

SIAA Response

Welfare Foods – a consultation on meeting the needs of children and families in Scotland

June 2018

The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (SIAA) is a membership organisation that has the overall aim of ensuring that Independent Advocacy is available to any vulnerable person in Scotland. Independent Advocacy safeguards people who are vulnerable and discriminated against or whom services find difficult to serve, empowering people who need a stronger voice by enabling them to express their own needs and make their own decisions.

1. How can we increase the uptake and awareness of the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods?

We believe that it is important to increase both the uptake and awareness of the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods. In particular, it is important to increase registration of those eligible; increase use of Best Start by parents; increase the number of retailers registered with the scheme; and increase the range of outlets registered and accepting the scheme.

We believe that the uptake of Best Start could be significantly increased if the application process was simplified and made more flexible so that not only health professional can sign the form. We would like to see the range of people able to sign the form widened to include voluntary organisations and community link workers. This would take some pressure off health visitors who have a huge amount of information to share with new parents. We would like to see something about Best Start on the Universal Health Visiting Pathway, a simple tick box mentioning Best Start could prompt health visitors to ask about Best Start and ensure that it is not forgotten about amongst all the other information shared.

SIAA believes it is important that everyone is aware of their rights and we think that more can be done to ensure that those who are eligible for Best Start are aware of it. This is particularly crucial in a time of social security change in Scotland where people will be attempting to navigate through changes to the system. We also believe there needs to be greater partnership working with other organisations and public bodies who could signpost people to Best Start – this could include organisations such as Department for Work and Pensions, Local Authorities, Citizens Advice Bureau and Independent Advocacy organisations.

More needs to be done around ensuring the application form is accessible to everyone. There should be an option for, and an easy procedure in place, for people to request the form in alternative languages as well as in accessible formats. The application should also be as easy as possible to fill in. New parents have a lot to think about at the time of application so a simple, easy procedure would be helpful for them. We feel that it is crucial to ensure that processes and administration of the scheme are simple and much less cumbersome than the current approach to ensure that all families who are eligible are able to engage.

We believe there also needs to be increased marketing of Best Start. Something which could be effective would be to put posters up in registered retailers providing information about the scheme as well as details of products you are able to use the money for. Better marketing could also help tackle the fact that people see Best Start as the 'milk scheme'. Case studies which detail how the money could be spent could also be helpful – perhaps these could contain some

recipe ideas / meal plans where the costs of the ingredients equalled to £4.25. SIAA suggests that a way to increase both awareness and uptake would be to include a leaflet about Best Start within baby boxes. It would be helpful if this leaflet detailed eligibility requirements as well as how people can register.

We believe that it would be beneficial to remove the need for retailers to register as this would increase the number of retailers which are part of the scheme.

Crucially, in order for there to be an uptake in use of Best Start there needs to be a transformation of the Scottish food environment. We need to ensure that these types of healthy foods are available locally across Scotland. We believe that having access to good quality, nutritious and affordable food is a human right. The right to good quality food is something which every individual should be entitled to. We believe that there needs to be an emphasis on transforming the food environment and to tackling 'clusters' of shops such as fast food outlets and off-licenses in certain areas, particularly in areas of deprivation.

2. What can we do to make the smartcard system as easy to use as possible?

We believe, in order to maximise uptake, those entitled to Best Start should have the option of whether to continue to use vouchers or to use the smartcard.

There are certainly benefits of the smartcard and it could help to overcome the stigma which some people face when using paper vouchers. However, with the implementation of the smartcard, there could be issues around excluding independent and community run shops who cannot afford the cost of electronic payment systems as well as issues for those who may not have a fixed address or a bank account.

However, we do agree that the use of a smartcard would likely be beneficial to the majority. We would like to see the smartcard piloted initially before being rolled out nationally. We would also like to see a smartcard which could work both in store through electronic payment systems as well as via an online system to ensure that it will be accepted in shops which don't accept bank cards.

We believe that the smartcard could work well alongside a complementary Best Start app which could contain useful features such as a balance checker, recipe ideas, a map with local shops which accepted the vouchers (and details of the types of products available / special offers) and links to the eat better, feel better campaign.

We think it is important that it is clear to users whether the balance on their card will roll over or whether they have to use it within a certain timeframe. We would propose allowing the balance to roll over to help those who may wish to buy their fruit, vegetables etc. in bulk to allow for cost savings and ease of purchase.

3. How do we gather feedback to make improvements as the system evolves?

We believe it is important to involve both retailers and service users when gathering feedback to improve the system. We would like to see engagement and feedback gathered from both individuals and groups (e.g. playgroups and mother and baby groups).

Perhaps the smartcard could be piloted in a particular region and the feedback used to improve the system before a nationwide roll out.

If there was a complementary app, there could be an area where users were allowed to leave feedback on the app system.

4. How can we work creatively with retailers and others to make it easier for families to use Best Start Foods to improve their diet and nutrition?

SIAA believes that there needs to be some awareness raising and training communicated with retailers to increase awareness of Best Start and that this training needs to reach each individual branches and members of staff rather than

just head office level as there have been instances where retail head offices have been aware of the scheme but each branch had no knowledge of it.

Another message which needs to be communicated with retailers is ensuring staff know which products are valid with Best Start. There is a need to incentivise retailers not to allow people to use Best Start for things which they aren't supposed to e.g. alcohol and unhealthy foods. There is an opportunity for work to be done with the Scottish Grocers Federation and the Scottish Retail Consortium as well as any other similar organisations to communicate information about Best Start to retailers.

SIAA believes there is also scope for working with other organisations who would be able to signpost people to Best Start – these types of organisations include Department for Work and Pensions, Local Authorities, Citizens Advice Bureau and Independent Advocacy organisations.

5. What could an innovative programme that will support families to establish healthy eating patterns look like?

We have outlined what we believe an innovative programme of Best Start would look like in questions 1 and 2.

Additionally, SIAA believes it is important that the programme is linked to other health or social justice government policies and initiatives such as the Healthy Weight Strategy, Eat Better, Feel Better Campaign and the Baby Box. We believe that a joined up approach with these and other relevant strategies should help Scotland to better address healthy diet and establish healthy eating patterns.

Additionally, improving knowledge and education around health would help to tackle some of the issues surrounding Best Start (e.g. using the vouchers for unhealthy products)

Given the considerable differences of the cost of living across Scotland, it should be considered whether the value of Best Start Foods 'vouchers' should be higher in areas where the cost of groceries is higher, for example in rural and remote areas.

We also believe it is important that the scheme does more to recognise the role which the voluntary sector is playing in supporting many of the families which are eligible for Best Start Foods.

6. What evidence could we gather about the impact?

SIAA believes that it is important to gather evidence to assess the impact of Best Start. We believe it would be useful to measure the uptake both of those using the scheme as well as of retailers registering with the scheme. It could also be useful to measure what people are buying to ensure that people are using the grant for the eligible products.

7. Should the provision of children's vitamins be linked to eligibility for the new Best Start Foods (i.e. up to age of three)?

SIAA believes that the provision of children's vitamins should not be linked to eligibility for the new Best Start Foods as we believe that all children should have the right to vitamins.

8. What do you think about the proposal to offer milk as part of the free meal offer for all children in ELC funded provision by 2020?

SIAA welcomes this proposal but would like to see an emphasis on alternatives to cow's milk to ensure those with intolerances and allergies to cow's milk are still benefiting from this offer.

9. What are your views on the proposal to include an offer of a healthy snack to complement the free milk and meal offer for all children in early learning and childcare funded provision by 2020?

SIAA welcomes this proposal and would like to see a choice of healthy snacks available.

10. We are interested in your views on how we can best support childcare providers to provide milk to children out with funded ELC entitlement. How could this work in practice without creating a costly administrative system?

We are unsure how to best support childcare providers to provide milk and how this would work in practice.

11. What are your views on the proposal to include an offer of a healthy snack for children out with funded ELC entitlement?

SIAA welcomes this proposal.

The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (SIAA) is Scotland's national membership body for advocacy organisations. The SIAA promotes, supports and defends independent advocacy in Scotland. It aims to ensure that independent advocacy is available to any person who needs it in Scotland.

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