

WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM July 2nd 2014

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

A summary of developments for Metro Catering

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the recent developments and approach for Wirral Council Metro Catering traded service.

BACKGROUND

1. Summary

1.1 Metro Catering is a traded service for Wirral schools that provides a comprehensive lunchtime meal service through a service level agreement (SLA). It was one of the first traded services to be developed after the establishment of LMS for schools.

1.2 For 13/14, 73% of primary schools bought back the service and 100% of special schools. No secondary school bought back. This generated an income from schools for 13/14 of £4.1 million.

1.3 In 13/14, 1.46 million meals were provided by Metro Catering.

1.4 Metro Catering currently employs 240 staff which equates to 110 Full Time Equivalents (mainly term time only).

2. Developments

2.1 In September 2013, the Coalition government announced its policy for Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM). The Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement 2013 confirmed both revenue and capital funding to introduce free school meal entitlement for all children in reception, year 1 and year 2 with effect from September 2014.

2.2 This is a legal duty on schools, included as part of the Children and Families Act 2014.

2.3 Guidance from the DfE issued in March 2014 indicated that funding will be provided to schools at a rate of £2.30 for each meal taken – based on those infant pupils that are newly eligible for a free meal.

2.4 Wirral Council Cabinet agreed on March 13th 2014 to the recommendations in a report which included:

2.4.1 *That the price of a paid school meal is increased to £2.30 from September 2014 in primary schools where services are provided by METRO Services and that this increase is recommended to governing bodies of primary and special schools.*

2.4.2 *Subject to Council approval that the capital grant received to implement universal free school meals for infants in maintained schools totalling £623,802 is included with the capital programme for 2014-15 and is used to progress the range of schemes described.*

2.4.3 *That METRO school kitchen staffing number are increased to take account of additional meal numbers, with costs funded by schools and a DfE revenue grant based on £2.30 per additional free meal served.*

2.5 Metro Catering has been revising its SLA offer, in consultation with schools using the Wirral Education Quality Services (WEQS) management boards. A new SLA offer was sent to all schools on the 12th June 2014 which also gave notice on the current SLA arrangements.

2.6 The key features of the new Metro Catering SLAs as outlined in the letter of the 12th June are:

- There are three options for the SLA, Standard, Standard Plus and Premium. A standard SLA will provide the core meals service only, the Standard Plus will in addition make provision for equipment repair and replacement, whilst the Premium will also include arrangements for paid meal cash collection.
- Options have been developed in consultation with schools and take account of requirements identified.
- There is a transparent approach to charging for the school meals.
- Charges will only be levied for the meals that are actually served.
- There is an opportunity to review and enhance food purchases.
- There is an 'Early Bird' incentive offer for schools who commit to the SLA on or before July 8th 2014.
- The current SLA will finish on 31st August 2014 and a new SLA will be introduced from 1st September for one year. This new SLA will be reviewed during 2014/15, including costings based on actual in-year figures and consulted on for the offer for 2015/16.

2.7 An option to participate in a KS1 trial day was also offered to all schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Schools Forum to note the report.**

Julia Hassall
Director of Children's Services