

Call In of Cabinet Decision – Customer Charter and Service Standards Framework

Appendix 4

Response of the Chief Executive

This note outlines the suggested response to the call in submitted and a proposed way forward.

The position with FSM is that eligibility depends on receipt of a range of benefits/credits, none of which are under the Council control but are under the remit of Department of work and pensions or HMRC

Where the council has processed a claim for Housing Benefit or Council tax reduction the Council may have already obtained proof that one of those benefits/credits are in payment so we can confirm eligibility without checking further. Also the Council has an 'opt out' clause included in our HB/CTR application forms for parents to tick if they **do not** want to claim FSM – the aim being to maximise take up and ease the process, which it does.

In terms of process when the Council uses the eligibility checking service to seek confirmation of DWP/HMRC benefits, it can get one of three responses:

- Entitlement to one of the qualifying benefits is confirmed – award FSM
- Entitlement to one of the qualifying benefits is **not** confirmed – refuse FSM
- Please check back as an application is pending – we therefore resubmit, and often resubmit and resubmit and resubmit until there is a definitive answer one way or another and FSM can be awarded or refused.

Once a decision is made on a new award, a confirmation email is sent to the parent and the data team in education who will update SIMS so the schools are aware and this is done usually in a matter of a day or two after confirmation is obtained.

As the process or timeline is not within the control of the Council the proposed service standard was set to cover the "overall" process and to match up with HB/CTR claims and to allow for the potential for 'to and fro' with the DWP checking system.

However the Council understands that this could appear to show a much longer period to assess claims than is actually the case so it is proposed to amend the timescale to include the elements that are only within the council control and with this in mind will be suggesting the following change.

Free School Meals (FSM)	Make a new application for FSM or tell us about a change in your household circumstances that might affect an existing award of FSM	If you have provided all the information we need and we have been able to obtain confirmation of your eligibility/non-eligibility from DWP/HMRC, we will tell you if you are entitled to FSM	7 working days (of receiving the confirmation)	Web: Free school meals - Swansea Email: freeschoolmeals@swansea.gov.uk Phone: 01792 635353
--------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

However if the DWP have a decision in the pipeline, the Council has no control of the time it takes them to make their decision so that could be a considerable period during which the Council will continue to submit multiple eligibility checks. This is why the 28 days was originally set to try and reflect the overall timeline but it is accepted the proposed change to the above definition and response time should make it clearer to residents.

Conclusion

It is intended to make this change to the service standards to better explain what the Council is able to do in terms of processing applications for the elements within its control. i.e. 7 days from receipt of confirmation of eligibility.

The process and timing for making this change would depend on the outcome of the call-in process.