Press Release by North Yorkshire County Council

**Apply for free school meals, in time for the new school year**

Families in North Yorkshire are being given easier access to apply for free school meals with a new streamlined system that has been launched ahead of the new academic year.

It is now quicker and easier to apply for free school meals after North Yorkshire County Council launched a new, online system earlier this summer. The digital application involves a four-step process and tells applicants instantly if their child is eligible.

All children in reception, Year 1 and Year 2 automatically qualify for free school meals and do not need to submit an application. Families with a child in Year 3 or above – and who receive certain benefits - need to apply now in order to have free school meals from the first day of term, as the application will need to be processed by the deadline of September 5.

Families can apply for free school meals at any point in the school year, but to receive them from the first day of term, parents and carers need to apply as soon as they can.

North Yorkshire County Council’s executive member for education and skills, Cllr Annabel Wilkinson, said: “If you receive certain benefits, please check to see if you are eligible for free school meals.

“Even if you are worried your child is a fussy eater, school catering staff are very good at introducing new foods to children gradually, for instance, by providing small taster pots of a dish they may not have tried before at lunchtime. There are also several choices of foods each day.

“Importantly, school meals contain the right balance of nutrients and calories your child needs in order to help with their energy levels and concentration throughout the day.

“The new, online application system for school meals has been designed to be much more user-friendly and will let you know straight away if your child is eligible for free school meals. Once you have found out, your child should be able to access free school meals within five days.”

Parents and carers already receiving free school meals do not need to reapply, as their meals will continue as normal. This includes pupils who are moving up from primary to secondary school, as the county council automatically transfers the eligibility with the child.

North Yorkshire County Council has been running a campaign to encourage more pupils to try nutritionally balanced school meals. In particular, the campaign aims to make sure families to take up the offer if they are eligible, as the cost of living impacts further on family budgets.

School catering teams can offer individual appointments to parents and carers of children with food allergies and intolerances, to provide information and reassurance.

For more information and to apply for free school meals at a North Yorkshire school, visit, [www.northyorks.gov.uk/free-school-meals](http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/free-school-meals)

Applicants will need their National Insurance Number, or National Asylum Support Service number and a copy of a document such as a Universal Credit statement.

The new form also links to Google Translate, so can be accessed in any language.

For further information on support with cost of living in North Yorkshire, including childcare costs, visit, [www.northyorks.gov.uk/cost-living-support](http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/cost-living-support)