

Government to fund free school meals during the summer holidays

The Scottish Government announced today that it will make an additional £27.6 million to help feed pupils and other key groups over the summer months available.

Children eligible for free school meals will be among those who continue to be supported over the summer through the additional funding.

The funding will ensure councils are able to continue the provision of free school meals during the summer holidays and other food provision to help low income families during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The latest data from local authorities shows that around 175,000 children and young people are currently receiving free school meals in school premises which are open, or by vouchers or cash payments to buy meals.

The number of children receiving free school food has risen by 53,000 since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic due to the impact of the pandemic on family incomes and financial circumstances.

The extra funding will also enable councils to continue to support a range of people who may be facing new or continuing barriers to accessing food including due to reduced income caused if they are asked to self-isolate through contact tracing – until the end of September.

This funding is in addition to the overall package of £30 million allocated to councils in March to provide free school meals and offer food provision to key groups during lockdown.

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills John Swinney said: "These are challenging times for families and economic uncertainty has added even more pressure on parents already dealing with the stress of this dire Covid-19 crisis.

"We want to ensure families are given the same support through the summer holidays as we provide in term time in recognition of this unprecedented situation. That is why free school meals provision is essential to support families, children and young people who need some extra help at this difficult time.

"This significant additional funding will allow councils to plan for the summer and to continue the existing provision, whether that be offering nutritious free meals for children or through more direct means allowing families to get food for their families. Councils will have the flexibility to ensure they are able to use this additional funding to put in place provision that meets local needs and circumstances.

"£15 million of this funding is being made available to ensure we continue supporting the range of households who have been or may experience difficulty in accessing or affording food during the pandemic. We know that people are under pressure just now as they cope with the impact of Covid-19 and this funding shows we are doing all we can to help them at this difficult time. This funding is additional to the £350 million we have already made available."