

**AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET**

**Name of Committee** Cabinet

**Date of Committee** 18th October 2007

**Report Title** Review of Demand for School Meals

**Summary** A panel comprising Members from the Resources, Performance and Development and Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committees has undertaken a review of demand for school meals. The panel's report has been endorsed by both committees and is now before Cabinet for its approval.

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**Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?** No.

**Background papers** None

**CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-** Details to be specified

- Other Committees  Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Local Member(s)  .....
- Other Elected Members  Councillor David Booth, Councillor Richard Grant
- Cabinet Member  Councillor Seccombe, Councillor Burton, Councillor Cockburn
- Chief Executive  .....
- Legal  Sarah Duxbury
- Finance  .....
- Other Chief Officers  Dave Clarke, Strategic Director, Resources.

Marion Davis, Strategic Director, Children, Young People and Families, David Carter, Strategic Director, Performance and Development

District Councils  .....

Health Authority  .....

Police  .....

Other Bodies/Individuals  Phil Evans, Head of Facilities Management, John Betts, Head of Service – Resources Division

**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  .....

## Agenda No

**Cabinet - 18th October 2007.**

### **Review of Demand for School Meals**

#### **Joint Report of the Chairs of Resources, Performance and Development and Children, Young people and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committees**

##### **Recommendation**

That Cabinet consider the report of the Review of Demand for School Meals Panel and approves its recommendations for implementation.

1. In December 2006 a panel comprising elected Members for the Resources, Performance and Development and Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committees commenced a review of demand for school meals. The principal driver behind the review was the significant decline in demand for school meals experienced since 2005. This decline has resulted in the Resources Directorate being faced with an annual operating deficit of around £250,000; a sum sufficiently high to bring into question the long-term viability of the school meals service.
2. Over the seven months to June 2007 the members of the panel held a series of meetings and visits to gather evidence and develop their understanding of the service provided and the factors that determine demand. The panel's work culminated in the preparation of a report and a series of recommendations for action (see Appendix 1). The recommendations were produced in collaboration with senior managers from the Resources and Children, Young People and Families Directorates.
3. On 4<sup>th</sup> September 2007 the Panel's report was considered and endorsed by the Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee. On 19<sup>th</sup> September 2007 the report was considered by the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This latter meeting considered a series of supplementary comments from the Strategic Director, Children, Young People and Families. Attached at Appendix 2 is the report presented to the Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> September. The same report (suitably headed) was presented to the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Appendix 3 is the briefing note submitted by the Strategic Director, Children, Young People and Families to the 19<sup>th</sup> September meeting. Appendix 4 provides an extract from the minutes to the 4<sup>th</sup> September meeting and Appendix 5 is an extract from the minutes of the 19<sup>th</sup> September meeting.

4. Given the acknowledged need to tackle the issue of reducing demand for school meals Cabinet is now asked to consider the Member panel's report and approve the recommendations. If Cabinet is minded to approve the report it is anticipated that the two Overview and Scrutiny Committees engaged in this process will continue to monitor the situation and assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the panel's recommendations.

CLLR DAVID BOOTH  
Chair of Resources,  
Performance and  
Development Overview and  
Scrutiny Committee

CLLR RICHARD GRANT  
Chair of Children, Young  
People and Families Overview  
and Scrutiny Committee

Shire Hall  
Warwick

19 September 2007

# Warwickshire County Council Review of Demand for School Meals

## August 2007

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## Foreword by Councillor Heather Timms



Councillor Heather Timms

In common with many other local authorities and private sector suppliers across the United Kingdom Warwickshire County Council has over the last couple of years witnessed a significant downturn in demand for its school meals service. Negative media coverage, changing tastes amongst young people and new nutritional standards have combined to produce an operating environment that is challenging in both financial and culinary ways.

The school meals service provided by County Caterers has been quick to respond to these challenges, introducing new menus and promoting its work to pupils, school leaders and parents alike. Nevertheless, the service cannot be expected to reverse its business position overnight and the decision was taken by the Resources, Performance and Development and Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committees in September 2006 to review the whole issue around demand for school meals. The resulting panel comprising six Members has worked over the last few months with officers and customers to explore ways in which we can enhance the service further, make it even more attractive and improve its financial viability.

As with other such scrutiny reviews you will find within this report an explanation of the current position, various observations on different approaches that can be adopted and a series of recommendations for consideration and implementation by the Cabinet. However, the report does not signify the conclusion of the process, rather it is a marker along a journey that may take some while to complete. Members and officers will continue to take an interest in this journey, requiring regular progress reports so that we can all be certain that we are providing the very best service for the young people of Warwickshire.

I should like to take the opportunity to thank all of the people who have contributed to this review. Without their input it would not have been possible.

## 1.0 Executive Summary and Recommendations

### 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 It is acknowledged nationally that a good well-balanced diet is fundamental to children's development. As well as aiding physical growth, a good diet helps children to concentrate and can improve their behaviour in the classroom. For many years Warwickshire County Council has delivered a high quality meal service to the majority of schools within the County. This service has adapted to embrace changing eating patterns and nutritional requirements and until 2005 was in a good position financially.

1.1.2 However, further changes in child/parent choice, compounded by negative media coverage has led to a significant decrease in demand for school meals both nationally and within Warwickshire. This reduced demand has resulted in a drop in income with the viability of the service being questioned. This has meant that the service is now operating at a deficit, which has been supported from reserves but it is recognised that this situation is unsustainable and needs addressing.

1.1.3 At its meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> September 2006 the Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a joint report from the Strategic Directors for Resources and Children, Young People and Families on the demand for school meals.

1.1.4 The committee agreed that, along with Members from the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, they would form a small panel to examine the position of the school meals service (under County Caterers) and to develop options for the future development of the service. Members from the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered this matter and Members were nominated to join the panel. These were:

Councillor David Booth	Councillor Mota Singh
Councillor Jose Compton	Councillor Heather Timms (Chair)
Councillor Brian Moss	Councillor John Whitehouse

1.1.5 The panel was supported by Scrutiny Officers and representatives from the Resources and Children, Young People and Families Directorates. The objectives of the panel were based upon the challenges identified above and the need to meet them. They were:

- To agree a series of recommendations for actions that will increase take-up of the school meal service in Warwickshire,
- To consider mechanisms which assist the service and its customers in balancing financial/operational pressures,
- To assist school Governing bodies in ensuring that their obligations regarding the provision of good quality school meals can be met and considering ways of improving awareness/take-up of free school meals,



- Further enhance the nutritional quality of the meals provided thus helping to improve educational attainment in schools

1.1.6 This report outlines the evidence gathered in the review process and sets out the conclusions and recommendations arising from the panel's investigation.

## **1.2 Reduced Demand for School Meals**

1.2.1 The majority of meals served in Warwickshire's schools are produced by Warwickshire County Caterers, which is itself an arm of Warwickshire County Council. This has been the position for many years with the service operating at a break-even or in some years a profitable level. Since 2005 demand for school meals both nationally and locally in Warwickshire has decreased significantly. This reduction can be attributed to a number of factors including negative media coverage, changes in nutritional standards and changes in school days that have diminished the significance of lunchtime.

1.2.2 In 2006 Warwickshire schools witnessed an average reduction in demand of just under 9%. In addition to reduced demand the problem was compounded by:

- Increases in food costs both reflecting local demand/quality issues and national guidance changes concerning nutritional requirements.
- Increased labour costs primarily relating to the implementation in 2001 of a revised pay structure for site based staff
- Increased costs associated with improving the skills of staff in order to respond to new service demands/improvements

1.2.3 The net result of all these factors is an operating deficit of just under half a million pounds a year, a position that cannot be sustained.

## **1.3 Efforts to Address the Problem in Warwickshire**

1.3.1 To date County Caterers has worked hard to reverse the recent downward trend in demand and to address the other factors leading to their operating deficit. They have:

- Reviewed staffing arrangements.
- Developed new menus
- Increased marketing and promotion of their service
- Reviewed school meals operation to benchmark provision against examples of best practice.
- Increased the price of primary school meals

1.3.2 It is clear that some of the initiatives being pursued are having an impact on demand for meals in primary schools showing a marked improvement. In June of this year

County Caterers was able to report an increase in demand in the primary sector of 30% bringing it up to pre 2005 figures.

1.3.3 Nevertheless, demand in secondary school continues to fall and it is clear that more needs to be done to address this. Warwickshire County Caterers is therefore faced with five options to address the question of its operating deficit. These include: -

- **Contracting Out of the service** - The service could be offered to a private sector contractor either as a whole service contract or, on a sector or geographical basis. In view of the current national picture of reducing meal numbers however, this may not prove to be particularly attractive to companies and could result either in 'cherry picking' of schools/areas/sectors or could result in schools facing increased management fees for the provision of services. This option would be a significant procurement exercise and would have considerable employee relation issues.
- **Cease the opportunity for schools to buy the service from the County Council.** Individual schools effectively take direct control of school catering, including the direct employment of site based staff. This option would create significant difficulties for schools with no on-site catering facility. It is also likely that in order to remain cost effective a core central catering support team would be required to provide management/technical advice to schools.
- **Operate on a wholly commercial basis and withdraw from providing a catering service at schools where income/expenditure cannot be balanced.** This option could introduce significant variation in service from area to area and would particularly impact upon schools with no or limited fit for purpose facilities and schools with low numbers on roll.
- **Provide a partnership-based service to schools that relies on clearly defining the respective roles and responsibilities of both the school and County Caterers.** This approach would need to clearly set out the risks/benefits to both parties of any under/over performance in the number of meals delivered and the potential risks that each party would face in that situation. This particular option would undoubtedly impact upon the fair funding formula arrangements applicable for the delivery of school meals.
- **Grow the business to such an extent that the financial deficit reduces to manageable levels.** This will require the current business management processes to continue for a period of some years before returning to previous levels. This option would effectively require a continuing central subsidy to support the service.

1.3.4 From its inception, the panel was aware that given the urgent need to address the question of the operating deficit it would be neither desirable nor possible to wait until the completion of the review before any action was taken. Therefore, the panel has acknowledged throughout the course of the review that officers of the council would be taking whatever action they considered appropriate to progress matters even though these actions may pre-empt the conclusions of the review.

## **1.4 Recommendations**

### **1.4.1 Continuous Improvement**

- 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.
- B. The Strategic Directors of Resources and Children, Young People and Families report on a six monthly basis to the Resources, Performance and Development and Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committees providing updates on progress in implementing the recommendations contained in this report and agreed by Cabinet, this report should include details of the trading position of Warwickshire County Caterers
- C. The Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families be requested to administer a questionnaire to parents and carers concerning i) their ability and willingness to pay more for school meals and ii) their views on the introduction of incremental charging that more accurately reflects the higher production and transport costs of school meals in some parts of Warwickshire.
- D. Cabinet be requested to support in principle the production of a budget bid from the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families 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.
- 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 Children, Young People and Families 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 a strategic and operational level.
- F. Opportunities be explored for representatives from Warwickshire County Caterers to attend and address at least once a year meetings of Head teachers and governors to promote the service and through dialogue explore ways in which schools and the catering service can work more closely in partnership.
- G. The Strategic Director of Resources be requested to explore any opportunities to insure against lost trading days (snow, strike etc).

### **1.4.2 Facilities and Equipment**

- H. When planning new schools in Warwickshire the provision of full kitchen facilities to allow for the preparation of hot meals on site should be given a high priority.
- 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, head teachers and governors should be encouraged to contribute to the running costs of these systems.

### **1.4.3 Marketing and Training**

- J. That the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families 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.
- K. From 2008/09 Cabinet is asked to allocate up to £50,000 per annum to the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families 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 evening and to invite parents into schools to sample meals

### **1.4.4 Improving the dining experience**

- L. New schools or schools being refurbished should be provided with adequate dining facilities for students eating school dinner and packed lunches ideally in the same room.
- M. Schools should be encouraged to allocate resources from the Dedicated Schools Grant or other funds on good multi-use dining facilities.
- N. Cabinet be asked to provide financial support to the Children, Young People and Families 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.

- O. Warwickshire County Caterers explores options for 'Grab & Go' menus, a range of healthy take-out school food for primary and secondary schools.
- P. Attention be given to improving vegetarian dishes with salad bars being provided where practicable.

#### **1.4.5 Integrating meal time into the school day**

- 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.
- R. Schools should be encouraged to regard school lunch as an important element of the school day with meals being used to reinforce lessons eg through theme days.
- S. The Children, Young People and Families Directorate in conjunction with all school meal providers across the County, including Warwickshire County Caterers is asked to work closely with secondary school Head teachers 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.
- 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.

**2.0 The Review of Demand for School Meals**

**2.1 Membership of the Panel**

2.1.1 In the Autumn of 2006, Resources, Performance and Development and the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved to set up a joint panel to explore the factors affecting demand for school meals. It comprised two elected Members from each of the three political groups. These were,

 <p>Councillor David Booth (Liberal Democrat)</p>	 <p>Councillor Jose Compton (Conservative)</p>	 <p>Councillor Brian Moss (Labour)</p>
 <p>Councillor Heather Timms (Conservative)</p>	 <p>Councillor Mota Singh (Labour )</p>	 <p>Councillor John Whitehouse (Liberal Democrat)</p>

2.1.2 At the inaugural meeting of the panel Councillor Timms was elected as the Chair.

## 2.2 Terms of Reference

2.2.1 Draft terms of reference were prepared shortly after the first meeting of the panel using as their basis the results of a scoping exercise. As well as stating the membership of the panel the terms of reference set out the aims, objectives and scope of the review. The overall objectives of the review have been:

- to agree a series of recommendations for actions that will increase take-up of the service,
- consider mechanisms which assist the service and its customers in balancing financial/operational pressures
- to assist school Governing bodies in ensuring that their obligations regarding the provision of good quality school meals can be met and considering ways of improving awareness/take-up of free school meals
- to further enhance the nutritional quality of the meals provided thus helping to enhance educational attainment in schools.

In order to achieve the above, the review considered,

- school meal provision in primary and secondary schools
- the seasonal factors that determine take-up of the service
- the impact of the dining environment and experience on take-up of the service
- trading accounts and potential school by school/sector by sector issues
- clustering arrangements of schools
- the potential impact of the kitchen upgrade strategy
- the timing of lunch times within the school day
- the quality and training of catering and lunchtime staff

2.2.2 The full terms of reference can be found at **Appendix 1**.

## 2.3 The Process Followed by the Panel

2.3.1 From the start it was acknowledged by the panel that if the review was to result in a series of meaningful and useful recommendations that could ultimately make a difference the process followed had to be as thorough and robust as possible. Although the terms of reference served to guide the work of the panel there was a recognition that as the review advanced, so the process followed and the sources of information exploited would have to be change accordingly. Thus for the panel to obtain an accurate picture of the issues currently facing school meal provision in primary and secondary schools it was important to draw upon a number of different sources of evidence. These are set out in the following paragraphs:

**Meetings to which catering providers, head teachers and governors were invited.** – Three meetings were held at which the views of catering providers, Head teachers and Governors were sought. It was not possible or desirable to invite and speak to every person falling within one of these categories. A list was therefore devised comprising those people who it was felt had an interest in school meal provision and who could make a valid contribution to the debate. It should be noted that not all those engaged with were supportive of the efforts of Warwickshire County Caterers. Indeed some schools from which representation was invited had opted out of using the council's service. By eliciting information from a range of practitioners it was possible to build up an accurate picture of the factors that influence pupils and parental choice. In addition, where new initiatives had been successfully introduced, it was possible for experiences to be shared between schools and catering providers. **(See Appendix 2)**

**Visits to a range of different primary and secondary schools to witness ways in which meals are provided and the challenges being faced** – Perhaps the most effective means by which the panel was able to gain direct knowledge of current challenges and opportunities was by visiting a number of schools. Visits were generally arranged around lunchtime with Members and officers able to question Head teachers, Bursars (or Business Managers), catering staff and children. The information drawn from catering staff and children complemented the views of the Head teachers and governors gathered elsewhere. Meals were sampled in most cases. It should be noted that it was not only the quality of the food that was assessed. In addition the dining facilities and general ethos of the school were explored. Many lessons were learned from these visits. Those lessons are set out later in this report. **(See Appendix 3)**

**Analyses of written material sourced from within Warwickshire County Council** – Officers from both Warwickshire County Caterers and the Children's, Young People and Families Directorate contributed material to the panel's work. This took the form of performance graphs and tables as well as written information regarding the nature of the service provided in Warwickshire and the challenges facing it. This material proved invaluable in terms of developing the panel's understanding of the issues being faced by Warwickshire County Caterers.

**Consideration of practices from around the country (See Appendix 4)** – No review of this nature would be complete without at least some consideration of the practices being introduced around the country. As well as establishing the extent to which other local authorities are struggling with reduced demand, the examination of the efforts being made to address this helped the panel to identify some of the means by which this council's deficit could be tackled.



2.3.2 Listed in alphabetical order below are the contributors who provided direct evidence and support:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
John Betts	Head of Service, Resources	WCC – Children, Young People and Families Directorate
Alan Brown	Director of Resources	Etone School
Carol Bunyard	Extended Services Co-ordinator	WCC - Children, Young People and Families Directorate
Andrew Chubb	Head Teacher	Campion School
Phil Evans	Head of Facilities Management	WCC – Resources Directorate
Jim Ferguson	Head Teacher	Trinity School
Ali Foster	Head Teacher	Telford Infant
Kate Gover	Head Teacher	Claverdon Primary School
Jan Hamilton	Head Teacher	St Johns Primary School
Donald Hannah	Governor	Great Alne Primary School
Valerie Hopkins	Business Manager	Stratford High School
Jacky Lyon	Head Teacher	Woodloes Infant
Charlotte Marten	Head Teacher	Rugby High School
Lynda Pearce	Business Manager	Manor Park Community School
Bernard Peffers	Bursar	Bilton High School
Wendy Philp	Service Manager, School Food Support Service	Leicestershire County Council
Robin Richmond	Governor	North Leamington Community School and Arts College
Sandra Russell	Head of Catering	WCC – Resources Directorate
Jean Sinclair	Business Manager	Boughton Lea Junior School
Angela Stanton	Head Teacher	Brookhurst Primary
Shona Walton	Principal Inspector, Access and Innovation	WCC – Children, Young People and Families Directorate

## **3.0 School Meal Provision in Context**

### **3.1 Historical Background**

- 3.1.1 Formalised school meal provision was first introduced over 100 years ago with the Education (Provision of Meals) Act of 1906.
- 3.1.2 In 1941 the first set of nutritional standards for schools was set. These were followed in 1944 when the Education Act set out the basis for Government funding of school meals through local education authorities. With the introduction of the Rate Support Grant in 1967 education authorities were given full responsibility for the financial management of the school meal service. This resulted in the abandonment of central government control and provided education authorities with the opportunity to use their discretion over menus and pricing policy
- 3.1.3 The 1980 Education Act removed the obligation on education authorities to provide school meals (except for children entitled to free school meals), and the obligation for meals to be sold at a fixed price or to meet any nutritional standards.
- 3.1.4 The Local Government Act of 1988 introduced compulsory competitive tendering, obliging all Local Education Authorities to put school meals out to tender.
- 3.1.5 The Education Act 1998 imposed a duty on LEAs, and where funding is delegated on the Governing Body, to provide a school meals service for all pupils and not just those entitled to a free school meal. The White Paper, Excellence in Schools, further developed the whole school approach to food and nutrition in partnership with caterers, head teachers, pupils and governors. This whole school approach linked health and well being with a drive to improve educational standards, tackling inequality and raising self-esteem and achievement of young people.
- 3.1.6 In 1999, the Education & Employment Select Committee published a report of its inquiry into school meals, recommending the introduction of quantified nutrient-based standards, to be monitored by Ofsted as part of its inspection remit.
- 3.1.7 The National Healthy Schools Programme was launched in 1999 by the Department for Education & Skills (DfES) and the Department of Health to reduce health inequalities in school, promote social inclusion and raise school standards. All schools are expected to achieve healthy school status by 2009.
- 3.1.8 In 2000 funding for school meals was delegated to all secondary schools. Primary and special schools were given the right to opt for delegation. The NHS Plan for investment and reform of the health services included a government commitment to introduce a National School Fruit Scheme (by 2004), giving every child in nursery and infant school a free piece of fruit each school day.
- 3.1.9 From April 2001, National Nutritional Standards for all schools were introduced by the Government. The Standards are compulsory and compliance with them is the responsibility of the School Governing Body, unless responsibility for the service provision is delegated back to the Education Department. The Children Act 2004 introduced a shared vision of every child having the opportunity to fulfil their potential and identifies five key outcomes for children.

- Being healthy
  - Staying safe
  - Enjoying and achieving
  - Making a positive contribution
  - Achieving economic well being
- 3.1.10 The Act puts improving children’s well being at the heart of policies by creating clear, shared outcomes across services embedded in legislation. School meals have significant potential for supporting children’s health and education. Happy and well-fed pupils are better able to engage in learning. Well-controlled lunch times can support school strategies for good pupil behaviour.
- 3.1.11 In 2005, following a media campaign by the chef Jamie Oliver, the DfES announced a number of measures to improve food in schools, including training school catering staff in healthy eating, the inclusion of school food in the Ofsted inspection programme, and the development of standards for processed foods used in school meals. The Secretary of State for Education and Skills commissioned an independent group of professionals, including dietitians, nutritionists, headteachers, governors, catering and industry professionals to form the School Meals Review Panel and to recommend tougher nutritional standards for school lunches. The Department of Health published *Delivering Choosing Health* making a commitment to bring into force new statutory requirements for primary and secondary school meals by 2006. Additional commitments were made for Ofsted to inspect food in school, for the setting up of the School Food Trust to advise parents and schools, to publish guidance for governors about their responsibilities regarding school food and to strengthen the Healthy Schools Programme.
- 3.1.12 2005 saw the launch of the Food In Schools programme to assist schools in implementing a whole school approach to healthy eating and drinking, including advice and resources on breakfast clubs, packed lunches, vending machines and tuck shops, dining rooms, cooking clubs, growing clubs and water provision.
- 3.1.13 Other legislation and guidance that steers the provision of school meals include,
- Sections 114 and 115 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998
  - The Education (Transfer of Functions Concerning School Lunches etc.) (England) (No. 2) Order 1999
  - Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
  - The Education (Nutritional Standards for School Lunches) (England) Regulations 2000 – as amended from September 2006
  - The Education (Free School Lunches) (Prescribed Tax Credits) (England) Order 2003
  - The Education (School Lunches (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Order 2003

## 3.2 Demand for School Meals – National Picture

- 3.2.1 Perhaps the most comprehensive national assessment of demand for school meals over the last couple of years was undertaken by the School Food Trust (SFT) in April 2006. As part of that assessment the SFT, working with PricewaterhouseCoopers, distributed a survey to all school food providers in local authorities in England. The aims of the survey were to assess: ~
- levels of take up of school meals nationally over the 2005-2006 financial year
  - levels of take up in the 2004-2005 financial year
  - the proportion of children eligible for free school meals (FSM)
  - the capacity of schools to prepare food from scratch on the premises or simply to regenerate food, or neither
  - the food and catering costs associated with the provision of school meals in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006
  - the main type of provision (Direct Service Organisation (DSO)/Local Authority Catering Provider (LACP), contractor or other provision)
  - factors believed by LA school food providers to be associated with decreases or increases in take up over the last year.
- 3.2.2 Comprehensive details of the findings of the survey can be found on the SFT website ([www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk)). However, certain key findings merit discussion here. Nationally take up of school meals in 2005 - 2006 was 42.3% in primary schools and 42.7% in secondary schools. This contrasts with values of 44.9% in both primary and secondary schools in the previous year and represents a 5.8% fall in provision in primary schools and a 4.9% fall in secondary schools.
- 3.2.3 Free school meal eligibility was 18% in primary schools and 17% in secondary schools. There was no association between the eligibility for free school meals and changes in take up between 2004 - 2005 and 2005 - 2006.
- 3.2.4 The average price of a school meal was £1.54 in primary schools and £1.62 in secondary schools. This represented an average increase of 4% on the previous year's price. Roughly one-third of the price in primary schools and about 42% of the price in secondary schools was for ingredients. Close to half of the price covered labour costs.
- 3.2.5 72% of primary schools could prepare all food from scratch, but 5% had dining centres only. 20% (about 3500 schools nationally) had no facilities for preparation. 5% (about 900 primary schools in England) served cold food only, mainly in the South East and South West. The majority of secondary schools could prepare all food from scratch (96%), and 3% had dining centres only.

- 3.2.6 72% of primary school providers and 56% of secondary school providers reported a fall in take up in 2004 - 2005. On the other hand, 8% of primary and 15% of secondary school providers reported an increase in demand in the same year.
- 3.2.7 Addressing demand for school meals the SFT survey asked catering providers to think about factors thought to be responsible for the fall or sustained or rising demand compared with last year. The findings are shown in the tables at **Appendix 5**. The main reason given for the perceived fall in demand in both primary and secondary schools was media coverage of school dinners (the Jamie Oliver effect). The second most common response was parents' perception of poor quality provision. The third most common reason in primary schools was the lack of provision of more healthy options resulting in more pupils bringing in packed lunches. In secondary schools, the same reason was felt to have resulted in more pupils buying meals elsewhere. Numerous other reasons were also given, ranging from an increase in prices (although this did not seem excessive nationally) to an actual decline in the number of pupils either on roll or eligible for free school meals.
- 3.2.8 Of those who reported either a constant or rising demand, the main reason given (by 43% in primary and 35% in secondary schools) was the influence of a school food policy. A second important reason was improved meal quality offset by prices being held constant, and a third was the provision of more healthy options. No increase in prices was also seen as a positive contributor. Some secondary schools also cited improved facilities for provision (for example, a new dining room or kitchen).

### **3.3 Demand for School Meals – Warwickshire Picture**

- 3.3.1 Warwickshire operates within the national legislative framework. The duty to provide free meals to eligible pupils, paid lunches where parents request them and to comply with national nutritional standards rests with school governing bodies; this responsibility has been with schools since April 2000 when Warwickshire County Council delegated all funding relating to the service. At present in Warwickshire:
- The governing body may provide meals or other refreshments to pupils, either on the school premises or elsewhere where education is provided.
  - The governing body must provide facilities for pupils not taking school meals, so they can eat meals, which they have brought to school. These facilities include accommodation, furniture and supervision to allow the pupils to eat their meals in suitable conditions. The school cannot charge pupils for using these facilities.
  - The governing body may make provision through arrangements it has negotiated itself or by buying back into a LA catering organisation; buying back from the LA does not shift the legal duty back to the LA. Governing bodies should ensure that meal providers are competent to deal with the various health and safety issues which relate to a catering service.
- 3.3.2 In guidance to schools, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills strongly recommends that some hot food should be available; however powers do not currently exist to require a school to provide hot food.

- 3.3.3 Following the Government's Review of School Meals and the subsequent investment funding to schools and LA's (via the Standards Fund), the government has the aspiration that "all schools will be able to provide a school lunch cooked on site using local ingredients".
- 3.3.4 In Warwickshire a Working Group has been established to guide and work with schools to use these funding streams towards meeting this aspiration.
- 3.3.5 Schools have freedom to procure their meals service in a number of ways including:-
- Buy back services from the Council's County Caterers Service
  - Provide a service 'in-house' with school managed staff
  - By a contractual arrangement with a private sector catering company
- 3.3.6 Currently the breakdown of schools is:-

	County Caterers	In-House	Private Contractor
Primary	188	3	0
Secondary	18	11	8

Note: the remaining primary schools (6) do not currently provide a meals service.

- 3.3.7 The County Catering Service provides school meals as the major element of its trading base, employing some 750 staff at unit level (334 full time equivalents) plus 20 management and supervisory staff. It has annual expenditure in 2005/06 of £8.5million. Major expenditure categories are £4.8m employee costs, £2.8m food costs with the remaining £0.9m a combination of costs including transport, premises and overheads. Financial administration and HR support is provided from within the Resource Directorate.

## 3.4 Recent Issues in Warwickshire

- 3.4.1 Whilst the improved awareness of the issue of school meals and healthy eating in general has provided some benefits particularly in relation to improvement funds there has been a marked reduction in customer take up of meals following the Jamie Oliver television series.
- 3.4.2 Within Warwickshire school lunch take up in schools where County Caterers is the provider has reduced on average by 8.65% (compared to a national average reduction of 9%). This reduction in meal numbers has come at the same time as an increased cost base that reflects:
- Increases in food costs both reflecting local demand/quality issues and the national guidance changes outlined earlier
  - Increased labour costs primarily relating to the implementation in 2001 of a revised pay structure for site based staff

- Increased costs associated with improving the skills of staff in order to respond to new service demands/improvements
  - A reduction in some economies of scale brought about by loss of individual school business
- 3.4.3 This combination of factors resulted in the County Caterers posting a deficit in 2005/06 of £537,000 and £456,000 in 2006/07. This deficit was managed as part of the overall outturn position of the former CAMS department in 2005/06 and by the Resources Directorate in 2006/07.
- 3.4.4 The ability to actively respond to the deficit situation is somewhat constrained by a number of Warwickshire specific factors including: -
- The relatively high numbers of schools with no on-site cooking facilities, which necessitates off site preparation and onward transportation.
  - The compacted lunchtime periods prevalent in a number of secondary schools which can cause workflow planning difficulties alongside a reduced 'opportunity to sell'.
  - Dining halls which could be considered 'unfit for purpose' both in terms of suitability and sufficiency.

### 3.5 County Caterers Response to Date

- 3.5.1 County Caterers has worked closely with the Children, Young People and Families Directorate in regard to the wider issues connected with the recent focus on improving school meals and preparing for the introduction of the new standards.
- 3.5.2 As a separate but linked work stream County Caterers has undertaken a number of measures to assist in the reduction of the operating deficit. These measures include: -
- Review of staffing arrangements at both operational and supervisor level.
  - New menu development with the introduction of revised menus from    September 2006. (This work is ongoing and is likely to include further    refinement and changes to the pattern of menu later in the year). A typical primary school menu for September 2006 is attached at **Appendix 6**
  - Increased/improved focus on marketing/promotion and consultation to deliver increased take-up, including improved contact with parents.
  - Consultancy review of school meals operation to benchmark provision    against examples of best practice.
  - Increase in the price paid for primary school meal to £1.55 from September 2006 – an increase of 5p over the previous price for the majority of county primary schools. This price remains in line with nearby authorities' prices and better reflects the operating costs associated with the service. (The impact of this price

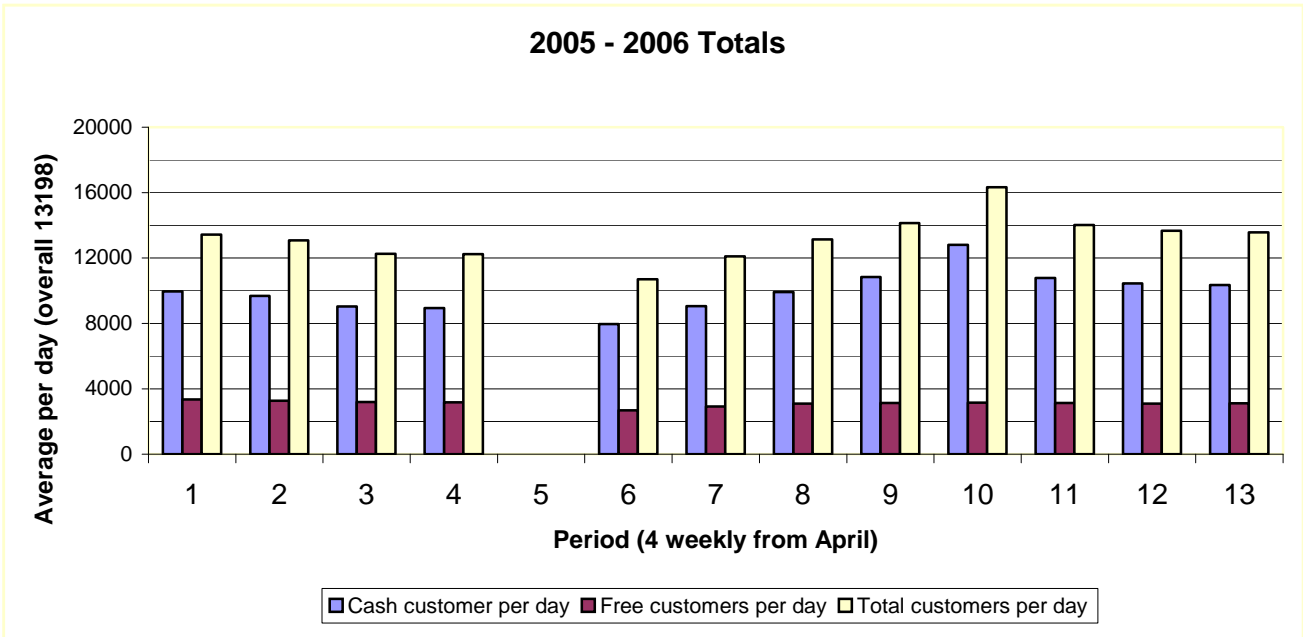
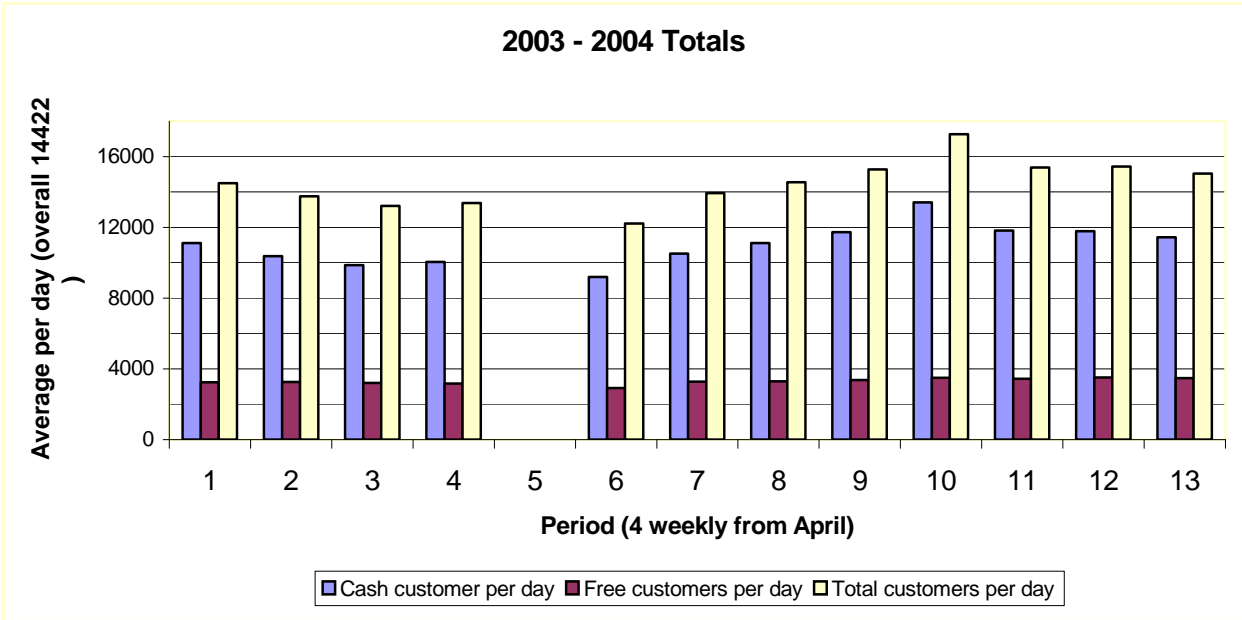
increase on meal numbers will be monitored carefully as customer resistance may occur).

- 3.5.3 These factors have succeeded in reducing the level of deficit in 2006/07, but the level of deficit remains significant and unsustainable. Work continues on attempting to reduce the deficit. It is imperative however that quality standards are maintained particularly in terms of food procurement, food preparation, and food delivery. In addition it will be important to ensure that customer service remains consistently high.
- 3.5.4 It should be noted that whilst there is some link between meal numbers and anticipated deficit it is not a direct correlation. This is in the main due to the limited flexibility which exists to reduce certain fixed costs, most notably staffing costs and overheads.
- 3.5.5 The following graphs detail County Caterers' meal numbers and/or income over the last three years (the data has not been adjusted for changes in number on roll and therefore provides a unadjusted analysis)

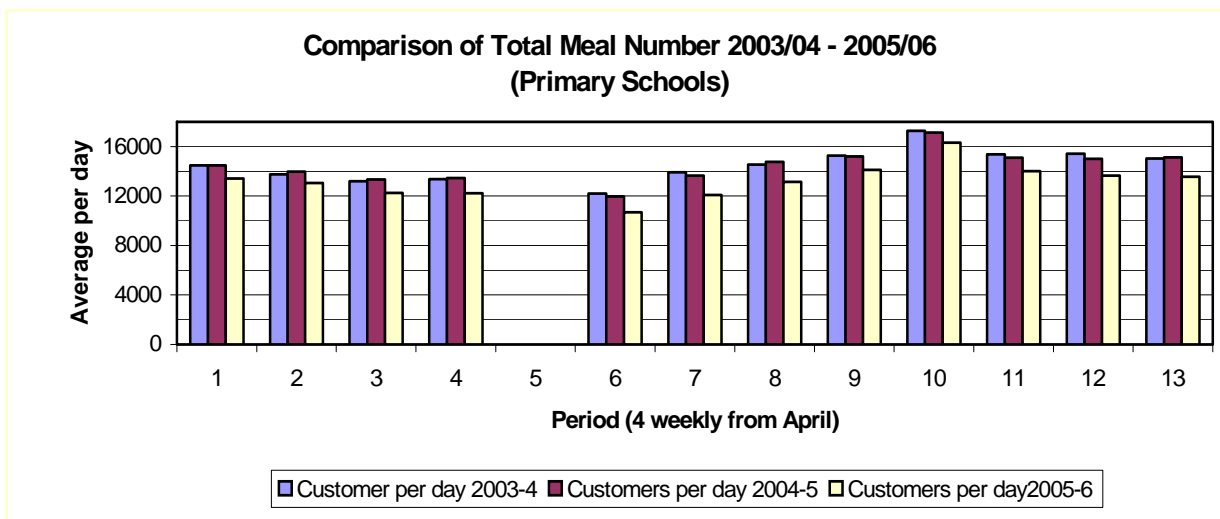


### 3.6 Meal Numbers

3.6.1 The following 3 charts show the distribution of primary meal numbers between cash customers and free school meals for the period 2003/04 – 2005/06



3.6.2 The following chart shows the overall number (cash customers and free school meals) of primary meals delivered over the 3 year period 2003/04 – 2005/06. The chart highlights the reduction in meal numbers of approximately 8.48% from 2003/04 to 2005/06.

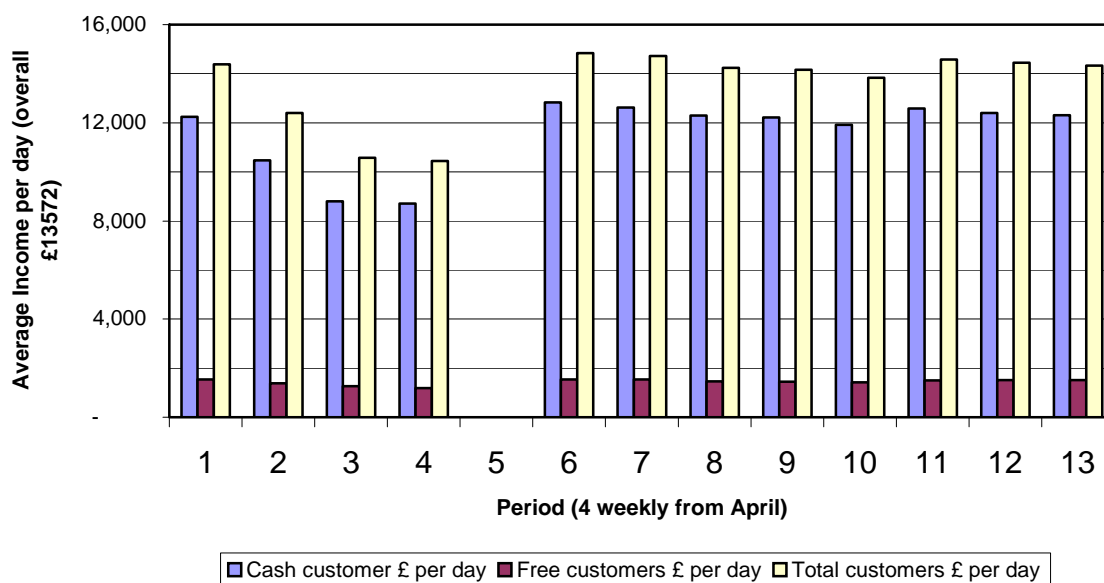


### 3.6.3 Secondary Schools

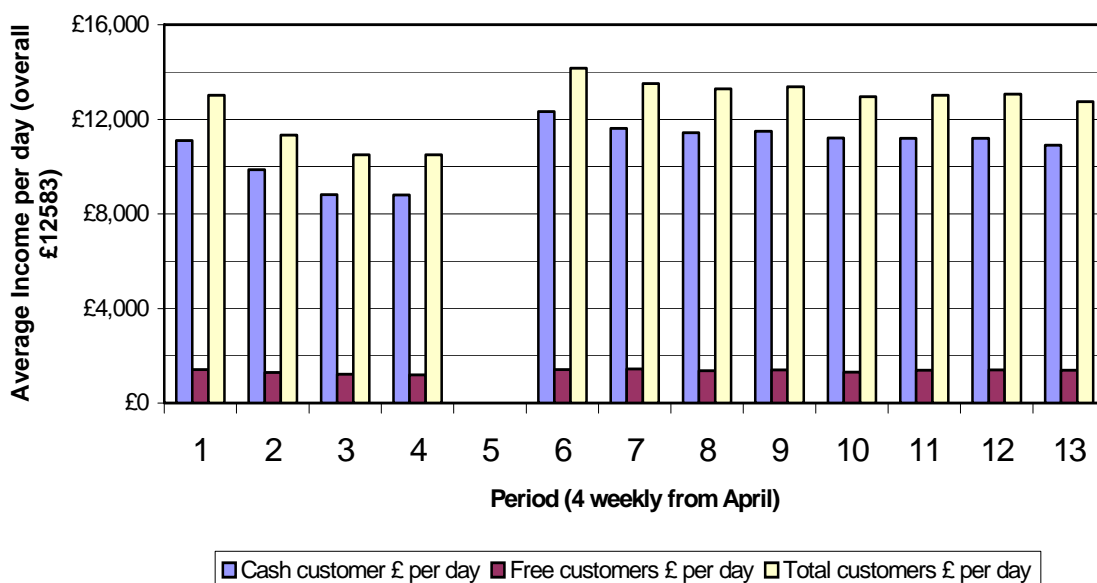
Secondary school catering operates in a different manner than from primary schools. Whilst a set price can deliver a set meal, all secondary schools in the County (where County Caterers is the supplier) operate on a cash cafeteria basis. This allows pupils to purchase individual items on a cash basis. Pupils in receipt of free school meal allowance are allowed a daily spend up to a free school meal allowance set by the schools – usually £1.55; this allowance may be supplemented by cash income from the free school meal eligible pupil. Because of the manner of supply, meal numbers is not the appropriate measure of supply and therefore income is utilised for data analysis purposes.

3.6.4 The following 3 charts show the distribution of secondary school income between cash customers and free school meals for the period 2003/04 – 2005/06. The cash income includes spend by non-pupils (teachers and support staff).

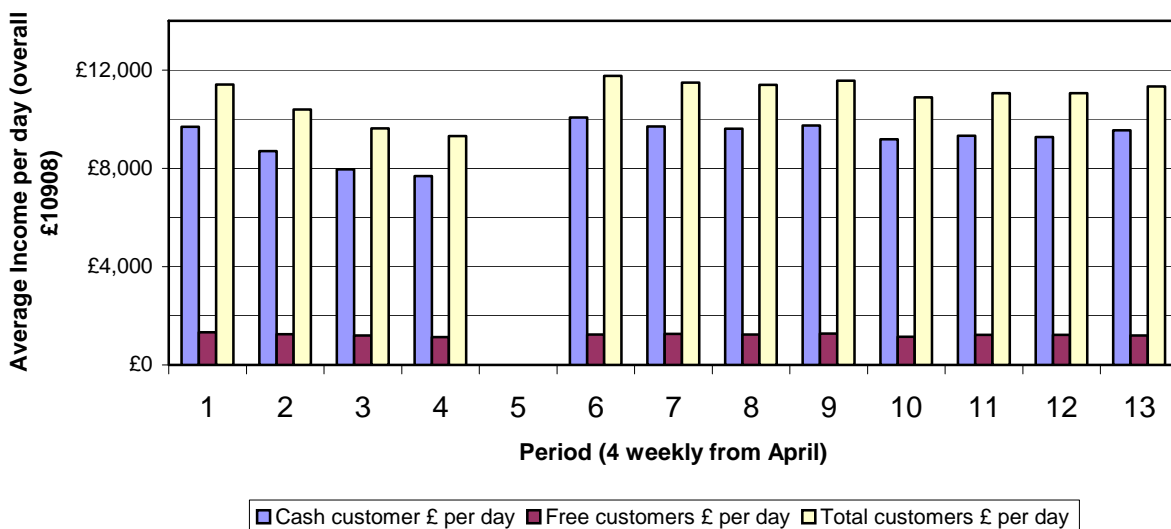
### 2003 - 04 Total Income



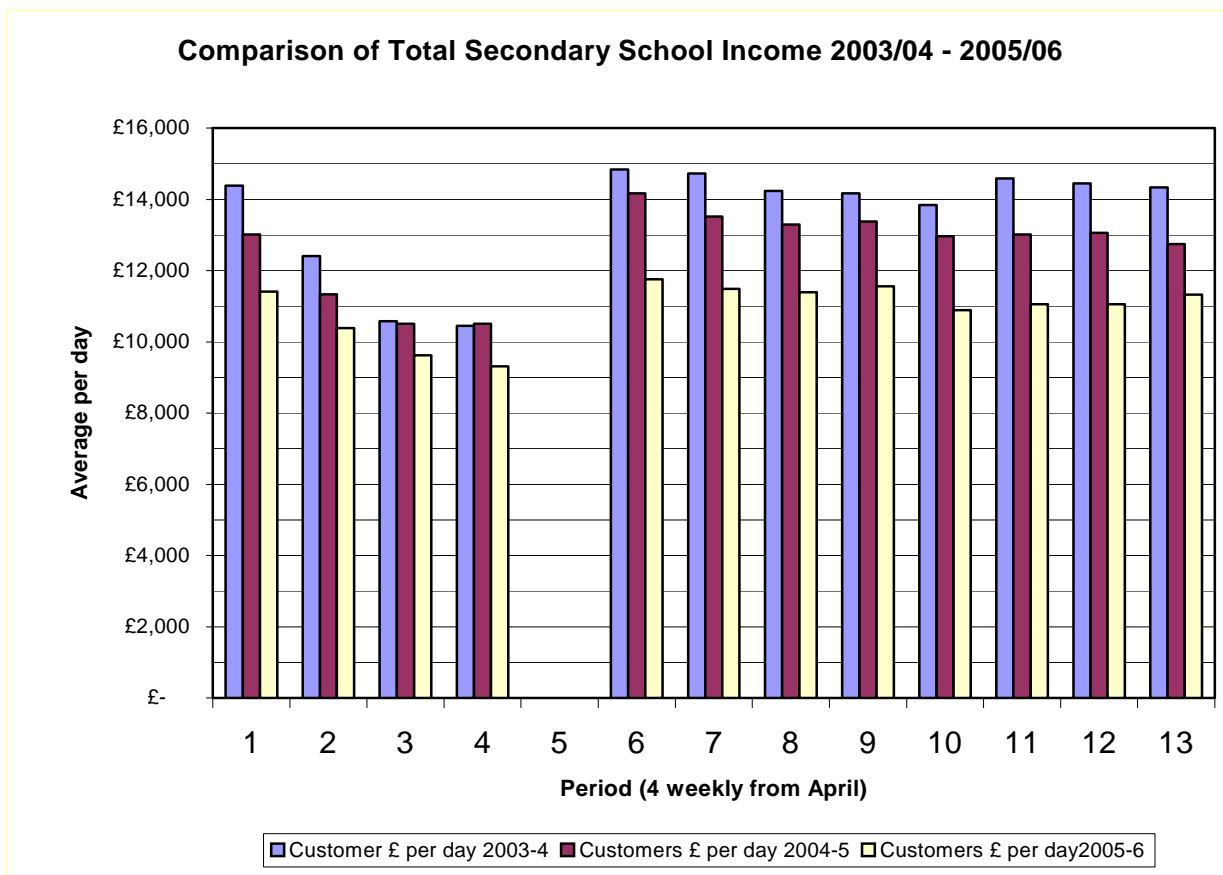
### 2004 - 05 Total Income



### 2005 - 06 Total Income



3.6.5 The following chart shows the overall levels of income (cash customers and free school meals allowance income) for secondary schools over the 3 year period 2003/04 – 2005/06. The chart highlights the reduction in income for County Caterers in 2005-06 was 19.92% lower than that achieved in 2003-4



### 3.7 The Standards Fund and Upgrades to Kitchens and Dining Facilities

3.7.1 As well as the various initiatives being pursued by Warwickshire County Caterers to increase demand for school meals, Warwickshire County Council is seeking to channel resources into improvements to kitchens and dining facilities. This resource comes in part from the Standards Fund and can be broken down as follows.

Grant 105a - paid to the local authority over 3 years

- 2005-6 £288,771.
- 2006-7 £488,443.
- 2007-8 £TBA (but likely to be similar to 2006-7).

Grant 105b - Devolved to Schools

- Primary, Special and PRU - £1,070 lump sum + 50p per FTE (full time education) pupil.
- Nursery - £1,070 lump sum +50p for 50% of FTE pupils.
- Secondary - £1,500 lump sum + 50p per FTE pupil.

3.7.2 Of the 105a Grant money, approximately £250,000 will be spent on kitchen upgrades. A further £300,000 has been made available to support this from Capital Projects Funding.

3.7.3 All schools have been visited and allocated a number of priority points depending on various criteria including:- state of current kitchen equipment; suitability to have a satellite kitchen instead of no kitchen; condition of hot/cold servery; location of school; number of pupils on roll.

3.7.4 The schools have been divided into groups according to priority.

#### **Tranche 0 (*urgent need and pilot schemes*) Complete or in progress**

Queen Elizabeth's - was unable to meet the criteria for school lunches brought about in Sept 2006.

Telford Infants - piloted a new satellite kitchen (new oven), linking to Telford Junior.

St Joseph's, Nuneaton - training kitchen built with funds already offered to the school from the DfES.

#### **Tranche 1 (in progress - approx 20 schools)**

Schools who could benefit from a new oven such as that piloted at Telford Infants in Leamington, and/or where a hot servery should be installed. Due to be completed by September 2007.

#### **Tranche 2**

Schools who would benefit from the introduction of a satellite kitchen, have a large school meals take up or large number of pupils on the roll, or who are in a rural location to which food has to be transported some distance.

**Tranches 3 & 4** - subject to further discussion.

3.7.5 As part of the review, members of the panel visited Woodloes Infant and Telford Infant both of which have benefited from the extra resources. The key message that came over was that without the commitment of key members of staff schemes such as this are unlikely to meet their full potential.

### **3.8 The University of Central England (UCE) Study.**

3.8.1 Three students from UCE undertook a study in to school meals in Warwickshire. Their brief was to:

- Develop a detailed quantitative questionnaire exploring primary and secondary school children's attitudes towards food and school lunch times,
- Discover the teachers and staff opinions towards school dinners and the dinner hall environment
- Experience first hand the lunchtime experience
- Research secondary information to assist with the development of recommendations and strategy
- Develop suitable and realistic strategy in order to create innovative recommendations to encourage children to take up school dinners

3.8.2 The study involved site visits and the use of questionnaires at a range of primary and secondary schools in Warwickshire.

3.8.3 Most of the findings of the study were relatively predictable, i.e. sandwiches, chocolate and crisps formed the basis of most packed lunches. However, a few of the findings were less expected and serve to add a further dimension to the panel's understanding of the issues to be addressed. These are.

- 69.9% of diners found the dining hall noisy  
51.1% of diners felt the dining hall was dirty  
51.1% of diners felt that the dining hall was boring.
- The most popular means of encouraging children to eat healthy school dinners were themed lunches, characters and mascots, menu input, taste testing, advanced information and cookery lessons.
- 83.3% of children from more affluent areas frequently have vegetables compared to 47.4% from areas of high deprivation.
- 83.3% of children who had packed lunches on the grounds of cost said that the way to make school dinners more attractive would be to reduce the cost.
- There was an interest amongst the children who currently do not have school dinners to receive information regarding school dinners.

3.8.4 The study produced a series of recommendations. These are reproduced in **Appendix 7** of this report.

## 4.0 Factors that can Influence Demand for School Meals

- 4.0.1 During its visits to schools and through its consideration of the national picture the panel has become aware that the factors that affect demand for school meals are many and varied. The following section outlines these factors. It should be noted that not all schools will be subject to every one of these influences. For example a school in an affluent area with few pupils entitled to free school meals will not have to contend with the stigma for the individual pupil that can arise from this.
- 4.0.2 **Price** – This is not generally an issue of concern to the individual pupil, but it is a concern for parents and carers. In Warwickshire primary and infant meals cost £1.55. This price is not enforced by County Caterers, it is offered as a guideline. On the basis of this cost a family pays £31 per month (20 days) for a child to have school lunch. Taken individually this amount may not seem very high. However, many families have two, three or more children at school, each potentially wanting a school meal. Therefore, a family with three children is faced with a bill of almost £100 a month for school meals. It is difficult to ascertain whether this compares well with packed lunches. There is no doubt that a packed lunch can be provided for less than £1.55. What is open to question, however, is whether a cheaper packed lunch has the same nutritional values as a school meal. Another consideration for parents and carers is whether the school meal constitutes the main meal of the day for the child. If it does then it probably does make good economic sense. If it is supplemented in the evening by another substantial cooked meal, then the economics do not add up so readily.
- 4.0.3 Understandably there is a reluctance to increase the price of school meals. Whilst such a move can increase income in the short term it can also deter parents and carers from using the service especially if they cannot readily identify any enhancement to the service.
- 4.0.4 **Perceived Nutritional Value** – The 2005 Jamie Oliver media campaign served to highlight the relatively poor nutritional value of the food served in some schools. It failed, however, to acknowledge the steps being taken by many local authorities and by the government to improve the quality of school meals. The net result of the campaign was to elicit a significant and ongoing reduction in demand for school meals as noted elsewhere in this report. Despite the County Council expending considerable resources on publicity and information many parents and carers continue to be suspicious of the meals being served.
- 4.0.5 **Choice** – Choice can be a two-edged sword for customers and providers alike. During the visits that were made to schools, some children commented on the lack of choice. This pattern was also identified when studying the results of research from around the country. However, whereas children seek an element of choice, the providers of meals consider too much choice to be an unwanted complication. This is for two reasons. Firstly, it can be difficult to assess the quantities of food that need to be produced on a particular day and secondly if pupils are presented with a choice at the serving hatch they can deliberate for so long that it delays the entire meal serving process. There are ways around these difficulties. Pupils can be asked to select their choice from a menu at the start of the school day so that numbers can be established early or no choice can be given. Obviously the



methods of providing choice will vary from school to school and between age groups with secondary school pupils generally requiring the greatest range.

- 4.0.6 Vegetarians can prove an extra complication for caterers. National studies have revealed that pupils choosing a vegetarian diet often feel that there is an over-reliance on cheese in their meals. Visits to schools in Warwickshire suggested that this might not be the case. Nevertheless, any pupil who seeks a vegetarian diet will resort to packed lunches if they do not feel that they are being given a reasonable choice. It is anticipated that the introduction of the new nutritional standards in September 2007 will make the position more challenging.
- 4.0.7 **Appearance, Smell and Taste** – This probably should be at the top of the list of priorities. Nobody enjoys eating food that is unattractive and children are no exception. The visits made by the panel to schools indicated that on the whole the food served was appetising. In accordance with Government guidance and accepted good practice, the levels of seasoning were low in the main dishes. Primary and infant children did not appear to mind this and all who were questioned appeared to enjoy their food. No ketchup was served with meals and only water was provided as a drink.
- 4.0.8 **Dining facilities** – These vary significantly from school to school and can be a major factor as to whether children have school meals or not. Many schools rely on the main assembly hall doubling as a dining hall as well. This can be a problem if the hall is not really large enough to accommodate the chairs, tables and serving facilities required. In addition, a small hall can exclude children eating packed lunches.
- 4.0.9 **Queuing** – Children do not like queuing for their meals. Not only does it mean that they have to wait to satisfy their appetites but a delayed lunch erodes the lunchtime and the opportunity to play. Queuing also provides an opportunity for mischief with bored, hungry children engaging in bad practices. Many children prefer a packed lunch which can be consumed in less than ten minutes over a school meal for which they may have to queue for ten or fifteen minutes before spending a further ten minutes or so consuming it.
- 4.0.10 **Staff input** - Evidence suggests that schools that have a positive attitude towards food and school meals will often have a higher level of school meal take up than schools that don't. If a child is operating in an environment that positively promotes the value of school meals then they are likely to feel more inclined to have them.
- 4.0.11 **Stigmatisation** - Having school meals will not necessarily lead to any stigmatisation. However, problems are likely to arise when pupils receive free school meals (FSMs). In these instances, insensitive administrative arrangements such as different coloured lunch tickets can single out pupils receiving FSMs for mockery. A system that does not overtly distinguish between pupils receiving FSMs and those paying for their meals can overcome these problems.
- 4.0.12 **Separation from friends** – Children enjoy being in their friends' company. If these friends have packed lunches and are required to eat in another room or at a different table there can be a major disincentive to have school lunch. Whether

packed lunches and school meals are eaten in the same room is usually determined by the size and layout of the facilities.

- 4.0.13 **Attitude towards food and eating** – At primary level in particular the decision of whether to have school lunch or not is made as much by the parent/carer as the child. If that parent/carer considers it important to have a healthy school lunch in the middle of the day they will steer their child towards them. A parent/carer who attaches little importance to healthy eating *may* look upon packed lunches as a cheaper and easier option.
- 4.0.14 **Cultural differences and preferences** – Culture can have a major impact on choice as it relates to school dinners. Meal providers have to be sensitive to these differences, ensuring that they are catered for.
- 4.0.15 **Seasonal Fluctuation and its impact on Warwickshire** - With occasional exceptions the pattern in primary schools shows a decrease from April through to the end of the year and an increase from September to Christmas and beyond. Clearly the weather has a direct influence on demand. As lunch times become colder and wetter the appeal of cold packed lunches decreases. In the spring and summer, the prospect of a quick lunch attended by plenty of time to play is attractive to children. The pattern in secondary schools is quite different to that in primary schools. As with primary schools the level of demand decreases through the spring and into the summer. However, in addition to the draw of the playground and lunch time clubs, year 11 and 13 pupils spend less time at school as they approach the exam season. Finally it will be noted that school meal take up at secondary school is high early in the school year but tails off throughout the first half of the year. This suggests that the appeal of school meals declines as lunchtime clubs are joined and alliances are made with friends who take packed lunches.
- 4.0.16 In addition to the general, forecastable pattern of ebb and flow there is one seasonal phenomenon that can have a serious impact on the viability of the school meals service and that is snow. In February 2007 snow fell on one night on Warwickshire. As a result the majority of the County's schools were closed for up to two days afterwards. Nevertheless with food ordered and salaries and other overheads to be paid the County Catering Service lost £50,000 in that one day.

## 5.0 Panel's Conclusions and Recommendations

5.01 This section seeks to draw together what the panel has learned. It draws on the sections above, the visits made and the evidence given by witnesses.

### 5.1.0 Overall Lessons and the need for Continuous Improvement

5.1.1 **The Distinction between Primary and Secondary Schools.** In order to address issues around the problem of reduced demand for school lunches it is important to draw a clear distinction between the primary and secondary sector. The issues to be addressed and the way in which this is done will be determined largely by whether they are to be found in primary or secondary schools. Demand for school meals in the primary sectors has increased during this academic year whilst that in secondary schools has shown a marked decline. Options for the future vary between primary and secondary. For example, if demand for school meals in the secondary sector continue to decline then withdrawal from the service is a possible course of action. In the primary sector such an approach would be considerably more contentious. .

5.1.2 **One size does not fit all.** In considering ways in which to address the question of falling demand for school meals it is important to remember that what might work well in one school would be unsuitable for another. Whilst the principal distinction to be made is between the primary and secondary sectors further distinctions need to be made between schools in different parts of the county. For example, there are clear differences between the challenges facing the school meal service in providing a service in rural and urban areas. There are also distinctions to be made between schools in areas of deprivation and those whose catchment area is more affluent.

5.1.3 **The need to act.** Throughout this review the panel has been made aware of the efforts that have been and continue to be made by officers of the County Council to reverse the trend of recent years. To await the outcome of this review would be impractical, hence there is a need to act in a timely and appropriate fashion. The panel felt that this need to act in this way now should be acknowledged within this report and the panel's recommendations.

#### **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.

5.1.3 **Reporting** Throughout this review the panel has been made aware of the opportunities and challenges facing the catering service in Warwickshire. It is confident that the recommendations it has developed will assist the service in tackling its operating deficit. This report, however, does not mark the end of the process the panel is keen to ensure that elected Members on the two relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees are kept in formed of progress.

### **Recommendation B**

The Strategic Directors of Resources and Children, Young People and Families report on a six monthly basis to the Resources, Performance and Development and Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committees providing updates on progress in implementing the recommendations contained in this report and agreed by Cabinet, this report should include details of the trading position of Warwickshire County Caterers

- 5.1.4 **Price and Cost (i)** The cost of providing meals and the cost to the consumer have a major influence on the ultimate viability of the school meal service. It is clear that there is a fine balance between charging enough to cover the cost of the service and continuing to provide meals that are affordable. Several of the school staff spoken to by the panel felt that the price of meals was a significant factor in determining demand. Nevertheless there was no firm evidence of the extent to which parents and carers would tolerate a price increase if this in turn led to enhancements to the service. As well as taking on board messages concerning the price of meals the panel was aware that the cost of providing the school meal service was significantly higher in some parts of Warwickshire than others. Again, however, there was no evidence available concerning the acceptability to parents and carers of the concept of incremental pricing that more accurately reflected the true cost of providing the service. The panel agreed that there is a need to increase income but concluded that before either of these initiatives were progressed further work was needed to gauge their viability.

### **Recommendation C**

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

- 5.1.5 **Price and Cost (ii)** The panel was made aware of the cost implications for families with more than one child receiving school dinners. This is particularly an issue for families that are just above the threshold for receipt of free school meals. In recognition of the importance of a healthy school meal the panel concluded that support for some families would be appropriate.

### **Recommendation D**

Cabinet be requested to support in principle the production of a joint budget bid from the Strategic Directors of Resources and Children, Young People and Families 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.

- 5.1.6 **Joint Working** Throughout this review the panel has been aware of the undeniable link between the healthy school agenda and the successful provision of nutritious and healthy meals by the County Catering Service. For the two elements of County Council service to operate in any way other than in close partnership would be

unacceptable and to this end the panel feels that more should be done to ensure that the school meal service is supported in its efforts to provide healthy meals.

#### **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 Children, Young People and Families 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 a strategic and operational level.

- 5.1.7 **The Importance of School Leaders.** The commitment of school leaders is crucial to the successful delivery of an effective and popular school meal service. In some schools lunchtime and the consumption of a school dinner are regarded as valuable in social, educational and nutritional terms. Resources have been allocated to promote healthy eating and to raise the profile of food whilst dining and cooking facilities have been improved and a great deal of thought has been given to ways in which pupils can be encouraged to take school dinners. In other schools lunchtime is regarded as a nuisance within the school day; something to be endured and to be made as short as possible to minimise the risk of disruption. The panel considered that it is important to ensure that schools are encouraged to work in partnership with school meal suppliers. Whilst it applauded the marketing initiatives being pursued by County Caterers, the panel recognised that these are aimed primarily at potential customers. It felt that more needed to be done in terms of persuading school leaders to acknowledge the importance of school meals in terms of social development, educational attainment and improved pupil behaviour and to work in partnership to provide them.

#### **Recommendation F**

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

- 5.1.8 **Lost Trading Days** Having learned that the snow that fell in early 2007 and closed schools across Warwickshire cost County Caterers £50,000 in lost income the panel considered that enquiries are needed into whether such eventualities can be insured against.

#### **Recommendation G**

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

## 5.2.0 Facilities and Equipment

- 5.2.1 **Kitchens and kitchen Equipment (i)** Good extraction systems, up to date cooking and refrigeration facilities and well planned kitchen layouts that are efficient and user friendly are also important. Good kitchen facilities cannot only serve to motivate staff but can actually help to keep the cost of meals down. This is achieved through the more efficient cooking of meals as well as enabling longer-term storage so reducing the number of food deliveries required. Ideally a kitchen should have a large walk in chill-room close to the main food preparation area. Fridges and freezers should be large enough, easy to clean, economical to run and reliable.
- 5.2.2 The panel is aware that a number of new schools are proposed for Warwickshire and is keen to ensure that no opportunities are missed for the provision of excellent school kitchens in these premises.

### Recommendation H

When planning new schools in Warwickshire the provision of full kitchen facilities to allow for the preparation of hot meals on site should be given a high priority.

- 5.2.3 **Cashless systems** The panel listened to the many arguments both for and against the introduction of cashless systems. Swipe cards are expensive to install and maintain but if used appropriately they can serve to reduce bullying, streamline payment at the till, potentially remove the stigma of free school meals and provide parents and carers with a record of the food being bought. The success of internet payment and the use of cheque only payment is largely dependent on the level of support they receive from school leaders (see above) and the ability of parents and carers to access the internet or pay by cheque.
- 5.2.4 The key lesson learned by the panel is that cashless systems should not be regarded as a solution to all the issues needing to be addressed. Rather they should be seen as one of a number of different tools that can be used.

### Recommendation I

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

## 5.3.0 Marketing and Training

- 5.3.1 **Free School Meal Take Up** Throughout this review the comment has been made on a number of occasions that there are pupils who are eligible for free school meals whose parents and carers have not applied for them. The panel has learned that for many people free school meals are symbolic of failure in some way. County Caterers have undertaken a promotional campaign to encourage take up of free school meals but it was felt that more could be done. For example, whilst it is now possible to apply for free school meals on line, parents and carers who need to use more

traditional paper-based forms are confronted with documentation that appears to be heavily bureaucratic and old fashioned. As with many of the initiatives or improvements identified during this review the key to success is partnership. The panel is therefore keen to encourage council staff to work more closely with schools to identify ways in which take up of school meals could be increased.

#### **Recommendation J**

That the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families 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.

- 5.3.2 **Promotion of School Meals and Training** At present most of the promotion of school meals is targeted on children in the primary sector. Some work is being done in the secondary sector but this is comparatively limited. From exploring examples of good practice from around the country it is possible to appreciate further the importance of effective marketing. However, the panel appreciates that there is usually a cost attached to any initiatives.
- 5.3.3 In secondary schools that use private contractors promotional material is provided. This is aimed more at getting the pupils to buy into the product rather than extolling the virtues of a healthy school meal.
- 5.3.4 Marketing can take many forms from the production of leaflets using cartoon illustrations to the use of the radio or even television. Publications can be sent home with pupils or distributed in free newspapers. They can be handed out in supermarkets or left on the counter in libraries.
- 5.3.5 Some schools provide taster sessions. These take different forms but all provide the opportunity for parents and carers and pupils to sample school cooking before committing themselves.
- 5.3.6 Training and training facilities serve not only to improve the skills and awareness of staff but also to motivate them. One of the issues around training is the amount of time that is available in the working day to undertake it. Chefs can be (and indeed are) commissioned to visit schools and share their experience with kitchen staff.

## **Recommendation K**

From 2008/09 Cabinet is asked to allocate up to £50,000 per annum to the Strategic Director of Children, Young People and Families 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 evening and to invite parents into schools to sample meals

## **5.4 Improving the dining experience**

- 5.4.1 **Dining facilities.** Where dining halls are spacious and airy, with nice décor and appropriate chairs, tables and cutlery and crockery, pupils at both primary and secondary level appear to enjoy their meals and the social aspects to it. It is important that food should have a high profile in terms of promotional material on the walls in dining rooms.
- 5.4.2 If dining facilities are cramped or set out in an illogical fashion this can lead to tensions or confusion among diners. Major changes to dining rooms can generally only be undertaken at considerable expense. This is a major issue for schools faced with limited budgets and competing challenges.
- 5.4.3 Methods of serving need to be given serious consideration. In infant and junior schools there is strong evidence that "family service" can engender a good sense of responsibility amongst pupils. However, this style of service does not lend itself to large scale that has to serve pupils in sittings. In these cases it is probably better to use trays with pupils visiting the servery once for main course and dessert.
- 5.4.4 One of the main barriers to increasing demand for school meals is the length of time pupils in some schools are required to queue for their meals. In some parts of the country initiatives have been undertaken to make the queuing experience altogether more pleasant. The panel was informed of these as part of the review of practices from around the country. One possible improvement that could be introduced is the use of televisions or DVDs to distract pupils and so make queuing more enjoyable.



One possible drawback with this approach is that it would slow down the progress of the queue as children slowed to watch their favourite programme. Nevertheless, if managed sensitively this should not be a major problem.

#### **Recommendation L**

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

#### **Recommendation M**

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

#### **Recommendation N**

Cabinet be asked to provide financial support to the Children, Young People and Families Directorate, to allow schools to invest in enhancing the queuing experience. Eg for example by showing DVDs to those pupils in the queue or extra serveries to reduce waiting time.

- 5.4.5 **Quality and Nature of Food** – The panel witnessed for itself how school pupils are increasingly discerning. The quality of the meal is dependent on the ingredients and the care with which they are prepared and cooked. Fresh food is generally to be preferred although some frozen vegetables can, if cooked with care, be pleasant to eat. Food is subject to fashion and as with marketing it is often a good idea to consider what is successful in the high street. Salad bars, for example are popular in places like Pizza Hut. If they succeed there, why not in the school dining hall?
- 5.4.6 Evidence from around the country and drawn from the children at schools visited is that vegetarian dishes sometimes relied too heavily on cheese and were generally unimaginative. The use of salad bars was witnessed at some of the schools visited. These proved very popular with vegetarians but were also recognised to be labour intensive. This comes from the need to produce fresh items of salad and then to oversee the salad bar ensuring that it is replenished regularly and not abused.

#### **Recommendation O**

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

#### **Recommendation P**

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

**5.5.0 Integrating meal time into the school day**

5.5.1 The panel saw for itself the desire on behalf of pupils to make the best use of the lunch time for play. It was noted that primary age children eating school lunches rarely “bolted” their food in order to get away from the table and play. However, there was a sense that children consuming packed lunches were at an advantage as they did not have to wait to be served or wait for their friends to finish before leaving. It was felt that in order to even out the time required to eat it would be advisable to encourage schools to agree a minimum time for lunch consumption. This way, diners having school lunch would not feel at a disadvantage.

**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.

5.5.2 At every school visited by the panel it was clear that high demand for school meals was closely allied to the general attitude to food and meal times within the school day. The panel saw several examples of work that linked the teaching curriculum to food. It also saw examples of lunch serveries that were decorated with drawings and models of food. Such links were not confined to the primary sector. In two of the secondary schools visited theme days are regularly used whilst healthy eating was promoted through the work of pupils. The link between this approach and the prerequisite that school leaders should support the importance of food and school meals was not lost on the panel which felt that more could be done to encourage this approach.

**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 eg through theme days.

5.5.3 Primary age children are not allowed off school premises at lunchtime. The policy regarding secondary schools is applied inconsistently with some schools allowing free movement of pupils at lunchtime and others restricting such freedom. The panel was informed that schools that do not restrict pupils’ lunchtime movements often see them visiting fast food outlets or shops for their lunches. Schools that do not generally allow pupils off site at lunchtime have a greater take-up of school lunches. The panel recognised, however, that a pupil who is prohibited from leaving school will not automatically have a school dinner. They may choose to have a packed lunch.

**Recommendation S**

The Children, Young People and Families Directorate, in conjunction with all school meal providers across the County, including Warwickshire County Caterers is asked to work closely with secondary school Head teachers 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.

5.5.4 The panel recognised that opportunities for multiple use of kitchens is limited. Nevertheless, evidence from elsewhere suggests that in instances where pupils are allowed to use or visit school kitchens they become more used to the concept of school meals. Clearly the use of kitchens by pupils would be attended by various considerations around hygiene and health and safety. However, if school leaders can be convinced that this is a good idea then positive benefits for the school meal service can accrue.

**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, thus helping to embed the importance of school meals in pupils' minds.

# Terms of Reference for a Review of Demand for Warwickshire County Council's School Meals Service – January to June 2007

## Aims and Objectives

### Aim

Following the national trend school meal take up in Warwickshire has over the last year or so witnessed a marked downturn. This has been largely attributed to a general criticism of the quality of school meals broadcast by Jamie Oliver. The majority of school meals in Warwickshire are provided by the County Council and as a consequence of the reduced take-up of the service the manner in which the service is delivered and in particular the positioning of risk is now considered in need of review. The aim of this review which has been requested by members of the Resources, Performance and Development and Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committees is to assist in developing strategies and policies aimed at addressing those issues highlighted.

### Objectives

The overall objectives of the review are:

1. to agree a series of recommendations for actions that will increase take-up of the service,
2. consider mechanisms which assist the service and its customers in balancing financial/operational pressures
3. to assist school Governing bodies in ensuring that their obligations regarding the provision of good quality school meals can be met and considering ways of improving awareness/take-up of free school meals
4. further enhance the nutritional quality of the meals provided thus helping to enhance educational attainment in schools.

### Scope

In order to achieve the above, the review will consider,

- school meal provision in primary and secondary schools
- the seasonal factors that determine take-up of the service
- the impact of the dining environment and experience on take-up of the service
- trading accounts and potential school by school/sector by sector issues
- clustering arrangements of schools
- the potential impact of the kitchen upgrade strategy
- the timing of lunch times within the school day
- the quality and training of catering and lunchtime staff

The review will not consider, draw conclusions or make recommendations on,

- Independent schools
- Health and obesity amongst young people
- Funding Formulae

The review will utilise the following sources of evidence.

- Guidelines on mandatory services
- Ofsted healthy eating reports
- Up to date figures on school meal take up and demand analysed by sector and locality
- Current financial information
- Information on experiences from other parts of the country broken down by area, school type and locality
- Benchmarking information
- Examples of best practice
- The results of a survey conducted with every pupil regarding the ECM outcomes including healthy eating
- WES survey data
- UCE pupil attitude survey

## **Indicators of Success**

The principal indicator of success is that the recommendations made are accepted and implemented with a corresponding impact upon the objectives outlined above.

Following implementation, monitoring of the situation will continue using SMART targets based upon school meal take-up, financial considerations and supplier and customer perceptions

## **Methodology**

The review will utilise the following

- Site visits to sample school meals and see catering and dining facilities first hand
- A DVD which illustrates facilities and practice in eight schools
- Where appropriate, visits to other authorities to learn from best practice
- Survey results

The following stakeholders will be consulted

- Young people
- Parents and carers via appropriate mechanisms
- Governors through their forums
- Head teachers via their conferences

A Member/officer panel will be established to oversee the review. This will comprise of:

## Councillors

Booth		M Singh
Timms		Compton
Whitehouse		Moss
Phil Evans	–	Head of Facilities Management
Sandra Russell	-	Head of Catering
Shona Walton	-	Principal Inspector, Access and Innovation
Michelle McHugh	-	Scrutiny Officer
Paul Williams	-	Scrutiny Officer

## Timetable:

December 2006	Initial meeting of panel
January 2007	Two meetings to develop working group's understanding of issues and oral update reports to relevant committee
February 2007	Site visits
May June	Panel to produce recommendations

### Meeting with Headteachers and Governors 14<sup>th</sup> March 2007

On Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2007 the Review of Demand for School Meals Panel met at Manor Hall with a selection of Headteachers and other staff from a range of schools across the county. Carol Bunyard attended to outline her work on extended services.

These were

Alan Brown – Etone School  
Charlotte Marten – Rugby High School  
Jim Ferguson – Trinity School  
Bernard Peffers – Bilton High School  
Ali Foster – Telford Infants  
Jan Hamilton – St John's primary School  
Jacky Lyon – Woodloes Infant School  
Angela Stanton - Brookhurst Primary  
Robin Richmond – north Leamington School  
Don Hannah – Great Alne Primary School  
Carol Bunyard – Extended Services Strategy Adviser

The purpose of the meeting was to give the panel the opportunity to hear, first hand, about some of the barriers and opportunities facing schools in delivering the school meal service. Here is a summary of the meeting and the points highlighted by Headteachers and Governors for consideration by the Panel

#### Carol Bunyard – Extended Schools

The DfES use the term “extended schools”, but Warwickshire County Council uses the term “extended services”. Extended services denoting the range of partners and services involved. Essentially involves a group of schools in an area working together to deliver services. There are targets relating to extended services, DfES have set the target of every school delivering extended schools by 2010, with an intermediate target of half of primary schools and one third of secondary schools delivering extended services by 2008. Warwickshire is currently on track with this agenda.

Cluster consultation has already gone out to schools, with suggested lists of clusters. Consultation closes at the end of March.

There are 5 core areas of work for extended services to focus on:

1. Parenting support
2. Child care – providing affordable access to childcare to anyone who wants it
3. Community access – opening school buildings to community
4. Extra activities and study support
5. Swift and easy referral – timely response. Work carried out by the Enhanced Support Network

The overarching agenda for extended schools is about localised delivery of Every Child Matters. It is a holistic approach focussed on improving outcomes for children and young people.

There is a clear link between the Extended Services agenda and school meals provision. It is about the ability and capacity for the catering service to add to the project. There is also the link between what is provided before and after the school day. At the moment legislation only covers school dinners, not before and after school provision. Is about making sure children are adequately nourished through the extended day.

#### Bernard Peffers - Bilton High School

The key to success is about the options made by children. It has been found that children often take two puddings instead of having the healthy option. The issue is about how schools can influence the choices young people make. It was acknowledged that County Caterers have perhaps done a lot of work with the primary sector to change behaviour but it was felt that this doesn't always come with the children when they move up into secondary school.

Bilton High School has introduced a cashless system, where parents can send dinner money by cheque or over the internet. This ensures that the parents' money is spent on food. This system has been in place for 12 months, although the internet payment is relatively recent.

The cashless system can be used to produce report cards that give an indication of what the individual pupil is buying and eating. However, to date there have been very few requests from parents and carers for such reports.

There are four perceived benefits of having a cashless system, namely

- It removes the need to handle cash
- It makes serving food easier and quicker thus reducing queuing times
- It enhances security with parents and carers knowing that their money is being spent on school meals rather than snacks and even cigarettes
- It reduces the incidence of bullying as it avoids the need for children to carry cash and can help to remove the stigma of being seen to have free school meals

There is restricted use of school to home passes. There was an issue around the timing of the school day. Having changed from a 6 period day to a 5 period day lunch now starts at 1.20pm, to compensate for this the mid-morning break was extended from 15 minutes to 20 minutes to enable pupils to get food if they want it. Pupils and staff have welcomed this and it makes the day easier and the afternoon go quicker.

#### Charlotte Marten - Rugby High School

This school does its catering in-house. The kitchens are over forty years old but the school cannot afford to modernise them. When the Ms Marten started at the school she was horrified by the amount of confectionary that was on offer. She convinced the Governors that they needed to seriously invest to make a difference. The school has now employed a chef. Interviews were held after a cooking test. The school pays double what was previously being spent on the chef / cook but considers it to be a good investment.



The School established a School Nutrition Group, which includes students, parents and governors. The group holds sessions where they tasted a selection of products - and decided on products that were quick and easy to produce.

Previously the pricing structure was very complicated, the school now has a very simplified pricing system. £1 sandwich / wrap, £1.60 for a main meal, £2 for a main meal and a pudding. Students are allowed to taste dishes for nothing.

Before there was very poor take up school meals, now the service has been transformed. This has cost a lot of money. Paying the chef twice as much, more money to staff and more money on packaging so that the food stays fresh. The projected deficit for the last 6 months was £8500, the actual deficit was £3275

The dining room only seats 130 pupils. Those pupils who bring a pack lunch struggle to find anywhere to sit. Facilities are the only major problem but unless they are changed it will not be possible to go much further. It is estimated it will cost £200,000 to transform the facilities, mainly because there is currently no extraction unit and the ovens are very old.

There is 1 hour 10 minutes for lunch – students often have to wait 20 minutes before they can get served. Anyone who wants a school lunch gets served a school lunch and there is always a choice, even at the end of the session. Teachers often sit down and have lunch with the pupils.

#### Alan Browne - Etone

The school has carried out its own catering service for 4/5 years. It is essentially facing the same problems as Rugby, in that the school is running out of space to serve its pupils. It currently provides breakfast, lunch and after school if it is needed. The school has also worked to integrate the kitchen staff into the school. The chef does food technology lessons and the Healthy School Group sit with the Chef and determine the menu. The school dining hall seats 150 pupils at any one time was recently refurbished out of a devolved capital budget fund.

The school has also bought a food trailer, which serves jacket potatoes and soup. The school has paid more money to the chef due to the extra work that is undertaken. The service runs at a £14k profit pa.

The main thing is to get the pupils and parents involved. Students should be rewarded for choosing healthy options. The school runs theme days that run across the curriculum and are not just about food.

#### Jim Ferguson - Trinity

This school uses County Caterers. The service made a significant loss last year. The school has found that the more healthy options that are offered the more loss the service makes. The school has recently started to review the provision for school meals, and the experience has not been encouraging. County Caterers are not regarded as very successful or responsive regarding healthy schools. The school is now thinking about outsourcing because of this.

### Jan Hamilton - St John's Primary

St John's Primary School in Kenilworth uses County Caterers for school meals. It also has a breakfast club. When Jan Hamilton started at the school she was less than satisfied with the quality of the food on offer. The school is a dining centre with food being prepared off site and transported over. The school even went as far as looking at another provider but in November 2005 the Governing Body and Parents brought the issue up with County Caterers. County Caterers responded well and came to the school to try a meal and agreed that it was not satisfactory. There were several issues – the timing of the meals being delivered to the school, the colour and combination of the food and the choice especially at the end of the day. Since then take up has almost trebled. Lunch staff are very positive and encouraging and the school has invested in dining room furniture. Dining and support staff sit with the children. The School makes lunch times a social occasion and has achieved Healthy School status.

### Jacky Lyons - Woodloes Infant - Warwick

When the Jacky Lyons arrived at the school she didn't like the dining experience and saw it as soulless, with children having to queue for a long time before being served. She took a school meal for one year and enjoyed most of it, but thought that there was scope to improve. The Head spoke to County Caterers and identified the long-term aim of having a family service, and a short-term aim of reducing the multi-choice menu to two choices.

The school now operates a family service. Children have an allocated place on a table and the year groups are mixed up. Year 2 serves the food and Year 1 clear away. Red aprons are given to the servers and white aprons given to those that clear away. The children learn about the social pleasure of sharing a meal, they learn about the manners relating to starting and finishing a meal together, and that someone has to do the clearing up – and it doesn't just happen. The meeting was informed that it is good to encourage children to associate eating with something that is good, not just grab something to eat culture. It is also important to encourage the culture that it is ok to try something and not like it, trying something is not a commitment to eating it all.

Tackling packed lunches is much more complex. It is important to keep reinforcing messages to children and parents alike. Also what works in one school won't work in another. Children who eat packed lunches are segregated from those having school meals but are in the same dining hall.

The relationship the children have with the cooks is also important.

Demand for school meals has remained largely static at around 50% and does not appear to experience any significant seasonal fluctuation.

### Ali Foster - Telford Infants

The meeting was informed that County Caterers had visited the school. The School had been looking at out sourcing for a while.

There has been significant investment by County Caterers terms of ovens, fridges, freezers and trolleys. £4000 has also been spent on new dining furniture. The Junior school used to

cook the school meals and trolley them over to the infants school but now the catering staff all cook together.

The dining hall is called the Café as the children, when they saw the new trolleys said that it looked just like a real Café. Dinner numbers have increased significantly from 50 in Sept 06 to 120 in March 07. All teachers eat with children on a regular basis. This has had a major impact on the noise level and on how the children sit and talk to each other.

Dinnertime is a key part of the holistic day for the children. The school has involved parents, school council and County Caterers

### Angela Stanton - Brookhurst Primary

Angela was faced with a kitchen that needed a lot of investment, particularly in the ventilation system; the school now has a good cooking facility. Six years ago she was not happy with what was being offered. The school piloted a reduced choice menu. Now it produces good quality food that the children enjoy. It is not just about food at dinner times, Children are only allowed to bring fruit and water in for break times. Healthy Eating is joined together with the PHSE curriculum. Hopefully when children go to secondary school they will make healthy choices.

The school has carried out lots of marketing with parents – it invites parents to come in and try a meal with their children. New parents are invited to a parents evening where they can sample school meals and this helps build the commitment between home and school. Menus are available on the website and payment can be made over the internet. The school also has visual menus for those children who cannot read.

## **Input from Governors**

The meeting of the Warwickshire Education Services, School Representative's Group held on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2007 was used to explore some of the issues surrounding demand for school meals. The messages that came from the meeting largely reinforced those that have come from discussions with headteachers and bursars. It was clear that there are distinct differences between the issues facing primary and secondary schools. It was suggested that if some schools are making a profit from their school meals this should be used to support schools in deprived areas where demand is currently low.

There was a call at the meeting for more resources for staffing and for marketing. This latter was considered particularly relevant to secondary schools where it was felt to be lacking. Cashless systems, such as that used in Manor Park Community School, Nuneaton, are open to abuse with code numbers being memorised and stolen.

The issue of free school meals was discussed. It was acknowledged that where a pupil is entitled to a FSM but does not use that entitlement, the revenue resource is kept by the school. It was suggested that this money could be used to fund a breakfast club the importance of which was being increasingly acknowledged.

There was a suggestion that the healthy eating agenda could be used to promote the school meals service and that funding aimed at promoting healthy eating could be used creatively to assist Warwickshire County Caterers in its quest to increase demand.

One speaker at this meeting felt that there was a fundamental need for officers from Shire Hall to frequently visit schools to speak to kitchen staff and others. In addition, it was strongly felt that more resources are needed in the short term to assist the service over this problem.

**Evidence from Schools****Lighthorne Heath Primary School. 13<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

As a prelude to this review, Councillor Booth, the Chair of the Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee, visited Lighthorne Heath Primary School for lunch. Lighthorne Heath Primary is a relatively small school (about 70 pupils) in a rural location. It is equipped with its own kitchen which in turn cooks and provides hot meals for another school equipped only with a dining centre. The take up of the service is around 75%. A high percentage of the children at the school are eligible for free school meals (Lighthorne Heath being an area of relatively high deprivation). However, take up levels of those free school meals were low.

Service is based on the family model whereby the children sit at a laid table and are served by older children and lunchtime staff. It was observed that kitchen staff are an integral part of the school team, that is, they have other roles within the school. At the time of the visit the acting head expressed satisfaction with the service.

Councillor Booth found the meal to be tasty and healthy. There was with fruit, raw carrot, and bread on the table in individual portions. Children had plenty of time to eat and there was very little wasted. Portion sizes were considered to be generous and appeared to offer value for money. Councillor Booth wondered whether the cost of meals might be an issue for some of the pupils' families ie those who just missed out on free school meals.

**Ilmington Primary School**

Sally Naish, the Headteacher at Ilmington CofE Primary School was interviewed as part of this review. Sally is an ex Home Economics teacher who appreciates the role and importance of food in the school day. Take up of the school meals service is high with 84 children out of a roll of 109 having regular school meals. Three children are entitled to free school meals all of who do so. Lunch time is a well structured affair. After washing their hands the children all enter the dining hall at the same time. A family service approach has been adopted. Eight children (mixed ages) sit at a table. two children on each table serve the meals and two clean up afterwards. Servers and cleaners are regularly swapped around to allow everyone to have these responsibilities. A conscious effort has been made to avoid the use of plastic "flight trays". Proper plates are used in conjunction with metal cutlery. A "table of the week" system was introduced whereby the table considered to be the best behaved would be allowed a table cloth and menu on their table. However, when the novelty of this wore off and when it was seen that the same children were being rewarded the initiative was abandoned. Those eating packed lunch have to eat in the dining hall with the others and are not allowed to leave before those taking school meals. Teachers do not generally sit and have their lunch with the children. This is principally because the school lunch break lasts only one hour and during that time, the teaching staff need to prepare for the afternoon's lessons.

Parents are allowed to have an input into the provision of school meals. Menus are sent out to them for consultation, their views are sought on new initiatives that could be tried and they are invited into the school to sample the meals for themselves. Children are allowed access to and use of the school's kitchen for cookery classes. They also have sessions with the school's cook.

Every effort is made to minimise the amount of processed food that is used. Unfortunately owing to the limitations of the oven currently installed it has been found necessary to retain a deep fat fryer. This is regretted by the Head teacher as is the absence of a hot servery and the small size of the kitchen. Salads are promoted widely and crudites are placed on the dining tables before each meal. Fresh vegetables are used wherever possible and the use of fresh, locally produced milk has been explored.

Payments for meals are made either weekly or monthly. Internet payment is not used.

Overall, take up of the school meals service is not a concern for Sally Naish. No reduction in demand was noted post Jamie Oliver but parental interest in school meals was noted to increase. This sustained high take up may be attributed to the efforts made by County Caterers and the school to provide a good service and to the socio-economic profile of the children attending the school.

### **Visit to Woodloes Infant School , Warwick. 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2007**

On Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2007 Woodloes School played host to a visit for school lunch. There are 150 children on the school roll approximately half of who have school meals. The school employs two cooks (known as the two Debbie's) who prepare the meals for Woodloes Infants and for Emscote Infants School. The food for Emscote is collected at around 11.30 and transported across Warwick. Before lunch starts the two Debbie's set out the dining tables, chairs, cutlery and crockery. Setting out is not really a part of the cooks' job and it can slightly delay production of the food. Lunch starts at 12.00. Before entering the dining hall (which is also the main school hall) the children wash their hands.

Knives, forks, spoons, plates and cups are all made from brightly coloured plastic. These replaced plastic flight trays, which were used until the introduction of family service. Each table accommodates eight pupils. Two pupils are nominated as servers and one for clearing up at the end of the meal. Tables comprise children of different ages with the older ones setting an example to the younger ones. It was noted that despite a brave effort on their part, the servers did not give equal portions to all the children. This was remedied by visits from midday supervisors who ensured that the food was distributed fairly.

When asked what their favourite food was the children, not surprisingly said that they favoured chips, pizza and cake. When asked about the quality of the school meals the children said that they liked them. The children are not given a choice of food although vegetarians receive a slightly different meal. The Head Teacher observed that when a choice had been available the children could never decide what to have.

The meal comprised processed breaded chicken with mixed vegetable, fried potatoes and a healthy side salad. Desert was a fruit sorbet in a small polystyrene pot. Water, fruit and bread were also available. The main meal appeared to have little or no seasoning in it and as a consequence was (to an adult's taste buds) slightly bland. The low levels of seasoning did not appear to affect the children's enjoyment of the meal and there was little food left on any plates.

On Friday 27<sup>th</sup> April Councillor Mrs Compton visited the school. She noted how the children seemed very competent with the organisation, appeared to enjoy the food, cleared the tables and socialised well. Mrs Compton also noted how the school cooks operated the menus as flexibly as possible and that this flexibility appeared to work well and reduce waste.

### **Visit to Brookhurst Primary School, Leamington Spa. 30<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

Brookhurst Primary School is situated in Leamington Spa. As its name implies, it is a primary school encompassing pupils from foundation stage up to year 6. There are currently 365 pupils on the roll in 14 classes. Children eat in a dining area that doubles as the main school hall and gymnasium. This multiple use of the hall can lead to problems as the number of classes and limited time that the hall can be used outside of lunchtime means that access to it is at a premium.

Tables and chairs are set out in the hall by the three kitchen staff. This task is contained in their job description. The staff are supplemented by seven midday supervisors two of whom operate in the dining hall.

Because of the numbers of children involved (more than one sitting being required) it is not practical to use any kind of family service. Flight trays are used because of the need to limit the number of visits to the serving hatch (a whole meal including a drink of water can be carried on a flight tray). Metal cutlery is used.

Menu choice is deliberately limited to two dishes and two puddings. On the menu on the 30<sup>th</sup> April was bacon, cheese and pasta bake and salmon bake with vegetables and garlic bread. Desert was either a flapjack or chocolate pudding and custard. The children spoken to on the day of the visit, whilst conceding that their favourite food was pizza and pasta, certainly appeared to enjoy their meals. As with the Woodloes, very little food went to waste.

Only 19 pupils on the roll are entitled to free school meals. All 19 take their meals.

Pupils are able to choose on a day-to-day basis whether they will have school lunches. However, the kitchen staff find they are able to cope with these changes and actually produce filled rolls for purchase by pupils preferring them to hot meals.

Parents and carers are able to pay for school meals via the internet. They pay an amount to the school which ten reduces as the meals are taken. In theory a parent might pay £20 at the beginning of the term and find it is never used as their children have elected to take a lunch to school.

To encourage take up of the service taster sessions are offered to children. In addition a member of the kitchen staff attends the new parents evenings at school to inform them of the service. Governors, parents and even grandparents are encouraged to visit the school to sample a meal.

### **Visit to Telford Infants School, Leamington Spa 11<sup>th</sup> May 2007**

Telford Infants School was constructed just over 40 years ago on the northern outskirts of Leamington Spa. It is situated in an area of relative affluence (as evidenced by the fact that it has only 11 children - out of a roll of 264 - who are entitled and registered for free school

meals). The Head teacher, Ali Foster recognises the value of school meals in the school day and has invested a considerable sum of money in revised cooking and dining facilities in the school. Ali has worked very closely with Sandra Russell and considers that the doubling of demand for school meals in 12 months is largely down to their combined efforts and that of her staff.

In common with the majority of schools, the main assembly hall/gym doubles as the dining room. Originally meals were served through hatches from the kitchen. However, there was some concern that the counters were too high for little children. In response to this, two hot serving trolleys were purchased. These are set lower than the counters and allow the children to see the food they are choosing. The trolleys are wheeled out from the kitchen at the beginning of lunchtime and whilst they can be seen as an improvement it was noted that their use does take up floor space that is already at a premium. It is intended that the serving hatches will be modified soon so with the counters being lowered.

Food is cooked throughout the lunch period. This ensures that it is hot and fresh. The ability to do this is aided by a new oven. The aim is to give children at the end of the queue as much choice as those at the beginning.

Whereas Woodloes Infant School uses family service, Telford Infants has opted to give children a choice of food, retaining flight trays and separate sittings. This is in part due to the numbers of children involved, which does not allow for the desired single sitting. Kitchen staff set out tables and chairs. This exercise can be quite time consuming and coming immediately before the start of lunchtime can lead to some delay in serving meals. Lunchtime lasts for 1 hour 15 minutes. This is found to be adequate.

The school has three kitchen staff but on the day of the visit was one staff member down. It was reported that recruitment of cooks and midday supervisors is a constant problem. Pay is considered to be too low to be attractive whilst the hours in the middle of the day are not convenient to many. The net result of these problems is that teaching staff have to assist at lunchtimes, a situation that is considered less than satisfactory.

The children spoken to all seemed to enjoy their lunches. On the day of the visit there was a choice of fish and chips or curry and rice (or a combination). It was noted that the majority of the pupils chose the fish and chips. Dessert was a chocolate sponge or fruit flapjack. Children with packed lunches eat in the same dining hall and can sit with their friends who are eating school dinners. It was observed that the nutritional quality of the packed lunches was very variable. Ali Foster conceded that this was the case but apart from offering advice to parents and carers on this matter there is little she can do.

### **Visit to Manor Park School, Nuneaton 24<sup>th</sup> May 2007**

Manor Park is a secondary school located at the heart of an area of relatively high deprivation. It currently has a roll of 600 pupils of mixed social and cultural backgrounds. The school uses Warwickshire County Caterers although it has in the past considered using private suppliers. A high proportion of pupils at the school are entitled to free school meals although many of these choose not to have them.

At mid-morning break pupils are able to purchase cakes, baguettes and small pizzas. For this they have 20 minutes. This break was observed during the visit. The whole process of



food purchase and consumption appeared frenetic, a sense reinforced by the apparent absence of any teaching or support staff from the dining area.

One of the reasons the school was visited was to see its use of a cashless system and to gauge the views of staff on it. The cashless system is centred on two “revaluers” into which the pupil places their money thus enabling a swipe card to be credited. It was noted that largely due to the location of the school, pupils rarely had money to put a week or month’s credit on their card. They were thus bringing sufficient money for one day’s food, placing it in the revalue and having their card accredited accordingly. This approach appears to undermine one of the key, stated benefits that a cashless system is said to bring ie removing the need for the pupil to carry cash so reducing the potential for bullying and theft. The only benefit that the cashless system operated in this school appears to bring is that it removes the need for kitchen staff to handle cash. The feeling was that whilst cashless systems may be appropriate and beneficial for some schools it was not right for Manor Park.

The school currently allows pupils off the premises at lunchtime. It is recognised that many pupils walk to the local chip shop where they can buy a 50p cone of chips. It is planned that from September 07, Key Stage 3 children will not be able to leave the school at lunchtime. It remains to be seen whether this will lead to an increase in take-up of the school meals service. This is a possibility although it is equally as likely that pupils will bring packed lunches.

It was observed that the dining facilities did little to promote the school meals service. There were few signs and little in the way of material to enthuse pupils. The facilities have been added to in recent years with an extension to the dining hall. This extension was built a number of years ago and now looks somewhat shabby. It was this apparent lack of marketing and the unattractive environment that was considered to be a major disincentive to pupils.

### **Visit to Stratford High School 30.5.07**

Stratford High School was built 5 years ago. It is a non-selective state secondary school with circa 1300 pupils on its roll. The site accommodates pupils from year 7 to 13.

In terms of meal provision, the school is interesting in that from the start it has used private catering firms as opposed to Warwickshire County Catering. The meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> June was held with Valerie Hopkins the school’s Business Manager.

The contract for catering is with Duchy (formerly called Kite). This contract is due for renewal and the school is, using a consultant, overseeing a tendering process. To date nine catering companies have expressed an interest in the contract although this has now been reduced to six going through to the next round.

The current contract operates on a profit sharing basis. If Duchy makes any profit it shares this with the school on a 65/35% basis (Duchy getting the higher proportion). If the company makes a loss, there is no requirement for the school to help make up the loss. The imbalance is the result of the school not having to pay any management overheads.

Take up of the school meals provided currently runs at approximately 60%. 80 pupils are registered for free school meals although 15 of these rarely have them. The school uses a

cashless system. This is regarded as successful. As part of the negotiation of the catering contract, two “validators” were provided for the pupils to place credit on their swipe cards. Unlike Manor Park in Nuneaton, most of the pupils will add a week’s worth of credit or even more to their card at one go. This means that they do not constantly have to bring cash into school on a daily basis. As with other cashless systems it is possible for parents and carers to request print-offs of their children’s purchases. However, these are rarely requested.

Meals are served during the hour-long lunch break with 3 sittings being summonsed to the dining hall by tannoy. Pupils have to queue for little over five minutes for their meals and those not wanting a full cooked meal can use a second servery for the procurement of sandwiches and other cold food. No crisps or fizzy drinks are sold on site and pupils in years 7 to 10 are not generally allowed off the school site during lunchtime. It is acknowledged that as older pupils are allowed off site they frequently walk to a local supermarket to buy their lunch.

Eight cooks work in the kitchen. They are supervised by a senior cook/manager who also provides a communications link with the school’s Business Manager. Duchy also employs a regional manager who also visits the school on a regular basis.

Valerie Hopkins explained that she is generally happy with the way school meals are managed at Stratford High. Duchy provides generally nutritious foods that are appealing to the pupils. There have been minor operational issues with the catering firm but it is acknowledged that this is to some extent inevitable.

Overall, there was a feeling that systems and approaches that are right for one school may not be right for another and that no single approach should be adopted to address issues of demand.

### **Visit to Rugby High School 6.6.07**

Rugby High School is a selective all girls Grammar establishment with a roll of 740. Accommodating years 7 to 13 the school was built in 1960. The school does not use a Warwickshire County Caterers or indeed one of the major independent catering companies such as “Duchy”. Rather, in the Summer of 2006, the school appointed its own catering manager who is responsible for overseeing all aspect of school meal provision from sourcing supplies to developing new menus and to cooking the meals. Demand for school meals fluctuates throughout the school year. In the winter the dining hall sees approximately 400 customers and serves 200 hot meals. In the summer these figures reduce to 185 customers and 100 hot meals.

All meals are produced fresh each day and in the winter soup is produced for the mid morning break. The catering manager has been able to identify a small number of local suppliers. A considerable amount of his time is spent liaising with these companies to ensure that the quality of the products is maintained at the right price.

Under the previous arrangements meals were charged for in a complex fashion. I.e. a sachet of sauce would cost 10p and this would go towards the final bill. Under the new arrangements students have a main course accompanied by a carbohydrate and choice of two vegetables for £1.60 and can add a piece of fresh fruit (30p) or a pudding (40p). All sandwiches are £1.00 regardless of filling.

A typical lunch choice would be lamb hot pot or vegetable plait, cheddar mash and vegetables/small salad followed by baked rice pudding or fruit. Pupils are not allowed to buy just a pudding. They must have the main course to have a pudding.

No confectionary is sold in the school. Vending machines are used but only to sell "healthy" drinks such as those that are milk based or contain just fruit

The dining hall at the school is quite small and is poorly laid out. At peak times this can lead to excessive queuing. At Easter 2007 it was repainted in a scheme proposed and agreed by pupils. This has served to freshen the environment up and make it more welcoming.

The school runs a School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG). This has undertaken a student survey revealing generally high levels of satisfaction with the service.

One area of continuing concern for the school is the layout and condition of the kitchens. These have not been subject to a major upgrade during their 44 year history and it is thought that the gas cookers are the originals. Much of the equipment in the kitchen is either worn out or inappropriate. This means that scarce resources have to be used to ensure that the machinery keeps running. The layout of cooking area and storage areas is inefficient whilst the absence of a dedicated chilled storage room means that food cannot be stored for more than a day or so. Extraction systems are either inadequate or do not work at all. This can lead to excessive heat build up especially in the summer and the accumulation of cooking smells.

### **Visit to Campion School, Leamington Spa 3.7.07**

Campion School is located in an area of Leamington Spa developed in the 1960s and 70s and characterised by relatively high levels of deprivation and an increasing migrant population. Until three years ago the school had been struggling to maintain its roll with parents preferring to send their children to schools in other parts of Leamington or Warwick. The Head teacher, Andrew Chubb, has since joining the school worked hard to improve the teaching and learning environment in the school in the belief that this will serve to improve his pupils' life chances and increase the attractiveness of the school to potential pupils and their parents/carers. The school currently has around 540 pupils.

One element of the school day that Mr Chubb has sought to improve is lunchtime. Provision of good school meals is regarded very much as a partnership between Warwickshire County Caterers and the school. This appears to work well with the school's management, catering staff and officers based at Shire Hall all working together to provide meals that are nutritious and attractive.

Lunchtime is comparatively short lasting 40 minutes and pupils receive their meals in sittings. Meals are served via a serving hatch in a small dining hall. The panel noted that the school has invested in new tables with integrated seats, tablecloths and even (artificial) flowers to go on the tables. Staff regularly have their lunch in the dining hall whilst the Head teacher dines with his pupils as frequently as he can.

The relatively high level of deprivation means that many pupils are entitled to free school meals. Take up of these is considered to be high.

The panel was interested in the effect that having a major supermarket (Asda) has on levels of demand for school meals. It learned that whilst pupils do visit the store before and after school, restrictions on pupils leaving the school at lunchtime mean that incidents of pupils purchasing their school lunch at lunchtime was limited.

The atmosphere in the dining hall on the day of the visit was atypical. This was because many pupils were out of school on trips. In addition, year 11 and 13 pupils had left the school following their exams.

The panel selected a combination of hot meals and sandwiches. Being served relatively late in the lunch time the panel noted that choice was limited. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that with fewer meals being prepared it was more difficult to gauge the level of demand. The panel agreed that the meals they had were tasty and attractive.

The school has recognised the benefits of cashless systems and is keen to introduce one at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **Sample school lunch at Shire Hall 16.1.07**

On 16<sup>th</sup> January 2007 members of the review panel were provided with a school meal at Shire Hall. The purpose of this exercise was to enable Members to focus on the food itself and not be distracted by consideration of dining facilities or pupil behaviour. Sandra Russell and her team brought along airline style trays and cutlery to show the members (although the meals were served on china plates). Members found the main course and pudding to be pleasant and satisfying. During the meal Mrs Russell informed the Members on the various methods used to increase the nutritional value of the meals without pupils being aware. For example, carrot is grated into spaghetti sauce and fruit is finely chopped before being added to sponge puddings. The meal served was exactly the same as had been prepared and served in Warwickshire schools the previous day.

### Review of Good Practice around the Country - Summary

An extensive examination of practices adopted around the country was undertaken as part of this review. The report considered by Members ran to many pages so has not been included in full in this report. Below, however, are the salient points considered by the panel.

#### 1. Good Practice

##### Wolverhampton

- Use of swipe card system
- £25,000 from the Big Lottery Fund's 5-a-day budget.
- Cards record pupil choices with rewards for healthy eating
- Cards reduce stigma of free school meals
- Twelve more schools to be equipped with cashless systems using, in-part, School Meals Grant

##### Essex

- Seeks to communicate and share service improvements
- Set up School Meals Support Group with partners
- Chefs hold sampler sessions at parents evenings
- Termly headteacher meetings used to disseminate information and gain heads' support.
- Catering adviser appointed
- Plans to create ten School Meals Support Manager Posts working with clusters of twenty schools
- Dedicated website launched to support headteachers and catering staff

##### Ealing

- Paper records replaced with Cypad
- Videophones installed in kitchens
- New salad bars, bench skates and hot mobile service counters introduced
- Zip "n" steam

## Sunderland

- “Passport to Health”. Free school meals for a week and a free swim for every child
- Taster sessions at parent’s evenings and a telephone survey to determine the best way to access parents
- Joint work with Sunderland Football Club with incentive schemes.
- Two day “sales pitch” in local sports hall.
- £7000 regional radio campaign
- School dinner menu published in local Saturday papers
- “Grab and go”. Quick and easy take out food.
- Pupil questionnaires with incentive vouchers.
- Pricing strategy introduced to cover deficits
- Council encouraged headteachers to impose “lock-in” lunchtimes and enforce two-mile “exclusion zones”.
- “Think whole school/ whole authority approach : you must let go of the baggage restricting you to school meals or catering. This issue is much bigger than that”

## St. Aidan’s School, Harrogate

(Note to Members – St.Aidan’s is an affluent school in an affluent area. What it has achieved is commendable but not typical)

- School secured a loan of £250,000 from the LEA with a further loan of £250,000 from other sources
- Meals cost £1.60. Average spend is £2-£3.
- 90% take-up of school meals service.
- Cashless system that cost £20,000 is used.
- Students pay £2 for breakages.
- Food purchases are monitored with thirty reports a month being sent to parents and carers.
- Class 1 fruit and veg is used for general cookery but class 3 is used in soups.

## Sheffield

- Headteacher school meals survey
- Parent/carer/pupil survey sent to 28,000 homes (5,000 response)
- School meals summit with senior stakeholders
- Two-day marquee event in Sheffield city centre with taster sessions
- Review procedure to track and monitor school meal developments and performance.
- Subsidies given to schools not catered for through the central contract so that they can still meet cost of delivering service.
- Partnership considered crucial
- But – One school using cashless system encountered complaints, broken cards and creation of black market. System was withdrawn.

## 2. Reviews

### Bath and North East Somerset

- Recommended that a LEA policy on school meals be created.
- Schools to increase integration between those taking school lunch and those taking sandwiches.
- Multiple use of school kitchens ie as a resource for food tech. teaching initially advocated but dismissed as too complicated.
- Merits of forging links with local suppliers acknowledged. Food should be produced locally.
- Training programme advocated for school cooks
- Schools to be encouraged to spend capital money on good multi-use dining facilities.
- Need to recognise that additional equipment will need to be purchased in order to deliver changes. Quality of school meals should be regularly monitored initially by Trading Standards.
- Executive asked to consider implementing measures to ease burden on families with more than one child taking school meals.
- Menus should be dated rather than headed “week 1, week 2” etc.
- Three ways of managing increased costs – rise in cost to parents, improved take up and absorption of some of the increase by LEA

### Middlesbrough

- Need to maximise take up of free school meals
- Parents should be able to sample food at their child’s school.
- Building Schools for the Future programme – Imperative that such schools include full kitchen facilities to allow for preparation of hot meals on site.

### Wakefield

- Focus on value for money
- The location of schools and the distribution of shops and other eating outlets in the locality can impact on policies relating to pupils going off-site at lunchtime and take up of school meals.
- Cost of cashless systems was prohibitive (£25k for secondary, £8k for primary).
- A private caterer funded cashless systems in every secondary school with a service level agreement of five years or more.
- Schools have an important role to play in educating children re school meals.
- Cost of each meal is £1.20.
- The Committee were unable to comment on meal pricing in its examination of value for money as information relating to the actual cost of producing the school meal was withheld on the grounds of commercial confidentiality. (!!!)
- Queues could be reduced if schools staggered lunch breaks in 15 minute intervals.
- Cashless systems reduce the length of time spent queuing
- Hull City Council is proposing to give all children free school meals

## Aberdeenshire

- Catering needs to be located in the Education and Recreation Service
- Staffing levels at each school should be reviewed to ensure that they are matched to the number of meals sold
- A five year business plan is required which would include a detailed financial improvement plan and give commitment to delivering the service's vision. This will need to articulate the process of change management required in order to achieve the service's aims.
- An Asset Management Plan is required to prioritise expenditure funded from the Schools Fund.
- The Council agreed to lobby for additional capital funding for schools to address the need for investment in kitchen and dining areas so as to improve take-up of school meals.
- The Catering Service manages the school crossing patrols.



## Results from School Food Trust Survey

## Appendix 5

Percentage of caterers identifying particular reasons believed to have contributed to a fall in demand for school meals in 2005-2006, primary and secondary schools in England

Reason	Primary			Secondary				
	identifying reason as contributing to fall in demand	ranking reason 1st	ranking reason 2nd	ranking reason 3rd	identifying reason as contributing to fall in demand	ranking reason 1st	ranking reason 2nd	ranking reason 3rd
Increase in prices charged due to inflation (wages etc.)	34.4	4.7	13.1	9.8	28.4	7.0	3.2	11.2
Increase in prices charged due to use of better quality ingredients	14.3	1.8	1.9	0.0	17.0	1.7	0.5	0.0
Increase in prices charged due to increase in quantity of labour required for meal provision	3.9	0.0	0.0	0.8	2.8	0.0	0.0	2.5
Increase in prices charged due to increased training provision	3.3	5.2	0.0	0.0	2.0	1.2	0.0	0.0
Provision of more 'healthy' options in the last year resulting in pupils buying meals elsewhere	28.6	2.1	2.5	0.0	52.1	10.9	18.0	13.5
Provision of more 'healthy' options in the last year resulting in pupils bringing in packed lunches	55.0	5.4	13.8	30.0	38.0	1.8	9.3	4.0
Pupil numbers have stayed about the same, but pupils are purchasing meals less frequently	17.8	0.0	0.0	2.2	16.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Number of pupils buying meals has gone down	36.1	3.8	2.1	2.5	33.3	9.2	4.5	3.4
Disruption in facilities for provision (e.g. kitchen refurbishment)	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.1	0.0	0.0	3.9
Parents providing packed lunches	44.0	1.8	6.4	6.6	11.4	0.0	1.8	1.9
Meal quality has fallen	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Parents' perception of poor quality provision	56.9	3.8	45.8	3.5	37.6	1.5	22.7	14.5
Pupils' perception of poor quality provision	11.1	0.0	0.0	4.2	27.4	1.6	14.7	2.1
A fall in pupil numbers on roll who would pay for meals	37.6	1.2	3.0	13.0	34.6	0.0	5.7	16.5
A fall in pupil numbers eligible for FSM	37.6	0.8	2.3	4.4	36.8	2.1	0.7	5.2
Media coverage of school dinners	72.5	69.4	4.5	9.1	63.2	50.9	17.1	8.7
Increase in locally available options for pupils to buy food (e.g. food vans, local shops)	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.5	0.0	0.8	2.8
Organisation of meals acts as a deterrent (e.g. longer queues, change in timetable)	10.4	0.0	1.6	6.6	33.4	4.9	1.0	7.8
Changes in food provision as a result of formal consultation with schools, heads and staff, governors, LA's	21.5	0.0	3.0	6.2	23.3	7.4	0.0	1.9
Changes in food provision as a result of formal consultation with parents	10.4	0.0	0.0	1.1	9.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Changes in food provision as a result of formal consultation with pupils	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	3.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
		100%	100%	100%		100%	100%	100%

**Percentage of caterers identifying particular reasons believed to have contributed to a steady or increased demand for school meals in 2005-2006, primary and secondary schools in England**

Reason	Primary			Secondary				
	identifying reason as contributing to constant/rising demand	ranking reason 1st	ranking reason 2nd	ranking reason 3rd	identifying reason as contributing to constant/rising demand	ranking reason 1st	ranking reason 2nd	ranking reason 3rd
No change in prices	26.9	33.9	4.7	4.8	15.2	22.3	1.9	6.3
Improved meal quality offset by prices being held constant	41.5	12.7	51.3	5.7	26.3	23.3	24.6	4.5
Provision of more healthy options	37.7	14.7	2.5	28.3	20.6	4.1	13.6	33.4
Provision of healthy options only	12.5	0.0	5.6	2.8	3.0	0.0	1.5	0.0
School policy (whole school food approach (e.g. locking school gates, teaching about healthy eating)	43.2	24.8	5.0	18.6	34.7	31.7	9.2	17.1
Removal of vending machines	4.3	0.0	1.6	2.4	5.7	0.0	6.0	4.7
Better trained staff	16.6	3.0	5.3	7.8	4.6	2.4	1.9	0.0
More staff	3.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Improvement in facilities for provision (e.g. new kitchen/dining room)	19.2	6.9	16.9	9.5	26.6	9.2	26.7	18.0
Increased eligibility for or take up of FSM	5.4	2.6	1.2	1.7	4.3	3.3	0.0	1.9
Increase in pupil numbers on roll who pay for meals	11.4	0.0	2.5	11.9	9.0	0.0	3.8	9.2
Reorganisation of arrangements for meals (e.g. shorter queues, change in timetable)	12.0	0.0	2.2	5.0	11.4	0.0	10.4	4.0
Media coverage of school meals	12.7	0.7	1.2	0.0	5.6	1.4	0.0	0.0
Other	5.6	0.7	0.0	1.7	6.3	2.3	0.4	0.8
		100%	100%	100%		100%	100%	100%

base (unweighted): 98 primary; 84 secondary  
Source – School Food Trust

Warwickshire County Caterers  
*Primary School  
 Lunch Menu*



*Good Food : Good Health : Good Behaviour : Good Learning*

Wholemeal bread and chilled water is available throughout lunch

Week One	Week Two	Week Three	Week Four
<p><b>Monday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Cottage Pie &amp; Gravy            Carrots and Cabbage            Chocolate Sponge &amp; Chocolate Sauce            Fruit Juice or Chilled Water</p> <p><b>Tuesday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            ***Lemon Sole Grill            Chipped Potatoes            Sweetcorn or Green Salad            Fruit Crumble &amp; Custard            Chilled Water</p> <p><b>Wednesday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Sliced Pork, Apple Sauce &amp; Gravy            New Potatoes            Broccoli or Sliced Carrots            Rice Pudding with Chocolate Buttons            Fruit Juice or Chilled Water</p> <p><b>Thursday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Sausages and Gravy            Diced Potatoes            Peas or Mixed Vegetables            Iced Sponge Cake            Milk, Milkshake or Water</p> <p><b>Friday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Tuna &amp; Sweetcorn Pizza            Sauté Potatoes            Baked Beans or Fruity Coleslaw            Ice Cream Tub            Fruit Juice or Chilled Water</p>	<p><b>Monday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Totally Chicken &amp; Gravy            Duchesse Potatoes            Peas or Carrots &amp; Swede            Eves Pudding &amp; Custard            Chilled Water</p> <p><b>Tuesday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Lamb Hot Pot            Jacket Potato            Cauliflower or Golden Salad            Syrup Sponge &amp; Custard            Fruit Juice or Chilled Water</p> <p><b>Wednesday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Sliced Turkey &amp; Gravy            Roast Potatoes            Broccoli or Sliced Carrots            Raisin Cookie            Milk, Milkshake or Water</p> <p><b>Thursday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            ***Haddock Fillet Bites            Chipped Potatoes            Peas &amp; Sweetcorn or Baked Beans            Lemon Sponge &amp; Custard            Fruit Juice or Chilled Water</p> <p><b>Friday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Sausages &amp; Bacon Rolls            Roasted New Potatoes            Mixed Vegetables or Cabbage            Chocolate Ice Cream Roll            Fruit Juice or Chilled Water</p>	<p><b>Monday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            ***Salmon Fillet Nibbles            Potato Bites            Carrots or Green Beans            Apple Crumble &amp; Custard            Chilled Water</p> <p><b>Tuesday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Sliced Beef &amp; Gravy            Yorkshire Pudding            Parsley Potatoes            Sweetcorn or Carrots &amp; Swede            Cheese &amp; Biscuits            Fruit Juice or Chilled Water</p> <p><b>Wednesday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Spaghetti Bolognese            Garlic Bread Roll            Peas or Green Salad            Chocolate Banana Flapjack            Milk, Milkshake or Water</p> <p><b>Thursday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Chicken Fillet &amp; Gravy            Roast Potatoes            Broccoli or Cabbage            Sultana Sponge &amp; Custard            Fruit Juice or Water</p> <p><b>Friday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            ***Giant Cod Fish Finger            Chipped Potatoes            Baked Beans or Mixed Salad            Oaty Fruit Crunch &amp; Custard            Chilled Water</p>	<p><b>Monday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Pure Organics            Chipolatas &amp; Gravy            Jacket Wedge Potatoes            Carrots or Sweetcorn            Honey &amp; Raisin Bar            Milk, Milkshake or Water</p> <p><b>Tuesday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Lasagne            Garlic Bread Roll            Mixed Vegetables or Celery, Apple &amp; Carrot Salad            Frozen Yoghurt            Fruit Juice or Chilled Water</p> <p><b>Wednesday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Real Chicken Nuggets            Sauté Potatoes            Broccoli or Coleslaw Salad            Bananas with Chocolate Custard            Chilled Water</p> <p><b>Thursday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Pure Organics Meatballs and Gravy            Pasta            Peas or Baked Beans            Lemon Tart &amp; Custard            Fruit Juice or Water</p> <p><b>Friday</b>            Fruit &amp; Vegetable Crudité's            Breaded Fish Fillet            Chipped Potatoes            Sweetcorn or Green Beans            Fruit Jelly            Milk, Milkshake or Water</p>



Find out more at [www.warwickshire.gov.uk/schoolmeals](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/schoolmeals)  
 Contact us at [countycaterers@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:countycaterers@warwickshire.gov.uk)  
 Your views and ideas are always welcome

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### Recommendations for University of Central England Study – “Action for School Meals”

1. **Repaint and decorate the hall with bright colours** – Primary research shows that the majority of children were unhappy with the appearance of the dinner hall.
2. **Banish plastic Trays** – Positive results from the fine diners incentive shows that eating from plates increases the enjoyment of the dinner time experience.
3. **Direct mail to parents** – highlighting the negative aspects of lunchboxes. According to The Trading Standards Lunchbox survey 2006, 92% of lunchboxes are too high in fat, salt and sugar. A Mintel report shows that mothers are beginning to believe school meals are more healthy and once initial resistance wears off amongst school children, mothers may take advantage of the convenience of not having to pack lunches.
4. **Introduction of character/mascot** – results from our questionnaire shows that the majority of younger children were in favour of the introduction of a character/mascot in the promotion of school dinners. Due to the recent trend in comic book heroes being adapted to the big screen, the introduction of a superhero mascot would be an appropriate choice.
5. **Production of comic** – This will include a comic strip menu and related articles to healthy eating and school activities. The comic strip could be designed by students from local universities as the work would look good in their portfolio upon graduation. The reason for this comic book will be to generate appeal for school dinners amongst pupils. Magazines have been found to be a popular form of promotion amongst children. A recent Which? Survey showed children are particularly perceptive to ‘cool’ promotion.
6. **Sponsorship** – Sponsorship from a local business e.g. Alton Towers (corporate social responsibility) would feature in the magazine and their logo on sports kits. Free press through P.R.
7. **Vegetarian and religious dietary requirements** – Throughout our primary research concerns were vocalised by several children over the lack of vegetarian options available. Additionally we were informed by kitchen staff that there was no healthy alternatives for those with religious dietary requirements. E.g. Halal Meat.
8. **Coloured Bands/badge** – This will show what meal each individual child is having on that day, in order to reduce waste, bring in an element of fun and possibly lead to the introduction of a third meal choice. This would tie in with the superhero theme e.g. superhero wrist band.
9. **Practical cooking lessons and taste testing** – This would help children understand healthy food and what's going into their meals. This idea is championed by lobby group Children's Food Campaign. (Children's Packed Lunches, Mintel 2006)

10. **Theme days** – our questionnaire highlighted that theme days were a popular incentive for school dinners. In addition to creating an element of fun children will have the opportunity to learn about new cultures and experience alternative healthy foods.
11. **Health week** – a week dedicated to raising awareness and educating children about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. E.G. no junk food all week, encouraged to walk to school, extra sports lessons and guest speakers.
12. **Group incentives** - The aforementioned tactics could incorporate group promotions as an emerald journal showed that children are more relaxed when surrounded by others and are more likely to be receptive to change.

## Long Term

13. **Healthy school status** – all schools in Warwickshire should aim to obtain healthy school status by 2009, one of the main 5 aims in to reduce and in time half childhood obesity. Children's Packed lunches Mintel 2006
14. **Refurbishment of halls, tables and chairs** - An inspector should individually assess each school to see if they require a refurbishment. In particular the introduction of round tables, as our primary research showed that they had a positive effect at dinner time.
15. **Improving kitchen equipment and training kitchen staff** – Research showed that in order to adapt the menu further and introduce more choice improvements are requisite, this would enable all schools to cook on site, ensuring freshness and control
16. **Banning of all unhealthy snacks brought into school including lunchboxes** - it is a requirement of the healthy school status to introduce a lunchbox policy Mintel report – packed lunches 2006
17. **Expanding menu** – one of the main concerns highlighted through our research was the lack of choice available at lunchtime, over the coming years as kitchen standards improve Warwickshire County Caterers should endeavour to implement more meals.
18. **County nutritionist** – in France many schools hire their own school nutritious to work with the parents committee to highlight the benefits of healthy eating Children's Packed Lunches Mintel 2006. A nutritionist should be hired to talk to all the PTA'S and the children within Warwickshire to promote a healthy lifestyle and the benefits of a healthy school dinner
19. **Funding** – the long term recommendations can be supported by government funding, the government has set aside £240 million to subsidise healthy eating in schools and provide extra training for kitchen staff until 2011

## Resources Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 19th September 2006.

### Demand for School Meals

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

#### Recommendation

The Committee is recommended to note the current situation in relation to the trading position of County Caterers, the potential further options for delivery of the School Meals Service, and consider whether it wishes to establish a short life panel to assist in the development of options for the future of the service.

#### 1.0 Introduction

1.1 In 2000 the Council delegated responsibility for the provision of school meals to **all** WCC schools in the County. The responsibility for the provision of meals includes the provision of free school meals and providing facilities for children bringing 'packed lunches' into school.

1.2 Schools have freedom to procure their meals service in a number of ways including:-

- Buy Back services from the Council's County Caterers Service
- Provide a service 'in-house' with school managed staff
- By a contractual arrangement with a private sector catering company

1.3 Currently the breakdown of schools is:-

	County Caterers	In-House	Private Contractor
Primary	188	3	0
Special	10	0	0
Secondary	18	11	8

Note: the remaining primary schools (6) do not currently provide a meals service.

1.4 In general terms this situation has continued since 2000 with limited change in either take-up of meal numbers or change in mix of

provider/supplier. The County Catering Service provides school meals as the major element of its trading base, employing some 750 staff at unit level (334 full time equivalents) plus 20 management and supervisory staff. It has annual expenditure in 2005/06 of £8.5million (Major expenditure block relate to £4.8m for employee costs, £2.8m relating to food costs with the remaining £0.9m relating to a combination of costs including transport, premise and overheads). Financial administration and HR support is provided from within the Resource Directorate.

During 2004 the Government commissioned Kings College to carry out a review of the impact of the implementation of nutritional standards in Secondary Schools from April 2001. This was followed by a second review covering primary schools during 2005/6.

1.6 In October 2004 the Soil Association conducted research (which was widely reported) which seriously questioned the quality of school meals provision. This was followed in February 2005 with a television series from Jamie Oliver, which again in general terms questioned the quality of school meals provision. Whilst the television series centred on one London Borough, public perception seemed to be that school meals across the country provided a low quality service relying heavily on pre-processed food. As was the case in a number of authorities, County Caterers within Warwickshire had however implemented year-on-year improvements for school lunches which made the programme unrepresentative.

1.7 The media picked up on the interest in school meals and the Government responded by launching a review of school meals, which resulted in the publication in October 2005 of a consultation paper (Turning the Tables – Transforming School Meals). In May 2006 the Government published its response to the consultation which broadly set out:-

School lunch standards to be implemented for all schools with:-

Interim food based standards to apply from September 2006 for primary, secondary and special schools

Nutrient based standards for school lunches in:-

Primary Schools – September 2008  
Secondary and Special Schools – September 2009

Set standards for all school food other than lunches – with effect from September 2007. This covers school vending/snack arrangements

In addition the Government has announced two time limited funding streams to assist in improving school meals with resources provided by means of:

Grants to individual schools  
Grants to administering local authorities

1.8 In addition The School Food Trust was set up in 2005 with £15 million of funding from the Department for Education and Skills to promote the education and health of children and young people by improving the quality of food supplied and consumed in schools.

1.9 Following the report '[Turning the Tables: Transforming School Food](#)' published by the School Meals Review Panel in October 2005, the Trust is now charged with taking forward the Panel's recommendations to transform school food and food skills to improve health and education for school age children and young people.

1.10 The School Fund Trust believes that this transformation of school food and food skills is critical to the health of a generation of children and will have a significant impact on our economy.

1.11 The Trust have set themselves four key goals that they will strive to achieve over the next three years:

Ensure all schools meet the food based and nutrient based standards for lunch and non-lunch food

Increase the uptake of school meals

Reduce diet-related inequalities in childhood through food education and school based initiatives

Improve food skills through food education, and school and community initiatives

## **2.0 The Warwickshire Context**

2.1 Whilst the improved awareness of the issue of school meals and healthy eating in general has provided some benefits particularly in relation to improvement funds there has been a marked reduction in customer take up of meals following the Jamie Oliver television series.

2.2 The Local Authorities Catering Association (a national grouping of Council based catering services) estimates that across the country school lunch take-up has declined by between 5 – 15% with a national average of 9%.

2.3 Within Warwickshire school lunch take up in schools where County Caterers is the provider has reduced on average by 8.65%. This reduction in meal numbers has come at the same time as an increased cost base, which reflects:

Increases in food costs both reflecting local demand/quality issues and the national guidance changes outlined earlier

Increased labour costs primarily relating to the implementation in 2001 of a revised pay structure for site based staff



Increased costs associated with improving the skills of staff in order to respond to new service demands/improvements

A reduction in some economies of scale brought about by loss of individual school business

This combination of factors resulted in the County Caterers posting a deficit in 2005/06 of £537,000. This deficit was managed as part of the overall outturn position of the former CAMS department.

2.4 For the current year, based upon the current expected meal numbers, a similar deficit is currently forecast. It should be noted however that this is very much an 'early year' forecast and this position may well change.

2.5 The ability to actively respond to the deficit situation is somewhat constrained by a number of Warwickshire specific factors including:-

The relatively high numbers of schools with no on-site cooking facilities which necessitates the off site preparation and onward transportation.

The compacted lunchtime periods prevalent in a number of secondary schools which can cause workflow planning difficulties alongside a reduced 'opportunity to sell'.

Dining Halls which could be considered 'unfit for purpose' both in terms of suitability and sufficiency.

### **3.0 County Caterers Response to Date**

3.1 County Caterers is working closely with the Children, Young People and Families Directorate in regard to the wider issues connected with the recent focus on improving school meals and preparing for the introduction of the new standards.

3.2 As a separate but linked work stream County Caterers has undertaken a number of measures to assist in the reduction of the operating deficit. These measures include:-

Review of staffing arrangements at both operational and supervisor level which will continue throughout the year.

New menu development with the introduction of revised menus from September 2006. (This work is ongoing and is likely to include further refinement and changes to the cyclic pattern of menu later in the year). A typical primary school menu for September 2006 is attached as Appendix 1.

Increased/improved focus on marketing/promotion and consultation to deliver increased take-up, including improved contact with parents.

Consultancy review of school meals operation to benchmark provision against examples of best practice.

Increase in the price of paid for primary school meal to £1.55 from September 2006 – an increase of 5p over the current price for the majority of county primary schools. This price remains in line with nearby authorities' prices and better reflects the operating costs associated with the service. (The impact of this price increase on meal numbers will be monitored carefully as customer resistance may occur).

3.3 Officers are hopeful that these measures will assist in securing a reduction in the level of deficit. It is imperative however that quality standards are maintained particularly in terms of food procurement, food preparation, and food delivery. In addition it will be important to ensure that customer service remains consistently high.

3.4 Allowing for known or anticipated changes to numbers on roll and pricing changes, any decrease/increase in meal numbers would have the following effect on the forecast deficit. Further improvements to the level of deficit will require additional expenditure control measures.

Meal Numbers	Forecast Deficit
Current level	£538,000
Current level -5%	£601,481
Current level -10%	£671,853
Current level +5%	£456,737
Current level +10%	£390,336

3.5 It should be noted that whilst there is some link between meal numbers and anticipated deficit it is not a direct correlation. This is in the main due to the limited flexibility which exists to reduce certain fixed costs, most notably staffing costs and overheads.

#### **4.0 Potential Options**

4.1 As previously discussed, measures are in hand to try to reduce the current level of deficit. The deficit however remains substantial, and this position is not sustainable. There are a number of potential high level strategic options for the future delivery of the service should the trading base continue to

experience ongoing difficulties. Subject to discussion and consultation with schools options could include:-

#### Externalisation of the service

The service could be offered to a private sector contractor either as a whole service contract or, on a sector or geographical basis. In view of the current national picture of reducing meal numbers however, this may not prove to be particularly attractive to companies and could result either in 'cherry picking' of schools/areas/sectors or could result in schools facing increased management fees for the provision of services.

This option would be a significant procurement exercise and would have considerable employee relations issues.

Cease the opportunity for schools to 'buy back' the service from the County Council; individual schools effectively take direct control of school catering, including the direct employment of site based staff. This option would create significant difficulties for schools with no on-site catering facility. It is also likely that in order to remain cost effective a core central catering support team would be required to provide management/technical advice to schools.

Grow the business to such an extent that the financial deficit reduces to manageable levels. This will require the current business management processes to continue for a period of some years before returning to pre- 'Jamie Oliver' meal numbers. This option would effectively require a continuing central subsidy to support the service through the change management process.

Operate on a wholly commercial basis and withdraw from providing a catering service at schools where income/expenditure cannot be balanced. This option could introduce significant variation in service from area to area and would particularly impact upon schools with no or limited fit for purpose facilities and schools with low numbers on roll.

Provide a partnership-based service to schools that relies on clearly defining the respective roles and responsibilities of both the school and County Caterers. This approach would need to clearly set out the risks/benefits to both parties of any under/over performance in the number of meals delivered and the potential risks that each party would face in that situation. This particular option would undoubtedly impact upon the fair funding formula arrangements applicable for the delivery of school meals.

4.2 A number of these options require further full consideration and detailed consultation with schools about potential implications. Committee is

therefore asked at this stage to note the potential options and provide views on each of the options. The Committee may wish to establish a short-life panel to assist officers in the further consideration of these options.

4.3 Committee will receive a further report later in the year, by which time the effects of the measures outlined in Section 3 in relation to service improvements/operational changes will have become clearer.

David Clarke  
Strategic Director of  
Resources  
Shire Hall  
Warwick

Marion Davis  
Strategic Director of  
Children, Young People & Families  
Saltisford Office Park  
Warwick

## **Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 4th September 2007.**

### **Review of Demand for School Meals**

### **Report of the Chair of the Review of Demand for School Meals Panel**

#### **Recommendation**

That the Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the recommendations contained in the Review of Demand for School Meals Panel's report and passes it to Cabinet for approval.

1. Members will recall that on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2006 this committee considered a joint report from the Strategic Directors for Performance and Development and Resources concerning the challenges facing the County Council's school meals service. At that meeting it was agreed to establish a small panel of six Members that would both explore opportunities for increasing take up of school meals and consider what actions should be taken to address the significant operating deficit being faced by the service.
2. The Review of Demand for School Meals Panel first met in December 2006 when, working with officers, it developed its terms of reference and agreed the timescale for its review. Since January 2007 the panel has met frequently and worked hard to gather information and develop its understanding of the complexities of the service we provide and the factors that determine take up. As well as speaking to practitioners both within Warwickshire and neighbouring authorities the panel has visited a number of schools to experience the dining experience for themselves and speak to catering staff, head teachers, governors and pupils.
3. The panel has noted the efforts being made by Warwickshire County Caterers to further enhance its service. It has also learned of the many barriers that are being or will need to be tackled if the trend of the last two years or so is to be reversed.
4. It is reassuring to report that even as this review has progressed, take up of school meals in the primary sector has increased significantly; something for which our schools and catering staff should feel justly proud. However, demand for meals in secondary schools does continue to fall. This continuing reduction in demand and the pressures that this has placed on our already

overstretched budget has meant that County Caterers has had to consider the future of the service it is able to provide to the secondary sector.

5. The appended report is the result of the work of the Review of Demand for School Meals Panel. The recommendations within the report are considered to be realistic whilst the actions that it is expected will come out of them are achievable. With this committee's agreement and that of the Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee it is expected that the report will be forwarded on to Cabinet for approval.

COUNCILLOR  
HEATHER TIMMS

Shire Hall  
Warwick

27 July 2007

**Comments from the Director of Children, Young People and Families  
on the Report of the Chair of the School Meals Panel  
on the Review on Demand for School Meals**

The Children's Directorate is generally very supportive of the recommendations made in the report, because they should lead to an uptake in the demand for school meals that should address the operating deficit being faced by the catering service and contribute towards healthier pupils in schools.

However, there is a concern regarding the County Council's overall response to the tension between the need for traded services to break even and the acknowledgment that not all schools have equal access to a market of suppliers, should local authority services withdraw from a particular school, area or market. This is particularly important in areas of high deprivation, where private sector providers may not find the market attractive. We believe that Cabinet should also consider this as well as the impact on the catering service. This is particularly important if reconfiguration of financially unviable services has a disproportionate impact on schools in deprived areas and we would request that Cabinet monitor this closely.

Other points are more minor:

**Recommendation E**

The vast majority of funding for Healthy Schools initiatives is grant funded and ring fenced, so whilst we would make all effort to ensure that close partnership between County Catering and Healthy Schools continues and develops, the ability to use ring fenced funding for this is constrained.

**Recommendation C**

It would be difficult for the Strategic Director of Children's Services to administer a questionnaire on school meals, because many schools providing their own catering provision or purchasing from a private sector supplier may already be quite content with current levels of charges and quality of service. Therefore, it would make more sense for this questionnaire to come from Warwickshire County Caterers (as it relates to their provision). The Children's Directorate would obviously assist in ensuring that this questionnaire went out to the right schools as swiftly as possible and would encourage them to respond.

**Recommendation M**

Members will need to note that it is the responsibility of the Governing Body, not the LA, to allocate its resources from the Dedicated Schools Grant to all aspects of running the school, so although the Directorate can encourage schools, ultimate responsibility lies elsewhere. Also, the Dedicated Schools Grant is essentially a revenue grant, whilst upgrading multi use dining facilities

would essentially be a capital issue, perhaps best dealt with via the County Council's Corporate Capital Programme.

### **Recommendations Q, R & T**

Some clarification would be helpful on who should be doing the "encouraging". It would normally be considered that the traded service, working in partnership with School Leaders, would lead on issues such as these, to both mutually improve the trading position as well as enhance the service experience.

There is no mention of the WES Board in the report. The WES Board is the umbrella organisation for all services that trade with schools. It has the knowledge, experience and best practice associated with maintaining a successful partnership relationship with schools. County Catering are represented on the Board. There should be a recommendation that the Catering service works closely with the Board to learn from the experience of others to improve take-up as well as provide guidance to other traded services on how best to manage a situation of diminishing demand.

*John Betts*  
*Head of Service - Resources*  
*17/9/07*



## **Extract from Minutes of Meeting of Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting 4<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

### **4. Review of Demand for School Meals**

The Committee considered the report of Councillor Heather Timms, Chair of the Review of Demand for School Meals Panel.

A panel comprising Members of the Resources, Performance and Development and Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reviewed school meal provision in Warwickshire with a view to increasing demand.

Councillor John Haynes, the Vice-Chair took the Chair for this item.

Following introductory comments from Councillor David Booth, Members discussed several aspects of the report. The following points were noted during the debate:

- It was expected that, following implementation of the Panel's recommendations and depending on demand trend, it could take approximately 18 months for the school meals service provided by County Caterers to break even.
- The demand for school meals was a national problem.
- Any increase in the cost of individual meals had a temporary impact in reducing demand and income.
- There were difficulties in obtaining financial information about the private provision of school meals owing to commercial sensitivities although the review had obtained some information from schools who used private meals providers.
- Schools could choose which provider they wished to use for school meals.
- There could be equal pay implications for the meals service.
- There was a need for active collaboration between schools and parents towards healthy eating.
- It was suggested that consideration should be given to introducing a specific compulsory lunch period at all schools for both hot meals and packed lunches, so as to give equal play/free time to pupils no matter what type of lunch they had.

The Committee expressed its appreciation to the Working Group and officers, in particular Paul Williams from the Scrutiny Team.

The Committee supported the recommendations contained in the Review of Demand for School Meals Panel's report and recommended them to Cabinet for approval.

## Extract from Minutes of Meeting of Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting 19<sup>th</sup> September 2007

### 6. Review of Demand for School Meals

Members considered the Report of the Chair of the School Meals Panel outlining a review of school meal provision in Warwickshire with a view to increasing demand. It was noted that this report had been considered by the Resources, Performance and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who had recommended its endorsement by the Cabinet. A Briefing Note was circulated setting out comments from the Director of Children, Young People and Families on the report, which would be included in the report to the Cabinet.

Councillor Heather Timms (Chair of the Panel) made the following points:

- a. The significant operating deficit being faced by the service was not sustainable and the Panel had looked at how best to work towards reducing that deficit.
- b. There appeared to be no one solution and the recommendations encouraged better partnership arrangements between the Directorate and Schools, the different Directorates within the County and involving young people and parents.
- c. Councillor Timms thanked Michelle McHugh and Paul Williams for ably supporting the Panel and to Members for their contributions and exemplary attendance.

Phil Evans added:

- i. The current deficit for the service was £250,000, approximately 90% of which was from school meals.
- ii. At the end of the last school year there were some signs of recovery in the primary sector but the secondary sector remained in a difficult position.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

1. The Panel visited schools that used the service as well as schools who had opted out. It was clear that where school meals had been integrated into the whole school experience, there was a significant increase in uptake.
2. The arrangements that were in place as past of the WES arrangements reflected a number of areas, some of which were not directly related to the provision of meals. It was noted that where these contracts were in place and demand fell causing gaps, these costs currently fell directly on the providers (County Caterers).
3. It was the decision of the Governing Body of each school to decide whether to enter into a contract with WES. As WES was required to

run as a business on a commercial basis, when remedial action had to be taken, this was usually only done following a long period of dialogue with the school concerned.

4. Members noted their concern at the possible impact on schools and young people, particularly in deprived areas, if services were withdrawn and the need for these judgements to be made taking into account the bigger picture.
5. Members commended the excellent report, and were pleased to note that the views of children and young people had been considered.
6. There was some discussion around the impact of locking school gates during the school day. Mark Gore noted that this was a decision that was made by Head Teachers and Governors, but that there was a need to look at the advice given to schools in terms of their duty of care.

The Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to:

- support the recommendations contained in the Review of Demand for Schools Meals Panel's report and to pass the report to Cabinet for approval.
- Note the comments of the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families and to forward these to the Cabinet.