

Overview and Scrutiny Update: What action is being taken to support children entitled to free school meals and encourage people to take up their entitlement to free early years childcare?

Free School Meal Uptake

Public Health is actively working to understand the uptake of FSM and to propose actionable solutions to increase participation. The focus will be on both secondary and primary schools in Torbay. The following actions are being taken:

- **Increasing Awareness:** Promoting FSM registration through social media, Family Hubs, the Torbay Healthy Learning websites, and regular updates in education newsletters.
- **Exploring Auto-Enrolment:** Considering all options for auto-enrolment and collaborating with Local Authorities that have implemented this system.
- **Data Analysis:** Analysing data from schools and communities with low uptake to identify patterns and areas for improvement.
- **Researching Best Practices:** Investigating successful strategies used by other Local Authorities to achieve high FSM uptake.
- **Identifying Barriers:** Working with schools to understand the barriers to FSM uptake, which may include:
 - Conducting surveys and questionnaires with parents, children, and school staff.
 - Discussing FSM as a topic at Personal Development Professional's Network (PDPN) meetings to engage with education staff.

A project plan will be developed to outline how the actions will be executed, detailing the project's objectives, scope, and timeline. Evaluation of the findings along with recommendations will be available to stakeholders by September 2025.

Early Years Entitlement

An Early Years Sufficiency Strategy update report has been agreed for six months' time and will be led by Children's Services' Early Years.

Torbay's Early Years entitlement is 86%. Several activities to promote and encourage uptake of entitlement include:

- Early Years placements and entitlements forms part of the one year and two-and-a-half year developmental reviews. Conversations and support is extended to other children in the family who are eligible.
- Online links to enrolment application pages are sent to all families via text or email by 0-19 staff.
- Home Learning Environment Outreach Development Worker– supports families to access their entitlement when children are not registered with a setting.
- Portage team have regular conversations and support families to access their entitlement,

- PH Nurses – developmental reviews
- Information is on Social Media posts and all Local Authority websites including Family Hubs promoting uptake.
- Early Years entitlement posters across all Hubs
- Families are supported with online applications by Family Hubs staff both in the Hubs and at home.
- Collaboration with Local Authority to support families who have made an application but have not taken the entitlement