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## SCHOOL FOOD SCRUTINY TASK GROUP

### REPORT OF A MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2009 AT COUNTY HALL, TROWBRIDGE

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#### Present:

Members: John English, Peter Fuller, Mollie Groom, Rebecca Macdonald (Chairman)

Officers: Sarah King (School Food Strategy Co-ordinator), Karen Linaker (Scrutiny Support Officer), Richard Palmer (Personal Development Education Team Manager), Richard Parker (Assistant Director, Resources, Improvement & Youth Development), and Mike Swabey (Head of Procurement & Contract Management)

Other: Neil Baker (Chairman of the Schools Forum)  
Judith Finney (Chairman of the Primary Heads Forum)  
Gerard MacMahon (Chairman of the Wiltshire Association of Secondary & Special School Heads)

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#### APOLOGIES

1. There were no apologies for absence.

#### REPORT OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

2. Members noted the report of the previous meeting and that all matters included were scheduled to be taken forward to this meeting and the task group's final report.

#### WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

3. The Personal Development Education Team Manager presented members with information on the 'whole school approach' regarding healthy eating and the Wiltshire Healthy Schools Programme, including two case studies to illustrate how schools were taking these matters forward. In discussing this information, the following key points were made and clarifications given:
  - (a) the National Healthy Schools Programme (NHSP) was the government's main way of delivering a whole school approach, whereby the whole school community (pupils, staff, caterers, parents and governors) were involved in school food issues

- (b) the healthy schools programme had been running for 10 years, and 3 years ago the government introduced 41 new criteria that schools have to comply with to achieve healthy schools status. These criteria were categorised across four themes: Personal, Social & Health Education (PSHE), Healthy Eating, Physical Activity and Emotional Health and Wellbeing
- (c) the criteria relating to Healthy Eating had the following key aims – children and young people have the confidence, skills, knowledge and understanding to make healthy food choices; and healthy and nutritious food and drink is available across the school day
- (d) the criteria includes the requirement that schools have a ‘whole school food’ policy that is developed through wide consultation, implemented, monitored and evaluated for impact
- (e) as of the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2009, 72% of schools in Wiltshire had achieved the National Healthy School Status. The remaining schools had completed 38% of the criteria. This puts Wiltshire 7% above the national average and broadly in line with statistical neighbours. Over 80% of schools were anticipated to have achieved the status by December 2009
- (f) schools were to be congratulated for the way in which they had embraced the healthy schools initiative
- (g) nevertheless a number of schools still needed support in implementing the government’s new nutritional standards, and in sustaining the good work that had led to them achieving the status
- (h) support from a school’s senior management team was often the key to ensuring a continued focus on the aims and objectives of the healthy schools programme and the whole school food policy
- (i) in the absence of a national re-validation process to ensure that schools were maintaining good healthy schools standards, the Government of the South West had commissioned a new initiative known as “Healthy Schools Plus”, involving 15 local healthy schools programmes in the region. Consequently, Wiltshire was to receive £400,000 to implement this new initiative over the next three years, which would assist it in providing additional capacity within the Healthy Schools Team and provide funding for schools (£1,750 per school). NHS Wiltshire had committed £250,000 to this funding – the rest had been allocated from GOSW’s bid to the “Inequalities Fund”
- (j) the initiative would support schools in building and developing further their work on being a healthy school and in reaffirming their commitment to achieving the 41 NHSP criteria
- (k) the initiative would also be supported by three additional local targets that would:

- address local priorities in the Wiltshire Children & Young People's Plan, including priorities relating to obesity, sexual health, drug and alcohol and mental health
  - provide targeted work in areas with the highest health inequalities
  - provide opportunities for schools to address the needs of vulnerable children and young people
- (l) Healthy Schools Plus will be launched in Wiltshire after easter 2009 with a target to get 50% of the county's schools participating by 2011
- (m) in September 2009, ofsted would be introducing a 'pupils wellbeing' performance indicator that will be used to monitor schools' progress in matters such as healthy eating
- (n) generally speaking the application of a whole school food policy was easier to achieve in smaller schools, particularly primary schools, although two thirds of secondary schools in Wiltshire had achieved healthy school status
- (o) whilst recognising the role that initiatives such as 'healthy schools' could play, the key was for a school to naturally promote healthy lifestyles in a way that was integral to its daily activities and overall ethos
- (p) there was a risk that in some schools the healthy schools initiative became a 'tick box exercise' – particularly now that local authority Healthy Schools Teams were not permitted to go in to schools to check and monitor progress
- (q) in 2011 the new national curriculum would include PSHE as a core subject, with the same status as literacy, science and maths
- (r) in addition, the commitment to achieving the five Every Child Matters outcomes, meant that schools should be promoting healthy school practices
- (s) retaining a strong focus on healthy school initiatives, whilst needing to be integral to a school's general ethos, was often challenged by the many other priorities and initiatives schools were asked to manage and facilitate
- (t) the task group would like to see that there was sufficient funding continuing to be allocated to train school staff, caterers and others involved in promoting a whole school approach.

**AGREED to note the information and further clarification provided on the whole school approach and healthy schools initiative.**

#### **REPORT FROM THE DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN & EDUCATION ON SCHOOL MEALS**

4. Members considered a report which set out the issues involved in developing a new framework for school meal provision in Wiltshire. This report had been submitted to provide a context in which the task group would go on to consider the issue of future school catering contract arrangements in Wiltshire. In discussing this report, the following key points were made:

- (a) the current legal framework governing the provision of meals in schools had been established in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, which legislated that local authorities were obliged to consult with schools on the delegation of responsibilities for the provision of schools meals and for the maintenance of school kitchens. In Wiltshire, the decision to delegate both of these responsibilities to all schools was made in April 2001
- (b) this decision coincided with the development and tendering of a new contract for facilities management within the whole of the council, and this was intended to include school meals provision. The proposed contract included provision for investment in and development of the school meals' infrastructure as well as the direct provision of meals. The viability of these provisions was dependent upon a sufficiently large number of schools taking up the contract. In the event, only 119 schools out of the 180 initially expressing an interest actually took up the option – leading to a re-negotiation and restructuring of the contract conditions
- (c) following the corporate decision in 2008 to extend the original contract with Sodexo for a further two years, the 109 schools in the contract at that time were offered the opportunity to remain in the contract until 2010. Only 79 schools chose to do so, with the remainder taking services in house, finding alternative contractors or ceasing to provide school meals
- (d) in 2005, the government funded a number of initiatives to improve the quality of school meals. In Wiltshire this enabled a school meals strategy co-ordinator post to be funded to develop an overall strategy, to establish a broad based partnership group (SNAG), to provide direct support to schools and to coordinate work across a number of different strands. Although this funding ended in 2008, NHS Wiltshire provided funding to continue the post through to September 2009
- (e) a major thrust of current government policy has been the development of statutory nutritional standards for school meals, as well as a new national performance indicator (PI 52) for school meal take up. These standards are also linked to the 'healthy schools' and obesity targets, while there has been some concern to link the actual provision of meals with curricular provision – learning to cook – work with parents and in children's centres. Within the Wiltshire Children and Young People's Plan there was specific reference to the improvement of school meals as part of the obesity priority
- (f) a significant emergent issue has been the inconsistent provision of kitchen/servery facilities across the county, reflecting both individual school management decisions and the difficulties of maintaining and equipping increasingly obsolescent buildings and plant. This issue has been recognised nationally, and a major bid for capital funding – including a commitment for 50% funding from the schools involved – has been submitted to the DCSF

- (g) a further related and more recent issue is that of the long term viability and financial sustainability of the school meals' service, particularly in small schools. To some extent this has been masked by the funding and support initiatives of the past few years, but there is now evidence that some of those schools which have embarked on innovative approaches are now finding these difficult to sustain, as changes of personnel and loss of initial enthusiasm begin to impact. These difficulties are compounded by the overall economic pressures on small businesses – particularly catering businesses - who are finding the school market does not provide a sufficient return and in some cases are ceasing to trade
- (h) there are consequently a number of significant issues which need to be resolved in the near future with regard to the future direction of school meals policy in the authority. These include:
- clarifying the role of school meal provision within broader approaches to healthy schools, parenting and obesity strategies
  - developing links between school meals and curriculum provision
  - determining and monitoring the significance of the performance indicator (PI 52) on school meal take up within the overall performance management frameworks of the Wiltshire Council and the Children and Young People's Trust Board
  - supporting schools in maintaining services and meeting statutory nutritional guidelines
  - ensuring the financial sustainability of school meals services
  - maintaining the viability of the existing physical infrastructure and equipment of school kitchens
  - developing commissioning and contracting arrangements for school meals services, including clarifying the respective roles of schools and the local authority and, where appropriate, supporting schools in commissioning and contracting
- (i) the Department for Children and Education will be discussing these with strategic partners in NHS Wiltshire, Schools Forum, and the Children and Young People's Trust Board with a view to developing a shared approach to commissioning the school meals' service which can inform the tendering process for 2010
- (j) the new contract could provide the local authority, schools and partners the opportunity to reassert who was responsible for which aspect of school meals provision, e.g. with the local authority needing to meet performance criteria – should it take back the responsibility of school kitchen maintenance etc

**AGREED to note the report.**

### **SCHOOL MEALS CONTRACT – PROGRESS UPDATE**

- 5 The task group considered a paper which provided an update on the progress towards replacement arrangements for school meal services currently provided under contract by Sodexo. This report also outlined a number of

tender options and suggested alternative school food delivery methods that were being considered as part of the procurement process. In discussing this paper, the following key points were made and further clarifications given:

- (a) much work had already been undertaken towards facilitating new arrangements for the future provision of school meals, but a number of key issues remained to be resolved. The task group was invited to comment on plans for the procurement process
- (b) the need to comply with new national standards for school meals, and the nutritional guidelines had in one respect helped to simplify the re-letting process – leaving less scope for negotiation on the terms and conditions of future arrangements
- (c) in developing any future arrangements a number of key lessons had been learnt from the existing school catering contract and some key improvements had been identified with schools
- (d) there were a number of key issues regarding which schools would want greater clarity in any new catering contract, including each party's responsibilities, e.g. equipment, training, replacement policies, performance monitoring, payment policies, duration of contract and 'let out' clause, how to amend the contract to link with initiatives such as the healthy schools' programme, school meals' strategy, healthier Wiltshire and all national policies
- (e) from the 'soft market testing' so far undertaken, it was evident that providers were seeking similar points of clarity and improvements in arrangements as requested by schools
- (f) in addition, there were a number of issues that providers would like to see resolved before entering into contractual relations with the council, i.e.
  - will the school meals' service remain a fully delegated function
  - how will refurbishment funds be directed
  - what will be the future policy on production kitchens
  - how will contractors be expected to assist with (and therefore 'cost in') 'additional outputs' e.g. use of school produced ingredients, special events, greater involvement of parents
  - what was the council's investment plans for school kitchen and servery infrastructure
- (g) schools would also prefer any future contract to be as flexible as possible, bearing in mind the diversity of provision which had developed across the county, which was indicative of the varying needs of each school
- (h) one option for the new contract would be to offer a core set of services from which schools could choose, as opposed to one overall service that schools were locked into for a period of time

- (i) there was a need for the future provider to demonstrate a willingness to market its' services to schools, pupils and parents
- (j) within the overall contractual arrangements the task group would like to see that provision included organic, locally grown food and environmentally sustainable practices
- (k) the task group would welcome any new contract to include the provision of other services such as breakfast clubs
- (l) the task group was also encouraged to see that future provision would be available not just to schools but to children's centres too
- (m)the task group would also like to see the following built into future arrangements:
  - regard for the long term benefits of healthy food
  - strong links with the priorities of NHS Wiltshire, i.e. the obesity strategy
  - auditing practices which helped to measure the impact of improved diets, and overall school catering arrangements
  - regard for best practice and a contract that could be adapted to incorporate lessons learnt
  - regard for the improvements requested by ofsted at any given time
  - support for 'whole school food' policies and practices
  - an ongoing programme of training for school caterers and designated teachers to ensure standards in health and safety, nutrition and continuous improvement
- (n) the role of school food strategy co-ordinator was being reviewed, as the current funding was due to end in September 2009
- (o) the new council's organisational structure should make it easier to draw on resources from environmental health services that could be used to help with the monitoring and maintenance of health and safety and food hygiene in schools
- (p) in addition to the member appointed from the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee to the procurement board for the facilities management contract, a member from the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee should be appointed to this board for the purpose of the school catering contract
- (q) schools should also have representation on the procurement board

**AGREED to note the report and to take forward key issues and recommendations for the task group's final report.**

## **THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM IN PROMOTING THE SCHOOL FOOD STRATEGY**

6. The Chairmen of the Schools Forum, Primary Heads Forum (PHF) and Wiltshire Association of Secondary & Special School Heads (WASSH) were asked to provide clarification to the task group on how they saw the role of the Schools Forum in promoting the aims and objectives of the school food strategy. The main points arising from this discussion included:
- (a) the main responsibilities of the schools forum related to school finances and contractual issues
  - (b) the chairmen of PHF and WASSH had leadership and oversight of curriculum management in schools
  - (c) the Schools Forum would play an important role in helping to shape the new school catering contract
  - (d) in the re-shaping of future school contract arrangements, the task group requested that the Schools Forum explore an option whereby schools buy into resources provided centrally which would help with menu analysis, food hygiene, health and safety issues and kitchen maintenance

**AGREED to note and take forward key issues and recommendations for the task group's final report.**

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*(Duration of meeting: 9.30 pm to 2.15 pm)*

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