

# COSLA submission of 19 May 2022

## PE1926/B: Expand universal free school meals for all nursery, primary and secondary school pupils

COSLA works on behalf of Scotland's Councils to focus on the challenges and opportunities they face, and to engage positively with governments and others on policy, funding and legislation. COSLA is a politically led organisation, with collective Local Government positions agreed through COSLA Leaders and our four themed policy Boards, including the Children and Young People Board. The CYP Board is made up of the Councillor from each of the 32 Local Authorities with lead responsibility for education and children's services.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the petition highlighted on Universal Free School Meal expansion.

Since 2014, all Primary 1-3 pupils at Scottish local authority schools, regardless of family income levels, have been able to access free, healthy school lunches during term-time. Universal provision was extended to Primary 4s in August 2021, and Primary 5s in January 2022. Local authorities are also responsible for providing free school meals to children in primary and secondary schools who are entitled due to low-income eligibility. Children in funded early learning and childcare can also access free lunches. This work has been delivered as a result of agreement and joint working between Scottish and Local Government.

Scottish Government and Local Authorities have committed to further expansion to include P6-7 pupils and, as with previous phases, COSLA has emphasised, in discussions with Scottish Government and other partners, the crucial need for Scottish Government to provide full resourcing to enable implementation. COSLA, together with Local Government professional associations such as ADES and Directors of Finance, is working with the Scottish Government to agree funding arrangements (including both revenue and capital resourcing) and timescales for delivery of this next phase of expansion.

COSLA does not have an agreed position on expanding free meal provision in secondary schools beyond the current arrangements. Any proposed changes to secondary provision, and plans for delivery, should be considered in partnership with Local Government. As with the primary

school expansion programme, any new commitments would require full resourcing to enable successful delivery.

We hope that this information is helpful to the Committee in their consideration of this petition.