals and links to other Community Feeding Programmes and Support.

**1. Provision of School Meals**

All children who use the emergency childcare provisions are being provided with a meal and snack(s) whilst they are accessing childcare in schools. These are being provided either by; school catering teams, external caterers or through the Local Authority’s School Meals Service.

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, schools are asked to continue to provide meals for children during term time and the Easter Holidays where settings are open.

This is a universal offer and we thank all our schools for continuing to provide a meal during the pandemic to all children who access childcare in their settings. School Catering and in- house Catering Teams continue to offer the option of a hot meal or packed lunch to schools during this type of provision including over the Easter holidays.

Should schools require additional information on this area of food provision, they can contact their designated Strategic School Contact for further information or guidance.

**2. Take Home Meals and Grab Bag Provisions**

Schools and the School Meals Service are providing meals for children to take home as part of their continued support to alleviate food poverty.

Schools and Catering Services are providing take home packed lunches and provisions to provide food for 1 or 2 days on average to support short term feeding requirements for families.

This model of support should continue where schools feel it to be the most suitable form of support that can be provided to families.

Schools can continue to use their own provision, School Meals Service or other external food providers to provide take home meals and Grab Bag Provisions.

**3. Free School Meal Provisions**

This guidance follows the DFE approved guidance released on the 31st March 2020. Under normal circumstances, schools are not expected to provide free school meals to eligible children who are not attending due to illness or if the school is closed. However, during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak the DFE expect schools to continue to provide support to these pupils if the school is:

* only open for certain groups
* closed

Schools are using a mixture of the approaches outlined in this document to provide free school meals to eligible children. Schools are best placed to determine how they provide Free School Meals to children. This can include meals, short term feeding support such as Grab Bags, food deliveries, vouchers and other outreach and community support.

The steps schools can take to support pupils may be different depending on the individual circumstances of the school. Where schools are not able to provide eligible pupils with meals or food parcels through their current food provider, they can provide eligible families with supermarket vouchers in term time weeks.

Whilst we await further clarification on the guidance, many schools continue to provide food to children and families who present as hungry, regardless of their FSM entitlement. We are very keen to support schools to continue to do this but recognize that this could result in a cost to schools. Therefore, we have made arrangements for schools to claim the cost of this from the LA. Further details of how schools can do this will be released in due course.

**4. Food Boxes / Shopping Support from the LA**

We now have confirmation of the service that Bradford is offering to citizens who need support with food during the COVID crisis.

For people who cannot leave their house; any new requests for support should be routed through the Council’s Contact Centre on **01274 431000.** The Council’s Contact Centre will triage calls and people with money to pay who cannot leave the house will be offered a shopping service via Neighbourhood Hubs.

For people that cannot do this and need a food parcel, the call will be routed to the new food distribution centre. Bradford is moving to be able to offer three types of food parcels –Traditional, Halal and Vegetarian, these will be offered in 1-2 people sizes boxes or family boxes.

These boxes will be distributed straight from The Food Delivery Hub to the doorstep.  For the next 10 days we will offer boxes made of up of essential goods that we can source.  The offer also includes nappies, baby food and sanitary products if needed.

**5. Voucher Provisions**

The Government has updated their guidance on the use of vouchers and the development of a national voucher system as provided in the Free School Meals Guidance for Schools.

This is separate to existing voucher systems that schools have been using to support families to alleviate food poverty.

The Government has developed a national scheme to provide supermarket vouchers via the Edenred online portal. Schools will not have to pay for these vouchers as the costs for this scheme will be picked up centrally by the DfE.

Before ordering vouchers, schools will need to check which pupils are eligible and currently in receipt of benefits-related free school meals. Vouchers should be made available to the adult with caring responsibility for that child

Further advice on how to order vouchers through the Edenred portal and the eligibility criteria is listed in the Governments advice. The link to the national guidance is at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>

We have fed back to the DFE on the challenges being faced in regards to accessing the Edenred portal and that some schools have not been provided with their logon details. We will update you once we receive further information on this issue.

**6. Outreach Support / Vulnerable Groups**

The Government has outlined support to vulnerable families and persons. This covers individuals who are currently being advised to stay indoors as part of shielding recommendations for people with medical vulnerabilities. The Local Authority is co-ordinating this service via the Hub with deliveries being made to people in this group. The shielding group have now all received their parcels and will get further parcels directly from government.

Social Workers in addition are liaising with families and will provide support where possible to vulnerable children who are open to Social Care where needs are identified.

**7. Foodbanks and Other Support**

Some families are currently receiving support through community feeding and foodbanks within Bradford. Foodbanks in Bradford will support families through the existing appropriate referral methods and routes that are currently in place.

Where families have a change of economic circumstances, schools are well placed to signpost parents to the Council who can provide additional support relating to benefits, housing support and applications for free school meals.

The Council’s website is the first point of contact for families who need to access our services and information can be found at [www.bradford.gov.uk](http://www.bradford.gov.uk)

**8. Further information**

Overall, schools are well placed to support our children and most vulnerable residents through access to food provision using a mixed model of services and approaches to support children and families in this Coronavirus crisis.

We will continue to work with schools during the Coronavirus Pandemic and will provide further information as it is published to schools.