Subject: Advance notice – changes to Free School Meal holiday vouchers (from December 2026)

Dear Headteachers and colleagues,

I am writing to let you know about an upcoming change to the way the council will provide support with food costs for families.

What is changing

The council currently provides free school meal (FSM) supermarket vouchers during school holiday periods to families in receipt of benefit related free school meals (FSM). This support is funded through the Crisis & Resilience Fund (CRF).

The final FSM supermarket voucher issue will take place for the December 2026 school holidays. After that point, FSM supermarket holiday vouchers funded through CRF will end for the rest of this financial year, with a further decision on the 2027/28 financial year to follow.

This change applies only to FSM holiday supermarket vouchers funded through CRF. It does not affect:

- statutory free school meals provided by schools during term time, or
- support provided to children educated in settings other than at home (EOTAS).

Why this change is happening

The Crisis & Resilience Fund is a UK Government grant and comes with specific conditions. The grant guidance discourages ongoing blanket voucher provision, and local authorities are being encouraged to move towards more needs-based assistance, targeted at households experiencing financial difficulty at that time.

To remain compliant with the grant conditions, the council may need to move away from automatic holiday FSM supermarket vouchers, long term.

What support will continue

Any change will not see withdrawal of support for families, but could mean that families experiencing financial hardship will access help via other means, with details to follow by the beginning of next year.

As always if parents and carers are experiencing financial hardship, further information is available through;

Cost of Living

https://www.bristol.gov.uk/residents/people-and-communities/cost-of-living-support

Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF)

https://www.bristol.gov.uk/residents/people-and-communities/find-a-holiday-activity-in-your-area

Support will continue for households in financial crisis, however this may require a needs assessment to be carried out by the council and end to a blanket provision.

We are sharing this with you in advance so that you are aware of the change should families raise questions.

We will send you further information to you and families once a future plan has been agreed, including a FAQ.

Thank you, as always, for your continued work supporting children and families. If you have any immediate questions, please contact matthew.kendall@bristol.gov.uk

Regards

Matt Kendall

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