

Supplementary written evidence submitted by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in response to questions asked by the Committee on 30 June 2020 (COV0163)

Question from the Committee

1. When did Defra become aware that Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) people were experiencing difficulties using free school meal vouchers online, and how did Defra respond? (Q 248)

Response from DEFRA

Defra have liaised with the Department for Education on this query and are unaware of any particular issue around clinically extremely vulnerable (or indeed anyone) using the free school meal vouchers online. If such an issue did arise, it would be with DfE as owners of the scheme to provide a solution.

DfE has added the following:

With regards to FSM national voucher scheme, only Asda and Waitrose offer the facility for vouchers to be used online.

Not all children eligible for benefits-related FSM would be in the clinically extremely vulnerable group. However, school leaders are free to consider the best solution for providing support to their free school meal pupils during the current circumstances. We recognise that it may not be convenient or possible for some families to visit one of the supermarkets on the scheme. Where the national voucher scheme is not an appropriate approach, schools are able to claim for additional costs incurred in supporting free school meal pupils through the schools coronavirus exceptional costs fund.

Question from the Committee

2. How much has it cost the Government to get food parcels delivered to CEV people? (Q 255-257) Please provide figures the Committee could publish (estimates are acceptable).

Response from DEFRA

The total contract value is £208m. Providing a more detailed breakdown at this time would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of the authority and the suppliers.