

Committee:	Children's Services Scrutiny Committee
Date:	15 June 2006
Title of Report:	Centrally Managed School Meals Services in East Sussex
By:	Director of Children's Services Department (CSD)
Purpose of Report:	To update the committee on school meals service developments since the previous report in June 2005

RECOMMENDATION -

To endorse the Department's approach to the provision of integrated healthy food approaches in East Sussex schools.

1. Background and Supporting Information

1.1. In September 2005 schools participating in the corporate Primary & Special and Secondary School Meals Contracts voted to support a final one year extension to the existing contracts with Initial Catering Services until 31 July 2007.

1.2. These contract extensions allowed the Contracts Management Team a good timeframe to develop the service requirements and contract specifications to address the Government's Nutritional Standards for school meals (confirmed on 19th May 2006), for services post July 2007. A programme of compliance with these standards becomes mandatory for all schools from September this year.

1.3. Performance targets have been set within the CSD Performance Improvement Plan for 2006/07 to ensure that the challenging transforming school food agenda and Best Value are met from contract development. Ways to support the achievement of healthy schools targets are being formulated in liaison with the CfBT Healthy Schools Team and NHS Health Development colleagues. This has involved a joint approach to the development of a programme of direct support to priority schools. This programme will commence in September and will involve improving the management of the lunch time arrangements and increasing general awareness of healthy eating. The combined aims will be to increase hot meals uptake with a view to contributing to the control of childhood obesity and enabling schools to meet aspects of the criteria of the Healthy Schools Programme.

2. Developments Since September 2005

Primary Sector

2.1 The first payment allocation of a 3 year transitional centrally managed Standards Fund 5a and school level Standards Fund 5b for the improvement of school meals services was received in East Sussex in September 2005.

2.2 Following the recommendation from the Schools Forum that the 5a funding should be used to improve the ingredients and products used in school meals, Primary and Special schools agreed to the expenditure of the 5b funding for this same purpose.

2.3 New style menus were put in place in October 2005, with an extra 7.5p per meal being spent on ingredients. This has allowed for improved meat and fish products and increased fresh fruit and vegetable content. Customer feedback on meal quality has been excellent and meal numbers have increased from the low level experienced following the negative media coverage last year with 37% of pupils having meals, 10% of which have a free meal entitlement. Menu planning is now underway to ensure that the Term 1 menus fully comply with requirements set out in the Government's standards.

2.4 To enable the increase in fresh produce some investment from the funding will go towards the provision of vegetable preparation machines for larger production kitchens.

2.5 Interactive taster sessions for pupils and parents have taken place in schools to build confidence in the meals service and encourage uptake. Further sessions, along with curriculum and service support activities in partnership with PCT and CfBT colleagues will continue in September.

2.6 Following a trial in 15 schools, LEA-administered milk schemes are being phased out in favour of schemes from the 'Cool Milk' company. The benefits will be a free fridge loan and complete administration and management of pupil payments. This should improve participation and thus increase the number of pupils accessing keenly priced, locally sourced daily drinking milk.

2.7 The Children's Services Capital Programme is continuing to support the provision of replacement kitchen facilities on a priority basis within our schools. A new kitchen is to be available at St Michael's CEP, Withyham from December 2006 and a new dining hall at Peasmarsh CEP from September 2006. Replacement kitchen plans have been drawn up for Northiam CEP and at Wivelsfield Primary as part of the new school building.

3. Secondary Sector

3.1 Since September 2005, meals services provided within the 15 secondary schools participating in the corporate contract have undergone a programme of phased changes in support of healthier eating. This has included the introduction of pasta and jacket potato bars, an expansion to the range of home made lower fat /sugar content cakes and biscuits and initiatives to increase fruit & vegetable consumption with fruit smoothies, fresh fruit pots and homemade soups being offered. Snacks and fast food options with high fat or salt levels and carbonated drinks are no longer offered.

3.2 Schools have been provided with guidance and support to allow sensible phased approaches to service changes, including vending and to encourage a whole school approach to healthy eating.

3.3 Since these changes have been introduced 4 schools have seen substantial growth in their uptake, however 6 have seen their uptake drop substantially. Members of the CMT Food Advisory team are working on initiatives in partnership with Initial Catering and the adversely affected schools with a view to improving uptake levels.

3.4 Capital funding has contributed to the provision of a complete renovation and expansion that has transformed the dining facilities at Beacon Community College and St Richards Catholic College has been allocated funding from the County Council L.C.V.A.P (LEA co-ordinated voluntary aided programme) to extend the dining facilities in 2006/07.

3.5 The Government's Building Schools for the Future plans indicate that capital funding for improvements for all East Sussex secondary schools is to be allocated by 2015, with funding for one whole school replacement building programme, to include the kitchen and dining facility by 2011.

4. Visit to schools

4.1 Members of the Scrutiny Committee are invited to participate in a group visit to Beacon Community College and Buxted CE School during week commencing 26th June, the precise date will be agreed with participants. These schools have been identified as good examples of local capital investment along with service style development contributing to the transformation of catering services for pupils within the school.

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15 June 2006

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Local Members: Councillor Reid and Councillor Stodgon
Background Docs: None