

Briefing 18/20

June 2018

Welfare Foods – a consultation on meeting the needs of children and families

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in Scotland

For information only to England, Northern Ireland and Wales

Key Issues

The purpose of this briefing is to advise APSE members on the consultation which is currently under way with regards to Welfare foods. The consultation will run until 28 June 2018 and all responses should be completed using the online survey form which can be accessed by [clicking here](#)

Link to the consultation paper - https://consult.gov.scot/health-protection/welfare-foods/user_uploads/sct0218087754-1_welfarefoods_p4.pdf

Link to the full consultation paper and online survey - <https://consult.gov.scot/health-protection/welfare-foods/>

1.0 Introduction

Scottish Government's Programme for Government, sets out its ambitions for a fairer, healthier Scotland providing a plan to help to continue the process of making Scotland a better place and tackling the challenges it faces. One of the challenges highlighted is how **best to ensure everyone has access to a healthy diet**. Both Scottish Government's "[Maternal and Infant Nutrition Framework](#)" and "[A Healthier Future](#)" help to set out the crucial role of nutrition in the early months and years of a child as well as highlighting the priorities and actions to change food culture for everyone. Through the devolution of Welfare Foods, Scottish Government has an additional opportunity to build on these important documents.

Scottish Government wish to link Welfare Foods to expanded and enhanced early learning and childcare to create a unified package of nutrition for young people. They wish to make the current system easier for families to access and use, including creating a new smartcard

and aligning the application process with the new Best Start Grant. Scottish Government also want to increase the weekly payments to families to cover the costs of ensuring their children get a healthy diet.

2.0 Background to Welfare Foods

Welfare Foods was originally introduced as a wartime rationing measure in the 1940s, with benefits originally being universal but over the years these have become more targeted as **the nation's diet has improved. At the moment Welfare Foods are delivered through the Healthy Start Scheme and the Nursery Milk Scheme.** The first provides vouchers to pregnant woman and families on low incomes enabling them to purchase affordable healthy food and vitamins. The second, entitles all children under five to receive 1/3 of a pint of fresh **semi-skimmed or full fat cow's milk (this includes infant formula for those under the age of one)** on days where they have spent two hours or more in early learning and childcare.

The powers over Welfare Foods have been devolved to Scotland as part of the Scotland Act 2016, however as yet these powers have not been brought into force. The Welfare Foods consultation is seeking views on how to take these powers forward. Through these powers Scottish Government wish to increase uptake and choice for families, reduce bureaucracy (including streamlining the process), and focus on health outcomes.

3.0 Phase 1 – Best Start Foods (to be introduced in summer 2019)

Currently UK Healthy Start scheme provides vouchers to pregnant teenagers (under the age of 18) as well as pregnant woman and families with children under the age of four, qualifying for benefits including **income support, income based Jobseeker's Allowance or income related Employment and Support Allowance, Child Tax Credit (family income £16,190 or less) and Universal Credit (monthly income below £408 per month).** Those qualifying are entitled to receive one £3.10 voucher per week or for babies under one, two vouchers per week totalling £6.20. It is estimated that the current uptake for these vouchers is around 70%.

The Healthy Start vouchers can be used to purchase:-

- **Plain cow's milk**
- Infant formula milk
- Fresh & frozen fruit
- Fresh & frozen vegetables

Scottish Government wish to combine the Healthy Start vouchers and the [Sure Start Maternity Grant](#) which is also being devolved to Scotland. The **new combined system "Best Start Grant" (BSG) will look to replace the previous Sure Start Maternity Grant and form part of the Scottish social security system.**

The BSG is split into three payments and aims to provide support during key transition periods in the early years of a child. The intention is to help contribute towards improving outcomes for children, recognising the costs incurred by parents supporting their child during these important years. The three payments are broken down as follows:-

Maternity and New Baby Payment
£600 for a first child and £300 for any subsequent children.

Nursery/ Early Learning Payment
£250 providing help during nursery and early learning years to help support the child's development.

School Payment
£250 to help with the costs for preparing for primary school

The BSG will also include a system for Best Start Foods payments (formerly known as the UK Healthy Start vouchers). These payments will be a sub-set of the Best Start Grant and the eligibility criteria includes:-

- income support
- **income based Jobseeker's Allowance**
- income related Employment and Support Allowance
- Child Tax Credit (up to a maximum £16,190 per annum)
- Universal Credit (monthly income limit of £610 per month)
- Both maximum Child Tax Credit and maximum Working Tax Credit and income under £6,420, or the 4 week run on
- Pension credit
- Housing Benefit (for those on a maximum income of £16,190 per annum)

The Best Start Foods payment will increase in value from £3.10 to £4.25 and entitlement will commence from confirmation of the pregnancy instead of from week 10 of the pregnancy. There will also be a continuation of two vouchers for babies under one per week but this will increase from £6.20 to £8.50 per week. The range of foods will also increase to cover, as well as the current UK Healthy Start provision, tinned fruit and vegetables, fresh or tinned pulses and eggs.

As part of this, Scottish Government will look to more closely align and simplify the eligibility for Best Start Foods with the eligibility criteria for the two year old early learning and childcare places. Out with the early years setting the focus will be on supporting low income families and how they can be supported in the home.

The consultation also provides information on a new smartcard system to help reduce the stigma associated with paper vouchers and to help make the system easier to access, as well as asking how the can gather feedback as the system evolves. The consultation also asks how Scottish Government can work with retailers to ensure families make the best choices to improve their diet and nutrition.

As part of the consultation Scottish Government would also welcome any innovative programmes to support families to eat healthy and what evidence could be gathered regarding the impact.

Finally, as part of this consultation Scottish Government would like to gather views on **whether the provision of children's vitamins be linked to eligibility for the new Best Start Foods**. In Scotland, free vitamins are offered to all pregnant women throughout their pregnancy as **part of Scottish Government's commitment to giving children the best start**.

4.0 Phase 2 – Milk and Under 5s (to be introduced as part of the early years expansion in 2020)

The current UK Nursery Milk Scheme (UK NMS) entitles all children under five to receive 1/3 of a pint of fresh **semi-skimmed or full fat cow's milk (this includes infant formula for those under the age of one)** on days where they have spent two hours or more in early learning and childcare. This scheme reimburses childcare providers for the cost of supplying milk. It currently funds milk for approximately 1.5 million children across the UK and costs the Department of Health and Social Care and the Scottish and Welsh Governments around £70 million per year. Scottish Government estimate there are around 30,000 claims made each year by childcare providers, with the scheme costing the Scottish Government around £4 million in claim costs each year.

Scottish Government's expansion of the early learning and childcare programme to offer three, four and eligible two-year olds 1,140 hours of funded entitlement each year from August 2020, will also include a free meal as part of the provision. As part of the free meal, Scottish Government are looking to integrate the milk provision into this offer and would like feedback on the proposal to do so.

In order to deliver this the consultation proposes to remove the administration burden of the UK NMS by providing the milk as part of their funded early learning and childcare offer, which removes the requirement for the reimbursement scheme. The consultation highlights that the provision of milk would be available to children accessing funded early learning and childcare provision, whether offered by a local authority, private, third sector or childminder provider. It also notes that Scottish Government would agree funding with local authorities. In addition to the milk offering, Scottish Government are also considering increasing the offer by introducing a healthy snack to complement the free milk and meal, again the would look to agree funding for local authorities regarding this.

Given the importance of milk for children in their earlier years, Scottish Government will maintain the offer currently provided through UK NMS for children out with the funded early learning and childcare provision. They are keen to introduce a system which does not recreate UK administration systems. They are therefore interested in views on how they can best support childcare providers to provide milk to children out with funded entitlement and ask how this could work without creating costly administrative systems. Also, they are looking for views on the proposal to include an offer of a healthy snack for children out with funded early learning and childcare provision.

5.0 Consultation Questions

The full list of consultation questions are below:-

1. How can we increase the uptake and awareness of the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods?
2. What can we do to make the smartcard system as easy to use as possible?
3. How do we gather feedback to make improvements as the system evolves?
4. How can we work creatively with retailers and others to make it easier for families to use Best Start Foods to improve their diet and nutrition?
5. What could an innovative programme that will support families to establish healthy eating patterns look like?
6. What evidence could we gather about the impact?
7. **Should the provision of children's vitamins be linked to eligibility for the new Best Start Foods (i.e. up to age of three)?**
8. What do you think about the proposal to offer milk as part of the free meal offer for all children in early learning and childcare funded provision by 2020?
9. What are your views on the proposal to include an offer of a healthy snack to complement the free milk and meal offer for all children in early learning and childcare funded provision 2020?
10. We are interested in your views on how we can best support childcare providers to provide milk to children out with funded early learning and childcare entitlement. How could this work in practice without creating a costly administrative system?
11. What are your views on the proposal to include an offer of a healthy snack for children out with funded early learning and childcare entitlement?

6.0 APSE Comment

Mandy Callaghan and Sarah Bruce of Scottish Government outlined the main areas of the consultation at our most recent Soft FM advisory group meeting which took place on 1st May 2018. As part of this agenda item, there was a group discussion post presentation regarding some of the thoughts of local authorities as well as some of the potential challenges. These included the suggestion for Scottish Government to look at the administration and operation of fuel payment cards as a potential option for adopting a similar method for welfare foods payment system. The importance of linking everything back to the nutritional guidance and the food standards document "[Setting the Table](#)", as well as whether local authorities would receive a budget for the complete offering of meal, milk and snack. Another potential challenge raised was how budgets/ monies would be distributed to childcare providers, where a child attends more than one provider over the course of a day. APSE would therefore be supportive of a new system which simplifies the administration and allocation of funding but would ask Scottish Government to consider any potential challenges for local authorities.

APSE would encourage local authorities to respond to this consultation, which cuts across the whole council and would welcome the views of our member authorities within Scotland; a copy of your response may be submitted to Louise Melville, Principal Advisor for Scotland on Lmelville@apse.org.uk in order for a collated APSE response to be submitted.

APSE will continue to keep members updated on the consultation via Soft FM advisory group forum as well as our briefing service. Please [click here](#) to access the APSE Scotland diary of dates page on our website for further information on future advisory group dates and [here](#) to access our briefing service.

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