GREATER**LONDON**AUTHORITY

London Borough Leaders   Date: 19 May 2023

Dear Colleague,

RE: Update on Universal Free School Meals (UFSM)

As further development of the scheme and the policy continues, I would like to reinforce our appreciation of the efforts of you and your colleagues in preparing for September.

We would now like to provide further updates to you on:

- the grant process
- engagement
- implementation support package.

Grant process

Payments and contracting for the programme will be managed through the GLA's internal grant and project management system. Once you have successfully registered, we will be able to use the system to authorise payments, monitor your budgets and allow you to report against meal uptake and pupil premium registrations.

Following the publication of the latest census data, anticipated to be the first week in July, we will write within seven days of this publication to:

- confirm the final allocation for your borough
- issue you a template contract to sign and return
- supply details and guidance on how to register on the GLA's grant management system.

The funding formula used to calculate the indicative UFSM funding allocation for each borough is as follows:

- The GLA has **replicated the established Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) approach** to calculate grant amounts for delivery of Free School Meals for state primary school pupils. So, for academic year 2023-24, the GLA will fund on an **average of the primary pupils taken on census days in October 2022, January 2023**

and June 2023 extrapolated across the year **multiplied by £2.65 per day** (£2.65 being the agreed price per meal).

- The calculation then takes into account the number of children who are **eligible for the government's free school meals** and therefore funded outside the Mayor's scheme. This means our indicative allocation is based on the number of children <u>who are not eligible</u> for the Government's free school meals offer.

- An **assumption of 90% uptake** has then been applied to calculate your final indicative allocation. However, boroughs will be **paid for the number of meals taken up** using the grant payment process set out in the grant conditions. Payment would be made termly in advance. To **allow for upfront costs** it is proposed that half of the funding would be paid in July 2023, with a further 20% in December 2023 and a further 20% in April 2024. A balance of 10% would be held back for the final payment.

- Boroughs will be **paid for the number of meals taken up** using the grant payment process set out in the grant conditions and **if a borough return shows that they have had above 90% take up, the final grant allocation will ensure this is covered through a top-up allocation**.

- Based on the **census day returns** in October 2023 and January 2024 **a balancing payment or claw back would be made** before the end of the summer term 2024. Any additional process for clawback or top up will **be based on actual differences in uptake of free school meals**, except where an Local Education Authority (LEA) chooses not to implement the scheme after having received the advances.

- We will be **asking boroughs to report on the number of free school meals taken up** (at a borough level) – this is explained in the grant conditions shared with you in April.

- The **allocations remain indicative until the latest census data is available** – we aim to send all boroughs their final allocation by early July and this will remain subject to final Mayoral confirmation.

Engagement

In my previous letter, I provided an update on the Partnership Advisory Group (PAG) meeting that took place on **Friday 21 April**, where we provided your Senior Responsible Officers (SROs) with a strategic update on the programme and undertook further testing of policy details before they were shared with you.

The next PAG meeting took place today and your SROs will have received an invitation to this.

As many of you will be aware, we have recently been working with Reconnect London to engage with schools and academy trusts across London to help inform our package of

support detailed below. This is in addition to the vital engagement many of you have been doing with the schools in your borough, and compliments this by ensuring we have a full range of school type and geographies represented. This engagement will continue into the coming weeks as we further test the resources we have identified that would be most useful.
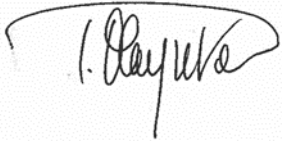
Implementation support package

We want to ensure support and guidance is provided to schools and boroughs prior to rollout. Our first good practice webinar took place on **Thursday 11 May** and was focused on the procurement of school meals. For those of you who missed it, the slides and a recording has been circulated to all SROs and attendees. Our next webinar will take place on **Thursday 25 May.** Invitations will be circulated to schools and boroughs this week.

Our online hubs for boroughs and schools are being launched on our website this week. These can be found via the UFSM homepage here: https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-mayor-does/priorities-london/emergency-universal-free-school-meal-provision. These hubs provide an overview of the scheme and will be updated with resources for schools and boroughs. These include templates, communications packs for communicating with families, FAQ sheets for staff and families, copy for websites, social media assets, and best practice around free school meal registrations and pupil premium. These hubs will be suitable for circulation via all existing networks and channels within your boroughs to cascade the resources widely amongst colleagues and schools.

Between now and then, we will continue to use the Task and Finish Groups and the PAG to provide as much up-front information about these processes as possible.

As always, if you have any queries in the meantime, please do send them to freeschoolmeals@london.gov.uk and we will get back to you.

Yours sincerely,

Tunde Olayinka
Executive Director, Community and Skills