

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

FINAL REPORT OF THE SCHOOL FOOD TASK GROUP**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 this report and to adopt its recommendations.

Background

3. 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.
4. The School Food Strategy was launched in 2007 in response to the government's White Paper 'Choosing Health: making healthier choices easier' (2004), and the announcement in March 2005 of a package of measures to significantly improve the quality of food offered in schools. These measures were supported by a national fund of £220m for 2005-2008. The government's expectation was that, in partnership with parents, schools, health services, school meal providers, contractors and others, local authorities would lead the development and implementation of a local strategy to deliver a high quality, sustainable school meals service.
5. The objectives of this council's School Food Strategy were influenced by the findings and recommendations of two previous task groups of this committee – the Sodexo School Catering Task Group (Sept 04 – Apr 05) and the School Catering Task Group (Oct 05 – May 06).
6. The objectives relate to:
 - (a) national and local policies for food in schools
 - (b) education and training
 - (c) partnerships
 - (d) links with local producers of food and local providers
 - (e) communications
 - (f) environmental and financial sustainability of school meals
 - (g) resources to support and improve school meals
 - (h) contract arrangements
 - (i) monitoring and evaluation of school meals and the services offered.
7. The committee has received 6 monthly updates on the progress of the strategy. On considering the update in September 2008, the committee concluded that there were a number of areas related to the strategy which warranted further evaluation. These areas included the government's new nutrient based standards for school meals, the

teaching of cookery (referred to as 'food technology' in this report), and plans for the council's new school catering contract.

8. Consequently, this School Food Task Group (Nov 08 – Mar 09) was commissioned with the following terms of reference:

To give further attention to the following:

- (a) the government's nutrient based standards, and the challenges they pose*
- (b) how many secondary and special schools in Wiltshire will need to make plans to build or share modern food technology facilities and equipment*
- (c) what is the general impact of making learning to cook and understand the principles of diet and nutrition an entitlement for 11-14 year olds*
- (d) the principles underlying the new school catering contract, particularly to:*
 - i. see how best to secure buy-in from schools*
 - ii. gain a better appreciation of the demand for alternative school food delivery methods*
 - iii. gain a better appreciation of what alternative school food delivery methods will be possible for schools in the future*
- (e) the role of the Schools Forum in promoting the council's school food strategy.*

Task Group's Methodology

9. The members which took part in this task group were Rebecca MacDonald (Chairman), Patrick Coleman, John English, Peter Fuller, Mollie Groom and Malcolm Hewson. These members were able to bring to the task group a broad mix of experience and knowledge in school catering, education, health and procurement. Three of the members had taken part in the previous two task group exercises on school catering, as mentioned in paragraph 5 above.
10. In addition to considering the main topics listed in the terms of reference at paragraph 8 above, the task group also discussed information relating to investment in school meals since 2005 and the 'Whole School Food' approach as carried out in Wiltshire.
11. These topics and additional information were explored at a series of meetings with officers, teachers, and catering representatives, and through a number of school visits.

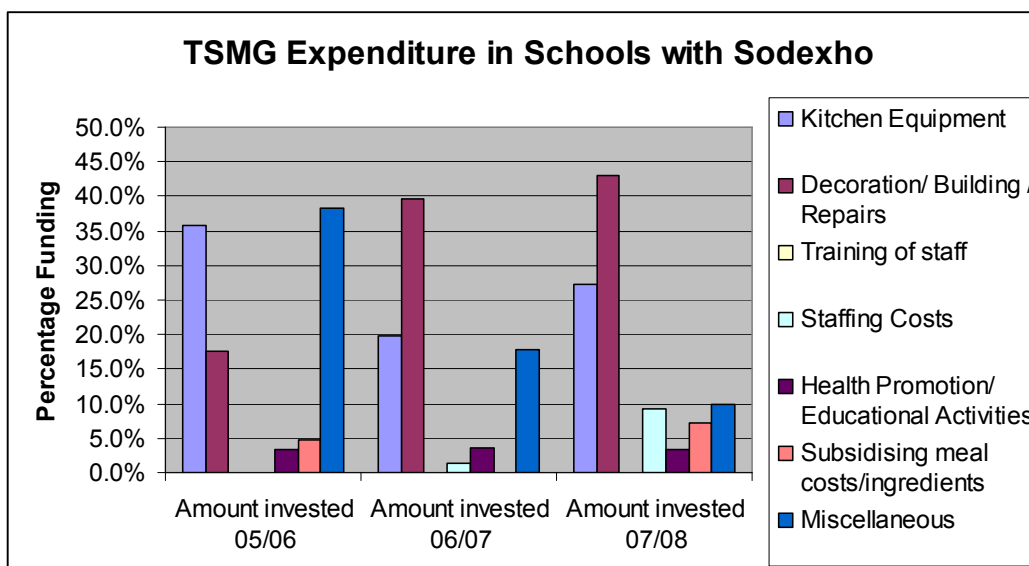
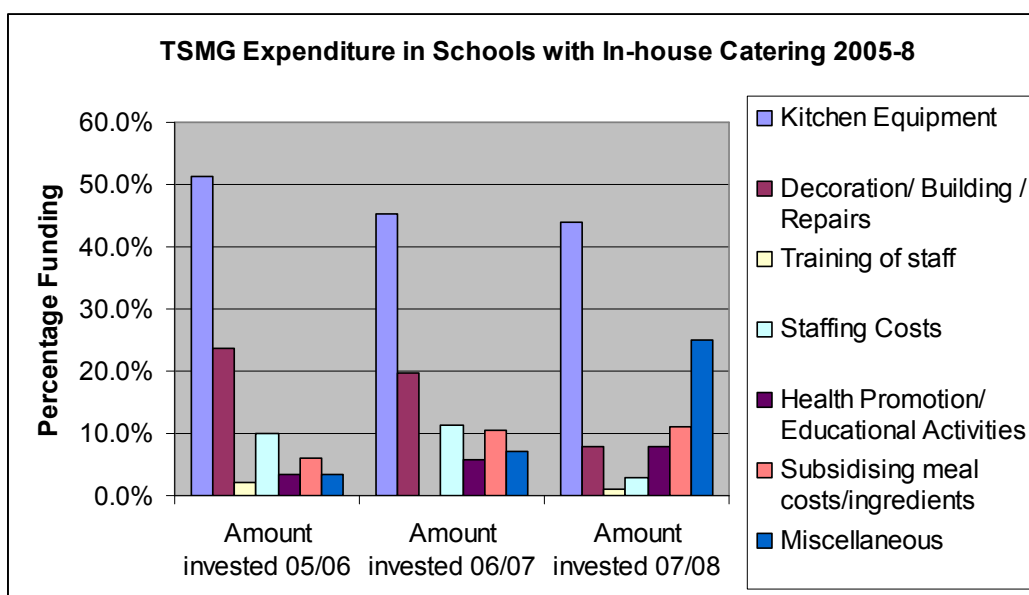
Main Findings

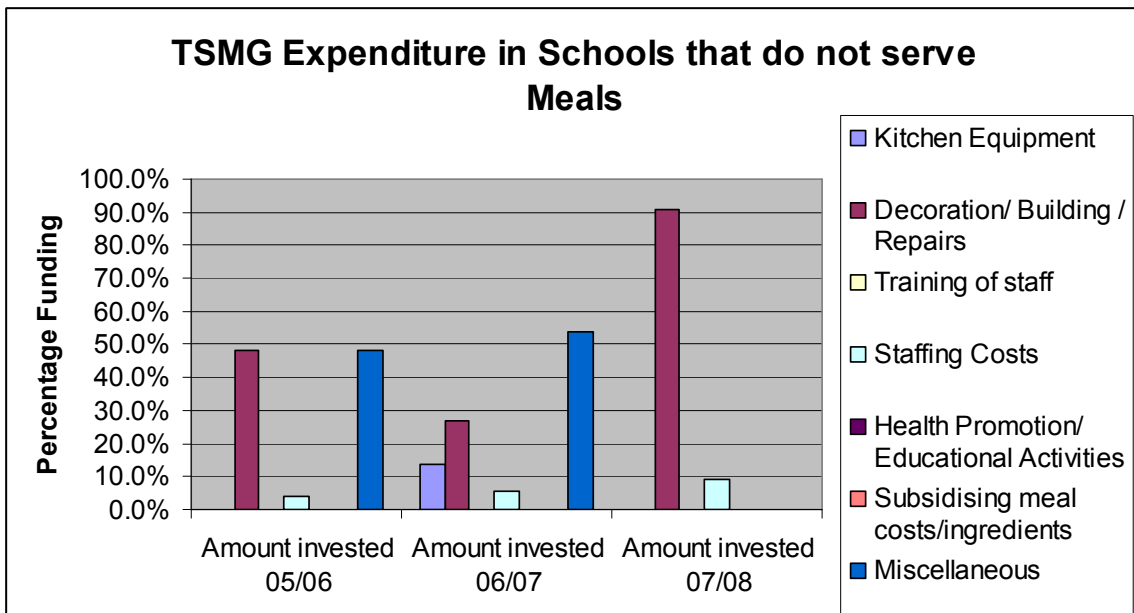
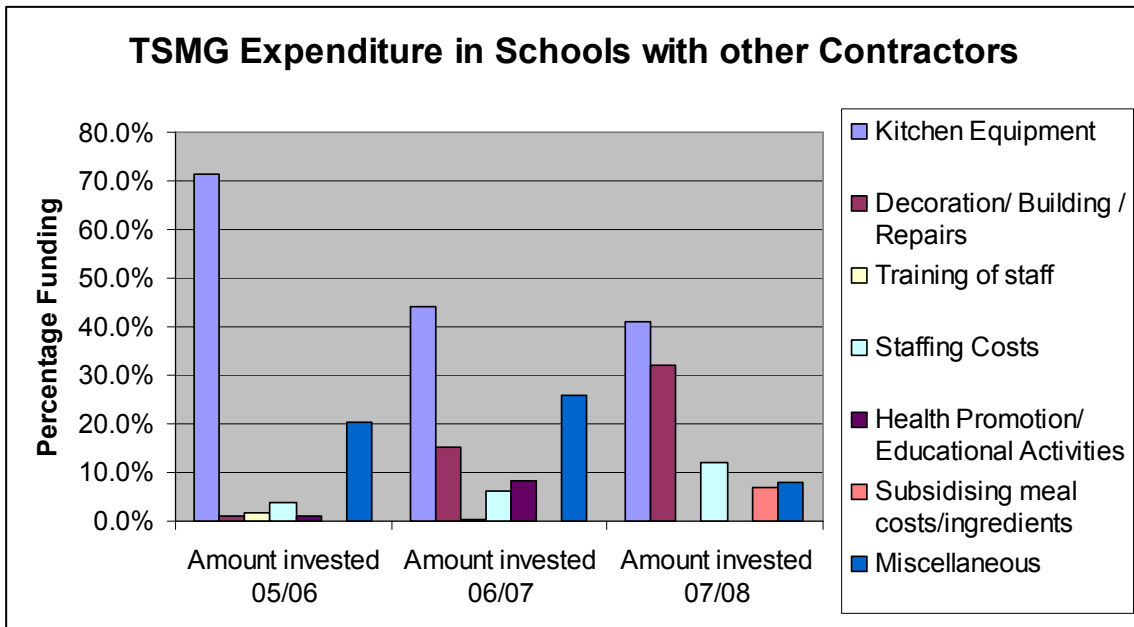
12. Investment in School Meals since 2005
- (a) Currently there are 237 schools in Wiltshire (202 primary, 29 secondary and 6 special). 171 primary schools provide meals. 114 primary schools have kitchens, 52 have serveries and 36 have neither. All 29 secondary schools have at least one kitchen and 5 out of the 6 special schools have kitchens.

- (b) 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 since 2005. These include the 'Targeted School Meals Grants – 5a and 5b' (2005-2008) and the 'School Lunch Grant' (2008 – 2011).
- (c) Since 2005, approximately £2.7m has been invested in improving kitchens, the school meals service in general, and the quality of food.

Targeted School Meals Grant 5a (2005-8)	=	£1,079,262
School Meals Grant 5b (2005-8)	=	£936,560
School Lunch Grant (2008-9)	=	£671,813
TOTAL	=	<u>£2,684,635</u>

- (d) From the School Food Strategy Co-ordinator's analysis of the impact of the 'Targeted School Meals Grant', a total of 66 schools successfully bid for £834,412 between 2005 – 2008. The charts below illustrate how this funding has been spent.





- (e) This analysis indicates that investment during 2005 – 2008 was used mainly to upgrade kitchen equipment and dining areas, repair/improve building and decoration, and to subsidise staff and meal costs.
- (f) Of the 10 schools in the county without a school meals service in 2005, 8 have since been able to introduce a service as a consequence of the Targeted School Meals Grant, and another is planning to commence a new service in easter 2009.
- (g) The 66 schools that took advantage of this funding were asked to comment on the impact so far evident. All of these schools responded and their feedback is summarised below on page 5:

Comments	Number of schools (05/06)	Number of Schools (06/07)	Number of schools (07/08)	Total
Quality of meals has improved	10	12	4	26
More fresh, local ingredients used	11	11	7	29
Better dining environment/lunch experience for pupils	7	11	10	28
Meal up-take has increased		10	11	21
Pupils are enjoying healthier choices of food/drink	13	10	6	29
More efficient kitchen/ service is faster	5	9	9	23
Has enabled a meals service to be re-instated		5	3	8
Has enabled staffing levels to be maintained/increased		3	3	6
Has empowered catering staff	2	2	2	6
All children have visited a farm		1		1
Healthy eating lessons have been taught		1	4	5
Healthier children		1	2	3
Less wasted food	2	1	1	4

- (h) The conclusions drawn by the School Food Strategy Co-ordinator from this analysis is that the Targeted School Meals Grant has had a significant and positive impact on the school meals service in Wiltshire in those schools that have bid for funding, with the greatest impact perceived by schools to be the increased use of fresh, local ingredients, and that more pupils are enjoying the healthy food provided.
- (i) In addition, the co-ordinator has confirmed that dining environments and the lunch time experience has been enhanced and the general quality of food has improved. The examples of this include:
- queuing in secondary schools has been reduced by installation of new points of sale
 - dining halls have been made more attractive with new furniture and decoration
 - new kitchen equipment has enabled catering staff to cook a greater variety of fresh foods from scratch in a more efficient way
 - refrigerated display cabinets have made food look more attractive
 - the introduction of jacket potato ovens, smoothie makers, salad bars, panini machines etc has increased the appeal of the school meal overall.

- (j) In addition to the funding already mentioned, there is an opportunity for schools to bid via the local authority for further funding from the Department for Children, Schools and Families for kitchen and dining room projects. 86 Wiltshire schools have bid for £3.2m. This is based on 50% match-funding from the schools own budgets. Consequently, the total investment from this avenue of funding could be £6.4m. Confirmation of the success of the bid for this funding will be received in March 2009.
- (k) Despite this investment there will still be a number of schools in the county without adequate facilities to provide the standard of schools meals required. For example, the maximum amount each of the 66 schools received from the Targeted School Meals Grant was £15,000, which helped them to buy new equipment and to make refurbishments. A complete re-fit for a new kitchen, depending on its size and condition could cost tens of thousands of pounds.
- (l) The challenges still facing a number of schools include outdated equipment, poor flooring, gas and ventilation problems and asbestos. Assessment of gas equipment has recently been carried out and officers are in the process of informing schools of the level of risk they face if faults are not overcome - the worse case scenario being closure of the school kitchen.
- (m) These challenges and risks have implications for the viability of the council's school catering service, as access to and use of well maintained and adequately equipped kitchen and dining facilities are important for the continuation and sustainability of the service provided by in house or private contractors. Also, these challenges and risks can prove a disincentive to schools to continue providing a school meals service at all especially for those schools whose kitchen is used for providing meals to other schools.
- (n) 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. Within the primary capital programme, schools will be rebuilt with up to date kitchens and dining areas. The outcome of the Building Schools for the Future revised expression of interest for secondary schools will be known this spring. Once again, when funding is secured it will enable the provision of new build and / or the refurbishment of existing facilities. Kitchen and dining areas will therefore be significantly improved.
- (o) The task group would like the committee to give further consideration to the challenges and consequent risks which schools face in Wiltshire from inadequate school kitchens and dining room facilities, bearing in mind the investment already made, but the need which still exists. The task group would like children's services scrutiny members to understand better how these risks will be managed, and how this will be funded, to ensure provision of the standard of school meals required by government and the future sustainability of school catering arrangements in Wiltshire (*recommendation 1*).

13. The "Whole School Food" Approach

To complete following the 26th Feb meeting

14. 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. As a consequence of the report, the School Food Trust (SFT) was appointed by government to take the recommendations forward. These recommendations are to transform school meals and food skills to improve health and education for school age children and young people.
- (b) The new standards cover all food sold or served in schools at lunchtimes.
- (c) The timetable for introducing the new standards is:
 - Sept 06 – interim food-based standards for school lunches
 - Sept 07 – food based standards for food other than lunch
 - Sept 08 – primary schools to meet new nutrient based standards for school lunches
 - Sept 09 – secondary and special schools to meet new nutrient based standards for school lunches
- (d) The food based standards which schools have been required to follow since September 2006, apply to food or food groups, e.g. fruit and vegetables, bread, oily fish, salt etc, and to the frequency and quantity permitted (see Appendix 1 which is an extract from the SFT’s guide).
- (e) The nutrient based standards which schools are now required to follow, apply to the nutrients (both minimum and maximum) which school lunches should contain, e.g. zinc, carbohydrate, protein, fibre, vitamins, calcium, saturated fat etc (see Appendix 2 – extract from SFT’s guide).
- (f) The council’s School Food Strategy has included strategic objectives regarding the implementation of these new standards, and the task group was asked to find out more about the challenges faced by schools from these standards.
- (g) The strategy since 2007 has been to provide support to schools in preparing for the new standards, and this has included regular communications, meetings and workshops. In addition, the SFT website and its guides and publications have been distributed and promoted to schools.
- (h) All schools currently in the Sodexo school catering contract are compliant with the standards, and Sodexo is currently working with the SFT to help in the promotion of healthier school meals.

- (i) From feedback at the workshops and other surveys and audits carried out by the School Food Strategy Coordinator, the main challenges so far identified are:
 - (i) the cost to the school in analysing recipes and menus to ensure compliance with the new standards, whether that cost is in staff time, use of a dietician or procurement of software specifically designed to analyse menus
 - (ii) the time it takes to check menu compliance, which sometimes requires extra research to confirm the nutritional value of a particular food item
 - (iii) the reliability / accuracy of menu analysis
 - (iv) the loss of creativity in the kitchen, as once menus are analysed they cannot be amended or adapted, without further analysis – this also impacts on the appeal factor of some dishes, with food being wasted rather than a little license being allowed to make it taste a bit better
 - (v) the need to meet the standards and cater for a variety of dietary and cultural requirements
 - (vi) uncertainty as to how menu compliance will be monitored and by who
 - (vii) potential risk of schools currently outside of the council's or other school catering contract, stopping their in-house arrangement and not providing a school meal service at all.

- (j) As part of its work, the task group visited a number of schools to discuss these challenges with teachers, catering staff and pupils, and to gain a better appreciation of the way in which schools are planning to meet the new standards, or the way in which they are already working to comply. In addition to the challenges listed at paragraph 14(i) above, the following were identified from the members' school visits:
 - i) the need to promote the new standards as part of a whole school food policy, co-ordinated by a responsible individual or group, so that these are consistently applied throughout the school curriculum and school day (this is good in some and not so good in others)
 - ii) the impact on the cost of the school meal and the concern that price increases will affect the up-take
 - iii) the food and nutrient based standards are only part of the equation to improving children's diet and eating habits - the dining environment and organisation of the school lunch is another important factor
 - iv) need to support catering staff in accessing training
 - v) some schools feel that the nutrient based standards have been introduced too quickly and that schools are still trying to apply the food based standards

- (k) Whilst the majority of schools outside of the Sodexo contract are intending to comply with the new standards and will either facilitate this through use of software or help from a dietician, there is a minority which are still undecided as to how to proceed or who have decided not to comply.

15. 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 would be entitled to learn how to cook and understand the principles of diet and nutrition from 2011.
- (b) The school food strategy's objective 'education and training' includes a number of measures which relate to food technology, and improving pupils' knowledge and skills in cooking healthy food. The measures are intended to ensure that:
 - (i) all young people leaving school will have been taught how to cook healthy meals
 - (ii) the general good quality of teachers' skills in food technology would be improved further, both in primary and secondary schools
 - (iii) where possible, schools will grow their own produce.
- (c) In considering the impact of this government requirement, the task group was informed that the general standard of food technology lessons is good overall in Wiltshire, with some schools being outstanding. In addition, the task group was informed that the national shortage of food technology teachers was not reflected locally.
- (d) Building on this generally good provision, schools in Wiltshire are responding positively to the government's requirements and expectations regarding food technology and are involved in various initiatives to further improve performance, including the Licence to Cook programme for secondary schools and the Lets Get Cooking project for primary schools.
- (e) As part of its work, the task group interviewed the food technology teacher from Pewsey Vale School about her involvement as a lead practitioner for the south west for the Licence to Cook programme, and visited the school to see her conduct a food technology class. During this visit, the task group was given the opportunity to cook with a year 9 class and held discussions with staff and pupils about food technology, how it sits within the whole Design & Technology curriculum, and how some of the practical issues associated with cooking are overcome, i.e. the cost of ingredients.
- (f) Additionally, the Secondary Adviser for Design & Technology helped the task group to explore the potential impact of the government's requirement.

- (g) The potential impact could be:
- (i) the need for careful adjustment and balance of subjects taught within the Design & Technology curriculum to ensure that the minimum requirement of 16 hours of food technology is achieved **per term / per year??**
 - (ii) if the requirement is extended from key stage 3 to key stage 4, schools will need to recruit additional food technology teachers, and adapt the curriculum to make space for more food technology lessons
 - (iii) the need for further investment in food technology equipment and facilities (**see paragraph 16 below**).
- (h) 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 included 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.
- (i) Whilst encouraged by the wide variety of activity ongoing in Wiltshire to improve children and their parents' cooking skills, the task group highlighted the need for robust monitoring arrangements to be in place to measure the impact of this activity. Members were informed that there were a number of national and local targets relating to childhood obesity that would inform these monitoring arrangements, and that Ofsted would have a role in measuring the impact of this activity (**recommendation 2**). Also, members were informed that the Wiltshire Obesity Strategy, the Healthy Schools Programme, the Children & Young People's Plan, the Local Area Agreement and the Local Agreement for Wiltshire would each play a role in helping the authority and its partners to measure the benefits of healthy eating and cooking initiatives.

16. Investment in Food Technology Equipment & Facilities

- (a) The Secondary Adviser for Design & Technology provided reassurance to the task group that overall, schools in Wiltshire had food technology facilities and equipment which ranged from 'adequate' to 'very good'. **However, to meet the government's requirement that by 2011, all secondary schools should have their own, or have access to others', up to date food technology facilities and equipment, the local authority will need to assess carefully the level of need for further investment (recommendation 3).**
- (b) There are four schools in Wiltshire which had met the criteria for the most recent government funding stream made available for food technology equipment and facilities, these included:

<u>School (for pupils of secondary age)</u>	<u>£</u>	<u>Scheme</u>
Bishop Wordsworth's Grammar School for Boys	300,000	New Build (09/10 – 10/11)
Downland Special School	50,000	Improved Equipment (09/10)
Exeter House Special School	300,000	New Build (09/10 – 10/11)
Larkrise Special School	300,000	New Build (09/10 – 10/11)

(c) 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. The government expectation is that, where BSF funding does not provide for improved facilities, the installation of food technology areas and extending/improving existing facilities will usually be funded as a priority from the devolved capital budget.

(d) The task group would like officers to clarify what is the baseline of current performance in food technology and its effectiveness in teaching young people how to cook healthily, before further investment is made, so as to ensure meaningful measurement of the benefits derived from future investment (*recommendation 4*).

17. The principles underlying the council's new school catering contract
To complete following 26th Feb meeting
18. The role of the Schools Forum in promoting the school food strategy
to complete following the 26th Feb meeting

Recommendations

1. That officers provide a detailed report to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee in **(timing to be confirmed)**, 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, 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 12(o))**.
2. 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, both through Ofsted and through any other local arrangements **(see paragraph 15(i))**.

3. 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 ??????. This report to include information on the funding and resources required and available to make these improvements (see paragraph 16(a)).
4. That, in the same report requested in recommendation 3, officers clarify what is the baseline of current performance in food technology and its effectiveness in teaching young people how to cook healthily, before further investment is made, so as to ensure meaningful measurement of the benefits derived from future investment (see paragraph 16(d)).

(Karen to add paragraph explaining the process to be followed in submitting the recommendations and in monitoring their implementation)

Rebecca MacDonald
Chairman – School Food Task Group

Report Author: Karen Linaker, Scrutiny Support Officer, 01225 713056