

REQUEST FOR DIRECTOR DECISION – DD2655

Title: Universal Free School Meals: Monitoring meal uptake and policy impacts

Executive Summary:

This Director Decision (DD) seeks approval of expenditure of up to £100,000 to contribute to the evaluation and monitoring approach for the Mayor's Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) programme.

Expenditure will cover the Monitoring impact and insight: primary research with audiences workstream. Insights will highlight impacts of the one-year policy during implementation, as well as provide case studies and capture lessons learned.

Up to £100,000 is required to conduct in-house primary research and develop data outputs relating to school level uptake data. This amount includes associated direct costs (platform hire, accessing respondent samples, recruiting respondents for research, payment for participating in research, data dashboards) in addition to an external commission to conduct school case studies (involving qualitative research with pupils, teachers, kitchen staff, head teachers and observations).

The Mayor approved expenditure of up to £100,000 for the evaluation of the UFSM programme, under the cover of Mayoral Decision [\(MD\)3146](#) (see Decision 4 of MD3146) with details to be provided under a DD.

Decision:

That the Executive Director of Communities and Skills approves:

1. Expenditure of up to £100,000 to conduct primary research into the impact of the Universal Free School Meals programme.

AUTHORISING DIRECTOR

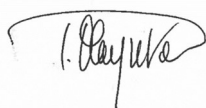
I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

It has my approval.

Name: Tunde Olayinka

Position: Executive Director of Communities and Skills

Signature:



Date:

29/09/2023

PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. The Mayor of London believes that all primary school children in state funded schools should have access to a free school meal. In February 2023, the Mayor announced an historic £135m emergency, one-off funding plan to help families with the spiralling cost of living by ensuring that every primary schoolchild in a state funded school across London will receive free school meals in the next academic year. [MD3103](#) approved the Mayoral budget for 2023-24, which included £130m for the Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) programme.
- 1.2. The cost-of-living crisis means families and children across London are in desperate need of additional support. This funding will help up to 287,000 primary school children in state funded schools in the capital receive free school meals and save families around £440 across the year. This policy will ensure parents are not worrying about how they are going to feed their children during the school day.
- 1.3. This emergency funding is for one academic year only – the 2023-24 academic year (which spans two financial years). By funding a one-off scheme, the Mayor will directly impact thousands of children this year.
- 1.4. MD3146 approved the expenditure of up to £100,000 (outlined in Decision 4 of MD3146) to conduct monitoring and evaluation of the UFSM project. The programme objectives for the monitoring approach can be found in section 2 below.
- 1.5. Monitoring impact and insight via primary research will be gathered across a range of key audiences including head teachers, parents and pupils. Insight will be valuable in demonstrating the impact of the policy in the early stages of the implementation, provide an opportunity to identify challenges and best practice and demonstrate listening. Early insight will be provided to the Mayor's Office and will inform communications throughout the year. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will inform future policy decisions and lessons learnt.
- 1.6. Both strands will be informed by the UFSM Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) (see Appendix A); Theory of Change (see Appendix B) and the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) due to be published on the GLA website in September/October 2023. This work will draw on the EqIA through analysing differences in religion, socioeconomic status or children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The Theory of Change identified four impact areas: household financial circumstances; child and family mental health and wellbeing; child and family physical health; and educational attainment. Research will draw on this Theory of Change model. The GLA monitoring will also connect with partner evaluations led by Impact on Urban Health and Education Endowment Foundation. Together all three pieces will complete the monitoring and evaluation for the Mayor's UFSM programme.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 2.1. Up to £100,000 has been allocated for the UFSM programme evaluation, the primary objectives of which are to:
 - understand within the 2023-24 academic year, both the quantitative and qualitative impact of the Mayor's UFSM scheme, with a focus on cost of living
 - determine the extent to which the guiding principles & grant conditions for the policy were adhered to during implementation
 - understand the experience of pupils with protected characteristics

- inform ongoing communications with boroughs, schools and parents
- collaborate with and complement wider partner-led evaluation approaches.

Monitoring impact and insight

- 2.2. GLA led primary research will be informed by the Theory of Change model which identified the potential impacts of the policy (see Appendix B) developed in May 2023; the EqIA (Appendix A) and the IIA which is due to be published on the GLA website in September 2023.
- 2.3. GLA led primary research will provide early impacts during implementation and inform communications and messaging. Gathering insight from head teachers, parents and pupils will address the following objectives:
 - collect ongoing evidence to understand the successes and potential challenges of the policy
 - understand differences in groups identified in the EqIA e.g. faith schools, children with a religion or a belief, ethnicity and SEND
 - gain early insight on implementation to inform best practice and help identify opportunities to support schools
 - identify unintended benefits and build the wider story
 - ensure policy review and refinement is informed by schools and families.
- 2.4. Research would be collected through a variety of methods including interviews with headteachers, parent polling, and qualitative research conducted with parents. This work would be led by the GLA's Opinion Research team.
- 2.5. Research will produce a number of outputs, including:
 - identified potential policy impacts on beneficiaries over the year, highlighting differences in subgroups (pupils with protected characteristics)
 - policy insight to share with partners and boroughs in the form of testimonials, case studies or quotes
 - key London-specific statistics e.g. family finances, food choices, improvement to mental health and all other unintended benefits
 - insight that can be built into communications to share learning
 - examples of children and parents' voices and reactions to the policy
 - Lessons learned to inform future policy direction.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1. Section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010 provides that, in the exercise of their functions, public authorities – of whom the Mayor is one – must have due regard to the need to:
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 3.2. Relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
 - 3.3. The Mayor's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy sets out how the Mayor will help address the inequalities, barriers and discrimination experienced by groups protected by the Equality Act 2010. In this strategy the Mayor of London has gone beyond these legal duties; and contributed to addressing wider issues such as poverty and socio-economic inequality, as well as the challenges and disadvantage facing different groups in London including young people.
 - 3.4. By ensuring all children who are living on the poverty line have a nutritious meal once a day during term time the scheme will work towards tackling the underlying determinants of ill health – including food poverty and cost of living. While this scheme could lead to wider benefits relating to the improvement of the health and educational outcomes of children, it is fundamentally framed as an emergency cost of living intervention. This will complement the Mayor of London's funding for Holiday Hunger¹.
 - 3.5. In London, more than 2.3m Londoners live below the poverty line and 33 per cent of adults have skipped meals to save money so that their children can eat. 13 per cent of Londoners say they have been unable to buy food and other essential items in the last six months or have had to rely on outside support such as food banks. This policy seeks to improve this, with evaluation processes embedded to understand impact.
 - 3.6. The monitoring approach is being informed by an IIA which will be published on the GLA website in September/October 2023. The EqIA has been completed and recommends that monitoring is undertaken during the first year of the policy to understand the number of children; difference across children with a religion or a belief or SEND and take up of UFSM (Appendix A).

4. Other considerations

4.1. Key risks and issues

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation	RAG
Monitoring approach does not go ahead or is delayed – due to delays in GLA approvals, leading to delay in data collection thus delay on insight and evidence.	Medium	High	Officers will highlight time implications to colleagues in the Mayor's Office and explain the risks if deadlines are missed.	G
Schools do not provide the data required and data set received is not representative of London.	Medium	High	Data can be bolstered by wider insights and qualitative data collection. Small sample sizes can be weighted to London representations, depending on the scale of data collected.	A

¹ The Mayor has made over £3.5m of emergency funding available to provide meals and food supplies to those in need over the school holidays and at weekends. It will be delivered in partnership with Mayor's Fund for London and The Felix Project until the end of March 2024, across all London boroughs.

Data protection issues arise meaning data cannot be shared with the GLA.	Low	High	No identifiable data is being requested. Management information system (MIS) providers have robust data protection processes in place and data sharing agreements will be developed.	G
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Links to Mayoral strategies and priorities

- 4.2. This programme links to the Mayor's delivery of the Robust Safety Net Recovery Mission, which aims to ensure that, by 2025, all Londoners can access the support they need to avoid and alleviate financial hardship. Provision of FSM through this programme will ensure children have at least one meal a day and reduce financial burden on parents.
- 4.3. It also contributes to the delivery of the Healthy Place, Healthy Weight Recovery Mission which aims to ensure that, by 2025, all London's families find it easier to eat healthy food and be active where they live, learn, shop, work and play. This programme provides an opportunity to promote whole school approaches to supporting the health of London's families through a set of agreed grant principles and engagement with boroughs and schools.
- 4.4. The programme will also promote best practice in relation to food waste, transportation and share procurement practices, to facilitate tackling the climate emergency where possible.
- 4.5. Primarily this programme seeks to reduce the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on low-income families, which is a priority under the Getting London Back on its feet Mayoral priority.
- 4.6. Evidence suggests that the provision of FSM has a positive impact on children's physical and mental health. Both of which are priorities within the Mayor's Health Inequalities strategy and the partnership Vision for London's Health and Care. The learning from this one-year programme has the potential to inform an additional role out of free school meal provision which would help work towards the Mayor's goal of London becoming the world's healthiest and fairest city.
- 4.7. There are no conflicts of interest to note for any of the officers involved in the drafting or clearance of this decision.

5. Financial comments

- 5.1. Approval is sought for the expenditure of up to £100,000 to conduct primary research into the impact of the UFSM programme.
- 5.2. MD3146 (see Decision 4 of MD3146) approves the expenditure of up to £100,000 to conduct monitoring and evaluation of the UFSM project with details to be provided under a DD.
- 5.3. This expenditure of £100,000 would be funded from the 2023-24 UFSM programme budget.

6. Legal comments

Power to undertake the requested decisions

- 6.1. The foregoing sections of this report indicate that the decisions requested of the Executive Director of Communities and Skills (the "Director") concern the exercise of the GLA's general powers and fall within the GLA's statutory power to do such things considered to further or which are facilitative of, conducive or incidental to the promotion of social development within Greater London and in formulating the proposals in respect of which a decision is sought officers have complied with the GLA's related statutory duties to:

- pay due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people
- consider how the proposals will promote the improvement of health of persons, health inequalities between persons and to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom
- consult with appropriate bodies.

6.2. In taking the decisions requested, the Director must have due regard to the equality objectives under the Public Sector Equality Duty; namely the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, and to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation) and persons who do not share it and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). To this end, the Director should have particular regard to section 3 (above) of this report.

Procurement

6.3. The decision, above, seeks approval to procure monitoring services and qualitative research. Officers are reminded to comply with the requirements of the GLA's Contracts and Funding Code when undertaking the procurements. Officers are reminded also to enter into appropriate agreements with the relevant service providers, before the relevant services commence.

7. Planned delivery approach and next steps

7.1. Direct award of £100,000 for Monitoring impact: Primary research.

Activity	Timeline
Procurement of contract	18 September 2023
Delivery Start Date	22 September 2023
Agreed approach in place	October 2023
Field research conducted	October 2023, November 2023, December 2023, June 2024
Polling conducted	November 2023, June 24
Primary research report presented	November 2023
Research analysis	November 2023
Comms delivered sharing outputs	December 2023 to March 2024
Project Closure: [for project proposals]	September 2024

Appendices and supporting papers:

Appendix A - UFSM EqIA

Appendix B - UFSM Theory of Change

Public access to information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and will be made available on the GLA website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** This form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 - Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form – NO

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION:

Drafting officer to confirm the following (✓)

Drafting officer:

Sara-Jane Millar has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

✓

Assistant Director/Head of Service:

Jazz Bhogal has reviewed the documentation and is satisfied for it to be referred to the Sponsoring Director for approval.

✓

Financial and Legal advice:

The Finance and Legal teams have commented on this proposal, and this decision reflects their comments.

✓

Corporate Investment Board

A summary of this decision was reviewed by the Corporate Investment Board on 25 September 2023.

✓

INTERIM CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER:

I confirm that financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this report.

Signature:



Date:

25/09/2023