



Using a project steering group to deliver a free school meals pilot in Durham

For the free school meals pilot in Durham, we only had about 12 weeks to plan. Six of those weeks were during school summer holidays, which made life incredibly difficult. In the end, we delivered on time, but I can tell you a few extra weeks would have been helpful! Fortunately, this time round, eight months gives better planning time.

We set up a project group that included: head teachers; finance officers; communications staff; caterers; and public health. The steering group developed and oversaw the delivery of detailed UIFSM project to identify any problems early on. Developing a communication strategy to keep everyone up to date should be one of the first tasks. Schools running their own catering provision need to take a similar approach to that of a local authority or catering provider.

Everyone involved in this policy decision needs to start planning *now*. Durham County Council is already working with its contract caterer, along with Head teachers, school staff and local authority officers to prepare this time around.

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