

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
12TH MARCH 2009**

**FINAL REPORT OF THE SCHOOL FOOD TASK GROUP
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Purpose of the Report

1. To present the findings and recommendations of the School Food Task Group.

Action Required of the Committee

2. The committee is asked to consider the final report of the School Food Task Group (attached) and to adopt its recommendations.
3. The committee is asked to submit this report and its recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education & Youth Development and the Cabinet Member for ICT, Procurement & Partnerships for consideration and for a formal response.

Background

4. The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee commissioned this task group in September 2008, following consideration of a report updating members on the progress of the council's School Food Strategy.
5. The task group was asked to give further attention to aspects relating to the strategy, including the challenges posed by the government's new nutritional standards, the requirement that all secondary aged pupils will have access to practical cookery lessons from 2011, the principles underlying the new school catering contract and the role of the Schools Forum in these matters.

Task Group's Methodology

6. The members which took part in this task group were Rebecca Macdonald (Chairman), Patrick Coleman, John English, Peter Fuller, Mollie Groom and Malcolm Hewson.
7. The areas of scrutiny identified by the committee and a number of additional related topics were explored at a series of meetings with officers, teachers, and catering representatives, and through a number of school visits.

Main Findings & Recommendations

8. Investment in School Meals since 2005
 - (a) The local authority and schools have taken advantage of a number of different government funding streams to upgrade school kitchen equipment, buildings and the school meals service in general – investing approximately £2.7m since 2005.
 - (b) In addition, the opportunity to bid for funding from the Department for Children, Schools and Families for kitchen and dining room projects is

being taken in 2009, with 87 schools bidding for £3.3m, based on 50% match-funding from the schools' own budgets. Consequently, the total investment from this avenue of funding could be £6.4m.

- (c) Despite this investment there are still a number of schools in the county without adequate facilities to provide the standard of schools meals required. The challenges still facing a number of schools include outdated equipment, poor flooring, gas and ventilation problems and asbestos.
- (d) Further investment is anticipated to come in the form of Building Schools for the Future funding – a total of £10m for Primary Schools over the next two years, and approximately £450m for Secondary Schools from 2012 at the earliest.

RECOMMENDATION 1

That officers provide a detailed report to the children's services scrutiny committee in September 2009, on the assessment that has been and will be carried out to identify the outstanding challenges and risks facing schools in Wiltshire from inadequate school kitchens and dining room facilities. This report should also detail the plans in place to manage these challenges and risks and the consequent funding and resources that will be needed and available, to ensure the provision of the standard of school meals required by government and the future sustainability of school catering arrangements in Wiltshire (see paragraph 13(j) of the main report).

9. The "Whole School Approach"

- (a) The National Healthy Schools Programme (NHSP) is the government's main way of delivering a 'whole school approach', whereby the whole school community (pupils, staff, caterers, parents, governors and providers) are involved in school food issues, helping to implement, monitor and evaluate the impact of healthy eating.
- (b) Support from a school's senior management team is often the key to ensuring a continued focus on the aims and objectives of the Healthy Schools Programme and the whole school food policy. Also, generally speaking, the application of a whole school food policy is easier to achieve in smaller schools particularly primary schools.

RECOMMENDATION 2

That the Department for Children & Education ensure that there is ongoing funding and support for teachers, other nominated school staff, caterers and providers so that focus on the aims and objectives of the 'whole school approach' is maintained and continuous improvement achieved through training opportunities (see paragraph 14(j) of the main report).

9. The Challenges Posed by the New Nutrient Based Standards

- (a) In October 2005, the Government appointed School Meals Review Panel published its report "Turning the Tables". The report proposed radical changes to the quality and nutritional value of food served and consumed in school, and has resulted in new standards for school meals which are to be fully phased in by September 2009.

- (b) From feedback at workshops and other surveys and audits carried out by the school food strategy coordinator, some of the main challenges so far identified from the new standards are cost and time in having to analyse menus and recipes, the reliability and accuracy of this analysis, and the loss of creativity in the kitchen. The task group's school visits identified further concerns (see paragraph 15j of the main report).

10. Cooking Lessons (Food Technology)

- (a) The task group was asked by the committee to consider the impact of the government's requirement that all secondary aged pupils will be entitled to learn how to cook and understand the principles of diet and nutrition from 2011.
- (b) The potential impact relates to capacity within the Design & Technology curriculum, the need to recruit additional food technology teachers and to invest in equipment and facilities.
- (c) The task group also enquired about activities to engage parents in cooking, recognising the important role that parents as well as schools play in encouraging children to eat healthily. The task group was informed that the initiatives to facilitate parent involvement in Wiltshire include the Lets Get Cooking project in primary schools, family learning days in all schools, healthy eating events in children's centres, the Food in Schools Programme and the Healthy Schools Programme.

RECOMMENDATION 3

That the school food strategy co-ordinator clarify for schools as soon as possible how the impact of activities to improve children and their parents' cooking skills will be monitored (see paragraph 16(i) of the main report).

11. Investment in Food Technology Equipment & Facilities

- (a) Overall, schools in Wiltshire have food technology facilities and equipment which range from 'adequate' to 'very good'. However, to meet the government's target that by 2011 all secondary schools should have their own, or have access to others', up to date food technology facilities and equipment, assessment of the level of need for further investment will be required.
- (b) From 2008 – 2011, almost £22b of capital funding is available nationally to improve school buildings, including food technology areas. Major capital programmes such as Building Schools for the Future (BSF) should now be ensuring that adequate food technology areas (including practical kitchens) are addressed in local authority plans. In addition, schools have access to devolved capital funding.

RECOMMENDATION 4

That the local authority carry out a thorough assessment to identify which schools will need to make improvements to their food technology equipment and facilities to meet the government's requirement from 2011. The outcome of this assessment to be reported in detail to the children's services scrutiny committee in September 2009. This report to include information on the funding and resources required and available to make these improvements (see paragraph 17(a) of the main report).

RECOMMENDATION 5

That, in the same report requested in recommendation 4, officers clarify what is the baseline of current standards in food technology and its effectiveness in teaching young people how to cook healthily and understand nutrition on a broad basis, before further investment is made, so as to ensure meaningful measurement of the benefits derived from future investment. Officers to carry out this work in consultation with the chairman and vice chairman of the committee (see paragraph 17(d) of the main report).

12. The Principles Underlying the Council's New School Catering Contract
 - (a) There are a number of significant issues which need to be resolved in the near future with regard to the direction of school meals (see paragraph 18(h) of the main report). These relate to the healthy schools agenda, parenting and obesity strategies, links with the curriculum, performance management, nutritional standards, financial sustainability of the service and kitchen / servery / dining infrastructure, commissioning and contracting arrangements.

RECOMMENDATION 6

To support the Department for Children & Education's decision to discuss with strategic partners in NHS Wiltshire, Schools Forum and the Children & Young People's Trust Board the significant issues which need to be resolved in the near future with regard to the direction of school meals' policy in Wiltshire, noting that this is with a view to developing a shared approach to commissioning the school meals' service to inform the tendering process for 2010 (see paragraphs 18(h) and (i) of the main report).

RECOMMENDATION 7

That the Department for Children & Education discuss with partners as a matter of urgency the future funding arrangements for the school food strategy co-ordinator, bearing in mind the continuing national and local priorities associated with healthy eating and the proposals to develop a shared approach to commissioning the school meals' service (see paragraphs 18(h) and (i) of the main report).

RECOMMENDATION 8

That, in noting the principles which underlie the future of school meal's provision in Wiltshire, the Department for Children & Education request that consideration be given by the procurement project board of building in the following to the revised arrangements (paragraphs 18(a) to (l) of the main report):

- (a) a proactive approach from the provider in marketing its services and generating good uptake of school meals
- (b) provision of organic, locally grown food, and environmentally sustainable practices
- (c) flexibility to provide other school food related services such as breakfast clubs
- (d) provision for children's centres
- (e) regard for the long term benefits of healthy eating

- (f) *strong links with the priorities of NHS Wiltshire, i.e. the obesity strategy*
- (g) *auditing practices to help measure the impact of improved diets, and of improved school catering kitchen / servery / dining room infrastructure*
- (h) *regard for best practice and a contract that could be adapted to incorporate lessons learnt*
- (i) *regard for the improvements requested by Ofsted at any given time*
- (j) *support for 'whole school food' policies and practices*
- (k) *an ongoing programme of training for school caterers and designated teachers to ensure standards in health and safety, nutrition and continuous improvement.*

RECOMMENDATION 9

That a children's services scrutiny committee member be appointed to sit on the procurement project board for the re-letting of the new school catering contract. This to be agreed in March 2009 and reaffirmed in July 2009 (see paragraph 18(m) of the main report).

RECOMMENDATION 10

That the procurement project board invite a school representative to sit on the board as soon as possible (see paragraph 18(m) of the main report).

13. **The Role of the Schools Forum in Promoting the School Food Strategy**
From discussions with the Chairman of the Schools Forum, the Chairman of the Primary Heads Forum and the Chairman of the Wiltshire Association of Secondary & Special School Heads, the task group has identified that the main ways in which the Schools Forum promotes the school food strategy is through financial support and contractual oversight.

RECOMMENDATION 11

That, as part of the procurement process, the Department for Children & Education, with reference to the Schools Forum and other relevant local authority departments and partners, explore the potential benefits of providing a central resource to carry out the necessary menu and recipe analysis, support for health and safety, food hygiene and advice on kitchen / servery maintenance (see paragraph 19(c) of the main report).

Conclusion

14. This report and its recommendations will be submitted to the children's services scrutiny committee for consideration on the 12th March 2009. Subject to the committee's adoption of the recommendations, this report will be issued to the Cabinet Member for Education & Youth Development and the Cabinet Member for ICT, Procurement & Partnerships and a formal response requested.

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