

Free school meals till Easter a welcome move

The Scottish Government has allocated over £10 million which is now available to local authorities to continue free school meal provision during Christmas, the February break and Easter holidays in 2021.

Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People Shirley-Anne Somerville said: “No one should be struggling to put food on the table, keep the lights on, or stay warm at home in the midst of this pandemic. With continuing uncertainty around Brexit and the furlough scheme being scaled back we are doing all we can to ensure the right support gets to people at the right time in the right way.

“We know a healthy meal during the school day helps children to learn – but right now it’s an essential to support families at such a difficult time. This money will offer nutritious free meals for children or allow families to get food they desperately need.

“Those experiencing financial hardship can currently apply to the Scottish Welfare Fund and seek advice on which benefits they can receive. However, this will not be suitable for everyone: some people are not eligible for crisis grants or already receive the full benefits they are entitled to, while others may need immediate support with food and essentials.

“We are giving local authorities greater flexibility over funding held in reserve for the Scottish Welfare Fund, to support local action and address people’s needs. This may include supplementing local budgets for the Scottish Welfare Fund to meet demand, providing financial support to tackle food insecurity or to meet fuel costs, or boosting local funding for Discretionary Housing Payments.

“Additionally we are making further resource available to continue the provision of Free School Meals over forthcoming holidays, including Easter.”

The money for school meals is part of a £30 million fund the government is allocating to local authorities to support those who face financial hardship as a result of the pandemic. The balance of £20 million was previously held in reserve for the Scottish Welfare Fund to support people and local authorities will have flexibility to use that too.



9th December 2019 – Scottish Labour Leader, Richard Leonard, at the Sick Kids in Edinburgh during the General Election campaign. PHOTO Thomas Brown

Richard Leonard, Scottish Labour leader, said: “It’s welcome news that the Scottish Government has finally agreed to provide funding for free school meals during the holiday periods.

“Marcus Rashford has run an inspirational campaign that has forced both the UK and Scottish government to make concessions and to rethink their initial reluctance to provide ongoing support during holiday periods.

“Scottish Labour has been fully supportive of Marcus Rashford’s campaign throughout, and this additional money is welcome and will provide essential support forward pressed and poverty-stricken families.

“It’s vital that Ministers ensure this package of support is

fully and swiftly delivered, and that local councils have the funding in place to make sure that all children in need of free schools receive them whatever the time of year.”

Chair of the Poverty and Inequality Commission Bill Scott, said:“We welcome this much needed additional help for low income families and individuals. The funding for Free School Meals during the Christmas, February and Easter breaks will come as a great relief for many hard pressed parents.

“We would urge local authorities to use the flexibility given to them by Scottish Government to ensure that every penny of extra help available gets to those who need it most.”

COSLA’s spokesperson for Resources Councillor Gail Macgregor, and spokesperson for Community Wellbeing Councillor Kelly Parry said:“The impacts of the virus have not been felt equally across society and we welcome this funding which can be used flexibly by councils, enabling them to provide more support for those who need it most in our communities.

“Local authorities will deploy it in ways that best meets local circumstance, to provide the most effective support to those experiencing financial hardship, for example through grants, addressing food insecurity, or support for fuel costs. We know that as winter arrives and the furlough scheme draws to a close unfortunately more adults and children are likely to need assistance to ensure they are fed and warm. Local Government is the anchor in our communities and is able to provide advice, support and assistance to those that need it.”