

**19 June 2023****Agenda Item 6****REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES****CHILD POVERTY – FREE SCHOOL MEALS****Purpose of the Report**

1. To examine and scrutinise how the increase of children in receipt of Free School Meals is being used to plan and inform the provision of other support for children and families.

**Information****Free School Meals Eligibility**

2. Benefits-related free school meals are available to pupils in receipt of, or whose parents are in receipt of, one or more of the qualifying benefits below:
  - Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)
  - Income Support
  - Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
  - Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
  - Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
  - The guaranteed element of Pension Credit
  - Child Tax Credit (with no Working Tax Credit) with an annual gross income of no more than £16,190
  - Working Tax Credit run-on (paid for the four weeks after the person stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit)

In addition, free school meals for children in all households with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) has been permanently extended subject to maximum income thresholds.

**Changes regarding Free School Meals uptake and the reasons for this**

3. There has been a significant impact in free school meal eligibility over the last few years. Notably this was around the Covid pandemic where families were unable to work and entitlement increased. Furthermore, the roll out of Universal Credit has resulted in eligibility being protected. Pupils who were eligible on 1 April 2018, or have since become eligible, will continue to receive free school meals until March 2025 or until the end of the phase of education.

## **Actions the Council is taking or proposes to take to expand and seek new methods of enrolling children onto free school meals**

4. Children are only eligible to receive a benefits-related free school meal when a claim has been made on their behalf and their eligibility has been confirmed. When parents apply and their income does not meet one of the qualifying benefits, the Council continues to check the entitlement on a weekly basis. This ensures that if a family's circumstances change and eligibility is confirmed the Council can notify schools immediately of the child's eligibility to Free School Meals.

## **Council actions to improve public awareness to ensure all who are entitled benefit from free school meals**

5. The Council includes information about eligibility for Free School Meals in its factsheets when parents apply for school places. At the key transition points, information is shared with parents to advise them how to apply for free school meals. The service is currently in the middle of transitioning to a new portal for parents to apply and once this is live publicity through social media will remind families of the importance of applying if they are in receipt of a qualifying benefit. Additional promotion is being considered for the start of the new academic year.

## **Pupil Premium and how it is being used for children on Free School Meals and its effectiveness**

6. One of the conditions of the Pupil Premium Grant is that schools must publish a Pupil Premium Strategy on their website. This details how they are using the additional funding for the current year and includes a review of the impact the previous year's funding had on outcomes for children on Free School Meals. Schools can choose how they spend their funding, but the approaches chosen must be taken from the Department for Education 'menu of approaches' which include improving teaching within classrooms, targeted academic interventions, and wider strategies. The Pupil Premium is funding to improve educational outcomes for children on Free School Meals.
7. The Education Improvement Team has an adviser who leads on Pupil Premium. School leaders and governors are regularly kept up to date with Pupil Premium requirements and good practice via newsletters and senior leaders' briefings. A Pupil Premium leaders' termly network ensures that the 49 schools choosing to attend can hear and learn about best practice in making effective use of the Pupil Premium. The sold offer available to all schools includes training on making the best use of the Premium and details the monitoring needed to check if it is effective in driving improvements.
8. Each term the adviser works closely with about 12 primary school leaders to ensure the Pupil Premium is used effectively in their school and the Pupil Premium Strategy drives the school improvement work. The schools are selected each term based on risk assessments, which include Ofsted category and outcomes for children on Free School Meals. The package of targeted support ensures that each school leader is supported to make improvements in the provision for children on Free School Meals so that their attainment and progress improves.

9. In terms of accountability, schools have to show how they are using their Pupil Premium effectively through inspections by Ofsted, through scrutiny of Pupil Premium plans by governors and trustees and schools are also held to account for the outcomes achieved by children on Free School Meals through published performance tables.

**How the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme is being delivered in Nottinghamshire and the difference it is making to children and families**

10. The Council has developed a comprehensive package of support to provide an activities and food programme to children and young people who are eligible for free school meals during the school holidays. The Council has adopted a blended approach, which includes in-house provision, outreach events, and activities, as well as developing partnerships with a range of providers across the area. This approach ensures that families have access to a range of opportunities and activities that are sustainable and cost-effective. The Council has worked closely with health and wellbeing teams, the cost-of-living team, the Youth Service, and community-based groups and schools around the County to ensure that there is a coordinated effort to support children and young people who are most in need. This collaborative approach has enabled the Council to provide a holistic service that benefits the wider community.
11. The HAF Team attend a variety of events around the County to raise the profile of the programme with stakeholders and to engage Nottinghamshire families, supporting them to understand free school meal eligibility and offering wider signposting for support.
12. The Department for Education annual report due to be submitted in June 2023 will report on 12,133 individual children and young people engaged in the 2022 HAF programme. The breakdown per district is detailed in the table below:

District	Numbers of Children and Young People engaged in the 2022 HAF programme
Ashfield	1,984
Bassetlaw	1,510
Broxtowe	1,122
Gedling	2,713
Mansfield	1,860
Newark and Sherwood	1,392
Rushcliffe	1,552
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,133</b>

13. **Appendix 1** details how the provision of HAF is making an impact.

**How the Household Support Grant is being deployed in Nottinghamshire to help the families of children in receipt of Free School Meals**

14. Phase four of the Household Support Fund launched at the end of May 2023 (along with previous phases of the Household Support Fund), with £3,230,966 of the Government allocation of £11,292,900 being designated to those households in receipt of Free School Meals. These payments will be issued prior to the summer and winter breaks in the school

calendar and the amount of support will be provided per household based on the number of children in receipt of free school meals.

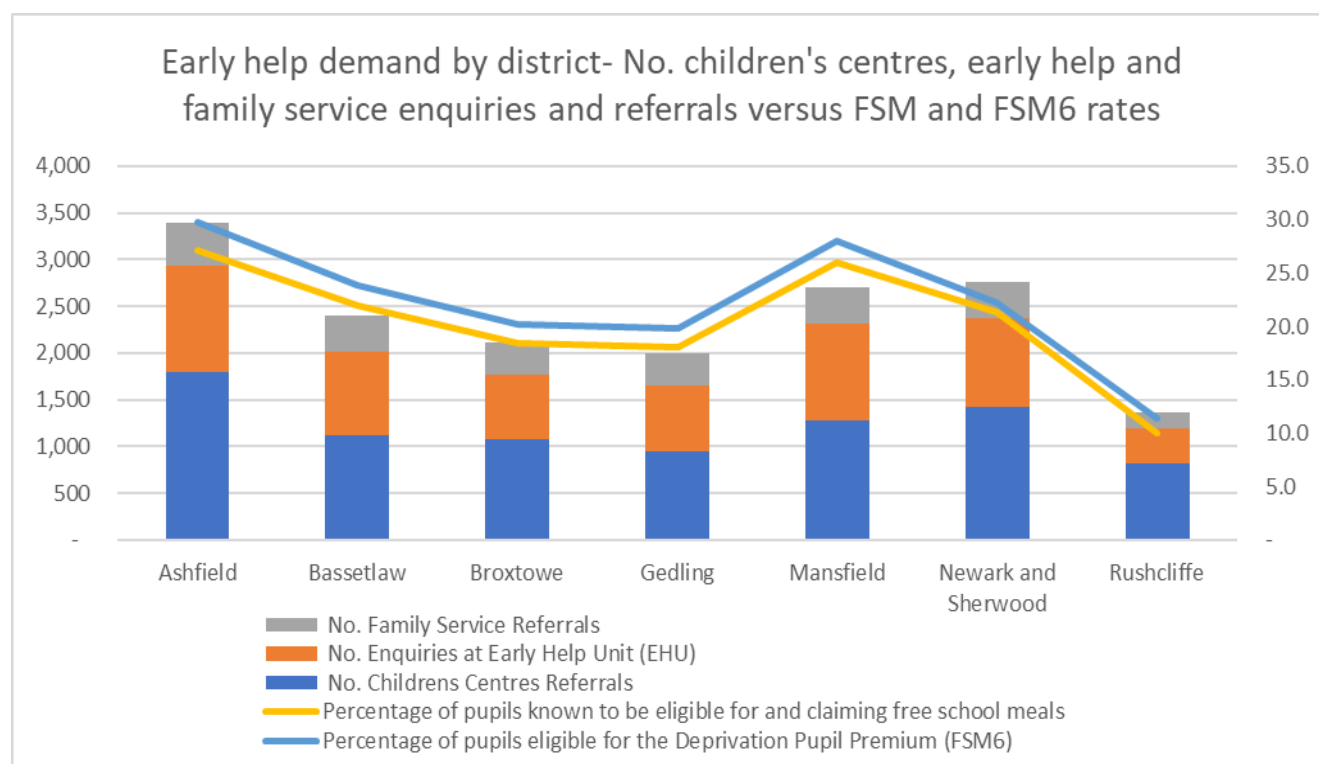
### **Auto Enrolment in Respect of Free School Meals**

15. There are some legal considerations on auto opt-in in respect of free school meals in relation to data sharing. Prior to the Online Free School Meals Project some years ago, data sharing for Free School Meals eligibility was particularly restrictive. The project successfully enables local authorities, through a Department for Education (DfE) platform, to access data from HMRC, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Home Office by introducing wider data sharing agreements. This has successfully enabled local authorities to use the DfE Eligibility Checking System to confirm benefit for families in receipt of legacy benefits (income support etc) and universal credit to assess Free School Meals entitlement. To access Housing data, the County Council would need to co-ordinate efforts with the district councils to ensure that appropriate data protection considerations have been considered.
16. There is ongoing representation through the Local Government Association and Food Network groups to encourage auto enrolment but there are significant data, systems, financial and legal implications to this change which would require Data Protection Impact Assessments and further data sharing agreements to be established to ensure data sharing is fair, lawful and transparent to the satisfaction of all parties involved.

### **Explanation of the provision of early help services through the Children's Centres, Family Service and Healthy Families Programme and how these align with what is known about populations where there is a higher uptake of Free School meals**

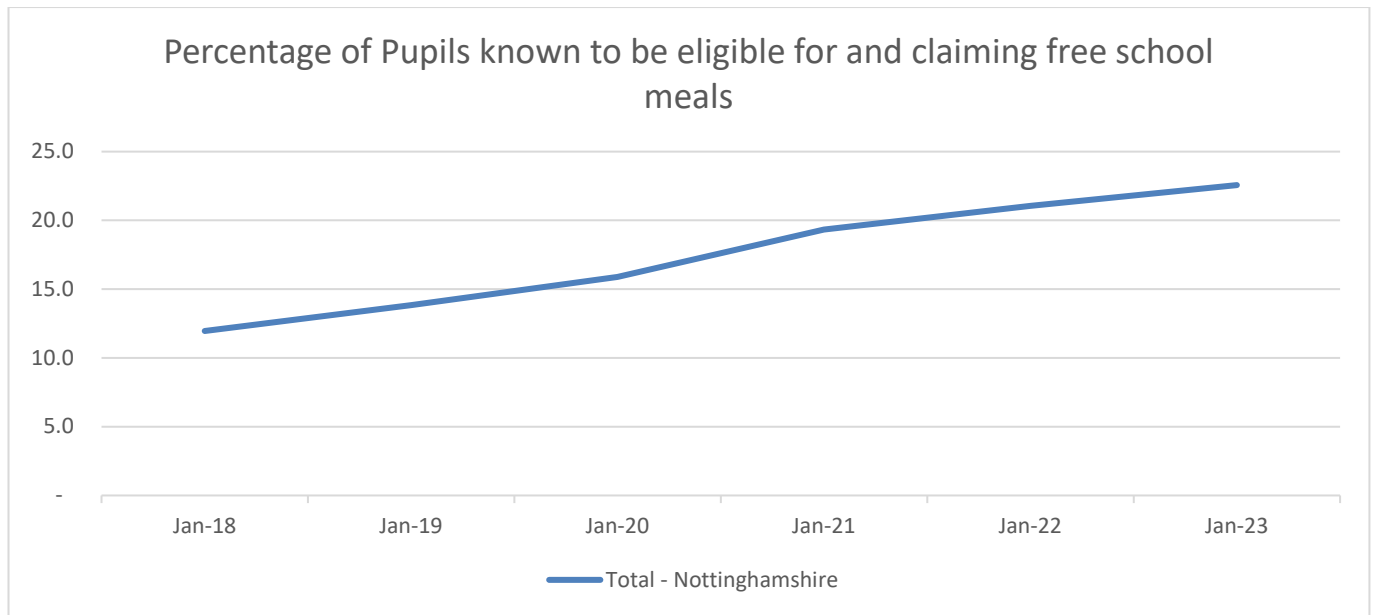
17. The following section considers the correlation between early help spend and activity and free school meal eligibility. Two measures of eligibility are used in this analysis:
  1. FSM - the percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals – as at the October 2021 school census. This is expressed as a proportion of all pupils on roll between reception and year 11 and excludes pupils who are eligible but have not made themselves known.
  2. FSM6 – the percentage of pupils eligible for the deprivation pupil premium – this is the percentage of pupils eligible for or who are known to have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

a) Early Help demand versus free school meal (FSM and FSM6) eligibility



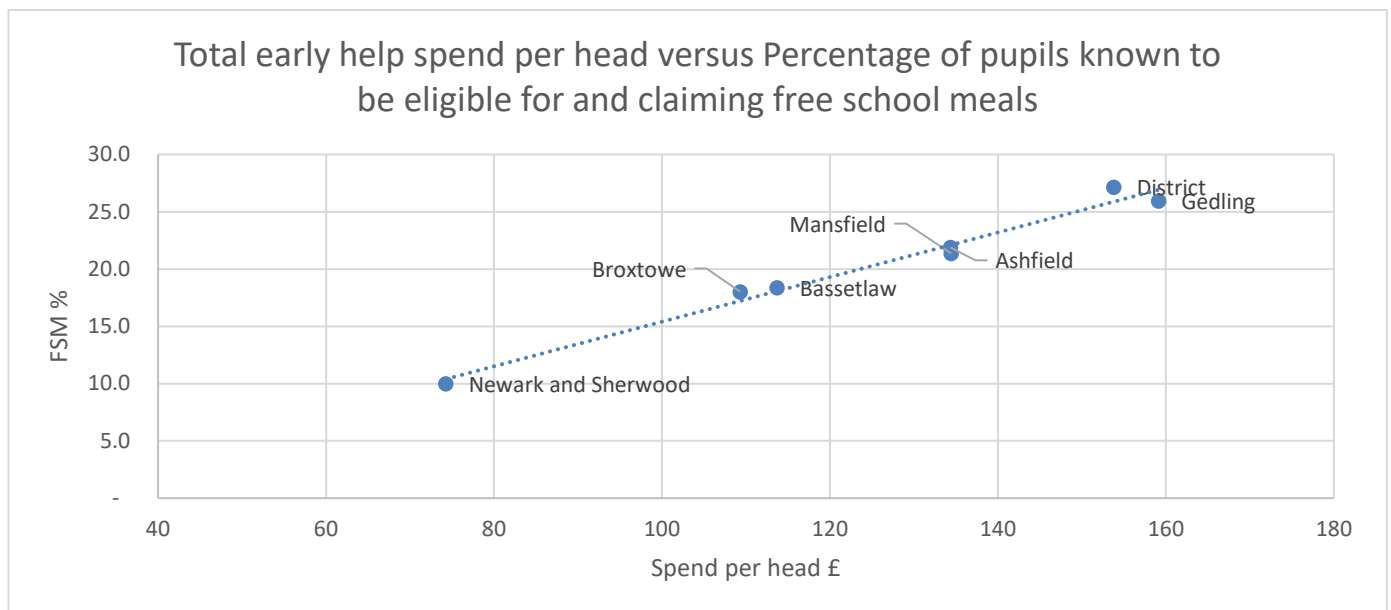
District of School	Number on roll Reception to Year 11	Number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals (2)	Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals (2)
Ashfield	17,935	4,869	27.1%
Bassetlaw	15,961	3,493	21.9%
Broxtowe	14,810	2,723	18.4%
Gedling	16,405	2,954	18.0%
Mansfield	16,537	4,292	26.0%
Newark	13,982	2,987	21.4%
Rushcliffe	17,545	1,750	10.0%
Nottinghamshire	113,175	23,068	20.4%

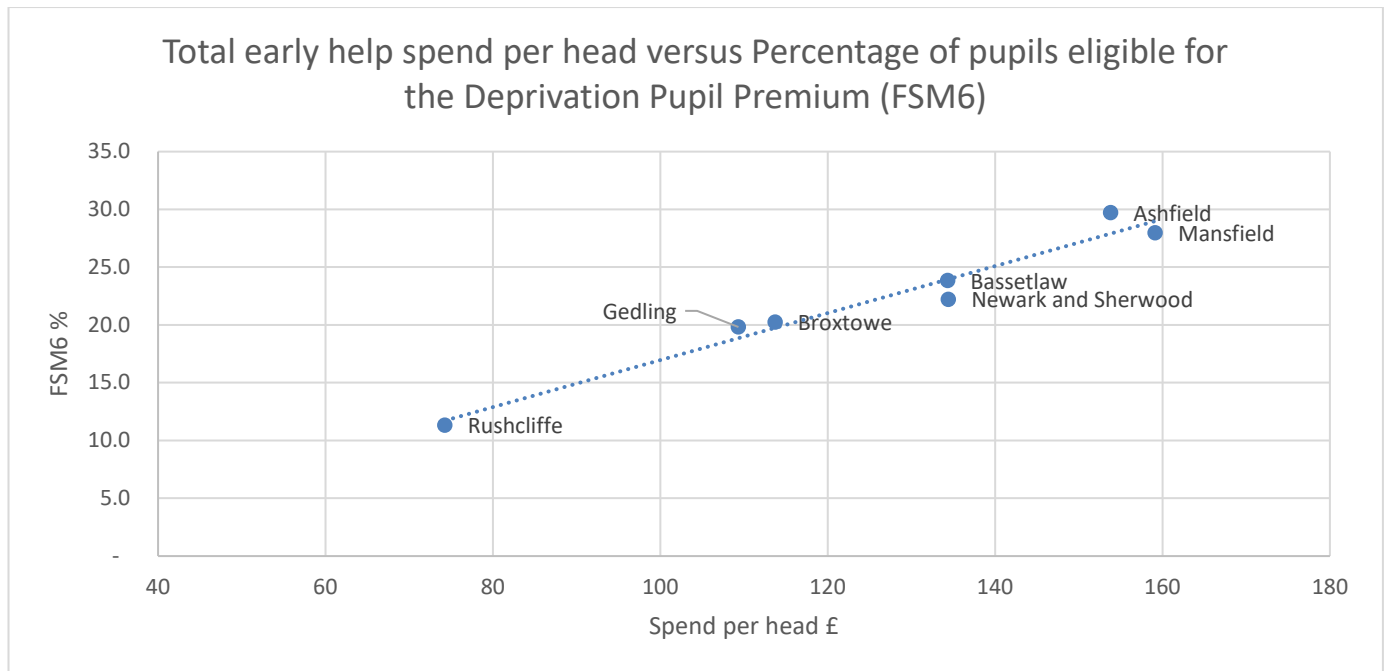
18. The chart above maps early help demand (the bar charts) against FSM and FSM6 rates (the line charts). This includes the number of enquiries at the Early Help Unit and the number of referrals to Children's Centres and the Family Service. The table below then shows the number of pupils eligible for free school meals by district and for Nottinghamshire.
19. There has been a 10 percentage-point increase in the percentage of pupils eligible for and claiming free school meals between 2018 and 2023. This is predominantly due to the changes in eligibility described in **paragraph 3** above. The chart below shows this increase.



20. As can be seen, there is a direct correlation at district level in Nottinghamshire between early help demand and free school meal eligibility with the bar and line charts aligning for each district.

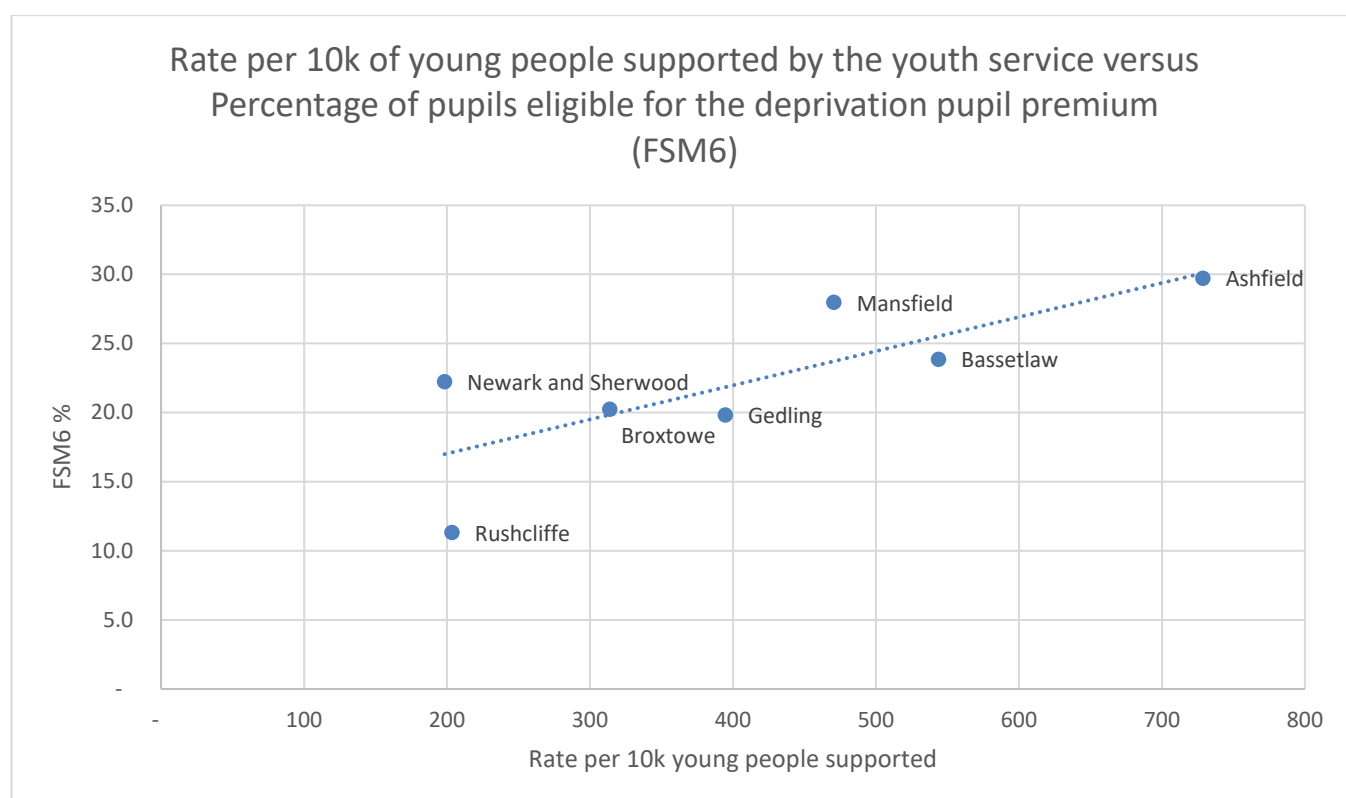
#### b) Early help expenditure versus Free School Meal (FSM and FSM6) eligibility





21. The two charts above map total expenditure on early help against FSM and FSM6 rates at a district level. This includes revenue and premises expenditure on Children's Centres, the Family Service and Youth Services activity.
22. The linear trend lines on the two charts show there is a direct correlation between expenditure and free school meal (FSM and FSM6) rates with all data points close to or on the linear trend lines. This shows that the Council is targeting expenditure at areas of greatest need.
23. The following sections look at the correlation between individual early help services and free school meal eligibility at a district level. These sections use FSM6 rates as a better indicator of long-term deprivation but FSM rates for each measure would show the same picture.

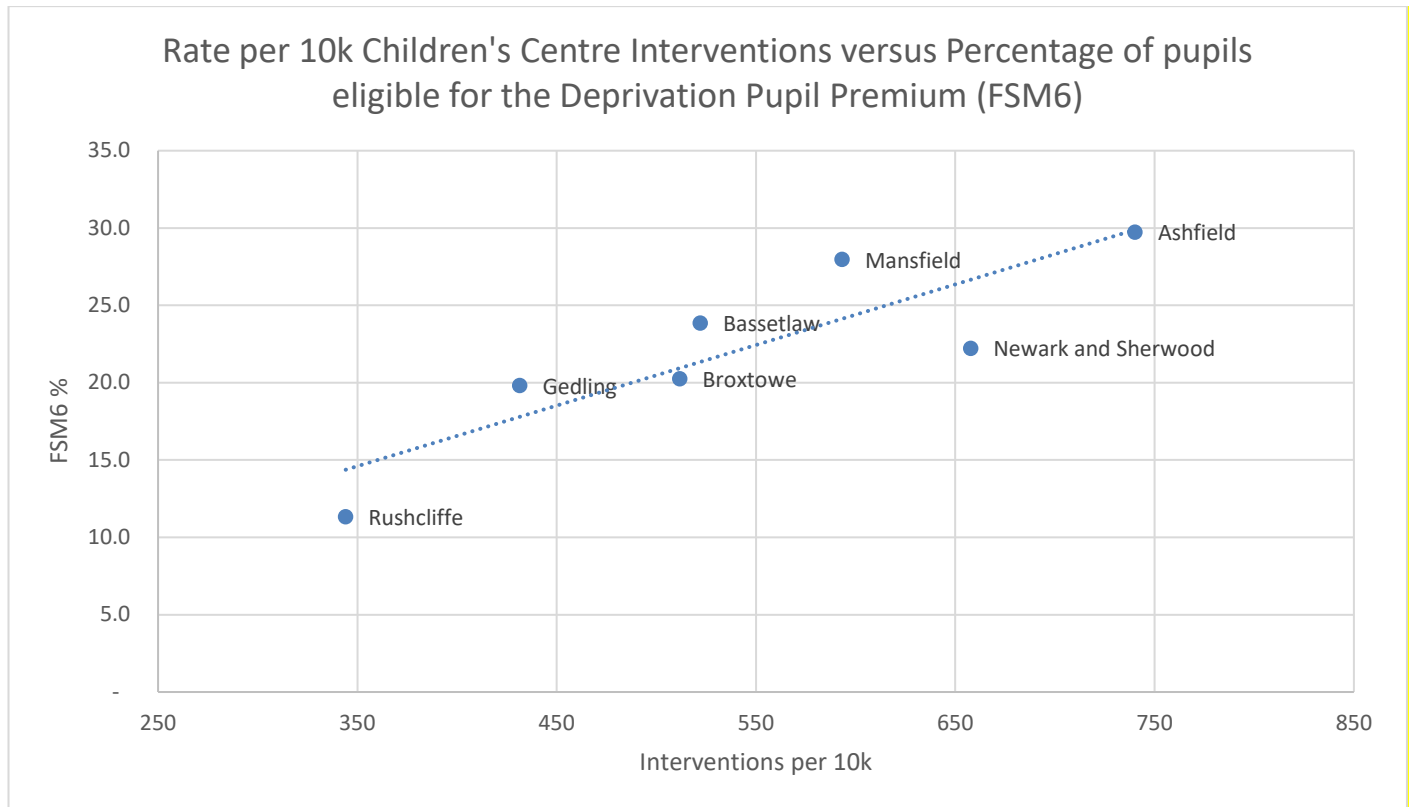
c) Youth service activity versus Free School Meal (FSM6) eligibility



24. The chart above maps the number of young people supported by Youth Service activity per 10,000 population against FSM6 rates for the school population in the district.
25. There is a correlation between levels of free school meal eligibility and Youth Service activity, although there are some exceptions. Mansfield and Newark and Sherwood have lower than expected levels of Youth Service engagement given their FSM rates. For example, Bassetlaw has a lower proportion of FSM6 than Mansfield but has higher rates of Youth Service support.
26. Rushcliffe is the opposite, there is a very low level of FSM6 eligibility at 11.3%, which is to be expected as the most affluent district in Nottinghamshire, but the level of Youth Service engagement is on a par with Newark and Sherwood whose FMS6 rate is almost twice that of Rushcliffe.

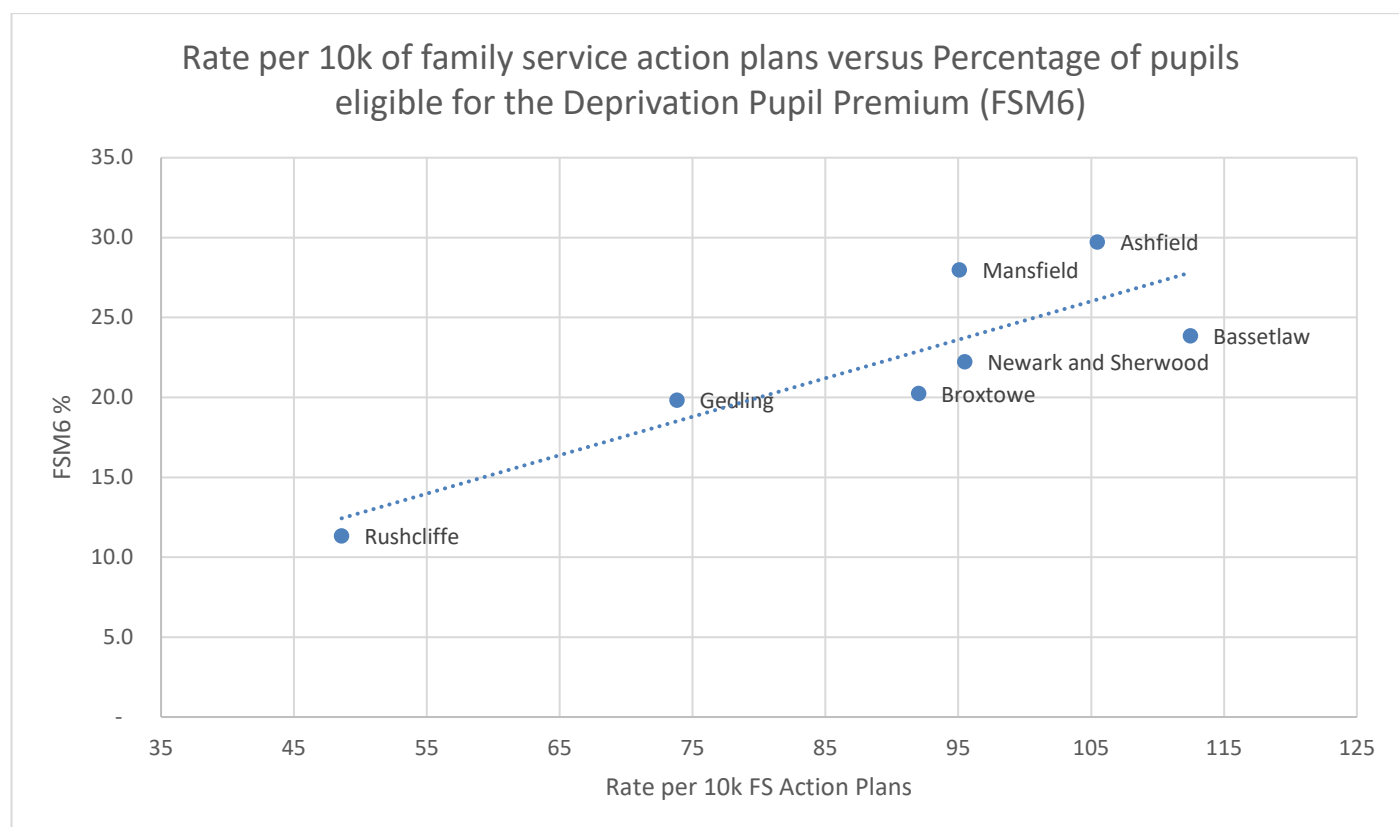


d) Children's centre interventions versus Free School Meal (FSM6) eligibility



27. The chart above maps interventions by Children's Centres against the rate of FMS6 eligibility at a district level. There is a direct correlation between these with some slight variances. Mansfield has fewer than expected interventions given their FSM6 rate and Rushcliffe and Newark and Sherwood have slightly higher rates of intervention but overall there is a strong link.
28. It should also be noted that Children's Centres provide support predominantly to pre-school children whereas the FSM6 measure relates to children between reception and year 11, so the two cohorts are not directly comparable.

### e) Family service action plans versus Free School Meal (FSM6) eligibility



29. The chart above maps the number of Family Service action plans per 10,000 population against the rate of FSM6 eligibility. As with Children's Centres interventions and Youth Service support, there is a strong correlation between the rate of Family Service action plans and the level of FSM6 eligibility. As with the other services, there are small variations such as Mansfield and Ashfield who have a slightly lower-than-expected rate of Family Service action plans given their levels of intervention.

### Financial Implications

30. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

### RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Children and Families Select Committee considers the information regarding the increase of children in receipt of Free School Meals and how this is being used to plan and inform the provision of other support for children and families.

**Councillor Tracey Taylor**  
**Cabinet Member for Children and Families**

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### **Constitutional Comments (SSR 24/05/2023)**

31. The recommendations fall within the scope of the terms of reference for the Children and Families Select Committee.

### **Financial Comments (CDS 24/05/2023)**

32. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

33. Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.
- None.

### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

- All.

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