

**Children and Young People Committee
School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Bill
SSO12 – Response from Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough
Council**

School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Bill

Consultation to the White Paper

Response from Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

N.B.

The response is to Section 5 in the White Paper – Reducing Bureaucracy and specifically relates to:

5.3 Primary School Free Breakfast Initiative

5.5 Flexible Charging for School Meals

5.3 Primary School Free Breakfast Initiative Proposals:

- a) To give governing bodies of maintained primary schools the power to request free breakfasts from the local authority*
- b) To place a duty on local authorities to provide free breakfasts in maintained primary schools in response to a request from the school, or where it is already providing free breakfasts, unless it would be unreasonable to do so.*
- c) To give local authorities the power to withdraw free breakfasts in individual schools if circumstances change and it would be unreasonable to continue to provide it.*
- d) To give the Welsh Ministers the power to issue guidance in relation to the provision of free breakfasts.*
- e) To give local authorities the power to decide the breakfast content subject to compliance with any regulations made under the Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure 2009.*
- f) To give the Welsh Ministers the power to transfer to the governing body of a maintained primary school, by order, the local authority's duty to provide free breakfasts.*

The authority would broadly support the changes proposed in a) – f) as outlined above.

However, although we can understand that the purpose of the proposals is to reduce bureaucracy, there are serious concerns relating to the proposed change that the specific Primary School Free Breakfast Initiative (PSFBI) grant will cease and be transferred to the Revenue Support Grant (RSG).

The PSFBI has been very successful in Rhondda Cynon Taf and it is anticipated that there will be in excess of 100 of our schools participating in this initiative by the end of 2012.

It forms a vital service for our schools and is proven that children who have eaten breakfast are better behaved and are able to concentrate and therefore learn more effectively.

There are clear areas of deprivation in our authority that are well documented and by providing a free breakfast ensures that they have a healthy start to the day with a nutritious breakfast in a safe and secure environment.

Another consideration is that the PSFBI currently provides employment to 380 people in our area and this is a “plus factor” given the current economic climate and the unemployment statistics in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The main reason for this success is that the grant is “ring fenced” for the caterers’ to fully utilise for this purpose.

The concern is that if it is included in the RSG, given the reduction in budgets, the Council has many other funding priorities and therefore insufficient funds would be provided to the catering service to continue with the provision.

The White Paper does not provide details of how and what the level of funding would be and what it would be based on.

Information would be needed to ascertain how the funding would be increased for more schools joining the scheme and to account for future increases to food and labour costs.

Clarification would be needed to understand how and when adjustments to the funding would be made, otherwise the initiative would be unsustainable.

5.5. Flexible Charging for School Meals

a) To repeal sections 512ZA (2) and 533(4) of the Education Act 1996 to give local authorities and governing bodies of maintained schools the freedom to charge different persons different prices for the same quantity of milk, meals and other refreshments.

i) To discount the cost of meals for a limited period for the new intake in infant, junior and primary schools.

ii) To discount the cost of meals for families where there is more than one child wanting school meals.

b) To amend sections 512ZA and 533 to prevent schools and local Authorities from charging more than the cost of providing milk, meals or other refreshments to pupils.

i) The current legislation does not allow the catering providers in the Authority to change the selling price of the meal to pupils and it has been frustrating as opportunities to increase meal numbers have been lost in the past.

Marketing techniques such as targeted pricing strategies are crucial to the catering service, as this will encourage groups of pupils to have a school meal for a fixed period of time during the academic year.

Therefore, the proposals outlined in the White Paper are welcomed in that the catering team can determine meal pricing.

However, there are reservations in terms of the practicality, administration and financial implications that will have to be considered in the costings of any variable pricing.

- ii) There are major concerns that if the Authority decided to discount the cost of meals for families where there is more than one child wanting school meals, there could be challenges by parents relating to inequality and discrimination issues. This could cause difficulties between schools that would need to be resolved between the various parties concerned and lead to issues and problems for the Local Education Authority.

Although the White Paper is attempting to reduce bureaucracy, the good intentions outlined in the proposal will be undermined by the administration burden and related costs to the Authority.

- b) To ensure the catering service remains viable, more clarity and/or explanation is needed relating to the “cost” element outlined in b)