**AGENDA ITEM 07**

**Title of report:** School Meals Service Update to Schools Forum

**Author of the paper:** Jenny Pittam, Interim Head of Contract Services

**Officer to present the paper to Schools Forum: Sailesh Patel**

**Details on who has been consulted with on this paper to date:**

John Biggs – Executive Mayor

Debbie Jones, Corporate Director of Children’s Services

Ronke Martins Taylor – Divisional Director Youth and Commissioning

Neville Murton, Sailesh Patel and Sandra Smith, Finance

Angela Birch and Somen Banerjee, Public Health

Jonathon Fox, Legal Services

**Executive Summary**

This report provides Schools Forum with an update on a change to the way the Mayor’s Free School Meals Programme will be funded and the introduction of a legal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between primary schools and the local authority from 22 April 2019.

**Actions required:**

1. Schools Forum is invited to **comment on** the proposed changes raised in the report.

**Background**

1. Since 2014 it has been the Mayor’s priority to provide free schools meals to all primary school children in key stage 2. In 2017/18 £3,556,761 was spent and approximately £1,000,000 per annum of the programme’s budget comes from the Public Health.

**Main report**

1. It has been highlighted that schools can generate a surplus from the Mayor’s programme and as this was not the intended outcome of the programme’s funding, various approaches to addressing this issue have been discussed. Following a meeting with colleagues from Contract Services, Finance, Public Health and Legal Services, the following action has been agreed and will be introduced in April 2019:
   1. **Introduction of Terms and Conditions for the Mayor’s Free Schools Meal Programme:**  A legal Memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Primary Schools and the Local Authority regarding the Mayor’s Free School Meal programme will be introduced. Legal Services have drafted this document and it is attached at Appendix 1. A summary of the key terms and conditions are set out below:
      1. **Payments for actual meals provided**: Currently, schools are reimbursed by the Mayor’s programme on the basis of the average number of school meals identified from the school census data. The MOU states that schools are to be reimbursed only for the actual number of meals served paid monthly in arrears. The financial saving will be the difference between census data and actual number of meals taken.
      2. **Refund Primary Schools that are no longer receiving school meal provision from Contract Services only for the value of the actual contracted price subject to that price not exceeding £2.30.** For Primary Schools that are out of contract (i.e. the school manages their catering provision in-house; or have an external provider), the school will have to confirm and provide evidence to the Finance Team of their contracted meal price. For example, if the meal price is £2.10 then only £2.10 per meal would be refunded to the school to a maximum limit of £2.30 per meal. This recommendation will negate the opportunity for schools to profit from having a cheaper meal price offering.
      3. **Expectation of high quality school meal provision**: the Mayor’s programme terms and conditions states clearly that a high quality and healthy school meal provision should be delivered and maintained by all schools being reimbursed by the programme. All schools must meet as a minimum the School Food Standards set by the Government – School Food Standards Checklist (see Appendix 2) which became mandatory in January 2015.
      4. **Tower Hamlets Public Health and the Healthy Schools Team are working towards enhanced Food Standards** that will exceed those set by the Government’s School food standard referred to above. The new Food Standard, which will be ready and will come into effect at the start of the new academic year in 2019, will focus on supporting pupils to make better, healthier choices and to live longer, healthier lives free from avoidable, diet related conditions by reducing the sugar content and, improving the nutritional content of school food and drink. All Primary Schools will be expected to meet these standards as a requirement for the Mayors FSM programme.
      5. **All schools will be required to complete a monthly Mayors Free School Meal Returns form on a monthly basis:**  This details the actual number of meals taken each month. Finance will verify and reimburse the meal cost to the schools. The Mayors FSM Returns Form is attached as **(Appendix 3).**

**Conclusion**

1. The introduction for the first time of an MOU for the Mayor’s Free School Meal programme is intended to ensure that programme funds are utilised more effectively, delivering best value; and to ensure the delivery of high quality primary school meals that are provided as part of the Mayor’s programme.

Report written by:

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