# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Holiday Free School Meals Provision** |
| **DATE**  | **29 February 2024** |
| **BY** | **Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and Welsh Language** |

Extending free school meals support into the school holidays was introduced during the pandemic and we were clear at the time that it was a time-limited crisis intervention. The support ran from early in the pandemic until May 2023.

The decision not to extend funding into the 2023 summer holidays was not taken lightly by the Welsh Government. However, as the subsequent comprehensive impact assessment demonstrated, and given that our budget is worth £1.2bn less in real terms than when it was set by UK Government in 2021, it would have been unaffordable without having to make significant cuts in other key education budgets.

The Welsh Government received a judicial review claim in respect of the provision of free school meals over the school holidays in September 2023. This has now been settled by agreement between the parties by way of a consent order. As the claim related to a procedural issue, the current position has not changed: the provision of free school meals during the holidays ceased in 2023, as funding unfortunately remains unavailable within the current budgetary constraints.

In reaching a settlement, the Welsh Ministers accepted that in June 2023, further equality assessment work needed to be completed.

These procedural issues were addressed by taking a further decision in October 2023 after consideration of a comprehensive impact assessment. Again given the ongoing financial pressures on the Welsh Government’s budget, the decision was taken not to reintroduce the provision for October 2023 half term and subsequent holidays, and to cease the provision indefinitely.