More than a meal: Technical appendices

Appendix A: CPAG and Reconnect London Lived Experience Evaluation: Detailed Methodology

1. **Methodology overview**

The lived experience evaluation was established to capture the views, voices and perspectives of those most directly impacted by the policy and to understand the day-to-day effects on the lives of children and families. CPAG and Reconnect London devised research questions, using the Theory of Change, which explored how the policy has affected household budgets, food insecurity, family health and wellbeing, children's experiences at lunchtime, the wider school day and children and families' perceptions of school.

CPAG and Reconnect London took a school case study approach to explore the policy's effects in different school contexts. Working intensely with individual schools, CPAG conducted focus groups, surveys and interviews. CPAG participated in and observed the lunchtime experience, gathering insights and perspectives from a variety of school stakeholders. CPAG focused primarily on pupils and parents and carers.This evidence was triangulated with insight from school staff, including school leaders, administrative teams, caterers and teaching staff.

Each of the individual school case studies provide a snapshot into the effects of the policy in their own context. Collectively, they also highlight the effects of the policy on children and families across London, and the barriers and enablers to implementation experienced by schools. In total, CPAG and Reconnect London worked with 10 primary schools and settings. CPAG and Reconnect London's research also sought to understand whether the universal nature of the policy had specific effects or benefits for children and families.

CPAG also gathered the views of parents and carers who may face barriers to engaging in research opportunities in school settings. CPAG did this by partnering with community organisations such as holiday activities and food providers and foodbanks to hear from more parents. Sessions were also conducted with CPAG's pan-London Family Panel.

Across CPAG and Reconnect London's different research strands, the team directly captured the views and experiences of:
- o   345 pupils in primary schools in London (through focus groups)
- o   286 parents and carers (through surveys, interviews and coffee morning discussions)
- o   50 school staff members (through interviews)

All participants including children, parents and school staff were given information on the purpose of the research, how their insights would be utilised and shared, and given an opportunity to ask questions before giving their consent to take part. Parents were notified in advance that their school would be taking part and were provided with the opportunity to opt their children out of the evaluation.

2. **Sampling strategy**

The lived experience evaluation used demographic data to map and identify those boroughs and schools invited to take part in the evaluation. The boroughs and schools selected represented a cross-

section of London's diverse school system. This helped the evaluation explore how the UPFSM policy is being implemented and experienced in different contexts and what works where. Particular attention was paid to boroughs and schools with a higher proportion of people and children with protected characteristics, those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and those who face intersecting inequalities.

The borough sampling strategy considered several factors including:
- Geographical location (e.g. inner and outer)
- The political context (e.g. political party of council and designated MP)
- Socio-economic composition (e.g. number of pupils eligible for FSM, number of families experiencing poverty, number of people experiencing food insecurity)
- Demographic composition (e.g. race, ethnicity, disability, religion or belief, age)
- Types of schools (e.g. multi academy trusts, maintained schools, faith schools)
- and the catering set-up (in-house catering, large private caterer, L.A. caterer).

CPAG and Reconnect London's research took place in 10 primary schools and settings across five boroughs: Lambeth, Bromley, Havering, Hillingdon and Kensington and Chelsea. Research also took place in community settings in these boroughs, as well as in Camden. CPAG's London Family Panel also took part in the research, this is a pan-London forum.

The school sampling strategy considered several factors including:
- Proportion of pupils eligible for means-tested FSM
- Levels of socio-economic disadvantage
- Take up rates among those eligible for means-tested FSM
- Proportion of children and families from Black or mixed ethnic groups
- Diversity of faiths and cultures across schools and within schools
- Proportion of children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Proportion of children and families who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL).
- Proportion of children and families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

Understanding how the UPFSM policy is experienced by these groups was integral to the research, as children in these groups are less often heard but are also at a higher risk of experiencing poverty and food insecurity. CPAG and Reconnect London worked with London councils and partners, such as School Food Matters and Chefs in Schools, to shortlist and approach schools.

The sampling strategy also ensured the research was reflective of the London school and school food system. For example, working with a mixture of maintained and academised primary schools and settings and with schools with different catering approaches e.g., external caterers and council caterers.

3. **Research model**

Research in case study schools

CPAG's research practitioner spent one week with each school carrying out research activities. This included:
- Semi-structured focus groups with pupils: 345 pupils total
- Survey with parents and carers: 120 usable responses
- In-depth interviews with parents and carers: 19 interviews total
- Follow up interviews with parents and carers (3-6 months later): 8 interviews total

- Formal and informal interviews with school staff members (including senior leaders, caterers, teachers, support staff and admin staff): 50 interviews total
- Observations all aspects of school lunchtime using a combination of auditing and observation techniques
- Attendance at coffee mornings to engage in more informal conversations with parents and carers: 81

The parent survey was distributed to all parents in participating schools via newsletters, emails, texts, and social media posts. Paper copies were provided and could be submitted anonymously in schools.

Opportunities were also provided to run through the survey in-person with families. The parents' surveys provided quantitative and qualitative findings.
- 120 responses from parents in families with 244 children.
- Boroughs represented: Brent, Bromley, Camden, Croydon, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Havering, Hillingdon, Kensington and Chelsea, Kingston-upon-Thames, Lambeth, Southwark, Westminster.
- 89% of respondents were female, 9% male.
- 25% lone parents
- 32% in receipt of UC and 10% in receipt of tax credits
- 29% reported that an adult in their household has a disability
- 23% Muslim, 5% Sikh, 44% Christian, very small (1) numbers from Jewish and Buddhist respondents
- 10% NRPF
- 30% had children were eligible for means-tested free school meals last year
- 22% of respondents have a child in Key Stage 2 who has a special educational need
- Children dietary requirements: 22% halal, 1% vegan, 4% vegetarian, 8% allergies/intolerances,

All evidence was analysed and triangulated to understand the effect of the policy in each setting. All schools that took part received a short report detailing the findings from our research, what's working well for families and what more can be done to utilise the UFSM offer. Collectively, the research highlighted key themes and some of the effects of the policy on children and families across London. Participant schools were provided with a £100 voucher as a thank you for taking part in the project.

Parents who took part in formal interviews were also reimbursed for their time, with a £40 voucher for initial interviews and £60 to those that took part in follow-up interviews.

Research in community settings

Some families may face barriers engaging in research in school settings including those from seldom heard groups. CPAG and Reconnect London undertook some additional research activities in community settings, such as in local foodbanks and Holiday Activities and Food programmes. This included informal interviews and roundtable discussions in community centres. CPAG's research practitioner spoke to a total of **33 families** through this process.

Research with CPAG's Family Panel
CPAG hosted two London Family Panel meetings to further understand how the policy effected families beyond our identified local authorities. CPAG's Family Panel comprises of families from across all 32 London Boroughs who are living on a low income and are from Black or ethnic backgrounds.
Family Panel 1 (November 2023): attended by **16 panellists.**

Family Panel 2 (July 2024): attended by **17 panellists.**

4. **Theory of Change (ToC) and research questions**

CPAG and Reconnect London developed research tools and resources were adapted to explore the following ToC themes through research activities and research questions.

ToC Themes	Questions Explored
Mitigating the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis	What effect has the introduction of UPFSM had on family budgets? How are families utilising the money previously spent on school lunches? What effect have changes to school food payment process had on school communities? What effect does UPFSM have on registration rates for government means-tested FSM and pupil premium levels.
Child and family mental health and wellbeing	What effect does UPFSM have on pupils and parent's perception of equity and fairness at school? What effect does UPFSM have on the stigma FSM-eligible pupils and lower-income pupils can face at school? Does UPFSM have an impact on pupil anxiety around food insecurity? What effect does UPFSM have on family stress and anxiety?
Child and family physical health	What effect has the introduction of UPFSM had on pupil's experience of food at school? (including their food choices, food preferences and tastes, amount of food consumed and quality of food) What effect has UPFSM had on pupil perceptions of their energy levels and ability to engage with physical activities in school.
Attainment	How does UPFSM effect pupils' concentration levels, behaviour and engagement with their learning? How does UPFSM effect pupils and families feeling of belonging at school? How does UPFSM effect pupil attendance?

Appendix B: ICF and Public Health Nutrition Research Implementation Evaluation: Detailed Methodology

This Implementation Evaluation follows a mixed methods inductive approach, with each phase building on the previous, to build, refine and deepen knowledge and insight. Phase One (Scoping) was conducted from September to November. Phase Two (Discovery) was conducted in December to April. Phase Three (School-Based Case Studies) was conducted April to July. Specific objectives and methods are described below.

Phase One: Scoping

In this phase, the implementation evaluation team conducted a methodological review of available documents and mapped stakeholders. It had six main objectives:
1. Draw out UK-specific School Food System Pillar findings and issues to explore further in our research.
2. Identify tools and synergistic projects to connect with and review.
3. Map and draw on current the implementation evaluation team school food projects' insights, connections and tools specifically Southwark School Meals Transformation Programme (SSMTP), School Food Matters (SFM), Healthy Zones, and previous historic work for Public Health England (Nutritional Standards) and Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme.
4. Develop stakeholder lists for amplification of research activities, fact finding and validation of approaches and methods.
5. Understand how the policy will work in practice – the funding terms and conditions and timing.
6. Understand what Early Adopter boroughs are doing with the saving generated by the Mayor of London's policy.

As part of this phase, the implementation evaluation team conducted desk research, reviewed more than 50 documents including grey and scientific literature and attended meetings (hosted by the GLA with all 33 London boroughs, the national auto-enrolment network and the School Food Improvement group). The team also reviewed the content of relevant webinars and London Assembly meetings to broaden and deepen understanding of the policy and implementation context.

This phase also mapped and explored existing data sources on the education system in London to improve the feasibility of the later phases of research activities, extracting, merging and cleaning three data sources:
1. Schools pupils and characteristics: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics
2. Freedom of Information request about MIS providers of London schools: https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/school_mis_suppliers_as_of_the_s_3/response/2084197/attach/html/3/FOI%202022%200023997.xlsx.html
3. School address details from the DfE.

Datasets at borough level were combined to define research priorities, to capture important contextual data, and to understand, stratify and sample.

Scoping Phase Outputs:

At the end of the scoping phase in December 2023, the implementation evaluation team produced the following for both internal and external sharing (e.g. to guide other research teams):

1. An integrated dataset of all London schools, their DfE details, socio-economic, educational and demographic characteristics, their address details, and the MIS provider.
2. A UK-school food system grounded desk research presentation.
3. A borough-level sampling framework and data visualisation.
4. A refined evaluation framework.

Phase Two: Discovery

At the end of Phase One, significant knowledge gaps about the implementation context emerged as expected. To address these, the implementation evaluation team devised and conducted four focused research activities between December 2023 and March 2024:
1. An online semi structured survey sent to all London boroughs.
2. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with catering providers and other school food stakeholders in London.
3. A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with all five early adopter boroughs.
4. An online survey to all state-funded schools with >5 Key Stage 2 (KS2) age children in London.

Borough survey

Informed by Phase One and in consultation with our evaluation partners, the implementation evaluation team devised and deployed an online survey for the borough leads (focal points for the policy for the GLA) in the boroughs that were new to delivering this policy (i.e. it was not designed for the early adopters). This was launched directly via email to named borough leads via the GLA in mid-December and stayed open over the Festive holidays to the 9th January. It was designed in MS Forms and pilot tested for length, sense and flow. Participants were accurately informed as to how long it would take to complete it and consent for data processing and storage obtained in accordance with GDPR. Data were held on a secure system accessible only to the research team.

This survey had five key aims:
1. Understand the various roles of boroughs in implementing the policy across the five pillars but especially funding, entitlement, uptake and procurement.
2. Map catering models across the boroughs.
3. Understand catering providers.
4. Understand what boroughs have been doing to support implementation.
5. Understand barriers and enablers to implementation.

From a total of 28 boroughs, the implementation evaluation team received 15 responses to this survey. Enthusiastically, two early adopter boroughs also replied, allowing comparison across these contexts. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with Early Adopters

In March 2024, a structured two-hour online FGD was conducted with the early adopter boroughs. The facilitation guide was structured across the five pillars of the school food system. Opening questions explored motivations and support for the introduction of UPFSM, drawing out the driving and influencing factors. This discussion helped to understand how boroughs that had been implementing for years have sustained momentum and maintained funding despite financial pressure on local authority budgets. The discussion then centred on logistical actions and changes introduced to set up and implement the policy, challenges, barriers and facilitators. For the penultimate section, the implementation evaluation team explored success metrics and monitoring activities along with what considerations the boroughs had made/would make/were thinking of making to the policy.

The session was conducted over Microsoft Teams, recorded with all participants consent, and a Mural Board prepared to collect written details, prompt and guide.

At least one lead, sometimes two, from each of the five boroughs attended the FGD. Roles of participants were diverse from children and schools finance teams, public health, procurement and contracting.

KIIs with catering providers

Four Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with five different catering representatives were conducted in February and March. One was dual purpose as the participant was both a Local Authority catering provider and a representative from LACA. Another was a Local Authority caterer. One was a large-scale catering contractor with a significant market share in London. Another was from Chefs in Schools. Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and recorded with participants permission.

Transcriptions were produced alongside detailed notes to analyse and summarise key findings across the five pillars, the enablers and barriers. Data were stored securely on password servers accessible only to the research team.

Survey to all London schools.

Using the data mapped earlier in the Scoping Phase, the implementation evaluation team identified all state-funded schools in London with >5 children in KS2. This gave a total of 1832 schools including primary schools (excluding infant only schools), special schools, Pupil Referral Units and all-through schools with KS2 age children. The implementation evaluation team then sent a letter with a link to an online survey through the post to all 1832 schools. Further amplification and reminder activities were conducted to encourage participation using the stakeholder mapping and other networks across the evaluation teams. More than 100 individual or organisational stakeholders were contacted. As an incentive, schools were entered into a draw to win one of five £100 Decathlon vouchers.

The survey was designed to directly address the research questions with questions split into the five pillars of the School Food System and a specific section on barriers and enablers. Key areas for exploration included:
1. Changes schools have made to their catering models.
2. Changes to dining provision.
3. How schools are monitoring uptake and using what characteristics.
4. Costs and financing.
5. How menus are designed.
6. How have the meals offer changed since the policy.
7. Barriers and enablers to implementation.

It became clear that UCL's IPE team intended to survey head teachers about similar issues in a very similar timeline. To minimise the fatigue and willingness of head teachers to participate, one survey was co-designed with UCL to be sent in January. This process, whilst resource intensive, was very productive due to the positive relationship the implementation evaluation team had built with UCL's IPE team. The survey launched on 10th January and responses were extracted for clearing and analysis in Microsoft Excel and STATA on 14th March.

School survey responses

One hundred and forty responses to the survey were received of which seven were duplicates. Excluding the Early Adopter boroughs, the implementation evaluation team have at least one response from all but three of the remaining 28 boroughs. However, no schools from Brent, Camden, and Kensington and Chelsea responded.

The final sample of eligible responses included 132 schools (7%) and was tested using t-tests (in STATA 18) for representativeness of the London school landscape, specifically school size, proportion of Academies vs LA maintained and percentage of children eligible for FSM.

- In the sample 29.7% of schools (95% CI: 21.9-37.6) were academies vs 31.9% (95% CI 29.8-34.1) in London (p=0.602).
- The average number of pupils in schools in the sample was 372 (95% CI: 342-402) compared to 351 ((95% CI: 343-360) across London (p=0.2156).
- Eligibility for MT- FSM saw a mean of 26.5% of children ((95% CI: 24.1-29.1) in our schools were eligible as compared to 28.8% (95% CI: 28.0-29.5) in London (p=01231).

These tests give confidence that the 7% sample of London schools is representative of London using these characteristics.

Analysis of school survey data

A descriptive analysis (proportions, cross tables and subgroup analyses) was performed with accompanying graphs and charts in Microsoft Excel. Text data were synthesised and coded.

Phase 3: School-Based Case Studies

This phase added the depth and nuance to the high-level pan London insight gathered in Phases 1 and 2. The aims were to explore:

1. Communication of the policy to schools, and from schools to families – education staff perceptions
2. Engagement with families entitled to means-tested FSM (registration, additional support, reduced stigma in universal delivery etc).
3. Barriers and enablers, as well as related data on:
4. Uptake
5. Funding/financial mechanisms
6. Procurement related information:
7. Catering models, decisions and priorities, including changes for LUPFSM
8. Logistical, spatial and other issues (time, location etc)
9. School meal-related staffing needs and challenges (recruitment, pay and conditions etc)
10. Accountability and quality assurance mechanisms
11. From catering providers: catering quality assurance incl. sustainability, children's preferences, cultural requirements, nutritional balance, adherence to standards, etc.
12. From schools: quality assurance approaches, sustainability, communication between stakeholders (children, parents, school staff, kitchen staff, catering companies).

13. Whole School approaches to school meals and the extent to which LUPFSM acts as an enabler to maximising success.

Each deep dive responded to specific issues in that school context and had a greater or lesser emphasis on some themes or have a specific focus depending on the context.

Two Stage Sampling

A two-stage stratified, purposeful sampling method was used to select case study schools using the data source earlier described. The stepwise sampling method followed was to filter and sort as follows:
1. Exclusion of the early adopter boroughs
2. Parameters of deprivation and inequality
3. Deprivation affecting children (MT-FSM)
4. Proportion of LSOAs in top 10% nationally
5. FSM eligibility (limit to boroughs >10% eligibility)
6. School food model (LA caterer, school-sourced/prepared, LA catering contract)
7. Religion and ethnic diversity
8. Proportion of academies vs. LA maintained schools

Four boroughs were selected using this step-wise sampling approach: Kensington and Chelsea, Lewisham, Waltham Forest and Hillingdon. These four boroughs represented a variety of contexts and communities including deprivation and inequality, ethnic and religious diversity, proportion of LA maintained schools vs Academy Trusts, varying catering models).

The second stage sampling approach aimed to select schools with interesting contexts in their borough to explore in the case study research. A purposeful approach was taken to variables including school size, proportion of KS2 (to identify those with a significant scale up required), MT-FSM eligibility, location (using IMD data to determine whether it was in an area of inequality or deprivation) and type of school. The total number of schools to be invited was oversampled given the likely low recruitment rate expected among participants.

Recruitment

Schools are in demand places for research activities and the approach to recruitment of schools was to be accountable, proactive and flexible to their context, needs and priorities. Initial contact was made through the borough or known networks, follow up contact to survey respondents or through their publicly available contact details (e.g. the website, in the DfE data).

Schools were offered a £100 Decathlon voucher to participate. Schools would also receive a specific, detailed and tailored write up of the research at their school to share findings and to signpost to ways to maximise the impact of the policy at the school.

Data privacy and informed consent

Schools who agreed to participate as a case study were sent a participant agreement and information pack to make it clear what the aims, objectives and expectations of the research activities were. All researchers involved in school-based research had verified DBS certificates – provided in advance or on the first day of research to the school along with a verified ID document. Consent for the research was

secured via signature with the Head Teacher in advance. Paper copies of the participant information sheet and data privacy notice were available to anyone participating in the research. Interviews recorded using encrypted devices. If staff did not grant consent for recording, data were collected via detailed note taking.

The participant information sheet also set out the expectations and timescale across the visit which was scheduled to take place over two to three days, depending on the availability of the school.

Data collection methods

Case study research consisted of a survey, face to face and phone interviews, observational research and flexible conversations with a purpose.

The first activity at the school was an in-depth interview conducted with the Head Teacher and the School Business manager. The focus of the interview was on enablers, barriers, entitlement, uptake, funding, procurement, operations, contracting, quality assurance and accountability. Questions aimed to gather detailed insights into the school's experience and identify areas for improvement

In-depth interviews with key members of the admin team set out to explore implementation experiences for them and their roles, such as workload and well-being issues related to not collecting money for school meals or chasing debt as well as how they would communicate this policy with parents and carers, and whether they have adapted registration practices for families eligible for MT-FSM. Reactions and feelings about the implementation of UPFSM at the school were also collected.

In-depth interviews were also conducted with catering managers and chefs, with follow up interviews with area managers. This explored scale up activities for UPFSM, enablers and barriers, detailed experiences of implementation at that school, and feeling and perspectives about the school community's response to UPFSM.

Flexible 'conversations with a purpose' took place with midday meal supervisors, catering assistants, teaching assistants and KS2 teachers depending on the school's availability and the workload of the staff. In these flexible activities, targeted questions most relevant to the interviewees role in the policy were explored and notes taken on paper.

Photos of meals and catering provision – with no children's faces or identifiable features captured – were also taken. Copies of menus were collected and compared with any menus displayed in the canteen.

A total of 11 case studies were conducted by four researchers over May – July. Two follow up interviews over Microsoft Teams was also conducted to supplement and verify data collected in person.

Analysis

Transcripts and notes were analysed thematically against the five pillars of the school food system, and the enablers and the barriers. Data were collated into a 'Post Cards from the Field' Mural board and interrogated by the team. Individual write ups per school were produced to inform the school about the key findings and notes and tips for how to make the most of the policy.