

## Neighbourhoods and Regulatory Services

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Dear Head Teacher

### Notification of Primary School Meal Price Increase – April 2023

I am sure you will appreciate that the Council has experienced a huge rise in its food costs for school meals over the past year. Whilst the annual food inflation figure in December 2022 was quoted at 13.3% (source: British Retail Consortium (BRC) and data firm Nielsen) which in itself is severe, the inflationary impact on our school food contracts has actually been much greater with many menu items increasing between 30-90% during 2022. You will also be aware of the impact arising from the recent pay rise in local government and non-teaching staff which sees an increase of more than 10% for the lowest grades.

In my letter to Head Teachers on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022 informing schools of the 4.7% price rise for September 2022, I indicated that the Council would be closely monitoring its meal service costs during the remainder of that year and if necessary review prices again early in 2023. Like many other School Meal providers, the reality is that the Council cannot continue to operate without taking further steps to cover rising costs.

#### **Meal Price**

I would therefore advise that the Council will be increasing the primary school meal price on 1st April 2023 to **£2.41** per meal (£12.05 per week). This applies to both paid and 'free' lunches and represents an 8% increase on the current price. The new price is in line with the funding per meal the Government allocates under the Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) programme 2022/23. Further price increases before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 cannot be ruled out but I can commit to these not exceeding the uplift in the UIFSM grant funding rate for 2023/24.

#### **Adult Meals**

A small number of adult meals are also taken each year. The price will increase from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to £3.50 (plus VAT).

At present, Service Level Agreements are being finalised for schools whose agreements commence on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023. We are meeting with these Heads to discuss the terms of our new offer and outline a potential change that may impact on some schools with low 'free' meal uptake levels. Once work with schools included in the first round of SLAs is completed we will make contact with academies whose agreements start in September to arrange similar conversations.

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I appreciate the price rise will have an impact on your school's budget but I can also confirm that the Council is continuing to provide substantial financial support to the Meal service and by doing so, is effectively subsidising some of the service costs which would otherwise have to be passed onto schools.

The financial pressures relating to school meals in Hartlepool is replicated in many parts of the country. Lobbying of Government to recognise the crisis and for increased funding continues. A survey of UK school meal price rises has been compiled by LACA, the leading professional body representing public sector and private contract caterers operating in the school food sector. Should you be interested the link to the article is as follows: [LACA survey finds price of school lunch expected to rise further in 2023 | LACA](#)

Finally, please be assured that we continue to be committed to providing pupils with enjoyable, healthy and good quality food each day with no reduction in portion sizes. Should you have any queries please contact Lynne Bell, Catering Manager, on (01429) 523850 or myself using the details at the top of this letter.

Yours faithfully



Jeff Mason  
Strategic Policy and Facilities Management Manager