

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Committee 23rd April 2008

Report Title Update on Review of Demand for School Meals

Summary Following the review of demand for school meals carried out in 2006/07, this report details progress made to date on the recommendations contained within the Review report.

For further information please contact:

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? [please identify relevant plan/budget provision]

No

Background papers Cabinet report 18.10.07

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:

Details to be specified

Other Committees

Local Member(s)

Other Elected Members For information:
Cllr Jose Compton – “good progress has been made but still a considerable amount of work to do on implementing the recommendations”
Cllr David Booth – comments incorporated in the report

Cllr Heather Timms
Cllr John Whitehouse
Cllr Mota Singh

Cllr Richard Grant
Cllr Brian Moss

- Cabinet Member For information:
Cllr John Burton
- Other Cabinet Members consulted For information:
Cllr Izzi Seccombe
Cllr Alan Cockburn
- Chief Executive
- Legal Diane Nation – comments incorporated in the report
- Finance
- Other Strategic Directors
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals Phil Evans, Head of Facilities Management,
Resources Directorate – comments incorporated
in the report
Michelle McHugh, Scrutiny Officer
Paul Williams, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

FINAL DECISION **YES**

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 23rd April 2008

Update on Review of Demand for School Meals

Joint Report of the Strategic Directors for Children, Young People & Families and Resources

Recommendation:

That the Committee scrutinises the progress made on the recommendations contained in the report on the Review of Demand for School Meals published in August 2007.

1. Background

In the period December 2006 to June 2007 a panel comprising Members from both the Resources, Performance & Development and Children, Young People & Families Overview and Scrutiny Committees carried out a review of demand for school meals in Warwickshire. The original driver behind this review was the significant decline in demand for school meals experienced since 2005 with the result that County Caterers in the Resources Directorate were faced with an annual operating deficit. During the review process it became apparent of the need to ensure that the review also considered the links between demand for school meals and the wider healthy eating agenda.

2. Recommendations

The Panel published its final report in September 2007. Cabinet, at its meeting on 18th October 2007, endorsed the recommendations of the Review of Demand for School Meals Panel subject to decisions on any additional funding required being considered as part of the 2008/09 budget discussions.

An update on progress to date is given below each recommendation.

2.1 Recommendation A

That Cabinet acknowledge the difficulties currently faced by County Caterers and asks the Strategic Director of Resources to continue working with schools to promote and provide a quality service and where this appears to be unviable service reconfiguration may be required to reach and subsequently maintain a sustainable trading position.

Update:

Resources Directorate through the Head of Service for Facilities Management is restructuring the catering section to meet the move towards financial viability. The service has made a considerable reduction in the level of deficit and this ongoing improvement is expected to continue. Whilst formal notice of potential withdrawal (or indicative notice) has been given to a number of secondary schools with a view to re-establishing the foundations for the agreed service provision, to date Catering Service withdrawal from any secondary school has not occurred.

2.2 Recommendation B

The Strategic Directors of Resources and CYPF report on a six-monthly basis to the relevant O&S Committees, reporting progress on implementing the recommendation of this (O&S) report, (and the Transforming School Meals sustainability plans).

Update:

This report is the first of a series of six-monthly updates following the original report of September 2007. The respective Chairs of the two O&S Committees have agreed that CYP&F O&S should receive the monitoring reports.

2.3 Recommendation C

The Strategic Director of CYPF be requested to administer a questionnaire to parents and carers concerning their ability and willingness to pay more for school meals, and their views on the introduction of incremental charging that more accurately reflects the higher production and transport costs in parts of Warwickshire.

Update:

The Directorate has not been able to prioritise this piece of work at this time.

2.4 Recommendation D

Cabinet be requested to support in principle the production of a budget bid from the Strategic Director for CYPF for financial support to be given in appropriate circumstances to families where two or more children attend school and would wish to take school meals.

Update:

No action – a bid will be considered for 2009/10.

2.5 Recommendation E

In acknowledgement of the close affinity between the healthy schools agenda and the provision of healthy and nutritious school meals the Strategic Directors of Resources and CYPF are asked to jointly explore options for enhanced joint working and the pooling of elements of the healthy school budget so as to enable efficient delivery at both strategic and operational level.

Update:

Whilst the close working between the two services has continued, it has not been possible at this time to take forward this recommendation and further discussion is required between the two services to establish a way for improving the existing joint working. Since the approval of the report by Cabinet, the Government has made a School Lunch Grant available for three

years from April 2008. This grant is ring-fenced and may only be used to support the direct costs of the catering service.

2.6 Recommendation F

Opportunities be explored for representatives from Warwickshire County Caterers to attend and address at least once a year meetings of headteachers and governors to promote the service and, through dialogue, explore ways in which schools and the catering service can work more closely in partnership.

Update:

Representation at headteacher meetings during the Spring term 2008 took place and included providing a staffed display stand. A briefing paper was circulated and the Transforming School Meals ("Every Meal Matters") DVD was played and distributed.

2.7 Recommendation G

The Strategic Director of Resources be requested to explore any opportunities to insure against lost trading days (snow, strike, etc).

Update:

The opportunity for insuring against loss of income through unforeseen circumstances has yet to be explored.

2.8 Recommendation H

When planning new schools, the provision of full kitchen facilities to allow for the preparation of hot meals be given high priority.

Update:

Architects working on new schools have initiated links to County Caterers for appropriate advice. This is underpinned by active support from the DCSF regarding the aspiration that all new schools have production kitchens provided and is being reflected in the Authority's Primary Strategy for Change.

2.9 Recommendation I

That, given the acknowledged benefits of cashless payments systems (swipe card and internet), Cabinet be requested to support the installation and maintenance of cashless systems in schools as appropriate. In view of the benefits that these systems deliver to schools, headteachers and governors should be encouraged to contribute to the running costs of these systems.

Update:

Support for the introduction of cashless systems in secondary schools has not yet been sought.

2.10 Recommendation J

The Strategic Director for CYPF be requested to identify ways in which, through closer work with school leaders, uptake of free school meals can be increased and that, if necessary, Cabinet identify further resources for the promotion of free school meals.

Update:

The free school meals promotion campaign using buses, bill boards and bus shelters in appropriate geographical areas was repeated in December 2007. The launch of the electronic system for registering for Free school meals has

been delayed and a further campaign is planned to coincide with the launch of this system.

2.11 **Recommendation K**

From 2008/09 Cabinet is asked to allocate up to £50,000 per annum to the Strategic Director for CYPF for an enhanced promotional campaign for the School Meals Service that might involve:

- the appointment of an officer to promote the school meals service to parents, pupils and school leaders with attention also being given to highlighting the importance of an adequate lunch break and meal in the school day
- the use of media-based advertising such as radio advertisements or posters on buses
- publication on the Saturday of each week of the school meals in local newspapers
- an annual training day to which all school cooks will be invited
- parents' leaflets and termly menus allied to a newsletter for distribution through schools
- production of display boards for focused use in libraries, supermarkets and other public areas
- all schools should be encouraged to hold taster sessions at parents' evenings and to invite parents into schools to sample meals.

Update:

A bid was not submitted as part of the 2008/09 budget process and therefore additional resources to support this recommendation have not been forthcoming. Work has therefore continued utilising existing resources.

Parents are given termly menus and newsletters about school meals, and display boards are placed in public areas. School cooks are invited to an annual training day, and all schools are encouraged to hold 'taster sessions' at parents' evenings.

County Caterers have continued to use "the little people" in their promotional materials for primary and special schools as this is becoming a recognised 'brand'. Secondary promotions are planned and implemented termly with information being prepared for the new intake and distributed to schools for use during the Summer term.

A DVD has been prepared for all schools, 'Every Meal Matters'.

2.12 **Recommendation L**

New schools or schools being refurbished should be provided with adequate dining facilities for students eating school dinners and packed lunches ideally in the same room.

Update:

This has been and will continue to be implemented (again as part of the Primary Strategy for Change).

2.13 **Recommendation M**

Schools should be encouraged to allocate resources from the Dedicated Schools Grant or other funds on good multi-use dining facilities.

Update:

Advocating further investment from Dedicated School funds is difficult when the timing coincided with the outcome of the Job Evaluation process and other pressures on school budgets. It is anticipated that the School Lunch Grant will support the next steps of implementing the revised nutritional standards.

2.14 Recommendation N

Cabinet be asked to provide financial support to the CYPF Directorate to allow schools to invest in enhancing the queuing experience. For example, by showing DVDs to those pupils in the queue or extra serveries to reduce waiting time.

Update:

No bid has been made to the Council at this stage.

2.15 Recommendation O

Warwickshire County Caterers explores options for 'Grab & Go' menus, a range of healthy take-out school food for primary and secondary schools.

Update:

County Caterers has continued to implement revised methods of delivery where school head teachers have supported change – some of these are shown on the Transforming School Meals DVD and good practice and to enable schools to consider their own approach to lunchtime arrangements.

2.16 Recommendation P

Attention be given to improving vegetarian dishes with salad bars being provided where practicable.

Update:

Vegetarian recipes and items from suppliers are actively being sought – the implementation of salad bars does depend upon a partnership approach from the school and the available funding for purchase of equipment. It is anticipated that some salad bars will be introduced in the Summer term 2008 when the weather makes the option more attractive to customers.

2.17 Recommendation Q

Primary and infant schools be encouraged to agree a minimum time for packed lunch eaters to avoid them rushing their food and leaving to play.

Update:

Guidance coming from the School Food Trust supports this recommendation and this organisation is actively encouraging school policies that retain pupils on site at lunchtimes and have 'protected' lunch time.

2.18 Recommendation R

Schools should be encouraged to regard school lunch as an important element of the school day with meals being used to reinforce lessons, e.g. through theme days.

Update:

Links to curricular activity are being sought when possible – and again the DVD outlines this approach to schools as good practice. The School Food Trust has

launched its “Million Meals” campaign to encourage school management teams to plan and build in ‘lunch times’ as an important part of the day.

2.19 Recommendation S

The CYPF Directorate, in conjunction with all school meals providers across the county, including Warwickshire County Caterers, is asked to work closely with secondary school headteachers and governors to identify ways in which pupils can be encouraged to remain on school premises at lunchtime and enjoy a healthy school meal rather than visiting fast-food outlets and shops.

Update:

CYPF is considering this recommendation and has held discussions with school governors.

2.20 Recommendation T

Where practicable, schools should be encouraged to allow for the multiple use of school kitchens, in particular as a resource for food technology teaching, to help embed the importance of school meals in pupils’ minds.

Update:

One or two pilot schools are starting to use the kitchens – outside of catering use – for curricular activity. Based on the outcome of these pilots a scheme/toolkit will be produced to encourage schools to consider the additional resource which could be utilised. Additionally extended schools may impact on the use of catering resources within schools.

3. Current position

- 3.1 Meal numbers in primary and special schools are beginning to rise against a backcloth of continuing media pressure and worldwide rising food costs. The average daily meal numbers are over 2% higher year on year and this is an encouraging start.
- 3.2 Three small primary schools are currently taking their service from County Caterers in the current financial year (2008/09) with a loss of circa 120 meals per day. All special schools have signed up for 2008/09.
- 3.3 In secondary schools efforts in marketing and special promotions during 2007/08 have reduced the operating deficit but not yet near to break even. Indicative or formal notice was given to eight secondary schools with renegotiation being the outcome in seven of the schools. Whilst the position is not yet confirmed it is likely that County Caterers will withdraw from Manor Park School in Nuneaton at the end of the Summer term 2008. County Caterers will work with the school to ensure an effective handover of arrangements should this situation occur.
- 3.4 The final year end figures are being compiled as this report is being written and the deficit is anticipated to be in the region of £270,000.
- 3.5 The Government has recognised that nationally the school meals service continues to need additional financial support to meet the stringent regulations

being implemented and therefore has allocated £240million funding (which is ring-fenced) and allocated over three years.

- 3.6 This funding is to support the direct delivery costs of school meals and is aimed at keeping selling prices from rising substantially during the coming year(s). It is also anticipated this grant funding (which is for all schools) will support the full and final implementation of the nutrient standards whilst assisting services to move towards a sustainable future.
- 3.7 Warwickshire has received circa £785,000 for this financial year and the School Forum has agreed the method of allocation to all schools. Catering providers will then recover this funding for the direct delivery costs in conjunction with schools. The Government has provided detailed guidance on how this additional funding should be utilised to support the delivery of school meals. The grant can only be spent in four ways; local authorities and schools can use the funding to:
- pay for ingredients for school lunch,
 - pay labour costs of catering staff,
 - buy small pieces of kitchen equipment, for example, microwaves, ovens, combi-ovens, mixers, etc,
 - pay for the nutrient analysis software required to assess whether a menu meets the nutrient-based school lunch standards and the expertise to operate the software.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families and the School Food Trust will be checking how the funding is being used in local areas to ensure that it is being spent in accordance with the conditions set out above. The funding will help meal providers with the “strain” caused by reducing demand and will allow for a period of financial stability during which time it is hoped that demand levels will rise as awareness of the benefits of a healthy school lunch become more apparent to both children and their parents/carers.

- 3.8 The School Lunch Grant will continue to build on the foundations and legacy from the Transforming School Meals Project of 2005/08.

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