

ARRANGEMENTS FOR SCHOOL MEALS PROVISION

Report By: Director of Children's Services

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To inform the Committee of the arrangements for School meals provision and to notify Members of the take-up of School meals.

Financial Implications

2. The Revenue cost is delegated to the schools. The Council is responsible for the capital investment cost which was £500,000 for 2007/08 and transport costs of approx £26,000 which are grant funded.

Background

3. Catering provision within Schools was externalised in 1981. A number of School Kitchens were closed down and many others were operated by external contractors.
4. Up to 2006 an adhoc arrangement existed for providing school meals. In February 2006 there was a Cabinet Member for Children's Services decision note agreeing to a new policy. The basis of the policy was that school meals would be provided from High School kitchens. These would be improved to cater for primary schools within their catchment area. Details on this are set out in Appendix 1. Should the Committee debate information contained in appendix 1 then the Committee will need to consider excluding the public and press from the meeting on the grounds that this document sets out information relating to the financial or business affairs of particular person(s). Copies of Appendix 1 have been supplied to Members.
5. Out of the 103 Schools within the County 98 now have some sort of meal provision. This can be either a full menu or just sandwich provision. In addition there are 36 breakfast clubs operating within the schools.
6. Within the County there are 24 operational Kitchens based at existing Schools. A number of these Kitchens provide meals both for the School at which they are located and a number of other Schools. As an example the Kitchen at John Kyrle High School, Ross-on-Wye provides catering provision for one Primary School. This is increasing to seven Primary Schools in the New Year.
7. Relation between hot meals and children's education. We have widespread anecdotal evidence that suggests that when primary school and early year's pupils have eaten breakfast they are more likely to be able to focus and concentrate successfully and behave in an appropriate manner in class and around the school. The same is found when pupils are given a healthy hot or packed lunch. Furthermore, when healthy eating

is promoted in schools alongside a healthy lifestyle, pupils have a better understanding of and therefore commitment to these principles.

8. In addition to operational Kitchens at Schools a number of catering companies provide meals from their own premises. These number five in total.
9. The standard of catering in Schools is regulated by the Government's Nutritional Standards. In addition there are a number of advisory bodies such as the Schools Food Trust which advise on standards and the Obesity Group which is led by the Primary Care Trust. The Catering Officer at Herefordshire Council also plays a part with the monitoring of the contracts. There are 3 visits a year made to each school where by the Catering Officer will monitor the standards of both the facilities and provision of food. A report will be produced from the visit and the Caterer informed of any issues that may have arisen.
10. A recent Life Style report indicated that only 17% of children age 11 to 15 had anything to eat or drink for breakfast.
11. Within the County the standard of catering is also influenced by the School Meals Steering Group comprising representatives of schools, catering companies, the PCT and the Bulmer Foundation, which was set up in early 2006 following the withdrawal of Jarvis from the school meals market. The chair of this group is Frances Howie, Associate Director of Health Improvement at the PCT.
12. A majority of the Schools have a service level agreement with the Facilities Management department of the Property and Asset Management Section within Resources Directorate. The monitoring costs of the contract will be included in this charge.
13. The catering contracts are typically for a period of three years with the option to extend for a further 2 years. The procurement process is roughly 4-5 months and all caterers on the Approved Caterers List with the Herefordshire Council are invited to tender. The catering company contract to provide School meals of the required standards, to maintain the Kitchen and replace any defective equipment as necessary. Within the next 12 months there are 5 contracts due for tendering. These will be tendered from a list of approved contractors all of whom have been vetted for competency.
14. The financial contribution made by the catering company varies considerably. In some Schools the catering company just pay out-goings such as electricity, gas, water, etc. In other Schools (mainly the larger High Schools providing a high number of meals), the catering contractor pays an annual licence to the School for the privilege of catering on that site.
15. There are a number of initiatives in the School meals provision. These include Healthy Schools, Duchy Suppliers Group and the Schools Steering Group. A number of catering companies are also now analysing their menus using software packages on nutritional standards. Also the School Food Trust has launched a major new national campaign called Million Meals. The initiative was launched in conjunction with the Secretary for State for Children, Schools and Families, the Rt. Hon. Ed Balls MP. Herefordshire Schools are being encouraged to sign up to this initiative.
16. As from September 2008 any child in a County School can request a hot School meal. In recognition of this the Council has started to invest in Kitchens at High Schools in order to increase their capacity to provide meals for the Primary Schools within their catchment area. The strategic framework for this investment was set out in the Policy

statement approved by Cabinet Decision notice on 23rd February 2006 with immediate effect.

17. Initially works have been undertaken at John Masefield High, John Kyrle High and Aylestone High Schools. Works at three more High Schools are being considered in 2008. Ledbury Primary is now fed by John Masefield High School and this had proved successful in over 50% of the school now taking meals.
18. A decision on which school kitchen should be upgraded is being deferred until the outcome of the school review is completed.
19. The Council make a financial contribution towards equipment for the initial provision of meals. In addition it pays a contribution, from school meals grant towards transport costs with either the School or the catering company funding the balance. In most circumstances the transport costs will be shared equally between the Council and the School, however in some instances the Caterer has offered to pay a percentage towards this.
20. The Council has been instrumental in organising a number of training initiatives for catering staff. As an example, Worcester College has organised courses on School meals provision.
21. The Council also participates in a national scheme for providing fruit and vegetables. This is a Government contract and is at no cost to the Council.
22. Funding for free meals is delegated to schools and is currently set at £1.70 per meal for 179 days for each pupil on free school meals as determined by the January annual pupil census. An extra £1.05 is added to the Christmas dinner and there is a small 5.8% adjustment to reflect absence rates in schools. In 2007/08 primary schools were allocated £285,861 and high schools £197,125. Pupils in special schools were allocated £9,518 and a further £13,150 is allocated at 41p per day so that all pupils can have a sweet. The standard cost is £1.70 but some schools add on an overhead to cover administration costs which can increase the cost to £2.20 in one instance.
23. Standards Fund School Meals grant is available in 2007/08 to support schools meals worth of a total of £276,202 of which £127,106 must be devolved to school by formula. 2007/08 is the last year of this grant and it is replaced by the School Lunch grant of £239,770 in 2008/09. School Forum Budget Working Group is due to consider the School Lunch grant on the 14th January 2007.
24. Finally, a small amount of Dedicated Schools Grant, £40,000, has traditionally been used to help transport costs to the schools, particularly special schools. This is for schools when the contract is at risk and new school meals provision. It is intended that this funding will be reviewed as part of the School Lunch Grant consideration.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT: The Committee notes the content of the Report for information.

Appended Reports:

- Appendix 1 - Kitchen/contractor and financial details.

NOTE: Should the Committee debate information contained in Appendix 1 then the Committee will need to consider excluding the public and press from the meeting on the grounds that this document sets out information relating to the financial or business affairs of particular person(s).

- Appendix 2 - Transport Service Level Agreement
- Appendix 3 - Percentage take-up of School meals and new arrangements
- Appendix 4 - Healthy School Meals for Herefordshire Draft Policy Framework
- Appendix 5 - Policy statement from Cabinet Decision

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- None identified.