

Committee: **Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services**

Date: **16 June 2005**

Title: **Centrally managed school meals service in East Sussex**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Purpose: **To update the committee on meals service standards and developments and to inform on the findings and recommendations of the School Meals Review Group**

---

**RECOMMENDATIONS -**

- 1. To endorse the approach to further develop the support being provided by the departmental team to East Sussex schools**
  - 2. Following an introductory period of six months, to review the overall provision of support to schools regarding food and health related issues with a view to ensuring that approaches and advice being provided to schools is consistent and clear.**
- 

**1. Background and Supporting Information**

1.1 The attached report was considered by the Cabinet on 5 April 2005 and the approach being taken by the department was positively received. The report is therefore being referred to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

1.2 The Committee is invited to comment upon the report, which advises on the findings and subsequent implementation of initiatives identified by the School Meals Review Group and further reports on the Council's work in relation to supporting schools with food issues in general during period of heightened media attention.

1.3 It is now important that links are established between the work of the Contracts Management (Catering) Team, the CfBT Healthy Schools Team and the NHS based 'Food in Schools Co-ordinator who has recently been appointed. All of these have a remit to support schools in connection with food and health issues in some way and schools need to have a clear understanding of the range of support that is available.

DENISE STOKOE  
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Jane Carter, Contracts Manager (Catering), Children's Services Department  
Tel: 01273 482513

School Meals review group outcomes and recommendations – June 2005

Results of the Countywide survey of pupils /parents undertaken in October 2004

- 54 out of 159 schools in total returned completed surveys.
- 2127 adult returns and 2915 pupil returns were processed

**Adult survey results**

58% have children that use the school lunch service						
Reasons for the 42% not using the service: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 30% prefer packed lunch</li> <li>➤ 7% consider that they are not healthy</li> <li>➤ 5% say they are too expensive</li> </ul>						
87% eat beef at home and 73% support beef being re-introduced on menus						
6% of respondents had children with special diet requirements						
73% support a higher proportion of home made dishes / 22% think this is currently about right.						
58% would support a price increase for organic / local produce as follows: <table> <tr> <td>0 -10p -</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10-20p -</td> <td>21%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20p + -</td> <td>20%</td> </tr> </table>	0 -10p -	4%	10-20p -	21%	20p + -	20%
0 -10p -	4%					
10-20p -	21%					
20p + -	20%					

**Pupil Survey**

64% pupils consider meals to be healthy
61% say they eat their vegetables
45% sometimes have fruit instead of pudding
8% say they don't have time to eat their meal
6% think meals are never tasty
23% don't feel full up

Follow up to survey results and School Meals Review Group outcomes:

- Increased proportion of fresh ingredients/ produce used within menus introduced in June 2005, 80% of main dishes are now home made.
- Phasing in jacket potato/ ploughman's options in favour of choice option where schools operate this service style. The choice option has historically tended to have a higher level of processed items available to pupils to select from.

- Established development /tasting sessions to coincide with new menu cycles involving pupils, parents and teachers
- Undertaken a review of the quality of meals in schools where meals are prepared and transported in from another school production kitchen
- Developed a refresher craft skills training programme for cooks in partnership with Initial. Delivery of this training has now been completed for all East Sussex primary and special school cooks
- Reviewed the support service provision for schools from the contracts management team to focus on strengthening support to schools with a wider and more comprehensive package encompassing whole school food related issues.
- Set up a benchmarking group with the following southern local authorities - Kent, Bexley, Medway, Brighton & Hove, West Sussex, Essex.
- Responded to DfES consultation concerning the establishment of a national School Food Trust and Jane Carter has volunteered to be a board member on behalf of East Sussex.
- The group agreed to recommend to all participating schools an extension for the Initial contract by one further year to August 2007. If agreed by schools the additional extension period will be used to develop and trial a new menu specification featuring an even greater proportion of home made dishes, locally sourced ingredients and higher quality raw ingredients.
- From September the Children's Services Department Catering Contracts Support team will become 'Food Management Advisory Services' and the structure of the team will be sub-divided into 2 clear units of 'School Advisory' and 'Strategy'.

The vision of the team is as set out below:

***"It is our goal to continuously support schools and other customers with professional guidance and advice on the development and management of school and community food & health issues that aid the development and sustainability of a whole school approach. Our services meet Best Value criteria, promote the values of the Children's Services Department and are financed to on a 'not for profit' basis"***

## **School Meals in East Sussex – Update**

Following the 'Jamie's School Dinners' T.V Programme and the Government announcement of additional funding for school meals there has been intense public, political and media interest in the subject of school meals. I thought members would appreciate an update on the position in East Sussex.

### Summary of the Main Points

- Almost all East Sussex schools provide free fruit daily to infant pupils.
- The overwhelming majority of primary schools, 15 secondary schools and all special schools are in our corporate contract with Initial Catering Ltd, running until August 2006.
- Our primary meals exceed the Government's food based standards and meet the more demanding nutritionally based 'Caroline Walker' standards for school meals.
- 40% of children in primary and special schools eat school meals daily. 14% of all primary children in the county are entitled to free school meals.
- Around 70% of primary meals are cooked from fresh ingredients on the premises.
- Our contractor does not use 'turkey twizzlers' (as featured on TV) nor mechanically recovered meat. Where 'breaded' products are used, they are specifically produced for schools with added fish oil or iron, reduced fat, salt and sugar and are always baked, never fried.
- We have had a successful pilot of a secondary school introducing 'Jamie Oliver' style healthy menus.
- The school meals contract is very competitively priced, and the price to parents is one of the lowest in the country at £1.40\*\*. One consequence of this is an ingredients cost of 44p\*\* per primary meal, higher than the 37p in Jamie Oliver's programme, but still in the lowest quartile of all authorities.
- Kitchen facilities in our schools have been maintained and equipped to a much higher standard than in many LEAs (for example West Sussex, where kitchens have been removed from primary schools altogether).
- Nevertheless, there have been concerns expressed by head teachers and governors about the poor quality of some school meals. In response to this we established a School Meals Review Group last autumn which has already come up with many of the recommendations arising from Jamie Oliver's programme. We are well positioned to take advantage of the newly announced government funding and significantly improve quality, nutrition and proportion of fresh ingredients.
- We develop primary and special school menus in close consultation with parents and pupils and hold regular tasting sessions to assess new recipes and products.

### Background information

#### **1 The East Sussex School Meals Contract**

All schools have funding for meals in their delegated budgets. They are free to choose whether to make their own arrangements or join the corporate arrangements, which is divided into two contracts: one for primary and special schools, one for secondary schools.

The current contracts began with Initial Catering Ltd in 2001. At that time a very keen contract price was achieved, making substantial savings on the previous contract. These savings have been passed on to schools as part of their delegated funds through successive years of passporting budgets to schools.

All East Sussex primary and special schools opted for the corporate contract, with the exception of Little Common School, Bexhill, who made their own arrangements, and the 4 primary schools covered by the Peacehaven PFI contract, which included catering. 15

secondary schools opted for the corporate contract, 11 made their own arrangements and Peacehaven Community School is covered by the PFI contract. The Initial contracts were due to expire in July 2005. Following consultation with schools, this contract has been extended until August 2006, with the option of a further 1 year extension to August 2007.

Since the contract was signed, labour costs have increased at a much faster rate than inflation, mainly due to the introduction of the minimum wage. In light of this, in 2003 the Council agreed to an increase of 5p above RPI inflation to the price of meals. This has helped settle workforce retention and stability issues. This is of particular significance because there is substantial evidence that a good cook/supervisor can greatly improve the quality of meals in a school.

## **2 Primary / Special Schools Menus and Nutrition**

The service available to primary pupils consists of a hot two course meal with a vegetarian option. Fresh fruit is offered daily as an alternative to the pudding choice in all schools. Most participating schools have opted for a 'traditional' primary school menu. This menu is developed with Initial to exceed the food based standards set by the government and to comply with the nutritionally based Caroline Walker standards for school meals. There are a high proportion of dishes cooked from fresh ingredients on the premises on the menu and these are highlighted as such within the menu details that are distributed via schools to all parents. A number of larger schools operate a choice menu – i.e. 2 choices + a vegetarian alternative.

## **3 Secondary School Menus and Nutrition**

Each of the secondary schools within the contractual arrangements is managed and financed on an individual basis. Costs and expenditure are managed on behalf of these schools within their delegated funding allocations. Throughout the life of this Contract, where pupil meal uptake is good, schools can benefit from substantial annual financial returns. Schools are encouraged to re-invest these surpluses in service initiatives. All secondary schools offer a cafeteria style menu with a range of choices

Recently there has been a high level of interest from schools wishing to develop and tailor services towards a healthier approach, which we have actively supported.

Willingdon Secondary School was used to launch a 'healthy secondary school service' pilot in September 2004 and this has been operating successfully to date. This involved transforming the lunch time eating habits of pupils with initiatives such as a range of healthy home made meals, a choice of nutritious salad pots, a jacket potato and pasta bar and a full range of healthy baguettes. Chips are seldom on offer. Other secondary schools are seeking to follow this initiative and there has been a significant increase in the meals uptake and income level at Willingdon Secondary since September.

Secondary Schools within the contract have a low presence of vending machines, and where they exist, they mainly sell healthy vending options.

## **4 Premises issues – Primary and Special Schools**

In general, kitchen premises within East Sussex schools have been well maintained to date and the majority are considered to be in a reasonable state of repair, considerably better than the standards reported in many other authorities. Our worst school kitchen buildings have been replaced over recent years as part of the new deal capital programme. Kitchen equipment has generally been reasonably well maintained and frequently serviced and replaced. It is not considered at this stage that further increases to the level of cooking that are being proposed would create a substantial requirement to further equip kitchens.

## **5 What the Council has already been doing**

The Council has had a School Meals Review Group since autumn 2004, which is attended by LEA officers, head teachers and other stakeholders from across the County. A full county wide survey of parents and pupils was recently commissioned by the group. As a result of this research, initiatives that are currently being implemented are:

- Increasing the proportion of home cooked dishes (currently around 80% on traditional menu);
- Looking for greater local sourcing of produce by the contractor, within limits of EU and competition regulation;
- Increasing the ratio of fresh to frozen vegetables;
- Implementing a countywide cook skills refresher training programme, developing a midday supervisor training programme for school based staff;
- Introducing a main meal filled jacket potato/ploughman's lunch option to approximately 60 schools;
- Providing greater detail of menu content to parents via menu leaflets, website etc.
- Introduce a planned programme of parent taster days within the schools.

The group has established that the current work being undertaken in partnership with Initial Catering Services is having a positive impact. Initial have advised the Council that they would require a further 8p per meal if they were to adapt menus to fully comply with Scotland's 'Hungry for Success' standards.

At the most recent meeting of the group on 3 March 2005, the group opted to recommend to head teacher colleagues, via area heads meetings in June, that a further one year contract extension be granted to Initial, i.e. until August 2007. This would then allow a continuation of the ongoing work developing and tailoring services as required by the government in partnership with our established contracted service provider.

## **6 Priorities as set out within the Government's announcement on 30 March 2005**

Key issues that have been identified to be addressed by the Government's 'Healthy Food in Schools – Transforming School Meals' package from September 2005 are set out below:

- Minimum spend of 50p in primary schools and 60p in secondary schools on ingredients per meal supported by direct government grant to schools;
- Financial support to increase kitchen staff hours allocations and a structured staff training and development programme;
- The introduction of tough new minimum standards for lunches from September 2006;
- A three year programme to support the preparation of meals on school premises;
- The inclusion of a review of the quality of meals to be included within regular Ofsted inspections of schools;
- Establishing a School Food Trust to provide central support and advice to schools and to parents.

The full details of these proposals have yet to be fleshed out. However, a rise from 41p to 50p for primary meal ingredients, extra funding for training staff and our strong starting point in relation to kitchens and equipment could lead to a significant improvement in our school meals.

Denise Stokoe  
Director of Children's Services

**\*\*N.B** previous to inflationary meal price increase in June 2005 the price charged for a primary meal was £1.37 and the food cost was 41p.