

QUESTION BY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

Question submitted by: Alex Moore

To the Cabinet Member or Chair for: Schools – Councillor Cresswell

To be asked at the next (Council, Cabinet or Planning Committee) Meeting: Council

Date: 26/01/2026

Question (to be no longer than 50 words):

Regarding the decision to withdraw funding for CaterEd what guarantees can you make that the quality and costs of school meals to children in Plymouth will not be affected?

Response: (for completion by City Council officers and Cabinet Members / Chairs)

The planned closure of the school catering company CATERed is not a result of the council withdrawing any funding, and it will not lead to children going without school meals.

CATERed is a cooperative trading company, jointly owned by local schools and Plymouth City Council and was formed in 2015 to provide high quality school meals to Plymouth schools by using a cooperative model designed to provide economies of scale.

As CATERed currently is unable to continue trading beyond academic year 2025/2026, the CATERed Board has taken the decision to cease school meal provision to prevent a situation of wrongful trading, and to give schools time to secure alternative providers. This is a Board of Director decision and not a shareholder decision, Council Member decision or a Plymouth City Council decision.

The supply and provision of school meals (meeting mandatory School Food Standards) is a statutory responsibility that is delegated to school governing bodies and, where appropriate, trusts. Funding for the school meals service comes from the school's delegated budgets. While many schools in Plymouth are part of the CATERed cooperative company that provides school meals, they are free to choose how they provide meals. Some schools already use other providers for children in the city.

This means children will still receive their school meals and there should be no gap in provision. Schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) will now need to make the decision as to who provides school meals from September 2026. Schools and MATs are still working through this decision, so providers at this stage are not known. Providers must adhere to certain standards of nutritional value and quality.

Plymouth City Council has not directly funded CATERed, so has not withdrawn any funding. However, in light of the difficulties the company was facing, the Council offered a one-off package of support (likely to cost Plymouth City Council more than £500,000) to allow the company to keep trading through to the end of the academic year 2025/2026, or until schools make the switch to an alternative provider if that happens sooner. This has given schools the time they need to source and contract an alternative provider.

As a council we will continue to support any maintained schools in finding alternative suppliers.